

Animal Facts And Fancies

With Gators, Beauty Isn't Just Scale Deep

(NAPSA)—Whether placing his entire head into the toothsome mouth of an alligator, laying gators across his stomach, wrapping himself around his pet python or corralling his slithery charge into stillness, Ted McRae's mission is to prove to audiences that beauty is not scale deep.

"They're basically dinosaurs," says McRae, who is known as T.M. The Gator Guy for Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey®, describing his primordial reptile friends. "They really haven't changed in 50 million years."

A champion of human-reptile relations who goes nowhere without his trusty pet python, this self-described "puppet, pauper, pirate, poet, pawn and king" has taken it upon himself to befriend creatures from the reptile world that most people would assiduously choose to avoid.

"As a child, I used to play with crayfish, salamanders and snakes that I would find in the woods," he recalls. He had pet snakes, turtles and piranhas, and loved to spend his free time rearranging his aquarium. Now, T.M.'s lifelong affinity for scaly creatures has led him to lead a gang of 10 alligators, each measuring up to 10 feet in length. He also works with giant Burmese python constrictors, including two rare albinos.

Having previously worked with big cats with other circuses, McRae has developed a fond affection for whatever animals he's working with, even the gator that bit off part of his thumb. Rather than casting blame, The Gator



T.M. The Gator Guy loves his work, befriending the cold-blooded reptiles he trains.

Guy claims it was his mistake.

"It wasn't his fault," McRae says of the incident. "Alligators are alligators. You have to know that. If you're juggling and hit yourself on the head with a ball, it's not the ball's fault."

Though he may count creatures from the reptile world as his fondest friends, it is his family that keeps him going. T.M. and his wife Renee raise three boys on the road as Dad amazes audiences with his scaly co-stars.

Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey is the only show business phenomenon to run in three consecutive centuries, and each year a new edition tours the country to delight adults and Children Of All Ages. To learn more about *The Greatest Show On Earth*, visit www.ringling.com.