

BACK YARD

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The Man Who Tried 9,000 Times Hard Work is the Big Trick in the Circus Trade

By Franklin Fargo-Liberty, August 7, 1926

(From ISU Archives Circus Collection)

The greatest tragedy of the circus performer's life is that, while most persons enjoy the circus, very few indeed really understand and appreciate it.

The performer tries to make his act graceful, suave; to give it what he calls "the class." "The class" requires him to perform the most difficult feats with the minimum of apparent endeavor. It imparts finish to his act. It is his technique. The circus management encourages him, for "the class" is the ambition of the circus as a whole. But both showmen and performers have been somewhat amazed to discover, as time goes on, that "the class" is not entirely an asset. And for an interesting reason: A circus performance moves quickly. The most costly acts seldom fill more than 7 or 8 minutes. Thus the audience has no opportunity to scrutinize carefully what the performers do or to reflect upon the often amazing degree of effort involved.

It follows that acts which have the most "class" are frequently mistaken for acts which are the least difficult because the performers go through them adroitly, gracefully and seemingly without any great exertion. This is unfortunate, not only from the performer's standpoint but from the standpoint of the public as well because the circus has almost everything else, becomes increasingly enjoyable the more one knows about it.

Take, for instance, the case of Ernest and Charles Clarke. The Clarkes are considered by many showmen the greatest high-trapeze performers in the world. Their great-great-grandfather was a circus performer, so they were "born to the circus." Ernest is now 42; his brother is 18 months younger; and they have been practicing ever since they can remember. "Among our principal tricks is the somersault and pirouette," said Ernest. "We attempted to accomplish it 6 times daily for 2 years-or 3,600 times before we did it at all."



*Ernest Clarke, of the famous Clarke
trapeze team.*

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Cole 1942

Eleanor Schagar
Gladys Peacock



1940



Al House and
Mabel Stark
Toyko, 1955
Thanks to Al for
this great photo.

I would like to
borrow any photos
of Teresa Ramos for the
next issue. I have an 8x10
by Charlie DeWein, but I
do not want to cut it up.
Thanks, Cherie.

Circus Pages Opens In Arcadia

By Ken "Turtle" Benson

Jorge Pages brought his show into the Arcadia National Guard Armory for 2 shows Jan. 17 and this was their opening day. I went down around 10:30 that morning to see if I could do any running for them and they were all set up. Jorge gave me the grand tour of his new elephant truck, brand new for this year. I returned for both shows, which were both full. Without going on and on about his quality show, I've got to mention ringmaster James Earheart's new act, AMBX bike act!

This guy has a lot going for him. This year he is giving his fine juggling act a rest and, along with Jorge's youngest daughter, really wows the kids with this bike act. For all the Tom Traditionalists, you only had to look at the audience to see how much it was enjoyed. All the animals looked and worked good, as is always the case, and Jorge gave Arcadia a great show. He is truly one of the young show owners to watch.

Barnum's Kaleidoscope In Houston

By Charlie Simpson

For the last several months, I had been hearing reports of the new Ringling tent show, Barnum's Kaleidoscope and I was very happy to hear that the show would play Houston, Texas in December and January. During the set-up of the show, I went down to watch and had a very nice visit with my old friend, Charlie Horthybagi, who is tent master. It was easy to see that this was going to be something special with a beehive of activity. With the show moving on over 50 trucks, there was plenty going on. On Dec. 27, I went to an evening performance and approaching the lot, I saw the light show being projected on the outside of the big top.

The whole lot was surrounded by a white picket fence and entering the lot, there was the big red ticket wagon and the front was transformed into a garden setting with park benches for the comfort of the waiting patrons. The front door is a large display of "Barnum's Kaleidoscope" and you enter through the "O" in the sign. While you are waiting for doors, the Hassani troupe comes out front with drumming, dancing and acrobats on a Persian rug to amuse the crowd and get everyone in the mood for what is to come. Entering the reception tent, which is huge,

you are surrounded by food, drink and souvenir booths, with an old circus wagon in the middle of the tent in this art-nouveau setting. The performers and staff come out and before you know it, a party is going on with some of the performers doing bits of their acts, a small band is playing and everyone is having a good time.

Then the performers lead the crowd into the big top and what a magnificent sight this is. Here is the most elegant seating you will see anywhere with all seats red plush velvet and all details done for the comfort of the patrons. The backdrop and performer's entrance is enormous with the band of 10 players above it and this golden sculptured backdrop is a sight for the eye.

While the crowd is getting seated, there is David Larible playing the part of a bumbling usher and he and his sidekick, Pipo, the whiteface European clown, keep the audience amused until the show begins. The show begins with a Charivari of the performers, with David putting on his makeup in the center of the ring and the performers assist him in dressing for the show.

Then act after act perform and with so much going on, I will only try to mention the acts. The show is built around the many antics and skits of David Larible and having seen him many times in the big shows, he is so much better and funnier in this one-ring setting.

Pipo does a number of musical numbers at the beginning with bottles, pans, whistles, and you name it, and then acting like a little lost waif is Fanny Kerwin, as she ambles through the show watching the wonders. Later, you are in for a big surprise when she becomes a beautiful acrobat.

There is the tumbling and acrobatics of the Bogino and Hassani Troupes, the Kabanov take the Russian Swing to new heights, Olga Rogacheva's act, with her geese, is unique, along with help from dwarf Istavan Toth, who even though he is one of the little people, is outstanding in his strength and comedy. The Golden Statues is an audience pleasing act and the juggling of Picasso, Jr. is more than spectacular.

It is unfortunate that Sylvia Zerbini was unable to perform her trapeze act due to a broken wrist, but this was replaced by the hair hang act of Michele Ayala which was adequate. Sylvia then works her beautiful 6 white horses in their Liberty act. For comedy, we have 5 elderly English gentlemen who bring the clown band to new heights. These guys are absolutely crazy which gives them the name of Nuts and Bolts. They play every kind of musical instrument imaginable including a Rolls Royce muffler and a toilet. (Continued on Page 6)

The Man Who Tried 9,000 Times.....

