

# Seven Tons of Birthday Fun

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*Portland, Ore.*

It was Packy the pachyderm's 33rd birthday and he was in a foul mood.

Outside the elephant house, thousands of moms, dads, grandparents and kiddies were lining up at the "Elefun" display to get their paper elephant ears (complete with a cheerful "I Love Elephants" declaration printed across the headband). Smilin' Eli the Clown was entertaining the crowd with his elephant puppet, while the Tigard High School band was warming up to play "Happy Birthday" to the seven-ton Asian elephant.

But inside the elephant house, Packy was moody. Wouldn't you know it? You plan a big party and then you go into musth.

Musth is a sort of PMS exclusive to bull elephants. In Hindi the word means "intoxicated," but for elephants it's like a long hangover; it can ruin their disposition anywhere from six weeks to 10 months. During musth their testosterone level goes ballistic, making them ornery.

"He desperately wants to kill or break somebody," explained Roger Henneous, Packy's keeper for the past 26 years.

Packy had gone into musth the previous Wednesday, but by Saturday afternoon Mr. Henneous was carefully monitoring the moods of all the Washington Park Zoo's nine elephants to see how they were handling the excitement of the annual party. By now the creatures are used to the awesome sight of as many as 10,000 people wearing elephant ears—an annual event here since 1963, one year after Packy's birth made international news.

The little fella was the first Asian elephant born in the Western hemisphere in 44 years. (Since then, 26 other elephant babies have been born at the Portland zoo, seven of them Packy's.) The son of Belle and Thonglaw, Packy was no more than about three feet tall and weighed just 150 pounds at birth. Now he's 10-feet-4 at the shoulder, and on a good day weighs about 14,000 pounds.

While in the throes of musth, however, Packy sometimes turns up his trunk at his usual daily diet of 300 pounds of grain, fruit and veggies. Mr. Henneous said Packy's musth moodiness may cause him to lose a ton of weight. Literally.

This was, of course, making zoo officials extremely nervous. After all, the highlight of the day was to be the presentation of the birthday cake, followed by the spectacle of Packy wolfing down the 35-pound morsel. If Packy wasn't in the mood for birthday cake, that would be no elefun at all, especially for Smilin' Eli the Clown.

Smilin' Eli, also known as Harold Whitney, is the originator of the recipe for Packy's birthday cake. The zoo asked him to come up with an elephantine treat in 1977, while he was baking instructor at Portland Community College. Mr. Whit-

ney just happened to have graduated from a clowning class about the time the zoo called.

"I asked them, 'You wouldn't happen to need a clown to give the cake to the elephant, would you?'" reminisced Mr. Whitney, who noted that he is 43 years older than Packy.

Although he is retired from his teaching job, Mr. Whitney continues to show up at the zoo in full clown regalia every April, on the Saturday closest to the 14th, Packy's birthday. It's his job to carry the cake into the deserted elephant yard, place it on the ground and high-tail it to safety before Packy is released.

In 1985 his baking duties were taken over by Gary Lorenzen, who succeeded Mr. Whitney as the college's baking instructor. Mr. Lorenzen remembers Packy's birth as if it were yesterday. His mother was so thrilled about the newborn in Portland that she and her son drove the 200 miles from Aberdeen, Wash., to see him.

"I never dreamed I'd be making his cake someday," said Mr. Lorenzen, who was 15 at the time.

The recipe has changed very little over the years. Mr. Whitney said the first cake contained "anything in the bakery we had that was good for elephants." Now there are exact measurements for the whole wheat flour, bran and cracked wheat. A pound each of shortening, sugar and milk goes into the mix, along with 12 ounces of yeast. After the cake is baked it's spread with a thick layer of peanut butter and lots of carrots, in lieu of candles, standing on end.

On any other day, Mr. Henneous would have tossed Packy a few carrots during the morning, but he was afraid that if he gave Packy vegetables, it would spoil his appetite for cake. Being denied his customary treats was making Packy even grumpier, and he banged his huge head against his 11-foot steel door in a dour rhythm.

At the appointed hour, Smilin' Eli the Clown scampered across the elephant yard, set the cake down and cleared out of there as fast as his floppy clown shoes would take him. The band began to play, thousands of happy voices were joined in song and the world's largest Asian elephant, crazed by musth, emerged.

Packy swept his trunk across the top of the cake and raised a glob of frosting and carrots to his mouth. He continued eating, chunk by chunk. For the moment, at least, the elephant was content. Mr. Henneous and Smilin' Eli breathed sighs of relief.

Back at Portland Community College, Mr. Lorenzen was happy to learn that Packy had eaten the whole thing. There have been years when Packy has not been at all polite and, even without having musth as an excuse, has stomped the cake to smithereens. In fact, he said, he felt doubly honored, considering the circumstances. "They told me," he said delicately, "it's his 'time of the year.'"