

CWM Audio 77

Peggy Williams Interview, August 8, 2018

Interview Transcript Part 2

- Scott O'Donnell: 00:00:03 So Peggy, over the years, you've obviously been involved in a lot of interesting, dynamic, and creative PR opportunities that only the circus-
- Peggy Williams: 00:00:03 Yeah.
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:00:13 ... could probably afford with the cast of characters, nationalities, and all the elements that make up The Greatest Show On Earth. What are some PR stories, good or bad, uh, that stick with you after all these years?
- Peggy Williams: 00:00:28 Wow. There's a couple that really come to mind fast, because they were, they were outrageously large and, um, poignant. The first one I was personally involved with, outside of all the, the weekly, you know, the, the weekly stories in the local papers and the TV shows I was exposed to. In, um, 1971 in particular, I was on the To Tell the Truth, I was on What's My Line? I was on the Doris Day Show. I was on the Today Show with Barbara Wawa ... Barbara Walters, when she was ... only had a five minute segment on the show before she became a ... she was a ... this was early in her career and very early in mine-
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:01:09 Before she became Barbara Wawa.
- Peggy Williams: 00:01:11 Before she became Barbara Wawa. And um, I loved doing all those TV shows. I was on the Carol Burnett Show and was able to present Carol Burnett ... one of my idols. I've got several female idols in the comedy business. Lily Tomlin, to a degree, but she became an animal rights activist, so we kind of parted ways, but we had some early communications there, and she knew Bobbi Kay, who was one of mentors, as was Lou Jacobs, and as was Dwayne Thorpe. So they were, they were all clowns.
- But um, uh, outside of the TV media that I had so much fun doing, um, it's just fun to whip into town and someone whisks you off to the TV station. They're so happy to talk to you, you go back, you slap the stuff on and do it again. You know, you um ... it, it's just sort of a bright spot in a town and you remember the town or the person for that.

The, the one I remember the most and have had the most joy in knowing that I had a part in it was in 1975. So we were the Red Unit again. We were playing California and we were playing Fresno, I believe. And um, so that was the year of the Vietnamese Orphan Airlift. Um, some amazing pilots ... you can look it up in ... Google baby lift and learn the story about the pilots that went in there to, uh, certain areas in Vietnam and got all these orphans out of there like a day before that whole thing blew up in that area. And he ... and they really saved their lives. Well, they brought them from Vietnam to Camp Pendleton, California, and they were living in a tent city there, similar to what you might see after a hurricane when peoples' houses are destroyed and there's tents ... just tons of tents and stuff. So all these orphans were living in tents with a Marine for each six or eight kids.

And um, Ringling Brothers had a policy to take the circus to the people when the people couldn't come to the circus, and um, we took a circus ... ground base only, we didn't have any rigging acts because it was an outdoor amphitheater they had there next to this tent city, which was in a flat field. I mean, it's kind of desert out there. It's not lush and green, at least what we saw.

So they had these thousands of kids that are never gonna go back to Vietnam and know their parents, because they were all orphans. They didn't have any paperwork when they got here. They didn't have any English, they didn't have any language, they didn't have any comedy experience to speak of. They didn't have any entertainment because it was a war zone they lived in, and that's what they saw every day. They didn't know how to react.

So we took the clown car that had like 17 people, including two dwarfs in it, and we filled our ... and I got in the clown car for this one, wearing my old lady costume. I saw a picture the other day. It cracked me up. We were all scrambling out of the clown car as we went through the tent city, the road in the middle of the tent city with all these thousands of kids. And all these kids, you could see them, we were looking out. And the ... when they paint the clown car windows, there's little peek holes. You can ... in the paint job in the windows, you can actually see, you know, who the audience is or whatever. And we were all looking out, "I wanna get out of the car, I wanna, I wanna shake hands with them, I wanna give them a hug," and we didn't know their culture about hugs and all that, but it was so exciting.

We finally got out of the car and just went, "Come on, come on," and they'd look up at their Marine and their Marine went, "Yeah, yeah, come on, all eight of you," you know? So there was like this whole parade to the amphitheater, and we had a show set up and we had dogs and we had clowns and we had acrobats and we had a couple horses there and we had, um, just whatever acts we could do on the ground. You know, we just did about an hour show for them. And they, they didn't know if they could laugh, smile, applaud, or had to sit quietly, like in a theater. They had no experience and these were kids, some of them were teenagers, some of them were in handicapped, they were in wheelchairs. And they were, they were the abandoned of Vietnam for many reasons.

So I was so excited to do that, that ... and we all talked about it. We rode a bus out to Camp Pendleton from the arena, with ... after we loaded all our props and wagons and stuff and they, uh, hauled, um, towed everything out there, and I was like, "This is really cool. I hope we don't have to do this too often, because these kids ..." it was great for them in the long run because they came to a safe country with no Agent Orange, and people that would care for them, feed them, and help them assimilate, learn English, go to school, and do all that kind of stuff. The sad part is, they didn't even know who they were. The kids didn't have papers. They were scrambled up from orphanages and stuff in a very short amount of time, and they, they came on like a big C-130 or some big transport plane. They were shoved in there. You read about it online under baby lift, and it's like, they're lucky they got to the plane in time before they took off in the middle of the night and all hell broke loose the next day.

So, we were talking about this about a year ago at a reunion, here in Baraboo, Wisconsin, and one of the girls who was in the, the ... one of the girls who was in the clown alley and performed in that, that particular performance out in the middle of the desert with me and the other clowns, um, and another one, Ruth Chaddock 00:06:45 ... and I'm not sure if she was here, because I called her and told her the story, but she was the third clown. When I said there was ... the first year, there was me, then the second year there was two girl clowns, the third year, there was three girl clowns. Ruth Chaddock and Kathy Herb, Kathleen Herb were the two ... when there, when there was three of us, they were the other two.

And Kathleen and I went to the ... um, and she ended up staying in the San Diego area, which is how this whole story ties itself in a knot after all these years. She became a teacher. After she left

the circus, she became a teacher and she taught high school History. And um, one of the students in her class, um, her last name is N-G-U-Y-E-N, a very common name in Vietnam. Not sure how to say it. Nguyen, or Nguyen, or-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:07:32

Nguyen or something, yeah.

Peggy Williams: 00:07:33

Yeah. So anyway, she gave her students, when they were seniors, um, uh, the challenge to write about what do they do now that high school's gonna be over? What's their plans? And they had to write an essay, so they all ... and she's, she's at home reading all these papers. At, at home in San Diego, far removed from us circus people, not doing circus or clowning anymore at all. And she read this one, and this little girl said, "I'm so grateful to be an American." This is a senior, right? Super smart, valedictorian of the class by the, by the way. Super smart, super grateful to be an American. And she has to thank the Americans for saving her as an orphan and she was on that flight.

