

CWM Audio 4-13
Ed and Jenny Rooney Interview, March 9, 1971
INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT
Part 2

Jennie Birmingham, Brighton, Cobern Empire we were playing there.

Rooney:

Richard Flint: This was Vaudeville in Europe.

Jennie Yes. Right.

Rooney:

Richard Flint: In your travels with the circus about the country, did you find any one spot of the country better to play to than another, anywhere ...?

Jennie No.

Rooney:

Richard Flint: No. Generally all the same?

Jennie All the same.

Rooney:

Richard Flint: Right.

[00:00:30]

Jennie A circus audience is like a theater audience. They're eating ice cream and peanuts,
Rooney: whatever they eat, and you know, a lot of murmuring voices.

Richard Flint: What's it like up there? Do you look down at all?

Jennie Not much. No, because if you do, you can get real nervous if you look down. No, we
Rooney: didn't look down much. I used to glance down, but I didn't sit and look down.

[00:01:00]

Richard Flint: You were never scared of heights then?

Jennie Yes, I was scared.

Rooney:

Richard Flint: Then why did you go up there to work? It seems ...

Jennie Well, it was all Ed knew. He come from a circus family. I was forced into it, I was given
Rooney: away to the circus. What was I going to do? What could I do? I didn't have any
education, so I just stayed.

[00:01:30]

Richard Flint: There was a question I was going to ask when we were talking about your working in the
air. Did you have something you wanted to ... Charlie Chaplin. Were you in the movie

then?\

Jennie No, but we were in the prologue at Grumman's Chinese Theater.

Rooney:

Richard Flint: Ah, when it ..

Jennie When it opened.

Rooney:

Speaker 3: Yes, that's 1927. I found the data, we had to look around for the dates.

Richard Flint: Did you find it different working in theaters than in circus?

Jennie Oh yes.

Rooney:

Richard Flint: Which was better, would you say?

Jennie Well the theater. Grumman's Chinese Theater was gorgeous.

Rooney:

[00:02:00]

Speaker 3: [inaudible 00:01:59], May Wright.

Jennie No, she wasn't there.

Rooney:

Speaker 3: An old fashioned one-ringed circus, that was the prologue, the valley who.

Richard Flint: Right.

Jennie But then at All Star, in my cloudswing, I did my cloudswing there, in that and ... the

Rooney: swinging ...

Richard Flint: Right.

Jennie ... they had the spotlights fixed so that there were, I don't know, maybe six reflections of
Rooney: my body perfect all around. It was beautiful. I swung partly out over the orchestra,
[00:02:30] because it was such a big swing.

Richard Flint: I was just going to say you'd be swinging out over the orchestra, over at the ...

Speaker 3: You'd be swinging over an audience in a theater in Havana, Cuba.

Richard Flint: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jennie That's my cloudswing.

Rooney:

That was a roof of a theater there, I forget the name of it, but at that time it was the biggest theater. I think they built a more modern one now.

[00:03:00]

Richard Flint: Right. Did you ever have any accidents at all?

Jennie
Rooney: No, not to speak of. I've had more accidents since I retired than I ... to get hurt you know.

Richard Flint: Yeah, but no falls at all, just pinches and strains.

Jennie
Rooney:
[00:03:30] No, because Ed ... see I was married when I did the hydro piece and Ed always renewed the airplane wires, what we used, which is very strong. He always renewed our apparatus and everything, every spring. Most performers, their rigging breaks. Leitzel died because her rigging broke. You know a clevis or a ring, it can be frozen in one spot and break.

Richard Flint: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jennie
Rooney: What do they call it? Burn to too much or something?

Richard Flint: Right.

Jennie
Rooney: They give it too much heat ...

Richard Flint: Right, a friction or something.

Jennie
Rooney: That's not the right term.

[00:04:00]

Richard Flint: Right, I know what you mean though, a friction.

Jennie
Rooney: You know what I mean.

Richard Flint: Right, right.

Jennie
Rooney: It can be perfect from a, they give it a certain amount of heat and maybe a little bit too much here, that part of it will break. It can happen ...

Speaker 3: Crystallize or something like that?

Jennie
Rooney: Yeah, that its, that's it.

Richard Flint: Right, right, right.

If you had your life to live all over again, would work in the circus?

Jennie
Rooney: No.

Richard Flint: No?

Jennie
Rooney: No.

Rooney:

Richard Flint: You've found it a rough life then?

[00:04:30]

Jennie It was hard on me. Now the people who are with it, I'm not saying anything against it,

Rooney: wonderful, nice clean life and I've never had a cold. We talked about that, when I get a winter cold. We never, Benny and I were never sick with the circus.

Richard Flint: Is that right?

Jennie You know you're outdoors all the time, you take a bath when it's cold. You're just never

Rooney: sick, but the mud and the dust and the rain and the discomfort and then you have to go to the sleeping cars in those wet clothes ...

Richard Flint: Right.

[00:05:00]

Jennie ... and you have to hang them up in your little place allotted to you. You've got those

Rooney: damp clothes, I would say, "Not for me." It was tough.

Richard Flint: You're honest about it, that's good.

Jennie Well, that's the truth.

Rooney:

Richard Flint: How did you keep your clothes clean, take a bath and so on? It must have been ...

Jennie Well, we worked at it.

Rooney:

Richard Flint: I've heard about the fabled one bucket of water. Is that ...

[00:05:30]

Jennie I had two.

Rooney:

Richard Flint: Two?

Jennie Mm-hmm (affirmative). Most people had two, one you wash and one you rinse in. Then
Rooney: there was a young man in the wardrobe department, which was between the women's dressing room and the men's dressing room, there was a space. This man, he would take our wooden slop shoes at night and take care of my chair that I had and all roughs ... and my, what do you call that?

