

BACK YARD

Volume IV, Issue #66

April 30, 1999

****LIFE OF A LION TAMER****

**ALFRED COURT—CAT ACT **

(“PIC” Magazine, June 11, 1940)

The largest mixed animal act in the world, featured by Ringling Bros. Circus, represents a \$50,000 investment & 8 years of work. Trainer & owner of the 3-ring act is Monsieur Alfred Court, who, before the war, had the second biggest circus in Europe. His present assortment of animals includes 15 African lions, 6 tigers, 6 polar bears, 6 Himalayan bears, 2 black jaguars, 2 spotted jaguars, 4 pumas, 4 black panthers, 2 black leopards & 16 Indian & African leopards and 2 spotted Dane dogs. The various cats seem friendly enough when working side by side during a performance, yet if Mr. Court or an asst. left the ring for 5 minutes, the beasts would be at each other's throats in a matter of seconds.

His fortune in cats is probably the most fragile in existence. Usually male & female get along better than 2 of the same sex. Caging females together is apt to be fatal—particularly during their periods of spring heat. Trainers dread the mating season, for the females not only become unmanageable, but the toms develop jealousies which extend to the men who feed the she-cats. Rarely does Court breed his cats—the resulting pregnancy takes the female out of the act.

Trainers with less pride in perfection mate their animals, but the cubs never train as well as wild ones. And unless new stock is imported, the inbreeding leads to degeneracy. Occasionally, a lion is bred to a tigress, or a leopardess to a puma, but the metis produced is of little worth other than a curiosity specimen & like a mule, can't procreate. Court's rarest cats are the black panthers from Siam & Java. He worked with them 6 hours a day for 2 years to break them into the mixed group routines. To accustom the animals to each other, their cages are at first put side by side. Later, held by leashes so they can't get at each other, the different species are put in the

ALFRED COURT



same cages. Court is quick to sense feuds.

(Continued on Page 6)



"KING TUSK"

HARRY LOCKER



AUG 1958



"LONG LIVE THE KING!!!"

By Mike Cecere

Over the past few months, many elephant people, circus folk and circus fans have asked the whereabouts of the famed elephant, "King Tusk."

"King Tusk", also known as "Tommy", is one of the diamonds in the collection belonging to Feld Entertainment's RBBB Circus & one of the best specimens of Asian elephant in North America.

Well, good news folks. He's doing fine! After decades of traveling the country, he is enjoying the Florida sunshine at the RBBB Elephant Retirement Center in Williston, FL.

"The King", as he's referred to at the farm, is under the direct supervision of Harry Locker, operations manager of the facility. Harry is one of the Feld/RBBB elephant elite and is an extremely experienced elephant man. He has the vast experience it takes to manage adult bull Asian elephants.

Harry's goal is to make every elephant happy and with Feld/RBBB's support that is an easy job. They get the best feed, vet care and facilities. "The King" is no exception. An added plus for him, his longtime friend and traveling companion, Jimmy Silverlake, is General Manager of the facility and visits him daily.

The continues a tradition whereby "The King" has had the good fortune to be with the top elephant people in the country. Trained by the legendary Louie Reed with Smokey Jones and Rex Williams, he was then owned for decades by businessman/elephant owner, Tony Diano. With Diano, he had the best people & best food/care at all times while he toured America.

Mr. Diano, when he retired in his senior years, choose the Felds to protect his beloved herd in their future years. This was because of their deep commitment to quality care of all their animals. It should be noted that the previous owners of RBBB pre-Feld, the North/Ringling families, sold off elephants once they got older or didn't fit into their touring production.

So, I'd say the elephants are doing a lot better with the Feld organization running the show, wouldn't you? With top people like Harry Locker on the job, there can be no doubt. So, Long Live "The King"!!

Bobby Gibbs sent along the program for the Nashville Shrine and the acts were: Shane Johnson with Bengal and Siberian tigers; Aerial displays with Miss Wendy, Walterinas Cradle, Rockabys, Vicky Flores; Super

Locos; Johnny Pierce & His Mutts; Ellian Rosaire; Murtias, high wire; The Flying Pages; Shoshoney, the Pony; Tahar & His Pets; Esquedas, teeterboard; Puchitos, Cable Riding Motorcycle; Libros Wheel of Death; Clyde Bros. Elephants & Friscos Elephants. Prop Boss was Walter Patterson; Concessions, Shane Johnson.

A full page ad in the program was dedicated "In Memory of Native Nashvillian & Internationally Renowned Trapeze Artist, Lorelei, A Member of the Al Menah Circus Family. Lora "Dinky" Patterson, 1955 to 1997. A beautiful photo of Dinky, hanging by her heels, is in the center of the page. Thanks Bobby for sending this in.

Remembering Okie Carr

Toni McIntyre, one of Peggy Null's daughters, writes that they worked with Okie on Carson & Barnes back in 1966, 1967 and part of 1968, when he was still working the cat act. Her mom and dad, Peggy and Don Null, were in the band and used to sit on the bandstand, with the cat cage right in front of them. Toni remembers Okie taking such good care of the cats. She later took her mother to visit Carson and Barnes when Okie worked with the elephants.

Toni says, "he was a hard worker and a nice guy. We will miss him." (Thank you, Toni).

Jackie LeClaire reports he saw the Tommy Hanneford Shrine Circus in Sarasota on April 22 and 23. It was a fast moving and most entertaining performance. Dolly Jacobs was brought in at the last minute to replace the aerial ring act that couldn't make it. "What great luck for us all! There is no question why she is the star that she is and she literally stopped the show." Jackie says he heard the Friday evening show was a straw house. Johnny Herriott did a super job, as usual, as announcer. Vicki and George Hanneford were visiting, coming from the Swap Shop in Ft. Lauderdale. (Thanks, Jackie).

Denny Childers reports he went to see the Plunkett Circus when they played Phoenix. Acts were: Shane Johnson, 6 tigers; Wheel of Destiny, Martine; Luba Khepakova, horses; Roman rings, Wendy Bell; Olates, dogs; Giraldo, high wire; Juggling & balancing, Wendy, Olates & Di Di; African elephant act; Globe of Death; Rebecca Smith, cannon. Phoenix must love circus! Show started 30 minutes late, due to crowds waiting to get in. A straw house! It took 20 minutes to get thru front door and 30 more minutes to get the rest of the folks in. (GREAT!!)

FOX 63*4/12/99



THE FOX!!!

My Dear Friends;

First of all I like to tell you about a real nice anniversary and to top it off it was a Golden one. Andre and Hilda Prince. The invitation read "We ordered a new door for our house in September and then paid to have it installed; well here it is April and we finally got our new door. We would be honored to have you come and see and walk through our new door. P.S. It also is our Golden Anniversary. There house by the way is like a castle, right by the water and there boat is right by the house. Andre had Patsy Jordan, Joachim and Betty Krause with the little girl and Andre & Hilda's daughter Monique and Bobby Heinz flown in from Vegas, from our town there was Hilda's brother Harold and Minnie Alsana, La Norma, and yours truly. The rest of the people I do not know, they were neighbors about 12 people.

