

CWM Audio 4-12
Alex Sokolove Interview, February 18, 1972
INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT
Part 1

Richard Flint: For me, it's this.

Testing, one. I'm speaking with-

Alex Sokolove: I'll answer your questions.

Richard Flint: Okay. I'm speaking with Alex Sokolove in Philadelphia on February 18th, 1972. Do you want me to start by asking you questions, or do you want-

Alex Sokolove: You may, if you wish. Yeah.

Richard Flint: Okay. I'm interested in how you got into show business, to start at the beginning.

Alex Sokolove: Well, I worked in the department store here at one time and I met a fellow by the name of Nelson Butler, who went out with a show one or two years. He was a driver of a six horse team. He used to come home in a Ford every year. He told me what fun it was being with the circus, about the good times he had, and he came home with a little money. I figured, well, maybe that would be good work for me to come home with a little money too. Everybody likes money.

[00:00:30]

[00:01:00] At any rate, Jones Brothers and Wilson went out of ... they were selling their show, the Jones Brothers and Wilson's Circus in Norfolk, Virginia. That was in the spring of 1914.

I joined the show. I didn't know what I was going to do. I never rode a freight train in my life and I never bummed a meal in my life and yet I took a chance to go and, again, I didn't have money enough to take me both ways but I took a chance of getting there and getting back somehow if I had to, but I got there and had some nice ...

[00:01:30]

Richard Flint: Just a minute. The mail's come.

You're on your way to Richmond now?

Alex Sokolove: No, to Norfolk.

Richard Flint: Norfolk.

Alex Sokolove: Norfolk, Virginia. So I left here Sunday night and I went by way of Newport News to Norfolk and I arrived in Norfolk and went to see some ... I don't remember who in my store and said I wanted a job. You know, non-circus people will say circus. I

[00:02:00]

wanted a job at the circus. Someone took me to a man named Howard Damon. Damon. He happened to be the nephew of Walter L. Main, who was ... everybody knew William Main. William Main. And he was the steward of the cookhouse.

[00:02:30] So he gave me a job. I had a nice blue suede suit on and he put me on painting poles for the cookhouse. I got some yellow paint on me and I was heartsick. I got sick when I saw that paint on my good suit. At any rate, I made the best of it. I was with him all that season as a cookhouse ... what they call a cookhouse flunkie. That's a waiter in the cookhouse.

[00:03:00] At the end of that season, he brought a friend of his on for the following season. That is, after that first season. The name of the show that season was Jones Bros. and Wilson. Do you have it on?

Richard Flint: Yep, yeah.

Alex Sokolove: It was Jones Bros. And Wilson. It was Harry Wilson, a Philadelphian with a red beard, and J. Augustus Jones. We're back with the show. Harry Wilson's wife worked the small animal acts. She worked leopards and pumas and ... Leopards and pumas and other small animals ... wild animals. There was a fellow, name of ... I'm trying to think of Taylor's first name who worked the big animal act. Lions. So they had two or three animal acts. Wild animal acts. Now as Howard Damon brought him a man with him, he figured he'd get him a job.

[00:04:00] Incidentally, the boss porter, the man who had charge of the sleeping cars, was leaving that season ... at the end of that season, and they needed a man that following season to take charge of the sleeping cars. We were in the living quarters painting dens. You know, different wagons and dens and stuff. J. Augustus Jones walked into the paint shop with a man by name of Bob Beasley, one of the actors with the different acts in the show. He pointed to me and said, "Alex", he said, "is one of my men", he said, "but I'm going to give him a job as boss porter." See he knew then he wasn't going to have a boss porter for the following season.

[00:05:00] I said, no, I'd rather not have that. I've gotta stay in the cars as a ... I will stay in the cookhouse because Howard Damon promised me the best tables in the cookhouse where I can make the most money in tips. See, we all depended on tips. So I said, "okay, we'll see." A fellow by the name of Howard A fellow by the name of But it's [inaudible 00:05:20] Can't remember the first name. A fellow by the name of Cash was the head cook in the cookhouse. He got me afterwards. He said, "you take that job that Mr. Jones wants to give you. As boss porter, you'll be better off." You know, taking charge of the sleeping quarters.

[00:06:00] So I went to Mr. Jones. I said I've changed my mind. I'll accept the job as boss porter. Number seven car. That was the car where the bosses of the various departments slept. You know like the boss hostler had charge of the horses or the boss canvasman. Everybody slept in the boss's car. That was the car that ... boss porter had charge of that car. That was supposed to be the car where you made the most money. So I took that. Well, Mrs. Jones, Mrs. J. August Jones, told them.

