

CWM Audio 70-17
Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus Homecoming
(Employee Reunion)
Group Interviews, July 22, 2017
Session 3

John Russell, Lee Stevens, Barbie (Seal) Vasek, Lorna Spellman, Brian Miser, and Craig Miser
Interview conducted by Sara Klemann

Sarah C: This is Sarah Cleeman. This interview was recorded at the Circus World Museum Wardrobe building at 2:45 pm on July 22nd, 2017. I'm going to go ahead and ask you all to kind of go around, introduce yourselves, tell us your name, what unit you were with, the years you were with the circus, and what your jobs were.

[00:00:30]

Barbie S: Name is Barbie. My maiden name was Seal, and my last name now is Vasek. I was with the Blue Unit in 1971, the hundredth year anniversary show. It was actually the second year of the hundredth year anniversary show, and I did ... did I say Blue Unit? In the Blue Unit. I flew trapeze with the Flying Bradons. I was a flier, and then also, at the ending of the show, we did a high dive, 35-foot high fall from the top of the trapeze rigging into a large mat that was filled with air. Then also, we did some of the web routines and some of the things that you learn to fill in as needed for the show.

[00:01:00]

Lorna S: Okay. I'm Lorna Spellman. My maiden name was Heimer. I was with Barbie on the hundredth year anniversary Blue Unit show, second year, in 1971. I also did the high dive and filled in with dancing in the opening, did the web rope routine, also was on the center during the long mount, on the elephant act, and then rode an elephant in spec, and thoroughly enjoyed the show.

[00:01:30]

[00:02:00]

Craig M: Craig Miser. I was on the Red Unit from '77 to '81. I was a catcher for the Flying Fire Fans, so ...

Sarah C: That's it?

Craig M: That's it. I can tell you all the other stuff. Everybody did spec and opening and ...

Brian M: Right. My name's Brian Miser, I'm his younger brother. I was on the show in '82, was a flying trapeze artist, and then I went back in 2003 to 2017 as human cannonball on the Red show.

Sarah C: Great.

[00:02:30]

Brian M: And I did high falls, like they did, and a lot of repairs on the equipment, on props. I was kind of the handyman/fix-it guy on the site.

Craig M: [inaudible 00:02:41] sessions.

John R: Am I in?

Sarah C: You're in.

John R: I didn't sign up for this, but I'm here, enjoying the cool weather. I'm John Russell. 2 S's, 2
 [00:03:00] L's. I was with the clown college in 1976, stayed with the Red Unit until 1983 as a clown
 and a stilt-walker. In 1979, I broke the world's record on tallest stilts. 1980, I broke that
 [00:03:30] record, and my second ... the first one was in Cincinnati, Ohio. My second record, I
 broke my record, was in St. Petersburg, Florida. I did it on the circus ... once a year,
 Ringling had a national television show. I did that ... that one was hosted by Dick Van
 [00:04:00] Dyke, and I broke my record during that time. My last record was 1982, at Madison
 Square Garden, and the heights were 31 feet, 32 feet, and 33 feet. Thank you very
 much.

Sarah C: Great. So we've got someone who's just joined us. We're having folks introduce
 themselves by name, telling us what --

Lee S: Real names?

[00:04:30]

Sarah C: Real names, and otherwise, what unit you were on ...

Barbie S: Aliases.

Sarah C: What unit you were on, the years you were there ...

Lee S: I'm sorry I'm late. Sorry, fellow reading the files. My name is Lee Stevens, and I'm a 1971
 graduate of the clown college. In 1989, I went to Japan with the Gold Unit, with my
 [00:05:00] baboon act, and then we came here to Baraboo for a year, to switch unit. Then we did
 two years on the Blue Unit as well. Then we came here, and switched, and went to the
 Red Unit, and did two more years there, and came back here to switch to the Blue, but
 by that time, the ... things had changed over there, so ... anyway, it was fabulous. That's
 me.

Craig M: We see this.

Sarah C: Good, good. So just to sort of lead us off, I'd be fascinated to hear how you all got
 involved with Ringling Brothers/Barnum and Bailey ...

[00:05:30]

Craig M: I'll start. Our hometown is Peru, Indiana. We're the counterpart to Baraboo. So in Peru,
 we have an amateur circus that is primarily children, kids. We've got trapeze acts and
 high wire and the whole nine yards. Well, as kids, my brother and he got us involved, so
 we all did that as kids. I happened to be at the right place at the right time, and was
 offered an opportunity to learn to fly with Armando, a Fire Fan. So I thought, what the

- [00:06:00] heck, it's a once-in-a-lifetime idea, so I got to do that. Not only that, but I cut Dolly Jacobs, which is ... I made her look good, believe it or not. Dolly makes everybody look good.
- Lee S: This is going out.
- Craig M: I know, but I tease her all the time, she gets it. So anyway ... and if you don't know Dolly, you need to look her up online. She's an incredible performer. But that's how I got involved in it. Then he followed steps the next year, wasn't it? When he got out of high school. Yeah.
- [00:06:30]
- Brian M: When I graduated high school, yeah.
- Lee S: I met Brian when he had a fabulous flying act, by the way. And he did. We won a [hammered 00:06:40] show together. We did some smart things together.
- Brian M: Yeah. I got started in '81, right after I graduated high school. Went down to Florida and got to circus school, which Ringling owned it, started it. That's where I got started.
- [00:07:00]
- Barbie S: I ended up getting started ... in high school, I was real involved with gymnastics and I happened to live next door to Fred Wall, who was a stuntman in Hollywood. At the time, there weren't any women doing stunt work at all, so he decided I'd be a great one to train and kind of put through into the industry.
- [00:07:30] But he also know, Blackie Escolani, they were very good friends from the Flying Escolanis, so he had a trapeze in his backyard, a sway pole, a high wire, a horse for doing vaults ... you name it, he had it in the backyard. So he started training me with trapeze and high wire, sway pole, and then the deadfall, which no women did at the time. It's basically, if you get shot off a building, you just fall dead into a mat. Some of the older mats were just made with bunches of foam, but as the industry progressed a little bit, they changed them to what they called was an air net. Was basically a big bag of air filled by fans.
- [00:08:00]
- [00:08:30] So an opportunity came up that Bobby Yerkis, who is also very well-known in Hollywood and just about everywhere -- he used to do Circus of the Stars -- was looking for someone to fill in in a trapeze act. They needed a girl. So they contacted me, and I said yes. Then the cannon act, someone had gotten hurt the year before, in 1970, which was the finale of the show. So they needed something to also add to the birthday cake finale, which was the giant, hundredth year anniversary show. So they thought, "Aha, she can do a deadfall. That might work."
- [00:09:00] So they hired me to do both trapeze and high fall, which was awesome. so I went to work with Bobby, just training and getting ready for that, then Ringling I think decided that two deadfalls would be better than one, so Bobby asked me if I knew anybody, and I said, "Yes, maybe I know someone." So I called my good friend at the time, also from gymnastics, and ... your turn.

Lorna S: I actually kind of started with gymnastics, because my father was a gymnast, and back in
 [00:09:30] the day when you did gymnastics, it wasn't just all technical stuff. He did a lot of
 acrobatics and pyramid building and trampoline, and he was there kind of in the
 beginning of some of the very early trampoline development. So, as kids, we always just
 played around with gymnastics, and then in high school, Barbie and I worked together
 on a high school gymnastics team, and I knew I was too tall to be an Olympian, and so I
 [00:10:00] thought, well, let's just have fun with this sport. Then, after ...