Speaker 3: Clothes hangers.

[00:06:00]

Jennie Clothes hanger ...

Rooney:

Speaker 3: You had a rack, a clothes rack.

Jennie ... that was collapsible and what's your name?

Rooney:

Richard Flint: Dick.

Jennie Show Dick my son's picture.

Rooney:

Speaker 3: It's right there.

Jennie In the meantime, while we were away from the Ringling show, I had a son. He was
Rooney: planned and he retired, he's a lieutenant cornel in the air force. He's a nice fella, he's a
[00:06:30] dentist.

Richard Flint: A dentist?

Speaker 3: He was an oral surgeon.

Jennie Dental surgeon.

Rooney:

Richard Flint: One that pulls teeth then?

Jennie No.

Rooney:

Richard Flint: No?

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Jennie Oh, does he?

Rooney:

Speaker 3: Yeah, but in the service he did a lot of oral surgery, I mean with ...

Richard Flint: Catching up

Jennie Cause he was in all of the clinic bases. On the base where he was stationed he was
Rooney: always the boss.

Speaker 3: He ran the clinic.

Jennie He graduated from Marquette ...

Rooney:

Richard Flint: How very nice.

Jennie ... and lived all his young life in Baraboo with his grandmother.

Rooney:

[00:07:00]

Speaker 3: Yes.

Richard Flint: Are there many circus people left in Baraboo, do you know?

Jennie I haven't been back there since. I don't know. I don't think so.
 Rooney:
 Richard Flint: Can you compare the winter quarters in Baraboo with Sarasota? Which was better to work in, to practice in? Was there any difference?

Jennie The circus quarters in Baraboo was along the bank of a river at that time. Is it still?
 Rooney:
 Richard Flint: Right, right. Well, the buildings are still, yes.

Jennie Well, this was a better one, bigger, much bigger.
 Rooney:
 [00:07:30]
 Richard Flint: Did you ever go to the quarters in Bridgeport?

Jennie No.
 Rooney:
 Richard Flint: No?

Jennie No, but really not here, because Ed was training those 42 girls. I didn't go out there to practice because I've been ...
 Rooney:

Speaker 3: I found more of those of Ed's ...

Richard Flint: Ah yes, there he is training.

Speaker 3: Yeah. Five girl act in them.

[00:08:00]
 Richard Flint: When they have these trapezes altogether, is there a term for them at all?

Jennie Well, that was Mosul, there were five girls on that and there were probably two or three of those over each ring.
 Rooney:

Speaker 3: There were two, one on ...

Jennie One on one end, one on the other.
 Rooney:
 Speaker 3: ... one on the other.

Jennie Then the five girls would do tricks of simultaneous ...
 Rooney:
 Speaker 3: The two end girls work together and the girl in the center did something separate. Then at the end the center girl got into a deadlock and the next girl would get down into a deadlock around her waist and then they climbed on down to the bottom. So there were five girls hanging and I was on the bottom. That was long climb down.
 [00:08:30]

Jennie I wanted to say that not all people like circus. My son, he hated it.
 Rooney:

Richard Flint: You say he hated it.

Jennie He was a scholar.

Rooney:

Richard Flint: Ah-ha.

Jennie Always.

Rooney:

Speaker 3: He didn't like spending vacations there.

[00:09:00]

Jennie He hated the dust and the rain and everything like that. He'd come out to see us and
Rooney: then ...

Richard Flint: What was it like for a child on the circus, to grow up?

Jennie I guess we tried to play, all children try to play.

Rooney:

[00:09:30]

I remember one time, there was a rollerskating rink near the, this is when I was a kid, Mamie and I we sneaked over there and we were rollerskating and I fell and my hands went down on the floor and someone come along and rolled over my little finger and broke my little finger. I was doing trapeze, so you can imagine. I was afraid to tell this man I worked for that I had hurt my finger. Imagine what I went through.

Richard Flint: Pretty painful.

Jennie Yeah.

Rooney:

Richard Flint: Did it heal alright?

Jennie Oh, it's alright.

Rooney:

Richard Flint: It's alright now.

Jennie But, when you asked me did I ever get hurt, I don't call that any big accident. I never fell
Rooney: ...

Richard Flint: Right.

Jennie ... or anything like that.

Rooney:

[00:10:00]

Richard Flint: Right, right. Just the usual things that you get around the house I guess, also.

Speaker 3: Yeah, close calls, cause that time the bell ring broke and all of the hacks fell ...

Jennie Well, yes. With the circus one time, the main bell ring that holds the tent up broke. Ed
Rooney: and I were up in the air doing our act and the trapeze, all but on that end, there are two

bell ring, had come down about eight feet and pretty fast ...

Richard Flint: Right.

[00:10:30]

Jennie ... yeah, so it just happened that we were holding on, but it made us black and blue
Rooney: across the back of our legs when it stopped.

Richard Flint: It would bounce you.

Jennie Yeah.

Rooney:

Speaker 3: Then another time, when I was there and you had just stepped out of the breakaway and all the rigging fell and Ed was coming off of one trapeze to the other and he hung on and rode it all the way to the ground.

Jennie Yes.

Rooney:

[00:11:00]

Speaker 3: He had just thrown Jenny into a breakaway and if had broken then, she would have dived right into the ground.

Jennie That was 35 feet, you know.

Rooney:

Speaker 3: But see, she had just stepped out of it and walked forward for her bow and down came. Well, it shook two girls off of one end.

Jennie And another time, when I was my cloudswing, it's swinging and Ed had a hook that had a
Rooney: tongue on it about this long but in swinging it had kept working itself up until one side of it unhooked.