[00:06:30] She said, "you don't know about this man Webb, whom Howard Damon is bringing." She said, "but you do know Alex as someone reliable, so if you give him a job, you know you'll have a steady man."

[00:07:00] So I took it and I had it for three years until they sold the show. That was 1915, 16, and 17. At the end of 1915, we went into Hot Springs, Arkansas. At the end of 16, let's see. In 14, we went into St. Louis and at 15 went into Hot Springs, and at 16 we went into Riverside, California. At the end of that year, we went into Shreveport, Louisiana to the fairgrounds. That's where most of the stuff was sold under the hammer, because ... The reason for that was, with the war coming on ... By that time, this country had entered World War I.

[00:07:30] Mr. J. Augustus Jones was planning to take all ... The government would need his horses, so he decided to sell the biggest part of the show. He sold a lot of them under the hammer in Shreveport, Louisiana. Charlie Sparks bought some of it. The American Circus Corporation bought some of it. I don't know whether the Ringlings bought some of it or not. At any rate, most of it went under the hammer.

[00:08:00] So the next year, there's Howard Damon took out a show for J. Augustus Jones. He was manager of the show. It was a two-car show. I was on the show as ticket seller, you know, doing odds and ends. It was a lot of hard work and I was waiting for my notice from the government. My ...

Richard Flint: Draft.

Alex Sokolove: My draft notice. I gave the billboard publishing company as my permanent address. [00:08:30] I received my notice somewhere near St. Louis to contact the draft board outside of St. Louis as ... I'm trying to think of where the draft board was at. Somewhere outside of St. Louis, so I figured I'd go from there but then I had a sister, at that time, that lived in St. Louis so I went to visit her for a couple of days. While I was [00:09:00] there, I decided that instead of going to saint ... My memory isn't as sharp as it used to be.

Richard Flint: Oh, it's pretty good.

Alex Sokolove: At any rate, I decided. So I went home instead. I contacted my draft board here in Philadelphia, which was in a station house in 8th and Jefferson. That's here in the city. 1500 North. On a Monday morning ... I came in on a Sunday. On a Monday [00:09:30] morning, I went to the draft board and I reported. I said my name is Alex Sokolove. He said I thought you were in St. Louis. I said I was. I said I had been away from home for a little over four years. I said, "I'm afraid if I go into the service and don't come back, my folks will never have a chance to see me again", so I decided to come home and go from here. He said, "you did a wise thing".

[00:10:00] At any rate, I went from there and I stayed and enlisted. He said, "I can't send you out until May the 25th", I think he said. This was May the 12th so it gave me approximately two weeks to be at home. I said that's fine. That will give me two weeks to visit with my folks. So, he made all the necessary arrangements and I left

from home, I think, on the 27th of May.

Richard Flint: Excuse me, can we just ...

Okay. Sorry to interrupt.

[00:10:30]

Alex Sokolove: That's alright.

So I left home. We left May the 27th. We went to New York. We shipped out from there. From New York. I landed in Brest, France. I landed there either the latter part of May ... No, it was a little bit later. It must have been the early part of June when I landed there. I was in France until sometime in ... until after the war was over. Then I went to a hospital in Vichy, France, which was a big hospital, base center of Americans. I went to Vichy and I stayed there, I think, five or six weeks.

[00:11:00]

[00:11:30]

Richard Flint: In the hospital?

Alex Sokolove: I had something wrong with my right or left knee, I don't remember which. I stayed there and then I went back to the company. They sent me back to the company, which was in a small town. I don't remember the name of the town where I landed coming back from the hospital but I was with the company until we were ready to sail. We sailed sometime in May, about the middle of May, from Saint-Nazaire, through the Bay of Biscay, which is a rough piece of water. We landed here in Philadelphia in Washington Avenue wharf. That's the wharf here where a lot of ships came in. Then I was mustered out about 10 days later. I've been out ever since.

[00:12:00]

Richard Flint: You have? Back to the circus though?

[00:12:30]

Alex Sokolove: Now so I was home ... No, I was home there barely. That was 19 ...19. 19 ... I was home 1920. In the meantime, I got in touch with Elmer Jones who had out five shows. He had out two two-car circuses. He had out two two-car medicine shows. No, two two-car medicine shows, and then the dramatic show. So he had five two-car shows out. So I stayed with him. 1920, and I'm doing different things in his shows. The fact is he sent me money to come on. I didn't have any money. I had run out of money at that time. So I had written to him to send me money for transportation. I joined him in Spartanburg, South Carolina. That's where he was wintering. That was the winter of 20 ... 20 and 21. He went out in 1921 from Spartanburg. The fact is he went into Spartanburg that winter and I had charge of winter quarters.

[00:13:00]

[00:13:30]

Richard Flint: Did all the shows go in there?