Andre & Hilda had super food and cocktails served. Every thing was just arranged like for royalty. Nothing was missing. Hilda was still limping from her broken hip but was getting along just great. Andre told me he had some problem with his knees but he assured me that after he has his operation he will be like new. So it was a beautiful day.

I was told by proud Daddy Norbu, that daughter Nobu was in Time Magazine. It was a two page spread for Cannon Color Copier March 29th. You also could have seen her on Meet The Press 60 Minutes.

Now I have to report a sad thing, Mrs. Hetzer, sister of Jimmy Hetzer has been murdered at her home in Huntington. No suspect so far.

Oh yes, good news, Nina Unus became Grand Ma again and is she proud.

Antonetta Mac Mahon, came home for a short visit to check on her office and then she took all her employees out for lunch to a Chinese restaurant. While here she got to visit with her dear friend Patsy. Patsy was here just for a week. Antonetta just 3 days.

Carla Wallenda came home for a day to check on her trailer park.

Tino Wallenda on the road with family while Ricky Wallenda is going to collage. I think he quit the business.

Donny Johnsons cats are on road with the Jordan Circus. The cats which Tammy Wallenda works, I am not sure were his second cat act is performing.

I was told that Charlotte Kora is not doing to well at all.

I really would like to talk to her as she is a dear friend. I will be praying for her recovery and I know lots more friends will do the same.

I received a very nice letter from Elene Hester, she went to visit the Jordan Circus with husband Lee. Lee just watched the first half and then went to the back yard to visit with Patsy, but Patsy was not there as daughter in law Melony is running this unit and Patsy is holding the fort at home and son Jody is running the other unit. Elene writes that she loved the show and told me how great Tammy looked with the tigers. By the way Elene is a former Barrette Girl while Lee Hester is a former member of the Wallenda Troupe. This just for those who can not remember them.

By the way, Fay Alexander is doing just great. He fully recovered and now you can never catch him at home, Rosie and him are constantly on the go. Where they going?? Rosi tells me they go to all the shopping centers, not buying things just looking.

All the shows are not out on the road and there is not much to tell unless some one bothers to call or write me. I also got a nice letter from the Conways, they are doing fine.

Did I ever mention that John and Hertha Cuneo bought a house here in Sarasota. I ask John why it took him all these years, his answer was, just to much business going on, never any time between flying to Europe and to all his acts around here which he owns. I think Herta likes it here, she grew up here in Sarasota.

La Norma is doing OK, she is just very exhausted from worrying about Gilbert. He has to go 3 times a week to dialyses.

Olga Bertini is also not well. Also going always to dialyses and feeling very weak. Henry Strazan and Erna (which is Olga's sister) had bought a house together here in Sarasota, so Erna and Henry are taking good care of her. Henry and Erna are still working. Erna sewing for the stagehand and Henry, I really do not know what his job is but I think he works at night.

Well I guess this is all for to day.

Lots of Love

Your Fox

P.S. Who send the stamps from Manatee Co and put no return address or name on it?????????????

Karen L. Wann passed away in Sarasota, April 8. She was a designer & producer of Ringling Bros., Walt Disney on Ice and Hagenbeck-Wallace Co. She was a graduate of Ringling School of Arts. Karen was 40.

******Ringling Bros. Responds To Allegations,
Cooperates Fully With USDA On Inspections,
Regulations * April 7, 1999-Vienna, VA.******

"Four months ago, when Ringling Bros. learned of the claims by a former employee, we cooperated willingly and fully with the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture's investigation. The USDA physically examined the animals & conducted extensive interviews with a number of employees. Simultaneously, the USDA conducted an inspection of the elephants & issued an Inspection Report stating that Ringling Bros. was in full compliance with federal Animal Welfare Act Regulations and Standards. This favorable Inspection Report follows a letter USDA sent to Ringling Bros. 6 months earlier confirming that the company had never been found to have violated federal animal welfare laws.

It is Ringling Bros. policy that animal mistreatment of any kind will not be tolerated. Any employees who see activity they might consider not in keeping with USDA regulations or standards should report the incident to their supervisor immediately. We are disappointed that the employees mentioned did not report their concerns while on staff.

We have worked hard to earn our reputation for leadership in providing the best in animal care and we will always maintain the high standards we have set for the treatment of our animals."

***Review of Video Tapes of European Circuses*
By Paul Horsman**

For those readers interested in European Circuses but not able to visit them in their home countries, Rex Owens of Mercedes, Texas, offers good coverage of Circus Krone and Circus Knie. There are 2 Krone tapes and also one of Circus Knie. The Knie tape also includes scenes from Italian Circuses, one even presenting a parade, shown on the tape.

Krone Vol. I shows train unloading & setup, wagons arriving on the lot & backyard scenes during a performance. Vol. II goes into more detail of the morning lot scenes and complete set up. Vol. I includes circusy European circus music; Vol. II has background sounds. The Knie tape includes performance scenes and includes the music.

Krone Vol. II shows detailed coverage of the seats being erected, while the Knie tape concentrates on teardown of seats & other night scenes. Coverage of the shows show

the spectacular lighting visible at night & complete daytime lot coverage. The Knie tape has interesting coverage of the lead stock coming up the street & onto the lot. Also shown are tigers entering & exiting the top through the chutes and returning to their cages.

The massiveness of European shows is highly evident in all operations-unloading the train, spotting wagons on the lot, the various departments & the menagerie offerings. Also evident is the enthusiasm & excitement of the visiting public, looking forward to viewing a high quality performance. Care of the animals & people is extensively covered. All in all, the 3 videos give a good glimpse of circus life in another part of the world.

Tapes run 2 hours & are on Premium High-Grade Maxell Gold tapes. The Krone tapes are currently priced at \$23.50 each or a special price of 2 for \$45. The Knie tape price can be obtained by inquiry. Order from: Rex Owens,

1715 Valencia Ave, Mercedes, TX 78570-3947.

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

Mike and Silvius Piccolo, from Pittsburgh, report they had a great time visiting the Pittsburgh Shrine Circus for the 3 day run, April 9-11. Struppi Hanneford was the manager of this unit and the Piccolos had the run of the building. They visited with many friends, including Lucy Loyal and family. Ringmaster was David Maas & the acts included: Lance Ramos, cats; Aerial Display, Miss Dulce, Marinov Duo, Sir Sladek; Raul Castano, dogs; Alfonso's Big & Little, horses; Lance's 6 miniature horses; Giorgio & Luisa Marinov, aerial; Alfonso Loyal Riding School, with Lucy Loyal; the Vitals; David & Dana, magic; The Great Garveckio, comedy; Carmen Hall's Baboons; Sir Pepe's Swords; Benito, juggling; Castano & Co; Dania Kaseeva, hula hoops; Ramos' elephants; Winn family. Quite a line-up & I know Mike & Silvius had a great time!

