

BACK YARD

Volume III, Issue #39

March 15, 1998

BACK YARD CHANGES HANDS

Greetings everyone! I have been "given the reigns" by Frank to continue with his publication. These are mighty big shoes to fill but I hope, with your help, to expand this great newsletter. I would appreciate any circus news that you would care to send in; routes, articles, any circus sites on the Net that you enjoy, and especially any interesting stories about your experiences with circuses, both past and present, to share with the other readers.

Your memories of trips to the circuses and of your performing days are precious and should not be forgotten. With your help, we can make this publication grow! And that would make Frank very proud.

For those of you that don't know me, I was "flying" before I was born. My parents were George & Lorraine Valentine of the Flying Valentinos. I made my circus debut at 3, on a single, portable, trapeze rigging, with my mom & her partner, Sue Pelto, after my dad could not catch anymore. I was on Clyde Beatty Circus from 1975 to 1984; then to the Big Apple Circus until 1988; then with Great

American Circus and I was with Circus Flora from 1992 to 1994. I now work full time at Illinois State University, in the History Department. I get much encouragement to write! You all know how historians are! I know that I have met many of you on many circus lots. My partner in this great adventure is Brian Nunn. He has been writing about his experiences in some of the past issues. I hope all of you will take advantage of this opportunity to send me your comments and please write with any suggestions or criticisms that you might have.

WALLENDAS RE-CREATE 7 HIGH PYRAMID

The Wallendas have successfully performed the famous seven person, three-tiered pyramid at the Detroit Shrine Circus. They have not performed this achievement in Detroit since the tragedy in 1962.

As the family did in 1962, the troupe is working without a net. Jenny & Mario Wallenda have flown to Detroit to be with the family during this great event in circus history. The troupe includes Delilah Wallenda, Rietta Wallenda, Tino Wallenda-Zoppe,

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BACK YARD

is published twice monthly-(15th & 30th) by Cherie Valentine, 1522 Clinton Blvd., Bloomington, IL 61701. Phone 309-828-0737 (no collect calls, please) My E-mail address: cdvalen@acadcomp.cmp.ilstu.edu

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Minimum ad (one inch)	\$ 5.00

The column, "The Fox," is written by Jenny Wallenda. Other material is written by Cherie Valentine, unless otherwise identified as to author. Reprints from other published material are identified as to source.

Comments by writers are their own and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the publisher.

Back Yard is a pro-circus, pro-animal publication, which supports the use of animals which are legally held and properly cared for, in the American circus.

RUMBLINGS FROM THE CRUMMY

By Brian Nunn

A couple of old show guys walking by the place of another showman, that has circus posters up all over the place. One guy says to the other, "I've been run off a few shows, but this guy has been run off 'em all!!!"

A proven showman was told by a veteran clown, "You'd make a good tramp clown." The showman did not like that very much. But the veteran clown said, "No, you got me wrong!" It takes character to be a good tramp clown! You gotta have "panash" to be a good clown."

This story took place at the Sarasota Parade. I forgot what year it was, but there was Dumbo, Misty, Ronnie, Siam, Tyke, Ben and me. We were behind the Hemisphere wagon with a live band and Gunther was waving to the crowd on top of the wagon. (It was a great parade). But, (and I don't want to get in trouble here), the man that was driving the 8 up hitch could not drive! He'd either have to have the big old horses stopped, or just let 'em go off at will. (Well, anyway, no one got hurt!) But, Ben would have to bring the bulls in line and wait; or go ahead fast to keep up.

Plus, Dumbo had this thing about grease spots and man-hole covers. She had to zig-zag around them! It was funny; the

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VALENTINE'S VAULT.....

The Sept. 25th issue has an ad that reads: "Thanks, to my many friends for their kindness in trying to locate my children. This was signed by Terrell Jacobs, Hutchison, KS. P.S.: I hope to locate them some day."

