

CWM Audio 4-4

Lucio Cristiani Interview, March 6, 1972

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Part 1

- Richard Flint: I'm speaking with Lucio Cristiani and Sara Sotohard on March 6, 1972. Can we start at the beginning as to where you were born and what you remember of your very early childhood?
- [00:00:30]
- Lucio Cristiani: Well, I was born in [inaudible 00:00:23] my father who was in show business. We traveled all over Europe. Came and went to South America. While he was in ... Excuse me. Then [inaudible 00:00:43] in Lisbon. I was born there. They moved away from Portugal. I was about 18 days. They went back to [inaudible 00:01:01]. See, my father, he came from a circus family. In fact, from a large family. He ... 24 brothers and sisters. My grandfather, he was the one that originated the circus in Italy, the Cristiani Circus. Together with my great-grandfather. He furnished some of the money. Anyway, my father developed some paid talent about being a tumbler and a rider. He went all over Europe. He's [inaudible 00:01:50] his horsemanship. Acrobatic stunt. He arranged a [inaudible 00:01:55] in the meantime with my mother. He got to have four boys. It was a little hard for him to travel around, so he went back to Italy. He started his own show. That's how the Cristiani brothers started out and was called [inaudible 00:02:22] Cristiani Circus. Then it became the Cristiani Brothers Circus, but you asked me about my early life, see? Well, I remember that my father had [inaudible 00:02:37] family circus. All us boys, we started doing some work in the circus together with my father. We started doing some little acrobatic stunts and so on. Some riding with a mechanic, but they called the rope. Safety rope.
- [00:03:00]
- [00:03:30]
- [00:04:00]
- [00:04:30]
- [00:05:00]
- Then from then on we started practicing acrobatic trapeze and everything that was possible to do. When you have a family show, you have to do mostly everything, including clowning and so on, but ... Then it got to be ... The circus become pretty large when we got bigger, and I became a very good acrobat. With my, I would call it, obsession was horsing. I loved horses, and I wanted to be a great bareback rider. I practiced quite a bit. Acrobat and ballet and all kind of stuff like that. I could improve my dexterity on horseback. I became quite a rider. In those days there was a fellow by the name of Barasso. He was known. He never relied on [inaudible 00:04:11]. He was always a hero. He was my hero, Barasso, because he was such a good performer, good [inaudible 00:04:19]. Wonderful acrobat. On horseback he was beautiful. He did a somersault from one horse to another. I always thought to myself, "Someday I was going to do that." Someday I did it. It was in Cararra, where all that marble come from. That was the first time that I did a somersault from one horse to another.
- I got to do it so good that I had the idea of doing a somersault from one horse to

another through a hoop. Then, of course, I don't know. I didn't get the first interview. I had to do, I don't know, a full twist from one horse to another. Of course,, there aren't many things in between all of them that had gone on as a kid.

Richard Flint: Where was your home? Did your folks have a home [crosstalk 00:05:26]?

[00:05:30]

Lucio Cristiani: Well, yeah, we had a home. We called it a home. It wasn't more than a ... It's about, oh, I would say about a hundred and twenty miles from Milan. He's in the famous Villa [inaudible 00:05:46] went all the way from Rome to London. It's right on that highway that there's more than a ... It's a city of about 100,000. Something like that. That was our base. Our headquarters was over there. Overnight. [inaudible 00:06:06] it was in 19 when Mussolini came over in Italy. See, all us boys, we belonged to the Fascist party. It was good for business, but my father never wanted to join, see? He was one of those. He was [inaudible 00:06:30] . He never wanted to join the party. We got in bed with a [inaudible 00:06:38]. Especially my father. Then it became difficult to operate with my father, so my father decided that, since he had a good family [inaudible 00:06:49] to get out of Italy, we went to France.

[00:06:00]

[00:06:30]

Richard Flint: This is about when?

[00:07:00]

Lucio Cristiani: I'd say 1931. Something like that. We had the largest circus in Italy. It got so bad we lost Milan. Milan, they had a theater over there, the [inaudible 00:07:09] wintertime. It was then that he would pick up the big money was in the theater. It was Milan, Naples, Palermo, and so on. Since all of that was political ... You know, you had to [inaudible 00:07:26] the other. When it got tough on my father to [inaudible 00:07:31] my father has a friend in Rome that he belonged to the fascist regime. See, going back a little bit, my father was friendly with a deputy called a representative on the ... He was a socialist before the fascists took over. He was assassinated. Name was [inaudible 00:07:55]. He was quite a powerful man in the socialist party. My father knew him. We need your business. He knew him fairly well. When he was assassinated, my father, he made some remark about, "He was heard by people, and they reported it," and so on because they wanted to see the [inaudible 00:08:25].

