BACK YARD

Volume V, Issue #85 February 15, 2000

Circus Master Of The Big Cats

By Ralph Major (Coronet-April, 1950)

From the 6' platform, a deadly paw swept down in a lightning flash of sleek yellow fur. Its unsuspecting target was a stocky young man in evening clothes who was armed only with a whip and a short stick. As spectators screamed, the huge leopard's needle-sharp claws sank into the man's shoulder.

Acting with experience-whetted instinct, the man lifted his feet from the floor and hung from the animal's paw while the circus audience watched, hypnotized. Then, with a ripping sound, the padded shoulder of the man's coat tore loose and he dropped to the ground.

Quickly he turned to face the big cat. Brandishing his whip admonishingly, Damoo Dhotre scolded his snarling pupil. "You bad child," he said sternly, "don't you know better than to attack your old friend? Now, behave yourself!" When Damoo left the barred cage to the applause of the circus-goers who had almost witnessed his death, he made 2 resolutions: never be overconfident and never again wear heavy clothing.

The first resolution stems from Damoo's conviction that any mistakes by his jungle charges are the trainer's fault; the second, from an intimate knowledge of wild beasts. An animal attacks its enemies, Damoo knows, with one paw at a time. That paw pulls the quarry toward the beast, while the other waits to encircle the victim. So-the secret is to keep that first paw outstretched. If the material of the trainer's garments is strong and does not tear, there is no hope for him. Damoo's inside information on the habits and mental processes of big cats comes from long experience. At 47, Damoo Dhotre is America's top animal trainer. As a high salaried star of the Ringling Bros. Circus, Damoo demonstrates each summer before awed spectators the dangerous art he has been practicing since he was ten. In his native country, India, animal training has long been an honorable profession. Damoo was one spangle-struck boy who actually followed storybook tradition & ran away from home to join the circus. Fortunately and coincidentally, the circus belonged to an uncle, so there was only token opposition from his parents. One morning, Damoo ventured into a cage in the deserted main tent.

Rose Alexander & Damoo

(Continued on Page 4)

1941

1940

Al G. Barnes 1938

FOX 76

THE FOX !!!

Dear Friends,

Happy New Year to all of you. Yes it took a long time for me to get an other letter out, but everything is topsy turby right now around me, I will explain that later.

First of all New Years went great at the Club, but I think there ware lots of people missing. It seems that every year less and less people show up. But then more and more people left us from our world and the new generation just does not show up, also the moneys are not there for a party. There have to be some changes made.

The Ringling Reunion was great but from 50 people who committed them self to come, just 25 showed up. So again I made to much food. But what counts, everyone had a great time.

To day we will have the election for the Showfolks and hope everything will come out alright. June Mills will end her raign. I have to say she really worked like a dog and did bring money in for the club. She watched every cent which was spend and she never missed out on being there for every event. She had very little help from the rest of the board. She started right off with being short 4 people. One of them bailed out shortly after she started as President. That was the Treasurer. So she did all the time also the Treasurers job. Well this year we will start out with no Treasurer and no Secretary. I will report about all this after to night.

I have a house full of children as Tammy showed up with her 4 kids and they keep me hopping. They were supposed to go back a few days ago but something unexpected happened. So they are not with Donny Johnson any more. Tammy will do advance for the Circus World of Jordan for three month, the children will stay with her mother except Erika who will go with her mother to help her. Tammy also needed a car so she bought one with the help of her mother. Only time will tell how life will go on. Jenny drove to Dallas with Tammy to pick up all her belongings from up there. It was a whole truck load full.

Most of the shows are already out there working. Walker Brother Indoor Circus, Royal American Circus, I believe the Dubskys also are out and running. I had no time so far to check them all out. So I will leave this also to my next letter. The performers also are leaving one by one, so soon Sarasota will be missing all the lively crowd. I am just putting a short note in, so all of you do not think I am gone for ever. I am still sick but not like most of the others. I have my back out in three places and am trying to get it back in my self, but it is very hard and I am in a lot of pain. I do not have the flu, Thank God.

The Black Show will be in Tampe in a few days, Ringling had there stay in Tampa and St Pete. Tommy Hanneford will be doing the Shrine date in Sarasota.

The Dubskys second unit had a bad accident and lost all there equipment. It burned down. Three people where hurt, one lost his life.

Well we had the election at the Club. It was not to legle as it was done in the bar area with everyone around drinking but as I was for the last 4 years told, who cares about law, we do it our way. As I said before, I am very much of doing things the right way by following rules and regulation but you can not win. Hopefully the new Board will get things back the right way. I am sorry to inform all of you, but I will not be involved in this, as I lost by one vote. I had 39 votes and Norma Davenport had 40. So I like to congradulate Norma and wish her all the luck in the world. She will be the Second Vice President. As President you will have Dale Longmeyer. I hope I spelled his name right. Penny Wilson had no one running against her so she will be your Vice President. On the Board running most of them won, there were just two extra. I can not tell you who all won but I know La Norma won, Bea Warfield, Ann Copeland, these I am sure off. Still no Secretary or Treasurer. Please everyone do not think that I am upset or sad that I lost out. This job is very important and hard job and will all I have going on right now, I really could not do as Second Vice well. I also know that Norma Davenport will do a wonderful job for all of you and I am proud to loose to her as she really deserves it.

Hey all you out there, I need to ask you a question. When you train wild animals in Winterquarters, should that be a free bee??? How much should a trainer get for working the animals in a circus season??? Should a animal performer have a groom and a driver if the cats not belong to him or her??? I really would very much have an answer to this. I will print your answers in my next Fox letter but will not name names, so do not be afraid to write me. Sdenka, Mania Kaisers sister had an other stroke and passed away. Poor girl, she really suffered for quite some time. I just read it in the newspaper and it was a private funeral. She is in peace now Thank God.

Derick Rosaire called me and told me what a great time he had on a vacation which daughter Kay and Pam took him and wife Liza on. **(Continued on Page 10)**

Inside was an old lioness with whom he had made friends. When he tried to arouse the senile beast with taps from a bamboo pole, the lioness suddenly let out a roar and leapt at Damoo.

