

BACK YARD

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ONE ARM SWINGER RECALLS CIRCUS JOB

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Peru, Ind.- With a rim of white hair and blonde curls framing her face, 90 year-old Marie Florida Gertrude "Mickey" King recalls her circus days with dramatic detail. As her blue, speckled eyes stare out the window of her mobile home, she doesn't see the dusting of snow falling outside. Although not because of her failing eyesight, it's obvious she is watching the events of her life unfold in her mind, as one watches a fascinating movie on the big screen.

Mickey, born in August, 1905, was known as the "Queen of the Air." She began as a member of the Flying Wards and then went out on her own., traveling around the world performing the web and rings and eventually her most notable trick-the one-arm swing. She has met and performed with several circus stars & movie stars including Sally Rand, a famous strip-tease artist, and Jimmy Durante.

Looking back on her heyday of the circus, Mickey said, "I wouldn't change one second, not one iota. I loved it so much I dream about it with happy tears. It was like playing with toys. Oh happy days!" Mickey can remember the first time she saw a circus in Greenfield, MA. She was 17 years old. "The circus had put up down in the back of the paper mills and



the wind was blowing to beat Hades. And here's a guy up on the platform in a beautiful red outfit with gold buttons and the man standing beside him announcing him...'Captain Jacobs,'" Mickey said in an announcer's voice as she recalled the moment vividly, "who dares enter the arena to fight the lion up one side of the cage, and the lion fights him down the other-Sultan, that untamable lion. Are you ready, captain?"

(Continued on Page 4)

BACK YARD

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THE ELEPHANT PRINCE

BY MIKE CECERE

In the circus when the top elephant acts are talked about, it's usually been large herds and complicated routines.

Well, that's not true anymore! The top elephant act for 3 years running has been young "Nick", a male Asian elephant born at Hawthorn Corp. facility & the jewel in the crown of John Cuneo's excellent collection of wild animal acts.

Raised by Tom Thompson & Dione Arata from birth, he is growing into a magnificent specimen of an elephant. He's under top training as Tom is no newcomer to the animal biz. He's eight generations circus on his mother's side, the Morales Family, and his father, Frank, is a well known and respected Zoo Director/Elephant Trainer in the industry. Tom worked in many major zoos with his father, as well as assisting in the import of many elephants from the wild.

Along the way he worked with many famed elephant men, including the late Bill Johnston; the late Allen Campbell, as well as a long tenure with the Dean of American Trainers, Rex Williams.

In fact, while serving as chief asst. on the huge Vargas herd, under Rex, Tom & Dione made their spectacular debut of teamwork presenting the huge tusker, "Colonel Joe." They were featured extensively in the show's media campaign & sought after by the Hollywood set. In fact, Tom headlined in a direct to video flick with the gentle giant tusker, called "Tom Among The Savages."

Filmed in the wilds of Simi Valley, Calif., this epic was noted for a special cameo appearance by famed elephant man, Steve, H-J, Patton, famed for his ability to speak in tongues! An additional footnote about Tom; before he chose elephants for his life's work, he followed the Thompson, natural musical ability & was a drummer for rock legends Ted Nugent & KiKi Freedman. So, all in all, Tom's one talented guy with a partner who embodies showmanship. They can't help but go to the TOP!

If you get the chance, don't miss seeing young Nick, the ELEPHANT PRINCE!

VALENTINE'S VAULT-MEMORIES, 1949 GOLDEN YEARS FROM THE BILLBOARD

Spencer Huntley, 47, elephant trainer on Robbins Bros. died of heart disease 8/28. He opened with Mills Bros. & had been with Robbins 4 weeks...Chas. Sparks, former circus owner, died the 28th of heart disease, in Hot Springs...From Cole Bros., Sallie Marlowe reports-Pete Ivanoff buys a new straw hat about every day, only to lose it the same day! How many have you bought so far, Pete?...Jean Pistra has decided to wear strapless bathing suits from now on to avoid trouble with straps while swimming...Independence, IA: Dolores Ellen Day, year-old daughter of Elden & Joanne Day, of the Flying Eldonas, made her debut. She was introduced by Earl Shipley, who also introduced not only her mother for the first time, but also the baby's grandmother, Bebe Siegrist, in 1927...From Clyde Beatty show:Dorothy Herbert was nonplused the other day on a broadcast when the announcer asked her the location of the lot & it was not in the script...The other day, just before the elephant & pony act, A. Kennard discovered the pony-boy had brought up the wrong ponies. When he told the boy about it, the boy said: "I was in a hurry. Why don't you use these this time & I will bring the right ones the next time!"...