[00:07:30]

[00:08:00]

[00:08:30]

Anyway, that's it. My father was in bed with the ... My father decided that a little bit better, after he saw this friend of his [inaudible 00:08:38]. He says he's the one that told me about it. He advised him to leave it. He said because it would be trouble coming up. He said when all those boys you have [inaudible 00:08:53].

[00:09:00]

What he really meant, he meant that the war in [inaudible 00:08:56]. We didn't know anything about it, but they knew it inside. He knew that something was brewing with Mussolini and Hitler, so he advised my father. He said, "With all the ability that your family got, why don't you leave?" Of course, he left. We went to

[00:09:30]

Paris in 1931. Then we went from there. We went to [inaudible 00:09:36]. You see, in the meantime, I left Italy, my brother and I, with a permission of two weeks because I was supposed to join the army. It was compulsory military service. They all went back. We went to France. From France we went to England and Germany

[00:10:00] and so on, and then it was in 1933 that the representative of Greenland came over, and we were playing a royal circus in Brussels. He saw the family, and he hired the family to come to his country. We came over here in 1934, March 1934 with the navy organization.

Richard Flint: Now, going back to [inaudible 00:10:25] in France. Was your father the manager of the family act?

[00:10:30]
Lucio Cristiani: Oh, yeah, sure. He was always. [inaudible 00:10:31] laid around when we came to this country. He couldn't speak the language too well. He was always the man that had the last two word about it. That's tradition mostly, but there is a little story that happened over here. It's kind of funny. It's cute in a way. When we came over

[00:11:00] here in 1934, there was the Shrine Circus that ... They work in wintertime. We finished the season with the [inaudible 00:11:11]. This fellow from Detroit. He was the chairman of the Shrine Circus. He wanted to hire the family, but the manager of the [inaudible 00:11:23], they liked the family, and he was afraid that this fellow would take advantage of us. He told us. He says, "They want to pay you \$750," he says, "but they're going to try to get you cheaper." He said, "Don't tell him. You don't mention my name." I said, "All right." My [inaudible 00:11:47] was much poorer than it is now. [inaudible 00:11:53] came over there, and he says, "You want to go work Detroit, Cleveland, and [inaudible 00:11:59] and so on?" They had about eight or ten weeks there. [inaudible 00:12:03], so I said "yes."

[00:12:30] My father was next to me. How much money you want? I said, "\$750." He said, "We can't pay you that kind of money. We'll give you 500." In those days it was quite a bit of money. Well, I said, "That's good money." I said, "But I want 750." "No, we can't pay you that much," he said. Well, we'll get somebody else. I said, "All right. Thank you." Walk away. He said, "Come over here a moment. We decided we never pay anymore than 500, but [inaudible 00:12:42] we give you 550." Well, I said, "That's good. Thank you, but I want 750." It went on all day.

[00:13:00] Finally he got tired. He says, "All right, I'll give you 750." Come away and find the [inaudible 00:12:59]. I signed the contract. My father signed his contract. Then in those day I was [inaudible 00:13:05] my other girl in that hotel, and I walked up to see the girl. They had a room there. This chairman of the Shrine Circus [inaudible 00:13:16]. He was the agent. The door was open, and I heard him say, "Somebody must have spoke to that [inaudible 00:13:27]. That's all he could say was 750."

[00:13:30] Anyway, later on in life I told him that heard that remark. You mean you never said nothing? I said, "No, I laughed hard." He said, "Did somebody told you?" I said, "Yeah, the man was [inaudible 00:13:47]. How can you say that? I know somebody must have told you because we had intention of paying you 750, but we tried to get you down, but that's all you could say was 750." Oh, yeah, it was really funny.

[00:14:00] Richard Flint: Can you remember when you first arrived in this country when you came over?

Lucio Cristiani: Oh, yeah, sure. 1934. Oh, yeah, it was very [inaudible 00:14:09].

Richard Flint: Did you come into New York? I'm thinking when you shipped over.

Lucio Cristiani: I did understand.

