

CWM Audio 4-10

Harold and Eileen Voise Interview, January 8, 1973

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Part 2

- Richard Flint: Just put the tape there. [crosstalk 00:00:03] Pardon?
- Eileen Voise: Yeah. It's a long tape, isn't it?
- Richard Flint: Yeah. It's ...
- Harold Voise: Yeah. We got one in [inaudible 00:00:12]. Well, something like that.
- Eileen Voise: Yeah. That's a big one. That's-
- Harold Voise: That's a longer one.
- Richard Flint: It's a 90 minute tape.
- Harold Voise: Is it? What, 45 on each side? Yeah. It's a lot.
- Eileen Voise: I gave Harold one of those tape recorders it was about three or four years ago. Oh, he was just like a kid with a new toy and he hasn't even looked at it since that Christmas.
- Harold Voise: It's in there somewhere.
- Richard Flint: Huh. I asked some questions about the fact that fliers are supposed to be the aristocrats among the performers. Was there much of a pecking order, so to speak, among performers where certain types of acts are regarded as being ... Was there any social order to at all among performers [inaudible 00:00:59]?
- Eileen Voise: I don't know. There might be nowadays, but I don't think it was- [crosstalk 00:01:06]
- Harold Voise: No. Everybody respected each others' ability in the old days. If a guy was a bit-
- Eileen Voise: There's a little jealousy, I think, nowadays, but there never used to be.
- Harold Voise: Good wire act. If a guy was good at his profession, whether he was an acrobat or a bareback rider or any act that took skill, we had respect for him. With the Cole show, and we had all [inaudible 00:01:34] in their heyday. [inaudible 00:01:38] We had one of the best shows in the country at that time. We had the [inaudible

00:01:44] to start the show, and then we did ... We even had two flying acts then, didn't we?

Eileen Voise: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Harold Voise: [inaudible 00:01:55]

Eileen Voise: Yeah. They had all good acts. Of course, the Ringling show has got good acts. I don't mean that, but I mean it's too much pageantry now. You know what I mean? One or two numbers is all right, but there's just four numbers and all of that? People come, they want to see the acts. They don't want to see all of that-

Richard Flint: Walking around.

Eileen Voise: Yeah. They overdo it, I think. I know we went over to St. Pete the last time we saw it, a couple of years ago, three or four years ago. We went over a couple of years ago. The only thing is we changed our mind and went to the dogs.

Harold Voise: Of course, the people today, I guess ... I like the [inaudible 00:02:44]. It's beautiful, but I think people ... Now we do just a one ring show up at Lansing. First we give them all. Every act's a feature act, and give them a balanced show, and the people are ... two hour show and they're just as happy walking out of there as they are seeing any show. Believe it or not! But you give them a good show-

Eileen Voise: Well, the Ringling show is in a class with the ice shows now. It's all costume and all of the pageantry and stuff like that. Now when I go to see a circus, I want to go and see the acts. I don't care anything about ...

Richard Flint: Can I ask a little about yourselves now, since you both met at the [inaudible 00:03:32]. Was there a circus romance here, or when did you two get married?

Eileen Voise: Well, yes. It was a circus romance. I guess everybody met when they were on the circus and working in the acts. You know.

Harold Voise: Yeah. Way back when we were kids.

Richard Flint: Can you remember when your wife first showed up at the [inaudible 00:03:54]?

Harold Voise: Yes! Yeah. Yeah, well, we were just all ... you know. Teenagers. We used to go to dances, dance at the house. [inaudible 00:04:10] going, and-

Eileen Voise: Yeah, and when we were broke there we'd get in Charleston contests to get some money.

Harold Voise: Yeah. We won some Charlestons.

Eileen Voise: First prize was \$25, and that was like \$25,000 to us then.

Harold Voise: Yeah.

Richard Flint: What was life like living on the trains so long?

Harold Voise: Well, you got used to it. It felt just as natural as it would be doing [inaudible 00:04:47]. In fact, when you'd get off the train on Sunday you'd have the worst night's sleep of the week because you're waiting for that train to bang and hookup, and as soon as the train would hook up it'd start going just like on a boat, I guess or something, but you just sleep like a baby.

Eileen Voise: You couldn't sleep until the train started.

Harold Voise: Sleep like a baby. Banging around wouldn't bother you at all, and-

Eileen Voise: All of the trains and freight cars going by, and noise, and you never woke up.

Harold Voise: [crosstalk 00:05:20]

Eileen Voise: And here you come home and if a cricket would get outside the window, it'd wake you up.

Harold Voise: Cinders would fly in the window, but it didn't seem to bother. As they say, human nature. You get adjusted to everything, and you certainly do. Like I said, you had the gang all there at night and all-

Eileen Voise: We used to get out on the tracks and dance and sing and play the ukuleles.

Harold Voise: Yep. It was really a wonderful life. Yeah. It was wonderful.

Richard Flint: When you were on the Polack show, that was your first time on a non-railroad show.

Harold Voise: Yeah. We didn't think we was gonna like it, but we had a little 16 foot trailer and we went out last. We got to see more scenery and more places than we ever did all our life with the circus.

Eileen Voise: Yeah. We got to see more than we did with the circus because we were doing two shows every day and every day. We never had any days off, and when we went with the Polack show we got to see the Grand Canyon and went up to saw Old Faithful, and went to Yellowstone, and- [crosstalk 00:06:35]

Harold Voise: Stayed in there for ... We had a few days off. Every time we get a few days off [inaudible 00:06:39] we'd go in there and stay all the whole show. At night we'd meet at the dining area there at Old Faithful. We'd all be there at night.

Eileen Voise: Yeah. We saw the petrified forest and then when we were in San Diego we got to go and see the zoo. You get to see more, you know?

