

CWM AUDIO 66
Jorgan Christiansen part 1
March 20, 1965

Jorgan C.: It's wonderful.

Speaker 2: Okay. Thank you Bruce. We have with us, at the Chateau today, perhaps one of the greatest horse trainers of all times, that being Jorgan Christiansen. Jorgan, just where were you born?
[00:00:30]

Jorgan C.: I was born in Denmark in Helsingor, that's a little city with a famous Castle of [Kronborg 00:10:33].

Speaker 2: Would you mind telling us when this was Jorgan?

Jorgan C.: It was not long ago, 1884.

Speaker 2: Well, you're just a young man yet.

Jorgan C.: Yes.

Speaker 2: Let's get right down to what you're known for, your horse training. When did you start working with animals?

[00:01:00]

Jorgan C.: Well, I hung around horses from the day I can remember. Before I started to hang around horses and ponies, for children my age, you had to be my horses. I was very much interested in horses, and I got a job as an apprentice in an office in my hometown after my confirmation. I remained there, like it usually was the custom, for five years.

[00:01:30] That brought us up to 1904, I was 14 years old. There happened to be a circus in town where I can hang around to watch the horses and so on. I went with that circus as a secretary to the boss on count of my office experience.

[00:02:00] When the fall came on, we was in Sweden and the circus went to France. As I could not talk the French language, of course, I lost my job. I went to Copenhagen and somehow made the winter through like anybody connected with the circus must make the winter through, because that is kind of customary.

[00:02:30] In springtime my next circus job was with the circus [inaudible 00:02:21] and there I had to take a job as a prop man, but I advanced quickly and I became the fellow who went in the ring and talked with the clowns. I was with that circus in 1905, 1906. I was fortunate to join a circus in Copenhagen. A circus, which had come to Copenhagen from Poland, had about 50 or 60 horses because over in Europe we consider more the size of the circus, by the amount of the horses, not like it is customary here in United States. You judge the circus size by the amount of elephants to carry them. Well, [inaudible

[00:03:00] 00:03:11] I got a job to be a helper by training horses and that is what I looked for. Oh course, them years, I had not yet thought that I ever would be a horse trainer but

[00:03:30] fortunately I seemed to have the ability and understood horses very well.

In 1907, I had to leave that job because I had to go back to my home town and serve as a recruit and that here famous Castle [Kronborg 00:03:46] there. 1907, in the fall, I was through with that.

[00:04:00] I took a job in a little circus in Malmo, Sweden, and while there I saw an advertisement from a circus in Moscow. It was looking for a man, what we over there called a bare rider. I sent an offer to Moscow; the circus name was [inaudible 00:04:15] and I worked in a big mammoth size building, round, very beautiful. Them years, I didn't think anything about where I was going. Of course, I couldn't talk Russian or anything like that, but I went anyhow. I had a little trouble to get there with my passports and such things, but that get all smoothed out. I worked that here circus [inaudible 00:04:40], 1907, 1908 and then to trainer. A man by the name of [Gotchy 00:04:46] from a very prominent circus family; he left as the trainer. He got into an argument and I was asked by Mr. [inaudible 00:04:54] if I could work a two horse Liberty Act with a kind of horses, that we today here in United States, call Appaloosa horses. In them years, like today in United States, somebody believed that you can't teach such a horse with all them dots and [inaudible 00:05:10] on them.

[00:05:30] But anyhow, I said I would like to try and he let me try and it went very good and he put me to do small training jobs. Of course, I was happy; very very happy to do that. I didn't figure out that he was saving a good deal of money by keeping me in place of his trainer. Little by little I get into train larger amount of horses. At first, I made replacement for acts. From there, I had a trip to Denmark in 1913 and I come back to Russia. I worked Circus [inaudible 00:05:53] who hired me as a trainer. Then in 1914, was during the first world war, people there, like everybody else, had this silly notion everybody marching in the streets and hollered hooray, because there was a war on. Later I learned, I could never understand, why would people holler hooray to go to a war; be shot or be maimed, but they did it.

