

CWM Audio 79
Janice Aria Interview, August 10, 2018
Interview Transcript

Scott O'Donnell: 00:00:01 It is August 10th, 2018, we're here at the Robert L. Parkinson Library in beautiful Baraboo, Wisconsin, and I have the great pleasure of interviewing Janice Aria this morning for her life career and journey in the circus. Hi-

Janice Aria: 00:00:17 Good morning.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:00:17 ... Janice.

Janice Aria: 00:00:18 Hi [Scott 00:00:18], it's so great to be here-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:00:20 Ah, it's so-

Janice Aria: 00:00:20 ... wow.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:00:20 ... great to have you. So we're gonna s- we're gonna dial all the way back to the beginning.

Janice Aria: 00:00:24 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Scott O'Donnell: 00:00:25 Where is Janice from, and what-

Janice Aria: 00:00:27 I-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:00:27 ... was your early life like?

Janice Aria: 00:00:31 Ah! I, I had a really wonderful early life, I'm proud, happy to say, grateful to say, as Janice [Gillespie 00:00:36] in Oakhurst, New Jersey, um, and who didn't love being young in the '70's, wow-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:00:41 (laughs)

Janice Aria: 00:00:41 ... right? I mean you guys are what, uh, younger than me, but tell ya what, it was a great time, and I remember it. (laughing)

Scott O'Donnell: 00:00:50 Very nice. So parents were not part of the circus industry?

Janice Aria: 00:00:53 Not at all, nope, nope. My dad was a white collar worker with Bell Telephone Company-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:00:58 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Janice Aria: 00:00:58 ... and my mom was a stay at home mom who was a raging circus fan, so.

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

Janice Aria: 00:01:02 And growing up in the Shore area of New Jersey I saw every little show that came to Long Branch, Asbury Park, I mean this was a huge circus, it's a huge circus area-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:01:11 Yeah, very much-

Janice Aria: 00:01:12 ... so.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:01:12 ... so-

Janice Aria: 00:01:12 And they-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:01:12 ... even to this day.

Janice Aria: 00:01:13 I actually saw Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus in the old Madison Square Garden, and I vividly remember the menagerie downstairs, and then going upstairs and seeing the show, so.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:01:22 Wow.

Janice Aria: 00:01:23 Yeah, and then the new Madison Square Garden, and then to ultimately be in it it was really like what a, what a trip-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:01:30 What a trip.

Janice Aria: 00:01:30 ... liter- literally.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:01:32 So what did young [Janet 00:01:33] Gillespie think she was going to do with her life?

Janice Aria: 00:01:36 I thought I wanted to be an actor. From the time I was a kid I wanted to be a performer, but I didn't ever consider circus, so I thought actor, that was it, and I never deviated.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:01:47 Nice.

Janice Aria: 00:01:48 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Scott O'Donnell: 00:01:48 So at some point you must a saw an ad, a-

Janice Aria: 00:01:52 (laughs)

- Scott O'Donnell: 00:01:54 ... some kind of a, an entrance way into the circus world, and what would that have been?
- Janice Aria: 00:01:57 It was for me total serendipity. I, um, I was a, an educational theater major at NYU, I tried one year as a theater major, and I was very disen- disencharnted with, um, actors and actor types. I found them so self-absorbed, and I ... It just didn't suit me, and I was heartbroken 'cause I wanted this my whole life, so I switched to educational theater at NYU. I thought I love kids, and I thought, you know, theater, theater is a great way to reach kids. And a dear friend of mine wrote the school newspaper, NYU, um, newsletter, and, so I got to go to a lotta Broadway free with him. Um, and one of the gigs that he had to cover was The Greatest Show on Earth at Madison Square Garden and I said, "Yeah." I hadn't been in years, you know, so very innocently I, I went to that show, and it was the Blue show, and after the show he had, um, scheduled to interview some clowns, so I went to Clown Alley.
- Janice Aria: 00:02:57 Well, this was '70, '71, '71, so I met Ron Severini, Stevie Smith, uh, and these are all young, energetic guys. I always thought ... I had remembered clowns as older, crotchety kinda-
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:03:13 (laughs)
- Janice Aria: 00:03:14 ... you know, a very, very different kinda character-
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:03:16 Right.
- Janice Aria: 00:03:16 ... than what I met. And I ... They told me about Clown College, and I s- I left there with this seed planted, and I thought, you know, that would be a hell of a way to reach kids, juggling, big movement, makeup, oh, I, I just thought I, I have to apply, I have to apply. So I applied like that week while the show was in the Garden, and Bill Ballantine was in town, so he got in touch with me immediately, I never had to audition. I never found out until years later, we became good friends Bill and I, and he told me, um ... I walked in the room, and I was almost six feet tall, and he took me immediately 'cause Roberta was s- six feet tall, his wife was very tall. And I'm still thinking I'm gonna use these skills, I, I had no interest in joining the circus, I mean I, you know, I just didn't.
- Janice Aria: 00:04:03 And, uh, I did get into Clown College, and I negotiated with the theater department at NYU to get a full semester's credit. I never told Mr. Feld that, and I didn't even tell Bill Ballantine that, but I got a full semester credit for what, 11 weeks in

Venice, you know? So the following autumn I went down to Venice, um, very excited, completely ... I'm sure all you guys that went to Clown College had this what is this, you know, what is that? Um-

- Scott O'Donnell: 00:04:31 And what year is this?
- Janice Aria: 00:04:35 ... this was '72-
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:04:36 'Kay.
- Janice Aria: 00:04:37 ... and in the first week Hugo Schmidt unloaded a, a group of five elephants that were just purchased, I forget actually who they were from, another time it might come to me, but the day he unloaded them, you, you know, you remember the, the, the thought of ... Uh, I mean clowns were dispensable basically, right? So here's a new group of, uh, Clown College students who are just looking at these elephants like wide-eyed, and just enraptured, and "Who wants to get up on the elephant?" Yeah-
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:05:04 (laughs)
- Janice Aria: 00:05:05 ... so he put me on an elephant, and he had them do a pyramid. Um, I didn't know what this was, but, uh, there were two bull tubs, and two elephants laid down between the two bull tubs stretched out, and then Zina with whom I became very good friends later, I was on Zina, stepped over them, and got up on their back, and, uh, that was it. I, I was up there, and I just thought I never want to do anything but this for the rest of my life, how do I do it? Um, my boyfriend, Mike Aria, um, was in school in New York also, Wagner College on a football scholarship, and he was about as interested in college as I am, uh, in, in filling Coca-Cola, Coca-Cola bottles at a plant. So after the football season ended he visited me at Clown College, and I ... There were nine women in my class, so I was the odd one out that I had the whole Venice Villas Apartment to myself, so Mike just moved in. So at the end of Clown College my mom came down for the graduation, right? And, um, I got a contract, and boy, that's a heavy experience. I think we all remember that to this day that heavy panic of ... They have you so molded by that time you've gotta get on a show, and I saw so many adult hearts broken that day that I, I still have not gotten ... I, I still feel tender about that, um, but I was lucky enough to get a contract, and I didn't know what to do. I had one semester left at NYU, and my mom said to me, "If you pass up this opportunity you'll regret it the rest of your life. Try it." she said. I said, "Mom, you guys are paying for NYU and my apartment in Greenwich Village." great life, right? She said, "No, you have to try it, you

can always come home." Wow, bing, that's it, signed the contract.

Janice Aria: 00:06:50 Well, Jackie Althoff was the bear trainer on the Blue show, very contentious fellow, vivid circus figure, and he hired Mike 'cause Mike had been ho- you know, hanging around, and Mike was a really good looking, big, clean-cut guy, and he knew nothing about bears, what do you know bears in Oakhurst, New Jersey, right? So Jackie offered Mike a contract to work with the bears and he signed that, and that's how we got in the circus, serendipity, wisdom by change.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:07:18 See? As life-

Janice Aria: 00:07:18 Yeah.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:07:19 ... as want to do.

Janice Aria: 00:07:21 Yep.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:07:21 Let's go back to Clown College for a-

Janice Aria: 00:07:23 Hmm.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:07:23 ... little bit. So who were some of your teachers in Clown College?

Janice Aria: 00:07:27 Certainly Bill Ballantine, [John Toy 00:07:29]-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:07:28 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Janice Aria: 00:07:30 ... um, Sigfrido Aguilar was pantomime, uh, a woman named Sioux, S-I-O-U-X, oh, my goodness, I can't remember her last name, for arena movement. Um, Antar Wazzan who assured me-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:07:46 (laughs)

Janice Aria: 00:07:46 ... that he had taught everybody in his life to do a cartwheel, and I was not gonna be his first failure, but I was.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:07:53 (laughs)

Janice Aria: 00:07:53 I went to extra help in cartwheel, and I never got it. They put a mechanic on me, and I still, I couldn't do a cartwheel, but if you look at my arms they're two linguine's, so. Uh, anyway-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:08:03 (laughs)

Janice Aria: 00:08:03 ... let's see, who else? Hugo Schmidt for elephant riding. Um, I ca- just can't think of who else, but it was so early, you know, '72-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:08:13 And who-

Janice Aria: 00:08:14 ... then, so.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:08:14 ... who is Janet Gillespie the clown, what kinda clown character did you create-

Janice Aria: 00:08:18 Uh-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:08:18 ... or-

Janice Aria: 00:08:19 ... I didn't-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:08:19 ... did you gravitate-

Janice Aria: 00:08:19 ... create-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:08:19 ... to?

Janice Aria: 00:08:20 I never created, um, and, uh, when I thought about this on an intellectual, like a real cerebral level rather than a gut level, and that's why I kinda turned off with theater. I, I didn't, didn't take well to the whole idea of fitting another, an outside, an external, creation. What I found out by accident, and I was talking to the wonderful Peggy Williams about this, where you had that moment of just, um, epiphany where that's me, that's my clown. So I went through a lot of really funny makeups that I have a ber- very boney neck, a turkey neck, and I had this when I was young, and Bill Ballantine wanted me to, um, extenuate that.

Janice Aria: 00:08:57 I tho- I can't remember, I think it was maybe Paul Jerome that had the ... Or I can't remember who it was, I'm so- I ... That's disgraceful that I do, but, so I tried that, that didn't work. Uh, tried a bunch, I tried white-face, I thought, but I don't know, I just thought it was more m- m- m- suitable, that didn't work for me either, and I didn't want all that m- white on my ears, and down my neck, and didn't like that. So, uh, one day I looked in the mirror and there she was. And then I don't know how they did this later on, but with us they took us to a costume warehouse, and they said, "Just rifle through it, and find

whatever you like." Well, I found a feather boa first, and then I found what had obviously been a man's costume, it was kinda like a baby doll dress, real short, and I have ridiculously long legs, so I thought, you know, use that instead of this neck thing.

- Janice Aria: 00:09:44 So I took that off the shelf, I still have that very same costume in my clo- in my barn in Florida, my mom sewed big appliques all over it, and I used it forever with the turkey boa. I found a pair of, um, hiking boots kinda in that se- I think they were working man boots in that same warehouse, but I used them, and I said ... Weighed those into a size 16 converse sneakers, and sewed sequins all over them. So I found, um, this person inside of me that honest to God is the truest me, and i- I really think, um, this is ... I'm jumping here, but I think if every woman had gotten to be a clown in front of people for a period of time, not just one time like a guest clown shot, a period of time, there is so many, um, body issues that women have. I know men have them too, but I only know them personally from being a (laughs) woman-
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:10:35 Right.
- Janice Aria: 00:10:36 ... a tall woman at that. Um, it took care of some ... I never felt more beautiful in my life than wha- what I discovered inside. And it ... I, I never thought I was funny, I don't think I was funny. I mean some of the stuff that I did was funny was purely accidental, like falling down, falling off the elephant for two weeks in rehearsal 'cause nobody told me when she does a headstand all you have to do is a back bend and you stay on her. No, they thought it was better to just let me fall off, and then struggle to get back on. But none of that was staged, that was all just horribly embarrassing. Every day I drew a bigger crowd. (laughing) But anyway, um, I just, uh, discovered ... I, I ...
- Janice Aria: 00:11:13 My clown character I, I guess was just the joy that I felt at being a part of that incredible pageant. I never got over, not one performance, uh, did I ever feel jaded. Um, just the magnitude of that spectacle, and to be part of it, and I didn't, didn't try to put that out there, it just came out-
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:11:35 Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Janice Aria: 00:11:35 ... because it was so sincere, and that was my cown- cap- clown character. I was kinda like a, a Greek chorus person just pointing at everything like look at that, ah, and look at that, and look at that, you know-
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:11:45 Right.

Janice Aria: 00:11:46 ... so.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:11:46 Do you remember what gags you presented at-

Janice Aria: 00:11:49 I did-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:11:49 ... graduation?

Janice Aria: 00:11:49 ... the camera gag with, uh, one of my favorites was, um, [Laslo, uh, Donard 00:11:53].

Scott O'Donnell: 00:11:54 Donard, yeah.

