

SEASONS'

BACK YARD

GREETINGS

Volume III, Issue #57

December 15, 1998

THE FLYING VALENTINOS OF
BLOOMINGTON, ILLINOIS*By Cherie Valentine*

(A Paper Presented at the Illinois History

Symposium in Springfield, IL December 5, 1998)

The circus was & is an important component of American popular culture. The circus coming to town was a very exciting time for rural America. Everyone had his or her own favorite acts in the circus. For many, the aerial acts not only represent grace & daring, but they are the highlight of the circus. A lot of the young girls in the audience want to be like the beautiful girls flying in the air. The young boys, perhaps, dream of being one day like "The Man on the Flying Trapeze."

My interest in the circus, both past & present, comes from my circus family background. My parents & my aunt & uncles were trapeze artists way before I was born. My family has left me with many journals, telling of the expenses & income made in the circus business; performance contracts with circuses, stating their salaries & dates & towns of the performances; scrapbooks with many newspaper & magazine articles & programs from the shows they worked for.

I also have some of the flying act rigging & all of the double trapeze act rigging that my mother & her partner & I used after my father had to quit flying because of heart problems. I am fortunate enough to have all the costumes, from the mid-30s to 1984, when I retired from performing in the circus. I also have 3 circus wardrobe trunks used in the dressing rooms. One is the trunk that my father used in 1932 when he was catcher in the Flying Concellos trapeze act for Ringling Bros. On the inside of the lid there are a few small pictures & route cards.

My father, George Valentine, was born in Normal, IL in 1898. By 1928, he is listed in the city directory as an "aerial-artist." He taught his 3 brothers the act of the



flying trapeze. George's troupe would be called, The Flying Valentinos; Fred's was the Flying Valentines; Roy's was the Flying Romas (a combination of Roy & his wife Mary's names) & Bill's was the Flying LaVals.

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PIO NOCK 1970



Emmett Kelly

Ringling Bros.



FLYING VALENTINOS



THE FLYING VALENTINOS....

By the late 1920s. George was the catcher for the Flying Sullivans & the Flying LaMar troupes. Art Concello chose George to be his catcher in Art's new act, The Flying Concellos & they went to work in 1930 with the Robbins Bros. Circus.

In the off-season, performers either practiced at the Ward Barn or at the YMCA in downtown Bloomington. Many people came to watch them practice at the "Y" & Lorraine Mather was one of them. She would go watch her father play chess, but would also go watch the circus performers practicing. She said, "Oh, if I could ever learn to do that!"

Little did she know that one day she would be thrilling millions of people, flying thru the air, like those performers she so admired.

In a 1979 article, Gary Schoepfel states: "It was pure coincidence that George Valentine & Walt Graybeal were standing together in front of the YMCA on a day that Lorraine happened to be walking by. Walt piped up, "There's a girl that wants to learn to fly! He called Lorraine over. George then asked her, 'Would you like to be a flyer?' Lorraine said, 'I don't think I could.' 'I didn't ask you if you could, I asked you if you wanted to,' George said. She immediately answered, 'Yes!'"

When asked to recall her first time on the trapeze, she said, "The first thing you have to learn is how to hit the net. That's most important. You go up & get hold of the bar. They tell you, 'Don't drop in the net until you swing all the way out to the end. Then, let go. Put your arms in close to your body & just float down & hit on your back.' Then you get out there & you can't let go! Finally, you can't hang on anymore. You just fall in the net. They all stand around & laugh at you!"

Lorraine had learned to do a single trapeze act & a web act in case the contract might call for more than just a flying act. This paid off for her when in 1950 my dad had to retire from the flying act because of heart problems. Lorraine & her flying partner of 15 years, Sue Pelto, started a double trapeze act, that they could put up & tear down by themselves. After George passed away in 1955, Lorraine booked the act herself.

I joined the act when I was 3 years old. We were known as the Valentino Sisters & Cherie. One time I climbed up to the pedestal board of my uncle's flying act rigging, that was set up in the yard & discovered just how high up I WAS! There was no one around & I started yelling. They had to come up & get me! I never went on a flying

trapeze rigging again! Steve Gossard, curator of the Special Circus Collections at ISU invited mom & Sue to his house in 1985 to view circus movies & had a tape player running to listen to their comments. When mom saw the wardrobe Alfredo Codona had on, she said, "Look, Sue, we have that costume!" I have several costumes in the trunks that the Codonas wore. I also have a picture with Dad, Alfredo & Art Concello, taken on the Ringling Circus. While looking at the costumes of the 30s, Mom commented, "Today, they wear practically nothing at all!" Mom also said, while watching the movies, that she once hit the net & bit her whole lip in half. She was 22. She had a fractured jaw & deep gashes of the lower lip & one knee. In a 1937 article, it states, "Lorraine is recovering from a bad injury received in a fall when she was doing a one & a half somersault during a show in Corpus Christi, TX. She missed the timing with George & fell on the side of her head against the net. The fall tore loose several vertebrae." I remember her saying that the only thing that saved her life was going to a chiropractor.

In Steve Gossard's *Bandwagon* article, Mom tells the story. "After the show, George & I went to the doctor & we were told we had to wait our turn. The doctor was busy with a fellow who had gone to the circus & suffered a heart attack when he witnessed a girl falling from a trapeze!" Mom loved telling that story!

I have the pay receipts from the Russell Bros. Circus in 1943. Both Mom & Sue were fined 50 cents each, 8 times, for missing Spec! There is also a Victory Tax Withheld receipt for \$127, for 6 months work. From the journals & contracts, I have been able to put together the itinerary of the Flying Valentinos from 1933 to 1950 & the double trap act from then until 1964, when I retired from trapeze performing. Lorraine was very proud of a trick she did. It was a 2 1/2 somersault, performed with a black blindfold over her eyes & a gunny sack over her head. I still have the gunny sack. Lowell Sherer recalls witnessing an unusual spectacle at the Shrine Circus at the Coliseum in Chicago, while catching for Fred's act. There was in attendance a large group of deaf children, seated in the balcony at about the same level as the trapeze act. Each time the announcer introduced the tricks the flying act would perform (George & Fred were working together on this date, a rare occasion), they received a healthy round of applause. From the catch bar & from the pedestal board, George & Fred announced the

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KING KONG LIVES!