Alex Sokolove: No, not all of them. I think that was the only one. The one that I was on. I think that was the only show that went in.

Richard Flint: Was that ... you were on a circus then or the minstrel?

Alex Sokolove: No, that was the circus, yeah.

[00:14:00] At any rate, then I ... The next year he cut one of the shows off. He took a car off one of the shows and made a three-car show out of two two-car shows. He figured he'd arrange a circuit ... give a parade with the three-car show. That's the picture that you have seen.

Richard Flint: Uh-huh. Over at Jim's doorway.

Alex Sokolove: Over at Jim's. Yeah. He put on a parade and I used to a little announcing. I had to go into town while they were doing the parade. I would say, there will be a number of circus ... there will be a number of acts given on the show grounds immediately after the circus returns. I don't remember the exact words. After the circus returns, everybody please follow the parade to the show grounds, or words to that effect.

Richard Flint: Right.

[00:15:00]

Alex Sokolove: After that, then they had a fellow, name of Verne Crawford out of Wichita, Kansas. Verne Crawford had the candy stands on that circus that he had taken on for loan so Elmer Jones called me into his office. He said, Alex I'm in a spot. I'm in a bad spot. I said, "what's the matter?"

[00:15:30] "I've got two candy stand men and I only need one. You and Crawford are both doing candy stands," he said, "if I give Crawford a stand, he's a good candy stand man." I said, "Crawford is a good man. He's got his stands for years." He said, who has been ... Elmer Jones said "who has been on the show the longest?"

I said, "I have been on the longest but he has been doing candy stands longer than I have. He knows more about the business than I do." He said, "the only trouble is, if I give him the stands, he has a wife." Because Crawford was married. "If I give him the stands, I've got to give him a lower berth."

[00:16:00] And sleeping space was, you know, worth a lot of money to him then. It was scarce. He said, "if I give you the stands, so you can sleep in an upper berth double, and if give it to him, he's got to have a lower berth with his wife." "Not only that", he said, "if I leave the show, I can leave you in charge." See, he had left me in charge quite a number of times and he knew I was able to do the work that I was supposed to do.

[00:16:30] He said, "I can leave you in charge. I don't know anything about Crawford. I don't know if he knows how to run it. I can leave you in charge of the front door." That means taking care of the entire show. So he gave me ... That was ... So he gave me the candy stands. Then a short time later, he had that show. He took the show out himself, see, but I had the candy stands.

Richard Flint: What was the name of the show?

Alex Sokolove: I don't remember. Could be ... It was either Cole Brothers, Cole and Rogers. Either
[00:17:00] Cole Brothers or Cole and Rogers or Cooper Brothers. One of the three names.

Richard Flint: That's the three-car show?

Alex Sokolove: No, that was a two-car show.

Richard Flint: Two car show. Oh.

Alex Sokolove: Yeah. Now that was the two-car shows. Al F. Wheeler had one of the shows, you
[00:17:30] know, out of Oxford, Pennsylvania. He had one of the shows. So, he said, "I'll give
you the candy stands." So he told me that I Was going to have the stands and I
went over and spoke to Crawford. He said okay, he wants to give them to you. So I
was like, Crawford wasn't mad about it. He joined another show. I don't remember
where he went. I think he went with the show that afterwards went off the rail in
[00:18:00] 1916. No, it couldn't have been 16. It was after that. I don't remember the name of
the show. Auten [phonetic 00:18:00] Brothers. I think it was Auten Brothers but I'm
not sure. At any rate, Crawford went with another show.

Richard Flint: Right.

Alex Sokolove: I stayed with him until I went off to war ... until I was called into the service. That
[00:18:30] was in 19 ... 19 ... when Damon ... Howard Damon took the show out. You know, he
was manager of the two-car show that J. Augustus Jones put out. Mrs. Yards
[phonetic 00:18:31] was in there. That's Mrs. J. Augustus Jones' sister. She was the
treasurer of the show. She would sort of look after the money. I was with him then
[00:19:00] until he went off the road in the spring of 19 ... In the spring of 1930, he went into
... outside of Buffalo. I forget the name of the town outside of Buffalo.

Richard Flint: Tonawanda?

Alex Sokolove: No, a small town outside of Buffalo, New York. Springville, New York. Springville,
[00:19:30] New York, I think it was. I went home. He went up there, and I went home. After it,
I was home for a while, and I did different jobs. You know, I was on different jobs,
and then I happened to go to Easton, Pennsylvania. It's about 55 miles from
Philadelphia here, to run a cigar store for somebody in our family. A man had two
cigar stores. One was in front of a barber shop and one was in the front of a bank
and he needed someone to run one of the stores. They contacted me wanting to
know whether I would run one of the stores, a cigar store in front of the barber
shop. It was the nicest shop in Easton. It had eight chairs. It was in a beautiful shop.