From King Bros: Lucio Cristiani added a new horse to his riding act, replacing Kansas. Davisio broke the new horse. Lucio & Belmonte, somersaulting from one horse to another, garner plenty of applause...From Kelly-Miller: Members of the aerial ballet include Armida & Alice Gutierrez, Isla Miller & Ora Jo & Lucille...From Polack Eastern: Helen Billetti visited in Du Quoin...Penny, Trudy & Joanne Wilson have returned to their home to begin school...Johnny Malikova has a red face, the result of shooting himself with a blank cartridge. While trying to force open the gun barrel of Dime Wilson's prop gun, the blank went off. He was burned on the arm & in the stomach and taken to the hospital for treatment...Those new faces at the novelty stand are Lowell & Mary Sherer.

*Eddie (Temple) Polo was killed while performing in Riverside Park, Agawam, MA on July 8. He was killed at the climax of his act, a slide for life while suspended by his hair. The accident resulted when the sliding mechanism to which his hair was attached "froze" to the slide wire, breaking his contact. He fell 40 ft. to the ground.

*From Polack Western: Eddie Ward, catcher of the Ward-Bell Flyers, received a cut lip & nose when he &

Eddie Kohl, leaper, tangled in one of these Calif. crosswinds as Eddie was doing his two-and-a-half...Josephine Berosini was embarrassed in the lobby of the Vancouver Hotel, when the mgt. refused admittance to her Peek pup. She beat them the next week, resorting to a paper bag!...From Tom Packs: Arthur Wallenda is doing comedy in the high wire act...Rose Behee has taken over the children's dept. teaching web, cloud swing, etc., & chaperoning at movies...Harold Voise bought an awning for his trailer that almost requires a prop dept. to erect...From Dailey Bros: Baton Rouge, LA-Police headquarters, alerted by a frantic phone call from a local housewife informing them that an elephant was roaming her street, sent out the town's heftiest cop to reconnoiter. He found the foot-loose bull & halted it by grabbing a dangling neck chain & pitting his avoirdupois against that of the pachyderm. Novel tug-of-war was ended by the arrival of an elephant trainer from Dailey, who took charge of the AWOL bull & escorted it back to the lot!...Barbara Williams acquired a pup which she named Sooner, then adopted another dog which the girls dubbed Hater... From Kansas City: Jan Vogel, 30, trapeze artist known as the Great Stanelly, was killed Nov. 18, plunging to his death when his ankle line snapped on his 90-ft. breakaway pole...Rose Gould, aerialist with Polack Western, fell at Dayton, OH. March 24. She fell about 12 ft. Owing to the low ceiling, she did not regard the distance high & failed to resin her heel for the heel catch on the trapeze. X-rays showed no broken bones & she returned to her trailer.

*Miami, Nov. 25: Gargantua, famous gorilla with Ringling, died of double pneumonia. It was the last day of the season and he had become ill a week ago. The 16-year old, 750 pound, 6 ft. 6 in. gorilla began life as a mountain gorilla in Africa. Show officials declared that he had been worth a million dollars to the circus. He was flown to Baltimore's Johns Hopkins Univ. medical school for an autopsy...Dec. 15-New York: Two 8-month-old gorillas, Gargantua Jr. & Toto, arrived at Idlewild Airport today from the French Cameroons, Africa & were put on a plane for Sarasota. They weigh about 13 pounds each.

From Stevens Bros: Punch Jacobs's dog act almost has been put out of the program by the stork...From Jay Gould Circus: Laugh of the week was on Jimmie Cole, Sr. who blew the route & drove the elephant semi 26 miles out of the way!...From Biller Bros: Louis Reed is now handling the bulls. He is assisted by Possum Red, Smokey, Cotton and Miles. Teresa Morales held a Halloween party for the children on the show.

ONE ARM SWINGER-MICKY KING...

And the captain turned around and walked into the side show. Watching in amazement, Mickey & her best friend, Polly, followed him in without buying a ticket. The man they followed was Terrell Jacobs, famous lion tamer. After seeing Jacobs perform, Mickey watched him on the side-lines as he sewed his pants up where a lion had clawed him. "I was hanging over a chain that keeps you away from the cage (and getting clawed). He said, 'How's the crowd in the Big Show?' I said, 'I don't know.' He asked me 2 or 3 other questions. I said, 'I don't know.' He turned around, & he looked and he said, 'Aren't you with the Big Show?' I said, 'No.' He said, "Why aren't you?" I said, 'You mean I could get a job with the circus?'"

And that was Mickey's big break. The next day she came back to the vacant lot to find the Sell-Floto Circus had moved on, so she hitched a ride 40 miles, grabbing rides on chicken vans and such from Greenfield to Holyoke, MA., to join the circus. "It was pouring rain, but when she arrived) the sun came out and was shining beautifully. It was like walking on eggs, fool's paradise," Mickey said of her beginning in 1923. The first act for the 98-pound, 4 foot, 11 1/2 inch girl of nearly 18 was singing "Who's Sorry Now" while playing a small drum and dancing. "I was a marvelous ballet girl; I could kick 6" above my head."

