

# BACK YARD

Volume IV, Issue #77

October 15, 1999

## THE GREAT WALLENDAS

### Part I "A Hero Is Born" By Rick Wallenda

Fruitville Gazette, 11/98 \* Susan Roberts Spears, Ed.

The train was rolling and he was just about to fall asleep to the clickity-clack of the tracks, as he thought back to how far he had come. Karl Wallenda had left the comfort of family, friends, his wife Martha and a new daughter, Jenny and the bosom of his homeland on this adventure. This wanderer was seeking something and was about to find it. Why had he left? Was it because impoverished Europe had little to offer beyond starvation, or was he a true adventurer in search of his place in life? This adventure would last most of the twentieth century and affect millions of people. This is how it started...

The Wallenda family had circused all across Germany from the snow capped Bavarian Alps in the south to the Polish border in the northeast of Germany. All of their travels were in their tiny horse drawn wagon, where Karl Wallenda was born, behind the circus ring in 1905. Travel during the winter months was sometimes dangerous. Crossing the open country when food was scarce would draw wolves in search of prey. The wolves would sometimes stalk the caravan of travelers in hopes of feasting on one of their young and at times, when the pursuit became heated, they would leave a horse behind for the predators in order to save the children.

During the war, scarcity became poverty while on the political horizon the Kaisers were occupied with battle and all resources went toward that effort. The circus could not provide for the family and so Karl had to join the work force at one 9 years of age. The coal mines brought barely enough but weekend "hand balancing" provided Karl with a creative outlet as well as some loaves of bread and small coins to add to his wages. He was trained for hand balancing and would spend evenings at the local pubs entertaining patrons for whatever offering they could spare. Karl's commitment to family and respect for his mother was nurtured during



Fred Bradna, Rietta Wallenda, Lee Wallenda,  
Fredrick March, Helen Wallenda

Karl Wallenda, Herman Wallenda,  
Joe Geiger

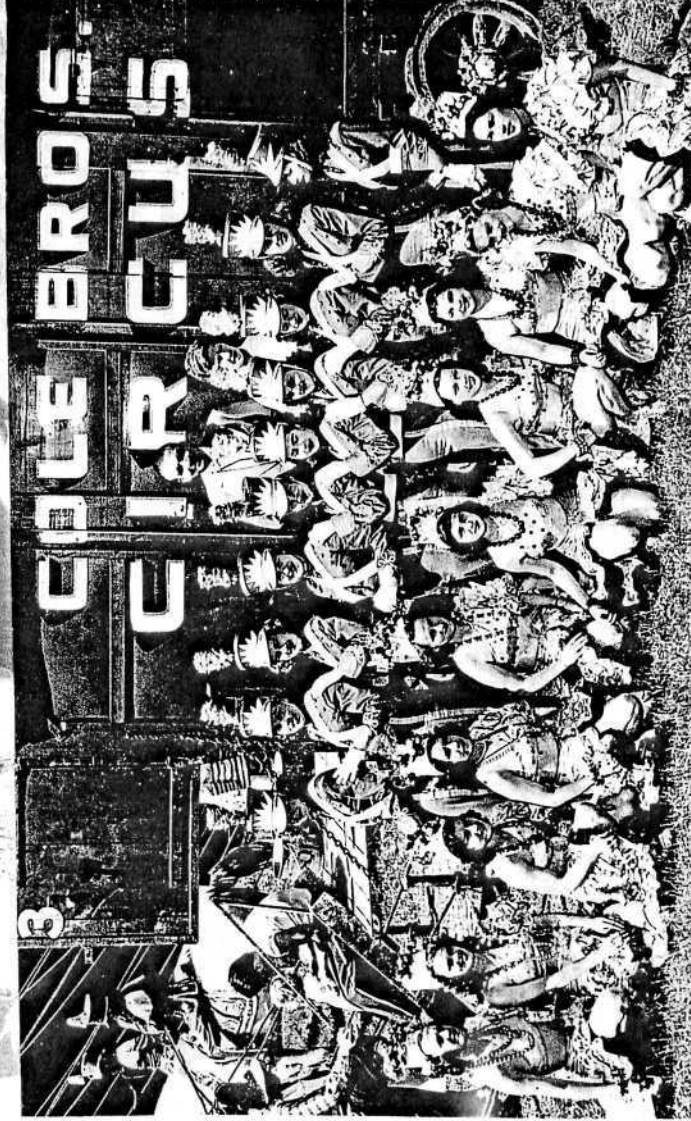


Herman, Karl and Helen Wallenda with Joe Geiger taken at the Ringling Museum when Fay Alexander was honored. January 1974.

those years. He was literally the "bread winner" and was already being prepared for the role he would play for the Wallendas years later. (Continued on Page 4)



THE NEVELES NOCKS



FROM  
KENT  
GHIRARD  
  
CAN  
YOU  
NAME  
THEM??

## **CLEAR SAILING** By Mike Cecere

After a fury of comment by both fans of my articles and those who wish they were, I thought I'd "clear the air" on a couple subjects. First, several folks were confused by my referring to TV-star, Bob Barker, as "doing something for animals" while in Washington D.C. lobbying for various Bills including The Farr Bill to Ban Circus Use of Elephants. Tho I oppose The Farr Bill, I give Bob Barker great credit for the variety of pro-animal causes he supports. I share many of his concerns over pet over population and inexperienced people owning exotic pets among other pro-animal causes.

If you don't agree with taking the same stand on certain issues with Animal Welfare Groups, that's fine. It's a free country! Some people are so self-absorbed or concerned with the singular issue of the circus use of animals that they aren't interested in other animal causes. That's fine. (This is America.) But remember, we are the original Animal Welfare People and our motto of "The Animals Come First" rings true with every good animal person.

Next, tho my good friends know my views, I'll state that I feel although the circus/zoo business has opponents in the Animal Rights and Animal Welfare fronts, I refuse to join with certain industries that I personally consider pro-animal misuse or abuse.

The best course for anyone is to follow your own hearts. But I would absolutely recommend that everyone who is interested in the future of the circus and animals in entertainment give their support both financial and moral to Heidi Herriott, your OABA representative.

She has done amazing things for the industry and could do much more with your help. She needs attorneys, tax consultants and a variety of other talented people to assist her and the OABA in keeping the circus use of animals (kept properly) alive! So, get off your duffs and contact her! And last, despite rampant rumors, it is not true that a group opposed to using slinky blonde models posing in suggestive ways on TV game shows has sent a team of hitmen, dressed in Hawaiian shirts, to hunt me down!

Tell a friend about Back Yard. The subscriber and advertiser list grows daily. Take your copy with you and show it to your friends (The few who don't subscribe) when you visit them. God Bless America!

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**Don't forget to start thinking about your Christmas greetings! It's coming sooner than you might think!**

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

I talked to **Millicent Dunwoody** on Oct. 6 and she said Jim had just had a triple by-pass operation that day and was doing well. I am sure he would like to hear from you. Their address is: 1315 Doris Dr, Sarasota, FL 34243. Get well soon, Jim. The Showfolks Tent needs you!

\***Fred Logan** wrote that daughter **Freida** and family joined Circus Vasquez for a few weeks for Texas dates. They have their elephants, Daisey and Bambi and Jorge's cage act, with lions & tigers & a white tiger. Valentine Tent President, **Charlie Simpson**, went to see them and they were having 3 shows, 6-8-10 PM, on Sunday last in the Houston area.

