

CWM Audio 78
Joe DeMike Interview, August 9, 2018
Interview Transcript

Scott O'Donnell: 00:00:01 It's August 9th, 2018. Uh, we're here at the Robert L. Parkinson Library & Research Center in Baraboo, Wisconsin at Circus World. It's my pleasure to interview, get the oral history of the life and talents of Mr. Joe DeMike. Hi there?

Joe DeMike: 00:00:20 Hi, there.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:00:20 (laughs) How are you?

Joe DeMike: 00:00:23 I'm doing great.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:00:24 Excellent. Let's start at the beginning.

Joe DeMike: 00:00:27 Okay.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:00:28 It's very good place to start.

Joe DeMike: 00:00:29 I was born in Michigan.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:00:30 There were go, that's what I want.

Joe DeMike: 00:00:32 Do you want to go back to that fun?

Scott O'Donnell: 00:00:33 Yeah, I do. Yeah. Let's, uh, let's understand pre, pre Feld Entertainment.

Joe DeMike: 00:00:40 Pre Feld Entertainment, um ...

Scott O'Donnell: 00:00:42 Where you're from and how- how did you get into-

Joe DeMike: 00:00:45 I'm from ...

Scott O'Donnell: 00:00:46 ... what you spend a large time of your life doing?

Joe DeMike: 00:00:49 I was born in Edwardsburg, Michigan, grew up there, uh, a small town, 800 people.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:00:56 And where is that in Michigan?

Joe DeMike: 00:00:57 That is just across the Indiana and Michigan State Line from South Bend.

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

Joe DeMike: 00:01:03 Um, became interested in the railroad industry-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:01:07 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Joe DeMike: 00:01:08 We lived down the street from the station there, and so I knew the local agent there I've hanged out with him once in a while. Uh, I went to Michigan State University, got a degree in marketing and transportation distribution, came out of college, work for various short lines for about 10 years and-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:01:26 And for those that might be listening that don't know what a short line is-

Joe DeMike: 00:01:30 Uh, small, small railroads.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:01:32 Okay.

Joe DeMike: 00:01:33 Uh, 100, 200 miles in that range, that, um, during that time there was a lot of turmoil in the industry and carriers were coming and going pretty quickly under the new regulations the government had. So you could, you could go into the business and go out of the business pretty quick for fill-ins when the majors were getting rid of pieces of track. But it was volatile and I think I went through eight or nine different railroads in about 10 years. So was not stable.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:02:10 And what was your job at those railroads?

Joe DeMike: 00:02:13 Um, well, I worked in a, as a train man, conductor and an engineer, I was a station agent for awhile, I was a block operator for awhile. Um, at the end I went into the marketing department, sales and marketing and I was a pricing manager in Chicago and at a railroad that was in financial difficulty. Geez, surprise! (laughs)

Scott O'Donnell: 00:02:38 And, uh, just like the circus, you started at the shovel well.

Joe DeMike: 00:02:42 Yeah, pretty.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:02:43 And did sort of every, every layer of the rail.

Joe DeMike: 00:02:46 Yeah. And, uh, the company was in trouble, handwriting was on the wall and so I was asking around about jobs and my counterpart, the Illinois Central Railroad said, uh, "Yeah, there's this chemical plant in Memphis looking for traffic manager and

Ringling Bros." And I'm thinking, you know, I pictured this chemical plant, you know, with the, the, uh, yellow cream tile on the outside and the pipe sticking out with some kind of fog coming out of it outside your office window, which probably wasn't the case, but you know, you know how your mind works.

- Joe DeMike: 00:03:23 And, uh, I was in Chicago and what little I knew about Ringling was that they were in Florida. And so I thought, "Well, you know, why not give a similar resume, what, what can happen with that?" So about three weeks later, Bill Missouri calls me up and says, um, they'll be in Chicago when I interview you. So we had a, a dinner interview in Chicago and-
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:03:48 And Bill Missouri is who?
- Joe DeMike: 00:03:50 Oh Bill Missouri at the time was the director of transportation.
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:03:53 Okay. For Ringling Bros I guess I should fill that part in.
- Joe DeMike: 00:03:58 Um, we had dinner, he said that you should come to Washington DC was where you'll be, which wasn't quite what I had in mind. (laughs) Uh, at the time the corporate headquarters was in, uh, northwest DC by American University and we went and visited and thought, "Well, I don't really don't want to live in Washington, don't know about working for a Circus. But, uh, it's very unique. I'd never forgive myself if I didn't go try that for two, three years and I'll go back in the rail industry," and then almost 29 years later I was still there.
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:04:39 Yeah. The Circus has that effect, I feel. So the-
- Joe DeMike: 00:04:44 For the right people it, it does.
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:04:46 Yes.
- Joe DeMike: 00:04:46 Yes.
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:04:47 That's a fair observation-
- Joe DeMike: 00:04:48 Yes.
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:04:49 ... quantify that.
- Joe DeMike: 00:04:51 Um, it's a very entrepreneurial type of business. It's a no fail kind of business. It can be a high pressure business, but it can be a very rewarding business. So there's, there's a lot to it and if you last more than a couple of years, you'll be there a long time.

But it, it's very much like the railroad, it'll weed people out real fast. It takes a certain personality to be in there. And as, as you've seen with the people you've worked with over the years, um, they are very bright, very can do kind of people. It's a, it's a very, um, uh, I can't think of the right word. The environment is that collects those kinds of people-

- Scott O'Donnell: 00:05:55 Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Joe DeMike: 00:05:56 ... achievers and ...
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:05:59 Yeah, I gotcha. Okay. So you were hired, uh, for Ringling Bros, what was your title? What was your job description?
- Joe DeMike: 00:06:06 Transportation manager railroads. I was a one man show in the production company moving trains around. So as long as things went well, you were just, you know, I talked to bill, you know, and, uh, but, uh, they didn't want to know you existed less. (laughs) So yeah, I do.
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:06:30 So let's dial back a little bit. You say moving trains around. What does that mean for those that might not know or understand the Ringling Bros trained legacy or train operations?
- Joe DeMike: 00:06:43 Okay. So dating back to 1872, uh, P.T. Barnum and Coup decided that they needed a, a good logistics plan and they came up with the unit train, a single train that they owned, that moved to Circus around. That continued on up until 2017 with Ringling Bros and still continue to straights the carnival train. Um, when I came, the show was pretty much self-contained on the train in '88, um, we were running with a 45 and men they're testing my memory. 45 and 46 cars, I think we have to correct that, but in that range ...
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:07:34 On both units?
- Joe DeMike: 00:07:36 On both, one unit was 45, one of them was 46. I think the blue was the longer. So there's two trains. The tour basically followed a year apart, it was a two-year tour, so they would do the west coast the first year. Both, both shows were in the east and the spring. In, uh, May-ish around Memorial Day, the West Coast tour go to California and do the West Coast. The year one tour, the year two tour would, would do the Midwest, Texas and, you know, the upper and lower Midwest, they would follow each other a year apart. Um, and it continued that way for pretty much my entire career. We'd have a, a general basic tour of, of the longterm dates, the New Yorks, the Denvers, the

Chicagos, the Dallas, the Houston's that you'd play the same week every year.

- Joe DeMike: 00:08:36 And then the fill end dates that went in between. So my job was to facilitate the movement of each train, um, when I started the railroad industry was had more carriers than it does now. So we were doing around 40, 45 contracts a year with each one contract for each carrier to move the train. So you'd negotiate the contracts and then plan the operation.
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:09:09 By moving the train that's contracting the locomotive or two to hook onto the private trainers?
- Joe DeMike: 00:09:15 Well, that's a little more than that.
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:09:17 I had a feeling it was.
- Joe DeMike: 00:09:19 Um, there's ... We'll talk about the carriers first.
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:09:25 Sure.
- Joe DeMike: 00:09:26 Okay. So the first step was to take the tour, figure out, um, how it could be routed over each carrier. The carriers are territorial. So for instance, if you're going to Tampa, you have one carrier CSX Transportation that goes there. So that's, that's kind of a given. If you're going to Dallas, at that time we had a half a dozen carriers that went into Dallas, so it would then come down to where you're coming from, timing, timing was like number one.
- Joe DeMike: 00:10:08 Then operations meaning can they get you there without messing up the train? Can they do they have a place to park of the train and then price. So we'd start out with looking at the tour, planning out how it could happen, looking to see if there are competitive ways to pit one carrier against the other, and then we'd go out for bid. So we'd go to each carrier and say, "Okay, here are the moves that you could handle this year. Send us your price met."
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:10:43 And when from a timing point of view would you do that? Would you be working on next year's tour the previous year? Or was it-
- Joe DeMike: 00:10:50 Um ...
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:10:52 ... a month lead time?

