

# BACK YARD

Volume III, Issue #58

December 31, 1998

## 25 YEARS ON THE CIRCUS BANDWAGON

FROM "SONG HITS" MAGAZINE, 1943

By Arthur Pine (From Valentine Archives)

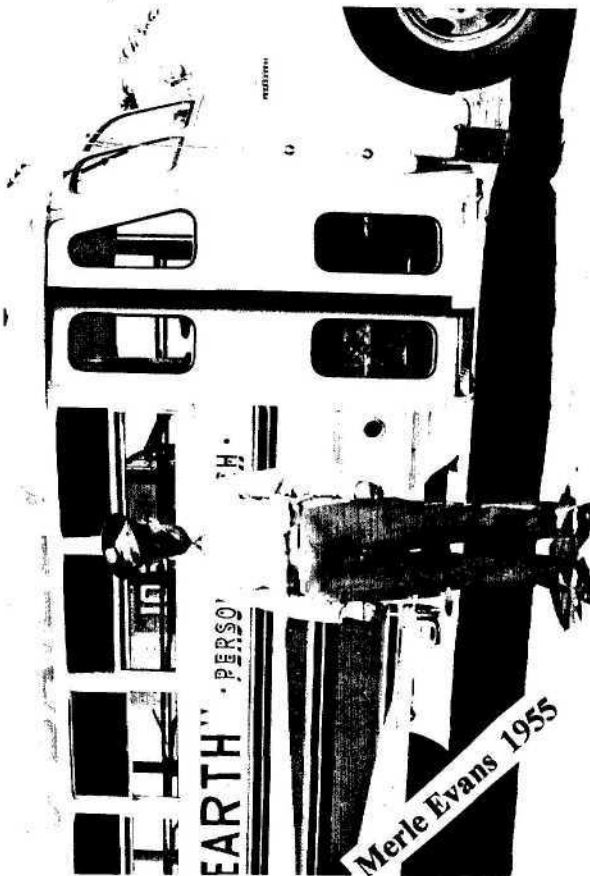
When it comes to the Big Top, there can be only one name connected with the circus band & that is Merle Evans! Merle Evans, who is 50 years of age, has spent exactly one half of his lifetime as musical director of the famous Ringling Bros. Circus, which is equally well known as "The Greatest Show On Earth!" For approximately 30 weeks of every 52 in the year, for the past quarter of a century, Merle has stood in front of the circus band all over the country, & during this period he has never missed a performance-they number over the 11,000 mark.

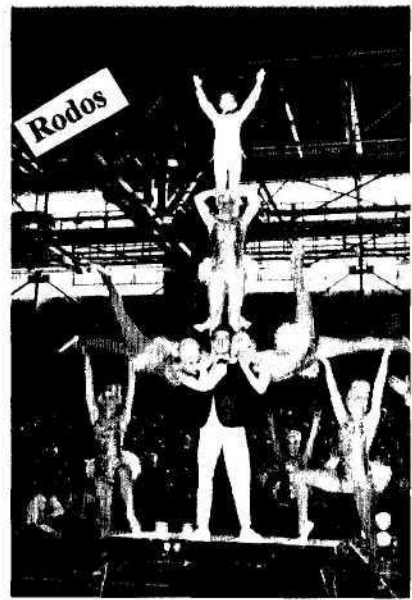
When Merle Evans was a young boy, it was his ambition to be with the circus, just as it is every other country boy's. Merle was no different from any other youngster in Columbus, KS-he was ready to do anything that would get him a job with the circus. So when his father told him that practicing his cornet every day would get him with "The Biggest Show On Earth," you can bet that Merle dropped everything else & played his cornet 6 hours a day.

However, before joining the Ringling Bros. Circus in 1919, Merle had to gain some carnival experience & background. And so, for several years, Merle was with minstrel showboats playing up & down the Mississippi River, with several dozen one-night stand opera house shows, medicine & carnival shows, & even played with the last Buffalo Bill Wild West Rodeo. With several seasons of this type of entertainment under his belt, Merle took over the baton of the circus in 1919 & has been with it ever since. However, in 1942, because of a certain change in the rules of the musicians' union, Merle was forced to leave the circus for several months & during that time he became bandmaster & music instructor at the Hardin-Simmons University in Abilene,

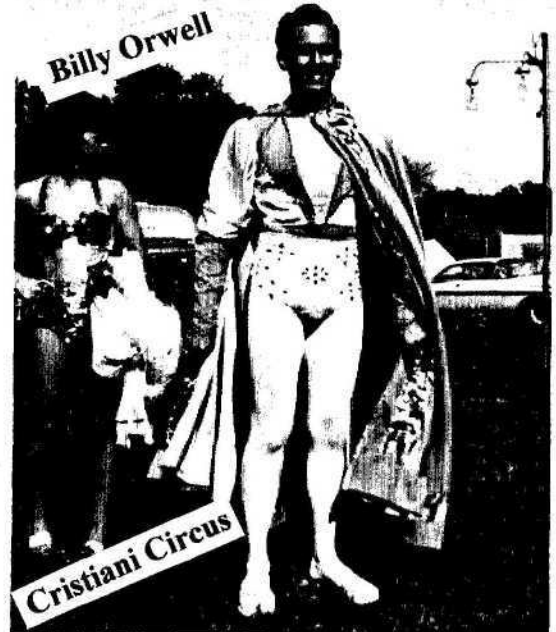
Texas. Now down Texas way, a college band is more than just a musical organization. At Hardin-Simmons, the students & faculty take as much pride in having an outstanding band as in having an undefeated football season.

(Continued on Page 4)





Turtle just wrote that our friend Bobby Gibbs will have a heart operation Jan. 1<sup>st</sup>. His address is POB 626, Seagoville TX 75159 or call at 972-287-4992. Your cards & calls would make him feel better real soon! Thanks, Cherie



## **FELD TO LAUNCH KALEIDOSCOPE TENT SHOW** By James Zoltak

**(Thanks to Brian Liddicoat for the E-mail  
announcement and to Ed Motta for the clipping  
from Amusement Business, 12/14/98.)**

Feld Entertainment is launching a new \$10 million tent show called Barnum's Kaleidoscope, a 2 1/2-hour production that will feature international circus performers in an intimate 1800-seat setting with plush chairs & rug-covered floors. The show is designed to play any number of open spaces, from parking lots to fairgrounds to vacant lots. The idea is to bring Kaleidoscope to markets where residents haven't been able to see Feld's Ringling Bros. because they don't live near a major arena.