[00:20:00] So, I went to Easton. I stayed there about two and a half years in Easton. I got fed
up with it because I had to get up very early. I had to get up about 5:30, quarter to
six, to open the store at 6:00. Yes. That's an early hour in the morning to open a
cigar store. At any rate, I got used to it. I stayed there and then ... The reason I left
[00:20:30] there, the man said to me one time And then I took a leave of ... Then I got a
card from Elmer Jones, a card or a letter, saying that he was putting a show out of
Warren, Pennsylvania. That's their home, you know. North Warren. Putting a show

[00:21:00] out of Warren, Pennsylvania. To write him. It was addressed to Alex Sokolove, cigar store, Easton, Pennsylvania. The population was about 55 or 60,000 so I had to ... at the time, you know, the addresser addressed it that way. At any rate, I got the card and I answered him, and got in touch with him, and he sent me money again for transportation.

[00:21:30] I joined him there. That was in 19 ... Let's see what year that was. That was in 1936. In the spring of 1936. That was the last ... By that time, Elmer Jones lost all of his money and his brother ... His brother by name of Dick Jones, who had quite a bit of

[00:22:00] money and also a lot of land, he bankrolled the show. Elmer Jones was the manager of the show. So we went out and we stayed out. For a while, the show didn't make any money. I don't remember how late we stayed out for that year but we stayed til about three ... early in the fall, and then we went into Warren, Pennsylvania. Then I went home.

That was the end of my show business ... That was in 1936.

Richard Flint: Right. Now, the Jones brothers. One of them lived until about 10 years ago. Wasn't that Elmer or J. Augustus?

[00:22:30] Alex Sokolove: That was ... No, that was ... J. Augustus Jones was kicked by a mule in 1918. He died a short time later. That was in 1918. I was in France at the time when I received word from Mrs. J. Augustus Jones that J. Augustus Jones was kicked by a mule, that he'd died a short time later.

Richard Flint: All right. What sort of a man was J. Augustus? Do you remember him very well?

Alex Sokolove: [00:23:00] He was a very ... He was a businessman but he was a nice man. He believed in everybody doing what he was supposed to do. He wasn't a He was a nice man to work for.

Richard Flint: Did he travel on the show, did you say?

Alex Sokolove: Yeah. He traveled on the show in 1914, and then in 19 ... In fact, he was on the show all the years that I was with him.

Richard Flint: Did he ever tell you how he got into the circus?

Alex Sokolove: No.

Richard Flint: No.

Alex Sokolove: No. He never told me that.

Richard Flint: No. What about Elmer Jones, now?

Alex Sokolove: Elmer Jones. He and I became very, very close friends, very close friends. That was

[00:23:30] on the small shows. See I was never with Elmer Jones on the big shows because when I went out, I joined Elmer Jones in 1917 in Riverside, California, when I went out with the small show. That's when I joined Elmer and that's when I became a friend of Elmer's as well as an employee of Elmer's.

Richard Flint: Right.

Alex Sokolove: I have ... Look, I'm going to show you something.

Richard Flint: Okay.

Alex Sokolove: I mean to [inaudible 00:23:55] I want to show you something.

Richard Flint: Okay.

[00:24:00]

Alex Sokolove: Cut that off my tape.

[00:24:30] These might not even be of interest to you because they're my own family. This is me in uniform. No, that's the uniform of ... not the service ... of the Jewish War Veterans, when I was commander of the post. That's the girl I met in the ... somewhere in Canada. Brother named Smith. To Mrs. Sokolove from Toby Smith, July 1st, 1927. Yeah. That's over two years ago.

Richard Flint: Over three. Was she on the show?

Alex Sokolove: No, I she was ... I just met her on the show grounds and I took her to see the show. She wasn't a circus girl.

[00:25:00]

Richard Flint: What was life on the show like?

Alex Sokolove: It was hard for me. Like anything else, it's just what you make of it. You can make it easier on yourself or you can make it tougher on yourself.

Richard Flint: Are these any show people or?

Alex Sokolove: Yes. This is Pearl Clark and that's her sister-in-law. This is ... I think, no ... That's not her sister-in-law. That's another woman. That's Pearl Clark and the Clark Family, the M. L. Clark, the wagon show.

[00:25:30]

Richard Flint: Oh yeah, yeah.

Alex Sokolove: This is Pearl Clark. She was like the girl from [inaudible 00:25:31]. She used to come in on the horse and sing and then she'd have pigeons flying to her. And this is she and her sister-in-law. This is Pearl Clark. No, that's Pearl's sister-in-law, and this is, this woman whoever she is. I forget her name. And this is Pearl Clark again. This is

[00:26:00] Pearl Clark and her sister-in-law. This is Willie Clark's wife. Willie Clark was one of the Clark sons. This is Pearl Clark and her sister-in-law again I think.