- Harold Voise: And we took advantage of it because we had never really got a chance to see a lot of the things that we were right near, but never got a chance.
- Richard Flint: Well, since you were traveling with your own trailer and you weren't in a railroad car, do you think a lot of the family sense was gone- [crosstalk 00:07:19]
- Harold Voise: We had a pretty good group with the Polack show.
- Eileen Voise: We had good groups with the Polack show, too.
- Harold Voise: We would all stop at these truck stops. One would stop and another one would stop, and we'd get around and talk like we hadn't seen each other for a year. Then we'd say, "Well, we better get going. We'll see you down the line." We had quite a good group. We enjoyed it very much.
- Eileen Voise: Yeah. It was a little different than the skills that work every day and every day, Sunday and everything. We never trouped like that. In fact, we were never on a mud show. We were always with railroad shows. Of course, with Polack we had days off that we could go different places and enjoy ourselves.
- Harold Voise: Yeah. We'd play two days and then we'd be off a day or two days and then jump and play another two or three days. You always had-
- Eileen Voise: Or a week or something.
- Harold Voise: We'd have time off to go and a lot of people said they didn't like it. We got a good salary and we enjoyed it very much.
- Richard Flint: When you're on the rail show, what sort of compartment did you have? How big was your living compartment?
- Eileen Voise: Well they didn't have as many state rooms in those days as they have now. They had your [inaudible 00:08:41], you know, sections and stuff like that. The only one that had that was the owner of the show, Zach [inaudible 00:08:50]. He had the whole car. Who was the last big star in there? Well, we had Tom Nicks on there.
- Harold Voise: Yeah. He had his own railroad car.
- Eileen Voise: He had his own railroad car.
- Harold Voise: And Jack Dempsey and them kind of people had a whole car. But they had a 30 car show and they didn't have the ... cars for-
- Eileen Voise: All the state rooms and everything.
- Harold Voise: All the state rooms.

- Eileen Voise: Now a lot of them have great big state rooms. Some of them have half a car and all that, but ...
- Richard Flint: Well, how much of a state room did you have on the show? Did you have a state room or a [inaudible 00:09:30] or-
- Eileen Voise: Yeah. We had a state room towards the end, but not at first we didn't.
- Richard Flint: No.
- Eileen Voise: We had sections.
- Richard Flint: Right.
- Harold Voise: Yeah. We had a state room at the end. That was a pretty good size. They had one car, and they had ... Mainly you had the girls, valet girls, on one end of the car and the rest of it was state rooms. Paul Nelson and Hubert Castle was there, any myself. You know, they only had just a few then. All them days, I mean, it was pretty tough to get a state room unless [inaudible 00:10:18]. Do you know what I mean? They just didn't have them, that's all. Of course, when you was coming up you didn't care too much. Of course, with the Ringling show they always had state rooms. With the Ringling it was no problem, but these other shows ... Of course, they had 100, 105 cars in ... them days, see. It was no problem-
- Eileen Voise: Yeah, it's going in sections then. Now it's all in one section.
- Harold Voise: Yeah, like the whole show. The rest of them was about 40 cars. About 40 cars, 30 sometimes, 40, but it was all equipment that took that much. See, Ringling had that 100 cars, 4 sections, so they ... But then when you're young you didn't care too much about the state room anyway. All you was interested in was the money, and you was tired at night anyway. Didn't make much difference. Soon as you got up, you got out of the train and went downtown. [inaudible 00:11:21] when I got out the lot. At night it was the time you would fool around, have your lunch, and dance outside of the train.
- Eileen Voise: We used to go places- [crosstalk 00:11:30]
- Harold Voise: Yeah we'd go to visit friends at night.
- Eileen Voise: Now they talk about gambling in these towns. When we were back in the Ringling show in the 30's, down in Miami, we used to all get dressed up. We had evening gowns and everything. Went to these big places, gambling places, and then ... Where was it?
- Harold Voise: St. Louis.

Eileen Voise: St. Louis and New Orleans. [inaudible 00:11:57] gambling. Get in there and played roulette and all that.

Harold Voise: Oh, we had a gambling car with the coal show.

Eileen Voise: Yeah, but I mean there were all these big towns. We used to get all dressed up and go to those places. We had our own gang that used to, after the show at night, we'd go.

Harold Voise: Oh yeah. One, you had a different class. You had a better class of people.

Eileen Voise: No, but where was it they were talking about? They're going to legalize, or have gambling in Miami? Christ. In the 30's we went out in Miami. It was a beautiful, big gambling house.

Harold Voise: Oh yeah. Oh sure. Lots-

Eileen Voise: I don't know how we got in. We knew somebody that used to take us to those places.

Harold Voise: Oh, you had to.

Eileen Voise: You know? Some member or something, but a whole gang of us. [inaudible 00:12:45] We had a whole gang that used to go. We knew all the towns. St. Louis ...

Harold Voise: Yeah. I don't know how we got in either. It must've-

Eileen Voise: I don't remember either.

Harold Voise: New Orleans.

Eileen Voise: We used to go in a gang, yeah.

Harold Voise: Los Angeles.

Eileen Voise: Yeah, LA.

Harold Voise: We went off of Long Beach there on a boat- [crosstalk 00:13:10] gambling ship.

Eileen Voise: Yeah. Went out on a boat there, on a gambling boat. You know?

Harold Voise: Yeah. If there was anything around it, and of course when we was in-

Eileen Voise: Who was that fellow that despise, oh ...

Harold Voise: Warner.

Eileen Voise: Warner. You wouldn't remember, but it was one of the first big radios. Warner, and the son was a drunk. Well, he took us out on that, didn't he?

Harold Voise: Yeah.

Eileen Voise: And he tried to drive his car off the pier.