By Mike Cecere

During the year I spent touring South America, I got to see some really great shows. Down there, without the Shriners, Jaycees, Lions Clubs & crooked phone promoters fronting for you, it was circus living on its own merits. As a result, you got to see some really alive productions with a high degree of imagination. One of these was owned by my good friends & one-time employers, the Fuentes-Gasca family.

Mexico's first family of the circus. They are a multi-talented family, each possessing great skills in performing & show management. They also are big animal lovers & of the various shows I either worked on or visited, I saw nothing but top animal care, much of which, at the time, was superior to standards in the U.S.

And at that time, in the early 80s, they owned about 8 large shows with huge 4 mast Cannabbio Tents & custom seating, all imported from Europe. These tents often hosted up to 5 shows daily, standing room, daily full of happy circus goers.

I would guess with the younger generation in action now they have twice that many. I'll tell you these are first class showmen & very nice folks. A real pleasure to work for.

And to spear another "Myth of the Circus," they don't buy renegade elephants & other cast-off critters from U.S. shows.

When I was there, they had just received 2 Asian elephant babies & a 3 Bacterrian camel act from Europe, with more on the way. I Mexico/South America, as well as Canada importation of all types of wild/exotic animals is permitted, so they bring in the best.

One show they had featured a huge portable pool where they had performing dolphins (transported at great expense) & sea lions, as well as top talent. But my favorite was the Circo King Kong. Trust me, you haven't lived until you've seen a King Kong Circus. (Yes, I did say KING KONG!)

In the jaded, media-driven world, we Americans wouldn't pay much attention to a 40 foot lifelike King Kong, but down in Columbia, Ecuador & Peru, where there are no Universal Studio Tours, old Kong does make an impression. Kept till the end of the show, a whole production number with a number of people, along with the familiar "Beauty & the Beast" theme.

And they pull the drape off King Kong & he comes "Alive", the audience goes wild! Quite a few run out

thinking Kong is coming to their seats, but most cheer wildly. proving surprise is one of the keys to big time showmanship all go home happy.

Hey, when a show can stay a month in one location, doing 4 and 5 shows a day, I would say they know what the Entertainment business is all about. Maybe we need a good King Kong Circus here in America???

CIRCUS ANIMALS TO STAY IN CITY

Two elephants & 8 llamas confiscated from a circus last year will make Albuquerque their permanent home under an agreement reached 11/24 between the city & King Royal Circus. The city will drop its legal action against King Royal & pay the circus \$35,000.

It also will do away with \$162,000 in liens on the animals that would require the circus to pay the city for their care & feeding since they were seized in August, 1997. The circus will also drop its lawsuit against the city, which charged that Albuquerque police & the city government violated King Royal's employees' & owners' civil rights when they took the animals.

The city has already paid \$15,000 to the Florida man who owned the Asian elephant Irene & leased it to King Royal. The city's purchase of Irene put it in the odd position of owning Irene & holding her lease to King Royal. That lease is also voided under the settlement. With the agreement, the city also takes possession of Donna, an African, & the llamas.

Ben Davenport will perform community service as part of his sentence. The circus is also challenging a \$200,000 fine by the USDA in federal appeals court. The animals are staying at the Rio Grande Zoo. "The public can be assured that none of the animals will ever return to circus life," said Mayor Baca.

Carin Cristiani attended the opening night of the National Circus in Sarasota. The program consisted of the Russian Cossacks-Tchalaesav Digits-Riders; Artistic Bike-Yuri Ryjkov; Creative Comedy-Denis Lacombe; Plate Spinning-The Villams; Comedy Canines-David Rosaire & His Perky Pokes; Acrobats-The Moroccan Connection; Roman Rings-Dolly Jacobs; Hand Balancing-Vision; and the high wire with the Great Wallendas. Thanks, Carin.

Sheelagh Jones reports: The Nov. 14 fan-get-together was overshadowed by the news of the death of Doris Guay, Cat Dancers, and cards were signed for Ron.

THE FLYING VALENTINOS...

trick AGAIN hand signing, to yet another even louder round of applause from their special audience. While working with Billy Ward's troupe the following year in Omaha, Jimmy Olson also witnessed George signing to a special audience of deaf children! My grandparents couldn't speak or hear. In December, 1947, George bought a large horse stable & 7 acres in Normal, IL. He purchased the Happy Acres stables from Bill Caudell & converted the area & building into a training ground & rest center for show people. He called it, Circus Haven. I can remember seals, dogs, lions & tigers parked in our driveway! The walls of our apartment were covered with 8x10 photos of performers, most of them autographed, which I still have. In 1939, the Flying Valentinos won the Billboard magazines' award for the Best Flying Act in the Country. I have the plaque hanging on my wall. They took pride in not only their appearance, but also their performance. I am very proud of them & the impact they had on the circus industry. (This is a portion of the paper I gave. I also had slides to go along with the talk. It was well received by the non-circus people attending. This may not be reprinted or copied without the written approval of the author.)



