

# CWM Audio 4-6

## Milonga Cline Interview, August 24, 1972

### INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

#### Part 2

Milonga Cline: We played ... you know where Mercede and Montega is?

Mamie Ward: Yeah.

Milonga Cline: It's 50 miles difference and my dad went to Mercede and he was trying to get the license. We had to play Montega and he had this limousine and he had all 10 kids in this car. We stopped in what was a hot day and he stopped alongside this park and he says, "All right you all play there and cool off while I go to City Hall and see about a license". We all played and fooled around and Minnie and Blackie were playing out by the trees and Dad come by two hours later, "All right Amelia. Get in, get all the kids come on we're already late." We all jump in the car and we take off.

[00:00:30]

[00:01:00] We get to Montega, 50 miles away and we all pile up and my dad says, "Wait a minute, where's Blackie, where's Minnie? We're two short". My dad calls, "My God," he says, "I bet we forgot them." Sure enough he calls the police and they say "Yes, we found two little boys crying. They've been asleep underneath this tree, where it was hot, and they had cooled off and they fell asleep." My dad was so mad because he had to drive all the way back to pick up the two boys, and he says to me, "Amelia from now on I don't care what you do. You count them, you understand? You count them in and out of that car.

[00:01:30] You count them. Ten kids.

Mamie Ward: Where was your mother?

Milonga Cline: She was there but she was so hot and had all of us kids to take care of. Those two kids had gone and fallen asleep underneath the tree and [crosstalk 00:01:43].

Mamie Ward: Was she in the car too?

Milonga Cline: No, she was in the park with the rest of us, but the two boys walked away and fell asleep underneath this tree.

Mamie Ward: Blackie and who?

Milonga Cline: Minnie.

Mamie Ward: Oh. Where's Minnie?

Milonga Cline: He's in LA. He plays trumpet now.

Mamie Ward: Oh really?

Ward:

[00:02:00]

Milonga He does television repair work.

Cline:

Mamie Oh. He was the quiet one.

Ward:

Milonga Yeah, but that's about all he does.

Cline:

Mamie He never was a performer.

Ward:

Milonga No he couldn't perform. He never could do anything. Every time he did a barn trick on

Cline: the trapeze on the fly net and he couldn't return. I'd take the blame. I'll say, "Well I didn't return the trap part right". I'll always covered up for him, but he couldn't fly. He couldn't do anything.

[00:02:30]

Richard Flint: How did you start the fly net? Did you-

Milonga I don't know how they start the fly net. They didn't do fly net when they first went on

Cline: the LG bars, remember?

Mamie No no, they did that until we left.

Ward:

Milonga After you left?

Cline:

Mamie After about '33 or '34. We was there in 1930.

Ward:

Milonga Well, '33 and '34 is when the fly net was in, remember? To Mexico. They already had it.

Cline:

Mamie Yeah, down in Mexico.

Ward:

Richard Flint: Who trained the fly net?

[00:03:00]

Milonga Trained? What do you mean?

Cline:

Richard Flint: Yeah, who taught you the fly net? Or did you just buy some equipment and start practicing?

Milonga No, the rigging ... I don't know who they get the rigging. I know [Cordonas 00:03:14] had

Cline: already given him ... measurements for making the rigging. I know Lalu's rigging was always different from this other Mexican fly net, like the parson. They got their trap bar right on top of each. You can't show your trick. You know, the American style, your fly bar and your catcher's bar, so when you do your trick you really show it, you know.

[00:03:30]

When you make a return you really have to return. When you get up to that bar, to that pedestal, you really have to beat to get up there. A lot of these people get the trap bar, and the pedestal is right there. They look like monkeys. The body doesn't show up.

[00:04:00]

See, the flying act is an American act. It's not a European or Mexican, it originated here in the States.

Richard Flint: How did Mimi get hooked up in your act?

Milonga: Well, my dad booked her and took her on the fly net in 1933.

Cline:

Richard Flint: As a catcher?

Milonga: Yeah, she was catching.

Cline:

Richard Flint: Did you train them at all?

Mamie: I caught her sister, Esther.

Ward:

[00:04:30]

Milonga: The one that I showed you the pictures?

