

# BACK YARD

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## *The Flying Valentinos: Circuses & Fairs They Played Along Route 66, 1935-1959*

By Cherie Valentine

Contracts were signed well in advance of the dates of the circuses. In May, 1948, George Valentine signed a contract for the Houston Shrine Circus that was to be held November 3-16. For this date, they received \$1200. The Moslah Temple Shrine Circus in Ft. Worth was held a few days later, from Nov. 19-28 and George signed their contract in May also. Ft. Worth had a very lengthy contract; 3 legal size pages, with 11 conditional parts. The salary for the 10 days was \$857. In June, 1948, George received 2 contracts from the LaRose Attractions Agency in St. Louis. One contract was for a Route 66

town, Litchfield, IL, to perform in August, 3 days for \$300. Lorraine Valentine's journal showed they bought 73¢ worth of stamps at the post office and also had to get the icebox repaired in their trailer, costing \$8. Another expense was \$5 for help, which meant they hired someone from the town to help put up the flying act rigging. They also spent money at the local gas station, filling up for \$14. From Litchfield, they traveled to Kingman, Indiana. In July, the Flying Valentinos performed at the Ball Park, for the Jr. Chamber of Commerce in Springfield, IL for 7 days, receiving \$550. While in town, they spent \$15.40 on gas and had to pay for electricity, at the park, \$6.43. They also had the car greased for \$5.60 and the mileage on their new car was now 5, 420. They closed the season Oct. 2 in Hannibal, Mo. and returned to their new home in Normal, Illinois.

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*Ligonier, Pa.  
Idlewild Park  
-1940*



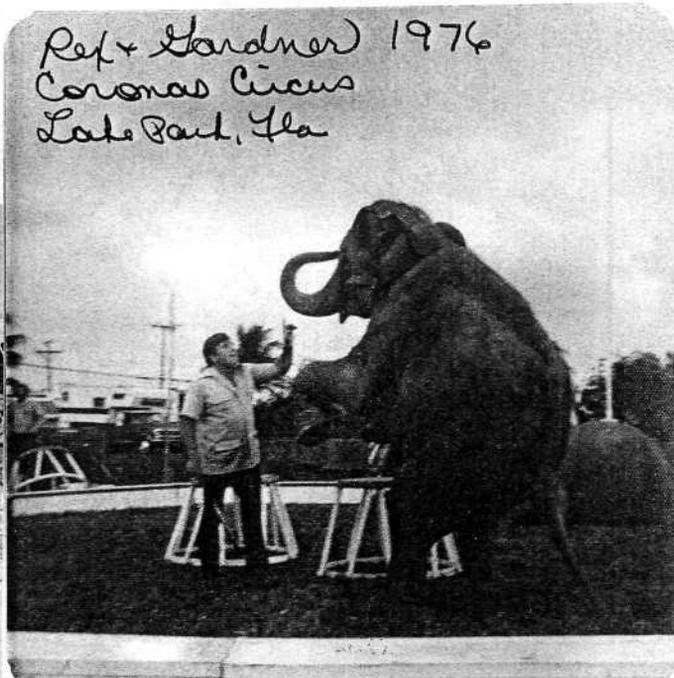
Kari Johnson

*Tika + Kari*

Dick McGivney Collection



George & Lorraine Valentine



*Ref + Gardner 1976  
Coronas Circus  
Lake Park, Fla*

## *What's it Like Being the Man on the Flying Trapeze?*

Some interviews with Fay Alexander

Fay's movie career began in 1950, when he became a stand-in for Cornell Wilde in "The Greatest Show on Earth," which won 11 academy awards-but his favorite memory is working with Burt Lancaster in "Trapeze." "The entire plot of the movie was built around a trapeze artist who could perform the triple somersault," said Fay, adding he wasn't the first to do the triple, but he "was the only one doing it at the time." Fay doubled for all 3 stars, Lancaster, Tony Curtis and Gina Lollobrigida, which of course took a little make-up. Burt said, "Without Fay, we could not have made 'Trapeze.' Fay had done the triple only 6 times in his life-and we had to take the chance that he could do it at least once more for us. Two months before the picture started shooting, Fay practiced every night.

On the day that the big scene was scheduled to be shot, everyone in the company was keyed up to a high pitch of excitement. Again and again Fay tried the triple. And again and again he failed. He realized that each day's shooting was costing about \$25,000 and and that if he couldn't come thru, the day would be a total loss. Finally we begged him to stop trying but he kept saying, 'Let me try once more.' I'll never forget that last try. He did it-it was perfect-and everyone on the set let out a screaming cheer, lasting 5 minutes. Fay, meanwhile, just stood up there on the platform, blushing crimson." What makes a triple so difficult? "You must have a tremendous lift when you take off, for if you don't reach a sufficient height you'll miss the catcher coming down. Your speed when you approach the catcher, or, as they say, 'barrel in,' is 60 miles an hour. And unless the timing is perfect to a split second, the catcher's grip on you can't hold," Fay said. Working on the movie "Trapeze" was Fay's come-back to the world of trapeze. He had suffered a serious injury 3 years before and had virtually retired from circus life. "In 1952, while working in the Ringling Bros. Circus, I flew over the edge of

the safety net and fell into the seats." Fay went back to work 5 days later after being told at the hospital he was fine. Still experiencing pain, however, Fay went to the Mayo Clinic where he was told he had "two broken ribs and a hairline fracture in my neck, which was causing the should problem. In 1954, I quit because I felt I would never fly again," he said. Believing he should learn another trade, he attended barber school and went to work for his father. "My father was a barber, but my sister and I started an acrobatic act when I was 4 and she was 3," he said. They worked in vaudeville during the Depression, but their act was canned when he turned 12-the truant officer caught up with them. Fay quit school at 17 to start his own troupe. He and 2 other men traveled around the U.S. until "Uncle Sam" decided he wanted one of the boys to serve in World War II. "We wanted to keep the team together so we all enlisted in the Coast Guard. We were assigned to the Rudy Vallee Coast Guard Band. We were the warm-up." Vallee wanted the trio to receive first class petty officer ratings, but they could only be listed as musicians. Vallee solved the problem by getting all three a musician first class rating. "The funny thing is that none of us could play an instrument," Fay said. After being discharged, the three went on the road with a show called Tars and Spars.