- Joe DeMike: 00:10:53 Well, from the carrier's perspective we're about six months out. The tour, the tour was not concrete up until that point and even may still change even after that, so that the contracts had to be flexible enough that you could change them if you had to. But about six months out as far as the carriers. So once we had their numbers, we'd put it all together, look for the best alternatives that again fit the timing that we had to meet, and then the price.
- Joe DeMike: 00:11:29 So, so now you got the contract, you know you're going to use, then you start working on the operation side. So about four or five months out, I would develop the schedules for the moves and we tried to always be conservative. So usually, um, most routes I'd figure 20 to 21 miles an hour average over the whole tour or over the whole, the whole jump, the whole move. Uh, it doesn't sound like much but the railroad, most railroads or single tracks, you're meeting trains going in opposite directions. You may sit in a meeting for three hours waiting for traffic going the other way.
- Joe DeMike: 00:12:17 So you, you need to plan it so that they can do it and you can out, and you can actually make the moves that you're telling the comp, telling our company you can make. You don't want to sec and move from Baraboo to Chicago in 20 hours when you know it's going to take 30 or 35. So that, that had to fall into the whole thing. So we'd go out with their schedules, um, their operations people review them, usually get it back in about a month or so, and they would say, "Yeah, this is good, you need to add some time here."
- Joe DeMike: 00:12:55 Occasionally, he'd say you need to take out some time here. So it, it kind of went back and forth both ways, but surprisingly I had a lot of leeway with actually giving them the schedules and getting their feedback back instead of going the other way. But with the railroads, they deal in days not in hours. So if you'd let them plan it instead of taking 30 hours, it'd be three days.
- Joe DeMike: 00:13:22 So, you had to be proactive in that respect and they, they knew the special requirements we needed them, they would work with that.
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:13:34 And what would some of the special requirements be?
- Joe DeMike: 00:13:36 Well, mostly it's traveling in a tighter timeframe and what they would normally do. But you're, you're running as a unit train so, and you're not going into any yards, the train would go from a to B and never get yard, and then we would plan the water stops. Back then the water stops were really water stops, where

the train would pull into a station, they'd get the hoses out, they'd get the, the, um, the, uh, buckets and pails and trash cans and all that, uh, to, um, actually water the animals as we were sitting there and move back and forth.

- Joe DeMike: 00:14:18 Um, as time went on, um, we had a big tanks on the stock cars. It was getting harder and harder to get water and route for one thing. And when the passenger went away, those facilities went away too as, as time went on, roads didn't need them. And so it became much more difficult. But, um, probably in the, and I'd say mid '90s at the latest, we could go three, maybe four days without actually taking on water. They had enough capacity on the stock cars to do that.
- Joe DeMike: 00:14:54 We'd still stop, but we didn't have to have the facilities anymore. We more self-contained so that, that made the operation for the railroad more palatable. Then you had to consider the unloading operations on each end. Um, that was, uh, a very much a sales job to the railroad. Um, in the '80s they had extra track by the mid to late '90s they usually had to give up something they use to make it work. So when we come into town, they would take a piece of yard that they normally used and they would put our train on it for a week or occasionally two weeks.
- Joe DeMike: 00:15:42 So it became more of a sales job, uh, a, uh, got to make it happen job and-
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:15:51 Yeah, it's one of another questions I was thinking, was it harder to move the train or part of the train?
- Joe DeMike: 00:15:57 Um, once you had the parking, that part of it would go for a long time. So I suppose it was more difficult getting the parking but once you had it and people agreed to it, you had that, well you did it last year, we can do it again type thing, you know, so that- that a lot of times the same place would, would, there were a few places that we use the same place the entire time I was there, other places you would like scrambled every year.
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:16:36 Geographically in the country. Where is there a part of the country where the train was going in and you're like, "Oh God. Here comes the tough months? The tough weeks"?
- Joe DeMike: 00:16:45 New York. New York. Absolutely. Uh, the, the New York area is the most complicated and hardest to deal with. Um, the least amount of capacity in the highest amount of business in the railroad, railroad side. Um, I forced to play at a Long Island, we

had to go through Penn station. Um, the train was always kept under the- that- the clearance profile through Penn station is probably the most restrictive in the country. And you're running over, I think the Canton is about 20,000 volts.

- Joe DeMike: 00:17:27 So the highest, the train could be as 14, six from the top of the rail to the top of whatever's on the training, 14 feet, six inches. One trip through there that they forgot to take the antenna off the show managers car, the radio antenna. And it made just enough difference that, um, the train was going through the tubes under the, under the Canton area to the electrified cable over the top to run the trains. And they got it off an alarm that has stopped the train inspector because if something happened with the, we weren't, something happens with electricity, we're running with electric engines. So it, it shut off the power it was the ground or something and they couldn't find anything wrong and they went on.
- Joe DeMike: 00:18:14 Well when they got to the other side and went to unload the train to the dashboard of the show managers car was completely blown out, where that power surges come through the antenna into the radio and, so it was a very critical to get through there. Um, you had to hit the windows right there- there were operating windows when they would run anything other than passenger trains.
- Joe DeMike: 00:18:40 So when you came in, um, we would, we would come in on whatever freight carrier and they'd get us to Amtrak, um, in New Jersey. Then they could take you through Penn station out to queens where you'd pick up the Long Island road and then go on out to, to Uniondale.
- Joe DeMike: 00:19:04 So you had from about 10:00 AM until about 2:00 PM, and then you had from about 10:00 PM till around 3:30 AM when you could actually make that move. So from, you had to be in position to get on Amtrak and leave by 10:00 AM or 10: 00 PM and complete your move through Penn station, change to the Long Island road which involve changing locomotives, changing personnel all that, and then making your way out to, you know, to where we spotted in Queens or to, to Uniondale in that timeframe. If you missed those ... if you missed one window, you had to wait for the next one. So it was a big deal.
- Joe DeMike: 00:19:56 And there were times that we did miss it, there were times that we came from somewhere along the way, that are somewhere far away trying to hit that window. So it, it could get a nail bitey, I guess is a good, good description.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:20:17 And I have to believe if I remember when I was on the unit, we played Bridgeport.

Joe DeMike: 00:20:22 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Scott O'Donnell: 00:20:23 But I want to say that train parked far away from Bridgeport.

Joe DeMike: 00:20:28 The train, the coaches parked in New Haven.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:20:31 Yeah.

Joe DeMike: 00:20:33 The stocks in the flats actually did go to Bridgeport. They would, um, in New Haven, we are on a Conrail or now CSX after the, after the change in consolidation, or whatever. But you had to get on Amtrak even though the freight carrier was moving, you were on Amtrak and you had the same kind of windows you had to deal with there, that they would actually allow a freight train to operate over the northeast corridor. That would be the main line between New York and Boston that ran between Bridgeport and New Haven and then on to Boston. So you were in a 110 mile an hour corridor running a freight train that probably didn't exceed 40 or 50.

Joe DeMike: 00:21:19 And, uh, the safety aspects of all that, I mean, it's, it's safe is just they take a lot of precautions when they do that. And, and then of course when we're unloading our personnel were away from there. But, uh, the, uh, and then when we played, um, Trenton had the same issues made a short move on Amtrak. We actually start on Amtrak next to the corridor for a couple of years, and then we're able to move to Morrisville with the train. So the train was no longer next to 110 mile on our main line there.

Joe DeMike: 00:21:54 Uh, San Diego was another one that you had to hit the right times. Um, Austin, Texas of all places. We were on a, um, short line there, but it was also a, uh, commuter line that was owned by the I think state of Texas or the county there or whatever. But you had very strict windows you had to meet there. We actually would load the show out and we'd have to sit until Monday night before we could get the train out because of it.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:22:27 What was 24 hours in the life of your position?

Joe DeMike: 00:22:36 Twenty four hours?

Scott O'Donnell: 00:22:37 Your average day, I want to be consistent.