Cline:

Richard Flint: Right.

Mamie: Esther was not on the fly.

Ward:

Richard Flint: Were you with them for, how many years then?

Mamie: Oh, I wasn't with them ... only just that-

Ward:

Milonga: Just that winter.

Cline:

Mamie: Winter.

Ward:

Milonga: In '33 and '34, yeah. Circle Bell.

Cline:

Richard Flint: How did you like Mexico?

Mamie: I hated it. [inaudible 00:04:50] starve to death. I couldn't eat, because I couldn't talk.

Ward: Going to the restaurant didn't do me any good. I used to hang out with some of the kids,  
[00:05:00] [crosstalk 00:05:05]. I couldn't say a word, you know. I tried to get something to good.

Milonga: Hey Mamie, answer me this, though. Why is it, I used to watch you dress all the time  
Cline: and you'd come out of the flying act, and you'd take up your leotard. You had always  
your wrist bands, and the first thing you put was your hat.

Mamie: I don't know.

Ward:

[00:05:30]

Milonga: I was like, why does that lady always put her hat on first?

Cline:

Mamie: I don't know, so I wouldn't forget it I guess.

Ward:

Richard Flint: That's as good a reason as any.

Milonga I never, as a child, I could never figure out, "Why does Mamie always put her hat on?"  
Cline: She put it on with the pins you know, fix it all up. Then she'd do the rest of her stuff, like if she had to wash or anything, but the hat was on already.

Richard Flint: Ready to go.

[00:06:00]

Mamie Well, I didn't want to lose the hat. I used to wear a hat all the time. Now I haven't worn  
Ward: a hat for years. I don't own a hat.

Richard Flint: I haven't worn a hat since grade school, myself.

Mamie Years ago I used to have a hat to go with every different outfit I have. My shoes. They all  
Ward: matched. I had them in sets. I had more shoes and more hats ... my husband used to get  
[00:06:30] disgusted with me. He used to walk off and leave me. He walked off and left me one  
time, and went to a movie on Sunday. We finally did go to a movie, but those days, it  
didn't have air conditioning. You know, it was hot in there. I had bought a pair of cheap  
white shoes, and I just was walking, oh and it was hot. We finally went in the theater  
and my feet were swollen from walking on that hot pavement. I took my shoes off.

[00:07:00]

When the show was over, I couldn't get them on. I put them under my arm, and I  
walked out. When I got out in the lobby, Edward turned around, was going to say  
something, and he looked down at me and he said, "Where's your shoes?" I said, "Here,  
[00:07:30] under my arm." He said, "Well, why don't you put them on?" I said, "I can't get them on.  
My feet are swollen up and they hurt." He took off. I never did find out where he went.  
He left me standing in the lobby, so. No good walking around in your stocking feet  
though. I walked all around, and finally I went off the edge of the side block and got a  
cab. Had him take me down Crane. Then I had to walk down the track in my stocking  
[00:08:00] feet. On cinders, and ooh, but I couldn't get my shoes on. I threw the damn shoes away.  
Oh that was terrible.

He was so mad at me. I don't know where he went, he just disappeared with the  
problem. He was embarrassed. I told him. I said, "What did you run away for?" "Well,"  
[00:08:30] he said, "You didn't think I was going to walk around with you in your stocking feet?" I  
said, "Why not? Goddamn it, my shoes pinch my feet." I said I did. Sunday, and stiff  
shoes, and hot weather and outside walking my feet got swollen up.

[00:09:00]

Milonga This one Sunday we're playing in Santa Fe, and we didn't work that Sunday, so John said,  
Cline: "Do you want to go to the hotel? The guys are going to have a game of poker." "I don't  
want to go to the hotel," I said, "I want to go to the picture show." I got Kathy in my  
arm. John said, "Well, how are you going to go see the picture show with a kid?" I said,  
"Well, are we going to eat first?" He said, "yeah." I went in the restaurant with him and I  
ordered lamb chops, but I had a motive. I saved the bone from the lamb chops, see? I  
took Kathy with me to the picture show, and every time she'd start whining, I'd give her

[00:09:30] the lamp chop.

