

CWM Audio 70-7

Interview with Laura Bassett and Joshua Guptill July 22nd, 2017.

Part 2

Interview conducted by LaVahn Hoh

- LaVahn Hoh: Okay, [inaudible 00:00:01] again and part 2. Here we go. We were talking about what the duties of the floor crew.
- Joshua Guptill: Most of it assembling the trace when we did loading, putting down all the floor rubber, putting out the mats over all the wiring so that people could work down for pre-show and not be tripping over the boxes around the ropes and cables going up to the trace.
- [00:00:30] Then during the show, mostly just moving props in the dark and trying not to be notices. So that, everyone's focus stayed on the actual that was being performed at the time. Obviously, if the elephants or horses made any mess on the way around the ring. It was kind of a race to see who could get there fastest and make it disappear again, so the show is kept that kind of nothing like that ever really got seen. It was just the performance that everyone noticed.
- [00:01:00] LaVahn Hoh: All right. Let's talk about the horses.
- Laura Bassett: What about the horses.
- LaVahn Hoh: Well, what were your duties? What did you have to do daily?
- Laura Bassett: Well, basically all of us were assigned to certain animals so when I arrived I was assigned to the brand new pink horses. They had just arrived the week before so we kind of learned the ropes together. Just kind of how it worked out. You were responsible for your horses and I started in charge of all four and later on when we had more crew I was in charge of just two horses. But you're responsible for everything related to those horses. You make sure their stall is always clean. They always have water. They always have hay. They are well taken care of. They are groomed perfectly for the show. There also the competitiveness over making sure horse is the cleanest. Because you'd notice if there were stains on anyone else's horses and you'd let them know.
- [00:01:30]
- [00:02:00] It was making sure the horses were groomed and dressed and ready to go out for the show. We assisted. Every morning there would be a practice that would be the first thing. Usually we get on a bus at about 8, that would take us from the train to the arena and we would run horse practice. That was usually about an hour each morning and it was just us in the arena. We set up the rings ourselves and run through the acts. My horses were brand new so I got to actually watch an act to be trained up from nothing to full show performance, which was a pretty amazing thing to see.
- LaVahn Hoh: Who was the trainer?

- [00:02:30]
 Laura Bassett: When I first started, it was Sasha Hook. He was just finishing up on the 135th and new trainers who were coming in were Sophie and Stephie and they were sort of learning his style and there were beginning there. They took over at Winner Coaters for the next edition. They were in charge of my ring, in charge of the pans. Stephie began in charge of the pans. There was a lot of drama around that. Her husband was working I believe the zebras at the beginning and it sort of a mix. Karen Hook was also on the crew working presenting some of the animals and Tather was presenting the sun through rain with every [inaudible 00:03:14] at the time.
- [00:03:00]
 Our act had four the paints act ...three pains one of them ended up being too and they sent him off to be not on the show. We had the three paints act and we had three Norwegian fieds. That was the ring that I always worked in. You basically stayed with your horses whichever you were assigned to during the practice.
- [00:03:30]
 LaVahn Hoh: What did you do when you were with your horses outside the ring? What did you have to do?
- Laura Bassett: During the practice, when Sasha was running it, we were basically poop shovelers and saddle slippers. He run the whole thing and your job is just if I horse pooped, you run in, you scooped it up without disrupt anything. So you had to jump and time it so the horse [inaudible 00:03:56] scoop up you hop back out again and you'd set up and clean up. That's all you really did in his practice.
- [00:04:00]
 With Stephie and Sovio, cause they were training a brand new act and they were much, you know we are one big family kind of attitude. Especially at the start. We were leading the horses through act as they were still learning the movements. We spent the whole practice with the horses on leaves and we would walk them when they did commands and the horses would learn the movements by us leading them through. Like [inaudible 00:04:23] we are just spining around in the circle bringing them up the Purdue which is where they come up next to each other.
- [00:04:30]
 Basically, will be leading them through. During the act and slowly moving so that you might have a whip on the side, a driving whip, not obviously pretty. Just to give signals to the side to help queue, like if there was having trouble learning that it was supposed to turn at this point. One of us might be standing on the side. Just to give a little motion or a flek there to queue the horse the it was supposed to. In a normal act when they are fully trained you wouldn't need to any of that. But we were in a new act and there were some struggling in getting up to full show performance.
- [00:05:00]
 Actually the first few months we were on the road, we were in the ring doing this during the performance to leading the horses through the acts for large portions.
- LaVahn Hoh: Dressed in black?
- Laura Bassett: Dressed in black. Yes. Circus ninja you cannot see me. Same idea we were trying not to be conspicuous as much as possible.

LaVahn Hoh: I have to confess that a lot of times I'm watching you guys rather than what's going. Cause I'm interested in the logistics of what's happening out there.

[00:05:30]

Laura: There is a lot of people making stuff happen.

Bassett:

LaVahn Hoh: Yes, absolutely. To me that's fascinating and the applause doesn't go enough for you guys, it is the truth, the performers. Tell about your first day were you overwhelmed, blown away?

Joshua: My first day, one of our mutual friends Mark, he was on forward crew at the time. He saw me arrive and he knew me from my home town. Cause when we were in town, we all went and hang out for a while. He was over zealous and went, "Oh good. You're here let's get in the ring you can help with Loden." As soon as I walked in the building Dema, who is in charge of the whole floor came running right over and pulled Mark's aside, yelled at him for letting in there yet. Cause I hadn't signed any paper work yet.

[00:06:00]

[00:06:30] I need to go right back out cause they finally told me I go to 16 wagon, they will fill in on everything. Get you an ID and all that. They immediately commented that you have to be clean shaven for the circus. At the time I had like a full goatee and everything and didn't have any of my razors with me or anything. It was kind of a nuisance, but as soon as I got that done, the nice part was I already knew somebody on the floor crew. It was great. We went and he basically just had be an extra set of hands, moving everything, cause he already knew where everything went. Cause it was near the end of that tour.

[00:07:00] It was really seamless transition for getting started, because it was mostly just going, move this with me, will set up ring three and once ring three is set up will see if any others aren't done cause that ... like she said, there is usually competition and with the floor crew rings it was always. which ring could their ring set and fastened first. Then you go help the other guys and point out to them that they were slow, while you're there.

[00:07:30]

LaVahn Hoh: Moving things around on the floor, did do anything else? Were you in rigging or in riding?

Laura: Yes, I actually really like climbing. I grew up helping my dad with forestry. So I grew up in trees. They had mentioned that they needed climbers, so my first week they put me through the training for climbing. Immediately I took over doing all the climbing that needed to be for ring three. Like if a speaker was blown or something. A lot of times the electricians or sounding relating people didn't feel like climbing. Cause most of them were afraid of heights.

[00:08:00]

They'd send me up with a rope, I drop it down, hook it to a poly and we drop down the speaker or light that was needing to be fixed and haul up a fresh one that was already up and running and I just reattach it. They test it and make sure it works and I'd go back down. Seeing with any other thing like that if there was really anything that needed to

[00:08:30] be done. Like in one of the shows the ladder for the trapeze got caught, all the up to the trace and you couldn't drop it at all. Pretty close to when we were going to be starting that specific part of the show.