Richard Flint: How would you have time to meet these people since you were on- [crosstalk 00:13:43]

Harold Voise: We were out in Los Angeles then. We used to show 10 days and- [crosstalk 00:13:47] Los Angeles and then four or five days in Hollywood. We used to show right around there quite a bit.

Eileen Voise: Yeah. All the stars-

Harold Voise: Of course we had time then, see, but ... Didn't have to go no place, so at night we would always get a gang. In San Francisco we'd go to Chinatown.

Eileen Voise: Yeah. They had big night clubs. Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey were both playing at this. One would play for half an hour, and then-

Harold Voise: Sebastian's ...

Eileen Voise: It was Sebastian's Cotton Club on-

Harold Voise: Cotton Club-

Eileen Voise: Big, big night club. It was beautiful.

Harold Voise: Yeah. They'd have all them big bands.

Richard Flint: Hm. You mentioned that the Cole show had a gambling car. Was this-

Harold Voise: Yeah. We had a gambling ... Always had a car.

Eileen Voise: Oh yeah.

Richard Flint: It was in the pie car- [crosstalk 00:14:29]

Eileen Voise: Yeah, the pie car.

Harold Voise: The pie car, on the one end. You roll up in the crap games and the ...

Eileen Voise: Poker games and the-

Harold Voise: Slot machines.

Eileen Voise: One armed bandits.

Harold Voise: We had that all our life.

Eileen Voise: Yeah.

Richard Flint: Did most of the performers-

Harold Voise: Well they didn't encourage it because once you lose your money, they want to keep you happy, see? They figured that you worked hard for it. That was-

Eileen Voise: They want to get the candy- [crosstalk 00:14:58] the ushers and people like that that they knew stole money.

Richard Flint: Get it back somehow?

Harold Voise: Yeah. That's right. If you wanted to, you could, but they ... They felt better if you didn't-

Richard Flint: They felt better if the performers-

Eileen Voise: The performers. Yeah.

Harold Voise: They'd tell you, "Well, if you want to give us your money that's all right, but we'd rather not have you. We'd rather not have your money. You work hard for it and we want you to keep it."

Eileen Voise: I used to play the slot machines. A lot of them used to play the slot machines, and then they'd ... they'd get a whole flock of nickels in something and throw it in the thing and it'd sound like the jackpot was hitting. [inaudible 00:15:43] used to run over and get the screwdriver and tighten it up.

Harold Voise: Yeah. We used to play Las Vegas and-

Eileen Voise: Reno.

Harold Voise: Reno.

Richard Flint: On the show itself, did most of the candy butchers and working men play the machines or not?

Eileen Voise: Oh yes. They all gambled- [crosstalk 00:16:04]

Harold Voise: Well, they'd come in with that loose money every night. Then they had served drinks and everything, just like ... It was wide open, just like Las Vegas.

Richard Flint: In the pie car was there quite a bit of mixing between the performers and the working people?

Harold Voise: Oh, no.

Eileen Voise: No. There was two cars.

Richard Flint: Two cars.

Eileen Voise: Working men's car, and the performer's car.

Richard Flint: [inaudible 00:16:29]

Harold Voise: Yeah.

Eileen Voise: Well, of course the candy-

Harold Voise: They would come in later. We'd go in there right after the show.

Eileen Voise: [crosstalk 00:16:35]

Harold Voise: We'd come in right after the show and have a lunch that we'd eat at the car, and by the time all the performers was out of there, the working men and the-

Eileen Voise: Well, the working men used to have their own car, but the ushers- [crosstalk 00:16:48]

Harold Voise: Yeah, but I mean the ushers, [crosstalk 00:16:51], ticket sellers would come in on their own later. There was no-

Richard Flint: No real chance to-

Harold Voise: No. Of course, they always collected and we never had no [inaudible 00:17:01] with anybody.

Richard Flint: What about grifts any of these shows?

Harold Voise: Oh, we had it all on the Cole show. We had 26 of them on the Cole show.

Richard Flint: Yeah?

Harold Voise: Oh yeah. We had all the greatest. We had the greatest-

Eileen Voise: And you wanna know something?

Richard Flint: What?

Eileen Voise: I never knew it until we got away from the show, because it was always out in the-

Harold Voise: They had it in the side show.

Eileen Voise: In the side show.

Harold Voise: The side show.

Eileen Voise: And I never knew it. I said, "Well, we never had any on the Cole show," and Harold would say, "Oh we didn't? Who do you think so-and-so was?" You know?

Harold Voise: Zach [inaudible 00:17:34] told me one time. He said, "The people haven't got larceny in them. They just go right to the big top. The ones that come here is trying to beat us. That's why they get took." If they wouldn't have larceny in them, they would go right on into the big show and they don't know it. But it was the ones that had the larceny was trying to make a buck, so that took. Oh yeah. We had all the greatest. [inaudible 00:17:59] and we had some of the fabulous, one of the best in the country. 26 of them. In fact, sometimes we would walk on the lot and some of the shills would try to get us. They didn't know who we was.

Richard Flint: Well, I guess the town would have to be fixed then?

Harold Voise: Oh!

Richard Flint: Fixed for sure.

Eileen Voise: Yeah.

Harold Voise: You'd better believe it.

Richard Flint: If it wasn't fixed-

Harold Voise: You couldn't work.

Richard Flint: They just wouldn't work?

Harold Voise: They wouldn't work.

Richard Flint: Did they ever take a chance and work-

Harold Voise: No.

Eileen Voise: No.

Harold Voise: No. It wasn't worth it. They had pie car fixers. It was fixed.

Richard Flint: How long did grifts stay around or-

Harold Voise: Well let's see. I think we used to have grifts right up 'till the end.

Eileen Voise: On the Cole show.

Harold Voise: Yeah. Right up 'till 48 when he sold it.

Richard Flint: Was it as strong in 48 as it was in 35?