Barbie S: And I wasn't good enough to be an Olympian, so it was definitely, we're going to have
 some fun here.

Lorna S: So we were kind of the class clowns in our gymnastics, we would kind of clown up the
 balance beam and fall [crosstalk 00:10:15]

Barbie S: And literally!

Lorna S: So then after we both graduated, we went our different directions, and I get the call,
 and Barbie says, "What are you doing?" I said, "Oh, going back to school, get some sort
 [00:10:30] of college degree." She says, "Oh, well, okay, never mind."

It's like, "No, no, wait. Wait. Wait." I said, "You don't not talk to me for a year and then
 say never mind!" I said, "What do you have up your sleeve? It's got to be something
 good." She says, "Well, do you want to join the circus and do a 35-foot high dive into an
 air mattress that's going to explode when you land on it, and a bunch of other stuff that
 you don't even know what it's going to be yet?" And I said, "Sure! When do we go?" So
 it was like ... how long did it take?

[00:11:00]

Barbie S: Only a few weeks for you. It was very short.

Lorna S: Yeah. So we just cut off school, and joined the circus.

Barbie S: We ran off to the circus. It was great.

Lorna S: So that was it, and the story goes on from there.

Lee S: For me, that's all I'd ever wanted. I'm the kid from New York City, so ... my birthday was
 St. Patrick's Day, and then Easter always fell around that time, Easter and April and so
 on. My brother's birthday was in early part of May, so the circus was always in the
 [00:11:30] Garden. We used to go to the old one on 51st street, where maybe you guys were, I
 don't know.

Lorna S: No, we were in the newer one. Yeah.

Lee S: Anyway, we used to go, and that's from the earliest memories I have of a circus, that's
 all I ever wanted to do and it's the only place I ever wanted to be, and it took me a little
 while, but I got there. It was fabulous. It's a fabulous life. My mother was kind of upset
 when, at 15, I left home. I didn't run away from home, I ran away to join the circus, and I

- [00:12:00] joined a little tiny ... well, if it was here today, it would be huge, but back then, by the standards, it was a very small circus. It was three rings, but small, and I made \$36 a week, and they kept 18 of that, to make sure you didn't quit.
- Lorna S: Oh, my goodness.
- Lee S: I did that for about a year and a half, and while I was there, I was under the act there, that Bill Balentine came to meet with them to hire them for clown college. They knew what I wanted to do, so they said, "You know what? Bill, go, take this kid" ... and I was 16. I think you're supposed to be 18, but it doesn't matter, it's 5500 years ago. Anyway, I went to clown college on the say-so of this other act who was quite nice, and it's bittersweet in how things turned them out, because one of them, before he just died, was actually my first son's godfather. So it's just how things worked out. It was fabulous.
- [00:12:30]
- [00:13:00] And we're all intertwined somehow. I see their dad all the time at home. I didn't realize you guys were brothers.
- Craig M: Yeah?
- Lee S: I knew you were connected, but I wasn't quite sure. I didn't know who was older, you or him.
- Brian M: I'm the oldest. I'm the old one.
- Craig M: I'm like, "Look at my dad."
- Brian M: Everyone always thinks I'm his dad.
- Lorna S: You can tell he's a clown, that he started being a clown.
- Lee S: Yeah. The circus is great. Ringling Brothers was -- for me, I mean, I can only speak for me -- it was the absolute crowning jewel of my career.
- Lorna S: Yeah.
- John R: I agree.
- [00:13:30]
- Lee S: It absolutely was. I waited all my life. I was in a park up at Canada, and they had sea lions and baboons, and most people who know me, knew me because of the baboon act, and so on. I did other things as well. But anyway, I got a phone call, and it was from Kenneth Feld, and I said, "Yeah, BS," or some other adjectives, and I hung the phone up. And I had a phone. We had a big semi we lived in. And the phone rang again, and, "This is June Forsythe, this is Kenneth Feld's secretary. Please hold for Kenneth Feld," and I said, "Okay." Some guy got up the phone. I said, "Stick it up your butt." Whatever I said. I think my language got worse.
- [00:14:00]
- Barbie S: This is the joke, yeah.

Lee S: Yeah, and there was other show people there. There was people with Tiger Acts. Roy Wells was there, and John Cox, and I thought they were all just pulling my leg. It was no secret where I wanted to be. Then the third time the phone call came, it was just the guy. He said, "Look, this is Kenneth Feld. Either listen to what I have to offer, or I'll never call you back." And then I realized it was him, and my knees buckled and ... yeah. It was one of them things you don't even know what to say, or you can't think straight or anything.

[00:14:30]

For a lot of the other acts, he had another guy as an assistant that did most of the hiring, but for him to call me, absolute ... and find me in Canada, between shows, was pretty unique. But then again, he could do a lot of things. So it was great. It was great.

[00:15:00]

Barbie S: Circus life ...

Brian M: John Stern.

Barbie S: ... the circus life is wonderful. There's nothing that compares to it, nothing. It is a family that you will do pretty much anything for each other. But the smells, the sounds, the arenas, the towns ... I mean, it is an amazing opportunity. And to work with Ringling was, like he said ... it's a privilege beyond belief, because anyone that works in the circus aspires to get to Ringling at some point in their life.

[00:15:30]

Lee S: And if they don't, they were lying.

Barbie S: Yeah, exactly.

Lee S: Or their act wasn't good enough to begin with.

Lorna S: They're the top of the top.

Lee S: Right or wrong, guys? Come on.

John R: Right.

Craig M: Correct.

Lee S: And we've all heard it, because we worked, we have all had careers before Ringling, and we certainly had ... we still have careers long after Ringling, and anybody who says that is just not telling you the whole truth.

Lorna S: Right.

Craig M: That's true.

Lee S: Do you agree, fellas?

All: Yes.

[00:16:00]

Brian M: Yeah, I can honestly say, like, Cirque de Soilel? I got no interest to go there.

Lee S: No, no. And I appreciate what they do. It's all one of the theatrics ...

Brian M: But Ringling ...

Lee S: Yeah. It was a circus. When I was there ...

Brian M: It's a lifestyle.

Lee S: Yeah, and I can't speak for everybody ... it was still the greatest show on Earth. It hasn't been in the last ten years, maybe, or even more, that it's been whittled down to nothing.

Barbie S: That ... yeah.

Lee S: It just has been. Production value, costume-wise, everything. It's been ... down to nothing. But I know when he was there, I was there, it was three rings ...

[00:16:30]

Barbie S: In '71, the show was three hours long.

Lee S: It was fabulous, yeah.

Barbie S: It was three hours long. It was entertainment from the moment you sat down to the moment you left.

Craig M: You said Blue Unit?

Barbie S: Yes.

Craig M: Right. So you had Charlie, you had Ju Lu, you had ...

Barbie S: ... had John Lee Bellman, who was Tigers, the Herriotts ...

Craig M: Yeah, John and Herriott ... Ruth was there. Willy Lins was there, and ...

Barbie S: We were there at such a really honorable time, because many of the ...

[00:17:00]

Craig M: Mike Dover was still there.

Barbie S: Yes.

Lorna S: That's the other name we forgot.

