

# BACK YARD

Volume III, Issue #53

October 15, 1998

## BIG TOP'S ROYAL FAMILY

**They're Walt Disney's choice for Disneyland's circus-the death defying Cristianis, who, for years, have kept audiences gasping at tricks nobody else dares try. By Harriet La Barre**

(From the Circus Archives of Illinois State Univ.)

In the brass band the drums begin to roll, & into the glitter and tanbark of the three-ring circus come fast-trotting, magnificent circus horses carrying lovely ballerinas, poised on tiptoe.

Before you know it, the three rings are alive with acrobats of breathtaking skill, top-hatted animal trainers, and trapeze artists floating through the air.

What's so strange about this is that it's all one family-the famous and incomparable Cristianis. The blonde girl riding bareback is the daughter of the acrobat you see spinning like a dervish in dizzy somersaults. The tumbler dropping through hoops of fire is the brother of the pretty girl high on the swaying trapeze. In the troupe, at one show or another, are 32 Cristianis-nieces, cousins, sons, brothers, nephews and sisters.

To Walt Disney, it looks as though the Cristiani Circus is exactly what he wants for Disneyland, his mammoth new amusement park in Anaheim, Calif. For, through five generations, the Cristianis have been creating & perfecting dangerous stunts no one else can match. And they are no streamlined Ziegfeld Follies circus, but a real, traditional one. The whole thing started with Papa Cristiani's grandfather, who left his job as blacksmith to the King of Italy to join the circus. In Europe, where Papa's 22 brothers and sisters have all been in the circus business, "Cristiani" has come to *mean* circus.

Way before Walt Disney, John Ringling spotted Papa's family troupe in Belgium; he brought it here in 1934. By 1950, the expanding Cristianis family again started its own circus, which now gives them a net income of up to



\$150,000 a year. At family discussions around the kitchen table in Papa's \$32,000 Sarasota, ranch house, are born a daredevil trapeze act, a thrilling bareback trick. On one such evening, third son Lucio talked & showed diagrams for hours before winning permission to perfect his famous three-horse "suicide" trick.

(Continued on Page 5)



MABEL STARK 1935



ALBERT WHITE

**\*\*WHITE TIGER BITES, KILLS ITS TRAINER\*\*-**(by Bob Arndorder, of the Gainesville Sun-October 9)

Alachua, Florida: A 3 1/2-year-old white Bengal tiger attacked & killed a trainer who had worked with the cat since it was six days old. Charles Edward "Chuck" Lizza III, 34, was pronounced dead at 10:18 a.m., about 2 hours after the attack at Ron & Joy Holiday's Cat Dancers Ranch, southwest of Alachua.

The nearly 400-pound male tiger, Jupiter, is one of six big cats owned by Ron & Doris Guay. The couple have toured for almost 30 years under their professional names, Ron & Joy Holiday, traveling throughout the world performing with their exotic cats at circuses, fairs & Las Vegas stages.

Lizza had worked with them as a trainer for the past 6 years & lived with them, said Sgt. Jim Troiano, of the Sheriff's Office. "We're treating it as a freak accident, nothing more," he said.

Around 8 a.m. Thursday, Troiano said, Ron was leading Jupiter on a leash from its night cage in the trailer of a semi truck to a day kennel inside the fenced enclosure at the ranch. Some workers were at the compound installing a 12-foot-high, chain-link fence for a new kennel. When Jupiter saw the strangers, Troiano said, the tiger became agitated. Lizza came to help Ron calm the cat, but apparently tripped in front of the tiger & was attacked. Joy rushed over & helped her husband get the tiger off Lizza, who had received a severe bite on his neck.

Paramedics worked on Lizza at the scene for about 30 minutes. The victim was then airlifted by helicopter to Shands at the Univ. of Florida, where he died.

Troiano said the Guays, who thought of Lizza like a son, were too distraught to give any personal information about him. Later Ron sent 3 framed photographs of Lizza with some of 3 tigers & 3 leopards he had worked with to reporters gathered at the ranch's gate. They show a young man & the obvious tenderness he felt for the animals. In one chilling photo, Lizza is feeding a bottle to Jupiter. The black-striped tiger towers over the trainer, its paws propped playfully on his shoulders. "They said Chuck really loved these animals," Troiano said.

Chuck's mother, Pat, lives in Latrobe, PA-east of Pittsburgh. Representatives of the Florida Game Commission were on the scene to investigate & review the Guay's permits. "They had all current & valid permits to possess & house class 1,2 and 3 animals," said the officer. Exotic cats & other dangerous animals fall under

class 1. Officer Weaver said the Guays have been licensed for some 30 years with GFC, as well as with the USDA, and never had a problem. Cat Dancers Ranch was inspected recently and no infractions were found.

After the attack, Jupiter was placed in a cage in a shady area of the compound. What happens to Jupiter now is up to the Guays, Weaver said. There is no requirement that the tiger be destroyed, as it occurred on private property, and the animal did not escape.

Cat Dancers Ranch was established in 1984, on a narrow dirt road in a picturesque unincorporated area between Alachua & Newberry. The neighborhood consists of small farms & new & older homes. Neighbors said the Guays & their exotic cats have never been a problem.

"They're excellent neighbors. I've seen their cats & they're always so protective of them. We're not concerned," said Irene Caudle, who lives across the road. \*\*\*\*\*

**\*\*\*\*\*BIG BANG by Mike Cecere\*\*\*\*\***

While sitting tonight watching the Farm Report on TV, waiting for the Tractor Pull to come on, I surfed the channels and came upon the Guinness Book of Records show on Fox.

There was a double cannon set up at what I recognized as Kennywood Park. Even more recognizable was the smiling face of the circus industry's resident mechanical genius, Prof. Dave Smith, Sr. I had the pleasure of working with the Smith family while working on the excellent George Carden Circus back in the 80s. They are sure nice folks & some of the most intelligent and innovative people to ever grace our industry.

In this TV show, it was Dave, Sr. vs Dave, Jr. to see which would get the record for longest cannon jump. These folks work hard to make what they do look easy but don't be fooled. It takes a lot of hard work, planning & cash \$ to make it in the Human Cannonball biz. It was a really nice, well done show and very, very positive national publicity for the Smith family. Oh, yes, Dave, Sr. is still the champ! Good job folks.

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**LATE NEWS: GUNTHER HAS A NEW BABY GRANDSON!!!! MORE NEXT ISSUE. CONGRATULATIONS !!!!!!!**

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**CHRISTMAS IS COMING REAL SOON! SEND IN YOUR CHRISTMAS ADS AND SPECIAL GREETINGS NOW !!!!**

## \*\*\*GOLDEN ELEPHANTS\*\*\*

by Mike Cecere

There are many kind and generous things done for the elephants around Kenneth Feld's Feld Entertainment. They have the world's top food, housing, vet care & dedicated caring people. In fact, they have been having a massive recruitment drive to add to their already elite elephant department on all fronts.