He fled from the cage and scrambled to the top of a high platform. His uncle, called to the tent by excited attendants, took in the scene at a glance. There was the lioness, by now snoozing peacefully again, the open door of the cage-and Damoo-crouched fearfully on his precarious roost.

"If you want to be an animal trainer," the circus owner called to the boy, "then do it the right way."

Thus Damoo was catapulted into his career. Next day the circus' animal trainer began to instruct him in the wiles and ways of the jungle kingdom. When he was 14, Damoo was performing in the cage. By the time he reached 17, he had become a veteran animal trainer.

Damoo came to the U.S. just before WW II and now presides over one of Ringling's featured wild animal acts-billed as "Graduation Day in the Jungle." When the spotlight from the tent-top illuminates the circle of 15' high iron-linked meshwork, he unfastens 2 clamps on the door and steps confidently into the cage. Dressed in a white turban and baggy spangled trousers, his upper body bare except for a bright-colored bolero jacket, Damoo carries no gun or weapon of any kind. His sole protection is a whip and a stick tipped with a rubber plug.

As the smiling Hindu stands there casually, a barred door at one end of the cage is raised and out walks the strangest student body any professor ever taught. First, muscles rippling beneath her spotted coat, comes Sonia. She is followed by Champion, Tabou, Poupette and Eacloo. They look like overgrown cats, but all are snarling leopards.

A soft word of command and each animal climbs atop its pedestal. Then from the opening come Souris and Ratan. They are pumas. Behind them follow Jogo and Megus, black jaguars. Next come Macou and Bangkok, the circus' fierce black panthers. All are ancient enemies. Loose in their native habitat, they would instinctively attack each other. Yet, in the spotlighted ring, each walks docilely past Damoo and with a single fluid movement, springs on a reinforced tub and sits down. Among animal trainers, Damoo is respected for his ability to make such ancient enemies behave.

Now the audience is silent. All eyes fixed on the trainer. He is wholly unimpressed by the gasps of fear, for the big cats-Sonia, Champion, Jogo, Macou and the rest-are his friends. He knows them as a father knows his children.

Speaking in a low, gentle voice, he urges his pets to assume their positions. Champion, 130 pounds of solid leopard, places front and rear feet on 2 tubs. And the 155 pound Damoo stoops and hoists the heavy beast atop his shoulders. Then he parades about the cage. One by one, the animals acknowledge Damoo's soft commands and take their places in pyramid formations. Occasionally a panther or jaguar will snarl, or spring at another animal. With a sharp command-or, in exceptional circumstances, a crack of the whip-Damoo brings order to what could easily be frenzied chaos.

How does a single man control 11 savage animals? Damoo's answer is disarming in its simplicity-kindness and love. Nothing else. He seldom has to whip his animals. "In school, teachers try to install in children a respect for fellow humans. They try to discipline, through love and understanding, naive kids who sincerely don't know how to behave themselves. Well, I try to do the same thing with animals. You see, they don't know what to do until you tell them. And you must not frighten or upset them. If you do, like children they'll freeze up. My animals, when I begin to train them, are just like kindergartners."

Soon school will open for his newest recruits-Cuba and Nola, roly-poly black panther cubs which already are demonstrating the ferocity for which their species is notorious. When Damoo appeared before a TV camera in NY last year, for instance, he brought Nola with him. **(Continued on Page 6)**

Rodeo Days & The Elephant Race

By Mike Cecere

If you had to think of the wackiest stunt ever thought up by a circus promoter or press agent, what would you say? High wire walk over a lion cage? A circus parade? Radio interview of a clown in full makeup?

NO, It's An Elephant Race!

Maybe if you've never trained, handled or cared for Elephants, it would sound like a plausible publicity stunt. But, with on of the main points of training the great beasts is to have them stay with you, it's a nutty idea on all points. But sometimes even the best of us get talked into a crazy stunt.

Well, it was back years ago on a large, long since bankrupt tent circus, that had a large collection of animals and a group of top animal people. One of whom was my friend, Ken Turtle Benson.

And for awhile, the owners of this circus were sold on the idea of Elephant Races by a promoter I'll call "Ahab" (this is the same guy who wanted to bring the giraffe downtown daily for a banner deal!) And while a giant waste of manpower & negligible return at the box office, it was good for a few laughs.

One memorable day, Capt. Benson and I drew the short straws in the morning lottery and got put on Race duty. So, off we went on a 2 mile hike to town with Big "Boo" and "Debbie," both reliable elephants from Harry Locker's center ring act. Arriving in the center of town with the giant beasts, we were informed it was the town's annual "Rodeo Days" Celebration and most of the inhabitants were dressed like extras from "Gunsmoke!"

As usual, preparation was sketchy at best, so we found the circus committee chairman, who had made the "saloon" a few too many times that day, and ended up coordinating the event U.S. Navy style, with Capt. Ken in charge. So off we went with the elephants going at a slow, steady pace in the "Race" and would alternate which elephant would "Win." Most people took it well and we were usually very well treated and a had a number of kind people bring treats for the elephants as it was a thrill, no doubt, to have a live elephant there on Main Street, U.S.A.

This particular day was kind of warm, early summer and we stopped to water the Girls at a kind merchant's front door and stopped to buy a soda from a street vendor at the edge of town. Once we had left, the event slipped back to semi-chaos and unbeknownst to us, the "Gunsmoke" irregulars were about to stage a mock Bank Robbery! Well, there we were, ready to walk back to the lot, sodas in hand, when the gunfire (blanks) started and Capt. Benson shouted, "Incoming!!" What to do?? In one of those amazing moments of animal intelligence, "Boo," matriarch of the herd, and "Debbie" looked at each other. ears out and said to themselves, "Should We Be Frightened?" Then, as if shrugging their massive shoulders, they said, "Nah, The Humans Don't Seem Worried, So It Must Be Okay!"

I can say that we were 2 relieved elephant men and the guardian angel of elephants was sure watching over us that day. But we talked it over on the way back and reasoned what a dumb idea the races were and when we got to the lot, found the offending promoter visiting the show as he often did (when he should have been out booking!) and once the Girls were back with the herd, gathered the crew and chased "Ahab" back into his car and rocked it so hard he thought it would tip over. He started up the car and roared out of there and not long after, stopped promising the sponsors a Race and life returned to normal, or as normal as it ever gets on a one night stand tent show. But, there isn't anytime I watch an episode of "Gunsmoke" and don't think of Rodeo Day! God Bless America.

