

# CWM Audio 4-6

## Milonga Cline Interview, August 24, 1972

### INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

#### Part 1

Richard Flint: It's August 24, 1972 in Baraboo Wisconsin. I'm speaking to Milonga Cline. This will pick up very well. To begin with can you tell me how you got into the circus business?

Milonga Cline: I was born and raised in the circus.

Richard Flint: How long had your family been in the circus business?

Milonga Cline: Well I don't exactly remember. My dad started when he was 16 years old.

Richard Flint: How did he started in it?

Milonga Cline: Well, he just happened to like the circus business.

[00:00:30]

Richard Flint: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Was he the one that was a carver and would go to the town square you were telling me?

Milonga Cline: Yeah. His father made the little statues, you know, of little saints and all that. Then he'd have to go to the public market and sell them. Rather than go and sell them, he'd go out with the boys and tumble. Finally found out if he could tumble real good and pass the hat around, he could collect a few pennies. Every time my grandfather would catch him, he'd get a beating. Finally my dad would sneak away and take his brother and my aunt, his sister and he'd got them all to tumbling while my aunt would sing. He had a regular little show and he'd pass the hat around.

[00:01:00]

Finally grandpa realized that they were making more money than selling statues so he finally thought, "Well, we'll just start our little own circus." That's what happened. That's how they started.

[00:01:30]

Richard Flint: What happened with the circus there? Did he start his own or join up with another one for a while?

Milonga Cline: No, Dad started own little circus. Finally when he passed away he was a tailor. He liked to sew and he used to make his own pants. Everything. Curtains. He made his own little tent.

Richard Flint: What part of Mexico did you tour in?

[00:02:00]

Milonga Cline: Well, my dad came from Durango. He played all through central Mexico. Then of course in 1934 we went back under the name of Cirque Cobell and we played right in the heart of Mexico City. We had Amy worked with us then. She was a catcher. A mid-line act.

Richard Flint: Did you family own Cirque Cobell?

[00:02:30]

Milonga Cline: No, my dad was working for these two brothers. Their name was Dias. That's the first time I saw a candy stripe tent. Later on they said Disney Land had it but it was in 1933 that we had it in Mexico City.

Richard Flint: A candy stripe tent?

Milonga Cline: Candy stripe tent.

Richard Flint: Well, returning to your father and his circus, do you know what other circuses were in Mexico at the time and how big his was compared to the others?

[00:03:00]

Milonga Cline: I can't remember. He used to say something Pegrene but I really don't remember that well about the other circuses. He didn't stay very long in Mexico.

Richard Flint: No? When did-

Milonga Cline: He came into this country about 1909.

Richard Flint: How long had he been touring in Mexico before then?

Milonga Cline: I think it was he started when ... Oh, I guess not very long before then.

[00:03:30]

Richard Flint: Did he ever tell you any stories about the beginnings of the circus that you can remember?

Milonga Cline: No. Except that it was hard. It was a hard life there but to him it was glorious, being young and loving the circus, you know. He thought that was the most wonderful thing. He used to do clown, he used to do trapeze, he used to do bars. You name it, he did every act.

Richard Flint: When did he die?

[00:04:00]

Milonga Cline: Dad passed away in 1960.

Richard Flint: How old was he?

Milonga Cline: 80.

Richard Flint: Was he in the circus most of his life?

Milonga Cline: No. He put the circus away in 1936.

Richard Flint: Right, and then became a tailor you said?

Milonga Cline: He became a tailor. He opened his own shop.

Richard Flint: In California?

[00:04:30]

Milonga Cline: In Los Angeles. Before that he'd been a circus man. His main dream was to always own an elephant. I guess every circus owner wants to own an elephant. Finally at the end, just before he passed away, you know, he used to say, "My dream has finally come true." I would say, "Why Dad?" He says, "Well Johnny Cline has an elephant." That's just as much as being his. When drove one time in front of his house with this great big truck and two elephants. That was it. Oh, Dad was so tickled. That man, towards the end it was sad because that was his whole life.

[00:05:00]

If the Ringling or Cole Brother's, whatever circus came in town. He was in full health. He'd be there every day, doing whatever they wanted him ... Collect tickets, whatever he did. He was in seventh heaven as long as he was there. That very last day you could see the tears come on him. It was heartbreaking.

[00:05:30]

Richard Flint: When do your own memories of the circus begin? How old were you when you can remember?

Milonga Cline: We were traveling with the circus when I was just a wee kid, a little bitty kid. I remember sleeping on the ground in Calexico and feeling the earth quakes. I remember in Riverside having a hurricane come in. They say that it was a snake like and they said only an innocent child can cut that cloud with a knife. I went over there with an knife and I'm then cutting this thing. I used to fall for everything.