[00:09:00] I just threw on my harness cause I always kept right next to the ring. Scaled all the way up, dropped it down and by then it was too late for me to come back down before the acts started. So I get to watch that entire act from the trace, which was great. Then I just came down as soon as it ended.

LaVahn Hoh: You had to go through fall protection and all of that training?

Laura Bassett: Yes. The first time I was up there and climbing and lost my balance a little bit, the rope wasn't nearly as tight as I would have made it. Not loose enough you'd fall or anything. But you grab it and instead of it being tight it came out like six inches and you get that panicky moment that you're going to fall. After that I checked all my own rigging every time even though anyone that climbs uses that one. But I went and made sure all of that was good and if I could do it without the other rings noticing I was checking their work. I would see if [inaudible 00:09:44] good too. Cause sometimes they have to go open their rings too.

LaVahn Hoh: Competition.

Laura Bassett: Yes.

[00:10:00]

LaVahn Hoh: How did you get started? How did you find out that ... did you applied for the position, did you read about it?

Laura Bassett: I did. Well, I had just graduated from college the year before. I got a bachelor's in biology and animal science. My real hop was to get into the zoo world. I wanted to be a zookeeper. Zoo keeping is an exceptionally competitive field and didn't realize that. So I had spent trying to get into zoos and I couldn't get so much as an interview and I have done internships and couldn't get anywhere.

[00:10:30] I had always seen on the [Feld 00:10:30] cause I had always thought of like, "Wouldn't it to be cool to train animals for something." I had read various posts from like movie animal trainers on things as I was growing up. That always sounded amazing to me. I looked in the Feld website, pretty much always had an animal handler posted and I'm kind of like. I think they posted on the Zoo Association website that they had and opening specifically. I went, "Why not?"

[00:11:00] I sent a resume and I had a phone interview, which was primarily I believe it was with vet tech at the time who interviewed me, Kelly Coleman. Basically the interview was her trying to convince me that I wouldn't want the job. That it's hard. This isn't a job it's a lifestyle. I got to the second interview, which I believe with Steve Curtis, that might not be correct.

But again it was this whole thing. That basically he was trying to ... he was basically

[00:11:30] trying to convince me, I don't want the job. It's going to be hard. You don't get days off. This not a job it's a lifestyle. It's going to be rough ride and I'm like, "Well, if you'll have me I'll do this." I ended hoping on and that was my first full-time benefited position with my [inaudible 00:11:38] degree. Was running away and joining the circus.

LaVahn Hoh: What was your first day like?

Laura Bassett: The very first was kind of a mess because this was my first job and I didn't want to look incompetent. So I didn't want to call and ask for help or anything. I found my own way out there and I showed up.

LaVahn Hoh: This is in Florida?

[00:12:00]

Laura Bassett: This was in Indianapolis there were on the road at the time.

Bassett:

LaVahn Hoh: Already on the road. Okay.

Laura Bassett: I flew in Indianapolis with my suitcase and I showed up. I was told you go to 16 wagon. I found that. Nobody knew I was coming. The communication between corporate who had hired and when my start day apparently wasn't communicated. So I get to 16 wagon and nobody has any idea. It was a weird day. I walk in and Steve Curtis is sitting there and Elvis Wage and I'm like, "This is normal?"

[00:12:30] I think he got me oriented. There was shuffling around as they figured, "We've got this person here apparently who is starting and we didn't know." But they shuffled around, the vet tech took me around and give a quick orientation of the animal compound. They found me a trainer room and I settled in sort of a whirlwind and I was exhausted. So the next day was my first day actually doing animal crew. It was a little overwhelming and that when they put me with the new like I had mentioned. Who were in a sort of own area because they were new so they were technically under quarantine.

[00:13:00]

I didn't really have any contact with people and sort of expected some kind of training but it was mostly, "Here is a shovel, here is a bucket. You've worked with horses before? Yes, little. Great, you know what you're doing. There is the shovel, there is the bucket, there is your horses. Don't get kicked." That was pretty much it, the end of my training. After the start you sort of learn as you go. I was the only female on the animal crew at the time. Some of the presenters and trainers were female but I was the only animal crew who was.

[00:13:30]

That was another thing, the female [inaudible 00:13:34] who can of gave this. She called that the fresh meet introduction that it's like you are on train, you're in the minority. There is a lot very lonely guys here. You have to be blunt. You have to be straightforward. People will approach you. They'll do all sorts of things and you have to stand up for yourself and make it clear whether you're interested or not. I had that in my head and I walk into this crazy world. Everything.

[00:14:00]

My first duty was essentially to catch the lamer that was being used in the opening

parade. I was supposed to take the lamer at then end and bring it back to the animal compound. That was my primary duty for a little while and it slowly worked from there. The first day when they handed me the lamer and they like, "Okay, take it back to the animal compound." Went, "Okay, this is great. I'm just walking it back to the compound." What they didn't me was that right behind you is all 10 elephants.

[00:14:30] So I'm walking the lamer and I hear, "Away, away, away." I turn around and there is 10 elephants bearing down on me. Someone grabs the lamer and me and like hauls us off to the side and the elephants passing. That was my introduction to how quickly things move. How alert you have to.

LaVahn Hoh: I was going to ask both of you, you had interaction with elephants obviously. At that you did. Did you?

Joshua
Guptill:
[00:15:00] Yes. Well, Asia was ... she'd come out. She'd painting and pre-show. I was part of ring three, so that was my responsibility, was walk out with ... I forget his name ... but the personal that handled the Asia. Just basically make sure the crowd stays out of the ring and everything. It got to the point where, I would go out and wait with them because I had a prop to bring out, the painting table and all that.

[00:15:30] After about a month of that, it got to a point where Asis would be like brushing a trunk against all things like that. At one point she wrapped her trunk around my hand the guy got all upset and worried. He's like, "She is not squeezing, right?" "No, no. Fine." He said, "Oh good she is just playing tag of then. He is like pull." I pull as hard as I can and the trunk doesn't even move. Then she pulls back and I'm off my feet almost. It was great. That became like a normal thing was, I'd go out. She did it there like nudging me off to the side and I'd stand back there and she'd do it again or tag of war, he really kind of tried to avoid her playing because it didn't look good.

[00:16:00]

It looked good if he didn't know what the context was and she was just playing. She was sweet. Then when she'd be out doing her painting she'd like weave back and for and cross her back legs sometimes. She was always in a hurry to get through a painting set. It was great.

LaVahn Hoh: Other than having 10 elephants chase you down the track.

[00:16:30]
Laura
Bassett:
[00:17:00] Nearly getting run over on my day. Great start to that. I didn't work directly with the elephants cause I was on the horse crew. But they were obviously there and we got to hang out. Sometimes especially in magazines [inaudible 00:16:45] we were directly next to them and one of my horse was horrified of the elephants and the one was fascinated by them. So one of them would be sitting there, looking through the back of the stall and the elephants were I don't know 10, 10 feet utmost away from us. Just the electric wire around the holding area. He'd just be watching them and he was fascinated by them and the other one was terrified. He'd stay at the far side of the stall. He wanted nothing to do with these crazy smelly things that were out there making all that strange noises and such things.

[00:17:30] But the one who loved the elephants was terrified of the tigers and the one didn't care about that. All my horses had different personalities with that. I didn't work directly with them but they were always there and just to have that presence of these massive creatures that ... the honor of being in their presence in any way it never got old. There is this sort of shift that I think a lot of people would just sort of getting used to them being there and it was hard to fight that tendency. You see them all the time. They are right there and sometimes you're like, "I don't want to go unload 200 bails of hay because these stupid elephants need eat so much."

