

CWM Audio 70-6

Interview with Colin Murphy

July 21st, 2017

Pete Shrake: It is July 21st, 2017. We are in the Elephant House at Circus World Museum and we are with Colin Murphy who had some time with the Ringling show. Colin, please tell us your story.

Colin Murphy: As a background, I was originally a child back in Peru, Indiana when the youth was trained by retired performers from Ringling and other circuses. Having 15 years of performing it came as a real surprise when visiting friends in Miami when Ringling had arrived and we were offered the opportunity to work on the ring [curb 00:00:45] crew, basically on the quiet side or the invisible side of the show.

[00:01:00] Ring curb crew is charged with bringing in the mats and the ring curb, lacing the mats together, setting it up whenever the circus arrives, and taking it apart when the circus leaves. Aside from that, we're responsible for cleaning up the little predigested hay balls that many of the animals leave around the track or in the ring. I happened to be tasked with center ring and as such I tried to be invisible when animal acts were on. If they [00:01:30] happened to deposit a few mementos around the ring I would clean them up between.

[00:02:00] It just so happened that I was on the red unit in 1975 with, among others, Gunther Gable Williams. He had some of the most interesting and prolific animals in both the track and in the ring, but one thing that the elephants very seldom did was deposit their hay filled cannonballs in the middle of the ring. Usually they were spread around and it was not much of an issue.

[00:02:30] I was scheduled to leave the show in Madison Square Garden and I had given two weeks notice, which are the head of the ring curb crew, Andrew Robinson, who is called dummy, has said he had never had experienced. With only a few days left before I was leaving I was in my favorite spot beside center ring when Gunther's elephant teeter board act came on. It just so happened that as soon as he landed on the in ring elephant's back the tail went up.

[00:03:00] That was actually my cue, but this was a unique situation since he's standing on the top of the elephant at the same time the elephant was producing cannonballs. I made the choice and trotted into the ring and began catching the almost center of the ring cannonballs, stacking them very artistically on the shovel. Gunther hopped down off the elephant, came over, shook my hand and I gathered up the remainder, trotted out of [00:03:30] the ring and leaped over the ring curb just as Gunther did when he was running from ring to ring.

[00:04:00] This, of course, was my performing background, so when I lifted the shovel and let the cannonballs cascade into the big bin beside me. I turned around and styled back to Gunther in the ring. Apparently the union light crew at Madison Square Garden appreciated it, as did the crowd. We had a standing ovation from Madison Square

Garden on Saturday night with a packed house. All of the [inaudible 00:04:09] spots were thrown on my little corner just outside the ring and they turned off the ring lights.

[00:04:30] Gunther was in the dark and this small pool of light just outside center ring is where the invisible ring curb crew fellow stood. As a result Gunther eventually left the ring, came out and gave me a great big hug. He was quite good about it and regaining his act, he went back, finished and afterward, the next day when I saw him he said, "You see. It's not what you do, it's how you do it," which I actually had heard many times before but I didn't tell him that.

[00:05:00] For the remaining days that I was there every time his elephant lifted a tail he moved it over to deposit the cannonballs just outside the ring. That was my biggest applause, biggest audience, and it was in a job that was not intended to attract that much attention. As a result, I remember fondly my time in 1975 with Ringling Brothers, Barnum and Bailey and Gunther Cable Williams.

[00:05:30]

Pete Shrake: Tom, thank you very much.

Colin
Murphy: It's my pleasure.