\***Mary Jane Foote** writes that her husband, CFA Chaplain, **Rev. Bob Foote**, broke his left ankle Sept. 27. They, with John Vick, had gone to Chicago to see the UniverSoul Circus-along with Margaret Shannon & Steve Ferguson and their little daughter, Alexandra. Bob got up early Monday morning to go downstairs & take a shower. "Well, I heard a big thud, and then, 'Mary-Jane, Mary-Jane!'" I went downstairs & found Bob sitting on the floor. When I asked him what had happened, he said, 'I fell down the stairs & broke my ankle!' I asked him how he knew that it was actually broken & he said because 'it looks funny.' It did! A bone was obviously out of place.

At the hospital, x-rays should it was dislocated and broken! He had broken 3 bones and had to have surgery that night. They put in a metal plate and 9 screws." We are sure Bob would love to hear from you. Their address is: 2931 Main St., East Troy, WI 53120 or you can e-mail him at: bobfoote@prodigy.net.

\***Sheelagh Jones** wrote the John Davenport & Earl Tegge Tent will have a luncheon Nov. 6 and then attend the Ringling show at the Allstate Arena. To reserve tickets for the luncheon & show, please write Sheelagh at 704 Lorraine Cir, Highland Park, IL 60035 before 10/23.

\*The Annual Train Fair at the NY State Fair Grounds, Syracuse, will be Nov. 6-7. Circus display sponsored by the Hoxie Tucker Ring. Contact Dick Bennet, 315-446-4780 for more information.

\***The James A. Bailey Ring's** 27th Annual Banquet will be in Allentown, PA Nov. 6th. Contact Earl Herster, 610-865-1940 for more information.

\*On Nov. 13, the **Leonard Aylesworth Ring's** Annual Banquet will be in Harrisburg, PA. Contact Walter Heist, 308 S. 31 St, Harrisburg, PA 17109 for reservations.

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## THE GREAT WALLENDAS.....

The hardships he endured and the sacrifices he made helped mold and shape his character for life's demands he faced later in life. This part of the journey was merely the foundation for what lay ahead.

One day while scanning a trade magazine, Karl noticed an ad seeking a hand balancer for an act already on tour. Karl's heart jumped at the thought of quitting his job at the mine to travel and do what he really wanted to be in the spotlight. As he headed to the train station he counted all the spare change available only to find he had just enough to make the trip one way. He thought of his family, but this adventurer was willing to take the chance and follow his calling, so he boarded the train.

The circus grounds were not an unfamiliar place to Karl but he was not familiar with this hand balancing act known to him only as Louis Weitzman. As he asked around for the Weitzman family he was directed to the highwire rigging standing outside the circus tent. "This can't be," he thought, "maybe they do a hand stand act too." Finally he found Mr. Weitzman and felt relieved that the mystery would now be resolved.

His heart pounded as Weitzman described what his responsibilities would be. As anger flashed through his mind, he confronted Weitzman, "That's insane," Karl declared, "I don't know how to walk the highwire." Weitzman sized up this 16-year-old and stated, "Ich lerne dier, I'll teach you." Instantly Karl thought of the coal mines, the late nights in bars for change and his mama without any money or food for the little ones. "Okay" came from his lips before he could stop himself.

Karl's apprenticeship was short lived as he easily adapted his balancing skills to the highwire and once he had mastered it, Weitzman's insanity and excessive drinking drove young Karl to break free and form his own act.

He constantly thought of his family in Magdeburg & what more could be done for them. His compassion & concern became deeply ingrained in his character. His choices were always tempered with his mama's needs in mind & like the highwire, this concern became second nature to him as he quickly grew from a boy into a man.

Securing the necessary equipment, Karl began booking his own act. First he recruited family friend, Joe Geiger and later his older brother, Herman. All the trio needed now was a woman to complete Karl's dream of a four-person pyramid on the highwire. Several unsuccessful prospects prompted the trio to advertise in the same trade magazine where Karl had found Weitzman's ad. Their

response came in the form of a petite 16-year-old named Helen Kreis. She had very little highwire experience and what followed proved to be more trouble than it was a help.

The foursome went to rehearsals diligently and eventually realized their vision of Herman & Joe standing on the wire connected by a bar at the shoulders, Karl standing in the center of the bar with Helen standing on his shoulders. This was the crowning trick of the act known as The Great Wallendas.

They toured with this four person act continuing to gain acclaim but rarely leaving Germany and mama & the kids behind. Then came an offer that Karl thought worthy of greater consideration. A small circus in Cuba known as Santos Y Artigas wanted the troupe for their winter engagement in Havana. This was it! The offer they had been waiting for. This contract would take them across the Atlantic and closer to their goal, "The Greatest Show on Earth. Robert Ringling often traveled to Havana in the winter months in search of new talent and this time fate lent a hand.

Karl Wallenda's leadership skills had brought this troupe this far and none were willing to turn back. He was admired and respected by all who worked with him or saw his performances, Robert Ringling was no exception. Ringling did not hesitate to make the quartet an offer, despite the wishes of the owner of the Cuban circus. The four adventurers wasted no time signing the contract and bags packed they were now headed for America and an adventure that would last a lifetime.

As the giant circus train left the winterquarters in Sarasota, not far from Fruitville, in late March of 1928, the foursome were all aboard and bound for New York City and one of the most astounding performances in the history of their troupe.

Karl Wallenda drifted off to sleep as the train rocked him the way his mother in Germany now rocked his younger siblings. Would they be all right without him? Money would be sent every week. No one would starve. To be continued.....

(Reprinted with permission of "The Fruitville Gazette," 5753 Palmer Blvd., Sarasota, FL 34232. "In the heart of beautiful downtown Fruitville-Between the farm and the feedstore.")

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**Amos Bolieau, Manchester, NH, reports** "Just finished reviewing Ringling Bros. super collection produced by Three Ring Video. Again, Jim has done a fine job of putting together bits of film gathered from many people into a great video. It is worth ordering and send a biscuit along for Rube!"

## **"For Daredevil Michelangelo Nock, The Sky Is Not The Limit"**

**Interviewed By John Vick And Mary-Jane Foote**

**Written By Margaret Frances Shannon**

Ever since he can remember, Michelangelo Nock has literally looked up to family. Towering 100' above him on a sway pole, his mother Aurelia Canestrelli Nock, was for him-even at 4 years old-a model performer and the ambitious daredevil he would soon become. "I was 4 years old, sitting in a carriage," says the now 33-year old Michelangelo, "when I looked up there and realized what she did..it scared me like you wouldn't believe. I could not watch the show directly. I had to watch the shadow that..the act made with spotlights."

In a worldwide spotlight of his own now, Michelangelo casts his own impressive shadow in the world of circus and the greater entertainment industry. Along with his parents and brothers Eugene, Jr., John, Bello and the extended Nock dynasty, Michelangelo plays the multiple roles of producer, circus performer, Hollywood stunt man and all-round family man in the Nock's five units criss-crossing the globe at any given moment.

Featured for 21 seasons at the Tommy Bartlett Thrill Show in the Wisc. Dells, the Nocks are the 7th generation in a family whose circus roots date back to about 1860, according to the handsome book, *Nock-Der Erste Schweizer Zirkus (Nock-The First Swiss Circus)* by Thomas Amiet & Peter Aebi. Between brother Bello's Monte Carlo award and incomparable clowning in the Big Apple Circus and the family's shows in Atlantic City, Wildwood and Japan, this is one family on the move.