[00:18:00]

[00:18:30] But I'm working one of the winner coters. The picker junior was set up right next to where the practice area was. The elephants would line up there before going into their practice in the morning or in the afternoon. I remember, I'm sitting there and there is all these at their tables. They are eating their hamburgers and their hotdog for lunch and 10 elephants come in, and they line up, and they are only, they less 100 paces away. Just waiting there and nobody even looks up. I was sort of like, I never want to come to that point. I always want to notice the elephants and remember how cool it to be with the elephants and have them around.

LaVahn Hoh: This was Tampa?

Laura Bassett: That would have been Tampa. Yes. No, it was Newshore. So that was-

Joshua Guptill: Palmetto I thought.

[00:19:00]

Laura Bassett: We were in Palmetto. It was not Palmetto. It was either Lowland or Tampa. Should have been Tampa because we was in Newshore. I think we did Tampa from Newshore.

Joshua Guptill: Yes, when that was, I don't remember. When I was with them it was Tampa.

Laura Bassett: Because I know when you in the between [inaudible 00:19:13] I think it was Orlando and then Tamper.

LaVahn Hoh: Now you don't have to answer this one. Some people did not want to answer this one.
[00:19:30] What are your feelings about the show causing?

Laura Bassett: I think it is a very sad thing in many ways that there is just this, the idea of live spectacle and just the amount specialized skill of being between the crews and the designers, and the wardrobe. The people who made this happen and this incredible world that existed. I think it sad that of all that went away. Even if, the show maybe wasn't really traditional circus anymore. I know a lot of people had mixed feelings about the direction that the show was taken. But PT Barnum was always ready to reinvent things too. Its kind of that is what it is.

[00:20:00]

[00:20:30] I think that this whole world and community of people traveling around on a train and the kind of culture that came up around that. That's what I find the most sad thing that's going away in many ways that, there is nothing really quite like that, where everything is self-contained and people are there. I'm an animal person and I think any place where

people can experience animals in some way that inspires all or emotion. Whether you throw natural history facts in there or not.

[00:21:00] I feel it's far less important than having an experience that's personal in some way and you just have some moment of awe and getting to see an elephant. Just your sense of the scale of the world changes of the world changes when you're standing next to an animal like that. You hear the hoof beats of the horses and you have them all there. You see someone interacting with tigers and in like this sense. I feel there was a great value in that and I'm sad that it's no longer there.

[00:21:30] Joshua
Guptill: I actually left the circus because I had a one-year-old at the time. I had planned on going back in another six years, when he turned 18. When I heard it was going out business, it was rough for me because I had always planned on getting into eventually. Because it was the best job I ever had. Especially, with living on the train and traveling with everybody. Cause there was a lot of night where you'd decide you wanted to cook something or eat something and you walk out. [inaudible 00:21:59] step of the train and
[00:22:00] 100 feet of the tracks there was somebody with a little camp fire grill and you could walk over throw hamburgers on with and they were fine with it. It was that really great community of people, all working together for the same goal.

[00:22:30] My son went and saw the show three time now. It's always been amazing to him. It's kind of one of those I wish when he had kids, he'd been able to the same. To bring them to see the show and I'm sure there's going to be other shows but nothing quite like it.

Laura Bassett: I'm involved sort of news ... after I left the show I took up circus aerials just as hobby. I have that sort of contemporary new circus in my world as well and a lot of them feels like, "Well, the circus has just become something else and it's a different thing." I think the contemporary circus world is also struggling. Our local [inaudible 00:23:03] and
[00:23:00] Seattle had to close cause they already got ... they recently reopened just anything. Big Apple had gone down for a while in theatrics had to close and the contemporary circus festival in Chicago weather we couldn't get enough funding so they had to cancel that this year.

[00:23:30] There is something kind of shaky about that live performance and that appreciation for the amount of skill that goes into all of this. Just kind of caught up all of this sought of aspect of being caught up in that.

LaVahn Hoh: Talk about a funny story that happened while you were on the road. Other than the elephants chasing you down the track on your first day.

Laura Bassett: Oh gosh. I don't know. There were so many of things that happened. It's hard to pick one without ... do you have something that comes straight to mind?

Joshua
Guptill: The-
Laura Bassett: Jump in.

[00:24:00]
 Joshua Guptill: When we were setting up for one of the new acts. We had gotten the LED screens and it was the first we'd had them. At the time the zebras were practicing. The bidding crew or sound, whoever it was that was controlling the screen turned it to test it and all the zebras bolted for the open doors at the other end of the arena. Everyone's shouting and they close the door. We get them all closed. The zebras were so upset about the screen coming on that they just really weren't concentrating. They decided to take them back over the to the animal area.

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[00:25:00]
 Trip was one of the newer people on animal crew at the time. He is trying to run out with two zebras. Get them back up to the animal enclosure area and I don't what they did but you could see through the doors up hill, Trip is between them and all of sudden he did a somersault and landed on his back and just held on to the rings. So they didn't go anywhere but every one that say it was like checking to see if he is okay and he is like, "I dot know what happened it's just all of a sudden I'm on the floor." It was great because everyone really got off track on what they were doing because it was just so interesting watching them all run and then run back the other other way and all of a sudden trips. Completely somersaulting.

LaVahn Hoh: Trip, tripped.

[00:25:30]
 Joshua Guptill: Yes, and he was knew. Of course, everyone was messing with him about.
 LaVahn Hoh: Just as to take that all further, did the zebras obviously got used to that?

Joshua Guptill: Right, yes. I think it was just because they immediately went from a black screen to all the light bulbs being lit. So they could check to make sure that with it assembled everything lit correctly and it was just a really sudden change, right next to the right they were in. It was up and on the wall 30 feet away and apparently they noticed.

[00:26:00]
 Laura Bassett: Zebras are pretty flighty animals in general. Didn't take much to set them off.
 Joshua Guptill: No.
 LaVahn Hoh: Did you come up with something?

Laura Bassett: I don't know. Like there's lots of just like little things I feel that just of sort made this kind of like around the horse ban. Because we spent a lot of time just hanging out there waiting between part where people had to go in. I have little clips of video I had taken on my phone of like people ... like we discovered two Stephie the presenter and one of our trainers, one of their crew Zibbie had they knew the [inaudible 00:26:39] there is something at point they are trying to in this forked in there are dancing up and down the line, in the tents, in horse tent and it's late night.

[00:26:30]

[00:27:00]
 They are trying to get the rest of in the line. We trying to figure out this like launching of kicked forked in since we are going up and down. We were exhausted. We just like doing anything to keep saying at this point. We did a crazy dizzy bat race there. At one

point everyone is spinning around on the tools and come banging down. It had the brilliant idea of Stephie being the goal post and she held a dollar up to her forehead. So that everyone could come. So that was the goal you had to be the first one to get there. Not anticipating the fact that somebody would take that a little too serious and basically bolt her over in the process of coming for this dollar.

[00:27:30] I don't just little in like doddle ... I don't have a good. I don't I need like a seed or something to try and figure out which one.