- Joe DeMike: 00:22:40 Went to the office and turned on the computer (laughs) and get on the phones and, um, there's probably not too many. Well, there's a lot of average days, um, on the phone with the carriers. It's all, it's all relationships as you know in any business.
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:22:57 Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Joe DeMike: 00:22:58 Any business should do it from selling pencils to moving trains at its people and relationships. So you would, uh, be maintaining those relationships in with my in-house customers. We looked at, at the Circus as our customer. Um, so you had in-house relationships and external relationships. And the in-house relationships where sometimes as difficult as the external. One of the, one of the big hurdles was marketing and where they played and when they played versus what it took to get there.
- Joe DeMike: 00:23:43 And as I look back on it, I actually had a lot of power in that discussion because we would start looking at tours four and five years out. And I would do a, what I like into a time budget. So we're, we're going to close in Chicago on Sunday night with a 5:30 PM show and they want to open in Dallas on Tuesday with the 7:30 PM show.
- Joe DeMike: 00:24:18 So we would calculate how many hours it would take the train to get there and everybody's got to have a spreadsheet, you know? So I had this spreadsheet that would show when the show was going to close, how many hours it took to get there, when they projected it was going to open, animals stops in between and the hours it took for those. And you got down to the Internet, so the magic number was you have X number of hours to set up the show before the doors open. And you know, they want to open on Tuesday, you're not going to get there until Wednesday morning or Thursday morning or whatever.
- Joe DeMike: 00:24:59 And so that was something that was discussed several years out and then a year out, and then six months out, and (laughs) you, you know the drill.
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:25:12 Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Joe DeMike: 00:25:15 Um, but then marketing had to make a, a financial and operational decision on where they wanted to cut, or if they wanted to, to change. And sometimes we would look at the tour and say, you know, we're backtracking, do you really want to do this and here's what it's going to cost you to do it. We'd also throw real money numbers at those projections as well as, as it, as the tour began to really develop and it got closer.

- Joe DeMike: 00:25:42 I saw something really weird, you know, um, you're, you're making a, a 1500 mile trip for a Saturday, so Friday, Saturday, Sunday date, is this really what you want to do? And here's what it costs. So those discussions happened and sometimes you could make a change in the tour that would, would reduce your transportation budget by some big numbers.
- Joe DeMike: 00:26:16 So there was the in-house thing going on in the external thing, and, um, the animal department was one of our customers in, in corporate. So Debbie Fehrenbach, um, she was the permit person and, you know, early on here's where we're going to make these service stops. It's not so much just to stop and water the animals. But when we were trips over 750, 800 miles sometimes on mileage, sometimes based on timing that we would stop and unload the animals and walk them around and rest and all that, which you've got to have a place to do.
- Joe DeMike: 00:26:57 But then depending on what state you're in, you may have to have a permit for that. You may have to have shooters there, you may have to have whatever you have to have one in the show is in town. So those things don't just happen over night either. So we had to plan for that.
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:27:13 Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Joe DeMike: 00:27:16 Am I rambling?
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:27:18 No.
- Joe DeMike: 00:27:18 Okay.
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:27:18 Not at all. Uh, let's talk a little bit more about rail operations. So you're in the home out, what did the breadth or, um, sort of chain of command of the Ringling rail operations like you interacted from the Home Office to whom on the show, or who was your correspondence with?
- Joe DeMike: 00:27:39 Hey, well, my main context with the show managers and the train masters on the show itself. Um, as far as communication for pla- for planning purposes, show manager, train master, um, the marketing folks in the office on the road. It was, you know, those guys. From a communication standpoint, like the- the paperwork you guys have seen here, the schedules and, uh, the synopsis, those meant to everybody. In-house, um, the show management, um, various departments, you know, the animal department, the, the pie car had to know where the train was going to be, um, the promotions people needed to know where

to pick up people and where the train is going to be parked this year. The schedule when it was getting in.

- Joe DeMike: 00:28:34 So it was, that stuff was widely distributed on the shows. They used to post them in the pie car and I forget how, how widespread that was. It was more the synopsis more than the transportation orders that, that had a wider distribution. Um, in corporate, uh, man it went all over the place. Marketing got it. Um, Kenneth Feld got them, um, purchasing ... they use that stuff all the time. I was in a lot of, I talked to them a lot of, you know, if they were trying to work further out than I was. You know, I would give him a heads up on, is the train in the same place it was last year? Am I having trouble there or whatever?
- Joe DeMike: 00:29:21 And you know, if something would change, I'd have to let them know they're sitting on dumpsters and they're setting up food deliveries in there. You- you name it, they're setting it up and you know, materials for the trains coming in, sometimes stuff for the arena be delivered at the train for whatever reason, all that stuff was going on. So the- the location of where we parked and about when we got there was important information that, that went around, um, back in the, back in the day.
- Joe DeMike: 00:29:56 This, this is well, uh, the younger people will not understand this, but back in '88, '89, '90 when cell phones were new to the business, you could not call somebody's number and get them. So I had this book was about three inches thick and it was a cell phone roamers guide. So this, this information went on every synopsis. So in Oklahoma City there were three numbers you could dial a local landline number in Oklahoma City.
- Joe DeMike: 00:30:35 So if you wanted to get, um, uh, Jeff Steel or Tim Holland cell phone, you hoped that they were in Oklahoma City, you would dial a local number in Oklahoma City? No, I think you'd get as three beeps then you dial their cell phone number and if they're in range of whoever that carrier is at that number went to their phone. Does that make sense to you what I'm telling? (laughs)
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:31:07 Yeah.
- Joe DeMike: 00:31:07 That was one of my jobs was to do that. And the other thing was, um, the medical information and every time before nationwide health insurance and all that, we had a vet, a dentist, a doctor, um, was three or four different things that had to be arranged. A lot of times the promoter would make most of those arrangements and then the, the veterinary staff would give you that, but he had to assemble all that information

and that was, in this little Bible that came out on two sheets of paper.

- Scott O'Donnell: 00:31:43 Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Joe DeMike: 00:31:45 Then that information also went to the railroad. So it would go to the local guys in Oklahoma City would say, "Okay, here's, here's where we agreed to park to train for a month out, if something's changed we need to know it, we don't want to show up." And have you guys surprised and have us surprised by scratching their heads saying, "What are we going to do with this thing now?" Here's a mile long train, we don't have a place to put it. So, so that was kind of the reminder that we're coming. Then two weeks out in the mail they would get the schedule, and that will go to their corporate guys and the, the division there, there are structured in regions so they have corporate divisions are more local and then the, the terminal people who are actually in the town here went good.
- Joe DeMike: 00:32:37 So that's, that was the communication in as far as, um, the paperwork and ... But I never answered your question about 24 hours in life. One week, you're- you're traveling trying to solve problems in other cities, um, you're working on budgets, you're working on, on timing, you're developing schedules, you're developing routes. Um, no two days were the same and that's probably how I was able to stay amused for almost 29 years in the job doing the same thing at the same company.
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:33:21 Was there somebody in your position before you?
- Joe DeMike: 00:33:24 Yeah, a guy named Mike Martino who, uh, he was there for, hm, maybe four or five years and, uh, the job was much different then. Um, when I came they actually added in the international department. So prior to that, um, Bill Missouri we talked about it before, Mike Martino I think it was just the two of them, did all the ice to the trucking on the ice, the busing, although there weren't as many ice shows then, I think they were running maybe two, but they would go international as well. So they were handling the international aspects of it as well as moving the train around.
- Joe DeMike: 00:34:14 So it was a, a whole different, probably very intense ballgame. I'm sure the Bill probably got pulled into a lot of what I ended up doing on the rail side at that time. He started running winter quarters done in, and, uh, then isn't doing transportation at the same time. But as the company grew, they needed more, so they, they added an international transportation group with a couple of people that, um, moved the ice shows internationally.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:34:47 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Joe DeMike: 00:34:48 And then when, uh, when the Circus would move internationally, they would handle the, the aspects of crossing the border, the carnegies or the, usually have moved on a carnegie, it was going in and coming back out. Um, they would handle that aspect of it. I would handle the operations with the railroads. And, you know, you had-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:35:10 [crosstalk 00:35:10] in my mind. So when he went down to Mexico what- what does that look like with the train? Is it a different same principle or is it a different experience in a different country for real?

Joe DeMike: 00:35:22 Oh it's, it's very much the same. Yeah. Um, the first time we went, which I think was '95, '96, somewhere in there. At that time, the railroads and Mexico were owned by the federal government. So if you can imagine dealing with a million government officials that didn't speak your language, that's kind of what it was.