HAPPY HOLIDAYS
and
BEST WISHES
from
CIRCUS REPORT

525 Oak Street
El Cerrito, CA. 94530

A VERY HAPPY

HOLIDAY

SEASON

TO ALL MY FRIENDS

JEANNIE
SLEETER
SINGLETON

From the Phoenix Zoo: As part of regular annual exams given to all animals, as many as 5 meerkats ("Timon" of the *Lion King*) will undergo physical exams on Dec. 10 & 2 male baboons will receive exams on Dec. 17. Both exams will be conducted in the Zoo's Animal Care Center. Media is invited to observe the physicals. "Tigers in Crisis", a traveling exhibit, will make a stop at the Zoo thru Feb. 28. This exciting exhibit will give visitors an opportunity to discover the plight of the endangered tiger, & ways to conserve this species. Zookeeper elephant talks are held at 11:15 a.m. Monday-Thursday at the elephant exhibit. For more information on Zookeeper talks, call 273-1341, ext. 6421.

Sheelagh Jones reports: On Nov. 14, Illinois circus fans were joined by fans from Wisconsin & Ohio for their annual John Davenport/Col. Earl Tegge Tent No. 1, luncheon in Rosemont, IL. Father Jerry Hogan, the circus chaplain, joined the 52 fans & guests for lunch. Ringling had generously donated "goodies" for all attendees, and a few words were said by officers of several Illinois Tents, the Father & Past CFA President, Rich Deptula.

ELEPHANT STAR

By Mike Cecere

Back in the early days of television, it was not unusual to see elephants several times a week as part of either a circus, variety show or some children's theme presentation. Then, there was a long lapse where you only saw them on wildlife specials or yearly Ringling Bros. Circus highlights & "Circus of the Stars" shows.

Well, elephants are back in a Big Way. Not only do several major products use elephants in order to sell their products, but TV shows are bringing them back. The top ones, of course, are wildlife-based shows, such as Jack Hanna's Animal Adventures, Kraft's Creatures, Wild Things among others.

And the best elephant venue yet. ABC/Disney TV's "One Saturday Morning" show. Co-starring with a teenage girl host, the elephant is named "Jellyroll" and has an off-stage actor with a deep baritone voice "speaking" for her. Sounds kind of kooky, I know, but if you're an elephant trainer, it's nothing short of hilarious! And those of us who are really into elephants, recognize "Jellyroll" as none other than "Susie", one of the many highly trained African elephants in America. She was raised & trained by well-known animal trainer, Joanne Wilson.

For many years, Joanne & Susie toured on some of America's top indoor circus venues, as well as tent shows & parks. Imported by well known elephant authority and trainer, Frank Thompson, she is one of the best looking elephants in America, with fine confirmation & great personality.

Frank, a well known elephant authority & zoo director, always was able to obtain the finest specimens of any species through his many years of zoological experience. And he always made sure only the top people in the industry obtained animals he was involved with.

After touring many happy years with Joanne, the chance for her "Susie" to go into the film business came & she joined the highly regarded Brian McMillan & his movie menagerie. Under the bright lights of Hollywood, "Susie" has really excelled and with her own TV show every week, the sky's the limit. What could be next for her? Her own talk show?

Just imagine, "Live with Susie", sponsored by Purina Elephant Chow & Planters' Peanuts! Not all that crazy an idea really. Anyway, just happy to have elephants back on TV. Good job "Susie!"

HAPPY HOLIDAYS FROM CHERIE

"DOC, MY TIGER'S GOT AN ITCH"



*The True Story
of a Kentucky
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Veterinarian
Who Occasionally
Runs Away
With The Circus*

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DOC, MY TIGER'S GOT AN ITCH

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NEVER A HO-HUM DAY

A true story about a Kentucky hill country veterinarian's practice before there were paved country roads, no rural telephones, houses and barns lighted with kerosene lamps and a land smothered with self-serving politicians and bathed in superstitions. Some even believed in witches! Maybe some still do!

In this book "Doc" Martin also tells more of his circus adventures with Mills Bros. Circus as well as the Ringling show.

Shipping and Handling is \$3.50 first book, \$.50 each additional book

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Columbia, SC-Carolina Coliseum-2/5-2/7
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Orlando, FL-Arena-1/15-1/17
Birmingham, AL-Birm.-Jefferson CC-1/20-1/24
Greenville, SC-Bi-Lo Center-1/27-1/31
Knoxville, TN-Civic Coliseum-2/3-2/7
Greensboro, NC-Coliseum-2/10-2/14
Richmond, VA-Coliseum-2/17-2/21
Norfolk, VA-Norfolk Scope-2/24-2/28
Hampton, VA-Hampton Coliseum-3/2-3/7
(All information is subject to change)

BIG APPLE CIRCUS: Damrosch Park, Lincoln Center thru January 10

BACK YARD

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**"CAN YOU IDENTIFY PERFORMERS
ON BACK PAGE OF #56???"**

**JACKIE LECLAIRE, MARY JANE MILLER
AND JEANNIE SLEETER CAN !!!!**

Jackie e-mailed me as soon as he got Back Yard and had called Mary Jane Miller to help him identify the performers on the back cover. Jeannie Sleeter called the same night, but she wasn't sure of one! Great memories you three! From left to right: **Angela Antelak, Valerie Antelak, Martha Wallenda, Dolly Jahn, Yetta Wallenda, Lee Wallenda, Laura Mae McKinzie, & Kitty Clark.**

Jackie says the photo was probably about 1945 or 1946. Martha is Jenny Wallenda's mother. He says they were all wonderful. real show people. They were excellent performers in every way & very versatile, appearing not only in their family acts, but in many venues in the show. Kitty Clark drove a horse drawn chariot in races in the "Amazonia: production number in 1945. All the Wallenda girls not only performed in the high wire act, but in their roman ladder act & also in the cloud swing number & of course, all production numbers. He believes this photo is of the Wallenda's Roman Ladder act. Kitty Clark came on the circus as a showgirl & looked great in big costumes. She had a dynamic smile & fantastic audience projection. Laura Mae was a back bender contortionist & at one time, Albert Powell was teaching her his act. They all looked straight at the audience & said, "Here I am. I'm happy to be here. I am going to show you what I can do & I just love you all for being here! Thank you for coming." You could see it all in their face & eyes. And after all, isn't that what show business is all about anyhow? Jeannie says that when they first came to Sarasota, they stayed at the old Sarasota Mobile Home Park & she went to the old Sarasota High School. In 1943, they joined Ringling the last part of the season. From 1944-47, they were on the Beatty-Russell show. From 1948 to 1960, she was on Ringling. They used to play tricks on each other & she remembers putting Limburger cheese on the pillow case of one of the other girls! Sometimes she would be in another car & the train would start to move & she would have to run along side of the train to get to her car! Thanks to Jeannie, Jackie & Mary Jane for bringing back so many memories.

