**CWM Audio 1**

**Floyd King Self-Recording, December 1973**

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Part 2

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Speaker 1:  [00:00:30] | To make the day in [inaudible 00:00:04] North Dakota complete, just before the parade went out, our equestrian director came to me and he says, "Mr. King, myself and wife would like to place a two-weeks’ notice in. I've located a small circus out in Nebraska with several trucks, and I'm going out there in two weeks and get it ready to open up on the road." |
| [00:01:00]  [00:01:30]  [00:02:00] | I says, "Well, I'll see you right after the parade." I tried to make it a point to anyone who asked me a vital question to stall 'em for a little while so I could study it in my mind what would be the best answer to the problem. When the parade came back I told the equestrian director ... I was paying him $75 a week and his wife $75 total. She'd done a [inaudible 00:01:15] act and sang in the spectacle. I told him, I says, "I know you want to get this circus started as soon as you could. And I tell ya, I'm gonna do you a big favor. I'm gonna give you a whole pack, amounted to $300 for two weeks, you wife and yourself, so you can go out and get the circus started." The equestrian director looked a little aghast, but there was not much he could say, because he figured two additional weeks would give him about $300 more to invest in the circus. |
| [00:02:30]  [00:03:00] | When the parade came back, I noticed clouds began to gather. It was a Saturday afternoon, and the tent was packed with people, every seat occupied. I saw this storm coming up. I sent word back to go ahead and start as quickly as possible, as I figured if the show started and they saw the menagerie and the beginning of the circus, there would be no refunds. I got inside and the storm really hit. Poles bounced up and down. We had brand new top, we'd only had it on a week or two. I ran up in the seats and asked everybody to move out until the storm passed over. No one paid any attention to me. The band kept playing. I ran outside to help 'em [inaudible 00:03:13]. I had a brand new Dobbs hat, and the wind hit it, and I'm still looking for it. |
| [00:03:30]  [00:04:00] | Anyway, the ropes tied from the big top to the stakes snapped like string. We ran inside and I was still trying to get the people out on the outside. Told 'em after the storm passed they could come back in. About that time, the rain started hitting the tent. And all the farmers spoke up and they said, "Son, you got nothing to worry about now because this rain will fall on the tent and make it heavy, and it'll keep it from bouncing away." A heavy downpour of rain ran for a few - a little while, after which the clouds disappeared and the circus went on. Never did stop, it went on continuously. |
|  | So that night, a few people came out and said they had left in the afternoon and they wanted to see it again tonight. They had left early on account of the storm, which we allowed 'em to go on and see the big show. |
| [00:04:30]  [00:05:00] | The equestrian director went on, and I found out later the next day that he'd gone to our band leader and made a deal with him to lead the band. And he'd gone to a couple of Japanese performers, one who walked on his head, and then he [doubled 00:04:52] for a double act, he and his partner done a high pole act in which he stood on his- one of these Japs stood on the head at the top of the pole. It took me a day or two to round up these Japs to give them the idea to forget about going into the circus business. One of them told me both of them together had invested $250 in the circus. I says, "$250? That wouldn't even buy a first class cash register for the front door." |
| [00:05:30]  [00:06:00] | Anyway, I talked them out of going into the circus, leaving me and going into the circus. However, the sideshow manager went on back to Kentucky. He wanted to join the Mighty Egg Show. So altogether we really had a exciting time in [inaudible 00:05:49] North Dakota. Totally, with the good Lord and everything, we had a terrific day's business in [inaudible 00:05:57], which always seems to be a splendid circus town, period. |
| [00:06:30] | Among the many men that I have met during my career, one of the finest characters that I was ever associated with was Jerry Mugivan, who was a founder of Mugivan, Bowers and Ballard shows. They later sold out to John Ringling who- they had obtained a lease for the New York Garden. They sold out to John Ringling for $1,000,450, which included the five circuses they owned: Hagenbeck-Wallace, Sells-Floto, Al G. Barnes, Yankee-Robinson Circus, and the Sparks Circus. |
| [00:07:00]  [00:07:30] | Mr. Mugivan was in Peru, Indiana, after he'd sold a show. My circus had closed in Brenham, Texas, in 1903. In 1900 and ... I think the first year of the Depression, which started in, I believe in 1900 and ... I forget just now the date that it did start, the Depression. But anyway, I remember the second it sold. |