Richard Flint: When you came over by ship coming to New York, what was your impression of this country?

Lucio Cristiani: Oh, well, I tell you I always wanted to come, see. We had a fascinating idea about the United States through the movies. We used to see those movies and so on. We all admired the actors and the way of life of the United States. We heard about the way the people, they felt so independent and so on. See, because regardless of how you free Europe, there was always a fear of the government. The government was always despot. Regardless of all these revolutions and so on, you always have that fear because there is a law [inaudible 00:15:09]. It's called you are guilty until proven innocent, see? But over there you are innocent until proven guilty. You're always in fear of being arrested on suspicion. Sometimes they hold you. They used to. I don't know about now. They will hold you for a month with no trial or anything. Then they let you go. There is nothing you can do about it. You were guilty all the time until proven innocent. Now I understand that they have a three day limit. They got habeas corpus or corpus [inaudible 00:15:49]. Whatever they call it [inaudible 00:15:51].

[00:16:00] Anyway, they have to produce the body or send you on. Over here we always heard that it weren't that way. There was always a fascination to come to this country, but the turning point of that fascination ... I don't know if I use a good expression about the maximum of that point is when you come into New York. Especially I came over there. It was night. We didn't come into port because it was foggy ahead, so ... but when I saw New York at night, to me it was like seeing some fairy city with all those lives and what you call a disguise [inaudible 00:16:47]. I was really fascinated. I could hardly wait to come into New York. I tell you what happen after. See, I got into New York. We took an apartment in 50th street and 9th avenue. We used to read about this village. It was the time of village, see. My God, in New York, it wasn't about fifteen minutes that we were there, the siren of the police. I was in bed. I was all excited about being in New York, but then all of a sudden the siren would come. I would get out of bed, jump out of bed, look out of the window. Oh, my. [inaudible 00:17:39] like. Then their story was that we finished there in New York with the car, and we were sent to Chicago at the [inaudible 00:17:57].

[00:18:00] They told me to be careful in Chicago because the people stop you in the street, and they ask you for two dollars. If you don't have it ready, they punch you in the nose. All that was story build up for a [inaudible 00:18:20] because there was some corruption in Chicago. Villager was still [inaudible 00:18:25], and there was some bandits. Then beside that, they had Capone before that and all that Valentine's Day killing. Anyway, I come into Chicago in fear, looking around for somebody asking for two dollars. I was staying on a small apartment building, and I'm next to the building. One day a great big looking fellow, about six foot two, he was coming down from the stair, and he had his hat down in front of him. He looked tough,

[00:19:00]

[00:19:30] believe me. I was walking up, and I had to look [inaudible 00:19:09]. He says to me, "You got a match?" But I was ready with the two dollars. He looked like a mountain to me because he was coming down. True this little time when he says, "You have a match?" I'm telling you I went through everything. I said, "This guy going to punch me in the nose." Anyway, he asked me for a match, and I had a box of matches. I said, "Here, keep it all." Oh, that was funny. I thought it was funny after.

Richard Flint: Did you speak any English when you came [crosstalk 00:19:58]?

[00:20:00]

Lucio Cristiani: Oh, I spoke some English because we played in England, but when you come over here, you got a different pitch, and you have to recondition yourself from the American language, so I spoke enough to get by. I remember one time my brother used to love to imitate Italian speak. We went over. Used to smoke Chesterfields together. He liked to go an imitate Italians, and so he brought us over there, and he says, "Cigarette, please." [inaudible 00:20:56] says, "What kind?" He said, "Chesterfield." Then the guy, he gave him the Chesterfield, and he says, "How much?" Then guy said, "Fifteen."

[00:21:00]

Richard Flint: Guy [crosstalk 00:21:04]. What did the act consist of when you came to this country?

Lucio Cristiani: Well, it was a family act. We were five people. It was two sisters and [inaudible 00:21:19] the three brothers. The other three were two brothers. They were still kids. Then either way my brother came in, so it was four brothers and two sisters. It was a six people act.

[00:21:30]

Richard Flint: Which brothers and which sisters?

Lucio Cristiani: It was Oscar, the one who's got the elephant now, and there was [inaudible 00:21:43] was in the carnival business now. Myself. Was four brothers, and then Cheeta and Cosette are the two sisters. Then that year, at the end of the season, we put together the acrobatic act which was [inaudible 00:22:01]. She was the one with Walt Disney now. She [inaudible 00:22:08] four high over there. You see that picture there. We were seven people. Then the four [inaudible 00:22:17] and Paul, and there were eight people. Then slowly we were ten people. With my father, eleven in the act.