CFA Chat's on Sat. & Sun. at 9 pm EST. Also Circus Friends Chat on Wed. at 9 pm EST. Contact Harvey Esto at ACMACK235@aol.com for more information.

USDA REVOKES NOELL'S LICENSE

Nov. 13: The USDA administrative law judge has found Anna Mae Noell of Palm Harbor, FL, guilty of violating the Animal Welfare Act. "Noell's Chimp Farm didn't provide the minimum standards of animal care required by the Animal Welfare Act," said Michael Dunn. "The housing facilities lacked proper ventilation & drainage and, in some instances, were not fit for the types of animals they contained. 2 violations involved the mishandling of her primates; it was in the best interests of the animals that we revoked her license."

She was fined \$25,000 & her license revoked. She has until early December to appeal the decision.

TOPEKA ZOO SETTLES USDA CHARGES

Nov. 9: The Zoo, working with the consultants & USDA, will spend at least \$25,000 on the development & implementation of a quality & compliance assurance program to ensure the safety & well-being of their animals.

BOISE CITY ZOO CHARGED

The deaths of several animals at the Zoo are a direct result of their noncompliance with the AWA. The APHIS inspectors found that the Zoo failed to: Keep compatible animals in primary enclosures resulting in the death of an elk; Utilize a sufficient number of employees to maintain the prescribed level of husbandry practices resulting in the death of an elk, lion & leopard; Provide vet care to animals in need of care; Keep the premises clean & in good repair; Clean primary enclosures as required.

SANTA'S FOREST ZOO, PICAYUNE, MS-CLOSED

FOR 10 YEARS:

"Our animal care inspectors found a number of problems involving housing at the Craig & Elaine Collier facility. Rather than collecting a large fine & allowing continued operation, we reached an agreement with the Colliers that will close Santa's Forest Zoo for at least 10 years."

They agreed to a fine of \$7500 & a 10-year license suspension.

PIGEON FORGE, TN EXHIBITOR CHARGED

Bill Dolozier, dba Three Bears Gift Shop, broke a promise. In 1996, the USDA & Dolozier settled in good faith several charges involving AWA violations. APHIS inspectors found that he failed to: Clean enclosures for bears as required; Provide adequate Vet care for animals; Clean & sanitize food receptacles; Provide animals with adequate shelter from sunlight & inclement weather.

FRANK BUCK ZOO CHARGED

The Frank Buck Zoo, Gainesville, TX, lacks properly trained personnel & that is a problem. The agreement we've reached with them will require that they spend the money to get the type of training their animal handlers need. The civil penalty is \$15,000. \$10,000 is to be spent on training for all personnel & \$5000 is to be paid to the Treasurer of the United States.

SIEGFRIED & ROY SCHEDULE

The master illusionists will appear from Jan. 2-5. On January 8, they resume their regular two-show-a-night (7:30 & 11 pm.) Friday thru Tuesday schedule.

They begin their summer hiatus June 29, returning to The Mirage on July 19-20. They are off July 21-22, resuming their regular schedule July 23.

Siegfried & Roy have received the highest honor accorded on behalf of the gaming entertainment industry; induction into the Gaming Hall of Fame. They join Frank Sinatra as the only entertainers honored in the 10-year history of gaming's ultimate recognition.

In accepting the Tiffany-designed award, Roy said that it "stands for many things: breaking molds, changing attitudes, breaking rules & setting trends. "More than 25 years ago, we were told magic doesn't work in this town. In 1982, as Siegfried & I did away with topless shows, we opened new ways for all ages to enjoy our entertainment...and the city followed our lead."

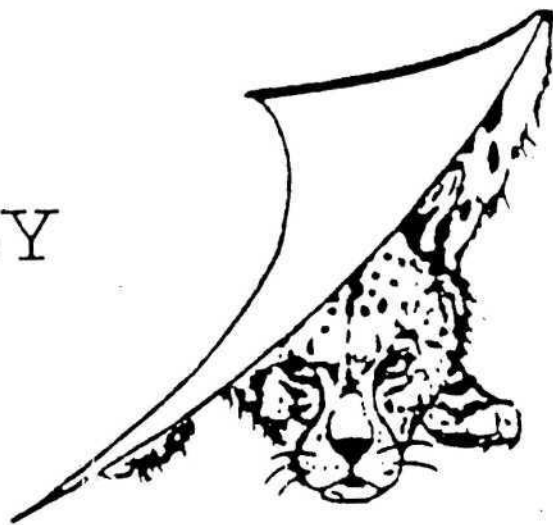
"We brought wild animals to the desert. Unusual? Sure! Who would have ever thought that 'Sin City' would be the one which would save for the world the rarest endangered species of them all-the White Lions & the Royal White Tigers. In helping to bang the drums & shape the image of our magical city, Siegfried & I really did what was logical for us...grow with Las Vegas & have Las Vegas grow with us. It's been the perfect marriage & we've been having fun along the way. To join Frank Sinatra as the only entertainers recognized by you, the gaming industry, for induction into the Gaming Hall of Fame is a milestone we will always treasure." To learn more about the world of Siegfried & Roy on their official web site go to: www.sarmoti.com

There you will find beautiful pictures of Roy and the White Lions at the Cincinnati Zoo when he recently went back to visit Prosperity. I have saved one picture of Roy and the lions as wallpaper on my computer. Just right click on any picture on the Net and you can save it as wallpaper.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year To All

CIRCUS WAGON

DICK MCGIVNEY



COURTSHIP OF A CLOWN

By Bill Ballantine

(Holiday, July, 1950. From the ISU Archives.)