Harold Voise: Yeah. Yeah.

Richard Flint: Yeah?

Harold Voise: Same thing. In fact, we were with the [inaudible 00:18:54] show, and he had a harder time, they did, fixing to come into a town than we did because they thought that the [inaudible 00:19:03] show had grifts and they didn't have any, so they thought that they were trying to sneak it. So they were waiting for the payoffs, and there never was any, so it was tougher for 'em. They said, "Where is that guy with all the money they took?" Of course there wasn't any, but they didn't believe it, so it was tougher then with a show that didn't have any because he didn't have no payoff.

Richard Flint: Right, and all the people- [crosstalk 00:19:31]

Harold Voise: They'd fix it so that they couldn't [inaudible 00:19:34] because they'd be out of town. Whoever got the money would be gone. You'd call up and they wouldn't be here. They'd be out fishing or something. They didn't know anything about it.

Richard Flint: Well, the Daily Show was notorious-

Harold Voise: Oh, that was the worst.

Eileen Voise: Oh, yeah.

Richard Flint: How would you compare Cole with Daily?

Harold Voise: Well, ours was more of a-

Eileen Voise: A refined [inaudible 00:19:52].

Harold Voise: Refined. Well they did it like I say. We had it in the side show, and you never really was concerned about it because it was never-

Eileen Voise: I didn't know about it.

Harold Voise: There was never no heat or no trouble, no nothing. In fact, you just knew it was there and that was all there was to it. It went day in and day out and nothing. But of course the Daily show, they operated like they did 50 years ago. They robbed the cars and had guys that robbed the automobiles and the homes, and they did everything. Which then you're bound to have-

Eileen Voise: [inaudible 00:20:28]

Harold Voise: Heat. Naturally you're gonna have heat. They'd rock them out of town and shoot them out of town and everything. Naturally.

Richard Flint: Did you ever go through any good [inaudible 00:20:37] or-

Eileen Voise: No.

Harold Voise: No. No, not in our time.

Eileen Voise: No. Not in our time. My mother and dad did.

Richard Flint: Any stories you can remember that they told about?

Eileen Voise: No. Just ...

Harold Voise: Oh, once in a while they'd get it.

Eileen Voise: They'd talk about it, but I mean, I thought that they were exaggerating when they used to talk about the different things.

Harold Voise: Yeah. Well, kinda.

Eileen Voise: Not on the big shows they didn't, but-

Harold Voise: Like I say, the way they handled the grifters at Cole's, though, there was never no heat at all. They'd load up at night. There was never nobody come down and looking for anybody or no nothing. I don't know. It was a different operation. It was a smooth operation, that's for sure.

Richard Flint: Did you ever see much of it? What did they have? What kind of games and so on?

Harold Voise: They had the shell game and-

Richard Flint: [inaudible 00:21:35] What about any short changing?

Harold Voise: Well, that's something nobody knows anything about. They didn't mention it. If they do, they don't tell nobody.

Richard Flint: Yeah. I mean, the man would have all the loose silver and-

Harold Voise: Well, that would be something that nobody would be in on.

Richard Flint: Right.

- Harold Voise: It's like if I'd give Alan the show, and I'd give it to you, it'd be between you and I, that's all. You wouldn't discuss it with anybody. You wouldn't dare to. You wouldn't want to.
- Richard Flint: Well, generally there was some arrangement between the show owners and the grift.
- Harold Voise: Oh yes. There would have to be. Oh, sure. The grift was operated by Gerald, and he had his watchmen lists. They had checkers.
- Richard Flint: Who would get first count?
- Harold Voise: Well, he had guys that was right there. When they made the score they knew exactly who was, and so they never had any trouble. And these guys were all professionals. They knew that if they didn't come up with the right count, they wasn't gonna be there. Then that was a good goal for them, so they-
- Richard Flint: Did these fellows generally stay just on circuses, or did they come from other, or don't you know?
- Harold Voise: I don't know. We never was ... We knew them all, but they never discussed it either.
- Richard Flint: Yeah. But did you always see them on shows, from one show to the other?
- Harold Voise: No. We just knew them because they was there, and they were just like anybody else. The only thing is they never talked about it, and we never talked about it either.
- Richard Flint: Wow. They just knew it was there, and you didn't.
- Eileen Voise: Yeah.
- Harold Voise: That was their job. We'd see them sometimes at night, and we'd see them on Sundays or something and be good friends. Didn't talk none about that. They wouldn't talk about it, and we wasn't interested either, so ... It was like it should be, see? Of course today I don't know whether you could do it or not. There isn't any more of that, I know. It'd be pretty hard, I guess. I don't know.
- Richard Flint: When did it really go out if-
- Harold Voise: I guess that was it.
- Richard Flint: So in 48?
- Harold Voise: Yeah, because he was the last one, I guess, that knew how to run it right. You have to know how to operate. It's just like setting up a casino or something in Vegas. When you're handling that kinda money and everybody's gonna steal on

you, you've got to have it tightened up so you get it. Otherwise you might as well not have it. See?

Richard Flint: It's sort of a lost art on the circus anymore.

Harold Voise: Oh yeah. [inaudible 00:24:32] was a gambler to start with. Of course he liked that. He loved that kind of money. He said he'd rather have a buck that was illegitimate than two dollars legitimate.

Richard Flint: Yeah?

Harold Voise: Sure, because he was a gambler.

Eileen Voise: Well, I used to gamble on the Ringling show, but then that was the-

Harold Voise: They had regular crap games at night.

Eileen Voise: They used to have crap games, and they used to have that lantern. They'd take the blanket down there and they used to just cut the game, but a lot of times somebody tipped the police off. One time they took Eddy [inaudible 00:25:08] to jail and he was just watching him, and he was in his pajamas and his robe!