With ticket prices likely to fall between \$20 and \$25 apiece, Kaleidoscope will boast sophisticated lighting & sound & will be nimble enough to constantly change on the fly-hence the play on the word "Kaleidoscope" in the title, explained Feld Entertainment Chairman Kenneth Feld. The show is in production & will rehearse & make its debut at the Sarasota County Fairgrounds before moving to San Diego sometime in March or April. The route will be set by mid-January & the show's initial tour will put it on the road for about 45 weeks.

"This project, for me, is probably the most exciting thing I've been involved with since we bought Ringling Bros. It has been a dream to be able to create something that can constantly change. Not only can the picture change, but the frame can change also," Feld said. He said he was reading a Life magazine not long ago that dealt with the 100 most influential people from the millennium. P.T. Barnum was one of the 100. "I was floored. He's always been No. 1 to me, but to think he meant that much to Americans. He changed the face of entertainment & advertising in America, & probably the world. I thought let's do something that pays tribute to P.T. & let's do something that is very much an entertainment that is changing. That's what a Kaleidoscope does. Then we said, what people need & want is an escape. We put the two together & came up with Barnum's Kaleidoscope: a visionary kind of entertainment that is always changing but is always going to be fun & an escape from everyday reality. That was the premise we came up with in putting together this show," Feld said.

Bringing the show to the people is in keeping with what Barnum himself did before the turn of the century, Feld

said. "We want to bring the show to people & communities that might have a difficult time getting to the circus. There's been a demographic shift in the country the last 5 years that has had a lot to do with technology," Feld said. Modern telecommunications allow businesses to operate anywhere, & that has led people out of cities & into less developed areas.

"We want to capture that audience with a new & different kind of entertainment," Feld said. The company has designed & built special tents & traveling structures & come up with an interior design that in the main tent is reminiscent of an intimate one-ring circus, but with a unique look & state-of-the-art lighting.

"I would say without a doubt it will be the most comfortable environment to sit & watch a performance anywhere," Feld said. "Every seat is a plush seat. There are wooden floors that are carpeted. It may look like a tent from the outside, but when you get inside it will be as warm & cozy as your living room. The whole idea of the show is fun, personalized & personality-driven. That's why we chose, in my opinion, the most humorous & entertaining clown in David Larible as the show's featured performer. He's been with Ringling for 8 years. He's known really for working with people from the audience. He uses the people in the audience instead of props & gets them involved. Everyone gets the feeling they are part of the show."

"There are aerial acts, comedy & a live orchestra & the music is very much original. We have some of the greatest performers from around the world, but it will be how the show is put together that sets it apart. From the time you walk in through the entryway & into a reception area that will be sort of a pre-show, you get the feeling you know the performers."

No one in the audience will be more than 50 ft. away from the performers. "People are going to be blown away by the comfort we are going to provide & they will leave with the feeling they've been to the greatest party for 2 1/2 hours they've ever been to in their lives," Feld said.

Kaleidoscope will be the first Ringling Bros. entity in a tent since 1956. "Raffaele DeRitis of Italy, is the director. Leroy Bennett, who lights the MTV Music Awards, is the lighting designer. His most recent work for Feld was on the "Anastasia" ice tour. The costume & production designer is Pascal Jacob, who is currently doing costumes for the 129th edition of Ringling Bros. The music composer is Linda Hudes, who was involved in composing

(Continued on Page 5)

## 25 Years on the Circus Bandstand.....

So when Merle was appointed as leader of the university's band, he added a few circus touches. Merle gave each member of the band a beautiful white horse on which to sit while playing. Then he chose 50 of the most beautiful girls at the school-& beautiful girls are not hard to find in Texas-& he dressed them in attractive white cowgirl outfits, & had them serve as cheer leaders. Merle then found a student with a Tony Martin type of voice & while the band played, the singer would carry a portable microphone & croon the most popular tunes of the day in a manner that spelled "Victory" for practically every football game that season. When Merle told the authorities at the school that he would have to resign to rejoin the circus, they told him that they refused to call it a "resignation" but rather a "temporary leave of absence," & that any time he cared to return, his desk would be ready for him!

But, getting back to Merle Evans' activities as the circus band leader for the past 25 years, we discover that the country's Number One trumpeter & band leader, Harry James, received his early training under Merle's direction. Whenever the circus would play anywhere in the vicinity of Beaumont, TX, which is Harry's home town, the James boy would play "hookey" from school to come down to the big tent to sit in with Merle's musical outfit. Merle would then take time out to point out any faults in his playing to Harry & many of the hints that Merle suggested to Harry James have been instrumental in putting the trumpeter where he is today.

Playing with a circus band may be enjoyable, but it definitely is not an easy job, as will be attested to by the 31 musicians in Merle's organization. From the time a musician takes his chair on the bandstand at 8:15 p.m., he plays steadily until 11:30 p.m., during which time over 200 different pieces accompany the various acts in the circus. When you are a circus band musician, there is no such thing as missing a cue for it may be that very note which will throw a high-wire walker off his guard & which may result in an accident. Also, regardless of what may happen during the course of a matinee or evening performance, the band plays on! If a performer should slip, a storm shake loose the tent, or a lion break from his cage, the circus band keeps playing!

The band under the direction of Merle Evans has 31 musicians consisting of 6 cornets, 9 reeds, 2 baritones, 3 French horns, 4 trombones, 2 basses, 3 drums, Hammond organ, & Merle himself, who plays 8 different kinds of

cornets, all of which were especially made for him by an instrument manufacturer-designer. The men in the band are from every part of the country & all are experts on their instruments. In fact, any big-name maestro would offer them any price they demanded to have them with his orchestra. Incidentally, proof that the circus band has a tremendous following among the jitterbugs is found in the fact that Merle's crew has appeared 5 times on the Sunday night Fitch Bandwagon program & that their appearance on this show brings the largest volume of fan mail for any single engagement, topping Benny Goodman, Harry James, Jimmy Dorsey & all the other top-flight orchestra leaders.

In the course of 25 years, Merle had seen practically every circus act in the world, & one would think that by this time all the thrills of watching the lions, tigers, wire walkers, etc., would be gone. However, such is not the case with Merle, who is still as enthusiastic about each performance as the day he joined the circus. In his opinion, the greatest circus performer of all time was Madame Lillian Leitzel, who used to swing from the very top of the circus building by a rope, she lost her hold on the rope, & she fell to her death. Among the performers in the circus today, Merle says that without a doubt the most daring act in the world is The Wallendas. This is a group of high wire performers who do their amazing act, which uses a girl on a bicycle as a pivot, high in the air & without a net below.

One of the many interesting facts regarding circus animals pointed out by musical director Evans, is the one that a lion will always be given aid by another lion when he is in trouble, but if a tiger should get into a mix-up, he will have to fight his own battles as none of the other tigers will ever come to his rescue.

