

# BACK YARD

Volume IV, Issue #65

April 15, 1999

## **"THEY SPLIT SECONDS TO LIVE"- Shooting Stars Of The Big Tops Must Time Acts or Meet Death!**

**Detroit Free Press, Feb. 21, 1932 By Bart Lynch**  
(From Illinois State Univ. Circus Archives)

Charles Siegrist broke his neck last April when he fell 40 feet from a flying trapeze doing an aerial act with Ringling Circus at Madison Sq. Garden, New York.

That should have made an end of him according to the doctors & their text books founded on the statistics of men & women who break their necks. And he was well along in middle life-time for him to be doing something besides earning his living-and breaking his neck-on high trapezes. Charlie is an interesting person anyway, but very much so than he might have been because he persisted he was the man of whom they read 10 months ago, under a NY date: "C. Siegrist, veteran aerialist, broke his neck in a fall before 5000 horrified spectators at a performance here today." Siegrist frankly admits he does not know how he comes to be alive.

Miss Mickey King is interesting, too-by the divine right of personality, altho she has other claims. She, too, is an aerialist, & demands the crown of her tribe as successor to Lillian Leitzel. There are other claimants of the crown, to be sure. But Miss King thinks her 145 aerial somersaults gives her premiere place. And she adds a fall from her sky perch-from which she escaped with her life-to her record, better luck than was the lot of the lamented Leitzel.

Mickey holds to the belief that perhaps she was preserved because she says her prayers every day, carries a rosary & goes to church whenever she has an opportunity. While performing at the Shrine Circus at the Coliseum, she attended mass every morning, she says. Siegrist is a materialist. "I had to come back," he tells you. "What else could a man do after spending all his life since boyhood with the circus? One can't give up a job he has spent 35 years in mastering just because he



happens to break his neck-at least not without seeing if something can't be done about it."

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## **TRAPEZE ARTIST SUFFERS CONCUSSION IN 20-FOOT FALL: Orange Co. Register-4/9**

Irvine, CA: **Sylvia Zerbini**, entertaining nearly 1000 people Friday, at "**Kaleidoscope**" was hospitalized after falling more than 20 feet from a trapeze. She was taken to Mission Hospital shortly after 2 pm with a mild concussion. She was in fair condition Friday night. She was attempting to do an inverted heel catch on the trapeze when she slipped. One of the show's spotters broke her fall. "She is doing quite well considering what could've happened," said **Jim Ragona**, the production director. "It's the reality of the beast, what they do is very dangerous."

The trick she was performing has been part of her act for 10 years. Ragona said her spirits were very "feisty" at the hospital. Sylvia was very deeply touched by the reaction of the people, he said.

(Thanks to **VeeKay** for the article.)

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### **Fire in SW Missouri Destroys Clown Memorabilia**

Houston, MO: 4/6-A fire destroyed 6 buildings, including one with memorabilia from Emmett Kelly. People dashed into the building to save what they could of the collection.

Flames consumed much of the collection of paintings, figurines, dolls, autographed pictures & other items from both Kelly & his son, Emmett, Jr. Kelly moved to Houston as a child & is enshrined in the Hall of Famous Missourians in Jefferson City. Houston holds the Emmett Kelly Clown Festival each May. (AP)

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### **\*LA Zoo's Elephant Accidentally Injures Trunk\***

(From the LA Zoo web site [www.lazoo.org](http://www.lazoo.org)) **Tara**, one of the LA Zoo's African elephants, is recovering from an injury sustained when her trunk was accidentally caught between 2 hydraulic doors in her barn. About 4" of her trunk was severed when her keepers were preparing to open doors to her barn so she could have indoor/outdoor access during the night. As her keepers were operating the doors, 33-year-old Tara unexpectedly turned her head around & got the tip of her trunk caught between the doors. "The keepers reacted instantly & stopped the door," said Gen. Curator Mike Dee. "However, Tara pulled her trunk, resulting in the loss of the tip." Tara didn't make any painful noises when the accident occurred. She ran into her outside yard with her trunk in her mouth. Zoo vets responded & prescribed a bucket of ice water for her to dunk her trunk in.

"We don't expect major medical problems with this injury," said Zoo vet P.K. Robbins. "Tara will keep the sore clean by herself. We will monitor her closely & prescribe antibiotics and/or antiseptic dips if needed." Elephants in the wild sometimes get their trunks snapped off by crocodiles when they go to river banks to drink water & they heal naturally. A keeper stayed with Tara the entire night & hand fed her hay. Tara, who is eating by herself, will continue to also be fed by hand until her injury is better. Fortunately, there was no nerve damage to her trunk.

"We have an elephant management protocol that our keepers follow," said Zoo Director Manuel Mollinedo. "We will revisit it & see if there are any changes that need to be made to that protocol or door in light of this incident." This is the first accident involving the doors, since installed in 1994. Following Zoo policy, the USDA was immediately notified of this accident. Tara will be off & on exhibit depending on her needs & will be monitored closely by vets & her keepers.

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**Protests as Chipperfield is Fined** (London Telegraph) 4/10/99: **Mary Chipperfield** & her husband, **Roger Cawley**, were escorted thru a mob of furious protesters after being fined for cruelty to animals. Mary, 61, was fined \$12,000 for 12 charges of cruelty towards a chimp and Roger, 64, fined \$1600 for cruelty towards a sick elephant. Magistrate House ordered the couple to pay \$19,580 in court costs. A group called Animal Defenders used hidden cameras to shoot hours of footage at Chipperfield's training facility between 10/97 & 1/98. The group's director criticized the fines as "paltry" & said she was disappointed the couple hadn't been banned from handling animals. The court was told that Mary transferred ownership of Trudy, the chimp, to Monkey World in Dorset, where she has been living since being removed from the farm. Jim Cronin, director of Monkey World, said it was Trudy's 3rd birthday & he was relieved that she would be staying at his sanctuary. Their lawyer said all their animals, except 1 llama, had been sold or given away. In a statement, Mary said she was sorry her "loss of patience" had led her to be firmer with Trudy than she should have been after being bitten by her. "I am very relieved to have been cleared of all the other charges brought against me & hope this brings an end to this unfortunate & regrettable episode in my life. I am not the ogre depicted. I will continue to care for animals in a humane manner."

FOX 62 March, 1999



## THE FOX !!!

My Dear Friends:

First I like to wish you Happy Easter. I hope this will get to you in time.

There is not to much to tell this time, but I do like to get a letter out. I am like many of you fighting the flu and that is miserable, I know La Norma has it already for over 2 month. I have it now a little over a week and believe me I could very do with out that.

Yes we did loose an other dear friend Alfred Fredonia Fullgrape and I could not go as I was just to sick. He was a great performer and a great person. I know all our hearts go out to his loved ones he left behind.

I went to the February Membership Meeting of the Club, but there was no meeting. There were just 5 people there and the only one from the board was the president June Mills. I was really disapointed, I tell all of you out there, June is working her you know what off for the Club. I know she will be happy when she can turn all this over to the next bunch.

La Lage, well I finely found out were they put her now, after I called the Lutheran Ministry, (not connected to a church) I was told that they put her in a nursing home, the Pines on Orange Ave. They told me, well you know she has no more money so we put her in the pines and she is in security, as she is trying to escape all the time. Well those....should have left her in her beautiful little house, but no they took it all from her and spent the money and now she is dumped. Oh this is a shame. Here she was a great performer a star for many years and then they just take everything from her. Friends I tried to stop it. I even went in front of the judge. He told me off made me sit down and when I spoke he paid no attention to what I had to say. I could see it was already an all made up deal. Everytime I think of it I get made again. How can this happen in America the free country, How??????I know of 4 cases this was done to. The one lady, Inge Woods they had even the police drag her out of her mobile home at 11:00 PM. The minute this is done the person has no rights at all any more. Oh I could go on and on, it is just to horrible. Inge could not eat so they were going to put a tube in her stomach. I begged them not to do it. I told them I was willing to come there every day to feed her. You see the reason she could not eat was that she could not see and when I fed her she ate it all. I went home and

when I came back the next morning they had her already at the hospital and puting a tube in her. It was to much bother for them. It was horrifying to see Inge there. I gave up thier to. Inge died a few months later. If you have no children, please make sure you have a close friend who you give the right to decide over your well being.

Everyone writes about the Barnum Kaleidoscope but no one says anything about the show, so I will. I like the show. It is very different but I like it. There is no announcing done it just runs from one act in to the other. The clowning is done strictly European style with the Ordeans Padissipation, no speaking and the people love it.

