

CWM Audio 70-3

Interview with Eryn and Brett July 21st, 2017.

Part 2

Interview conducted by LaVahn Hoh

Eryn: Okay, so I'll go back a little bit on the ... The teacher on the Blue unit and I didn't quite see eye to eye. I think there had been some drama on the show and I don't know the story. But she didn't really want me to be there, she didn't really respect my credentials, and so I was a little unhappy with that situation and it became really untenable fairly quickly. And then I had to go and show management and just say, "I don't know what I can do here. I'm not really being allowed to do my job." And so they quickly found out that, oh, there was a teacher leaving on the Red unit, and so that I could just transfer units. So actually I left the show in Baltimore, and we crossed paths in the Pie Car on the Blue unit.

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Brett: The day I arrived was the day before you left.

[00:01:00]

Eryn: Yeah. So Joe was giving him the tour, and you know, "Here's Pie Car." And Joe stopped by me and asked if I had enough boxes for my moves, introduced me to somebody, and I'm pretty sure that my first words were, "Yeah, no offense, but I'm not going to remember you because I'm leaving tomorrow, so have a good one."

[00:01:30] And yeah. How I even came to join the circus, I had watched the ... I think it was a PBS documentary called "Circus". Maybe it wasn't PBS. Anyway it was about Big Apple.

LaVahn Hoh: Yep.

Eryn: And they had a show teacher on there and I said, "Wait a minute, you can be a teacher on the circus? That sounds amazing." And again, I sort of had a life reset as well. Had bought a house at just the wrong time and was getting foreclosure and had lost a job and just went, "You know, let's just do something totally different." Went online and saw that they had an opening for teacher on the circus, so I applied. That's how I got the job.

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LaVahn Hoh: So what was your background, education?

Eryn: Yeah. I had been a teacher in Minnesota. My license is in social studies, grades five through 12, but I had taught at a Montessori high school, and I had taught at a gifted and talented program for all grades. I had done some work in curriculum development. So my background was education, I have a master's degree in education, which I think made me probably the most qualified teacher on the show, maybe ever, because most teachers just had a bachelor's degree and I think

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some maybe didn't even have that. But it's with a homeschool curriculum, it's certainly not necessary because it's right there for you, so you just follow along.

LaVahn Hoh: So what was your last day like for both of you?

[00:03:00]

Brett: My last day was, at the time, more sweet than bitter. There had been some things going on that just made it the right time for me to leave. And I saw the writing on the wall with the elephants going away and everything like that. Originally it was a little sweeter than bitter, but I miss it. I miss it a lot. There was always that feeling that you could go away for a couple of years and it's always going to be here. You can just come back, you know, you can come back to visit. With the show being closed and with everything being scattered to the winds, now there's a little bit more reminiscing going on.

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LaVahn Hoh: How about you, what was ...

Eryn: Yeah. My last day was very hard. I didn't want to leave the show, but at that point in time we were together, and I knew that he needed to leave just for health. And the job of trainmaster is just so stressful as it was, and there was a lot of added stress from certain situations. I don't want to drag anybody's names in the mud.

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LaVahn Hoh: Yep.

Eryn: So we're not going to go there, but ...

LaVahn Hoh: I won't let you.

Eryn: Yeah, exactly. But, you know, he did need to leave, mostly for his own health. And so then I had to make a decision if I wanted to stay on my own or if I wanted to go off the road and join him. So I thought about it for a long time, and ultimately again said, "Well, the show's always going to be here. If I change my mind I can always come back." But saying goodbye to my kids was really hard. Really, really hard. I cried a lot that day just saying goodbye to my kids. And yeah, packing everything up ... And then I did take the train run to the next city, so I'd be a little bit closer to where my final destination was, but then I just got picked up and that was it. So it was definitely sad for me because I do miss a lot of the kids. They're sweeties.

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LaVahn Hoh: So for both of you, this experience here in Baraboo has to be pretty amazing to see lots of people that you worked with.

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Brett: Yeah. Yeah, it's very interesting. I'm noticing though that it's a lot of the generation of circus people, not age-wise, but the circus generation right before we were on.

Eryn: Yeah.

Brett: ... Because most of the people that we were with were there right through the end.