[00:06:00]

[00:06:30] Being in a tent and making those great big jaunts from Texas all the way to California.

Richard Flint: How were you traveling then? In trucks?

Milonga Cline: When I was just born there's a picture of my folks by a train. See, years ago you could buy 32 tickets as a passenger and you'd have a whole baggage for yourself. My dad would buy 32 tickets and he'd get a whole baggage and put all his circus in that baggage. My mother said that was the only way to travel. Then Dad got big and he bought Mack's, these trucks and then Mother said that was the downfall because every time you turn around the trucks were busted. Turned over or something. We had bears at one time and lions, monkeys, horses.

[00:07:00]

Richard Flint: Can you remember being trained as a performer?

Milonga Cline: Yes.

[00:07:30]

Richard Flint: What were the first things that you were-

Milonga Cline: The first thing I was taught was tumbling. That was the basic step of any circus performer according to Dad. You had to learn tumbling for anything else he said. I learned to tumble.

Richard Flint: Who was your teacher?

Milonga Cline: My brother Lalan.

Richard Flint: How many are in your family?

Milonga Cline: There were 10 in the family.

Richard Flint: Can you scale them from oldest to youngest?

[00:08:00]

Milonga Cline: There was Phillip, he did wire walking. Lalan, he did heel and toe when he was a child. Angie that did contortionist act. Chaca, she did singing and dancing. Esther did also trapeze and then she by her feet on those loops?

Richard Flint: Right.

Milonga Cline: Blackie did double traps with Esther, who was the next one. Blanca, well Blanca and Nini and myself and Yolanda, we were the youngest ones and actually the only thing we did was tumble. We didn't do no special act.

[00:08:30]

Richard Flint: That's the order, oldest to youngest?

Milonga Cline: Yeah.

Richard Flint: Are they are still living now?

Milonga Cline: No, Yolanda passed away, which was the youngest one and Angie, the oldest of the sisters.

Richard Flint: After you learned tumbling and so on, did you get into any other acts?

[00:09:00]

Milonga Cline: Well Dad tried to teach me to do heel and toe. You know, you get these special shoes, but I used to get a cramp right on the bottom of your foot and I couldn't make the catch by my heels because my feet would cramp up. I just couldn't do it. I'm too flat footed for that act, let's face it. Esther now, she did and Lalan did too.

Richard Flint: What was the basic organization of the show? Was it most all your family or were there other performers hired on too?

[00:09:30]

Milonga Cline: Mostly the whole family. My aunts and uncles, they all did clowns, singing and dancing. See, the Mexican circus was a European style. One ring and a stage. He had the stage and while they were performing on the stage, they'd be sitting the ring.

Richard Flint: Right. You mentioned your uncles and aunts being in it also. Did your father get his brothers and sisters to come along?

Milonga Cline: Yeah, they all came from Mexico, the whole family and my grandmother.

[00:10:00]

Richard Flint: Right. They all joined up with the circus?

Milonga Cline: They all came on the circuit.

Richard Flint: What was your father's name?

Milonga Cline: Mariano.

Richard Flint: What were his brothers and sisters that were in the business?

Milonga Cline: Marcos, that was the youngest ... After my dad was Marcos and then the youngest one was Pete, Pedro.

Richard Flint: Did they have any special responsibilities?

Milonga Cline: Yes. My uncle Marcos was the electrician and he was the clown. He took care of all the lights and the tent. I remember the lights being those kerosene, those little ...  
[00:10:30] Like what you use on those lamps now.

Richard Flint: Okay. A kerosene type of lamp?

Milonga Cline: Yeah. You know the Coleman lamps?

Richard Flint: Right.

Milonga Cline: How they had those little sacks?

Richard Flint: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Milonga Cline: My uncle had these things all over the center poles, you know?

Richard Flint: Right.

Milonga Cline: They'd light up the whole circus.

Richard Flint: Did it get smokey in the tent?

[00:11:00]

Milonga Cline: Sometimes, yeah. He had a power plant. I remember thought that was the greatest thing. He had a neon sign made.

Richard Flint: For the marquee?

Milonga Cline: For the marquee. A great big thing with a clown and it'd blink up and down.

Richard Flint: Did it get broken in transporting at all?

[00:11:30]

Milonga Cline: He finally gave it up. It was too much for the power plant. My uncle Pete was a general manager. He'd go up in advance and get the license and get the lots and everything. That was his job.

Richard Flint: What part of the country did the circus play?

Milonga Cline: He played Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, California.

Richard Flint: Were you primarily catering to the Spanish speaking population?

Milonga Cline: Yeah. That's about all we cater to.