Joshua
Guptill: Yes, trying to stay a wake was always interesting. They'd come up with random things to help with that. Like Misher who was in charge of most of the floor crew staff. We were there on and loading and we had a delay. So we are all just sitting there in the seats starting to get drowsy and stuff like that. He got a bunch of the stands for the elephants and got all the floor crew guys down there to see who could make it [inaudible
[00:28:00] 00:28:04] to the arena and back with one without it falling over fastest. We just did these jogging races back and forth for probably about an hour between all of us.

It was great because we all felt fine when we finally got to get working again. It was just such a random, "Hey, we going to do this." Nothing we would have thought of to do on our but it made the day a lot better than it would have been.

[00:28:30]
LaVahn Hoh: On the canver side of that was there anything that happened that could have been frightening, scary, problematic? Other than the elephants chasing you.

Laura
Bassett:
[00:29:00] That was just surprising. Things were under control. I was just caught off guard. The were days that were certainly miserable compared to others. When we did this shift from Tampa to our first town I think we were ... maybe we're still in Tampa for one of our first towns in Florida. When we left Winnercoaters we got there and there was no perimeter fence for the animal compound. We had a really short animal lock. We were supposed to ... it was going to be an easy thing, so none of brought jackets, none of really brought food or anything like that. It was going to be an easy lock to drop off the animals we go back to the train. We get there and there is no perimeter fence.

[00:29:30] It was a holiday so the union that was supposed to come set up the fence wouldn't come out that day. We had to instead get everybody back in the track, drive back over to Winnercoters. Take down all of the perimeter fencing that has been around the Winnercoters area. Throw it in the track, haul it back over and the set it all up, which was the longest day I think in the entire time I had worked there.

[00:30:00] During this of course it had started hot and sunny. It was a beautiful floral day and it started pouring rain. We are out there and it drops 20 degrees. So it's freezing, it's pouring rain, none of us have our jackets, none of us have anything and we can do anything cause we can't leave the compound without a fence around it. We had to spend these hour. That was one of poor miserable experiences. I don't remember lots of it. I just remember being so cold. I could barely move while we were hauling this fence around.

- [00:30:30] We had a near miss just cause we at one point when we were ... some of us had been sent back to ... usually we'd load some ... there was a weird situation. I can remember the ... sorry I'm bubbling. There was a weird situation and we had to send the horses back, some of the horses back to the train early. I don't remember why during load out and so were groups of the crew to stay with them on the stop car to make sure they were okay. Feed and water them at periodic intervals, while other things were going on.
- [00:31:00] We'd told that one side was a live track and one side was not. So we rode the cars up to a certain point where they were going to pack them out of the way and we were told you have to get off on the non-live track side to do the water stuff while you're there which meant we had to. We open up the door and there is this giant troubery tree that completely blocking the hay door and we are looking at this going, "How are we going to get half a dozen bails of hay out of this thing with tree in the way." Of course, we can't move the tree. We're just stuck with this thing.
- [00:31:30] We had this brief moment where we considered, if we just hopped around on the other really quickly and loaded and did it from that side, it would so much easier. We wouldn't have a tree in the way. We sort of hemmed and hang, we finally no they told us we need to on this side. It will take too long to go around whatever. I climb up in the tree and I'm in this giant tree passing the hay out of this thing and we ended up do it we are grumbling like you do and we close it up and we go back inside the stacker.
- [00:32:00] We sit down at the table, at which point a train comes burrowing full speed on the other side. We had this frozen moment of looking at each other is like if we had taken the time to close up that door and go work from the side. If we had tried to do that, it would have been just enough time that we all would have been standing on that track, when the [inaudible 00:32:13] train came through. Nothing happened and it was one of those they told us not to go over. We didn't fortunately but it was a moment when you sort of realize just how dangerous what you're doing is. One slip up or one miscommunication or one bad call could really have traumatic consequences.
- [00:32:30]
- LaVahn Hoh: That would have been very dramatic.
- Laura Bassett: Yes. We were off on some out of the way, place. The train was going full speed when it came by. That was you know, a moment.
- Joshua Guptill: There wasn't much with our crew. The most disconcerting that ever happened was in ring one on the far right side. We were sitting there. Getting set up for one of the shows. Everything was set up. We were just basically making sure everything was all set to start the first show. All of a sudden we saw the trace down on that corner just bounce a little. Just three or four inches, but everyone was kind of like, "It shouldn't be moving." When we climbed up we found out that one of the lights had bent and turned so that it was facing up and was actually too hot and melted through one of the straps that was holding up the trace.
- [00:33:00]
- That's why we had cable back ups. The cable was just a little bit longer than the strap. So that's why it jiggled but that's also same idea we were told need those cables there and that's exactly why. Cause when it snap, that strap the cable was there to catch it. I don't

- [00:34:00] know how much it would impact it without it but it's another one of those instances of you're told this things for a reason. You do them even if you think there are ridiculous because the straps you can probably hold half an hour of them with but they melt.
- LaVahn Hoh: Appreciated some of the hot lighting instruments well to that end. What's your favorite memory that you have 10 years from now if somebody goes, "Tell us about," the memory going to pop into your mind?
- [00:34:30]
Laura Bassett: I think working in the practice isn't just sort of this crazy world that I had fallen into here. I don't know. Now I'm still thinking about the heroine thing. It's like a top of mind. There was one particular it was during a show and we were trying to teach the horses how to come up next to each other and stay next to each other, do the Purdue. So they come up and you have two by two going around in the circle. The [ribery 00:35:06] act.
- [00:35:00] For some reason the person who normally did this role of ... we had a little clip that we'd hold the together while they were still learning. They would flip on to each others rattles. So we would hold them in place. So this was this craziness of the person who normally did that in the act [inaudible 00:35:24] couldn't do it that day. He was giving me instructions. He was telling me this in detail again, telling you why you don't do something. Telling me not to to do something.
- [00:35:30] It was, "All right, when the horse comes you have to make sure you swing around on the side. So that you're not between the horses. Whatever you do, don't get between the horses." I'm kind of like, "That seems kind of silly, cause wouldn't be easier to clip it if you're between the horses. But okay, fine. Don't get between the horses." I'm in the act and I go in there and before I know it the other horses run up next to me when I wasn't expecting and now I find myself between the horses. This is during the show and we are trying to be unintrusive.
- [00:36:00] I was like, "Okay." So I clip the strap and this is where I realize that when you're in the middle pair of the horses, there's a pair in front of you and there is a pair behind you and you now have a strap between you. There nowhere to go and now running between the two that are parelling along and you know the next command is for them to valxy together. At some point these horses are sprang and you can't see anything. I'm short so I can't anything over the horses and I'm stuck here and I'm like I have no idea how to get out of here. All I can do is say a prayer to the horse gods, let go and hope for the best.
- [00:36:30] I let the go ducked out and slipped between the next pair and manged to get out of that. The trainers didn't see this happen. They saw me disappear between the horses. They continued with the act and at the end, I remember Stephe coming up to me, "Oh my gosh. You're alive. I even thought I was going to have to scrap you up off the ground. You were going to run over everything." Zibbie the one who had given me the instructions, "I saw you go between the horses and I told you not to go between the horses. But you made it out. You were fantastic." It was just one of these crazy moments in all of it. Again sometimes people tell you things for a reason and you do what you are told. I don't know. It's just there's those kinds of just being involved in this crazy thing.
- [00:37:00] Some you go like, "Did I really do that. I was I really dodging in and out of, between
- [00:37:30]

horses in the act."