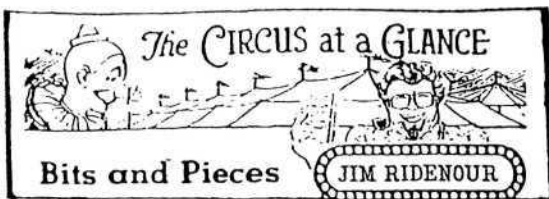
But it wasn't always this glamorous for Michelangelo. Recalling a PM Magazine show interview, he laughs about the reporter's inquiry 'So..what about Michelangelo? What does he do?' "I was a slow learner because I liked to take my time. I was the best closet juggler in the world. I would only juggle behind the trailer or house or in the dressing room. Nobody could see me; I was too embarrassed. I did get over that. And how. From the space wheel to the breath-taking helicopter-propelled trapeze, Michelangelo does it all and in front of a "sea of people" now, sometimes 400 to 500 thousand people at a time at air shows around the world. "Two years ago, we mad the *Guinness Book of World Records*. We performed for 2,200,000 people in Chicago," recalls Michelangelo. "It's under 'circus' or 'circus acts' (for the most people viewing) at a single performance..That was an air show. In the old days, you would work with the Great Wallandas, The Nerveless Nocks would work with the Flying Gaonas. Lately, I've been working with the Stealth Bomber, the B-52 bomber and the Blue Angels." For Michelangelo, however, it's still the circus and the performers of earlier generations that awe the daredevil himself. "There's a certain standard that I can't forget-and my brothers can't forget-when we perform or produce shows." As he recalls how his father, Eugene, started in America with the sway pole act, The Nerveless Nocks, Michelangelo's reverence for those who came before him is clear. "My father would set

up a wooden sway pole in front of the tent in the late 40s and that would draw the people, stir up the crowd, bring them in. So then John Ringling North heard about these people called the Nerveless Nocks: Eugene (my father), along with his sister Elizabeth, his brother Charles and Joseph Bauer. They headlined for 3 or 4 years," he says proudly. "This did shows at State Fairs with Elvis; they were on the Ed Sullivan Show with the Beatles. Boy, could you imagine the experience they had and the stories they can tell?? Just amazing! They thought they were just going to be here for 2 or 3 years but then they became Americans. They never went back. They had their kids here. They had their homes in Sarasota and..it was one success after another," he says of the original 4 and their subsequent progeny. "Joe Bauer was an original member..and he's still producing some of the best entertainment in the business. Circuses, thrill shows..with these you have a level of quality that you don't want to let go of. I had other opportunities, I went to school..We could have picked any field we wanted but we come back to home base. And that is the circus."

For Michelangelo, 'home base' is indeed where he turns for inspiration and even valuable criticism. Performing on the sway poles with his mother and father at about the age of 14, he remembers how, with his mother on the pole to his left and his father on his right, his parents' standard of excellence shaped his own. "I'm scared. I'm scared *for them*. But my mom's not scared. When your mother is up there hanging by her toes-100' in the air-you know she's pushing you to be a better daredevil, a better performer. I can only say good things about my mom. She's one of my idols that I look up to..Still in our shows she's in charge, along with Carolina (Michelangelo's wife) and Sandra (John's wife.) My mom's in charge of costuming & she helps me out in the productions."

Recalling a performance at the Charlotte Motor Speedway, with 400,000 people in the audience, Michelangelo says, "I knew my mother was in the audience and..I did an extra special show because I knew she would tell me, 'You didn't point your toes.' When you're underneath the helicopter & you're 200' above the ground & this big blade is blowing, I sometimes say, 'Do I have to wear make-up? Nobody is going to see me!' But I do anyway. I can't hear anything. I can't hear the music, but I can see the people. I lift my hand up after a trick & I see the hands clapping. My brother always says to wear earplugs. 'You're going to go deaf.' And I say, 'It doesn't matter. I got the best seat in the house! *I can see everything!*'" Perhaps one thing Michelangelo couldn't have envisioned is how his bright future would continue to unfold from the first time he performed as one of the twins on Disney's Peter Pan Show, with Kathy Rigby in 1975. With brother John as the other twin, Michelangelo's experience on this touring show took him to Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore & Australia, setting his "double education" in motion. "Going to school and seeing the world, different cultures, it was the greatest thing. Anytime we were in a place more than 2 weeks, my father would put us into school."

**(Continued on Page 12)**



I am writing this Tuesday morning, 9 Sept. We just finished the Labor Day weekend. It was a busy one for me, Labor Day is important to me. It's not Wall Street Day, it's not Portfolio Day, it's a holiday or the laborer or, if you will, the man who works for a living. If you read the papers you know that the working class have taken a beating in the last 20 years. The top 1% (the super rich) have taken a bigger percent of the nation's wealth and the little guy has taken a beating. I'm afraid this trend will continue with the power brokers & lobbyist working overtime to take care of the ones who need it the least. (End of editorial).

I got up early Saturday, went to Kinkos and made copies. Went off Office Max to buy video mailers & to Service Merchandise to buy 100 blank videos. Was home by 11:30 a.m. and decided to take a 30 min. nap...Well, I was late for the 1 p.m. meeting at the Dunwoodys. We were putting the final touches on plans for the Tent 122 upcoming season. Norma Davenport is our new 2nd Vice Prez. Norma recently had heart surgery. She told me she laid around about a month doing "little" but feeling sorry for herself. She finally had a talk with herself and is back living life to its fullest. Atta Girl! Life goes on. Live it to its fullest.... Saturday night it was to the Showfolks monthly social. As always, plenty of good food and fellowship. Aurelia Nock won the 50-50 raffle & donated it back to the Club..What a nice gesture.

Jenny Wallenda had asked me to write a press release announcing that a famous circus producer would be producing the Showfolks Circus. I worked about 4 hours on it, praising the gentleman, etc. Well, Jenny called and said, "Forget it, he cancelled." This is not the first time we have been let down. Life goes on and we will have a Showfolks Circus on Saturday, Dec. 11th. It will be great as always. Quitters never win and winners never quit..

I worked Sun. & Monday on videos. I'm putting together 15 carnival videos. I am working with a gentleman named Dave Holden who puts out a monthly called Carnival News. I will be manning his booth in Cleveland at the Amusement Industry Expo on Oct. 26-28 & I will be in Vegas for the IAFE (Fair) Expo 29 Nov. thru 1 Dec...I haven't been to Vegas in years so I am looking forward to this trip...I hope I get invited to the famous Gibbs party.

I have gotten about 20 comments on this column and they have all been positive..Not one written rebuttal. I must be "on the money." My good friend, Bill Biggerstaff, said I should lighten up on the "new wave" circuses. He named me at least 6 real circus people who are working on the du Soleil show in Vegas. It's just that I love the real traditional circus so much. I hate to see the word "circus" misused..

There is a magazine in Australia called "Pro-Circus" (what a title). A gentleman named Bob Cunningham recently had a

thought provoking article called, "When is a Circus Not a Circus?" Space limitations prohibit me from repeating the entire article. Here's some of Bob's thoughts on Cirque du Soleil: "Apart from the magnificent big top and a beautiful presented lot, a great band, exceptional lighting and sound and a few brilliant acts, I was quite disappointed on the whole in this highly publicized and acclaimed "circus."

Some acts were far too long and had little thrill content. Frank goes on, "unlike most circuses, du Soleil offers a house troupe of artists meant to add color and movement during & between acts. Their colorful and bizarre costumes certainly add color but their frantic rushing about the arena is often meaningless: For the rest of the time they were either posing or groveling around the floor like a tin of worms. In general terms the entire cast seemed very aloof, not a smile on any of the faces, more disdainful than arrogant, a singular lack of warmth.

To be sure, everybody is raving about Saltimbanco. It is for many a new & colorful experience and I'm sure they haven't regretted paying the high prices (extra for Fri. & Sat. nights) for it was a good night's entertainment.

