

CWM AUDIO 66  
Jorgan Christiansen part 2  
March 20, 1965

Speaker 1: Okay. Thank you once again Bruce. We are back at the Chateau and again we have  
[00:00:30] Jorgen Christiansen as our guest. He is attending the annual Circus Fan's Fun Fest here at the Chateau this weekend sponsored by the Elgin tent, the Hannaford family tent. We gotta get that plug in here.

Jorgen: Yeah, well, I think that the town of this [inaudible 00:00:49] an organization because it is  
[00:01:00] wonderful to me being 53 and 1/2 years in show business to hear about these many people who still are interested. Some of them don't even know about the times that I'm talking about from 1923 when I said to you, I come to United States to the Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey. In the time, I have a [inaudible 00:01:14] of 40 years ago so you would know how many years from 1923 to now. Yeah, that would have been 63 is 40 years.

Speaker 1: Right.

[00:01:30]

Jorgen: I haven't ever had any desire to go back to Europe because we miss the comfort we  
[00:02:00] have here in the United States, so I am very much satisfied. Anyhow, let's go back to show business and the Ringling show. I started to grow up in the summer of 1923. The circus was on the road and I [inaudible 00:01:52] all these stallions. They just couldn't take them on because there was no suitable cars for them. We would have to have single stalls and so on so I was placed in the [inaudible 00:02:05] the quarter.

And as I didn't know the condition, I did a lot of unnecessary work. I had a different  
[00:02:30] smaller horse [inaudible 00:02:14] I never used. And I just broke my head off with them because I want everything to be the best but when I took my 16th horse [inaudible 00:02:23] in the ring, and of course I had the same and I told [inaudible 00:02:26], I said the ring was so much larger than the one we had had in Marshall where I originally had to train the horses. 16 horses going to [inaudible 00:02:36]. They didn't fill up the ring.

Now if you have a 42 feet ring like we have here in the Ringling brothers circus, it's very  
[00:03:00] [inaudible 00:02:46] fills the ring up. So there's probably one or one and a half horse distance between the first and the last horse. And that is about as many you can make ... What we call, change the ring, which means reversing the direction.

Well, I come home one day and I said to my wife. I had married a Russian in 1913. I said,  
[00:03:30] it's kind of funny. That ring is so much bigger, and I said these 16 horses they use don't do the trick; they don't fill up the ring. And she didn't seem surprised at all. She said very calmly, why don't you make [inaudible 00:03:26] twenty-four. And she kind of stunned me. I said well whoever heard about twenty-four horses.

But anyhow she was one of them womans who, if she got an idea, you got to do it.

Speaker 1: That's right.

Jorgen: So she kept pushing and pushing and pushing and certainly I picked out ... The 16 horse act was four groups of different color horses. I think -- I don't think, but I know. I had a black. I had a gray. I had a sorrel and I had a bay. Four sections at four. So to each section I added two. This made it 6. Of course not at once. First you took one section of four, added the 2 you wanted to go with them, and then you start to work with them. Then you take the next section like that, 6 horses, and then you work them. Then you took this 12 and work them together. Then you come to the other section, which by that time had also become about finished to go ahead with the learning, so finally you add them all, 24. And when you have a trained horse ... And you know, I understand horses. It is not too difficult to train a horse because he kind of feel what you want him to do with your cue, with your influence, and your determination.

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Like the famous horse trainer in Copenhagen, [inaudible 00:04:58]. We all have seen an international showtime, Schuman, I am a fan too. He's supposed to have said to a author of a Danish book called Circus that his system is the horse first go to kindergarten like a child. From kindergarten the same horse, or animal, advance to the first class and from there on, like a child, further and further and further. And I have used that system and I have used the same explanation to lots of people who have asked me, you know, how do you begin to train a horse act like that?

[00:06:00]

And that is the same system I train horses. My horses must never frighten of me or scared, but they had a confidence. So I say that I was kind of flattered that a man like Schuman used the same way of training his horses like I ... But anyhow I finished that [inaudible 00:06:07] 24 horses [inaudible 00:06:09]. This was the first 24 horse act in United States and today it has not been duplicated.