Gary Thomson reports from Canada that upcoming dates for the **Martin Downs-Fred Logan** group will be May 14-16 at Northland Mall in London; June 12-13 at Argyle Mall, London and June 26-27 at Elgin Mall in St. Thomas. The June 12 & 13 dates we are holding the show in conjunction with **Tarzan Zerbini's** Shrine Circus. Gary is working on an article about the Montreal School of Circus Arts and will send it along when finished.

"LIFE OF A LION TAMER".....

The animals are treated far better than those in zoos & because of the daily exercise, have less time to sour and become mean-tempered. Each cat has a distinct disposition which Court studies & puts to use. The lazy ones he teaches to lie down and roll over, the spirited ones are trained to jump.

Court can usually sense trouble by the cat's eyes and switching tail. Rewards for a dutiful performance are horsemeat tidbits-the cat's favorite food. The tigers & lions, at their daily meal just before midnight, get 18 pounds of the meat. The smaller cats eat only half as much. He pays up to 11 cents a pound for the meat & over a year's period, the board bill of his cats is around \$35,000. This does not include the cost of soup fed to the Polar & Himalayan bears.

Liability insurance covering 10 assistants totals \$3500 a season. There's no insurance on the cats or himself because Court considers it bad luck. He believes precaution is better than paying premiums & anticipates emergencies before they happen. 2 battery lamps are kept near the ring in case of a power shortage during an evening performance. Cats see well in the dark.

Before becoming a trainer, Court was an acrobat & circus manager. Born in Marseilles, France, in 1883, he joined a tent show when 16 to escape a job in his father's soap factory. Young Alfred, working the high bar, did some 15,000 double back somersaults before having a serious fall. Then one evening at the Crystal Palace in Marseilles, he soared to high, struck against some low-hanging stage scenery & lit off the mat on the hard floor. The broken arm & knee cap ended his career as a tumbler, but after 6 years as a circus manager, he originated a hand-balancing act. One of the trio in the act is now Madame Court.

The couple signed with Ringling Bros. in 1914 and for 2 years toured America. In Mexico, the Courts organized their own show. The Frenchman became a lion trainer thru necessity after firing his Mexican cat man for drunkenness. In the 23 years since, Court has had one nervous breakdown, 4 cases of blood poisoning, 2 handshakes with death & innumerable minor wounds from the teeth & claws of half-wild beasts. His worst cat, he says, was Benguli-an Indian tiger. Benguli gave Court a case of blood poisoning that kept him inactive for 2 years. At this time, Court owned the second largest circus in Europe. He sold it, bought a villa & hotel in Nice and a stock farm in northern France. 2 years later, he was

again training animals. The most comic experience of his career happened in the French village of St. Amand. 10 lions and 2 tigers escaped. One of the tigers made straight for the home of 2 newlyweds about to retire for the evening. The honeymooners barricaded the door of the bridal suite with the nuptial bed & screamed for help. Court's assurance that there was no need for worry, the creature scratching at the door was merely a tiger, had anything but a pacifying effect. Friends rescued the bride & groom from their room with a ladder while Court went in search of the other cats.

One was found in a meat market, one in the local schoolhouse & one in a nearby woods. The others had not left the circus grounds. The cat who'd terrified the honeymooners spent the night stretched out before the couple's bedchamber & was captured with little trouble the following morning. The show went on that afternoon and Court gave his scheduled 2 performances.

Now he goes in the ring only during the evening performance. His chief assistant, Damoo Dhotre, who handles the matinee, is a 38-year-old Hindu. Damoo has been with the circus since he was 10 and with the exception of Court, is probably the best cat trainer in the world. Like Court, he has had his share of close calls. Several years ago, Damoo also worked with elephants. (Valentine Archives-no author noted.)

NEWS FROM THE LOS ANGELES ZOO

Tzambo, the Los Angeles Zoo's oldest silverback gorilla, died April 10th, following a physical that determined he had serious heart disease. He was estimated to be 28 years old, which is equivalent to about 60-years-old in humans.

It was during a 2-hour exam that a cardiologist, using an ultrasound machine, found serious heart problems in the 475-pound ape. Zoo vets went into this exam knowing that they might find signs of heart disease & aortic aneurysm. "It is not surprising to find heart ailments in gorillas this age," said Zoo vet Dr. Cynthia Stringfield. "It was the consensus of all the specialists present that if he were human, he would have been on a heart transplant list. Because of his heart problems, he could not have come out of anesthesia successfully."

A 9-member team of vets checked Tzambo for ailments because he had been acting ill for the past month. He had poor appetite & had been lethargic. He was back in his night holding area when he died of heart failure. Zoo vets & his longtime keeper, Jennifer Chatfield, were by his side. "He was so sweet & gentle. He was a strong silverback leader in one of our gorilla troops & a wonderful father. We're going to miss him tremendously," she said. Tzambo had 2 offspring: 11-year old Jim, at the LA Zoo and 3-year-old Hope, who lives at the Albuquerque Zoo.

"Barnum's Kaleidoscope"

Ringling Bros. has announced that their new show now has a web site for you to visit. And it is fantastic. Now, you can see for yourself the performers with the show. Great photos! They include Sylvia Zerbini and her Arabian horses; David Larible & Pipo Sosman, Jr, clowns; Nuts and Bolts, 5 musicians; Olga Rogacheva's trained geese; the Golden Statues; Kabanov Russian Troupe, performing acrobatics high above the ring on a swinging platform; Sylvia, trapeze; Picasso Jr.'s plate act; Guy Tell's bow and arrow act and in the finale, Sylvia on a beautiful white horse. The costumes are beautiful, as the pictures show.

The circus will have their world premiere in Century City, CA, playing there April 30 to May 23. Ticket prices, which you can purchase from their web site, run from \$22 to \$48. They will be in the San Francisco/Bay area at the San Mateo Expo Center June 15 to July 11. Ticket prices are \$22 to \$52. Please take a look at their new web page: www.barnumsk.com. You will enjoy yourself!

RINGLING ON-LINE STORE-COMING SOON!!

That's right! They are currently hard at work building the on-line store you've been asking for. Programs! Videos! T-shirts! Jackets! Toys! Posters! And much, much more. Rest assured that when the Ringling.com store is ready to go, we'll let you know about it! The new Barnum circus will also have items for sale soon on their web site!