[00:22:00]

[00:22:30]

Richard Flint: Was your father in the act originally?

Lucio Cristiani: Oh, yes, he was in the act until we closed the show. Then after it became [inaudible 00:22:44] he quit, but he did. In the movie we made, which [inaudible 00:22:50] he's in there. He is [inaudible 00:22:55].

Richard Flint: What about your mother?

[00:23:00]

Lucio Cristiani: My mother-in-law, she quit long before. She did trapeze. She did horseback and

contortion, and then she quit after the third child. She quit doing contortion, but she still did trapeze for quite a while.

Richard Flint: Quite a family she had to raise.

Lucio Cristiani: Oh, yeah, well, her family, they [inaudible 00:23:22] family circus literally. [00:23:30] [inaudible 00:23:25] circus. They combine when my father met her. They combined for a while. Then they split up because my grandfather wasn't the easiest guy to get along with.

Richard Flint: This is your father's father or your mother's father?

Lucio Cristiani: My father's father. My mother's father, he was easy going. See, in those days it was a lot of wine drinking and so on, and my grandfather, he started the night, and he used to have the wine bottle. Wasn't easy. Became a poet and so on. Wasn't easy to get along. He was a great showman. He was a good looking man for a circus man, but he was tough. I met him when he was already old. He was still tough. [00:24:30] Always told me I was good for nothing. He said, "You're good for nothing." Then when somebody would say that I was good for nothing, he would [inaudible 00:24:37] get mad. He was cute, though, but he was one of those guys.

Richard Flint: Do you know how your mother and father met?

Lucio Cristiani: Yeah, I think back in the fair. It was a fair, and it was what we called a competition [00:25:00] between the two circuses. In Italy they have big fairs. Sometimes there is three circuses at the same location. They compete for business. Of course, the public decide which is the best. It's not a one-day [inaudible 00:25:13]. The fair sometime [00:25:30] last a week, two weeks. The best circus will get the best business. They were in opposition. That my father and mother, they met. That's how the romance start, and then my father [inaudible 00:25:35] father surfaced. He got together with my mother's circus and then combined together for a while. Didn't last the whole season, but it last long enough that my mother and father, they flew the coop, see? They left, so you knew [inaudible 00:25:58] in Italy. It wasn't an instant marriage because it was a permanent affair. Marriage and so on. If you were married, you were married. There was no divorce. There was a lot of living together before marriage because they wanted to be sure. They stay together for about a year or so, and then they got married, but it wasn't what we call a marriage. They left, and [00:26:00] they stayed away for about a month, and they came back. The parents, they [00:26:30] recognize the fact that they were married. That's it. That's how they met.

Richard Flint: You said the Cristiani Circus was the largest in Italy at the time?

Lucio Cristiani: You see, when my father's father [inaudible 00:26:56] circus Italy, then too many [00:27:00] circuses under [inaudible 00:27:01] . They were a report, but they did have circus [inaudible 00:27:07], circus [inaudible 00:27:08]. They were theater only. No canvas. Consequently I would have called my grandfather's circus the largest under canvas, although comparison of today's circuses, he wouldn't have been a big [00:27:30] show, but he was in those days. They had no animals. He had no elephant. He had

[00:28:00] two camels. You see [inaudible 00:27:36] that was given to him by the royal zoo of Pisa because my great-grandfather, he was a blacksmith. He worked for that royal family over there because they had a big [inaudible 00:27:52]. He was to keep fences and shoe horses for the king of Italy. He wasn't king then. He was a prince. He worked there.

[00:28:30] In fact, when he retired, they gave him a lump sum of money instead of a pension. That's how he helped my grandfather to put the circus because he was a circus lover. He used to go to the gymnasium and so on. That's how my grandfather became an acrobat, by going to the gymnasium. Then he got into the circus by marriage. They give him a zebra and two camels, but he's [inaudible 00:28:40]. He was considered a good show because he had those animals, but the big show in Italy in those days, there was two that they [inaudible 00:28:50]. They were competing for leadership of [inaudible 00:28:55]. Then Gotti combined with Manetti. That was a big show, but it was theatrical, in theater. No canvas. Who came to Italy once in a while, they had all kinds of animals, was circus [inaudible 00:29:16] from Czechoslovakia. All the foreign circuses like circus [inaudible 00:29:22], circus [Sarazani 00:29:24] from Germany or from [inaudible 00:29:27], [00:29:30] they used to come in wintertime in Italy because in Germany, it was too cold to operate, so they would come in Italy. That's how we saw the first big show with elephants and animals and so on. They came from Germany.