Richard Flint: Were most of the bills put out in Spanish?

Milonga Cline: They were all in Spanish.

Richard Flint: All in Spanish?

Milonga Cline: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Right.

[00:12:00]

Richard Flint: Did you ever go back to Mexico?

Milonga Cline: We went back in 1933 and 34. Which is when Mamie Wards went with us.

Richard Flint: Right. That isn't when you went back with the band uniforms?

Milonga Cline: No. That was in ... Just before Mexico became a government, which was in the seventeens or the eighteens. We always as children used to be referred to in uniforms as the Sears and Roebuck uniforms because we remembered he had ordered them through a catalog. As a child, that's the only thing we could think of was Sears and Roebuck catalog, that's the only catalogs we could think of. He ordered these uniforms, so when they came in they were fire engine red with gold

[00:13:00] braid and it said EV Escalante Brothers. My dad had to go to Guaymas, which is just across from El Paso, just to show all those Mexicans how good Mariano had done in this side of the country.

[00:13:30] He went and of course, the main thing of any Mexican circus was to send the band one hour ahead before show time into the square of the main town, and then they'd have a concert. Then they would all march back. Well, they'd draw all this crowd and then by the time they got to tent, my uncle would be the barker and he'd say, "Right this way ladies and gentlemen, to the big top," you know. When Dad played in Guaymas, well he he had to show off his brand new uniforms so he send the band leader to the square and all the musicians. Dad waited, and waited, and waited, no band.

[00:14:00] Finally here comes the chief of police. He says, "Mariano Escalante?" Dad says, "Yes sir." He says, "Are you the owner of those musicians with those red uniforms?" He says, "Yeah." "Well, we got them all in jail." He says, "Well, what'd they do?" He says, "Don't you know we have two parties here and we're having a revolution? There's a green party and a red party and we figure you belong to the red party and you better find \$3000 if you want your musicians back." My dad cursed up and down. He went across the border to El Paso, got his 3000 and he said to Mama, "As I'm coming back, you pack everything and get back to the states." That was it. That was the end of his Sears and Roebuck-

[00:14:30]

Richard Flint: He didn't go back to Mexico then until 33?

Milonga Cline: He went back in 33 and 34. Of course, he got jipped there too, again. Let me tell you, they're good those guys. They really can con you around.

Richard Flint: What happened that second time around?

Milonga Cline: Well, the second time that we did real good business in Mexico City and then they took him Vera Cruz and anyone can tell you, they didn't pay us after that. They started owing us. You know, they owe us one week.  
[00:15:00]

Richard Flint: Who they now?

Milonga Cline: These Dias brothers. My dad had taken all his chairs, he had reserved seats. They figured they were going to finagle all these seats away from Dad. My dad, rather than letting them have it, he went to a lodge, some brotherhood or something and he gave them to it rather than let these Dias brothers because he had gotten ripped all these weeks. Anyway, they had to pay our passage. We had to get our passage back some way or other. We came back to the states and Dad swore up and down he'd never go back but, in 1941 we were in Calxico, just this side of the border, when Pearl Harbor was bombed.  
[00:15:30]

[00:16:00] Wouldn't you know it, Dad was in another Mexican circus and we were along with him. Again, he got ripped. We only lasted two weeks. We were on that side of the boarder but my dad already belonged to the Spanish-American, it's a society deal

[00:16:30] that ... A big club here in California and New Mexico and all that. We're in Somerton, Arizona and we're stranded there. We just made it across the boarder, nothing. Not even money to get to home. My dad goes to this club and he was a president of his own club in Los Angeles. They loan us the money and we could buy a license and we put the show on ourselves. You should have seen all of us girls setting up the tent.

[00:17:00] We put the tent, we had blisters and everything. My dad says to this one boy, he said, "You're going to be the head cook and I only got so much money." Billy, he was the head cook, he bought eggs and bought a loaf of bread and being all Mexicans, he bought a little jar of pickled peppers. Breakfast time come and he's out there jungling up, he's got a great big can, he's making jungle coffee. He fries these eggs and he gives us each one egg, one slice of bread, one pickled pepper.

[00:17:30] Donna says, "Billy, did you get us anymore? I'm hungry." "No, no. Gotta ration you. Gotta ration you. The old man just gave me so much money, that's all."

[00:18:00] Billy's got to do a clown number with Phil. Well the clown number is where they get an apple and they both come in the ring and they find this apple. Phil says, "This apple is mine." Bill says, "No, it's mine." He says, "Well, I'll tell you what, let's hide this apple among ourselves and whoever finds it more times eats the apple." Phillip says okay and Billy says okay. Well at the end, Phil's supposed to eat the apple. The first time on the gag, Phillip puts the apple here and Billy's looking. He's supposed

[00:18:30] to have this apple hidden in his body but he can't find it, see? Finally, Billy says, "Raise this arm and then raise this arm," and he can't raise it so finally he makes him raise it and out drops the apple.