Janice Aria: 00:11:54 Yep. Um, and then ultimately, uh, Antonio Hoyos we did the, uh, camera gag. And I, I loved much better playing off other people, that was my, my jam. I really, uh ... And they, and they were, they were funny. I worked with Mark Anthony a lot too, um, and, uh, worked with [Don Dabelly 00:12:14], we did a, a tightrope gag where he just, uh ... We stretched out the tightrope, and made a big thing between two chairs, and then he got down on all fours, and I just stepped on his back, and he walked under the tightrope. Um, but my, my favorite, favorite thing was the elephant act, which where you, you're virtually invisible as a clown, you know, people aren't looking at you, they're looking at the elephant, but that for me was the most joyful-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:12:37 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Janice Aria: 00:12:37 ... time because I got to see how many thousands of faces just lit up, you know?

Scott O'Donnell: 00:12:43 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Janice Aria: 00:12:44 And I felt, since I was doing this from such a real authentic place I felt like, um, I was just part of the scenery, and that's, uh, that was enough for me. I never really wanted to be, you know, a featured clown. But, um, the following year was the new show, and m- because Don Foote was, uh, very, uh, uh, he liked tall people who could, who could show off wardrobe. So I was Tinkerbell and Colin Clarke was Peter Pan, and I loved that, that was fun, that was really fun to be Tinkerbell, I mean 'cause come on, I'm much more Olive Oyl than Tinkerbell, but there was the humor. So the costumes and the situations were more funny than I ever was, but I was just so thrilled to be there that I hope that that's what came across.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:13:27 So you got your contract to go to The Greatest Show on Earth, which unit did you join?

Janice Aria: 00:13:32 Blue.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:13:34 The Blue unit-

Janice Aria: 00:13:34 Yep.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:13:34 ... and it was the second year of-

Janice Aria: 00:13:35 It was the-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:13:35 ... that tour?

Janice Aria: 00:13:36 ... first ... My first year was the, that second year, um, and then my second year was, uh, the f- new show. So I was only a Ringling clown for two years, and ridiculously short period of time for something I thought I wanted to do forever, you know? But again serendipity came in, and just changed everything.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:13:55 Right. So over those two years you clowned, and your boyfriend/fiancee?

Janice Aria: 00:14:03 I would ... And we were never gonna get married, we were just gonna be together forever.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:14:06 (laughs)

Janice Aria: 00:14:06 Now, I'll-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:14:07 I love that.

Janice Aria: 00:14:08 ... I'll tell ya in a little while why we ... We had to get married-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:14:10 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Janice Aria: 00:14:11 ... it was one those-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:14:12 S- So Mike's-

Janice Aria: 00:14:13 ... things

Scott O'Donnell: 00:14:14 ... apprenticing with Jackie Althoff-

Janice Aria: 00:14:15 Uh-huh (affirmative).

Scott O'Donnell: 00:14:16 ... who had the biggest hands I've ever seen in-

Janice Aria: 00:14:18 Then you know who we're talking about.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:14:20 (laughs) Yes.

Janice Aria: 00:14:21 And a personality.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:14:23 And a personality to match-

Janice Aria: 00:14:24 Right.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:14:25 ... everything larger than life.

Janice Aria: 00:14:27 Everything lar- I, I, uh ... This is a, this is a really terrible story, but it happened, right, let me tell ya. Um, Kenneth moved Jackie to the Red show at the last minute, who knows why, I was too new to understand all the finagling's that went on here, and Jackie was furious because he didn't, they didn't use his music, and they wanted him to use different costumes. He and [Katia 00:14:48] had the very traditional Bavarian costumes, right? So Mike had to go with him 'cause by this ... For the first week it was like me on an elephant, the first week that Mike was around bears he said, "I wanna do this. I want bears." I said, "Oh, please-"

Scott O'Donnell: 00:15:00 (laughs)

Janice Aria: 00:15:01 "... oh, hell no." not no, hell no. So he moves to the Red show, and he created such a kerfuffle as, as Jackie could do. I was gonna say only Jackie could do, but no, no, no, we all know show people who-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:15:12 (laughs)

Janice Aria: 00:15:12 ... could really-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:15:13 Yeah.

Janice Aria: 00:15:13 ... create a kerfuffle. Um, and, so the ... One of days that I, Mike and I happen to witness a very raging argument between Kenneth Feld and Jackie Althoff, and Kenneth said, "You are going to the Red show, Jackie." and Jackie said, " All right, Mr. I go now, but I'll be back here, and I come back mit the oven." Ooh, stinger. And years later Kenneth said to me, "You, you witnessed that." eh, eh, eh, 'cause I, you know, I thought, "I can't remem- believe you remember who I am, it was years we

had left the show." he said, "Oh, no, you were there, you saw it" Whoa, that was a stinger, and that was Jackie. I mean-

- Scott O'Donnell: 00:15:51 Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Janice Aria: 00:15:51 ... he took no prisoners. But Mike had a hell of an education. Part of Mike's deal was Jackie said, "You know, I'll pay you what? A pittance every week, but all your meals." Well, Mike had to sit outside Jackie's trailer (laughs) and eat what the bears ate while Jackie and Katia had their dinner, so Mike ate white bread, and carrots, and apples, for years. I mean we s- I supplemented that because I was a very good girlfriend, you know? So, (laughs) and Mike's living quarters were in a camper with two chimpanzees, what bastards they were.
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:16:19 Yes-
- Janice Aria: 00:16:20 Oh, my gosh.
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:16:21 ... as they can be.
- Janice Aria: 00:16:21 They pulled his ... His bunk was on top of the two chimp cages, so this is dicey, but, so we could not, Mike and I, sleep up there together because the ceiling was like right there, um, so we had to have conjugal visits in my roomette, that was really fun. Um, but the chimps pulled Mike's m- blanket off the bed, and through it on the space heater, and started a fire in the, in the camper. It was a dull life in those days.
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:16:48 Very dull. (laughing)
- Janice Aria: 00:16:50 Fire department, yeah.
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:16:51 So let's talk about yo- you mentioned the wor- uh, term roomette.
- Janice Aria: 00:16:55 Yeah.
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:16:56 So you're a new clown on The Greatest Show on Earth, home was the train.
- Janice Aria: 00:17:00 Yep, 149 car.
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:17:01 What was your experience of life on the train-
- Janice Aria: 00:17:04 Oh.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:17:04 ... and what was your initial experience of finding ... What, did you start in a roomette-

Janice Aria: 00:17:08 Yep.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:17:08 ... right off the-

Janice Aria: 00:17:10 I had started and finished in a roomette. (laughs)

Scott O'Donnell: 00:17:12 So, so what did you think when here I come from NYU, and now I'm on a train?

Janice Aria: 00:17:17 I loved it. I ... Uh, the fantasy of it, the ... Oh, my gosh I loved it. I loved that little room, I loved how every inch was used, you know? I, I realized I don't need all those clothes, we have one closet. This was before they had, uh, showers on the train, before ... We had one doniker in the whole train car., Half of it were clowns, and the-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:17:36 And-

Janice Aria: 00:17:36 ... other half were-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:17:37 ... and what is-

Janice Aria: 00:17:37 ... staterooms.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:17:37 ... doniker for those that might be listening-

Janice Aria: 00:17:37 (laughs)

Scott O'Donnell: 00:17:39 ... that don't know what the doniker term is.

Janice Aria: 00:17:40 The water closet, the toilet, not with a shower, you can't say bathroom because it had no, yeah, not even a sink. It was just a train toilet, go in, close the door, and the whole car used that doniker, that toilet, and my room was right next to it, so I always knew when someone had a, a GI problem on that train car.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:18:00 The more you know. (laughing) Uh, how many roomettes on a car?

Janice Aria: 00:18:06 Oh, my gosh, I don't remember. I'm thinking maybe eight, and then staterooms because the other half were staterooms.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:18:13 All clowns, a mix of clowns and dancers?

Janice Aria: 00:18:15 Clowns, acrobats, like Michelle and Vladimir of Vlada-Vladimirov, he was in the Romanov Troupe, they had a stateroom, and there were like two or three more staterooms, and I honestly, I can't remember who was in them. But the, the closeness of everybody, I really dug it. I love the idea that everybody's there, you can hear everybody, but you can go in that room and slide that heavy door closed, and you're in your own world with that huge window. And I'm a reader, so the, the train trips were just ... I mean just lay back there on your bed or sit in your little booth setup, and read, read, read, and there's America going by outside your window, it, it was probably the, my favorite place I've ever lived because it was always changing right, I-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:18:57 Right.

Janice Aria: 00:18:58 ... loved it. And then those nasty horrible train yards that when the train was there they were transformed into a neighborhood, a wholesome neighborhood where kids had bikes, and barbeque grills were out there, and it was, uh, whoa, just wonderful. Wonderful parties at the train, right, if I remember. (laughing)

Scott O'Donnell: 00:19:18 I'm confident you do.

Janice Aria: 00:19:18 Ooh-ooh, uh-huh (affirmative).

Scott O'Donnell: 00:19:22 Yes, I would concur. So Mike goes with Jackie to-

Janice Aria: 00:19:24 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Scott O'Donnell: 00:19:25 ... the Red show.

Janice Aria: 00:19:27 The Red show, and they ultimately did come back to the Blue show, but there was no oven, thank God.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:19:30 (laughing) And they came back in the same year, they came-

Janice Aria: 00:19:34 Uh-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:19:34 ... back in the-

Janice Aria: 00:19:35 ... no, the-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:19:35 ... next year unit?

Janice Aria: 00:19:35 ... second year, the next year, yeah, yep.

- Scott O'Donnell: 00:19:35 And wha- Was Jackie working by himself, was he part of a display?
- Janice Aria: 00:19:42 Nope, no, always wi- by himself, which at the time, and I do understand this, chimps and bears, those ground leash acts, that you don't want distractions in the end rings, you know? I mean we later ultimately did agree to do that, but it would have been a big mistake because that's just, uh ... And, and that's I think to a great degree why, well, the whole animal thing, which we'll get into I'm sure, um, is disrupted now, but, uh, the, the dangerous element of a leash act with animals of that magnitude, It's amazing to me that it went on as long as it did with, with the public not being as supportive and understanding as they need to be that yeah, sometimes things do happen, you know?
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:20:22 Right. What kinda bears did Jackie have?
- Janice Aria: 00:20:27 He had all European Brown bears, which is, uh, synonymous with a Grizzly bear.
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:20:31 Right. So two years of clowning, Mike comes back with Jackie's bear act-
- Janice Aria: 00:20:39 Mm-hmm (affirmative), and left again by the way, he left again, it didn't last long, and Mike left with him, so I was on my own-
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:20:45 On your own.
- Janice Aria: 00:20:45 ... on the Blue show, yeah, the second year pretty much.
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:20:47 So you left after two years to go?
- Janice Aria: 00:20:51 Well, (laughs) um, I did a lot of PR because, uh, as I said, I was, uh, the biggest circus fan in the world, but I was in it. (laughs) So when I spoke about it it was so genuine, um, and, so they used the hell out of me for PR, which they did, um, mostly. Wom- The women clown thing was still very unusual, and a-
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:21:11 'Kay.
- Janice Aria: 00:21:11 ... woman clown who had left college to join the circus, so they played that up, and I loved talking about it. So every city I would do the PR, you know, the early morning talk shows, the press, and when we got to Anaheim-
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:21:23 When we say early we're not talking like-

Janice Aria: 00:21:25 No, we're talking-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:21:26 ... 7:30-

Janice Aria: 00:21:26 ... 5:00-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:21:26 ... a.m.?

Janice Aria: 00:21:27 No we're talking 5:00, 5:30.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:21:28 Right.

Janice Aria: 00:21:28 Yeah, you know. (laughs) But again, what magic to get-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:21:31 Which means-

Janice Aria: 00:21:32 ... up, and-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:21:32 ... that you had to get up earlier to-

Janice Aria: 00:21:33 And slap that-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:21:33 ... put on your makeup-

Janice Aria: 00:21:33 ... all on your-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:21:33 ... and the ... Yeah-

Janice Aria: 00:21:34 ... face, right-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:21:35 ... right.

Janice Aria: 00:21:35 ... yeah, yep. But, you know, that ritual meant so much to me, that ritual was transformative to me, it was honestly of a religious nature. I would sit down there, this, this retched woman first thing in the morning, and, you know, you just s-start, you start, and you put it on, and there you are, and by that time that, that I powdered the last powder I was, I was in the groove, I, I was totally into it. So it didn't matter, it could have been 2:00 in the morning with no s- I don't care. So we get to Anaheim, and one of the gigs that had been prearranged, I knew nothing about it, was with this show on ABC called Girl in My Life, and it was a remake of the old Queen for a Day show.