Richard Flint: Was your family circus all your own family, or were there any outside performers?

Lucio Cristiani: Well, later on we used to hire performers and so on, but my grandfather's circus was mostly family. They did everything themselves because he had a big family. He had 24 children in a period of two marriages. He didn't need anybody [inaudible 00:30:12]. No, he sure didn't, because my father was a family show, and he did mostly everything himself with the kids and a helper. Then later on when we grew up, we had the largest circus in Italy. We had animals and so on, yeah.

Richard Flint: Returning to your parents in this country, you said you came directly into New York, and you didn't ...?

Lucio Cristiani: Yeah, we were opened at the Madison Square Garden.

Richard Flint: Then you joined rehearsals there? Not in Sarasota?

Lucio Cristiani: No, see, we came in in March. The circus was already in New York.

Richard Flint: Had it opened by the time [crosstalk 00:30:58]?

[00:31:00]
Lucio Cristiani: No, it was about to open.

Richard Flint: Right.

Lucio Cristiani: We were really hired to go with the [inaudible 00:31:06] because the Ringling

owned the [inaudible 00:31:09], but when they got to New York, they changed their mind, and they made us open in New York for the three weeks [inaudible 00:31:17].

Richard Flint: Right.

Lucio Cristiani: [00:31:30] We played the three weeks. In those days we played three weeks in New York at the garden. Then instead of going to Boston, they send us to Chicago to be featured there because [inaudible 00:31:37] was going to Boston. They're drawing the show, so they had no feature in Chicago. They send us [inaudible 00:31:46].

Richard Flint: Right. Now when you opened in the garden in New York, was this the first time you'd been to the three ring circus?

Lucio Cristiani: Oh, yeah.

Richard Flint: Did you find that ...?

[00:32:00]

Lucio Cristiani: I saw one over [inaudible 00:31:59]. I was in it myself. There was circus [inaudible 00:32:04] that he started the three ring circus in Italy. I never work in one.

Richard Flint: Did you find that different?

Lucio Cristiani: Oh, yes, it's different, especially when the three act, they don't get together. That's what happened there. They didn't get together. There was more or less competition among them.

Richard Flint: Who were the other acts?

Lucio Cristiani: There was [inaudible 00:32:36] act and [inaudible 00:32:39] they took the center ring, and we were in one end ring. [inaudible 00:32:45] act in the other end ring. Our act was organized to an amount of time of ten minutes. It was ten minutes every night. Then [inaudible 00:33:00] they never knew what they were going to do from one day to another. It was difficult to keep up with them. That's why it made it difficult for us. We did our act, and then we [inaudible 00:33:13]. Question [inaudible 00:33:13] he said, "You've got to finish together with them." I said, "We can't finish together with them. We never know how long they're going to be there." Well, he says, "Wait." I'm not going to wait. When I'm finished with the act, I walked off. Otherwise I call the other three act together so we get together. [inaudible 00:33:37] they wouldn't get together. Anyway, we left there. We never had no more trouble like that because we were always [inaudible 00:33:50] act.

[00:34:00]

Richard Flint: Can you remember any of the reviews that the act got when it opened in this country? Was there any comment from the newspaper about ...?

Lucio Cristiani: Oh, yeah, sure there was comment. I don't remember. I think it was the Tribune. I

don't think it exist anymore.

Richard Flint: No.

Lucio Cristiani: They came out, and they said the Cristiani Brothers ... The article started right there. They said that they defied the law of gravity. There is a column about everything. They spoke in general about the show. They give us a space for our act alone. He went on talking about all aspect and so on. Precision and the timing and so on.
[00:34:30]

Richard Flint: Can you remember the routine of the act?