No two days under the Big Top are alike, & for that reason, Merle is as young in spirit as the days when he used to sneak under the circus tent in Columbus, Kansas. Today, Merle Evans is an institution in the circus world but he still gets a thrill when he sees the young boys & girls running along side of his golden bandwagon as he goes parading down Main Street. And the next time you see Merle in your vicinity you will know that "The Greatest Show On Earth" is back in town for another thrilling run!

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**Dorita Estes reports** the Sarasota Ringling Reunion was very nice & **Jenny Wallenda** deserves a lot of thanks for trying to keep these going. So, **THANKS, JENNY!!!**

## FELD'S KALEIDOSCOPE.....

the music for the Woody Allen film, "Annie Hall." (Ed.-Linda was the music director on Big Apple for many years.) She has a great feeling for live performance & how to accentuate live performers & bring out the best in the act." After the U.S. tour, Kaleidoscope will go International, Feld said.

"Each successive year we will come up with a totally new version of it. This year it's a one-ring circus. Next year, it may be something very different. That's going back to the days of Barnum. He didn't get into the circus business until he was 62. He was known for bringing the greatest acts from around the world to America. He had all kinds of other entertainment as well, & that's something we are going to be doing. Each year we will come up with what we think is the most cutting-edge, customer-friendly, warmest, unique-type of entertainment. It won't be locked into any one specific format."

Feld said the show offers sponsorship opportunities for companies that want to do something special for employees, customers or clients. "We've had incredible interest from a lot of sponsors & corporations that want to be involved with the project," he said. While a ticket price of \$20-\$25 is contemplated, Feld said pricing isn't set yet & will reflect the cost of producing the show.

Feld said an entire line of exclusive merchandise is being developed for the show & will be available at the performances, on the Ringling Web site & via mail order.

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## ANIMALS STAR IN 129TH RINGLING BROS. CIRCUS From The Sarasota Herald

The new 129th edition of The Greatest Show on Earth will pay tribute to the more than 200 animals in its show. Big cats, horses, rhinos, giraffes & elephants will star in the three-ring "living carousel" from Feld Entertainment. Trapeze artists, the Globe of Death, the Human Comet, foot-jugglers & all the glitz of Ringling Bros. Circus production numbers will fill the rings. Ringmaster Jonathan Iverson will lead the magical journey to the beat of an engaging musical score from Broadway composer Michael Starobin & lyricist Glenn Slater. Clown extraordinaire Robert Shield will lead the new and traditional clown antics.

Those who get to the show early, can mix it up in this year's 3-Ring Adventure & watch as Clown Alley's masters of mayhem get painted and warm up.

Some of Sarasota's circus tradition can be seen, even

though the Ringling winter quarters left Venice for Tampa in 1992. Sarasota's Carlos & Susanna Svensson return to the show with their graceful acrobatic act, performed atop white draft horses. Their equestrian comedy act features Jasper, a mischievous horse that also performs in one of the clown gags.

Cindy Herriott, daughter of circus veterans John and Mary Ruth Herriott, will present liberty horses & elephants with her husband, Roy Wells. The Herriotts were renowned for their mixed-animal act with the Ringling show in the early 70s. Cindy trained with her father and performed with liberty horses for the first time in 1988 with Ringling's Gold Unit in Japan. Roy fell into animal training one summer while working at an amusement park & began a circus career.

Catherine Hanneford has followed in her family's circus tradition, beginning at age 5, as a ballerina on horseback. At 7, she began working with baby elephants & by the time she was 12, she was training elephants as well as horses. As a high school graduation present, her parents gave her 6 liberty horses.

The Human Comet, J.P. Theron, grew up in Sarasota. His parents were part of the Cycling Therons act with Ringling in the 50s and 60s. Tutored in clowning by Alfredo Landova, he was performing at age 13 in Sarasota during school vacations & by 16, was touring as a clown. He performed on the sway poles before developing the Human Comet act in 1992. He stands on a 40-foot-high platform, is ignited by a technician & dives aflame into an airbag.

Also following his father's footsteps, Juan Pedro Carrillo, Jr. will present the highwire & double trapeze act with Tatianna Carrillo & Capitolino Mitrovich Acevedo. Capitolino is the first person to leap from the shoulders of a 2-man stack-while navigating a 30-foot high wire-to a wire 5 feet below, which is situated over roaring Bengal tigers.

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**Norman Maxwell reports** to the CMB Web site that on Nov. 6, Jean Warner passed away. She was a chimp trainer. She started working with chimps in St. Louis in the 50s. She worked on several shows, the last big show was in 1969 on Carson & Barnes, where Norman met her. He was prop boss, & Fred Logan was elephant trainer & boss canvas man. Jean & Norman went out in 1970 with Mighty Mike's Mini Circus. They retired in 1977. Please contact Norman at [wme@sccoast.net](mailto:wme@sccoast.net) for more information.

\*\*\*REAL ANIMAL WELFARE 101\*\*\*

By Mike Cecere

Quite a lot has been said on all sides of the animal welfare in captivity issue & I thought I'd start a series of articles to give the viewpoint of professional animal people.

I'll begin by thanking, from the bottom of my heart, the many fans & friends of animal trainers who have counter protested in person, in the press & generally have given the Pro Vegan Hate Groups reason to think better of fooling with our industry.

By the same token, it's important to explain the reason those of us choose to spend our lives working with animals is that we love them & put their welfare before our very own needs.

We are, in truth, the real welfare activists. And especially people of my generation see the role we play & how our animals should be treated much differently than the generations that came before us. The idea of communality with other groups having problems with the Pro Vegan Hate Groups depends on which groups you look at.

As a person involved with elephants, cattle ranching, farming & logging, I come up against "Whack Jobs" on at least 3 fronts. But I refuse to ally myself with fur farmers, canned hunt operators, Laboratory Animal Providers, (which I might add are the number one group under investigation nationwide by law enforcement for felony kidnapping of family pets), puppy mills & a myriad of other animal use & abuse groups. I am not alone in this.

It's been said one mans terrorist is another mans freedom fighter, & extremist violence is wrong. Equally wrong is to join with entities which abuse animals, while trying to uphold the tradition of "The Animals Come First", which all professional animal people live by.

Yes, like anywhere in society, there are a couple characters who don't work as hard at it as others. However, if you look closer at some of the more publicized incidents of recent years, you'll find the base cause is the lack of good trained people coming into the business & the exodus of good people not being able to afford to work for low wages.

It's time to start working out solutions & staying on the right side of the program. Think about it!