What's more encouraging is that they underwrite the largest Asian elephant breeding program with an unlimited future. The huge multi-million dollar facility built in Polk County, Florida is a shining tribute to their commitment to their animals.

Not as publicized by equally important is Feld Entertainment's Elephant Retirement Center, headquartered where the breeding program began, Two Tails Ranch in Williston, Florida. Built by my good friend, the late Ted Svetsky & now leased by his family to the Feld organization, it houses a large herd of elephants, who have well earned their time in the sun.

The general manager is Jimmy Silverlake, well known as a circus owner/manager & elephant man. A lifetime showman & elephant lover, he makes sure only the best hay, feed & other food-stuffs are brought in for the elephants. His right hand man is well known elephant man, Harry Locker. Harry is responsible for the day to day running of the operation using the experience he's gained working in some of the top elephant operations in North America.

And many circus fans will remember the several years he toured with his own act of huge black bears. Harry found a wonderful home for his Bear Buddies at a wildlife park, near Branson, Mo. I sure hope they like country music!

He then was able to give his full time to his first love, working with elephants. It's a full days work everyday, seeing to the comfort of those retired jumbos. (Just imagine having to arrange the shuffleboard games for 18 elephants!)

And an even more amazing fact is that the Feld-RBBB organization feeds & houses about as many or more elephants at their off-exhibit facilities as their touring units. Now, that's something that needs more publicity. Real good news about elephants enjoying their Golden Years!

## \*\*\*MYTH UNDERSTOOD\*\*\*

Like any business that has been under way since the Roman days, a lot of traditions get started & a lot of

myths pass on generation to generation. One wacky one I heard was when we first were assembling equipment up here in New York to possibly tour a circus. I had a character call up & ask for a quarter of a rail car stateroom (we still own our own full size RR train), a big salary & for that he'd show us how to tour the Canadian Maratimes, so we could become millionaires.

I was sorry to have to break it to him that what few friendly Canadians still were able to fish in those areas all had satellite dishes & would rather watch WCW Wrestling & Baywatch! Then, when I was a young man, you'd hear especially from show management people that the animals were the attraction & you should train them so you could stand in the background. Truthfully, they wanted you to do that so they could replace you if you asked for more money or disagreed about your help or how much to feed the animals.

Of course, in those days, there were a lot of experienced circus elephant men around, more than there were jobs. Now, it's the zoos that have the biggest supply of people & circuses have to cultivate good people. Once, years ago, while on my last tour with Hoxie Bros., I was offered a job by one of the big Shrine circus' producers, (who has passed away since), to take over his cage act. Of course, being a young fellow, I was quite flattered. When we talked about money tho, I mentioned I expected to be paid every week, year-round, which shocked him.

He thought it was "un-American" to expect to be paid 52 weeks! I had to reply it wasn't my problem he didn't tour or have money coming in every week. Since he expected the cats to be trained & looked after every week, why shouldn't he pay for it? There are a lot of showmen today that would pay someone 53 weeks if they could find someone experienced!

Finally, (for this article), a big dumb myth used to be that African elephants were somehow troublesome & untrainable. Boy, was that idea wrong! In the old days, there were only a few Africans to judge from & they didn't have the history with man that the Asian elephants had.

Then, in the 80s, when their habitat was being destroyed & their parents killed for ivory, dozens of these creatures came to America. And within a few years, have become the top species of elephant in entertainment.

While they have their critics, often it's someone who has never trained an elephant or a handler not able to match wits with them.

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## **\*\*BIG TOP'S ROYAL FAMILY.....\*\***

Papa and Mama still run the whole show, though now in their seventies. The Cristianis like Papa at the helm. "It's why we never had a fatal injury in the family. Papa won't let us perform a trick unless we're positive we can do it." Former trapeze artist, acrobat & contortionist, Mama Cristiani still goes on the road with the family and keeps them strong with ground, raw beefsteak.

A picture caption- "Fourth generation at work-Papa's daughter-in-law Marion & daughter Corky, practice the elephants at their Sarasota winter quarters. After acrobatic, trapeze, & bareback-riding practice, they relax in separate homes. The Cristianis have 14 houses, in the \$20,000 class in Sarasota. The families now eat individually (except when on tour), & all own cars, mostly sporty convertibles." Another photo caption: "This "suicide" act took 3 years to develop & was filmed at friend Leo Carrillo's California ranch. From horses, 3 Cristianis somersault through hoops and land one place behind. Lucio, the only man ever to somersault from a first horse to a third successfully, won medals in Paris & London for the feat, which still tenses the family. Even routine acts carry danger, since a horse, though perfectly trained, can stumble on a pebble, destroying split-second timing." Another photo caption: "Fifth generation Antoinette practices a riding act on a dancing horse while her father, Papa's second son & the family's horse trainer, guides her. Pretty, 19-year-old "Tony," like all of the Cristianis boys & girls, began her circus training by studying ballet, which Papa considers basic. On the road, she & her parents live in air-conditioned comfort in the \$5000 trailer attached to their car."

Another caption: "In the troupe are 17 grandchildren & a smattering of cousins. In the photo there is a nylon trampoline (springboard) for making a lively entrance onto a stage, a pedestal for jumping (beloved of the 10-year-olds) and a teeterboard. In the winter, most of the youngsters attend boarding school, but some perform during vacations."

A photo shows 4-year-old Livio as he bones up on balance with Uncle Belmonte. Livio's godfather is author Paul Gallico, whose meeting with the Cristianis led to the story on which the carnival movie, "Lili" was based. Another photo shows Chita holding son Livio's hand tightly, after he tried to shake hands with a particularly dangerous bear. Papa's oldest daughter, Chita annually does an acrobatic act at New York's Latin Quarter. Another caption says: "The difficult somersault, four

high to the shoulders, stuns audiences. 28-year-old Ortans is catapulted into the air, & does a triple somersault before landing on brother Lucio's shoulders. In the original trick, Ortans landed sitting in a chair, but the act was revised because the shock always knocked her unconscious."

"Before the nightly poker game, Lucio plays with nephew Ray Anthony. Papa Cristiani, who trains most of the children, began getting Ray Anthony used to balance & height when he was only 4 months old. Papa also oversees his son's management of the circus, which costs \$5000 a day to run. So far, the family thinks it has played just about every U.S. town of over 10,000 people at least four times. But as Disneyland's circus, they will move around less."