Janice Aria: 00:22:14 The concept being that you, you take this innocent person that had done so much good for people, and you give them the prize that they'd always wanted their whole lives. Well, I hadn't done

that much good for people, but my, I did, I had a cherry pie gig going on the show, which cherry pie means yo- extra money, right? I was the school teacher, Jackie Althoff's daughter, bunch of the flying act kids, the Gaona kids, um, acts of [Godia's 00:22:37] kids, the elephant guy, they were, they had no teacher at this time. They had a correspondence school, so I became the teacher, it was great, it was fun, because the, the curriculum was all laid out by the correspondence school, so I just had to meet with the kids and get 'em through their lessons.

- Janice Aria: 00:22:54 So they filmed me for about a month. I didn't question why because again, you know, like all clowns we did a lotta PR, um, but that's what they used as the gimmick to get me on this show. All they wanted was PR for Ringling, m- cool. So they asked Mike, this was just not fair, they asked Mike what would she most want, and he said a bear cub.
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:23:14 (laughs)
- Janice Aria: 00:23:14 What? So here I am, I, th- I go to ABC to do a, an interview, and I keep looking at my watch, and go in all dressed up 'cause they said, "This is a special, you know, really put on makeup, not show makeup, girl makeup." and, uh, so I'm waiting, I'm waiting, I'm waiting, and they said, "You know, gee, the guy's late, but here's, here's what they want you to do. Go in and watch this game show, and then we'll come and get you when the interviewer gets here." I said, "I hate game shows to tell you the truth I, I'll just wait out here." "No, uh, no, you need to come in." So we go in, I sit on the aisle seat, they showed me where to sit, I never thought a thing about it. So here goes the first lady on Girl in My Life, and I don't remember what she did 'cause again I was not even paying attention, and they gave her, um, something like a roll-top desk and three goats. I remember thinking-
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:24:01 (laughs)
- Janice Aria: 00:24:01 ... what in the heck, but that's what evidently she wanted her whole life-
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:24:04 Got some-
- Janice Aria: 00:24:04 ... a good yea.
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:24:05 ... interesting diverse wants, yeah.

Janice Aria: 00:24:09 And then I'm sitting there, and I'm starting to get a little pissed 'cause I don't have much free time, this is all on your free time, right-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:24:12 Right.

Janice Aria: 00:24:12 ... these PR's. And now I hear (sings) and the bloods leaving my face, and then up there on the stage is the video of me teaching these kids, and I go, "Oh, this can't even be happening."

Scott O'Donnell: 00:24:25 (laughs)

Janice Aria: 00:24:25 And I didn't even think of a pay-off, I'm just thinking this can't ... And I'm sitting there, here comes the MC up the aisle with the microphone, and he takes my hand, and I'm pulling back down, like he takes my hand, and I did see the tape later, and it was really not flattering to me, I looked like a very unwilling contestant. I get up on the stage, and I'm like this, and he's telling the story that I teach these ... Making it sound like I, out of the goodness of my heart m- taught these circus children when in fact it was really a very (laughs) substantial income for me. Um, and he, "Now we're giving you what you've wanted your whole life." and I'm thinking I don't have ... I mean it's gonna be a car.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:25:01 (laughs)

Janice Aria: 00:25:02 Huh? You know? And, uh, the curtain opens, and out walks this guy with a full blown, a full grown Black bear-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:25:09 (laughs)

Janice Aria: 00:25:09 ... on a leash, and I thought I was just gonna pass out, but, and I didn't realize that ... I didn't realize until later I saw the tape. You can clearly see my lips moving to I don't want that-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:25:19 (laughs)

Janice Aria: 00:25:20 ... I don't, I don't want that, but I got that. So here's the deal, this is why Mike and I had to get married, you see we had a bear coming. So they're only born once a year, I thought my God, they're gonna make me take this damn bear home with me now, how is this gonna work?

Scott O'Donnell: 00:25:33 (laughs)

Janice Aria: 00:25:34 But what they told me afterwards, "Um, you will get a bear cub from the next years birthing. They're only born once a year, and we have a deal with the Lincoln Park Zoo in Chicago, and when the bear cubs are born you will get one." oh, my gosh. So my life changed, my life changed at that, and, uh, I-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:25:52 Imagine of you had got the roll-top and the three goats.

Janice Aria: 00:25:55 Well, I would have put a goat act together-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:25:56 I know-

Janice Aria: 00:25:56 ... right? I'd probably-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:25:57 ... but a whole-

Janice Aria: 00:25:57 ... still be working-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:25:58 ... different trajectory.

Janice Aria: 00:25:58 ... today, (laughing) man, right, you're right.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:25:59 Yeah.

Janice Aria: 00:26:00 And I probably coulda transported 'em in the roll-top-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:26:03 In the-

Janice Aria: 00:26:03 ... desk.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:26:03 ... roll-tops, see?

Janice Aria: 00:26:03 Put a couple holes in it, you're in.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:26:05 Good to go.

Janice Aria: 00:26:06 Little diaper sheets on the bottom, ah, geez Scott, you just totally-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:26:09 (laughs)

Janice Aria: 00:26:09 ... ruined my, (laughs) my ... Like you gave me a new fantasy, I'm gonna torment-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:26:12 Oh.

- Janice Aria: 00:26:13 ... torment with that. So, um, I finished the season, um, and I ... Uh, Mike had decided ... I can't honestly, I'm trying to think, I forget how it came to be that he was gonna go to Circus World. I think he worked something with ... Oh, I know. He worked something out with Kenneth 'cause Jewell New was breaking a male lion act, all male lions at Circus World. Circus World ha- was very new, very, very new-
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:26:38 Circus World, not-
- Janice Aria: 00:26:39 ... in, in-
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:26:39 ... this Circus World.
- Janice Aria: 00:26:39 ... Central Florida, right-
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:26:40 Right.
- Janice Aria: 00:26:40 ... in Central Florida, um, Davenport, Florida. And, um, Mike went there as a groom, and then kinda just started hanging out with the elephant department, and ended up working with the elephant department as well. Um, and this was a perfect setup for us to welcome our baby bear, right? So I finished the season, Kenneth was very upset with me because Don had deci- dis- m- uh, designed some really cool costumes for me, and I'm so unusually built. He was wondering how I, you know, (laughs) we're gonna ... Well, I, in my first year I wore Bob Drake's costumes from the previous year, so I didn't worry about ... Uh, they'd find somebody to, to wear them. Um, but I had negotiated with Kenneth for a raise above the normal the second year 'cause I did the, the showgirl tricks in the elephant act, and t- they didn't let clowns do that, but I begged and begged, and Sonny Ridley finally caved and let me do them, so I asked for more money and I got it.
- Janice Aria: 00:27:35 Um, to go to Circus World Kenneth punished me by, uh, u- took my raise away, and put me back on starter salary. Well, I didn't wanna be a part clown, I didn't wanna be out in that heat, and, you know, a whole day with no gags to do, just sight gags, and I, I, it just didn't feel right. At this time I still fancied that I was gonna be a clown with a bear, I mean that, that was the, two of the oldest performers historically-
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:28:00 Yeah.
- Janice Aria: 00:28:00 ... for a reason, you know? And I thought if I were a bear trainer as a clown I could do this until I was the age I am now, almost

70. Um, didn't work out that way, but, uh, I, I wasn't gonna be a clown at Circus World, kind of like I'll show you Kenneth, yeah. So, um, I went to work with Barbara Woodcock as her leopard groom for \$80.00 a week, which was way less than I was ... Well, not that much less than I was gonna make as a clown, but it was still ... I needed to learn, I knew nothing about exotic animals, zip, zero. I bitched and moaned so much at the show jumping back to the day I won that, um, bear cub over my ... God, did this really happen. You could never do that now. I mean you couldn't even-

- Scott O'Donnell: 00:28:42 Right.
- Janice Aria: 00:28:42 ... done that 15 years ago, but they did it then. Um, I wa- I kept saying in the dressing room and in Clown Alley, you know, if, if I was gonna get an animal I wanted a Golden Retriever, I wanted a Golden Retriever my whole life. Why a bear cub, ma-ma-ma-ma-, I never shut up about it. The show moves up the West Coast, we go to Portland, Oregon, and it was my birthday, it was October, and I walked into Clown Alley on a Sunday morning, and next to my trunk was this beautiful Golden Retriever puppy with a big yellow bow. The clowns and the showgirls had chipped in, researched it, found a breeder, and they got me a Golden Retriever puppy.
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:29:17 Oh.
- Janice Aria: 00:29:17 How about that, right?
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:29:18 That's awesome.
- Janice Aria: 00:29:18 I mean gee. The bad part of this was we're sense went out the window, we get to Clown College, the bear cub gets there, I'm a leopard groom, we breed this Golden Retriever, we have a litter of puppies, we couldn't part with any of 'em, and now we had a dog act. I really crunched the time on that one, so. (laughing)
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:29:40 Yes, you did.
- Janice Aria: 00:29:40 Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:29:42 Uh, see ... Let's see if we can un-crunch that.
- Janice Aria: 00:29:45 (laughing)
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:29:45 So you're at Circus World with-

Janice Aria: 00:29:48 Uh-huh (affirmative).

Scott O'Donnell: 00:29:48 ... Barbara Woodcock.

Janice Aria: 00:29:49 Yeah.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:29:49 For those listening who is Barbara Woodcock, and what did you learn from-

Janice Aria: 00:29:54 Oh.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:29:54 ... Barbara Woodcock?

Janice Aria: 00:29:55 Barbara Woodcock is an iconic circus figure, just iconic, yeah. The elephant empress of everyone's dreams, a phenomenal, uh, circus performer I, I really do believe. The best, one of the best circus performers, women performers I've ever, ever seen, I mean her heart and soul was in every single act. She was stunning, and also a very capable trainer. A lot women just dress acts, she was a handler and a trainer, and, um, at this time she had Anna May's act, which was an incredible Asian elephant, uh, who just had two tusches with a f- the Asian elephant female of, version of tusks that they were unusually long, and they allowed you to do ... You could hook your arms on them, you could hook your legs on them, you could hook your toes on them, you could do unbelievable mounts and poses, and Barbara took full advantage of that. Um, but she also ... She had a leopard in the act, Nirvana, it was an unbelievable two animal act, one elephant, one leopard, and this amazing woman performer, and it was ... And, and her son Ben Williams, just absolutely dazzling, and it never left an audience with their mouths closed, everybody just gaped at this act.

Janice Aria: 00:31:03 And, so I took care of Nirvana, her leopard, and then four more leopards, and then a jaguar that she ultimately got, and, uh, and a tiger. So I really learned from the ground up, from the poop up literally, uh, which is the only way to do it with animals, I didn't know that. Um, I learned, I learned styling, she taught me Anna May's whole act, she taught her daughter-in-law, uh, Karen Williams and me Anna May's act. We were both too tall to ever do those mounts, but she taught us just to teach us how to style in the ring. You know, I had to go from a, a clown persona with my feet out into a, a showgirl. I had to trade in the putty nose for the false eyelashes because, uh, for one thing I worked in the elephant act at Circus World, and Buckles Woodcock, Barbara's husband, who is ma- arguably-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:31:50 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Janice Aria: 00:31:50 ... the best elephant trainer, uh, American elephant trainer ever. I mean there was Smokey Jones, phenomenal, there were ... Uh, Hugo Schmidt was German, Buckles is certainly in the top five historically. Um, and all of us, he encouraged all of us to stretch what we knew, uh, learn i- as much as we could, and then stretch that, and, and put it in a show with animals, and, but he would not let me work in the elephant act as a clown, and nor would be bear cub tolerate. I s- We started with me practicing with the wig, and the nose, and bear, because I raised the bear cub from infancy, and, and all bears after that that we had. Um, I was around them as a person a lot, and they didn't handle.

Janice Aria: 00:32:31 This is a difference in animals. Elephants don't give a shit, you know, they don't, but bears, and I would imagine monkeys or primates would notice the same thing. I'm imagining, I have no experience with that, but it didn't work. So I ... That's why I only was a clown for two years even though it was the real me. The showgirl part was not the real me, but when I put all that makeup on in my mind I still was a clown, so I was very comfortable with it. I never, never looked at myself as a, as a showgirl, always a, the clown inside.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:32:59 So Barbara started to teach you about training animals?

Janice Aria: 00:33:03 Mm-hmm (affirmative), and styling, presenting them too.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:33:06 And presenting.

Janice Aria: 00:33:06 Yep.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:33:07 Let's go with animal training first. So for those that might not have had the blessing of sharing their life with a-

Janice Aria: 00:33:13 Hmm.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:33:13 ... elephant, a, a leopard, or a bear cub-

Janice Aria: 00:33:17 (laughs)

Scott O'Donnell: 00:33:17 ... what's that journey like, and what's the process of obviously-

Janice Aria: 00:33:22 Hmm.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:33:22 ... we can't go beep by beep, but what's the overall concept and process of animal training? Life with the animals.