Then it was exceedingly crude and imperfect in form; it had, in other words, no 'class.' "So we rehearsed it 6 times daily for 3 years more-or a total of 9,000 times-before we exhibited it to the public. Yet in our regular performance its essential parts fill just one-half second, while, including all preliminary motions and gestures, it is completed usually in less than half a minute.

The trick consists of myself, the leaper, swinging off my platform, high in the top of the tent, with hands gripped on a bar that hangs at the end of 2 ropes. In midair, I hurtle myself into 2 somersaults and as the latter one is finished, revolve in a pirouette. Meanwhile, my brother Charles, the catcher, swinging from his bar on the opposite side of the trapeze, times his movements so that his hands, which are hanging downward, grip mine just as I start to fall."

"The individual parts of the trick are not difficult for a circus performer; but to synchronize the several elements of the climax perfectly in the short span of half a second is quite difficult. Two or 3 others of our tricks were as difficult to master and are as quickly gone through. We attempted a feat known as '2 pirouettes in the hands' for 3 years-or more than 5,000 times-and were entirely unsuccessful. So we abandoned it as impossible. After another year, however, we returned to it and perfected it in about 1800 additional trials and rehearsals. Two-fifths of a second is required to accomplish the essentials of that feat, which, including its preliminaries, occupies hardly a minute. We start from the same positions as in performing the double somersault and pirouette. I leap from my bar and catch my brother's hands. Charles, of course, is hanging head downward."

"We make a complete swing (about 45 degrees of a circle) with our hands locked together. When we reach the maximum elevation on our return trip through the air, and are over the center of the net, Charles releases his grip. I perform 2 pirouettes and catch my brother's hands again, before gravity and the pendulum-like movement of his bar carry him out of reach."

"I have to be quick in the pirouettes because if I fall more than about 18" before rejoining my brother, the trick fails. The 3 somersaults-the last of the trio of principal tricks we happen to be using this season is similar to the double somersault and pirouette, except that a somersault replaces the pirouette."

"We have been exhibiting this trick for about 12 years. It was brought out of rehearsal about 3 years after the

double somersault and pirouette and it required only about 2 years to perfect because a great deal of the preliminary work had been done. Yet in all the 12 years of its public exhibition we have performed it only 900 times more than its 2-year rehearsal called for."

"We have mastered a total of 20 tricks, all of which are timed differently. That is, each of them requires me to go to a slightly different elevation before I leave my bar and Charles to seize me out of the air at a little different juncture. Our act, however, is seldom the same. We follow no routine. I do whatever I please. And the funny thing is that I never have to let my brother know what I'm going to do. We have no signals; we seem to have a sort of mental telepathy. I suppose it's because we have gone over and over the same things so many times we understand each other instinctively. A circus man knows what that means-all the work that's behind it. But the public doesn't. Sometimes I think it's better not to have an act too well finished because it's unquestionably a fact that the more you perfect a really difficult act, the easier it seems. And the public's inclination is to take matters at their face value. Look at the rosin-back horse-the horse on which the equestrians perform."

"His stuff looks simple-just to trot around and around the ring. But he is probably the most highly trained animal in the show. Before he can be used, he has to be taught to make the circuit of the ring always in a certain number of strides: 14 to 16 is the average in a 42' circle. His gait must never vary. He must never falter or stop, no matter what happens. If he does, the equestrian, who as likely as not is turning a somersault on his back, will suffer a fall that may easily be fatal. Yet I'll venture that not more than one person in 50,000 who comes to the circus thinks of the rosin-back as a trained animal. Most of them never think of him at all. Europe has produced most of the great circus performers because there the facilities for training have always been better. In every town of any size there is a municipal hippodrome, where one circus will play for as long as 6 weeks, changing its performance frequently. The apparatus, of course, is kept in place, so that the performers can use it in the mornings. And they have an opportunity to train their children." "The American circus, on the other hand, is always on the move. The apparatus is seldom in place before the afternoon performance is virtually ready to begin and the performers can use it for their own purposes only an hour or so a day-that is, between the afternoon and the night shows."

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HAVE I GOT A JOB FOR YOU!

By Sloan Damon

Back in June '87, my dear old pal, Mike Cecere, and I were talking. I was looking for work with elephants but nothing was shaking. Mike gave me a call back a couple of hours later at my Dad's place, "Have I got a job for you."

He gave me a fast run down of what it was. Taking care of some animals and snakes at a roadside golf course that also had circus acts in a beach resort in North Carolina. He told me a man by the name of Henry Hampton would be calling me.

I waited for a call to come in from Henry Hampton, giving me more information about this job. (What it entailed, how much money I needed to do this job, etc.), and I asking in return, what he expected of me. I would be replacing a guy that had been bitten by a snake.

Finally, I get a call back, so I told him what I wanted for wages and that I required a place to stay. Standard push and pull of job negotiation, he stalls by saying he'll call me back.

In the meantime, I call good 'ole Mike back to tell him all about what I had discussed with Henry and he told me to hold tight and if I needed him, to call anytime. Henry calls back, deal; "I'll have a plane ticket for you at the airport tomorrow and we can discuss this further in person."

I fly down to North Carolina to finish working out the details with Henry and we are able to strike a deal; then Henry, with a gleam in his eye, shows me this little snake pit he has told me all about. The deal seemed to be crumbling right before my eyes; in this little snake pit, as Henry called it (20' circle and 6' deep), there were 100 venomous snakes. Copperheads, Cottonmouths and Eastern Diamond Back Rattlers and Cane Breaker Rattlers. As I peered into this pit, a million and one reasons came to mind why I should turn tail and head home, but being in this sort of business for 12 years, I know a deal, so I held my head high and prayed.

Now, remember that I have been an elephant trainer for these past years and had hit a dry spell,

so snakes are new to me. The job I signed up for was jumping into this pit of hell 5 times a day and hope beyond hope that I am able to jump back out after the show, with no bites. The snake show comprised of me jumping into the pit and handling these dangerous creatures, by milking the venom, showing the crowd there are lovely long fangs and explaining how dangerous they are.

The first night after I have seen this pit of hell, I called Mike and asked him what the hell did you get me into and is there any way out? And if any of you know Mike, you will understand this response, "You can do this, I have faith, just don't get bit." And with that he hung up the phone with a snicker. I promptly called Ken Fess, breeder of primates and snake expert for some healthy advise. Ken carefully explained the do's and don'ts of handling these snakes and a few trade secrets. And he wished me luck. Three months of knee shaking, total unadulterated fear, as I jumped into this pit daily, 5 times a day for 7 days a week, and I am unbiten and still alive to share this little tail.

