

Interview with Kay Rosaire  
Interviewer John Daniel Draper  
Great Circus Parade Showgrounds  
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DRAPER: Kay, we have marveled very much at your wild animal acts. Did you ever perform with other animals before you began with the lions and tigers?

ROSAIRE: Yes, actually one of the first animals that I worked was kind of an unusual one. I used to work a penguin act when I was with my dad.

DRAPER: Was this in England?

ROSAIRE: No, that was in Erie, Pennsylvania. We were with the zoo there. My dad was the curator.

DRAPER: Who was Varick.

ROSAIRE: My dad, Varick. During those years - we were there for about four or five years - and at that time we trained everything that was trainable at the zoo. I was very interested in the penguins so I did a lot of work with them. Of course, llamas, camels and...

DRAPER: So-called exotic animals.

ROSAIRE: Just kind of worked my way up to cats. My mother had been involved a lot with cats.

DRAPER: What was your mother's maiden name?

ROSAIRE: My mother's maiden name was Betty Kayes. The Kayes family of Ireland. They were a large circus family and on both sides of my parents' family there were four girls and four boys, so they were large families. And my mother's brother was very well known in the '30s. His name is Tommy Kayes. He was a famous lion trainer in England, probably equal to Clyde Beatty over here. And as growing up I always heard stories about the cats and the lions. My mother was his assistant and raised the cats for him and helped the training and assisted him in his act. So naturally when it was time for me to get involved...also when we came to the United States I think this was a very important reason why I ended up working cats. When we came to the United States in 1960 the feature act on the show was Evelyn Currie with the cats. She was a blonde woman, very elegant looking. She got so much attention from everybody, she was like a star. I thought oh that's my cup of tea. I want to be treated like that. So that was another factor why I was always drawn to work with cats.

DRAPER: Did you ever work with horses?

ROSAIRE: Yes, I did of course. My father is probably one of the best horse trainers in the world.

DRAPER: He's worked liberty?

ROSAIRE: He can do anything. He's actually an all-around animal trainer. He can train everything, but he definitely has a gift with horses. He's done every kind of horse act, riding act, high school liberty. You name it with a horse, and my dad's done it. And we did it all too. We trained with him and actually I've modified the way the training that he uses on the horses, I use the same basic technique on the cats and it works.

DRAPER: I imagine there are very, very basic things that are the same now. Will cats show an affection for you? I think they do.

ROSAIRE: Oh, sure they do. We find that the more time you spend with them and the more verbal and physical rewards you give them, the praise, the better they work. We don't use punishment unless it's necessary and when they do a good thing and we're happy, we really...It looks silly when we're training, because we're all "good boy!" with fussing and and actually that's what they work for. We don't use very much food reward. We use a little bit occasionally, but mostly it's just the fact that they do have an affection for us and they work on that.

DRAPER: Actually when they act real aggressive or sometimes appear more dangerous than other, I guess a lot of that is due to fear or insecurity on their part.

ROSAIRE: Exactly, exactly. And a lot of trainers that...my father always says you can always tell a trainer that doesn't know what he's doing is because he's very brutal and very hard on the animals. He doesn't give the animals a chance. A good trainer doesn't...I never saw my dad get really rough with an animal. You just use a technique that doesn't require that. You bring out the best in the animal. So by the time the animal is trained, it doesn't just...it's not like a drudgery. "Oh, we got to go work now." They enjoy it. It's a pleasure.

DRAPER: A happier area to be in.

ROSAIRE: Of course. It's a big difference I know particularly with cat acts. You watch people when they're chasing them in the ring and you can always tell if they have a hard time getting them into the arena, you know that they're not looking forward to going in there, because they've been brutalized. If you open the door and they come in and they look happy, then it sets a whole different mood of the act.

DRAPER: The tenor of the European type of wild animal act has always been more or less to direct and to...like Charlie Baumann for example.

ROSAIRE: They have a fighting act.

DRAPER: The fighting act which is all from this country.

ROSAIRE: Which isn't bad. I'm not saying that there was a time and a place for that. And I actually did that in my first act. I did quite a bit of bouncing. But I still...it was a trained behavior. It wasn't a case where I had to poke him and then he'd come after me. He was cued to come after me and came after me.

DRAPER: And it was a way that you were cuing him too.

ROSAIRE: Yea, exactly. He was a very good bouncer. I have one picture where he has all four feet off the ground. Most times to get that kind of thing, you really have to be aggressive to bring out that.

DRAPER: Did you know Sidney Howes at all?

ROSAIRE: No.

DRAPER: You've heard of him.

ROSAIRE: I've heard of...

DRAPER: Elderly trainer in England. He had a son Gordon Howes. When we met he had been at Bingley Hall with Chipperfield and the next time that we came into London, which was in 1978 at Easter vacation, we heard that he had been killed. He had lions and a couple of them got him from the back and the front at the same time.

ROSAIRE: Oh, my goodness. I didn't know that.

DRAPER: This was Gordon Howes, his son.

Is there a difference between...I've been told that lions are more gregarious than tigers. That lions have a tendency to stick together more. Is that true or not?