"The drink that Papa says cured his stomach pains is half a glass of milk combined with half a glass of Italian brandy. The photo shows him in the kitchen of his 4-bedroom Sarasota house, that has 2 baths, a maid's quarters & a 2 car garage. In more precarious days, Papa's circus was destroyed by storms twice in one year, once in Messina, & once on the outskirts of Milan. With the rebuilt remnants, he began his world-wide tour. "One of my babies was born in Morocco, one in France, one in Spain & several in Italy," Mama says. She and Papa became U.S. citizens in 1945."

From childhood, all the Cristianis sons were taught to play the violin, saxophone, trumpet, concertina & guitar. A music teacher & a tutor traveled with the family so that the children's schooling would not be neglected. Two of the girls, Corky & Chita, can design clothes. They buy material and, with the whole family's help in cutting and sewing, completely outfit the circus with costumes for only \$30,000 a year, thereby saving an estimated \$60,000 a year. A photo shows the Cristianis elephants with 2 girls in Fairbanks, Alaska. On this trip, Mama, used to facing foreign foods, fed the family moose meat, "browned in oil & butter, & then simmered slowly with red wine & garlic. Another photo shows 2 elephants, held by Corky & Marion. Oldest son, Oscar, still a brilliant acrobat at the age of 48 & grandfather of Ray Anthony, points out the way Marion, his wife, holds the elephants quiet.

(No date or magazine title on this article. The article is six pages long and contains 13 photos! Anyone having any other articles on the Cristianis family that they would like to share with Back Yard readers, please send them in. Also, any old photos that you would like to see in Back Yard or have for sale-of performers-please write Cherie.)

## **\*MARAN BURCH ACCEPTS HONOR FOR HUSBAND ERNIE AT THE CLOWN HALL OF FAME\***

Maran writes that her trip to Milwaukee was fantastic! Her whole trip, including hotel & meals, was complimentary of the Clown Hall of Fame. She says the night of the Honoration, Jackie LeClaire made a speech of "Blinko" from his birth to his death, and then they asked her to speak. It was very hard for her to speak of her beloved husband, Ernie & she had to stop, and I know they all understood. She says that her life with "Blinko" was a very happy one and their world-famous "Comedy Novelty Balloon" act traveled all over the world, except for Australia. She was very touched & honored by the whole affair. After reading Maran's letter, I decided to contact Jackie LeClaire to ask if I could print his speech in Back Yard. The following is Jackie's speech, reprinted with his permission.

### **Ernie Burch-Blinko, The Clown by Jackie LeClaire**

In my opinion-of all the clowns who have ever been inducted into the International Clown Hall of Fame, no one has ever been more deserving. Ernie was a clown all of his life. That is all he ever did was clown. He never even ever had one job outside of his clowning world. Although his background was circus, Ernie clowning in every possible venue of clowning imaginable. He was always an outstanding attraction, no matter where he appeared.

Born in 1923, in New Jersey, to parents who were in the restaurant business, he was the youngest of two children, the other being his older sister, Evelyn. Even as a child, Ernie remembered his teacher in Irvington, New Jersey, making him write 1000 times, "I will not clown in class." Always a flair for the artistic, even as a child, he would borrow his sister's cosmetics & stand in front of the bathroom mirror, applying various faces & expressions. When the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus came to town, it was usually a school day & the huge tent set up on a lot near the school. Like most lads, he could not resist the circus, but unlike most of his classmates, he would rub poison ivy leaves on his hands & arms. The resultant rash gained an unauthorized absence from school on "circus day." His sick bed was the circus lot, where he would run errands for the clowns, get free passes for the show & temporarily live the dream he hoped to make a future reality. When he was later given inoculations to prevent poison ivy, Ernie still had another "hookey gimmick" for circus day. He pried a filling from

his tooth with a pen knife, and drank ice cold water to swell the jaw. The result, another full day at the circus, swollen jaw notwithstanding. Ernie only went to the 8th grade before the circus bug finally enveloped him. He started clowning at 14, and debuted with his first circus, The Dailey Bros. in 1941, in Georgetown, Texas at a salary of \$1 a day. Being a youngster, another old-time clown, Lou Kish, took him under his wing & acquainted him with the initial do's and dont's of clowning. There was no clown college or schools of clowning in those days. Ernie toured with Dailey Bros. Circus through 1943, until he entered the army. First assigned to the infantry, he was later transferred to special services to do clowning at camp shows. He always remained very proud to have served his country. Mustered out of service in 1944, he returned to Dailey Bros. at the close of that tent season. He played his first Shrine Circus date for Zack Terrell & Cole Bros. Ernie also spent seasons with the King Bros. Circus & the Sparks Circus. That is where I first met and saw him perform. I knew at that time, he was a great clown. Clowning, tho relatively safe, has its occupational hazards. Ernie broke his nose during a slambang Indian routine; severely injured his leg one time in a dive through a barrel with a dummy shooting out the other end. I will always remember him telling about one time on the lot when a sweet, little girl came up to him & asked, "May I have your hand?", which he gently put forth and she proceeded to bit a large piece of skin out of the back of it to the tune of several stitches.

In 1948, he was hired by Ringling Bros. & Barnum & Bailey Circus, totally prepared to meet any challenges that might come his way. Ernie knew where he had come from & where he was going. He was fully living his childhood dream. It was during the 1951 season that Cecil B. DeMille & Paramount Studios decided to film "The Greatest Show On Earth" movie, and who else's talents would DeMille decide to fall in love with? Why Ernie Burch, of course. Ernie has always worn a unique makeup, especially noted for a musical treble G clef on his forehead, a fluttered nose and two and a half inch long tin foil eyelashes. John Murray Anderson, the great Broadway producer, had already dubbed him "The New Look Clown," but DeMille started calling him "Blinko" and when Ernie went to Hollywood to film his scenes, the name "Blinko" was written into the script so Betty Hutton would say his name loud & clear on the silver screen. It was perfect, & stuck with him through the rest of his career.

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**MYTH UNDERSTOOD-by Mike Cecere...**

(You have to be smarter than elephants to work them!) Thus destroying a big old myth that anyone can work an elephant, just because they are "dumb" animals. There are no "dumb" elephants, just dumb handlers!

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**\*\*\*MORE WHAT? by Mike Cecere\*\*\***

One thing, if you are to be successful in the circus/zoo business, you have to be observant to what are the trends of what the public would like to see. For way too long, a great mistake has been to keep giving the public what we wanted to give them, rather than what the public wanted to see. The results are obvious. The original thinkers are doing real well & the rest shuffling around with their hands in their pockets mumbling, "It's all set up. Where are the people?" Another side of the coin is people who say, "We need more chimp acts" or "We need more cat acts" or even "We need more liberty acts."