So when Kathy reads this, she's the teacher now, so removed from this; she reads this and it's like goosebumps all over the place and, and she said ... and she held her after class the next day and she said, "I need to talk to you. Were you, were at Camp Pendleton? Were, were you with Marines when ... you know, what was this experience?" Because to all of our knowledge, this did not happen twice. It happened once, right? So it had to be the same girl, in the right area, in San Diego. It was this girl. This girl has gone on to finish college, became a doctor. So, she can give to American people the second chance that she got from American people unlike ... oh, I still get goosies when I think of that, right?

So, Kathy and I have communicated. We're trying to find her. Kathy has lost touch with her, of course, because it's been quite a while. I know we can find her, and I think it should be a story for Circus History Society or something, right?

Scott O'Donnell: 00:07:33

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Peggy Williams: 00:09:15

And pull some pictures of that, that beautiful performance, and all those kids with their Marines. You know, we were saying, "Yeah, you can clap. You can thumbs up. Here, here, put that up," you know, because they didn't know thumbs up. These were Vietnamese orphans from 1975, right? All that cool stuff.

That was one that I remember very well, and it feels like it was yesterday. And we had so much fun performing for those kids. It was like, "Welcome to America. You're gonna love it here. You're gonna be happy here. And we got circus." That was my whole, that was my whole thing.

The other thing that was amazing that we can't do anymore either, hopefully we'll never have to do an orphan airlift again, but this we can't do. It was, when I started working with Mr. Charly Baumann 00:10:04, those triplicate papers that we had to type out for the public relations, you know, and we'd give one to the performer and one to the publicist and we'd keep one in our office. So everybody knew what was expected, what they're supposed to wear, what time the pick up is, where ... everything about this performance detail, which is outside the scope of the circus in the arena.

And um, so Charly Baumann would receive these from the promoter the week in advance, and then when I got there ... because I got along pretty well with the performers. I tried to make it really fun for them, like, "It's gonna be fun getting up at 4:00 and putting your make-up on. Yeah, then you can warm up. You can warm up on the bus. Yeah," you know and try to, try to make it work, because we don't have the choice to say, "No, we don't need media." That's not it. We had to do these things.

Um, Charly Baumann has this whole pack of, of, uh, PR slips and he comes in, he tosses them on my little table with the typewriter and he said, "Here, here's PR for you." This was my fifth day on the job. It was like closing day in Charleston, West Virginia. And we were going to one more town and then we were gonna be in Washington D.C. And the thing was, small PR, a parade to the White House with elephants and performers and wagons, the whole thing. Props from the show, jugglers, clowns, acrobats. And this was before you could like do background checks, right?

So we're going to the White House. This was ... have you ever been to the White House? So you know that they probably now have, um, concrete barriers in front and you can't drive a vehicle up next to the gate and certainly can't walk a herd of elephants up there, but we did. We did that, and it was a very momentous day. We, we did this and I had to handle the PR with Mike Falls. We, we got all the projects. Charly wasn't feeling comfortable that he wanted to do the detail work on. And um, we had to get the name of every performer, their origin, their visa status. I mean, everything. The Secret Service

was all over this stuff. Back then it was all done by paper, so, so they became our best friends for about two weeks.

And we ... so we staged this parade. We do a whole herd of elephants walking in front of the White House with clowns and flags and all kinds of stuff. And the elephants do, um, a trunk salute, which means they, they put their trunks up, right? Which is a good luck sign in Asia and it's a, it's an ... you know, it's not a battle thing, it's a good ... it's a friendly thing. And uh, so we did that elephant trunk salute and had some acrobats doing some things on the sidewalk in front of the White House. And Reagan was the president, and that was the day he came home from the hospital after he was shot, and he waved to us from the window in the White House. And um, we didn't know it was that momentous day. We had a date, but we didn't have shows and the train would already be in. That was our date, and it happened to be the day he got out of the hospital, it just so happened. So it's sealed in history now that we did that.

Shortly thereafter, because of all the security issues with Reagan getting shot and all that, uh, they started moving people back from the front of the White House. They made the fence higher, they put these concrete barriers, you can't drive vehicles there. But it was great for us, because we did a ... but I was like, "That's my first PR? That's my first assignment, is a parade to the White House?" Yeah, we can handle this. I had ... what are you gonna do, right? Just preparing me for the daily street parade at Disneyland, I think. Catching a few stilt walkers on the way, too.

Scott O'Donnell:	00:13:43	So you got to work with a lot of dynamic people.
Peggy Williams:	00:13:46	Yeah.
Scott O'Donnell:	00:13:46	Both acts and cohorts and circus management.
Peggy Williams:	00:13:50	Yep.
Scott O'Donnell:	00:13:51	I'm gonna start with the furry, fuzzy animal kind. So, you've spent the majority of your life around the animals-
Peggy Williams:	00:13:51	Yep.
Scott O'Donnell:	00:14:01	... that are part of the family-
Peggy Williams:	00:14:02	Absolutely.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:14:02 ... of circus, of The Greatest Show On Earth.

Peggy Williams: 00:14:05 Yep.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:14:06 And we have found ourselves in the trying, challenging time, as far as the perception of those.

Peggy Williams: 00:14:06 Yeah.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:14:13 I often wonder if it's because people ... the general public did not know circus people to have the connection to understand-

Peggy Williams: 00:14:24 Yeah, might be.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:14:25 So your observations-

Peggy Williams: 00:14:27 Yeah.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:14:27 You, you've been behind the curtain, so to speak.

Peggy Williams: 00:14:29 I've been on the front lines too with the animals issues. You know, holding a rope to give a quarter for our animals to walk down the street to get from the train to the building. I've been there. Um, I have to say, if anybody would have my experience with the animals and the people who care for them, they could not hold two philosophies together. Um, they would have to believe that they are well taken care of. They would have to, by observation alone, if not conversation or training, um, know that the animals were taken care of. And how you ... how much ... I mean, I know the name of some animals; I don't know the name of some people. Animals are a very big important part of the circus history and family. Um, and having a personal relationship with an elephant ... I rode an elephant 500 times a year for three years. So I rode that same elephant 1,500 times. It was part of what I did in the show. All the clowns were trained to elephants in a very humane way, I have to say.