Richard Flint: Right.

[00:11:30]

Jennie I was sitting there, the rope goes through your legs, right up there.

Rooney:

Richard Flint: Right.

Jennie I was sitting there, hanging on and out in the front, one side gave way and it dropped to
Rooney: just one rope. I just hung there, I didn't even slide an inch.

Richard Flint: Wow, you've had some fortunate ...

Jennie I've had a charmed life.

Rooney:

Richard Flint: When Leitzel had an accident, that must have been traumatic news. Where were you when heard it? Do you remember?

Jennie Well, here's my nice husband.
Rooney:
[00:12:00]
Richard Flint: Oh.

Jennie Robert Ringon was born there.
Rooney:
Richard Flint: You bought the hous then from ...

Jennie Ed's older brother, but he bought it from ...
Rooney:
Ed: It's on the corner of Sixth and East.

Richard Flint: Sixth and East.

Jennie Was is 722 East Street?
Rooney:
Ed: 722 East Street.

Jennie That's right.
Rooney:
Richard Flint: See if it still has the same number, I would imagine so.

Jennie Oh, I would imagine so.
Rooney:
But anyway, it wasn't Robert Ringling that was born there.

Ed: Yes.

Richard Flint: You sold the house then to ...?

Ed: We sold it, I don't know who to.

[00:12:30]
Jennie I don't know who bought it.
Rooney:
Ed: After we came down here we sold it.

Jennie We sold it through a real estate or some ...
Rooney:
Richard Flint: But, which house was it that the Ringling's lived in?

Jennie The one that we live in, that we bought.
Rooney:
Richard Flint: Oh, oh.

Jennie The white house on the corner.
Rooney:

Richard Flint: Right, right.

Jennie Rooney: I think it was their first house and then they built ...

Ed: Then we lived in the one that Charlie Ringling owned down here.

Richard Flint: Ah-ha.

Ed: We had that out in the north trailer ...

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Ed: ... for a long time.

Richard Flint: That mansion up there?

Jennie Rooney: No.

Speaker 3: No.

Richard Flint: No.

[00:13:00]

Speaker 3: The first ...

Jennie Rooney: A big white house ...

Ed: Oh, we lived out there with Mrs. Charles for about seven years after Mr. Charlie died.

Jennie Rooney: Well, I'll explain it to you. When Mr. Charlie died, then they had a daughter, Hester who was my age, and we chummed together. She asked Ed and I if we'd gone live with DeDe, that was Mrs. Ringling's name. Her name was Edith, but she said, "Would go Eunid in the winter when the circus closed, would go and stay in the marble mansion with my mother DeDe, she's all alone," with the help you know.

[00:13:30]

Richard Flint: Right.

Jennie Rooney: Ed and I had two bedrooms for the back, between there, many wondrous, we lived there.

Ed: We lived there seven years.

Richard Flint: Would you care to join us here on our conversation?

Ed: Yeah, I'm going to put this photo.

Richard Flint: Okay, good.

Jennie So she was a teacher. Speaking of my education.

Rooney:

Richard Flint: Okay, go ahead.

[00:14:00]

Jennie So, she was a teacher and I was quite a young person. She would correct me and she never had to tell me anything twice, grammatically. I met all of the wealthy people in town that she knew, because I lived there with her. I played bridge with'em and everything.

Ed: When you go to the [inaudible 00:14:21] over there, there's a son-in-law a harness right there. What was the dickens was in ... well anyway ... he's got a lot of old pictures that we've had from years ago in Briarwood, Wisconsin. You see our family, old riders like Mike Rooney and Johnny Rooney, Black Jack and Bill, they're all Rooney's they're all riders.

Richard Flint: Right, I know, the ...

Ed: Then of course, there was Charlie Rooney, that was the first horsier with the Ringling show.

Jennie He was a cousin.

Rooney:

[00:15:00]

Ed: He was a cousin and Harvey Rooney, menagerie, with the combined shows, after they combined.

Jennie Ed's brother, he started out in show business with his older brother. He was the most famous bareback rider, male, ever.

Richard Flint: The Riding Rooney's were quite a famous name at the turn of the century.

Jennie That's right. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Rooney:

Ed: Yeah.

Richard Flint: I have a tape recorder on, if that's all right with you.

Ed: That's fine.

That's my brother Charlie.

Richard Flint: Right, right.

Can you tell me how you got into the circus business? You were born into it?

[00:15:30]

Ed: Well, my oldest brother was in show business.

Richard Flint: Right.

Ed: Of course, he taught us tumbling and everything right in the living room. I started doing with embalming wiring with the Gomer show on, just kiddin. Then I went to the Forepaugh-Sells show, which was the show at that time.

Richard Flint: Right. What was it like on the Gomer show? That was ...

[00:16:00]

Ed: It was a nice little show, it was a very ... it had two tracks. They were cousins, and they had real nice, small show, no grass, no ...

Richard Flint: No grass.

Ed: Oh no. They played up through Wisconsin ...

Jennie Rooney: Speak up a little ...

Rooney:

Richard Flint: I'm the ear so to speak. It's a good mic, but it's just a bit distant. I don't know what it ...
[00:16:30] it's not everyday I can hear about the Gomer and the Ringling Worlds Greatest and the Forepaugh-Sells. All I can do ...

Ed: One time in Baraboo, there was three shows ...

Richard Flint: Right.

Ed: ... there was the Governor brothers and there's up in the north end of town and the Forepaugh-Sells show was in there and Mr. Al Ringling was the manager of that, then
[00:17:00] the Ringling show. Al Ringling was the oldest brother and he was the head of the Ringling show for a long time and then of course he got out. He is health began to fail, so he got out and he started the Forepaugh-Sells show and had it for two years.