Barbie S: That's who we were trying to remember, yeah.

Craig M: Ten dollars. Don't pay me now.

Lee S: It was fabulous.

Craig M: After the show closed, everybody was posting pictures from the past, and if you really paid attention to them, they were full houses in every one of those pictures.

Barbie S: Yes. Absolutely.

Craig M: Did you see all of those? They were everywhere. You would ... that was so common, that you heard.

[00:17:30]

Lee S: I mean, Madison Square Garden, the new one, held almost 23,000 people. It was always full. If it wasn't, they had 19 then.

John R: It was a morning show.

Lee S: Yeah. Yeah, and even that was ... t whole first few days were full. You guys know that. There were still 10,000 people. I booked back in LA on the show, on the Red Show, and there were still 16,000 people. So at least I had a standing ovation when they cast me out.

Craig M: Yeah, that's a proud way to get one.

[00:18:00]

Lee S: They had to get through the baboons, first, so it took them a while. It was another act in the show, getting me out. But it was good.

John R: In high school, I was very interested in acting. I went to Weyland Academy, and during our senior year, we were given three months to go out and do what you want, during the spring. Might as well go do something, instead of just sit there, do nothing, and wait for graduation. So a group of us went to a mime school called the Wisconsin Mime Company in Spring Green, Wisconsin. You've heard of it, if you're a ... I think it's even still there. This was back in early seventies.

[00:18:30]

[00:19:00] I graduated high school '73, went to college '74 ... at the end of '74 and '75, I studied mime, and I met a person who had an application for the clown college. I thought, wow. It was a whim, but I filled it out, and bang-o! I got accepted. I got a telephone call from Bill Valentine, asking if I wanted to come down. "Sure!" They say 6,000 applicants at clown college. I don't know how true that is.

[00:19:30]

Lee S: It was true. It was a lot. You were one of the 50 that got to go.

Barbie S: I was going to say, I wouldn't be surprised ...

Lee S: Yeah, as was I. It was ... a lot of people thought they were going to get in.

John R: Yeah. I thought, sure, I'll fill it out. Yeah.

Barbie S: In Houston, they actually had auditions. Very few were picked.

[00:20:00]

John R: Yep. So I went and I got accepted and I was given a contract, and I wanted to try it out. Told my dad I quit college. My dad's a doctor.

Lee S: My son the clown. Good for you. Good for you.

John R: I was in the journal ... JAMA, Journal of Medical Association. I was in it when I broke my world record. I said, "Here, dad." He always said, as far back as I'm going to remember, "If you're going to do something, you might as well just do it right. Try your hardest and ..."

Lee S: You were lucky that way.

John R: And I did, and I ended up teaching at the clown college, '79 ... no ... '79, '80, '81, and '82. That's how I fell into it, and ever since, I've been a circus person. I didn't belong to it, but I was a CFA, Circus Fans of America.

[00:21:00]

Lee S: Which we need members, so if anybody's watching this ...

John R: Are you in the CFA?

Lee S: Absolutely. It takes a circus fan to be a great act. That's another part I like to bring out. Because of who we are, sitting here, we're all from different backgrounds, obviously. They're from an actual circus city, so it had an influence, just because of where you lived. It was kind of like Baraboo. So there's always some kind of activity or spin. It's great, it's another ... it's a great town as well.

[00:21:30]

[00:22:00] But it's people like us that kept the chain from stopping or getting rusty, because you can be the 15th generation performer. That doesn't mean you know how to entertain anybody. It doesn't mean you're necessarily any good, because 15 generations ago, somebody made a name for you. So this job they gave away was not anything to do with the circus.

For me, personally, Charlie Banner, who was probably the greatest animal trainer that I know was not from any kind of circus. He was from a very privileged background. A lot of people like that. Then, even when they say they're 15 generations, somebody had to join out somewhere, and perfect themselves, to create something. It's constantly reinventing itself.

[00:22:30]

Craig M: It's kind of interesting, because none of us are generational.

Lee S: No. No.

Craig M: Which, that's a rarity.

Lee S: That was my point.

Barbie S: We all came in from the outside.

John R: Yeah.

Craig M: I mean, our dad was in the air force. Had no background at all.

Lee S: My father worked for Proctor and Gamble. He was 16 when he got a job there. My mother worked for a brokerage firm on Wall Street. My wife ... like him, my wife's family were all doctors and surgeons. She was in medical school. She fell in love with me, like on Easter Sunday, and we got married here July 30th, 32 years ago.

[00:23:00]

Brian M: In Baraboo?

Lee S: Yeah. We got married during the show, yeah.

Lorna S: Great!

Barbie S: Very cool.

Lee S: And we worked here five years later, we worked here ten years later, and we were here for our 30th wedding anniversary, and they brought us in the tent and they did a whole big thing ... it was quite [crosstalk 00:23:22]

Craig M: 31 years ago, I got married. He was my best man and I haven't seen him since.

Lee S: Really!

Craig M: 'Til today.

John R: 40 years ago?

Craig M: 31. '86.

[00:23:30]

Lee S: So yeah, it's full circle. That's why it is great, see?

Craig M: I lost track of him because he went to Japan!

Lee S: That's fantastic.

Craig M: So I couldn't find him, and so what was it, a few years ago, he found me through Facebook and my brother, and we talked for three hours one night.

Lee S: Well, we couldn't find anybody to marry us.

Craig M: And he and I ... well, we hung out together constantly.

Brian M: During the show, we did.

Barbie S: Well, we ran into Laura, who roomed with us, 'cause the way the train was set up, there
[00:24:00] was different cars for different things. There's a clown car, and there's a workman car, a rigging car, et cetera. But the train had been gutted, and the Herriotts had a third of the train car. Charlie Baumann had a third of a train car, and then they had these five roomettes at the end they didn't know what to do with, 'cause you couldn't go back and forth. So they asked Lorna and I if we would like to, and then Laura Harriet was the other.

Lee S: She was old enough, yeah.

Barbie S: Well, she was ...

All: 16.

[00:24:30]
Lee S: 15 or 16, yeah.

Barbie S: Bless her heart, she wanted to be 19, but she was 16.

Lee S: I know Laura. She was 23.

Barbie S: But it was so great to run into her and see her like we saw her yesterday.

Lee S: Yes. I love her. I love her.

Barbie S: I have enjoyed talking with her and the rest of the sisters, and just having a blast seeing everybody, 'cause ...

Lee S: I was in love with every one of them at different times.

Barbie S: How funny.

[00:25:00]
Lee S: Yeah.

Lorna S: That's great.

Lee S: It was a one-way street, but it was fine. It only lasted one night, but ...

Craig M: This whole reunion's been a good idea, and I'm fortunate, because Brian's been around the show a lot, so he knows a lot of people.

Lee S: Sure, sure. Sure.

Craig M: Last night was very enjoyable, you get to talk to people you didn't know, or it's like, "Oh, yeah, I remember you!" So that's been kind of fun. And poor John, he got here late and we haven't found anybody yet.

John R: We haven't found anybody.

Lee S: One person.

Craig M: If you're out there, come see John!

[00:25:30]

John R: Yeah, it's scattered. In the future, if we ever have it again, we should have it at 2:00, Saturday, there should be an area for ...

Lee S: Introductions. There should have.

John R: Yes.