When I wasn't in the pit, Henry had me do an alligator show and general care of the other animals in his shows. I made a few good friends there, Popcorn, the Clown and Norbu, and his daughter, with many memories that I will take with me forever when the show closed down on Labor Day. This is one of a few stories that I have from my many years in this business and I will be glad to share some more in the future. Until then, Sloan.

***** *News From Our Circus Friends*

Paul Holley reports the **Circus World Museum's** opening day will be Saturday, May 6. The **Wallenda Tent's** annual outing with the **Zor Shrine Circus** (George Carden, Producer), Dane County Expo Center, Madison, is Sat., Feb. 19. Please meet at Jingle's Coliseum Bar, 232 E. Olin Ave at 4:30 for dinner before the 7 p.m. show. Reserved center section tickets are \$14 each. For reservations: Mary-Jane Foote, 937 O-Sheridan St., Madison, WI 53715. Deadline is February 12. **Wayne Bolz**, Sheboygan, is booking dates for the **Alain Zerbini Circus**. Open dates are 5/26-29, 31, June 4 and June 15.

KALEIDOSCAPE IN HOUSTON.....

Then there is the wonderful balancing act of Alex Petrov and Lucy Kirilova, with Alex balancing a perch pole on his forehead with Lucy on the top of the 13' perch pole. The act culminates with Alex ascending an inclined tight wire with Lucy at the top of the perch pole. This act is a real spectacle. Accompanying this act is the beautiful cello playing of the one beautiful show girl, Vanessa Fisher, which adds so much to the beauty of this act.

Throughout the show there are many skits of David Larible when he does his famous acts with members of the audience on plate breaking and his hilarious opera act. He and Pipo do a great musical number with whistles in their gloves on their fingers. These numbers are so much better in a one-ring setting since the audience is so much closer & can catch all the body language and facial expressions of David.

Closing the show is the Crossbow act of Guy Tell and Regina Bouglione. This act ends with a multiple crossbow set up and ending with an apple being shot off the head of Guy. A very dangerous act but much appreciated by the audience.

The show ends with a finale of all the performers in another wild charivari with much tumbling and Fanny finally emerging as a beautiful acrobat. Guy Tell sends an arrow high into the big top and the audience is covered in an explosion of confetti and streamers. Then the performers lead the audience back into the reception tent where they again meet everyone and sign autographs in the program.

I was most fortunate in visiting with General Manager Chris Ragland, Jim Ragona, David Larible and many of the other performers and staff. I was fortunate in having a ringside box seat and it was almost like having the whole show in my lap. That's how intimate this show is. The show is slick and moves very fast and the two and a half hour show is over before you know it. The program is a little expensive but is a beautiful hard cover book that will be a must for any circus fan's collection. And the music score is wonderful and the live band

never overpowering. My many thanks go to staff and performers of Barnum's Kaleidoscope for the courtesy and friendliness shown. This is a show where everyone enjoys themselves. Even though the show is somewhat pricey on tickets and concessions, when you leave you feel that you have gotten more than your moneys worth.

As this show makes its way across the country during the year, if it comes to your city or near you, go see it. It is more than worth the visit. This is not one of those pseudo-circuses. This is real circus in a European setting and I doubt you will see anything like it anytime soon.

STORMS STRIKE EUROPEAN SHOWS!

By Mike Cecere

Well, many of you may have noticed on the news a couple weeks ago the high winds and storms which lashed France, Great Britain and other European countries. These once-in-a-century storms brought the worst fears of doomsayers and warnings of global-warming prophets. Winds from some of these storms were said to reach over a hundred miles an hour and the populace was totally unprepared for the sudden way it came up.

Now here in the United States, we have fairly defined seasons for touring different kinds of shows, tents in the spring/summer, building shows in the fall/winter. There are a couple exceptions such as the NCY holiday stand of The Big Apple Circus and shows on short tours of Florida.

Over in Europe though, except for the big generations old operations, such as Circus Krone and others with their own custom built-for-circus buildings, there are some shows that, using heated tents, still perform in the winter.

Using the European-style tents with steel girder towers and quad-poleset, makes it quite a sturdy set up. But when you get those incredible winds, there is no tent, no matter how well set up or guyed-out, that can stand up, to those winds. Fortunately, there was not a lot of injuries connected with the circus operations but a lot of equipment was destroyed or damaged. But that is how the circus business is; some days are sunny days, some aren't. If circus was easy, more people would be doing it!

The Man Who Tried 9,000 Times.....

Neither Ernest nor Charles Clarke has ever been seriously injured in following their hazardous calling-hazardous because it is quite as easy to be killed by a fall into the net, which all trapeze artists use to protect them, as it is to be killed by another kind of a fall. "I think we have our father to thank for that," Ernest said. "He was a kind but severe man. We never were permitted to try any new trick until we had learned all of its preliminaries to his complete satisfaction. The first thing he taught us was how to fall properly. You should fall feet downward, but, at the moment of striking, elevate the feet so as to strike on the back. If that is impossible, you should gather yourself as nearly as possible into a ball, but hold all the muscles loosely. I saw a Japanese killed in Paris not long ago, merely because he failed to ground himself thoroughly in that particular. The fellow missed his catcher's hands, spread-eagled and broke his neck. My father's system was to attempt to learn only a limited number of tricks-say 4 or 5-at one time. We were not permitted to try any trick more than 6 times in a day. After we had finished that part of our work, we did something else-bending, gymnastics, equestrianism or juggling; for abroad (we were brought up in England) a circus performer must have more strings to his bow than one."

"A bender is a contortionist and bending, like gymnastics, juggling and equestrian work, is valuable on the trapeze. Equestrian work imparts an idea of speed and distance. Juggling quickens the eye-helps a performer to learn to think and act in the shortest possible time. Bending makes the body supple and graceful, while gymnastics, of course, is the very backbone of the business."