Lucio Cristiani: Yeah, sure, I remember the routine. We got somersault from horse to horse, but I have a 16 millimeter film, and nobody's got a projector for 16. I got one over there for one night, and I showed the film over there to [inaudible 00:35:21] good idea about the act [inaudible 00:35:24] and the timing of the act. It's hard to explain.
[00:35:30] Everybody running and jump on the horse. Now we develop a technique of being on time with the horse by stepping. Only we calculated that the time that it takes to get there, the three horse going around in a circle, and we timed it so we could jump together and land on the horse was going down instead of coming up. All of that was calculated. Then we did the four jump. The four boys, they ran and jump up on together, and the five, which is not in this film. We did it later on when Paul came in the act, and we did the ... You remember you saw it in the movie there? We stepped like the one, two, three, and then in turns. We run all together. That was the effect in New York. The people, they used to watch that step, and they were amazed by the way we ran on together. This film was made in slow motion.
[00:36:00] You see all the moving.
[00:36:30]

Richard Flint: When was it made?

Lucio Cristiani: 1937 in Hollywood, yeah. MGM. It's Pete Smith. I don't know if you remember. They had two [inaudible 00:36:48] call it Pete Smith's [inaudible 00:36:51].

Richard Flint: Wow.

Lucio Cristiani: Yeah, it was a 13-minute reel. They used to put it between ... They used to have the news reel. The here of the world. The eyes and [inaudible 00:37:04]. They had those shorts to make the show last about two hours or more. They had those Pete Smith specialty. Used to do the football and so on. It was very humorous. Play back. The guy that ran for a touchdown, and he says, "Well, I don't like it. Let's go back."
[00:37:30] You see the guy running back. He was very humoristic himself about talking. I always like Pete Smith. On this it's also humorous because he's in this family over here. They came to this country, and they can't speak English. It's all we're going to find out if we can make them understand. They say they're bare back rider. Oh, we got all the instrument behind us. You don't see instruments. We like for you to ride horses. We said, "Oh, yes, we'll take out our instruments. We'll start playing." He said, "No, we want you to do some trick on the horse." Oh, yes, playing again. Okay, he said, "Go ahead and play." We said, "Yes, when we go on the horse." Yeah.
[00:38:00]

Richard Flint: How long were you in Chicago?

[00:38:30]

Lucio Cristiani: I don't remember if it was two or three weeks in Chicago at the coliseum. That was the opening indoor [inaudible 00:38:35] because they used to enter in Peru or Indiana about [inaudible 00:38:40]. The opening was there every year. They open up the coliseum until they went in the stadium because Cole Brothers took the building that year. It was 1936, I think. Yeah, '36. They went in the stadium, and then the stadium was the opening for the Hagenbeck until 1938 when they took it off the road.

[00:39:00]

Richard Flint: Now that first season with Hagenbeck, when you went from the coliseum to under canvas, did you go back to Peru to open?

Lucio Cristiani: No, we went to Kokomo. They opened in Kokomo, Indiana. That was the opening every year for the Hagenbeck. From the coliseum they went to Kokomo.

[00:39:30]

Richard Flint: Now they had a parade for you [inaudible 00:39:32].

Lucio Cristiani: Yeah, '34 was the last parade they had.

Richard Flint: Did you have to make parade?

Lucio Cristiani: No, I didn't go in parade, and it was our first [inaudible 00:39:40] didn't want a parade.

Richard Flint: Can you ...?

Lucio Cristiani: My brother did go because they paid him extra because he played the trumpet, so they put him in the clown band, but, of course, he says, "I'll go if you pay." He was getting eleven dollars a week for being in the parade, just to tell you how money changing. Over there a clown was paid from 15 to 25. That was the maximum. For a feature clown they were getting \$25 a week.

[00:40:00]

Richard Flint: He was getting 11 just to play in a band?

Lucio Cristiani: He was getting what?

Richard Flint: \$11 just to play in the band.

Lucio Cristiani: Yeah, because they needed a trumpet player. He played the trumpet, so they gave him 11 dollars a week to go, but he had to get up at seven in the morning. He told me he liked it because he would see the city.

[00:40:30]

Richard Flint: Can you remember the details of that argument? How were you told you were supposed to make parade?

Lucio Cristiani: Well, he liked it. He used to go through town. I went one time just for the fun of it, and it was amusing. It was amusing to go. The only reason I didn't go was getting up so early in the morning. Then sometime I tell you a parade lasted four, five hours. I think that's [inaudible 00:41:03] one time. Oh, my God. [inaudible 00:41:05] in the morning they didn't come in until 1:00. [inaudible 00:41:08] in those days was always at 2:15.