Lee S: Don't you agree? Everyone would have got up --

John R: Yeah, we been looking ...

Lee S: And in three seconds of, "Hi, I'm Lee Stevens, I was here, here, and here. If you remember me, I'll be over there later." And we all should have had something.

John R: They've done a wonderful job with this, though. Yeah, I'm not complaining at all.

[00:26:00]

Lee S: There are guys, they were 18, 19, 20 years old first of Mays. I don't recognize them. Now they're fatter than me, they got three kids, I don't know who the hell you are.

Craig M: That's like he said.

Lee S: Look, I know your makeup!

Barbie S: Oh, see, that's one advantage with the clowns.

Lee S: It's with the showgirls, though! It is with the showgirls too. Don't even go there.

Craig M: It's like John said last night. Everyone he looks at, he goes, "He's fat and bald." It's like, everybody is! Heck!

Lee S: Yeah, everybody is! I was in the class of '71, so there was Tim Holst, there was me, there was Severini, there was Stevie Smith ...

[00:26:30]

Barbie S: And Tim Holst was just [crosstalk 00:26:34]

Lee S: I mean, I see Steve, he kind of looks the same.

John R: Frosty was '68? Frosty? Was he was at the first?

Lee S: Yeah. He was with Danny Chapman and them guys. Well, Danny did it first, and then Bill Balentine.

John R: Was that '68 or '69?

Lee S: Yeah, '68, I think.

Lorna S: And then Paul Shapiro. I don't know if you knew Paul.

Barbie S: Well, he had Marky on our show, too.

Lee S: Yeah, W. Washburn, though he ended up in the Shrine Circus, is that's why.

John R: Prince Paul, did he go to clown college?

Lee S: No. No, no, no.

[00:27:00]

Barbie S: no, he just ... and he was on our unit, too, Prince Paul was.

Lee S: No. Nasty went to clown college.

Barbie S: Nasty?

Lee S: We all have a mutual friend we know called Nasty. Anyway. I don't know why he got the name, but his name was Nasty, and now he's done quite well for himself. He had some issues, he wouldn't mind me saying he turned his life around quite a bit and he's doing really well. He's doing really well. But Nasty was Nasty.

[00:27:30]

John R: Well, there was another thing with the show, all the nicknames. You didn't know anybody that had a real name, was the way [crosstalk 00:27:39]

Lee S: Yeah.

John R: Big Red and Dummy and ... yeah.

Lee S: Every show had five Whiteys.

Barbie S: That's true!

Lee S: We all have a Whitey, he knows. We all have Whitey. There's Whitey, and ...

Sarah C: So anyone here have nicknames?

Barbie S: I was just Barbie. I'm easy. I got stuck with Barbie, I stayed with Barbie.

John R: No.

Brian M: I'm just Cannonball.

Barbie S: Yep.

Lorna S: Cannonball.

[00:28:00]

Barbie S: Well, Cannonball's a nickname, right there. Yeah.

Craig M: I was Mitch-I-mean-Craig, 'cause he was always yelling for my flier, Mitch, only he meant me, or vice versa. Mitch-I-mean-Craig! So it became a joke in clown college. Clown Alley, actually. Chuck said, well, you see all that all the ... he still does!

Lee S: But they were merciless, too, those guys, 'cause there was 30 in the room, so they were going to gang up on you, they got you good.

John R: Yeah.

Brian M: Yeah, towards the end, there were so many guys coming in, and someone would say, [00:28:30] "What's his name?" It was Jim.

Craig M: No matter who the new guy was, his name was Jim.

Barbie S: Jim!

Craig M: He only was there for three months. He got that going.

Barbie S: That is true, 'cause they kind of filtered through very quickly sometimes.

Brian M: Six weeks.

Lee S: Yeah. The smaller circuses, the turnaround is almost extreme, 'cause it's just on a weekly basis. Ringling was, 'cause there was unions, there was this and that ... everybody was so busy, you didn't get to know everybody all the time. There was a lot of friendships made, and the class system was kind of broke down on Ringling, I would say, more so than any other show, because you were there longer, you know? Your prop guy got to be the guy you went to, so things like that. But on the smaller shows, they were just ... there was a Whitey on every show. Every week was a new Whitey.

[00:29:00]

Brian M: There was a couple Shitheads too.

Craig M: A lot of Shitheads, yeah. Asshole.

Brian M: Yeah.

Lee S: God bless. Harry Dupe's here, everyone was a Gazoony.

[00:29:30]
Barbie S: When you're diving 35 feet, you want to make sure you're very good to your prop guy.

Lorna S: Yes.

Barbie S: You do not get mad at your prop guy. And of course, when you're flying, you don't get mad at the catcher, don't make him mad too, 'cause he very easily could go ...

John R: Oh, I'm sure.

Craig M: He did. He brought me a trapeze bar one day that had two strands left. Holy crap.

Barbie S: That's scary.

Craig M: Yeah, it is.

Brian M: One time ...

Craig M: There's a lot of drama that you don't ... most people don't have no clue about.

Brian M: When I first went to the Ringling, I was shooting, on fire, in the cannon, so the barrel
[00:30:00] was already elevated some, and I prepared and I climbed up in the dark and got inside the cannon, so nobody knew I was in there. Well, I made my wife mad.

Craig M: She shot you?

Brian M: Well, she raised the barrel a little bit too much, so I'm trying to climb up there, so I kept sliding down.

Lee S: Jesus. But that's the worst.

Lorna S: Don't do that before you shoot.

Lee S: I'll testify to what he's talking about, because we were in Bush Stadiums with the
[00:30:30] Coronas when they had two cannons. They had one and Dave Smith Senior was there, and his stuff was all electric. Well, it was supposed to be a double cannon, so both cannons go up. One was more of a cannon than the other, but needless to say, one was the next Ringling sled, but the power went out. Now, here's a guy, it's ready to go, but there's no power. Well, you can't climb out. You can't, because if it went off, it would split you in half, you would ... not to give away nothing, but you ain't coming out of there. And he sat in there for almost an hour and 45, an hour and 20 minutes, whatever
[00:31:00] ... I mean, forever. Finally they just shot him. The power came on and they shot him.

Lorna S: Wow.

Lee S: He wasn't coming out. It's not fun, there's a lot of variables that could ... my ass is talking.

Barbie S: That's not me.

Lee S: That you?

Barbie S: Hello. That was not me.

[00:31:30]

Lee S: Okay. Anyhow, all of us have, even in Clown Alley, there's all these foibles that you have to deal with, especially on a setup day or load-out day. You don't know what the hell to expect. Everybody's fighting for space. Six inches, a foot, becomes a big deal. If you want to spread your makeup out, as far as these guys go ... where's the trunk, where's the vent? Where's the air conditioner blowing in? Where's the best place to get TV? So all that becomes a serious priority, and it becomes a class system within a class, am I right? I mean, especially back in those days, 'cause you had all the old bastards just didn't want you there in the first place.

[00:32:00]

Barbie S: Yeah. If you were a young kid, yeah.

Lee S: All these young kids were coming in, which he was one, pushing the old guys out. You know, the guys that have been there 25 or 30 years, so they're in their late fifties, mid-late fifties, and then you got a guy, 25, dancing all over their heads. I mean, it's kind of intimidating, and I'm sure you were one of them. I can tell by your smile.