Richard Flint: Now, where were these pictures taken? At the winter quarters?

Alex Sokolove: No, they were taken on the road.

Richard Flint: On the road. Summer of 19-

Alex Sokolove: Summer of 1924. This is only the ... This was the third year I was with Elmer Jones on the two-car show after I left the big show.

[00:26:30]

Richard Flint: Now how did you see people from another show when you were on a show? Did you day and date?

Alex Sokolove: IF we were close enough, I'd take time off. I always had somebody working on the candy stands. I'd go and visit the show. See with all these pictures but the thing is I gave Jim a lot of these pictures.

Richard Flint: Missed a couple things.

Alex Sokolove: Yeah, I see.

This is Pearl Clark, again.

Richard Flint: You must have liked her.

[00:27:00]

Alex Sokolove: No, I just happened to have pictures of her. This was one of the men from the side show, Clark Burns. This was a drummer in a band and this was the boss canvasman's dog. I forget what he called him. He had a pet name for him but that's a German from Little Rock, Arkansas.

This is ... They're not from Arkansas. They're from someplace else.

[00:27:30]

Richard Flint: Jim showed me a picture of you standing in front of a candy stand.

Alex Sokolove: Yeah, that's when I had the candy stand.

This is a brother of mine. He's dead now. My brother and his wife. She's still alive. I just called her last Sunday. She's in Miami Beach, Florida. She's working in the big hotels as a head hostess. This is somebody from town here. This is my brother. This fellow here, but he's dead now.

[00:28:00]

Richard Flint: It's loud in here. Do you have any show people here?

Alex Sokolove: That's me and the girl I went with there. I took her out a few times.
You can't use your tape recorder for this.

[00:28:30]
Richard Flint: Well, I can get back and get some of what you say but of course I can't get the pictures, but ... that looks like the show.

Alex Sokolove: Yeah, that's ... This guy was a ... August was a, he wasn't an old legion. I forget what he was. That's a man and wife. His name was August Kanerva. He and a brother of his were brought over to this country by the Wild West show quite a number of years ago to do a head walking act across a platform, up the steps and down the other side.

[00:29:00]

[00:29:30] This is probably where ... There's a musician. This fellow worked among the cars. There's one of the sideshow girls. These are two performers. This is Fredda Haag. I still get the Christmas cards from her. She comes from western Virginia now, but they were from in Tennessee.

Richard Flint: Is that the Mighty Haag?

Alex Sokolove: That's the Mighty Haag, in that family, yeah. She was the wife of Ernest Haag's nephew.

Richard Flint: Oh. Was she on the show's then?

Alex Sokolove: Yeah, she and [inaudible 00:29:54] could use what they call a jingle board. You know, you throw them under your ... you through harness rings that cost you coins. Whatever you circle is whatever you get.

[00:30:00]

Richard Flint: Where is she living now?

Alex Sokolove: She's living in Tennessee somewhere. I mean in Virginia somewhere.

Richard Flint: Don't know the town.

Alex Sokolove: No, that's not in Richmond.

Richard Flint: And what's her name?

Alex Sokolove: Fredda Haag.

Richard Flint: Fredda Haag. Is she married?

Alex Sokolove: Well, her husband died. She was married, yeah. Here are some of the musicians. There's a guy, name of Walter Cook, is a trombone player. This is Lee Smith, a clown. This guy's a musician. This is one of the clowns.

[00:30:30]

Richard Flint: Yeah, I thought I'd write swiftly enough.

Alex Sokolove: Well. And that's me. I don't remember where this was taken, but it was taken somewhere here.

Richard Flint: What sort of bands did the two-car shows have?

Alex Sokolove: They had ten or twelve piece bands, something You know they had big bands.

Richard Flint: How many people would those two cars carry?

[00:31:00]

Alex Sokolove: 75, 80, 90 people. That's counting the working men too.

Richard Flint: Where would the working men sleep?

Alex Sokolove: They slept in the baggage car. They'd make a bed for themselves in the baggage car and slept there.

Richard Flint: Uh-huh. And the performers all had berths?

Alex Sokolove: The performers, yeah.

Richard Flint: Right.

Alex Sokolove: That's the boss canvasman's wife. Ruth Helms. She's still alive I think.

Richard Flint: Whereabouts?

Alex Sokolove: She comes out of ... of Dallas, Texas.

[00:31:30]

There's some of the musicians. Who's this? That's a musician. A clarinet player. I forget who this is.