Reprinted with permission of the Ballantines.)

Apr. 13, NYC—Impossible to hear music cues down here! You'd think someone could rig up a speaker so clowns wouldn't have to make their numbers by sheer animal instinct.

Apr. 14, NYC—First week over & into the grind. Snow rocker broke tonight & the loges had a blizzard dumped in their laps. The blue lights & that snow fluttering down in Spec sure gives that tall skinny Snow Queen a break. Vince, the new animal boss, has broken a giraffe & a baby hippo to lead in Spec. The hippo is on a leash just like a pet dog. The giraffe is kept out by the performers' dressing rooms & it's a weird sight to see her neck weaving up over the backstage telephone booth. Nicky, the Greek from the slack-wire act, calls that Whiskers girl "Giraffa." I don't know which name is worse.

Apr. 15, NYC—My prop box got its first lick of paint today. One side is now grass green. The tall one came by as I was putting the mermaid away & passed a few words. Said she liked my drawings in the program & thinks the mermaid is very "droll." First time I've heard her talk; has the strangest high-style voice. Wonder where she hails from? I just come up to her shoulder.

Apr. 16, NYC—My strip pants are still not dropping fast enough. Asked Jerry to file down the release pin.

Apr. 20, NYC—Have been out with the tall one. My friends Ted & Vera caught the night show & I had to find someone to take along to a small party after. Asked tall one just before Finale this afternoon on the 50th St. side, where we both wait to go on. She seemed pleased & surprised but I think she knows I've been nosing around. Was a good thing Sue Fox found out her name for me between shows. It's Roberta Light. The Whiskers is just a John Murray Anderson showgirl nickname after her Uncle Ron, who once wrestled thru Africa & Australia under a magnificent red beard & the moniker "Whiskers Blake." I did a quick splash-bucket bath & Kellogg lent me some scent from his splendid array to cover what clown smell didn't come off. The party headed for "21" but changed course to Tim's, down 3rd Ave. Had a lot of talk & draft beer, both good, & found Whiskers looks quite charming under amber light. Floated home in a little glow.

Apr. 21, NYC—Whiskers came by to say she had a nice time last night & to pass along some new business she'd

thought up for my mermaid. I've asked her to come along to another party Fri. night. She'll let me know. The Garden is very breezy backstage. Ballet broads are complaining of drafts up their hoop skirts. First-of-Mays are sorry now they picked out the scanty glamour wardrobe. Old circus girls know better. They remember those bitter nights in Tennessee & the Carolinas that always come at the end of the season.

Apr. 22, NYC—My strip pants are only dropping right once in every 4 or 5 shows. It embarrasses me not to have them come down right when I'm before the public. Went with some of the clowns to the Spaghetti Joint, another cheap eating place. Circus supers soon get to know all the nutritious places without tablecloths around the Garden. Whiskers sent word she can't come to the party. During Spec I caught her smiling at the new Danish juggler.

Apr. 24, NYC—Good party last night. The midgets arrived first. They must have run across town between peoples' legs. Paul Jerome, the clown, came & Felix, who never turns down a social doing, & Norman Carroll, our announcer, & Kellogg & lots more. Paul Horompo, the midget, held my ear all evening on the grievances of the little people in a 5' 7" world. Felt lousy today. May be just hung over.

Apr. 26, NYC—The chimps have pneumonia & the act is out of the show. Madame Fifi, who works them, is sad. I asked Whiskers about that crazy Suzy between shows. Now at least the mystery of her new blouses is solved. She simply throws the dirty ones away! New romance budding—Marcella, who left a socialite family to join out last year, & Elkhorn, a new elephant boy.

Apr. 27, NYC—A photographer came back for some clown shots & while we had coffee at the grease joint backstage, saw a workhand suddenly get slapped silly for saying there are too many foreigners with the Circus. Explained to the startled photog that the Circus is 28 different nationalities, real proud of its democracy & way ahead of most other communities in genuine tolerance. Whiskers is out of the show today with a cold. Feel downright lousy myself.

May 4, NYC—Been laid low the last 5 days with what is being labeled "walking pneumonia." Affected so many clowns it really should be called "walkaround pneumonia." While I was out one of the chimps was put in an oxygen tent, but died. The act is supposed to come back under canvas, but I think it's out for good.

(Continued on Page 13)

****PASSING OF OUR FRIENDS****

PIO NOCK DIES IN CIRCUS RING

(Thanks to Peter Bendall, of Hamburg & Bobby Hakes for sending this report in. Prof. David MacDonald, History Dept. at ISU, translated from the German report Peter & Bobby sent me.)

Translated from German: Pio Nock, the last great classical clown of Switzerland, is dead. Pio died December 4, seven months after the death of his beloved wife, Alexandra, at the age of 77, during his act at the premiere performance of the Dortmund Christmas Circus, "Maskerade," of a heart attack. Despite immediate attempts of recitation, he died still in costume. According to the desire of the Nock family, the performance, after a half hour interruption, was played to the end & concluded with a minute of silence. The last resting place of the great clown will be in the family plot in Morrens, Switzerland. A public memorial service will take place Dec. 14, at 11 a.m., in the tent of Alfred Nock's Christmas Circus at the Allmend in Bern, Switzerland & the burial will take place later in a private family ceremony.

From Peter: The artists of the Christmas Circus & the family of the famous clown, Pio Nock, say farewell today at 2 p.m. with a memorial service in the Circus tent. The Swiss artiste suffered a heart attack in the circus ring during last Friday's performance of the "Weihnachtscircus." It will be a very special festive memorial. Those of the people of Dortmund who feel they would like to attend are cordially invited-says Dietmar Niemand, Chief of the Circus.