- [00:06:00] And they're younger like us, so now they're just having to start a brand new job, so they couldn't really come. I mean there are some people coming in later today and tomorrow that are of the younger generations. But right now it's amazing to see all these people have an excuse to get together again, you know, people that were on the show in the '70s, '80s, '90s, who just haven't seen each other since then.
- LaVahn Hoh: Yeah.
- Eryn: Yeah, and I think a lot of our friends, thanks to the magic of Facebook, we are able to keep in contact a lot more, I think, than the older generation. But a lot of friends in the circus just said, "It's too soon for us." It's still too fresh, too raw. You know, and, "I just started a new job. I don't have any time off." Like, "I'm still trying to find an apartment." And so it was too much for them to come.
- [00:06:30]
- LaVahn Hoh: So some people don't want to answer this question, some people do. What are your feelings about the closing of Ringling Bros. Barnum & Bailey?
- [00:07:00]
- Brett: I don't think it was necessary. I think that just from ... And I can only speak from my side of the world. I can't speak for the show side because I wasn't there every day, so I don't know, but on my side of the world there were things that we could've changed that would've made everything easy for us. And we could have saved a lot of time, a lot of effort, and a lot of money. But towards the end, we were, all of us, just way to entrenched in our ways. You know, this is the way it's always been so this is the way we're going to do it. And when you get into a mentality like that and you don't change with outside necessity, the environment concerns from the railroads, from the people coming to the show, what do they want, what does everyone want. If you can't make changes that are necessary, this is what happens.
- [00:07:30]
- [00:08:00]
- Eryn: Yeah. I mean, sad. Sad and frustrated too. I think for me one of the most frustrating parts of the job was not interacting with protesters. Just my job and my natural instinct is to be an educator, and so I always felt a pull to be like, "I would like to teach you more about what you don't understand." But we couldn't, it was in our contract that we could not have any contact with protesters, which was for our own safety, really, because certainly there were death threats and ... Honestly, one of ... The day that I probably was the closest to being fired was in Oakland.
- [00:08:30]
- Brett: Yes.
- Eryn: Because in Oakland at the arena they had ... We would go out the backdoor, and to get to the animal compound they had a little one square meter box that protesters could stand in that ostensibly then they were just there to protest the circus people directly. They had cameras that they would put up on poles to try and look into the animal compound and monitor misbehavior or whatever. So anybody, going back and forth backstage would have to go past this little area. And one of my eighth graders, her parents were in the pool act, and she would help them backstage during the pool act. So when her parents' act was coming up, she would go and
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- [00:09:30]

help get all the dogs ready, and then do the act, put the dogs away, and then come back to school. And she came back to school just ... She was white and she was shaking, and she started to just sob because ... I'm going to get a little teary telling this story. But she had had to go past the area with the protesters, and they had basically just abused her and told her that she was an animal abuser and that she was going to pay ... She's just a child. She was a kid.

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LaVahn Hoh: Wow.

Eryn: So it was ...

Brett: The interactions that we had with these people were so far removed from the realities that upper management would allow to be disseminated. The experience of just what the animal activists did was very different for a lot of us than what was allowed to be talked about.

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Eryn: I think we ... I mean, we've all been spit on. We've all been ... "How does it feel to abuse animals all day long?" You know it's ...

Brett: Yeah. Yep.

Eryn: And when you're an adult ... I chose this, you know. I chose this job because it's something that I want to do, because kids need to learn, kids on the circus need to learn too. And I slept very well at night, thank you very much. But when they would go after kids, that was hard. That was really hard. That day when that girl came back to school, it took every ounce of my self-restraint not to just go out there and give them a piece of my mind.

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Brett: I knew I'd made it, and you were hanging around when I got the letter, but knew I'd really made it in the circus world when I got my first death threat letter from PETA.

Eryn: Yeah.

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Brett: They found my address and sent me a letter to the show, and they knew where my kids were. They knew where I was living. They knew where we were going. They had our schedules. They knew everything about us. And I showed her that letter and she could say anything, she just stood there kind of shaking as she read the letter. I knew I'd made it up into the high ranks of the field of entertainment when I got my first death threat from PETA.

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LaVahn Hoh: What a way to get up into high ranks.

Brett: Exactly.

LaVahn Hoh: Oh, my word. Well, let's change the topic a little bit. What's your favorite ... Yeah.

Eryn: Well, actually I want to keep going because I do want to say something and have it sort of recorded for posterity.

LaVahn Hoh: Okay.

Eryn: I think a big reason that the circus closed is that the circus didn't do a good enough job of defending itself. Again, to just an average person who cares about animals, you'll do a little research. You go online, you try and find some videos, but the only information that was out there was coming from the animal rights side, and so then that's the only information that you believe. And I'm not sure why the circus made the choice that it did. I don't know if it was well, "We're not going to dignify those accusations with a response." But they just never really publicly defended themselves. I think behind the scenes there was a lot going on. I know in Minneapolis there had been a push to ban elephant performance or something, and behind the scenes there was a huge push by Feld and Ringling to get local politicians to understand. But they weren't doing that publicly, and I think they should have, because then I think there would have been more information out there. People could have actually seen what we saw every day, which is the elephants were treated sometimes better than the performers were. And I think that's a big reason, a big reason.