Richard Flint: Right, right.

Jennie Rooney: I wanted to clarify something. Dick didn't know that they had parades after. I told him that if I had to do a pre-attraction out in front of the side-show and go and parade, that you wouldn't stand for it and we'd quit. Dick said, "I didn't know they had parades at that time."
[00:17:30]

Ed: Oh, sure they had parades.

Richard Flint: This was in 19 ...

Ed: This was the combined shows.

Richard Flint: Right, to the combined shows in the ... and then they paraded for whatever ...

Ed: This was with the Ringling show in 1912.

Richard Flint: Right, but I think you were talking about when you left the Ringling Barnum show.

Jennie Rooney: Yes, I was. I was. I said, well, no.
[00:18:00]

Ed: No, it was probably the afternoon show.

Jennie Rooney: Our son was born in 1915.

Richard Flint: Yeah.

Jennie Rooney: Figure that. That goes back, so that I don't remember the years.

Richard Flint: Because I know that they paraded in the first year they combined and I think the second year, in 1920 also. I thought we were talking about 1930, when you left. It was 1920.

Ed: We left there in 1940.

[00:18:30]

Speaker 3: No, no, no, before Ed. When you went to Europe, you left the show.

Ed: Oh, when we left there in 1927.

Speaker 3: And you went back.

Ed: We were with the show in 1927 and then '28 we were away. We went to Europe for two years.

Richard Flint: Right, right.

Ed: We stayed over there. We played Grumman's Chinese Theater, we played ...

Richard Flint: I saw some the programs ...

Ed: We keep on building on, you hear them talking about the Palace all the time. All those people on TV, "We played the Palace," well, we played the Palace five times when it was a real palace.
[00:19:00]

Jennie Rooney: Two shows a day, then it went into regular three or four shows a day.

Ed: Four shows a day.

Speaker 3: Was one of the things I was going to show you.

Richard Flint: RPOs.

Jennie That was in the palace.
Rooney:
Richard Flint: It's [inaudible 00:19:16], I've heard of their ...

Jennie And that's Mae Worth, she's in that.
Rooney:
Speaker 3: and then ...

Jennie She was a girl from Mamie Warzet.
Rooney:
Speaker 3: Ginny and Ed.

Richard Flint: Ed and Ginny. This is the ...

Speaker 3: Yeah.

[00:19:30]
Richard Flint: The toe-to-toe hang is amazing.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Richard Flint: It's ...

Ed: This [inaudible 00:19:40] was there. I worked in Mamie where it's at, I nettie ward and then she learned my arm swings.

Speaker 3: Oh yeah, the picture of [inaudible 00:19:50].

Richard Flint: Can you tell me a bit about the riding act that you were in originally?

[00:20:00]
Ed: Oh yeah. We were with my brother Charlie and he came on the Ringling show. We worked in muse with him in the Mavs you see ...

Jennie It's a younger brother than John.
Rooney:
Ed: That's not right. Middle you see, John was the oldest and Charlie was next and I was third. I was the youngest brother. He came on the Ringling show, we worked in the act with him, my wife and I. She did somersaults.

Jennie How was I bareback riding, too?
Rooney:
Ed: Pretty good.

[00:20:30]
Jennie I was good, but you get hurt riding. If the horse feels frisky on a cold day, they call it humping. If they hump with their back flanks there called, why it just sends you off. I was little and thin and I fall down onto the ground from a running horse with my feet,

and hurt myself, while most of the girls like Mae Worth, if they fell off they'd stand up and run, but I'd sit right down and have somebody come pick me up.

[00:21:00]

Ed: My brother Charlie, then of course, he got away from the show, he went with the Volex show. Then it seemed that every spring when we came out of the show there'd be an act in there we were shorter riders. Of course Mr. Charles Ringling would ask us to do it and we'd fill in, so we did. After a long time, she hurt her knee one time and I said then, I said, this is out. I told Mr. Ringling, "This is out because she'll hurt her knees and then we can't do the trapeze." And that's what we ...

[00:21:30]

Richard Flint: And that's your feature.

Ed: ... that's our area, that's what we work at." He said, "I believe that's right," so that was it.

Richard Flint: Can you ...

Speaker 3: You can go ahead and talk.

Richard Flint: Can you tell me about, making parade? I understand that's how you met your wife.

Ed: No, that's ...

Jennie Rooney: I told him about the costumes were matched up, the yellow costume.

Rooney:

[00:22:00]

Ed: Dave Castello and his wife, they owned another pair, there were four of us you see.

Jennie Rooney: Nearly all those couples got married that season.

Rooney:

Richard Flint: What are these four couples now?

Ed: It was David Castello.

Jennie Rooney: Castelllos, they're quite famous in show business. You've never heard their name?

Rooney:

Richard Flint: I've heard of Castello, that got Barnum in the circus. The clown, which goes back to the 1870s, I don't know whether their

[00:22:30]

Ed: This is Dave Castello, they were a family from up in north Atlanta and the whole family.

Jennie Rooney: Weren't they riders?

Rooney:

Ed: Yes, they were all riders.

Richard Flint: So they met the parade of the four costumes?

Jennie
Rooney: He's the one that they changed costumes. Dave Castello took the green one that Ed had and gave Ed the yellow one and I had the yellow one and the girl he married had the green one so they got married in the fall too.

[00:23:00]

Richard Flint: Can you recollect life on the Forepaugh-Sell's circus and that period? Any details you can remember or people or particular personalities, your accommodations on the show?