I better start from the beginning. The tent is well build it lookes to me more Oriental Egyptian style. You can see well from every seat. The chairs all have red soft cloth on and are very comfortable. There is one row of couches, I did not try them but I know John and Herta Cuneo, Jenda Smaha and Jeanette Williams were sitting on one. Now to the show. When you enter the first part were the concession is sold you meet with all the performers. 4 girls are dancing for one hour to a live band. The Arabian Troupe are performing there act, the Russians are tumbling, a man and a girl are doing hand ballancing on a stage. There is a rollerskating act then a chairbalancing act, a juggler, one act after an other. This mind you is before you enter the main tent. It reminded me of Europe when the people performed on the streets. Anyway then you entered the big tent and got seated. The beginning was the clown La Ribbel (I hope I spelled his name right) sitting in the middle of the tent in front of a table and putting his make up on, while all around him every one was doing somekind of acrobatic.

Then came my favored act, Silvia Zerbini with her trap act beautifully done after she finished she entered the ring and her horses were waiting for her as she was changing her shoes. The white horses were also gorgios and the act she presented with them was also fabulous. Now since there was no program I will be mixed up in the line up, but whattae heck. There was a juggler who did it by mouth and then he though plate in the audience and had them through them back while he juggled with them. An English musical clown act with 5 people. A very good statue act with 3 man. A crossbow act, Russian swing act, and the only other animal act were geese. What really was impressing in that act when about 20 white geese and I think 12 black

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## "THEY SPLIT SECONDS TO LIVE".....

These two are a pair such as one could hardly hope to find under the same circus roof on a single afternoon. Miss King, along with being at the top of the aerialists, has a mental equipment & an outlook on life & the things that life means that goes with racial background & religious training. Her ambitions are not such as one would associate with wandering shows. To save money, to be come independent, & to be the mother of a family, these are the aims & end toward which she says she is working. As far as a job is concerned, she holds the circus offers a girl the best of all.

Mickey, in spite of her Hibernian cognomen, is a French-Canadian, even at 19, the women from Quebec usually have mastered a good share of the world's wisdom. "There is one thing I like better than any other," she said in answer to a question. "I like the people in the audience to like me. I want them to applaud & cheer me. I know when I please those who come to see me that I can be with them a long time, & that is a great thing for a performer to know. And besides that, it means money. After all, money is the thing that counts. Does it count more than applause? Well-I don't know. But if you can get applause, why, you can have money too, & that's money & applause. And what's the matter with that, eh?"

"I don't think I could stand it if the spectators behaved as if my act were a flop. It would be tough going up there and turning somersaults-more than 100 somersaults-while hanging by one wrist, & have people act as if they didn't like it or didn't care. I guess if you were the kind that the public wouldn't care about, you never would go up there at all. But it's hard to be without money. I don't want to think about it. I guess I'll try to keep on pleasing them & so have money & the fun of having the crowd tell me they like me in the way a crowd can."

"When I am 40-what about then? Oh, I have that all figured out, & I know just what I am going to be & be like. I will have a family-a big family, maybe. I think every woman ought to have a big family. A lot of children are so much fun. I will go back to Quebec, perhaps. I like it in Quebec-but I like it here too. So I may stay here and settle down."

"I don't think a woman has any business in circus acts when she is 40. Lots of them stay & stay. I don't want to be around & hear them call me 'Old Mickey.' That would not be nice. Maybe the public would still like me, maybe only make believe. There are a lot of women performers who come around every year & they are always given a big hand. I don't know. I think the people just do it for old times sake; the public are very kind. Some of the acts are getting pretty bad. I have a notion that they are just what I would be if I should stick around too long-just 'Old Micekeys.' So I will go while the going is good." Mickey King says there are no tough circus women among those engaging in dangerous acts & very few circus men who are not pious & gentle, in their own way. "When a girl is liable to break her neck any day, she thinks of life-her life here & in the future-in a serious way," volunteered the small moralist. "They nearly all go to church when they can. More so, maybe,

than lots of young women who never have to leave their homes. One is better able to do a hard day's work well after going to confession than after a session at a night club. It may be due to early training in my case. But I have noticed that it holds with all of the performing girls. And it doesn't make much difference what creed they profess. I guess there is something in the life itself.

I like to have a rosary with me when I go up to start somersaulting. Do I think it does me any good? I certainly do. Not the way some people may think. I could break my neck, I suppose, just the same. But if you carry something that shows you love God & venerate the saints, don't you think--? Well anyway, I have a kind of a feeling I am safer, more confidence that I won't fall & hurt myself very much. I did fall once-40 feet. It may be that's what saved me-that I was friendly with the saints. It was at Circleville. OH, last spring. I don't know how it happened. First thing I knew I was falling. I guess the noose slipped off my wrist. I thought it was all over for me. I hit the ground so hard I bounced. And what do you think? I wasn't hurt hardly any. I was back on the job in 4 days & never felt it afterward." The noose to which Mickey referred is the looped rope which suspends her in the air while she whirls like a pinwheel-over & over. Her record is 145 somersaults, her lithe body with its 97 pounds of vibrantly living weight suspended by the wrist on which she is turning. It is a trying act, & toward the finish, little short of torture. Thru it, the girl maintains the deceptive smile that is so seeming-natural, but still only a part of the make-up.

"Sometimes I want to scream & nearly always I have to cry after I get to the dressing room. And it isn't because I am nervous. Just because I am hurt! It feels like the hurts you cried over when you were little-only worse, oh, much worse!" In spite of the painful nature of the act, Mickey said she always is able to watch the audience & keenly note the way they receive her work. It may hurt to hang by your wrist & turn somersaults, but she admitted it was even more painful to note any sign of indifference among those who had paid their money to see her.

"Once at Cleveland, I thought they didn't like me very well. I forgot about the way my wrist was hurting & turned 12 more somersaults. I guess I would have kept on forever if the crowd hadn't begun to cheer me. Vanity? Well, in a way-but after all, cold, hard common sense. You can't afford to get the cold shoulder in the show business." Mickey says a girl is as safe in her line of work as in any other. Only the hard worker can hope for success & hard workers can't be fast livers, she pointed out. The others soon are forced out of it."I don't know whether I would care to have my daughter follow it. But, you see, I haven't any daughter. So how should I know? That daughter of mine is going to be hard to suit if her mother has anything to say about it, which she probably won't. Seriously, there is no reason why this potential girl or any other shouldn't be a circus performer. Only maybe she couldn't. Lots of girls wouldn't get a look in, or stay 3 hours if they did. It takes determination-lots of it-the hardest kind of work, & considerable talent.

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\*\*\*\*\*THE FOX.....\*\*\*\*\*

geese entered in four each line and were in complete line up and ever so often all made a complete turn together. For the Finale they had everyone come in again and tumble-juggle and just moved real fast. Colored strings came flying down and then they all went back to the first tent and greeted every one.

So this is it for this letter as my nose is still running and my head is busting up.

Lots of Love,  
Your Fox

P.S. Does anyone know the were abouts of Sharkey????? Also for those who need a winterquarter for there animal. Look at this.

"I still have my Winter Quarters for sale. It's not too far from the old Castle & Gil Gray quarters. Is close to Donnie Johnson's quarters and even closer to the Plunketts. I go to see the Plunketts once in awhile. It is a nice place for circus people, especially since it is strictly rural & there are NO restrictions which is becoming important nowadays. Spread the news around as only you can. I also have bleacher seats for sale. 4 tier seats for about 400 people. Need a good coat of paint but I will sell cheap. \$1000 for the seats. Everything is fine here in Texas. Tell all of my friends in Florida hello for me. Maybe I'll get there one of these years. I hope so anyway. Hello to Andy. Best Wishes, Ronnie Lewis. Also have 4 new webs & some swivels. No loops. Also lots of hang cables for buildings. 77.5 acres fenced & sectioned; 2 ponds; 2 mobile homes included; quiet & secluded. Call 903-451-3417. All animals OK. Elephants, cats-anything OK. Also all tents & trailers, etc. OK.  
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\*\*\*\*Daviso Cristiani Birthday Party\*\*\*\*

A collection of Sarasota's living circus treasures gathered to celebrate the 91st birthday of one of their own-Signore Daviso Cristiani, equestrian extraordinaire.