Mamie You'd give her what?  
Ward:  
Milonga The lamb chop bone.  
Cline:  
Mamie Oh, girl.  
Ward:  
Milonga She'd chew on this lamb chop and I could see the movie. Finally she dropped the lamb  
Cline: chop bone, and she started, "Wah!" I said, "Shh, shh," and I got down on my hands and knees. I'm holding her on the chair, and I'm looking for that lamb chop bone, and this man says, "Lady, is this what you're looking for?" He hands me this lamb chop bone, and I was so embarrassed I grabbed Kathy and ran out of there. Then John and I went, I talked John into taking me to see the Babe Ruth story, and Kathy was little. I don't know how much they charged us, but they made us buy a ticket for Kathy, and we had her in our arms and I had the bottle for her.

[00:10:00]

[00:10:30] Kathy starts whining, so I give her the bottle. She goes, gulp and the people start laughing. They can hear that someone's drinking. Then she finally throws the bottle, crash, the bottle falls and breaks. These ushers going like this, "Shh! Shh!" Finally, I pick her up, and she stands up and there's a bald headed man right in front of me, and she goes, "Wee" and grabs him, and he goes, "Ah." Then the usher came over and told us to get out, and then chased John and I and Kathy out of the theater, and John was so mad. He said, "Well give me my money back for the ticket for the kid." But they kicked us out of the theater, all on account of Kathy.

[00:11:00]

Richard Flint: Oh jeez. What was life like on the BD Rail show? Not to change the subject.

[00:11:30]  
Milonga Well, it was nice. It was real nice on the train.  
Cline:  
Richard Flint: You mentioned earlier how things were taken care of.

Milonga Yeah, they had the porter. You put your shoes out, every night. She'll tell you in a burst,  
Cline: you used to leave your shoes out. Late at night the porter would pick up all the shoes, and then he'd sit in the vestibule and there he'd shine everybody's shoes. In the morning when you wake up, there would be your shoes all shined up. Everybody's shoes. That was his job, and then of course he took care of making the bed. He made your beds. You didn't make your own bed, and you tipped him at the end of the week.

[00:12:00]

Richard Flint: What sort of a tip would he get?

Milonga Oh, a dollar, you know. When you get to the Cook House, you had your own waiter. The  
Cline: waiter would carry jellies and pickles and stuff like that, and have them there, and you'd tip him a dollar also. Of course there would be your dishes and cooking stuff. It was all in spotless, you know. He'd come, and ask you what you want. Sometimes if you didn't like eating that, you'd say just, "never mind, I'll have a peanut butter and jelly sandwich," but they had a pretty good cook house.

[00:12:30]

Then of course when you get to the dressing room, the water boy, they always fill the bucket with water. Every bucket had their own name.

[00:13:00]

Richard Flint: How many buckets? Did you get one or two buckets?

Milonga Cline: Two buckets. Then ... your trunk would be there, and your trunk was considered your own home. Everybody went to their trunk, and took care of their washing. Whatever they had to do. Nobody come around. Very seldom did you see girls jumping from trunk to trunk, because that was your own private. Then you had a chair, one of those canvas chairs. It was all very set. The chairs would have this little canvas, and then on the side of these canvas would be little pockets. Well, now there went your stockings and different things you put away in there. Then you'd change into your costumes. If you had washing, well then you took out your little clothesline and go outside the tent, tie it up and hang up your clothes.

[00:13:30]

[00:14:00]

When it comes to tear down, well then of course you took off your clothes. Close your trunk. First you put your canvas inside, you know off the chair. All they carried was a skeleton of the chair, and the buckets were empty so you go out there and wait for the Gilly. The Gilly was like a little bus. He'd charge you a quarter and take you to the trains.

[00:14:30]

Then you'd go to the pie car. You'd go either to the berth, and hang up your jacket or whatever you were wearing, and go to the pie car. Have a sandwich.

Most of us kids, like when I was going around with Johnny, we'd go outside in the platform and listen to records, you know. Come back.

Mamie

Ward:

[00:15:00]

I remember, on the cold show, when that was ... one season everybody had a little Victrola. We had one. We used to put it up and off the berth, and about six of us would get up there. Somebody was always buying a new record. Every day somebody would buy a new record, and we got the [inaudible 00:15:14] needles so they wouldn't be loud, you know.