[00:19:00] Phil says, "Okay, now it's your turn. You hide it." As Billy gets the apple, he's supposed to hide it here, between his two legs you know, in the back? Finally when Phillip spots this apple he says, "Take a step," and he takes a little, wee step. "Take another step." Finally he pushes him and the apple drops. Well, Billy didn't do that. He took the apple and he ate it. Phil's looking for the apple and he's on his knees and he's going like that in back of him and he says, "Take a big step," no apple. Phil says, "Where's the apple?" He says, "I ate it." "You dumb goose, that was my gag." He says, "I'm sorry Phil, but I was hungry."

[00:19:30] He ruined the whole clown thing. Anyway, that was the last time Dad and I and the whole family went to Mexico. That was in 41 and Dad says, "Never again."

Richard Flint: Never did go back?

Milonga Cline: He went back as a tourist but not as a circus owner.

[00:20:00]

Richard Flint: In the 30's your family was booked on to some American shows right?

Milonga Cline: Oh yeah. They played in 1930, from then on he played on the LG Barnes, every season.



Richard Flint: What was the last year he had his own circus out?

Milonga Cline: The last year Dad had his circus out was in 1936.

Richard Flint: 36?

Milonga Cline: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Richard Flint: He had been on other shows before that?

Milonga Cline: He'd been on the Barnes. They'd been on the Cole Show.

[00:20:30]

Richard Flint: Before 1936, what was the last year you had a show out? Did you tour in the winters down there?

Milonga Cline: We toured in the winters, yeah.

Richard Flint: Right, and then with the summers go-

Milonga Cline: Then after 36 we went on the Hickenbach-Wallace show.

Richard Flint: What was the first circus other than your own family circus that you remember?

Milonga Cline: LG Barnes. That was the first one, yeah.

Richard Flint: That was 1930?

Milonga Cline: Yeah. Because see they were touring in Los Angeles, also.

[00:21:00]

Richard Flint: Right. How did you happen to get onto that show, do you know?

Milonga Cline: My aunt and my uncle, he did slack wire and my aunt did an iron number.

Richard Flint: Which ones are these?

Milonga Cline: Aunt Aurora and Uncle Alex Esavido. Then they were asked if they had any other acts so my uncle says, "Sure." He named my dad, he says, "The family, they're all

[00:21:30] performers." See now, when my brothers and sisters were all little and they did traps and all that, well at that time the Ringling wanted to take him but he wouldn't go.

Richard Flint: Not enough money?

Milonga Cline: I guess he figured he was pretty good with his own little show. At that time Dad used to make two, 300 a day and he didn't have no tax to pay and it was all family. I have the ledger at home.

[00:22:00]

Richard Flint: How did they get away with paying no tax?

Milonga Cline: At that time?

Richard Flint: Was there just no tax or was it something you didn't know of?

Milonga Cline: I think there was no tax and even if there was, most Mexicans that come from Mexico they dummy up. They always say, "I don't know." They play the dummy.

Richard Flint: Right. About how big was your family circus at this time? Can you compare it in tent size and equipment and so on?

[00:22:30]

Milonga Cline: It was like our tent here. It was a good sized tent.

Richard Flint: Was it a two or four pole then?

Milonga Cline: Two pole.

Richard Flint: Two pole then just like this one?

Milonga Cline: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Richard Flint: Okay. Were you moving on mack trucks then?

Milonga Cline: We had the mack trucks, yeah.

Richard Flint: About how many trucks?

Milonga Cline: About three. I'm not sure. I don't remember but I know that we had a bed and he had ... You know like the dressing room we have? Well, we had one in our backyard in Los Angeles. That was our trailer where we slept. Not all 10 of us but most of us did. Three deckers, you know.

[00:23:00]

Richard Flint: That's off of your own family circus then?

Milonga Cline: Yeah.

Richard Flint: That was pulled behind-

Milonga Cline: By one of the macks, yeah. It's an old trailer because it's got the solid rubber wheels.

Richard Flint: Right. All of the equipment would have been packed in [inaudible 00:23:22]

Milonga Cline: Yeah but see we didn't move every day. We made five day stays.

[00:23:30]

Richard Flint: Then would move on a weekend or a couple days?

Milonga Cline: Yeah, a couple of days we moved. Set up. He actually wouldn't move until he figured he wasn't drawing the crowds. He just changed his program every day. He'd tell the audience. He'd say, "Tomorrow we're having a change of program." The same people would be there the next day. All eating peanuts and popcorn and waiting for the show to start. They'd been there the night before.