From my viewpoint, on top of an elephant, knowing that I had nothing to do with where the elephant goes, I was a rider, so I wasn't in charge, right? You have a relationship with the trainer or the handler, who guides your elephant, by name, and you ride the same one everyday. You really develop a relationship. If those elephants wanted to actually up, they could certainly do so. They were, they were well cared for, they were well trained, they were well kept. The ones that weren't very trainable didn't ever make it on the road. They were in the breeding program or something else, but I have to say if, if people would sit back and

think about the reality of caring for such a large, large animal, they would have to give a second thought to the philosophies that deny those animals the right to exist, who say they're better off ... let them free on the highway and all those kind of crazy statements that they haven't really thought through. But they're reading a script, too.

So I think, um, the people for instance, one of the, one of the great people that I saw work with the animals, and he worked with every different kind of animal, Gunther. Gunther was on the Red Unit all the years I was there, all 10 years. He had been there several years before, he came from Germany also. A lot of, a lot of German people came to Ringling Brothers. Um, he was fantastic with the elephants and he was very, very good with the horses. Charly Baumann, I think was the best with the tigers. And I'm not ... that's not putting Gunther down at all. He was great with the tigers too, but he understood each animal. He would come in in the morning and while he's sweeping or doing whatever, because he did whatever his men did too, he would watch the animals, individual animals, and talk to them, call them by name. They knew their names. And, and he would begin to understand their relationships with the other animals.

When there would be a new animal come in, he'd just sit and watch it, interact with the other animals, to get the personalities down, because that was key to how he's gonna interact with them, too. He knew what animals liked being rubbed on the head or stroked on their paw or their back or their mane or not touched by the teeth or whatever that was. That was the animal in him, learning about each other, together. And when you see that happen day in and day out for, okay, 5,000 shows, 500 shows a year roughly, 10 years, that's just in the performance end, you, you ... this is the real deal. You, you cannot hide the truth there. You can observe it, you can't hide it, and you cannot be ashamed of it, because the results were fantastic.

Other people disagree with the whole captivity thing and they have their right to disagree. They also have a right to be informed, because proper information is out there and I know that. We've been challenged a lot as Ringling employees, um, to the degree that, you know, it's stressful. It's stressful. When you get personal death threats from people who disagree over a philosophy, that's a war. That's not just a difference in agreement. That's ... you have no right to threaten someone else's life because of what they ... that's what the legal department is for, right? It ... so that's always disarmed me a little bit. To be spit on in public was difficult. Um, for just being

... trying to be a good carer for the animals and keep them safe, keep the public safe, let everyone enjoy their time, that was difficult. And I, I kind of resent that instance because it's demeaning to spit on someone. It always has been, it always will be. And it's dirty. It's nasty too, but that ... I mean, it didn't happen a lot. It happened two times, so that was enough of that.

But um, I can't say any more high regard for the people, especially who worked with the elephants. Because it's 24/7, it's relationship based, and you know, you can't put certain elephants with the other ones. Just like dogs. You can't put certain dogs with other dogs, because they're both Alpha and they're gonna hurt each other or they're gonna fight or they're gonna get ... so these people knew these animals well enough to take them to many cities and many different places and create the stable, the outside stable, the inside stable, whatever it was for the animals to be cared for well and to perform well and to stay beautiful. Because one thing I did learn is, if an animal has a scratch, a scar, or anything like that, people don't want to look at it. They want to look at pretty animals. That's not the real world for animals. Animals defend themselves and they also, um, scar. And um, not the, not the ones we were working with specifically, but people don't connect well with the reality of animals and their nature.

So from what I've seen, I'm fine with all of it. I regret that many people will not see elephants. You can see them here at Circus World for a period of time during the summer every year, and that's ... I hope that continues because it's an amazing experience to look eye to eye with an elephant. Somehow you see eternity in that eyeball once they focus on you. It's like, they've been around a lot longer than we have and, uh, hopefully they'll continue to. But there's other stellar people in the circus too that care for people, like those amazing people who don't get a lot of vacations either who care for animals, right? And one of the ones I know you and I have talked about before is someone that we both crossed paths with for many years, and he, he became a very good friend of mine. And to most of the people in the circus, he's known as Mr. Tim. Mr. Tim, he come to our circus, he invite me, he say, "You want to come to America?" Right? And in any language, right? I mean, he invited people from Poland, from Czechoslovakia, from Mongolia, from Russia, from China, from South, uh, from, from, uh ... the drummers from Africa. Mr. Tim was a constant a communications person on behalf of Ringling Brothers, Barnum & Bailey, to go spot a good act. He probably watched thousands of, um, circus performances in many different languages and

many different cultures. And he brought the best of what could come to America to America for the American public to see. And along with all of that came great stories. Just great stories.

Um, I wish he was here to tell his own stories about, about just different things. But um, what he understood was the tempo of the circus. He understood the production. So he started as a clown. He went to Clown College, he became a ringmaster, he started, uh ... graduated clown college and went on the Blue Unit for a year, but then became a ringmaster on the Red Unit. He was assistant ringmaster on the Blue Unit. They realized what a great voice he had. He came to the Red Unit when there was an opening for a ringmaster, which is how I met him, because he was in Clown College one year after me. So we'd never met until he came to the Red Unit. And he was just different in so many ways. He was fun, he was courageous, he was adventurous. He learned five or six languages because it was helpful to his work.

Um, he, he's from Illinois actually. He's just from south of, south of here. And uh, ended up living in Utah for awhile, and his family moved to Utah, and he um, pretty much said ... did what he said he would do in many different instances. Sometimes what people need ... well, he, he actually taught me something very valuable. There was an elephant trainer who, um, wanted more, either more money or more appreciation at contract time. And Tim dug pretty deep with him and he said, "So, so if you're working with elephants, that means you're gonna continue your schedule the same. You're gonna be up, you know, 18 hours a day with the elephants. It's not gonna lessen. We can't take those hours away from you because you have to be there because you know them. Um, we can't give you more space on the train because your family already has a whole car. It, it, it doesn't get bigger than that, so we can't do that for you. What exactly is it that you want? I mean, you don't have time to go shopping. This is your life. You're an animal person."

And the guy, he finally dug deep enough in trying to find out, "How can we help you be happier?" And you know what his answer was? His answer was, "I want a bathrobe that I can put on as soon as we leave the building to walk out to the tent, because sometimes I get wet or I, you know ..." he wanted a bathrobe that he could put on quick and tie with a rope, or tie ... you know, tie. And they got him a beautiful ... they got him a fantastic Chanel blue bathrobe with lots of body to it, easy to get on, little oversized, and uh, and the, the tie belt. And it made him so happy. That's ... I mean, it, it's not always about money or space. Sometimes it's about other considerations. You

just have to dig deep. And he was an excellent ... Tim was an excellent man when it came to digging deep to find out what really would make people happy. And he tried his very best to deliver, when it was possible.