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**Bobby Hakes, Sarasota, reports** he & Phips went to the Ringling dress rehearsal in Tampa & looks to be the best

in 5 years! They have a Chinese troupe that do a flying act & they do doubles & one did the triple. He also reports that Tommy Hanneford put together a terrific show. He & Phips will be at the Showfolks party on New Year's Eve. (Please let us know who was there! Thanks, Bobby.)

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**My aunt, Mary (Valentine-The Flying Romas) Stath, of the Flying Marilees,** told me her brother, Bill Atterbury passed away in Palm Springs, CA. She & Lee will be leaving Texas to go out there. They then plan to visit friends in Sarasota, including the Edelstons.

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**Thanks to Paul Butler, Ontario,** for sending in a beautiful picture of his circus room. There are many old, colorful posters on the wall, including a Carson & Barnes one, featuring Col. Tim McCoy; King Bros. with Cristiani Family & Al G. Kelly & Miller Bros. Circus posters. Paul is a founding member of the Martin Downs Ring & Fred Logan Tent & the only one remaining.

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**New subscriber, Raymond Govus, Marion, SC** reports the first circus he ever saw was the Sparks RR show in Glen Rock, NJ in 1928. He vividly remembers the street parade that came up Rock Rd. with 9 elephants & a steam calliope, bringing up the end of the parade. He also saw Ringling at Madison Sq. Gardens when they had Clyde Beatty, The Wallendas, Con Colleano. That was truly the "Greatest Show on Earth!" He saw Ringling under canvas when they still moved from the trains thru horse power. He got up at dawn to get a job setting up chairs for Downie Bros-the first big truck show-to earn a pass for the matinee! He also saw Hagenbeck-Wallace in 1938 in Hackensack, NJ. Last year he took the whole family to see the Big Apple in Atlanta. He says, "Of all the shows I've seen over the years, that was the best!" Thanks, Ray.

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**Ed Motta reports** the Big Apple Circus will play a new location this coming year in the Boston area. From April 3-May 9, they will be at the Moran Terminal, beneath the Tobin Bridge, near the U.S.S. Constitution in Charlestown, MA. Ticket prices are from \$12-\$38. If you need times, write Back Yard. Ed also sent in 3 beautiful color photos of Dolly Jacobs new tent. It is beautiful! One of the displays inside the reception tent has a picture of Dolly and one of her dad, Lou. There is also a display of the Wallenda Family. Thanks, Eddie.

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## \*\*COURTSHIP OF A CLOWN\*\*

By *Bill Ballantine Part III*

(From *Holiday Magazine—July, 1950*)

May 17, Enroute—I'm in an upper on the train, about the middle. Air-conditioning gone, replaced by metal window louvres, no glass. We'll get more fresh air, more cinders in the beds & more smoke in the tunnels. Everybody up late last night talking about the old street-parade days & how horn players used to chip their teeth going over cobbled streets.

May 18, Wash. D.C.—Up early & to the lot to see the new Big Top unsullied as it will never be again. It's blue with red sidewalls. This year for the first time in Ringling history there will be no performers' dressing top. Dressing rooms will be under the Big Top grandstand seats. There is general grumbling, for circus people hate change more than anything. Saw Whiskers & she doesn't seem so tall now that she's out-of-doors.

May 19, Wash.—This Marcella's home town & her mother got a first look at Elkhorn. The new foreign acts all seem to have bought rubber boats at Army surplus & the muddy river behind the lot looks like the upper Thames in punting season. One of the cookhouse dishwashers, disappointed in love, tried to end it in a plunge between shows, but was dragged out to love again. I took a buster on the cinder track during matinee & sliced my leg a bit. Whiskers came around to have a look.

May 20, Wash.—Suzy fell off raft in mid-river today. She didn't forget to point her toes nicely while being carried to the doctor's wagon. Walked to the train tonight with Whiskers & told her how we almost had a blow-down on this lot last year during a sudden, violent storm & exaggerated my heroic part only slightly.

May 21, Baltimore—Downtown this a.m. for a brew at the Peabody Bookshop, the only one I know of with a beer stove in back. Same wonderful *gemulichkeit* place with only a few more Lavinias & Rebs carved in the tables. Herr Weissberger still looks like an erudite Groucho Marx. Took Whiskers a cone of pistachio from an ice cream parlor near the lot. Found her on a wagon tongue with the Danish juggler, eating Good Humors. Matinee was late, didn't get going until 5:30.

May 22, Balt.—The prop hand who is painting my box says he'll finish it sure in Philly. Then he dinged me for a half buck. Suzy was rolled on by an elephant down in the round-end during Finale this aft. There's a backyard

rumor the dressing top will be back in Philly. Roberta is out of hairpins again.

May 23, Philly—Sunday off, thanks to Pa. blue laws. Sat lonely in a movie thru something I'd seen before.

May 24, Philly—Same lot out at 11th & Erie by the carbarn. Same miserable clutter of trailers & brazen little carries. Suzy is back, in a lacy white blouse & jeans. We opened with a screeching kid matinee. Whiskers & Sue Fox had a room in town yesterday for hair washing & hot bath.

May 25, Philly—To the Eagle bar up on the corner with Whiskers after the show. She talked about her show-girl days at the Diamond Horseshoe & how her horse Cissy became a mother. Whiskers jarred me a little by ordering boilermakers—a shot of whiskey with a beer chaser.

May 26, Philly—Suzy must have a high-octane rating, for the local motorcycle club has found her already. She is also practicing wire-walking. Hope someone stops her before she splits herself wide open. Whiskers says Marcella's mother met Elkhorn & was agast.

May 27, Philly—Clowns have discovered a washeteria near the lot & it's getting a big play. Lou Jacobs had his 9-yard strip shirt done for a quarter. Tomorrow is Friday, performers' visiting day in the sideshow, & Whiskers and I are going out to see if there is a bearded lady. Those props who carried my trunk in N.Y. have hit me for a sawsky.

May 29, Philly—Those props blew the show yesterday. I should know better than to lend money so early in the season. Kiss the 10 bucks good-by. Occupational hazard. Still no rain, knock wood.

June 1, Pgh.—There is a shortage of workhands & mgt. brought 125 up from the South. Most of them walked away when they saw how tough the work is. Lulu, the lady clown, has taken a furnished room near the lot & is busy sidewalling neighborhood kids into the shows. Had dinner at Aunt Clara's & brought her back with me to catch the night show. Suzy was fired today & is on her way home. She came overland from Philly on the backseat of a motorcycle & told everybody she was married to the front seat! Turned out she only said she was married to make the trip seem more proper. Pat went into his own pocket for \$25, Barbette (the aerial director) likewise & bought her a ticket back to Chattanooga, FL. Whiskers gave her \$6 to eat on & put her on a daycoach. You can never tell how a First-of-May is going to turn out!