Richard Flint: So these are taken right at the train, aren't they?

Alex Sokolove: Yeah, these were taken ... I mean, you can see this thing. This is Pearl Hicks and so is this. This is Paul Cooke.

Richard Flint: What did these people do on the show?

Alex Sokolove: Which people?

[00:32:00]

Richard Flint: Well, Paul Cooke and ...

Alex Sokolove: Musician.

Richard Flint: Musician?

Alex Sokolove: Yeah. This is a brother of mine. This is his wife. He lost her. She died about a year ago or so.

Richard Flint: That's taken-

Alex Sokolove: That's a musician, yeah. This thing can ride on the end of a car.

Richard Flint: Right. How long were the two-car shows? I mean, did each car ... or?

Alex Sokolove: [00:32:30] 72 feet long, or. Yeah, they were long cars. This is Elmer Jones's baby. With her is that? Is that Elmer Jones with her? Is that a man with her? No. That's his baby. She's married to a lawyer now. She's a big girl and married to a lawyer.

Richard Flint: Whereabouts?

Alex Sokolove: In north Little Rock, Arkansas.

Richard Flint: What's her name?

Alex Sokolove: Not north little ... in north Warren, Pennsylvania.

Richard Flint: What's her name now?

Alex Sokolove: [00:33:00] Yeah, I don't remember her name now. This is that candy stand man's wife, Mrs. Crawford and that's me with her. Yeah, that's me with her. Somewhere [inaudible 00:33:03], I think.

Richard Flint: Somebody's babies.

Alex Sokolove: Yeah. This is somebody I met on the road. This was taken somewhere in New Hampshire, too. This is a musician and this is Crawford's wife and that's me. Look at that brim on their hats.

[00:33:30]

Richard Flint: Yeah, people don't even wear hats today for the most part. But were these all pictures of the shows, the lock is on the ...

Alex Sokolove: I don't know who this baby is.

I think that's me, isn't it?

Richard Flint: I don't know. I can't tell.

Alex Sokolove: I can't really see it.

[00:34:00] Yeah, I think it is. Yeah, I think that's me.

Richard Flint: What did you do? What was your job on the shows in the 1920s? Were you ... you were on candy stands already.

Alex Sokolove: I was on candy stands, yeah.

Richard Flint: All the time?

Alex Sokolove: Yeah, most of the time.

Richard Flint: Oh, here's probably some of the ... Is that the train in this one?

Alex Sokolove: [00:34:30] No, that's a schooner, that's a ... No ... Yes, it is. I don't know what's the train in that. Maybe, yeah, I think it is the baggage cars.

Richard Flint: That would be on a three-car show because there's two baggage cars.

Alex Sokolove: Yeah, two ... yeah, three-car show. This here fellow is in the Army. I forget his name. Max something. He and I were buddies.

[00:35:00] This is Elmer Jones' daughter, I believe, this fellow. This is Pearl Clark again.

This is a sister-in-law of mine. Is that me with her? Yeah, that's me. I was home on pass. That's me and a brother of mine who lives in Baltimore and a sister of mine who is in the hospital at the present time, at Jefferson Hospital there. That's me painting. I don't know what.

[00:35:30] This is Verne Crawford, the other man who had the candy stand.

Richard Flint: The candy stand. Right.

Are there many show people you still keep in contact with at all?

Alex Sokolove: Not too many, no. I have been exchanging Christmas cards until last Christmas, then I cut down. I've been sending out too many.

These are the friends I met in Little Rock.

Richard Flint: Can you think of any show people that are still around that I might ...?

Alex Sokolove: Right here?

[00:36:00]

Richard Flint: Yeah or at anyplace. I'm traveling right now. I'm going down to Florida and then out to Wisconsin, so I ...

Alex Sokolove: In Florida, you may be able to but I don't know of any down there.

There's a brother of mine who used to wear a derby suit. He was a little brother of mine whose quite grown up. That's a picture of me. That's my brother and his wife.

[00:36:30] That's my sister. She's dead now. That's a brother of mine. That's my baby brother. He's still alive. That's my brother and wife. She's dead but he's alive.

Richard Flint: What did your family think of you being on a circus?

Alex Sokolove: Oh, they didn't seem to mind.

Richard Flint: I wish we had some of the circus pictures here for you to ...

Alex Sokolove: To do what?

Richard Flint: Oh, for you to see and talk about and so on.

[00:37:00]

Alex Sokolove: Well, actually I can't say too much about them except what I told you. This was taken somewhere in Mississippi, wasn't it?

Richard Flint: Uh, yeah ... St. Louis ... Santa-

Alex Sokolove: St. Louis ... Bay of St. Louis?

Richard Flint: San ... Saints it looks like. It says Mississippi. I can't read the writing.