Joe DeMike: 00:35:58 But as far as the operation of the railroad, um, from Laredo, Texas to Mexico City, heavy haul, main line, um, 70 mile an hour railroad that, that, uh, you know, rivaled anything we used in the US. The, the other side of the coin is they did everything on typewriters, um, they still had a telegraph office with, with telegraph keys and sounders and all that stuff like you see in the western movies. Um, the same with, with it, um, the government officials at the border. You'd walk into their office and there'd be this typewriter sitting on his back so that they have room to, to write and then they would flip it down on, so it's four feet and type away and put it back up. But it, it was ...

Scott O'Donnell: 00:36:52 So when the train would move across the boarder, would you be there?

Joe DeMike: 00:36:57 Yes, most of the- well sometimes just as, as time got, as we got more into a rhythm of it in the later years I would be there sometimes and sometimes not. Um ...

Scott O'Donnell: 00:37:09 You guys got to be a lot of work to move a couple hundred people and animals across the, from one nation to another.

Joe DeMike: 00:37:16 It's, it's, it's choreographed just like to show, it has to be. So going, going either into Canada or Mexico, it's pretty much the same process, the requirements might be different. So things you'd run into are like, "Oh, there is a, uh, a quine disease in

Mexico right now. So the horses coming back out of Mexico and the US have to go into a two-week quarantine." So one year coming out of Mexico, they pulled half the horses out of the show and put them in quarantine for two weeks.

- Joe DeMike: 00:38:06 And then when we crossed the border, those horses went with the unit and the rest of them went into quarantine. So the show was never without horses, just with less for those couple of weeks. One year we had that, other years, different things, um, with the people. Um, that was handled by legal and you ran into a lot of problems with people coming into US, performers into the US with their work visa, when they left the country and came back. You were pretty much starting over again and you had to have work visas in Mexico. And after, right after 9/11, we had some nationalities on the show that were on the watch list.
- Joe DeMike: 00:38:57 So it was, it wasn't impossible, but it was challenging. One of my jobs was to, um, I took a group of, um, I think they were from Morocco, but they had to go to the border, not on the train, they had to go to the border off the train, do an exit interview with the, with the, uh, immigration officials. And then they had to stand and watch them walk across the, the bridge, the real grants there in Laredo. They had to walk across the river while these guys watched.
- Joe DeMike: 00:39:39 And then we met them on the other side and took him back to the train when it, when it cleared. As far as the train and the equipment, one, one of the big problems was if they wanted to look in a wagon, it's, uh, the way the trains loaded, you can't look into a wagon. They're smashed up on the flat cars and there's no getting in. So they, it was worked out ahead of time, they'd go in bond to Mexico City and the, the customs people would be there to inspect what they wanted to inspect. Um, the animals that was a big deal as well.
- Joe DeMike: 00:40:20 Um, the elephants, the cats moved on site's permits, which is the convention for the international trade of endangered species. If I got that all right.
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:40:34 You're good.
- Joe DeMike: 00:40:35 Um, it took months, I mean, thi- this process would start out a year ahead of time at least to put this all together, getting them out, getting them back in. So you had to have USDA permit, you had to have USDA and Mexican counterpart inspectors at the border. I think between the two countries we had 11, 12 agencies involved, um, but we made trips down on both sides

built relationships there. They, they actually would bring, um, Mexican officials into the US to inspect, um ...

- Scott O'Donnell: 00:41:22 What about security for parking a train in a foreign country, is that are of concerned or something you had to do with?
- Joe DeMike: 00:41:33 The railroads in Mexico we were already dealing with that. It's, it's not like here in the US, um, when you go to a railroad yard in Mexico, it is very secure. They have, they have their own issues there and, um, you've been to Mexico, right? Um, we had a meeting at, in Taco Yard in Mexico City. It's, it's a very large railroad yard, has an inter- has the facility where they unload sea containers and put them on trains and all that stuff.
- Joe DeMike: 00:42:13 So there's a lot of, a lot of valuable commodities moving through. The thing is totally walled in you, you can't just get into it. So we hired a van to take our group down to this meeting at the railroad yard and we showed up like 20 minutes early. So we're at this big iron gate and we just stopped there.
- Joe DeMike: 00:42:38 And within 30 seconds there's four guys with rifles pointed at the van, "What are you guys doing here?" And we were on the street, we were not even in the yard. We were out in the street. So as far as being on the train, you're very safe between the train and the venue. That could get iffy, you know, you had to, uh, we instructed our employees to call for cabs, don't flag cabs on the street and we stood a few people who took the beetle cabs and we got, got mugged.
- Joe DeMike: 00:43:15 Um, but no, uh, other than that, there were not a whole lot of problems. And of course the arenas, they had their security issues as well. The one thing I did the last time is in Monterrey at the show though, the activists had pretty much free reign of the sidewalks. You walk through a tunnel of people to get in and out of the building for the, for the people buying tickets and all that. But it's a very costly, very time consuming and resource using proposition. We did Canada a few times, um, Mexico, we tried various ways of getting in and out of there. Um, one year we only took equipment down, we didn't take the whole train, and flew people in and used hotels.
- Joe DeMike: 00:44:12 Um, it's tough market. I think Mexico is what the second largest city in the world. Mexico City or something like that. I mean, it's, it's huge. But, um, the local circuses would all jump in on the Ringling publicity and there's various schools of thought about that, you know, um, I think Atlanta that happened and there was a lot of PR about the battle of the circuses, you know, Chalets here-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:44:47 Universal.

Joe DeMike: 00:44:47 Universal-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:44:47 The Apple and-

Joe DeMike: 00:44:50 ... and Ringling all in town together. And what, who's going to go to all these shows and you got so much PR, I think everybody did good.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:44:58 Right? So Ringling had a, a very decent track record for safety on the rail, but-

Joe DeMike: 00:45:07 Absolutely.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:45:07 ... at some rail incidents probably how did-

Joe DeMike: 00:45:13 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Scott O'Donnell: 00:45:14 ... how did those affect your life in your world when those unfortunate, unexpected events would happen?

Joe DeMike: 00:45:22 Well, to your first comment, Ringling was very dedicated to safety. Um, there's several good reasons for that, um, if you had a problem with the car, it was somebody's house or a piece of the show that you are leaving on a sighting somewhere to get repaired and then catch up. Um, that happened with, um, [inaudible 00:45:52] car coming out of Salt Lake and route to Denver and he had, uh, the wheel, the wheel, piece of the wheel broke off or something.

Joe DeMike: 00:46:13 It was something that caused his car to get set off on a siding and left, and we had to repair it and catch it up. Um, we had the pie car derail in Doswell Virginia on a switch, it was the only car that had a problem, but it, it, it derailed one truck and it hit a great cross in about 100 yards down the trek and pop back up, but they somebody, I guess people in the pie car company realized that had happened. And we ended up having to set the pie car off there to be inspected and then catch up, but I think the one you're really referring to is Lakeland.

Joe DeMike: 00:46:51 Um, Lakeland, we were in the process of, of getting rid of cars that had the problem that caused the Lakeland derailment. So there's two types of braking systems on rare road cars. One of them is called on tread where if you watch a freight train, you'll see that as well where the brake shoes, when they- when they put on the brakes on the train, the brake shoes rub on the

wheel itself. And what that does is it causes that wheel to get hot and get cold. You know, when the shoes are rubbing on that wheel, the wheel heats up and when they released and it will cool back down again and then cycles through that. And the metals designed for that, but there was a derailment in auto train, uh, probably in the mid '80s that was caused by an on tread break overheating wheel, and the, the problem was there was a, a, a serial number stamped in the wheel near the top edge of the wheel.

Joe DeMike: 00:48:20 So that stamping caused the weakness in the wheel and that heating and cooling eventually caused a crack in that wheel, and that wheel then, um, had a, had a sudden defect that caused the train to derail. And Bill Missouri going back to him his, he has an engineering background, he a mechanical background and Ringling had a few cars left that head on thread breaks.

Joe DeMike: 00:48:53 So there was no real reason to just willy-nilly pull them off. But in the recycling program, those cars were being replaced a couple of, of time. And I think we were down to maybe four or five cars left that had these on tread brakes. All the car that caused the leak and derailment was one of those cars. And the problem with that heating and contracting is the flaws in the middle of the wheel are internal. There's no way you can tell if there's a problem without a destructive test, which means you cut the wheel apart and look inside and then you can see if the metal is fatigued or not.