In between shows that first summer in the circus, Mickey would sneak over to the Big Top, crawl up the ladders and swing on the trapeze. One day she got caught by the owner of the trapeze rigging who was impressed with her strength and lack of fear. That man was Eddie Ward who asked her to come back to his home in Bloomington, IL, and train to become one of the Flying Wards, which she did. Mickey left the circus when Ward died of pneumonia in 1929. She returned several times to help in acts. After she left, she trained & started her own act on the web & rings. She added the one-arm swings on Feb. 21, 1932.

With her arm in a loop and her hand holding on tight, Mickey would put her feet together & flip her

body up & around in circles, while holding on with just one hand. On each revolution, her shoulder would practically pop out of it's joint. The difficulty in this trick was the number of times she could hoist herself around.

According to Agnes Carrollo, of Las Vegas, the only woman currently performing the one-arm swings, it takes a lot of power. The most Carrollo has been able to do is 100 swings. Mickey's record is 276 swings. The world record is 315.

Mickey was inducted into the International Circus Hall of Fame in July, 1987. She was inducted after her first year on the ballot, according to John Fugate, board member. She has performed with Jimmy Durante; entertaining troupes; performing with many circuses, including Lee Bros., Hagenbeck-Wallace, Robbins Bros., and indoor Shrine and King circuses. She worked as a stunt flyer for movies, such as, "Vengeance of the Circus" and "Crime Without Passion." The last thing she did was make the "Greatest Show on Earth," a TV series with Jack Palance. The episode was "Last of the Strong Men." She also has performed iron-jaw, high wire, webs and rings. "In our day we had to learn everything," Mickey said of why she performed so many different acts. "We could go in and take a chance & do anything & everything that the other guy did because if somebody got sick, we went in and helped. If we were strong enough to do one thing, we were strong enough to do everything."

CORRECTION TO VALENTINE'S VAULTS:1949

BY HELEN BILLETTI WARBURTON

From Polack Eastern, Billy Barton reports: I was not a replacement for Clayton's wife in High Wire Act after they had an accident. After Eddie Billetti and I went out separate ways, I owned the High Wire Act. I retired from High Wire performing 11-19-48. My last appearance was on Polack Bros. Circus in Baltimore, Maryland. I sold the equipment to Clarence (Gabby) Wendt. I believe he and his brother, Clayton, took the act out. I do not know how or when the accident happened that was mentioned by Billy Barton. I am currently serving in the CFA as Director of Dist. 9. I am also serving my 15th term on Board of Governors of the Ladies Auxiliary of Showmens League of America. Keep the Valentine's Vault of Memories open!

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**In 1985, circus historian Steve Gossard discovered a conflict. Two different cities in the United States had taken credit for the invention of the particular type of trapeze performance called the *flying return act*. Since then Gossard has been fixated on finding the source of the invention of this act and solving the mystery. He has spent thousands of hours scrolling through 19th century periodicals in tracing the evolution of the various types of trapeze performances.

What he uncovered is more than historical study. It is an adventure. It is a mystery. It is the story of **A Reckless Era of Aerial Performance. Share the author’s sense of discovery as he traces the evolution of the daring and beautiful art form, and chronicles the exploits of dozens of long-forgotten foolhardy aerial daredevils.

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Gaithersburg, MD-Fairgrounds-May 4-5
Woodbridge, VA-Woodbridge High-May 6-7
Springfield, VA-Springfield Mall-May 8-10
Annapolis, MD-Navy-Marine Corps Stad.-5/13-14

Ringling aerialist, beautiful 24 year-old Vanessa Fisher, is recovering after a fall at the conclusion of the opening display, on April 11th fall in Washington, DC. She suffered no serious injuries.

127th EDITION RINGLING RED UNIT:

Roanoke, VA- Civic Center-May 2-3
Mex. City, Mex.-Palacio de los Deportes-5/12-6/7
Shreveport, LA- Hirsch Mem. Coliseum-June 13-14
Memphis, TN- The Pyramid-June 18-21
Little Rock, AR-Barton Coliseum-June 25-28
San Antonio, TX-Freeman Coliseum-July 1-5
Austin, TX-Erwin Sp.Events Ctr-July 9-12
College Station, TX-Reed Arena-July 14-15
Houston, TX-Compaq Ctr-July 17-26

128TH EDITION RINGLING BLUE UNIT:

Springfield, MA-Civic Center-May 5-6
Worcester, MA-Centrum Centre-May 8-10
New Haven, CT-New Haven Arena-May 12-13
Hartford, CT-Civic Center-May 15-17
Hershey, PA-Hersheypark Arena-May 21-25
Albany, NY-Pepsi Arena-May 28-31
Syracuse, NY-OnCenter-June 2-3
Rochester, NY-Rochester War Memorial-June 5-7
Lexington, KY-Rupp Arena-June 11-14
Lubbock, TX-Memorial Coliseum-June 18-21
Las Vegas, NV-Thomas & Mack Center-June 26-28
Phoenix, AZ-America West Arena-July 1-5
Fresno, CA-Fresno Convention Ctr-July 9-12
Long Beach, CA-Long Beach Arena-July 15-19
Los Angeles, CA-LA Sports Arena-July 22-26