Alex Sokolove: I don't see how you could. It's mine.

Richard Flint: (laughs)

Alex Sokolove: Hotel.

[00:37:30]

Richard Flint: Can't you read it?

Alex Sokolove: No, I can't read it either. That's not good. You haven't got a thing on me. I can't read either.

Richard Flint: This family again?

Alex Sokolove: Yeah, this is a brother of mine. He just died last May, this brother here. That's me in uniform in front of the house when I was home on pass.

Richard Flint: All right.

[00:38:00]

Alex Sokolove: This is Jones's baby. She's married. She's the one that's married to a lawyer.

This is my step-mother. She's dead now. That's my father. He's dead too.

Richard Flint: How old were you when you first went off to the circus?

[00:38:30]

Alex Sokolove: Well, that was 1914. From 87 to 14, that's 27 years of age. How old do you think I am?

Richard Flint: Not what I just figured out you are. You look like you're in your seventies. You're 85?

Alex Sokolove: Almost 85. I'll be 85 in June. I'm holding up pretty-

Richard Flint: You're holding up pretty well, most definitely.

Alex Sokolove: This was taken in Denver I think. The three of us and [inaudible 00:38:52] I were visiting together. Maybe this fellow was there too. This guy was a blacksmith. This
 [00:39:00] guy was a general handyman. He drove a car for Mrs. J. Augustus Jones and he taught her to drive a car. The first time she had gotten in her car and driven through the lot, Mr. J. Augustus Jones, said what the hell are you doing in a car? She said, I'm not going to walk if I can drive a car.

And that's me. This is taken in Denver. This is taken in Denver.

Richard Flint: This would be on the big show then?

Alex Sokolove: Yeah, this was on the big show. That was in Denver.

Richard Flint: Was that any of the train? No.

[00:39:30]

Alex Sokolove: Yes, that's near the train. That's a small show because it's a schooner from Blair, Miss. That's Mrs. Lewes [phonetic 00:39:38] a performer.

This is a brother of mine. That's also a brother of mine. This says what?

Richard Flint: April, 1920.

Alex Sokolove: April, 1920.

Richard Flint: Is this when you got home from the army or?

Alex Sokolove: April 1920? Yeah, I was home at that time.

[00:40:00]

Richard Flint: Who's this fellow with the doves?

Alex Sokolove: That's my father.

Richard Flint: Your father.

Alex Sokolove: Yeah, he's been dead since 1950. That's a family picture. I'm in this picture. See me right there?

Richard Flint: Ah.

Alex Sokolove: That's a sister-in-law Margaret who is in the hospital. That's the sister who is dead. That's a brother of mine that lives in Baltimore. That's ... He was a baby. He's a man now.

Richard Flint: Youse laughing.

[00:40:30]
Alex Sokolove: Yeah. This is my sister-in-law. She died. This is my brother and his son.

These are some of the Jones's. Here's Arthur. I think he lives in Hastings along the Hudson. That's outside of New York. Outside of ... Oh, heck.

[00:41:00]
Richard Flint: Ossining and ...

Alex Sokolove: No, it's not Ossining. It's outside of ... Short ways out of New York for taking the turn.

Richard Flint: Yeah. It's Allen Jones?

Alex Sokolove: That's ... No, not Allen Jones. It was ...

Richard Flint: What's his name?

Alex Sokolove: His name is Arthur Jones.

Richard Flint: Arthur Jones. Right.

Alex Sokolove: He was an adopted son. This is Mrs. Florence Jones. She's living. She lives [inaudible
[00:41:30] 00:41:29]. In 15, in 16 she was a few years old. Sixteen that's 30 ... that's 56. She's 59 years old. This is Mrs. Agnes. This is Mrs. J. Augustus Jones's sister.

Richard Flint: Her sister.

Alex Sokolove: Yeah, Mrs. Jones's sister. And that's Arthur.

Richard Flint: Arthur was the adopted son of-

Alex Sokolove: Yeah, Arthur Jones and Florence Jones. They're both adopted children. She's now
[00:42:00] assistant dean at the ... what town in Wisconsin? I forget the name of the town in

Wisconsin.

Richard Flint: Assistant dean of the school or?

Alex Sokolove: Assistant dean of the school for the college.

Richard Flint: You can't remember what town? I'm going to be in Wisconsin. I'd love to ...

Alex Sokolove: Oh, you shouldn't go to her. No, I wouldn't even tell you where she is.

Richard Flint: Oh, but don't the Jones family like to admit to their-

Alex Sokolove: No, she wouldn't now. Would you if you were? Not being assistant dean of a college. She wouldn't want to-

[00:42:30]

Richard Flint: What's this picture of the rider here?