Are you kidding? Yes, it's true. There is only one large scale professional chimp act now. That very entertaining & highly trained Zoppe-Rosaire chimps. They take super care of their chimps & are in high demand all year long. But that's all the work there really is for that type of act. Yes, up to a few years ago, there were several, but since then, the other folks have retired with their chimps. And that was the right time for that to happen. And as for caged cat acts, there are way more than there is work for them. With the fade out of Shrine circuses, well underway, there is little work to be had along those lines after March & April every year. Theme parks used to be a big summer spot for many but now they seem to be concerned with big thrill rides instead of family-type attractions. Lately, quite a few cat acts have found success playing state & county fairs, top among these being the excellent Hawthorn white tiger acts and Andre Skarbeki's Serengeti Lion Show. The public loves these, especially as they can sit up close to these beautiful creatures & talk to their trainers close up. Once people get to meet & talk to trainers & handlers they often change the preconceived notion they have about showpeople from countless bad TV shows & movies, not to mention propaganda from the Pro-Vegan Hate Groups. But still, cat acts, except for those on long touring shows, are relatively under unemployed with their trainers/owners having to take outside work to feed both man and beast. Then there is the ever rising cost of motor equipment, help, permits etc. So every time you hear people asking where are the acts, ask, "Where is all the work?"

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

Immediate Past President of the Circus Fans Assn., **Rich Deptula**, recently lost his mother, **Anne F. Deptula** on August 20th. She was laid to rest on August 25th in Lorain, Ohio. Rich's mom loved the circus and took him to his first circus, Cole Bros. in 1949. She is survived by her son, Rich; daughter-in-law, **Cheryl** and grandson, **Jason**, who are both members of the CFA. She was looking forward to the wedding of her grandson, Jason on October 17, 1998.

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**Jim Nordmark**, 56, of Sarasota, FL died on Oct. 1, 1998. He was born Dec. 21, 1941, in Mt. Vernon, WA & came to Sarasota 35 years ago from Sedro-Woolley, WA. He was owner of Events International. Survivors include a daughter, **Kristina**, of Sarasota; two sons, **Jason & Nicholas**, of Sarasota; two sisters, **Judy Beck** of Stanwood, WA; & **Lisa Garcia** of Sarasota; & his stepmother, **Madelyn** of Sarasota.

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**\*\*\*NEWS FROM CIRCUS FRIENDS\*\*\***

**Ned Kronberg** reports from Minn. that he saw **Circus Eloise** on 10/6. They played 2 shows in St. Paul. The show from the Nat'l Circus School of Montreal featured **Marie Eve Dumals**, Trapeze; **Jeannot Painchaud**, Artistic Bicycle; **Comic Duo Les Voila**; **Vertical Rope**, **Marcus**; **Group Juggling**, **Alain Damiem**, **Daniel**, **Jeannot & Robert**; **Hand to Hand Alain Boudreau & Noemie Sirard-Gervais**; **Balancing Ladder Daniel Cyr**; **Slack Wire Jamie Adkins**. The show was well choreographed & lasted about 2 hours. All in all, it was very good for a new age circus.

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**Pat & Donna Kine**, of Olympia, WA report that several members of the **Bobby Kaye Ring** displayed their layouts at the **Lynden, WA** fairgrounds 10/3-4 with great success. The people of Lynden really made them feel welcome. Lynden is located just south of the Canadian border & 10 miles west of **Bellingham, WA**. This was a fun event & beautiful country.

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**David Tetzlaff** reports that **Caribbean Gardens**, Naples, FL opened **Tiger Forest**, a 16,000 sq. ft. tiger exhibit this summer that is very natural with numerous trees & other vegetation & has a large custom rockwork pool for cooling off. They have a new exhibit under construction for the **Asian deer**, **Muntjac** & others, still in the planning stages.

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**127th EDITION RINGLING RED UNIT:**

Boston, MA-FleetCenter-Oct. 14-25  
Pittsburgh, PA-Civic Arena-Oct. 28-Nov. 1  
St. Louis, MO-Kiel Center-Nov. 4-8

**128TH EDITION RINGLING BLUE UNIT:**

Cleveland, OH-Gund Arena-Oct. 23-Nov. 1  
Rosemont, IL-Rosemont Horizon-Nov. 4-15  
Chicago, IL-United Center-Nov. 17-29  
Huntsville, AL-Van Braun Civic Arena-12/3-12/6  
Miami, FL-Miami Arena-12/16-1/3  
Sunrise, FL-Nat'l Car Rental Center-1/6-1/10  
Jacksonville, FL-Coliseum-1/14-1/18

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**BIG APPLE CIRCUS: New York City-Damrosch**

Park, Lincoln Center October 22 thru January 10  
George Carden Circus: Abilene, TX-Oct. 18; Victoria, TX Oct. 19-21; Beeville, TX-Oct. 21; Pleasanton, TX-Oct. 26; Seguin, TX-Oct. 27; New Braunfels, TX-Oct. 28; Kerrville, TX-Oct. 29-30; Laredo, TX-Oct. 31-Nov. 1; Glenpool, OK-Nov. 3; Alua, OK-Nov. 5; Miami, OK-Nov. 7; Ft. Worth, TX-Nov. 9-21; Ada, OK-Nov. 22  
(Thanks to Bill Loter of Hugo, OK for sending these in.)

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**BACK YARD**

is published twice monthly-(15th & 30th) by Cherie Valentine, 1522 Clinton Blvd., Bloomington, IL 61701. Ph. 309-828-0737 (no collect calls, please) E-mail: cdvalen@ilstu.edu Subscription rates are \$25.00 per year, for 24 issues, within the USA. Advertising rates, payable in advance, with your copy, are: Full page \$30; Half page \$15; Quarter Page \$10; 1/8 page \$5. \*\*The column, "The Fox," is written by Jenny Wallenda. Other material is written by Cherie Valentine, unless otherwise identified as to author. Reprints from other published material are identified as to source. Comments by writers are their own and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the publisher. Back Yard is a pro-circus, pro-animal publication, which supports the use of animals which are legally held and properly cared for, in the American circus.

