

Life at the Gatorium

(Alan Harrap's story – continuing from the last issue of "Creative")

After Jill discovered that I had been "Cecil Lilywhite, the Alligator Wrestler " she wanted to hear more. So I continued.

"When I started alligator wrestling it was a solo act. But then Bart, the Proprietor of the Gulf Gatorium, decided we should introduce something new, to spice it up and boost the audiences. It had to be Cecil saving a beautiful maiden from the fearsome alligator. And who could play the part of the maiden in distress? Well, Dusky Dawn got the vote. She was beautiful in a slim and vulnerable-looking way. Just what we needed.

Of course "Dusky Dawn" was not her real name. She was Hannah Finckelstein, a name which would have frightened any alligator.

Well, I have to admit that this was even more successful than my solo act. My relationship with Hannah was only professional - at first. At the end of the show we'd go our separate ways saying "Good night Mr Harrap", "Goodnight Miss Finckelstein", just as if we were nine-to-five workers leaving the office, rather than leaving a stage where we had conquered an alligator and had the audience's applause ringing in our ears.

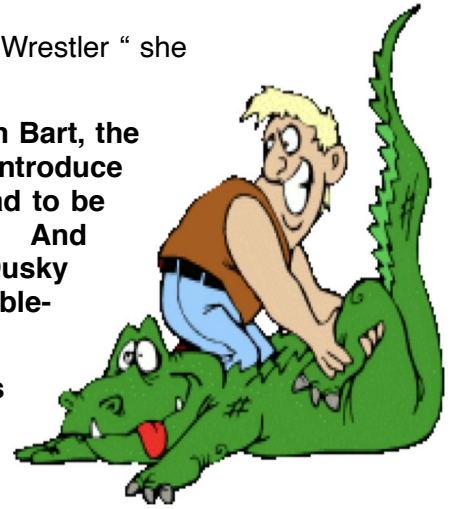
Wednesdays were different. That was Hannah's night off, and I did the original solo act.

One Thursday night our act went a little wrong. After all it was quite dangerous. Julian, our alligator, was rather frisky. We managed to get through the show without serious injury, but it was pretty scary. When we left the stage Hannah was trembling. She started to say "Goodnight Mr Harrap", but she could barely speak. Some reassurance was clearly needed, so I opened my arms to give her a hug and said "Miss Finckelstein - or may I call you Hannah - perhaps I should see you to your van".

Well, we became "an item"! I really hoped it would be for ever. But there was a little snag - no, a big snag - "Big Jake". He was the alligator-stable manager. He was also the mail-man (and certainly a male-man!). All mail was delivered to our vans. I didn't get much myself. But Hannah obviously had lots of mail, because I had often seen Jake coming from her van before eight in the morning. I didn't think of any other reason.

Hannah gave Jake the heave-ho which didn't please him at all! But he left us alone for a few more days, before he took action. Another Wednesday came around and the time came for me to go on stage and display my puny body as part of the warm-up. Then it was time for the entrance of the alligator through a gated tunnel. Beyond the tunnel I spotted Jake. He was grinning broadly as he operated the gate. And in came the alligator. But It wasn't Julian (my lovable and usually obedient Julian). This time it was a larger and altogether fiercer alligator called Tyson. What a struggle! I won, very very narrowly, and kept all my limbs intact. Exhausted, I looked towards the tunnel and saw Jake mouthing "That was just a warning". But the applause was rapturous as I left the stage.

But, despite the ovation, there would be no repeat of that triumph for Cecil Lilywhite. My life was too important. So I scarpered and managed to board the next flight out of Orlando. My alligator wrestling career was over. I heard later that Hannah went back to swimming with dolphins and that Jake was working elsewhere with alligator husbandry. He is now known as "Jake the Peg" for some reason. And, as you know, I became a family-man, good with guinea-pigs. "



DAVID CAWSEY