"Two Baby Chimps Make Public Debut At Jungle of the Apes"—St. Louis Zoo

You have to visit the St. Louis Zoo web site to see the fantastic baby chimps, at www.stlzoo.org and go to the What's News page. 2 chimp babies, born at other zoos & abandoned by their mothers, are being hand-raised at the Zoo. For months, they have been reared behind the scenes at Jungle of the Apes by keepers & trained docent volunteers, within sight & sound of other chimps. Now, they are getting used to their new home. Eventually, they will meet a new chimp family. The docents will offer them familiar baby toys with which to play. The large space has trees & rope apparatus to explore. The chimps may snack on mashed banana & sweet potato or take a nap in the arms of their sitters.

Holly was born last March at Montgomery Zoo. Bakhari was born last April at North Carolina Zoo. Neither of their mothers was interested in raising a baby. From the

beginning, a crew of 11 trained docent volunteers have spent hundreds of hours with the little female chimps in shifts, 7 days a week. They hold the babies, play with them, nurture them. Like human babies, chimp babies do not thrive without a loving relationship. The Zoo's adult chimps, Molly & Smoke, have already successfully fostered 3 chimp youngsters plus a biological daughter of their own.

"The process of introducing new animals to a social group takes many months. The baby chimps are allowed to hear & see the other chimps long before they are actually introduced. Even then, they don't meet all of the family at once. It's a very gradual process," said Ingrid Porton, curator of primates at the Zoo. (You have to see the photos of the young chimps with these volunteers. They are sitting in the enclosure with the babies. One photo shows a baby kissing a lady volunteer. Another, shows a man laying down in the hay & a baby is sleeping on his chest, with her arms around him and the other baby is laying on the man's stomach. These photos are priceless! It shows how vulnerable & trusting these baby chimps are.)

****NEWS BABIES AT THE ZOO-LOS ANGELES****

Yoshiko, the chimp, surprised everyone with a brand-new baby girl, Toshi, on February 1. Keepers noticed she had put on weight, but dismissed the possibility she might be pregnant because all of the male chimps of reproductive age had undergone vasectomies. Could the father be 44-year-old Toto? 4-year-old Glenn? Chances are more likely that a dashing 8-year-old, Jerrard, is the father; his vasectomy has probably reversed itself. When she is more trusting with the baby, Zoo vets will perform DNA tests to establish paternity. Toshi was born the night of a rare, blue moon, lending more credence to the phrase, "once in a blue moon."

Neema, the giraffe, gave birth Feb. 4 to little Bariki, a boy. Bariki is Swahili for "blessing." He had to be taken to the Zoo's nursery because keeper, Robin, was concerned about his weak legs. Keepers bottle-fed him & gave him mother's milk that provides protection from disease. With his legs looking stronger, he was returned to his parents the next day. He shares the exhibit with his father, Kito, 18, & half brothers Raffiki, 7 months & Johari, 1. There are 2 other female giraffes at the Zoo. "Bariki is very people friendly. Because he is mother-reared, I expected him to be shy of people, but he is actually very curious," said Noll.

(See their pictures at www.lazoo.org/babies.html.)

RINGLING RED UNIT:

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; Lexington, KY-Rupp Arena: 6/3-6; Tucson, AZ-Convntn Ctr: 6/16-20; Phoenix, AZ-America West Arena: 6/23-7/4.

RINGLING BLUE UNIT:

San Antonio, TX-Freeman Arena: 5/12-5/16; Peoria, IL-Civic Center: 5/20-5/23; Fort Wayne, IN-Allen Cty Colism: 5/26-30; Columbus, OH-Schottenstein Ctr: 6/2-6.

CARSON & BARNES CIRCUS: Blackwell, OK-4/30; Alva-5/1; Woodward-5/2; Perryton, TX-5/3

UniverSoul Circus: Prospect Park, NY-4/21-5/11; Newark, 5/14-23; Philly-5/28-6/13; Boston-6/16-20.

Famous Cole Indoor Circus: Sidney, OH-5/7; Troy-5/8.

Hamid Circus Royale: 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.

Cirque Leonardo & Bobby Gibbs: Chicoutimi, Qc-4/30; Jonquiere-5/1; Dolbeau-5/2; Roberval-5/3; Clermont-5/4.

Circus Chimera: Fresno, CA-4/30-5/2

Reithoffer Shows: Glen Burnie, MD-4/28-5/9; Suffolk, VA-5/6-16; Pasadena, MD-5/12; Bensalem, PA-5/20-31

Royal Palace: Wyandotte, MI-4/28; Midland-4/29.

Hubler Shrine Circus: Holland, MI-6/5.

Circus World Museum Opening: May 8th.

BACK YARD

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

Amos Bolieau reports at high noon on April 9th, 48 very devoted circus fans & friends of the circus, met at Belmont hall in Manchester, NH for a gathering of Commodore Nutt Tent #165. Father Jerry Hogan gave a brief explanation for Life magazine reporter & photographer who were with him, gathering information for an article due out later this year on the daily life of a circus chaplain. Following him was Father Jack Toner with a blessing. Next, the cookhouse flag went up & all enjoyed a great variety of food: braised beef, fish & chips, chicken & spaghetti. A raffle was held and Clyde Reynolds won a Big Apple poster, donated by Frank Robie and Roland Kelly won a clown doll made by Mary Bolieau. Mary also made clown place settings. Wayne McCarey gave a preview of what is in the works for this year at the Big E.

Guest speaker was Barry "Grandma" Lubin, talking about his clowning career. Other guests were the Carletons, Ludstedts, Wayde & Peg Earl, Earl & Bernice Krauzer, the Walshs, Larry Crocker, Ed Motta & Dottie, Bob Commerford, Robt. Sugarman and a whole lot more. Amos hopes to see you all at the CFA Convention.

Brother J. Francis Dolphin reports the 59th Annual El Jebel Shrine Circus was held in Denver 3/26-28 & 4/2-4. To my present surprise, was to see 10 Siberian tigers under the direction of Bruno Blaszak, son of Ada Smieya, famous wild animal trainer going back to the days of Ringling under John Ringling North. She is as attractive as ever with her blond hair. Her son's tiger act was superb including a tiger walking back & forth on a "high wire." Ringmistress was Heidi Herriott. Acts included: Motorcycle Spectacular by the Anderson Brothers; Aerial display with Miss Victoria, Miss Martiza & Felix Duo; 6 elephants presented by Mike Donoho, highlight for me seeing an elephant balancing herself on a globe, which received an astounding applause from the audience; The Soaring Stars & The Esqueda Troupe; Break-away pole by Jay Cochrane; Mega Minnex; High Wire by The Sensational Murcia; The Human Projectile-Dave Smith, Jr. There were also elephant rides and pony rides.

From the Byrd Tent: Peoria, IL Shrine (Plunketts): June 10-13; Big Apple Circus: Arlington Park, Chicago: 6/12-17; Carden Circus-Godfrey, IL 5/24-25; Miniature Circus Exhibit: Arcola, IL-5/14-16; Kelly-Miller Circus: Jacksonville, IL-10/4; Carson & Barnes Circus: Havana, IL-8/18. Thanks, Charlie!