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LaVahn Hoh: All right. So what's your favorite memory?

Eryn: So many.

LaVahn Hoh: Yeah.

Brett: Sitting on the vestibule for train runs when I was cognizant enough to actually enjoy what I was looking at.

LaVahn Hoh: A number of people have said the very same thing.

Brett: You know-

Eryn: Oh yeah, there's nothing like sitting on the vestibule.

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Brett: Oh, my God. Especially on runs where the coaches were reversed so we were kind of stationed sort of in the middle of the train, because we were at the back, kind of the coaches. So you had, you know, all the coaches and animal cars up in front of you, then three or four coaches, then the containers and all the flats, and going through some of these amazing landmarks like Horseshoe Curve. I'm sitting in the middle of my train watching myself go through Horseshoe Curve, and I get about halfway through the curve, I can't see the engines anymore up in front of me, and the flat cars are still coming around the back of the corner, and it's just this train stretched out for miles. Going through the Tehachapi Loop in California where the train actually crosses over itself, and you're talking to people, waving to each other,

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the train's crossing over itself. Oh, the coastal route, coming up ...

Eryn: Coming up from San Diego ...

Brett: Coming up from San Diego-

Eryn: ... You are literally on the beach.

Brett: Ocean, train tracks, everything else.

Eryn: Yeah.

[00:15:00]

Brett: I mean, you're literally on the beach for miles, and you're just skirting the coastline. And here again, you're sitting on the vestibule, looking forward or back, and all you see is this long silver snail snaking through the countryside. Train runs were the best when I wasn't so tired from ...

Eryn: Yeah.

Brett: ... Being up for 72 hours.

Eryn: Yeah. Gosh, I had so many, so many fun things. I really enjoyed, I mean as far as
[00:15:30] from a school aspect, we would do a talent show every year or a school play or something. And the year that when we did a talent show, watching all the kids, and some of them doing basically just miniature acts of what the circus was that year, was adorable. Watching the tiger trainer's son in his little miniature, just a perfect little replica of his dad's costume. I think his mom was helping him with a pony, but has displaying a pony act.

Brett: Yeah.

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Eryn: I mean, he was five, so it was so cute. But that was adorable.

LaVahn Hoh: Wow. So who were your best friends on the show? I mean, you were always working.

Brett: Well, for the most part ... Here, again, just on the train side, train crew was a fairly tight nit group.

Eryn: We all had barbecues every night.

[00:16:30]

Brett: We would have barbecues every night. We'd set up a little hobo camp. When the performers were away, the train crew came out to play, is the best way to put it. No, we would get done at 4:00 and everyone would kind of go their separate ways for a little bit, but then we'd all get back together and we'd be barbecuing out in

[00:17:00] the train yard. We'd have instruments out. We'd be playing, just hanging around with each other. It didn't happen every single night, but for the most part that's when we did our hanging out, was when everyone else was at the building performing. That was some of the surreal times for all of us because we would just sit around and it'd be so quiet. There's nobody there.

And then we'd get up in the morning at 8:00 a.m. after all the performers had just barely gone to bed, banging on train cars and they'd get all mad. It's like, "Hey!" This is when we work.

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Eryn: Yeah. I don't know, I had a few close friends on the show. Some of the nursery staff, we would hang out. I was friends with Chris Sullivan, the clown.

Brett: Yeah. Clowns.

Eryn: Some of the clowns, we'd hang out with. Living on 57 car was a kind of interesting experience. 57 car was the last car that had public hallway, but it was only half a car that had public hallway, and then it was the door to the trainmaster's room. And so
[00:18:00] I lived in 57-3, so I was the second to last room on the train, so I was way on the end. So then it was a really long walk to get to Pie Car or any of the other cars on the other end. But so there was an apparent ... Living in 57-3 and 57-4 was always usually me and one of the nursery staff. So we usually hung out together.

[00:18:30] And then I hung out with the previous trainmaster before you came, and then you came. I had to keep an eye on you because I'd heard some things about you. But yeah, then we hung out together, and then we became an item.

LaVahn Hoh: Nice.

Eryn: Yeah.

Brett: It's good to be the king.

LaVahn Hoh: All right. A funny story that happened when you were on the show?

Brett: One that we can tell.

[00:19:00]

LaVahn Hoh: One that you can tell, yeah.

Brett: Must clarify, because there are lots of funny stories, but ...

Eryn: Yeah, there are so many funny stories.

Brett: Not for public consumption.