I saw him succeed many times in making people happier people, even by ... he had these little habits too that he would do. When he knew someone was down on their luck or missed a quad four times in a row or had trouble with their family at home or were homesick because they were new clowns and they were young and they'd never been on the road before and they needed, uh, they needed some attention from a human being, right? He had these little note cards that he would have and he would write a quote or a question they could ponder, or just some little statement on there and he'd just walk by and say, "Hey, when you get a chance, read this," and he'd hand it to you and he'd keep walking. It was just like, "I know who you are, I know you're having trouble, I, I know, uh, I want you to know that I know." And that's sometimes all you can do.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:14:29

Right.

Peggy Williams: 00:26:01

He was, he was doing his best ministering job, if you will, to the circus people one by one, because he understood their situations. And um, his name is Tim Holst, and ... H-O-L-S-T. And um, for ... since 1971 until 2009. He died in a foreign country, on a circus trip, um, auditioning, uh, dancers and acrobats and stuff in South America. In ... actually it was in, um, Brazil.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:26:36

Sao Paulo.

Peggy Williams: 00:26:37

Yep, Brazil. And um, Scott, you've had the opportunity to travel with Tim and know that there's something right here in Baraboo that is his number one favorite place in the world, because you traveled with him and had many meals in many different places. Sometimes where they had like 20 rounds of food service, right? He went to a place in Mongolia, and I don't know if you were with him on this one trip. You, you might have been, but he said he was so exhausted by the time he got to Mongolia and then he had to get on this small plane and go to this city he'd never been to and they'd never had an American there before.

And they pulled out all their best cars in town and they had like a vehicle parade, like a dignitary from a government would get. And then they had this banquet somewhere, and all he wanted to do was get to the hotel and sleep because he was so exhausted. And yet it's rude to yawn in front of some cultures. It's very rude and they disdain it really, and, and so he sat there

and, and he didn't drink, and they had drinks in between every service of food. And, and he said that it, it was, it was a real, uh, test and testimony to being able to stay awake when all he wanted to do was sleep. And of course he had a translator and all that with him. And um, do you remember this statement that he said, about the Log Cabin?

Scott O'Donnell: 00:27:55 The Log Cabin.

Peggy Williams: 00:27:57 Yeah. Were you with him on that trip or some similar thing? I know it happened more than once.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:28:00 Very, very, very similar, yeah. We were in Shangjing, China, and we were served very similarly as you're describing, that they rolled out the red carpet. Traveling with Tim in a foreign country was like traveling with a world leader.

Peggy Williams: 00:28:00 Yeah.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:28:14 And there was caravans. We had Secret Service kind of people with us. Roads were blocked off as the caravan would go through because Mr. Tim was in town.

Peggy Williams: 00:28:24 Mr. Tim, your ticket to America.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:28:27 And we got to this restaurant and they served a delicacy of this big flat fish, which was like a flounder or something, that they had shoved the back three-quarters of it under the grill to cook, but the front half was still ... the lips were still going-

Peggy Williams: 00:28:27 Oh, no.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:28:41 ... on the fish. So the back three-quarters ... and to them, it was a great delicacy. They presented it with great pomp and circumstance-

Peggy Williams: 00:28:50 Yeah.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:28:50 ... to Tim and I. He looked at it and looked at me and looked back and he said, "Wouldn't you rather be at Log Cabin right now?" Which is the restaurant here in Baraboo. Uh-

Peggy Williams: 00:29:02 Do you know the Log Cabin, all homemade food, tall pies, and uh-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:29:05 World renowned for its pies and desserts and-

Peggy Williams: 00:29:07 Oh, it's, it's, it's a log-

Speaker 3: 00:29:07 I'll have to check it out.

Peggy Williams: 00:29:08 It looks like a log cabin. Yeah, it's up on 33.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:29:11 Completely slaved me. And of course, him and I laughing like two schoolgirls and all of these dignitaries looked at us with great abject horror, like, "We've just presented this world leader with our best food offering and they're giggling at it." You know, it just ... yeah, it was strange. But great man, for sure.

Peggy Williams: 00:29:29 Yeah. Yeah, and the care he gave to people, uh, on things that had nothing to do with their circus performance. I mean, he hired these people because he expected the excellence in performance and they ... you know, that's the expectation for The Greatest Show On Earth, to have excellent performance of whatever it is, if it's contortion or aerial or clowning or whatever. And that, you can't change the expectation. But he also expected that he could do things to make other people feel good about themselves in some small way. It was always a small way. And so everybody ... he was beloved by so many people because he paid attention to their psyche, and their children. He was a, he was ... uh, he knew all their children's names, and that was cool.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:30:16 So 48 years, you've seen a lot of circus performers.

Peggy Williams: 00:30:19 Phew. Is it that many, really?

Scott O'Donnell: 00:30:24 A lot of acts. Any standout as, as memorable, like, "Holy whooptie, I've been in this for a few years now. I never thought I'd see this."

Peggy Williams: 00:30:37 Oh, gosh. There's a lot of standouts. I, I think, um, I think someone, um, having an elephant charge fully at them by request, to step on a teeter board and throw you up into the air so that you land on their back was the first thing I saw Gunther do that was like, that thing's 10,000 pounds coming right at you and it stops and puts its foot on the teeter board to vault you on top of its back. How did you get from, "There's a teeter board, there's an elephant, I'm an acrobat," how did you get that all together to make that happen? That was visually amazing to me.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:30:37 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

- Peggy Williams: 00:31:11 And I saw him practice it. And [Tichi 00:31:13] was the name of the elephant. And, "Tichi come, Tichi come, Tichi here, Tichi here." And it just took forever for that trick. He was working on it for the next year, for the new trick, for the final trick in the menage, the elephant number. Oh, there's another word. Menage.
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:31:30 Yes.
- Peggy Williams: 00:31:30 Comes from menagerie. That means a ... in Ringling Brothers it means an elephant number, but in other circuses it means animal numbers in general. But anyway, that was amazing, because he, he was a small guy. I mean, he was physically maybe 5'9. I was taller than him.
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:31:49 Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Peggy Williams: 00:31:50 A little bit, especially with my clown shoes on, with the half inch heels. But um, uh, some other things that really, really took my breath away was seeing the first quadruple summersault by Miguel Vasquez and his brother, because I watched them rehearse at night after the show when everybody else was home and the people have come in to clean the seats and take the popcorn in the sticky goo from the floors around the arena. And they've got that net set up and it's 11:00 at night and they're practicing and they've got those spreaders and those guy wires. And they need the whole arena to practice and they're up there doing that and I see them touch but miss, touch but not catch, touch closer, closer, closer. And finally in rehearsal, they knew they could do it but they had to do it in front of a paid audience to get the acclaim. It wasn't about acclaim. They were so motivated as brothers, one flying and one catching, it was a family act, to do this thing that no man had ever done before. And when they finally did, I was like in tears, because that really moved my needle, because of their work. They could have given up. A lot of people had given up on the quad. They do a triple and it's amazing to watch. The quad is even more amazing if you can count that fast.
- And um, so that really, that really took my breath away. And then in 1986, we had something so spectacular happen at The Greatest Show On Earth and this is about cultural politics worldwide, too. In 1948 the Chinese Revolution. That happened to be the year I was born, but um, the Chinese Revolution was in full swing and they stopped sending performers to America. And there's a lot of things. I mean, they ... I think they burned books, I think they took people from the country and put them in the city, took people from the city to the country, and they

just changed up a lot of things. And we didn't have any Chinese acrobats in America for a long time.

