

## I Organized a Protest at my Local Fair to Speak Out for Circus Tigers

By Ashley Geiger

Hello to all of the AdvoCats out there. I myself am very new to this subject, but wanted to share with you all how I decided to take action in my own community against a traveling circus tiger show that was held at my local fair in February. I think it may be something that other people could recreate with success, and hey, if a 19 year old like me with zero experience doing this can make an impact, so can you!

In February 2017, I found out that the local Martin County Fair in my small town of Stuart, Florida was hosting a tiger show called, Nerger's Splendid Tigers. I was instantly shocked and disappointed. The fair was scheduled this year from February 10<sup>th</sup> through the 18<sup>th</sup> which left me very little time to take action considering I learned about the show on Sunday the 12<sup>th</sup>. This left me only about five days to organize a peaceful protest on the last day of the fair.

To be honest, I had not been to a fair or circus in years, so I had no idea that they were still hosting traveling acts involving big cat species like this one. I regretfully decided to go to the fair one night with a friend only to be more shocked and disappointed. There were about 14 tigers pacing back and forth repetitively in their small metal cages. I could not help but be deeply disheartened to know that this was the life these stunning animals were being subjected to live, a life so different from the respect and dignity that they deserve as an endangered species. The show was advertised as "educational," yet not once throughout the entire event did they teach anything about tigers, not even one educational fact.

The trainers made the tigers do several series of tricks which included leapfrog, jumping through hoops and even a flaming hoop, to my complete dismay. It did not take an expert to see that the cats were not enjoying what they were being forced to do. Many of them would flatten their ears and bare their teeth at the trainers when they were being asked to do a trick, and some would just flat out refuse to comply.

In fact, on Wednesday, February 15<sup>th</sup> reports of an alleged incident of a tiger escaping the circus ring at this same tiger show flooded social media and even made the local news. Many audience members claimed that at the end of the tiger performance that night when one of the tigers was being taken back to its cage, they saw it possibly get loose from the trainer momentarily, and then proceed to fight with the other tiger it shared a small cage with. Whatever may have happened that night, fair goers were definitely afraid of what they witnessed as many described seeing people stampeding to get away from the vicinity of the show.

Not only did this incident exemplify the danger of this type of show, but it displayed the obvious notion that these animals are not meant to, nor are they capable of, burying their natural instincts and behavior. A quick google search about this particular act and others like it left me feeling disturbed and helpless. I was disgusted, and soon found out that I was certainly not the only one who was outraged by this barbaric event.

After making several calls and failed attempts at figuring out what I could possibly do, I came across Big Cat Rescue online and decided to call. I received some much needed advice, help and encouragement. From there I decided to take action. Below I've listed the steps I took in order to accomplish my goal of preventing this act from coming to my local fair again, and hopefully you will be inspired to do the same if you run into this situation in your own town.

1. Organize a protest -- Pick a date/time/location that allows for optimum exposure.
2. Contact your county property management department to find out whether you will need a permit for the location you have chosen, in my case I decided to hold our protest on the public sidewalk outside of the fairgrounds, so I did not need to worry about a permit.
3. Contact your local Sheriff's Department Office. It is a very good idea to contact your local Sheriff Department beforehand about your peaceful protest in order to inform them about what your intentions are, and also to let them help you figure out the best way to ensure everyone's safety.
4. Create an event page on Facebook. This will be vital to bringing awareness about your event. This is the one I created <https://www.facebook.com/events/1759156201078880/>
5. Create an online petition, I used [care2petitions.com](http://www.care2petitions.com) to create this one <http://www.thepetitionsite.com/.../demand-that-florida-fairs.../>
6. Have your protest participants make signs that clearly get your message across to people and cars going by.
7. Contact the media. It is a good idea to reach out to local news stations about your event. Most news stations have a tip-line email, which is how I ended up getting our event on the local news.
8. Call/Email the General Manager of the fair or event venue and politely inform them about why these types of acts involving wild animals are not something your community would like to support. Email them your petition and why supporting these types of shows is not in their best interest or the animal's.
9. Contact Big Cat Rescue if you need help or advice. Email [Susan.Bass@BigCatRescue.org](mailto:Susan.Bass@BigCatRescue.org)