[00:06:30] I got a job in 1914 with a circus, it's called [Shavis 00:06:29] Circus; Akim Alexander [Gortis 00:06:32], or something like that. There I had about 25 stallions because, them years over in Europe, most of Europe, the horse we trained was mostly stallions, because the stallion has much more personality. That was my regular first job where I had the horse; what I wanted to do, how I wanted to do. With these horses, I was engaged in the year of 1916 to go to Moscow and work 'em in the circus building there, where I had started in 1907, but not for the same owner. There was other parties who ran the circus now. I played the stage in 1916, brought us into '17. The circus went for about 7 months in one spot. It was a beautiful building; everything concrete and cement. Then I went back to the man, Mr. [Gortis 00:07:29], who owned the horses and worked with him during the summer month.

[00:08:00] Early in fall, in 1917, I went back to Moscow and worked the season '17 or '18, but that was a very unruly season because in 1917 as we all know in October the Bolshevik Revolution. Lots of people here ask, "What does Bolshevik mean?" The Bolsheviks mean the majority and a Menshevik means the minority. It was a tough time in Moscow, but we came through it without any major incidents like that. Only one time of [inaudible

[00:08:14] circus building when I crossed the boulevard from my hotel to see how my stock and my boys were making out there. We [inaudible 00:08:22] in the circus on account of shooting for about four or five days; we couldn't get back again, but finally [00:08:30] we landed back in the hotel. The hotel was such a thing and the shooting was so severe on the boulevard that from our window, standing back in your room, not standing by the window because if you did stand by the window, you would be considered a sniper and you might get a bullet through your head very easily. When we wanted to get to the window sill, which was made out of some kind of marble, it was very cold and very [00:09:00] white, there was double windows so we had used to get in there and get all food stuff out but you didn't dare walk over there, so you usually crawled over on your knees and hands and you reach up and felt what you wanted to get there.

[00:09:30] In 1918, after the Bolshevik Revolution was all over, said and done, the Danish consular told me that he was able to evacuate us out of Russia, entirely and we wanted that because you couldn't get no bread, you couldn't get nothing to eat. You could stand hours in front of a bake shop and when you finally get to the door you would have a sign put up, "No more bread today." That evacuation trip was going to go to Germany. Then the Germans changed their mind and said, in the mean time they had to make peace, I think, with the Bolsheviks and he was getting down war prisoners and Syria prisoners [00:10:00] out of Russia and he wasn't going to take no Danes. Of course he was going to get his own people out. Well, I had to cancel my job and I started there, in the evacuation.

[00:10:30] I had to look for another way of making a living and I had a pretty nice dog and my wife, she worked, and I had a trainer during '17, '18 so I got an engagement in the town, them years, called Sonata. I don't know what it is called today, but it got another name I know that. I worked there with a circus while the afternoon become there was kind of an unruly and [inaudible 00:10:36], but we didn't think that was a man down from the circus, he took care of our bags and get the stuff to the circus and get the pile of stuff to the hotel. The next morning we were very surprised by hearing he was now in Kerensky, which means the white Russian's territory. The Bolsheviks had announced that town to [00:11:00] them. We played a few months and then Trotsky was appointed to be the organizer of the Russian Army and I think he was doing a very good job. Because the Russian Red Army started to push the white Kerensky's and [inaudible 00:11:14] and Anaksim's Cossacks and what have you. Lot's a different Cossacks and Don Cossacks and lots of separate parts of armed service, you had to use to retreat and retreat.

[00:11:30] That retreating trip, took us two and a half year to reach up to Novosibirsk in Siberia. There we then was overtaken by the Bolsheviks and I formed there a corporation circus, which is the only kind of circus you could run any business in them years. We played [00:12:00] there from the fall of 1919 until the spring of 1920. In this period, 1919-1920, hundreds of thousands of ... what was that word you say the people who run away? Run away not to get in the Bolshevik side, what do you call them?

Speaker 2: Fugitives.