Joshua Guptill: That was actually a big enough event that floor crew had heard about. It was to us as like a watch where you end up during the act with the animals. We had a girl from animal crew that was just between two horses.

Laura Bassett: I didn't know that made it to floor crew.

Joshua Guptill: Oh yes. It was a cautionary tale.

[00:38:00]

Laura Bassett: I survived. All good.

Joshua Guptill: But my favorite thing would definitely have been pre-show. Just cause the audience is down there, inches from clowns and performers. Even like she was part of the pre-show horse act. They'd come down and people would be on the other side of thing curve but a foot away from the horses that are running in a circle. You could almost reach out and touch them. They were so close. Then of course, Asia coming out and [inaudible 00:38:32] kids reaching out so they can touch Asia. She walks past them. One of the clowns had a act where they one of big hard ball and she turned it back I was supposed to roll the ladder and then she'd stumble over it.

[00:38:30]

[00:39:00] It became a thing that every show I'd fine some kid that looked like they were paying attention and excited to be there and I'd pull from like, "Okay, when I tell you push really hard," as soon as I said, "Okay, now push really hard." I'd have my head down at the bottom of the ball and push from there. Two or three-year-old, four-year-old kid thought they'd pushed that hard not the clown. It was that kind of a thing where the crowd was down and front row, center for it or actually in certain parts and everybody is happy that's there. You never see anyone upset or angry and it's the only job I've ever had where that was the case. People show up thy are just happy to be there where you're working.

[00:39:30]

LaVahn Hoh: Nice. You both may have made friends on the show. Can you talk about some of your best friends?

[00:40:00]

Laura Bassett: Yes. Absolutely. One of my best friends was is a kind of, he went by [Ziwie 00:40:04] cause no one could pronounce his name correctly. He was there for I think four years before I joined. He was there right up to the end. When everything ended he had to go back to Poland now, which is really sad cause he doesn't have a job there. There is nowhere to go. He's been away for 14 years. He went to go live with his father. He is like, "I have no life here. This isn't my life. My life was in America working for the circus." He is trying to figure out his next thing now and that's sad because I used to visit him all the time on the show and now he is back in Poland.

[00:40:30]

We don't get to see each other. But he'd been there for years and he had this amazing sense of working with the horses. He worked with the free agents for the most part. He was a groom. A lot of crew member and he took such pride in those horses. They were

[00:41:00] spotless and he was always on to you know, " Zibbie works with the black horses," and this is something that he was very, very proud of. He loved those horses. You'd walk over and you'd be scratching them on the back and they'd be scratching you on your shoulder.

[00:41:30] It was great. I heard all sorts of crazy stories at working with him. His ability to be watching the ring and in the after when trying to figure out like, what went wrong or what did work. He could walk you through every moment of the act. He had like a photographic memory for this and hi general awareness of what was going on. If anything was wrong of if I got stuck somewhere or something, he was always just there. Like out of nowhere. He was always alert and aware of things in a way that I wish I could have been, which made him an amazing in the ring.

[00:42:00] We hang out a lot we drink on the the best beer and we'd go hang out. There was period were over land and I like to drive at night. Basically, we'd would load out. I would drive all night while they sleep in the car. Catch a couple hours in a hotel and then someone else would take over the driving in the day. But we made so much progress that will have like a day to go exploring. So it was me and Zibbie and a few other people from animal crew. We'd do that. We had all sorts of adventures of the West Coast to help this time seem right with some things. That's fun. Zibbie was definitely one of my best friends there and I miss him a lot.

[00:42:30] Cindy was also ... she joined about two weeks after me. Fortunately, I was not the only female on the crew for very long. She was great. She was older than me and she had a confidence in the sense of how things were supposed to work that I totally didn't have and I was so grateful when she joined. She gave me perspective. She'd just be it's like, "No. We handle things this way." It's like relax whatever. Then we hang out all the time and she was very much a stabilizing force for me in many ways. We'd all hang out, her and me and Jimmie from elephant crew.

[00:43:00] He'd bring out bottles of wine and we'd come own the hall. He'd say, "Come get your glass. Bring your glass. Bring your glass." We'd all bring our glasses and he'd pour wine and we'd sit on the view of Orleen. Complain about the day mostly. It's just amazing people. Every one I met had incredible stories there. That's another thing. There's just no place where you can people with all this different backgrounds and these stories, who are willing to tell them in that way.

[00:43:30] People are very private in general or you get through the filter of the internet which isn't quite the same as everyone just hanging out on the vestval telling the crazy thing they'd had before. Everyone on the animal crew but those were sort at the core of my world I think were the most hang out on folks I hang out with on the best crew and save my several times. Animal with the various things.

[00:44:00]
Joshua
Guptill: For me it would be Est Rodak my production manager. Basically, anything she wanted done I'd make sure got done because she was great to work with and she made a point of explaining everything she needed and why she needed it. It got to the point where we were in Florida for Christmas and I just didn't have the money to fly home. She

[00:44:30] ended bringing me back to her sister's house for Christmas. Instead of me just sitting at the train alone. I end up doing Christmas there. The n she brought me out to Disney cause she worked there as well. Basically showed me what her whole world there was like.

[00:45:00] We still talk now and then. Joyce one of the aerialist, we don't really talk much but I'm on her Facebook and follow her there cause I've been out of the show for 10 years. So lost track with a lot of people like our friend Mark. Who was part of the reason I joined the circus. She'd said I should join and then he said if I didn't join he was going to try and come in and throw me in a train room until I was enough states away, that I'd have no choice but to work for enough money to get a ticket back. He had a great sense of humor.

Laura Bassett: He managed to get himself fired from horse crew and they put him on elephant crew. When he got fired from the elephant crew, they put him on the floor crew. Managed to get fired from the floor crew and they sent him to the pie car. He started in [piral 00:45:27]. Set someone on fire unintentionally and that's how he ended up on animal crew. He kind of made his way through the entire-

[00:45:30]

Joshua Guptill: He was everything except train crew and the wardrobe.
 LaVahn Hoh: Did he ever get fired period?

Joshua Guptill: Eventually yes.

Laura Bassett: Yes. He didn't last on the pie car. He was no longer in union. It didn't take for him to get out. He was fantastic. He was extremely sharp and I think he just got bored and that tended to get him into trouble. He was fantastic though and a lot fun.

[00:46:00] Joshua Guptill: Yes. I would agree cause when we were on floor crew together. We'd figure out all our queues in no time cause really wasn't that difficult. It was just you memorize what you were supposed to do and if there is part of the show when you don't have anything to, you'd walk around and see what could I be doing during that part. So that it all goes better. He'd memorize it and the he'd bored, be like I'm going to just go take a nap under here. Wake for my next queue, when we're doing the practices for the new show before it started, when we are done in Florida. He got spoken to quite a few times about taking naps.

[00:46:30]

LaVahn Hoh: I can try to imagine.

Laura Bassett: Him and Dustin. Dustin also he left about half way through the time I was there for health reasons. He was on elephant crew and horse crew. He didn't care. He loved what he was doing but he didn't really care and if got pissed off he'd be like, "I don't feel like dealing with this." He'd drop the horse lead lines and walk away. We'd scrambling to catch things. He was a lot of fun to go wander around with too. He and Mark and I did a lot of exploring before even Cindy joined up on to the show.