From Polack Eastern: Two of the Wilson girls celebrated birthdays and received many beautiful gifts. They are thinking of opening a dept. store!!...Trudy and Penny left the show to resume their school work...Emil Pallenburg had 7 stitches taken in his finger, the result of being clawed by Fu...Fu, Emil's motorcycle riding bear, is a life member of the Royal Palm Motorcycle Club, Jacksonville, Fl...At a Halloween party, Linda and Joanne Wilson came dressed as hula dancers...Connie Wilson celebrated her birthday last week...From Oct. 16th issue: The Great Barton has a new Buick convertible... From Ringling, Mary Jane Miller reports that Jack Bray joined and is doing the catching in the Flying Artony act...Frenchie Wolthing getting plenty of ribbing about her cheese sandwiches...Ernie Burch is very proud of having his picture taken with Carmen Miranda. Ernie wore his new Carmen head-piece in the pic...Jean Carson and the wardrobe ladies threatening never again to wash the plastic spec dresses...Since Curtis Genders left for Sarasota, the grown-ups in the back yard have quite a time trying to

find enough comic books to read between shows...New feature in the Alzana act, with Harold and Hilda both ascending and descending from the wire by walking a wire from the dead end to the pedestal.

Dorothy Storey reports from Circo Americano that the tragedy of the Circo Razzore was quite a blow to our personnel as we were all acquainted with them. Our head canvasman, Cristian, was the hardest hit as his sister, the wife of Sr. Razzore, and his nieces and nephews went down in the boat.

From King Bros.: Mr. and Mrs. Felix Morales, doing trampoline and head slide, are a recent addition to the big show program...From Cole Bros.: Since Hubert Castle bought that Palomino it's become the style to own one. Latest to acquire Palominos are Daviso Cristiani, who bought one for his daughter, Antonette...Everyone was shocked to hear of the death of Eddie Silbon...Baby elephants for Hunt Bros. arrived on the City of Swansea, docking at Boston, Nov. 10. A new elephant barn was made ready for the arrival. The unloading from the boat was televised.

BOB BLACKMAR CATALOG

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

WHIP CRACKIN'

by Frank Thompson

When I was a child, (if I ever was a child!) my idol wasn't Babe Ruth, it was Clyde Beatty! I first saw Clyde at about the age of 4 or so, when he was with the fabulous Hagenbeck-Wallace circus. My father took me to North Adams, MA, to see this circus which had one of the best and one of the last real circus parades. It was an unbelievable show, but the Number #1 feature with them was Clyde Beatty. He went into the big arena and handled some 34 lions and tigers, twice each day. I believe that I went at the age of four the first time, but certainly when I was five I went, and I know it because I still have a program from that year's show.

Today, I know that Clyde Beatty wasn't necessarily the best animal trainer of all time, but he certainly was the best showman among the top animal trainers. For some three or four years of my young life I was determined that I was going to be just like Clyde when I grew up. I started practicing, sans animals, by wearing a white, pith helmet, just like Clyde's, on hot summer days. I also wore out three or four of those little toy whips you used to be able to buy at any circus, just in case you needed to train some big cats.

My father thought for quite a few years that I was going to be more than a little effeminate when I grew up; a result of my debut in a tap dancing school performance, not to mention a head of hair that looked amaz-

ingly like Shirley Temple's; -both of which were my mother's idea, not mine. He therefore decided that these toy whips were a waste of time. One day he came home with an eight foot bull whip, made of real rawhide, with a real popper on the end. I was in heaven!

The whip was a bit heavier to handle than I should have had, but I was determined and eventually learned to pop it. More work-along with several cut ears, bruises on my rear, and other assorted places-I began to teach myself the basics of how to cut off pieces of a rolled newspaper as I cracked the whip. This was quite difficult, since my supply of willing volunteers had gone to just about zero as I learned to control the whip. I had quickly learned to avoid my older brother during these practice sessions since he had an unfortunate habit of grabbing the whip out of my hands and beating me half to death whenever I accidentally snapped his finger. My older sisters seemed to have a distinct dislike for being zapped in the arm under the guise of "helping."