| [00:08:00]  [00:08:30] | Anyway, I jumped into Chicago from Brenham, Texas. I was there a day or two, and I figured I'd better go down and see Mr. Mugivan, and I figured I might be able to make some kind of deal with him. I got into Peru, I went down to the Wabash Valley Trust Company, which Mugivan and Bowers had control. Mr. Bert Bowers, his half-owner, was the president of the bank. Mr. Mugivan says, "Well, I tell ya what, King," he says, "We've sold all the shows, and I'm dog-gone sorry now that I sold 'em." But he says, "My partner Bert Bowers here, this fellow Bert Bowers here, and Zach Tarrell wanted to have money that they had in the circuses, they wanted that, and we decided to sell all out to John Ringling, which we did. But I repeat, I'm dog-gone sorry now." |
| [00:09:00] | We talked alone for while and he says, "Now, the ol' number two circus is down at Brenham, Texas. What would it cost to ship that up and clear up the indebtedness that's against it to Wabash ... to West Baden, Indiana, where the 15-car circus had been shipped after it closed in Paris, Tennessee, what would it cost to clear up the debts on both shows, free of indebtedness?" |
| [00:09:30]  [00:10:00]  [00:10:30] | I figured it up and I says, "I believe it's $40,000. Everybody could be paid off to their satisfaction." He says, "Well, I'll tell ya, here is proposition I'll make ya. You get ahold of Charlie Sparks in Macon, Georgia." I believe this was a Monday there in Peru. "Tell him to be in West Baden, Indiana, next Saturday morning to meet us, Bert Bowers and myself and you. Now here's a proposition we'll make you. We'll take these two shows, take the best equipment from each one. Instead of having a 25-car show, we'll cut it down to 20 cars. You'll be the general agent. Charlie Sparks'll be the general manager. We'll put up the dough." |
| [00:11:00]  [00:11:30] | They figured a new big-top for a 20-car circus, and they had a couple of wagons they had to change around, add on a couple of cars, and take off the other cars. They found out it would cost about $60,000 all total, 40 for the two shows and 20 to get it ready for the road. Bowers spoke up and says, "Well we just as well figure it at $100,000." I says, "What title would you call the circus?" He says, "Well, we would call it Cole Brothers. That's a very good title, you used that the past year with a 10-car show. And after the $100,000 is paid off, you will own 25%, Charlie Sparks will own 25%, myself and Bert Bowers will own the balance, 50%." |
|  | He says, "You get on the train next Friday night. We'll drive on over to Lafayette and get [inaudible 00:11:46] train into Lafayette. You grab a train in Chicago, and we'll be in West Baden Saturday morning. And we'll try to consummate the deal." |
| [00:12:00]  [00:12:30] | I went on back to Chicago that afternoon, and I made a great mistake. Instead of getting Charlie Sparks on the telephone, explaining the details, I figured that Mr. Sparks was pretty sore about Mr. Mugivan buying the Sparks Circus, and he was very sore that he had sold the circus. So I sent Mr. Sparks a wire, "Will you please meet me in West Baden, Indiana, next Saturday? I have a deal of vital importance for you." I was afraid to commit too much, whereas if I'd talked to him on the phone, no doubt it would've been a great deal different. |
| [00:13:00]  [00:13:30] | He said ... So that made about 7:30 hours from a room at the [inaudible 00:12:52] Hotel in Chicago. A phone call came from Mr. Mugivan. He said, "Have you heard from Charlie Sparks yet?" Just at that instance, somebody knocked on the door, and it was a bellboy with a telegram. I says, "Yes, here's a telegram that just came in, period." The wire said, "I'm sorry I'll be unable to be in West Baden Saturday. Charlie Sparks" He said, "Well, I tell you what, you get on that train Friday night. And when we get down to West Baden, we'll get Charlie on the phone and get him up there." |
| [00:14:00] | I got on the train that night, and when we got to Lafayette, Mr. Mugavin and Mr. Bowers got on. The next morning we were there in West Baden. Snow was on the ground. The Howe's London Show had come in, towing their quarters. We waded around in this snow, about two feet deep, myself trailing Mr. Mugavin and Bert Bowers. And I noticed there seemed to be difference in attitude in the two boys, the two fellows. And I began to sense that things didn't look too clear for this new show going out the following year. |
| [00:14:30]  [00:15:00] | Along about five o'clock we got over to the West Baden Hotel. Mr. Bowers and I, we all embarked, we all went in, sat down, and he said "Floyd, I tell you what. Since I talked with you in Peru, Mr. Bowers has changed his attitude. He wants to take a trip around the world. I've got all my business cleared up, my will's made and everything. I've got a double hernia, and I'm gonna be operated on in Detroit by that circus doctor there, and I'm not gonna do anything at all until I come out of the hospital, period." |
| [00:15:30]  [00:16:00] | I went on down to Sarasota, Florida, and I had several talks with John Ringling, who'd just purchased these different circuses. And when I was there, I had a wire from Chicago that Mr. Mugavin had died on the operating table. A blood clot had formed while the doctor was performing the operation. And the statement was the Mr. Bowers said to his wife as he was dying, says, "Well, I finally made a sucker out of myself." Meaning of course, he was getting along alright with his double hernia when he decided to be operated on. So that ended the Cole Brothers Circus, period. |