[00:06:30]

My next 24 horse act I accomplish it by [inaudible 00:06:26]. He organize it in the Winter 1934/35. With that act I open it and the stage in the old [inaudible 00:06:36] building in 1937 in New York. Then we went on the road and in 1938 the circus [inaudible 00:06:47] went in bankruptcy.

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[00:07:30]

But let me go back to Ringling show. Another one of my accomplishments was there by Ringling show in 1927. I presented a tableau with 39 horses, 27 ponies, 4 zebras, and five camels. The camels were standing on elephant tops. Two feet and each tops. They build a bridge five point during the ring. In the center was a big pedestal otherwise it would have been impossible to have that among the animals in there. And the first tier of that pedestal were six white horses. The next tier was four zebras. And the next tier was three ponies, and then I stood above them about 8 feet up in the air on a little pedestal up there.

[00:08:00]

Now it might interest you how I got the zebras up there. Well, I tried one way. Zebra is a kind of peculiar animal. It's an animal not like a horse. A horse when they don't want to go a place, you can give him a rap on the behind without being cruelty to him, and he will go. But when you give that to a zebra, he will kick out at you and he will be more stubborn. So I had a boy bringing in some canvas blanket and we made a kind of corral around the zebra. Her name was Mimi. Funny thing, I can't remember people's names

but I seem to --

Speaker 1: ... remember all the animals.

Jorgen: I never forget the animal's name. And these 1 to 75 animals, I could call everyone by  
[00:08:30] name. So shake these blankets. The zebra get afraid from the noise and at once she just jump up, hit the top and roll down the other side. Well it scares me to the death because she could have broke a leg or broke her neck. Well that stopped me from practicing that for a few days and then I say, then I got an idea.

[00:09:00] I thought about it during the night and I thought about it during the day and it's such a common idea and it's so funny that we humans some [inaudible 00:08:58]. So I say, sling is the [inaudible 00:09:00] like you hang a sick horse up in the stable. He's not supposed to lay down so I said to him, [inaudible 00:09:06] the stable boys, I say Frank, make me a sling for these Zebras.

[00:09:30] He said, what are you going to do now? Well I said, I'm going to get them up there on that pedestal. It's the only way so he made me the sling. So we put a double putty on it and fastened it up to the girders, and 3 or 4 man on the rope and used the blankets and [inaudible 00:09:28]. I was up there with the lunge line. [inaudible 00:09:32] she went out in the air sailing around in this harness. I just pulled her slowly. When she feel the ground under her, I have never seen anything shaking like she shook. She was just, get up to her feet and she stood there in shock when I nudged her to go again. Off she went in space. I pulled her in again. Well that repeated three or four or five times. Finally she landed, stood on her feet, and I gave her a piece of carrot. And she took the carrot and she left. And then of course, [inaudible 00:10:03] repeat it all and one nice day they just come in, form themselves and jumped up.

[00:10:30] The camels was another hard problem to solve, because a camel is a very clumsy animal. So to learn them to get up on these elephant tops, which is about two feet and six inches, three inches high and not too large, I made a platform. The platform was big obviously, 8 by 8 feet. We lay it on the ground. And we led the camels across them. Then in a little while when they get used to that, we stopped them on the platform. Then we begin to cut the platform down. And then it was just a little narrow space. And then we cut it in two. So she had to do a little step across and stay on two platforms. And before you know it, you could lead them into the elephant top and she would do like a good old timer acrobat, put one foot up and just brace herself up and slowly then her hind feet would follow her, and she would put one foot over on the other top and make the pedestal.

[00:11:00] One of them, camels had taken a funny habit when the horse went under them. I had a line of 12 gray horses. One of them started to kick at the horses so I want to get away from that habit so I let a man [inaudible 00:11:21] under them. His name, [inaudible 00:30:54] -- Santy Claus because nobody could say his right name. He was called Santy Claus. And Santy Claus, he went in under that camel. Once he kicked him, he [inaudible 00:11:33] kicked the horse and put him flat on the floor. Well, so that wasn't a good way either. Well I finally put a pair of hobbles and solve that problem.