- Janice Aria: 00:33:29 Phoo. It, it ... That ... It ... It's just that, it's life with the animals. You ... And again, I didn't know this, uh, you know, my mom always told me, "If you ever have a kid you better be ready for it 'cause you're not bringing it home for me to raise." my mom loved kids, but she said very clearly, "A kid will change your life because they own you from that moment on." Um, nobody could have advised me that with animals, I don't care its dogs because we had those too, from the moment you take them into your life they own you. You can't hire a babysitter if you have bears, you know, you can't unless you're in a very secure situation, you can't leave the lot. You can be in your trailer, but you ... They, they own you, and it, it is a very, very, uh, severe ownership.
- Janice Aria: 00:34:11 They, uh ... We felt, and I think it's the reality, that you have to make this life viable for those animals. If they're no longer i- in the romantic sense free how do you sublimate that, and make their lives viable? So they're off time is the greatest amount of their time, and we realize, um, it was our burden, our responsibility, and actually our privilege, to fill their time with stimulation, to make sure that species maintains its integrity. And if, if m- m- It was a commitment that we were ready for fortunately, it happened so quickly, but we were ready for it.
- Janice Aria: 00:34:49 And to live at the, at Circus World in Florida, um, our, our trailer was right by the picket line, right by where the elephants were kept. Uh, when the weather was nice they were all outside on the picket line tethered, um, but so content. And, you know, you, you know yourself is the after-hour times around a show are just so wonderful-
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:35:07 Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Janice Aria: 00:35:08 ... it's, it's the, the, it's the meat and potatoes of the whole deal. The show is such a small slice of payback, but, you know, to sit out there, and barbeque, and drink a cold beer, and watch those elephants deal with each other, and throw hay on each other, lay down, sleep, get up, i-, i-, it was just, uh, magical, but the point was you were there, and they owned you. Had to stay in shape, you couldn't be sick, there's no such thing. Um, it was a commitment that I miss to this day, I will miss it every single day.
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:35:42 So my experience in being around animal trainers there's one animal that most animal trainers say you have to be of special talent to work with, and that's always bears.
- Janice Aria: 00:35:56 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Scott O'Donnell: 00:35:57 I've always-

Janice Aria: 00:35:57 (laughs)

Scott O'Donnell: 00:35:58 They always seem to rise above any other animal, uh, eh, in, in the circus world. So you spent some with the elephants, and leopards-

Janice Aria: 00:36:08 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Scott O'Donnell: 00:36:08 ... and now you're the mom to a bear cub. What's the, wh- what's the, uh, the reality behind those observations? What makes bears so unique?

Janice Aria: 00:36:21 Thank God we didn't know. Thank God we-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:36:23 (laughs)

Janice Aria: 00:36:23 ... knew nothing, nothing because if we had we never would have. Uh, Jackie Althoff said to us that bears have black hearts, that even when you raise them from infancy they'll turn on you in heartbeat. And you don't see bear trainers, nor to my knowledge, uh, a lot of primate trainers, switch animals. Um, elephant trainers, big cat trainers, dog trainers, can ... You know, this dog isn't working out for me, do you want her in your act? Uh, uh, these cats are owned by so-and-so, so they hire trainers, you can't do that with bears. And really that's why we didn't get killed, and I mean get killed because w- w- like these two ex-hippies from New Jersey, come on, but we didn't know that about bears, you know, we did not know that.

Janice Aria: 00:37:11 And Mike was fortunately very, very strong. What I learned was that to I- It's all relationship, it's all ... And it is with dogs too, but with bears it will, it will save your life. If they trust you, and something frightens them, if they look to you rather than booking, it, you got something going for your there. Um, we initially tried stuff because every bear act we had seen, and we hadn't seen that many, had a bicycle, that's just standard, right? So we took my precious 10 speed Schwinn bike that I loved, and we traded it in for this, well, and we had to add more to it, a small bike with a sprocket set so that the wheels went, uh, the pedals went when the wheels went, right, and it figured that's how you do it. But, but she tolerated us, put a muzzle on her, get her up there, pet, pet, grape, grape, grape, treat, treat, treat.

- Janice Aria: 00:37:59 Well, I will tell you, Scott, for two years we pushed that damn bear around in a circle on that bicycle, and every time we'd stop pushing her with the, with the pedals going automatically she'd do like a kid, like push forward and look at us like come on, come on. And we, we realized we don't know what the hell we're doing, we don't know how to get her to ride that, but you can't poke a bear too much. I mean that's where that expression you're poking a bear comes from because you, you, you know, you're gonna s- set off a bonfire. We canceled the, uh, bike notion, and we just started observing what they do, uh, naturally. Uh, wh- wh- wh- what do they wanna do every day? We came out with kind of a children's playground concept that, because they wanted to do it, so we did very ... We had a, a big globe that she loved getting up on and walking around on, we had barrels, but our blow-off trick, which I really did love, we had a swing rigged really high in the arena, and she, that bear loved that swing.
- Janice Aria: 00:38:53 She didn't like me initially, I never really got the first bears respect because I honestly did not understand, I thought they were all like Golden Retrievers because I did not know.
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:39:01 Yeah.
- Janice Aria: 00:39:01 (laughs) And to get her to get on the swing I would stand in front of it, and she'd come after me, and then she'd be on the swing, that's really f- I was bait, you know? Um, and she'd get on the swing, and we'd push her, and it was really nice 'cause they put her in a spotlight, and we had two big, um, uh, rhinestone flowers on each end of the swing, and the bear in spotlight, and so it just threw lights everywhere, you know? And the bear would kick her feet, she loved that swing. So we just ended up doing very, very simple acts. We had Don Foote wardrobe, which really was the whole act, that and the bears.
- Janice Aria: 00:39:33 Again, I got to be a Greek chorus like look at that, look at that. Um, so we didn't, we didn't have a typical American bear, uh, 'cause we didn't know how. We asked Jackie Althoff one day when we, uh, first got this bear cub, Mike said, "Jackie, how do you muzzle a bear?" He said, "What you, what do you mean, Mr.? You put the muzzle on the bear." Mike said, "No, and I really have my own now, and, you know, you're going at the mouth. It's the, it's the business end of the (laughs) bear. What, what's your technique, well, Eddie?" he said, "If I tell you someday you put me out of work." so we had to even figure out how-
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:40:06 (laughs)

Janice Aria: 00:40:06 ... to put the muzzle on the bear. Isn't that funny though when you think about the hardship of, of, you know, animal trainers-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:40:12 Right.

Janice Aria: 00:40:13 ... and if ... I, I totally get it, there was no resentment on our part, he was right-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:40:16 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Janice Aria: 00:40:16 ... he was right. Um, so-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:40:20 So you had one-

Janice Aria: 00:40:20 ... okay.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:40:20 ... bear.

Janice Aria: 00:40:21 We had, we had one bear, uh (laughs) then Ringling Brothers gets a call from a hunter in, uh, West Virginia, they had a bear cub they had rescued from the woods, and it had gotten too feisty for them, did anybody in Ringling want this bear cub? So Venice winter quarters called us at Circus World, of course we said hell yeah. Now, by this point we need more bears, and we didn't know how to get them. So those two hunters drove the ... I, I ... We kinda think they might have shot the mom. They, they get down there, and, uh, and out of the back of their truck they ... Now, kinda the, kinda the warning was that they put welders gloves on to get the cage out of the truck, we should have known.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:41:02 (laughing)

Janice Aria: 00:41:02 So they put his bear cub down on the ground, and, uh, or in this big crate. We open up, here's this small Black bear, but oh, my God, she was just a dynamite, literally like the kind that blows up, you know? And, um, three of the s- the elephant guys who are still very good friends of mine to this day, Gary Jacobson, the head of the CEC being one of them, came over, and Gary said right away like, "Let me ... Here, give me that leash." So Gary takes the leash, takes the leash, and that bear just shredded his arms right now, bing, so that was our second bear, we had a lotta work to do. And she never did, and that was the one bear that we ultimately did give to a zoo because she, it was too late, sh- they had babied her.

Janice Aria: 00:41:40 I, I tell you there's nothing more beautiful in the world than a baby bear. If you look at the tip of your finger, and you imagine that that's a bear paw when their tiny, with these tiny little claws coming out, I mean ho- you're in love, you know? And, but i- in time at all they're ... They're a solitary animal, they live on their own in the wild, they don't even suffer their own kind let alone, you know, Homo sapiens.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:42:04 Right-

Janice Aria: 00:42:04 (laughs)

Scott O'Donnell: 00:42:04 ... right.

Janice Aria: 00:42:04 So that was our second bear, and she was a runner, that was really fun, (laughing) oh, my God. Thank God Circus World, uh, the show at Circus World was, uh, in a proscenium situation, it was a one ring show, but in a proscenium situation like a typical theater, right?

Scott O'Donnell: 00:42:20 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Janice Aria: 00:42:21 Fortunately there were not people all around us. When she booked she went into the wings, and we had people set up to, to help us, but she never did, she never did work out. (laughs) That was our second bear. We didn't turn back though, Scott. (laughing)

Scott O'Donnell: 00:42:35 Plugging forward, second bear, third bear must show up?

Janice Aria: 00:42:39 Second bear we were gonna go on the show, on the, on the Blue show, uh, with the bear. Um, both of our bears rode elephants in the show at Circus World, which was really cool, and thank you Buckles Woodcock. Um, what an education, and who gets that kind of education, right? And we started with a dog, we started with Clarence the Woodcock's, uh, dog who ended up, he loved me, so I kept him. Um, we started with a bear on two elephants, and I mean, I'm sorry, a dog, and then strangely our Brown bear, Chloe, the first bear that we got, loved riding that elephant, this the same bear that did the swing trick, she loved things like that.

Janice Aria: 00:43:18 So we built a T-bar, and put it on top of the elephant with a howdah, and she, we had a bull tub set up next to the elephant, she jumped from the bull tub up to the elephant, and Mike worked the elephant, and I worked the bear. I was on the outside, on the off-lead side, Mike was working it. It was an

African elephant named Bonny after Bonny Feld, she was the first Bonny, we have a Bonny now at, uh, the CEC, Center for Elephant Conservation, but this is the first Bonny. And that bear just took to this trick, and, um, Buckles was so impressed with that he said, "Let's put her on a Asian. Heck, yeah, let's put her ..." so we used the elephant Barbara who was in an act that I presented from time to time, and Mike presented from time to time, so I had a relationship with Barbara the elephant. Let's put the bear on Bar- So we practiced a bunch of times, and then the first day we put her in the show, it was really cool, my mom was visiting, um, Circus World, and I was so proud to show her this. When we walked in the parade with this bear on an elephant the male lions were coming in right behind us into the, uh, steel arena, Jewell New's act. I don't know what happened that day, um, but that elephant spooked, pitched the bear and me into the audience, the bear climbs back over the, the barricade, and books. The elephant is flapping those big ears out, she takes off, I'm, my butt in the air in the seats.

- Janice Aria: 00:44:36 I never realized that elephants could kick to the side 'til that day. I mean it kicked with great force, no aim, but great force. Uh, so we went back to the African elephant, and that's how it was. So we were gonna do the two bears on two elephants, and we were gonna go on the Blue show, and-
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:44:52 And what did ... Let's back up, what did mom think that day?
- Janice Aria: 00:44:55 Sh- My mom was a-
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:44:56 (laughs)
- Janice Aria: 00:44:56 ... stalwart, man. She said, "Well, you just gotta practice more." (laughing) "Wow, okay then-"
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:45:03 Uh-huh (affirmative).
- Janice Aria: 00:45:03 "... ma." which we knew, you know, but we also knew we had a bad match there. Again, these are all preliminary lessons. You learn ... You're not gonna make any animal do anything, I just don't believe you're gonna. If you, if you i- i- I mean there are gonna be performances where they're sluggish at what they wanna do, and you might have to encourage them, whatever, um, but we learned the bicycle didn't work, the, the Brown bear on an Asian elephant didn't work, uh, we learned our lessons in front of people, uh, (laughs) and they were, they were indelible, so-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:45:34 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Janice Aria: 00:45:34 ... that was another lesson. Let, uh ... You know, if it work ... If it ... It ... If it ain't broke don't fix it.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:45:38 Right.

Janice Aria: 00:45:38 We had the little Black bear on a small Asian elephant, a male, and they were tailed up, it was really cool, and that was gonna be the basis of our act on the Blue show. Um, it didn't work out that way, uh, there were just some, uh, political finagling's let's say that, that, uh, our contract was dumped, and at the time it was devastating, um, but it was one of the best things that ever happened. Um, our cages, we, we were having our cages built to, um, go on the road, and they were all in Tampa being galvanized, so we had no cages, we had to stay at Circus World for a while, uh, and as soon as our cages were done we had to leave Circus World, and we had no place to go literally.

Janice Aria: 00:46:20 So the vet, uh, one of the vets at Circus World had a farm in Haines City, Florida where Circus world was located, and he said, "You can come and stay in my back pasture." This is what you do for animals, this is what ... And to answer your previous question. So for a winter we lived in his pasture with no electricity, we didn't even have hookups for our trailer. Um, it was really rubbed- rugged, it was rough, but it was so worth it. You never think, um, gee, this is tough, I wanna go back to my air conditioned house in New Jersey, no, you think look it, those are my bears, wow, am I lucky.

