

## **Barbara Caldicott – Elephants**

Six years old. Excited. Dressed in best dress, Liberty Print, Peter Pan collar, puffed sleeves. We entered through the turnstile in the huge arch of the entrance. Had to be very good, well behaved. Skipped down the hill past all the cages.

And there she was, standing patiently, waiting.

We climbed the steps up to a platform, one big stride onto a big seat. Strapped in, we started to move, lumbering around the track, thrilled to be close to such a large animal.

It was the beginning of my love affair with elephants. I had read about them in National Geographic and watched documentaries. I wondered at their social order, living in a mob protecting each other, especially the calves, mothers sharing duties. All protected by the bull.

I have ridden these gorgeous beasts through the streets of India. On another occasion I had an elephant ride in Thailand, down a very steep embankment to a creek in the jungle. The seat was strapped across her shoulders and each time a front leg moved the seat rocked strongly to each side.

Elephants' legs move independently, rather than like most animals whose legs synchronise in pairs. The magnificent beast placed one foot firmly on the ground, secure and stable. Then it lifted the opposite rear foot from the ground. This was repeated with the other two feet until we reached the creek. The same going up the hill, one foot after the other.

A Four wheel drive animal.

Friends and relatives, knowing my love of elephants have given me many figurines of these lovely pachyderms. They're everywhere, front door greetings, the sideboard, the table, even the bathroom. Elephant cushions comfort my lounge, mugs, magnets on the fridge door. Clothes, jewellery all feature my beloved mammal.

White elephants, pink floral, gold, silver, brass, blue glass, plain, bejewelled, – the trunk is up or, the trunk is down. I wear a lovely silver pendant which is much admired by my colleagues, acquaintances, strangers in the street, and even Indian bus drivers. A carved bone necklace featuring elephants, matching earrings, add to my collection of elephant jewellery.

I am surrounded and identify with these symbols of good luck, wisdom, fertility, and protection. Known for their intelligence, wisdom, majesty, good luck, loyalty, strength, and other noble qualities they are my world. My animal kingdom.