[00:12:00] So that's about the three biggest acts I ever made over here. In 1927 I had a [inaudible 00:11:53] Ringling Brother circus and I went in business for myself and was in business with at that time with horses I called the famous creamoline stallions. In 1934 the Cole Brothers organized the circus in Rochester, Indiana, and I was working the Royal Horse Show up in Toronto, Canada. And Mr. [inaudible 00:12:16] and Mrs. [inaudible 00:12:17], they come up there, they bought my horses, and they bought all my equipment and gave me a contract for two years for a trainer.

[00:12:30] And I [inaudible 00:12:28] with the Cole Brother Circus until 1938 and like I said before, they went in bankruptcy. So I had to find a new way of living. So I went out and I found some dun horses, buckskin. It was the same place where I had bought my creamoline horses. They were a kind of [inaudible 00:12:51] time to breed these palomino horses or creamolines, and I bought me ten heads. I couldn't figure out the name because in show business, like in any other business, the name is the most important thing. You got to have a sound and clang, otherwise it's no good.

[00:13:00] And we had the black horse troupe, the gray horse troupe, and I had a [inaudible 00:13:12] famous creamoline. As we were sitting out there in the ranch, and these horses they were all white. Not even holdable by anything so we keep them in the corral, we fed and get them used to people. And I read there in an American thing, I read an article about Argentina. They had a horse down there which they call a Criollo horse. Criollo means a half breed of something. And they are this dun color ... Was their favorite color, and they favor that horse down there just like even in the United States in that year and today favors most of us a palomino horse.

[00:14:00] And when I read that word, "criollo horses," I jumped up and I said to my wife, there's the word. We're going to call them the famous South American criollo horses. And it was good time. People told them horses were different from anything they had ever seen. I opened up the world fair in 1939 with them and that was more or less a flat. The accommodation wasn't there or anything. But anyhow, I worked my way with these horses from 1939, 40, 41, 42, 43. By that time I was in California, and the circus there Arthur Brothers Circus bought these horses and gave me a contract as the trainer.

[00:15:00] And I was glad because you couldn't get no tires, you couldn't get no drivers, so I get rid of a lot of responsibility. Well, Arthur Bros didn't live a very long era. He got broke in about 1945, down in Texas. And that is for my compliments during my lifetime, I think without flattering myself, I can consider myself a champion in horse training. And now if you are interested let's go a little back here when I have gone to horse shows.

[00:15:30] There is so much misunderstanding. I saw a incident which I just cannot forget. I went to a little horse show, the Flying Hoof's Riding Club, put out every year in Rochester. And there was a ten or twelve year old girl sitting on the horse. She had this long cowboy reins on it and the father was standing next to her and when I approached she was slapping the horse over the head with the reins and the father said, slap him harder. He's got to have respect for you. Now to me that was the most ridiculous way of giving a horse respect when in my opinion she accomplished was to scare the poor horse.

[00:16:00] Because the horse's head is about the most sensitive part of the horse's body, and I have never had the habit to have ... like so many trainers have used, they have a kind of

a netting made, [inaudible 00:16:17] like glasses to protect his eyes that you don't hit him.

[00:16:30] And I know from show business if you have a bareback rider standing on a horse and she's supposed to hop over a banner and the horse pass under, if ever the band pass touch that horse a couple of time on their ears, you might as well get a new horse because he's not going to get under them banners in a quiet manner anymore. So that just proves to you how difficult it is with horses heads.

[00:17:00] And as so many people have, during my lifetime, asked me about the circus ring, which I just explained it a moment before. It was 42 feet in diameter inside. But that is not a stand out size. It was 42 feet because Ringling Bros circus Barnum and Bailey, is a big circus. And they use a fifty feet white meter piece with one mast outside the ring. So that permitted them to have 42 feet ring. If you go to a smaller circus, you see rings in all sizes. Usually 38 feet, 36 feet, 34 feet. If you go on stage in them days when [inaudible 00:17:31] was walking around he had to use a 28 feet stage. When I worked a horse act on the stage, some places I didn't even put a ring up, only to the backdrop. And that backdrop they just made it without the ring. So there's all size of ring.