"Care is a trapeze performer's life insurance. The net and other apparatus must be inspected daily and renewed as it gets old. Either Charles or I usually attend to that. We also weave our nets or have them woven for us by other trapeze performers. The process, in the odd moments that are to be found around a circus, will sometimes require the better part of a season." (The End)

News From Our Circus Friends

Amos Bolieau writes that Saturday, December 11th, a meeting of the last of the 20th Century was held by the **Commodore Nutt Tent 165** at the home of **Chuck Druding** in Webster, NH. This also marked the opening of the Ori Circus Museum. It now houses the famous 1921 Ori Aircalliope, which won World Championship at St. Paul, Minn in 1971.

The second floor has been colorfully decorated in circus colors. The walls are covered with posters and pictures together with a beautiful elephant blanket and other memorabilia. It really is done in good taste and is a must to be seen and hear the beautiful tones of the calliope.

It can be seen by appointment only. Just give Chuck a call at 603-746-2764. He will be most happy to see you. A lovely lunch was served by Judy in their home in a holiday setting. (Thanks, Amos)

From The Nashville Zoo: "How do you weigh an elephant? Very carefully." At least that's how the Zoo at Grassmere does it, with the help of truck scales loaned by the state Department of Safety-one for each leg.

Chuck Pankow, the Zoo's elephant superintendent, bent to place a leg just right for **Hadari**, who weighed in at 8,300 pounds. His son, assistant elephant superintendent **Chuck Pankow, Jr.**, totaled the four scales to find the weight of **Kiba**: 8,100 pounds. The ladies-all are female African elephants-didn't seem to mind the annual public spectacle to determine their heft. The results were pretty close to estimates, said Zoo elephant manager, **Rise Pankow**, who is married to Chuck. "**Sukari** (at 6,300 pounds) weighed at a little bit less than we expected her to," Rise said. "It's good to know for sure."

Jim Harshman, after suffering a stroke on his birthday, January 10, has now been moved to a rehabilitation center. I know Jim would love to hear from all of you. Please write him at: Homewood, Room 126, 16505 Virginia Ave., Williamsport, MD 21795-1399. When Back Yard went to print, he did not have a phone in his room. Will let you know when I receive word about his phone. You are in all our prayers, Jim.

A Visit To Barnum's Kaleidoscope

By Denny Childers

After much procrastination and some trepidation, not to mention Cherie's consistent harassment about sending my impressions of Kaleidoscope, the time has finally arrived to try and put my thoughts on paper. Maybe, then, she will give me some peace & quiet! Sending e-mail messages about a show is one thing, trying to write an article about anything that so overwhelms the senses, is another story!

The fact that I am basically a "townner" or maybe "lot lice" with no real inside knowledge is quite intimidating, especially when I know so many *Back Yard* readers are circus people. I have never been in a tiger den or even touched an elephant for that matter (much less ridden one), so I hope you can understand my apprehension over writing about things I know absolutely nothing about. With that said, Kaleidoscope has neither tigers nor elephants, so the fact that I have never been up close and personal with them is immaterial, but is a good lead-in to my experience with Barnum's Kaleidoscope.

As Webmaster for the *Back Yard* and *Circus Model Builders* web sites, I was contacted by Lisa Wallenda-Picard in October to provide some information about the Circus Model Builders (CMB). Some months before, Lisa had asked me about using some pictures of the Wallendas performing the 7 for her family web site, so it was like talking, although by e-mail, with a lost friend. Through the course of our "conversations," she told me that she was now working for Feld Entertainment. Never one to miss an opportunity and since the CMB is producing an educational documentary about the CMB and circuses, I asked Lisa whom I could contact for permission to shoot the set-up of Kaleidoscope, which just happened to be arriving in Phoenix, AZ on November 8. I held little hope of receiving permission, since everyone had told me that the show was shrouded in a veil of secrecy. However, a few days later, I received an e-mail from Lisa, not the contacts name, but giving me the e-mail address and phone number of Chris Ragland, Kaleidoscope's General Manager. She further told me that he was expecting my call. After a couple hours of reading, reading again and re-reading Lisa's message, looking for an indication that I misunderstood what she was telling me, I contacted Mr. Ragland. We made arrangements to meet at 8 AM on Nov. 8th, at the parking lot of Diablo Stadium in Tempe. For the next 3 days, I "lived" on the lot (even bringing my RV on the second

day, for "potty" breaks. On the first morning, I had made the mistake of drinking a pot of coffee, without getting into the details, suffice it to say that I did not want to miss any of the action on the lot, so it was a very, VERY long day until I got home that evening), and periodically over the next week (well, I had to go to work some time).

I watched and filmed as the "Phoenix" rose from the asphalt like the mythical bird for which this metropolis is named. What I observed and think I learned those enjoyable days would probably be the source of another article and not what Cherie has in mind for *Back Yard*. Suffice it to say that the set up of the show gave me a birthday present that I shall never forget. (Yes, I spent my birthday on day two, dawn to dark, watching the tops rise.) It is as entertaining and enjoyable as the actual performance. And speaking of performance, this is the subject that I am supposed to be writing about in the first place (Cherie, I told you I was not a journalist!)

Since Barnum's Kaleidoscope was going to be in town for several weeks and with the Thanksgiving holiday preparations and other commitments, my family and I decided to wait until closer to the end of the date to attend the performance, so, we purchased tickets for the 7:30 PM performance on Thursday, Nov. 30. As the date approached, the family anticipation was building up since I had been "screening" the video footage of the set-up and my wife and I had been talking about Sylvia's performance. This was the one act that I had previously seen during her engagement with the Circus World Museum. Sandra, my 6-year-old granddaughter, is a lover of animals, elephants & horses in particular, and she was "chomping at the bit" to see Sylvia and her Liberty Act. On Wednesday, the day before the big day, I found out (from your illustrious editor) that Sylvia had sprained her wrist and ankle and would not be able to perform. If my heart sank, I was not quite sure what Sandra's reaction would be when I had to tell her that the horses would not be performing. During supper, I broke the news to the family. Katie; daughter, Katrina and her 3-year-old son, Brysten; daughter, Venice and her 6-year-old daughter, Sandra. The anticipated reaction of Sandra was immediate, but hopeful, "Tell someone else to perform the horses!" (Grandpas can do anything, especially grandpas that run circuses. -OK, so I don't necessarily dispel SOME of her misunderstandings! Isn't that a privilege of being a grandparent?!) Katie had been looking forward to seeing Sylvia again but put her disappointment aside & jumped in to rescue grandpa with Sandra.