Eryn: Yes. Yeah. Let me weed all of those out of my brain. Well, there's a cute story. The

[00:19:30] elephants were pretty mischievous. So when we were down in Mexico City, we were close enough that we could walk over to the building in pairs and groups. We wouldn't do it alone, but we had decided since so few of the performers sent their children to Mexico ... Same way the show has been like, "We can't really guarantee their safety." Like, "This is your choice." So probably more than half of the parents just sent their kids to go stay with family or something. So our school numbers were ... I think we maybe had eight kids in school when we were in Mexico, so we

[00:20:00] just decided to have school way early in the day, and then the kids were free then to go to the nursery, but most of them were older, so then they could hang out with their parents or do whatever ... Trying to think if we had any younger kids, I don't know that we did.

Brett: I don't think we did.

Eryn: But anyway, so we had walked over to the building early before any of the shows. And we're just standing outside the backdoor, wasting a little bit of time before we went in, and looked over and the elephant compound was right there. And the elephant crew was kind of laughing and joking, and they were just sitting around.

[00:20:30] They weren't really entirely paying attention. And I watched an elephant kind of do a look around, like look in both directions, see that nobody was watching it, and just reach its trunk way under the fence and grab a water bottle that was sitting there. And then it chewed the water bottle until it broke and then tossed the bottle, like, get rid of the evidence. I was like, "You are sneaky. I saw what you did there."

[00:21:00] Brett: I have so many funny stories. I don't know. The funniest one, the puppy story.

Eryn: Oh, my gosh. Oh, my gosh.

Brett: That's probably the funniest one that I can tell.

Eryn: So we got a dog on the train. When we were in Texas, we bought a bulldog puppy that became an instant hit of train crew.

Brett: Right, named "Lady Meat Wad".

[00:21:30] Eryn: Yep. Lady Meat Wad.

Brett: Yeah.

Eryn: And train crew members were always trying to steal the dog. And I think they-

Brett: It was Dillon and John Qu, yeah.

Eryn: Dillon and Qu, and they didn't know that you were home.

Brett: They didn't know that I was home, no. They didn't know that I was home. I was hanging around at my house, and they didn't know that I was home. And we used to leave the dog ... When we would open the vestibule, the side of the vestibule that was closed, we had just a little baby gate so that she could be outside so she wasn't in a crate, you know, for hours on end.

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So I had just walked into my house to get something and I open the door and there's Qu, holding puppy, looking at me like he had just gotten caught stealing cookie out of a cookie jar. And I'm like, "What are you doing?" "We're here to steal your puppy." I'm like, "No, you're not." So he slowly puts the dog back in, gets back up, turns around, looks at me, looks at Dillon and goes, "Run!" And they go piling off the vestibule. Dillon fell on his face, smashed his nose up.

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Eryn: Oh, my Gosh.

Brett: Qu comes the next day, he had a black eye ...

Eryn: He had a black eye.

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Brett: ... From falling off the vestibule and landing on his face. I was like, "See that's what you get for trying to steal my puppy."

LaVahn Hoh: All right. So did you have any interaction ... Obviously there was that one elephant, but any of the other elephants?

Brett: I interacted with them on a weekly basis because I had to be there to load the stock cars. And if there was any issues during the train run, there was always a handler in there with me. But no, I went in and out of those animal cars all the time with the elephants. I had some favorites. I got to know a couple of the elephants fairly well to where I was comfortable enough to ... You know, the handler could be down at the other end of the car and I could be doing some work, and they'd listen to me enough. Yeah, no, I interacted with the elephants a lot.

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LaVahn Hoh: Any other animals?

Brett: The horses.

Eryn: Because those were the only ones that went on the train.

Brett: Right.

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Eryn: Camels and tigers went over land.

Brett: Over land, yeah. And I avoided the tigers like a plague.

Eryn: That's another funny story. We'd be at these buildings, and the building security

guys would always want to get close to the animals, and they'd be like, looking at them, like get real close to the tigers ... Because when the tigers are in the transfer cages, they can't get ya', but they-

Brett: Oh, no, they can still lift their tail and get ya'.

LaVahn Hoh: Oh, yeah.

Eryn: Well, that's what we would say, because the guys would be standing real close, looking all tough, and we just look over and go, " You know tigers can pee like ten feet behind them, right?" And you literally just watch them back up 11 feet from the cage, like ... Not so tough now, are ya'?

LaVahn Hoh: What about anything frightening that happened on the show that really ... Accidents or anything that you were frightened of?

Eryn: We were in school when the accident happened in Providence. The hair hang accident.

LaVahn Hoh: The hair hang, yeah.

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Eryn: And again, a lot of the kids, they had cousins that were in the act and family. So trying to keep the kids calm when that news happened was challenging.

Brett: For me it was such a lack of control over where people were when I was getting to move the train. Because performers, even though they'd been through the class and they supposedly knew better, performers were constantly getting on and off the train when I was moving it. And I can't be everywhere in 3,500 feet at the same time. We had people watching and things like that, but you know, a train crew would tell somebody, "You can't get off the coaches yet. The train's not spot." And they'd be like, "I don't care." And just get right off the train.