Ed:
[00:23:30] The accommodations were always fine. The Ringling's always said that they're working and they fed all the working men three times a day. With the Ringling show they fed 1500 people three times a day. They always had the best of food, because Mr. Ringling said that if a man isn't well fed he isn't a good worker, so we always had the best food and all you wanted. Of course, the first World War, the people came on there and studied how the range wagons they had on the show

Richard Flint: Right, right.

[00:24:00]

Jennie Did you hear about that?

Rooney:

Richard Flint: Yeah.

Ed: ... they made the soup kitchens for the war.

Jennie They copied that.

Rooney:

Richard Flint: Right.

Ed: We had the army men on the show for several weeks.

Richard Flint: I happen to have a copy of this ...

Jennie Do you?

Rooney:

Richard Flint: ... a friend of mine put it together. George Emmory, who used to ...

Speaker 3: Oh well, we ...

Richard Flint: ... you him?

Speaker 3: He's the one that wrote this.

Richard Flint: Uh-huh.

Speaker 3: He visited with us, when we were at North Hampton Fair. That's right, this is a very good article that he wrote about Ed. That's true.

[00:24:30]

Richard Flint: He sent me a copy of this. This is his daughter ... I just saw him, oh, just last spring at the Trion Circus ...

Ed: Oh yeah, must be an old now.

Richard Flint: ... he's doing well ...

Speaker 3: Mary did ...

Richard Flint: ... in fact, this is the fair that's produced by a fella named Wally Beach who used to manage the Quart Square Theater in Springfield.

Ed: What's that?

Richard Flint: A historical music fair. It's recent, it's only 10 or 12 years old.

Jennie Rooney: Not a state.

[00:25:00]

Speaker 3: No, not the, like the North Hampton ... he's a very nice person.

Richard Flint: Yes, he's in the placement ...

Speaker 3: He sent this to Ed. He sent this to Ed.

Richard Flint: He's in the placement office of the University of Massachusetts. I was just writing him a postcard this morning as a matter of fact, letting him know I'm in Sarasota. I haven't mailed it, so I'll put a postscript noting I spoke with you.

Speaker 3: Tell him that we said, "Hello" because we remember him well from North Hampton. I was there too.

[00:25:30]

Ed: Yeah, he was nice. He was real friendly.

Richard Flint: What did you have to do in riding in parade? What were your ...?

Ed: All you do is rode a horse down there. They were really tough, because those hot summers there riding out there in those heavy costumes.

Richard Flint: Yeah.

Jennie Rooney: They were heavy now, but ...

Ed:

[00:26:00] They ran for hours, now like when you played Philadelphia, that was about five hours. But, Barnum show, when I just a kid and I played at the Gorman show, I went to the Barnum show.

Richard Flint: Right.

Ed: I worked in the flying act with Charlie Segres, see. We played in Cincinnati and we were out at Cummings from there, which is 14 miles. [crosstalk 00:26:13] When we came in those and pranced around Cincinnati was going out there and ghee, we were way, we were just outside of Cincinnati and here it was one o'clock, it was time for the show to start. They sent buses down to pick the people up, they sent groves down to take the horses and pick up the people and take them back so the show could start.

[00:26:30]

Richard Flint: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ed: Yeah, down in Philadelphia, that was about, oh I guess about eight miles down and eight miles back, so they started the parades early. They were long and hard.

Richard Flint: Did you get paid extra for all those?

Ed: Oh no, all that was all in your contract.

Jennie Rooney: Contract.

Richard Flint: You glad to see the parade pass?

Ed: Oh, yes. Naturally.

[00:27:00]

Richard Flint: I understand that you were the one that originated the aerial ballets on the circus.

Ed: That's right.

Richard Flint: How did that all get started?

Ed: Well, Mr. Gumpert set the idea that he wanted a girl act. I asked Elaine to get these girls and they had 60 girls working in the afternoon and night for seven years. We had five acts there with the girls hung five down in a row, one girl holding, the rest were swinging ladders and Jenny did the cloudswing in the center.

[00:27:30]

Richard Flint: Had they never done a ladder and web acts around the cracks? Was this the first time that this had been done?

Speaker 3: Yes.

Jennie Rooney: Ed created it and originated it and produced it.

Richard Flint: It's now a standard feature on a ...

Ed: No, what was ...

Jennie Rooney: It's easy after someone shows you.

Rooney:

Richard Flint: Shows you how to do it.

Ed: ... kept it there.

[00:28:00]

Jennie
Rooney: Excuse me, they glamorized it after. You know, the girls with the beautiful costumes and everything.

Ed: Oh, sure, it was a big number and a big success.

Richard Flint: You developed anything that's successful, of course.

How did you train the girls? Were there some that you couldn't use? How did you get the girls?

Ed: Well, they sent them down from New York. They were dancing girls, most of them. They sent them down from New York and you take 'em out there ... what a quarter's end and train them.

Jennie
Rooney: Some were better than others.

Richard Flint: Were there any that didn't make it, or?

Ed: Oh yes. There were some others [inaudible 00:28:32].

Speaker 3: Your parking lights are on.

[00:28:30]

Richard Flint: They are on? Oh ...

Speaker 3: Is it alright?

Richard Flint: I think I locked my car because I have some gear in there.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Richard Flint: It's alright because it won't put the battery down.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Richard Flint: Can you tell me a bit about your aerial routine? I had asked your wife a bit, but is there anything you can add? What were some of the tricks that you did, the routine, can you ...?

[00:29:00]

Ed: Ro used to do flyenzsis, half somersaults in the hands and the toe swing.