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****NEWS FROM BOBBY GIBBS****

Bobby writes "Got off ship in Miami from Jamaica and headed for Texas. Because we were held over 10 days we were short on time to visit our many friends. Missed the Pages Circus in Clewston; missed my good friend Turtle in Arcadia. Stopped in Sarasota at Kay Rosaire's to pick up supplies-got to visit with Rosaires, Larry Allen Dean, Doc Gibbs of Iowa CFA & even Dick Kohlrieser and Johnny Herriott came over to say hello. In Ruskin, Rosa & I had lunch and a great visit with Buckles and Barbara Woodcock, then on up to Gainer Johnsons in Clermont. Saw opening performance of RBBB Blue in Orlando on 20th, thanks to Jimmy Cole who told Josip Marcan and Randy Pederson we would visit. Randy was nice enough to get tickets for myself & Rosa and Shane Johnson. We had a great time at The Greatest Show On Earth.

***Circus Millenium:** 1999 saw the start of a new tent circus built and operated by the Victor & Linda Flores family. After being headline performers for years with their *Globe of Death*, *Space Wheels*, etc. and playing spot dates & fairs as the Fearless Flores, Victor & Linda, along with their 3 children Tito, Vicki & Frances have built a one-ring, 4 pole European style vinyl big top, shaped like a flying saucer. It seats 1800 people. They have ample lighting; use taped music and have a 5 man ring crew. Much of the show are family acts but they also use some big name talent on their dates. The family also has concession equipment. Having the family helps, Tito is married to Chela from the Gaona flying act. Vicki married Walter Macias of the high wire Macias family and Frances' soon to be husband now works in the family acts. Because of this, Flores can produce 2 shows at the same time as is the case now with one unit in Miami with Linda and Frances and the big tent unit here in Jamaica. The Flores are hard-working & really great people to work for. I am sure you will be seeing more of them and their show in the coming years. They maintain 2 WQs; one in San Antonio & one in the Miami area. So, it looks like the circus will go on with a younger generation willing to brave the hardships of circus life & to overcome all problems and continue with a real American tradition.

***Circus Funfest In Jamaica:** At the end of 1999, the Victor Flores family put together a tent circus to play the West Indian island of Jamaica, promoted & sponsored by Elite Tours & TV Jamaica. The tenter played Kingston for 11 days & then moved to Montego Bay, tourist hot-spot for 4 days at Aqua Sol Amusement Park. Show

was held under Circus Millenium big top owned by Flores who also put together the performance & seats, etc. Local companies furnished lights & sound and security. Acts flew out of Miami and stayed in 4-Star hotels. Animals & equipment went by ship from Miami and back. As sponsor, the Flores family worked very hard to see that acts and performers had a nice Christmas. They threw a lavish poolside Christmas Eve bash with everything catered; also on trip over to Montego Bay, they provided a tour of Dunn's Falls & even purchased fresh local fruit for everyone. New Year's Eve, we were in Montego Bay so you know everyone had a great New Years. Shane & many other performers went parasailing, jet boats & a lot of other tourist stuff between shows. I do want to say that Jamaica was a nicer place to be in Dec. & Jan. than Buffalo. Say, this circus business is alright. See you down the road.

Oh, yes, here's the running order with Jamaican announcer and taped music: Shane Johnson, tigers; Jimmy & Jose, clowns; Ilona Ramos, traps; Color Book Pitch; Antilera Archers; Balloon Pitch; Macias, high wire; Ricardo, wheel; Sandro, hand balancing trio; Judy, the elephant; Lupe, hair hang; Miss Candy, hula hoops; Flores family, *Globe*. (Thanks, Bobby. Welcome back!)

Teresa Ramos-Caballero Killed By Kenya

Teresa, 52, was killed at the Ramos compound in Riverview, FL Wednesday, Jan. 26. She and her sister, Magdalena were walking to their mobile home and walked by Kenya, eating grass just a few yards away. Magdalena wanted to go around another way but Teresa said, "No, she's fine. She knows us and we know her," Lance Ramos, their nephew, reported. Without a warning, Kenya knocked Teresa down but she was able to get to her feet. The women started to move away slowly but Kenya went after Teresa again, and this time crushed her chest. She died before paramedics could arrive. After the attack, the elephant was back grazing on the grass. Lance said, "We've had the elephant with our family for 15 years and my 2-year-old daughter feeds her. We don't understand what happened. The only thing we can think of is that my aunt startled her and Kenya acted in a way to protect herself." (The Ramos family was with me on the Beatty show and our prayers go out to her family.)

PHOENIX KALEIDOSCAPE VISIT.....

(It seems that Grandma is always rescuing Grandpa.) Venice was disappointed. Perhaps I had hyped u Sylvia too much. Katrina wanted to cancel going to the show. (I should have washed her mouth out with soap!) Brysten could care less, a circus is a circus. (Atta boy, Brysten, my kind of guy!)

Circus day arrived. I warned everyone that morning that I was leaving the house at 6 PM and they better NOT be late getting home from work or they could hear about the show when I returned home. For the first time in their lives, both daughters took me seriously and 6 of us piled into the car. Katrina wanted me to take the Motor Home since it would be 10 PM (Lightning struck! Not only was I taking a 3-year-old-Brysten originated the phrase, "trying threes"-out past his bedtime, but THREE hours past his bedtime!) by the time the performance ended and the little ones would be tired and could sleep on the way home (Lightning strikes twice in the same place!-4 hours past his bedtime by the time we got back home!) They say people do strange things in time of duress, and this was NOT an exception. I let emotion get the best of me.

FACT: I knew that we were going to miss the pre-show which begins 1 hour before the performance.

FACT: Driving a Motor Home is a fairly new experience for me, having only driven it about 3 times previously.

FACT: It was an hour drive from the West side of Phoenix where we live, through nightmarish rush-hour traffic, to the East side where Kaleidoscape was set up.

FACT: It would definitely be a more comfortable ride in the spaciousness of the Motor Home, not to mention, quiet and peaceful on the way home, if I didn't wreck it on the way to the show.