Eryn: Yeah.

Brett: You know, of course sometimes there was discipline meted out after the fact, but I can't tell you, as a guy who's responsible for that, how scary it is to think that there might be somebody under your train trying to cut through, and you don't know for sure. But you get used to that after a while.

LaVahn Hoh: Yeah, that'll wear on your nerves.

Brett: Just a touch.

LaVahn Hoh: Wow. Do you have a favorite item or souvenir that you brought from the show as a memento, other than your memories?

Eryn: That I can tell?

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Brett: I think you're going to find that there's a lot of mementos to be had.

Eryn: Yeah. Yep.

LaVahn Hoh: What's the strangest thing you ever saw with the circus? I mean, you talked about the coast and all the beautiful things.

Brett: Well, we had ... I guess it's not really strange. Well, it's strange, but it's yet again, another story funny story. So on the Red unit, performers would actually come out and help us chain the train.
[00:27:00]

Eryn: Oh, my gosh, I love this story. Oh, I love this story.

Brett: ... So that we could get everything done quicker and get out sooner. It was called "Cherry Pie", they'd actually make a little extra money to do it. So we-

Eryn: And that was I did. I did that for probably a year.

Brett: Yeah, you did that for a while. And then-

Eryn: Chaining the wagons.

Brett: So we had ... It was a crapshoot as to who would come out sometimes. And we had the Mongolian strongmen come out.
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Eryn: ... When they joined the show.

Brett: Yep, and they decided they were going to come out and make a little extra money and help me chain the train. So that's fine, and I send them down the flats. And these bars, these chaining bars that we use are big. I mean, they're a good ...

Eryn: An inch solid of ...

Brett: ... Inch solid steel with a big 3/4 inch ratchet end welded on the end.

Eryn: Square plug, yeah.

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Brett: So you can get some oomph on it to make sure that the wagons aren't going to move. So I send the Mongolian strongmen down the train, and they're chaining up, and I'm still loading the train with the rest of the train crew. And I see this one guy, one Mongolian strongman come back and he comes up and he goes, "I sorry." I'm like, "What happened?" But he shows me the chaining bar and it's bent at like a 45 degree angle. And I'm like, "Note to self, never make him mad." I'm like, "It's okay. Don't worry about it. Go back and finish the train, you'll be all right."

[00:28:30]

Eryn: Yeah.

LaVahn Hoh: Any others?

Eryn: The word "strange" is ...

Brett: When you live on the circus, you live in strange, you know?

Eryn: We had everything. Everything is strange and nothing is strange, you know.

Brett: I mean, you see a bearded lady come by the train to visit a friend because she just came off the side show, and you're ... You don't think to yourself, "Man, that's weird." You're just like, "Oh, hey, Julie! How are you?" You know, it's not strange.

Eryn: Actually, her name's Dakota.

[00:29:00]

Brett: Right.

Eryn: Yeah. Lots of funny stuff, weird stuff. I don't know if it's some strange stuff.

Brett: Not strange.

Eryn: I mean, is it strange to have 12 clowns on a vestibule having a drinking party to Bob Ross videos? You drink whenever he says "friendly trees".

Brett: That's not really ... That's normal clown alley.

Eryn: That's normal.

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Brett: That's not strange. You know, that's the kind of thing you get used to. The first time you walk by you might go, "Huh." Then you walk by it the next night, you're like, "Okay."

Eryn: "I guess that's just the way it is." Yeah.

Brett: You walk by it the next night, and you're like, "All right. I guess this is the way it's going to be in this town. Maybe it'll be different next city." You know?

LaVahn Hoh: What was your favorite city?

Eryn: So many, for so many different reasons. There's certainly ... Vegas was fun if could survive it.

Brett: Yeah.

Eryn: ... Because you were stumbling distance from Fremont Street.

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Brett: The train literally parked at the top of Fremont Street.

Eryn: Yeah.

Brett: I mean, it's like the distance for me to get to Fremont Street from the train is like I just cross the river, and there I am.

Eryn: Yeah. It was real close.

Brett: So that was a rather interesting city for us on train crew.

Eryn: Plus, they were so mean to you guys.

LaVahn Hoh: Do I dare ask why?

Brett: You can dare to ask, and I can dare not to tell when it's being recorded for posterity. Yet again, I'm not going to name any names.

[00:30:30]

Eryn: They seemed like they always did the bi-annual inspections in the cities that were the most fun.

Brett: Yeah.

Eryn: Which just was good for the palmetto folks that came out and were like, "Oh, we'll do the inspection and then we can go have fun." But for you guys it was like, you had so much work getting ready for those inspections.