Ann Canestrelli hosted a party catered by Joe Capozzi. Worldwide circus greats were in attendance including many whose names appear on St. Armand's Circle Ring of Fame. Among those attending were Aurelia Canestrelli Nock, Pete Cristiani, Pete & Grace Ivanov, Belmonte Cristiani, Angelina Nock, Cosetta Cristiani, Linda Rosaire & husband Dr. Steve Repasy, Remo Cristiani, Iver Rosaire, Eugnia Moroski, Gilda Cristiani, Amleto Sciplini, Jenny Wallenda, Mario Ivanov, Desi Togni, Bunni Bartock & husband Janek Perz, Carin Cristiani, the Zamperla family, Otto Herrmann of the Herrmann Lipizzans, Lily Esqueda Cristiani & Freddie Canestrelli.

Telephone greetings were received by Mickey King and Alex Konyot. Famed circus priest, St. Martha's beloved Father Jerry Hogan, stopped to wish Daviso happy birthday. He stayed for the entire party as circus history came to life for him.

Daviso attended a performance of Barnum's Kaleidoscape & was graciously greeted by Tim Holst and Kenneth Feld.

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\*\*\*\*"CIRCUS BOY", By Mike Cecere\*\*

Like most 12 year-olds, young Anthony Arata has a keen interest in computers (he has his own), music & is a good student. Anthony is bi-lingual, quick on his feet, & has a straight-ahead hard work ethic that most adults would envy. That's right. You guessed it. He's a show kid!

The son of Circus Vargas big top boss Victor Arata and performer Dione Arata, there is not much he can't, or won't, do to make every circus day a success. He's worked on props, concessions, big top, operated a spotlight and takes care of electrical & water connections for him Mom, as well as helping her & his Step Dad with the day to day care of the Hawthorn Elephants. At his young age, he even rolls a heavy stainless steel bull tub at top speed. There is very little on a show that he can't do and do well!

Anthony knows that in this day and age, it is important to not only take care of one's own job but to look at the bigger picture of the success of the whole show. He has recently become an unofficial advisor to the Circo Mundial tent crew. Circo Mundial has the same type of tent as the great Circus Vargas & while Anthony spends a portion of each year with his father, his dad has taught him much of what is involved in the setting up & tearing down of the top, as well as taking care of it while it's up. As a result, the newer tent crew members on Circo Mundial have learned that by coming to Anthony, they can get advice and help in carrying out their duties.

That's how it's supposed to be in our business. You lend your knowledge to those moving up, which makes it easier for everyone. This young man is a fine example of the future of the circus industry as he combines the lessons of the past with the innovations of the future. Everyone who loves the circus should be glad that young Anthony Arata is on the job! ALL THE BEST SUCCESS, CIRCUS BOY! Mike Cecere.

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I talked to **Fred Logan** who was leaving the 4th for Mexico. He is working for **Ian Garden** on **Atyde Circus** and will be Supt. of his mixed group of animals; 2 camels, 2 llamas, 2 zebras and 2 hind-leg ponies. Fred will replace **Louie Del Moral** who is going to Canada. His daughter, **Omi**, was preparing a bar-b-que going away party for him.

Hopefully, she got the coals going! Ora Logan made the best fried bread, but Omi said even tho they watched her make it, they still can't make it the same as Ora. Darn!

## **“Daytime In The Menagerie And Environs”**

**By Paul Horsman**

The following text will relate some interesting events that occurred on a visit to the Strates Shows in 1958, centering around the big wild animal menagerie. Fans who had observed the show unloading often conjectured over the reason for the use of dump trucks. I soon found out one use during the week in Winter Haven. After making it known I was available for work, I was sent to the man with the pony ride & he engaged me for loading pony manure into one of the dump trucks. Before I began, Chubby told me to be sure & let him know when the load was transferred, as he would need the truck.

Apparently, the dump trucks came in handy several ways, as well as being powerful, some being chain driven Mack trucks. With the acquisition of the elephants, the dump bodies were needed to haul elephant manure away. Once the pony manure was transferred from ground to truck, Chubby came over & said we had to load the truck with elephant manure. We both shoveled by hand & the truck was soon ready for a trip.

Chubby jumped in the driver's side & I got in the passenger side. Once under way, Chubby explained that one of the Pinkerton guards hired by the fair asked about having elephant manure dumped on his lawn for fertilizer. Chubby was in a hurry, taking advantage of the then new turn right on red provision. He said he wanted to get the manure dumped and get back to the lot.

We found the house, in the middle of a circular drive & other houses around the perimeter. No one was home at the house in question, so we went knocking on doors. At one house, the occupant explained that the house wife had gone shopping & would be back soon. When Chubby explained why we were there, the man said her husband was always pulling stuff like that without letting his wife know about it & that we'd better get the manure dumped and get out of there, which we did.

At the next stand, in Orlando, Pinky & June Madison visited the fair & Mr. Strates asked him to put the Polack elephants through their paces. Pinky obliged, enlisting Al G. to assist. I was working the front on the fat show & was able to witness the performance while on a break. I was able to park the microbus at Taft quarters & commute to the Fairgrounds & stayed in quarters a few days after the Orlando Fair closed.

One night in Bert's trailer, I remarked that the pay on carnivals wasn't too high, at \$4 for a 16 hour day. Bert's wife Marie laughed & said, "We only get \$3 a day for taking menagerie tickets, but we do it to keep things in the family. The other workers get \$2 a day in brass." I should have exchanged some of my quarters for brass, as that commodity today is valuable and rare. Though I enjoyed the comforts of the cot in the Microbus, the animal show workers slept in abandoned wagons, some of which were minus undergears & sat on their roofs. There were no facilities for eating, so a dining car provided 1 dinner item-pork chops & mashed potatoes. There were other circus people working on the show, one being a

black man named "Nappy", whom I'd known on Jimmie Cole's circus. He had been on big top canvas & worked with Jimmie on Sells-Floto. He was working on Strates train crew.

Hard Times Leonard, who had been electrician on Mills Bros. & later had his own show out under the Leonard Bros.' title, was also there operating the pony ride. He had married Margie Butcher while on Mills & they had a young son, Ricky, who gave me a tour of the quarters. A little blonde girl, named Jeannie, followed us all around & on a later visit to the Fair in York, PA, an enterprising merchandiser had a stage built & was demonstrating hula hoops he was selling. For a draw, he had kids come up on the stage & twirl hula hoops. Little Jeannie was right in the middle of them, swinging a Hula Hoop faster than the other kids.

The next Fair was at Homestead & the train was being assembled for the jump. The 6 elephants were carried in a long box car, with each herd of 3 at opposite ends. A young fellow named Oliver, that worked for Bert, was sitting in the doorway, so I jumped up & sat beside him. I had taken him to DeLand one day to the Beatty quarters, as he had come to Strates from that show. He had also been a drome rider and was from Maine. While we were talking, a switching engine hooked onto the car & it started moving. Oliver started acting nervous & I assured him they wouldn't move the car very far. He turned & said to me, "I understand that one of those 3 elephants is a bad one." My reply was, "I understand both herds have a bad one." Fortunately, the car was switched without incident.

My plans were to head for Sarasota, but first I made a trip East to New Smyrna Beach to get a look at the Kelly-Morris quarters. When I got back to Taft & went to Bert's trailer, Marie introduced me to Tony Gentry, who had stopped by & she laughed & told Tony I'd had enough carny and was heading for Sarasota.

After that, I traveled to Miami, then North & stopped at Ft. Lauderdale where Strates was to play the Fair. Arizona Jack Gagne went with me to follow the train up & we were parked at a crossing gate as it was going by. Jack was quite perturbed that people waiting for the colorful show train to pass weren't as excited as we were. Once the train was in, it wasn't unloaded for several hours, as a tractor on the first car had the timing gear locked in place. When unloading finally took place, I noticed a fellow in a white shirt & tie poling wagons. I was informed he was one of the office help, working for points with the old man. By the time Spring came, many workers were on different shows than on my Florida visit. Chubby was an elephant man on Ringling & Ringling bull man, Joe Flynn, was working in Beatty's elephant dept. Another elephant man, Fats, showed up on Beatty at Palisades Park. He told me he wanted to get with elephants & Beatty only gave him one day's work, butchering floss. So I told him Bert needed a man as Chubby had left. Fats got the job & was in York when I visited later in the season.

The hippo was in a pen on the ground & Chubby had told me it took 3 years to get the hippo to leave his cage.

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## "THEY SPLIT SECONDS TO LIVE"....

Besides that, there is a lot of training to be done before you can even hope to make a start. You must learn it like any other trade. How did I come to choose the circus life? I just liked it & made up my mind. I would do it again! There is nothing that ever could attract me like the sawdust ring. The Flying Wards taught me. Yes, I'm very strong," & the muscles of her small, sinewy arm swelled ominously to prove it. "But I never have had to use it, only in my act. In the time I have been on the circuit, nobody ever has tried to molest me. I think I could give one awful punch in the eye," she added judiciously.