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NEWS FROM OUR CIRCUS FRIENDS

Hovey Burgess sent a beautiful postcard from Monte Carlo Festival. Also fantastic color Cirque stamps! He said the Pyong Yang Troupe from North Korea (7 men, 2 women) did 2 triples, back to back, from the vertical catcher to the swinging catcher-then on the same momentum, from the swinging catcher to the fixed-cradle catcher! AND there is no fly bar! (If you went, please tell us who was there and the winners! Fred & Susan, please write!!)

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Frank & Conchita Thompson will be the guest speakers at the Pot Luck Dinner at the **Showfolks Club** in Sarasota March 7 at 7:30 p.m. Hopefully, they will share what they spoke about! Frank has a great article in the new **Animal Trainer Magazine**. Great color photos of him and his African elephant, **Connie**! This is a beautiful magazine with great articles and full size color photos. This issue also has articles and color photos of **John Herriott** and **Ellain Rosaire**. Also articles on dolphins, llamas & bears by Zoo employees. More review in the next issue!

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Circus Master Of The Big Cats.....

She became brightened at the blinding lights and sank 4 tiny teeth into Damoo's thumb. Damoo bit through his lip to keep from crying out in pain.

"It wasn't Nola's fault at all. It was mine. I should have known she would be scared." Fear will have no place in the school curriculum the cubs will follow. When they are 12 or 15 months old, Damoo will take each separately into the cage. As soon as she is accustomed to her new surroundings, Damoo will slip a rope about her neck, tying the other end to a bar. Then, coaxing her with light prods from his stick and murmuring soothing words, the trainer will start training by teaching her to climb atop a stool. When he addresses his animals, he speaks either Hindustani or English. Beta, an affectionate term for "child" is a favorite word.

Baitho means "sit down," while Chalo commands the animal to "step lively." It usually takes 6 weeks to tame an animal to the point where difficult tricks can be taught. Once a young beast has learned to perform alone, Damoo tackles the ticklish job of introducing other animals into the cage. This he does by tying them to opposite cage bars with ropes. Every day the ropes are lengthened and the animals slowly advance closer to each other.

The process may be tedious, but, as Damoo says, "Animals are like people. They don't get acquainted right off the bat." Soon, two, 3, 4 and even more old-timers are admitted to the cage to rehearse with the newcomer. Gradually, well co-ordinated teamwork replaces the animal's initial mistrust and fear. And, at the end of several months, Damoo's pupil is graduated as an experienced performer.

Damoo's amazing control over his animals stood him in good stead some years ago in India. While he was putting his cats thru their paces in a huge circus tent one night, the lights suddenly went out.

In a cold sweat, Damoo, moving slowly, picked up an unoccupied stool and backed gingerly toward what he hoped was the side of the cage, shouting, "Light! Light! Someone give me light!" A spectator struck a match. His neighbor did likewise and soon a flickering wave of tiny dots spread through the audience. And Damoo, in the faint glow from thousands of sputtering matches, saw his big cats, majestic bodies motionless, sitting obediently in their places. "Only true friends would not have taken advantage of me in the darkness," he says proudly.

(At the Cleveland CFA Convention in 1998, **John Polacsek** gave a talk and slide presentation on the Cleveland waterfront fire of Ringling. I turned my head away from the screen many times, not wanting to see the pictures of the injured and dead animals. In Damoo's book, "Wild Animal Man," published in 1961, he speaks of the great tragedy and of his own animals.)

"I arrived at the circus grounds from the hotel, breathless. The menagerie tent, housing the untrained animals, was on fire. My concern was for the animals that had been caught in the fire and my concern for the effect this might have on my own animals. During the next several hours, I did what little I could to help Doc Henderson-to lead any animals to safety and minister to them.

As soon as I felt I was no longer needed, I went into the big top where my own animals were in their cages. Their eyes wide with fear. Their eyes stared vacantly into space, their nostrils quivered with the smell of the dreaded smoke and the burnt flesh of their jungle companions. I began pacing back & forth very slowly. I talked in a low, confident & soothing voice. I kept calling each animal by name. I don't know how long I kept this up.

The manager of the circus came up and said, "Damoo, these gentlemen want us to cancel the evening performance. They are afraid the animals will be too excited to perform. What do you think?"

I looked at my animals carefully. Champion was in the corner of his cage, gnawing a bone left over from the previous day. Sonia was curled up on the shelf of her cage, half asleep. The animals had settled down and apparently forgotten the fire.

"My animals are fine," I announced. "But what will happen if they act up?" asked the police chief. "That will concern only me. No one else is in danger," I said. The police chief said to the manager, "We will permit the evening performance only under one condition. If any of the animals show any sign of being nervous, you will stop the show. Is that agreed?" The manager turned to me, "How about it, Damoo?" I grinned. "I will be the first to know," I said. I never left the animals. When they were fed, I ate my meal in front of them. We performed that night as calmly and with as much discipline as though nothing had happened." **(I taped John's talk and hope to print it in a future issue of Back Yard. Thanks, John.)**

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THE FLETCH FILES

By Mike Cecere

HOWDY FOLKS! Hope everyone is settled into the New Millenium. I am taking the place of your regular Movie/TV/Video reviewer, "Mr. Circus Video" himself, Jim Ridenour, as poor Jim is down with the flu like so many people. Get Well, Jim!

I saw the government on TV. News last night telling everyone that we are not having a Flu epidemic nationwide. Remember, those are the same folks that deny a UFO crashed at Rosewell, NM! (Yea, sure, it was a weather balloon!) Okay, as you know Jim is working day and night to fine tune his tribute video to the late D.R. Miller. Watch for his ads in Back Yard as part of the money goes to the Endangered Ark. Reserve yours today! Now, on to the movies! Perhaps the best recent work done on a TV news show was the NBC Dateline report on circus elephants. Lots of good footage of RBBB and lots of interesting interviews. If you didn't see it, I'm sure Jim has that available.