[00:15:30]

Some of them would have their heads off now, "Put on the steel needle, I can't hear it." Others were saying, "Shut the goddamn thing off." At 12:00, we couldn't play it after midnight.

Milonga

Cline:

No. Then the cold show, when I was in the cold show, they had one side of the section of the train and it was just a single.

Speaker 4:

Where's dad, mama? Is he asleep already?

Milonga

Cline:

No. His car's not there, is he?

Speaker 4:

Yeah, the car's there. The Plymouth isn't. Johnny go someplace?

[00:16:00]

Milonga

I don't know. No, Johnny didn't go. Is Dad's car there? The big car? I have to go make his

Cline: bed yet.

Richard Flint: Do you have to go now?

Milonga What time is it?  
Cline:  
Richard Flint: 9:20.

Milonga What else do I have to tell you now?  
Cline:  
Richard Flint: You don't have to tell me anything. No ... what sort of accommodations were there on the trains? Was it berths, or-

Milonga Berths, yeah. Well afterwards with Clive, with Johnny it became a question to them. We  
Cline: had a little stable.  
[00:16:30]  
Richard Flint: About how big was that?

Milonga Not very big.  
Cline:  
Mamie A berth with a door on it.  
Ward:  
Milonga That's right, that's about what it got to be.  
Cline:  
Mamie That's what Edward, you know, we never had a state room. I never had a state room in  
Ward: my life.

Richard Flint: Just had a berth with a door?

Mamie No, we just slept in the car. Edward wouldn't have a state room because he said he  
Ward: wanted to be with their own people, you know, our people. He said, "I don't want one  
of those things to hold me down with this. Goddamn birth of an aura on that." Not very  
[00:17:00] big, so we never had a state room. He wouldn't have one.

Richard Flint: Could you do any cooking on the train?

Milonga No, and I wouldn't even attempt it. Not when they had the pie car and all that.  
Cline:  
Richard Flint: Right, right. Is there anything else of life on the show that you can think of?

Mamie No.  
Ward:  
Richard Flint: What did you do to amuse yourself? Get away from the daily routine?

[00:17:30]  
Milonga From the circus? Oh we went to the picture show. I really never did hardly ever go to  
Cline: the picture show, because I couldn't enjoy a picture, because I was always worried that  
the show would start and I would be late, and I couldn't relax. I would be tense, looking

at the clock all the time, and seeing you know if I was going. You really couldn't enjoy it, unless you had a day off. Then most of the times when we had day offs we had picnics. We planned picnics and stuff.

Richard Flint: The whole show?

[00:18:00]

Milonga Well, most of the performers would get together and have a picnic.

Cline:

Richard Flint: Were there any social restrictions? Mamie was telling me, what were some of them when you were on?

Milonga Well, performers stayed with the performers and the working men with the working men, you know.

Cline:

Richard Flint: No intermixing?

Milonga There was strictly a classified deal. Everybody in their own class.

Cline:

[00:18:30]

Speaker 4: He's not there. I was going to tell you I'm going to eat a pizza at Domino's.

Milonga How far is that, and how long are you going to be?

Cline:

Speaker 4: Well they take a long time.

Milonga Well don't forget, he told you to use, you promised him to be here at nine.

Cline:

Speaker 4: Yeah, but that's why I come back and he's not here.

Milonga Well ... you promised to get back right away, I don't want to hear him hollering, understand?

Cline:

[00:19:00]

Speaker 4: Yeah, I guess so, but it could take a long time. [inaudible 00:19:03]

Mamie Well I don't know, Timbuktu.

Ward:

Speaker 4: Pizza place up at the square.

Mamie Huh?

Ward:

Speaker 4: Pizza place up at the square.

Mamie The pizza place?

Ward:

Milonga Anyway ... the circus life was hard, I guess. But when you're young, you know.

Cline:



Richard Flint: It doesn't bother you.

Milonga [inaudible 00:19:24] you missed payday. Oh, was payday today? I didn't even know I  
Cline: have to get paid. They always have to be chasing me across the lot, "Come and get your  
[00:19:30] pay!" "Oh," I said, "What do you want to pay me for? I'm having a good time."