In the following years, he worked in the Clyde Beatty Circus, formed his own act called the Dwayne Bros. Circus and traveled to Central South America with a trapeze act. He slowed down enough in 1948 to marry a trick rider in the show. Rosie pushes the buttons when Fay and his Comedy Car act perform for the Circus World audience. "I bought the car from the widow of the guy who originally did the act. I figured I had better learn something besides trapeze for my later years." Fay said there are times he gazes up at the aerial acts and feels nostalgic. "I kind of miss it," he admits, adding that he does enjoy doing his comedy car routine. "I like hearing the laughter from the people. I guess I'm a ham at heart."

### *The Flying Valentinos.....*

The Valentines used the next few weeks off to work on the barn and purchase household equipment for it. Lorraine purchased a new Singer sewing machine for \$147, which would make sewing their costumes a lot easier. ( I still have this). In Lorraine's journal for Oct., 1948, they paid 50¢ for a driver's license. On Oct. 30, George left for the Houston Shrine Circus, leaving Lorraine home, awaiting the birth of their first child. Gas to Houston and the Ft. Worth dates, and then back to Normal, cost \$63. A hotel expense was \$43 and meals \$160, so, perhaps, this means George only took the equipment truck to the dates, not the housetrailer.

Lorraine was admitted to the Mennonite Hospital on Dec. 4, room 326 and her doctor was O.H. Ball. Cherie Diane was born at 5:14 PM on the 5th. Lorraine's journal states it was a cloudy, windy day. She was in the hospital until the 11th and the total hospital bill for the 7 days was \$55. George insisted that his daughter should be called, "Cherie," daughter of the famous, "LaRayne."

The 1949 season saw them opening at the Chicago Stadium for Barnes Bros. Circus, April 22-May 8, for which they received \$1300. They also performed at the Omaha Shrine Circus and a picture of Cherie, 5 months old and Lorraine, appeared in the paper. I am hanging by a set of rings, off a clothesline, with Lorraine close by saying, "She's been doing it since she was 3 months old." In November, they performed at the City Auditorium in New Orleans for 10 days, receiving \$925. In March, they paid \$17 for the car license and \$12 for the truck license. In May, they paid the car insurance of \$39. On July 9, George wrote a check to the Rogers Trailer Ranch in Rantoul, IL, for \$794 and a note at the bottom of the check said, "Paid in full for 1949 Vagabond trailer." Lorraine's journal also notes they paid \$1200 cash. In October, George paid one dollar for a car shine.

For the 1950 season, they opened for the Omaha Shrine in April. In January, it cost \$23 to repair the

car, grease and change fluid. The mileage on the car was 18,500. In April, George purchased a truck battery at the Ford garage, for \$22. It cost \$6 to grease the truck, which had 13,018 miles on it. In August, he paid \$7 for headlamps; \$52 for a tire and \$11 for a bumper guard. Doctor bills were appearing more frequently in Lorraine's 1949 journal and much more so in 1950. On Dec. 20, George paid \$15 to a lawyer to make out his will. George had developed heart trouble and at 52, he found it necessary to retire from the flying act. As he would not let anyone else catch for Lorraine & Sue, the Flying Valentinos would not perform again. Performing & life on the road had been hard on George, but he didn't just sit at home. Lorraine had learned back in 1933 how to perform a single trapeze act and a web number, so George booked her into a few dates in 1951, starting in June for 3 weeks in Canada with the Garden Bros. Circus. Her journal reported dates in Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Iowa, Colorado and Peoria, IL. A *Billboard* article from June holds the mystery as to what Lorraine did in 1951. She is listed in the program as, "LaRayne," trapeze. Sue Pelto went to work in 1951 for Lowell & Mary Sherer, of Bloomington, in their flying act. Sue broke her ankle in a rigging accident and worked the rest of the season with a cast on her leg. I remember her saying she could recall the sound that the cast made when it hit the trapeze bar. When Lorraine & George were on their way back from Canada, a gas expense to Detroit was \$20.70, with a toll of \$1.85 and a trailer camp rent of \$2. She listed gas for 3 weeks in Canada at \$131. A date in South Bend, IN paid Lorraine \$180. At the end of Sept., they traveled to Colorado to perform and their gas cost \$47. In early December, a check for \$50, for rigging, was written to Fussner Co. This was, perhaps, the start of building the new rigging for Lorraine & Sue. On Dec. 11, an \$8 expense for rings to be chromed was listed in Lorraine's journal. They used the rings in the new act they were forming.

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## IS THIS HEAVEN? By Denny Childers

Following a comment that I made in the January 31 issue of *Back Yard* about never having touched an elephant, I received an e-mail message from Kari Johnson of Have Trunk Will Travel. In that message, she hoped that one day, I would be able to touch one of her elephants. Time passed, but the hope was always there that one day Sandra and I would be able to make the trip to California and pay a visit to Kari and her elephants.