And in 1986, Nixon had been working on opening the doors to China, which takes politically a long time, years really. Um, and Urban Feld was passed on by this time, but Kenneth was hot on the case for the Chinese acrobatic troop to come to America. It was also the time when pandas were very popular. And any baby panda that was born anywhere got international news. And so, The Greatest Show On Earth was looking at Chinese acrobats and pandas. That was the conversation, "Oh, maybe we'll get a panda." We did not get the pandas because of the issues ... to transport them was critical with temperatures and food sources and all that kind of stuff. Um, so we did not get the panda, but we got the Shanghai acrobatic troop for the first time since 1948.

So this is, in peoples' memories, in their lifetime, they'd never saw these precision balancing acts from China. And I was, um, a system performance director at that time for Mr. Baumann, and that's another PR thing he gave me. He was good at that little, uh, you know ... in their contract, in, in the Chinese, uh, acrobatic ... um, Shanghai acrobatic troop's contract, they were to go sightseeing one day a week. That was written. That was part of their, their mandatory thing, to see something in every city that we played.

So in preparation for that, um, I was told I was the one that was gonna take them. And Mr. Baumann didn't want to spend his time that way, and that meant I had to rent a bus because there was 22 of them, plus a leader, and a translator and a cook, and we all got to go. Um, and it was like, okay, so I have been around the country now for 16 years, 17 years. 1986, 17 years I've been going around the country. I know what I like to do in all these cities, but what's gonna be of interest to the Chinese acrobats, right?

And so, I had many conversations with their amazing translator and I explained ... I mean, we did everything from ... we went deep sea fishing in ... uh, we rented a boat for just the Chinese troop; a small fishing boat that would hold about 40. And we went out and they all cast and they, they're very big fish eaters, culturally. But we weren't gonna catch fish and take them back. I mean, we didn't have the coolers and all that, but we wanted the experience of fishing. In fact, we had the Miami skyline in the background. It was amazing. So we were trolling. We were all trolling. And between the 24 or five of us, we caught one fish. Someone, someone nabbed a fish. We called him Scarface

because he had a big scar on his face. He'd probably been caught and released before. The only fish that nibbled. Pulled him up, everybody got their cameras, held up the fish on the line, took a picture of that performer and that fish. Next, that performer and that fish. Next. We dipped him in the water one time to get his gills full. And so ... and then we tossed him back in. The captain, he said, "Hurry, hurry, fast, fast, fast," because the thing's like thirsty for gill work.

And so um, that was an amazing one. Another one was taking them in Fort Lauderdale to a very high end shopping mall where there was at least four shoe stores. And they had so many questions about, " Why is necessary for four shoe stores? Because one shoe store have ... can have everything. Why?" Right? I'm like, "Oh, my gosh." I learned a lot about our culture and our opulence from these people who have a market economy. They go to the store for fish, they go to the store for milk, if they even drink milk, I'm not sure. For bread, for whatever they do. So they taught me a lot about our opulence and I started really noticing things then.

But some of the really fun trips were like the Liberty Bell, uh, in Philadelphia. And no, you cannot ring it. Because a bell is to be rung, that's what their answer was. Uh, not this one. No more, because it has a crack. But we went to ... this was amazing. We went to Washington D.C. to see the Monuments when we were playing Washington. And that was an easy trip. You know, it's easy to get a bus and they give parking rights on the street. It was perfect, right? And with every one of these trips, we would go to a Chinese ... a local Chinese restaurant. I had to find one in advance. I had to make sure they had mandarin speaking wait staff. I had to be sure that they could cook off the menu to the real Chinese food, because our Chinese restaurants don't cook what they eat. There's different cuisine that they actually eat.

So we did this Monument thing, and we're standing in the Lincoln, um, um, the Lincoln Memorial. And on the wall is, "Four score and seven years ago, our fathers brought forth a new nation conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal." And it goes on, and I don't remember the rest. But the, the, the, um, the translator says ... he, he read the first line and he was gonna translate it for the Chinese people that didn't speak English, right? And he said, "Oh, oh, Miss Peggy, I know this talk. I know this talk." And I said, "You know that speech?" And so he said yes, and he turned around so he wouldn't look at it. He said the whole thing word for word. He learned it in school.

Speaker 3: 00:31:50 Wow.

Peggy Williams: 00:39:42 And I said, "Why would you Chinese students ... you didn't learn that just to be a translator?" "No, we study American history in school. We understand America from the history it has had," because it was such a young country. Not China, but we are such a young country. And he said the whole thing, word for word. And I was like ... and then he said it in Chinese, translated it for all of them, and then looked at Lincoln and ... you know, it was just like ... I was surrounded by some excellent, excellent people that ... I don't know Chinese rulers, leaders, epic eras, uh, I don't know any Chinese speeches in Chinese. You know what I mean?

Scott O'Donnell: 00:40:24 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Peggy Williams: 00:40:25 I was getting people like that in my presence all the time, that were really studied in something special besides acrobatics and aerial work. It's amazing.

And then we'd go to the ... this is great. We'd go to the restaurant. Have you, have you ever been in a group of people and you're the only one that doesn't drink? Probably not. I-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:40:25 Frequently.

Peggy Williams: 00:40:47 Frequently?

Scott O'Donnell: 00:40:48 Yeah.

Peggy Williams: 00:40:48 I know. And sometimes it's hard to get that message across that, it's okay if you drink. I choose not to drink. It's okay. I'll have water. I'm good. Chinese have some requirements that you toast a lot of things when you have a big meal.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:41:03 Yes.