USDA CLEARS DISNEY IN ANIMAL DEATHS

April 22: Two inspectors spent 3 1/2 days at the theme park, talking to animal-care workers & reviewing records from the deaths. They found no evidence that Disney violated the federal Animal Welfare Act. The case was closed Wed. afternoon. There were only 12 animal-rights activists who picketed the opening of the new park. Since September, 4 cheetah cubs, 2 rhinos, 2 hippos and 2 African-crowned cranes have died at or en route to the park. A previous USDA probe found no wrongdoing, & state regulators also cleared the park.

Col. Arthur Brown, Hastings, NY., Passes Away
Double M Ranch, while affected by the death of the Col., founder, will not be selling the elephant, circus train, or other similar items. Mike Cecere remains in charge as Gen. Mgr., & the ranch will continue it’s operations as in the past. Col. Brown’s son will, it is assumed, be at the head of the foundation & he said that no sales are contemplated.

BRUTES OF THE BIG TOP

BY BILL BALLANTINE, 1960

BY BILL BALLANTINE PART III

(Reprinted with permission of the Ballantines)

I asked how it felt to be responsible for so many expensive animals. (The value of the entire Ringling herd then was estimated at somewhat over \$100,000; the new babies had cost \$3500 each.) The bull-boss leaned back in his chair. "The chief press agent, he comes to see me in New York. 'Smokey,' he says, 'you're the greatest elephant man ever, handlin' more bulls 'n anybody ever did, especially at your age.'"

He looked scornfully toward the Red Wagon on the Midway, the circus manager's office on wheels. "Big deal. They're payin' me a great big fat hundred bucks a week. That's *almost* two dollars an elephant a week. I'm 28 an' makin' 28 cents an elephant each day. That's a laugh, ain't it?" He didn't laugh. "I drag down around \$14 an' two-bits per day for mostly a 7-day week. 7 a.m. to midnight an' often later-two, three a.m." Smokey shrugged. "But, hell, a C-note is *more'n* any other elephant boss ever got aroun' here. When you figger I started out like them punks-only makin' less money 'n they are-I guess I'm doin' all right. I got my wife with me. (She could pull in a little as a ballet-broad, but I don't want her workin' in the show.) We get cookhouse an' a stateroom-a nice wide one, clean acrost the middle of a car, with *two* windows. I ain't complainin'." Smokey abruptly got up & left to see to the watering of Mr. North's bull ladies. I tagged along. Circus elephant watering is no longer done by enthusiastic small boys toting countless buckets to earn a ticket. Today, the mountains come to Mohamad. The bulls, in small units, are led to drink at a line-up of oil-drums kept full by continuous pumping of the circus water wagon (a tank truck). Frantically flopping the clumsy canvas hose from one rapidly emptying drum to another was the new boy. "We waters our elephants," Smokey told me, "twice a day-after they walk up from the train an'

folley-in' the matin-knee. Each one takes about 50 gallons a day, but they wastes a lot by slippin' and playin'." Three thirst-slacked elephants trotted away from the drum in front of us & were replaced by a pair of thirsty ones. After a while, the bull-boss said to me, "Some screw-balls think an elephant drinks through its trunk, like it's a soddy straw. "They don't realize the trunk's its nose." He smiled tolerantly. "You be surprised the things people believe about elephants. Like they never forget an' they live to be a hundred 'n two-things like that. It ain't true. Elephants forget a lots'a things an' I bet there ain't one elephant ever hit even 80." Smokey was right about elephant age; I'd looked into the subject. Elephants rarely live to 70. Records kept by the London Zoological Society until 1948 listed not 1 elephant over that age. The Bombay-India Trading Corp. kept track of more than 1700 of its working elephants over a period of 50 years. None lived to 70; only 24 passed 65. 90 percent of the total died under the age of 55. "An' like they never sleep," added Smokey, "without a one standin' guard. Hell, I've seen them myself on a 2-day stand, every damn one conked out an' snorin' away." It's the nature of elephants to doze while standing; they lie down to sleep only after midnight & then for just a 2-3 hour stretch. Circus elephants can do this only on engagements of more than 1 day, as their sleeping cars offer standing room only. "An'," Smokey went on, "there ain't no mystical hidden place where wild elephants goes to die. The real old ones goes to riverbanks an' swamps where the eatin' an' drinkin' is easier. Then when they gets real feeble they jest sink into the ooze an' dies of starvation an' the buzzards finishes them off." Smokey then left me, saying he had to shave for the matinee. In the grassy acres beyond, the circus Big Top was beginning to puff into an enormous dusty brown mushroom. Off to its one side, 6 elephants in ungainly work harnesses with drag chains attached, idled with their handlers, waiting to do their job in the creation of the fantastic pavilion. The working girls' names were painted on their broad chest-straps. The elephant is used to put up the big top because it can go under the drooping canvas without tearing it, can maneuver in tight places where a

tractor cannot & can spot the poles more precisely than the machine. Draught horses are not suitable, as the flapping, flopping canvas tends to panic them. Once the Big Top is raised, bullhands go into the menagerie to pound in the stakes of the elephant line-up (picket line, in circus lingo). It is always situated against the tent's sidewall so that the bulls' heroic droppings can easily be shoved outside.