An opportunity presented itself when Spring Break for Sandra's first grade class rolled around the third week of March. After a message to Kari, the date was set and the closer we got to March 24, the longer the days seemed to last. As luck would have it, one day before our planned trip, we discovered the old RV needed to have some extensive work that would not be completed before our departure. Panic ensued, but upon hearing of our plight, Diane Hill (author and e-mail friend) and her husband, Paul, hastily volunteered to open her house to the vagabond Childers troop. March 23 arrived and wife, Katie; granddaughter, Sandra; and I loaded into the car, starting a 400-mile journey to our Field of Dreams.

Sandra kept the trip interesting, by asking how many more miles until we get there or how many miles had we driven. During the ten miles between each of Sandra's mileage checks, I used the time to go over the hundred or so questions that I wanted to ask Kari the next day. The trip to Diane's home was uneventful. Following supper, Diane brought out the series of children's books that she is writing about the elephants of Have Trunk Will Travel. She and Sandra went through several books before calling it a night and retiring with thoughts of elephants and the next morning's arrival at the Johnson's' ranch.

March 24, 8:45 A.M., we pull up to the Have Trunk Will Travel gate. After a short call to Kari, the electric gate slides open and we pass from the "cornfields of Iowa," over a slight hill. Opening in front of us, is our Field of Dreams. Is this Heaven?

On the hillside to our left, is a large, empty corral. This is no ordinary corral, but is made of huge metal tubing and to use the words of a Rogers & Hammerstein song, "extends higher than an elephant's eye." As we drive down the hill, we see the main part of the compound, a large flat area densely surrounded by trees. The large tractor-trailer combinations used to transport the elephants are parked immediately in front of us at the foot of the hill. To their left, we see another large corral

of the same type construction as the one on the hillside and the concrete block elephant barn. We parked the car beside the trucks and as we walked around them, we could see Kari bathing one of the elephants, Kitty, on the bathing pad. Evidently, when caring for elephants, one cannot afford to waste time and must make use of all available labor. Kari immediately took Sandra by the hand, gave her a scrub brush, bucket of soapy water, and put her to work scrubbing Kitty. To avoid this work detail, I made some lame excuse about forgetting my camera in the car and retreated to the safety of the car to get my video camera. After much scrubbing by Sandra and following a thorough rinsing and dental inspection by Kari, Kitty raised one foot with one word from Kari, "foot." It was time for Sandra's break to end and she was put to work one more time, diligently scrubbing Kitty's toenails. We later found out that this routine is followed every day for each elephant. As a matter of fact, the day begins with a morning walk by all the elephants around the ranch, followed by each of the elephants completing a practice of their routines, and finally, each is bathed. Today, the routine was changed slightly since Kari knew that we would be visiting.

After Kitty's bath, she followed Kari around the corral, past the barn, and into the corral where we met Amos, the 18-month old baby and his mother Becky. Again, by verbal command only, both lied down on their sides so that the dirt and dust could easily be brushed from them before they were led to their morning bath. Trunk to tail, Amos took the lead, followed by Becky, and Kitty brought up the rear. This unusual procession paraded back to the bathing pad and the routine was repeated with Becky and Amos. "Repeated" may not be the appropriate word as it implies that there was the same sequence of events. As with most youngsters, bath time is play time and Amos was no exception. Suffice it to say that Amos thoroughly enjoyed his bath and Sandra enjoyed bathing him! There were two other elephants in the corral, Rosie and Dixie, but they had already been washed when we arrived. One more time, trunk to tail and Amos in the lead, it was back around the barn, not to the barn, but to the practice arena. After positioning Kitty and Becky to the side, Kari walked Amos in a large circle and gave us an exhibition of the training process used at Have Trunk Will Travel. I will not go into that here as this will be the subject of **another story**, but let it be known that Amos thoroughly enjoyed his work out.

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## News From Our Circus Friends

**Al House** writes "Our **Felix Adler Tent #12** had coffee-cake treats for **Ringling Blue** on March 4 and was a great success. Performers, staff and administrative personnel all came between the 2nd and 3rd show. Former Ringling clowns, **Barry "Grandma" Lubin** and "**Cowboy**" **Mike Keever**, with his wife, **Patti**, also came to visit their former colleagues. This year's clown alley has a New Jersey woman in it. She is **Melanie Covello** of Rockaway. She trouped last on Beatty-Cole in 1998, doing face painting, clowning and school tours. We were glad to see her. For many Felix Adler Tent members who follow **Vidbel** in Jersey, a warm reunion was held by them with the Cossack riding troupe. The troupe was the Vidbel closing act for 3 years and impressed all with their fast act. It now is the first act in the show, getting the performance off to a fast start.

Our local paper, *The Record*, of Hackensack, on its religion page, interviewed religious leaders of many faiths; Christian, Islam, Jewish, Buddhist and Hindu, to name a few. All, except the vegetarians by choice-said man shouldn't abuse animals, but there are no restrictions on using them. I was pleased to see such a scope of opinion, which merely solidifies in my mind, that animal activists are radical thinkers. (Thanks, Al and Maxine)

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**Bud DeVere** was interviewed by the *Palm Beach Post* about the **Kenneth Feld Tent**. Looking forward to seeing that article, Bud!

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**Earl Krauzer** and his wife, **Bernice**, attended the **Commodore Nutt** opening, running for 2 months at the Manchester, NH Historical Society. The Shrine Circus opens there April 6-9 and the producer is **Wayne McCary**, director of the Eastern States Expo in Springfield, MA. See you both in Sarasota!

