

Dale Carnegie

5-Minute Biographies

Author of "How to Win Friends and Influence People."



CLYDE BEATTY

Stick His Head in a Lion's Mouth? Not Without a Gas-Mask

Clyde Beatty has one of the most dangerous jobs in the world. He looks into the jaws of death, not once, but twice a day. The life insurance companies realize that he may ripped to pieces at any time by savage claws; so they refuse to gamble on his life. He is the only performer in the circus who can't get an insurance policy.

He told me he had sometimes thought of quitting the lion and tiger business; but he says that if he had to punch a time clock in a factory or some similar job it would kill him. And if he's got to die, he'd rather be GORED to death than BORED to death.

Clyde Beatty has spent half his thrilling and exciting lifetime—fifteen years of it—under the big top. As a kid back in Chillicothe, Ohio, he was crazy about the circus.

One exciting day the Barnum and Bailey circus came to town. A laundryman stuck up a poster

in his window. A glamorous picture in yellow and purple and red, showing a heroic lion trainer bravely cracking his whip over a cageful of roaring snarling cats from Africa, Beatty rushed inside and begged the owner of the laundry to give him the poster, after the circus left town. The laundryman said "Yes, I'll give it to you if you'll run errands for me for a week." He agreed to this.

This twelve-year-old kid already had some roaring, snapping, snarling friends of his own. Or at least, he made believe they were. He had five dogs which he had trained to sit up and beg, roll over and walk around on their hind legs. And every so often he would stick up his circus poster and put on a wild animal act for the kids in the neighborhood.

Then one summer when the big caravan chugged out of town, Clyde Beatty was aboard, his heart palpitating with excitement. For three days, his desperate par-

ents, searched frantically. His mother spent nights of weeping before a letter came saying he had a job of cleaning out the cages with the circus. He was only fifteen and he was getting five dollars and a chance to live in Paradise.

In the ten years' time, this youngster from Chillicothe, Ohio, had outstripped every lion-tamer in history. He put on an act so daring, so foolhardy, that even circus men said it couldn't be done. And then when they saw him actually do it, they said he was a lunatic and that his life wasn't worth a plugged nickel. He put forty snarling, spitting lions and tigers into the same cage crackled his whip and made them do their stuff. Forty lions and tigers bristling with hate and snarling with rage. No wonder the act created a sensation even among circus people, for lions and tigers are mortal enemies—they fight on sight. And more than on one occasion Beatty found himself in a cage of fighting, roaring, murderous jungle cats.

Yet strangely enough, Clyde Beatty says that lions and tigers are not the most dangerous animals to control. He's tried them all—lions and tigers, leopards, bears, hyenas, and elephants. And he found that the most dangerous beast of all is the polar bear. And he says that the hardest trick of all is to make a tiger ride on an elephant's back. In fact, he himself was nearly killed by an elephant one day, just because he had been to the tiger's cage and the elephant caught the hated scent of the tiger.

You've heard, haven't you that animal trainers control their animals by looking them straight in the eye? Clyde Beatty told me that that is a lot of nonsense. The average lion wouldn't give two hoots even if Mae West looked him in the eye. He says the only reason he watches his animals is to find out what they're up to and what they're going to do next.

Beatty says no trainer has ever actually stuck his head in a lion's mouth. It just looks that way. He says: "I've known some pretty reckless animal trainers, but I've never heard of one crazy enough to stick his head into the mouth of a lion." Besides lions have halitosis so bad that even their best friends would have to wear gas-masks.

There's another popular idea—that lion-trainers use red-hot poker to control enraged animals. But Beatty says that if you want

to commit suicide, just enter the cage of a lion or tiger that has been burned with a red-hot poker. His harmless weapons are a kitchen chair, a whip and a revolver filled with blank cartridges.