But was it a circus? I spoke to a couple at interval and the gentleman who happened to have worked for Ashtons some time ago said, 'This isn't a circus but Ashtons 20 years ago was a circus.' And we went down memory lane together. Well, Frank is like myself. He knows a circus when he sees one-if du Soleil is a circus then I'm a brain surgeon.

Reminder: Send Henry Bush something nice for the CFA auction.

Tips for videoers!!! If you insist on putting the time & date down in the corner when you are taping a circus, for God sake, do so for about 15 seconds only. It is very distractful when viewing. Another thing-if possible-start tape with a shot of lettered truck, a window card, ticket or something to identify the subject matter. Another tip-pan slowly, let the subjects do the moving. After all, tapes are cheap & you don't gotta pan all over the place in a hurry-take your time-pan slowly.



## FAMOUS CIRCUS QUOTES

When I first joined the circus, they called me a "First of May" because that's when you are the greenest. The second year I was a "Johnny Come Lately." Because I thought I knew all the answers. But "First of May" or "Johnny Come Lately" I am a circus man from beginning to end." *Burt Lancaster*

### \*\*CIRCUS TRIVIA\*\*

Hugo Zacchini, who was shot from a cannon, is the only man who was fired twice a day and never lost his job.

**\*\*RUMOR MILL:** Rumor has it that Clyde Beatty Cole Bros. will not play Sarasota at the end of October. Dick Garden's "Sterling & Reid" will play Sarasota at Ed Smith Stadium the end of Oct. Rumor has it that Dickie is buying a winter quarters out near Myakka City.

**The CIRCUS at a GLANCE**




**Bits and Pieces**

**JIM RIDEENOUR**

Remember-Take a kid to a circus: Help stamp out "No body asked me". Ask someone to join the CFA.

**TELEVISION & VIDEO**



Gil Gates produced a lot of films and TV shows that were circus related. His best effort was "Rings Around the World" which the late Don Ameche played the part of John Shawcross. A writer records his personal experiences and reminiscences about the one subject he has lived with all his life-the circus. As he explores circus history & explains the intricacies and dangers of the greatest circus performances. Shawcross also tries to examine the meaning of the circus for audiences and for the circus people. Why do they risk their lives, invent and defy fantastic dangers? What is the role of the circus clown? Shawcross concludes that the circus is the world & its players humanity, brave and foolish, defiant and frightened, bold & timid, skillful and bumbling. A circus performance, like life itself, is an incredible journey of suspense and adventure, excitement and laughter.

To tell the story, Gil Gates visited the following circuses: Circus Knie-Lausanne, Switzerland; Circus Krone-Kiel, Germany; Circus Schumann-Copenhagen, Denmark; Circus Scott-Stockholm, Sweden; Smithport County Fair-Pennsylvania and Spanish National Circus-Munich, Germany.

You'll thrill to the best of the best act including: The Flying Armors; Rudy Cardenas; the Francesco Clowns; The Four Tios; Grey Arrow & Zuni; Fredy Knie horses; Carl Sembach Krone; Freida Sembach Krone; Marco; 2 Mascotts; Mendez & Seitz; Pablo Noel; Pauline Schumann; Tarzan, Sahib & Boy; The Tongas; a very young Gunter Gebel Williams & Lily Yokoi. You'll see 19 of the greatest circus acts in the world. No hokey love triangle and no bad guys in black hats. Mr. Gates zeroed in on the best of the best and explained what makes the tick. If you love good circus acts, you will watch "Rings Around the World" again and again. It's available for a double and I pay the postage (plg).

**THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK! By Mike Ceece**

The ongoing "war" between the circus/zoo industry and its critics in the Animal Rights/Welfare Movement has had several skirmishes in the last couple of years, in the media.

But the most comprehensive media investigation into the question occurred recently on the "Dateline NBC" show, a highly rated and popular newsmagazine TV show on the NBC network.

Dateline took the time with their vast resources and top staff of investigative reporters to get both sides of the

story. And in my opinion they got that and more. Led by reporter, Lisa Rudolph, each side got their say in the matter in one of the most fair formats to date. Previous to this, mostly what you would see was just the Animal Rights/Welfare side combined with footage of clips taken out of context, much of it old, that they use for fund raising. Then 2 years ago on the Bryant Gumbel "Public Eye" show on CBS, a short, little-seen but excellent piece on Elephants in Circuses was done featuring elephants where Mr. John Cuneo, of the Hawthorn Corp., did an outstanding job of contesting years of misconceptions about showbiz elephants.

The RBBB-Feld Entertainment staff took a page from Mr. Cuneo's book and made a similar direct strike that was highly successful. They opened up their facilities, made their personnel available and the master showman himself, Kenneth Feld, made a rare television appearance.

Mr. Feld's honest, direct approach gave the American public a rare opportunity to get a balanced view of the subject. I thank Mr. Feld and his staff for taking the time and effort to do this as it helped everyone in the industry. It was great to see a lot of friends of mine who work at Ringling and as an elephant man to see such a nice looking herd of fat, happy, clean and well-managed elephants.

But as good as the Feld Ent. people did, the star of the show for me was that Animal Behavior professor from Texas A&M University. He gave an excellent perspective on the whole issue, in a style the public could understand. Just Great! All in all, it was a positive for our industry and shows what can be done by a calm, honest response to our critics. After all, as Mr. Feld said, "Why should we have to change something we are doing well?" So, follow his lead and strike back! God Bless America!

**Ringling Asked The World, "What's In A Name?"- And The World Answered!**

"What do you name a newborn elephant calf? According to the results of a worldwide poll on Ringling.com, you name him Osgood-and that's just we have done. As the result of tens of thousands of votes, the male Asian calf born at the Ringling Center for Elephant Conservation in Florida on Aug. 16, will be named Osgood-a name suggested by his caretakers the moment they laid eyes on him. "Os-good as it gets!" "Osgood" got 77% of the votes; "Petey", 12%; "Boomer", 5%; "Webster", 2.5% and "Barnum", 2.3%. (I voted for "Elvis" since he was born on the anniversary of Elvis' death!)

**RINGLING RED:** Cleveland-Gund Arena-10/22-31; Rosemont, IL-Allstate Arena-11/3-14; Chicago-United Ctr-11/16-28.

**RINGLING BLUE:** Boston-FleetCtr-10/15-24; Pittsburgh-Civic Arena-10/27-31; St. Louis-Kiel Ctr-11/3-7.

**CARSON & BARNES CIRCUS:** Paso Robles, CA-10/15; Los Osos-10/16; Santa Maria-10/17; Solvang-10/18; Carpinteria-10/19; Ventura-10/20-21; Wasco-10/22; Porterville-10/23; Bakersfield-10/24; Tehachapi-10/25.

**BIG APPLE CIRCUS:** Lincoln Ctr-NYC-10/21-1/9.

**UniverSoul Circus:** LA-10/22-11/3; Houston-11/9-14.

These routes are for information to the fans and should not be given to anyone other than fans without permission of the shows.

### BACK YARD

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

Amos Bolieau reports "On 9/24, Mary & I ventured to the Big E at W. Springfield, MA to partake in the wonderful exposition put together by Wayne McCarey and his very accomplished associates. It is certainly great to see so much excellent family entertainment at one location at one time. He continues to out do himself each year. We first visited Bedazzled with family style magic brought together with the help of "Grandma" of Big Apple fame. We also visited the CWM Museum & the Model show display; to the ever popular children's exhibits of animals sponsored by Bob Commerford at his petting zoos. The climax as usual is taking in the grand performance of the circus; presented by Tommy Hanneford & Co. You have to go a long way to beat an expo like this one."