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**Paul Holley** writes Walker Bros. Stars of the Circus had 'em seated right up to the ring curb at the Racine County Fairgrounds, Union Grove, Wis.,

April 1. After the 530 p.m. show let out, there was a long line waiting to get into the 730 performance. Business has been consistently good throughout the winter tour, said Scott Taylor, the show's illusionist and announcer. The indoor dates started Jan. 17 and conclude April 16. After a two-week layoff, Walker Bros. will reopen under canvas and be joined by John (John John) Walker III and two to four Cuneo elephants. Walker's Stars of the Circus is a very strong 90-minute show, including Scott Taylor's illusions, the Rosaire-Zoppe chimps, talented clown **Coco Kramer** (who works very well in a small one-ring venue), Scott's unrideable mule, foot juggling, hand balancing and unicycles. A low ceiling in the building kept the aerial acts from working in Union Grove.

Tickets are \$8 for adults. Up to two kids under 12 are admitted on free tickets distributed by local merchants. The gimmick really brought out the kids and their free-spending parents. Walker Bros. is expected to return to Wisconsin in the summer. The show also plans to tour Michigan's upper and lower peninsulas. Friends of the Circus, a Sheboygan, Wis.-based circus enthusiast group, has scheduled the rest of its meetings for the year. Upcoming meeting dates are June 11, Aug. 13, Oct. 8 and Dec. 10. All meetings are held at the Harbor Center Hotel, 723 Center Ave., Sheboygan, Wis. At least two traditional tented shows are heading into Wisconsin in 2000. Sterling & Reid Bros. is said to be booked into the state in late May early June. Alain Zerbini Circus will play several dates in June.

## Passing Of Our Circus Friends

**Helen Billetti Warburton** reports her sister, **Ruth Pettit**, 95, of Logansport, IN, went to check on a leak in the basement with a plumber and fell down the stairs and died. Ruth enjoyed St. Patrick's day by having corned beef and cabbage and green beer at the American Legion and was dancing at the Eagles Club. She obviously enjoyed life and her friends. **Mickey King** called to tell me about Ruth, as they lived close. Miss Mickey will be 95 years-young this August 6. Our prayers go out to Helen for the loss of her sister.

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**RINGLING RED:** Roanoke-Civic Ctr: 4/12-16; Charleston, WV-Civic Ctr: 4/19-23; Chattanooga-UTC Arena: 4/27-4/30; Fayetteville, NC-5/3-7; Dayton-5/11-14; Columbus-5/17-21; Peoria, IL-5/24-28; Little Rock-6/14-18. Coming Soon to Toledo, Ohio!

**RINGLING BLUE:** Philadelphia-4/13-23; Providence-Civic Center: 4/26-30; New Haven-5/3-7; Hartford-5/10-14; Hersey, PA-5/17-21; Springfield, MA-5/24-25; Albany, NY-5/27-29; Wilkes-Barre, PA-5/31-6/4; Lexington, KY-6/8-11; Austin, TX-6/15-18.

**BIG APPLE CIRCUS:** Boston-Fan Pier: 4/1-5/7; Queens, NY-Cunningham Park: 5/11-5/21; Brookville, NY-Long Island Univ.: 5/26-6/4; Chicago-Arlington Intl: 6/10-25

**Big Apple OOPS!:** East Lansing, MI-4/14-16; Pittsburgh-4/18-23; Detroit-Fox Theatre-4/25-30; Wichita-5/4-6; Boise, ID-5/9-10; Medford, OR-5/14

**Barnum's Kaleidoscope:** Chicago-3/29-4/30.

**Carson & Barnes:** LaPorte, TX-4/11; Dayton-4/12; Cleveland-4/13; Crockett-4/14; Jacksonville-4/15; Terrell-4/16; Durant,OK-4/17; Atoka-4/18; McAlester-4/19; Seminole-4/20; Shawnee-4/21; Stillwater-4/22

**Sterling-Reid Circus:** Bryan, TX-4/12-13; Irving-4/14-16; Lubbock-4/17-18; Hobbs, NM-4/20; El Paso-4/21-23

**UniverSoul Circus:** Cleveland: 5/24-28; Columbus: 5/31-6/4; Cincinnati: 6/7-11; Indianapolis: 6/12-16

**Circus World Museum: Opens May 6-Baraboo, WI**

**Circus Hollywood-Atlanta, GA: 5/5-14-Yaarab Shrine**

**Tarzan Zerbini Circus-Wilmington, MA: 5/15-21**

**Hamid Circus Royale-Springfield, MA: 5/4-7**

### **Louisiana Motorists Stop For Bear!**

Traffic came to a screeching halt in Metarie when a huge Black bear got loose on I-10. The 7', 450 pound bear fell out of a circus truck April 2. Drivers said they were caught off guard when they saw it running loose along the highway. Gauika was reunited with the Sterling & Reid Circus and its cage-mate, Masha. Gauika was hit by a truck but continued to walk around. State Police cornered it

and a vet gave it a tranquilizer. Gauika was then taken to the Audubon Zoo for observation and the Zoo said the it only had minor scrapes on its face.

### **BACK YARD**

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**Gee Gee Engesser attended the Ringling Bros. Circus Parade of the Millennium March 27 in Washington.** There were marching bands, old time fire engines, many, many horse & buggies with noted circus performers. Baraboo brought 10 wagons. Gee Gee contracted, for Feld Entertainment, 50 beautiful prize winning draft horses. Also there was Dave Hale with the 8-camel hitch, pulling the Royal Italian bandwagon; the Ken Maynard air calliope; all of the show animals; 13 elephants, bareback horses & riders, camels, llamas, zebras, liberty horses, dogs-you name it, they were all there! Mr. Feld and his family, plus the Mayor of Washington, all rode atop the Ringling Bros. United States Wagon and Charlie Schlarbaum had a 10 piece band on top of the John Robinson Wagon (owned by Felds) and they played old-time circus music. "The turn-out was great and we went right past the Capitol. The cherry blossoms were out and at one spot, a breeze came up and it snowed blossoms all over us." Gee Gee sent a line-up of the Parade and that will be included in the next issue of Back Yard. **Thanks, Gee Gee-see you in Sarasota!**

### *The Flying Valentinos....*

In 1952, Lorraine & Sue formed a double trapeze act that was portable and could fold up so they could perform on a stage at clubs or fairs alike. They could put the rigging together without the help of George, so he could just do all the booking of the act, now named, the Valentino Sisters. Most of the expenses thru April were for wardrobe for the new act & rigging expenses. On May 1, George paid \$5 for a rearview mirror. A notation for May 8 reports they sold their coupe.