(Continued on Page 9)

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**128TH EDITION RINGLING BLUE UNIT:**

- Miami, FL-Miami Arena-12/26-1/3
- Sunrise, FL-Nat'l Car Rental Center-1/7-1/10
- Jacksonville, FL-Coliseum-1/14-1/18
- N. Charleston, SC-Coliseum-1/21-1/24
- Macon, GA-Centreplex-1/28-1/31
- Augusta, GA-Civic Center-2/2-2/3
- Columbia, SC-Carolina Coliseum-2/5-2/7
- Raleigh, NC-Dorton Arena-2/10-2/14
- Charlotte, NC-Coliseum-2/17-2/21
- Fayetteville, NC-Crown Coliseum-2/25-2/28

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**ALL NEW 129th EDITION RED UNIT !!!!**

- Lakeland, FL-Lakeland Arena-1/1-1/3
- St. Petersburg, FL-Bayfront Arena-1/6-1/10
- Orlando, FL-Arena-1/15-1/17
- Birmingham, AL-Birm.-Jefferson CC-1/20-1/24
- Greenville, SC-Bi-Lo Center-1/27-1/31
- Knoxville, TN-Civic Coliseum-2/3-2/7
- Greensboro, NC-Coliseum-2/10-2/14
- Richmond, VA-Coliseum-2/17-2/21
- Norfolk, VA-Norfolk Scope-2/24-2/28
- Hampton, VA-Hampton Coliseum-3/2-3/7

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**BIG APPLE CIRCUS:** Damrosch Park, Lincoln Center thru January 10

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**BACK YARD**

is published twice monthly-(15th & 30th) by Cherie Valentine, 1522 Clinton Blvd., Bloomington, IL 61701. Ph. 309-828-0737 (no collect calls, please) E-mail: cdvalen@ilstu.edu Subscription rates are \$25.00 per year, for 24 issues, within the USA. Advertising rates, payable in advance, with your copy, are: Full page \$30; Half page \$15; Quarter Page \$10; 1/8 page \$5. \*\*The column, "The Fox," is written by Jenny Wallenda. Other material is written by Cherie Valentine, unless otherwise identified as to author. Reprints from other published material are identified as to source. Comments by writers are their own and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the publisher. Back Yard is a pro-circus, pro-animal publication, which supports the use of animals which are legally held and properly cared for, in the American circus.

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Richard Reynolds reports the CHS Convention will be May 19-22 in L.A. A visit to "Kaleidoscope" on 5/20 in Century City. BE THERE!!!

**\*\*\*ROY ROCKS RINGLING\*\*\***

**By Mike Cecere**

In their never-ending search for the best & brightest animal trainers available, Feld Entertainment has landed a big catch. Roy Wells.

Roy Wells and his lovely & talented wife, Cindy, are joining Ringling Barnum's Red Unit after several years on the popular Kelly-Miller tent show. Highly scouted by many major shows, they choose Ringling because of Feld Entertainment's commitment to quality animal care, ability to back the long training process it takes to turn out quality animal attractions & ability to provide young Asian elephants (Roy's first love) as well as quality retirement for those not so young Jumbos into their Golden Years.

Let me tell you, they might be on the "Greatest Show on Earth", but it's no rest home! They've got to move all these elephants back & forth to the train, put up & tear down the huge stable tents, (some larger than some shows big tops!) get all the gear, costumes & coordinate the animals' places in the show.

Not to mention keeping track of the feed supply & repair for the thousand and one things that break on a touring show. Then, there is training new routines, rehearsing old ones & generally keeping everything up to the high standards of Feld Entertainment.

But most of all, it's good to see someone you know that does a good job advance in their career. It helps all of us to have good people in top positions doing really well with animals. Every well done job is one less thing for the Pro Vegan Hate Groups to point to when they complain. We're all looking forward to what Roy will add to Ringling in the months and years to come. If it's anything like his past work, there will be some happy elephants over on Ringling Red! So good luck to Roy and Cindy. Go show 'em how it is done!

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Paul Holley & Sheelagh Jones report the John Davenport/Col. Earl Tegge Tent is sponsoring its 9th annual trip to the Hawthorn Corp. compound near Richmond, IL on Jan. 10th. Brunch at the Hunter Country Club with Hawthorn personnel, then visitors will be invited to tour the compound & see how big Ravi, Ramses & Isis, last year's baby tigers are now & maybe see this year's new ones, Yoko & Tara, born a few weeks ago & doing very well. Brunch is \$16 in advance; \$18. at door. Send reservations to Sheelagh, 704 Lorraine Cir, Highland Park, IL 60035. Ph. 847-433-3039.



## “COURTSHIP OF A CLOWN”.....

June 2, Pgh.—I'm staying away from the lot until just before showtime to avoid home-town ticket moochers. Did a tape recording interview on the lot & between shows Hans Goetchi, the unicyclist, left off listening to Switzerland long enough to let me listen to myself on his radio. Whiskers promised to listen, too, but she was too busy visiting the horses with the Danish pastry. Ernie Burch worked so strong in the Indian number that he banged up his face diving into the trick Conestoga wagon. Took him to the hospital in makeup & he startled all the nurses. Lola has stopped dancing in Finale, but is still walking the wire. Her tutu makes an excellent maternity garment.

June 3, Pgh.—Took Whiskers to dinner at the home of some old friends. The women gabbled about low infant production of clowns, mismating in marriage & what poor wives girls who are merely decorative make.

June 4, Pgh.—This is a circus-mad town, 5 circus stories on 1 front page today & all the columnists are giving up space. Elkhorn has bought Marcella a hammock & she's slung it between 2 wagons. Midgets opened their softball season, tied the local police, 12-12.

June 7, Wilmington, Del.—4 one-day stands this week & the seat men are keeping their fingers crossed. No one knows if these new fold-up grandstands can take it. Rosa Wong is embroidering a bedspread with pictures & autographs of all the acts. One of the boss grooms blew the show yesterday with a pocketful of money entrusted him by the grooms. Had a nice rainy-day discussion with Chesty about indoor circuses he's worked for. Chesty handles the American language strictly by ear & I had some difficulty identifying the various fraternal orders who sponsor these half sisters of the Circus. We talked of the Aleks, the American Leeja & the Scriners, whose titular head is teh Putintake.

June 9, Reading, PA—Got a late start here because of a stalled engine on the second section. We had only an hour & half between shows. New prop hand joined out. They call him Achin' Heart. He's a sign painter & already he's throwing hungry looks at my prop box with its orphaned paint job. I went hairpin shopping with Whiskers. Counted dog noses on the lot-26 in that Hungarian act, 6 with the clowns, 3 with the Bostock mule act & 14 deadheads (non-working) including an Australian silky, a Great Dane & Buddy North's Labrador retriever.