Brett: Yes.

Eryn: So what was entailed with the inspections?

Brett: Okay, we had two types of inspections, and they happened three times a year. So we had six inspections a year because you had three interior, three exterior. So

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we had six inspections a year because you had three interior, three exterior. The interior inspection was basically like having a home inspection. They go through with a fine-toothed comb. They open every electric cabinet. They check every single GFCI outlet. They check all the ... Anything that you can think of inside the train, they will check. Emergency lighting, fire extinguishers, crash tools in every room. Now let me tell you how much of a pain in the butt it is to try to convince somebody that they really need to have that crash tool in the crash bar underneath their sink when they could be storing something else like a broom there. And then you open up that door, and now there's a broom where the crash bar should be, and the inspectors are not too happy with you. You know, little things like that.

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And then the exterior inspection is everything outside the train. Wheels, brake

[00:32:00] shoes, brake appliances, running gear, diaphragms, couplers, coupler height, HEP cables, water lines, water cables, flange heights, flange thickness, tread heights, tread thicknesses, you name it. Anything that is regulated under or outside of the train, you know, paint peeling, body styles, everything, just everything. And these

[00:32:30] inspections would generate books of items, and there was items that had to be fixed and items that you know, well ...

Eryn: Eventually fix it.

Brett: Eventually fix this.

Eryn: Yeah.

Brett: So you were constantly, every day, working on the train and working towards the goal of having the smallest inspection list that you possibly could.

LaVahn Hoh: [00:33:00] The inspections, did they get more strenuous after the accident in which one of the clowns was killed in Florida?

Brett: As far as I understand it, and I could be wrong, I believe that before the accident, they did not have these outside inspections. You know, because these inspections are done by outside people. They're not done by Ringling personal. There is personnel from Palmetto who are there to supervise the inspection, but the inspectors are not Ringling or Feld. They're from a completely different company.

[00:33:30] And I believe that that started after the accident, even though the accident was almost unpreventable.

LaVahn Hoh: Right.

Brett: If you read the NTSB report and you dig into what actually happened.

Eryn: Not [crosstalk 00:33:47].

Brett: An outside inspector would not have found that defect.

LaVahn Hoh: No. So what'd you do with time off?

Brett: What time off?

LaVahn Hoh: Yeah.

[00:34:00] Brett: I really didn't get time off.

Eryn: Sometimes I would drag you out after we got spotted, to go have lunch or something.

Brett: Yes, but even then my phone would be ringing all day, every day. Even when I was

supposed to have a day off, I didn't get a day off.

Eryn: Yeah. I mean, I was lucky because I wasn't on floor crew, so I didn't have to really load anything in. We could load school in in just a matter of a couple hours. So generally when we got to a new city, I would have ... Depending on the time that they gave us to get in, I would have a day to see stuff in a new city. So I would go do touristy stuff and walk around, take a cab or take an Uber someplace and look around. Because the circus tradition, people have been coming to these cities for so long, there's always someone going, "Oh, you should go this restaurant." Or, "You should go see this park." Or, "You should go do this." And so you kind of do the things that people really recommend as being fun things. And sometimes you stumble on new things, and you pass that information along. But it gets tiring after a while.

[00:34:30]

[00:35:00]

Brett: It does.

Eryn: Every week, every week, every week. New city, new city, new city, new city. And some cities you're like, "Oh, I'm in San Diego. I should go do something." And you're just like, "I literally can't. I'm just going to sleep today." Like, "I'm not going to do anything today. Even though I'm in this fantastic city and there's so many things to do, I'm just burned out on touring."

[00:35:30]
LaVahn Hoh: I had a number of friends who preferred to go over land rather than on the train. I mean, you were stuck on the train. Did you ever ...

Eryn: I went over land once. One time, and didn't like it. I mean the train runs were so amazing, and it's ... Man, you go to sleep in your bed and you can just wake up somewhere else. Who else can say that, you know? It's pretty amazing. You can relax, you can have a friend over, you can watch a movie. Definitely it was in Pie Car one time ... And that's how Sullivan and I became friends. We were in Pie Car having breakfast and just chatting because that was the only seat that was available. And I just looked at him, and it was like 11 o'clock in the morning, and I just went, "Want to drink and make puppets in my room?" And he was like, "I don't know you, but yes." Like, "Yes, let's do that." So we did, we just went back to my room and I had a bunch of felt and we just made puppets and drank a lot of wine.

[00:36:00]

[00:36:30]
LaVahn Hoh: That sounds like a favorite memory, I think.

Eryn: That was a very good memory, yeah. That was a fun time.

Brett: Strange how everything on the circus, all the good memories involve alcohol.

Eryn: So many of them.