FOX 64



THE FOX!!!

My Dear Friends;

This time I decided to start early to write, so I will not forget things.

By now I guess you all were told that Sylvia Zerbini fell from the trap but I was told she was not badly hurt, so thank God for that.

Then I was told a funny story, any way it sounded funny to me. A vet came to inspect the tigers and he ask "How do you cook the meat for the tigers?" Also he looked at the tigers and complained, "How can I check these cats out, when I can not touch them?" The trainer ask them, "Would you like me to clime in there and wrestle them down and hold them, so you can inspect them"? I am sorry, but this takes the cake. Why vets, who do not know the first thing about wild animals feel qualified to give a report??

I also believe it is idiotic to have these giagantic cages being loaded in to the semi. In my opinion this indangeres the lions and tigers as they get thrown all over the place while traveling. You can not put a seat belt on a wild animal but you can have small cages so there is no way they can be tossed around. Also these cages are very hard to load. I saw it first hand.

Debbie Eldridge's mother just past away. She was on her way to the hospital. She was a long time member of Showfolks, she helped out quite a few time working behind the bar when I was bar manager. It is a great loss to Debbie, I know we all wish her our deepest condolence.

I am sure you all know Debbie, she now workes in the office of the Royal American Circus and before that for the Royal Palace Circus and before that she was for many years working as bartende for me at the Club and after I left she took over my position.

Now I like all of you to try and help me in any way you can. I am sure there is some television network producer who will see something good in circus. We need the International Competition televised. This will make the world know that circus is here to stay. I started it once here but it needs to be televised. If anyone can help, please do let me know. A S P.

By the way, the news about buying land in Texas was for those who have wild animals and have no place to go to as the restrictions are getting worse every day, and that place is zoned circus winter quarters I understand.

Lijana Wallenda Hernandez is here for short visit, she came for her Grandmothers funeral. But in a few days she will be going back to Chicago to join her husband. She told me that she has a nice apartment there and really likes it. While here she took her mom and Erangida with baby and yours truly out for lunch.

By the way Venicio Vasques just got his divorce from Golda Ashton and Golda moved to New York City. Venisio is taking care of there two children and grandson. Daughter Erangida will be working the Wheel and the Pole for the Nock Family in Texas with her dad. Also working will be Rietta & Lyric and one other man. Sorry I can not remember his name. Oh yes, Nocolas Wallenda Troffer is kind of sweet on Erangida.

Just talked to Jeanie Sleeter Singleton, and she is enjoying her retirement.

Every one ask me about La Norma. She is fine just always worried about son Gilbert. She hopes for a kidney transplat for him. So far no luck.

Charlotte Bell Kora lost her battle with cancer. It is so sad. her daughter Tosca called me to let me know there is no hope any more. The doctors sent her home, as they can not do anything any more for her. Me, I do not give up, there are miricles happening. I hope Charlotte will have one. Just got the call that our Charlotte left us to a better place. She is in peace now with no more pain. Charlotte, we all loved you very much. Save us a place up there so we can all be together again.

Well, I guess I will quit writing for this one.

Lots of Love

Your Fox

THE FOX LOVES YOU ALL

NEWS FROM THE SAN DIEGO ZOO

"So many Web guests have been asking how Onya-Birri is doing, our rare albino koala. He is doing just fine and celebrated his first birthday Sept. 1. He spent his first 6 months in the pouch of his mother, Banjeeri. He clung to his mom for about a year, and is now exploring his surroundings on his own. Onya-Birri is the only albino koala in a zoo facility, although albino koalas have been known to occur in the wild. The San Diego Zoo has the largest koala colony outside Australia. The Zoo contributes funds to the Australian Koala Foundation's "Koala Habitat Atlas," a koala habitat-conservation effort in Australia.

****"ELEPHANT WALK"****

By Gordon Turner

The articles by Paul Horsman, pertaining to the animal menagerie on the James E. Strate Shows, I enjoyed and found to be very interesting as my acquaintance with Bert Pettus and his family goes back to the large King Bros. Circus of the 1950s. I have in my collection a brass studded elephant head piece that Bert gave to me during that Era. My last visit to the show was in 1956 when they were stranded in Somerville, NJ, only bologna sandwiches were being served in the cookhouse and my offer to Bert and family of a meal couldn't be accepted as the State Police wouldn't permit anyone from the show to leave the lot.

The large menagerie that Bert headed up on the Strates Shows was a very extensive operation & consisted of a hippopotamus, Polar bear, hyenas, monkeys, the 6 elephants and various other animals. The show, which was first fronted by a typical colorful canvas bannerline, was to be later featured under a very large open front canopy and presented to the public as a free attraction. There were times the animals were split into 2 groups and displayed under separate canopies facing each other from across the midway.

The elephants presented by Bert & his daughter, Sandy, performed also on the Midway as a free attraction. Bert was always working to improve the show & I remember his enthusiasm in showing off the new steel cage wagons they were building. Also added to the Strates' train were 2 colorful orange stock cars beautifully illustrated with Polar bears & elephants pictorials. One of these rail cars is presently at the Circus World Museum in Baraboo, Wis. A folder with several black & white photos of the animal attractions, along with show owner James E. Strate was put out by the Press Dept. in the 1960s.

Then came, in my opinion, the best setup of all. Bert and his family were circus people and they knew how to do it. A very large 4 pole bale ring top was erected lengthwise just behind the carnivals' big lighted front entrance. As the public filed through the ticket gates, one entered this very spacious, well lit menagerie tent, housing all the cage wagons, open corrals and to view all the animals on display before passing on through to the Midway, it was just great.

One one occasion, while visiting the Hagen Bros. Circus here in Albany, NY, the word got out that their elephant truck tipped over on the bridge that crosses the Hudson River. The elephant was OK but the truck was blocking

traffic from both directions. We drove down to the Strates lot and Bert took his truck to rescue & deliver the elephant to the circus grounds. Bert always loved to have visitors and he treated & welcomed everybody with his hospitality.

After Bert and his family made their departure from the carnival, many changes took place with the menagerie. The animals had dwindled to only 3 elephants & they were now under the direction of long time elephant man, Steve Fanning, who, along with Irish, also operated a pony ride and a small wildlife show on the Midway.

I remember the 3 MGM elephants, that were once owned by the Polack Bros. Circus, being presented on that show by Pinky and June Madison around 1953. Now Queenie, Happy and Sally were being presented in a tent behind a large show front depicting & advertising them as Tarzan's Original Elephants.

In 1972, when the Strates Shows came to Albany, they did not play on the well-known established circus grounds but moved to another location in the town of Colonie. This change would present big problems for both Steve Fanning & the elephants, as the only direct route from the railroads to the new showgrounds was via a major interstate highway.