Joe DeMike: 00:49:40 So that derailment, um, it was coming out of winter quarters. So Lakeland, Florida, um, the train was going through town and about a mile and a half maybe from where the train actually piled up that wheel failed and the, the one, the one wheel that failed broke into four pieces. And when we found the pieces in the ditch, so that, that was the, uh, trailing truck, the trailing set of wheels on one of the cars.

Joe DeMike: 00:50:27 And the derailment code that would not have been as serious it was except for where it, where it actually happened and what the train went through town. Uh, there were several people who made calls to the railroad and the railroad mistakenly thought it was a different train that had the problem, so they were trying to get ahold of a train that was in the plant city area going north instead of the plant city area going east. It was the train, uh, went east out of, um, Lakeland. Uh, there's power plant out there and the sidetrack comes off the main line and makes a sharp right hand turn in 90 degree turn.

- Joe DeMike: 00:51:15 Had it just been a sighting, it would not have been the catastrophic event that we had. But what happened was that the, the lead wheels of that one car went straight. The trailing wheels of that car took that right turn, so you ended up with the car turning to its side in this switch, and that caused the other cars too, then telescope into it and, you know, the resulting fatalities and all that.
- Joe DeMike: 00:51:47 I was, I was at Dallas Airport that morning, um, we were having meetings in Orlando and a few of us were already in route down there for those meetings. And my pager went off, so I went to the payphone and it was, um, Roy Fulgurant of CSX, he was the vice president operations in the operation center there. And, um, he said, uh, that he had bad news, the train had derailed and all he knew was there was multiple fatalities.
- Joe DeMike: 00:52:22 So you know, your heart kinda misses a few beats, not called corporate, in the meantime they canceled my flight so I was stuck in Dallas for a while and, uh, but Dallas is one of the first airports to have the airport channel. And after I finished making the calls, I turned around and there it was on the airport channel already.
- Joe DeMike: 00:52:47 So it was, it was not a, not a good day. Um, I did make it down onto Lakeland that night, we, we spent a lot of hours working on what to do, how to do it. Um, that evening, the, the front of the train proceeded onto this, this happened in the middle of the train. It was at the tail end of the coaches and the two FC, the two concession cars derailed as well. But the flatcars were on track and, uh, the coaches and the animals, most of the coaches and the animals are on track.
- Joe DeMike: 00:53:27 So those proceeded to Orlando, um, because of where we were and the way CSX lays in Florida. The flatcars were pulled back to plant city and then they went up to Baldwin, which is just south of the Georgia border into Jacksonville and they came down into Orlando from the north. So the show was there, um, we missed opening night. That was the only performance. Um, the company was amazing. Interestingly, just the backup, we had had some derailment contingency meetings over the years to kind of have some what of a plan in place, if anything actually did happen.
- Joe DeMike: 00:54:16 Um, they bought tons of luggage, we had people in hotels, um, everybody came together. The, the railroad it when they, when they clear up a derailment, they're not concerned about the car and all they're concerned about is opening the railroad up. So they came in with, um, sidewinder, bulldozers, and just tipped

every-, everything that was still upright was just tipped on its side and pulled in a ditch.

- Joe DeMike: 00:54:49 The other complication was, um, next to the railroad on that same right of way was a, um, nine-inch jet fuel pipeline and a 12-inch gasoline pipeline that went from gasoline distribution in Florida, comes into the port of Tampa and barges from Houston, they come through the inter coastal and then it's distributed there by pipeline to various places with these ... The jet fuel pipeline went straight to Orlando Airport and the, the gasoline went to some tank farm over in that area. But it's in sand three-feet below the ground and the trains laying on top of it.
- Joe DeMike: 00:55:32 So that, that complicated things just a little bit as well. So the cars that were on that was the north side of the tracks, the cars that were on that side were drug far enough off that they were off of the pipeline. The pipeline came in and replaced, um, about 200 yards of pipe because they couldn't depend on it not being damaged even though may or may not have been. So after all that was done, I think the show, uh, it might've still been in Orlando. It may have actually been some said we played Daytona or someplace after that, I remember right.
- Joe DeMike: 00:56:16 But the, the residents who were affected were bused back and we, we hired the same guys that tip the cars over to set them back up right. And they spent the money to do that, they bust everybody in to get what they wanted to salvage out of the cars. So they had the luggage, the company supplied, they could salvage what they wanted. Then they made a list of what they'd lost and, and, uh, risk management stirred writing them checks. So they were taken care of pretty quickly.
- Joe DeMike: 00:56:47 Um, then we started recovering from it. So they were buying coaches, um, started rebuilding them, they hired people. We, we bought a lot of equipment and Palmetto, the shop went from a couple of year to ... and I think they were turning out three or four cars in about six months. So it- it took about maybe 18 months to fully recover from that. Um, you know, certainly the desks took a lot longer than that to recover from. It could have been a lot worse than it was, but the, the silver lining is that the, the trains were improved dramatically. The few cars that had those brake systems on them went away.
- Joe DeMike: 00:57:45 Um, the NTS, the National Transportation Safety Board was involved in that derailment. It was so of, of consequence. Um, and we, we had several meetings with them I was on the investigation panel of that derailment with them. And, uh, one

of the meetings was at the D.C.R Marine, had a meeting room there. This was, you know, obviously several months after the derailment, and they were making their recommendations to us.

- Joe DeMike: 00:58:21 Um, some of our deficiencies were in fire retardant within the car. There were some things that weren't tied down that, that should have been or could have been, um, in the meeting, in the middle of that meeting Cannon failed walks and introduces himself, and, um, he said, "We're doing whatever we can do to make the train safe and make sure that never happens again. And these gentlemen referring to our team, we'll make that happen." So it was not taken lightly, it was a huge commitment on the part of the Feld family of resources and money. A lot of money was spent to recover from that, and a lot more was spent upgrade the trains.
- Joe DeMike: 00:59:12 Um, one of the deficiencies was communications on board. So, uh, if you go look at the cars over here, you'll see that big red box in the hallway, which probably doesn't do anything anymore, but that was all put in. Um, it- it's actually pretty impressive, there's a fire alarm system in there. If it, if it's a commercial type fire alarms. So if it goes off the fire alarm goes off in their car, and you have a manager of radio on that frequency that assuming the radio is still in there, it'll come on and say fire alarm in car 68 or whatever car it is.
- Joe DeMike: 00:59:55 And they'll keep transmitting until you go turn off the fire alarm and see what's going on. And then there's that little push to button talk button in there. So if you push that button, the first thing it does is it says car 68, and then it allows you to talk. So if you stumbled into the hallway, you're having a heart attack and you push, you were managed to push the button but you couldn't say anything. They would know there was something going on and where. So it, you know, it, it was a huge improvement from find somebody in one of the adjacent cars to have a walkie talkie. And that, that's what [Sasly 01:00:34] was doing when, when, uh, she lost her life, they were trying to get to Tom Dylan's car because they didn't have a radio to call him.
- Joe DeMike: 01:00:44 And a lot of people went over land because we were going to Orlando and it was a short trip, get a day off at Disney and all that. So yeah, but a lot, a lot of good things came from that.
- Scott O'Donnell: 01:00:59 Agreed. You mentioned, uh, one element and the description of that and I think it would be interesting for people. So the train, how was the train composed? What cars came first sort of

behind the engine and what was the composition of a circus train?