Brett: So much alcohol.

Eryn: Yeah, I the real reason why there are so few circus reality shows is because you can't show children that stuff. My goodness.

Brett: Exactly. We don't want to start teaching them that it's not good to have that much alcohol in your blood system.

Eryn: Oh, my goodness. So much drinking.

Brett: Or the way that it's supposed to be said, you don't want to have that much blood in your alcohol system.

[00:37:00]
LaVahn Hoh: Oh my. What haven't I asked? Is there anything that you want to add to this?

Brett: I think I'm good.

Eryn: I mean, we could tell our story.

LaVahn Hoh: That would be nice, yes.

Brett: Well, you already basically told it. Met you my first day on the Blue show and you're like, "You're going to forget me."

Eryn: I did.

Brett: And you did.

Eryn: Yeah. But you didn't.

[00:37:30]
Brett: Yeah. I ended up moving onto the Red show when I became the trainmaster there. And she was spying on me for her old friends, and things just sort of went downhill from there.

Eryn: Yeah. Well, they ... The circus gossip wheel always turns.

Brett: Oh, as the wheel turns.

Eryn: Yeah.

Brett: And the funniest part about it is about .01% of the stuff that goes around that train is actually true.

Eryn: Oh, gosh, is ... It is ... True. Yeah.

[00:38:00]
Brett: Or has any validity to it. About 99.9% of it is pure elephant poop.

Eryn: Yeah. Malarkey. I don't know.

Brett: Buffalo biscuits.

Eryn: Yeah. So yeah, I had heard that you were kind of joker and you didn't know what you were doing, and so I was just watching and waiting to see what you messed up. But then you didn't mess anything up. Such a disappointment.

Brett: The train actually started being on time or early.

Eryn: The train actually started ... Yeah. And the inspections record reports got shorter and shorter. No, we would hang out because I would get done, school would get done before the show was out. So a lot of times I would try and catch a ride home early with, you know, Pie Car would get done early, or sometimes it was an animal change bus coming back that I would catch. And so everyone else would still be at the show.

[00:38:30]

Brett: Right.

Eryn: But I'd go knock on his door and be like, "Hey, you want to watch some M*A*S*H?"

Brett: Yes, I had the entire series of M*A*S*H on DVD.

Eryn: Yeah.

Brett: Yeah.

Eryn: Yep. Exactly.

Brett: So ...

Eryn: Yeah, and I think-

Brett: And then it started with that, and then I knew that she would be coming by, so I would make dinner because her cooking on the train consisted of ...

[00:39:00]

Eryn: Dude, popcorn is a meal. Don't judge me. Don't judge my life.

Brett: Her cooking on the train consisted of a bag of popcorn of a Pop-Tart.

Eryn: Pop-Tarts are gross, but also pickles make an acceptable meal.

Brett: Yes.

Eryn: Pickles and like a can of Coke. Right on.

Brett: I guess what I'm trying to say is that you ... By when I say "her cooking", I mean that she didn't.

[00:39:30]

Eryn: It's hard. I mean, you have a toaster oven or a microwave. So what are you really going to do, you know? Other people would have like a hot pot and stuff, or one of those little single burners, but ...

Brett: Yeah.

LaVahn Hoh: So talk about your living quarters on the train.

Eryn: Well, my room, I had a state room, which was an eight by eight. So I had the bunks, like two bunks. Top bunk, bottom bunk. I usually kept ... I never had the table set up underneath. I just kept a bed above and below. I would sleep up above, but on train runs I'd like to lay on the bed below just so I could look out the window. And then, you know, just a little strip of floor, and then tiny sink. Little fridge, mini fridge. Microwave.

[00:40:00]

Brett: I started out in a double state on the Blue show, which is basically just like what she had, except I had a private shower. Good to be the king. And then when I moved to the Red show, I moved into a coffin. So I literally lived on the smallest room on the train.

[00:40:30]

Eryn: The four by eight, yeah.

Brett: And then I moved into the biggest room on the train. And then I had a half car in 57, and I lived in the trainmaster's room.

Eryn: Which is nice because there was an actual oven and four ...

Brett: Yep. Full-sized fridge.

Eryn: Full-sized stove. Yep.

Brett: Stove, oven.

Eryn: Full-sized fridge.

Brett: Your own washer, you dryer. A tub.

[00:41:00]

Eryn: Yep. Yep. A tub.

Brett: Which was unheard of.

Eryn: Yeah.

LaVahn Hoh: It's good to be the king.

Brett: It's good to be the king. It's good to be the king.

Eryn: Yeah. And I didn't ... I mean, we started dating and I resisted moving in, because there's a lot of perceptions about ...

Brett: That whole culture of ... Yeah.

Eryn: You know.