Jennie Rooney: Breakaway, that's about it.
Ed: And, she'd hang by one toe on my neck and the breakaway, that was it. It was a very short act, but fast, we worked fast.

Richard Flint: Right.

Ed: Then of course, the whole routine on the lower bar. I'm only telling you the tricks we did when I hung on the little bar at the top.

Jennie Rooney: And held me.
[00:29:30]
Ed: Yeah, the rest of em, she did the same thing I did. That was repeated, the same thing.

Jennie Rooney: The reason we were such a big hit at the Palladium and in Europe, the German acts at that time, they called them Blongsem, Longsem ...

Ed: Longsem, they were short.

Jennie Rooney: ... that mean long. They wiped their hand and tossed the handkerchief.
Ed: They were slow.

Jennie Rooney: They very slow, and our act was six minutes and just went very fast and off.

Richard Flint: The speed was what distinguished your act.

Jennie Rooney: They liked that.
Ed: Schnell.

Richard Flint: Right.

[00:30:00]
Ed: Schnell.

Richard Flint: Schnell?

Ed: Yeah, that's German for fast. Mach Schnell, make fast.

Richard Flint: It's okay, she's just sniffing.

You mentioned that you were with the Wallace show at one time?

Ed: No, no. My brother ...

Speaker 3: She scared you?

Ed: I forgot to mention, she'll let you ... gotcha ...

Speaker 3: Does she catch ya or just scare you?

Richard Flint: No.

Ed: Till she's tired, then ... she does the same thing to me.

[00:30:30]

Jennie You know, she's 13 years old, she's 91 years old really.

Rooney:

Speaker 3: Did she get you?

Richard Flint: No, no ...

Speaker 3: She just scared you.

Richard Flint: No, I just ... the back of the neck and I could feel when she went back and I lifted my hand

Ed: She can't bite anyway.

Jennie I wonder if that'll be on the thing?

Rooney:

Richard Flint: Probably will be.

Jennie You think you got that one by the neck.

Rooney:

Richard Flint: Did you ever have any problems with wild animals on the circus, since I have problems with domestic animals in the house?

[00:31:00]

Ed: No, we've never had any trouble with animals. We've been with the show and the lions got loose. In the winter show, when the tiger got loose and he went down the halls, he was all over the place there. Those were the ...

Jennie Remember in Madison Square Garden when the tiger broke away from the man that
Rooney: was leading it and those colored men climbed this 16 foot wall, it just went right up. He climbed it so easy.

Speaker 3: A bare wall.

Jennie A big tiger.

Rooney:

[00:31:30]

Richard Flint: I would too.

Ed: Madison Square Garden, it was about 18 feet up to the seats there and here's all these colored men were sitting around on boxes ...

Speaker 3: Watching them.

Ed: ... you see, and they were watching. We were rehearsing the tournament and they led this tiger around with ropes around him. They had four ropes, one there and a couple of men down that one and a couple of men on this one and a couple of men on there, far away, you see, and they let him down around there. Well like this when he got there he went growl at the box and all these boggies went up in the seats up there. There was a newspaper man up there and he said to me, "How did they do that?" I said, "I don't know but you missed the greatest scoop there ever was in the world, you should've had your camera ready." He was taking pictures, but he wasn't ready for that, it all happened like that. Here they all sittin up there.

[00:32:00]

[00:32:30]

Jennie Rooney: Another time, Ed and I followed the elephant act, our trapeze act and ... did we follow them?

Ed: Yes.

Jennie Rooney: We followed them. I told you, I'm scared to death of elephants and so every time one of them would trumpet I'd start running back to the dressing room. We were supposed to be pretty, walking down the hippodrome track and Ed would say, "Stand up there, walk with me," and I said, "I'm a little nervous."

Anyway, one time, one of them went from one ring clear down to the other one, ran away ...

Ed: Started beating up on another ...

Jennie Rooney: On another elephant.

Rooney:

Ed: Another elephant.

[00:33:00]

Jennie Rooney: I let out ... have you been in Madison Square Garden?

Rooney:

Richard Flint: Mmmmm.

Jennie Rooney: Well, it's in tiers. It's in tiers, you know, up, up, up, up. Well, I ended up way up at the top tier. I climbed those stairs and I looked around and here's Ed right standing right beside me.

[00:33:30]

Ed: That same night there, this one, she started fighting another one. It was an old cow, there was a young cow down there, and she had a grudge against her. She left this ring and went down there, and they were grabbing through the hooks and trying to hold her

[00:34:00] back and everything. She knocked the man down and went to put her head on him to squash him and another fella grabbed her but the back leg and was pulling her back and she kicked it and he bounced like a rubber ball and killed him. You think that they kick slow or they move slow, they kick just like a cow, like that.

Richard Flint: As fast as that little dog.

Ed: Yes.

Jennie Too bad that scared you, I didn't know she was going to do that.

Rooney:

Richard Flint: I didn't either.

Ed: We had with us was the Crownwalls, did an act like we did. He was marching down there, he had been laying off in the winter time. He got kinda fat and he had a tough time climbing, we used to climb hand over hand to the rigging, which was [crosstalk 00:34:23] about 50 feet and he had trouble climbing up there.

Jennie Climbing with him.

Rooney:

[00:34:30]

Ed: What came out after this was all over, he said, "Jeez, you know the first thing I knew I was sitting around the bar again." He was, "I dropped the ring where it was at."

Richard Flint: Since you were an aerialist, you saw quite a number of aerial acts. What ones would you regard, you were impressed with? There's nothing like one professional evaluating another one.

Ed: Oh well, it's like no one owns it. The first ones to do the triple, and they ...

Jennie You mean the flying acts?

Rooney:

[00:35:00]

Richard Flint: Any aerial act?