Jorgan C.: Fugitive, excuse me, fugitive and it was said, over there, that the Russians during this [00:12:30] period lose more people than anytime of the war. While we were wanting the circus there [inaudible 00:12:36], we were divided up in points. We all had a vote, you knew

[00:13:00] something about show business or you was Scot woman, I didn't make no different, you had your vote. I happened to go out to the cemetery where I actually saw, with my own eyes, thousand and thousand and thousands of corpse in all shapes and forms just thrown in piles out there, like you would imagine [inaudible 00:13:04], all frozen stiff in that severe winter that was up there. In the springtime of 1920 when the sun started to hit them you could feel that terrible smell into the town from these bodies.

[00:13:30] So I and a friend, a German man, which I had hadn't known too long there, and he became a good friend to me, as a performer. We decided that we were going to get away from it all. We organized it ourself, loaded our stuff, be bought working horses; I bought two, he bought one and we got [inaudible 00:13:43] our stuff and we start to travel. There was no signs that said highway 20 North or 66 East of wherever you go, like we now have here in the United States. It was used to go by the sun. We were going far away from the railroad because along the railroad you couldn't get no food stuff at all.

[00:14:00] There was everything cleaned out by the armies. One's going East, then retreat and going back and forth. That way we traveled, changing from [inaudible 00:14:12] to [inaudible 00:14:13]. We traveled for about, oh I would say, about 4 months and then we both were able to get on trains. The train then brought me to Moscow, where then again the Danish Consulate come in very handy by doing an evacuation.

[00:15:00] We had a lot of Danish business people over [inaudible 00:14:35] them years, which I didn't know nothing about until the evacuation happened. We was taken up to Finland and the town, at that time, was put in a quarantine for three weeks then we was released and I had my dog over there. I went into town and arranged for an engagement in the circus there for about three weeks, I think, or a month. When that was over, we went to Copenhagen. That was the fall of 1920. I like dogs for playing but Nicholi never liked 'em; I can train, I can teach a dog, I've had many kinds of 'em.

Speaker 2: Are they more difficult to train than a horse?

Jorgan C.: To me, yeah, but to other people easier. It all depends on your disposition and what you like to do. I love to train horses and when some people, they said to me, when I was [00:15:30] [inaudible 00:15:28], hey I go there and whatever, "how can you stand", to me it was fun.

[00:16:00] I found myself in Copenhagen and I was a good thing I had that broken horse. I don't know whatever brought me to break it because I had no business doing it, but things like these ones that we humans don't understand. You can call it providence or destination or whatever you want, but I was [inaudible 00:15:57] to which I, for more than two and a half years, was able to survive and we, myself and my wife, and a little girl we had. Then, I didn't like the child with my wife and when she had to go to [inaudible 00:16:12] parties.

[00:16:30] I took a job over in Washa Poland as a horse trainer, and I was that little known in them years, that he gave me a contract for three months. Now, three months is a ridiculous little time for horse trainer to show anything about the training, but he seemed to be satisfied. There was another trainer when I came and we divided the time. He was an elderly man and I was a young man, in them years, and we divided the time between us

and I let him pick first choice. Well, he wanted to go later, so I went early.

[00:17:00] In 1923, I got an extension from the three month contract to a year. By 1923, I had several trained horse acts, which when I have told about later on was quite an accomplishment. Circus Ringling Brothers, Barnum & Bailey, had heard about these horses in Washa Poland, because every month we changed our program performers from all over the European continent came and played there, and he would go out like showman and told about the horses. Mr. Benson, who has now passed away I think; John T Benson, owned a big animal park up here in Massachusetts [inaudible 00:17:26].

[00:17:30] He liked the horses and he bought it. In 1923, I landed in New York City on the steamer Manchuria. From there the horses were shipped to Bridgeport, Connecticut, which was in them years, Ringling Brothers, Barnum & Bailey's [inaudible 00:17:43].

Speaker 2: Very good. Thank you very much Jorgen. We're going to continue this on. Again, we are going to make another program starting in 1923 when you came with the Ringling Brother's circus and continue right on up to the present. We know that you've made many accomplishments in horse training, and I am sure that our listeners are going to be very interest. We invite you to listen again next time. Thank you.

[00:18:00]

[inaudible 00:18:11].

Very good. I'll put on another tape.