Janice Aria: 00:46:57 Uh, at Circus World I, I think I mentioned we bred this Golden Retriever, couldn't part with the puppies, so-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:47:03 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Janice Aria: 00:47:03 ... we had the ... We took that winter to break a Golden Retriever act again not knowing at all what we were doing. Um, we broke them to do a liberty act 'cause we thought they're big, gorgeous animals, we couldn't see them necessarily doing a typical dog act. They're not feisty and energetic like Terriers and Poodles, right, but nobody told us. They're so lacksadagle- - daisical, like you get, you know, a liberty act is all formation, it's all precision, Golden Retrievers are like yo, dude, hey, ah-huh (affirmative), uh, hey, a bird, ah, yeah.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:47:35 (laughing)

Janice Aria: 00:47:36 And I mean some time ... That, that would have been a great clown act because we'd get out there and I'm all dressed to kill, you know, and strutting my stuff, and tha- sometimes Jeep right in the middle would stop and look at the audience like just wagging his tail-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:47:48 (laughs)

Janice Aria: 00:47:48 ... you know, and there's the ... Formation just all goes to hell. So we had that winter with no electricity (laughs) and no income to work, work on our stuff. Fortunately got a call from the Hunt Brothers Circus in Florence, New Jersey, and they hired us sight unseen. They were desperate for ground acts, and we were desperate for work, so that's a marriage isn't it- (laughs)

Scott O'Donnell: 00:48:07 Yes.

Janice Aria: 00:48:08 ... desperation? (laughing) and s- and so my point is, and it, uh, although it was devastating to us at the time that that contract, ooh, ooh, fell through-

Peggy: 00:48:19 Okay.

Janice Aria: 00:48:19 we would never have had the chance to be on small shows. You know what? I watched the show here at Circus World Museum in Baraboo yesterday, and, uh, and it stopped my heart because that's real circus, you know? I love the one ring concept-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:48:33 Right.

Janice Aria: 00:48:33 ... I love being so close, and you-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:48:35 Yeah.

Janice Aria: 00:48:35 ... can almost, well, you can, there are smells that are indigenous only to circus-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:48:39 Right.

Janice Aria: 00:48:40 ... you know? It's just that, that beautiful, intimate setting that comes alive. I mean it wasn't quite as beautiful on the Hunt show, um, as your show here because the tent had so many holes in it that sometimes people would be sitting in the seats with their umbrellas open. It's really-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:48:55 Hmm.

Janice Aria: 00:48:55 ... vivid, and we couldn't, you know, stop (laughs) and take pictures of this because (laughing) you're in the act of everything. Holy shit, look at this, and this is really vivid.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:49:03 Yeah.

Janice Aria: 00:49:04 And sadly and ironically, uh, we were on the Hunt show, that was at that time the oldest tent show in America. We were on that show the year it folded, (laughs) but also a great, um, great experience 'cause we worked with Herbie Weber who is a-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:49:19 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Janice Aria: 00:49:19 ... circus great in my mind, he did a-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:49:21 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Janice Aria: 00:49:21 ... a slake wire act, and his blow-off trick, he had two baskets on his feet. I don't ... He was older than dirt at the point we worked with him, uh, and, you know, you get to be very close with everybody on a small tent show 'cause you're moving all, and well, on any show, but, um, the show that the (laughs) ... Sometimes, well, many times there would be more people in the show than in the seats, and we were watching this day after day. Again, we're new, we're just so First of May, man. Uh, just a ... And, uh, I re-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:49:44 What does that term mean?

Janice Aria: 00:49:45 Means, uh, uh, first of May, um, typically old day circus would open in beginning of May, so if you're brand new on the show you're First of May. We were also ... Another term we learn on the show, gajo's, you come from an outside situation, from a town sucker is another term-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:50:04 (laughs)

Janice Aria: 00:50:04 ... for it, right?

Scott O'Donnell: 00:50:04 Right.

Janice Aria: 00:50:05 So you're a First of May once in your life, you're a gajo forever, and we-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:50:08 Right.

- Janice Aria: 00:50:08 ... were gajo's forever. Um, but it was so funny on the Hunt show, we're all going are this show all right, it isn't, and, uh, somebody said, "You know, the shows closing." "Well, how do you know?" "You see Herbie Weber in a phone booth with stacks of quarters you know." because this is before cell phones, that's how you lined up your next gig, you went to the pay phone. You talked to your parents once a week maybe on a pay phone, you know, no cell phones, none of that stuff, and damn if that wasn't accurate, the show folded. Uh, one day Marsha Hunt knocked on our door and said, "That's it, we're done." and, so here we are again, and i- But what an experience, what an experience.
- Janice Aria: 00:50:44 My brother joined us, um, and, and, and stayed with us the whole time we were out with our bear act and our dog act, and, uh, he went through all this. He still lives next door to me in Florida, um, to this day. Uh, but that was very sad to see a show fold like that, and, you know, sadly I got to see this many, many times even up to the big one.
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:51:03 Mm-hmm (affirmative), yes. Uh, Hunt Brothers to where, what was the next stop, do you recall?
- Janice Aria: 00:51:11 Um, uh, I think we filled in with a lot of fairs, we did a lot-
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:51:13 Yep.
- Janice Aria: 00:51:13 ... of fairs, and again, booking this stuff was daunting really, you know, and because we were so brand new. The only reason people would hire us because we were, well, we fit the category of a ground act, and then it was bears, and there were very few bear acts at that time. Um, ultimately I'm do- There were, oh, a bunch of spot dates-
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:51:32 Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Janice Aria: 00:51:32 ... which are difficult, but particularly with, with any animal because there's no continuity for them.
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:51:37 Right.
- Janice Aria: 00:51:38 So we ... I think we really built our chops with, with these different situations. Um, we ultimately ... I think one of the best long-term gigs we had was with Ed Migley shows, Circus Odyssey, it was a really classy nice show, uh, worked with some great acts, and, um, really more or less got our act together. We

qui- acquired a few more bear cubs, um, primarily from Albert Rix, an incredible-

- Scott O'Donnell: 00:52:01 Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Janice Aria: 00:52:01 ... bear trainer. Albert, Jeanette, and Susie Rix, are just icons to me, um, and these were Brown bears. Uh, we also got from Albert Rix a, a m- the oldest bear that we ever took 'cause we took very young cubs, um, we ... A big old Black bear, we named him after Mike's, ... The ... Chloe was named after my grandmother, our Brown bear, so we had to name this bear after Mike's grandfather, [Rocco Zoppi 00:52:25]. (laughs) He could-
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:52:27 (laughs)
- Janice Aria: 00:52:27 ... make some tomato sauce I'm telling ya, the, the grandfather, not the bear.
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:52:31 Uh-huh (affirmative).
- Janice Aria: 00:52:31 So, um, that was a great big ole Black bear that we ... And we had him until he was 33 years old, but I, I-
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:52:37 Wow.
- Janice Aria: 00:52:37 ... digress, um, great bear. So we, we had ... We ended up with a, an act of four bears, and, uh, again, kind of a playground act. Kind of just three people, four bears, and-
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:52:47 Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Janice Aria: 00:52:47 ... they're on leashes, and, you know, the, the, the, the main goal was get the muzzles on 'em, get 'em down the ramp, get 'em ... Once you're in the ring you can kinda breath, and then, but walking past whatever you don't know, you know, you never know, and even with dogs this very distracting, could be tigers, could be somebody's kangaroo, could be somebody's kid screaming, and it, it doesn't mat- you know, it's very, very changeable, and if you don't have a relationship with those animals you're in deep, deep trouble-
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:53:14 Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Janice Aria: 00:53:19 ... deep.
- Scott O'Donnell: 00:53:19 What was the name of our dog act and your bear act?

Janice Aria: 00:53:19 It was the Aria Performing Bears, and the Liberty Performing Golden Retrievers. (laughs)

Scott O'Donnell: 00:53:25 Very cool. Uh, so you're doing spot dates, different producers-

Janice Aria: 00:53:31 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Scott O'Donnell: 00:53:31 ... at some point do you get a call to go back to Ringling, or how does that-

Janice Aria: 00:53:37 Many, many-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:53:37 ... journey go?

Janice Aria: 00:53:37 ... years.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:53:38 Many years.

Janice Aria: 00:53:39 Um, m- we had a ... You know, as life will do it throws you wonderful, wonderful desserts, and then sometimes a really lousy meal. Um, Mike was, uh, Mike was getting, uh, having really m- m- tired spells, uh, excessive sweating, and he was ill, we knew there was something going on, we thought maybe it was allergies. We also had a, a severely ill bear at the same time, and this is what animal people do. Mike's situation got put on the back-burner, we took the bear to the University of Pennsylvania, um, she was seizing, and ultimately, um, we had to put her down, oh, it was horrible. Um, she had encephalitis, she had a brain disorder, and it was heartbreaking, so it delayed us finding out what was wrong Mike. And we finally dug into what was long, wrong with Mike, it turned out to be Lou Gehrig's Disease, ALS. He was 33 years old, devastating, and we didn't know what it was, what is this-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:54:33 Right.

Janice Aria: 00:54:33 ... you know? Well, it's a progressive debilitating disease that has a pretty much a two, two year life expectancy. Um, i- we knew immediately we were out of business, but we had signed a year's worth of pay or play contracts, which is pretty much what you do on these independent dates. In, in other words if y- y- you agree to a certain amount of money, if you don't show up you pay the producer that amount of money, this is the only way they could guarantee in those days, I don't know what it is like now, um, so we knew we had to fulfill those contracts. We had no idea how this disease was going to progress. Um, they told us Mike would die probably two years, uh, and, um, they

said most people their legs go first, and that's how it was. [Larry French 00:55:18] also had this disease Karen Cristiani's husband, Brian Cristiani's dad, his legs went first. So I became very good friends with Karen, I, I didn't know what, what to do, you know, um, but she said too you're never gonna know, so.

- Janice Aria: 00:55:31 It was so s- strange 'cause like playing these dates we, we did a gig in Puerto Rico, we did the Migley show in Puerto Rico for I think it was four years in a row. Um, we got back from Puerto Rico, and we had a, a gig in, in [Binghamtom 00:55:45], Binghamtom, New York. So we drive up to Binghamtom, and Mike got out of the bear truck when we pulled into the lot to find out where they wanted to spot us, we got, he got back to the truck, and his hands were done, he couldn't pull himself up into the, into the cab of truck. So we re- Okay, now what do we (laughs) do, you know? We worked the gig, we, uh, we just worked with it from that point on. My brother and I would duct tape the bear stick to Mike's hand because the bears, it, it was significant to them. It wasn't an ac- At wasn't a symbol of brutality, it was just symbolic that ...
- Janice Aria: 00:56:19 Uh, and fortunately as I said I had to learn to drive the rig, which I, I would work any bear you'd put me next to, but please don't ask me to pull a big rig with a trailer, and I had to do that. Um, our sec- So we kept going, our second to the last contract that we had was at Caesar's Palace in Atlantic City, and here's this guy who we don't know if his legs are gonna quite tomorrow. We had to walk four bears with three people up a parking ramp, up to the fourth level of this parking ramp, and then through the casino to the ballroom where, where the bears worked. And, um, my other brother came and helped us 'cause he had to walk Mike, my brother, one, other brother and I walked the four bears, and my, um ... And we made it, can't believe it.
- Janice Aria: 00:57:02 And we had one other gig in Canada, we had to go all the way to Canada, and that's where, you know, it was very significant to us when we took the ramp down for the last time because it was, it was the last time. But Mike lived six years, which was incredible, and honestly I swear I credit our animals with that because he was surrounded by dogs. We still lived in a trailer, um, he did become completely paralyzed. We, um, w- we, u- became very good friends with a special education high school. These kids came out and built ramps for Mike, um, they built, ultimately they built a bathroom for Mike 'cause I couldn't, I could no longer pull him to the back of the trailer, and that was a beautiful, beautiful relationship, and I mention that because when Mike did pass away I got my undergraduate degree in special education because of those kids. And it was-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:57:52 Wow.

Janice Aria: 00:57:52 ... kinda the trail I had started on in the first place-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:57:55 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Janice Aria: 00:57:55 ... but I never, you know, I never realized that. So Mike, um, passed away in '89, died at home which is, you know, was a blessing-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:58:03 Right.

Janice Aria: 00:58:04 ... and fortunately my brother and I, um, still had bears. So I was out of show business, which just devastated me. I, I was, uh, really a, literally a fish out of water, but we still had the bears, and we still had the dogs, so I'd still practice. You know, we'd get the bears out every day, walk 'em around, just because we knew if we took too much time off, my brother and I, we wouldn't be able-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:58:24 Right.

Janice Aria: 00:58:25 ... to do that because with me certainly it was never a force issue ever, which is a huge misconception of people that are against animal acts. It is not a force issue, just wouldn't work that way.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:58:37 Yeah.