On 9/26, Amos and Mary again hit the road for a trip to Quonset, RI. & the old Naval Station to catch Tarzan Zerbini. "The sight of that tent and the great acts that he presents are really great. It is right at the top of the list of

shows that must be seen whenever it is in your area."

## "MOZART SINGS THE BLUES"

By Mike Cecere

Well friends, one of our furry friends needs your help. He is "Mozart," leader of Back Yard editor, Cherie Valentine's "pride" of ferocious domestic cats. As any cat owner will tell you (or animal owner), "It's the cats that own you," not "You own the cats!" It's the same with elephants.

Anyway, a true animal lover such as Cherie will spare no expense in taking care of one of her beloved animals. So, Mozart, feeling pecked last week, was rushed to the veterinarian who had to perform emergency surgery on poor Mozart. Several (9) return trips were needed to get that "Top Cat" back in the pink.

By waiting on him hand and foot (or paw) Mozart has returned to his job as ruler of the Valentine household. Mozart being the owner of the editor of Back Yard is a very literate cat and would appreciate "get well" cards.

For updates on his condition, contact Cherie. (Maybe we need a Mozart "Home Page" on the Net?) Remember, in the true tradition of the circus, the animals come first to Cherie! (And humans don't own cats, cats own people!) God Bless America!

(Mozart, having 3 weeks of pain and suffering, staying days at the clinic, hooked up to IVs and catheters, and forced to wear 2 plastic collars that looked like satellite dishes, has returned home and is happy once again, helping me put Back Yard together. Mozart, 3, does the spell check! His urinary tract was blocked by what looked like sand crystals that were in his bladder and after everything else failed to flush them out, the vet told me he needed surgery. Thanks to the satellite dishes, his stitches healed very nicely. My other 2 cats and the 2 dogs thought he looked extremely odd and would get out of his way or he would run into them! Thanks to Mozart's vet, Matt Fraker, he is once again happy to be home. All the vet bills totaled \$860! I told Matt I didn't want to single handily pay for their new operating room!)

\*Thanks to Dr. Matt Fraker, our Miller Park Zoo has a new Sumatran tiger. He went to the Memphis Zoo, sedated the 16-month-old, 200-plus pound tiger, and transported it back to Bloomington. Matt interned at the Cincinnati Zoo. In 1998, the Miller Park Zoo sent its only tiger, Mesuji, to Waco, Tx in an effort to help the breeding of the species.

## Martlyn Monroe's Jewels Reclaimed By The

### Greatest Show On Earth At Sotheby's

"Cocktail" Auction From [www.ringling.com](http://www.ringling.com)

Ringling Bros. announced they have become the proud owners of historic jewels worn by Martlyn Monroe while riding a pink elephant at The Greatest Show On Earth in Madison Square Garden in 1955. The jewels and two historic photos of Ms. Monroe wearing them were offered by Sotheby's in NY as part of their "Cocktail" auction honoring icons of the 1950s. "We were delighted that we are able to reclaim a part of American history and our own history in acquiring the jewels worn by Martlyn Monroe in our show," said Kenneth Feld, producer. "They represent a very special part of the glamour and show biz tradition that has always been associated with Ringling Bros. as we move into our third century of entertaining American audiences. They were worn by one of the brightest stars of the 20th Century and we have very special plans for them in the 21st Century as part of our all-new 130th Edition. We know the American public will be 'tickled pink' to have the opportunity to see these jewels in person when the show comes to their town."

## REMEMBERING HOXIE TUCKER BY BOBBY GIBBS

Another circus giant is taken from us-who will take their place? Who has the will and knowledge? Who has the love and strength to put out and run a real circus nowadays with all the ants and the new wave ideas. Hoxie was a circus owner who came from the old school, who built a circus from a small show to a big top giant. He was a man of his word and had many friends that looked forward each season to seeing him. He was not one to wear gold chains or flash up his life style; he ate in the cookhouse, drove a truck or helped put up the tent, whatever was needed to do, he was there. He will be missed by those of us who knew him and the circus world has lost a major influence and a real show man. In the end, all I can really say is I appreciate Hoxie Tucker's life and his part in our circus family and history. Hoxie, I'll see ya down the road, Bobby Gibbs.

From "The Fight Master-Journal of the Society of American Fight Directors"-Sent in by Jenny Wallenda: "The Fight Master sat down with the astonishing stuntwoman, Nobby Arden. Nobby, who's more comfortable flying through the air than being on the ground, is the President of the United Stuntwomen's

Assn. Nobby talked about her amazing film & TV stunts and her unique perspective on the business. Nobby is a 4th generation circus performer. She started doing aerial stunts at the age of 8! Her father taught her how to use her first bullwhip in their act. And when a stunt coordinator friend of her fathers suggested Nobby go into stunt work, she was a natural. Nobby not only uses her circus background (Russian swing, teterboard, trampoline, flying trapeze, high falls, bull & stock whips) as a foundation to her many talents as a stunt performer but also to train actors. Nobby was the bullwhip trainer to actress Debi Mazar on *Batman Forever*. As president of the USA, Nobby has seen the growth of women as stunt performers and in the role of stunt coordinators. Women like Nobby, Sophia Crawford (martial arts), Marguerite Happy (rodeo) and Debbie Evans (motorcycle) give the association its outstanding reputation. Stunt performers will often trade lessons! The association refers & facilitates job placement. It also gets involved with special charity events. The association supports artsy & safety in stunt work.

While there may be more time to prepare and rehearse a stunt in film, Nobby knows, all too well, that a stunt can change at the last moment. Heights may be increased, weather elements may be added. Despite the pressure, Nobby puts safety first. Equipment is double checked and Nobby prefers to have a fellow stunt person as a second pair of eyes. Nobby also thinks through what to do if something were to go wrong. As Nobby simply and clearly says, "It's my life!" Doing a 200' slide off a cliff for a *Northern Exposure* TV episode or flying off a building without a full harness in the Bruce Willis film *The Color of Night*, Nobby excels. And while most actors marvel at her fearlessness, Nobby says that speaking dialogue makes her more nervous! Nobby's work as a stunt coordinator is unique in a business that is still dominated by men. With mostly male producers, directors & stunt coordinators, it is difficult for a woman to break the ranks. But Nobby has proven herself as an expert in technique and rigging, in planning and in the preparation and execution of stunt work for commercials, TV and film. Her years as a circus performer have taught her that for certain stunts keeping rigging simple can be the best protection for a successful and safe stunt. And what does Nobby do for recreation? She's getting into rock climbing! Still reaching for the sky.

## GUESS WHO'S GOING TO SCHOOL?

By Liliane Parbot-Johnson, Charlotte Sun Herald

Circus curriculum being developed to use circus arts in the teaching of physics, math & other subjects. The next millennium may see fewer children "run away from home to join the circus." That's because the circus is running away from the road to join the schools. At least, Circus Sarasota is. This particular show has jugglers, acrobats, aerialists, clowns, and other performers as is expected in a circus, however, it is not a circus in the strictly traditional meaning of the word because it does not move from town to town.

Circus Sarasota is a nonprofit organization founded by two aerialists, Pedro Reis & Dolly Jacobs, for the purpose of education in circus artistry and history. They give regular performances during the winter season and special performances with educational sessions for school children in the summer. Reis, a former flying trapeze performer, serves as executive director. He said recently Circus Sarasota is collaborating with the state-owned John and Mable Ringling Museum of the Circus to "develop and implement a circus arts education to provide instruction and outreach" for students from kindergarten to the eighth grade. The circus education committee and the museum education team has planned 3 in-service training sessions to work with school administrators and teachers for the development of curriculums and educational packets. According to Sue West, the circus director of marketing and development, the program was first offered to the Sarasota County School Board and the responses from schools have been very encouraging.