Along about this time, my oldest sister had acquired a suitor. Herb was a consistent, steady guy and, things being what they were in the depression years, he didn't have the cash to take Betty out much, though he did have a steady job. Also, you've got to remember that Vermont was not exactly a tropical resort during most of the year. As a result, the two of them, Betty and Herb, became a dependable fixture on our living room couch; permanently.

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WHIP CRACKIN'...

Herb was in love and wouldn't dream of offending his loved one's little brother. Voila! I had a paper holder!

Our living room in those days was a big, long room, perhaps 30 or more feet long. The couch on which Betty and Herb had staked their claim for the period between 7:00 and 10:30 each night, was against the long wall, roughly in the middle of the room. This allowed a whip cracking, slightly crazed, little boy plenty of room in which to do his thing, so long as no one else walked across the room. As I recall, I even went to the trouble of rolling several newspapers before Herb arrived each evening, so as to have a ready supply.

I would crack the whip in the middle of the room several times, then hand the first newspaper to Herb. He held them very steady, unlike my timid older sisters. In retrospect I suspect that he was closing his eyes, but I can't say for sure at this late date. Night after night, for about 20 minutes-or a half dozen rolled papers-I would crack the rolled papers like a professional. Well, almost. I missed occasionally I'll admit, but when I did it was on the side furthest away from his fingers. He gradually developed a false sense of security, I suppose.

On the night in question I had already snapped off perhaps four rolled papers in succession. I had even, on the two preceding tries, managed to cut two pieces off from each paper before Herb reached for

another. I always cracked the whip at least once in the air before the grand cutting of the paper, and this try was no different. I can't remember doing anything different until I cracked the whip and the popper hit the paper. There was a sudden YEOW! from Herb; a really loud yell for a grownup! Then came a delayed reaction type of screech from Betty, and quite a bit of blood. I remember the blood most, because I had the feeling that perhaps I had just cracked my last whip, at least insofar as my family was concerned. There is no way of saying it much differently; I had just snapped off Herb's thumbnail.

It wasn't as though it was a major injury. The way that Betty acted you'd think that I had just cracked her future husband's neck or something. There was a lot of discussion and some really bad threats from her, while my mother bandaged Herb's thumb. I was glad when Mom was finished and started in on me and my whip, 'cause it shut my sister up for the moment. Mom and I had a discussion and that was it. I wanted to go to bed early anyway; a future big cat trainer has to get his rest, you know.

From the New York Clipper, June 14, 1884 , page 206. Geo. Bayley registered in Fargo last week as an advance-agent of Forepaugh's Circus. He contracted for boards, etc., and departed leaving a stable-keeper to mourn his departure. Bayley was an imposter. The week before he had used another name and represented himself as an agent of Barnum's show!
(From the collection of Steve Gossard)

A Reckless Era of Aerial Performance;

The Evolution of Trapeze

“Just how important is it to be the first to do a thing? How important is it to do the most, to go the highest, the farthest? How Important? Some people have died for it.”

**Did you ever wonder who first swung from a trapeze? Did you ever wonder when the first aerial somersault was thrown? Did you ever wonder how the complex team aerial performances were developed and who invented them? If you have, you are not alone.

**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 the flying return 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.

Please send check or money order for \$25 to: Steve Gossard, 10 Siesta Ct., Bloomington, IL 61704

BACK YARD GOSSIP

A new show is staffed and ready to go, but had to delay opening by 30 days. Reason? The advance agent had not booked any towns!

The **Chipperfield** family is having their share of bad luck. A report from Britain says that an employee there was chewed up by a tiger, resulting in his arm being amputated.

Derrick Rosaire, Sr. and cowboy star **Hub Hubbell** were seen cutting up jackpots at the Showfolks of Sarasota recently. They both have had “meaningful relationships” with the hospital recently.

