



ELEPHANT AID INTERNATIONAL
One World...One Elephant at a Time

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**CELEBRATING TARRA: FROM CAPTIVITY TO CATALYST
ON HER 52ND BIRTHDAY, A VALENTINE'S DAY TRIBUTE TO AN
ELEPHANT WHO CHANGED THE WORLD**

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This Valentine's Day marks more than the 52nd birthday of Tarra the elephant. It honors a life that has profoundly reshaped how the world understands elephants, freedom, and compassionate care.

Captured from the wild in Asia in 1974 when she was just three months old, Tarra's life began in captivity. She was brought to the United States and placed on public display in a tire store in Southern California—an all-too-common fate for elephants of that era. Her future seemed predetermined until she met a young college student named Carol Buckley, who saw not an exhibit, but an individual.

That meeting would change everything.

Bottle-fed, nurtured, and taken home at night so she could feel grass beneath her feet and safety at Carol's side, Tarra quickly revealed her extraordinary intelligence, curiosity, and capacity for trust. A deep bond formed, one rooted in communication, respect, and choice, that would ultimately spark a global movement in elephant welfare.

“What can be said of an elephant whose life has improved the welfare of hundreds of elephants worldwide?” reflects Carol Buckley, now CEO and founder of Elephant Aid International. “Tarra is not just an elephant, but a catalyst for global change.”

Together, Tarra and Carol challenged the long-standing norms of elephant management. At a time when dominance, chains, and control were considered standard, Tarra demonstrated that cooperation, consent, and autonomy were not only possible but transformative.

“Tarra's precocious nature and her profound trust in me allowed us to challenge and ultimately break traditions that enslaved elephants for decades,” Carol says. “Through her adventurous spirit and innate ability to communicate, she inspired a new way forward—chain-free living, cooperative and consent-based care, and true retirement: a life lived in nature with full autonomy.”

That inspiration led to the founding of the nation's first natural-habitat elephant refuge and, later, Elephant Refuge North America (ERNA), Tarra's forever home on the Florida–Georgia state line. On more than 850 acres of protected land in Attapulgus, Georgia, Tarra now lives as an elephant should, free to roam, forage, and choose her own path.

Over the decades, Tarra has mentored other elephants, including her current herd mates, Bo and Mundi. Through her calm presence and lived example, she has helped them relearn how to be elephants again, to sleep under the open sky, to explore the landscape, and to build relationships on their own terms.

Tarra's influence reaches far beyond her home refuge. The lessons learned by listening to her have helped improve elephant care and welfare practices around the world, proving that dignity, autonomy, and compassion must be at the center of elephant stewardship.

Now at 52, Tarra lives surrounded by nature, her elephant family, devoted caregivers, and her beloved dogs, embodying what true elephant retirement can and should look like. Her days are guided by choice, curiosity, and connection.

Looking back on their shared journey, Carol reflects with gratitude: "I am deeply grateful for the many decades Tarra has mentored me, and all those who have been blessed to be part of her life. She has opened hearts and eyes across the world to the transformative power of freedom, showing what is possible when an elephant is allowed to live freely and discover her true self."

This Valentine's Day, we celebrate Tarra, not just for the years she has lived, but for the lives she has changed.

Happy 52nd Birthday, Tarra. Your life continues to light the way—for elephants, for caregivers, and for a more compassionate world.

To learn more about Tarra and Elephant Refuge North America, visit <http://elephantaidthelp.org/projects/elephant-refuge-north-america/>

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About Elephant Aid International (EAI): EAI is a nonprofit organization that develops innovative approaches to caring for and managing elephants worldwide. We unchain elephants in Asia, teach humane methods of training and handling elephants, and provide a natural habitat refuge for retired elephants in the U.S. Learn more at <http://elephantaidthelp.org>.