Manatee County has already expressed interest, and the circus plans to extend the program to neighboring counties, including Charlotte. "This is our opportunity to inspire students so that one day they will aspire to reach their full potential," Reis said. "In addition, this is an opportunity for them to experience positive role-modeling of persistence, hard work and healthy lifestyles, which are part of the process of becoming a successful professional circus artist." The program does not aim primarily at developing future performers-although some children may become interested in circus arts. The curriculum is to integrate parts of circus activities into sciences as well as language arts. For instance in physics, the teacher can explain the force of gravity a juggler must deal with, or how a "flyer" compensates for the forces of nature pulling him or her downward, instead of across to catch another trapeze or the hands of a partner. Language arts are a necessary part of circus life. There are letters to write to agents or circus owners when seeking engagements. Business knowledge can not be ignored either. There are contracts to negotiate and sign. At the Taylor Ranch School of Venice, second-grade teacher Jan Buckelew said she is anxious to see the curriculum ready. She became very interested after reading a flyer about the program, then she spoke to Jeanne Troiano, a second-grade teacher at Venice Elementary School, who is a member of the educational committee. "Speaking with her, it sounded like it could be a

part of our curriculum," Buckelew said, noting many circus people live in the Venice area. "I have a student whose mom is a clown. How perfect to tie everything together. We can hardly wait to start putting the lessons together." At the Laurel Nokomis School, Tracy Terry-Tuerk has a class of Exceptional Student Education students where "hands-on learning is our specialty," she said. She has to develop such exercises herself. For instance, before learning measurements from books, her students recently spent four weeks physically measuring various objects. She said the circus program promises to include math. "It's exciting for the students to have math in such a fun way," she said. "If I can get them interested-if it can be fun-my kids can try to catch up," she said. There will be one assignment few students are likely to object to. It is a visit to a Circus Sarasota's winter performance planned for January.

## SEATTLE POST-Mayor Says City Should Lead National Movement-By Kristin Dizon: 10/8/99

Mayor Paul Schell wants to ban circus animals from performing here, a move that would put Seattle at the forefront of a national movement aimed at stopping the use of exotic animals as entertainment. Should the City Council agree, Seattle would be the largest city in the country to outlaw circus animal performances. Yesterday, Schell said the issue was raised during his campaign for mayor 2 years ago and that after dealing with other priorities, he's ready for Seattle to set an example. The mayor plans to forward an ordinance to the City Council next month after the general election. His proposed legislation, still in draft form, would ban either the display of exotic and wild animals in city owned and operated facilities, or entirely within city limits. "Can you really limit it on private property and say, nowhere in the city of Seattle can you do this?" asked Lisa Fitzhugh, special assistant to the mayor. "That's the debate-how far can we go?" National groups such as the Humane Society of the United States and PETA contend that, at best, circuses force wild animals into performing unnatural tricks & living on the road. They cast exotic animals as a threat to public safety, citing the deaths of 45 people killed since 1990 by captive elephants alone. Circus operators deny such charges and say they treat their animals well and adhere to the federal Animal Welfare Act, as well as numerous state and local laws. They say there is no need for a ban, which will deprive their audience of cherished entertainment. The Ringling Circus as well as Circus Gatti performed in Seattle this year. Ringling was in town last month at the Seattle Center's Key Arena. Seattle's proposed ban would prohibit the exhibition, act or performance of 8 broad categories of animals such as primates, large cats, bears, elephants and non-domesticated hoofed mammals such as zebras. It also would exempt reptiles, birds, dogs and cats, according to Fitzhugh. Additionally, the wording will be crafted so that the Woodland Park Zoo would not be affected. Circuses are not the only wild animal displays that would be affected, though they are the ban's main target. Exotic animals in traveling petting zoos and those featured at photo opportunities in malls or at fairs could be prohibited as well. Catherine Ort-Mabry, a spokeswoman for Ringling Bros. said "mistreatment is never tolerated at Ringling Brothers," she said. "Our trainers devote their lives to these animals 24 hours a day, 7 days a week." Ort-Mabry, who called the Ringling experience part of American childhood, said the circus has enjoyed strong support in Seattle. She said animals are an integral part of the Ringling presentation & that in a recent nationwide survey, 70 percent of those queried said animals were what draws them to the circus. Ort-Mabry, who called supporters of the ban a small, vocal minority, promised that Ringling Bros. would oppose the legislation and we would employ the appropriate tactics at the time."

**\*\*From Heidi Herriott and the OABA\*\***

106th CONGRESS-1st Session H. R. 2929

To amend title 18, United States Code, to prohibit certain conduct relating to elephants.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES September 23, 1999 Mr. FARR of California (for himself, Ms. PELOSI, Mr. LIPINSKI, Mr. STARK, Mr. LANTOS, Mr. BLUMENAUER, Mr. LEWIS of California, Mr. YOUNG of Florida, Mr. TRAFICANT, Mr. WEINER, Mr. BOUCHER, Mr. MORAN of Virginia, Ms. WOOLSEY, Mr. WHITFIELD, Mr. GALLEGLY, Mr. HALL of Ohio, and Mr. TANCREDO) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on the Judiciary A BILL To amend title 18, United States Code, to prohibit certain conduct relating to elephants. Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE. This Act may be cited as the 'Captive Elephant Accident Prevention Act of 1999.'

**SEC. 2. ELEPHANT SHOWS AND RIDES.**

(a) IN GENERAL- Chapter 89 of title 18, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following: Sec. 1822. Elephant shows and rides (a) Whoever, in or affecting interstate or foreign commerce, knowingly makes available any elephant for-(1) use in a travelling show or circus; or (2) the purpose of allowing individuals to ride that elephant; shall be fined under this title or imprisoned not more than 1 year, or both. In the case of a conviction of a person who has previously been convicted for another offense under this section, the offender shall be fined under this title or imprisoned not more than 2 years, or both. (b) In this section, the term 'travelling show or circus' means a show or circus that spends most of its working time each year away from its permanent facility.' (b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT- The table of sections at the beginning of chapter 89 of title 18, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new item: '1822. Elephant shows and rides.'

**\*\*Hello, here is the info on where to send your letter of opposition to HR2929. Once again, please pass this info along to all concerned parties. Shows, please post for all personnel to see. My last email gave some points to make in your letter. Remember to keep letters to 1 page if possible. Let's get going! Heidi Herriott, (407) 656-4340, e-mail: circus4u@gdi.net, fax 407-654-4659 or 522 Buckhaven Loop, Ocoee, FL 34761. Please forward copies of your letter to me if possible. Happy Writing!**

H.R. 2929-the Captive Elephant Accident Prevention Act of 1999-The bill has been referred to the House Judiciary Committee-Subcommittee on Crime. The Chairman of the Subcommittee is Congressman Bill McCollum of Florida (who is running for the open Senate seat as a Republican). Letters in opposition to the bill should be sent to: (1) your local Congressman (2) Congressman Bill McCollum (R-Florida) 2109 Rayburn House Office Bldg, U.S. House of Representatives Washington, D.C. 20515

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

**Mogador Paul Cristiani**, 78, of Las Vegas, died Friday, Oct. 1 in Las Vegas. He was born Sept. 10, 1921, in Morocco. A resident for 20 years, he was a retired circus performer. He is survived by his wife, Donna; five daughters, Valentina Buchinski of Bradenton, Fla., Linda Cristiani, Sarasota & Laura Cristiani, Nicolle Cristiani & Alexess Cristiani, all of Las Vegas; two sisters, Cosetta Cristiani & Corcaita Bowes, and 3 brothers, Daviso Cristiani, Belmonte Cristiani & Pete Cristiani, all of Sarasota, Fla.; five grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. (More about Mogador in the next issue)

**Elephants Clever, Hard-Working-Deland, FL**

Hide it in an apple or slip it in a banana, either way, it was tough tricking Conti. Toward the end of her life, trainers with the Clyde Beatty Circus used unconventional ways of giving the 54-year-old elephant antibiotics to treat her weakening kidney. Circus officials said Conti had an automatic reflex when given an apple.