Charles Siegrist doesn't look on a long stay before the circus public as a matter to worry about. The man's way of seeing such things is different-or does he endure the wear & tear better? Charlie has been doing his stuff-he also is an aerialist-& his family traditions are those of the ring & trapeze-for 35 years.

"I never will quit the long road until I have to. What is there to life anywhere else? I have been under canvas for 35 years & don't know how to do anything else-and I don't want to do anything else! At 49, some men may think they should get into something easier than their real life work. They are old, generally, in their mind. More men deceive themselves in this way than you imagine. The notion is more prevalent in the outside world than among performers. You see men in the show business-legitimate or vaudeville-who are from 40 to 70 years old. They simply ignore birthdays until they have so many they are things to boast about!

The work of a circus aerialist is not easy. And it must be good or you must get out. I have been with the Barnum people all my life. I am 49 now. You can't pension an aerialist by letting him keep his job. Unless he can please the public, the circus must let him go. There is no alternative. The only way to suit the public is to keep as spry at 50 as at 20. I do it, & scores of others do the same. So why should I think of retiring?

Besides, what would I do? All my friends are under the big tents. 3 of my sons are in the business. Here in this show, one of my boys, Charley, is doing his own tight wire act, somersaults & all. he is just getting a good start. I have to look after him & show him anything I can, don't I?"

Siegrist, who was the first to throw a double back somersault in America, met with his only accident in the more than 3 decades of his career, last April 11 while doing his trapeze act with the Barnum & Bailey show at Madison Square Garden. "I had just caught the flying trapeze, but barely made it & couldn't hold. There is only one thing I blame for the mishap. The tempo of the music was not what it should have been. All trapeze work is done to music & timed by the tap of the drum. Here in this show, the Shrine Band furnishes the music, but a circus drummer, accustomed to the work of timing aerial acts, is on the job. At Madison Sq. Garden, I guess something went wrong with the timing & in just that fraction of a second difference it made, I met disaster. When the trapeze swung away from me & I shot down, I didn't think there ever would be much chance to try to analyze the cause. But you never can tell. I landed on my head & shoulders & went blank. When I woke up they told me

it wasn't much use, & that I had better make arrangements for a performance that has no encore!" His neck was broken-the 5th vertebrae shattered-& there seemed to be practically no hope. One in 10 survive a broken spinal column, & the nature of his injury was so serious, it reduced his chances many fold. "I made up my mind to come back. I don't know if that had anything to do with it, but I began to get better. Within a few weeks I was out of danger of death. Then the 5 doctors that had been looking after me warned me against any quick movement. They said any physical shock would be fatal. As to going back to the circus & my aerial act-that was something that just couldn't be done, they told me. I was not convinced. I didn't want to be convinced. I couldn't figure out what it was all about; why they had taken so much trouble to fix me up, if I was to be a cripple for the rest of my life & just watch the world go by.

I liked the world well enough at that-but sitting on the side lines & looking at the parade-that is something else again.

So I took the very best care I could of myself, not with the object of living, but with the deliberate purpose of living & going back to the circus & carrying on as I had always done." 4 months after the seemingly fatal fall, Siegrist was back with the Barnums, gingerly trying his aerial stunts under the sympathetic & pitying eyes of old associates willing to give a word of cheer to a game fighter even though they realized he didn't have a chance. "It was a terrible job. Painful as pulling teeth. It is a difficult job to do an aerial act even when one is in the best physical condition & young. But here I was-48-& with a spinal column that was liable to come in two any moment. When I let go one trapeze to jump for another, I hadn't only to watch that I didn't miss, but that I didn't jar myself too much. I suffered terribly but managed to keep my head on until I was perfectly recovered. There is no other performer who met with a similar accident & came back."

Siegrist will join the Barnum & Bailey show this spring for the usual season's tour & is booked up for a year on the vaudeville & indoor circus circuits, with which he fills out the time after Barnum goes into winter quarters.

\*(I find the part about his blaming the musicians hard to believe. I have a newspaper article that quotes my mother, Lorraine Valentine, "Circus people must watch what they are thinking as well as what they're doing when they perform a two and one-half, blindfolded, thru the air. We can't let our minds wander for even a moment, for if we do, that minute is gone forever & the rhythm of our routine is broken." My father, George, said that once he is on his swing (catch bar) in the arena, he is oblivious of anything but his act. "I can't even hear the band playing!" Any other performers out there want to comment on this topic???)

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Rich Deptula has just returned from a month in Hawaii visiting Kent Ghirard. They spent several days visiting Starr Bros.Circus. Dick & June Johnson & Walt & Millie Stimax got to see Kent's fabulous circus & 8x10 collection. Kent & Rich saw "The Maya's Living Statues at the "Yes" International Review. (Next time Rich, take your editor!!)

**RINGLING RED UNIT:**

Philadelphia-1st Union Spectrum: 4/15-4/25; Providence, RI-Civic Center: 4/28-5/2; New Haven, CT-Vets Mem. Coliseum: 5/5-5/9; Hartford, CT-Civic Center: 5/13-5/16; Albany, NY-Pepsi Arena: 5/18-5/19; Hershey, PA-Hersheypark Arena: 5/26-5/31

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**RINGLING RED UNIT:**

Landover, MD-US Airways Arena: 4/16-4/18; Charleston, WV-Civic Center: 4/22-4/25; Chattanooga, TN-UTC Arena: 4/29-5/2 San Antonio, TX-Freeman Arena: 5/12-5/16; Peoria, IL-Civic Center: 5/20-5/23

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**CARSON & BARNES CIRCUS:**

Bowie, TX: 4/16; Lawton, OK: 4/17; Altus AFB, OK: 4/18 Vernon, TX: 4/19; Burkburnett, TX: 4/20; Gainesville, TX: 4/21; Denton, TX: 4/22-23; Sherman, TX: 4/24

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**UniverSoul Circus:** Norfolk, VA: 4/9-18; Prospect Park, NY-4/21-5/11; Newark, NY-5/14-23

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**Famous Cole Indoor Circus:** Connersville, IN-4/18; Versailles, IN-4/21; Sidney, OH-5/7; Troy-5/8.

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**Hanneford Shrine:** Columbus, OH Fairgrounds-4/9-18; Univ. of Dayton, OH Arena-4/23-25

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**Hamid Circus Royale:** Hays, KS-4/18; Manhattan, KS-4/21; Salina, KS-4/24; Terre Haute, IN-4/23-25; Buffalo, NY-4/29-5/2; Binghamton, NY-5/7-9; Plymouth Meeting, PA-5/14-16; VA Beach, VA-6/24-27; Muskogee, OK-9/10-12.

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**Vidbel Circus:** Altoona, PA-4/19-4/25 (More routes??)

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**Cirque Leonardo & Bobby Gibbs:** Becancour, Quebec-4/29; Chicoutimi-4/30; Jonquiere-5/1; Dolbeau-5/2.

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**Ray McMahon's Royal American:** Bloomington, IL-4/22; Springfield, IL-4/26; Decatur, IL-4/27

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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. 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. Comments by writers are their own & do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the publisher. Back Yard is a pro-circus, pro-animal publication, which supports the use of animals that are legally held & properly cared for, in the circus.

**\*\*\*BIG APPLE TRUCKS VANDALIZED !\*\*\*\***

The following is a 4/1 letter from Gary Dunning, Exec. Director of the Big Apple Circus: The Big Apple Circus encountered an act of overt violence last weekend during our engagement in NJ. An arsonist set fire to 2 of our trucks & 1 flatbed trailer. No one was injured as the damaged equipment was separated from the rest of the unit. Police are investigating & state that they do have suspects. At first we were uncertain as to who might do this & what their motivation might be.

Yesterday, a group calling itself the Animal Liberation Front claimed responsibility. A related local press article follows. We have increased security to protect our people & our property. If this incident gets press attention, it has the potential to spark copycat incidents. Please share this with other colleagues who we may not be able to reach.

"The Record: "Animal rights group says it burned circus trucks." By Elise Young. "In a statement sent to The Record, members of the Animal Liberation Front said that on 3/27 they used gallon containers filled with gas & topped with candles to set fire to equipment owned by the Big Apple Circus. They have also vandalized furriers, butcher shops & drive-thru equipment at scores of fast food restaurants. The ALF has said it is out to cause "economic sabotage" to animal-based businesses. Joel Dein, head of public relations for Big Apple, said its animals are healthy & content, housed not in cages, but in specially designed trailers.

