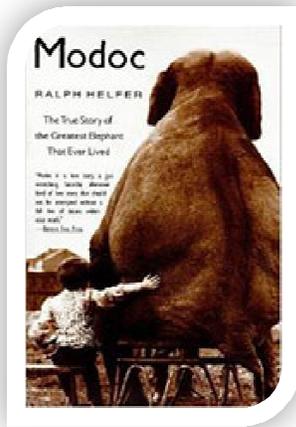


Readin' & Writin' with Lauraine- April 2014



All hail to the upcoming summer. I love watching the sun rise over the eastern hills. It is moving farther north every day, and is almost beyond the cedar tree barrier in my yard now. The trees are more leafed out, and with the sun sparkling on them, their greenness brightens each new day. Can you tell spring is my favorite season? And this spring in Tehachapi has been glorious.

With the onset of gardening, I have less time for reading; a yearly trade off that I always try to pretend does not exist. However, when I find a book like *Modoc: The True Story of the Greatest Elephant That Ever Lived* by Ralph Helfer, I ignore all else, and let myself be caught up in the story. The cover art caught my eye and insured I would buy the book. Printed in intense sepia, it is the photograph of the back of an elephant perched on a circus stool, and a young boy sitting beside the huge beast, with one hand and arm stretched across the animal's back. Unfortunately, the book got put on my shelf until just recently when I saw it again and started to read. And then I did not want to stop reading. What a magnificent story and it is true. No fiction writer could possibly make up this elephant's life; and editors would shake their head and say, "sorry, not believable."

On the same day that Modoc was born, elephant trainer Josef Gunterstein celebrated the birth of his son Bram. Joseph believed in the mystical links of humans and animals, especially elephants, and passed them down to his son. Modoc and Bram grew up together and developed ties to last a lifetime, in spite of a world war, an ocean to cross and the vagaries of the circus industry.

During her lifetime Modoc crossed the world, once nearly dying on a sinking freighter. Yet she not only managed to survive, but to save Bram and others until they were picked up and brought to India, where she regained her health. She became famous there, saved lives during the war, until she and Bram were brought to star in a New York circus in the 1940's. Known for her extreme brilliance and reasoning power far beyond many humans, Modoc carved a place for herself and became known as the greatest elephant that ever lived. Sadly due to abuse and misadventures, Modoc was forced from the circus ring, eventually spending her final years at an animal farm in Southern California owned by Ralph Helfer, where she became the inspiration for this book.

How I wish I had seen Modoc and met Bram. How grateful I am to have been able to read their story. May we all be blessed by the animals in our lives and enjoy their stories, where glimpses of their greatness bring us wonder and delight. May you enjoy Modoc's story as much as I did.

Until next time,

Happy readin' & writin' from Lauraine