[00:18:00] Let's come back to that here. People don't recognize what it really mean when you go on a fairground and you see a horse in the track in front of you and makes a nice show and they all stay in the ring. You don't think that mean anything. You take that for granted. But that is a accomplishment in itself. And so my problem was a little different than some other trainers use, and I take mine, the right one. Lots of trainers, a horse jump out, they get a little mad and they say to the groom, catch him. Bring him in here. Then when he gets into the trainer he get a hold of him and give him a good licking. Which is wrong.

[00:18:30] When a horse jump out for me, I tell the groom, catch him, not to lick him. Bring him in here to me. Now I tell him to lick him, not to catch him. Then when he got a few raps outside, he hops in the ring, I call him to me and I give him a nice piece of carrot. In a little while he realize when he jumps outside, he get a spanking. When he stays with me he get a carrot. So he play for the carrots for the spanking.

It's enough? Or one more?

Speaker 1: Well, I think that we've covered just about everything in your life.

Jorgen: I feel like we talk about storybook.

Speaker 1: Well let's talk about the storybook act. That's quite interesting. I saw some pictures of it here. Jorgen has a wonderful scrapbook. I wish that ... if this was television we could show you some. They're just tremendous, these pictures that Jorgen has collected for many years. He's got pictures in here from when he was in Moscow right up when he was with the Ringling circus, and just about all the circuses he's been with.

[00:19:30] Jorgen: Since that storybook act which I made in 1951, after I had sold these criollo horses, I was a private business training, riding horses. But that didn't suit me because people did not

[00:20:00] bring you a good horse to make him better. When they brought you a horse, the brought you an outlaw, which sitting on him, you took chances for your life. So I gave that up and went back to show business.

[00:20:30] And I bought a horse and a pony and a donkey and a brahma bull and a Nubian goat, a collie dog, and I trained them. And I went in business with them in 1951. But during the time, my brahma bull, many places I come and stop to, and they say, what do you got in there. And I told them I had a brahma bull, then the attendant of the gas station say, just a few days ago up here in the rodeo, a brahma bull killed a fellow. How is your bull? Well, I say, he's okay so far. I'm concerned but then one day he made an attempt, I think, to kill me. He tried to go on me with his horn. And that kind of finished my friendship with him.

Speaker 1: So you got rid of him.

Jorgen: And I got rid of him before he could get rid of me.

Speaker 1: That's right.

Jorgen: And I sold that act in 1957 to Cristiani Brothers show. Now, the Cristiani boys, they are [00:21:00] [inaudible 00:21:01] , wonderful bareback riders, [inaudible 00:21:03], and all around circus boys. But one fellow who was going to work the act, he worked the elephants. And then I wanted him to practice while I was there. He did it two or three times, take the opening of the act, but then he thought that was nothing too bad. That was just a little act. But it was a pleasant act and the people kind of liked it.

[00:21:30] But coming back to that fellow. Here's to show you that well-trained horses or any kind of animals, that is not driving a car. Because here you have to deal with nature. With the character, with the disposition. And when you get 8 different animals in a ring, every one has a different disposition. I mean you got a lazy little donkey from nature, some time you got to give her a little [inaudible 00:21:55] with the whip. But again, the man [00:22:00] who was going to work it, the act after they paid me for it and for my [inaudible 00:22:02] because I retired that fall, he worked the act exactly three weeks. And then there was no more act.

Speaker 1: Okay thank you very much Jorgen. It's been wonderful talking to you. We hope our listeners got some enjoyment out of this program. So let's turn it back to Bruce [inaudible 00:22:20].

Jorgen: Well okay, fine.

Speaker 3: Thank you very much.

Jorgen: You're welcome. Gee I talk a long time.