Steve, after unloading the elephants, and without a truck, left the yards by the arrowed route for the wagons & started out for the showgrounds & after walking for several miles along the shoulder of this interstate, wasn't discovered by the State Police until he was almost half way to the lot. The officers ordered him to leave the highway immediately.

Steve who explained the situation of having to follow the arrows found this wasn't what the officers had in mind. Steve, then, along with a few choice words, asked the question if they wanted him to take the elephants through everybody's backyard. The puzzled officers looked at each other & told him to proceed, following the arrows. The newspapers the next morning stated the elephants found walking along the interstate didn't get arrested but their trainer did.

During the run of the shows' date, I visited Irish and Steve several times. He was very upset about the situation and was concerned about the teardown night & the return trip with the elephants.

I really felt sorry for him & wanted to help somehow. With my knowledge of all the back roads & the distance involved, I considered the possibilities but

(Continued on Page 13)

***** "THE REAL DEAL" *****

By Mike Cecere

Well, the jangling of the phone brought news of the passing of yet another of our industry's Giants, Don "Okie" Carr.

Don Carr or "Okie" as everyone called him was a master trainer of wild animals and elephants. He started at the bottom like the best of us working his way up to being the zoological supt. of the world's largest tented circus, Carson and Barnes.

And he never forgot where he came from. He taught those who wanted to learn to be trainers and got the best out of the rest in a management style that would be the envy of many a corporate executive.

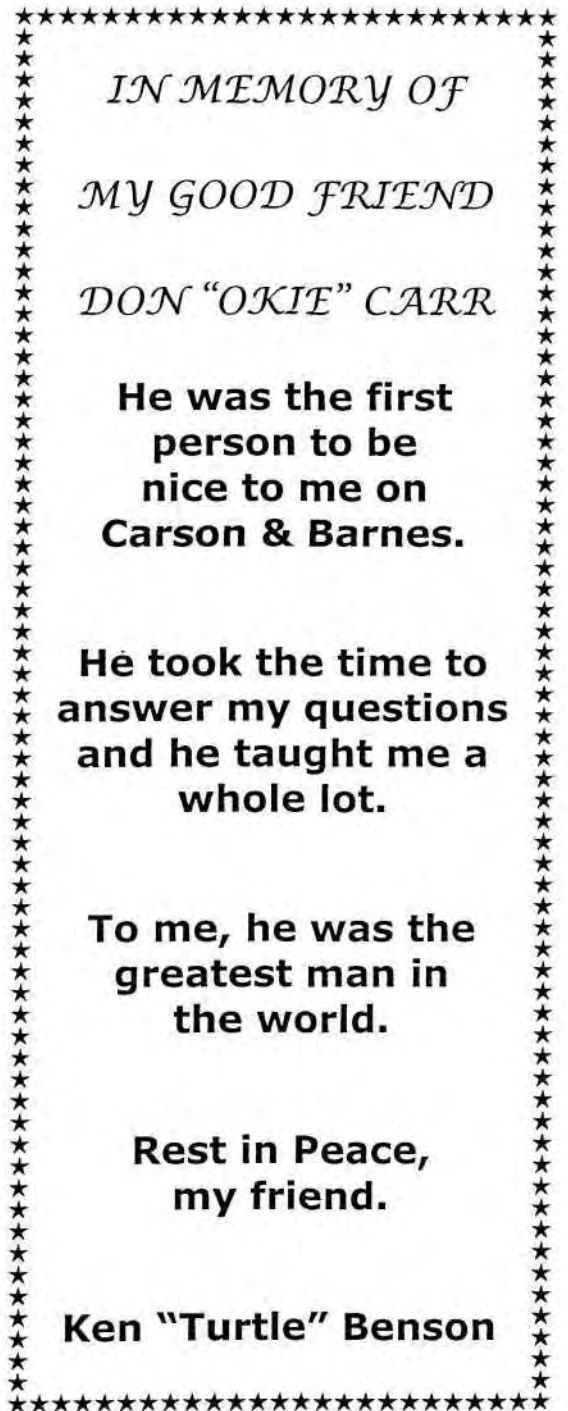
For decades, he watched over the vast menagerie of the Miller/Byrd families, turning out some amazing acts. A sensational wild animal act, lion riding on elephant and training and raising what is acclaimed as the largest and best looking herd of elephants on any circus today.

He did what we all hope to do, he left an important legacy behind. He was a man of good humor, had a hearty laugh, never let himself be stopped no matter what the weather. In good times and bad, he was always a true showman.

His animals, his family and the show all got his attention and he did a super job with it all. So when we, his friends and colleagues, sit around and tell the tales, we'll talk about all the good times and the things Okie did.

And I know we'll all agree that **DON OKIE CARR**, wild animal trainer, elephant trainer and showman, was **The Real Deal!!**

Becky Ostroff reports she worked on Kelly-Miller Circus from 1990-94. She did trapeze, rings & was an elephant tada girl. The Kelly-Miller elephants lived in the same barn as the Carson & Barnes elephants & she remembers going there for the first time, walking past all the "girls" to the back of the barn to meet Nina, Viola and Brittany. I felt like they could all touch me-it felt like a very small passage. That barn has a lot of history. It looks like a museum. It was spring in Hugo & we took the elephants to the practice barn. Every spring for 5 years, we would go thru the same ritual. The 2nd or 3rd spring, Okie paid me a supreme compliment. He told me I should come work with him on C&B & we would have a great act. I thought that was pretty sweet. He gave his opinion of our work when asked. He was a very decent human being.



*IN MEMORY OF
MY GOOD FRIEND
DON "OKIE" CARR*

**He was the first
person to be
nice to me on
Carson & Barnes.**

**He took the time to
answer my questions
and he taught me a
whole lot.**

**To me, he was the
greatest man in
the world.**

**Rest in Peace,
my friend.**

Ken "Turtle" Benson

"Dottie's Life Was a Carnival"

By Janet Leiser, Tampa Tribune

Born with her feet attached to her stomach, Dorothy "Dottie" Wright was forced to remain still the first years of her life. Her legs were freed when she was 5 & for the next 87 years, Dottie didn't seem to stop.

At 13, she ran away from her family's Philipsburg, PA home to join the circus. Her family had moved to Penn. from England in 1912, when Dottie was 8. Over the years, she swung from the high wire, trained elephants, wrestled alligators, performed acrobatics on horses in Wild West shows, danced & sang vaudeville & served as a nurse during World War II.

And she loved. She married 6 times, spending 42 years with her 5th husband, Edward "Pappy" Scully, until his death. Her last husband, Clarence Thomas, died in 1989. She played the piano, organ, ukulele and steel guitar.

"Everyone loved that lady. You couldn't stay down with her around. She was one in a billion & that's an understatement. If she didn't have the money, she'd put a show together & make it," said Gary Zirkler, a disabled Vietnam War vet who knew her from the American Legion. Dottie and Pappy Scully, winter residents in Riverview since the 1940s, helped build the post 52 years ago. Until her death, she was the oldest member.

