**CWM Audio 1**

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

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Part 3

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| Floyd King: | Both sides of number one tape, and now starting on the second tape, first side. |
| [00:00:30]  [00:01:00]  [00:01:30] | In 1918, I was in Chicago latter part of December, and in the Planters Hotel I ran into a fellow named Arthur Bill Godfrey. Arthur, no his name was Arthur Godfrey. I found out later that he was a brother of the famous radio man who talked on the radio, I forgot his name whether it was Bill or Arthur. But, anyway this was the brother of this famous radio man. I ran into him and I asked him where he'd been all the years. He says, "Well I was on the Barnum Show as legal adjuster but on account of the fact that he consolidatin' the two shows and going out in 1919 as Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey, combined shows, I was the last man on his legal adjusters who cursed him out for 1919." |
| [00:02:00] | He says, "I have a letter here from a fellow down in Oklahoma who has a little two-car circus for sale, and I'm trying to raise some funds from a [dod fis 00:01:47]. He had been in circus business in other years and he lived up in Wisconsin to see if he could raise some funds, and would put out this two-car circus. "Well," I says, "I'll tell you what, if this [dod fis 00:02:06] is not interested I possibly might be interested myself." |
|  | I had the theatrical show out on the road. This was the third year, third winter rather, and we were making plenty of money with it, and I had 5,000 dollars in the bank, so I figured maybe I'd better possibly get into business for myself. |
| [00:02:30]  [00:03:00] | So I says, "Well, if he's not interested in a repeat, I possibly might be," and I went on down the street to the National Printing Company where I was buying printing, and a little later, an hour or two later that night, afternoon late about 5:00, I was coming down Madison Street in front of the old Morrison Hotel. And I ran into Mr. Godfrey. He said "You know I was up to your rooms several times in the Planters looking for you. I'm interested in what you said you might be interested in, taking over that circus town in Oklahoma, a town called Okeene Oklahoma." |
| [00:03:30]  [00:04:00]  [00:04:30] | It was a two-car circus. It was owned by High Grass Bill Camel, who lived in this little town in Oklahoma, population about 300, and he wanted to sell the circus I believe for 4500 dollars. Consisted of a sleeping car, all equipped with the bars and so forth, and one baggage car, and six Shetland ponies and two high school horses, and two horses which we had to get for baggage horses. So, I read his letter over carefully, and he gave me the letter and I says "Well, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll go out there and look this over, over to Okeene, Oklahoma, and I'll try to make a deal with him, and the proposition with you, you tell me you don't have any money whatsoever, but you had been with Elmer Jones for several years as a legal adjuster. |
| [00:05:00] | Mr. Jones had two, two-car circuses out. One called Cole Brothers and another one called [koko 00:04:38] Brothers, and you told me you was thoroughly familiar with all the details of operating these little two-car circuses. I had been with the Hagenbeck-Wallace 50 car circus for six consecutive years, so I had never seen a two-car circus in operation. I knew nothing about it. This was my mistake number one. If I'd known about it, I would've gone around a two-car show, stayed there for several days, and at least learned some of the details of the operation of a small two-car circus. |
| [00:05:30]  [00:06:00] | I went out to Okeene, Oklahoma, and I saw this equipment which was painted up nicely and so forth, and I talked with Mr. Camel. He was the nephew of the original Camels out of Fairbury in Nebraska, who had the 30-car Camel Brothers Circus on the road for quite a number of years. He had operated his two-car show for two or three years, and he seemed to want to get out of the business. |
| [00:06:30]  [00:07:00] | I made a deal with Mr. Camel. I believe I prob'ly remember right, I paid him 2500 dollars cash, and I gave him a note for 1500 dollars to be paid the following June and July the first. I went on back to Chicago, and I got ahold to Camel, and he said, "I'll tell you what, I'll appoint you as manager of the show." I told him the deal we'd made. "You go on out to Okeene, Oklahoma as fast as you can, and get out there." This was in January and I says, "Get the show ready for the road. Hire the people, the band and everything. You tell me you're quite familiar with all the details. You'll be associated with my brother. I'll send him on to the show as a treasurer. He'll have money to operate during the wintertime to get the show on the road. But you work along with him, he has charge of the money section. You have charge of the managin'." |
| [00:07:30] | I later joined him in March, latter part of March. Early in April they were ready for the road. He had written me at various times of different people he had hired, and they told me he had a contract pay-in engaged in Chicago, 10 people, and they would be out all together. |