Richard Flint: They ever take you up on that?

Milonga No, Mrs. Web, finally Mrs. Web says, "You know, I'm going to take you up on that."  
Cline: Finally, oh, two weeks later I said, "I got to leave." "Where are you going?" "I'm going on  
the cold show." "No you're not." I said, "Yes I am, so here's my telegram." "Well, don't  
leave." "Well," I said, "What am I going to do? They promised to give me \$20, you're  
[00:20:00] only giving me \$15." "Well, I'll tell you what kid, I'll give you \$5 under the table." "Yeah,  
but is that \$5 all the time, not just this week?" "No, all the time, I give you my word."  
"Okay."

[00:20:30] This happened in '42, and in '43 she sold the circus to Art Conselo. After Art Conselo  
took over, oh I was like fooling around. Here comes Paul Ingles, "Anybody here by the  
name of Melonga?" I said, "Yeah, that's me." "I've got strict orders, payday you got to  
give Longa \$5 under the table, and that's strict orders from Mrs. Web." She sold the  
circus, but the \$5 under the table stays.

Richard Flint: That's surprising.

Milonga I got along pretty good with her.

Cline:

[00:21:00]

Richard Flint: What about, Kathy was born on the BD show, wasn't she?

Milonga She was born at home, but she joined the circus.

Cline:

Richard Flint: Well, she was raised in it. What was it like raising some young kids, and actually a baby  
on a show? Was it difficult performing also?

Milonga No, it was not bad, because Mamie can tell you. Most of the performers in the dressing  
Cline: room were pretty good. They'll always take over and help you. I never had any trouble  
that way, they always used to help me.

Richard Flint: Were there a lot of young kids on the show?

[00:21:30]

Milonga No, at that time there was only Kathy. Clyde didn't like anybody. No young kids around  
Cline: on the show, but when Kathy was born-

Mamie Well, they're always afraid they would get hurt or something, you know.

Ward:

Milonga He said, "Well, you might as well, I'll make an exception. You can bring Kathy."

Cline:

Richard Flint: Was she spoiled then by all of them?

Milonga Cline: Yeah, two years later she thought she owned the circus. She [inaudible 00:21:48].

Cline:

Richard Flint: Oh yeah?

Milonga Cline: Said, "Hi, Clyde." Clyde must have been very busy thinking about his business, and he didn't answer her, and he went into his dressing room. Kathy said, "I said hi, Clyde." He still didn't answer her, and he went up to his wagon. Harriet BD is watching, and she stomped right into his dressing room, threw open the curtain, and said, "I said HI, Clyde." Clyde said, "Oh, sorry Kathy, hi Kathy, hi." Turned, BD laughs and said, "I can see who the boss on this show now."

[00:22:30] That little stinker, she used to get anything out of Clyde. He was ... his sponsor on one television show was that Rice Krispies, so we were invited to the hotel for breakfast through this newspaper. You know, we didn't say anything to Kathy. She was just, I

[00:23:00] mean I guess all kids want to show they're kind of smart alec-y. I ordered bacon and eggs and John did too. They said, "You going to have some bacon?" She said, "No, rice krispies."

Richard Flint: Smart.

Milonga Cline: Clyde didn't come, that newspaper man said that the child wanted rice krispies, and Clyde and BD brought her a great big bag of jelly beans. "You said the right thing Kathy, you said the right thing."

Richard Flint: What sort of man was BD to work with?

Milonga Cline: He was a wonderful man to work for. One of the greatest bosses that I think I ever, that John has ever said ... you know. Each man was boss of their own department, and if he had any sore feelings of what they did, he'd call them out and far at the other side of the lot you could hear him lecturing that man, see, but he never did it in front of their ... who they were, boss. If he had anything, he'd have it out, a talk with him out there. Far away where nobody could hear.

[00:24:00] If Johnny say, this person is fired, okay he's fired. Clyde couldn't do anything about it, because he said, "Johnny, that's your department. You're the boss. You're responsible." Every man worked to their best for him, for that reason, and he was strictly a Sunday show. I mean, he didn't allow none of it. Messing around, you know. Everybody behaved

[00:24:30] pretty good. I know we weren't allowed to even wear shorts up in the front, on the midway, because we were circus girls and we had to put up a good appearance.