Pio Nock was cremated & the ashes taken to the family grave in Switzerland. He is known as a legendary clown, remembered particularly from the film, "Circus World," where he stood before the cameras with Claudia Cardinale, Rita Hayworth & John Wayne. After his death, the show's premiere carried on.

"That is what grandfather would have wanted," said his granddaughter, Nina. The Christmas Circus has performances until Jan. 10th. "Other clowns take over the parts from Pio, but they cannot replace him," said Dietmar.

MRS. ARNOLD MALEY PASSES 11/15

(I received this note from Frances' family.)

The members of Frances Wingo Maley's family are saddened to report her recent death. At eleven o'clock on Sunday, Nov. 15, we said our last good-byes to her.

"Gram" was lucid & positive-thinking to the very end of her purposeful ninety-nine years.

Mrs. Maley had left word with her family to notify me upon her demise. I have kept in contact with her since I joined the Beatty show in 1975. What a wonderful lady! When she moved to the Ft. Lauderdale area, she had to give her beloved two cats away to her Vet, and it broke her heart to do this. She always asked how mine were doing & I would send her pictures of them. Her birthday was in October and I knew she was getting older, just as I am, but I never imagined that she turned 99! I am so happy that I know she received my card. She will be missed not only by her family, but by your editor also. It is so important to keep in touch with our old friends. Rest in peace, my dear, dear friend. I will miss your friendship.

Dale Riker reports that Lewis Bros. Circus was a mud show that came out of Jackson, MI, pre-war, he thinks. The Nelson Family were a part of the show for a long time. In White Tops, Feb. 1942, it says, "Whitey Ford, the radio comic, known as the "Duke of Paducah," has purchased Lewis Bros. Circus & will be featured with the show this season. They will also add some barn-dance personalities who are favorably known to the radio audience. The show is set to open on May 1, at Jackson, MI. In the 70s, John Lewis & Hoxie Tucker were partners in Lewis Bros., as was Jimmy Silverlake.

Dale also reports on the National Circus School of Performing Arts in Sarasota. He said on the 28th, there was a show for the Circus Community & David Rosaire, The Wallendas & Dolly Jacobs got rousing, standing ovations. Dale also went to the Ice Palace show, Hanneford, & they had Mark Karoly, doing the horse act & elephants; he also did an audience participation number, throwing the hat & with a water gun. Barry Lubin was there & did his Jazzercise number that he did in Cleveland. There was also Lance Ramos, with his cat act; 5 high trap acts with 2 wheels; the bow & arrow Vitals; 3 tumbling acts; 2 flying acts, one did the triple & Satini Demon. The close was 2 incline motorcycles, a high motorcycle act with a girl doing trap & the Globe. This was a strong, stunning show. Thanks, Dale.

Sheelagh Jones says thanks to Ringling again, their group were able to purchase great seats to watch a great circus. The new regime have put together a show like none other in recent years!

COURTSHIP OF A CLOWN.....

Madame Fifi is crushed. I missed the crippled kids benefit yesterday morning. Kellogg filled in for me in the Indian number & another clown, Johnny Reilly, in Finale. I can't find Whiskers. She's still sick & has moved in with friends.

May 5, NYC—The prop hands have been at my box again & now it's painted green all over except the bottom, which needs paint the most. Whiskers came back today. Suzy has been riding too hard & fast in the Manege race. Today she cut a turn too close & sent Bunny Wight's horse away from her. She was in tears & said she only joined the Circus to be with that horse.

May 6, NYC—Payday today & I wasn't docked for being out. Neither was Whiskers. We're all glad the end of this stand is in sight, even though everything about the performance is the best here—audiences, costumes, floats & lighting. The Garden is rough on performers. The stage doors, being big enough to let elephants pass, make regular wind tunnels of the backstage corridors. Dressing rooms have all the faults of the makeshift. The constant stair-climbing knocks us out. As a going-away present, I took Miss Whiskers to see her favorite clown, Alice Pearce, at the Blue Angel. Had to rush to make the midnight show as we break about 11:30. Discovered the demure Miss Whiskers has an ear-splitting, through-the-teeth whistle she uses to hail cabs.

May 9, NYC—Our tiring tryout stand is just about over. Now we take the Circus out to America. More than a hundred cities wait for us. We're moving tonight & the Garden is all confusion. The backstage floor mats have been taken up & there is plenty dust. All the traveling bags will be trucked to the cars in the Bronx this afternoon. Saw that new Danish juggler putting Roberta's bag in the truck. Bunch of us will chip in for a taxi to go up after the show tonight. Train leaves about 2 a.m.

May 10, Boston—Into Boston for 6 days, still indoors. We're in Boston Garden, attached to North Station. We open with a matinee tomorrow, instead of the usual night show. Looks like the new management means business. Found my name chalked on the same dressing room door as last year, along with Kellogg, Frohm, Bangs & the new clown, Burch. Clowns are scattered all over. We're in a cubbyhole under the seats & lucky, for some are dressing in lavatory stalls. I safety-pinned my red berth curtains together to make a door drape & Kellogg foraged a dirty strip of canvas to screen off grills that open on the Arena. Burch stole a rubbish box from Concessions &

we're all set for the run. Laid in a bottle of wine against opening-night chill.

May 11, Boston—Opened to sparse house, mostly paper. *Never much good here opening day.* Met Whiskers walking in from the train. Dropped her at the railroad-station drugstore to buy hairpins & ear stopples to shut out the noise of train travel. Typical First-of-May idea, but might work. She took me to see the 2 new pony colts in ring stock. One was foaled on the train en route & Doc Henderson brought it to the Garden in a taxi. Clown walkarounds all mixed up today as everyone is trying to take his gags in from the entrance nearest the dressing rooms. Wenzel is back at his wire snowman again.