| [00:16:30]  [00:17:00] | In 1903, a circus went out of Kansas City, Missouri, called the Howe's Great London Show. It'd originally been owned by the Smith Brothers, who were railroad conductors out of Kansas City. It was operated by one of the Smith's widows. Concessions in those days weren't a big item. That is, I mean, cotton candy, hot dogs, novelties and so forth, sideshow concessions. They were kind of a side issue and didn't amount to a great deal. |
| [00:17:30]  [00:18:00] | Jerry Mugavin and Mr. Bowers, together they got $5,000 and they bought the concessions with the Howe's London 10-car circus from Mrs. Smith. Mrs. Smith was a Catholic and Jerry Mugavin was a Catholic. And they were down around Atlanta, Georgia, and Mr. Mugavin wanted to go into Atlanta to get some concessions supplies, [inaudible 00:17:35] rope, and so forth. So he told Mrs. Smith, "I'll be away a couple of nights, and Mr. Bowers will walk down with you at night with the money bag." She says, "Jerry Mugavin, I trust not no Protestant SB." Mr. Bowers was of course a Protestant, period. |
| [00:18:30] | In 1908, Mr. Bowers and Mr. Mugavin formed a partnership, and they leased 10 different cars, railroad cars from different parties, one of which belonged to the Arms Palace people in Chicago, used for shipping race horses, a baggage car. They leased that car for a Biddle car, and the had it shipped down to Kansas City. The Biddle [inaudible 00:18:39] had arrived, and no places for them to sleep. So Mr. Mugavin and Mr. Bowers [inaudible 00:18:46] together, [inaudible 00:18:49] in this baggage car, and lock us where they would store the paper. |
| [00:19:00]  [00:19:30]  [00:20:00] | The circus went out in 1908, as the Howe's Great London Circus, and they had a total of 10 cars, as I stated previously. They had four cross cages, one contained a lioness, another a gray wolf, another section a black wolf, some monkeys and some [inaudible 00:19:33]. That comprised a menagerie in 1908 for the Mugavin and Bowers Howe's Great London Circus. The show went on from year to year. In 1912, I had been with the Al G. Barnes circus in California for 40 weeks. I had gotten a job that winter in Macon, Georgia ... Not Macon, Georgia, but in Montgomery, Alabama, as a reporter on the morning advertiser. |
| [00:20:30]  [00:21:00] | I was in Montgomery all winter, and Mugavin and Bowers was running the Howe's Great London Circus at the fairgrounds, and also had a number two show, which they called Sanger's Show, which was operated by Mr. Mugavin's brother, Charlie Mugavin, and Mr. Bowers's brother. They operated the Sanger show for a couple of years. It was not a success, so they discontinued it. In 1912, they were in Macon, during the Winter, I became acquainted with Mr. Mugavin and Mr. Bowers. I was out to their winter quarters about once a week, and I was very - Luckily I gave them a nice big story almost every Sunday about the circus getting ready for the road. And that was my beginning with my relations with Mugavin and Bowers. |
| [00:21:30]  [00:22:00]  [00:22:30] | I had a send up before we got Macon with Mr. R. M. Harvey, general manager of the Howe's London Circus as general press representative of the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus. Mr. Mugavin was quite familiar with Mr. Wallace. He had been with his show in other years, and he was quite favorable on the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus. That was in 1913. When I got to St. Louis where I was ordered to report, I found out that they had a great flood at Peru, Indiana, and they had lost five or six elephants, and a great many animals and horses and so forth. The Wabash River had risen suddenly and had flooded the winter quarters and caused loss of thousands of dollars to Mr. Wallace. |
| [00:23:00] | However, the circus went out on schedule, opening in Marion, Indiana, and I was with this Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus from 1913 through 1918 as general press representative. Every year they gave me a nice raise, and the last year I was with them was in 1918. Period. |
| [00:23:30]  [00:24:00] | On the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus I met a press agent spec with the show, George Atkinson, A-T-K-I-N-S-O-N. George was press agent spec with the show, and he was a very likable character. In the old days, he'd been an actor, a black-face comedian. He handled the press spec with the show, and worked along with me very fine. In a year or two, I was talking with Mr. Atkinson and he says, "I believe if we took out a small burlesque show in the winter time, we could make a nice, sizable amount of money." |
| [00:24:30]  [00:25:00]  [00:25:30]  [00:26:30] | The sideshow manager with the Hagenbeck-Wallace show previously had been Warren Arnds. He was a sideshow manager at the start of the 1913 season. When the circus got to Detroit, around Decoration Day, Mr. Arnds was quite observant. And in walking about town he saw a large theater called the Avenue, on Woodard Avenue, leading down to the ferry, going into Windsor, Ontario, was empty. He talked to the owner and made arrangements to lease this theater. He found out a fellow who was over in Dixon, Illinois, had a repertoire musical comedy. So he went over there and made a deal. They went in together as partners. And he brought this repertoire musical comedy show, and from that day, turned it into a burlesque performance. They operated it for years and year, and they made a ton of money, after which the |