[00:24:00]

Richard Flint: How many laborers were there in all?

Milonga Cline: Working there?

Richard Flint: Right. Round figures.

Milonga Cline: I really couldn't tell you.

Richard Flint: Many or just a few?

Milonga Cline: No, not very many because they all doubled. Musicians and-

Richard Flint: Who were some of the people on the show? Can you remember? I know the name of one of those band leaders, was it Mendoza?

Milonga Cline: Mendoza.

[00:24:30]

Richard Flint: What was his name?

Milonga Cline: Jesus Mendoza. We had Marlina, who was a family that's very well known in San Francisco. You name any Mexican musician, they played on my dad's show.

Richard Flint: How big were the bands?

Milonga Cline: Well, my dad believed that there were three main things in a tent. A top, lights and music. That was his three main things that he needed. He didn't care about performers though, he had a big family. There were the three main things, lights, top and music. His bands were always an eight piece band. He furnished the instruments anyway.

Richard Flint: And the uniforms.

Milonga Cline: And the uniforms. He even had his own baseball team.

Richard Flint: Oh?

[00:25:30]

Milonga Cline: His baseball team would compete against the town. Finally he stopped it because it got to bad, the town. There would be bad feelings if the town would lose. I remember coming into New Mexico in Albuquerque and right on the streets it'd be saying, "Welcome Escalante Brother's baseball team." Not circus, baseball team. You're welcome on the sidewalk had been painted.

[00:26:00]

Richard Flint: What sort of audiences did you have? What type of acts would they like? How would they show their enthusiasm and so on?

Milonga Cline: Well now the Mexican people, if they liked an act, especially children, they'd toss money at you. The first time I ever worked on the tumbling act was in Stockton

[00:26:30] California. There was Mini and Tweety and Salia and myself. There were five young kids that had just started tumbling and we're all doing the tumbling in there. At the finish we either do back flip-flops, somersaults, round offs, whatever you could think of, we all went in there and that was the finale. The audience starts tossing nickels and dimes at us. You forget all about the finale. I'm doing this a back bend

[00:27:00] with two people doing it and my cousin and I are doing this when I spot a half a dollar and he drops me half way through and I fall on head and I said, "That's my half a dollar." He says, "No that's mine." My brother says, "No, that's mine."

[00:27:30] Before long we got into a hair pulling and my dad's blowing the whistle so we can get out and we don't pay no attention to him. We're all pulling each other's hair and fighting for the money. Finally he sends the working guys and each one picks us up like this and we're still pulling at each other's hair. Each working man had to drag one of us at a time and take us out. When we got beside the red curtain then my dad really wailed the daylight out of all of us. After that he told the head prop man, "From now on, you pick up the coins." We hated that because we knew he'd pocket a lot of that money. We never did get to pick up the coins after that.

[00:28:00]

Richard Flint: You never got that half dollar then?

Milonga Cline: No.

Richard Flint: Did they have the sort of rhythmic clapping that I know is common in Europe?

Milonga Cline: No. In Puerto Rico they did that. Johnny, at first he thought that they didn't like his act, but they keep a rhythm you know? That the European people do that. They liked his act but he didn't know that. He was scared. He says, "What did I do?" I says, "Nothing. They like the act. Keep going. Go ahead."

[00:28:30]

Richard Flint: Right. What type of act would your audiences like most? Arial or animal or the tumbling, anything that you remember at all?

Milonga Cline: You know they liked animals. The Mexican, just the like the European, they're very

[00:29:00] hard with their stock. They're trained through fear. American style is cookies and bait. We use bait. When John and I worked with a dog act, we had a 15 dog act and we took a lot of vanilla wafers but we taught them to bark and carry on every time they did a trick. You know, the Mexican people loved that. They just loved that because those dogs were having so much good time. They come in there barking and carrying on. They do their tricks, summersault, whatever they had to do. They like that style but they never seen it.

[00:29:30] Richard Flint: Right, it was something different.

Milonga Cline: The only acts they got there, there's a little dog with a tail between his legs and they notice it, they sense it. They like animal acts.

Richard Flint: What sort of animal acts did you have on the show?

[00:30:00] Milonga Cline: Well we had a horse act. It did a little [inaudible 00:29:51] number. Then my dad a wrestling bear. He had a lion act, which he had three lions but I don't think no one was able to work them and he finally gave them to the zoo. He had some rhesus monkeys, they were the meanest things. Nobody would get near them. I was deathly afraid of them and up until now I'm afraid of a monkey. Every time you get them, they bite a finger.

