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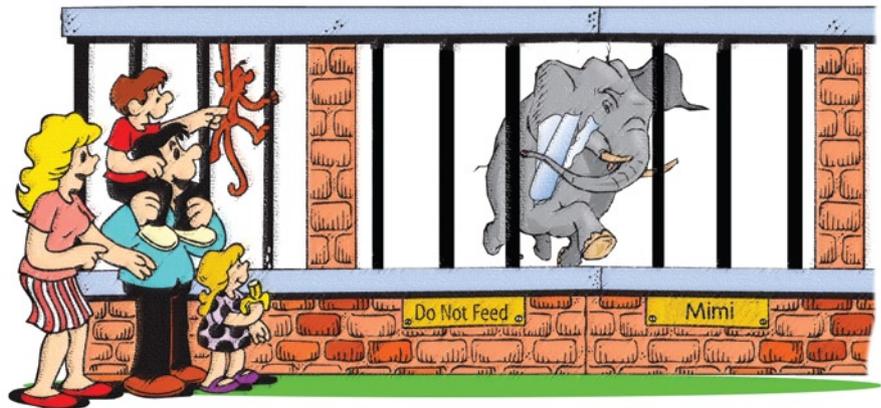
Mimi the Elephant

Years ago I worked for a medium-sized private engineering firm in Denver. We negotiated a continuing services contract with the City and County of

Denver for surveying services, and my crew was elected to conduct this work. The City was understaffed by one crew for their workload and retained us for the entire summer. I would report to the City offices every Monday morning and they would give me assignments to fill up my week. One of these assignments was to perform a detailed topographic survey of the outdoor elephant enclosure at the Denver Zoo. It seems one of the elephants had been getting a little too friendly with zoo patrons, and had actually snatched several purses from unsuspecting women. The idea, of course, was to design and construct a ditch or moat to increase the distance between elephants and people. The city engineer had given me a set of as-built plans from the last construction project with several key spot elevations and cross sections highlighted that he required for his design.

This was a peach of an assignment for me! I have always been fascinated with elephants, from my earliest memories. My mother liked to tell her friends that I was a stubborn child (probably true), but that she could get me to do anything if she would simply promise to take me to the zoo to see Cookie the elephant (certainly true). I have many fond childhood memories of visiting Cookie at the zoo.

The Denver Zoo had acquired several younger elephants over the years, and one was causing trouble. My crew and I arrived on site and met with the zookeeper. He was in the midst of cleaning their indoor area, and when finished, would move the



elephants inside. Naturally, he would not allow us in the outdoor enclosure until the elephants were locked safely indoors.

We ran some horizontal and vertical control and had an early lunch while we were waiting for access. All this was finished long before the zookeeper had completed his duties. As usual, my attention was drawn to the elephants. I stood close to the rail and quietly watched them. There is something very calming about watching elephants going about their daily business; eating, spraying themselves and swaying back and forth, as if to their personal music.

All of the elephants totally ignored us, except one. A young female seemed shyly interested in our activities, and since there were few other visitors, we seemed to hold her attention. She approached slowly and cautiously, despite our encouragement. We did not feed her, naturally, as there were several signs warning against it. We did, however, talk to her and bid her to come closer. She finally came as close as her enclosure would allow, then stretched out her trunk, as if to shake hands, or more likely to beg for food. I was totally captivated. I reached out toward her to

simply make physical contact and touch the end of her trunk. Suddenly, like a bolt of lightning, she extended a foot or so further, redirected her trunk and snatched the roll of plans I had been holding under my other arm. She then backed up two or three steps, slowly and methodically pulled the roll apart and ate the pages, one by one. They were fresh blueprints from earlier that morning, and I imagine they were still ripe with ammonia. That fact didn't seem to bother her a whisper. She enjoyed every bite. My crew thought this was hilarious, though I was frankly in shock. I had fallen for the very same ploy we had been sent to rectify!

Once the elephants were inside and we got the high sign from the zookeeper, we completed our survey from memory. We picked up plenty of detail to cover our loss. Imagine my embarrassment when I turned in our field notes and was obligated to confess what had happened to the city engineer! Worse yet was when word of my transgressions reached my office! Needless to say, there were many jokes at my expense; in fact an anonymous jokester even drew a cartoon commemorating the event. 