Vicky Cristiani read bits from her new book at the CFA meeting in Sarasota recently. Based on her childhood memories of growing up on a circus, the book promises to be a hit when published. Her sister, **Carin** and uncle, **Pete Cristiani**, plus others of the famous clan, were there to hear her talk.

Roberts Bros. Circus has opened already...**Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. Circus** will have a new top this year and, reportedly, with no quarter poles...**Allen Bros. Circus** opened March 2nd and is now touring the Valley.

Ray Valentine, Jr. has his show out, and is catching in the flying act.

(continued on page 8)

RINGLING NOW ON-LINE

Ringling Bros. Circus is finally on the Internet! Fans and performers alike can find out where they are, plus they have pictures of some of the great acts!

Their address is: <http://www.ringling.com>
This is really a great site!

They have ticket information, show schedules, pictures & biographies of the performers, a Ringmaster's Quiz, and a spot for you to e-mail them! And, believe me, they answer you right away!

See them at the following cities:

Blue Unit:

Uniondale, NY: Nassau Coliseum:

March 17-23

New York, NY: Madison Square Garden:

March 27-April 13

Red Unit:

Baltimore, MD: Baltimore Arena

March 12-March 22

Washington, DC: MCI Center

March 25-March 29

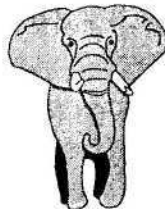
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(continued from page 1)

WALLENDAS.....

and his family, Alida, Andrea, Aurelia and nine-year old Alex. Pictures of this special moment have been in newspapers all across the country. Congratulations to all those who performed this tremendous feat. They will be performing at the Shrine Circus until March 22.

BACK YARD GOSSIP (from pg. 7).....

Someone had their elephants tested for TB, BUT the veterinary sent the tests to a human lab for the results and they got back 2 positives! The tests have since been redone and reports are that all is OK....

(From USDA news release)**Manuel**

Ramos was fine \$10,000 & had his Oscarian Bros. Circus' USDA license suspended until the violations are corrected, for violations of the USDA animal care regulations. \$7500. of the fine was suspended provided he has no further violations for 5 years.

RUMBLINGS FROM THE CRUMMY

(continued from page 2)

rest of the elephants followed her trail! Holy Smokes! What a comedy. Ben & I are sweating bullets. We get all the way to the end! Yeah, thank God. We bring the elephants in line; next to the elephant truck. Then, a balloon comes bouncing by. Just then, Tyke reaches out to see it and pops it with her hairy beak. Her head comes up; ears go out. And Ben says real cool, "Load her first!" We got back to winter quarters with no problems.

Late at night, Tusko would go to beating up on the "girls" (the females), so Joe would go up over the top of Lottie, and give Tusko a good poke, and that would slow him down for awhile. Sometimes, Lottie would duck to give Joe a clearer shot.

I walked into the menagerie tent sometimes late at night to see how things were. The night watchman usually sat at one end of the tent. But, we had just gotten some new elephants, so he had his chair in the middle of the herd. Well, one of the new elephants was named Gyp. She was a "belligerent" cow. She would not hurt people, but she would demand and flirt with you. (And drive you nuts!)

She had tossed hay at the guy to try and get him mad and then she threw more hay at him. Well, the man was tired, what with the new elephants and all, and other things going on at winter quarters, he had been working all day and now he

has the night watch.

He was asleep in the chair; which was OK, 'cause there was enough of us around with nothing to do, except to watch the elephants. Anyway, I walked in and all I saw of the man was big pile of hay, (looked like a big furry teepee). You could tell someone was under there because you could see the hay move when he breathed.

The elephants were put to bed with a bale of hay a piece; that is more than enough! Morning came and the elephants are up to their belly's in feed. It takes a while to clean them all up nice and exercise them. And have them back on the picket line, with enough feed and water to last until noon. Oh, yeah, they had it rough, them elephants!!