Richard Flint: Sticks with you. Was the wrestling bear with any town person that would wanted to take a chance?

[00:30:30] Milonga Cline: Well, they'd ask if any town person wanted to it. Of course nobody did but I had my cousin and he was a great big, husky guy and he'd come in and he'd wrestle with the bear.

Richard Flint: Would he come in from the audience?

Milonga Cline: Yeah, they'd plant him in the audience.

Richard Flint: Returning to when you were on LG Barnes, can you remember your first tour with a strictly American show? Incidentally at this point, were you speaking English? Did you grow up speaking Spanish?

Milonga Cline: No, I grew up speaking Spanish.

Richard Flint: When did you learn English?

[00:31:00] Milonga Cline: When I went to school. I had an awful time because we had to learn to speak English.

Richard Flint: How did you get your schooling? When and where?

Milonga Cline: Well, California was always very strict. In Santa Barbara my dad was arrested and taken to jail. He had to pay \$50 fine for each child that was working in the show.

Richard Flint: It was expensive.

Milonga Cline: Uh-huh. Then after that, we played three days in one town, we went three days to that school. Whatever school we played, we had to go. It's terrible for a child to go from school to school, you know? We'd play three days here and five days there and you don't learn anything. You have a terrible inferiority complex because every time you go in a new school these children are all looking and staring at you.  
[00:31:30]

Richard Flint: At the new kids, yeah.

[00:32:00]

Milonga Cline: It's a circus, you know. I really didn't get much schooling until my mother stayed in east LA where we had our home. Then I went to school there. It was hard and up until now, my English.

Richard Flint: Ah, it's good. When did your family establish residence in the states?

Milonga Cline: Let's see, my mother bought a home in 1924, I believe. She brought property in Santa Ana. She had a big home and she had 12 ... No, that was before World War One because my dad says before World War One he bought a lot of war bonds. They had 12 cabins where they used to rent to the food keepers. My dad says that my aunt said that one of the walls was kind of bare and drafty in one of these places, cabins. My dad said, "Well just get some paper and glue it on." They got all these old war bonds and glued them on.  
[00:32:30]

[00:33:00]

You know, my dad always said he probably didn't think they were good because at that time they had so many con guys that they sell war bonds on every corner before World War One and half of them were phonies.

[00:33:30]

Richard Flint: You never know.

Milonga Cline: You can't tell.

Richard Flint: No.

Milonga Cline: Dad was this kind of man, oh well I've got my circus there and they were just a few dollars worth is all.

Richard Flint: They solved the insulation problem.

Milonga Cline: Yeah, he said, "Besides they were worth more as paper in the walls."

Richard Flint: You were born in this country?

Milonga Cline: Yeah. I was born in Los Angeles.

Richard Flint: Right. Then your citizenship was by virtue of being born here?

Milonga Cline: Right.

Richard Flint: Did your dad ever take out citizenship in this country?

[00:34:00]

Milonga Cline: Yeah. He was 45 years in the United States and he finally became an American citizen.

Richard Flint: Then that was after he left the circus business?

Milonga Cline: Yeah. He left the circus business, he became an American citizen. When he went and applied for his citizenship papers, the judge asked him a few questions because his English was not too good. He always had in his shop he had a great big picture of Roosevelt because that was his favorite. They asked him who was the first president and he said, "Washington." Who was the president during the Civil War and he say, "Abraham Lincoln." He says, "Who was the president during the 30's and 40's?" He says, "Well, you know I got that man's picture right in my shop and his name is right at the tip of my tongue. I can't think of his name but you know, he put the WPA project, he put the Social Security," he went on naming everything Roosevelt had done.

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The judge said, "Would his name be Rose?" Dad jumped and said, "That's it. Roosevelt. Roosevelt."

Richard Flint: Returning now to the LG Barnes, can you remember your first season on an American circus? Had you been around that many American performers at that point?

[00:35:30]

Milonga Cline: No.

Richard Flint: Was it a big change?

Milonga Cline: I wasn't on the show but my sister always talked about it. See, I had to stay and go to school. Of course, to them it was all so different. For one thing, the girls in the dressing rooms, well they finally got used to it but, all these girls all dressing in one dressing rooms and they were kind of shy at first. They said you had to take a bath in a bucket and everybody watching you. I said, "You do?" "Yeah, you gotta take your clothes off. Everybody does that, otherwise they think you're a pig if you don't take a bath." I said, "Did you feel real bad?" She said, "I felt kind of bad at first but now I got used to it. Everybody else takes a bath, so I take a bath," she said.

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[00:36:30] It was kind of strange for them. Then of course they missed their spicy food. Let's face it, American have more of a bland diet and they missed their spicy Mexican food.