Janice Aria: 00:58:38 So you want me to tell you how I came back in the business-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:58:43 I do.

Janice Aria: 00:58:43 ... I'm curious? (laughs)

Scott O'Donnell: 00:58:43 I do.

Janice Aria: 00:58:43 So I taught public school for a while, it was a heartbreaking experience, and not because of the kids, and I taught really rough kids. I ... My, my degree was seriously emotionally (laughs) disturbed, I don't mean to make f- fun of them, but it is kinda funny because I know so many kids that were not labeled that, but who could play the game and get through school. I worked with the kids who couldn't play that game, who just ... Who's lives really were so tormented that school meant nothing to them, you know?

Scott O'Donnell: 00:59:09 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Janice Aria: 00:59:09 They were, they were my heart.

Scott O'Donnell: 00:59:11 Is-

Janice Aria: 00:59:11 Um-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:59:11 ... this all in Florida?

Janice Aria: 00:59:12 Yeah-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:59:12 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Janice Aria: 00:59:12 ... all in Florida. We, we, we ultimately bought a small farm in Florida, it was only 10 acres, but right near Circus World because we thought we'd be doing this forever-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:59:20 Right.

Janice Aria: 00:59:20 ... you know?

Scott O'Donnell: 00:59:21 Right.

Janice Aria: 00:59:21 Um, so, uh, taught public school for a while, and then I was just making no money. I, I had a daughter, had a wonderful little kid, and, um, had to raise this kid, so I had to work a whole bunch of other side jobs to, uh, afford being a school teacher. So I taught driver's ed, (laughs) I'm a terrible driver, so that's really funny. (laughing) I taught driver's ed, you know, when you get parking ticket you wanna get those points off it, so, I, I, I often thought this is so funny, people don't even know you had a clown up here who-

Scott O'Donnell: 00:59:51 (laughs)

Janice Aria: 00:59:51 ... can barely back up a car, (laughing) but you'll get those points off your driver's license. And I, uh, I taught homebound kids, kids that were just too naughty to go to school, and kids who had been in accidents and stuff, uh, so I did that. And then, um, a friend of mine hired me, eh, uh, he o- he was an optician, and he owned a chain of optical centers, and he was an eye doctor, and he hired me to ... He opened a construction company, he hired me to run his construction company. Again, I knew ... I wasn't afraid to do this even though I knew nothing about it 'cause I thought if I could live through-

- Scott O'Donnell: 01:00:24 Right.
- Janice Aria: 01:00:25 ... training bears I can do this. Well, the company did go out business. (laughs) God, when I think about it my track r- record is dismal isn't it? (laughing) Um, I worked for a while in his optometry business, and, um, Gary Jacobson, my dear friend at the Center for Elephant Conservation, kept pushing Kenneth to hire me back, "Hire her back, hire her back. She's got a degree in education." blah, blah, blah. The CEC was built in '95 right near my house, and, um-
- Scott O'Donnell: 01:00:54 And what does that acronym stand for?
- Janice Aria: 01:00:56 The Center for Elephant Conservation, it's a 200 acre property in Central Florida owned by Ringling Brothers, which for a, a g-well, for the length of time that, um, it was, um ... It is still in operation, but it's being phased out. It had the largest herd of Asian elephants in the United States, in the Northern Hemisphere as a matter of fact, and this is where the elephants who, uh, were too old to perform anymore were retired. It ... We started a really incredible breeding program, 26 Asian births, and for a, um, an endangered species that's really a bragging point. But also the research that I got to watch and participate in, uh, was, was incredible, incre- state of the art in the world, and the reason being that these animals were so well-trained and accustomed to people-
- Scott O'Donnell: 01:01:44 Right.
- Janice Aria: 01:01:44 ... that you could, you know, have access to them, easy access to, to them, that ultimately benefited the whole species. And Kenneth had often talked about about, according to Gary, um, he thought, you know, we've got all these elephants being born, we're, we're, we're, we've created a huge success here, looking down the road who's gonna train these elephants? It was pretty much like the Clown College scenario when Irvin Feld is credited with saying, you know-
- Scott O'Donnell: 01:02:08 Right.
- Janice Aria: 01:02:08 ... "These clowns can fall down, but can they get back up?"
- Scott O'Donnell: 01:02:10 (laughs) Right.
- Janice Aria: 01:02:11 ... you know, looking for the future. And those ... Th- the Feld's w- were an- and are visionaries. Um, so ultimately I did meet with Kenneth, and he introduced me to a guy he had hired as

his, uh, director, or vice president of animal stewardship, the guy hired me, long story short there. And, uh, an- honestly one of the best jobs, particularly for an older performer, m- phased out performer like myself, it was an absolutely incredible opportunity. Um-

Scott O'Donnell: 01:02:39

Hmm.

Janice Aria: 01:02:39

... with some valued colleagues we put together an intern program, it was residential program, these, these young people were paid, um, minimum wage, actually a little more than minimum wage. We provided housing, and we submerged them in the whole elephant culture, um, morning 'til night, you know? And they ... It, it was kind of interest m- educational for us too 'cause these kids showed up, it was a very, very, um, painstaking process to get accepted, again, much like Clown College, and when they got there they really kinda thought, "Hey, where's my costume?" and we said, "Hey, here's your shovel." because the mindset was such that hey, I got in, now I'm gonna learn to train elephants, and, you know? We ... Hopefully our, I think our greatest success was that we changed a lot of their minds around to the fact that no, this is a labor of love, this is not a lab- labor of, um, your personal (laughs) success unless you wanna start at the bottom. So, um, for over 13 years that's what I did.

Janice Aria: 01:03:36

It ... This, this position also evolved into, uh, having these training programs, but, um, sadly, um, w- we watched, we watched the foundation start to crumble. Um, I testified a lot, Los Angeles, Chicago, Boston, New York, uh, Roanoke, New York, uh, all over the place, when the, when this, the, the real vehement's of the animal activist, uh, program started to become evident. And we just ... And Kenneth Feld was such a, a warrior in this fight, I mean he, uh, as a typical of Kenneth he threw a lot of money at it, but he also ... I mean we had an incredible staff of warriors that ... 'Cause we knew we were right, you know, we knew we were right.

Janice Aria: 01:04:20

What will, will absolutely devastate me for the rest of my life is, and this is a cautionary tale, that an ideology can win out. An ideology can capture people's romantic notions, and totally, totally trump the truth, trump facts, and I, I watched that happened with my own eyes. I watched, you know, a- again, with my arsenal of personal experience. I was so confident speaking to these, um, city council people, and I knew they'd believe me because I really lived it, you know, and at this point it had been like 30, 35 years. Um, but then you hear the other side get up there, and, and talk about us with complete

fabrication, complete fabrication, and you can't stand up in a courtroom and go bullshit! Lies! you can't, and I- I'm horrified that they prevailed, they prevailed. You know, the ban the bullhook thing is the most sinister stab to sensibility that I have experienced in my life, and, and then it trickled down to other, you know, other aspects of animal training.

- Janice Aria: 01:05:25 Uh, I did a, um, an interview one time, we did tons of 'em at the CEC, um, with a, a guy from a Tampa station, and he went in the barn, and he's looking around, and he's, he says, "Those are the shackles, right?" I said, "They're not shackles, they're, they're tethers." and I explained to him, "These animals are trained to wear those tethers, and in fact they walk in the barn at night after their luxurious bath, and they hold their foot up because tethers to them mean groceries because when they're tethered they get groceries, that's their assoc- You can see it, right?" And, and I ... And he said, "But they're still shackles." I said, "Well, the professional word is here, and if I may say your interviewing a professional, they're tethers." When he did the piece, you know, you know, you can imagine what happened, he used the word, and he said it in a very nasty way. He said, "Ringling's calls these tethers, but they're shackles."
- Janice Aria: 01:06:15 And, uh, I, I remember another instance at the CEC when they brought the whole herd in, they had watched, they ... Oh, it was actually with NB- NBC, it was the Today Show. Um, and m- m- Zina the elephant that I mentioned earlier, my first elephant to ride, was at this time retired to the CEC. She was a very vocal elephant, so we loved to get the interns around her 'cause they got lulled into a false sense of security by some of the older lovely's. Zina would just put that trunk up, and squawk, and squawk, and it scared them, and we said good 'cause she wasn't gonna hurt them, but they ... Uh, so Zina was squawking outside, and she, eh, eh, Natalie Morales said to me, um, "What is she screaming for?" and I told her what I just told you, I said, "She's a vocal elephant." blah, blah, blah.
- Janice Aria: 01:06:59 We get into the barn, they s- they said, "Can we, um, not put any of the chains on the elephants, and just get a, a, a shot of all those beautiful piles of produce and grain in front of each elephant?" Gary Jacobson said, "I don't see why not." The elephants go in the barn, and they stood there-
- Peggy: 01:07:19 Hmm, hmm, hmm.
- Janice Aria: 01:07:19 ... and the guy says, "Why aren't they eating?" and we were cracking up. We didn't know, we didn't anticipate this. Gary said, "This isn't their routine, they, they sense that something's

o-" They were hungry, I mean they're a very food motivated animal, right-

- Scott O'Donnell: 01:07:32 Right.
- Janice Aria: 01:07:33 ... they didn't even wanna eat because the sha- the shackles so to speak weren't on them. So they, they put the tethers on 'em to prove, you know, and bang, they went right, right to town eating. Um, when we got outside, and Natalie Morales put me on mic, Zina was in there squa ... Oh, when they first brought Zina in the two, her two best buddies were behind her, and they were, they were actually pooping outside the barn, and we let 'em do it out there 'cause the barn was all freshly cleaned, right? She's starts eh-ra-uh- good, uh, (laughs) to the sound effects, sound effect, uh, and Natalie Morales says to me on, on mic later, "Why was that elephant screaming in the barn just before you chained her up? She obviously was in anticipating pain." and I totally blew the interview, fortunately they didn't use it. I said, "Natalie, we talked about that out back, that was that same elephant. You see that's the difference, Natalie, we know each one of these animals, each one is different, and that was the same vocal ..." I was furious.
- Janice Aria: 01:08:33 And very fortunately they didn't use any of that because I did what you never do in an interview, I portrayed a really angry person. But it hit me where I live-
- Scott O'Donnell: 01:08:42 Right.
- Janice Aria: 01:08:42 ... you know, and that's what I saw in, as, as things went on. As I saw things get better and better, and I saw animal care improved. I mean electric fences on the units, we didn't have that when I started. The elephants were always on a picket line, and you know what, they were content. How do you know? Well, you know, I mean you, you can tell if you're with someone who's relaxed and comfortable, or if they're anxious and, and uncomfortable. Um, I, I used to just, until they kicked me out, always hang around the elephant tent just to-
- Scott O'Donnell: 01:09:10 Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Janice Aria: 01:09:10 ... smell that, and watch-
- Scott O'Donnell: 01:09:11 Right.
- Janice Aria: 01:09:12 ... that, and, and feel this oh, my gosh, look how well cared for and cherished these animals are. And, eh, eh, you know, al- And

then years later on the show to see these b- m- folks set up those electric fences where the elephants could be outside, could have piles of sand delivered to every town, and then have big equipment that would put those piles back together so the elephants could play in them again. Uh, I was so lucky to see that all progress little knowing that at the same time as I said the foundation is being eroded from the bottom by nothing more than propaganda.

- Scott O'Donnell: 01:09:46 Yeah. Talk about some of the research that happened at the CEC.
- Janice Aria: 01:09:51 Oh, my gosh. Well, starting with, um, the breeding program. Uh, you don't know if an elephant is cycling except by hormone levels in their blood, so they had to draw blood, uh, weekly from all the females. How are you gonna do that from an, from an animal? Now, I do realize zoos, that most zoos have a really great, uh, way of protected contact training, that means the handler is on the other side of a barricade from the animal. We did free contact, which means that the handler is right there next to the animal, and we did blood draws free contact, it was fascinating to watch. Okay, she's cycling, put her in with that male, you know, uh, you don't put them in with the males unless they're cycling 'cause the males will beat 'em up, they have no interest in them unless they're cycling. That was an incredible thing to see.
- Janice Aria: 01:10:39 Um, the birthing of calves, I got see oh, my gosh, 11, 13 calves born. Uh, it's a two year gestation period, 22 months, it's a very, very long, long time, and they give birth standing up. To watch an experienced staff of people handling the hormonal rage of a delivery, and then, you know, that, that baby is slid to the side, and the vets check all their vital signs, and then you get 'em up on their feet, you get them stable on their feet with big towels under their tummies, and you walk them over to the moms, and encourage them to plug in. I saw that so many times that I used to sit in the courtrooms and hear them say we rip the babies away from the mothers, and I'm thinking what horror movie have you watched to say this? Um, that was really, m- really incredible.
- Janice Aria: 01:11:23 Um, we also did a, um, a body weight, uh, thing to, eh, study to see, uh, because captive animals tend to gain more weight than range country animals, so they studied the body fat composition. We brought in, um, scientists from all over the place. That, that particular study, the body composition study, was with Fort Worth Zoo primarily again, because we could get

up next to these elephants. We could weight them, they could ultrasound them, um, amazing.