Alex Sokolove: That's Mrs. Rogers. They had some nice horses. They had ponies and horses. They had a liberty act in there. In their small show they had a liberty act and they had pony acts.

Richard Flint: This is a picture taken in the back of the side wall. See the tax tag?

[00:43:00]

Alex Sokolove: Yeah. Let's see what that is. I can't even recognize it.

Richard Flint: It's a faded picture.

Alex Sokolove: Yeah.

Richard Flint: There you can see.

Alex Sokolove: This is Mrs. Wright. This is Mrs. Jones's sister, but I don't know who this is. See there's the organ.

[00:43:30] This is a musician. This is a bass player. This is Bill Lewes [phonetic 00:43:39]. This is a ... the sideshow we worked on.

Richard Flint: Who is Bill Lewes?

Alex Sokolove: Bill Lewes was a performer.

Richard Flint: What did he do?

Alex Sokolove: They did a ... nightly draw act holding his wife by the feet while she was on the wire. She'd walk across the wire.

[00:44:00]

Richard Flint: What sort of performances did the two car shows have? Were they strong ones?

Alex Sokolove: A very good show. They have a pace to them but strong enough with four shows.

Richard Flint: Did they ever carry any elephants?

Alex Sokolove: Yeah, he had a couple of elephants.

Richard Flint: How do they all fit in those two cars though? I can't ...

Alex Sokolove: Well, he was noted as the man that could put more stuff in those circus cars than
[00:44:30] any man in the business. They were double-deckers. The cars were double-deckers.

Richard Flint: Two rows of them?

Alex Sokolove: The baggage cars. One on top of the other.

This is Lenny Shaw [phonetic 00:44:41] the musician. That's Elmer Jones's nephew and that's Ruth Helms, the boss canvasman's wife.

This is a musician. I forget his name. And these are the Jones kids, boy and girl.

[00:45:00]

Richard Flint: They always travel with the show?

Alex Sokolove: Most of the time. June 23rd, 19-something.

Richard Flint: 19 ... 1918.

Alex Sokolove: 1918.

Richard Flint: So just before you went off to the army?

[00:45:30] Yeah, there you go. Oops. Get one but not the other.

Alex Sokolove: Thanks for this.

Richard Flint: There you go.

Alex Sokolove: This is my brother Josiah. This is my brother in Baltimore. This fellow's dead. This is my stepbrother. He was in the merchant marine.

[00:46:00]

Richard Flint: Are these two girls the same? They look much the same.

Alex Sokolove: No, they're sisters.

Richard Flint: Sisters. Well, that's what I meant to say.

Alex Sokolove: No, no, no. They are the same. This is the one that's in the hospital. This is her husband. She's in the hospital and he's dead. That's me there in uniform. That's the brother of mine in Baltimore and that's the girl here, the sister-in-law Margaret.

Richard Flint: More family?

Alex Sokolove: Yeah.

[00:46:30]

Richard Flint: How about we sift through these. If you see any circus ones, you know. Here are a couple clowns.

Alex Sokolove: Yeah, that's two clowns.

Richard Flint: Do you know who they are?

Alex Sokolove: Yeah, Abe Wynn [phonetic 00:46:38] and then John Lancaster. This is John Lancaster. He was bad for years and this is Ray Wood. That's me and Pearl Clark. That's me there too.

[00:47:00]

Richard Flint: Did the two-car shows have a new performance every year or did it remain much the same?

Alex Sokolove: They ... It had to change in some ways. Some people it carried over from one year to the next. They were good performers and they would stay on.

This was taken in Arizona somewhere. See the cactus?

Richard Flint: Yeah. The cactus. Did people like to travel on a two-car show or was it too crowded?

Alex Sokolove: No, they squashed like every where's else. That's a nice thing for some people.

See the high cactus here?

[00:47:30]

Richard Flint: Yeah, that's tall.

Somebody's pulling it up.

Alex Sokolove: Yeah. That's the other loose.

Richard Flint: Was she on the show?

Alex Sokolove: Yeah. That's one of the workmen on the show. Yeah, she was a performer.

This is a brother of mine in the fighting pose. He wasn't much of a boxer, but just liked it for ... It was just something to show people.

Richard Flint: How many working men are on the ...?

[00:48:00]

Alex Sokolove: Not all always the same number. They always doubled up on everything that they could, you know, the working men. That's a cactus in Arizona.

Richard Flint: Again. Did you tour out west very much?

Alex Sokolove: Yeah, we used to go into Canada every summer. We did it for 10 years.

Richard Flint: Where did you find the best business?

Alex Sokolove: In Canada.

Richard Flint: In Canada.

Alex Sokolove: The best business, yeah.