- Joe DeMike: 01:01:17 Okay. I always forget that that's, you know, not something well-known. So the train always ran with the stock cars, four stock cars on the head end of the train. And there's a couple of reasons for it. The main one is that in each coupler connection between the railroad cars, there's a little bit of slack about an inch, inch and a half in each car, which doesn't sound like much, but as you get further back in the train, the dynamics of the train moving, the skill of the engineer will cause that to run in and run out.
- Joe DeMike: 01:02:03 And if you follow the railroad at all, you know they got rid of the cabooses some years ago and that was a highly dangerous place to ride, at the end of a freight train with, with that inch and a half inch, inch and a half of slack and each coupler, and your, um, 50, 60 cars back. If, if something happened, the engineer had to stop or he wasn't skilled in handling his train, that train would run in and guys would get thrown off their seats. If they're standing up, they get thrown through the car and there were all kinds of injuries and, and all that. So the smoothest ride is in the front of the train, and we're actually running a pretty long train so that, that is important.
- Joe DeMike: 01:02:49 So you had the elephants and the horses and camels and whatever, we're on the stock cars at that time on the head end of the train. Then came the coaches, the people cars. So normally, coaches are public, you can walk from one end to the train to the other with the exception of the private cars. So there was usually maybe three private cars on the front of the, of the section of coaches in the back of the section of coaches. Those cars you could not walk through. So once the show manager was in his, in his car, he was there until we stop somewhere. If you wanted to go somewhere in the train, he had to wait until the train stops, so he could make his way walking down the track and then back up into the train where you could actually access the rest of it. Um, you may have noticed the center vestibule cars. The, the, the vestibule is the doorway in the steps that come down so you can get on and off the car, and those were engineered and, and cut into the middle of coaches to, um, allow for four rooms in that car with that are the full width of the car.
- Joe DeMike: 01:04:14 So you'd have the vestibule on one end with that resident able to access his house in and out of that. The two middle quarter car rooms would access through the, the doorway in the middle and the, the opposite end quarter car room would access off

the vestibule on the next car, which they would share with them that car.

- Joe DeMike: 01:04:36 So you had the coaches in the middle, and then the flat cars were on, on the end. The, um, the concession cars, the two sells floto cars or to build consumer products and later days would, um, either be on the front of the train or the rear of the train. It generally they were on the rear, but occasionally if it made it easier to switch out at the destination, they'd put them on the front. Uh, the other reason if you're having the stock cars on the front is that they would probably 75 percent of the time would, would be moved away from the coaches to a location closer to the arena.
- Joe DeMike: 01:05:19 That was one of my one way eat was to stay within five miles of the building in the, in the older days, um, obviously we were walking the animals at that time. And the dirty little secret was it really wasn't about the animals. A five-mile stroll for an elephant's no big deal, but if you ever walked with an elephant for a human, it's an elephant's stroll is a pretty good job for a human. So at that, that five miles was really all about the two legged animals and not the four legged ones. Then in, in later years, probably in the last, um, maybe eight or nine years, we began trucking the, the, the animals from the train to the venue just because of the harassment and the problems.
- Joe DeMike: 01:06:21 And it gave us more operational flexibility to move the animals when we wanted to, and so many times they would publicize an animal walk and then we'd, we'd show up in town four hours earlier, four hours late, and, and it really was about the animals and not about the publicity and there were many disappointed people who would be out there to see the animal walking. It happened three hours ahead of time because we want to get the animals off the train and stapled. So you know, that tradition went away and actually I was kinda glad to see it go.
- Joe DeMike: 01:06:58 I was, I was on the end of the stick on a few of those phone calls from city officials and such. What did you do? Or, I, I got numerous, um, newspaper articles from our friends at the Union Pacific railroad whose headquarters was in Omaha. And the, the animal walk actually went right past their headquarters and at the last minute the local police decided to move the animal walk a block over.
- Joe DeMike: 01:07:27 So the people wanting to see it, we're standing on one street and the animals walked by behind the buildings the next block over, and I was getting all these, you know, nasty articles from the newspaper about that sent to me. And yeah, so

operationally that was, was a good thing. And then the other thing I neglected to mention was the cats were on the flatcars while they run the train, so they were on the rear end of the train. But the cats are very different, they're not writing, standing up, they're fed, they're fat and happy and doing what cats do when they are fat and happy. They sleep the whole time laying down.

- Joe DeMike: 01:08:12 So they really didn't need to, to be on the head another train and the way they were transported it was just worked out better that way.
- Scott O'Donnell: 01:08:23 The biggest change is you found in your job and move in a circus train from when you started to, say, a year ago when train operations came to a close.
- Joe DeMike: 01:08:40 Well, from the railroad standpoint, there was a large consolidation of, of a lot of work railroads into a few railroads. I think I mentioned earlier we were doing upwards of 40 contracts a year and toward the end it got down to 2022 maybe, but you had a lot of consolidations that happened.
- Joe DeMike: 01:09:04 Mergers, the, the Union Pacific absorbed the Missouri Pacific, uh, Missouri, Kansas, Texas to Chicago, North Western, Southern Pacific. So you had some, some large major carriers that were absorbed. Um, efficiency good, uh, competitiveness really bad, um, same thing happen.
- Scott O'Donnell: 01:09:30 Pricing along the same line.
- Joe DeMike: 01:09:31 Pricing, well yeah, absolutely. Um, the Burlington Northern Santa Fe merged, um, in that same timeframe and the west so you went from seven, eight in the West to major carriers. In the east, you went from, uh, we start out in the Norfolk and western, the southern. They, they merged in the Norfolk southern. You had, uh, the family lines, which was the LNN, and the SEL, and the SAL that merged with the BNL and CNO to form CSX transportation. And then you had three in the east, you had conrail, the CSX and the NS, and then NS and CSX went together and split conrail up suit.
- Joe DeMike: 01:10:20 We basically ended up with two carriers in the east, two, two major carriers in the east, two major carriers in the west. Then we had the, the Kansas City so that we'd use on occasion going to Mexico. We had the Canadian national that absorbed some US carriers, had the Canadian Pacific that did the same thing. I'm just because of where they went. We, we use the CN once a

year, CP we, we, uh, stopped playing some of the markets that we used them for, so I hadn't dealt with them in a number of years. But it, you, you became tied to these many monopolies. You wanted to go to Vegas, UP, you wanted to go into Dallas, Fort Worth. Um, you had the UP and the BN, but then storage was the issue. So, uh, and, in Fort Worth as on the BN and UP was, was, uh, tied into Dallas. So you, you had to work around those issues and their marketing people were not blind to the, to their franchises. So the prices did indeed go up, um, occasionally would be given an opportunity, um, when, when they changed that winter quarters to, to May and we made the move from, um, Florida to Los Angeles to open that, that left me some, some competitive, uh, options there. Uh, I've actually, uh, been with the BNSF and the UP both into Los Angeles. I started to buy a switch from the UP and Los Angeles, but, um, we ended up using the BN and saved well over my salary on that one move. So when we had the opportunities to use them, we would. Um, it also made us become more, um, creative, um, back to New York, um, when the garden went away and we started playing in Brooklyn and presented a lot more logistics problems.

- Joe DeMike: 01:12:40 Um, so we kept looking at it, kept budgeting, kept looking at the timing, uh, just turned out, um, we were, one year we, we kept the train in Newark and moved everything by truck over to Brooklyn in and out to Uniondale. It made financial sense, it certainly wasn't easier on the show to have the bus out there. But, but, uh, yeah, by leaving the train in one spot for some of these markets, we, uh, we were able to do that and I actually trucked the entire show.
- Joe DeMike: 01:13:24 I think we loaded the trucks out of Philly and I believe on that run, we ended up in Newark. So they moved in trucks as far as Newark and then went back into the wagons, went moved on wagons. So that, that was the other thing onto show. It, it went from the self-contained on the train when I started on 44 and 45 cars, I believe it was up to 63 and 64 cars, and I think we're running about 16, 17 semis as well. A lot of the, the lighting, the pre rigging, you know, a timing for moving the show, you know, and no more split weeks. We actually, when I first came we had a couple overnight jumps, we closed, um, that was, um, Columbia and Augusta.
- Joe DeMike: 01:14:16 We would close on Thursday night in, in Augusta and open Friday night in Columbia, but the rigging was a bunch of tin cans, of tin can lights in the ceiling and we were using the building sound system and a quality of the show was nowhere near what it was at the end. I mean, if you go to the show and

you just hear this acoustic rumble and you go to the sound systems that, that we know you, that we, we, they ... (laughs) I guess it's still kind of we, but you know, I'm not as we as I used to be. (laughs)

- Joe DeMike: 01:14:56 But the, the production quality went up, but we outgrew buildings, a lot of them. It took a lot longer to rig buildings. It took a lot, long- longer to tear it down, you know, so instead of show being over at, um, you know, 10:00 and the trains rolling by one, then it got to be more like seven, 8:00 AM before we were out of town.
- Joe DeMike: 01:15:25 A lot more stuff, you know, and there are lights and all that stuff did not stand up well to the railroad environment and, and it took longer to rig so the rigging would move over land and the animal housing would move over land, which it grew dramatically over the years too. And, um, changed, changed a lot of the operation for the better.
- Scott O'Donnell: 01:15:53 So let's move to recent history.
- Joe DeMike: 01:15:56 Okay.
- Scott O'Donnell: 01:15:57 So at some point, probably a year or so ago, some, some word had to come to you about the direction of-
- Joe DeMike: 01:16:09 Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Scott O'Donnell: 01:16:11 ... of both the Circus and the way that it moved, how did you receive the information? And then walk us through the process which sounds counterintuitive to your entire life's work, or trying to move a Circus at the same time as trying to dispose of the same assets that you had been the caretaker of for the majority of your life.
- Joe DeMike: 01:16:37 Okay. Well, let's back up a little bit further. Probably for the last eight, nine years, we heard a lot of doom and gloom. One thing about Feld Entertainment, it's privately held corporation and you don't get a lot of information. It's not like you can go look at the shareholders-
- Scott O'Donnell: 01:17:11 The 990 report.
- Joe DeMike: 01:17:12 Yeah, you cannot, it doesn't work. We used to have these corporate meetings and even the finance guys would put, would joke about it, but they would show a graph. And here's ticket revenue with no numbers on it, and here's the next graph with

expenses with no numbers on it, you know, it was, you, you had a kind of a picture of the company overall, but not, you know, you, you, you did not know.