Jennie Any.

Rooney:

Ed: Well, the greatest one I every saw was Desperado. Used to get up there at the top, 80 feet and dive onto a wooden shoot on his chest.

Richard Flint: What was his real name, do you know?

Ed: No. Desperado was the only thing I ever knew. He opened in 1909 with the Barnum show in Chicago.

Richard Flint: Any other great acts?

Jennie Leitzel is about all that we ...

Rooney:

Ed: Leitzel is the greatest.

[00:35:30]

Jennie: The others were good or they wouldn't have been with the Ringling show, but not
Rooney: [crosstalk 00:35:31]

Ed: Leitzel used to start out her act, before that with the Barnum show in 1909. The same thing, Leitzel came over with the Leimetrip and they had four girls that were just like she was. Leitzel's mother was in that act. They had these four girls working there and one of them must have died from the garters in to the Met and the Finish. Leitzel of course, stood the plan and all that, her mother used to do plans and hold her in her teeth. That was a marvelous act and then of course Leitzel got away by herself. She used to chin herself with one hand three times just to open the act and then do all the other stuff besides.

[00:36:00]

Richard Flint: Right. At what time in her act, did she have the audience in her hand, would you say? They say that when she walked out, just the way she styled that she would ...

Jennie: That's right.

Rooney:

[00:36:30]

Ed: I know she was good, and she was good. She used to start moving up, doing roll-up plans just up to the rigging.

Jennie: And the webbing.

Rooney:

Ed: Then she'd get on the rings and chin herself three times with one hand and she did everything on the rings that ever could be done.

Jennie: From her waist up, she was all shoulders and she had very small legs and tiny little feet.

Rooney:

Ed: She was ...

Jennie: That's why she could do all these things, because she only had to handle herself from her waist up.

Rooney:

[00:37:00]

Ed: She was very light, very little. Oh, and she quite a piano player too, she was ...

Speaker 3: Concert pianist.

Ed: Yeah.

Richard Flint: You've made various references to the Ringling Brothers. Can you remember the personalities of any of the Ringling's? Mr. Al, Charlie? I guess that's what they used to be called or referred to?

Jennie Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Rooney:

Ed: That's right. That is Mr. Al or Mr. Charlie and of course, there was in-between there, was Otto and Alfie and John. John was the youngest. The oldest brother was Gus and he didn't own any part of the show. Then there was Henry, and young Henry is, I believe he's dead now, he was Baraboo up there, young Henry was up there, owned a farm or something. He had [crosstalk 00:37:53] sheep up there. There was Henry, he was a younger brother, he didn't own any part of it. But, as they died off, they left their shares to the other brother.

[00:37:30]

[00:38:00]

Richard Flint: When you mentioned Desperado, which is what it was called, a thrill act. On the Forepaugh-Sells in 1911 when you were on, there was an automobile loop the loop act. Do you remember that at all?

Ed: Yeah, sure. Loop the Gap.

Richard Flint: Loop the Gap, right.

There was a woman named, Eloise Eddie that was in the automobile. Did you know her at all?

[00:38:30]

Ed: No, I don't know what her name was, but there was one of them that was goofy as cuckoo. She rode it, she was one of them. With the Barnum show, they had that Loop the Gap too, single woman. The other one, there was two, two cars and two women. One went down like this and turned the loop, while the other one jumped across.

Richard Flint: Went through the ...

[00:39:00]

Ed: Went through, under hers. But the one with the Barnum show was, it was a Japanese high rope. He did a high rope, high wire you call it. His wife used to ride it in the middle of the Barnum show in 1909.

Richard Flint: Do you know who had on Forepaugh-Sells? Was she the one that was goofy you said?

Ed: Yeah, one of them was.

Jennie Is she a relative of yours? Did you say?

Rooney:

Richard Flint: Not a relative. She just ...

[00:39:30]

Ed: One of them, she was real flighty. She would cry every once in a while, something didn't go right. She was very temperamental.

Richard Flint: In other words, this Eloise Eddie used to be with the Eddie Troupe and did one of these automobile loop the loops, lived with some distant relatives of mine. So I'm just curious.

Ed: Now Eddie's had a wire act, did they?

Richard Flint: They had an acrobatic act I know.

[00:40:00]

Ed: Yeah, and a wire act. There was Philip Eddie, he was quite a chess player and he played guitar and mandolin, he was quite a boy.

Richard Flint: Any other people of the circus at this time you can remember?

Ed: Oh, that I can remember?

Jennie Outstanding you mean? Because, we can remember all of them.

Rooney:

Richard Flint: Yeah, just people you remember. I'm interested in the human side of the circus.

Ed: What show did you want, the Barnum show?

Richard Flint: Any show at all. You name them ...

[00:40:30]

Ed: Well, the Repinksi. The Repinksi's came over in 1909 with the Barnum show, they were there, the whole bunch of them. They were just brought over from Europe. Then there was [inaudible 00:40:43] there and he had another brother who's another writer, he wasn't on the show then. It was John Davenport, he was one of the greatest riders there was. To open his act, he used to stand on the horse and he started running to [inaudible 00:41:03] over the horse. Then with the Robinson show, there was Stick Davenport?

[00:41:00]

Jennie Did you want to know just about the Ringling show?

Rooney:

Richard Flint: Well, I'm interested in anything you can remember, alright.

Ed: The circus.

Richard Flint: The circus, yeah.

[00:41:30]

Ed: There was the Davenports. There was Mae Davenport, Lula Davenport, Arn, Stick and John, they were all riders, you see. Of course there was McCrees, Reno McCree, he was married to Lula Davenport and he died with the Ringling show. I was going to tell you the dates, but I don't remember.