Richard Flint: What sort of accommodations did the family have on [crosstalk 00:41:16]?

Lucio Cristiani: Well, that's one of the reasons we liked the smaller show better than the Ringling because he would have been more break in a smaller show because he was to deal with the manager instead of with the big boss.

Richard Flint: Right.

[00:41:30]

Lucio Cristiani: A good act, a feature act, there were just a few at the Hagenbeck. You had better treatment than the [inaudible 00:41:40] show because over there everyone was a feature. They didn't have enough to go around. With that they give us a full car with a family. Each of the boy [inaudible 00:41:53]. Then we had a dining room and a kitchen. It was nice. Then when we move from there to the [inaudible 00:42:03] was even better.

[00:42:00]

Richard Flint: Were you with the [inaudible 00:42:06] before you got them?

Lucio Cristiani: No, we [inaudible 00:42:11] '36 and '37.

Richard Flint: Who were you with in '35?

Lucio Cristiani: Then in '38 we wanted [inaudible 00:42:18].

Richard Flint: Who were you with after your first year with Hagenback-Wallace, though?

Lucio Cristiani: You mean in the riding act?

Richard Flint: Yeah, which circus?

Lucio Cristiani: Before Hagenback?

[00:42:30]

Richard Flint: No, after your first year with Hagenback in '35 [crosstalk 00:42:32].

Lucio Cristiani: Well, we played '34 and '35 with the Hagenback, yeah. I was wrong when I said '36 before. See, '35 was the last year of the Hagenback. They closed it, and they sent us to [inaudible 00:42:49]. We played there '36 and '37.

Richard Flint: Right.

[00:43:00]
Lucio Cristiani: That was the [inaudible 00:42:56] we make a movie. Then we went with the Ringling Show.

Richard Flint: What happened when the Ringling show closed in Scranton?

Lucio Cristiani: They closed in Scranton, and we came back here. Then most of the performers, they were left behind, except a few that joined [inaudible 00:43:22].

Richard Flint: Right.

[00:43:30]
Lucio Cristiani: We went to [inaudible 00:43:27] South Dakota. [inaudible 00:43:28] and a few other acts. We went over there with them. It was the [inaudible 00:43:35] present Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey for the rest of the season. We closed the [inaudible 00:43:41] in Sarasota. I think it was November the 28th. It was cold. That was 1938.

Richard Flint: Those years that you were on the Ringling [inaudible 00:43:52] shows, was your contract renewed every year with each individual [crosstalk 00:43:57]?

Lucio Cristiani: No, with us was two years at the time.

Richard Flint: Two years.

[00:44:00]
Lucio Cristiani: Yeah, we had two years by two years. We came over with two years, but Hagenback would play the two years. Then we went [inaudible 00:44:11]. They renew it for two more years without [inaudible 00:44:14]. Play that. They renew the contract for three years, and we were going to go back with [inaudible 00:44:25], but then Johnny [Knorr 00:44:27], he saw this movie in New York. He went over, and he says, "Who's that act?" He asked [inaudible 00:44:37]. He said, "That's the Cristiani." He said, "What they doing in California?" He said with [inaudible 00:44:44]. He said, "Let's get them over here." We got a telegram. No, we didn't get a telegram. The [inaudible 00:44:52] that got a telegram to tell us that we were going to go with the Ringling show. That's it. We joined the Ringling show in 1938.

[00:45:00]
Richard Flint: Right. What did you do when the Ringling show closed? Were you a bit worried?

Lucio Cristiani: We went over what the ...

Richard Flint: Did you know immediately when the show was closing that you would be going over to the Barnum?

Lucio Cristiani: Oh, yeah. You see, we were going to get off in Washington because it was no use for us to come over here. When the show closed, and it was fully on, we asked to

[00:45:30] be left in Washington, but the manager, he said, "No." He said, "I can order for you to tell you to come to Sarasota." I say, "Why?" He says, "I can't tell you." [inaudible 00:45:41] Cristiani to come around [inaudible 00:45:45]. When we got over here, he told us that we were one of the act, that we will join the [inaudible 00:45:55].

Richard Flint: Who was this that told you?

Lucio Cristiani: Who?

Richard Flint: Who was the manager that told you?

[00:46:00]

Lucio Cristiani: Smith. Young Smith. [crosstalk 00:46:02]. George Smith. George was the manager there.