[00:32:30]

John R: I was, and I paid my dues. It got to a point ... when I broke my record, that's when ... Lou Jacobs, myself, and Dwayne Phillips, Uncle Salt.

Barbie S: What was the final record?

John R: 33 feet.

Barbie S: Doggone.

Lee S: What was that? I missed the intro.

John R: Tallest stilts in the world.

Lee S: Fantastic! That's you!

John R: Guinness, yeah.

Lee S: Now I know who you are.

Barbie S: Wow.

Lee S: I know exactly who you are.

[00:33:00]
Craig M: Without his makeup. I get it. Right?

Lee S: No, I do. Now I know who you are.

John R: John Russell!

Craig M: Two S's, two L's!

Lee S: Lee Stevens, my pleasure. Nice to meet you.

Barbie S: Nice to meet you!

John R: Anyway, Lou got his spot, and many times he got his own little curtained area, you know those open eye? "Well, I think I'll take over there." "No, Johnny, you sit ... "

[00:33:30]
Craig M: And move you three times before ...

John R: So we got the best spots.

Lee S: I loved Dwayne. He was a good guy.

Craig M: I did too.

Lee S: Wonderful. Wonderful.

Craig M: So one of our trainers in our group was Hodgini, Tom Hodgini. Well, he was Joey's brother, so I don't think ... I don't know that Tom did this, but I think that he talked to Joey before I got on the show, because my room, my first year, was right next to Joey and Dwayne, and those guys were funnier than heck. I mean, they would get me laughing. You remember? Load-out night, holy crap. But I think that Joey kept an eye on me, 'cause I never had any problems anywhere. If something happened, Joey would always be there. It was just kind of nice.

[00:34:00]

John R: It was 40 years ago, and I still have ... I'm sure you all have dreams, no nightmares, dreams. I still do.

Lorna S: Yep.

[00:34:30]
John R: I'll have my makeup on and I'll be looking for my costume.

Barbie S: Right, yeah, yeah.

Brian M: Yeah.

John R: Do you? Or ...

Barbie S: Doesn't go away.

Craig M: Vice versa.

Barbie S: Or I hear music for the next performance ...

Lee S: With no makeup!

Barbie S: I'm late!

John R: Where's my trunk? I don't think anybody ... maybe, well, if you're a vet, maybe, in Vietnam, or ... I don't know if it's going to be good.

Lorna S: So we need to come up with a term for circus PTSD.

Barbie S: Not PTSD.

[00:35:00]
Lorna S: But yeah.

Craig M: Well, where's the building at? 'Cause I forgot to look.

John R: Where's the building? Whenever it has to do ...

Craig M: How many times you done that? How many times? Like, uh-oh.

John R: Whenever it had to do with circus, I still had dreams, and I'm sure I will until the day I die, but my point was, it's like it happened yesterday. And I don't know if that happens with everybody. Circus is just ... it's a microcosm in a ... we had our own little city, a traveling city.

[00:35:30]

Lorna S: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Craig M: Don't mess with it.

John R: Self-sufficient ...

Barbie S: And that was the other neat thing, too, when you would come to a town, whatever the town be and how long you were there, you would maybe go to the town when you had a few minutes or an hour, you'd still see everybody from the circus, 'cause they were doing the same thing! But you learned about the town. You learned where the laundromat was really quick, where the post office was ...

[00:36:00]

- John R: Did you ever get that book written?
- Barbie S: Yep. And when you're traveling, you don't do that, but when you have to come to a city quickly and live there for a little bit, you learn things that you wouldn't know otherwise, which is great, 'cause you do learn a little bit about each city quickly.
- Lee S: And Uncle Salt, Uncle Salt new where everything was.
- Craig M: Everything was. Twice.
- Lee S: But it was also two sets of lives on the show, as well. Because there was the people that
[00:36:30] lived on the train, and then it was all of us regal superstars that lived on our own private house. We traveled overland, either by choice or just because of size and necessity. Mine was because of the animals, and so on. The type animals I had, nobody can just go in and handle and take care of, so therefore, we're on our own.
- [00:37:00] But we had our own set of problems, getting on the lots, getting through towns, getting through the traffic. We were almost always ahead of the train by at least a day, and depending on what unit you were on, what shows you were on, for instance, the Blue Show, it got so bad to the point where Mike Nilsson had to start putting diagrams of the backyard, of the parking and whose names, names actually on the slots of the trailers. "Lee Stevens' baboon truck," and "Lee Stevens' house," and "Johnny Peterson's truck" and "Johnny Peterson's house" ... because it was just Star Wars in the backyard. You guys all know it. You all know it. They all know what Star Wars was. You know, on the
[00:37:30] train you didn't have that so much, because they appointed you your spot.
- Barbie S: Yeah.
- Lee S: We were fighting, jockeying for the best light plug and the closest water outlets.
- Barbie S: And where you were on the train was the whole season, so ...
- Lee S: Yeah, yeah, and on the Red Show was easy because Gunther was still there, still working, and we had a wonderful, great relationship with him and his family, as I did on the other unit with other people as well. But my kids were at very formidable ... they
[00:38:00] were at four and almost six, so he took them in like little kids, like his sons. They rode overland in the bus with him. But we knew enough that when we got on the lot, we just stayed off to the side, and waited for the bus to come. Then I hear the horn beep when he'd pull on the parking lot, and the same thing for two years: "Why you no parking, Sonny? Why you no parking, Sonny?" Because if I did, that asshole would have made me move, because that would have been where he wanted to be, so I never parked first, you know?
- [00:38:30] It was fabulous, but ... and that was limited, because it wasn't that many people in the backyard. You know, it was mostly the animal people and a few, maybe the fly, and if Brian had his trailer, Brian would have been there, and so on.
- Brian M: Yeah. I lived on the train in '82, when I was 18, and it was fun.

Lee S: It had to be fabulous. You kidding?

Brian M: Then when I went back, I was 39. I started off on the train. I didn't like it, so I stayed in an RV.

Lee S: Yeah. My wife and the kids, my wife and the kids rode overland with different people, just to do it, on the shorter trips from Sacramento to ... not Sacramento, sorry. What am I thinking of? Into San Francisco. Where am I thinking of? Oakland! Oakland to Frisco. They'd do jumps like that.
[00:39:00]

John R: What, six miles?

Barbie S: I know! That's a little jump.

Lee S: Yeah, but it still took them 33 hours to get there! They'd leave Sunday night and they'd show up ... yeah, they'd show up Thursday! You rode the train! It's like, "Where the hell are they?" And when we were lucky, we carried two swimming pools, one where we had more room than the other, and we always had our swimming pool set up ...
[00:39:30]

Craig M: When were we on that show?

Brian M: '80?

Lee S: But the parking lot was where you lived, and we made it a home. All of us, over the years we were all there, the show took over. They took over the building, they took over three blocks around the building ...

John R: That is another thing.

Lee S: Did we not?

[00:40:00]

John R: Also, to this day ... the train is almost a mile long, and everything anybody needs or anything is on that train, and we'd pull up a day later, that train is empty, it's in the arena ... and that was nothing compared to these tents. The tents!

Craig M: Yeah.

John R: Set up, tear down. Set up three times a week --

Lee S: At minimum!

John R: ... this huge ...

Lee S: On 14 acres!

[00:40:30]

John R: I love watching on my phone, just documentaries of back in the forties, thirties, when the circus was a tent. Ringling, the big show.