Peggy Williams: 00:41:03 And especially if they really liked the food at a Chinese restaurant. And you know, I, I just, I, I paid for all this stuff. You know, I had, I had ... literally to get those people over here, my part of it was to make them have a good time outside of performing. Their coaches part was to make them perform excellently all the time. And we gave them practice time and let them do their thing. I did my thing. We had clean buses with a microphone that we went ... and you know, we weren't ever shelved for time, you know, we weren't like pushed together to accomplish too many things in a day. There was a few things.

There were quality and they were different every time. Never repeated anything, because we went to landmarks and stuff like that.

And so this one restaurant, the cook was fantastic. And he came out and he ate with the troop, because he got to cook the stuff that he knew they would love and he loved it too. And they were all ... I'm, I'm the only one out of touch. I don't speak Chinese, so I'm, I'm sitting there and I'm like, "There's an eyeball."

- Scott O'Donnell: 00:42:09 Yeah.
- Peggy Williams: 00:42:09 "There's a fin. I don't know what this is, but it's good," right? So um, I was eating and then they'd say ... one of them would say, "Wait, we have to do a toast," and he'd have a little round in the little shot glasses of whatever. I don't know, probably some thing strong, I, I guess. Right?
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:42:09 Yes.
- Peggy Williams: 00:42:26 I don't drink.
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:42:27 Very strong.
- Speaker 3: 00:42:27 Yes.
- Peggy Williams: 00:42:28 Yeah. So I don't drink, right? And they insisted that I join them, otherwise I'm insulting their culture. That's what the translator told me. And I said, "We need to talk about this, because I'm not insulting your culture, I'm honoring mine. I don't drink alcohol. I will drink a liquid and maybe Chinese lemonade or whatever, or maybe just a glass of water with lemon that I can squeeze or something, I will honor your culture. But I won't disrespect my personal culture and I don't drink." And he said, " Oh, just this one time because this man makes such special food." He was trying to talk me into it. This went on for a number of weeks and, and the performers were telling them, or at least he told me they were telling them, I don't know, that I was being offensive to their culture, that I would not toast with them, right?

And finally I explained to him the reason that I don't drink. And he went, "Ah, oh. You're a purist. Okay. Yeah, we let you drink water then." He just had to find the word for I chose not to have any alcohol at all. And he told the troop that the next time, and the next time that they ordered off the menu and the guy asked

them if they had any favorites or anything, he said, "And that little thing for everybody, but not her. She's no, she's purist," and they said it in Chinese and they protected my honor from then on.

Speaker 3:	00:43:58	Mm-hmm (affirmative).
Peggy Williams:	00:44:00	It was the weirdest thing ever.
Scott O'Donnell:	00:44:01	Mm-hmm (affirmative).
Peggy Williams:	00:44:02	I didn't know how I was gonna no offend them, but I wasn't gonna, you know, become who I'm not, so-
Speaker 3:	00:44:02	Right.
Peggy Williams:	00:44:08	Anyway, that was interesting stuff.
Speaker 3:	00:44:11	Wow.
Peggy Williams:	00:44:12	Yeah, and I had something like that with every culture.
Scott O'Donnell:	00:44:14	Mm-hmm (affirmative).
Peggy Williams:	00:44:16	Yeah, but I spent an awful lot of time with the Chinese acrobats. And then after that, each new production, we had Chinese troops from different, uh, provinces.
Speaker 3:	00:44:27	Oh.
Peggy Williams:	00:44:27	So this was from Shanghai. And then we had, oh my gosh, I can't ... probably 10, 10 or 12 different provinces, uh, sent their acrobatic troops, because this is a common thing in China. They do have highly schooled acrobats that do balancing, amazing things, swinging on logs and, uh, oh, what were some of them Scott? They, they ... stilts? Did they do uh-
Scott O'Donnell:	00:44:48	Stilts, stilts on skates.
Peggy Williams:	00:44:50	Basketball on, uh-
Speaker 3:	00:44:52	Spinning chairs with their feet and stuff.
Peggy Williams:	00:44:55	Spinning, spinning stuff, balancing,-
Scott O'Donnell:	00:44:55	Trampolines, bicycles-

Peggy Williams: 00:44:56 Juggling, all kinds of stuff. And then, those, those stilts that, uh, bounce up and down.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:44:56 Yeah, the bounce stilts.

Peggy Williams: 00:45:01 And they, they did a basketball game on bouncy stilts.

Speaker 3: 00:45:04 Yeah.

Peggy Williams: 00:45:05 Not me. So yeah, so I appreciated them all for their special niche that they, they were hired for.

Speaker 3: 00:45:05 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Peggy Williams: 00:45:12 And the last troop that we had, they did acrobatics on ice skates. And we had a part of the floor at the circus was a, like a horseshoe of ice, and then in the middle was the rubber where the horses can come in and do their thing in the middle on the rubber and not have to slide on the ice. But the acrobats, the Chinese acrobats did perform on ice. So, I don't know. It's amazing.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:45:36 Very much amazing.

Peggy Williams: 00:45:37 Yeah. I'm sorry that the, um, opportunity for performers worldwide is diminished, because a lot of them would come to Ringling first, spend two years here, and hook up with other people in other circus, uh, circus companies, and extend their visa to stay here. We could only support them while they're in their visa, while we hired them. Then we had to get them home or someone else had to take their visa support over. So ...

Scott O'Donnell: 00:46:13 That's a good transition to this question. So I'm, I'm not gonna, I'm not gonna ask about the end, because I don't feel it's the end. But I want to ask you your reflection for the current. What has America and the world these days missed, or is missing, because there is no Greatest Show On Earth?

Peggy Williams: 00:46:32 I've thought about that a lot, and especially since May 2017 when, when this whole, you know, wonderful, being able to go to the cast and get 100 hugs and see the show and marvel every time they do their amazing stuff, because I think what, what the circus artistry does for humans is to help them believe that yep, man can fly, uh, people can overcome, um, people can do things no one said they should or could do. I think that will be missing in the physical performance aspect.

There's still a lot of good things out there, but also, the relationship, um, a beneficial relationship between people of different cultures. I always call it the United Nations that works. And um, also the relationships between humans and animals. And the commitment that we all make in advance when we do work with animals is that they will be cared for. You know, that's ... everything else is behind that. They will be cared for and they will live good lives and they will be treated well, they will have veterinarians, all that kind of stuff that people worry about. That's at the front ... the forefront of that, and I think that, uh, the, the living examples of that are a little distant now from the general public. I mean, when you, when you can have the opportunity to see full grown tigers eating a big thing of meat, you know, like you have here, I'm sure they eat meat because they are tigers and you cannot, you cannot think they're not. And they ... and 200, 200 pounds a day of food for the elephants, I mean, you see that and you see how its cared for. It's amazing.