- Joe DeMike: 01:17:45 But, I kept hearing doom and gloom in various meetings that would be in no numbers, no, just wow, what can we do to reduce, reduce costs, you know, transportation with our little mini monopolies went up dramatically over the years and the other, the other thing that happened was that the railroads, when the economy's good, the railroads are plugged and, and they start getting selective about what they want to handle and what they don't. There's still common carriers, but they can price, um, stuff they don't want to move out of the market.
- Joe DeMike: 01:18:23 Like single cars are costly to move, they want to move conveyor belts from a coal mine to a power plant back and forth, back and forth. We know this train's going to run every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday so you can plan your whole operation around it and it doesn't go through your yards and all that. So costs were going up on transportation, show was getting bigger, um, hard to move. So there were a lot of studies being done of how can we do this better? Can we get rid of the train? We add more trucks and we want to get rid of the trucks and put more on the train. You know, the whole ... There are a lot of smart people looking at a lot of options.
- Joe DeMike: 01:19:08 Um, the announcement came about the elephants, that was in May of '16. Um, it was very coordinated, now it was done. Um, the, the rumor mill and the office was that the people who were planning this signed, uh, non-disclosure agreements that had high personal financial penalties, should they violate that agreement. And pretty much the rest of this all found out the same time all you guys found out. The rumors were out there, you know, one trains going, one trains, you know, this and that and the other and, um, but the elephants were taken off the show.
- Joe DeMike: 01:20:06 Um, actually if you back up a little bit more we went to the four year cycle from the two year cycle. My personal opinion is these roll attempts to save the Circus, these were not attempts to save a bunch of money, these were attempts to save the show because it was from what I could gather was spewing red ink and you had monster jam and the dye shows carried, you know, carrying the day.
- Joe DeMike: 01:20:37 Again, this is my personal opinion. I have, I may be way off in Mars on place. Just that caveat needs to be there so, okay, so you saw that coming. We changed winter quarters, went to the

four year cycle, which producing the Circus was a big dollar item for a two year production. And so there, there was a first handwriting on the wall. Um, then the elephants coming off to show again, I think that was an attempt to save the show.

- Joe DeMike: 01:21:18 You don't realize even though the- the elephants went back to the CDC taking care of an elephant's not a cheap proposition, um, if it's there on the road, but what you were dealing with were the activists. And I liken that whole thing to death by a thousand cuts, you ... It looked like we were doing good from the government relations aspect, what was happening, the activists were going into markets where shows didn't play in enacting willow, getting town councils to enact, enact laws that ban the bowl hook, or you had to have so many acres for animal being displayed, or you can't display or whatever.
- Joe DeMike: 01:22:15 So as they got all these little towns and non-play markets to do these things and they could go into the big markets to say, "What are you guys doing? Look what all these guys did." And it, it would happen stealthily and quickly. A lot of times it would come up on the docket and get voted that night before anybody could react to it. Then you had the same thing happened in the big cities. Um, Atlanta was a nail biter, um, Cobb county had passed ordinances banning the bullhook, can't remember it actually banned at exhibition or not.
- Joe DeMike: 01:22:59 Dilute was outside the county and the city of Atlanta said, "We didn't pass that," so circus can come so that, that saved this Chicago teetered for years. Um, you know, the last, last year we played was the last year for United Center. They, they were not thrilled with us being there to have disrupted their hockey season, which they probably made a lot more money on them, they did with us. So we were looking at alternate venues in Chicago area for that.
- Joe DeMike: 01:23:34 Los Angeles, um, was teetering, I think they had passed the, a bullhook band that matched when our contract expired there. So the picture was not pretty. The other side of it was, um, the human aspects. We had employees that were being personally sued, charged with, um, assault. We had the company defending employees and court in California on a regular basis, and to the point that, uh, some of the management were wearing go pros around the venues and it actually saved a few of them in court.
- Joe DeMike: 01:24:21 So when you, when you look at that whole toll that took on the company, it took on the employees and the animals were not being these people who cared about these animals so much.

We're not loving animals out there, they were trying to get him to stampede, they were trying to scare him. They'd come to the loadings and blow whistles and yell in bull horns and all kinds of stuff at these animals. And it, you know, it gets to the point where it's, you know, you're, you're not gonna win, you're not gonna, you know, you're the big bad money raising boy in the house. And so there you go. So I, I, I saw that as another effort to save the show.

Joe DeMike: 01:25:18 Um, again, my personal opinion, I think when that happened, it, it disappointed a lot of our supporters, not just in the Circus community but in the conservative world. You know, we ended up throwing their hats into those guys even though we still displaying animals and they were still protesting. Again, that's my personal opinion, but, uh, sales did slump. Interestingly, there was an interview with Kenneth Feld, I think it was in Forbes several years before that and they asked him what the biggest problem was with the Circus. I think they expected them to say animal rights. And his answer was people don't believe what they see anymore.

Joe DeMike: 01:26:20 So when you think about go into a marvel movie and people run up the side of buildings and catch bullets in their hands, and fly and what have you, and you go to the Circus and you see a leopard on the back of an elephant, first of all, you don't realize the significance of it and secondly, eh, you know. So if people would come to the show, they were blown away, but getting them in, in the building was the problem. And then you have the, the big bad, nasty Circus allure of a two. So ultimately revenues fell, expenses continued to grow. So come January 14th, I believe it was, which I think was a significant date back in '94 as well and we piled up in Lakeland. Um, we found out the same time everybody else did. Again, it was a very controlled planning process. Um, the, the show's found out the same time the press found out the same time that a blast email went out to the corporate people.

Joe DeMike: 01:27:42 So that was about, uh, maybe 9:00 on a Saturday night thereabout. I got a text from, uh, one of the people in the office I said, what awful news that's all it took? Right, you know, I'm not looking at my email at 9:00 on Saturday night as a general rule. And I'm like, "Who died, what happened?" You know, and she's, she wrote back, look at your email. So, you know, then that's when I knew, um, I knew at that moment I was done, just, you know, as a sidelight, I'm a trained guy, there won't be any more trains.

- Joe DeMike: 01:28:20 So, um, we got a little more information and the people on the road basically saying, um, Monday morning your managers will tell you what's going on. So Monday morning we had a meeting in Grand Berman's office who's a vice president of logistics. What is his title? He's logistics procurement and consumer products. I don't remember exactly what his title was, but basically he laid it out and about, uh, 10:00 I was given my package, which was no, you know, I was prepared for that. So it was no big deal.
- Joe DeMike: 01:29:03 And, uh, after lunch we had a planning meeting to start deciding what we were going gonna do as far as assets. And, uh, certainly continued operation was a, was a, uh, big issue. First thing that, that I did was I started calling my vendors saying is business as usual, we're not going on a business, we are shutting down a show. We have a lot of other shows still going. Your bills will be paid, who the train is normal. Our credit's good, because the first thing could see as well we want cash up front right now and you know, train is not gonna move and blah, blah, blah. You guys going into bankruptcy, right? Uh, no.
- Joe DeMike: 01:29:52 So that was the first hurdle. Um, fortunately the way that they stopped the show and the way that we contract, we had already contracted the first six months of right about, to the point where the shows were going to stop anyway. I had to change a few moves. Um, then we had all these assets, a very specialty type of asset and what are we gonna do with these rail cars, um, that are not going to be available until May.
- Joe DeMike: 01:30:35 So we did some planning on that, um, as we were one of the largest owners and operators of, um, older, not exactly vintage, but I guess you could call them that equipment. Um, we had a lot of contacts so we, we had arranged to bring the train to plant city and park in the yard there, and the first thought was to try and and, and, uh, have the sale there, or at least bring what was left there. That was on day one.
- Joe DeMike: 01:31:19 Then as it developed, we decided that we wanted to, um, to be more proactive with that. So the word went out through the channels that deal in that kind of stuff, because the other problem was we couldn't have 300 people show up and want to look at the train just to look at the train. We're not set up for that. And the railroads not set up for that. So we set dates in Washington DC and in, um, Norfolk for truly interested prospective buyers to come view the train.
- Joe DeMike: 01:32:09 We had a lot of equipment and it's being dumped on the market all at once. So the other part of that was to have appraisers

come in, look at each piece of equipment assign a value to it. So financially we looked at whether it was better to take a bid for a given car or donated. Cash is always a good way to go but if the cash is not enough and you get more value out of donating the car and having the right often, that's what we would do.