Lee S: It was.

John R: What did they have, two, three trains, just to ...

Lee S: Four. Four trains, 1,600 people. They ate three times a day on the lot.

John R: Just think of the food!

Lorna S: Yeah.

Lee S: 1,600 people.

John R: And you're not in one place, so ...

Lee S: 35 people cooking, 60 people ... 60 waiters!

Barbie S: My goodness.

[00:41:00]

Lee S: Depending on what color your check the [inaudible 00:41:00] book was, was your status.

John R: Where do you get the food? Where do you get the food? Where do you get the food for the animals? Where ... just goes on and on. So it is ...

Lee S: Not three elephants, 54 elephants.

John R: Yeah.

Lee S: 300 horses.

Lorna S: Yeah, it's a lot.

John R: And going to ... not really, Ringling didn't go to, a lot of times, big cities, but there's little country towns out in the middle of nowhere. It's just amazing how ... chaos.

[00:41:30]

Brian M: It was amazing when we were on the show. It was amazing. It wasn't a day later, it was two hours later.

Craig M: It just kills, the logistics ...

John R: Yeah, yeah.

Lee S: You're in the building, and you're out. We pull on the lot, our house trailer does. Once the train arrived, more often than not, all the animal feed, everything, was delivered. As

[00:42:00] soon as the train came, I never had ... it touched nothing, when the train came, the crews broke down and they all started doing their own jobs like ants, and they just ... they really just spread out. Once the train got unloaded. Loading and unloading a train is a fantastic sight in itself.

Barbie S: It's a ballet. It really is.

Lee S: It really is.

Barbie S: It really is. It's a ballet of jobs then.

Lee S: And most of the times, it's the same, but not every time, because you get a flag car that's six feet shorter, therefore it changes the whole lineup, because those three wagons don't fit there. Now we have to put two wagons and what, maybe a pickup truck? Brian, you got a car? Let's put Brian's car up there, I'll get ... whatever. That's how they did it.

[00:42:30]

John R: get a car ?

Barbie S: Or they close ...

Lee S: No, I just rode [crosstalk 00:42:35] His name came up, that's why, 'cause he was an act that went over land.

Barbie S: Or they have a train strike and you got to walk the elephants.

Lee S: Let me tell you about a train strike. It was fabulous. So we were in the Meadowlands, what used to be called the Meadowlands. Giant stadium that's in New Jersey. Yeah, well it's changed so many times. But anyway, we had to go to Nassau Coliseum. Years ago, you played New York, you played the Garden, that was it. You moved on. You went to Rhode Island, you went to Boston, you went to New Haven, you went to Maine, whatever you went. But now there's five spots around the city, so we had to go to Nassau, I mean, from Meadowland, New Jersey to Nassau Coliseum.

[00:43:00]

Well, now, Sunday night was last night. Paul Gauthiel was there taking pictures like crazy. It's the snow blizzard from hell, right? So I get in my truck and trailer. We had two trucks and trailers. I drove one, my wife drove one. We had 12 horses with us as well, and we get the hell out of New Jersey, just in the nick of time. We get on the LIE, we're headed to Nassau, we're just about to ... now they close the highways down. Then they close ... the train froze to the tracks and they had three and a half feet of snow. So this went on for a couple of days, nothing was happening. Now it's opening night, Nassau Coliseum. It's a 7:30 show ...

[00:43:30]

Lorna S: And the circus isn't there.

Lee S: At 7:00, there's nothing! At 7:15, you get on the radio, the train's pulling in. The only people in the building is my stuff, Sue and Rudy Lance, and Bogus had buffaloes and

[00:44:00] mountain lions, and David Larible drove his car, so he was there. No makeup. So he got lipstick from my wife, and he did his makeup with lipstick. He had nothing. No wardrobe, nothing. He went out, started doing the come-in, which most people ... he knows what that is. He's doing the come-in, and I did the baboon act, and then Bogus took the buffalo and walked them around. We were trying to make a show out of ...

Barbie S: Out of nothing!

Lee S: Yeah. Then I went back with ... we took six ponies and we went back and then we brought six more out later, 'cause they were a different color ... David Larible was working in between ... so by 8:15, it was packed. Don't ask me how the people got there, don't ask me where they came from, the building was packed, and the first wagons, the ring rubber rolls in on ... we had those little things called clogs, sometimes, then started pulling the wagons in. Everybody got their money back, they all got a voucher. And I went, "Excuse me, hello, 16 wagon?"

Barbie S: Yeah.

John R: I worked!

[00:45:00]

Lee S: Barbara [fluke half 00:44:59], where's my meal?

Barbie S: We played a show in Canada one time, and the musicians were on strike. That was one of the oddest things. We had the drummer, 'cause it was ... yeah, just the drummer, and that was all you had was just boom, boom, boom. And it was like ... even though everything was exactly the same, you don't realize how impactful music is!

Lorna S: The music is, right.

[00:45:30]

Barbie S: It was like an empty show. Something ... you felt it missing, and that's when you realized that everything is puzzle pieces. They fit together so well.

Lee S: You guys ... you too, Brian, I don't know what years you were there ... the band was still 20 pieces, 30 pieces? Depending on the union, right or wrong?

Barbie S: Right.

John R: Right. Yeah.

Lee S: I mean, it was spectacular. There was the real deal.

Lorna S: Live music.

[00:46:00]

Lee S: And they did a lot of ... a lot of really modern stuff was coming in, but it still had an oom-pah beat to it, which made it more endearing. To me, it did. But there was no canned

music, not on Ringling, anyway. It was great.

John R: All live. All live. All live.

Lee S: In all the other Shrine dates we've worked on, there were canned record players! You had a stereo set up, and they had a microphone down, honest to God.

Barbie S: Really. Ugh.

Lee S: Yeah, that's the circus, honey. They laid a microphone down.

John R: The key to ...

Lee S: There was no Bill Prines and no Keith Pullingers and there was none of those people.

[00:46:30]

Brian M: He'd have full shows and Keith'd play better music, remember?

Craig M: He'd get out his [fornix 00:46:33] and start to go nuts.

Brian M: I used to look forward to that.

Lee S: To this day, he's unbelievable.

John R: I know. Keith travels with the show, he's the director, trumpet, [Helif 00:46:45] King was the organist, drummer, and one ... there were four.

Craig M: There was another trumpet player.

Lee S: A horn player.

Craig M: Yeah, a former ... yeah.

Lee S: And that's with union, so ...

[00:47:30]

John R: They had people, yeah. So they would come, they would come, they'd practice for an hour, like on a Sunday. When would the show ... anyway, before the show. Monday was dark, we didn't have a show, Monday, and Tuesday, I think we had one show. Yeah, and all the people from the town, the musicians, the professional musicians would come and they'd practice for an hour, and that music was fabulous. I mean, they could have done three hours of music. They're professionals, I know.

Lee S: Of nonstop music.

John R: It's nonstop. I mean, you'd think that they're just drooling and ...

Craig M: We think we worked hard. Those guys worked harder than anybody.

Barbie S: Yes, they did. You're right. Yeah, we just had an act and went back.

[00:48:00]

Craig M: You needed ... those guys were blowing horns for nine hours.