DECISION: Be safe, take the car, you can weave through traffic much more easily with a car than a 25' RV. You can also escape more quickly if you have to insight a bit of brief Road Rage among other drivers because you are running a few minutes late and might miss the show opening.

The drive could have been worse, maybe-why do little ones ALWAYS want a drink, when you are packed like sardines in a car, in the middle of traffic, miles away from a place to stop? At any rate, we arrived with plenty of time to spare; so much time in fact, that I had time to buy Katie a cappuccino at \$3.50 (Cherie told me to be sure and tell all of you the prices of concessions so you could compare to other shows; so this is as good a place

as any to sneak that in) and Sandra and Brysten each got a soda (Sorry, Cherie, can't remember the price, but it was cheaper than at Disney World). Looking around the lobby top, I can't figure out why there is nobody in there, hmmm. Then, those terrifying words that all husbands and fathers learn to dread... "Where are the restrooms?" The lobby lights are flashing to signal 5 minutes to show time, and they ALL have to go to the bathroom! I can't believe it; I think, "my driving wasn't all THAT bad to get here!" I point to both ends of the top, you know, the places that are clearly marked with 20', flashing, neon signs "Restrooms" and an arrow, hand my head in disbelief, and flashback to when Venice, my 21-year-old daughter, at age 3, used to make a career of inspecting the bathrooms wherever we went.

This night, that great ringmaster in the heavens was looking out for me tonight, as the lights had not yet dimmed and back through the tunnel they marched, Grandma leading the gaggle. I proudly presented our tickets to the usher who pointed to the location of our seats and we begin our trek up to row "J", noticing the plush red velvet seating, just as the lights begin to dim, I think to myself, this isn't going to be bad, in fact, it's too dark now anyway. How hard can it be to see 6 empty seats, all in a row? Let me tell you, it's darn hard, especially when somebody else is setting in the middle 2! I say one of those silent prayers to myself, you know, the bargaining prayer that a dying man recites to his Maker in the face of impending disaster. "If you just get me through this, I PROMISE that I will build a chapel here, I will go to church every Sunday, I will become a missionary in the depths of Antarctica..." That type of prayer. Rather than incite another riot (remember the road trip through rush hour traffic?) when we compare ticket stubs, in the dark, and I see that they, in fact, do have the same seat AND row letters, I leave the family standing in the aisle, partially obstructing the view of other patrons (I can tell they are becoming a bit distraught by the way they squeeze the \$5. boxes of popcorn-snuck another price in for you, Cherie), and trek back down the steps, again taking in those beautiful red velvet seats. If only I were seated in one right now! Back up the aisle, usher in tow, mumbling to myself, "Listen, people, it's not my fault, 30 seconds, that's all, just 30 more seconds, and we will be seated and you can enjoy the show." After a discussion with the usher, "the claim jumpers" in our seats finally understand that, in fact, they do have the right row and seats, just that they are in a section on the other side of the top. (Continued Page 13)

Sissy Has Arrived At The Sanctuary!

January 26 noon: The trailer transporting Sissy rolled onto Sanctuary grounds at . Her leg chains were removed without any objection. After several tries, Sissy finally stepped down from her trailer into her new barn. She was a little concerned but showed no aggression. **At 2:00 p.m.** Barbara was allowed to enter Sissy's stall. Barbara was very curious about Sissy and spent almost an hour making gentle advances. Sissy continued to turn her back to Barbara for quite a while. Finally, when they were side by side with the corral dividing their bodies, Barbara reached through the bars and Sissy let Barbara touch her face. They spent several minutes exchanging curious touches. **3:15 p.m.**-Sissy started to take notice of her keepers-the people with the food. She came over to where Carol was conducting an interview & flip-flopped the end of her trunk which made a very unusual noise. It was obvious she was trying to get someone's attention. She wanted more treats. **4:45 p.m.**-Tarra, Jenny, Shirley and Bunny came in from outside. They were excited and trumpeted as soon as they entered the barn. Sissy spun around and ran to the far end of her stall. After she settled down, the others were allowed in an adjacent stall. Sissy immediately backed up to a herd of gentle, curious trunks. Everyone was in on it. Sissy leaned in to get closer and allowed the other elephants to touch all over her for almost a half hour. After a drink of water she went back to the probing trunks and appears to be in 7th heaven.

January 25, 5:30 p.m.: Forest City, Ark. Sissy drank gallons of water, finished off the last of her river cane and is bedded down for the night. All is well. She has remained calm for the entire trip. **2:30 p.m.:** Just outside Little Rock, Scott spied some river cane growing alongside the road. Knowing that bamboo is a staple of wild elephants and a favorite of the Sanctuary's elephants, he stopped and cut some for Sissy. She made a quick treat out of the entire pile! **Jan. 25-Great morning!** Sissy slept well last night and drank for more than 5 minutes this morning. Fox-14 is following Sissy for the entire trip from El Paso to the Sanctuary. One of the big questions asked of Scott and driver Mike Knowles was, "Why do you stop every 3 hours?" Scott let them know that Sissy needs to be monitored as often as possible, but more importantly, Scott is establishing a trust with Sissy, a sort of contract. He is demonstrating to Sissy that she is a priority & that her welfare is his concern. She is being shown that she is a very special individual. The more special attention Scott shows to Sissy the more she will trust him. This will make her trip less stressful and begins the bond that will form between the two.

Jan. 24, 11:30 a.m.-Traveling East on Hwy 20 just outside of Pecos, TX. Stopped to offer Sissy a drink of water. She ate a few carrots & appeared calm. **8:30 a.m.:** Scott called from the road with an update. Sissy is eating and appears comfortable. She is riding well and not rocking or moving around much. The temperature in the trailer is 60 degrees. **7:10 a.m.:** Sissy began her trip to Hohenwald Jan. 24. **7:00 a.m.** Sissy was led directly into the trailer without hesitation. She was very calm.

SISSY COMES HOME By Mike Cecere

There is an old American song from back in the days of the old wild west, part of which goes, Oh, give me a home where the buffalo roam." But for Sissy, the Elephant, replace "Buffalo" with "Elephant" and you'd have her lifelong dream. A dream she'd had since coming to this country as a baby, first being trained for a show at a large Texas amusement park. When she grew larger and was not considered "amusing" enough, she was sold to the Frank Buck Zoo in Gainesville, TX where she was renamed "Gerry, the Second," as she was the replacement for a popular old elephant, named "Gerry."