The past commander of the post said, "She didn't judge, she said that was God's business. Whatever she had, she'd help others with it." She lived most of the past 25 years at the International Independent Showmen's Assn. retirement center in Riverview. Dottie made a meager living for a while with her own gator show, traveling from town to town with a circus. She wrestled a 14' crocodile 4 times a day. The 4 reptiles-2 alligators & 2 crocodiles-ate better than mother & daughter. While Dottie & her daughter, Shirley's daily food ration was a quarter can of beans, the gators received red meat 3 times a day. "She always told me she'd sell me to the gypsies if I lost one of her gators. If it rained, you pulled the blanket over your head," Shirley said. They washed in rivers. In the 1930s, they moved to NYC, where her mother was in vaudeville. Between shows, she sang with her mother on street corners or the Staten Island Ferry for tips.

Dottie didn't slow down until she was placed in a nursing home in March. She was admitted to the hospital 2 days before her death January 28th. That afternoon, she talked to Shirley on the phone. She said, "I'm in God's world now. She ate dinner just before 6 & fell asleep for the last time. Survivors include her daughter, 4 grandchildren, 20 great-grandchildren and seven great-great grandchildren.

*****MORE NEWS FROM THE L. A. ZOO*****

Four of the 7 female chimps are taking birth control pills after tests indicated 2 more pending births. The surprise Jan. 31 birth of Toshi by Yoshi, prompted Zoo vets to check for possible additional pregnancies within the troop. Tests show that Gracie, 12, and Regina, 15, are

pregnant. The urologist who helped with vasectomies in 1996, said that there is 1% failure rate in humans. The rate for chimps is unknown. It could be 6 months to a year before the DNA test is done on Toshi, as she still clings to her mother. Their keeper crushes the birth control pills & puts them into yogurt given to the females individually. The chimps began taking the pills Feb. 21. For Zoo officials & visitors, the good news is that all babies will be able to stay with their families. The new Chimpanzees of Mahale Mountains habitat was built to comfortably house many chimps. It has 4 bedrooms, a day room & an upper & lower penthouse. Between that & many nooks & crannies, where they like to make their nests to sleep in, there is room for the babies.

****Ringling Special CD Offer For Fans****

A CD-ROM highlighting the 129th Edition of the Greatest Show on Earth! What's on it? Glad you asked! Place it in your regular CD player & you can hear 2 sensational songs from the 129th Edition: "Those Fabulous Animals" & "Put A Little Circus In Your Life." Put it in your computer & there is about 45 min. of video clips from the show-& from the making of the show! You'll visit Winter Quarters. You'll see clowns practicing & pie-throwing! You'll see how the floats are made. And much more! You'll even visit the RB Center for Elephant Conservation! (Plus it has the coolest RB screensaver you've ever seen!) Right now, this special CD is available only to circus goers who purchase 129th Edition programs in NY and Philly-but they've arranged a ver special limited-time offer for you.

Call 1-800-466-0844 before JUNE 1st and you can order a 129th program, with the Bonus CD, for just \$10 plus \$4 shipping. Or send a check or money order to: Sells-Floto, Inc., 8230-A Sandy Ct, Jessup, MD 20794. Attn: Mail Order. (Please order this soon, as Ringling said not to offer it in the next Back Yard, as it might be too late!)

DRESSING ROOM GOSSIP * 1952 *

Ringling: Rusty's softball team included: Maggie Smith, Prince Paul, Frankie Saluto, Charlotte Bell. Bab's team included: Babs Graham, Jimmy Armstrong, Jeannie Sleeter, Curtis Genders, Terry Loyal, Marian Seifert. Great to see Fay Alexander back after his accident. Jeannie Krause joined the show. Polack Western: Mac has named the new baby elephant Skeeter. Tom Packs: Picnic arranged by Victoria Zacchini, Kay Francis & Astrid. Connie Welde is practicing tight wire.

"ELEPHANT WALK".....

possibilities but everything had to be worked out. Naturally, I didn't want to get Steve arrested again along with myself and the elephants.

My backyard neighbor at the time was the Chief of Police for the town of Colonie where the show was playing. After a brief visit & explaining the situation, he asked what my plans were & what route I wanted to take. He gave me the permission & said they would also help us get the elephants to the train, but we had to start early to avoid the shopping center rush traffic by 9 a.m.

Now knowing I had the fix on the situation, sometimes it helps when everybody in town knows you are the Circusman. I returned to the showgrounds & explained everything to Steve and we planned to meet real early the next morning.

I set my alarm for 4 a.m. & arrived on the deserted, darkened carnival, hearing only a barking dog and the purring of a generator to supply a lone half-lit light tower.

I stumbled across the shadowy midway to find Irish, who told me that Steve was already up by the road. As I made my approach, the view of the outline of the 3 elephants, silhouetted in the moonlight, was a sight I will never forget. I have to admit, my heart was halfway up in my throat as I knew they were waiting for me.

Steve handed me a bull hook; he took up the lead and I brought up the rear. Then, in the darkness one could only hear the soft sweeping sounds of each of the elephants footsteps as our journey began. It was 5 a.m. A patrol car slowly and silently passed, confirming the elephants were on the way.

This endeavor was to be a 10 mile walk, taking us along a major highway, several back roads & through various suburban neighborhood streets and ending up at the rail yards in a very populated area, but avoided completely the problem of the interstate.

During the course of our route at various points, a patrol car waited & reported on our progress. Dawn was just breaking as we arrived at the halfway gas station that was arranged as a watering and rest stop for the elephants.

The elephants were very well behaved during most of the trip. We saved quite a few residential mailboxes along the way by keeping them tailed up. The only real crisis was a very low hanging tree branch which one of the elephants couldn't resist grabbing and kept right on walking with the group until the long cracking sound ended and tailed up again, after depositing it in her

mouth. At one point an elephant was playing a game by walking along with 2 right legs up on the curbing. It was amazing the willingness and response to commands that these large animals acknowledged and behaved to during the trip.

Steve got a laugh when a little old lady came out in her bathrobe & big floppy pink slippers to get the morning newspaper, saw the elephants and ran back in the house.

We arrived at the shopping center before the stores were open and were met by several waiting police cars with red lights flashing while Steve, myself, the three tailed-up elephants, including the one dragging the tree branch, all crossed the busiest of intersections safely at 8:45 a.m., right on time.

Within 15 minutes we were in the railyards and the elephants, finding their stock car, started to trumpet, knowing they were home. Steve brought out a large tub and the elephants enjoyed a long drink. Louis Brusie arrived at 9 a.m. and drove us back to the show to have breakfast in the cookhouse.

Steve and Bert have since passed on and the big menagerie on the Strates Shows is a memory in which many of us enjoyed having a part in. Several years ago I visited Irish and during our conversation she asked if I remembered the "Elephant Walk." I replied HELL YES! How could I ever forget it.