[00:47:00]

LaVahn Hoh: Talk about your train car, your room or roommate.

[00:47:30]

Joshua
Guptill: I loved it. It was perfect for me. It was small obviously but it was designed really well because you had the big open boxes underneath the cushion so you could lift up the bed and you've got the storage bases. Everything I brought with me fit with plenty of space to spare. You had everything you needed within reach and where you were. It was great because usually by the time you got done with load out or something like that you had done a few shows did load out and all you want to do is sit down and relax.

[00:48:00]

There were so many people on the same train that usually there was something happening. Like if we weren't traveling I used to chocolate covered strawberries and cherries and just leave my door open. Then anyone that wanted one they'd be on tray right next to the door. Just on a box of-

Laura
Bassett: Cherry alcohol infused.

Joshua
Guptill: The cherries yes, not the strawberries. But things like that. It got to the point where you really wanted to carry a short glass with you when you walk through the train to go for dinner because typically somebody would stop you and be like, "Hey, do you want to shop for dinner." I think the worst was I had three shots on the way to dinner one night because we were in a town, no show the next day. Everyone was just kind of relaxing.

[00:48:30]

LaVahn Hoh: You were headed to the pie car?

Joshua
Guptill: Yes, pie car for dinner.

[00:49:00]

Laura
Bassett: I loved living on the train. It was sort of like all the cool stuff I remember from college dorms. People leave their doors open. Everyone is there. You just go out to the bestvial and there all just like many ... you had dozens of shared front pouches. Something was going on one of them at any point and you could just hang out there. You'd be immersed in a cigarette smoke cause couldn't smoke in their room they'd smoke on the bestvials. I didn't smoke so I would just kind of be surrounded. I was a minority but you just hang out and have these conversations and such.

[00:49:30]

The rooms were small. It was interesting because even married couple each only got individual rooms. They didn't get a bigger room because they were living together or something. One point there was a brief period where I was between a husband and a wife who were hired on to ... I forget which crew. But they had these rolling fights and they would have these screaming matches up and down the hall. Something would go on. There was a time there frozen hamburgers being thrown across the way. By way I don't but I don't remember what she was screaming something and these frozen hamburgers are coming whipping past door and like, "I'm going to chill in my room for a little while. I think it is a good time just stay put."

[00:50:00]

Train runs I miss more than ... it's dark and it gets so real after [inaudible 00:50:26] cause in the middle of the night you lose all sense of time. Especially as an animal crew

[00:50:30] person where you doing water stops. Your sleep is constantly being disrupted cause your never quite sure when you're going to get called to go feed and water the animals. You there and it just this rocking motion and you see is this all the crew back side of America essentially. You're appearing people people's backyards and there is the washing on the line. These kids tree houses that are like hidden in the woods. You're there in the dark.

[00:51:00] The wee hours of the morning and there is nothing nothing outside. Except every now and then the flashing red from when the signal is going by. Going down and hanging out in the pie car during train runs at 3.00 AM because your sleep is just completely short at this point. There is some crazy poor slasher playing on the screen and there is nothing outside the window and there is just that steady rocking sensation and that weird mix of people.

LaVahn Hoh: For the shoe curve?

[00:51:30]
 Laura Bassett: Yes, the one where you can see down and see the train loop around behind. Sometimes you can see the lights from the rest of the train. Most of the time it was with the lights on you couldn't see out of the windows especially in the pie car much sitted. It was mostly just service weird self contained thing and a bunch of people who were probably pretty drunk hanging out. You just didn't want to be in your room anymore cause it was just too tight.

[00:52:00] Or someone might be sitting ... my first train run there was Linda. Lived on my car and she was sitting in their and she decided to teach people how to knit. It was me and a couple of clowns and this very tough guy off on the animal crew. Who I think was trying to impress some of us the girls. We are all sitting there and she went and she got knitting needles for all of us. She was teaching us how to knit. Sitting there in the pie car during a train run. Just random things that would happen during this, that world on rails.

[00:52:30]
 LaVahn Hoh: Someone that I interviewed the other day said that the real life was on the train. That why were you guys are here now. Relationships that was established on the train, when you went into the arena that was a job and you were on your own its on the train. That was really quite a point in looking at your lifestyle in the relationships that were developed and the friendships that were developed were on the train not arena according to him.

[00:53:00]
 Laura Bassett: To me it felt more blurry. Cause the people you work with are the people that you hang out with, are the people you fight with, the people you love and hate. It's just all one big mix. To me it felt less divided between like train life and arena life. As animal crew we spent a lot of time at the arena. So maybe not everybody does but we were pretty much always at the animal compound from first thing in the morning till after the show.

[00:53:30]
 LaVahn Hoh: I remembered I think it was in Providence there wasn't enough room in the arena for

the elephants so a tent was put outside.

Laura Bassett: Yes. Depending on the arena sometimes we were inside but most often we were outside. We had to set up a tent for the elephants and for the horses. We had separate tents. Horse tent which was the horses and in the mins we had goats. The zebras would all be in one tent and then the elephants were in a separate tent. That was actually many times we were outside. So we were out in the weather. Vegas in summer.

[00:54:00]

Joshua Guptill: My home city was one of those. I'm from Manchester, New Hampshire originally. They had an entire parking lot dedicated to the animals and these huge tents. It kind of gave you that feel of the old circuses under tents because they've got thing big animal tents there that you can't get anywhere new them but you see them up in the distance.

LaVahn Hoh: Who put the tents up? Did have some help with that?

Laura Bassett: Animal crew put them up and took them down.

[00:54:30]

LaVahn Hoh: Did have to drive the stakes?

Laura Bassett: No stakes. We didn't usually have stakes. It was sort of a metal frame set up.

Bassett:

LaVahn Hoh: Okay.

Laura Bassett: More like an event tent if you seen those sort of things. There was a smaal subset we go with overland crew ahead of the train. They get on the road. Like I was talking about before. They get on the road right after the show. Drive out and the trucks with all the animal compound equipment would travel as well. They'd all meet and set up the compound. Set up the stalls so that bu the time the train arrived with horses and the elephant. Everything was set up. We had water in the buckets. We had horses set up. We had hay in the stalls. Everything was [inaudible 00:55:10] in so that when the animals got there everything was ready for them. We had the shelter set up.

[00:55:00]

Some of the animal crew would ride the train to take care of the animals and another subset would go ahead to set up the compound in each town.

LaVahn Hoh: Did somebody ride in the cars with horses? Did you have to do that at anytime.

[00:55:30]

Laura Bassett: I did once. It was cherry pie job but with extra pay that some people had been doing for a while and they were sort of the designated folks who did that. People didn't typically ride with the horses but there was someone riding with the elephants. There were video cameras. They could watch the horses and the elephants through video cameras just to make sure everything was good. There was someone who would ride the stalls.

LaVahn Hoh: Was there just a bonk or a just a chair to sit on?

[00:56:00]

Laura Bassett: There was a little like kitchenette kind of set ...not really kitchenette set up. There was a table and there were benches. It was sort of a little pocket of the same way they set up the pie car. There was sort of a bench and the table set up there. There was a little mini bathroom with the toilet and the shower stalls. Whatever your needs were you were taken care of. You were extremely isolated there. There was no connection between that and the rest of the train. You did that job. You were basically in isolation for the duration of the journey.