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

Friends of Louis Brusie of Clifton Park, NY will be saddened to hear that Lou passed away in West Springfield, MA on Sept. 18. Death occurred at the Coliseum Restaurant, adjacent to the Big E Grounds, where the new Wayne McCary Tent, CFA, was holding a luncheon. Funeral calling hours & interment were in

Lou's hometown of Saratoga Springs, NY on Sept. 23. Lou was a longtime circus enthusiast & member of CFA, CHS & CMB. He spent his vacations following circuses each year & frequently worked as a ticket seller on the Beatty-Cole show. Lou was also an avid collector & loved circus history from early beginnings to the current scene. Lou had many good friends, both among the show people & circus fans & was very active in CFA functions, being a member of the Felix Morales, Pedro Carillo, Billy Martin & Wayne McCary Tents & the Gilbert Spaulding Ring of CMB. He was also very active in combating the animal activists. Recounting Lou's activities in 1998 gives an overview of his circus related affiliations over the years. Lou caught the Beatty-Cole show every year it was on trucks, & missed only 1 parade staged by the Circus World Museum. Lou was also a member of CWM-Inc. In '98, Lou worked on the April Morales Tent dinner, traveled to Baraboo & Milwaukee, attended a Carrilo Tent function, and the Wayne McCary Tent Raising in Dalton, MA. In addition, he visited several circuses several times & was present at the CFA Convention in Cleveland.

Friends from New York state, Vermont & Mass. came to the calling hours & attended the burial service, where tributes were given. Fans also acted as pallbearers. Members of the 4 tents that Lou belonged to paid their respects at the calling hours. Lou's presence will be mourned at all his friends whenever they attend a circus or fan function, especially his close friend of many years, Gordon Turner. Despite the tragedy, Lou passed away in the proximity of the Hanneford Circus, Commerford's Petting Zoo & the Circus World Museum exhibit; all areas where he had many close & valued friends, as well as those attending the Tent function. (Thanks to Paul Horsman for this tribute. Lou was a Back Yard subscriber & will be missed by his many friends in the circus world.) Gordon Turner, Lou's long time friend said that Lou would have been 75 on Oct. 11. Lou is survived by his brother, Donald, 82. Lou was one of the Albany Gang of the Morales Tent. Father Hogan gave a mass for Lou in Buffalo recently. In '55 or '56, Lou traveled with the Kelly-Miller show. Lou was fascinated by the way the hippo really traveled around the hippodrome track!

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Raymond Green II, of Venice, FL passed away 10/4 in Sarasota. He was an engineer for the IRS & a circus model builder. He was born in Brooklyn & came to Venice 3 yrs. ago from Rockaway, NJ.

## **\*\*BLINKO'S LIFE CONTINUED....\*\***

**By Jackie LeClaire**

It was with Ringling Bros. in 1955 that he met Maran Correll, a Hungarian acrobat, who performed with the Abbott Sisters, a tumbling troupe, & did production numbers. Ernie was her web sitter for the aerial ballet number. He was impressed with her from the start. He didn't know it at the time, but she would eventually become his wife. She had fallen in love with him from the very first minute she had laid her eyes on him.

In 1956, Ringling closed its canvas tour forever & Maran and Ernie went their separate ways. However, as fate would decree it, on another show, the Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. Circus, on October 18, 1958, in Miami, Florida, in front of an audience of 5000, covered by NBC and followed by a big top reception, Blinko married his Hungarian acrobat-web girl in the center ring. It was all part of a day that also included 3 full circus performances. Carrot-colored hair reflected her flaming vitality, and together they devised an amusing & novel balloon act, which they called the "Blinko-Maran-Balloonarama." Very popular as a pre-show warm up, they would shoot rocket balloons into the audience. The balloons, about 3 feet long, propelled by hand into screaming crowds, and geared to loose air as they wiggled above the outstretched hands of eager moppets. The press corps immediately labeled them, "Balloonologists."

Always looking for what was topical at the time, Ernie had space clown costumes designed & that way he could become Captain Astronaut and Maran, Miss Orbit. The kids loved that.

Some other engagements he made that I can recall were the E.K. Fernandez dates in Hawaii & a tour of Japan with Paul Kaye. In 1967, Ernie, with his wife, were chosen to represent American Circus in Russia, a rare honor at that time. Balloonarama was not only seen in circuses, but hotels, night clubs & elsewhere, including the Beverly Hilton Hotel in Los Angeles, the Chicago International Trade Show, the Canadian National Exhibition in Toronto & at what Ernie said was the largest audience he ever showed to, 40,000 people at the Calgary Stampede, in Calgary, Canada.

From 1978 to 1992-14 years, Blinko was a feature attraction at Circus Circus in Las Vegas. Performing with Maran in the balloon act, he also had a contract as an announcer & was Circus Circus' appointed ambassador of good will, meeting & greeting thousands of adults and children as the inimitable Blinko, the Clown. These are

only some of the highlights of Ernie Burch's brilliant career. Blinko was definitely a clown for all seasons. That was Blinko as a clown, but what about Ernie Burch as a person. Everyone loved Ernie & Ernie loved everyone. There was no such thing as a stranger to him. When Ernie met anyone, he always greeted them with great enthusiasm and excitement. He lit up all over, and like a little puppy dog wagging his tail & licking your hand, you knew that he was glad to see you.

He was always humble. Ernie once said, "A good clown never forgets that the youngsters are his greatest fans! Why if it weren't for the kids, I wouldn't have a job. I hope to clown always-I can't think of a pleasanter, more rewarding vocation." He also said the following, "My wife often says that we don't have any kids of our own, but we have millions of them around the world-in places where we've performed." "I truly enjoy making people laugh, but mostly the youngsters." "I have probably made over 1000 hospital visits in my life. I wish I could have done more."

"I have always wanted to be a clown from boyhood. I want to be a clown that represents everything that a clown ought to be. That is the only fame I desire, to just be remembered as a good clown, and a good man."

Ernie never turned down anything where children were involved. While with the American Circus in Moscow, he found out that his hotel room was across the street from a Children's Hospital, so everyday he would purposely make up in front of the window so the children could watch him. He made them and himself happy.

For years, he always contributed his time & talent to the Jerry Lewis Muscular Dystrophy Fund, both nationally & locally. He had attended grade school with Jerry Lewis.

He was always the first to volunteer for any charity involving children. When Ernie would get a call for a charity, all they would have to do is mention that it was for children & Ernie would ask only 2 questions-When? and Where? Ernie said, "If I couldn't be a clown, I might have become a doctor or minister, but as a clown, I can be a little of each. When I visit hospitals, I feel like a doctor of laughter, & I always believe that God's hand is on my shoulder & when I comfort people, I feel a great sense of satisfaction."

Even as the cancer progressed & his health declined, he would pull together enough strength to return to Circus Circus for special events and holidays. At Circus Circus, you could always find Mr. Scarecrow & Miss Pumpkin

**(Continued on Page 11)**

**\*FROM THE DUGGAN-MALEY TENT\***

Cirque du Soliel will be at the Civic Center Parking Lot in Atlanta, GA from October 29 thru December 20th.

Showfolks of Sarasota Circus will be December 12 in Sarasota, Florida.

Royal Hanneford Circus will be in Perry, GA at the Georgia National Fair thru Oct. 18.