While primarily a nose & extension of mouth, the trunk also is a hand-in African bush language the word trunk means hand. With its trunk an elephant can pick up the smallest object-a lump of sugar, a peanut, a hairpin, even a straight pin. It can open car doors and slam them, blow the horn, turn on the ignition, untie complicated knots, unscrew light bulbs. Every elephant is an accomplished pickpocket, able to lift coins, wallets and keys with the greatest of ease-and pleasure. I've seen elephants' versatile trunks pull telephones from booths, rip directories to shreds, actually dial numbers. The dainty maiden, with scented kerchief, never wafted pesky gnats & flies as adroitly as does an elephant with gunny sack held in trunk.

A favorite trunk trick, Smokey told me when I'd rejoined him at the bullhands' hangout, is turning on water faucets. "I ain't never seen one yet," he added disgustedly, "what could turn one off." A sober-sided bullhand, sun-browned to the waist & wearing sedate gold-rimmed glasses, sidled up to tell Smokey that a pair of elephants in the picket-line had been fighting. "Ain't no fight." Smokey counseled, "if one elephant saps another. That's jest their way of keepin' order." The boy went back to his dung-heaving. "That's Limoges," Smokey explained. "He ain't a big 'a help to me, but I might make him an assistant 'cause I like the way he works. I tell him to drive stakes an' he'll drive every damn one an' not say one word. Them's the first words he's said to me all week." (On 2-day stands, when a horse top was put up as well as the bullhand shelter, over 300 elephant dept. stakes had to be driven.)

"Knaudie," Smokey continued, returning to elephant battling, "she's a good fighter. She's got them strong back legs for that push; she ain't too old yet neither. After 60, elephants can't fight so good; they can't stand no more on their hind legs. I told Smokey that during the British battles of India, the Tommies often used elephants. Hathi, the elephant patriot who stemmed a retreat of the Poonah regiment at Lahore by holding aloft the regimental colors on a deserted field. "An' I suppose," said Smokey, giving me a cynical side glance,

"you're gonna tell me she did a hind-leg-stand & played *God Save The King* on her trunk."

BACK YARD GOSSIP

*Richard Chipperfield was released from Bayfront Medical Center April 6th, but his family will not say where he was taken.

*Rumor has it that a co-owner of Circus Vargas, was bought out by an ex-big circus employee and he wants to take Vargas indoors.

*On April 20, Circus World Museum big top went up; 2 center poles, and a beautiful blue top with red-starred sidewalls.

*A rumor from out west: when a Reid Bros. truck driver pulled into a rest area to get something to eat, the truck was stolen!

*From the east: Jennifer Vidbel was married in a double ceremony April 3 at the Vidbel Chapel at winter quarters. The other couple were from the Russian cossack riders.

*Eric Jaeger has reportedly left Bentley Bros.Circus.

I REMEMBER-BY CHARLIE SIMPSON, HOUSTON
In 1965, The Houston Astrodome, the first domed stadium, was built along with the Astro Hall & Judge Roy Hofheinz's Astro World Amusement Park.

Judge Hofheinz & the Felds had bought Ringling Bros. & Barnum & Bailey Circus and in 1966, they brought the circus to appear in this marvelous & vast Astrodome.

They rings were set up at home plate, & first and third plate as the building was configured for baseball, & aerial acts worked high over-head. The night I attended the show, there were 45,000 people in the audience; the largest crowd to witness the Ringling-Barnum show. Because of the vastness of the building, from where I sat, the elephants looked like ants down on the field & I was well above the flying acts!

The show was great, but for once, the building was too big for the Greatest Show on Earth. I have lost my program for 1966, so I don't remember the acts appearing, but it was a wonderous show. For the next several years, during the summer, a one ring version of the circus was in the Astro Hall and a \$25. package deal of Astro's baseball, the circus, & Astroworld Amusement Park was offered and I occasionally still run across an old trouper who appeared in the circus.