Lee S: And in the old days, the lighting guy, he had to sit there. The hardest he had to do is sit there and go, click. Click. You remember? There was no lighting! There was nothing. All this crap came on. Click. Click. And the guy put four kids through college going click. Click. Click. Especially in New York City, 'cause my mother handled the stock for the lighting tech and the head usher. And then the head usher, if you wanted to sit there, you sat there! It was like Vegas. Here's your 20, here's your 10, here's whatever. The more you gave, the closer you got! Somebody came with a ticket, "Oh, that one's yesterday, they gave you the wrong ticket. I'm sorry."

[00:48:30]

[00:49:00] They had an alibi, listen, they had an alibi for everything. Ringling Brothers was the only place in New York where they had to where a sign in their hats. The vendors had to wear a hat. It said "Cotton Candy, a dollar." Everyone had a thing they could turn, and make it a dollar and a quarter, a dollar fifty, and enough to get by, so anybody ... they just put the sign up, set it down.

Sarah C: I hate to say this. We only have about ten minutes left.

Barbie S: My goodness, okay.

Lee S: What?

Sarah C: I know, went fast, right?

Lee S: What the hell'd you call us in here for? We're just getting started. We're still getting comfortable!

Sarah C: You're just getting warmed up.

Lee S: Brian hasn't said two words! We haven't let him!

Sarah C: Your juiciest [title 00:49:17] thoughts, in the last ten minutes.

Lee S: Talk about the trap, talk about the cannonball!

Lorna S: Yeah, he needs to talk about the cannonball.

Brian M: I'll try. All right, you've got more questions, right?

Sarah C: But just ... if anyone's got final thoughts, final juicy dirt?

Lee S: We're going to let him talk.

John R: You got to talk about you.

Sarah C: There's no ...

[00:49:30]

Brian M: You said all my stories!

Lee S: Don't even go there!

Craig M: You two spent the ... well, you three spent the most time on this show.

Brian M: What's the question?

Sarah C: What's your most memorable moment from being with ...

Brian M: Performing.

Craig M: Absolutely.

Brian M: Yeah.

Craig M: Yeah.

Barbie S: Friendship.

Craig M: You got another five minutes?

Brian M: Every show, that was the highlight. And it's fun, backstage, hanging out, being with everybody.

John R: Boy.

[00:50:00]

Lorna S: And getting to know people. For Barbie and I, we were real young, and it was a great education for us, getting to go and see the United States. Not only that, but all of the acts from different countries, you know, when they get off the train and sit with the Bulgarians and the Polish and all around their campfires, and Dougie Ashton from Australia, and just different people, different people.

Barbie S: I learned to appreciate vodka.

Lorna S: Vodka, yeah.

[00:50:30]

John R: My daughter lives in the same town as Dougie.

Lorna S: Is she?

John R: She's getting married. She went to college there, and then she married.

Lorna S: So where does he live now?

John R: In Gold Coast?

Barbie S: I don't know. He's on my Facebook.

Lorna S: Really? I didn't know that. Cool.

John R: This one, I just want to quickly say, that's another thing. The kids, the kids have to be 15, [00:51:00] 20, 25, they had school, every day, we had a traveling schoolteacher or two.

Lee S: They built an entire schoolhouse.

Lorna S: An entire nursery. They built a nursery.

John R: And a nursery!

Lee S: Yeah, we had a nursery and a whole wagon was a schoolroom.

John R: We had a vet.

Craig M: We had a vet, but not a doctor. A vet worked. You get sick, Dr. [inaudible 00:51:16] would give you something.

Lorna S: I'd have liked us to have a priest.

John R: We had a priest. We had a priest, who traveled.

Lee S: Yeah, we still have a priest.

[00:51:30]

John R: This is the heyday. This was our heyday, back when there were 35 cooks and 1,600 ... yeah. There were about 300 people, but we were self-contained and we had everything, and I just think, "Wow, to get this together, just think of ... "

Lorna S: The logistics.

John R: The logistics, back, 1,600 ...

Lee S: People.

John R: ... cast. Yeah.

Lee S: It's mine, by the way. Actually, the Army came, the Army Corps of Engineers came. Not [00:52:00] just Ringling. They studied three or four different circuses at one time, just to see how to mash ... and that's how MASH units were even built and formed, and how to move

troops, and how to set up camps.

John R: Really taught.

Lee S: It was all because of the circus, the movements of the circus.

Craig M: Was that World War One or Two that they did that?

Lee S: Two.

Craig M: It was Two, okay.

Lee S: Two. Two. Yep. 'Cause World War One, if you got shot, you just died. If the horse didn't come take you, you were dead.

John R: You were done.

Lee S: Or you fell in a foxhole, they blew you up anyway.

Barbie S: Yeah, that was it.

[00:52:30]

Lee S: But my personal greatest moment of my entire career was the night before opening in New York City, and there was nothing on the floor yet, nothing was being set, my trailer was up parked on the fifth floor, and I walked out and stood, dead center, in Madison Square Garden, and cried for about 20 minutes. Now I'm probably going to cry again. I'm the kid from New York, so I had ... a week later, I had all the little bastards that teased me as a kid, all the ones that made fun of me, every one of them, with their families, sat third row up, center ring.

Barbie S: And when we played Madison Square Garden, it was amazing to do the high dive there, because our platforms were at the top of the rigging, the trapeze ...

Lee S: Yeah, you were at the top of the lighting, yeah.

[00:53:30]

Barbie S: To realize we're standing there getting ready to do the dive and almost being level with the people, and realizing the audience still went up past that, that was an amazing ...

Lee S: And you guys had to go over that cheesy water pipe rigging that they had.

Barbie S: Yes. Yes.

Lee S: No, the whole ship went like this, you know?

Barbie S: Yes, and it did.

John R: It did?

Lee S: You know, it had two clotheslines and three midgets and a Chinese lesbian holding it up.

Lorna S: We had a nice little board to stand on.

Barbie S: There was a safety pin or two.

[00:54:00]

Craig M: I had the same experience when we were playing in Indianapolis the first time, and there was a bunch of people from the Peru circus that came to see me perform, but what was really nice was ...

Lee S: That's really cool though.

Craig M: Yeah. I went up to see those guys, 'cause they were performers, too, but amateur. I went up there, and there was a gentleman by the name of Bob Hurley that had been a part of the Peru circus since it originated in '59, and he grabbed hold of me, crying.

Brian M: Yeah.

Lee S: Yeah. It's fabulous! It's fabulous.

Craig M: Yeah, it's great, and you made it. You're one of the ones who made it in life

Lee S: That's your validation.

[00:54:30]

Craig M: 'Cause I was the first one to get to go to Ringling.

Lee S: It was for me.

Craig M: There was some other ones that did some smaller shows, but I went to the Ringling first, and then he followed me.

Brian M: Yeah. I was still in school, when he joined, and I'd go visit on the weekends. That's all I could do in school, was daydream about what I was going to do.

Lee S: But you had another brother that was even ... I had no idea that you had another brother.

Brian M: We don't look like ...

Craig M: We have two other brothers.

Lee S: And if you didn't look like your father, 20 years ago ...

Brian M: if he was your brother ...

Craig M: I look like my father now!

Lee S: No, no. Well, no.

Brian M: If he was your brother, would you admit it?

Lorna S: He wouldn't tell anybody.

[00:55:00]

John R: Well, that's all right.