Brett: Dating on the train is a very, very fickle thing.

Eryn: It is, yeah.

Brett: You know.

[00:41:30]

Eryn: Well, and people just assume, "Oh, you're just dating him for his room." You know, and it's ...

Brett: Yeah.

Eryn: I'm not going to say I didn't date you for your tub because that was kind of true. But yeah, eventually I moved in. And when we were in Mexico, went out on that big day trip and then you proposed on top of the pyramids.

Brett: Pyramid of the Sun at Teotihuacan is where we got engaged.

Eryn: Yes. Yep.

[00:42:00]

Brett: Yep. Not many people can say that.

LaVahn Hoh: Yeah.

Eryn: Yeah, that's true. Yeah, and we had our dog and then we left the show and I think ... I don't know how far you want me to go on this. Relationships are different on the train. They're different on the circus.

Brett: Yeah.

Eryn: ... Because you're literally working together, you're living together, it's constant, you're constantly together. And so then when you leave the show, suddenly there's life happening around you and you're not in a bubble anymore, and what worked on the train doesn't always work off the train.

[00:42:30]

Brett: Yeah.

Eryn: Would you say that's a fair statement.

Brett: Yeah, yeah.

[00:43:00]

LaVahn Hoh: I get the feeling you would not have traded that lifestyle for anything.

Eryn: Not for the world.

Brett: No. It was an amazing experience.

Eryn: It was honestly the best three years of my life, hands down. Best three years of my life.

Brett: You and I had some really good times on that train.

Eryn: Yeah, we did.

[00:43:30]

LaVahn Hoh: And one last question, who was your favorite character or performer in the show?

Eryn: Different ones for different reasons. Did you even ever see a show?

Brett: What, I saw one show. No, two. I saw two. I ...

Eryn: I think I made you go see it when you decided you were leaving. I was like, "You have to at least see the show before you go."

Brett: I saw it once with my parents and then I saw it, yeah, and then I saw it once before
[00:44:00] I left. So yeah, I don't really have a favorite, but I wasn't there enough to ...

Eryn: Honestly, I think Alexander Lacey's cat act is the best I've ever seen. The best. I think Taba is hilarious. His totally [inaudible 00:44:18], can't understand a word he's saying.

Brett: He's saying "sugar". He keeps saying "sugar".

Eryn: Well ... Sugar.

Brett: A sugar.

[00:44:30]

Eryn: Yeah. But I don't even have ... You know, I love the clowns, and I love my particular clowns that were my buddies. I mean, I've had different interactions with a lot of performers because I had their kids in school, and so I might've got to see a different side of them. Nadia, who's part of the iron jaw act, and I had her son, and every day she would pack him a homemade Russian meal. I don't know how she got the time to do it, but she did, and she was amazing, and we are all sadder that she's not with us.
[00:45:00]

Brett: Yeah. This has been a hard year for the Red show.

Eryn: Yeah.

Brett: The worst yesterday, and everything.

Eryn: Yeah. Two people have died since the show, ever since we left. Leaving the show and leaving the circus is ... Nobody tells you how hard that's going to be. I mean, people ... "Running away with the circus, how was your transition when you got there? What were the first things that you saw?" Leaving.
[00:45:30]

Brett: Yeah.

Eryn: Trying to running away from the circus was so hard because your life has been the show.

Brett: Yeah.

Eryn: I mean, you don't have a car. You don't have a home. You don't have a job. You have to basically start from absolute scratch and build a life.

[00:46:00]

Brett: Start from nothing.

Eryn: And again, it's ... Nothing moves. God, we're still here? How long have we been here?

Brett: Exactly.

Eryn: Like, okay, we've been here a month. Like, we should go somewhere. It's too long.

Brett: Yeah. This is way too long to be in the same place.

Eryn: To be in the same place. We gotta go.

Brett: I need to change the scenery.

Eryn: Let's go.

Brett: You know, and I think that the other thing that people don't realize is that we talk about the show, what went on at the arena. That's not the circus. That's not the circus life. Life is what happened on the train. The train was the circus. The train is the circus life. That's where relationships were formed. That's where life happened, and that's where children were born. That train was literally the life and the breath of the circus. When you went to the building, you went to work. When you were at the train, that's when you lived. That's when you enjoyed life. That's where all these relationships that you're seeing this weekend, all these relationships came
[00:46:30]

[00:47:00] out of that train.

Eryn: Yeah.

Brett: You didn't have somebody just go to the building and ... Go stay in a hotel and come to the building. Yeah, they have friends maybe, but the real connections that everybody had came out of that train. 14 guys kept that connection moving every day.

[00:47:30]

LaVahn Hoh: I think that's a great way to end this interview. Perfect. Thank you.

Brett: You're very welcome. Thank you-