| [00:08:00]  [00:08:30] | When I got out to Okeene, Oklahoma, I started out in advance of the show. I was two weeks ahead, and three days behind me were the bill posters. I had two or three bill posters hired, nice competent men, and when I were down to the depot, he came down and he says, "I just got a little wire from the bandleader in Chicago, stating on account of illness of his mother-in-law, he'd gonna be unable to join us." This was two weeks ahead of the show, and we didn't have one band man engaged. Anyway, I sent ads into The Oklahoman, a Wichita paper, and several large dealers in that area, Tulsa. "Wanted for a road show, musicians, a cornet player, trombone player." I divided it up, wouldn't put 'em all together in one category, figurin' we had no one at all. So I divided up some for drummers, some for bass drummers, snare drummer, and so forth like that. |
| [00:09:00] | Anyway, when the circus opened, it opened on time with a band. I was able to get the part of the old band, or this two-car circus, which it had previously been operating. They called it the Camel Show. We went out on the road down through Oklahoma, and we tried to play as many of the oil towns as we could. We ran into opposition right away with the cold weather show. I met for the first time a very lovable character named L. C. Gillette, who a general agent for Alma Jones's two-car Cole Brothers Circus. |
| [00:09:30]  [00:10:00] | He told me the route they were playing, and I got together with him so I wouldn't go into the towns that they were playing. He asked me whichaway I wanted to go, and I says, "Well, any way at all to make a buck, but I want to go to Western Canada." So, I routed the show. They were gonna head right into Canada, and I routed the show up through Oklahoma, the oil towns, into Kansas, and out through Western Kansas into Colorado, and on the D & RG Railroad on up to Ogden, Utah, and from there on into Sand Point, Idaho, and Bonners Ferry, Idaho, and from there on into Western Canada through Alberta there. |
| [00:10:30] | We entered Canada, and we had a very small circus, two cars, no elephant, nothing. They had to learn around a two-car circus. One thing, I shouldn't advertise anything I didn't have. The result of it was we advertised on the billboards, "Elephants and Camels and Menagerie," which of course we didn't have. I found out if we had advertised strictly what we had, we woulda done a great deal better. |
| [00:11:00]  [00:11:30] | We went into Western Canada, and the first several days were very splendid. There were four additional two-car shows in Western Canada: Cole Brothers, my show, called Sanger Brothers: Sanger's European shows, Cooper Brothers that was three, fellow named Low Grass Bill Camel from Philadelphia married to Mabel Hall. He had a two-car circus up there, and another two-car circus was Christy Brothers out of Houston, Texas. I had two-car shows in Western Canada. |
| [00:12:00] | We got up into Canada, we found bitters was just about it was down in the States. Or lousy, or ordinary, just enough to get by on. So we was up there several weeks, and I routed the show out. We came out at Portal, North Dakota, and the first stand in the States was Kenmare, North Dakota. |
| [00:12:30] | When we were over in Idaho, a colored fellow approached my brother, who was the manager of the show, and said, "Are y'all headed anywhere towards Chicago?" My brother says, "Well, we ain't headed in a straight line for there." So the first thing you knew, we were in Canada. He says, "I thought you was headed in a straight line for Canada." "Well," I said. "You said we're gonna detour through here on down to Canada." Anyway, you know how they are, fellows who were at circuses in those days. They gave 'em their board and lodgin' , a few [dulkis 00:12:45], to get cigarettes and tobacco on, and a few extra dollars, and that was it. |
| [00:13:00]  [00:13:30] | Anyway, when we got down into Kenmore, the first thing the legal adjuster done, he went down and contacted the JP's the one or two who were there in town. Told 'em they were there with the circus, had pay, and in the time anybody came up with a suit, just tell him he'd already been engaged by the circus. There were two constables that would issue his suit. He gave each one of 'em a ten dollar bill, and told 'em that anybody come up, just tell 'em that he'd already been engaged, he couldn't do anything. This colored fellow said, "Well, if I didn't have so many good friends around this [suel 00:13:39], I'd put gunpowder under those two cars and blow 'em up." |
| [00:14:00]  [00:14:30] | Anyway, we whipped on along. In the meantime, I forgot to mention we'd been out on the road about three weeks. I caught the show for the second time in Hutchison, Kansas as they were going through there down at the depot. I said to my brother, "Where is Godfrey?" "Why," he said, "he's back in Chicago. He didn't know a thing in the world about the operation, as I found it a two-car circus. He had no band when we opened, I mean we had to get a band together, and instead of [harn 00:14:21] individually, he contracted a contract band. Then when you lost the leader, you lost 'em all. He kept wantin' to take the show into Kansas City to reorganize." |
| [00:15:00] | My brother says, "You been all winter long now organizin' the show, and now you want to go in to get it reorganized." He gave him his fare back to Chicago, and that ended the association with Mr. Camel. I later ran into Mr. Godfrey there in New York. He told me he was back again with the candy company which he'd previously been connected with. His brother then, who was a great radio star, was drivin' a taxi around Chicago. |