LaVahn Hoh: There was no vestvial connection to ...?

[00:56:30]

Laura Bassett: No. You were on your own. I think some people like that. There were people who rode along in the stacks. If anything emergency happened they had access.

LaVahn Hoh: Any different things that happened with the floor crew or in relation to the show?

Joshua Guptill: No.

LaVahn Hoh: Here we can isolate somebody.

Joshua Guptill: No. Floor crew it would just rotated really frequently because it was really physically demanding.

LaVahn Hoh: So people would leave?

[00:57:00]

Joshua Guptill: Yes, and you didn't get a lot of sleep because if you had a three show day, you might get an hour between the shows before you had to something. Then you take your bus ride back to the train. Sleep for a couple of hours. Get and get everything ready for the first show again. Throughout the tour it got slower but I was there for the busy section of it, at the beginning.

LaVahn Hoh: Then you had the six pack weekend.

[00:57:30]

Joshua Guptill: Basically you had like ... the worst was New York. Madison Square Garden because the [Nits 00:57:37] were playing. We'd have pull up everything on the floor. Raise everything above the square board, wait for the game to finish and then drop it all back down. Set it all back up, so we'd be ready for the next day's shows. It was one those I could have sat out there like at the edge of the court and watched the game. Instead I went out into one of the back hallways and took a nap for an hour.

[00:58:00]

LaVahn Hoh: In New York the train obviously the train was not close to the garden?

Joshua Guptill: No. You ended up taking the subway.

Laura Bassett: We were away out Secaucus. We were about a half mile from the Secaucus New Jersey Rail Station. In the morning we had to walk to the New Jersey Rail Station take that into

Penn Station, which was very far to Madison Square Garden. You had to walk the half mile and then wait for a train.

[00:58:30]

LaVahn Hoh: But the animals were in the garden?

Laura Bassett: There were in the building.

Bassett:

LaVahn Hoh: When you were there were they still walking the elephants through the tunnel and paying toll on them?

Laura Bassett: I don't know if we paid toll but we did go through the tunnels. We still did the animal locks at that.

LaVahn Hoh: I read one time an article in the paper I think Albert Fell was standing there handing out [inaudible 00:58:50]

Laura Bassett: It's good photo album.

Bassett:

[00:59:00]

LaVahn Hoh: Exactly. Do you have a favorite item or souvenir that you brought with you when you left?

Laura Bassett: One of my pressings on the head dressers they had those little silver buttons that each had the logo with the greatest on earth on it. I have one of those that had popped. They would pop off so they had a whole stash of extra ones so I have one of those which is my [inaudible 00:59:21] worry stone in my pocket sometimes. But actually of all the weird random things. On my first day, we were riding the circus bus that would take us between the train and the arena. I hadn't ridden the bus yet cause the vet tech had taken me to the train in there in the morning. To get home that night I was going to get on the bus.

[00:59:30]

[01:00:00] While waiting for the bus, "We go, oh yes, it will come and it will take us." People were telling me this is the pattern. I'm standing there waiting and it's dark, it's late and it's after and this is in Indianapolis. This bus comes around the corner. This giant like painted [inaudible 00:59:56] run down looking bus, comes around the corner. Whips around the corner, cuts it too close, clips the left tail light, the tail light shutter everywhere, the traffic lights are swinging all over the place is crazy, and they go, "Yes, that's our bus." What I have I gotten myself into. So I walked over I picked up a chunk of the tail light that had shuttered. So I have this piece of the circus bus.

[01:00:00]

[01:00:30] 5Which was even cooler because that year the Wintercoters, they replace this bus and got a shiny new one that was all like a clean one. Because this one on the inside when stepped in, it was plastered. Every surface was plastered in bumper stickers and garbage pail kid stickers, location stickers. Every surface was covered in this. It was another of this, "What have I gotten myself into. This life is crazy." The top escape had to be broken off at some point. It was covered over trash bag. We are like going along and in this crazy thing. It's my little memory of that crazy first circus but that disappeared shortly

[01:00:30]

after I came there.

[01:01:00]

LaVahn Hoh: Do you in the history of that bus that there is one time performers and worker had to pay to ride on that?

Joshua 25 cents wasn't it?

Guptill:

Laura Yes. We got to ride for free.

Bassett:

LaVahn Hoh: One of the clowns I don't remember which he was on to credit for getting rid of that little toll that you guys had to pay.

Laura A lot of people my time in things.

Bassett:

Speaker 4: He needs to tell this and the what he cleft it.

[01:01:30]

Joshua My most cherished thing is on of the circus books. My production manager got it for me, Esther. She had a couple of people sign it. I asked Michelle, she was one of the clowns at time, is she'd sign it for me. She grabbed it and took off and came back like a half hour later and she'd gone alley and gotten all the different clowns to sign it for me. Same

Guptill:

[01:02:00]

basic happened when I went and talked to the Chinese acrobats. The interpreter grabbed it. Went back on the train cause we were outside at the train at the time and had all the different Chinese performers sign it for me too. I have no idea what anybody but I've got it.

[01:02:30]

Besides that I've got one of my climbing clips. There is one that I had retired because when I got it, it shouldn't have been being used. The metal on it, I'm guessing they must have used it with cable or something the metal like two thirds of the way through. So there was just this little piece. I carried it on my belt to keep my electrical tape. Cause I use tape for marking any of the cables up in the trace that looked like they were getting some ware on them. The electricians just had asked that I just mark anything with like two or three different colors if it was just getting worn out, white. If it was split but not any cables showing at all then yellow and if it was a problem thoroughly wrap it in red and tell them about it. It seems they got other trace. Just so that when they are hauling all the cable and putting in the boxes they know where to look for the problems so they could fix them.

[01:03:00]

LaVahn Hoh: Good idea.

Joshua

Guptill:

When I left since it wasn't usable, Misher told me, "Just take it with you. We are going to have to throw it out anyway it like it's lived on your harness the whole time you've been here." I didn't take my harness but I kind of wish I had because it was labeled Galflin because my first week there, Esther had labeled me Galflin because she insisted that's what I looked like when I showed up. Cause I had gloves on all the time and they were like the fingerless gloves and for whatever reason-

[01:03:30]

LaVahn Hoh: And you had a beard?

Joshua Yes, beard, long hair.

Guptill:

LaVahn Hoh: I'm surprised you even took that picture?

[01:04:00]

Joshua I was kind of surprised too. I think they were in rush because we were doing loading.
Guptill: That was Steve Curtis and he was ... if I had been able to stay loner was going to get full climbing training to be certified for rigging because he came across me up in the trace at one point hanging off the trace. I'd used my safety lines, wrapped them around the trace itself and clipped them back on my belt so I could lean up further to reach one of the aerialist pieces. Because the cord that basically run the chain, that run it up and down, nobody had tapped it together when they raised up and they'd raised up, the piece had banged against and the had become unplugged so it wouldn't move and there is no way to reach out and get it from there. You'd have to go up to the ceiling basically and repel down from there. It's just out of reach.