But I, I think the United Nations part ... I mean, even circuses now that don't have animals because they can't afford them or cannot tolerate the constant criticism and protests and all this stuff that has come along in the last ... you know, recent years, um, they're still a testimony to a family, whether it's a blood family OR whether it's your cousin and your sister and, and my uncle all working together to do something, whether they're selling snow cones ... you know, the people in the circus that really get no attention at all are the concession people. I don't mean because they can sell. I mean, because for instance, spinning cotton candy is an art form. Making snow cones, lovely and timely so they're not dripping and they have a beautiful shape or color to them, that's an art form. Um, you see it at fairs sometimes, where you can actually see them spin it. Not so much at, at Ringling Brothers because they would be doing it in the lobby just before people come in or whatever. They'd pre-spin the cotton candy, but those things require a lot of skill. And there's an art form to the preparation of popcorn and that odor and what it connects you with in your childhood. To me, popcorn connects me to the circus.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:49:33 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Peggy Williams: 00:49:34 So does cotton candy, and so does snow cones. And it's amazing. Um, I think those connections are gone. And I have several concerns about entertainment today, I must say. This I have to say, and it'll change in another year or two. I think that we are doing a little too hallowed to the characters that have never really existed in real life. I love, I love, um, characters, but

I think one too many flashy Star Wars kinds of things, I don't, I don't think that we're learning the examples that we need to see as humans from the technology entertainment that I've ... I've been to a couple movies lately and I found out how many individuals were randomly shot because they were there and someone had a gun in the ... whether it's an animated character, which there's a lot of that going on in the games.

But I think it's, I think it's demeaning the respect we should have from, from one to another. And I, I think those things make a lot of money. They do. But it's random and killing and destruction of other people and their works, whether it's a building, like the Skyscraper movie, or whether it's something else. Um, and I think, I think they're missing the benefit of seeing real life pursuit of excellence on a daily basis, like the circus arts bring to the audience. I just think it'll be a missing piece. It's part of humanity that's kind of diminished a little bit. So anyway, that's my take on things.

- Scott O'Donnell: 00:51:19 Yeah, I feel the same way. You know, one other observation ... and this is my own observation, but I'm curious what you think. So it felt like after 146 years, the news came of this brand that has been part of the American experience longer than Coca-Cola, baseball, and the Kentucky Derby-
- Peggy Williams: 00:51:36 Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:51:36 ... ceased operation.
- Peggy Williams: 00:51:38 Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:51:39 And there was respectful coverage of it, but it felt like it went away easily.
- Peggy Williams: 00:51:47 What, the show itself you mean? It just ... it slipped into history too easily?
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:51:50 Too easily. And the American experience and the American population.
- Peggy Williams: 00:51:55 I, I know.
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:51:55 And, and it's-
- Peggy Williams: 00:51:56 It seems like people-
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:51:57 It's puzzling to me.

Peggy Williams:

00:51:59

It, it seems like when, when people even find out now, I mean, I think there's so much media that if they didn't catch the media that talked specifically about that, a lot of people didn't even know. And I, I think, I think that we have such opulent options with entertainment that some ... I mean, a lot of people probably say something else is coming along that'll be just as good. I don't agree. I think this was very unique, the circus arts and the artistry involved in it.

But it did slip away because nobody really saw the fight to keep it alive that went on for a good two decades or more, before the plug got pulled. Um, because that all happened in court and it really revolved around animals. And a lot of people aren't even aware of Judge Sullivan or any of those other things that supported it. People weren't engaged like they would have been in yesteryear. There was no PT Barnum there doing that thing, because we don't act like PT Barnum acted anymore. You know, and I think, I think the danger of media dismissing things of value is very high. You know, I mean, we got beat up on Twitter pretty much, I think. Um, but not, not everything on Twitter is true. I mean, it's, it is what it is. It's real easy for people to have opinions if they don't have to defend something that's being ... a cost of that opinion. You know?

I take it a little bit personally because I lost my job, but I haven't lost my connection with the circus community. If anything, due to things like reunions like you've had here, where people can come back together, there's been a shift in where people live from the circus. Some of them have moved to Baraboo. There's been a lot of shifts in what people do on a daily basis who were working with the circus, and are now doing anything and everything in the Sarasota area, because they come back there, their families come back there, their kids are in school, they're excelling in school what the kids learn in the circus. I mean, we tested our circus kids. We had teachers that travel. They lived on the train, they traveled with the show. They had school everyday.

There are regulations in this country that say, if you are a child and you work in an entertainment industry, you need to go to school. I'm glad for those regulations. Regulate those things, fine. Because the kids, when they go to school and get tested ... um, for instance Jonathan Lee Iverson was the last ringmaster for Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey. Happened to be African American. He was the first African American ringmaster. Not the only, but he was also the last one who was, uh, um, African American and the last ... of the last Ringling show that closed. And his kids are thriving. His kids grew up totally back

stage at Ringling Brothers. They're used to speaking to adults in a plain and kind manner. They don't have sarcasm. They don't have some of the things ... they, they're very comfortable with people of other cultures. If someone doesn't understand what they're saying, they'll make a game and teach them how to understand what they're doing. They'll find ways. I mean, they're around creative people. Their, their teachers love them in the schools in Orlando. They wish every kid would be like that, because they come so prepared.

They also have spacial awareness, which we learn in the circus arts. You learn that you don't take a big ... you learn it also in martial arts. You don't take a big board and start swinging it around without looking to make sure nobody's gonna get hit in the head, right? And that's missing in so many playground accidents and stuff. Spacial awareness is something circus kids learn very early. They learn it by going to different buildings and tents and arenas. They learn it by trying certain things. They know what can hurt people. They're not perfect, but they ... they're by and large really good children. And very talented. So, the circus parents are doing something right, as well as performing well.

So, so anyway, I, I think that the circus, um, is not dead. I think that, um, they're all reinventing themselves a little bit here, a little bit there. And you can tell by the circus arts programs in, um, 1996 there was 15 maybe circus programs for youth in the country. Sailor Circus of course was there and Wenatchee Youth Circus of course was there, and there's a few others that are older, like 50, 60 years old. But now there's over 350 of those kinds of programs, where you as a kid can learn trapeze, you can learn juggling, you can learn unicycling, you can learn all kinds of bouncing things, and they're all over the place. At least two in every state. That's amazing. The circus arts are thriving in a different format than just in the ring. So, who knows?

I just think, uh, the Feld's extended it by 50 years. Kudos to them. And now those who learned and are now teaching all over the country, all over the world actually, are, are keeping those arts alive, because it means something when you accomplish something. And I think it's really hard to do that these days, to know that you not only need to live up to a standard, but you need to feel accomplished in doing so. And that's what the circus arts automatically teach people. Not with applause, but with, "I can do this. You can make fun of me, but I can juggle. You can't take that away from me." You juggle?