Circus Hollywood will be in Birmingham, AL thru Oct. 25th.

**CFA NATIONAL NEWS:**

Congratulations to Duggan-Maley Tent member Charlotte McWilliams, who was elected national CFA President for the 1999-2000 fiscal year.

Congratulations to Millicent Dunwoody, who was re-elected CFA District 16 Director (Georgia, South Carolina and Florida.)

Congratulations to new Duggan-Maley Tent member, who was elected the new CFA Southern Vice President.

**IN THE CENTER RING:**

The 1998 CFA National Convention was indeed a "family affair." Under the guidance of President Rich Deptula the convention was a true winner. With his wife, Cheryl as co-chair, and his son, Jason, doing just about everything else, the participants were treated to hospitality at its highest level. The Big Apple Circus was the frosting on the cake. The hotel at Strongsville, Ohio was decorated for the event from one end to the other. The banquet featured two guest speakers. Jeanette Williams, former owner of the Williams-Althoff Circus spoke first. She was followed by Paul Binder, founder of the Big Apple Circus. The auction featured additional items from the Bill Walters collection. Thanks Rich, Cheryl and Jason for a great Convention! (And a BIG thank you from your editor too! And congratulations on your wedding Jason, on the 17th!!)

\*\*\*\*\*

**"ELEPHANTS"**

If you like elephants or have a curious wonder about them, here's a new Book and Journal, by Applewhite Publishing, written over a period of 24 years by Bucky Steele of his over 55 years of involvement with them.

Combining humor and history with honesty, he has compiled almost every trainer and elephant since 1796, their lives and sometimes tragic deaths. Answers every question he and other trainers have been asked on training, breeding, medications, and even executing. Its called **"Everything You Wanted To Know About An Elephant, But Were Afraid To Ask."**

This 8 1/2 by 11 inch, 394 page volume includes some 80 pages of color and black and white photographs, some of which have never before been printed. It contains countless stories about the combination of man and animal that has become the backbone of two industries: Zoo and Circus. A frank and true inside look at what it is like to be an elephant man, his ethics and responsibilities.

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## **BLINKO'S LIFE CONTINUED.....**

**By Jackie LeClaire**

at Halloween; Funny Bunny and Honey Bunny at Easter and of course, Santa and Miss Snowflake at Christmas.

I will always remember the devastation he suffered when he finally, at the last minute, had to cancel what would have been his last appearance there.

But, he was determined that he might be physically able to do a promotion at a Publix supermarket close to his home, so he took the date. With great effort, he once again donned all his regalia; his white face makeup with the treble clef on his forehead, the fluttered nose, his 2 1/2 inch long eyelashes & his satin suit with the huge ruffle collar. At the market, he seemed to work awhile like his old self, but he quickly tired & said that he was in pain & would be glad to get back home and out of makeup. We said to him, "Come on Ernie, Let's go."

But Ernie replied, "I can't. Can't you see there are still some children who are waiting to have their picture taken with me? I can not disappoint them." And he stayed and smiled for the camera until he was able to hold close to him, what was to be, his very last child.

Maran, nothing could ever give me more pleasure and more pride than to be able to present to you this award for Ernie Burch, Blinky the Clown, 1998 inductee into the International Clown Hall of Fame.

(Maran said that before their wedding in the center ring of the Clyde Beatty show, the audience was invited to stay after the show & witness the ceremony. This was even televised!)

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## **HOME GROWN CIRCUS SHOWCASES STUDENT TALENT-APPLETON, WI**

All the thrills and excitement synonymous with the word "circus" will be included in the program offered by students of the Wilson Middle School. The Great Youth Circus unfolds to the public on Oct. 23-25 in a classic, European one-ring format, which will be presented in Wilson's school gym, in Appleton. All performers in the show range in age between eleven and thirteen.

Some of the highlights, designed to evoke gasps from audiences of all ages include a breathtaking ballet in the air, human pyramids in feats of balance, acrobatic adagio, mysterious moments of magic, juggling and much more.

A congress of clowns, trained by renowned big top buffoons, Timothy and GiGi Tegge, will also be on hand to captivate the crowd throughout the action-packed show.

The show is enchanting. But when you get to know more about the Great Youth Circus, you'll realize that the performance itself is only the beginning. The lively, hands-on training program has already touched the lives of hundreds of people at the Wilson Middle School, from the students themselves, to their parents and family, as well as the various teachers and faculty members. The children are trained by actual circus professionals, like celebrated aerialist, Gulnara Salakhova, accomplished acrobat, Oleg Gapon, both from Russia and noted juggler, Robert Good.

Tim Noel Tegge, Circus Director, was born & raised in the circus. For 25 years, his family owned & operated the TNT and Royal Olympic Circus, a small, one-ring family show that traveled from coast-to-coast. His wife, GiGi, has performed as a clown & illusionist with her husband for nearly a decade.

Gulnara Salakhova was trained at the prestigious Bashkiria Circus School. Her unique talent is a great asset to the Wilson circus project.

Robert Good is a native of Pennsylvania and has been an elementary school teacher for thirty years. He has instructed children in a variety of circus arts in public schools as well as private seminars.

Oleg Gapon is from Kharkov, in the Ukraine. He was the pillar of a famous teeterboard troupe for nearly fifteen years, touring throughout the world with numerous circus legends, including Russia's great clown, Popov. From 1994 to 1996, Oleg's troupe was the featured attraction of Euro Circus, in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina.

Come join area Circus Fans for 2 exciting Circus events in October. The Great Youth Circus in Appleton on Sat., Oct 24-Brunch at 10:30 am and performance at 3 pm. Also Prof. Tegge's Circus Revue in East Troy, WI on Sat. Oct. 31 at 7 pm. Contact Mary-Jane Foote, 2931 Main St, East Troy, WI 53120, ph. 414-642-9208 for information.

**TO KISS A CLOWN-DEDICATED  
TO DANNY CHAPMAN\*Part V  
BY SARAH KATE CHAPMAN**

In 1972, a feature article in Danny's hometown "Philadelphia Enquirer" gave him the opportunity to be honest. "I should have been a hobo in real life," Danny laughed. "That's the way I am-relaxed, casual & always roaming around." He continues with this mixture of reality & unreality a year later in the "San Francisco Examiner" saying, "I feel that the clown in me saved me from becoming emotionally disturbed. There are many real clowns in the world. Yes, I am one. Everybody that knows me, knows this.

There are many painted faces but there are few great clowns. Clowning is a philosophy. A great empathy, a communication with people..realizing fully that we're on this earth for a very short time & the seeking of power through aggression is ridiculous." About this time, pressures of everyday life troubled him, & he began to drink. His reference to aggression means the power that people seek from controlling others. He was satisfied to laugh off life's realities & continue clowning eventually to become the eternal clown in the sky.