"She would spit it out and mash it on the ground to see what was in the apple," said Renee Storey. Elephant trainer Fred Logan, who cared for Conti for 27 years, said he would mash her pills into banana pulp. Outsmarting Conti was no easy task, Logan said. In the early 1950s, Ben Davenport with Dailey Bros. Circus gave his daughter the elephant as a wedding present. Norma Davenport Cristiani, the daughter, then used Conti in the short-lived King-Cristiani Circus. Conti was purchased by the Clyde Beatty Circus in 1957. After 42 years with the circus, Conti died Sept. 3 of kidney failure. Another circus elephant, Pete-whose job was to lead the herd of 5 elephants-died 2 weeks earlier. Pete, purchased in the early 1950s, loved setting up the big top, Logan said. And any time she wasn't used to pull the tent up or bring in the lion and tiger cages, Peter threw a tantrum. "She would stomp her feet on the ground. She would get upset because she wanted to work," said Logan.

\*\*\*\*\*

**Dressing Room Gossip!! 50 Years Ago-1949!!**

**Tom Packs:** Karl Wallenda claims he is not a car driver, but a truck driver. **Arthur Wallenda** is doing comedy in the high wire act. **Rose Behee** is teaching the children web, cloud swing and chaperoning at movies. **Harold Voise** bought an awning for his trailer that almost requires a property dept. to erect. **Duina & Egle Zacchini, La Tosca & Yvette Wallenda** add beauty to the show. **King Bros:** Lucio Cristiani, mgr., added another horse to the big riding act. **Daviso & Louise** are going over big with their perch act. **Polack Bros:** Eddie Ward received a cut lip & nose when he and Eddie Kohl tangled in one of these Calif. crosswinds as Eddie was doing his two-and-a-half! **Ringling Bros:** Mary Jane Miller reports "Laugh of the week": Prince Paul purchasing new shoes in Portland. On his return to the lot he had one 1 with him. **Gin Rummy** still the favorite pastime. **Paul Jerome** set a record when he received *The Billboard* almost before the ink was dry!

## "THE SKY IS THE LIMIT....."

The numerous water ski shows the Nocks have performed in or produced have also taken them worldwide, from the Wisc. Dells and Sea World to Thailand and Germany. "We're all accomplished barefoot skiers," says Michelangelo. "We do all the elements..everything. But it came to a point where it was a very physical sport and they are paying us to work our acts as daredevils. You blow out a knee skiing and that just blows everything. But for a long time we were actually a part of the Bartlett Water Show. I would drive the boats, the towboats, safety boats. Bello was an all around barefooter-really an exceptional barefooter. In other shows around the world, we incorporate other elements into our shows."

"We were the first major show to incorporate BMX extreme bike racing and bike stunts, ramp stunts, roller-skating and skateboarding. That was Eugene and my father's idea to incorporate these elements that we saw kids doing on the street back in the early 70s. We said 'that's entertainment! Let's put them in a costume and put a theme to a show,' and the rest is history. It still works."

"We've made lots of friends with the ski shows. I spent 2 years at Sea World. We produced a show called 'Wheels'-that was in the mid-80s. We still produce that show in some of our global travels. That was the show that incorporated the globe of death, the space wheel, everything to do with go-carts, race bikes, BMX bikes and roller skaters. It was like a 50-person cast..very innovative. It was all studio original music & singing. The stage was a giant hubcap; there were elevators. It felt like we were doing a *Star Trek* movie."

But unlike in the movies, danger is always very real for the Nocks' acts. With fifteen 45-minute shows a day in the peak season, the Nocks tested their limits. "I think we were in competition with Shamu (the Sea World whale)," Michelangelo jokes. "He would do 15 shows a day too. But he got paid in fish."

"We would have bare hands from all this. The thing was, especially when you did the globe or wheel, when you start doing so many shows, you would have to really concentrate. You start getting commonplace. You start saying, 'Oh, I'm not 60' up in the air. I'm not going upside down on a motorcycle. This is kid's play.' But you forget the danger element that if you start getting to-how do you say it-cocky-that's when you eat it, man. And it wakes you up like a big surprise, if you wake up." The Nocks, however, seem to always be awake, for their shows have been and remain just about everywhere. For one, there's the Nock American Circus in a Japanese amusement park. "They (the park) have had the most attendance while this show is there. It's like magic. They're getting rave reviews..and doing innovative things over there. They brought over..a big group of the best names in the business: the Nocks, the Winns, the Carrillos and the Vasquez. That's part of the success..We enjoy getting talents from other people."

"For the state of Wisconsin, we performed for the powerball and lottery," adds Michelangelo. "We used the skills of John and Eugene Nock, my brothers, and the Flying Gaona

family..that very famous family." There's plenty of talent within the extended Nock family as well. For starters, there's Michelangelo's wife, Carolina Espana Nock, who also comes from a circus family of many generations. "Carolina is an accomplished trapeze artist. She also does the sway pole, the space wheel. Then she does a contortion act," admires Michelangelo. "This is a unique thing she was born with..her beauty and the ability to bend her back; she does this very impressive act..I have a lot of respect for women in general who can do this line of work. Like..Sandra and my mother and my Aunt Elizabeth."

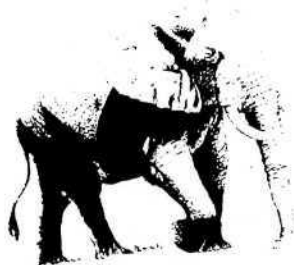
Then there's John Nock. "John's got 2 shows in NJ: Atlantic City and Wildwood. He and his wife, Sandra, have got all sorts of shows..audience participation shows, a clown production show, magic shows, things like that. Sandra..she does everything. And Natalie-that's Sandra's youngest sister-she's just starting. She's an accomplished announcer. Actually, she's becoming like..Pio Nock. I heard that she's a really funny performer. She's good with the audience."

"I have great respect for my Uncle Pio Nock, Sr.," says Michelangelo of the late great clown who passed away this last December. "He was very innovative in clowning..When you talk about Emmett Kelly, Pio Nock, Grock or ..the Russian clown Popov, he was right there..He could go into any country-Spain, Norway-and..not just relate with them physically, but he could speak their language. This man was a genius. Who would think that a generation later, here comes another clown," says Michelangelo of brother Bello Nock, whose antics, now featured in the "Happy On!" production of the Big Apple Circus, rank him among the very best clowns in the world.

"My brother..has got that talent to make people laugh. It's really amazing. Is it in the blood or just something that happens? Does lightning strike in the same place twice?" More than likely, it's not lightning, luck or even good genes that has prospered the Nocks all these years-it's competition. "Competition breeds quality, I think," says Michelangelo.