June 12, Upper Darby, PA—Rose & Paulette, French-

Chinese punks, apprentices to a band of Chinese contortionists, have started to move in on Whiskers, borrowing her buckets. Rose has corrupted Whiskers to "Whiskee" and does it French style, "Ouisqui."

June 15, Bridgeport, CT—Our first stand in Conn. since the fire. Matinee 1 hour late. Nothing happened except turnaway houses & extra close attention from the fire marshal. Couldn't even lay shavings on the track & had to work on a dangerous clay slick. Helen Traubel was Robt. Ringling's guest at the matinee. Had a real serious date with Miss Roberta tonight.

June 16, Bridgeport—Found some hairpins in my coat pocket this morning. Took Roberta a little sugar bulldog that I picked up in town & saw Paulette eating it between shows. Chesty has started a belloit tournament-some French card game-on his trunk top.

June 17, Waterbury—Roberta has given Rose & Paulette a bucket of their own. To keep their jealous aunts from snatching it, they've disguised it with the inscription "Ouisqui-ses amies." Had to compose a eulogy for Tony, a bandman, to read at a funeral. Saw a groom get kicked in the jaw today bringing out the Liberty horses from the Big Top. Bill Hanlon, the clown, is going to teach me to juggle.

June 20, Providence, R.I.—Sunday off. Took Whiskers to the beach at Newport. Too cold for swimming, but we waded among the rocks, had a couple of bracing boilermakers & a fine shore dinner. She told me she doesn't want me to call her Whiskers anymore. She likes Ouisqui.

June 23, Fall River, MA—We're heading Down East after a 4-year absence. Bangor, Maine Sunday. Clowns don't expect many laughs up here. That sign-painter prop hand has surprised me with the darnedest paint job on my box-my name in great big fancy orange letters about a foot high. I had to go around to all the other clowns & explain it wasn't my idea at all. I'm stuck with it too. If I paint it out, I'll hurt poor old Achin' Heart's feelings. Gave him \$2. Some nasty 11-year-old shot Buzzy Potts in the nose with a pin. Lucky it was his putty nose! Talked a lot of stuff tonight with Whiskers out on the platform of one of the cars. She knows all the words to *Blood on the Saddle* & I told her my middle name.

June 24, New Bedford—Rt. cards out today. We get a break Sunday, then do 4 one-day stands, a 2-dayer at Springfield, another Sunday off en route & 7 more 1-days. Whiskers went visiting a summer theater between shows with that latter-day Hamlet.

(To Be Continued)

**\*\*Slifka is Patriarch of Coexistence\*\*  
(Wall St. Journal: Thanks to Eddie Motta for sending this in.)**

When Wall Street philanthropist Alan Slifka sees a problem, he looks to the circus for solutions. He isn't clowning around. As the founder of the Big Apple Circus, he knows a thing or two about life under the big top. His experience with entertainers & acrobats has given him inspiration for his latest act: helping Arabs & Jews in Israel to get along.

"The circus is about community, doing things together, cooperation," Slifka said. "Watching cooperation is joyful. Therefore, the circus is a metaphor for coexistence, of people being able to do amazing things collaboratively." For nearly a decade, he has served as co-founder & chairman of The Abraham Fund, a non-profit venture dedicated to furthering coexistence in Israel. It has donated millions of dollars to schools, summer camps, hospitals & charities that try to bring the two peoples closer together.

The Big Apple Circus, established to bring classical European-style circus arts to the U.S., now is internationally acclaimed. Slifka realizes most children in his programs won't become best friends. But he believes 3 or 4 meetings over several years can teach that "the others are not demons. They are human beings with whom one can create a community."

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**\*PHOENIX ZOO UPDATE: RUBY & CALF  
NECROPSY REPORT COMPLETE 12/10/98\***

The results of the necropsies performed on Ruby & her calf were inconclusive in determining what caused the calf to die & subsequent complications that ended in Ruby's death. Five speculative possibilities include: Torsion or entanglement of umbilical cord; placental detachment from uterus; above average fetal size & weight; abundance of abdominal fat; reaction to oxytocin.

Pathological evidence confirms that the baby died at least 5 days prior to the attempted c-section. Zoo medical records confirm that the calf was dead when exploratory surgery began on Oct. 31.

The Zoo will share the results with vets, veterinary schools & the American Zoological & Aquarium Assn. & the Asian Elephant Species Survival Plan to contribute to our understanding of the biology & physiology of the species.

Ruby's male calf was apparently full term. He weighed

321 pounds; shoulder height-33 inches; tip of trunk to tip of tail-99 inches. The large fetal size & weight, combined with small maternal pelvic canal prevented normal delivery.

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**\*TASMANIAN DEVIL VISITS TAMPA ZOO\***

They're ugly, ferocious & unlikely to win any popularity contests. But you can visit them at Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo. "Only 4 zoos in the country have them, so it's a real privilege to have them here," said Zoo director Sam Winslow. "People are amazed at how small they are. They're not as big as Elmer Fudd."

They are about the size of a small dog. They have black fur, & they feed on the carcasses of dead animals. At one time, they ran wild across Australia, but today they're pretty much confined to the island of Tasmania.

"They've got a real nasty bite. They have very strong jaw muscles & sharp fangs. They can eat a sheep-skull, hooves, bones & all," Winslow said. The Zoo feeds them horse meat, chicken necks & fish. They are most active at dawn & dusk. During the day, they lounge inside of a log. "In the morning, when we first open, is the best time to see them. They're coming out to see what food is available, plus it's a little cooler in the morning."

The Zoo has 2 adult Tasmanian devils: a male, Lorina and a female, Marla. Winslow said he's hoping they'll breed.

"They have a very short breeding time-about 2 years. We're hoping this climate change might spur them on & help induce them to breed." Lorina & Marla will be at the Zoo thru January.

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**\*\*Circus Chronology From 1953 Billboards\*\***

**Eleanor Pelikan**, mother of **Lillian Leitzel**, died in June in Milwaukee. **Miss Lexi Polack** aerialist, injured in fall in Minn. **King-Cristiani** gave 5 performances in a single day at Halifax, N.S. **Charlie Siegrist**, outstanding flyer & acrobat, died in Oct., in Normal, IL. **D.R. Miller** bought his brother's share in **Cole & Walters** & then sold additional share to **Herb Walters**, making them co-owners. **Mrs. Elizabeth Hanneford**, 83, mother of **George & Poodles** & **Mrs. Ernest Clarke**, died in Nov., in Hollywood. **Art Concello** announced his resignation as gen. mgr. of **Ringling**, following a conference with **John Ringling North** in NY. North named **Frank McClosky** mgr. **Terrell Jacobs** signed with **Kelly-Miller** for 1954... **Unus** performed at Pres. Eisenhower's inaugural ball.