He had a system of clowns, earth spirits & mortals. I liked it because it involved me. He said I was an earth spirit & I married a clown. Our daughter was the product of an earth spirit & a clown; therefore, she was an earth spirit & our son was a clown. Only the combination of clowns & earth spirits creates the same. I felt blessed.

When analyzing this model of reality, I ask myself the obvious questions. What if Danny was not a clown? The answer is that he predestined himself to clowning. He clowned out of necessity rather than live any other lifestyle. He knew it is the clown that people want to imitate & interview. The clown has a universal appeal to all ages & transcends all prejudices.

The media gravitated to him for interviews like a plant with sticky leaves attracts flies. Once Danny captivated the audience, he performed his magic on them, relishing the fact that he could walk away leaving them to go back to their humdrum lives. He believed in his own publicity so much that he could repeat it over & over again. Clowning worked for Danny Chapman because he made it work. He turned the responsibility of his life over to his wife & booking agents, truly believing that "all the world's a circus." This article comes to an end with the same words that I had printed on his funeral card.

LAUGH CLOWN LAUGH by Mrs. Roy L. Peifer  
Laugh, clown laugh, tho' your heart is broken;  
Tho' sobs touch your lips and die, unspoken.  
Laugh clown laugh, for the world is sad  
And in need of your mirth, to make it glad.  
You keep your troubles and trials within;  
Hiding them under a cheerful grin.  
The children shout and clap with glee  
When all of your frolicsome antics they see.  
Laugh clown laugh, for your fellow men;  
Make them all happy and cheerful again.  
Would I, like you, tho' weary and sad  
Could make all the rest of the whole world glad!

(1992-Sarah Kate Chapman-The End)

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**CARSON & BARNES HAVE NEW BABY**

While visiting the circus Oct. 13th in Mt. Zion, IL, I noticed a poster board near the front entrance. On it were three 8x10 color photos of the new baby elephant, and an article out of the Hugo newspaper. Late Saturday evening, about 10:30 p.m., Sept. 5th, Isa gave birth to a 240 pound baby girl, a first for Dory Miller.

Isa is 28 years old and weighs about 7400 pounds. The father is Buke, also 28 years old and he weighs 11,250 pounds!!

The article said that with seven minutes, the baby was standing up. Within twenty minutes the mother and baby bonded immediately, which is remarkable since Isa has never been around a baby in her life. It went on to say Lilly, Isa's friend, are seldom apart and she stood patiently outside the elephant barn.

An article on the Internet said, "Present at the birth was Lilly, Isa's elephant friend, who helped to comfort her and prevent her from stepping on the baby, along with Dr. Schmidt, the Springfield, MO Zoo veterinarian, Isa's own doctor, Ted Eudy, Tim Frisco, Carson and Barnes animal care director and Kristin Miller Byrd, fourth-generation owner of the circus."

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CINCINNATI ZOO reports that Ganesh, their baby elephant, who weighed 213 pounds at birth, now weighs, on October 6th, 694 pounds!!!

### **\*THE PASSING OF OUR FRIENDS\***

Isla Miller passed away Oct. 2 in a Paris, Texas hospital. She was 81 years old. She was known affectionately as The First Lady of The Circus.

Because of her personal contribution to the circus profession, Isla was one of the first women inducted into the Ring of Fame in Sarasota. She was also a lifetime member of the Circus Fans Assn.

Surviving relatives include her husband, D.R. Miller of Hugo; one daughter, Barbara Miller Byrd and her husband, Geary, of Hugo; two brothers: A.C. Beach, Jr. of Hildreth, NE, and Kenneth Beach of Bennington, KS; two sisters: Lilly James of Kensington, KS, and Isa Kienzle of Agra, KS; two grandchildren: Traci Byrd Cavallini of Hugo and Kristin Marie Byrd, of Hugo and also numerous nieces and nephews and a host of friends. She was laid to rest Showman's Rest in Mt. Olivet Cemetery. (From the Hugo Daily News)

### **A TRIBUTE TO ISLA MARIE MILLER**

(Hugo Daily News):

Isla Marie Beach was born August 9, 1917 in Smith Center, Kansas. Her parents, A.C. & Libby Beach were farmers. She was child number 8 out of 11 brothers & sisters. She had the daily duties of a farm girl, milking the cows, collecting the eggs, carrying water about a quarter mile for cooking & cleaning. At a barn dance, when she was 14 years old, she met a much older & wiser 15 year old, DR Miller. He lived in Smith Center with his grandparents. He was tall, with dark hair & wore white shirts. Isla thought he was the best looking boy at the dance. DR thought she was the most beautiful girl in all of Smith Center. When Isla told her mother that she was going to marry DR, her mother told her she would get a whipping! In 1931, they got their marriage license, but couldn't pay the preacher until April. So, on the 9th, in Gaylord, Kansas, they were married. The day after the wedding, Isla woke up with chicken pox! But they started a circus together. She learned everything about the business-she performed in the show, sewed wardrobe, sold tickets, cooked for the entire troupe and drove a

truck from town to town. Barbara was born in 1946. For much of the time, D.R was often busy moving the show, running the Circus, but Isla was always there for Barbara. Whenever Barbara performed on the show, Isla made her wardrobe, coached her and stood in the background, absorbing Barbara's applause.

With Geary and Barbara taking over the operation of the Circus, Isla and D.R. took of Traci and Kristin for much of their school years. Isla was always there for them just like she was for Barbara. Once after a speech, D.R. rose to say just one thing-that his greatest accomplishment was having a daughter, son-in-law and granddaughters that made him proud that they would carry on the circus tradition. Later that afternoon, D.R. said that he had ended his speech too soon. He should have added, "...and none of it would have been possible without the best wife any man could have, Isla Miller." Over the last 81 years, the world has been blessed with Isla Miller's presence. She was never a star. She was always the darkness outlining the star, behind the star, causing the star to shine just a little bit brighter. (Parts of this tribute was taken from a speech by Jim Judkins on the occasion of Isla's 75th Birthday on August 9, 1992 in Winneconne, Wisconsin. What a beautiful speech.)