Note to circus fans, many showpeople were on tour and did not get to see this, so a great gesture for showbiz animal people would be for you to get a copy on hand and show it to them. The next great circus film and to me one of the best documentaries ever, was the "A Circus Season, Travels With Tarzan."

This was filmed on the Tarzan Zerbini Circus tent tour and chronicles that great group of professionals in the Zerbini AND Bauer families, plus staff.

A really well done profile of the Real circus on tour. Shows the high professionalism under all conditions that these folks give to the ticket holders. There is something for everyone, whether you like animal or people acts.

To me, the biggest surprise was that the cameraman was able to keep up with the ever-working leader of the family, Tarzan Zerbini. A real plus was getting to see Patricia Zerbini and that sensational elephant act she created. Seven huge elephants in a highly coordinated routine. All in all, a must-have video in your collection!

Another great video, though a couple years old, is the 30 min. episode of Jack Hanna's Animal Adventures with the RBBB Red Unit. Available from the Jack Hanna (www.jackhanna.com) website store, it's a mere $12.95, chock full of positive film with G.G. Williams, Mark Oliver Gebel, Graham Thomas Chipperfield and the Stevens family, along with the great animal collection of the Felds. Another must have. Check with Jim, maybe he can help you with that one. I don't have a recent list of his, Hint Jim, send me a List! Well, that wraps up my first column for Back Yard, if you liked it, please let Cherie know and once Jim gets better, we can work out a place for me to write about the Internet or some subject.

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RING OF FAME INDUCTION

By Bud DeVere

January 15: What a day for Circus Lore. All the famous names of the Ring of Fame Plaza shined as 4 more plaques were added. The ceremony began at 1 p.m. when a concert conducted by Charlie Schlarbaum and his circus band played familiar marches & gallops. During the ceremony, the band highlighted each portion by drum rolls and flouishes. Stephen V. Smith was a colorful Master of Ceremonies who introduced each presenter. Mayor Hon. Molly Cardamone, of Sarasota, welcomed the event to St. Armends Circle.

Four inductees, three posthumously, and one in person, were presented at 1:30 p.m. Jackie LeClaire spoke of Ernie "Blinko" Burch, the clown and the acceptance was made by Maran Burch. Allan C. Hill, President of the Circus Ring of Fame Foundation, told stories of the animal trainer, Alfred Court and the award was accepted by Christina Storey Whitfield, of Sarasota. Rita Adler spoke of the credentials of the Internationally famous juggler, Massimiliano Truzzi and the acceptance was made by Marcello & Sonya Truzzi. Circus Fan Paul Ingrassia, of Rockford, IL, spoke of the multitude of accomplishments made by world famous John Herriott, who was sponsored by Tommy Hanneford. John accepted by stating, "It's awesome to think I'll be enshrined with the circus greats." He brought his family to Sarasota in 1969 when he was with Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus. The entire family was with him on this outstanding day.

The plaques were unveiled as newspaper and TV coverage seemed to surround the crowd and a reception was held later at the Showfolks Club which celebrated John Herriott's 69th birthday, as well. (Thanks, Bud!)

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BABY ASIAN BORN AT SYRACUSE ZOO

Mike Cecere reports "Rommani" had her 3rd calf born February 10, a 286 pound female. This is the 4th elephant born at the Zoo. More in the next issue. Thanks, Mike.

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RINGLING RED: Atlanta, GA-Philips Arena: 2/17-27; Cincinnati, OH-Firstar Ctr: 3/1-5; Baltimore-Arena: 3/8-19; Washington, D.C.-MCI Ctr: 3/23-26

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RINGLING BLUE: Norfork, VA-SCOPE: 2/15-20; Richmond, VA-Coliseum: 2/23-27; East Rutherford, NJ-Cont'l Arena: 3/1-5; Uniondale, NY-Nassau Coliseum: 3/7-13; New York City-Madison Sq. Garden: 3/16-4/2; Knoxville-Civic Coliseum: 4/6-9; Providence-Civic Center: 4/26-30.

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BIG APPLE CIRCUS: Atlanta, GA-Lakewood Fairgrounds: 2/23-3/5; Somerset County, NJ-Patriots Park: 3/11-26; 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

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Big Apple OOPS!: Chicago-Auditorium Theatre: 2/15-20; Erie, PA: 2/22-23; Providence, RI-2/25-27.

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Jordan World Circus: Bloomington, IL-Interstate Center: 2/29; Muskegon-Walker Arena: 3/3-5; Grand Rapids-DuRex Ctr: 3/15-17

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Barnum's Kaleidoscape: Dallas-Valley View Mall-2/5-3/12; Chicago-Soldier Field: 3/29-4/30.

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Royal Hanneford: E. Lansing MI-Breslin Ctr: 3/17-19

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Sterling-Reid Circus: Springfield, MA-Civic Ctr: 2/15-16; Albany, NY-Pepsi Arena: 2/17; Stuebenville, OH-St. John Arena: 2/20; Wheeling, WV-Civic Ctr: 2/21; Cleveland-CSU Convocation Ctr: 2/22-23; Mansfield-Fairgrounds: 2/24; Dayton-Convention Ctr: 2/25-26; Toledo-U of Toledo: 2/27

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Royal American Circus: Dayton-Fairgrounds: 4/4-5

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Hanneford Shrine Circus: *Columbus, OH-3/24-4/2*

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Chinese Acrobats: Wilmington, OH-Murphy Theatre: 4/1

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Dayton Shrine: Univ. of Dayton Arena: 4/7-9

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

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Carson & Barnes Circus: Newark, OH: 8/17; Yellow Springs: 8/18-19; Englewood: 8/20

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JORDAN WORLD CIRCUS By Jerry Nicholls

The program included Ringmaster-Ari Steeples; Hoffman's Feline Fantasy; Aerial Display: Anna, lyra; Alicia Michele, cloud swing; Jill, rings; Justino, juggling; The Flying Dragons, from the Peoples Republic of China; Acosta Trio, high wire; Susan Sherylls Royal Afghans; Zhao Hong, unicycle; Circus East, hoop diving; Lin Fang, foot juggling; Motorcycle Thrill-A-Thon; Buffalo Barney and Whiskey-A Man & His Horse; Anthony's Wheel of Infinity; Loter's Horses; Steeples' Bears; Aerial Cradle, Mariba & Fassio; Flying Pages; Zoppe's Monkey Revue; Rolling Diamonds; Flying Dragon's Lion Dance; Hawthorne Elephants with Gary Thomas. (Thanks, Jerry)

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CIRCUS NEWS FROM BOBBY GIBBS!!!