| [00:15:30] | With this two-car circus, we struggled along just getting enough from get to one town to another. The first business we really ran into was down at Arkansas on a branch road running out of Blytheville, Arkansas on over to Jonesboro. It was about three or four towns on that road, and we showed each one of 'em, and we had a big day's business. |
| [00:16:00]  [00:16:30] | The next year, we went out again under the same title, "Wandering in Memphis," we went out again under the same title, and long in August we bought an elephant. It Muscovy, Oklahoma called Little Hip. It'd been previously in the Hippodrome in New York City. It worked with the girls in a disappearing act, under water. This elephant was highly trained, and we shipped him from Muscovy over to the show in Arkansas. Along with the show, came the trainer, who had a chimpanzee, and that attracted a great deal attention too. Anyway, both of 'em stayed around the circus, I mean the chimpanzee and the owner, stayed around the circus for several weeks. |
| [00:17:00] | That winter, we wintered in Memphis again, and I was out in California as a witness for L. G. Barnes in the lawsuit. I got a wire from my brother that the elephant had died in winter quarters. They had an autopsy performed, and he had contacted pneumonia and passed on. Anyway, our number one elephant, first elephant we had, we only had him several months, but we lost him. |
| [00:17:30]  [00:18:00] | The next year, I got another elephant from Muggleman and Bowers, an old runaway elephant that you wanna get rid of. We got over in West Virginia and it ran away one night. We finally got him back again. He didn't hurt anyone. So it went along, I think this was about the third or fourth year we were out, we were up into Ohio and Pennsylvania. On the Eerie Railroad, they had rule on the Eerie Railroad that they could not haul a circus. So we hauled this two-car show as a theatrical show. |
| [00:18:30]  [00:19:00] | We were showing a town in Ohio called Kent, K-e-n-t Kent, Ohio, where the state university is located, and that night we would take the elephant down with a camel we had acquired, and tie him to the steps of the baggage car, and load the show and put these animals in later. It seemed that during the day, it was in a terrific hot spell in July, one of those intense, hot days when the thermometer's over 100. It seemed that they had unloaded a carload of apples down at the depot, and when they were unloadin' 'em, the bad apples they threw in a barrel. It seemed this barrel was right near the elephant, and he would stick his snoot in there and eat these apples partly decayed. Result of it was the next day when we got over into Ohio, I believe the town was Ravenna, Ohio, we found out this elephant, the gas had formed in the elephant and he was swollen up so he could hardly get out of the baggage car. |
| [00:19:30]  [00:20:00] | We took him out to the circus grounds and got ahold to a veterinarian. There was nothing he could do, and the first thing we knew, this elephant feel over dead! A gas had formed around his heart, his stomach had swollen up almost twice the size. Anyway, a circus man never gives up, so our [pitchel 00:19:46] man spread a canvas sidewall around the elephant, took in a little over two hundred dollars that day exhibiting the dead elephant to the public. 15 or 20 cents apiece. That ended our number two elephant went to circus. |
| [00:20:30]  [00:21:00]  [00:21:30] | Altogether, our brother and I over the period of years we operated the circuses, we lost about six elephants. Elephants are very susceptible to pneumonia and other diseases, and they have to be kept on grass. You have to handle them very carefully. I picked up three elephants, one in from the [Cells 00:20:40] Photo Circus, and two additional one's I bought from Bartels Animal Company in New York. These were delivered to me over at Jersey City. This baggage car with the elephant I picked up at Hartford, Connecticut, I shipped down to Jersey City, and we were loading these two elephants. Number one of the two elephants that we had bought, elephants about 10 years of age, had no trouble walking up the automobile platform directly into the baggage car, along with the large elephant that we had bought from the [sellas 00:21:14] Photo Circus. This third elephant we couldn't do much with. We put a rope around his hind leg and ran it through the baggage car. Every time he would give a little, we would tighten it up. It took us about an hour to load this elephant an inch at a time into the baggage car. |
| [00:22:00]  [00:22:30] | We shipped those two elephants, three elephants on to the show, those two little one's on to the show, and three of them on to the show, which was at that time Escanaba, Michigan. When the show got in to Escanaba that morning, the manager looked out and he saw the baggage car, and he knew that the elephants had arrived, so instead of taking the elephants out to the grounds, he put them in the parade right from the downtown area, the start of the downtown area. During the parade, one elephant fell over dead. Come to find out later he was that elephant we had a great deal of trouble loading, that he had contracted pneumonia. The veterinarian that had performed an autopsy said he contracted pneumonia workin' up that intense sweat gettin' him into the baggage car, and later cooling off in the baggage car. |
|  | Altogether, as I said, we lost six out of twenty elephants, twenty or more that we owned at various times. End of first side of tape number two. |