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### **THE GREAT CIRCUS REUNIONS**

**Reunion Christmas Party for Circus Bartoc:**  
**Thursday, Dec. 10th.**  
**Reunion for Polack Bros. Circus:**  
**Monday, Dec. 14th.**  
**Reunion for Tom Packs Circus; Daily Bros.;**  
**Mills Bros.; Clyde Beatty/Sells & Gray; Hamid**  
**Morton; Orin Davenport; Floyd King; Clyde**  
**Bros.; and Cristiani Bros. Circus-A combination**  
**of a lot of shows will be Thursday, Dec. 17th.**  
**Contact Jenny Wallenda, 2708 DeSoto Rd.,**  
**Sarasota, FL 34234 if you'd like to help her and**  
**please pass the word about these reunions.**

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**\*THE PASSING OF OUR FRIENDS\***

Whiteland, Indiana....The lights of the Circus world are again dimmed by the loss of a beautiful equestrian star of yesterday, with the passing of **Maudie (Moore) Adams** of Whiteland, Indiana on Sunday, September 20, 1998. Maudie, age 70, was born in Des Moines, Iowa on September 1, 1928 to Percy and Hazel (Hickey) Moore of Circus and Rodeo fame and grew up in Kirkwood, Missouri, a suburb of St. Louis. Maudie married Huber Adams October 15, 1947, in Louisville, Kentucky. The couple made their home in Franklin and Whiteland, Indiana. Hub preceded Maudie in death July 13, 1992.

Maudie began her showbusiness career at the age of seventeen when she joined the Cole Bros. Circus where she rode jumping and dressage horses. She also showed pleasure and contest event horses in National Horseshows in and around the St. Louis area for several different owners. Following her stint with Cole Bros., Maudie then joined the Jinks Hogeland Equestrian Review where she again rode high jumping and dressage horses, as well as elephants and the colorful serpentine on horseback. It was on the Hogeland show Maudie met her husband Hub Adams, who also rode dressage and serpentine, as well as being the chief mechanic, keeping the unit on the road. Following completion of their contract with Hogeland, the couple joined the Buck Steele Frontier Days unit, where Maudie performed trick riding, trick roping, as well as jumping and dressage. At one time, Maudie was listed as one of the top women trick ropers in the world.

When Hub and Maudie decided to retire from show business, they owned and operated the very successful Adams Auto Sales in Whiteland and Franklin where they bought, refurbished and sold automobiles as well as hauling them cross country. Maudie is survived by a beautiful family she adored, including daughter Christine Webb of Whiteland, three grandchildren, Tracy Joe, and Brian Webb of Whiteland, and Christy Rhodes of Boggstown, Ind., and four great grand children,

Bryan, Brittany and Katie Webb of Whiteland, and Logan Rhodes of Boggstown, two sisters, Lydia Moore of Wayne, Oklahoma and Percy (Moore) Gibson of Blanchard, Ok. A graveside service was held on Wednesday, September 23, with burial in Greenlawn Cemetery in Franklin, Indiana, where Maudie was laid to rest next to her husband, Hub.

(A very special thank you to Lydia Moore for sending in this notice and the beautiful picture of Maudie. Back Yard would appreciate hearing from anyone that used to work with Maudie and might have some more memories to share with us.)

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**\*\*\*NEWS FROM OUR CIRCUS FRIENDS\*\*\***

**Brian Liddicoat** recently visited at the **Big Apple Circus**. Brian was manager of this show when your editor was there in 1988. He enjoyed visiting with Paul and Katja and remarked how much Katherine and Max have grown. Kenneth Feld was also visiting while Brian was there. As most of you know, Brian is the manager of the new Ringling Tent show. When press releases come out, Back Yard will have them! Thanks, Brian.

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**Mark Hammer** attended the Felix Adler Tent's Annual Banquet on Oct. 5. They were honored to have **Eric Michael Gillett** as their guest speaker. He entertained them all with his stories of being the Singing Ringmaster on Ringling Bros. Circus for 11 years. They presented him with an Honorary Lifetime Membership in the Tent. There were over 40 people in attendance. **Al House** reports that Eric was acting in Vegas at the time when he was hired by Feld.

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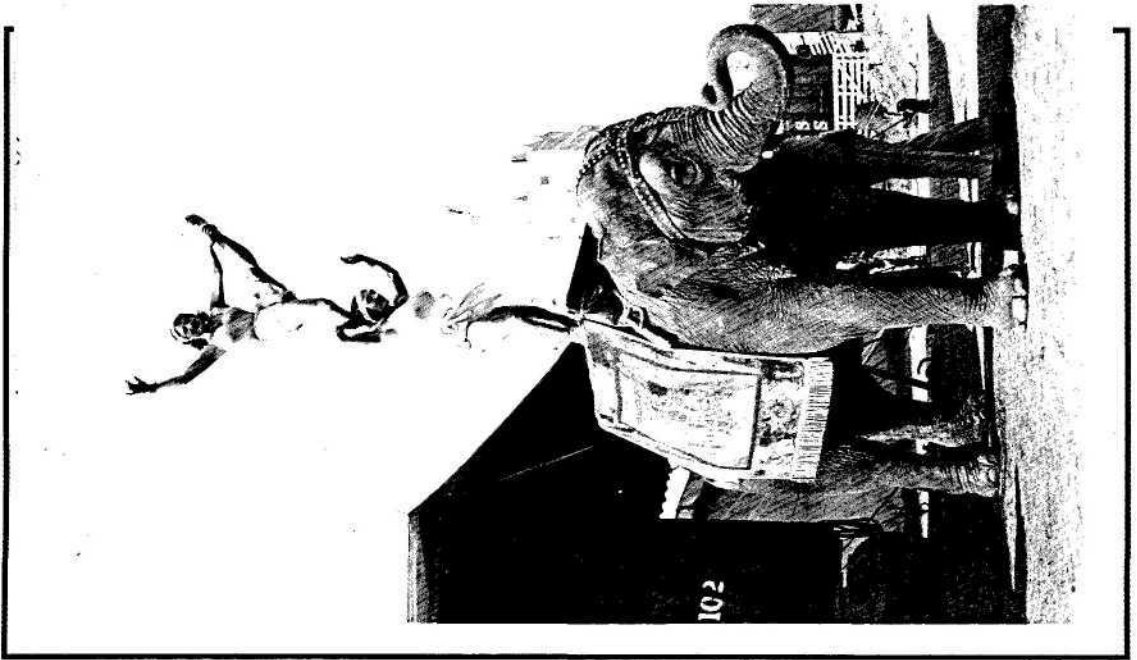
**Gordon Taylor**, of Atlanta, recently returned from a visit to the Clyde Beatty Circus in Dalton, GA and also visited Tarzan's circus in Chattanooga. He reports that both the shows were doing good business. Gordon said Mike Naughten was the ringmaster for Tarzan and did a great job, a very classy ringmaster. He said it was great to see both shows doing such great business.

CHYDE BEATTY

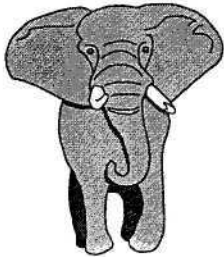


Maudie  
Moore  
Adams





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