Richard Flint: Did the family consider they'd made good money on the Barnes circus?

Milonga Cline: Yes, because after that my dad made it every season.

Richard Flint: How long were they on Barnes then?

Milonga Cline: They were there until 1935. Then in 36 they didn't go on the road. Phillip, the oldest one, he thought he was going to do better than go on the circuit. He was going to play all big players, so they conned my dad into taking out the circus again. When we get to Sacramento California, he got all these big players coming so they all pack up and leave. That's when we're left there in Sacramento with just me and my youngest brother, my cousin. My dad gets all of us kids to do little acts. I sang and I danced and I did tumbling. He didn't play the big towns, he'd play little towns where they had cotton fields and all that. He did real good. All he had was these little kids and our pay was taking us to the movies when we had a day off and we'd go have chop suey.

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[00:38:00] The big family come back in the first part of November. My dad told them, "Go back. I don't need you. I got these kids here." We were all working for peanuts. Why should he have them back?

Richard Flint: Was there a bit of friction in the family when-

Milonga Cline: No. My dad was too soft hearted. He wasn't that way.

Richard Flint: Did the older ones make money on the fairs?

Milonga Cline: Yeah, but they'd blow it. You know, they'd put on the dog how performers do. As you get older, later you start figuring out how to invest.

[00:38:30]

Richard Flint: Where were you in 37 then?

Milonga Cline: In 37 the boys went to Japan.

Richard Flint: With the circus?

Milonga Cline: Yeah, with the circus in Japan. I don't know what was the name of it. It was a fair or something.

Richard Flint: A Japanese show though?

Milonga Cline: Yeah. In Okinawa. They played Tokyo and Okinawa. It was a long time they were up there. The first summer.

Richard Flint: How did they get the booking on that?



[00:39:00]

Milonga Cline: I don't know who booked them. They took them and they took some German acts from here. I know my brother's came back and they were very digusted because they already said they was friction between Japan and the Americans. They had spies following them. This is in 37. Billy Temple, the boy that I told you about, he

[00:39:30]

went mentally up from drinking too much of that sake wine. Bill went to the police and there they had police reports of where everyone had gone, what they'd done all day and all because they were Americans. Phil says they had the best flying act and they had these German acts that didn't do nothing. All they had was flags with a swastika you know? The Japanese, oh god, they eat them up. They were the greatest.

[00:40:00]

They say Americans from the United States, they just stand there. Not one hand. Finally the manager comes back and he says, "If you don't mind Phil, I'll have to announce you as Mexico. That's the only way you'll sell the act." He said, "They wouldn't accept us."

[00:40:30]

Richard Flint: You got a light? I gotta know if my tape's getting low. Yeah. We got a bit more there. Then where were you in 38?

Milonga Cline:

In 38 we went in the Hickenbach-Wallace show.

Richard Flint:

Now were you back? Were you out of school now?

Milonga Cline:

They took me out of school and I went on the flying act. I didn't last very long because that first week ... The day we opened in Peru Indiana, there was a nine people flying act and it was too many and the whole rigging collapsed. They took me out of the flying act. I was the skinniest one but they took me out. They gave me \$8 a week and I did swinging ladders and spec. Then at that first week they gave me the \$8 and Phil's the manager then and he says, "You're getting too much money kid. I'm going to have to knock you down. \$5 is all you're going to get. Cut it down." After that, you know, Howard Wineberry was his name, we didn't get paid the rest of the season.

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That show just didn't make it. We had Blackman. God that man used the scare the daylights out of me. He was always after me on my posture because I used to, I was just a kid you know, and I didn't stand correctly. He'd hit me right in the back and he had this real frizzy hair, sort of afro and this silver teeth. He had this silver, platinum teeth and I was deathly afraid of that man. It's funny, as a child you see someone like that and he hypnotizes alligators and lions and all that.

[00:42:00]

Richard Flint:

Right, so that just lends to the fear.

Milonga Cline:

And then the silver teeth and yeah.

Richard Flint:

Still frightens you.

Milonga Cline: I used to be afraid of him.

Richard Flint: Since this was your first time on an American circus, can you remember anything that impressed you there at all?

[00:42:30]

Milonga Cline: Well on the Hagenbeck-Wallace show I remember I found out that if I went in to the office and picked up a dookie book I could get a lot of sandwiches. In the back there they had a hamburger stand and then in the pie car you could and eat all this fancy food. So I used to go and get dookie books. Then my dad found out or I don't know if the guy squealed on me but he says, "Milonga's getting a lot of dookie books." My dad came back and he yelled at me and he said, "I don't want you taking anymore dookie books." I said, "But Dad, we don't have no money and I'm hungry. I want to eat." "Yeah, but when we do get paid, we won't get paid any money because you're eating it all up." As it was we never did get paid and I didn't get anymore hamburgers.