Richard Flint: It's just your impression ...

Ed: He had a heart attack in the ring.

[00:42:00]

Richard Flint: Can you tell me at all, more about your act and any problems that you remember or competition with other performers? Did you ever have anyone try to imitate your act at all?

Ed: Oh, there were 10 acts of our kind when we opened the show. A whole number there, Mr. Al Ringling used to say, "Here they come, here they come," and he'd run out. They'd drop like apples, because they were all trying to faster than the other, because it was a fast act, match Libby and ...

[00:42:30]

Richard Flint: They couldn't keep up with you.

Jennie The rope is only three quarters of an inch. If you miss it, you're down.

Rooney:

Richard Flint: Right.

What do you especially like to remember about your time with the circus?

Ed: Oh, I don't know.

Jennie When he left.

Rooney:

Richard Flint: Would you do it over again?

Ed: Oh man, safe to say I would.

Richard Flint: You would?

Ed: Oh yes. That was a great life, because after the parades were done, all we had to do was our act. Our act was lasted six minutes so I only worked 12 minutes a day. Then of course, when Jenny did her cloudswing, then we did the two acts. When we done the riding act, because we did more of that, when I first went with Michele, I used to ride almost [inaudible 00:43:20] races and all that cause generally useful.

[00:43:00]

Richard Flint: I was going to ask you about the races that generally close the show in those days. How were they operated? How many races were run? What type of riding and so on?

[00:43:30]

Ed: Well, they used to have man against the horse. They used to have jockey race three horse and then when you have the Roman sang, see that was three of them and they used to give them to you like [inaudible 00:43:49], and then the chariot race.

Richard Flint: Was it?

Ed: Two chariots with four horses in each one. So that's eight horses at best, so we're even.

[00:44:00]

Richard Flint: Was it preset who'd win or was it a real race?

Ed: No, no. You just ... at the corner you'd pull back and let the other one pass you.

Jennie You'd have to.
 Rooney:
 Ed: The one on the inside would go ahead and you'd come behind here on the corner and the next corner the other one would turn. There's no race, it just ...

Jennie A lot of noise.
 Rooney:
 Ed: Just something to look at. Of course the thing is to run real fast.

Richard Flint: Were there every any accidents at all?

[00:44:30]
 Ed: Oh yes. We played on a place where I got a bad spill, on the Golmer show. If you go on a show you play on a place where they raise flax and they let the straw on ground, of course it was damp and slippery. Linda Jeal broke her arm, she was an old rider and she did a vaulty next with a sword symbol with the handles, she vaulted and the coupe straps and she did tail jumps up to her feet and all that kinda stuff. In that, her horse fell and she broke her arm, it was just slippery. Personally, we were in a couple of pretty bad blows. That was the thing you had to watch out for. I went ...

[00:45:00]

Richard Flint: Can you remember any?

[00:45:30]
 Ed: I can remember one of them that was real bad. We started off with a toe swing there, got out there and this thing went up about 20 feet like that and came on down. I said, "Eunid get down," so she slid down and we run out there and the whole end of that top fell on our riding, center poles and everything.

Richard Flint: Oh, just in time then.

Jennie We've been lucky. Ed and I had no, we were not hurt at all, ever. You know, little things.
 Rooney:
 Richard Flint: Charmed life.

Ed: We're just lucky.

[00:46:00]
 Jennie We've been charmed. I told him I had a charmed life because I almost got, might as well say, "killed," you could.
 Rooney:

Richard Flint: When that rigging slipped, you said that same thing, yeah.

Speaker 3: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Richard Flint: Were you ever in any train wrecks at all?

Jennie No, but Mamie was. Wasn't that Mamie?

Rooney:
Ed: Mamie, was in a big one. Yes, the ...

Jennie That the wall show ...
Rooney:
Richard Flint: Oh, 1918.

Jennie You see her, he was in that.
Rooney:
Ed: My brother ...

Jennie Ask her about that, that was terrible.
Rooney:
Ed: I had a brother and sister there.

Richard Flint: One was killed in there?

[00:46:30]
Jennie No.
Rooney:
Ed: No, they weren't in any trouble.

Richard Flint: What was the reputation various shows had in the 19 teens? The Ringling show of course, never carried any grip, nor did the Golmer show.

Ed: The Wallace show did

Richard Flint: The Wallace show?

Ed: The Wallace show and the Ravison show.

Richard Flint: Alright. Any others that carried a reputation?

Ed: The Cole show.

Richard Flint: The what?

Ed: The Cole show.

Richard Flint: Cole show, right. Who operated the Cole show? Do you know?

Ed: Zack Cal.

[00:47:00]
Richard Flint: Then this is in the 30s. Right, right.

What was grif like? How was it done? Was it games that they would have?

Ed: Yes, they had games. They had sur changes, members used to change money and the connection.

Jennie In the show, then.

Rooney:

Ed: Then they'd count out the money and the deal like that you'd say, "Oh that's wrong," he'd tell you, "Why do you want to assume," and you'd be five dollars short again. He'd take a little more each time. Pretty quick the guy wouldn't come back.
[00:47:30]

Richard Flint: What was winter quarters like in Baraboo? You spent the whole winters there?

Ed: You'll see what it's like.

Richard Flint: What was it like when the circus was there?

Ed: Well, it was all those barns there, it was the paint shop, what they call the paint shop where they have the repair shop and the painting all the kind of stuff. Then of course, in back of that they have lumbar stacked up, hickory, second row, hickory. That they let dry and cure it so that they could make cripple trees and body pools and all that kind of stuff for the out message.
[00:48:00]

Richard Flint: What did the town