Dallas is getting plenty of circus. We have Kaleidoscape here for 1 month and Shrine Circus is 2/28-3/2 at Mesquite Arena and last night, 2/6, we went to see the circus at Ft. Worth Stock Yards Coliseum. Their business was very good, family tickets, etc. They did 3 shows Sun. Show was indoors, on dirt floor, music was taped, good lighting and plenty of help. Visitors included Olmedas family, James Hall family, Bobby & Rosa Gibbs and some that I did not know. Pre-show: pony rides, elephant rides and moon walk. Show: Vencio, break-away sway pole; Vince Von Duke, 4 lions & 4 tigers; Clowns; 2 sword balance, 1 hand balance; John Pelton, 6 pony Liberty act; 2 Aerial perch, 1 Double traps; Globe-Zerbini Riders; Magic with 8 webs and Vincio, head balance traps; Rodriguez Flying Act; Rolling Globes; Cossack Riders (4); Rola Bola, Hula Hoops, Chair Balance; 2 Rings, 1 Trapeze; Double Space Wheel; John Pelton, 3 Asian Elephants. I want to say the wardrobe was excellent! Bobby.

Passing Of Our Circus Friends

From Frank Thompson: Teresa Morales, a circus star of the 20s, 30s, 40s and 50s, died in a Miami hospital January 29, 2000. The widow of well-known concessionaire, **C.J. Matchett,** she was 86-years-old. Ms. Morales was the last of a famous family troupe which presented a variety of circus acts. She was best known as a "heel catch" aerialist. With her brother and three sisters, they represented the 6th generation of performers in their family.

She was a featured performer with many circuses, including the John Robinson Circus, Downie Bros. Circus, Seils-Sterling Circus, Polack Bros. Circus, Biller Bros. Circus and many others.

She is survived by three daughters, Mrs. Cathy Moore & Husband Byron, of Tampa, Mrs. Juanita Smith & Husband David, of Tampa and Mrs. Vicky York, of Miami. Nieces and nephews: Mrs. Dorothy Yerkes of Los Angeles, Mrs. Conchita Thompson of Bradenton, Mr. Felix Morales, Jr. of Tampa, Mr. Pedro Morales, Jr., Tampa and Mrs. Toni Lamb of New Orleans. Grandchildren, David, Jr. and Michael Smith, Monica York, Tara Lorenzo. Great-grandchildren Kristine and David III Smith and Samantha Lorenzo. Services were held Thursday, Feb. 3, at 4:30 P.M. at Hamilton Funeral Home in Riverview, Florida. **(Thanks to Jim Elliott for sending along the write-up from the paper.)**

(In a 1949 newspaper ad I have, from Rutland, VT, for Biller Bros. Circus, it says, **"Netless Trapeze Sensationalist Teresa Morales."** Also the Cristiani Troupe, Rita Biller, Ki-Gore and his 6 Nubian Lions, Mario & Josefina Ivanov, wire stars, Betty Biller, famous equestrienne." "See the herd of Baby Elephants that were flown by plane from Bangkok! A Supreme Achievement in Clean Amusement! New Pre-War Prices, 50 cents, child-75 cents adult. Note: This is positively the only Big Circus to exhibit in this vicinity this year! June 25, 2:30 & 8.

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From Don Wixom: Lydia Herrmann, 71, of Myakka City, passed away Feb. 4 in Manatee Memorial Hospital. Lydia was born in Czechoslovakia and came to this country from Austria in 1964. She is survived by her husband, Ottomar; a daughter, Gabriella; a son, Guido and a grandchild.

****

Father Ralph Pollone of Pittsfield, MA had a heart attack Feb. 9 in his rectory while cooking a meal for friends. He just collapsed and died instantly. Funeral was Feb. 12 at St. Mary's Church in Pittsfield. His body laid in state in the Church on the 11th. Thanks to **Father Jerry Hogan** for this information. (If anyone would like to share their memories of Father Pollone, please write and they will be included in the next issue.)

Jane Nida reports Father Jerry Hogan has received national attention with an article, with color pictures in the March, 2000 issue of Life magazine, covering pages 58-63.

****

Magician Doug Henning has died of liver cancer at the age of 52 on Feb. 7 in Los Angeles. He was born in Winnipeg, Canada. He had been suffering from the cancer for five months. The attention he won on Broadway helped Henning land an NBC special called, "The World of Magic." He won an Emmy by recreating Harry Houdini's "Water Torture Escape" before a live audience. The show also received seven Emmy nominations. He is survived by his wife, Debbie.

****

Richard Reynolds, of Atlanta, sent along a newspaper article from Paris. A male hippo in rut, an annual state of sexual excitement, apparently mistook a tractor for a rival-or a female hippo-and trampled the director of a Zoo near Bordeaux.

The hippo charged through an electrified fence Nov. 1 and raced after the new tractor, trampling the director, Jean Ducuing, who was cycling past. Workers later succeeded in driving the hippo back into its enclosure. Komir, 7, weighs 2 tons. An employee said, "Komir had always been jealous of that tractor. He saw it as competition." A picture showed him & Ducuing playing in 1994 in the water.

THE FOX !!!.....

(Yes wife, they kept it a secret for several months that they got married. I think this is the greatest news I got, they are such a wonderful couple.) Back to the vacation, the first place was miserable and very expensive. The landlord really treated them like dirt, so they moved to an other place which was the greatest. Pam caught a fish on a fishing cruise which was the biggest they ever saw, even the captain said so. I am glad for you Derick, you have a bunch of wonderful kids.

Sheela Wallenda, the late Gunther Wallendas wife had an other stroke which left her paralized on one side. She is in terrible condition and has no spunk any more. Gunthers daughter Sandy is trying her best to perk her up. Sheela also sold her condo and now Sandy has to see where to store all her belongings. Also the doctors will not let Sheela go to Sandys home as in her condition, there is just no way that Sandy could take care of her. Her daughter Liza is expecting her second child and at this time can not be no help at all, as she has complications with her pregnency. Sheela was a tall person and as I was told went down to just 105 ponds.