Clyde Beatty says he's tried working with tame animals—animals born in captivity, and he prefers wild ones any time. Tame animals are just like spoiled children—they've been pampered and petted until they refuse to do anything. The question he has been asked most often is this: can a lion lick a tiger, or will the tiger lick the lion? Frankly, he doesn't know. He's been in the big cage dozens of times with lions and tigers fighting all around him but the lions always gang up and tigers fight alone. When one lion starts fighting all the lions in sight come to his aid—especially if the lions are brothers. Lions are just like boys—they can't see a scrap without mixing up in it. But a tiger has no race consciousness—he will sit up on his pedestal and actually yawn while some other tiger is being killed.

One of the most amusing stunts Clyde Beatty does in the Big Cage is to make a bear turn a complete somersault—the only trick of its kind in the world. He discovered it by accident. Beatty was in the cage one day when the bear came tearing at him, teeth bared, claws tense, and murder in his eye. This bear was out to kill, and his onslaught was so sudden, so fierce, that Beatty did the first thing that came to his mind. He hauled off and smashed the bear on the nose, and as nothing else is so painful to a bear as a poke on the nose, and as Beatty's fist landed the bear went over in a heap and turned a complete somersault. That's what gave Beatty the idea. And today all he has to do to make the same bear turn a complete flip-flop is to tap him gently on the nose with his whip.

Clyde Beatty knows his wild animals of the jungle and plain—knows them better than any other man living. Yet he says his favorite animal is the dog.

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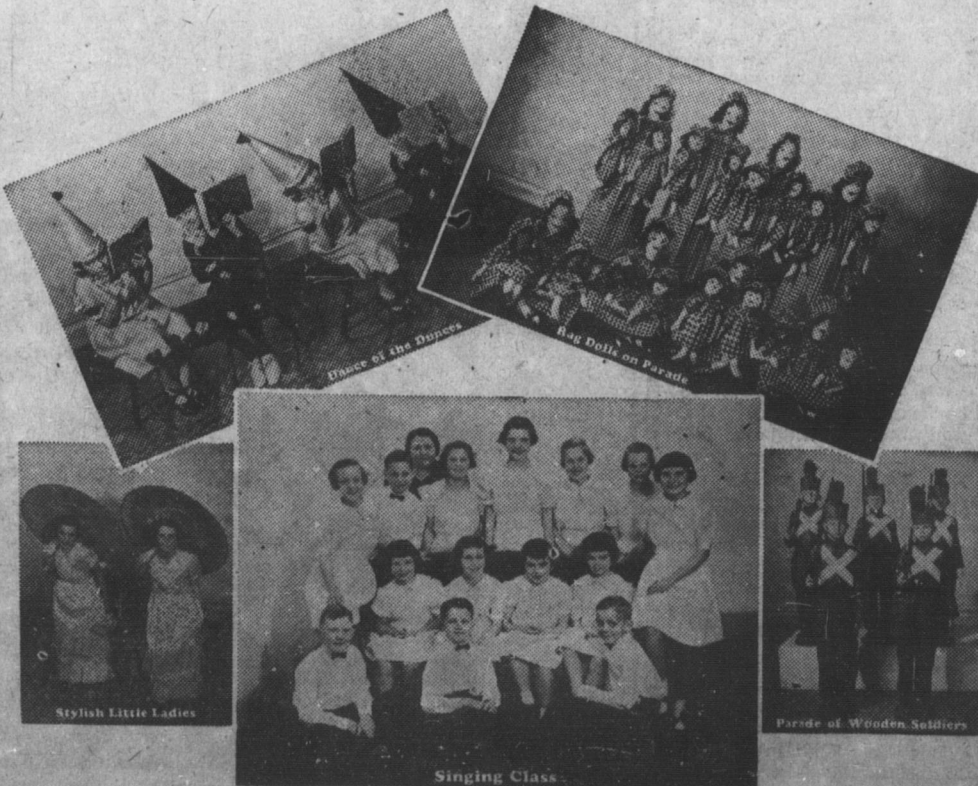
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