



THE ELEPHANT SANCTUARY

IN TENNESSEE™

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Shirley



On July 6, 2020, The Elephant Sanctuary celebrated Asian elephant Shirley's 72nd birthday and 21st year at The Elephant Sanctuary. At 72 years old, defies all odds as one of the oldest elephants in captivity and having lived well beyond the life expectancy for a captive Asian elephant.

Born in Sumatra in 1948, Shirley was captured from the wild and sold to a traveling circus, entertaining audiences for more than 20 years. In addition to the immense physical and emotional impact that a life of performance has on captive elephants, during her time in the circus, Shirley survived capture by Fidel Castro's forces as well as a highway accident that killed two other elephants. In 1963, the circus ship Shirley

was traveling on caught fire and partially sank, leaving Shirley with burns on her back, side, and feet and causing her to lose part of her right ear.

In 1974, Shirley suffered a broken leg during an altercation with another elephant. As a result of her injury, in 1977, she was transferred to The Louisiana Purchase Zoo and Gardens, where she was the sole elephant resident for 22 years. As Shirley aged, the zoo staff decided she needed more space and the companionship of other elephants. Her primary caretaker, Solomon James, accompanied Shirley on her journey to The Elephant Sanctuary in Tennessee. Her arrival was captured by Argo Films and became part of the documentary, *The Urban Elephant*.

At The Sanctuary, Shirley had an emotional reunion with another Asian elephant, Jenny—nearly bending the bars of their barn stalls to be near to one another. It was later discovered that the two performed together in the circus 24 years earlier. For the next seven years, Shirley and Jenny were inseparable in a relationship resembling one of a mother and daughter. The Urban Elephant documented Shirley and Jenny's explorations together, including Shirley standing guard over Jenny as she took naps in the habitat.

"Shirley has been through so much in her life, it is amazing how quickly she seems to trust people," said lead Caregiver, Kaitlin. "She emanates love and kindness."

At 72, Shirley spends many days journeying across Asia Habitat's open fields and wooded hillsides. This spring, just like every other, Shirley ventured over a mile to The Sanctuary's 25-acre lake. Throughout the summer, she has often been found grazing on Lake View Ledge, an area with a particularly beautiful view of the lake. She has also been utilizing the mud wallows in the habitat; on some days, Caregivers have found her in the wallow first thing in the morning, suggesting that she is sleeping in the mud during particularly warm evenings.

Shirley's habitat-mate, Tarra has joined Shirley on many of her adventures throughout the habitat, as the two have been nearly inseparable for much of the spring. Caregivers say there is no doubt how much they appreciate one another's presence; in fact, Shirley has recently been seen giving Tarra back scratches with her trunk while Tarra rumbles and barks in satisfaction.