The Sarasota Circus finished here and I did not have had a chance to go see it. Just to to busy. The tent will stay up for the whole year as the Van Wetzel rented it they are renovating the building.

Johny Peers lost his mother a few days ago. She also had suffered for a long time and now found her rest. I hope Johnnys father can get over the loss, he is not in very good shape any more.

Gaylord Maynard is still in town. He was performing at the Sarasota Circus.

Norbu is reporting that daughter Noby was the stunt coordenater for the Superbowl Aerial Girls Show on the webs. I watched it but they really did not give them much credit. I was disapointed, as I was told how hard the web rutine was.

Well it is that time again to end this letter. It always is nice to chat with all of you. I am at this time kind of depressed, but I know I will some how snap out of it.

Till Next Time, Lots of Love

Always Your Fox

PS. The installation of officers dinner turned out great. Some of the new officers could not turn up because of other commitments. June Mills handed out awards to her boardmembers and thanked Cathy Nelson special for her help, which all of us know how great of help Cathy was. The new President gave June and Cathy roses and said a beautiful thank you and gave roses to Jenny Wallenda, which she very much appreciated, as she knows it came from his heart. I also heard that they now have Corky as Secretary which is great. Oh yes, I forgot to tell you all one more thing. They forgot all about swearing the new officers legally in. This was supposed to be done on the installation dinner. Oh well they can do it later I guess. I know that Dale is very much on doing it right but this was anyway not his thing, it was the outgoing boards responsibillity, not the new board.

I also was informed that Paul Nelson, Cathy's husband went over to the other world, which must be a wonderful place to go to as so many of our people are already there and I am sure prepared a place for all of us. I miss them all and hope they will also be kind to me when it is my time to join them. Cathy, please look at it this way. He is much better off, now he is in peace.

May God Bless You All,

Always Your Fox

The Fox Loves You All

****

No More Elephants In The Zoo

Peggy Williams reports the Zoo director of the Henry Vilas Zoo in Madison, announced Feb. 10 that "Winkie" and "Penny" will be removed from the Zoo as soon as this spring. This will make the Zoo elephant-free. Where they will be sent was uncertain as of Thursday. Concerned elephant admirers argued a new "open elephant facility" would not fit "master plan"-wise in the Zoo and would cost a lot of money. The Madison Zoo is one of the last free Zoos in the country-totally supported by grants, funding and taxes. Animal rights activists have already been successful in removing a large portion of the primate population from the Zoo.

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Fun At The Florida State Fair

If you love animals, there are many shows to choose from at the Fair. Appearing there are the Baboon Lagoon; Rosaire's Racing Pigs; Welde's Bear Show; Muttville Comix; a Bengal Tiger Show, plus the Royal Hanneford Circus. On opening day, a black dairy cow gave birth in the Mooternity Ward!

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News From Our Circus Friends

Circus Room Visitors: While the Ringling show was in Cleveland, Ohio at the end of last season, Past President of the CFA, **Rich Deptula** had the pleasure of entertaining Roy and Cindy Wells for a day at his home to once again view his huge circus collection. Other recent visitors included John Kane (Egg Roll) of New York and Dick Kohlrieser of Wapokoneta, Ohio.

Millennium Party: Richard Deptula and his wife, Cheryl, had a Millennium Party at their home and had the pleasure of having family and friends over to help them celebrate the arrival of the New Year. They had a TV screen as large as a garage door to view the various celebrations coming from across the world, provided by their son, Jason. There were many guests at this party, including circus fans, Donald Horowitz, who flew in from East Hampton, NY and Kathy West, from Marietta, Ohio. The party had great food and even a fireworks display put on by their son Jason and his wife, Valerie. A great time was had by all.

The Big Apple's new circus OOPS! played Akron, Ohio for one performance only on Sunday, January 23. The show was greeted with almost a full house at E.J. Thomas Hall. The only thing Richard would say, "If you have the chance to do so, please see this great stage circus as it is great. It has very strong acts, beautiful costumes, a live band and a great stage setting. I especially loved the parakeet bird act. It's a must for circus fans."

****

From the Jack Bell-Helen Billetti Tent #90 and the Ernestine Clarke Tent #30: The Christmas Party was held at Betty Bartholomew's home. Those there were Helen Billetti, the Deckers, Gary Syers, the Sporrers and the Stewarts. Helen brought a funeral booklet from D.R. Miller's service. Herb Ueckhert has moved to Minnesota. Helen passed around a new book by Nancy & Don Moyer, "Cowboy Cliff Hangers B-Western Chapter Plays From A to Z." We are sorry to inform that Charlie Decker passed away. Gary Syers showed pictures of his sideshow, "Something Strange." He plans to take it on the road. (Let us know, Gary!) Their Feb. meeting will be the 20th and the speaker will be Ralph Decker, sharing Charlie Decker's collection. (Thanks, folks!)

****

From the Harold Barnes-Col. Lucky Larabee Tent: The last meeting of the Millennium was held at the Downings on Dec. 4. 27 members attended the Christmas party. Donna prepared a delicious meal! Rich & Cheryl Deptula invited everyone to their home for the May meeting. The Farmers will hold the Fall Meeting at their farm. Lucky called while everyone was at the party. Their next meeting will be at Duff's Smorgasbord in Fairborn, Ohio on March 11. (Will Smiley be there??)

Al Conover said they attended the Showfolks Circus and Flea Market and saw people they hadn't seen for 35-40 years! They also visited with June & Harry Mills and John & Mary Ruth Herriott and some of their daughters. One of their deliveries was to the Leibel Bros. Winterquaters. They will play Xenia in late July or early August. Did you watch the Super Bowl?? Perhaps you noticed the extra-long webs in the background during the halftime show. They were specially made for Disney Studios by Jake & Mary Conover and crew.

Al Conover is recovering from a stroke, shoulder and cataract surgery. Please write him at: 927 Oakland Dr., Beavercreek, OH 45434; phone: 937-426-4656.