She spent many years there and became famous for surviving a devastating flood by holding onto a tree branch with her trunk! Eventually, due to dwindling resources to keep such a high maintenance creature, she went around to a couple of other Texas zoos, sort of like a foster child who no one really wanted for one reason or another. Then she was sent to the growing Zoological collection in the legendary old west border town of El Paso. There, she joined 2 other older Asian females, but still didn't fit in. In fact she was at the center of a massive controversy over her management that received national publicity and ignited a firestorm that brought about the sudden resignation of the Zoo director and sanctions by the USDA, APHIS and local authorities. Much thought was given by the learned city leaders and concerned citizens, who decided the best path of action was to find Sissy a new home. Animal lovers nationwide gave opinions and it was, after much deliberation, decided she should go to The Elephant Sanctuary, in scenic Hohenwald, Tennessee. There she could join a growing herd of elephants, that like herself, needed a special environment and had formed a special bond with each other, making their own herd of female Asian elephants. The Director & co-founder of T.E.S. traveled to El Paso and began preparations to move Sissy to the Sanctuary. No big deal for elephants used to travel, but remember this was a creature moved only a few times in her life and not had a lot of good experiences in the process.

Through the generosity of hundreds of elephant lovers locally and nationwide that donated funds and or services, a plan was formed. One of the country's top elephant programs donated use of their custom built elephant trailer, a major trucking donated the tractor, fuel, permits and one of their top drivers who gave up big money freight hauling out of love of elephants.

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PHOENIX KALEIDOSCOPE VISIT.....

I mumble under my breath-you don't want to know what highly intelligent remarks, either! Finally, I settle into that lovely, plush, red velvet seat. I am not quite certain what happened before, but right now, David Larible has everyone on the show bringing him his make-up and clothes and even a dressing table! If only I could get service like that at home! How does he rate? So what is this guy did receive a Golden Clown in Monaco, he still puts his pants on the same as I do, doesn't he? Or does he? Guess you will have to go to the show and find out, won't you? Regardless of how David puts his pants on, the Kabanov Troupe is somehow in the ring. Can't remember how they got there, because we are now playing "musical chairs," shifting so that the 2 little ones can see over the giants seated in front of us. Popcorn is now showering us as the people immediately behind us squeeze their \$5 boxes of popcorn even more tightly. (Did I mention that popcorn was \$5 a box, Cherie?) Somehow, I did manage to see the entire Kabanov act & still can't believe that they have not broken every bone in their bodies as they jump from the very pinnacle of the big top, which has 18 meter high masts, to the ground below. Not only do they live to talk about it, they actually walk away. Their performance makes me reconsider my escape plans for a bad day at the office, the one where I open my 17th floor office window. Not only is a leap that far survivable, but they do it and a lot more every day.

Enough about the show! If you want to know more, you will have to go see it. I want to tell you about my camping trip last weekend. As I may have insinuated previously, Cherie has been threatening me with severe bodily injury if I did not get something to her about Barnum's Kaleidoscope. Since her threats were becoming quite frequent and much more viscous, I decided to escape with Sandra and Grandma and hide out in the desert last weekend (Her attorney henchman would never find me there!) It also provided me a captive audience to interrogate about their thoughts on Kaleidoscope.

The plan was simple, if they did not cooperate and help me with his article, I just would not take them home. Sandra finally caved into the pressure and told me which act she liked the best. Never for a moment in a month and a half did I believe Sandra when she denied having a favorite act. How could anyone like it all and not have a favorite act, even at 6 years old? It slipped out by accident, I am sure, as for 48 days of constant badgering, she was successful in avoiding the issue with me. But Grandpa got sneaky and took his circus buddy, Sandra, for a morning hike along this isolated trail through the desert. The conversation went something like this, "Now, listen Sandra, this mean old lady named Cherie, wants your Grandpa to write up something about our visit to Kaleidoscope.

I really need to know what your favorite part was and if you don't tell me, I'm going to leave you out here in the middle of the desert, miles from home with the coyotes.." At which point she blurted out, "the geese, I liked the geese." So the truth was finally out, I should have surmised it was the geese. After all, Sylvia couldn't present her Liberty Horse act. Of course Sandra

would have liked the Liberty act of Olga, Istvan and the geese. I was beside myself with pride when we returned to the camper, silently gloating to myself. I told Katie about Sandra's favorite act. Sandra told Katie about my threat. After my second hike through the desert that morning, more of a solitary morning jog this time, thinking it safe to return to the campsite, I drug myself back into the RV where Sandra & Katie were playing a game of Trouble. In retrospect, I realize now that the name of the game was an omen of things to come, but fearing the wrath of Cherie over failure to get this article to her more than that of my beloved, I steered the conversation with Katie back towards Kaleidoscope and her favorite act. Without hesitation, she mentioned The Golden Statues. I thought back to the performance, remembering how David Larible unexpectedly brought them to life from the columns, their seemingly superhuman power and slow motion animation.

Thinking to myself, but evidently also mumbling to Katie, (I think I was a little jealous at the moment about their physique and strength.) I found myself on a third trip out the door and so I put the article to rest for the time being, my muscles screaming for oxygen down that now familiar trail.

That evening, after things had quieted down, I took the Kaleidoscope program from the overhead bin (doesn't everyone carry circus programs with them when they go camping?) and sat beside Sandra, who had since made up with me. We were flipping through the pages, reminiscing about the performance, the \$10 for 2 boxes of popcorn (did I mention that popcorn was \$5 a box? But they are big boxes!), Picasso Jr. and why he didn't choke on those balls, David Larible & Pipo, Nuts & Bolts. The truth came out here, she really, really, REALLY liked Nuts & Bolts. I also think I successfully convinced Sandra that grandma's vacuum cleaner would not sound the same way though, if she tried to play it. Grandma was thankful too; from the look in her eyes, I think she was envisioning Sandra blowing on one end of the hose and dust blowing everywhere.