Their first date with the new act appears to be in Canada in early May. Gas to Canada was \$12 and they stayed at a trailer camp for \$3, May 8. Trailer camp expenses were also reported for the 14th & 17th, \$5 each. They were paid about \$350 a week. In August, they received \$325 for 4 days in Berne, Indiana. The first expense I have found for a TV was on Sept. 6, 1952, as they had it repaired for \$8. An entry in Lorraine's journal for Nov. 21, recorded the car's mileage at 49,700 and they were travelling to Ft. Morgan, Co. For once, meals were appearing in the journal, a total of \$17 while in Holdrege. The journal doesn't say they paid for lodging, so they must have taken the trailer. In 1952, they performed in Canada for 3 months, also Indiana, Michigan, Colorado and Nebraska.

A snipe from the *Billboard* in 1952 reports, "George Valentine, manager of the Valentino Sisters, advises that the act will be on the "Big Top" TV show July 2. They have been with Garden Bros. Circus and made club dates in the Detroit-Windsor area." Another article stated "the Valentino Sisters will take their portable trap act to the Berne, IN. Centennial Celebration Aug. 17 and will follow with the Fireman's Circus at Detroit, Aug. 23-24." Cherie, made the *Billboard's* headlines the following week, "Cherie Diane Valentine, 3 1/2 year-old daughter of George & Lorraine Valentine, made her "show biz" debut recently at Berne, IN. Following the Valentino Sisters trapeze stint, little Cherie came out for her routine of trap tricks and stole the show." The 1953 season opened in March

in Jacksonville, IL for the troupe. At Easter time, they were performing at the Shrine Circus in Omaha, a date they would play for years to come. (I have memories of the circus children having an Easter egg hunt on the grassy areas at the Coliseum in Omaha.) At the end of April, they returned to their favorite city, St. Louis to perform at the Shrine Circus. They also played other Route 66 towns that year; Mt. Olive, Pontiac, McLean and Bloomington, their hometown. The large salaries of the Flying Valentinos was now, in 1953, a thing of the past. Single acts on fairs and small town celebrations did not pay very much. On July 4th, at Shelbyville, IL., paid \$65. The Farmer City Fair in August, \$60. A contract from the Marlo Shows Productions shows they played 6 days, in 3 towns in Iowa & Minn., for \$425. A contract for Dayton for 2 days, called for 2 people and "Cherie," being paid \$200 for the date. While in Mt. Olive, they spent \$5 on a doctor and \$3.25 for medicine. In Pontiac, they received \$150, while 1 day in McLean brought only \$40. In Bloomington, they performed for the Purity Baking Co. for their Xmas show, receiving \$50. On January 15, 1954, they played Indianapolis for the Knight of Columbus. A letter states, "We can use the Valentino Sisters and Cherie in your 2 acts of double trapeze & web numbers for \$300 for Jan. 15-17, two shows daily. On March 21, they played Bloomington for the Moose Club for \$35. They played a small Route 66 town, Lexington, on July 22 for \$175 for 3 days. Another Route 66 town, Dwight was played on Aug. 20, where they spent \$6.60 for gas and ate in town for \$3.50. They received \$210 for 2 days. Come September 13, they performed in Chicago at the Vaugh Hospital, followed by Pontiac on the 18th, receiving \$140 for 2 days. There is a receipt from Harry Short Trailer Sales in Peoria for a 1953 Vagabond trailer, bought Feb. 20 for \$4450, which was paid in full. They traded in their old 1949 Vagabond, 29', for which they received \$2350. The rest of they payment was in cash. The trailer license cost \$20 in 1954 and an oil change, for the truck, was \$8. (To Be Continued)

## RUMBLINGS FROM THE CRUMMY

*By Brian Nunn*

When Frank Thompson started this publication and then it was turned over to Cherie, it was meant to make available for people like me to write their memories just for fun. This is what I've tried to do. I'd like to hear from H.J., Dog Red, Mad Dog, Beaner, Side Pole, Hollywood, Ichabod, Turtle, Buckles, The Blonde Bombshell, Mrs. Mac MacDonald, any Frisco brother, Chico, we can't name you all, you know who you are. Please write us with your memories. This list can go on forever. My meaning is we and those of you that read this would like to hear jackpots, parties and toasts. So, please send them here to Back Yard.

\*Working for Rex Williams was the best years of my life—that's why I write so much about them. The big horse was a large, athletic roaned out Appaloosa. I did good with him bareback, halter and lead rope. (The horse could do a flying lead change.) Anyway, the Big Horse and I would do sustenance errands, once or twice daily. We were playing a race track lot (Paducah).

On the far side of the lot (far away), the local firemen had a store set up. Me and Big Horse would go by way of the line of barns and stables. Big Horse was sparky but a gentleman, nonetheless. The horsewomen and stable hands got a kick (no pun intended) out of Big Horse's visits. They'd have carrots for him. (Might be one of the reasons he didn't un-seat me more than he did.) Well, there was a path (short cut) across the middle of the race course; real nice dirt and thick grass. I say this because I landed on it a few times.

This horse could unseat you with a dip of his shoulder (unless he was tacked up and you knew what you were doing.) In my opinion, this horse was brainy, world-class, rodeo stock. (Rex used this horse in the fastest elephant act in the world.)