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**Heidi Herriott reports** the OABA on behalf of its many circus members will continue to track this case & encourage prosecution to the full extent of the law. The circus industry is not willing to wait for a tragedy to make the public aware of the agenda of these radical groups. This is certainly not the first time this industry has been threatened or targeted, however, it is the most violent attack. Other groups, such as PETA & PAWS have not denounced this violent episode & have stated that these types of acts are a form of civil disobedience & an acceptable method to draw attention to their cause. Currently these animal welfare groups have lobbied to cancel all animal circuses without possessing any substantiated facts to indicate problems. If this type of behavior is allowed, eventually the general public will be chastised for owning a pet.

\*Texas legislators on 3/31 heard 2 bills regarding the banning of all privately owned exotic animals. Circus animal owners from Texas went to Austin for the hearing to state their side of the case. They also hired a lobbyist. Contact Heidi with questions or comments at: 612-831-4643 or e-mail: circus4u@gdi.net

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**Circus Chimera:** Canoga Park, CA-4/12-18; Oxnard-4/19-20; Fillmore-4/21-22; Agoura Hills-4/23-25

## **\*\*GAMMA PHI 1999 By Steve Gossard\*\***

Illinois State University is the home of the Gamma Phi Circus, the oldest collegiate circus in the country. Over the years the Gamma Phi organization has built up a stock program of training & performance of a variety of circus skills & presentation techniques. The variety of the acts presented, the continued renewal of the personnel over the years, & the refinement of the performers' skills keeps the presentation fresh & exciting year after year. This is an overview of some of the feature acts & a sample of a few of the outstanding people who will be performing with the 1999 Gamma Phi show on Friday & Saturday, 4/16-17.

**Russian Swing**-The Russian Swing is an act which was introduced to the Gamma Phi program just last year. Performers who were already versed in vaulting & teeterboard had little trouble adjusting to the new device, although the timing is quite different for these three disciplines. Vaulting requires a run & spring, the entire effort confined to the performer, himself. With the teeterboard, the aerialist is projected vertically, much faster, with the assistance of others. The Russian Swing also requires the help of other performers, but the aerialist's trajectory projects a longer & more graceful arc than with the other two devices.

John Deppong is one of the outstanding tumblers from the pledge class of last year. He is thin & wiry, not exactly the type of build you would expect of a first-class tumbler like John. But without doubt, he is one of the finest tumblers in the Gamma Phi roster. Last year his form seemed to be "all over the place," & yet his coordination & sense of aerial space is excellent, & he is constantly challenging himself to achieve more complex tricks. This year John has developed his strength & discipline a great deal through practice. He has been able to refine his style for a more graceful & precise performance.

Deppong began his gymnastic training as a student, training at the Wheeling American Academy in Elk Grove from 8th grade through his Sophomore year of high school. His high school in Des Plaines did not offer gymnastics. John continued to train himself in acrobatics whenever possible in the gymnasium & outside on the grass, while competing in hurdles for the track team. His major at ISU is Biology. John is an all-round performer. He will be performing in Tumbling, Vaulting, Teeterboard, Tightwire, Trampoline, Acroport & Russian Swing. We look forward to watching John perform for the next 2 years. **Gym Wheel**-According to our resident expert in Gym Wheel performance, Evan Brown, Gamma Phi was possibly the first organization in the U.S. to use the Gym Wheel as a circus feature. There had already been a strong school of wheel gymnastics in Germany, & this art was first brought to America by pioneers in the field such as Norbert Dill & Norbert Stinz. Gamma Phi took the idea of gymnastics performance from people in Canada, and debuted the act in 1970. Besides developing superior skills on the wheel, Gamma Phi performers have also been innovative in inventing new tricks & adapting the wheel as a feature for performance. Evan Brown is a senior

Anthropology major at ISU who began with an athletic scholarship for wrestling. His sister had been a member of Gamma Phi a few years earlier, & when the university cancelled its wrestling program Evan turned his attention to the circus. Evan pursues every endeavor with whole-hearted enthusiasm, & he has contributed a great deal of time & effort to the Gamma Phi organization over the past 4 years. Evan has not only performed on the Gym Wheel, fire eating & the unicycle in circus; he has also coached at Gamma Phi's annual summer camp & performed in parades and with road shows.

Gym wheels are being made very light now, coated with an abrasive or adhesive texture so that they will not slide on any surface. I watched Evan & Tom Cheimlarski practice one evening in the west gym. Tom had developed a one-person carousel trick-one person riding over the rim, then sitting on the bar, riding through, & jumping off after he completes the turn. They practiced this trick over & over trying to get the timing just right so that they can catch the bar at just the right moment as the wheel rolled over. I realized that there is a lot more to this art than meets the eye. They made it look like fun. Evan's ambition is to attend graduate school in Anthropology, possibly traveling with a professional circus for a time, & writing a thesis on some phase of circus culture. This is a fascinating topic & one which Evan would do well with. We wish him the best.

**Vaulting**-The Vaulting display is literally the ancient art of leaping, but with the air of a mini-trampoline. This event was very popular during the 1800s, but more-or-less died out at the turn of the century because it had become too dangerous. At that time leapers were suffering severe injuries, & even death, in attempting bigger & bigger tricks by leaping from the stiff wooden spring-board apparatus. Along with the other basic gymnastic events, Vaulting has been a feature of the Gamma Phi presentation since the organization's inception in the late 1920s. In the early days, the Gamma Phi students used a traditional springboard, but when the trampoline was introduced after WW II they began using the mini-tramp.

Steve Avgerinos is a senior Exercise Science major at ISU. At first glance you might mistake him for a nose guard for the defensive line of the football team, but, in fact, Steve's background is cheerleading. For his size & build, he is incredibly coordinated & agile. He accomplishes most of the advanced tricks in tumbling. Last year he was the understander for the perch pole act. Coach Polacek had tried a couple of stout athletes as understander for the pole, but injuries & other problems eliminated them from the event. Difficult as it was, & although Steve had never held the pole before, he filled the position without any problem. He supervises the use of the equipment for practice & all of the other members look up to him as a leader and role model.

**Rolling Globes**-In the early 1950s a retired globe walker & perch pole artist, Gene Enos, donated a globe to Gamma Phi. The students began practicing, improvising an act complete with ramps & a small teeterboard. Rolling Globes have been a feature of the Gamma Phi show ever since. (Continued Pg. 11)

## "DAYTIME IN THE MENAGERIE".....

One corner of the pen was visible from the midway & Bert would get us to wave a loaf of bread & feed it to the hippo, so he would open his mouth wide & be viewed by prospective customers out on the midway.

The Strates menagerie went through several ramifications later; Bert left to handle elephants on a new circus, Downie Bros., and Steve Fanning took over a show manager, eventually taking over operation of the pony ride. Another writer will be furnishing Back Yard with a continuing article on these changes and some interesting incidents in relationship to them. A fourth article will be furnished by still another writer as to the final disposition of the Strates menagerie animals.

There is still another case of a circus menagerie appearing on a carnival midway. In 1963, the Kelly-Miller Circus launched a second unit, to play the Maritime Provinces & traveling by boat. Unfortunately, the ship caught fire, causing great damage and a loss of \$150,000 or more. The only casualty was a zebra, which drowned in the hold of the ship. Eddie Kuhn's cats & equipment were rescued, but several wagons, the big top and other equipment were lost.

The circus continued, sidewalled, & suffered a seating collapse. A truck also ran off the road & a worker's life was lost. Once again, a carnival owner came to a circus's rescue. The King Reid Shows was on its usual tour of Nova Scotia & heading for the USA, with a date at Skowhegan, Maine. The show's owner booked the circus components onto the midway, exhibiting the elephants & the other animals booked on as a menagerie, under the management of Eddie Kuhn. The sideshow band was hired for one of the reviews.

Wild Animal circuses, including a menagerie, have been booked onto carnivals on several occasions, most notably by Clyde Beatty and Terrell Jacobs, but the foregoing has been limited to separate menageries under canvas presented on carnival midways. Fortunately, the Carson & Barnes Circus still carries a comprehensive menagerie & plays a route encompassing the entire width of America. At this time, the days when most shows carried a big menagerie where the animals could be viewed in a leisurely way by the public, exist only in memory. (Thanks, Paul)

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### **Circus Elephants: The Real Story! By Heidi Herriott**

I just had the opportunity to read Jerry Jonas column (3/21) regarding circus elephants. Once again, the circus industry was not asked for their point of view or side of the story. He quotes 2 self-proclaimed animal activists, Pat Derby & Heidi Prescott. One what factual basis does Ms. Prescott proclaim "physical punishment has long been the norm for animals forced to perform in the circus"? As is generally the case, the facts & numbers presented in this column are misleading. If one is going to criticize an entire industry, they should only use facts & statistics to the industry. The circus has had its fill of these 'experts.'