May 13, Boston—Went to rummage for clown wardrobe at the Morgan Memorial, but it was closed & I could only peep in the dingy windows at some faded tailcoats & castoff Harvard boaters. Saw Whiskers, who told me Suzy is less of a problem now that we are living in the cars. She & 58 other girls are stashed in No. 62, named *Los Angeles*.

May 14, Boston—Started to go to the Laff-Movie this a.m., but had more fun looking in the funny mirrors in the lobby. Father Sullivan, Boston's No. 1 Circus fan, brought a bundle of nurses' stockings around to the clowns. The tops make good skull caps. Went to the Italian section near the Garden between shows for a washboard, clothesline & clothespins. Lola, the tight-wire walker (Dainty Swiss Miss above an Abyss of Intrepidity) is telling the girls she's to have a baby.

May 15, Boston—Suzy has had her hair dyed a purplish red by Madame Fifi. Slight case of fisticuffs in the dressing room tonight. One of the Italian acrobats & a ballet boy, who was too concerned over his bridgework to make it much of a set-to. Asked Whiskers to go with me to the Old Howard midnight burlesque, but she'd already promised the Dane. So I went with some of the candy butchers. Saw Marcella & Elkhorn in a stage box, but didn't spot Whiskers anywhere.

May 17, en route—40 cars loaded with the outdoor equipment have come up from Sarasota & the Big Top is up & waiting for us in Washington. This big clumsy thing is finally beginning to be a real circus with tents. Spent a lot of time in the sun out on the platform feeling good to be swaying along on a circus train again. We are over 40 in my car—20 clowns, 5 midgets, 4 flyers, 2 aerialists, 3 from a riding act, 3 jugglers & the grandfather of 1, the organist, 5 dogs & Paul the porter!

(To Be Continued)

LIFE OF BIG CIRCUS OWNER NOT BED OF ROSES SINCE WAR BEGAN

Art Concello Tells Why, Brings News of
Local People (From the Bloomington, IL
Pantagraph, 1945: Valentine Archives)

The stocky blond man thought a moment, then he said, "Well, I think our biggest wartime worry was filling our meat supply. You see, we eat 600 to 800 pounds of meat each day."

That sounds like a big family and it is. In his family, there are 40 meat eating wild animals, not to mention 60 horses, 20 other animals & snakes and 500 people who have to find their own meat. This "family" is the Russell Bros. Circus and the blond man who has to worry about feeding the animals is Art Concello, owner of the circus & former Bloomingtonian.

This is the circus that features famous Clyde Beatty, wild animal trainer. Art is back in his old stomping ground visiting his parents, Mr & Mrs Vasconcellos. Art says the meat shortage was met with horse meat which the finicky lions wouldn't eat at first. They were used to beef. "They've caught on now and get along fine on equine rations," he declares.

The 40 cats-lions, tigers & pumas gobble up 15 to 20 pounds of raw meat daily. The meat problem was just one headache brought on by war, the former aerialist points out. Talented performers for the Big Top, workers to gather to gather up the circus and take it from city to city and steel rigging & big wagons are items that don't grow on trees! Transportation isn't what it used to be either. But women performers stepped into many of the acts, Art pointed out. Today, about 90 percent of his performers are girls & women but before the war, only 25 percent were feminine. As yet, circuses haven't suffered any shortage of animals, although they can't just ring up Frank Buck as they used to and say, "Send over a couple of tigers, will you, Frank?"

Mr. Buck's Long Island farm hasn't taken in any imported wild animals for 5 years, but circuses got stocked up before the war on llamas, camels, leopards, pumas, zebras & elephants. Fortunately most animals have long lives & charm circus audiences for many years. Art has no use for zebras! "They're the meanest animals in the world. They're hard to control & have no sense. We had a trainer work with one bunch from Nov. to April, but when he got thru, they were just the same as ever. You can train a pony, but you can't train a zebra," he declares. Art has lots of news about other

Bloomingtonians, now with the Big Top. His wife, Antoinette Comeau Concello is still with the show. He was asked how he felt when his wife went thru her daring performance & he replied, "Why, we're so used to it it's just like going down to the office!" He himself has done no aerial work for 3 years.

Grace Killian, his half-sister, is secretary-treasurer with the show, & his half-brother, Joe, will go out with it this spring. Wayne Larey is in Australia, managing a set of acts owned by Art. They travel with the Wirth Bros. Circus. Wayne has been "down under" for the last 7 years.

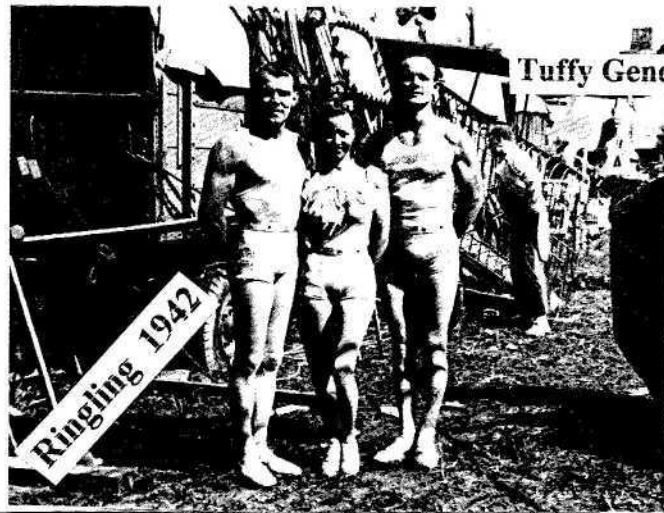
Eddie Ward is still in a flying act with the Concello outfit. Eldon Day is now in Grand Rapids, MI, managing a set of acts from Russell Bros. which is providing a Shrine Circus there. The army & navy also took their toll of Bloomington circus performers.