Speaker 3:

00:57:59

Scott gave me some scarves to learn how to juggle.

Peggy Williams: 00:58:01 Yeah, there you go.

Speaker 3: 00:58:01 I got them in my purse.

Peggy Williams: 00:58:04 Because it, because it's amazing once you learn how. You go, "Oh, it's not that hard," but it's ... and then know how to do it with flare. You know-

Speaker 3: 00:58:09 You can't work at Circus World and not at least be able to do a basic juggle, right?

Peggy Williams: 00:58:12 I'm, I'm thinking that's a pre-requisite, right? So I, I don't know where it's gonna go 10 years from now. I might look back and go, "Wow, wow," but I don't know what I'm saying wow at.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:58:27 So to sum it up, 48 quick, full-

Peggy Williams: 00:58:31 48 quick, quick, full, colorful-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:58:34 ... vast, colorful years.

Peggy Williams: 00:58:35 Fast moving-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:58:36 My life in the circus was ...

Peggy Williams: 00:58:38 My 48. It was fantastic. Colorful, surrounded by people of excellence and, uh, achievement. I was very lucky. Very lucky. And um, did I enjoy it coming to an end now? Not at all, because I know that in one month, 626 good friends all had the same result of, look elsewhere. You know? So, many have and many have succeeded. Many are in theater, many went back to their home countries and they're carrying on there. Some are changing industries. Yep. And uh, but they're not stopping and they're not quitting. Very few are depressed. A couple. Very few are depressed because they have so much going forward. They just have to find it. It's not easy. But-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:59:32 Well, thank you for your time.

Peggy Williams: 00:59:32 Oh-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:59:36 Thank you for your passion. Thank you-

Peggy Williams: 00:59:37 Thank you.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:59:37 ... for being a trailblazer.

Peggy Williams: 00:59:38 Ooh.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:59:40 I know. Thank you for-

Peggy Williams: 00:59:42 More, more adjectives for my list. A trailblazer.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:59:45 Trailblazer, for sure. Thank you for never giving up and having that spark that-

Peggy Williams: 00:59:45 Yeah.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:59:49 ... made us all better.

Peggy Williams: 00:59:50 When you're surrounded by these kind of people, you can't be a dud.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:59:54 That's-

Peggy Williams: 00:59:55 Because they won't keep you. The expectations are higher for the staff to keep the cast, uh, energized.

Scott O'Donnell: 01:00:02 Yeah.

Peggy Williams: 01:00:02 And keep the promotions fun and worthwhile. You know, they have to deliver results too.

Speaker 3: 01:00:08 Yeah. More fun than speech pathology, right?

Peggy Williams: 01:00:10 You know, I, I, I don't know, because I never really worked in that field professionally.

Speaker 3: 01:00:15 Right.

Peggy Williams: 01:00:15 I never, um ... I still ... if I was gonna go into that today, I have looked into it and I would have to start all over.

Speaker 3: 01:00:24 Yeah.

Peggy Williams: 01:00:24 Because stuttering therapy used to be something like this. When I was in college, Lois Nelson, who taught at the UW was the major stuttering therapy person in the United States. And she worked at UW and she wrote the first really key stuttering book that I saw. And it was things like, if you stutter, you probably came from a large family and couldn't get a word in edgewise at the table. And that was the best knowledge going, right? Now we have the brain synapses. We can measure. We know that speech ... that stuttering is something to do with

brain synapses. It's not a big family at a big table trying to get a word in edgewise.

So that ... I would have to learn so much science to even be a freshman again in that field. I would never be able to do it professionally. But that's okay, because I've done blind touch tours and I've done all kinds of different educational things. I wrote a Braille program book for about six years.

Speaker 3: 01:01:22 Wow.

Peggy Williams: 01:01:23 And I had to, I had to decode the Ringling Brothers Barnum & Bailey Program Book, which shows in pictures what the acts look like. The teeter board act, you know, some little person on the bottom and someone jumping on the top and they vault up and get caught in a three column, uh, three high column of people on the shoulders, right? That's a teeter board act.

So we used to ... when ... before Bell System became a monopoly and got disbanded, the Bell System was everywhere in America and we partnered with them. You see in the old program books the Bell family systems. And they had a great outreach program for, for, um, uh, deaf people. And they did these Braille ... they worked with American Braille Press, and they did a lot of things. And they translated, or they ... I, I translated the circus programs. I took all the adjectives out and I put the equipment in and described it like a teeter-totter that's movable, and someone gets vaulted off one of the highest ... you know, I had to rewrite so that they could read the Braille program while they're listening to the results of it.

Speaker 3: 01:01:23 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Peggy Williams: 01:02:36 And, and the Bell people came in and they would set up headphones in sections of seats. It didn't matter if it was high up, because they couldn't see, right? They were, um, uh, reading about the activity while the DJ was talking to them in their earphones, describing what he knew of it. And it was always a him. I never worked with a female DJ in the 70's. I think that's probably changed now.

Scott O'Donnell: 01:02:36 Right.

Speaker 3: 01:03:05 I think so.

Peggy Williams: 01:03:08 And then I would do the color commentary. I would say, "Well, that's called the teeter board. It looks like a teeter-totter, it's

called a teeter board. They're going up about 15 feet. They're landing on a column of about, you know, 14 feet tall," and all that kind of stuff. I did all the color commentary that I would know, and the DJ was just trying to talk his way through what he saw. And I loved doing that. And they would let me out of the show to sit with the DJ at the table that was connected to all the cords that were manually strung to all the seats. Now they do that with electronic-

Speaker 3:	01:03:41	Sure.
Peggy Williams:	01:03:41	You know, I could do it from here, you know, through a telephone or whatever. Well, not if I'm AT&T, no.
Speaker 3:	01:03:49	But how amazing that you had so many opportunities to educate and to you know-
Peggy Williams:	01:03:49	Unbelievable.
Speaker 3:	01:03:55	... really enrich lives-
Peggy Williams:	01:03:56	Unbelievable. I hope that that opportunity-
Speaker 3:	01:03:58	... that came out of the circus?
Peggy Williams:	01:03:58	... is not over.
Speaker 3:	01:03:58	Definitely not.
Peggy Williams:	01:03:59	Because the circus has so much to teach in science, technology, um, well, all the STEM stuff and STEAM stuff too, with the artistry and all that.
Speaker 3:	01:04:08	Right.
Peggy Williams:	01:04:09	So-
Speaker 3:	01:04:10	Incredible.
Peggy Williams:	01:04:10	Yeah.