\*Feeding and watering was fairly easy; picking up after, was some work. Once when only joking, I said, "Hey! If we didn't feed them so much, we wouldn't have so much to pick up. (That's when I

got whacked with the hat. I spoke of his hat in the last issue.) I studied some history and learned, in early circus parlance, the nickname Guy has something to do with the rigging of a tent. The main guy, is, of course, the boss and if you're any kind of a guy, you're with it.

A broad is someone that can take control or change the direction of the audience. So it seems that Broads and Guys were a big part of the show. Any further information would be most welcome.

When working with animals, you get to (now and then) work with what's called a good keeper. This means that the critter is almost (and, in rare cases, maintenance free). The animal has healthy, solid feet (very important); easy feeding habits (retains the food long enough to get maximum benefit); good stall manners; gentle with the public (ticket buyers); very few ailments (naturally). These kind of animals are rare and like a miracle.

So, see...you folks that think animal people aren't holding up their end, think again. Come spend some time getting criticized awhile, while you're trying your darndest best to complete your job. Folks, we work for the animals; they don't work for us. My stories are non-fiction, leaning hard on geographic scenes, along with sarcastic, fond memories. If I've offended anyone, I'm regretful.

If you've ever heard, up close, a 10,000 pound, 21-year-old, proven-breeder, male, bellow, you then know your basic call of the wild. For Rex and Gardner pushing a loaded semi out of the mud was just conversation. It froze on-lookers in their tracks. Gardner truly loved to work when he and Rex were out there in the dark and the rain getting things done. Gyp, Sue and the Brat were back in the department with me. There is no small excitement gong on but after being with Rex for a while, I could take it all in stride. I believe that elephant was at his best and happiest at work, unless he was making babies. He did enjoy performing, especially the hind leg walk where he would show being the proud papa that he was.

**(Continued on Page 12)**

## IS THIS HEAVEN?.....

Kari put him through his exercises by voice command, hand signals, and gentle touches. He was rewarded by kind words and gentle pats. If he did not complete a task to Kari's satisfaction, he was not scolded but simply walked in a large circle and asked to try the exercise again. Following completion of his practice session, he was told that he could play and like any child, he immediately lay down in the dirt and rolled. So much for the bath! One of his favorite toys appeared to be the foot pedestal, which he promptly knocked on its side and rolled around. However, being cone shaped, when it rolled in an arc and came back at him, he decided that playtime was over and it was time to run back to Mom's protection. With baths and practice over, it was time for breakfast, and one more time, Amos took the lead back towards the corral. They didn't quite make it into the corral before finding a strategically placed, special treat. During their walk, Kari had noticed a rather large tree branch that had been blown down through the night. While Amos had been practicing his exercises, this delicacy had been placed near the gate to the corral. No encouragement was required from Kari for one of the passing adults to drag this morsel into the corral where the five made short order of it and the awaiting hay.

As the meal was ending, Kari had one more remaining surprise as she turned towards Sandra and asked, "Would you like to ride?" I don't think a vocal answer was required as this huge smile crossed her face and you could see the excitement in her eyes. Now Sandra has ridden elephants before, but as with everything at Have Trunk Will Travel, one learns to expect the unexpected and this was no exception. Kitty was led from the corral and a headdress placed upon her. She lay on the ground at which time Kari lifted Sandra onto Kitty. After explaining exactly what Sandra should expect when Kitty would rise, the adventure was about to begin. Slowly Kitty rose into the sky, first the rear and then the front. Suddenly, Sandra looked so small or maybe Kitty grew an extra fifteen feet in

height. I don't know which, but there was electricity in the air as a new "elerider" took her first ride. Well, there is so much more to tell, but I don't want to take up this entire issue of *Back Yard* so it is time to bring this to a close. Before I do and thanks to Kari, Yes, I touched my first elephant and found it entirely different from what I expected. They were softer than I ever imagined and had the sensation of a waxed surface. All those questions I formulated during the drive to California, I was so wrapped up in the experience that I forgot to ask them. During the drive home to Phoenix, Katie and I were discussing the previous day's experiences when she mentioned how clean the facilities were. It dawned on me like a lightning strike that there was no odor at all. The grounds were so clean that one could eat a picnic lunch anywhere on the premises, including the floor of the elephant barn. There was not a stain on the barn floor anywhere. The most frequently spoken word that I heard during our tour was "shovel." Every time nature called, the shovel and wheelbarrow was not far away. If, as my grandmother used to say, cleanliness is next to godliness, then this indeed was heaven.

I would like to end with a personal observation. I have never seen such dedication and love as that shared between Kari and all the staff of Have Trunk Will Travel and their family of elephants. For they are indeed not elephants, but as much a family to each other as Sandra, Katie, and I are family. Two important words there, love and family, both of which indicate a two way street. We may not be able to understand the vocalizations of the elephants, but one can see in their body language that the "humans" have been accepted into the herd. Finally, I would like to thank Kari for inviting us into the "cornfield" and sharing her Field of Dreams with us. Have Trunk Will Travel is neither in Iowa nor California. Have Trunk Will Travel is that place between sleep and awake where dreams are made, dreams based on mutual love, trust, and respect.

**Have Trunk Will Travel is indeed Heaven.**

### *Rumblings From The Crummy.....*

It did shock the Shriners' wives tho. If I could have a herd of my choice, it would be Minnie, in lead; then Gyp, Bubbles, Boop and Flora. Minnie, because she's big and smart. And, she'll test you. Gyp, because she's big and smart and she'll test you. Well...all these elephants will test you, as any elephant will do. These elephants I have mentioned are tough, testy, athletic and good keepers.