Charlie DeWein's address has changed to: Masonic Health Care, 2655 W. National Rd., Springfield, OH 45504. I know he would love to hear from you. Charlie is a great circus photographer and many fans and performers have his photos in their possession, thanks to his giving nature. All of you that have his photos, please write him and let him know you are thinking of him.

****

Jim Harshman now has a new phone number. Please give him a call at: 301-223-5355. Thanks to Mrs. Meals for this information and also his son. You can write Jim at: Homewood Retirement Center, 16505 Virginia Ave., Room 126, Williamsport, MD 21795-1399. (Get ready for the new circus season, Jim! They're coming soon!)

****

Jim Royal reports from Hugo: "We had an unusually large snowfall for this area at the end of January. It caused considerable roof damage around Hugo. Here at C&B, the roof of the paint barn collapsed on a seat wagon which was inside. no one was in the building at the time, it occurred during lunch. Seat wagon is OK. We have had great weather except for that one week. Little Jennie is doing great, tipping the scales at over 1500 pounds now. Many folks are convinced that Jennie is a bit of a ham!

NEWS FROM OUR CIRCUS FRIENDS

Bud DeVere reports in the Kenneth Feld Tent Newsletter he really enjoyed the **Sarasota Circus**, with the Tangier Troupe, Gaylord Maynard, Dolly Jacobs and Yuri, Ms. Youens, hula hoops, David Rosaire's dogs, Grandma (Barry Lubin) and Chucko, Manuel Goncalves, with rolla-bolla, Renaldo, Duo Design, hand balancing, Guiming Meng, balancing.

Bud's second cousin, John Herriott, was one of the inductees at the Ring of Fame. Also there was Bud's two first cousins, Gee Gee Engesser and Peggy Earl, with her husband, Wayde. Bud finally met Gee Gee's son, Billy Powell, who is Vice President for Feld Entertainment.

Bud's newsletter included the Quote of the Day: "When we think of Circus Sarasota, we can be proud. Their international array of world-renowned circus artists and program of artistic excellence is an outstanding Cultural contribution to the State of Florida," said Katherine Harris, Secretary of the State of Florida.

Bud also sent along a copy of the Sarasota Herald Tribune's coverage of the Ring of Fame ceremonies. In the pictures were the plaques with Tina Storey; Steve Smith with John Herriott; circus great, Hub Hubbell and Ernie "Blinko" Burch.

At the CFA Convention in Sarasota, Ed Limbach, moderator on membership recruitment, fund raising, etc. has invited Bud, Clark Beurlen, Mary-Jane Foote and Jim Ridenour as panelists. (Thanks, Bud!)

****

WILLIE B IS DEAD

By Richard Reynolds

February 2: Sad news...Just got a call from ZooAtlanta advising that our great old male silverback lowland gorilla, Willie B II, passed away this afternoon. He was 41 and had been suffering from a combination of pneumonia and cardiomyopathy. Willie B took his name from Atlanta's long time mayor (1937-1961), William B. Hartsfield. The animal was Zoo Atlanta's second gorilla. The first, Willie B. I, was here from 1959 until his untimely death in 1961.

A new gorilla was obtained through animal dealer, Dr. Deets Pickett, of Kansas City and arrived at the Zoo on May 6, 1961. About 2 1/2 years old when he arrived, he was first named "Lumumba" after Patrice Lumumba, the first Prime Minister of the newly (1960) independent Congo (later Zaire and now Congo again.) The little gorilla's name was soon changed to "Willie B. 2nd" and over time, he became simply, "Willie B." He was born in the wild in West Africa in or about November, 1958. Hene, he was 41 at the time of his death.

Willie B. was at the Zoo for 38 years, 8 months and 27 days. While that is nowhere near the 50+ years logged by old Massa, first with Mrs. Gertrude Lintz and then, at the Philadelphia Zoo, it is still a very good gorilla longevity. I believe Willie B. holds the longevity record for any mammal at Zoo Atlanta. None of our elephants have lived there that long.

(Richard was one of 8 speakers at the Celebration of Willie B.'s life at the Zoo on Feb. 5. "There must have been 1,000 to 1,500 people there." Remarks by Richard Reynolds III, Zoo Atlanta's Historian: It was Saturday night, May 6, 1961 when our beloved gorilla, Willie B., came to our Zoo. Earlier that evening, he arrived by plane at our airport. He came here from Kansas City, accompanied by Dr. Deets Pickett, a veterinarian and animal dealer who sold him to the Zoo for $5,500.

Our new little gorilla was wild born..in West Africa's Cameroon as far as we know. He weighed only 65 pounds when he got here. The best estimate of his age was 2 1/2 years. That would mean that he was born late in 1958.

Our late animal hero was called Willie B. the Second because he had a predecessor with the same name. The first Willie B. was never a healthy animal and lived here for only 2 years, from June, 1959 until April, 1961. However, he was an important animal because he was the first gorilla to live in Atlanta and the first in our Zoo's new primate building. And, he had one great moment of national fame. That came in 1960, when he garnered several hundred write-in votes in the general election for Georgia's 5th Congressional District. As far as we know, he was the only gorilla to come that close to a seat in Congress.

His replacement, Willie B. Second, the great silverback male, silverback male, whose life we

celebrate today, reigned supreme at Atlanta's Zoo for 38 years, 8 months and 27 days, until heart failure took him from us on Wednesday (Feb. 2) at age 41.

He lived here longer than any other animal in the history of our Zoo. Elephants are often the longest lived of zoo mammals, but none of ours have outlasted Willie B. We had two Asian elephants, Maude and Coca II, who were here 30 and 36 years, respectively, but Willie B. topped both with over 38. As far as we know, only 6 gorillas have lived here in America longer than Willie. The champ in that department was "Massa" at the Philadelphia Zoo that died there in 1984 after an astounding 53 year and 3 months, under human care.

However, none of these other long-lived gorillas meant as much to their zoos as Willie did to ours. He was our symbol and we shall miss him.

****

"KENYA" FOUND DEAD

"Kenya", 18, the African elephant of the Ramos Family Circus died Feb. 4 at the family compound. A necropsy was done but results are not back as of this writing. Specialists at the University of Florida and the National Zoo in Washington, DC were analyzing tissue samples. Kenya's regular vet, Thomas Schotman, received a call from the trainer, **Lance Ramos**, around 11 p.m. on the 4th saying Kenya was uncomfortable, bloated and showing signs of abdominal pain. Kenya died a short time later. (More in the next issue.)