Famous Elephant Trainer, Donald "Okie" Carr Passes Away in Hugo, OK.

Don "Okie" Carr, 58, died April 15th and services were held in Hugo, OK April 20th. Okie was about 16 years old when he joined Carson and Barnes Circus, and was there for about 40 years. Okie also worked the cat act. Mary Rawls said she & Harry were on the King show with Okie. More information in the next Back Yard.

"DRESSING ROOM GOSSIP" * 1952 *

Polack Western: Mac MacDonald made a gold-plated bull hook with chrome handle for his wife, Peggy. **Arden Kriesch** is sewing her own wardrobe, coached by the **Ward-Bell** girls. **Rietta Wallenda** is sporting a hanging garden on her house trailer. **Clyde Beatty:** 2 of **Dorothy Herbert's** Chihuahuas had 11 pups! **Janice Franco & Geo. Voise** were married in center ring. **Polack Eastern:** **Don Dorsey** entertained **Nina Unus, Bea Konyot & Bob Lorraine** at the Desert Inn swim pool.

RUMBLINGS FROM THE CRUMMY

By Brian Nunn

*The Great American show, 1991 or so. I was working for Big John Walker and driving the spool truck. One week day, in the middle of the second show, right after Jose Torres' juggling act, the cops grabbed Jose as he was walking out the back door. They said, "You're under arrest for bank robbery." They cuffed him and took him away.

Well, as it turned out, the bank was robbed at the same time Jose had been working his juggling act in the first show. Fortunately, they brought him back to the lot (wardrobe and all) before we jumped to the next town.

*We were pulling and spotting on a lot somewhere in New Jersey. You know how it goes, the stake line was down, the big top was going up, when we noticed a big orange bob-tail tractor, Schneider, I think. The driver came around at 11 a.m. or so, and saw there was no way to drive off until the big top was down. He seemed to be pretty happy to have to stay the rest of the day. (He had an attractive woman with him, that had small feet, with yellow high heeled shoes).

We gave them free tickets and cotton candy. New Jersey will surprise you in ways you don't want it to and surprise you in ways you'll laugh about for a long time. But in my experience, it's usually the first of the two.

*The shooting in Colorado is a shame and a crime. I don't know how these things come to happen. To me, it seems the good, old-fashioned way of a fist fight settled a lot of differences. It seems to me, today's society and morals, discourage this practice; violence, you know. I would rather challenge and fist fight, than shoot somebody or get shot. I think it's a coward that holds a grudge and settles it by sneaking in and opening fire.

*If you keep moving and stay busy, it's good for you. In my opinion, animals have it better on a mud show 'cuz they get to do a little work, gain a good appetite and a basic, positive outlook on their environment, with the occasional disturbance that

happens with busy people and animals. The pygmy goats had it best of all. They would sproing right over the petting zoo fence and wander the lot like a couple of pet dogs, mostly around the floss (cotton candy) joint. The truck driver and his wife wanted to take them on the road with them as pets.

BLUE HAWAII ELEPHANTS

By Mike Cecere

Recently famed animal trainer & showman, Kent Ghirard, of Honolulu, Hawaii, brought an interesting case to my attention. It's always good to get mail from Kent, especially in the winter when just handling a letter from Hawaii warms you up.

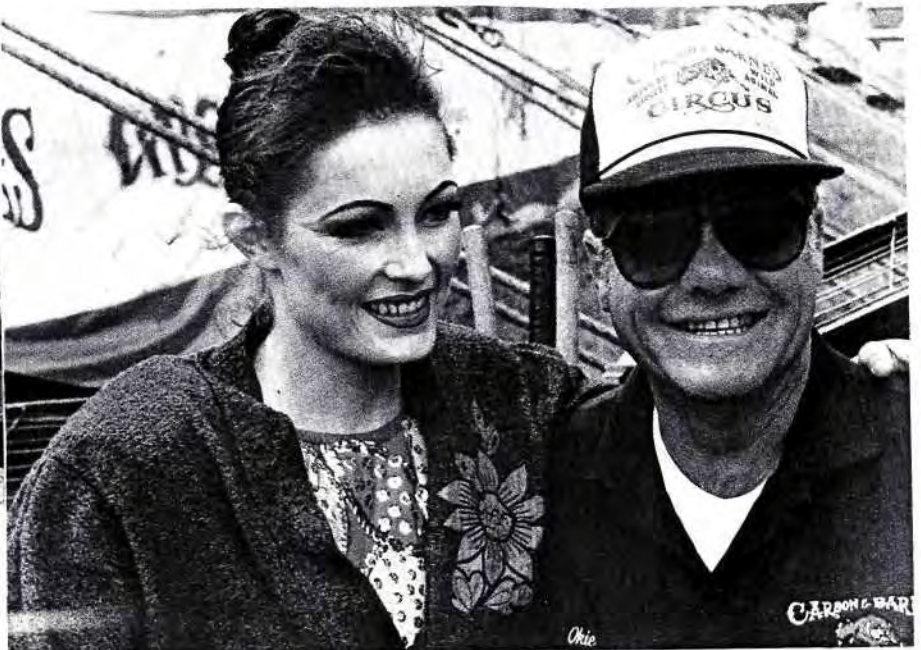
He recently sent me a set of clippings from newspapers regarding the elephants at the Honolulu Zoo. I'd heard several rumors about them and Kent was kind enough to give me the complete set of news stories so I could clear things up for Back Yard's interested readers.

It all started several years ago when the US Dept. of Interior gave special permits to the Honolulu Zoo to import 2 beautiful Asian female elephants. Tho there has been a ban on open importation of endangered species, such as Asian elephants into the US, qualified public or private organizations or people can apply for special permits providing they are going to do something redeeming with them, such as breeding.

Well, the 2 females, "Mari" and "Vaigai" joined the other happy campers at the Honolulu Zoo, under the expert care of Zoo director, Ken Redman and his staff. A plan to build a breeding facility and obtain a bull Asian elephant was drawn up but a series of natural disasters and the extraordinary cost of building large buildings (triple what it is on the mainland due to shipping) put it all on hold. (We're talking several million dollars, folks!).

So, the USDI inquired if there were still plans to breed the elephants since that's why they allowed their import. And somehow a rumor started that the USDI would want the elephants sent off to where they could be in a breeding program.

Well, that opened the flood gates of public clamor for the money to be found somehow. And the Honolulu city council sharpened their pencils and come up with the financing, much to the delight of everyone, especially the elephants. Now, which lucky Bull elephant gets to move to Hawaii? Any volunteer elephant people to ride there with him???



Daughter & Father - Amy Rosales-Carr & Okie Carr.

STRATES SHOW



Back Yard
1522 Clinton Blvd.
Bloomington, IL 61701