Janice Aria: 01:11:53 Um, I think probably the, the study that got the most attention was the, uh, pediatric cancer study. Um, an incredible pediatric oncologist, uh, based in Salt Lake City, Utah, um, fell upon this incredible fact that, uh, humans, he, as he explained it to me, humans, a lot of humans get cancer, 25% of humans get cancer, um, and as you get older, you know, there's all kinds of environmental hazards that could, could compromise your immune system. Why do children get cancer then, it, it's counter-intuitive. And they discovered that humans have two genes that are tumor suppressors, elephants have 40. So if an elephant loses two cancer suppressor genes they still have 38 left, right, to do the job, and this is why there's only a 2% chance of cancer in elephants. They do get cancer, but at such a lower rate than humans.

Janice Aria: 01:12:49 If one of our cancer suppressing genes goes klapooy we're in bad shape, and a lot of children are born that way with one or sometimes both of these genes that, that are inoperable, and they're 85% sure to, to get cancer. And by drawing blood on our elephants, and providing this blood for this study, um, Ringling Brothers elephants contributed a tremendous amount of, of information, um, in the ongoing study to turn this into a therapy that you could actually apply as a, as an injection, a pill, something like that, and they're very close to doing that. And the elephants from The Greatest Show on Earth are really, uh, really credited with, eh, eh, you know, offering that information. Of course to the elephant it's again, another feeding opportunity carrot, carrot, carrot, grape, grape, grape.

Janice Aria: 01:13:38 Um, a, a fascinating study that Dr. [Wendy Keso 01:13:41] is still conducting at the Center for Elephant Conservation involves, um, extracting testosterone from male feces. This is valuable because the range country Asian elephants are close to extinction, close to extinction, that means done on this planet. And if they can determine when particular males are in musth which is the hormonal raging, uh, cycle that male elephants go through, they can somewhat predict village safety, they can somewhat predict ways to, um, keep people and elephants separate because human/elephant conflict is what's killing the Asian elephant, not poaching as with the African elephant. So Dr. Keso has been extracting fresh male, uh, feces for years, and what a process. I got to help her with this, it's, I mean it's a lotta poop. She has two big freezers at the Center for Elephant Conservation that when you open the door it's just poop, poop, poop, poop, poop, poop, poop, poop-

- Scott O'Donnell: 01:14:39 (laughs)
- Janice Aria: 01:14:39 ... frozen poop. So you have to thaw this poop, bake it in a microwave, dry it, grind it a coffee grinder, put it in tiny little vials, and then later add chemicals to it, and figure out the testosterone, uh, element, unbelievable stuff-
- Scott O'Donnell: 01:14:53 Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Janice Aria: 01:14:53 ... you know? Um, we brought four, uh, Sri Lankan student over to the CEC, I was so lucky to go to Sri Lanka and help select these students, and one, uh ... They, they all got PhD's, they came as master students, and the next component of their education was to study with us for a year, and take this knowledge back to Sri Lanka. Here's a country the size of West Virginia, right? West Virginia has, oh, my gosh, what? I f- I honestly forget the number o- of, it's like 1.7 million people, Sri Lanka has 22 million people. West Virginia doesn't have any elephants, so-
- Scott O'Donnell: 01:15:30 Right.
- Janice Aria: 01:15:30 ... no danger there, but the elephants in Sri Lanka are being shot at a horrible rate because they're eating the same food, taking over the same land, that these very poor people need to survive. So our, Kenneth's point, Ringling Brothers point here was to educate range country people to take care of these animals in captivity as opposed to shooting them. So, um, [Mohan 01:15:51], uh, their, the leader of this group, um, practiced putting m- GPS collars on elephants, our elephants again, because you can handle them. The, uh, the information and the experience that he took back to Sri Lanka after a year was the really dicey process of darting wild male elephants, getting in there, putting this GPS collar on them, and getting out safely.
- Janice Aria: 01:16:15 It was interesting because we saw video, lots of video of this, that he kinda owed us that. They had a couple of guys whose jobs on the crew was just to go in with machetes, and cut a path so they could get outta dodge when the, when the anesthesia started-
- Peggy: 01:16:29 (laughs)
- Janice Aria: 01:16:29 ... to wear off, right? Really, really. But if he hadn't learned how to approach, where to stand, uh, none of that would have been possible, and his data is priceless. He found out things like

elephants will go days without water. You know, California required us to put water in front of the elephants at all time, which was so much work for the crew 'cause the elephants would constantly soil the water-

- Scott O'Donnell: 01:16:51 (laughs)
- Janice Aria: 01:16:51 ... and it had to be changed, and we kept telling they don't drink all day anyway, to them it's another toy.
- Scott O'Donnell: 01:16:55 Right.
- Janice Aria: 01:16:56 And that data supported what we were already saying from years of, of watching the elephants. Um, kind of a fun story, one day at Circus World when Mohan was stu- uh, yeah, at CEC, I'm sorry, um, when Mohan was practicing this technique. The crew had (laughs) at Circus World took one of the GPS collars, and put it on the golf cart, and just drove it all around-
- Scott O'Donnell: 01:17:15 (laughs)
- Janice Aria: 01:17:16 ... CEC, and when Mohan came in in the morning he had a heart attack 'cause he thought Gunther the elephant had been loose (laughs) roaming all night, and it was just people at the CEC messing with his data-
- Scott O'Donnell: 01:17:25 Uh-huh (affirmative).
- Janice Aria: 01:17:26 ... that's all it was.
- Peggy: 01:17:26 (laughs)
- Janice Aria: 01:17:27 But again, you know, but, uh, what show business entity would put the funding into bringing in folks from another country, this is completely altruistic, there was nothing in this. I mean there aren't tons of tourists visiting Sri Lanka that see the signs that say, "Thank you, Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey." And there are signs at the Elephant Transit Home there, which is a place that they bring orphaned babies because another thing Mohan learned from, when they took these videos, a lot of these elephants are riddled with bullet holes, riddled, huh, and nobody's doctoring that, taking care of that, what a horrible painful thing. Um, but the Elephant Transit Home takes, uh, babies, calves that have been orphaned, and raises them strictly to release back into a preserve. Again, they are, none of them, you know, this fantasy of elephants free roaming is none other than a fantasy.

- Janice Aria: 01:18:22 And Dr. Dennis Schmidt, um, who is just an incredible elephant expert, and a, a, uh, a veterinarian for Ringling Brothers, uh, maintains that there is no free roam- roaming Asian elephant in the world anywhere on the planet, they are all in some man managed, and, and d- dwindling preserve, one or another. And most of the staff in these preserves have no experience, no close up experience. This is where circus knowledge is absolutely priceless, priceless, and my horror at the, at the loss of our animals being handled in captivity is that all that knowledge is now just going to be interrupted. Now, in some species that's just gonna be a roadblock, but for the Asian elephant I, I have a horrible feeling that that's gonna lead directly to extinction.
- Scott O'Donnell: 01:19:12 Well, that's a tough-
- Janice Aria: 01:19:13 I'm sorry. Let's tell a joke.
- Scott O'Donnell: 01:19:15 Yeah-
- Janice Aria: 01:19:16 (laughs)
- Scott O'Donnell: 01:19:16 ... go ahead, Peggy.
- Peggy: 01:19:17 Can you explain the solar powered fences that was a result of this, and what it meant for life in the village?
- Janice Aria: 01:19:24 A- Absolutely. So another thing that, that Mohan and this group that we brought over perfected at the CEC, and thing Ringling Brothers provided them the resources, the materials for it at a great expense, is, um, surrounding the small villages with solar powered electric fences. And it was, this was all very carefully done, they just didn't go throw up some fence and say there ya go, from us to you-
- Scott O'Donnell: 01:19:51 Right.
- Janice Aria: 01:19:51 ... they, uh, the, the villagers had to have a buy-in, there was a very small monetary buy-in, but someone also had to be delegated, uh, and trained to maintain this fencing. And, and in one particular village, um, it was the, with the, the trial set that, uh, the, you know, the, the original vil- village that they started this on it was so successful. These people used to, eh, I swear, this is really true. Every night they would go s- live in tree huts because particularly the male elephants would maraud in the middle of the night. They, the people's primary, uh, diet is rice, and elephants love rice, so they would destroy the rice paddies,

which would be, you know, the crop for the year for the village, but then they would also come into the village, and just knock these huts down, very primitive living conditions there.

- Janice Aria: 01:20:39 With ... As a result of this fencing, um, the kids in that village were able to go to school for the very first time in the history of the village, they couldn't hold school in the middle of the night when they're all living in tree huts. So we have all these pictures that are sent back of these children just ecstatic to go to school, so look at the trickle down, you know, from this, uh, kinda unimaginable research that was done to completion. So much scientific research is started and then put aside, that I can guarantee you there are still to this day, even though Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey is no longer in business, there are two freezers full of poop at the Center for Elephant Conservation in Florida, and I'm proud of that.
- Scott O'Donnell: 01:21:23 Yes, that's a-
- Janice Aria: 01:21:23 (laughs)
- Scott O'Donnell: 01:21:23 ... interesting legacy.
- Peggy: 01:21:24 (laughs)
- Scott O'Donnell: 01:21:28 So let's get to the-
- Janice Aria: 01:21:31 Oh.
- Scott O'Donnell: 01:21:31 ... to the chapter of after 146 years-
- Janice Aria: 01:21:35 Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Scott O'Donnell: 01:21:35 ... news comes to you, comes to the CEC, in some manner. How ... What was that journey like?
- Janice Aria: 01:21:44 Ohf. Um, I, uh, I, I say this without equivocation, the most painful thing I've ever experienced in my life, and I, I've already told you some really personal painful stuff, um, because this did not have to happen. That's why I can-
- Scott O'Donnell: 01:22:03 Right.
- Janice Aria: 01:22:03 ... never resolve this in myself ever for the rest of my life. Um, it started with the animal activists are so amazingly well funded by such well-intended people who don't know the true story, um, and they're so strategic. So they couldn't ban elephants,

they tried, but people loved to see elephants. I mean it lifts you above your everyday life, and it's people are gonna always want that, always look for that. How could they get rid of the elephants? They vilified the tool, they vilified the very benign but essential tool, you could call it an ankus, you could call it a bullhook, and people think bullhook, here's a word that, that, uh, was vilified. You know, all circus elephants were called bulls, and it-

- Scott O'Donnell: 01:22:48 Right.
- Janice Aria: 01:22:48 ... does have a hook on the end. Two of the most important cues you can have with an elephant is get over and come here. Both ... Each of those cues can save your life or, or s- keep the public safe. Um, how are you gonna communicate to an animal the size of a UPS truck when there's the music, the, the, eh, the frivolity, the mayhem of a circus if they can't hear your cue, and they do. All ... They know their names, they're very responsive to verbal cue, you need that touch, it's a tactile thing. Their skin is an inch, inch and a half thick, as we trained our students you don't just haphazardly walk up to an elephant and poke and pull, you ha- you use specific cue points that makes it clear to the elephant, and it's, it's safe for the handler and the elephant.
- Janice Aria: 01:23:34 We tried, and I, you know, I'm using the proverbial we here, I really only just observed this, but for a good two years they kept manufacturing dummy hooks, version of the hook that would not appear to the public to be sinister, you know? At the same time just like, uh, words are so powerful aren't they? Just like that interviewer using-
- Scott O'Donnell: 01:23:57 Right.
- Janice Aria: 01:23:57 ... the word shackled instead of tethered, it, this, the connotation there is not well intended.
- Scott O'Donnell: 01:24:04 Right.
- Janice Aria: 01:24:04 Um, same with bullhook, um, that, that, that, you know, it's, uh, blah, whatever. So they tried, ma- and I, I have to say those guys who knew it wasn't going to work because they had worked at this point 40 some years, each one, with the very effective tool that's been in existence for thousands of years, approved by the USDA, Ni- United States Department of Agriculture, as a viable tool with elephants. Um, they knew it worked, but i- we try, uh, I mean it was a joke to try it without the hook the elephants knew. And everybody kept just m- instinctively reaching out

with their hand, and the elephants thought they were being petted, it did not have the same effect as come here.