****

2000 Circus Historical Society Convention

The annual CHS Convention will be held in the twin cities of Bloomington/Normal, Illinois beginning Sept. 6 and concluding Saturday evening, Sept 9 reports Richard Reynolds.

Carson & Barnes will be the Convention Circus on September 7. Illinois State University's Gamma Phi Circus is trying to find the best place possible to host the circus. The students are very excited about sponsoring this circus and they will do very well at selling tickets. They are looking forward to meeting the show's performers and seeing all the animals. This will be a treat for the whole university community! The CHS speakers will make their presentations in the Circus Room and Old Main Room at Bone Student Center at the university. This is located near Milner Library, home to the vast circus collections. The Banquet will be on Saturday night, the 9th.

An educational and entertaining program is being prepared, reports Richard. Those already on the card as speakers are Linda Fisher, with an account of Agnes Lake, the famous Equestrienne; John McConnell, describing how he produced and toured his Circus Royale (hopefully, his son, Eric, my former boss on the Big Apple Circus, will also be able to attend!); Brett Mizelle speaking on "The Downfall of Taste & Genius-Animal Exhibitions and the Struggle Over Acceptable Leisure in the Early 19th Century; Nigel Rothfels, the Carl Hagenbeck scholar, discussing Hagenbeck and the Circus in the 19th and Early 20th Centuries; Bill Slout and his "Two Rings and a Hippodrome Track," the story of how and when one ring became two and then three; Stuart Thayer with a slide show on early bandwagons and your editor, Cherie Valentine, telling the story of my family, the Flying Valentinos of Bloomington, Illinois. Other stimulating speakers will be added soon.

Convention headquarters will be at the Best Western University Inn in Normal. If anyone has any questions about the Convention or of the twin cities, please write or call Cherie. Want to know how you can join the Circus Historical Society and join in on all this fun?? Please contact Cherie or Richard Reynolds, 1186 Warrenhall La NE, Atlanta, GA 30319 or contact Secretary/Treasurer Dave Price, 1954 Old Hickory Blvd., Brentwood, TN 37027. Come join us and have a great time. You can also visit our Miller Park Zoo!

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Carson & Barnes new Route Books are available!! Please send $15 plus $5 postage & handling to: 1999 Carson & Barnes Route Book, PO Box J, Hugo, OK 74743. Checks payable to A.C. Beach Corp.

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A PAWS FROM MOZART

By Mozart Valentine

MEOW, to all my friends out there in circusland. I'm your new columnist here in Back Yard. If you like it, tell my mom, Cherie. If you don't tell her, she won't know what you like to see in America's fastest growing circus/zoo magazine. Well, let's start with the passing of "Kenya," the elephant, a great performer seen on a number of shows over the years. She joins with the herd of elephants in Heaven. Farewell, Kenya.

On more happy news, Sissy, the Asian elephant, is settling well into her new home at The Elephant Sanctuary in Tenn. Lots of new friends there for her.

Saw mom's friend, Helen Billetti Warburton on NBC Evening News with her CFA jacket on, defending the side of the circus up in Seattle. Keep up the good work, Helen! Thanks to all the fans out there who are helping the circus out. Won't be long before the big tent shows will be starting. We have some big shows coming to our home town of Bloomington/Normal (at least a couple of the residents are!) We had 2 great reviews of Kaleidoscape, let's have reviews of other shows. Please write or call in and tell mom about them!

Now, I need your help to bring cheer to some of my friends, all good loyal fans of the traditional circus. Please send them cards, postcards, letters, photos or programs from shows you visit. Hopefully, it won't be long until they are out visiting shows too!

Jim Harshman, Homewood Retirement Ctr, 16505 Virginia Ave., Room 126, Williamsport, MD 21795. Phone: 301-223-5355. Also one of mom's favorite photographers, Charlie DeWein, Masonic Health Care, 2655 W. National Rd, Springfield, OH 45504. And Al Conover, 927 Oakland Dr, Beavercreek, OH 45434. Phone: 937-426-4656.

And last, but not least, my pal Jim Ridenour, who is still struggling with the flu. Get Well, Jim, the CFA Convention is rapidly approaching! Okay, it's time to see what my mom cooked me for dinner. MEOW for now! Let me hear from you! Mozart Valentine.

****

CFA Convention 2000

The Circus Fans Assn. of America will hold their Convention April 11-16 in circus city, Sarasota, Florida, hosted by Showfolks of Sarasota Tent No. 122. Registration will start on Tuesday, April 11 at the Sarasota Airport & Marina Hotel. At 8 p.m. Old Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey videos on Kenny Dodd's big TV will be narrated by famous Ringling clown, Jackie LeClaire.

On the 12th, a seminar on Tent Organization and Activities will be hosted by Ed Limbach and Frank Robie. Following that will be a seminar by Steve Gossard, curator of the Special Circus Collections at Illinois State University, Normal, IL, "A Survey of Trapeze History." That night, there will be an evening of entertainment and a chance to visit with circus stars, both past and present.

On the 13th, there will be a trip to St. Armands Circle to visit the Ring of Fame and to shop. At the Ladies Luncheon, the speaker will be Sue Lentz, famous chimp trainer. That evening, fans will travel to the Royal Hanneford Circus. On the 14th, buses will go to the Lipizzaners performance and will be treated to lunch at the famous Showfolks Club, complete with tour of the Club. This is a special treat, as the walls are full of old 8x10s of the circus greats of the past and present. In the afternoon, fans will visit the Ringling Museum and at night, is the fun circus auction! On the 15th, Rob Houston and Manuel "Junior" Ruffin will speak on Wild Animal Subjugators of African Descent. Next will be a seminar on Animal Awareness with Frank Robie. The Banquet will be at 7 p.m. More info: Jim Ridenour, 3918 Freedom Ave, Sarasota, FL 34231 or 941-927-1546

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Paul Ingrassia presented certificate to John Herriott
Tommy Hanneford, next to John, sponsored him.

Photo By Bud DeVere