Harold Voise: Once in a while they'd pick us up. I'd run many a night, boy, down the track to get away from them. [inaudible 00:25:19] Once in a while they'd [inaudible 00:25:22], but as a rule they didn't bother you. But sometimes it-

Eileen Voise: Because it was just among the show people themselves.

Harold Voise: Yeah. Amongst the show people.

Eileen Voise: They have a crap game. They'd put a blanket down and the lanterns, and everybody would be out shooting craps.

Harold Voise: But they didn't bother us.

Eileen Voise: The men. Not the women.

Harold Voise: Just occasionally, anyway.

Richard Flint: Would this be down by the train?

Eileen Voise: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Harold Voise: Yeah. By the train, way out somewhere with nobody around but the show people. Once in a while you'd get knocked off. They'd say, "Here they come, boys." And boom! You take off.

Richard Flint: Was it usually one person who ran the games?

- Harold Voise: Yeah.
- Richard Flint: Was this [inaudible 00:26:01]?
- Harold Voise: Yeah, well that was a privilege that the guy had. I don't know what kind of arrangements.
- Richard Flint: What sort of money went down in these games? Big money, or ...
- Harold Voise: Oh, they had pretty big money. Yeah. Yeah, some of those ... Yeah, it was pretty good money. In those days it'd be several hundred dollars. Yeah, they had some good crap games.
- Eileen Voise: I used to watch every once in a while, but I was always of them raiding the place and throwing us in jail.
- Richard Flint: How many people would get gathered around the area?
- Harold Voise: Oh, there'd be 10 or 15.
- Richard Flint: Would there always be more than one game going, or-
- Harold Voise: Oh yeah. Sometimes there'd be a couple. Yeah. Yeah, they'd be scattered around. But there'd always be one big game, and sometimes the guys would come down and-
- Eileen Voise: They very seldom ever got caught because they always had lookouts that were watching. You know?
- Harold Voise: Yeah. Sometimes Bob Reynolds, he was the boss property man in them days, and he'd come down and whatever money he had he'd shoot just one roll. Just roll them out whether he won or lost, and then we'd shoot a hundred or two hundred or three hundred, but that was it. He'd say, "Get on, boys. There it is." He'd throw that one pass, and if he hit he'd grab it all up, put it in his pocket, and keep right on going because he had to get up early and he was getting old and he didn't want to be fooled with. But if he gloated he just kept on going. Either way it didn't make no difference. One shot. Here he comes! Am I faded? That's all he wanted to know. Am I faded? Good. Shoot. One roll. Every night he'd do that same routine. Here he comes!
- Eileen Voise: What was it that [inaudible 00:27:55] used to go in the dressing room every day? We used to play bridge, back when bridge was [inaudible 00:28:00] was my partner, and Jenny and ... We'd have to wait for [inaudible 00:28:11]. We used to give him 75 cents and he'd go in. I don't know what it was, whether he'd shoot playing cards or what the heck they were doing in there in the dressing room. We'd go and set up the table and he wasn't gonna play, and all of a sudden he'd

come back. He lost every day. 50 or 75 cents, whatever it was. He used to go in there- [crosstalk 00:28:36]. When he come out we'd play bridge.

Richard Flint: Were there quite a few bridge games going on- [crosstalk 00:28:43]

Eileen Voise: Yeah. Yeah.

Richard Flint: Was that sort of a favorite past time?

Eileen Voise: Yeah. It wasn't [inaudible 00:28:49]. It was just bridge, but we used to have a lot of fun. We used to have a lot of fun.

Richard Flint: What other activities did you have to occupy your time?

Eileen Voise: Well, they had baseball games on the show.

Harold Voise: Yeah. We used to play softball.

Eileen Voise: It was ... Softball?

Harold Voise: Yeah. We used to play hardball and softball.

Eileen Voise: We used to play hardball, and everybody would take their chairs- [crosstalk 00:29:14]

Harold Voise: And we played softball, too.

Eileen Voise: Clowns against the performers, and then the performers against the performers. [crosstalk 00:29:27]

Harold Voise: A lot of them played chess.

Eileen Voise: Yeah. A lot of them played chess.

Richard Flint: How often would the baseball games be going on?

Eileen Voise: [crosstalk 00:29:38] They used to have baseball games almost every day during the baseball season.

Harold Voise: If there was a lot or somewhere where we could play- [crosstalk 00:29:48]

Eileen Voise: Everybody would take their chairs and go over and watch the baseball game. They had a girls' team. The clowns had a team, and the acrobats, and then ...

Richard Flint: Was this true on Ringling as well as Cole- [crosstalk 00:30:03]

Eileen Voise: That's where it was on the Ringling show that they ... Because they had so many people they had plenty of baseball players.

Harold Voise: [inaudible 00:30:11]

Eileen Voise: Yeah. On the [inaudible 00:30:14] show. But they played on those other shows. They played on the [inaudible 00:30:18] and then Barnum & Bailey. My mother was a ball player and so was my dad.

Richard Flint: Did they ever tell you very many stories- [crosstalk 00:30:29]

Eileen Voise: Oh yeah.

Richard Flint: Can you make any generalities to types of stories, or remember what they told most frequently, or ...

Eileen Voise: They used to talk about when they'd baseball and ... We used to go on Sunday, when we had a Sunday off. We used to go on picnics, and we'd hire a bus and all go someplace to go swimming and have all the lunch and all of the stuff. Stay all day. We had a lot of fun.

Richard Flint: Were there ever very many stories told of some of the old timers on the shows to what they did or ... very much?

Eileen Voise: Yeah, well I used to hear ... My mother and dad and all the old timers used to talk, and we used to think they were silly and everything until we got so we were doing the same thing ourself when we got older.

Richard Flint: Just talking about the old days?