Brian M: No, but I would daydream that I'd get to visit him on the show. That's all I would do in school was daydream about doing it, being a flying trapeze artist.

Lee S: And you're a purist. When you flew, I remember ...

John R: That was pure trapeze.

Lee S: He was a purist, as far as the art form was concerned. I remember you had some issues with your catcher over the things like that, I remember very well. You were right.

Craig M: I learned from the purists, what do I know?

Barbie S: Yes, you did.

[00:55:30]

Craig M: We were ... you wore white, period.

Brian M: Always.

Craig M: And practice, practice, practice, practice.

Barbie S: Yep.

John R: And practice after a show! Until four in the morning.

Craig M: Yeah, sometimes after a six-pack, you got your ass up there.

Brian M: That's the good thing about the canon. I don't practice.

Lee S: Yeah.

Barbie S: Yeah.

Craig M: I had calluses on my butt you would not believe from that trapeze bar.

Brian M: I'd catch two acts, in practice. Not just one, two.

[00:56:00]

Lee S: Yeah. And you were the unsung hero, anyway, always.

Craig M: I sang it!

Lee S: Always. Always. You're the first one to come in the net, first one to take a bow, all of that. You were the most unsung people, and I believe that part, in the movie Trapeze, as shitty and hokey as that movie is, it's the catcher that makes the act.

Craig M: And he was a real trapeze artist.

Lee S: Because if you don't catch the kid doing the triple, it doesn't mean anything.

Barbie S: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Brian M: And that's who got me started in the business was Fay Alexander, whose son was the flying ...

John R: I love her.

Sarah C: She's amazing.

Brian M: ... whose son was the best flier in the movie, Trapeze.

[00:56:30]

Lee S: My sons are named after Fay and after the great Sebastian, so I have Alexander and Sebastian.

Sarah C: That's amazing.

John R: Yeah. Fay was a great man. He was good.

Lee S: I worked with Fay a lot. You worked with Fay a lot. He was wonderful. Rosie was a pain in the ass. She was like a bleeding hemorrhoid. Really.

Craig M: Lots of guys' wives were like that, in those days. How come it's always the wives, huh?

Lee S: Lou Hoff. I know Lou Hoff.

Barbie S: Hey, I'm a great wife. I have no ...

[00:57:00]

Lee S: Cut that shit out! Oh my God. No, it's all right. He's dead. It's all right. Hey, you want to hear some good shit about dead people? You got it. We got that.

Barbie S: That's a whole 'nother hour. Or two.

Brian M: See, aren't you glad you did this, John?

Lee S: John knows where all the bodies are buried. Don't let him ... I know he knows.

Lorna S: All on the train tracks.

Sarah C: Well, on that note ...

John R: The show must go on.

Sarah C: Thank you all so much.

Lee S: Did you ever red light anybody when you were there?

John R: Did who?

Lee S: Did anybody ever get a red light when you were there, on the train?

John R: Yeah. One guy. Yeah.

[00:57:30]

Lee S: We did our cars in the barns.

Craig M: We had a couple of guys that came on the show --

Lee S: Red light means to throw their ass off when it's moving. That's red light.

Craig M: ... we had a couple guys that come on the show that first day, they got nice rooms, they were ... I mean, it's like, what the heck's going on here. Do you remember that?

John R: I heard, but I didn't see it. I didn't ...

Craig M: One night, one of them opened the other one's door with a chain and started beating on him, and those two threw somebody off.

John R: Really?

[00:58:00]

Craig M: Yeah. The kid that they threw off was actually a pretty cool kid, and it was kind of probably a good thing, because those guys were not right after that.

Lee S: Maybe they decided to get rid of the cocaine dealer.

Craig M: Yeah, there was something going on. It was not good. But no, most of the time, everybody got around that.

Lee S: They called it a blanket party, was another fabulous thing.

Barbie S: I'd never heard it called that. I'd just read it.

Lee S: Blanket party?

Barbie S: Yeah.

Lee S: Yeah. I've seen some of those too.

Brian M: When I was there, one of the guys, new guy, he was there a couple weeks, he got drunk
[00:58:30] on the train one, went to the pie car, with a gun, and held them up!

Barbie S: You're kidding me!

John R: While the train was moving, too!

Lee S: I love it. I love it. That's great.

Craig M: Who was the guy that got off the train with the train stopped and there's lightning, and
so he got off and ran to a liquor store, and all he had on was sandals and gym trunks,
and the train ...

Lee S: ... the train left him!

Craig M: And so he told them he was the animal guy, and he did take care of animals.

[00:59:00]

John R: What time are you thinking? What are you talking about?

Craig M: This guy ... the town took care of him, got him fed, and clothed, and got him a bus ticket
...

Lee S: I know it sounds like a Big Joe story.

Lorna S: I wonder if that was Paul Shapiro.

Craig M: I can't remember that kid's name, that guy's name, but ...

Lee S: I don't know. That's before me.

Lorna S: Yeah.

Craig M: I lived on a private car, so I always had a problem getting back on that train. If I got on to
see John or something, I was stuck!

Barbie S: See, that's what we were. We were stuck.

Lee S: What about other people? You could maybe go with them one car in front of you,
maybe ... but yeah, you couldn't go through the [crosstalk 00:59:31]

Barbie S: Couldn't run through the train, yeah. We couldn't go anywhere.

[00:59:30]

Lee S: You could go to the pie car.

Lorna S: No, we couldn't ever go, yeah.

Craig M: And nobody said, "I had five people on my car, so it was great!"

Brian M: I own my own car now.

John R: Yeah, he bought a car.

Barbie S: How long ago did you buy one?

John R: A dream car.

Barbie S: Good for you.

Lorna S: That's awesome.

Barbie S: Good for you.

Lee S: Which one did you get?

Brian M: It has five rooms.

Lee S: Nice. Nice.

Craig M: In his car ...

Brian M: It still smells the same.

Lee S: How much did it cost more? To move it, or to buy it?

Brian M: To move, definitely, did.

[01:00:00]

Lee S: 'Cause I wanted to ... I really wanted to buy one, and I just never really pursued it.

Brian M: Yeah.

Lee S: I just didn't.

John R: I'm a guy that didn't ever get one.

Lee S: I got two wagons.

John R: My wife wouldn't let me buy any.

Lee S: I had Beller beat me out on a couple of the generators that I could use. But he brought a ton of shit.

Brian M: I know. Three generators? Really?

Lee S: Well, he'll resell them, hello.

John R: And this guy, here's what I say. In the 1979 --

Lee S: One of Rudy's chimps attacked you.

[01:00:30]

John R: ... the train derailed. I was sleeping, and my TV was up here, and we derailed. It fell down and it gashed me here.

Lee S: Workers comp for several months!

John R: Yeah.

Lee S: He was a stilt walker! Good work!

John R: 'Cause we derailed, the clown car, and I think one or two other cars.

Barbie S: Is that the one the clown got killed?

John R: No, that was the Blue Unit.

Lee S: That was on the show.

Craig M: That was the time ...

John R: They had another group come in [crosstalk 01:00:58]

Craig M: You have to wait! You're not as interesting [crosstalk 01:01:04]

Barbie S: She turned it off 20 minutes ago.

Craig M: That was that trip, wasn't it? At Lake [crosstalk 01:01:05]

Sarah C: Thank you all so much.

[01:01:00]

Lee S: Go ahead! Try to top that shit!