An example of the hypocrisy...A very vocal member of the

animal activist movement (PAWS) is Kim Basinger. She is outspoken, especially regarding the circus & its' elephants. At the same time she mentions that she has never seen our industry up close. She turns down invitations from our industry to see it first-hand & will state actual lies to make her point. Our industry finds it interesting that her husband, Alec Baldwin, also an outspoken animal activist, didn't have a problem making a movie, *The Edge*, with a trained bear. Is several million dollars the amount at which you can exploit an animal & sacrifice your ideals?

Don't misunderstand the point; awareness is a positive thing. Looking out for the interest of animals, children, the environment, etc. is important & necessary. Activism, however is dangerous. Our industry, the circus, consider ourselves animal welfare advocates. As an industry we do not abuse our animals! They are well cared for & loved. Their deaths are most often due to old age & there is no cure for that! We can produce facts & statistics to back this up. An example is 2/3 of circus elephants in America are over 30 yrs. old & 1/2 of those are in their 40s, 50s & 60s. Just as in your own community when you hear about a child or animal that was abused, we are equally appalled at isolated cases of abuse or neglect within our industry. If, in fact, the activists' statements were true & such atrocities were happening, charges would be filed against us & indictments would follow. This is not the case. The activists & some members of the press have acted as judge, jury & executioner & declared us guilty. The only thing our industry is guilty of is not being adept at public relations. Regarding the legislation to ban performing elephants in the state of Maryland, it was defeated. More & more these types of rulings are being dismissed or overturned as the criteria utilized in pushing these bills through does not hold up when challenged. Unfortunately, the resources necessary to challenge these proposed bans are overwhelming for our industry. While the activists groups seem to have plenty of time on their hands & unlimited funds, we spend our time taking care of our animals & trying to make an honest living. The Circus in America has been in existence for over 200 years & dates back centuries throughout the world. This is not to say we can't move with the times, however, an industry wouldn't succeed through the insurmountable odds if we weren't doing something right.

In the interest of fairness, all we ask is to present our side of the story. We also strongly encourage you to ask questions of the animal 'welfare' groups before donating money or becoming a member. Where does the money go & where would we put all the animals that would be set 'free'? What are their long-term solutions? Our solutions are to continue leading the way in the perpetuation of the Asian elephant; to continue to love & cherish our animals from birth to retirement; to continue to provide reasonable priced, G-Rated family entertainment & apparently of high importance, to continue our training in Public Relations. Maybe if some of the activists decide to convert, they can teach us the fine art of effective PR!!! Heidi's e-mail is: [circus4u@gdi.net](mailto:circus4u@gdi.net)

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## **\*\*GAMMA PHI Circus 1999.....\*\***

A number of performers wintering in both Bloomington and Petersburg, IL were performing on the Rolling Globe from the 1890s into the 1930s, & I like to think that the Gamma Phi performers are carrying on a long-standing tradition of Illinois circus performance.

Crystal Thiele is a junior at ISU majoring in Public Relations. Friends who already belonged to Gamma Phi convinced her to try out. She had had no gymnastic training at her home in Champaign, IL, & she felt somewhat intimidated considering the phenomenal talent that she saw at practice when she joined Gamma Phi. But Crystal is extremely coordinated & she has a wonderful sense of balance. Her charming personality & positive, energetic character make her a beautiful showperson & a lovely performer. You don't have to be a virtuoso acrobat to fit in with Gamma Phi. Crystal is captain of the Rolling Globe act and is also a fine Adagio performer.

*Roller Skating*-Russell Fitzgerald & Sonny Hughes had both worked as professional skaters in the 1930s. As employees of ISNU in the 1950s they were able to join Gamma Phi & revive their interest in skating. Fitzgerald & Hughes established the act & introduced all of the difficult & sensational tricks which the Gamma Phi performers use today. Sonny performed with Gamma Phi until 1974, & he also designed the harness devices which are still being used in the carrying tricks. The introduction of this act added to the depth & variety of the Gamma Phi show & extended the already diverse field of abilities which the performers could develop with the repertoire of Gamma Phi facilities.

Michelle Barth is a senior Exercise Science major from Naperville, IL. She was introduced to Gamma Phi by her high school P.E. teacher, who was a Gamma Phi alum, himself.

This year Michelle will perform in Adagio, Cloud Swing, Web, Lyric Hoop & Skating. She envies the performers who do tumbling & vaulting, she tells me, because "I don't have a good sense of aerial space." But there is no need for her to envy anyone. Michelle is an extremely talented & versatile performer, having participated at one time or another in Gym Wheel, Globes, Skating, Tight Wire & aerial acts as well. She has the discipline, poise & beauty of a professional.

*Aerial Acts*-Aerial acts such as trapeze, web & cloud swing were introduced to the Gamma Phi Circus in the early 1950s. Arley Gillette, who was director of Gamma Phi at that time, had performed with the YMCA Circus in Bloomington in the early 1930s & he was familiar with a number of the retired professional aerialists. Arley invited some of these circus professionals to assist in training. Among the professionals who was instrumental in bringing aerial acts to Gamma Phi was Chuck Imig, who was Arley's asst. at the time. Chuck had been a catcher with the flying return acts of Harry LaMar and Charlie Siegrist. Two of Gamma Phi's outstanding aerialists are Meredith Tate & Jason Nolan. Meredith is a senior English Educ. major. She had been a cheerleader for Schaumburg H.S., but opted for Gamma Phi when she enrolled at ISU.

She will perform on trapeze & web this year & has also worked on aerial ladders. I have watched Meredith work for hours at a time perfecting her style on the trapeze. She is a beautifully disciplined aerialist. Jason stopped in to watch Gamma Phi practice one day as he was roller blading past the West Gym of Horton Field House. From that time on he was inspired to perform. Jason is a Social Science secondary ed. major currently doing his student teaching at Farmer City H.S. Jason's home town is Cisco, IL. He attended Monticello H.S. Though he had had a scholarship to attend school in South Dakota, he elected to enroll in ISU to be close to his family. A versatile athlete, performing in Gym Wheel, Acro Sport, Adagio, Fire Eating & Trapeze; Jason is a tall, graceful and sinewy aerialist. *Clowns*-When Wayne Wright was employed as Asst. Director of Gamma Phi several years ago the clown acts needed a lot of help. Gamma Phi had ad clown acts ever since the early years in the 1930s, when local professionals contributed equipment & instruction to the performance. But in more recent years the clown acts had merely been a secondary concern. Undisciplined and lacking organization, they were thought of only as filler between the big acts. They were enthusiastic & energetic enough, but seemed random & unorganized. Wayne had had 30 years of experience as a professional circus artist. He introduced clown skits which had a central theme. From that time on the clown acts have been carefully orchestrated & much more organized than before. The students take the clowning very seriously & it is obvious that there is a great deal of talent in this area.

Alicia Fritz was attracted to ISU for its excellent Special Ed. program. Her dance instructor at home in Gurnee, IL encouraged her to join Gamma Phi. She was not able to participate in the more physical performances last year because of illness, but she was appointed captain of the clown act. This year she will be performing in Clowns, Adagio, Rhythmic Gymnastics and Ladders. Alicia also ties hair for the Hair Hang act, which I am told is a very specialized art in itself. A couple of years ago Alicia turned up at the Special Collections Dept. of Milner Library looking for an inspiration. She skimmed through several books on clowning looking for a unique style of clown face & dress. She copied several illustrations of medieval jesters & eventually designed a wonderful little costume which is perfect for her build & personality. Alicia feels sure that her clowning experience will be an advantage in teaching children with special needs. *Adagio*-As I understand it, the art of Adagio Dancing is a hybrid of Swing Dancing & Gymnastic concerns. Adagio numbers were being performed at the YMCA Circus in Bloomington in the 1930s & Gamma Phi naturally picked up the performance when Swing Dancing was at the height of its popularity. Last year Wayne Wright, who is himself, a professional Ballroom Dance instructor, choreographed a sensational Swing number for the Adagio act. Melissa Maffeo is a senior Criminal Justice major. She was recruited for Gamma Phi her freshman year, came to practice out of curiosity & "wound up trying stuff."