\*I get to mention Rex Williams' name and get a job working elephants anywhere (which I've done quite a few times and always have gotten hired). I've done a good job with any pachyderm I've been assigned to because of the teachings of Rex Williams and also Buckles, Smokey, Freddie and Bucky. I've worked for the best and this has made my life complete.

I've seen all these men walk into the Department early in the morning; all the elephants would go like, "Oh, oh, ho-look at me! Pay Attention to me!" The boss would walk by and all the elephants would act like, "Oh, don't go. I need you."

So, the next time the boss shows (10 minutes later) up, the elephants are like teenage girl groupies, going, "Me, me." The boss stops and says hello to the herd. And they all pee their pants, lovin' up to the guy. I've watched this and wished that I'd have that going for me someday. It takes a special kind to get that reaction. There's a few guys named Gary that have this effect on the elephants, I wish I did. These stories are dedicated to Mrs. Rex (Mary) Williams, a true show woman.

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**Kari Johnson** writes "Corona, Calif. banned displays of exotic animals on 1/19/00. Temecula is considering the same ban." Our local paper, *The Californian*, 3/28, quotes animal rights activist Priscilla Gargalis, director of Calif. Lobby for Animal Welfare, "We're going to take this city by city throughout the country..." "Our goal is to get these animals out of traveling shows. Period."

As more and more animal rights groups jump on the bandwagon to ban exotic animals from cities around the country, we are hard-pressed to defend

ourselves. The ban on exotic animals in Corona, California was heard on January 5 and became an ordinance January 19. We live 20 minutes away and did not hear a word about this until the end of March. It is easier to fight the passage of an ordinance like this than to get one reversed. Please, everyone, be vigilant! Circus Fan organizations, the Feld Entertainment Group and the Outdoor Amusement Business Association have been doing a great job. Look what happened when we all pulled together in Seattle. I would strongly suggest supporting the OABA. Heidi Herriott, circus representative, is doing excellent work for all of us. Contact Heidi at 407-656-4340 or e-mail: [circus4u@gdi.net](mailto:circus4u@gdi.net).

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### **Shrine Circus 2000 By Jerry Nicholls**

CFA members Paul & Winnie Butler, with Jerry, Shirley and Nathan Nicholls attended the Shrine Circus 2000 in Detroit at the State Fairgrounds April 1. This is the oldest Shrine Circus in America, celebrating its 92nd year, sponsored by the Detroit Moslem Shrine Temple and was produced by George Carden. It was a very good 2 1/2 hour show, led by the ringmaster, Charles Vincent Amaral, Jr. The show featured various aerial acts and George Carden was a hit with his talented elephant Broadway Bo, who played several musical instruments and performed various balancing acts. Mr. Carden also presented a Liberty Pony act in the center ring, with the ponies wearing a body stocking. This act was very well received by the audience. Lloyd's Old English Sheepdogs performed in Ring One. Intermission featured 3 ride elephants, 2 pony sweeps and 4 inflatable slides and bounces, which did a terrific business. Acts included Renes tigers; the Flying Vargas Trapeze Artists, Broadway Bo, single elephant act, presented by George Carden; Suetlana's Transformations "Quick Change Magic"; Lloyd's Old English Sheepdogs; Shrine Clowns; The Dancing Gauchos with Spanish Stomping and Rope Swinging, the Toscanos, high wire walking; Toscano Cradle; Ms. Miser & Maricels Duo in Cradle Acts; Elena's Hula Hoops; Charles & The Lady, Magical Artistry in all 3 rings; Sir Tito; The Iniakint & Trampoline, in all 3 rings; Carden Elephants in ring 3 and Juan's Pony Fantasy in the center ring. The final act was the breathtaking "Human Cannonball," followed by a fond farewell with the entire cast.

## Circus Flora Brings New Show To Downtown St. Louis And Says Goodbye To Flora

March 20: Circus Flora, St. Louis' own one-ring circus, will pitch its red and white tent outside the City Museum and present an all new show this spring. Show dates are May 5 through 21, tickets can be purchased at the Circus box office, located at the Circus Museum or through Metrotix: 534-1111. Titled "Passport for Flora," the show will honor Flora, the 18-year-old African elephant for whom the show is named. After 15 years of entertaining fans of the Circus, she will be packing her trunk and moving to Botswana to live in the Kingdom of the Elephants. "Ever since she was a baby, Flora has been entertaining fans of our circus," said Ivor David Balding, Artistic Director and Producer of Circus Flora. "Now, she's reached the age where she is thinking about a family of her own and needs to be with other elephants. Although we will miss her more than we can say, we are happy for her and invite fans to come and wish her *bon voyage*. We also want everyone to know that Circus Flora will go on with out Flora."

This year's production will combine old favorites with exciting new performers. YoYo, the classic clown, the Flying Wallendas, Sacha Pavlata and the St. Louis Arches will bring their acts back to Circus Flora. They will join Johnny Peers and his Muttville Comix and the Riders of the Night, an exciting 8-horse Cossack riding act to be seen in St. Louis for the first time.

This year's partnership with City Museum will offer discount tickets to visitors and members of the museum. Circus patrons will get same day discounts to the museum, as well. Circus show times include evening performances and weekend matinees. For groups of 20 or more, please call 314-531-6273. For more information about the show, call 314-231-3600. (Hey, David! Mozart and I are available to work! You know Bert & Ernie (the goats) need us! And, Flora wants her Aunt Cherie to bring her carrots! And how can the Box Office survive without me? Let alone the volunteer ushers! We could work weekends!-Cheap!) Thanks

to Judi Roman for this news update. Those of you in the area, please don't miss Circus Flora! It is a great family entertainment show!