[01:05:00] While I was leaning out he couldn't see me and he came to the end of the trace and jumped for a second because somebody is like leaning straight out backwards, tapping something. He is like, "You're not allowed to do this." I had just finished he is like, "You need to come back down and just get somebody that's certified for rigging next time." He is like, "Remind when I get back down there will sign you up for rigging class so we can get you actually able to repel down on your own." He is like, "You're the only one that really like climbing this much any way." But yes and of course a bunch of red ringing noses.

Laura Never too many noses.

Bassett:

LaVahn Hoh: You can never have too many. We are documenting this springling history, what would you guys like people to know about the history? What would you like people to know?

[01:06:00]

Laura Part of it is just that the whole culture of the life on the train and the people who were there. To me the people and the stories that came out of that is really what sticks with me from a lot of it. You've got everything from people with master's degrees in theater working side by side with people like me who wanted to be an animal scientist. Alongside people who were homeless when they were hired. It was a just a job, they will take whatever comes along.

[01:06:30] We are different races, all different backgrounds, all different experience levels and all different things coming in and we all had to work together. You're coming across language barriers. There is people sometimes you don't have a language in common or you have figure out how to make all of ... if somehow you have to make this show and you have to take care of the animals. You have to set everything up with whatever vocabulary and charades you pull through. I loved the fact that all of us were there. We were all part of a team and you'd have these crazy perspectives and these different stories and from that stand point.

[01:07:00]

[01:07:30] I don't think a lot of people know about that sort of culture and that complete, you know, "We all on this together." I don't that's something the public really knows about is just how very the kind of people who are working there, the degrees and the education or not. We had ex-military people there. We had people that had been doing animal stuff forever. People who had never around an animal in their life coming on. It was just such a mix and it was great.

[01:08:00] As an animal crew person too. We didn't have days off. I think I averaged a day off per month. I think if want a cross score. Never had days off. We were with the animals all the time. People just don't understand. Especially the main trainers they had their trailers right there. Especially the elephants guys they lived next to these elephants. We did nothing but take care of our animals. There was no other responsibility. it's the amount of dedication that takes that I don't think everybody fully understands that.

LaVahn Hoh: Obviously [inaudible 01:08:19] people like.

Laura Bassett: [01:08:30] Even the zoo world just doesn't compare. I'm a zookeeper now so I have great respect for that. But it's still just a whole other level when you're really living and breathing and like everything. There is no work life balance. It's like this is what you do. This is your life while you're here, is taking care of these animals and making sure that they are well and the show goes smoothly. Making sure that they are healthy and happy and well cared for and meeting all of their need. You clean up after them the moment it hits the ground. They always hay. Thy always have water. Having that time to bond with them. It's your life it's not a job in any way.

[01:09:00] Joshua Guptill: I would agree with that. It was home. The person in charge of my ring, Reuben. He was over 60 already and worked circles around me and would always take the time any time I came across something to show me how to do something I didn't know how to do. I have never encountered a job where it was that kind of a community thing where everyone is just perfectly willing to help you learn something new, do something new and they're concerned with how is you life going, that kind of thing.

[01:09:30]

[01:10:00] Like Brian and Tina Mizer they did they canon shot and the high falls. Brian kind of would show me exactly how he measures out where he would fall from, from the trace and all that kind of thing. Thee train crew would typically, if you had any questions about anything would be like, "So you're saying this is doing this? Well, show me right now?" Even if they were in the middle of eating or something.

It was not like going to an office all something. You might have office friends but you probably don't talk to them out of work. This was you go home with these same people. They are in your life the whole time you're there. I've just never seen anything like that.

[01:10:30] Laura Bassett: Of course, this sounds all warm and fuzzy. There was an awful lot of swearing and cursing and insulting going on. This warm nostalgia feeling from being here this way. We certainly have had raging fights and all sorts issues that way , but we still had to get

along, and we still had to make the show happen.

Joshua Guptill: Reuben was phenomenon for that actually. He blew up on me more than anyone else on the show. He was always willing to yell at me too. But he took to call me the professor because I was trying to come up with a better method of making sure set up was quicker. Like for a setting where the clowns were going to be on the trace, I was like, "Why don't we just put tape on either side of where that clamp goes and then will know exactly where it goes and not have to adjust it." We tried it once and the tape got in the way because the rigging was just a little off at the next arena and the tape in the way and I had to peel it all of. He like, "Oh professor." He is like, "Great idea. Huh."

[01:11:00]

[01:11:30] LaVahn Hoh: This place I guess closes at five and there are a couple of minutes to five. Is there anything, which you'd like to say or anything to this? Same thing happened with those interviews by other ones. We have covered those and that by you guys just talking. You know put like a memories or who is your manager? It just so covered. At the end I've asked a lot of things. Is there anything else you want to add to this.

[01:12:00]

Joshua Guptill: You got anything?

Laura Bassett: I don't know. There are so many stories. I'm just an individual there I wouldn't know what to tell. It's just a sense of when people ask me about the experience my short answer is I have never loved and hated something so much in my life. It's a weird thing to explain to people outside. You haven't experienced something like this and you like, I wasn't even there that long compared to many of the people I'm sure you've been interviewing. I was only there about a year and a half. Which made me an old time because our turn over was so fast. Over 30 people came in and went on animal crew just in the time I was there. That was just animal crew.

[01:12:30]

[01:13:00] I know you can flip your head and turnover too. It's that sense of it. It was so hard and so intense and it was so incredible but then you're just walking along the train at night in this train yard and it quiet. There are people laughing over. There is music coming out here and this other thing going on and you're like, this is where I like, this is where I live. This is amazing. How is this real and how did I stumble into this and how could ever leave it? Yet I can't go to my friend's wedding and I can't go to this thing and I can't do that.

[01:13:30] I have lost all touch with the outside world in some ways to do this. It's weird thing like how do I do this but how could possibly leave in this constant ... you're miserable and you hate it. You're working on the ground and you're fighting with your boss and you just can't deal with any of the drama but you can't imagine leaving at the same time. It's this very weird thing.

LaVahn Hoh: I'm going to paraphrase this badly but I think it was either John Ringling North or Henry Ringling North said that the circus is wench.

Laura Bassett: One of my favorite. I have that on my Facebook profile. I have it on my wall.

LaVahn Hoh: I love her like nothing else.

[01:14:00]

Laura That resonates so many times.

Bassett:

LaVahn Hoh: When I get talks I usually end with that or put it in there somewhere because-

Laura That's so true.

Bassett:

LaVahn Hoh: Of the things that just happen in there. Thank you for spending time with us. It's just great. My wife has joined me in all of these. Yesterday we had four priests that we talked to. Two nuns the day before that.

Joshua I met them earlier.

Guptill:

[01:14:30]

LaVahn Hoh: Did you? They are fabulous people. Train master, a school teacher and now you too.

Laura It's so great that you're getting such a wide thing.

Bassett:

LaVahn Hoh: Oh yes, I talked to John Harriet's daughter and the perspective that she brought another animal handler, trainer whose family were aerialist. But she chose to stay on the ground and work with animals. I don't know Cathy. The other interviewer.

[01:15:00]

Speaker 5: Oh Nancy.

LaVahn Hoh: Nancy, I know a couple of people that she's talked to and then today there are groups and like seven people in the group. Cranking it through every element. There's going to be some great stories out there.

Speaker 5: Originally, I went, "Oh, do I really want to sit down? No." Then I listened and everyone ...