(Continued on Page 14)

*"Lessons From The Old School"*  
**Clyde Beatty's Whipbox: An Insider's  
Personal Tour \*\* By Roger Smith**

Those recollecting the 1964 Beatty-Cole roster may question why I held the whipbox keys when another guy was considered Gun Boy. That guy was becoming all too often indisposed, & the keys came to me within 2 days. And he smoked heavily, which offended the Old Man no end on the nightly jumps overland, so it also was by convenient default that into my pocket came the keys to the white Cadillac. Nothing in showbusiness could excuse losing those keys & I felt in that pocket all day long making sure they were still there.

We played Bloomington, IL on August 22nd, a Saturday. I'm not sure if we ran 3 shows that day, but out came my notebook between shows & realizing my great good fortune, I carefully inventoried the whipbox. I remember thinking at the time that even curious circus fans had never applied, nor been invited, to climb up into 78 for a peek inside. Now, 76 was the steel arena & tunnel wagon that pulled the bandstand, driven by Bandleader Boom-Boom Browning, my pal & fellow Texan. 77 was the cat wagon facing the Back End, & 78 backed up to it, facing Mr. Beatty's Airstream & sported the cage hand's sleeper. Oddly, 78 was never locked, sacrosanct whipbox or no. My bunk, lower center on the roadside, featured a rude plywood bunk box, making my coveted digs tantamount to a "luxury suite." Directly beneath the "suite", rested Mr. Beatty's mysterious, double-padlocked tabernacle of the tools of the trade. We'll ply the 2 keys required and venture inside.

The one story lamentably never covered was the history of this whipbox. Whether it remained a relic from Mr. Beatty's Corp. show era, or was something whopped up in Deming or DeLand, I cannot say. The box was made of 1x8 boards, with the same 2x2 corner braces used to gaff his chairs wood-screwed about the ends. It was 3' 10" long, 8" wide & 8" deep and shared a Spanish blue paint job with the tunnel & the arena itself. It was in sturdy condition, considering once up in 78, it was set for the season & required no handling.

The length of the box accommodated the 8 whips the Old Man carried that year & featured a compartment on the right end for the often-used guns, tools & supplies. His whipstock lengths were covered in the first article. The 4 lashes, not counting Beatty's 2 new ones, measured 6' 2", 5' 3", 6' 8" and one an even 5' that was near ruin and became the first lash I repaired. There were 3 serviceable, working guns. A Jungleland guy made a liar of himself by flashing a big .45 to me, claiming, "Yer old boss give me this after his act one night. All he evah used wuz fawty-fives, ya know." Like hell!! Look on page 394 of The Big Cage, where he states, "I use exclusively .38 blank cartridges." Indeed, his veteran pistols were all .38 five-shot break-top revolvers. 2 were Harrington & Richardson "Defender .38" models. Another H&R had a 5" barrel, & we called it the "long gun", or the "Number 1 gun", being the first gun Beatty carried into the cage. It's patent read April 7, 1896. This pistol was nickel-plated, but I regret to say I was

insufficiently astute about guns at the time, damn it, to have noted the serial numbers. Now everyone's old .38 will be "one Clyde gave me." But the H&Rs were made in Worcester, MA, & I'll quote my notebook on one of them:

"The Defender model has a pointed handle & features a hammer. At the present, the hammer is weak & the firing pin worn down & loose. It shoots about every 3rd pull, but too often hits off-center, causing mis-fire."

When Beatty's tough, dead-serious bouncers came at him, mis-firing blank guns were unacceptable. The "short gun" was an Iver Johnson, made in Fitchburg, MA. But what about the gun worn in Beatty's holster during the act? Look closely in his last book, Facing the Big Cats, at photos of him in the early 60s-it was Clyde, Jr.'s Roy Roger's cap pistol, a good luck understanding between father and son.

The blanks were .38 S&W Smokeless Centerfire Cartridges, Stock No. W38BLP. 40 boxes of 50 gave 2000 rounds to a case. They arrived C.O.D from the Olin Mathieson Chemical Co., Dubuque, & if you were ever privy to the deal Beatty cut with the McClosky-Collins-Calhoun-Kiernan regime, you will scarcely be surprised to learn they also paid for his blanks. And when a given season wore on, Beatty ordered another case, making sure it was on the manifest for his independent winter dates.

Naturally, this sequestered sepulcher held safe all popper-making and lash-cutting needs, nuts, bolts, corner braces, & a drill for gaffing his chairs, along with shoe-shining supplies for the Gun Boy, oils for whipstocks, lashes, & guns, beeswax & rosin, knives & ice picks, dozens of loose blanks & shoe white for the jungle helmets. There were parts for guns, friction tape, sockets, electrician's tape, odd screwdrivers, wrenches & often as not, a pint of rotgut tucked away under the whips.

Plans rose & fell that year for a new whipbox, much bigger, over 6' long and wider, to contain all the usual plunder plus a case of blanks & a bundle of sticks. It would have made for a massive repository, and it was never built.

Seasoned showfolk remember well the sticks. They were solid hickory, up to 6' long & used by most cat acts for decades. The rustics called them cattle prods around the auction barns, but on the order blank they were "Round, tapered sorting poles." They came 50 to a bundle from the Split Hickory Co., out of Hope, Arkansas. The price was a dollar apiece. Not long ago, I spotted one in a barrel on a sidewalk over on San Antonio's East Side and I quickly circled the block. The proprietor carved African kings on them for walking sticks & failed to appreciate their use in warding off bouncers. "Ah gots tuh git 'bout 3 hunnud dulluhs," he allowed & I passed on this rarity from Hope..where the sticks are no longer made.

The Old Man was steamed. "Gee, boy, will you look at these?!" he fumed when he discovered his second set of pistols rusted shut in the trunk of his Airstream. "Your whips & your guns, boy, they are your act!" The Gun Boy was summoned. "They should have been wrapped in oil cloth, Boss," I offered. "Why sure they should, boy! Just look at these! My reserve guns!"

I further offered how, at a plater's, his guns could be chemically stripped, then re-chromed, nicked or re-finished as he wanted. This did not improve his mood with the Gun Boy. And that was the day I got the keys to the whipbox.

Next issue: Gaffing Beatty's Chairs.

After that: Dynamics of the Steel Arena.

And then: Compound Broke-Reflections on the Old Place.

Beginning a new series remembering Mabel Stark, Jungleland, West Coast circuses, film & TV work, the master trainers, breaking in, and my years in Thousand Oaks. (Thanks, Roger)

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### **\*\*Fund Established at Community Foundation For Circus People\*\*\*Showfolks Advises on the Use of the Dorothy Herbert Fund\*\***

(Sarasota-4/5): A special fund at the Community Foundation of Sarasota County that provides emergency help for present & retired professional circus performing artists is named after Dorothy Herbert, a legendary equestrian & animal trainer who died in 1994. Most famous for her years with Ringling Bros., the performer left money to Showfolks of Sarasota in her estate. Showfolks, in turn, established a fund in Dorothy's memory to be used to assist fellow circus performers in times of crisis, as requested by Dorothy Herbert herself.

The purpose of the fund is to assist needy individuals who are residents of Sarasota or Manatee Counties, FL who have been circus performing artists for at least 1 season. Emergency funds for shelter, utilities or other related needs will be considered. Application forms will be made available through the Community Foundation, Showfolks of Sarasota, Inc., & Showfolks Circus Fans Tent #122. Applications for assistance will be kept confidential. The Foundation makes final recommendations & grants the funds on behalf of the applicant. Established in 1979, the mission of the Foundation is to connect local philanthropy with community needs. The Foundation manages over 140 named funds & distributes approximately \$2 million to people in need & to programs that strengthen our community.

An Advisory Committee of circus performers, all residents of Sarasota County, has been appointed to work with the Foundation. Committee members include: Susan Kowalski, Chairperson, a retired registered nurse and professional international circus clown, who is active in the circus community; Jeannie Krause, retired from Sarasota Memorial Hospital, spent her early years as an equestrian in various shows (including Ringling Circus) & as a young woman, worked with Dorothy Herbert; Kay Rosaire, an 8th generation animal trainer from one of England's most respected families of animal trainers who currently works with tigers & lions, stressing the importance of conservation efforts on their behalf and Jackie LeClaire, a veteran circus clown with Ringling who is currently traveling and teaching clowning at seminars & conventions nationwide. Jackie was inducted into the International Clown Hall of Fame in 1996. Dorothy Herbert Kennard began her show business career as an asst. to the illusionist Howard

Thurston, but soon switched to circuses where her ability to train animals made her a star. Starting with a comedy mule & later a zebra act, she traveled with a number of circuses, including Cole Bros. But it was with Ringling that she achieved lasting fame. Fearless & sensational, Dorothy would reach into the center ring with her blonde hair flying as she rode sidesaddle & waved to the crowd with both hands. She was known for jumping over flaming 5 ft. high hurdles on a reinless horse. She was featured on 8 Ringling lithographs, the most ever issued on a single performer. When she retired to San Francisco, she continued to train animals-not horses, but penguins at Fisherman's Wharf.