And the Nocks have indeed worked alongside some of the very best. "Let's talk about the Tommy Bartlett Show" in the Wisconsin Dells," begins Michelangelo. "Tommy Bartlett was a world famous radio announcer, TV personality with the Welcome Traveler Show. He goes way back to vaudeville..He's always had some of the world's best comedians at his shows: Wes Harrison, Dieter Tasso..Bartlett was an innovator in the water ski show industry..The man is, along with Tom Diehl, a legend..I have respect for people who do innovative things and aren't scared to push the envelope of entertainment or anything. "I think of the success of what he's done," says Michelangelo of the late Tommy Bartlett, who passed away Sept. 6, 1998 at the age of 84 and to whom the 1999 edition of the Tommy Bartlett Show was dedicated. "When you see the stage out here, it's the biggest stage. Through the years Bartlett has had sky divers and kite flyers. They go up to 600' soaring with their man-carrying kites. (Reprinted with permission of "The White Tops", magazine of the Circus Fans Assn. of America.)

(To Be Continued)

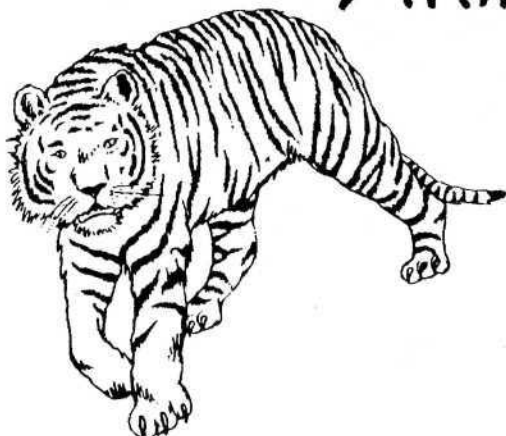


American



# Animal Trainer

Magazine



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## BLOW DOWN-1927 By Carl DeVere

Just prior to joining George Engesser's Schell Bros. Circus in 1928, my father, Carl M. DeVere I, went on the road with a tent show of his own. A "Mud Show," it traveled on trucks just like the circus and had some of the same problems. Here is an account of what happened one season.

In the 1920s, 30s and 40s, with radio in its infancy, reporting was simple. The public was innocent and naive. Stuffy attitudes were not common. Movies reflected the mood. There were few college graduates and not many high school graduates. Life itself was simple.

Dad's 1927 "Rep Show" (short for repertory show) had booked into the small towns of Iowa and Minnesota. More Swedes lived in those 2 states than any other state in the country. The "Ole" show played a matinee and evening performance in each town. Truly, a one-night stand.

The three-act play took place on a stage. An orchestra pit provided live music and was on the left of the stage. Everyone with the show "doubled in brass." In addition to their regular job, each member had one or two extra bang-up job of faking it. Only the real musicians played in the orchestra pit to accompany the drama. However, for "Ballyhoo," everyone who owned an instrument and uniform turned out. The large brass band looked impressive. Even I, at age 4, had a band uniform and played a snare drum. The concert blared out stirring marches at the main entrance of the tent. The "hoorah" of "Ballyhoo" created a fever in the crowd, luring customers to buy tickets. The ensemble consisted of 4 or 5 brassy marches. I loved to bang on my drum during the hullabaloo. Dad pecked away on a baritone as Mom squawked out harmony on a tenor sax.

Two hours before each matinee the most proficient musicians boarded our band wagon truck. We rode all around town, playing familiar marches on every street. Touring the small town, we paraded for a half hour to 45 minutes. The calliope drowned out most of the sour notes hit by some of the less skilled players. Each block received the same announcement. Dad shouted through a large megaphone: "Today, at two o'clock in the afternoon and tonight at 8 o'clock in Yohnnie Yonson's cow pasture, Ole Olson will present "You Tell 'Em Ole." Ole the Cowpuncher comes home from the wars. A 3-act comedy featuring a cast of forty. There will be vaudeville performances between acts. Price: 25 cents for grown ups and ten cents for kids!" We were somewhere in Iowa.

The show was playing in a town with a population of 500. It was larger than the burgs we usually played. As a result, the band wagon would spend about an hour on the extra long parade route. Mom decided to leave me in the care of Maggie Essbec on the lot. Maggie was somewhat older than Mom. That season, Maggie, who usually played character parts, was Zelda in the chorus line.

A hard, steady breeze was blowing that day. Dad told the boss canvasman to run extra storm ropes over the top of the tent. Double stakes were necessary to hold the ropes securely. Tent show folks shudder at the thought of a "Blow Down." That happens when a heavy wind blows a tent down and rips it up badly.

Dad recognized the signs of a suddenly blackened sky with an eerie green tint. He ordered the driver of the band wagon to turn around as the breeze became a strong wind. A dark, spiraling funnel appeared from nowhere, twisting over a hill. It was a tornado. Everyone in the band watched in horror as the tip of it headed directly for the show lot.

Meanwhile, back at the lot, panic-stricken Maggie took my hand and led me into the tent. Her jumbled thinking concluded that we would be safer inside the big tent. We went to the center of the tent and stood by one of the main poles. The roar of the twister became deafening. Ferocious winds sucked the entire tent straight up into the black whirlpool. Noises of shattering wooden seats and tent poles added to the din. Dirt and dust surrounded us. Everything became a blur as the wind blew debris through the air. Then, as fast as it had come, the wind withdrew. The tent, still puffed up in the air, settled down around Maggie and me. We were holding hands and frozen on the spot. In the middle of the devastation, our heads stuck up through the ripped mass of canvas.

The band wagon raced to the tent and Mom jumped from the truck while it was still moving. She ran to me, fell on her knees, threw her arms around me and sobbed out loud. Impressed with how beautiful she looked at that moment, I cried tears of joy (they tell me). My Dad also fell to his knees and loudly thanked God for our safety. Maggie fainted. (Great! More stories, Bud!!)

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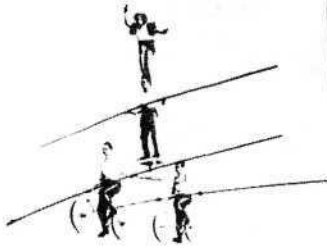
KEN BENSON

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Schell Bros. Circus midway 1928



"You Tell "Em Ole" Show

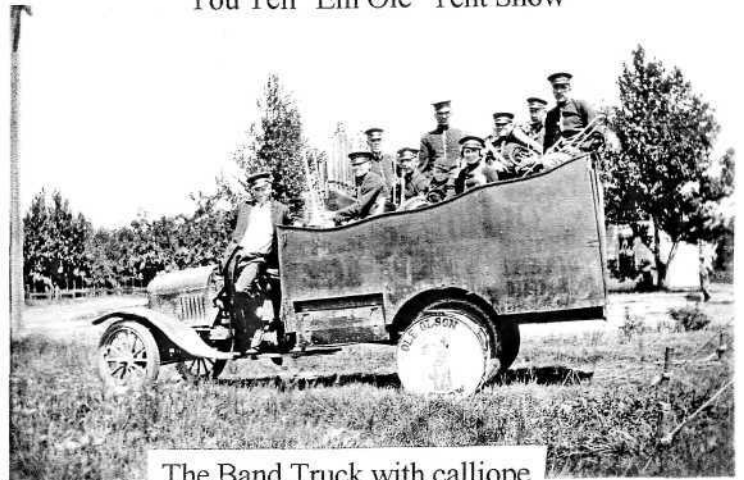


A "Rep Show" tent - Minnesota 1927

"You Tell "Em Ole" Tent Show



The lead snare-drummer



The Band Truck with calliope



Logan Family, Cycle Route, Isle Boer Circus