SNOBBISHNESS TO SHRINE CLOWNS

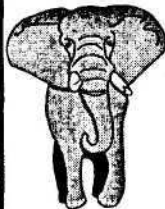
BY JACKIE LECLARE

(This article was written in response to comments written to circus-arts@lists.best.com)

As an old time circus clown, I want to personally apologize for any attitudes shown by the performers at the Houston Shrine Circus. I worked Shrine Circuses for years & years, and much of what I have today is because of my work with Shrine Circuses. I did play Houston & Ft. Worth-Dallas probably in the early 50s. The devotion the Shriners have to their crippled children's cause is without precedent. I can't remember who booked your Houston date, at that time, but most of the other dates in the North were handled by Orrin Davenport & Tom Packs, Gil Gray, Al Dobritich & in later years, Paul Kaye. With the situation circuses are facing today, it is beyond my comprehension that any performer could be anything but grateful to the Shrine for providing work in an otherwise deteriorating market. I went through the demise of the professional circus clown in the Shrine Circus. In almost all cases, they brought it upon themselves. They got older & older, bringing less & less gags & being almost totally uninterested in meeting & greeting the people coming in or going to hospitals. It was to most of them just a chore and the Shriners were so good to those of us that went, making sure we were picked up on time in the mornings & almost always taking us some place for lunch on the way back. I was in my 30s in those days. The Shriners had no interest in clowning themselves, but were forced into it to be able to get the hospitals visited & the kids greeted at the come-in. Unfortunately, when the Shriners were trying to learn, they got little help from the established clowns. If the Shrine Clowns looked bad in the early days, it was because no one would help them, or show them how to put on make-up or buy clown shoes, etc. There were some really devoted clowns from the old school who did understand what the Shrine Circus was all about and co-operated fully; like Ernie "Blinko" Burch, Otto Griebing, Carl Marx, Dime Wilson, Earl Shipley, Happy Kellems & yes, many more, but they were out numbered by the others. I shall always have the greatest respect for the Shriners. I have done clown lectures here at Sahib Temple, in Sarasota, FL. I have already heard that some Shrine Temples are viewing other money raising events, besides the circus; that might be more lucrative. How could any performers have an attitude where the Shriners are concerned is beyond me. Please accept this apology from someone who knows where you guys are coming from. Jackie LeClaire, International Clown Hall of Fame-1996.

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I am interested in purchasing for my own collection, anything related to Side Shows or the exhibiting of anything or any one odd or unusual. Let me know what you have and what you want for it in cash or trade. Send 55¢ for Circus & Side Show items catalog to: Bob Blackmar, POB 283, Carrboro, NC 27510 Ph. 919-929-2753

JOHN PUGH RING-LOT 2 GATHERING OF THE CIRCUS MODEL BUILDERS: JUNE 6-9 OCEAN TOWNSHIP, NJ.

Carson & Barnes will roll into the same mall for a 2-day stand on the 10th. There will be model circus displays in many scales, book & circus model sales tables, clown & model seminars, and over 200 happy circus enthusiasts.

RINGLING CHARGES PETA-APRIL 22

PETA registered "ringlingbrothers.com" as an Internet site, containing material criticizing RBBB because of their use of animals. "Our name is being used as a lure to entice children & their families to a web site that attacks us," said Julie Strauss, VP & Corp. Counsel.

Circus owners begin to feel their ages when collectors start writing them for their yester-year programs! Any gal can learn the art of annex dancing, if she can master climbing into the top three-high berth!

THE UNIVERSOUL BIG TOP CIRCUS

BY STEVE GOSSARD

I must admit that when I first heard that someone had organized an all African-American circus, I was skeptical. It sounded like a circus "with an attitude," using the circus to prove a point. It sounded like the old "anything you can do, I can do" idea. I didn't like that. That isn't what circus is all about. I've always thought that the circus lot is the ideal proving ground for equality & strength through diversity, with people from all ethnic backgrounds cooperating for the good of the performance. Limiting the cast to all black performers would, I thought, limit that diversity & make a weaker performance. All in all, I just didn't like the idea of using the circus as a vehicle for ulterior social or political motives. If the circus can be said to have any abstract theme at all, that is to celebrate the enormous potential of humanity itself, not to promote any kind of racial elitism. I have always thought that African-Americans have not been given credit for the importance of their role in circus history, and they have the ability to accomplish so much more if given the opportunity, but my feeling was that every circus company should represent an integrated cultural entity. As such, it should represent a more democratic ideal-an ethnic mix. But in thinking this way I was limiting the potential of the circus with a vague kind of cultural bias of my own.

I began to change my mind when I heard some seasoned professionals praising the Universoul Big Top as a unique kind of presentation-a mix of circus skills with a gospel revival meeting kind of audience participation. I began to look forward to seeing the show when it played as the finale of the Circus Historical Society Convention in Atlanta in March, & when I heard Cedric Walker talk about his determined efforts to organize & maintain the show during the early years; I became convinced that we were in for a rare treat. I was right this time.

Unfortunately, due to a number of changes in personnel, we were not able to purchase programs of the show, so I cannot provide a listing here. I can say, however, that the Universoul Big Top Circus had all the elements of the traditional circus, & every act was superior in every way. What is more, the ringmaster & the little person who was his side-kick knew how to work a crowd like nothing I've ever seen before. The joke of the convention had been that we would be seated in the "white's only" seats (a poignant & appropriate irony, for sure), but there was no white, black or in between in the crowd that night.