Richard Flint: You lost out both ways. Of course, at that time you had been in school with some American so there was-

Milonga Cline: Oh, yeah. I was able to-

Richard Flint: So it wasn't like when your family was first on the LG Barnes?

Milonga Cline: No, it wasn't like when the oldest kids went, you know. I had been to school.

Richard Flint: Was the family booked on the Hagenbeck-Wallace primarily for the flying act?

Milonga Cline: Yeah.

Richard Flint: Did you do any other acts at all?

Milonga Cline: Well, we had the flying act. Phil did the slack wire and Esther did the heel and toe. All the girls did web or [crosstalk 00:43:59] yeah.

[00:44:00]

Richard Flint: Continuing on, what happened to the family after Hagenbeck-Wallace?

Milonga Cline: Well after the Hagenbeck-Wallace show we come back, we were all broke. We finally came home and we're sitting around there and then the Marx Brothers decide to do a circus picture. We're the only circus act in town. It fell in pretty good. We got about six months work after that, working in the movies.

Richard Flint: What was the picture?

Milonga Cline: The Marx Brother's at the Circus. Then they made another picture, it was called Murder at the Circus or something and it had started with this brand new, small studio called Republics. They got my dad to make all the wardrobe. It was beautiful

[00:45:00] wardrobe. Well, being a tailor you know, he made this beautiful wardrobe. The head producer come over from this Republics studio and begged Dad to be in charge of all the wardrobe. Dad says, "Nah, I don't want to go." He says to Mom, "I don't want to go to that place. It's a little studio. They're not going to make it." It turned out to be a big thing, you know?

Richard Flint: Right.

Milonga Cline: My dad could have had first choice. He said, "They'll never make it." Itty-bitty studio.

Richard Flint: What circus were you with after that? Let us just continue chronologically.

[00:45:30]

Milonga Cline: After that we went on the Cole Brother's in 1940. I got out of high school in the spring of 1940 in the Cole Brothers. My brother's were all there.

Richard Flint: What act were you involved in there?

Milonga Cline: I was just one of the ballet girls. Ken Maynard and all the ballet girls dressed like Indians and we dance, "Woo, woo, woo, woo." Big deal you know. Of course I did swinging ladders so I got top money. I got a dollar extra. All the girls made \$14, but I made \$15 because I did swinging ladders. Then I went on the Russel show in 1942.

[00:46:00]

Richard Flint: Now, that's the truck show?

Milonga Cline: That was a truck show. That started there in Los Angeles. In 41 and 42. Then 43 [inaudible 00:46:25] bought it and then I went on that show. Still was on that show. [00:46:30] Then in 44, I gave up. I was very disgusted. Went on Herby Weber's little show. That's where I got hit on the head with a apple.

[00:46:30]

Richard Flint: Escalante Brothers?

Milonga Cline: Yeah. Then I closed with his show and I decided that's it, I don't want nothing to do with circus. There's no future. So I went and worked in Los Angeles at the Western Union. I worked at the Western Union, well I was there for about six months and then I decided I couldn't stand it any longer. I had to go on the circuit. Back I went on the circuit. In 46 I joined with Clyde Beatty and that's where I met John.

[00:47:00]

Richard Flint: We've got a little bit left there, can you tell me how you met him?

Milonga Cline: Johnny Cline?

Richard Flint: Right.

Milonga Cline: He was on the same show when I joined and he was assistant [inaudible 00:47:28] and I had to learn to do manage. He taught me how to ride. My dad came over on the circus and he just had a fit. I was going to get killed, how could I ride a horse? I

[00:47:30]

was going to get my neck broken. I said, "But dad you sent me up there on the flying act." He said, "Well, that's different. We got a safety net." I finally learned to ride a horse with John and with ponies because I never knew anything about any of this.

[00:48:00]

Richard Flint: Did you work some animal acts that year?

Milonga Cline: With John? No. I learned just to ride that year. I learned to ride on the manage number, do manage. Then after that we got married and he taught me how to work ponies.

Richard Flint: Were you married that season then?

Milonga Cline: I got married at Christmas time at home with my folks, we got married there. Then he taught me how to ride side saddle. To waltz and rear. Then I learned to work the elephants. I was climbing the elephants.

[00:48:30]

Richard Flint: Were you then in animal acts from then on?

Milonga Cline: Yeah. Then we got our own dog act and our own pony/dog act and then we got our elephant. In fact, I left all my pictures with Mimi today. I had a whole mess of them. A suitcase of them.

Richard Flint: Okay. This tape's getting very near the end. Why don't we stop.