**\*BIG TOP BOOSTERS-CIRCUS STARS  
RAISE FUNDS FOR CHARTER  
SCHOOL\*-By Liliane Parbot-Johnson  
(Charlotte Sun-Herald 12/11/98)**

There has been much talk about charter schools lately, but the one set up in Sarasota is being talked about the world over. Already 35 applications have arrived from foreign countries. Although the school will teach English, math & other academic subjects, the curriculum is to include the training of youths who aim at becoming professional circus performers.

The co-founders of the school come from different continents & their childhood's differed greatly, but they share a love of the circus. They want to give youngsters who dream of becoming circus artists the opportunity to work hard to realize their dreams.

Dolly Jacobs is the daughter of the late Lou Jacobs, the renowned clown who brought laughter to generations of children & their parents. Dolly will be inducted in January into the Ringling Museum Hall of Fame. She already has a plaque on St. Armand's Circle, next to her father's. Dolly's partner is Pedro Reis, the executive director. He was not born in the circus. In his native Cape Town in South Africa, his life seemed aimless & hopeless at 12. "You can say I was a street kid getting into a lot of trouble," he said recently, covered with dirt from setting up bleachers. As a youngster, his salvation was the YMCA, where they were teaching kids to perform in a flying trapeze act. While learning to become a flyer, Pedro helped with the development of the school. He realized the most important thing a circus school does for kids is to develop their self-esteem.

"At an early age I decided what I wanted to do. I toured the world with a flying act. It was a great education, as well as allowing me to support myself. You can say I have sawdust in my veins, after 20 years as a professional, & now I want to give back. For me to give it back, the best thing to do is to give back to the kids." Ringling wintered in Sarasota from 1927 to 1958, when it moved to Venice, until 1992. Each January, after Ringling returned from a holiday engagement in Havana, the winter quarters were open to the public. Visitors could watch the animals, the rehearsals or practice sessions by the acts. Performances were given outdoors on Sundays until the circus would leave for the new season, before Easter time.

For those Sarasota High School students who want to become professionals after graduation, the school will

offer a chance to polish their skills, but the focus will be on the charter school students.

"I was in Sailor Circus myself, as a kid," Dolly said. "This will be a different program. It will be for youngsters at risk of dropping out. We'll take them at 12 years old & up because we focus on professional training, so they have to have concentration, which comes after that age." Dolly said they have to put on the weekend performances to support themselves & raise funds to start the school. "In the future, we'll help others like the Diabetes Foundation..I found out 2 years ago I was diabetic."

The tent seats 1700 people. The tent comes from France. The metal infrastructure is from Russia. They placed a big for it when it was abandoned in St. Pete by the Moscow Circus. "We bought it sight unseen," Dolly said. "We knew it had not been used that much. It's in pretty good shape. It just needs a few repairs & painting." Dolly will not go on the road for a long engagement. "I want to stay here. I was born & raised here. People all over the world know Circus City. There are a lot of retired circus people here. They need to be recognized."

Trevor Boswell, of South Africa, is a catcher in the flying act & toured Europe 10 years before coming to the U.S. He is the circus' electrician. He had no trouble climbing a pole & popping up above the tent to do the job. Sylvain Dubois, of Canada, was rehearsing his bicycle act, but Voki Kalfayan of Chicago, was not rehearsing his comedy act. He was painting handrails & said, "Maybe I'll do rigging later."

Steve Smith, who was director of the Ringling Clown College until it closed a year ago, is the choreographer of the show, but he was working a fog machine. Also on the program are a hand-balancing act from Portugal, the Russian Cossacks horseback riding act, a Hungarian juggling act and more.

(Liliane was in show business for 20 years, 12 of them as an aerialist with American circuses. More about her circus career in next issue. You can e-mail her at parbotjohnson @ sunletter.com Thank you Liliane for sending this.)

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The Budweiser Clydesdales were in Venice, FL 12/24. 8 giant horses cantered into the Wal-Mart parking lot, met by crowds of shoppers & Clydesdale groupies! The team will finish their year in Miami at the Orange Bowl. They make 300-500 personal appearances each year, about 90,000 miles annually.

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**"ELEPHANTS A HUGE RESPONSIBILITY"**  
**From Mendon, MA Gazette-(Thanks to**  
**Ed Motta for sending the article in.)**

Bret Bronson feels like George Bailey in "It's a Wonderful Life." But, he hasn't gotten to the happy ending yet. Bret is an animal trainer & handler who, for 8 years, has worked with 4 giant African elephants at a training center provided by Southwick Zoo in Mendon. In October, however, Bret reached an impasse in his efforts to buy the elephants from their New Hampshire owner. That meant that Bret's extended family of Willy, Kalli, Dancer and Tanya would be broken up.

Even that has not gone well, however. Tanya has been placed with Al Jones, the owner from New Hampshire, who has been planning to open an animal park. And Kalli has been sold to the Philly Zoo. Dancer, though, is supposed to be sent to an animal sanctuary in Texas, but the transportation arrangements are on hold for reasons Bret can't determine.

Willy has been earmarked for Disney's Animal Kingdom in Florida, but that move also is delayed as Bret waits for transportation orders from the company. The orders, which would explain how Bret is to ship the animal to Florida, had been promised to Bret 3 weeks ago. The delays forced the Bronsons to cancel plans for Thanksgiving at home with family, because they thought they would be traveling with the elephants.

It also has prevented Bret from looking for another job & home, changes he must make by March, when his time with Southwick's is expected to run out. Bret also has been unable to commit Willy & Dancer, for whom he still cares, to seasonal Christmas contracts because of the uncertainty surrounding their impending move.

"It's been an incredibly tough ordeal to see them go," Bret said. "We're losing the elephants, we're selling our equipment & we're going to get out of the animal business, but it's tough to pursue anything when you don't know what's going to happen."

Bret retrieved Willy, Kalli & Dancer from a neglectful owner in Michigan with financial backing from Jones in 1990. Bret nursed the animals back to health from malnourishment & disease. Tanya was later added from an animal farm in New Hampshire. Bret created an educational & entertainment touring business that he thought would earn enough money for him to buy the animals from Jones. The venture enjoyed some success, with the elephants appearing in commercials for AT&T, the movie "12 Monkeys" & on the cover of Newsweek

magazine. Bronson has asked Jones for boarding costs for the animals for the past few months, but so far Jones has refused, according to Bret. Bret spent about \$3000 a month feeding & caring for the animals, while also trying to raise \$50,000 to buy them. Finally, in October, he told Jones he would be unable to raise the money.