Before we knew it, we were submerged in the audience cheering, clapping & chanting without any sense of race or ethnic difference at all.

I discovered that African-American Culture has something unique to offer circus presentation, & everyone I've talked to seems to believe that it has a "universoul" appeal. It is certainly one of the finest shows in the country today. For those of us who braved the unseasonably cold Georgia weather to see the show that night, we would not regret the effort, & we won't forget the first-class entertainment & warm hospitality of the Universoul Big Top Circus. Our thanks to Cedric Walker and the entire cast.

***** 3 CIRCUSES ARE BETTER THAN TWO

BY PAUL HORSMAN

Circus goers in Central New York were fortunate to have 3 circuses visit their area in a short time, each with it's own format & style of presentation. Dubsky's Royal Palace came first, to Auburn, on April 3rd. Kimball Keller is ringmaster, Irvin Hall & "Bubba" handle the clowning, and there was a good balance of animal, ground & aerial acts. Bannister's Canine's opened the show with a bang, followed by more high powered acts in the air and in the ring, as well as snakes; Irvin Hall's baboons, & elephant Nicholas, presented by Tom Thompson & Dione.

The Jordan World Circus played the Syracuse State Fairgrounds for Tigris Shrine, presenting a strong lineup of acts. Prominent were the Hawthorne 14 white tigers worked by Othmar Vohringer & 4 Hawthorne elephants worked by Gary Thomas. Other feature acts were the Flying Lunas, Steeples Bears, and the cannon finale.

The Cole All-Star Circus, Billy Martin's show, played the Moravia High School, April 8th, with one performance at 7 PM. Acts included Kim & Vlastic, aerial cradle; Joanne Wilson's beautiful poodles; the Zachary's, Alien Encounter; Pecos Patty & Durango; Miss Angela, single trap; and Vlastic on the trampoline. Billy Martin was ever present as Ringmaster & Announcer, and clown Paul Parsons was in & out during the show. Bill Galloway is instrumental in keeping all aspects of the show smooth running & well oiled. All in all, it was a great week with opportunity to visit circus friends, and there were visits between circuses by members of the shows.

Circus contracts seem to include "generally useful".

RUMBLINGS FROM THE CRUMMY

BY BRIAN NUNN

Working the elephant ride in Memphis: the lot was next to Beale St. and the Peabody Hotel. Anyway, this was an 11-day fair date. One of the supervisors for the carnival was a big, bad type of guy. Every morning when he left his trailer on his way to work, he'd pass by the elephant dept. He'd stop & tease and talk to Gardner.

Gardner was pretty easy to get along with if you just left him alone & went about your business. Well, Rex had a special picket line stake; we called it the "Gardner stake." It was 5 foot long & 3" in diameter and it was a little rough to hammer into the ground. It was Gardner's stake, plus two big top stakes drivin' in at opposite angles, on Gardner's end of the picket line. Showing Gardner's patience, he waited for two days.

The morning of the third day, after Gardner had done some work during the night, he had his stakes loose & he'd pull them out and lay them on the ground. He also would, one at a time, put them back into their holes. Well, I saw this & if you didn't know better, you'd think the stakes were as they should be. So, at the same time (7 AM) this idiot came by to tease Gardner. I'd had enough of him and so had Gardner. I went over to him & said, "Ah, you know that those chains wouldn't hold him if he didn't want them to, and that if he did bust the chain off, the stakes, he would have another 30 feet to play with and could reach you. He snorted at me and said, "Bull, what could he do?" Well, at this point, Gardner grabbed the big stake, pulled it out & held it up and waved it at this guy. I swear, I saw a wet spot on his pants as he walked away! And, he never went by Gardner's dept. on his way to work again.

I asked Rex, "Why don't we just give Gardner a sledge hammer so he can drive his own stakes?" Rex said, "I don't think you want to give him a 20 pound hammer to play with!"

*Gardner didn't work the ride. Rex used Sue & Gyp for that. For those of you that don't know Gardner, he was a 10,000 lb., breeding male. Darn

good worker. To watch him, you knew that he enjoyed working for Rex, whether it was performing or pushing semis out of the mud.

*Working an outdoor Shrine date in Atlanta, (another 11-day date), Gardner had a habit of when he was having a good time he would show off that he was a healthy, young man! So, opening day, Rex has got Gardner up doing the hind leg walk and Gardner's beating himself on the chest (you have to use your imagination here.) Anyway, the Shriner's wives seemed to think this was obscene and Gardner & I were banished to the Dept. during the act! It didn't hurt his feelings any, you think? I liked being around Rex and Gardner; they both have a great sense of humor. *After closing a job for Dory's show, I blew off the season with Atterbury's Texas dates. I think that's the only season that I went bell to bell with the same show. I like Carson & Barnes. We were billing some towns in Colorado & saw a sign in a second story window of a nice, old building. It read: Schister and Schnich, Law Offices. Honest! I didn't have a camera so I can't prove it.