- Joe DeMike: 01:32:51 So that was the process, um, we vetted the people who were bidding and they came by appointment by invitation to Benny Yard in DC and, and to Norfolk to view the cars that they had bid on and cars that they were still interested in. Then, we started looking at how those cars would get shipped to these people. We did not want to bring cars back to Florida that we're going to Vermont or Maine or New York or whatever. So the process began as to where we wanted these cars to end up, but we still had to ship the show itself back to Florida. Circus ops wanted the, the equipment to come back. Um, so we did that, um, the, the, um, unit that closed in, um, Providence.
- Scott O'Donnell: 01:34:02 Providence.
- Joe DeMike: 01:34:02 Thank you. That was the first one. So it, it came out of Providence, went over to Albany and dropped down in New Jersey and we set off a lot of coaches in Oak Island that were destined for there, or we had some cars that were bought by the state of North Carolina that we're going to rocky mount. So we's, we dropped all of those cars in Oak Island, which is Newark, by Newark Airport there. And the rest of the train, all the flatcars and, and a couple of the coaches went to Florida, generator car to keep power on.
- Joe DeMike: 01:34:46 And, uh, it was just John Barry and I can't remember, I think Tom Dylan wrote that one as well. John Barry was the train. Oh, he's the manager of rail operations at that point. Um, everybody from the show got off the train as they wouldn't normal, um, end of, end of a tour event other than the normal staff and everybody else had to get off as well. So the train ran down there, there's two people on it.
- Joe DeMike: 01:35:16 Um, then the garden city train to Uniondale train, a couple of weeks later, um, that one, uh, was allowed to ride the train home line just as a kind of a bittersweet thank you gift. Again, nobody else was allowed to ride the train. Tom Dylan, myself, and again, John Barry, um, had lots of requests that weren't going to happen. It wasn't, wasn't my train, wasn't my call. Um, and even the employees that wanted to go back to Florida couldn't write back.

- Joe DeMike: 01:35:58 So, but their side of the coin was a lot of their cars weren't going back anyway. So the last show happened, um, 6:00 AM on Monday morning we started running charter buses and vans to various airports in New York area, sending people to wherever they were going back to, that went on until, um, noon Tuesday. Um, about 5:00, 6:00 PM Tuesday night we started pulling toward Penn station and waited for a window to go through, and the train departed out there and headed for Newark.
- Joe DeMike: 01:36:49 Um, that all went smoothly, we set off the cars that we had that were staying in Newark and picked up the cars were taken with us and then we headed south. And that pretty much wrapped it up, um, surprisingly in the six months, actually less than six months, we- we pretty much had a home for all the cars, um, several museums, a lot of individuals, um, the Ferguson farm down at the, and Florida got quite a few. And, uh, we wrapped it all up, getting some of the cars shipped from wherever they were to wherever they were going was like pulling teeth. And you experienced that here as well as some of the others. We had one car go into Peru that sat forever and finally moved and, yeah.
- Scott O'Donnell: 01:37:51 What did America lose within the, the Ringling Bros circus train?
- Joe DeMike: 01:38:00 No, 140 some year tradition. Ultimately, um, most people won't know the difference. It's, you know, it's like baseball going away are probably not quite as, as big in people's lives as that. But, yeah, you never know what'll come next.
- Scott O'Donnell: 01:38:29 Never know what will come next. It's very true.
- Joe DeMike: 01:38:31 We had, we lost big apple and it came back, but I'm not saying I see that happening. Um, I don't know what's in the, in that world these days.
- Scott O'Donnell: 01:38:46 We had to do it again would you?
- Joe DeMike: 01:38:48 Oh absolutely.
- Scott O'Donnell: 01:38:48 (laughs)
- Joe DeMike: 01:38:48 Would you?
- Scott O'Donnell: 01:38:48 Absolutely.
- Joe DeMike: 01:38:53 To work in that dynamic environment? I, I do wonder how much things have changed. I mean, certainly I worked a couple

months past the end, July 1st was my last day in 2017. So the atmosphere was changing a little bit and certainly the, you know, quite a few people left out of the corporate office. Some of them immediately, um, some of them as soon as the show closed they were gone, and I had things to wrap up and actually have done a couple of little on the side consulting jobs for the company to tie things up, taxing and that kind of thing on the rail cars of the, the last year of operation that, uh, yeah, I, I think it's, it's probably changed a little bit. I did.

- Scott O'Donnell: 01:39:43 It wasn't the chemical factory.
- Joe DeMike: 01:39:45 It wasn't the chemical factory in Memphis, no, and it wasn't GM want to run back away and go back to the railroad. No, it, there are a lot of wonderful people there, a lot of wonderful experiences. Um, what you saw in the show was just the tip of the iceberg of what it was like behind the scenes. You walked into the arena was there and you walked away and two days later it was gone. Don't know where. Don't know how it just happens.
- Joe DeMike: 01:40:20 And, uh, if you ever saw the building and get rigged or the logistics that happened on the unit itself and the miracles, the train masters worked and the miracles, the railroads work. Yeah, it was amazing, surprise me what we were able to make happen (laughs) at railroad guys and say, "Joe, you're crazy." Yeah. Couple of years later, you're out of your mind. Yeah, that's true.
- Scott O'Donnell: 01:40:50 Yeah. That's a good place to. Anything else that you'd like to share with us?
- Joe DeMike: 01:40:56 Oh, probably lots, but no, not really (laughs) tons of stories, but I won't bore you here.
- Scott O'Donnell: 01:41:03 All right.
- Joe DeMike: 01:41:05 Okay. I got one funny story where we live.
- Scott O'Donnell: 01:41:07 Yes, there now.
- Joe DeMike: 01:41:08 Okay. So at the time the Burlington Northern's headquarters is in Fort Worth, actually still the operational stuff is, and, uh, the train was in there north yard in Fort Worth and there's this highway bridge that goes over the middle of this train yard, it's probably 15, 20 tracks wide and we're on the, on the fringe of it off to the side. So I get off the plane in Dallas, Fort Worth and I

have this message on my phone so I listened to it and it's the division safety officer who his office is right there in north Fort Worth and show you've got to do some about these Circus people. They have put a tight rope from the highway bridge down into a cut of cars in the middle of the yard and they're out there practicing walking the tightrope on this thing.

Joe DeMike: 01:42:06 And my first thought is, "Well, sounds funny, but maybe you know," so it's, it's about a 45-minute drive from the airport to the north yard and Fort Worth. And I get over there and the guy says, "Well, I'm sorry I hit the panic button. It wasn't quite what I had been told it was," and said, "Okay." He said, "There's this field off to the side of the railroad yard. It's just a grass field, and back along the head drill, they put this practice roadmap that's three wire up that's three feet off the ground." So it wasn't quite what you thought of it, thought it was an okay.

Joe DeMike: 01:42:56 Well then for the next four years I get the same call from a different safety officer, you know, somebody in the yard is playing games with this guy's head, you know, I get the same call here after, he said, "No, no, no." So that, that, that was one of the weird ones.

Scott O'Donnell: 01:43:13 (laughs)

Joe DeMike: 01:43:15 And certainly the, what radio station are you from when you're calling, you know, calling the range for a fire hydrant, they use a track or something, you know, you go through your spiel, "What radio station are you from? Who are you?" Okay, that's it. I'm done.