Richard Flint: Right. You were on the show when it closed?

Milonga Cline: Yeah, in '56.

Cline:

Richard Flint: What was that like? I mean, since you were ...

Milonga Cline: Well, pretty bad. John and I ... he could have gone on, you know. But he had too many lawsuits, and I don't know what it was all about. The union stiffed him.

[00:25:00]

Richard Flint: As far as you as a performer on the show, and fairly close to BD since you'd been on, what 10 years or so.

Milonga Cline: Yeah, well we were ready to work, because Clyde had so many animal acts. At one time, in 1950, I think he worked for a whole week with just the animals because none of the acts joined the circus in time. All he had was ponies and dogs and elephants and horses, and we went in and out and we worked just the animals. He still, he was the main attraction, and he was there. He could have run it that way. Johnny said, "Clyde, now you just say the word, and we'll work for you." There was not only John and I, there was others, like Colleen. She worked the elephants, too. Some of the performers said we'll work over the union, so we'll make it up for you, but they didn't do nothing.

[00:25:30]

What did they do? What have they done so far? Nothing that I can see.

[00:26:00]

Richard Flint: Well, did it become somewhat of an emotional trial for BD when he was starting to lose his show and had to sell it?

Milonga Cline: I don't know.

Richard Flint: I mean, was that actually apparent on the show?

Milonga Cline: You know, if he had gone out of Los Angeles, his circus was already sold. I don't know what it was, I really can't remember if it was the union or what.

Richard Flint: Nothing showed within BD himself?

[00:26:30]

Milonga Cline: Well, he felt he was pretty heard, because he only owed the performers three weeks' pay when he was forced to close.

Richard Flint: Right. That isn't too bad.

Milonga Cline: He says, you know, you could name a lot of other shows that had gone on and on and on without pay. As it was, he did pay us part of what he owed us. Maybe took two years, but he paid all of us.

Richard Flint: That's good.

Milonga Cline: We all got our money back.

[00:27:00]

Richard Flint: Just a little bit, there. What happened to, what did you do after you left the BD show? You stayed with it the whole season?

Milonga Cline: No. After it closed in '56, my father's home was there in east LA. We had our ponies, if you remember seeing this picture, we had our little ponies.

Richard Flint: You owned those ponies?

Milonga Cline: We owned the ponies, and we had the pony ride in the BD show. Johnny went, and he rented a lot, which is right in the city of Los Angeles. This is inside the city of Los Angeles, and we managed to run that lot with a pony ride. Then we worked for Ken Jensen, and went here and there, working ponies and dogs.  
[00:27:30]

Richard Flint: Just building up?

Milonga Cline: At first Johnny thought it was the end of the world, because he'd worked 11 years with Clyde BD, and then to freelance all of a sudden like that. You're not set. We make a Christmas show, in San Bernardino. We had a lot of props for our dogs, and here's a difference. We're making this Christmas show, and this Shapiro Brothers comes out and says, "How many minutes you going to give me?" Johnny says, "Well, we can give you six minutes. If you want, we'll cut it down to five. We're used to working on the circus, pow pow pow, move up, move up." Johnny said, "We're working six, but we'll cut it down to five." He said, "Five? I want 45 minutes or an hour."  
[00:28:00]

[00:28:30] Johnny said, "Well we don't do that kind of a show." He said, "You mean, with all those so and so props, you're only going to give me five minutes?" See we found out that there was a difference, you know. When you're away from the circus, you've got to go on and on and on. In the regular circus, like Clyde BD, he gives you five minutes, you're going too long. Get out, you know.

Richard Flint: When did you first acquire an elephant?

[00:29:00]

Milonga Cline: The elephants? When we got Dill Pickle it was ... I think it was in '60, or ... no, no. Before that. '58 or '57, we got it. Is Dad home? Anyway. Do you remember when we got Dill Pickle? Anyway, we got Dill Pickle, and that was the start of our elephants.

[00:29:30]

Richard Flint: Start. Why don't we conclude this here?

How did we do?



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