Richard Flint: You were with the Barn [inaudible 00:46:11] the rest of '37. What about '38? [inaudible 00:46:16].

Lucio Cristiani: That was ... We were moving with the Ringling [crosstalk 00:46:18].

Richard Flint: Again ...

Lucio Cristiani: We join [inaudible 00:46:22]. Is that what you mean?

Richard Flint: No, I mean when you finished with the Ringling show at the end, it was the barn [inaudible 00:46:28] at the end of '38.

[00:46:30]

Lucio Cristiani: '37. We went with the Ringling Show.

Richard Flint: Right.

Lucio Cristiani: Then they called in Scranton.

Richard Flint: Right.

Lucio Cristiani: Then we joined with the Ringling show [inaudible 00:46:41].

Richard Flint: Right.

Lucio Cristiani: At the end we had another year's contract with the Ringling show.

Richard Flint: You're back with the Ringling show.

Lucio Cristiani: Back in '39, and it wasn't the same Ringling anymore. They eliminated the stages and so on. It was a three ring show.
[00:47:00]

Richard Flint: Right.

- Lucio Cristiani: Before they closed that, it was three rings and four stages.
- Richard Flint: Right. Were you doing any work during the winters at all?
- Lucio Cristiani: Oh, yeah. In those days you could get about 12 weeks. Consecutive 12 week. That's why it was good then in the wintertime. Not good now. In those days they got together, the Shrine, and they had this winter tour that was 12 weeks.
[00:47:30]
- Richard Flint: When was your last year with Ringling? '41?
- Lucio Cristiani: Well, I had a two years contract, but when Johnny [Knorr 00:47:39] was left out, I asked to be relieved because I joined with Johnny, and I asked to be left [inaudible 00:47:48] other person. Other Ringling took over. It's just that I felt that it was during the war, and I didn't think I could make it. [inaudible 00:47:59] with the fire.
[00:48:00] Went to California.
- Richard Flint: What were you doing in California?
- Lucio Cristiani: We went over there [crosstalk 00:48:08]. It was a musical show with circus atmosphere. We did their [inaudible 00:48:18] riding act together with the [Shenettos 00:48:19]. All riding show act. [inaudible 00:48:22]. Harry Ridley. He did the table rock and so on. Who else? No, that's all at the Ringling Show. Oh, Tootsie, the [inaudible 00:48:34]. Beautiful show. We stayed 27 weeks in San Francisco, and then we went on tour for about eight more months, and then they closed. They couldn't get no building. The war. They took the building. They couldn't get no building to get in, so they closed the show.
[00:48:30]
[00:49:00]
- Richard Flint: Well, [inaudible 00:49:03] I was just worried about clipping the tape here. We're getting toward the end of the tape. Who is your booking agent at this time?
- Lucio Cristiani: Well, it was several booking agent. We had a fellow by the name of Miles [inaudible 00:49:15], but he did mostly a lot of booking, but who brought us to this country was Clifford Fischer. He was an international agent. He had the headquarter in New York and Paris. Clifford Fischer was our agent that brought us over. After we got over here, we did mostly our business [inaudible 00:49:35], but when we went with the [inaudible 00:49:41] was to Clifford Fischer.
[00:49:30]
- Richard Flint: Right. Did you ever have any problems getting a job?
- Lucio Cristiani: Oh, no. When we had the family, we didn't even look for it.
- Richard Flint: People came to you?
[00:50:00]
- Lucio Cristiani: Yeah, they came to us. They wanted to hire the family. Then it was also at the moment after we joined the Ringling show that through [inaudible 00:50:07] was scarce. Then the war came. It was nothing to [inaudible 00:50:14].

Richard Flint: What was your situation during the war years?

Lucio Cristiani: Two of the brothers went. They didn't take me because I had concussion a couple of times, and the psychiatrist, he turned me down. He said [inaudible 00:50:34] they had bad experience with people that had concussions. They [inaudible 00:50:39], so they prevent me. One of the [inaudible 00:50:44] your hair down. They [inaudible 00:50:46]. My brother, the [inaudible 00:50:49] they both went.

Richard Flint: Had you taken out American citizenship?

[00:51:00]

Lucio Cristiani: Oh, yeah, I was already a citizen because the war broke [inaudible 00:50:57]. Although was no different. You were a resident, they would take you. I ask to be physical instructor, and it looked for a while that I was going to be ...