I don't mean to tell stories on the elephant man, but if I remember it right, he thought it was funny too!!!!

ASHTONS CIRCUS ON-LINE

There is a new circus web site for you to look up. It is from the Ashtons Circus in Australia and it's address is: www.ashtonscircus.com I remember meeting Lorraine Ashton at the Sarasota Festival in 1994. They are celebrating their 151st year in the circus business! There are a lot of pictures and tells the history of the Ashtons Circus. At present, they are touring Victoria and New South Wales in Australia. One interesting photo is of a circus truck & van in the late 50s.

THE EXOTIC CATS OF THE WORLD

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& C. BAUMANN FOR STIMULATING
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Lions 'N' Tigers-Cooper	23.00
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Wild Animal Man-Dhotre	15.00
Vanishing Tracks(Snow Leopard)	25.00
Of Tigers & Men-Ives	6.00
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Here Keller, Train This-Keller	25.00
No Bars Between-Kerr	22.00
How the Tiger Lost It's Stripes	24.00
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John Bantock

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After reading Mike Cecere's article last time, Brian found this article in the Jan.-Feb. 1963 issue of "White Tops". "Is The Circus Dying?" by Pierre Couderc.

For more than 40 years now I've been hearing: "The circus is dead!"-or: "It's a lot better now than it ever was!" -and also: "Well, it's not what it used to be. I can remember when-."

I'm sure this perennial argument must have started when some of the Italian citizenry began lamenting the decline of the circus in Rome. No doubt some of the older circus adherents who remembered the "good old days" of Caesar, Nero and Claudius expressed vehement criticisms about the later programs which Marcus Aurelius presented at the Roman Coliseum. And so the argument as to whether the circus is in a state of decadence or progress will continue to go on-perhaps forever!

Since everybody likes to "get into the act", I'd like to say my two cents' worth, too. Having been both, a performer and a fan for some 60 odd years. I might as well voice a mild opinion on the subject-for, as Baron Munchausen used to say, "I vas dere, Charlie!"

No one can deny that public attendance has dropped off alarmingly. But the cause of that can't be placed upon the shoulders of any one group of individuals, for the major factor is a question of "ECONOMICS" - brought about by "CONDITIONS."

As mentioned before, this is only one man's opinion-which I suspect entitles the critics

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"IS THE CIRCUS DYING?".....

to have me declared "non compos mentis!" But then if our "prophets of doom" feel privileged to keep hollering, "The Circus is Dead!", why shouldn't I be allowed to add: **"LONG LIVE THE CIRCUS!"**

(Please see this article in it's entirety in the Jan./Feb. 1963 issue. Reprinted by permission of the "White Tops", the official Publication of the Circus Fans Assn. of America)

(We have purchased the following audio tape and highly recommend that this is something that you will want to add to your collections. Hopefully, there will be a Part II.)

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**SOMEONE WANTS TO KNOW
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ADAMS, WHO WAS WITH THE
COLE BROS. CIRCUS IN THE
1940S. PLEASE WRITE
EDITOR WITH ANY
INFORMATION**

**IF YOU ARE DOING SPRING
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WANT TO THROW OUT THOSE
OLD CIRCUS ITEMS:
THE EDITOR WOULD LIKE
ANYTHING OLD PERTAINING
TO FLYING ACTS OR ELEPHANTS.
I WOULD ESPECIALLY LIKE
PICTURES OF "WOMEN IN THE
CIRCUS" IN THE 20S, 30S, 40, OR
50S, AS I AM PLANNING TO WRITE
AN ARTICLE ON THIS SUBJECT.
SMALL OR LARGE PHOTOS
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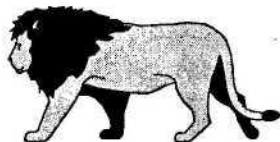
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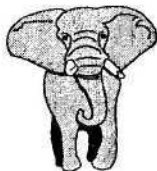
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