Mitzi & Jean Sleeter are in a flying act with Art's circus while their husband & father, "Red" Sleeter, former physical education director at the YMCA, is with the navy in the south Pacific. Harold Genders is in naval training at San Diego, but his wife is still with the circus. Both were in a flying act. Duke Rhodus is training at Norfolk with the navy. He was an aerialist, too.

Many Russell Bros. acts are touring the nation on winter engagements. Aerial & bar acts now in the Shrine show at Grand Rapids will go next to Cleveland, then to Minneapolis and finally to Los Angeles, where the circus opens its summer season March 24. There the audience will see Ala Naittlo, Russian-Chinese tight wire walker, who is not yet 20. Now training here in Bloomington, she is the only girl in the world who can do a forward somersault on the tight wire, Mr. Concello boasts!

Gary Thomson reports: The Toronto Christmas Model Train Show was held Nov. 21 & 22 in Mississauga, Ontario. This was the first fall show put on but the old spring show was well liked & well attended with 70,000 sq. ft. of displays & venders. The Martin Downs Ring #18 once again attended with a small circus model display. Gerry & Shirley Nicholls, Ray & Isabelle Bottoms & Paul and Grace Pattison displayed. The club will put on a full display next year. The show likes the circus models & always gives us a good location. We usually set up a display of about 25 tables. Emmett Kelly, Jr. was in Frankenmuth, MI Nov. 21 & 22 to sign his figurines at the annual gathering of collectors. There is a new collection that was introduced there in honor of his 75th year! Thanks, Gary.

Tuffy Genders Grayce Genders China Durbin

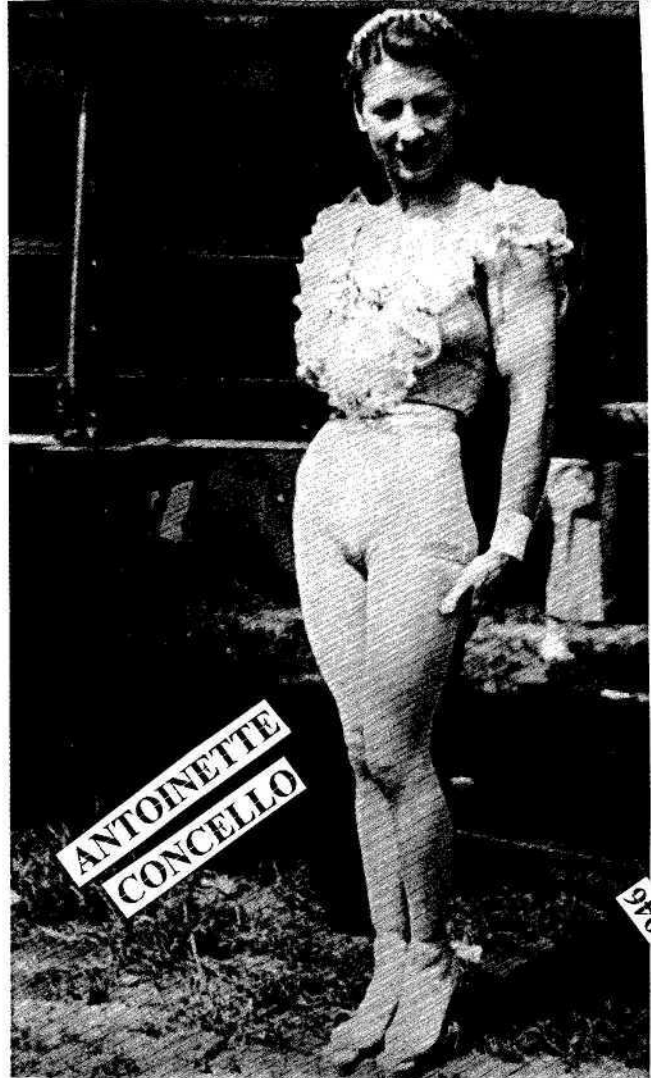


Ringling 1942

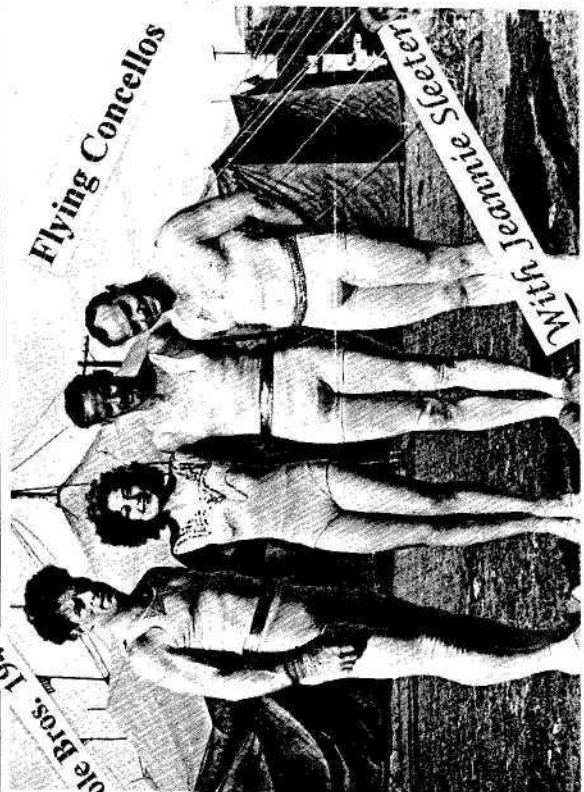


ROSAIRE FAMILY

1969



ANTOINETTE
CONCELLO



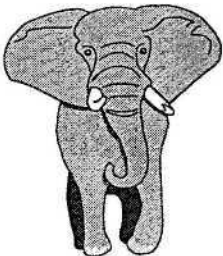
Flying Concellos

With Jeanne Slerety

Cole Bros. 1946



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