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**Richard Reynolds**, Atlanta, sent me the following, that Heidi Herriott sent: "Police believe animal rights groups that freed 3 tigers in Warsaw 2 weeks ago, are behind the release of 4 polar bears at the Nuremburg Zoo. The animals, star attractions of the Zoo, had to be shot March 30 after the locks on their enclosure were slipped. The 4 bears, all prime specimens, got into the main body of the Zoo. As in the Polish incident, keepers tried, without success, to tranquilize them."

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**Norman Berger** reports he received word from **Sylvia Kursawe** that her husband, **Siegfried "Freddy" Kursawe**, passed away March 7 in Bradenton, Florida of lung cancer at the age of 72. Freddy was the center of a bicycle pyramid and he was featured on Ringling and Clyde Beatty Circus. When he was 20, he made his debut with the Krone Circus in Germany. The Six Frielanis had 3 men and 3 women. John Ringling North recruited them in 1952 while searching for talent in Europe. In the early 60s, Freddy performed at Radio City Music Hall. He also appeared on the Ed Sullivan Show and also the Mickey Mouse Club.

His survivors include his wife Sylvia; 3 daughters, Angela, Chrissy and Steffanie and 2 grandchildren. Angela performed with her father at one time. Our prayers go out to his family.

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I talked to **Arden Kreisch** the other night and she said daughter **Noby** has done a commercial for Tropicana Orange Juice. You may not recognize Noby-she is made up like an old lady, wearing a pink jogging suit, running down the street, jumping thru tires and over a couch! Watch for this commercial-it is very funny. Arden also said her father, **Wayne Larey**, who had the **Flying Waynes** on **Ringling** for years, passed away in 1996. I don't think a lot of folks knew this.

## A PAWS FROM MOZART

By Mozart Valentine

**MEOW** everyone, welcome back to my column. I have been very busy trying to get Mom ready to go to the CFA Convention in Sarasota. So, I haven't had time to check out the Zoos News this week. Mike Cecere, my best friend, sent along a color photo of the new baby elephant, Preya and her mom, Romani from the Burnet Park Zoo, in Syracuse. Preya is a cutie! Wish our Miller Park Zoo here in Bloomington could get an elephant! We have a lot of other beautiful animals and those of you that attend the Circus Historical Society Convention in September will have a chance to visit the Zoo.

Our friend, **Niles Calhoun**, sent along this news. Niles Calhoun writes, "Mississippi seems to have exploded with circuses this Spring as there are several shows making the state that have not been here before. I have seen ads for **Bentley Bros.** in Gulfport and I understand they will be in Hattiesburg/Petal on April 5-6.

Also, the Joppa Temple Shrine Circus, produced by Snowden & Childress, will be in Gulfport, Biloxi, Picayune, Wiggins and Lucedale. **Royal Hanneford** was advertised for Columbia. Also, Hendricks Bros. Circus is supposed to be in State Line, Mississippi. I also heard **Royal American** was in the state recently. **Circus Chimera** will be coming our way in May! Thanks, Niles.

**Mike Cecere** also sent us news from The Nugget in Sparks, Nevada. **Don Boomer** and his wife will be heading for Seattle and a job at the Wildland Park Zoo. You will remember that their elephant, **Bertha**, 48, died in November after performing for years at The Nugget. Now, **Angel**, 11, has packed her trunk and moved to a Zoo in Ft. Worth, Texas. The Boomers visited Angel at her new home and say she is doing fine. The Zoo has 6 Asian elephants now, so Angel won't be lonely! Don will have four new elephants to care for in Seattle. Don will work regular hours now, including two days off a week, unlike at the Nugget, where the

elephants performed six days a week! "Of course, even on my day off, I would be the one to give them their last feeding of the day, their last medication and I'd tuck them into bed," Don said. Our friend, **Charlie Simpson**, from Houston, called last night and said little **Jennie** is the star of the new **Carson & Barnes Circus!** She works center ring now, with her friends **Tim Frisco** and his son, **Anthony** and looks adorable! Way to go, Jennie. Charlie said Jennie's mother was laying down and Jennie was romping all over her.

They have a great menagerie, including a giraffe, baby hippo and a zebra. They have elephants working in the 5 rings. The show looked great in Tomball on a beautiful, green grassy lot. They have a new marquee too. The attendance was so great, they had to do 3 shows! Charlie said they have a beautiful Spec. When he returned home, he saw a bit on the local news, as a camera crew had gone to Tomball to see the show.

Charlie will visit them again in LaPorte and the Houston Shrine starts this week, with **Carden Circus** and **Sterling & Reid Circus** are also playing close to Houston. Have fun Charlie and let us know how these shows were too. Those of you getting Carson & Barnes in your area this year, please say hi to little Jennie and her friend, Tim Frisco, for us!

Charlie also reminded Mom that **John Beard** celebrates his birthday on April 23. Those wishing to send him a card, please send it to: 1755 Atrium Dr., Sun City Center, Florida 33573. Happy Birthday, John from all of us here in Illinois!

Don't forget to visit the great folks of the **Hoxie Tucker Ring #73** at the Shoppingtown Mall in Syracuse, New York May 4-7. Tell them Mozart said hello! Also on May 19 & 20, there will be a Lot 3 Gathering at Rockhome Gardens in Arcola, Illinois sponsored by the **Bert Backstein** and **Don Erlenbush Ring #72**. And you can also have great fun in Boise, Idaho at the 2000 National Gathering of the **Circus Model Builders**. Everyone tell Mom hello when you see her at the CFA Convention in Sarasota. **Meow for now, Mozart!**



Dolly Jacobs



Mary Jane Miller - RBBB 1953

Kent Ghirard Collection



1956



Mary Gill

Elephant Riders - Ringling



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