I mentioned how I was impressed with Alex walking the inclined wire and Lucy perched 21' above him and Grandma chimed in that it was one of her favorite acts too. (Why can't anyone just pick one act and say it is their favorite?) Sandra pitched in with David Larible and the people from the audience. (What is with this man? He's no big deal, I mean even I can go into the audience, get some people to march into the ring, dress up in crazy opera clothes & make total fools of themselves in front of a few thousand people, and tell them "now pretend you are enjoying this." What is the big deal? I mean, we both put our pants on the same way, don't we? I digress! Forgive me.

Other favorite acts, Guy Tell & Regina. I am in total disagreement with an article in *White Tops* here, seriously, I thoroughly enjoyed the performance. I would never have the guts to even think about attempting the finale to that act.

Well, I see that I am on page 5 of this article so I better try to wrap this up so I can tell you about the prices of popcorn, or else Cherie will make sure that I put my pants on differently than David!

(Continued on Page 14)

SARASOTA SAWDUST SCENE

By Sarasota Sam

Well, Greetings from Sunny Sarasota! Hope all you good people are enjoying a pleasant winter season. This is the first Sarasota Sawdust Scene column, so if you like it, let Cherie Valentine know!

So, let's get to the big social event, The Showfolks Circus. As usual, it was a grand event with just about everyone there, lots of local talent and generous people contributing either acts or services. Produced this year by living circus legend, Jenny Wallenda, it was a huge success. Double treat for Jenny was the arrival of her favorite daughter, Tammy and her children back to Sarasota. So, as you can imagine, Jenny was one happy Grandma! Lots of luminaries from out of town, famed elephant historian and writer, Gordon Taylor in from CNN headquarters in Atlanta. Ray Gronso, past president of the Circus Fans of America and still a leading force in that circus-friendly group, along with organizing one of the most active CFA Tents in America. Quite a few other fans from up that way, all fine folks.

Seen also was James S. Cole (Jim to his friends), well-known circus model builder/circus owner and authority on wild animal acts and trainers. He is a close friend of many wild animal trainers such as the Tiger Lord himself, Josip Marcan. What few people realize about Jim is that in his real job, he is a Hero Firefighter and EMT with the Orlando Fire Dept. Lots of ballyhoo in the circus about courage, but people, this Jim Cole is one brave guy. He's the real deal!

The next big event was the OABA Circus Conference 2000. This was quite an event in itself. Organized by the tireless efforts of OABA circus unit director, Heidi Herriott, it brought a lot of show people together to work on issues of common interest. Lots of good dialogue, lots of hatchets got buried, fortunately, not in each other! All in all, a huge success with the circus business being the biggest winner.

So to top the winter social season off was the ceremony inducting another living circus legend, John Herriott into the Ring of Fame. This was a fitting tribute to a man who lives circus 24 hours a day, as a horse trainer and ringmaster. He is in the top of his game. His family was able to all be there, along with many, many of his colleagues and friends. A fitting tribute to a great circus personality!

Lots of luminaries seen for the ceremony and reception including William "Buckles" Woodcock who hurried

back from another holiday season with the Big Apple Circus in NYC to be there for his friend John. One circus legend there to honor another. Lots of history there as their fathers worked together on the old Cole Bros. RR circus.

One last item, we want to give a Sarasota Sawdust greeting and get well message to Jim Harshman. A Great friend and fan of the circus from scenic Hagerstown, MD. A finer fellow, you'll rarely meet. Drop Jim a card if you get a chance! Well, that's all from here, follow the Sawdust! Sarasota Sam. (Please write Jim at: Homewood, Room 126, 16505 Virginia Ave., Williamsport, MD 21795-1399.)

PHOENIX KALEIDOSCOPE VISIT.....

I don't wish to slight anyone on the show, the Bogino & Hassani Troupes will amaze you. Jon Weiss and his balancing-sure, I can do that, I just don't want to show off! Fanny, you may just have to wait until the end of the show to see what she offers to you.

If you want 2 hours of fun, if you want to escape into a whirling, changing world of color, Kaleidoscope is for you. Ask Katrina, the 24-year-old prim & proper daughter who wanted to cancel going to the show. For 2 hours she let her hair down; Katrina, the foot stomping, screaming, whistling, waving daughter. (Down right embarrassing, if you ask me. But after all the trouble trying to get into one of those red seats, I wasn't about to go hide from her.) Ask Venice, the bathroom inspector. (Yes, she gave the "donnikers" highly passing grades.) Ask Brysten, who on this night was the perfect gentleman, Kaleidoscope took him so far aback that he forgot about the trying threes. (He didn't mutter one word throughout the entire performance, no fidgeting, simply sat there wide-eyed all night.) Ask Sandra, well you better not as she will tell you that Sylvia still owes her a performance with her White Liberty Horses. As for me, well, for the first time in my circus- going life, I cannot pick an act that I liked better than another. I cannot even pick an act that I liked even a little less than the others. AND Mr. Larible, I don't know how you put your pants on, but don't change the way you do it!

(Thanks, Denny-very well worth the wait! As for the popcorn...Hopefully, I can visit in Chicago! Sandra will be jealous if I get to see the horses work! I heard that the best part is watching the prop men clean up after the geese!)

SISSY COMES HOME.....

There are many others that donated to bring Sissy to The Sanctuary, too numerous to mention here. Scott Blais, co-founder of the Sanctuary, oversaw her gentle loading and off they went. Waving good-bye to a huge throng of wellwishers, some weeping with joy for her, Sissy began her trip Home.

An El Paso radio station went along with live broadcasts to the old homefolk and Scott kept in constant touch with T.E.S. who in turn kept the running diary live on their Internet web page! She rode great but like any occidental tourist, wanted to stop every 3 hours for snacks! No really, Scott checked her every 3 hours to reassure her and give her drinks and treats.

But the great creature seemed to understand that now good things were going to happen to her and trusted her new human friends would look after her.

Then, at noon on the third day, they pulled into the gates of the Sanctuary and she stepped gingerly into her new home. After a good look around, some eats, a drink, she was ready to settle in. Slowly, the other residents were let into the adjoining stall and after much trunk touching and rumbling of greetings with the other girls, Sissy realized she had finally, after many, many years, really Come Home! God Bless America.





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