Eileen Voise: Yeah.

Harold Voise: Yeah, that's right. The young ones are all the same. We used to be the same way. [inaudible 00:31:40] all kinds, you know? Now you hear them say about the same thing about us. All talking about 20 years ago. You know? These guys. There he goes again.

Eileen Voise: When was that? 20 years ago.

Richard Flint: What do you talk about? People you knew and experiences-

Eileen Voise: [crosstalk 00:31:59] I can remember my mother talking about somebody dropping dead, and I said, "How old was he?" Then she said, "50," and I said, "Died suddenly at 50? My god!" I thought it was so old. Now you know how they felt when we used to laugh at them.

Harold Voise: We used to think they was old at 40.

Eileen Voise: Yes! True! It's true!

Harold Voise: It's funny how your sense of time when you're young ...

Richard Flint: Did you ever tell stories about, say, a performer who is particularly adept? I've heard quite often people talk about Charlie [inaudible 00:32:35].

Harold Voise: Oh yeah.

Eileen Voise: Oh yeah. There were many a story told about Charlie [inaudible 00:32:39] because he was really a character. Boy, he was a good all around performer.

Harold Voise: You said you talked with [inaudible 00:32:46]. He could tell you all about it. He was with Charlie.

Eileen Voise: He was with Charlie. [crosstalk 00:32:50]

Harold Voise: We knew him pretty well.

Eileen Voise: He used to call the Pennsylvania turnpike the Pennsylvania turnbuckle, only he didn't say buckle. He was kinda tongue-tied, you know? Pennsylvania turnbuckle.

Harold Voise: We knew him. He was really something. He was one-

Eileen Voise: Yeah. I'm gonna do a [inaudible 00:33:10].

Harold Voise: He was one of the greatest all around performers, I guess.

Eileen Voise: Yeah. He was a regular acrobatic. He'd do a back underneath a table.

Richard Flint: That's what I hear. Is that really true?

Harold Voise: Yes!

Eileen Voise: Yes! Yes! It's true.

Richard Flint: Of course, he was small anyways. But still- [crosstalk 00:33:24]

Eileen Voise: Yeah! He was a little guy. He was about like size of my dad. He did it.

Richard Flint: Is that a flip flap or a somersault?

Eileen Voise: No, a somersault. A back. He used to do a back right underneath a table.

Harold Voise: Yeah. He was something. He was a good bareback rider and an acrobat. He did everything.

Eileen Voise: Flier.

Richard Flint: Were there other people you told stories about, or-

Eileen Voise: Oh yeah.

Richard Flint: What would you call these people? Heroes of the circus, or what?

Harold Voise: Well, we used to talk a lot about the [inaudible 00:33:57]. They were the fliers and-

Eileen Voise: Yeah.

Harold Voise: They was with the [inaudible 00:34:01] show when- [crosstalk 00:34:04]

Richard Flint: Did you ever know the [inaudible 00:34:07]?

Harold Voise: We were with them.

Eileen Voise: Sure. We were with them.

Richard Flint: You saw them work?

Harold Voise: Oh yes.

Eileen Voise: Sure.

Harold Voise: [crosstalk 00:34:13]

Eileen Voise: He was the first guy to do a triple, Ernie Clarke, but he had no form. His legs were like a-

Harold Voise: He did a triple on the Ringling show for a few years over there, and nobody every knew it.

Eileen Voise: He had no forms. He legs would be flying all around like a [inaudible 00:34:31].

Harold Voise: Yeah. He did the triple and he did the two and half [inaudible 00:34:35], the two and a half pirouette. Come to tricks, he was fabulous. Yeah, we worked with him at the [inaudible 00:34:44] show for a year.

Eileen Voise: He could go back to his own [inaudible 00:34:46]

Harold Voise: He was something.

Richard Flint: That's what just sort of made him unique.

Harold Voise: Yeah. We all talk about him. He was something.

Richard Flint: Who else did you talk about?

Eileen Voise: [inaudible 00:35:02]

Harold Voise: Yeah, [inaudible 00:35:07] was terrific when I first went to the show as a kid. He was the first good comedian in the riding act.

Eileen Voise: There's a picture in here on the wall and that's the only one we've got left. Harold gave a picture. We lost all our pictures traveling around and everything. We had them in a hotel there in [inaudible 00:35:29], and when we come back they had lost them. They're hard to replace. But here, you want to see a picture of- [crosstalk 00:35:35]

Harold Voise: You've got the tape running.

Richard Flint: I'll turn it-

... seems and so on. I guess you've been talking about what performers do in their spare time. Do you find that when you talk to these people that since you're aerialists you mostly talk to other aerialists and what they did, or-

Eileen Voise: No. You're talking about, well, any kind of an act that was good. You know what I mean. It was real work. Of course naturally it seems like the fliers all hung together, and you know.

Harold Voise: Well, they talk the same way.

Eileen Voise: Because you talk the same language. We used to go when we weren't ... We'd go to JR Thompson's there in Bloomington to do our trick.

Harold Voise: Yeah.

Eileen Voise: [inaudible 00:36:27] to be talking over why you missed this and why this and that, and you had a-

Richard Flint: Did animal trainers stick together on the show, and tumblers, and-

Eileen Voise: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Richard Flint: What about when you settled in Sarasota? I don't know how recently you've moved to Sarasota, but when people settled in Sarasota did they settle near relatives or near people- [crosstalk 00:36:54]

Harold Voise: No. They're all over.

Eileen Voise: Well, they were scattered all over, but when we first came down here in 48 it was a smaller town. That's why we liked it.

Harold Voise: Right. We've been here-

Eileen Voise: You'd go downtown every night and all of those benches, you'd meet all the performers. If you'd go down in the daytime, well you'd find all the women and run into them in the dime store, and the men in the hardware store.