Dorothy Herbert died at age 83, full of stories about the circus in its heyday, & full of compassion for her fellow performers. The Advisory Committee will continue to investigate the possibility of more closely achieving Dorothy's dream of a home for deserving elderly circus performers. Her fund at the Community Foundation is her lasting legacy. The Dorothy Herbert Fund Advisory Committee would appreciate your consideration in assisting with this very worthy fund. Memorial and honorarium donations are encouraged & all donations are tax-deductible. Checks should be made payable to the Community Foundation Dorothy Herbert Fund and mailed to POB 49587, Sarasota, FL 34230. For more info call: 941-955-3000 or Susan Kowalski at 941-351-5006.

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**Don West reports** at the spring meeting of the Orrin Davenport-Jake Mills Tent, **Richard & Cheryl Deptula** announced their retirement as officers. Richard said that after 30 years of heading the Tent it was time for them to begin enjoying Tent activities without having to worry about the logistics involved. Tent members presented them with a certificate of commendation, praising them for their dedication & hard work for the Tent. The new Tent president is **Edward Limbach** of Aurora, OH. **Donald West**, Marietta, OH was elected Sec.-Treas. Members attended the Aut Mori Circus produced by George Hubler & later treated the performers to a late night supper, attended by 75 people. (Thanks, Don.)

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**"Barnum's Kaleidoscope Menu":** Bottled Water:\$2.50; Fresh Squeezed Lemonade: \$3.; Espresso: \$3.; Spanikopita: \$5.75; Artichoke Dip w/Baguettes: \$3.25; Crab Cakes: \$6.50; Hand-carved Deli Sandwich: \$6.50; Chicken Wrap: \$6.25; Italian Sausage: \$4.75; Hot Dog: \$3.; Cheesecake: \$6.; Candy Roasted Nuts: \$3.50; Popcorn: \$4.; Cotton Candy: \$5.; Caramel Corn: \$4. Bottled soda: \$2.50; Hand-Rolled Pretzels: \$3.

**(Can someone tell us how much t-shirts, programs, etc are? Thanks.)**

**\*\*Gamma Phi Circus 1999....\*\***

Melissa had had some dancing experience back home in Wheaton, IL & has now developed into an energetic & graceful adagio dancer. In the past she has participated in Adagio, Acro, Ladders & Clowns. This year she will perform in Adagio & Acro. She hopes to settle in Normal, working in the Criminal Justice field. Her partner is Marcus Alouan. He came to ISU from West Peoria as a Math Ed. major, but has since changed his major to Elem. Ed. He was working in Recreational Sports when Ed Cusac told him about Gamma Phi Circus his freshman year. Though he had never had any gymnastic experience, Marcus showed a natural affinity to certain skills. He has performed in Acro, Russian Swing, Adagio, Globes & is one of the finest wire walkers in the show. Marcus is Treasurer of Gamma Phi this year. He also coaches Jr. Gamma Phi students & hopes to help coach a summer program in NY. Though he is a senior this year, he plans to participate in Gamma Phi again next year. *Cradle*-Though Gamma Phi has never had a flying act, the aerial performances are sensational. The cradle act is my personal favorite because it is very much like double trapeze performances which were practiced in Bloomington many years ago. The caster hangs upside-down from a stationary cradle & holds the aerialist, who performs a number of graceful poses & flips from his hands.

Ed Cusac is an experienced caster with the cradle act this year. He attended Field Crest H.S. in Rutland & is now a senior majoring in Exercise Science at ISU. He hopes to go on to grad school to become a physician's assistant. This year he is in Adagio and Cradle & Ed has also done Sky Pole (also called *Russian Bar*). Ed is a strong performer, adept at work in the position of understander in any type of act. His experience at Cradle work has been a great asset this year. Carrie Felker has really matured this year in cradle work, taking a leadership role since Michelle Hart left last year. Carrie is a sophomore with a double major in Political Science & Public Relations. At home in Fowler, IL she had experience in tumbling, but had never done aerial work until joining Gamma Phi. Now she has developed into an excellent aerialist. She will be participating in Adagio, Cradle, Cloud Swing, Webs & Tumbling. Gamma Phi students are serious performers & at times they are tempted to think of their studies as secondary concerns. As one of the finest performers told me, "I'm flunking this class & the teacher says, 'I think you are thinking too much about circus.' Now I'll have to repeat the class next semester." In general, however, the Gamma Phi performers are superior students. Keeping their grades up is a major requirement of eligibility in Gamma Phi. They generally manage to reconcile this conflict in priorities one way or another. Gamma Phi kids are wholeheartedly committed to the circus arts. As Marcus Alouan told me one evening, "This is the last thing I think about before I fall asleep at night...How can I do this trick, or that one."

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For Sale: One unopened Jim Beam Circus Wagon Bottle, 1979. Contact: Donald Kowell, 104 Longmeadow Dr., Syracuse, NY 13205 or Bigtop5@aol.com

**\*Roberts Rocks At Opening! By Mike Cecere\***

Coming out of sunny Florida towards the still snowy North for another season is small tenter, America's favorite circus, Roberts Bros.

Talent packed & freshly painted, it debuted at a north Fl. location to many happy circus goers. Picked as the official circus for the 1999 Circus Fans Assn. of America Convention, they sure are ready for it with a talent-filled family show, new big top and other features.

The highlight of the show, of course, is Capt. Ken "Turtle" Benson, well known elephant man with his new friend, Big Boo. "Boo" is a huge, friendly Asian elephant on her first Roberts Bros. tour, looking to meet new friends & thrill the wide-eyed youngsters who only get close up to a live elephant on circus day in small-town America.

But, it's Capt. Benson, Boo and all the rest of the show that make it a living piece of Americana. The circus family visiting other families every day. We wish them sunny days and grassy lots! (Thanks, Mike. What's new Boo?)

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**\*\*\*\*"HATS OFF" By Amos Bolieau\*\*\*\***

On 3/22 "The Yankee Doodle Circus" produced by Mike Naughton gave 2 performances at Nashua HS, Nashua, NH. The 5 pm performance was attended by more than just circus fans. The audience consisted of about 25 3rd grade students of the Amherst St. School. This alone was not very special, but they were members of Ms. Fiske class & are members of families that come from a financially disadvantaged area of the city & were accompanied by members of their families. All this was made possible thru the humanitarian efforts of a member of the Commodore Nutt Tent 165. Chuck Druding sponsored the outing, including hiring a school bus. Most of the group had never been to a circus before. This is just the type of scenario that needs to be repeated as often as possible whenever a show comes to town. The education received from this source could go far in promoting the industry & lives of the recipients. "Hats Off To Chuck Druding."

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Cort Langdon reports Kay Rosaire's web site is very spectacular. It is: [www.bigcatencounter.com](http://www.bigcatencounter.com) Also, Ringling has 6 e-mail postcards you can send. Their address is: [www.ringling.com](http://www.ringling.com) Cort also checked out the *Cat Dancers* web site, which Chuck Lizza designed, and liked this one too. Visit: [www.catdancers.com](http://www.catdancers.com) Cort hopes Bobby Gibbs will play near the Minn. border so he can go visit.

WANCHESE, N.C. (AP) -- 4/11: Wind up to 100 mph toppled a circus tent, injuring 7 circus workers, minutes after the audience of about 125 was evacuated as the storm approached. Spectators at the Roberts Brothers Circus in this Roanoke Island community could have been killed had the firefighters & circus crew not acted quickly Sunday afternoon, Fire Marshal Remaley said. "They had just started juggling when the ringmaster said there was some severe weather in the area, & if the fire department came in & blew a whistle, the tent would have to be evacuated," he said. "They got everybody out in an orderly manner. The people got in their cars & left. It was handled very well." After the 25-foot-high tent went down, Roanoke Island firefighters quickly got ambulances to the scene. The ringmaster & 6 other circus employees were hurt by poles & other falling objects, Remaley said. "Apparently, it was just straight-line wind." Four of the injured were taken to hospitals & the other 3 were treated at the scene. Circus officials said a show scheduled for today at Knotts Island would be canceled.

## Charles Siegrist