That was one year that Carson & Barnes had a blow-down. The Vargas show was 300 miles away, but when Vargas heard, he went in at show time, calling to clear the top and drop the canvas. I remember when I was on that show, Vargas would run drills for emergency tear-down. We got so we'd have all the "pointy things" on the floor and the bale rings released in 45 minutes, with the menagerie tent down & animals loaded. If I remember right, it was a pretty big show. H.J. described it like Cliff was on a motorized skateboard with his toupee spinning around, screaming, "Hurricane, hurricane," and being Colorado, the folks in the seats had no idea what he was screaming about. But, we all know H.J! I think he might have colored it a little bit, ya think?

***ROMEO'S FAVORITE DISH:** Take a 6"x 6" round steak; 1 can Black-eyed peas; 1 can chopped clams (do not drain.) Put all in a large skillet, medium heat till hot. Simmer till 'ya want to eat it (the round steak cooks fast.) I use a lot of fresh garlic, Tabasco Sauce and a great spice called, "Spike". This, a couple of beers, and a loaf of French bread should do the trick!

WISCONSIN FANS FORM TENT 173 TO HONOR NOCKS OF SWAYPOLE FAME

The Nerveless Nocks Tent No. 173 has been formed in Wisconsin to honor the famous thrill act family. Today's performers represent the 5th & 6th generations, descending from Switzerland's Nock Circus. The Nerveless Nocks include Eugene & Aurelia Nock, plus their 4 sons-Eugene, John, Michelangelo & Bello, and their wives & children. The Nocks have displayed their talents throughout the world on television, on Ringling Bros. & Barnum & Bailey Circus, and at countless world's fairs. They are famous for their thrilling swaypole routines, but are equally adept at many other acts, including helicopter trapeze, sky wheel, sky cycle trapeze, balancing chairs-and Bello's clowning & comedy routines, featured this year on The Big Apple Circus.

District 6 Director, Mary-Jane Foote, the organizing force behind the new CFA (Circus Fans Assn. of America) Tent, said it was appropriate for Wisc. fans to honor the Nocks, noting that they have performed at The Tommy Bartlett Show in Wisc. Dells for 21 consecutive years. "It has become their second home. Bello even married a girl from the Dells," said Mary-Jane, who will serve as the Tent's first president.

Other officers are Alice A. Bailey of Baraboo, vice pres.; John W. Vick of Madison, sec'y; and Jill M. Martin of Baraboo, treasurer. Mary-Jane, the wife of CFA Chaplain, Robert Foote, lives in East Troy, WI.

Mary-Jane has been organizing Fans' outings to the Bartlett Show for the past few years, including a brunch. "The Nocks have always been very gracious to the Fans, and we have enjoyed hearing them tell us about their family," she said. "They are very excited about the prospect of having a Tent named after them." Gigi Tegge, an artist as well as a clown, has designed a special logo for the Nerveless Nocks Tent, which will be used on letterheads, membership cards, T-shirts, etc. Gigi also did the artwork for Bello Nock's coloring book when he was on Circo Atayde.

"The official tent-raising will be held sometime this summer at the Tommy Bartlett Show in the Dells, depending on when most or all of the Nock family can be there." Mary-Jane said there will be a special banquet in conjunction with the tent raising. For this reason, she urges all Fans who would like to become Charter Members & participate in these events, to send their dues (\$5.00 per year) to Treas.-Jill Martin, 214 5th Ave., Baraboo, WI 53913.

STU MILLER'S MEMORIAL SERVICE FROM JACKIE LECLAIRE

The memorial service for Stu was held at the International Independent Showman's Assn. Club in Gibsonton, FL on Tuesday, April 14th at 6 pm. Attended by a very large number of Stu's friends, the service was officiated by Jackie LeClaire. There were several speakers. Calliope music was played before the service to set the mood for this legend of the circus and carnival world.

Helen Skirvni read a beautiful inspirational poem. Ward Hall, a fellow side show producer and long time friend, gave the eulogy. Ward said that, "Stu was one of the few people who made the cross over from carnival to circus to theatre. He was very capable in everything he did. He was an excellent side show operator. One of the best," Ward said.

Roland Gagne then shared another thoughtful reading with us. An inspiring rendition of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir singing the Lord's Prayer was played while everyone bowed their heads in silence.

Jackie LeClaire presented the final thoughts in an original prayer titled, "Life Is A Show." On behalf of Stu's wife, Sara, everyone was thanked for attending. Sara was escorted by her father and two men who were devoted to Stu and had worked for him the last seven years, Vern McClain & Steve Smith. Following the service, there was a pot luck where so many memories of Stu were shared by all his showfolks family members.

Nothing makes a showman smart more quickly than his first experience with a lot owner!!!



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Bloomington, IL 61701



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