Harold Voise: I still see everybody. I see more people right down at Publix here.

Eileen Voise: Yeah. Right down at Ringling Shopping Center you'd run into a lot of the performers.

Harold Voise: Yeah.

Richard Flint: But in those early days in Sarasota, say, did the aerialists go to a certain bar in town, or was it more just show people that-

Harold Voise: Just show people.

Richard Flint: Show people. So there was quite a bit of mixing-

Eileen Voise: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Oh yeah.

Harold Voise: Just all show people down. You'd go downtown and everybody would be there.

Eileen Voise: Yeah. You used to see everyone. Now you never see anybody.

Richard Flint: Town's so big, yeah.

Eileen Voise: Yeah. It's too big, now.

Richard Flint: Where were the places in Sarasota that show people frequented?

Eileen Voise: Well, they used to have that dive down there in lower Main Street that used to be-

Harold Voise: The Tropicola.

Eileen Voise: The Tropicola. I used to go in there and dance and sit around, and-

Harold Voise: And there right next to the Sarasota hotel. Sit outside.

Eileen Voise: Yeah. They used to have chairs out there down at the Sarasota hotel. It's closed now. They used to call that Heartbreak Hotel. Everybody used to go down there and cry and lie.

Harold Voise: If anybody was in town, they'd meet all down there by the Sarasota hotel, and then of course the bars was all there.

Eileen Voise: Heartbreak hotel.

Harold Voise: They hung around there. Of course, the Ringling show had the [inaudible 00:38:32] and the hotel they used to all hang in. When they had the shows there they all hung around there.

Richard Flint: What about circus people and the townspeople? Was there much mixing there?

Harold Voise: Oh yes. Yeah, in them days all the [inaudible 00:38:46] used to come out and call you by your name, and everybody knew-

Eileen Voise: By your first name. Now you don't know anybody.

Harold Voise: We know some of the old timers, yes, that had businesses, but-

Eileen Voise: Oh, they loved the show people. The show people were the ones that brought money down, that threw money down to them- [crosstalk 00:39:02]

Harold Voise: Oh, we used to walk down the street and they'd say, "Hi Harold! Hi Eileen!" Everybody would wave. You used to buy something and just toss it in your car. You never had to worry about anybody stealing it. Nobody locked their doors. It was unbelievable.

Eileen Voise: We used to leave our doors open, and the cleaning fella would come in. I'd leave the stuff on the chair, and he'd come in and get it. When he'd come back he'd take it and hang it in the closet.

Harold Voise: Oh yeah.

Richard Flint: When did this change?

Harold Voise: Oh ...

Eileen Voise: I would say about ... about 10 years ago.

Richard Flint: After Ringling had left under canvas then?

Eileen Voise: About 10 years ago you had to start locking your doors. Some people never locked their doors at night, even. Well, I never did that, but-

Richard Flint: Why would the change-

Eileen Voise: Well, just like all over. All of the breaking and entering, and-

Richard Flint: It wasn't, say, because this all of a sudden became a winter vacation spot, or it's just the times?

Harold Voise: Just the times, yeah.

Eileen Voise: It's just the times. It's just like that all over.

Harold Voise: Well, you never thought nothing about it because that's the way it was. I mean, you look back now and you think, "Jesus. It couldn't be." But it was. You wasn't afraid naturally.

Eileen Voise: No.

Harold Voise: Like I say, you never worried about locking your car. You go downtown and you buy something, you just toss it in the car and go down the street, and you knew everybody, and you'd come back, get in your car, and come out the house. Yeah, nobody ever locked their doors or nothing. I don't know. You just felt like you was-

Richard Flint: Safe.

Harold Voise: Safe. Now you don't feel safe with them all bolted.

Richard Flint: That's true everywhere it seams, yeah.

Harold Voise: But it was really a wonderful little town.

Richard Flint: When you settled here in, this would be I guess 48 and into the early 50s, what percentage of the people in Sarasota were Ringling employees? How many of the circus people were Ringling connected?

Eileen Voise: Well, there was quite a few, but it wasn't only Ringling show that come down here. It was all show people, for some reason.

Harold Voise: It seemed like this was just a circus town.

Eileen Voise: Just a circus city.

Harold Voise: People came down here and they just felt like this was the town for them. Now they-

Eileen Voise: Because they knew everybody.

Harold Voise: They've got homes all scattered all over. Right back here [inaudible 00:41:34] right there-

Richard Flint: I noticed a couple on the mailboxes coming down here.

Harold Voise: And the [inaudible 00:41:41].

Eileen Voise: We used to be out in the country here when we bought our home.

Harold Voise: Astrid and Franklin. Franklin and Astrid. [inaudible 00:41:52] is just across the street.

Eileen Voise: [inaudible 00:41:55] used to do-

Harold Voise: The trampoline.

Eileen Voise: The trampoline, and the-

Richard Flint: I saw a little dwarf walking down here, too.

Harold Voise: Yeah, that was Landon.

Eileen Voise: That's Landon's little fella.

Harold Voise: [crosstalk 00:42:06]

Eileen Voise: I saw him the other day. Sunday. Yeah. He lives right over there in Colorado. I saw him. He used to play pool with Harold on the [inaudible 00:42:11] show.

Harold Voise: Oh, there's all kinds. There's some of them right down past the Lion's club there.

Eileen Voise: Yeah. [inaudible 00:42:17] Oh, they're all over, but we used to be out in the country when we bought our house in, what, 51.

Harold Voise: They're really all over.

Eileen Voise: Now we're practically in town, and we never had any traffic.

Harold Voise: You've got a lot of people that was with the Polack shows and all of the shows.

Eileen Voise: All of the shows. It wasn't just Ringling. In fact, Ringling-

Harold Voise: Zach [inaudible 00:42:36]'s wife was here.