Bret said it's been painful watching a dream crumble, especially during such a festive time of year. "It gets very frustrating," he said. "It's tough when you have to tell your 4-year-old that we can't get a Christmas tree, & we're not even sure why."

Bret & his wife, Kendra, had hoped to create a traveling animal show to support themselves, but now will likely get out of the animal business entirely, ending 18 years of involvement.

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**Amos Bolieau reports** from New England that Turtle Benson will have "Boo" on Roberts Bros. this season. Boo is bigger than Lisa, who will be in a breeding program at Carson & Barnes compound. Turtle will also help Ron Guay move his cats to an undisclosed compound in Florida. Turtle has the CDL license needed to move the big cats. Unfortunately, Doris had the license. (Ed.-Thanks to Turtle for sending the beautiful postcard with him & Lisa.)

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**Patricia Zerbini reports** from Germany that Circus Krone opened on Xmas with the first program that will run till Jan. 31; the second program begins Feb. 1 thru 28th; the last winter program starts March 1 thru 31st. The season starts April 4th. It will be the last year of a 6 year tour; the year 2000 will bring an all new line-up & many new additions to Circus Krone-new lighting, new tent & a band. A lot of renovations are already being made. Transports are being built for the elephants & horses. The show carries 48 horses & 10 elephants.

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**Gary Thomson, Ontario, reports** the Giant Holiday Circus will play the Samia Sports Center Jan. 1 & Copps Coliseum, in Hamilton, Jan. 2-3. Waiting for reports!!

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**David Orr reports** the Emmett Kelly Tent #41 sent a cash donation from the Tent to the Circus in Peru, IN to help ship the equipment of the 8-High to Monte Carlo. He says the Big Apple Circus is doing "Box Office" business in NY. They also have a different band this year. Buckles' elephants really look good. David is headed for Sarasota, so please keep us informed on things down there!

## RUMBLINGS FROM THE CRUMMY

By Brian Nunn

\*I went and saw the movie, "It's A Bug's Life". I'm not a Disney fan, but this movie was funny. It's got a circus theme and some of the characters reminded me of some of the shows I've been on.

I remember the fun of last minute putting together equipment for a long jump out of winter quarters, usually done late at night. The elephant (single) trailer had electric brakes; the show rented a diesel tractor to haul it. So, the show's mechanic is adapting an electric brake box onto the tractor's air brake system. While he's doing that, I looking at the trailer, a big 12" I beam, 3 axle, Texas trailer. He discovers that the front axle has shifted back a little. The pin holding the left spring to the frame had come out. No simple job getting it square in order to put a pin back in. I've got to thank Dirk, the mechanic, for being there. I don't like to think of axles falling off an elephant trailer going down the road.

\*The guy that worked the cat act was off doing something else. The owner was calling around for L.A. Dean. The show opened in Tyler, Texas in a few days. Well, the show got to Tyler & Dean got there just before the show. The arena was set up, Larry steps in and says, "Let 'em in."

Then, (as each cat comes in) he asks me what's this ones name and where's he sit. Well, he gets all the cats to their seats OK. Then, he says, "What's the first trick?" I say, "I don't know." So he queues the cats and whatever trick they start into he keeps them going at it.

At one time, three of them come line up and lay down. (There's eight cats.) Larry says, "This must be the big lay down." Anyway, he put together a nice routine by the next date. The announcer introduced him as Larry Allen Dean, the East Coast Flash.

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### \*Irvin Feld To Be Honored By Circus Friends\* From the Venice Gondolier 12/16/98

The late Irvin Feld, a modern-day circus king, who is credited with "saving" & restoring to glory an ailing Ringling Bros. Circus, is among a half-dozen circus greats who will be inducted Jan. 23 into the Circus Ring of Fame at St. Armands Circle.

Also slated for induction are Feld's son, Kenneth; Capt. Wm. Heyher, one of the greatest equestrians of all time; Czeslan Mroczkowski, a trainer & presenter of Liberty horses; the Flying Palacios, a family of flying trapeze artists; Albert Rix, long time breeder, trainer & presenter

of performing bears. The Palacios family reside in Sarasota as does Mroczkowski's widow. Irvin & Kenneth Feld will be honored together. Kenneth, who took over the Ringling reins on his father's death in 1984, has created a continuing series of outstanding circus presentations.

The Circus Ring of Fame annually recognizes those who have made significant contributions to the circus. Since its 1989 founding, it has previously honored 49 such individual & groups. New Ring inductees are selected by a committee comprised of former circus performers, administrators, fans & historians & by vote of living members of the Ring.

Among the expected highlights will be a live concert of circus band music, performed by members of Windjammers Unlimited, a national organization dedicated to preserving & playing circus music. It is meeting in Sarasota in January for its' annual convention.

\*\*\*\*\*

### Dr. Frederick McIntrye passes Nov. 12.

Fred was a member of CHS, CFA, Windjammers and a subscriber to Back Yard. He retired from private practice in 1986. Virginia Navin reports his funeral was just as he would have liked it. His wife, Toni, carried out all his wishes. The funeral home had circus calliope music playing softly in the background while the visiting was going on. The next morning at the church, they had a Mass in which the priest started out by saying he was sure that when Fred reached Heaven, the first two things he would ask were, "When does the fun start?" and "Which way to the Big Top?" When the casket was carried out, the organist broke into a resounding rendition of the "March of the Gladiators." It was a wonderful tribute to Fred's love of the circus. My sympathy to Toni. Thanks, Virginia for telling us.

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**Bobby Hakes reports** he & Phips went to a lovely party at Bunni Bartok Perz's. The weather & company were terrific! Among some of the guests were Daviso, Belmonte & Delilah Cristiani, Mary Ruth & John Herriott, Harry Dubsy, Ray McMahon & his wife, Bunny Pratt, Molah & Fatima Wassan, Hub Hubbell & his wife, Rose & Fay Alexander, Derrick & Linda Rosaire & families, Anne Delmonte, Jackie LeClaire, Diamond Jim Parker, Billy Rogers & his mom, Kathie & Paul Nelson, plus many more! Tony Bartok gave a show & has become a great entertainer. Food was great & a good time had by all. Great job, Bunni!

Al G. Barnes Circus 1937



Corky Cristiani

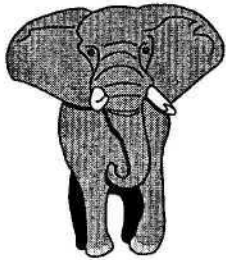


1946



**Can You Name These Performers???**

**Back Yard  
1522 Clinton Blvd.  
Bloomington, IL 61701**



**FIRST CLASS MAIL!**