ROSAIRE: Yea. And one thing about lions. Of course, I think when you have a problem in the arena, usually every animal gets involved. It's just a natural thing like a frenzy kind of thing. They bite each other. They get so excited and crazy acting. But I think with animals, the thing about a male lion for instance is that he'll get mad over a period of days. He'll stew and he'll get madder and madder about something and be in a bad mood. Where as a tiger can get very hot and very nasty and calm down very quick.

DRAPER: Sort of has a poker face somewhat doesn't he?  
You can't read it as well.

ROSAIRE: Right. But with my male lion I find that he has a week

where he's really nasty and not nice to be with, grumpy kind of.

DRAPER: When they're growling, is it more like a dog's bark?

ROSAIRE: Yea, he has a funny way about him. He'd kind of tell me when to leave him alone rather than come after me. Now, you get a tough male lion and he won't give you a warning. He'll just come after you. My lion he sort of just tells me that he will if I don't leave him alone. We have to kind of work it out. Of course, I do comedy in the act which makes it tougher because I have to have contact with him. When you're having a bad day and you have to have contact, it's really hairy.

DRAPER: Did you ever know Alex Kerr in England? He came down from Glasgow.

ROSAIRE: To tell you the truth, I don't know that many people in England because the problem was when I was eight years old, we left England and went on tour of the world. We were all over the world. I grew up in...

DRAPER: That's when you left England then?

ROSAIRE: We left when I was eight and we never went back until I was 14. And then we were only there about four months I think. We were at the Moscow State Circus in Wembley, England. And then from there that's where George Hamid came over and saw my dad's act and gave us...

DRAPER: Which act was that?

ROSAIRE: That was Tony the Wonder Horse - wanted him immediately. Of course my dad wasn't keen to go because we're a big family, five children, and so we had a two-year contract with Hamid. The only reason he went was because at the time...I don't know if you know Mel Cook, Mel Cook's Comedy Car. It was an American comedy car act and he and my dad were best friends. He was coming back over. So that was the reason my dad said, "Okay, we'll go then." He came over with a two-year contract with Hamid-Morton Circus and Ed Sullivan Show. Two appearances on the Ed Sullivan Show which lead to about six appearances on the Ed Sullivan Show.

DRAPER: How many Tony's have there been about, just approximately?

ROSAIRE: Strangely enough there's only been three, because the horses have lived long. The first Tony was in his late 20's when we left him with Joan in England. He had very bad asthma and he was allergic to hay and he had a bad breathing problem, so he got to where we couldn't travel him. So my dad retired him in England he lived very happy for several more years. I think he was in his late 20's when he passed away. The second Tony we had bought in Spain. He was an Andalusian palamino. He was already

10 or 12 years ago when he finally got a chance to work, because the old Tony lived so long. Then finally we brought him to the United States and the first year we were here my dad bought another horse and trained him to do the act. He never got to work because the second Tony lived to be 30.

DRAPER: It sounds like the royalty. The crowned Prince lives to be 60 before he becomes King.

ROSAIRE: Exactly. This poor other horse, his name was Golden Boy's Prince, hung around for years and never did anything because he never got a chance. My father is a very funny guy. He's very loyal to the Tony he was working at the time. He wouldn't feel right about working the other one because he'd hurt the feelings of the Tony. So now my sister Ellen has the the old...he's the only Tony now because the second Tony from Spain passed away about six years ago at which time my father bought an Arabian, trained him and he's the only horse he has on the road now. The third Tony still never got...he only works a few days once in awhile.

DRAPER: He never rides those horses, does he?

ROSAIRE: He used to years ago. When we were in England he worked as a cowboy because everybody worked.

DRAPER: In this Tony act he does not ride the horses? It's all imitation and I remember some of them are that he would cross his legs and things like this.

ROSAIRE: It's a talking act. The only reason he rode him in England was because he came in as a cowboy. But when we came to the United States, he went to top hat and tails because it was English.

DRAPER: Kay, this has been very interesting. Is there anything else you would like to say or...

ROSAIRE: No, not really. We're all still in the business. My sister - I have three sisters and a brother - Pamela and Linda are twins. Pamela has the chimp act and is married to Roger Zoppe. They're currently with Ringling in Japan. Linda has her own little circus and petting zoo and she works mostly at parks and malls.

DRAPER: She's under the name of Linda Rosaire?

ROSAIRE: Well, the name of their company is Lindrich Petting Zoo and Mini-Circus. She's married to a guy that's a pilot for Eastern Airlines. They do very well. My sister Ellen is a wonderful horse trainer. She's probably one of the best women horse trainers.

DRAPER: Where is she based?

ROSAIRE: She lives in Sarasota also. We all live together. We're a very close family.

DRAPER: Does she perform or train?

ROSAIRE: She's performing right now at a place in Orlando, Florida called Arabian Knights, which is like a dinner theatre with horses as the theme.

DRAPER: Like that Edith Evans. Did you know Edith Evans?

ROSAIRE: Sure.

DRAPER: She used to be in Mexico I believe.

ROSAIRE: Yea, that's a funny thing.

DRAPER: That type of show?

ROSAIRE: Yes, there's two of them in Orlando like that. It's a very popular format. She's doing very well. My brother Derek is with Zerbini Circus. So everybody's...and my dad still working and still on the road.

DRAPER: Well, thank you very, very much Kay. It's a lot of fun being with you and we certainly admire what you're doing.