- Janice Aria: 01:24:44 They tried, uh, one ... I thought this version was ridiculous, uh, be- it was like a, oh, what do you call it, a sl- when you pre- a sling blade, is that it where-
- Scott O'Donnell: 01:24:52 Hmm.
- Janice Aria: 01:24:52 ... the knife inside and it-
- Scott O'Donnell: 01:24:53 Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Janice Aria: 01:24:54 ... come ... Okay, they tried that version. To me first of all it was ineffective because-
- Peggy: 01:24:58 Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Janice Aria: 01:24:58 ... if an elephant's gonna book on ya they're go- they're out of there before you could hit that button-
- Scott O'Donnell: 01:25:03 (laughs)
- Janice Aria: 01:25:03 ... and f- flip out that, but that looked like the sharks and the jets bang, you know, and that-
- Scott O'Donnell: 01:25:07 Right.
- Janice Aria: 01:25:08 ... didn't work. So I watched ... That's when we started to know we're gonna lose, we're gonna lose, because there's no way to substitute anything for the bullhook. And the, the, the propaganda, ah, that, that came out of this. One time I testified in Chicago, and Tom Albert, our vice president of Government Relations, this guy is a hero to me 'cause he fought this over, and over, and over again. We brought our actual bullhook into the courtroom, um, and we passed security. You know, to go into any courtroom in America today you have to put, uh, they go through your purse, they look at your lipstick, (laughs) especially mine 'cause I have great lipstick.
- Scott O'Donnell: 01:25:44 (laughs)
- Janice Aria: 01:25:44 Um, (laughs) then, uh, but the activists brought in an armed guard, and when they testified they had this, it's a fireplace poker, which is a pretty retched looking thing, and they said ... And they ha- When they testified (laughs) they had a, a cop walk up with them, and they said-

Scott O'Donnell: 01:26:02 (laughs)

Janice Aria: 01:26:02 ... "We had to have a guard, this is the weapon that these people are using with these elephants." and they held it up in front of all the council members. And Tom Albert in his very crisp lawyer suit w- when it was his turn walked up to the podium and he said, "This is what we actually use." and we got right through security with this. But again, you know, an ideology is, it- it's like a bubble that you can keep chasing, and you're not gonna catch it, if it pops, shw, well, this bubble never popped, so the facts never prevailed. They, they made their visual image with the people who were gonna vote. LA was the first-

Scott O'Donnell: 01:26:38 (laughs)

Janice Aria: 01:26:39 ... to band the bullhook, they didn't ban elephants, they banned the bullhooks, but that's like saying here's a gift car for you, Scott, it doesn't have an engine-

Scott O'Donnell: 01:26:49 Right.

Janice Aria: 01:26:49 ... but you got you a new car. So I- I- wou- ha- couldn't, eh, eh, they, they banned the elephant by virtue of the tool, it was a pretty strategic move. Again, did not benefit the elephants at all, in fact it's a very, very disparaging, very horrible move. Then other tow- And, you know, the rhetoric that followed along with this was horrendous. We should be the first city in the United States to show that we are progressive, and we're ... So other cities fol- Well, whether we were progressive, we're, you know, and it was a terrible virus that spread m- m- through language, not through fact.

Janice Aria: 01:27:21 Um, when we heard that the elephants were, were coming off the road it was, uh ... Well, we were told there was meeting at the CEC, so, uh, and Kenneth was coming, and this happened frequently, but, you know, you always just sweep the corners a little bit more or whatever, but here shows up Kenneth, Nicole, Tom Albert, um, all the lawyers, uh, and we knew something big was up. And I will have to tell you I, I believe this, there were only six of us in this meeting, um, bu- and, and then the corporate staff. Um, Kenneth was moved to tears announcing that to this group, and I will always think well of him for that.

Scott O'Donnell: 01:28:05 Yeah.

Janice Aria: 01:28:06 Um, this is a life-long investment for this, this company, and, you know, Irvin loved the elephants, and Kenneth grew up with that.

Scott O'Donnell: 01:28:13 Right.

Janice Aria: 01:28:14 And, uh, Kenneth took out of his back pocket a roll of legal papers, and he had written notes, I've never seen him do that, and he, uh, very nervously kept unfolding those notes, and touching on all these points, and he told us what we knew. You, you know, you, you ... He said, "You can't fight city hall." and, and, eh, that's where w- w- where we lost, the hearts of the public. I sat in your show yesterday, and watched those people just l- lose all sense of immediacy watching those elephants. They're heart, everybody's heart was right out there.

Scott O'Donnell: 01:28:46 Yep.

Janice Aria: 01:28:46 So I know that's how people really feel if they get the true information, you know?

Scott O'Donnell: 01:28:51 Right.

Janice Aria: 01:28:51 Ooh, a- a- as it ... Somehow we could never get across to people. We were so highly inspected that your personal opinion, you don't like what we do, don't come to the circus, but the USDA, each state Fish and Wildlife, and each local municipality, inspected our elephants with an increased fervor as this, this thing when on, this, this horrible discrepancy went on, and we always passed, we always passed. So again, on the fact level we got better, and better, and better. We were training people how to use this tool. When I started nobody ... They just said ... I copied Barbara-

Scott O'Donnell: 01:29:27 Right.

Janice Aria: 01:29:28 ... that's how learned, you know, fortunately I had a good example. Sure we have some real losers out there in the animal field, but I taught public school, there is some people that should not be around children, and they are s- licensed to teach children, you know? That we're humans, we are the flawed-

Scott O'Donnell: 01:29:42 Yeah.

Janice Aria: 01:29:42 ... species on the planet I f- I feel. I don't think intelligence is all it's cracked up to be because it can be manipulated, I watched it-

Scott O'Donnell: 01:29:48 Yeah.

Janice Aria: 01:29:48 ... happen. The announcement that the elephants were coming off the road, um, didn't hit us, like we were so, so devastated, um, that I don't think anybody thought it through at that immediate moment that this might be the death of the circus, or The Greatest Show on Earth, um, but it certainly did play out that way. But it was just horrible because it's, it's, you know, just like me, just being at, around shows yesterday I had one of the best days I've had since I've not been around shows, animals are the same way. We have animals that I ... Uh, we saw them all come-

Scott O'Donnell: 01:30:21 Right.

Janice Aria: 01:30:21 ... back to the CEC. We had this great big press opportunity, which was gut wrenching for all of us. Yeah, it was really remarkable to see that whole herd reunited, but it was for such a horrible reason-

Scott O'Donnell: 01:30:33 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Janice Aria: 01:30:33 ... you know? Just a, uh ... And again, preventable, preventable.

Scott O'Donnell: 01:30:37 Right.

Janice Aria: 01:30:37 And this is where I think this is a cautionary tale, that a true reality that you can live every day, and certainly animal people, all show people live it every day, but animal people really can never get away, um, to see what you know true just dash like that ba- based on propaganda, uh, propaganda, it can happen, it did, it happened to us. So I mean like you said 146 years of a constantly improving-

Scott O'Donnell: 01:31:02 Yeah.

Janice Aria: 01:31:02 ... tradition, uh, to just be annihilated by a, a, a sensibility that is completely distorted. And so many people give money and energy to this thing thinking they're doing right for animals, and yet none of those people, um, a few of those people even wanna take on the care of a dog because it is, it's so life altering. You know, we have a group of people for 146 years that have dedicated their lives to this, and they lost out due to some really spicy rhetoric.

Scott O'Donnell: 01:31:33 Yeah, words are vessels-

Janice Aria: 01:31:35 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Scott O'Donnell: 01:31:36 ... for sure. Finish this sentence. My life in the circus was ...

Janice Aria: 01:31:49 Consummate.

Scott O'Donnell: 01:31:50 Words are-

Janice Aria: 01:31:50 Consummate.

Scott O'Donnell: 01:31:50 ... words are vessels, that's a great word.

Janice Aria: 01:31:54 (laughs) It has been the richest part of my life. Certainly having a child, you know, the loss of loved ones, these things rock your world, but the circus ... Even, even between shows when, when you walk back stage, and there's all the props, and the floats, and how you used to just get this feeling like it's magic, it's sl- it's sleeping, it's-

Scott O'Donnell: 01:32:15 (laughs)

Janice Aria: 01:32:15 ... sleeping magic. And show time, curtain opens, and oh.

Scott O'Donnell: 01:32:21 Yeah, that's very true. What do you think the next chapter is?

Janice Aria: 01:32:30 Phff. (laughs)

Scott O'Donnell: 01:32:30 Well, what, well, what do you hope the next chapter is?

Janice Aria: 01:32:33 It ... That's a really loaded question there, Scott. Um, I am very disappointed in myself that this year has been so emotional for me that I haven't snapped out of it, and I'm still aching for my friends that still there, my family, they're my, my family. Uh, I, uh, I am a real positive person, but I'm having trouble putting a positive spin on, uh, I got kicked out of my town.

Scott O'Donnell: 01:32:57 Right.

Janice Aria: 01:32:58 You know, I, I literally had to leave town, and, uh, oh, uh, we- all I can ... I love this opportunity to talk about it, I really do, thank you, thank you, I'm really honored. And, and given the people that you've interviewed that have a much loftier, including yourself, um, involvement in all this I'm so flattered to be i- in your company. But I wanna do something related to circus if it's ... In, in my little town of Iowa City I've done newspaper articles, I'm in a writer's group, and all they talk about it what I've just been talking to you about.

Scott O'Donnell: 01:33:27 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Janice Aria: 01:33:28 Um, I'm speaking at the end of the month, uh, to a, a retirement center 'cause I want these people to know what we've lost, what we've lost-

Scott O'Donnell: 01:33:35 Right.

Janice Aria: 01:33:35 ... not, not just us-

Scott O'Donnell: 01:33:37 Yeah.

Janice Aria: 01:33:37 ... the people that are show people. I'm still a gajo by the way, but I, uh, in my heart, my self-definition is-

Scott O'Donnell: 01:33:42 You and me both my friend.

Janice Aria: 01:33:43 (laughs)

Scott O'Donnell: 01:33:44 Um, that's been my other question I've asked people, so let's ask that question to you. What has America lost-

Janice Aria: 01:33:52 Huh-

Scott O'Donnell: 01:33:52 ... with the closing of this iconic American brand that's been around longer than baseball, Coca-Cola-

Janice Aria: 01:33:58 Right.

Scott O'Donnell: 01:33:58 ... and the Kentucky Derby, all these pantheons of American identity?

Janice Aria: 01:34:02 Hmm. Like, you know-

Scott O'Donnell: 01:34:06 'Ca- Cause from my point of view-

Janice Aria: 01:34:07 Oh.

Scott O'Donnell: 01:34:08 ... it, it got reverence as it should have, but it seemed like it easily went away.

Janice Aria: 01:34:16 But, you know, when you think about it the circus has prevailed in this country since, what, 1793 I think-

Scott O'Donnell: 01:34:23 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

- Janice Aria: 01:34:23 ... it was in that. Um, it has paralleled every, every huge divergence in our history. Made it through the Civil War, right?
- Scott O'Donnell: 01:34:33 Right.
- Janice Aria: 01:34:33 The circus is with really rude, crude I should say, crude, sorry, um, equipment crossed the Mason-Dixon line, and people still came to the show. World War I people came to the show, World War II people came to the show. People need this kinda tonic for the soul, and, and the circu- I mean, you know, with the ... When they drove the, the golden spike in Promontory Point that connected the East Coast to the West Coast, man, the circus was right on that. The circus has maybe exploited or capitalized off of every move in American history, so to me it's parallel, and really, really indigenous in American history.
- Janice Aria: 01:35:13 Um, eh, eh, you know, the stories of, the, the vivid stories that you get from the old timers like five kids living in a trailer, and doing three acts in a show, and putting the top up, and taking it down, there's so much indelible, uh, gut level work ethic and heart. It's, it's really ... It's, it's organic that way to me, um, the work ethic of the circus to be outside in your muck boots, and then throw on your wardrobe, and be one minute a, you know, an absolute wreck, and then the next minute a, an image of glamour, what a transformation because you saw all those people respond to that. How are we gonna recreate that? We're not with, with technology, we're not with, with, um, with devices. The sensuality of the circus, the smell, the, certainly the sights, that sounds, it, it, it's so important to, um, to art.
- Janice Aria: 01:36:10 It is such a 360, it's not a two dimensional like a painting, and I'm not then ingraining paintings and posters, but the, the circus is truly a three dimensional art, and to lose that, oh, uh, who can say I think we r- uh ... I think immediate we're losing a tremendous opportunity to feel better about life in these times when most people all you seeing is just depressing stuff about life. And I'm not a cynic, I have great hope for the human race despite our flaws, um, but the circus was a sure-fire go to to just feel better. How do we replace it? I don't know, that's a rhetorical question, I don't know what we're gonna do.
- Janice Aria: 01:36:47 All this ... When you think generations of people perfected their art to show other people the, eh, the level of dedication where does that go, does it just evaporate? I don't think so, I don't know. I wanna see it recreated, I wanna see it take a next step, but without animals it's not gonna be true American circus. And, uh, I think a, a locat- a place like Circus World Museum in Barabu- Baraboo, Wisconsin has taken on a, a, a

huge, huge role in the lexicon that, that you may not have had before because there were other places that you could go.

- Janice Aria: 01:37:25 And I really hope that there's a stop to this ridiculous, um, abuse by animal activists. I have to truly believe that these people are just so misguided, um, I'd like to see that turn around, but for the future, Scott, I just don't know. I think those of us that love it, and have lived it, just should do whatever we can to keep it alive even in story.
- Scott O'Donnell: 01:37:45 Mm-hmm (affirmative). It's a great place to end. Thank you, Janice.