Eileen Voise: A lot of the Ringling people have moved on to- [crosstalk 00:42:39]

Harold Voise: And Niles [inaudible 00:42:39].

Richard Flint: Yeah. I met him once.

Harold Voise: Yeah. Niles and ...

Richard Flint: What a guy.

Harold Voise: Yeah. He's here.

Eileen Voise: And Bobby B, he was up on TV. He got out of the business and he had a good thing up there in Milwaukee, and now he's moved down here. He was on this channel 44, but he quit. I don't know why.

Harold Voise: I don't either.

Eileen Voise: Mickey was out there. Have you been out to the show folks' clubhouse?

Richard Flint: Yeah. I was there last Saturday night.

Harold Voise: Yeah. You see a lot of the people up there.

Richard Flint: Yeah. Fred Orlando was tending bar, and- [crosstalk 00:43:11] Are you close to any show folks, or-

Eileen Voise: Oh yeah.

Harold Voise: Oh yeah.

Eileen Voise: Yeah. I play bingo, but I work on the bingo. You know, selling the specials and calling the numbers- [crosstalk 00:43:27]

Harold Voise: ... a lot of wild animal acts here in the south, that way. You know, you have to get out that way, but I've got one that's ... [inaudible 00:43:34]. He's got a big tiger act. He's out there with the Hermans. In fact he stopped here the other day [inaudible 00:43:42] me some pictures. Yeah. I got him booked in Lansing. [inaudible 00:43:46]

Eileen Voise: Well, do you live in [inaudible 00:43:50] now?

Richard Flint: No. I was working there for the spring and summer. I'm now in graduate school in Cooperstown, New York. My folks still live in Long Meadow, so ... I'll be back to [inaudible 00:44:02] next summer, I expect, and after that I'm settled down [inaudible 00:44:08].

Harold Voise: That's good experience.

Richard Flint: Yeah. I liked- [crosstalk 00:44:13]

Eileen Voise: Long Meadow is right outside of Springfield.

Harold Voise: Yeah. I know where it is. Yeah. Yeah. Tarzan's out here. We had him up there with a show. We got him right after he got chewed up there in Cleveland, and he went to Milwaukee for [inaudible 00:44:34] and then he came on to Lansing. Had his arm [inaudible 00:44:37].

Richard Flint: On the show folks, that's what, seven years old I guess now? What sort of effect has that had on the circus community here? Has it brought them all together again just to give them an occasion to get together, or-

- Eileen Voice: Oh yes. Yeah. They go out. It's open Wednesdays and Fridays and Saturdays, and of course Sunday is strictly for the bingo. That's when I go out, but we don't go out Saturday because we don't drink. They drink and dance and everything, and then Friday night they have ... It's for the teenagers out there. It's nice. They got a nice new card room. That one right off of the bar, and then just a few weeks ago, just before Christmas, when we were out there at bingo I heard all the sawing. I went out and they sawed the bar and moved it down and got the pieces in there, made it bigger. Then they got that room there on the end. Of course, Sullivan's room went up.
- Harold Voice: Last winter, I guess.
- Eileen Voice: No. A couple winters ago.
- Harold Voice: Yeah.
- Richard Flint: Do you go to most of the monthly suppers that they have, or-
- Harold Voice: Occasionally.
- Eileen Voice: Occasionally. Yeah.
- Harold Voice: Yeah. We go out for the bowling-
- Eileen Voice: And then of course the workers. Of course, I'm a worker on bingo, and every once in a while we'd have a gang of us. The workers can take a guest, and of course I can take Harold. He's- [crosstalk 00:45:57]
- Harold Voice: We went down to the new Heidelberg down there.
- Eileen Voice: We went to the Heidelberg the last time, and we went down to Martins, and down at the Ringling hotel and-
- Harold Voice: Well, one thing about it here is you know the feeling, I guess, is it's you know they're all here.
- Richard Flint: I think this is probably-
- Harold Voice: Geraldo's lived here. He'd call up once in a while.
- Eileen Voice: They're all here and they're all working, or something, but it's just you don't see them.
- Harold Voice: Oh yeah. They're in and out. At Leto Beach there they've done the [inaudible 00:46:32] comes out there, and Eunice, and a lot of the show people. On Sunday they all come out there, get together.
- Richard Flint: What did you do before show folks, as far as getting together?

Eileen Voise: Well, when the town was smaller you used to go downtown.

Richard Flint: You'd see people.

Eileen Voise: The guys used to go down at the Heartbreak Hotel and-

Harold Voise: They used to drop in.

Eileen Voise: Yeah. Before TV everybody used to go out visiting. Now ...

Harold Voise: They don't.

Eileen Voise: Nobody goes visiting, and if you do they want to watch their silly TV programs.

Harold Voise: Like I say, I catch a lot of them down at the market, and down at Ringling Shopping Center, out at the beach.

Eileen Voise: I see a lot out ... Not too many at bingo, because really we get more town people who play than ... It's the show folks that-

Richard Flint: [inaudible 00:47:25]

Eileen Voise: Peterson runs it, and then-

Harold Voise: We see a lot of them out there on election night. [inaudible 00:47:31]

Eileen Voise: Oh, yeah.

Harold Voise: And they're in the hospital, and working in the sheriff department, and there in the police department.

Eileen Voise: Oh, they're all over.

Harold Voise: All everywhere you go. You'll see somebody.

Eileen Voise: You've got a lot of them that work over there at [inaudible 00:47:42] brothers. They've got show people now.

Harold Voise: [inaudible 00:47:44] And at the House of Chong there's some waitresses. Oh, they're all over.

Eileen Voise: Yeah. Working at the sand castle.

Richard Flint: I think this tape is probably about- [crosstalk 00:47:57]