

CWM Audio 77

Peggy Williams Interview, August 8, 2018

Interview Transcript Part 1-2

- Peggy Williams: [00:00:00](#) Stop. (laughs)
- Scott O'Donnell: [00:00:02](#) So, how many years did you clown?
- Peggy Williams: [00:00:03](#) Okay. I clowned for 10 years from 1970 to 1980, and then I, um, went to the corporate office, which was two, three, four corporate offices ago for Feld Entertainment, their corporate office-
- Scott O'Donnell: [00:00:16](#) And how did that opportunity come about? What was the opportunity, the transition from clowning to corporate?
- Peggy Williams: [00:00:21](#) Oh, well, it ... Okay. So, it was all because of the education stuff that I was doing when I would go out and do PR. Um, I was doing a lot of stuff in schools. I was introducing kids to a lot of names for things, a lot of opportunities, a lot of information about the circus or what we called What in the show 'cause kids really don't have the handle on what's the difference between a high wire and a tight rope? Really, nothing, but if you call it two different things, what's the difference? Nothing. Right? (laughs) Um, things about flying trapeze versus solo trapeze versus web versus, uh, and you know, all the different terminologies we use to identify things in the circus.
- Peggy Williams: [00:01:02](#) And, um, while I was on the road, I did so many ... I, I would, uh, occasionally, I had to understudy for my costume, um, because I was able to go and do advanced clowning, which means you go by yourself to a town you're gonna come up to. They wanted to, you know, like a Washington or a New York or places where we're gonna be for a while, they really want word of mouth to get out there. So, because I was the girl, I was able to have that opportunity, and I had to develop a lot of materials for schools that would make my presence in the classroom valid for their curriculum, whether it was state history or ...
- Peggy Williams: [00:01:41](#) And I had this ... I worked with two amazing people, Dr. Fenner, Dr. Mildred Fenner, um, she was the editor of the National Education Association Magazine, um, and she was a wife of one of the executives at Feld Entertainment, um, whose name was Contin Fenner, and he was a major key player in the marketing. She was a key player ... 'cause we were getting letters all the

time. This is the days of mimeograph, okay? This is the days of, you know, you wanna communicate with someone, you type them a letter and fix all the mistakes with whiteout and then you mimeograph it or somehow, uh, keep a copy in your files and, um, send them the answers to their questions.

Peggy Williams: [00:02:28](#) And Dr. Fenner and I had a conversation one day 'cause I was doing all the school shows out there and I said, "I- isn't there a way, isn't there a way we could simplify what we can hand out? You know, can we do some standard materials and reference them with a live performance, within a live performance?" And, um, so, that's what we were ... There's three of us. Um, Judy was our, uh ... We had an actual secretary, who was actually opening letters from teachers, making sure they got their appropriate response. Dr. Fenner was the one who wrote the responses, and some of the curriculum, and I field tested them. So, I'd be out on the road and come back and we'd have these meetings. I'd be out on the road and come back, and I was doing a lot of advanced.

Peggy Williams: [00:03:11](#) It got to be that there was really thousands of teachers were writing us. And you probably get that hear from teachers questions about something, and, and it requires a response, uh, you know?

Scott O'Donnell: [00:03:24](#) Right.

Peggy Williams: [00:03:24](#) So, um, what we did was she would write generic materials that would qualify for educational requirements to be used in a classroom, and then I would be the live presenter out on the road. She did not travel with me. She stayed in, in Washington, and she was the director of the education services department, which lasted until Mattel bought the show and cut that department out because it wasn't a revenue. Uh, in fact, a couple of things happened if you look at how schools changed.

Peggy Williams: [00:03:59](#) Um, we got all these letters, and so, there was a lot of mailing, a lot of cost to mailing. And that was fine if it went to the schools and everybody in the school used it, right? Then homeschools like in the '90s, homeschools became a thing. Homeschool people really communicate with each other. They have these conventions. They have conferences. They have materials for homeschoolers and, and how to, um, just how to do everything, you know, how to, how can you make bowling part of a science thing for homeschoolers to have fun and learn at the same time? Amusement parks did the same thing. Science of, um, the roller coasters and those kind of things, all beautiful materials.

- Peggy Williams: [00:04:41](#) Hershey Park, one of the best, I think, for the roller coaster, but at any rate, um, now with all the homeschools, your ROI on what you sent out in the mail is not being used by a school of 500 kids. It's being used by a family of five. So, you have many more requests and much more going out and the class were going up, but it wasn't selling tickets. Uh, you know, uh, so, we ran into that problem of it was too popular. And we had the same popularity problem with when we had the all access pre-show. People liked so much going down on the, the arena floor, uh, before the show started that it was too crowded.
- Peggy Williams: [00:05:23](#) We had the same fantastic problem that people liked what we were offering too much, right? (laughs) We couldn't accommodate the crowds on either the mail and the delivery or with the same materials would go many places. So, um, I went to the corporate office to work on this transformation of the educational department with Dr. Fenner and our amazing Judy. Um, so-
- Scott O'Donnell: [00:05:51](#) And this is pre-Mattel, right?
- Peggy Williams: [00:05:52](#) This is ... Yeah, this was ... No. Mattel was, Mattel was bef- uh, was during this whole thing.
- Scott O'Donnell: [00:05:59](#) Okay.
- Peggy Williams: [00:06:00](#) So, so, our education department was a line item when the show was sold to Mattel, and they looked at it and they saw that it costs money instead of bringing in money, and that wasn't, that wasn't their plan.
- Scott O'Donnell: [00:06:11](#) And for those-
- Peggy Williams: [00:06:12](#) They said, "You're entertainment, and you're not education."
- Scott O'Donnell: [00:06:14](#) For those that might not know who Mattel is in that chapter of Ringling history.
- Peggy Williams: [00:06:18](#) Oh, wow! So, Mattel Toys-
- Scott O'Donnell: [00:06:20](#) Can you give a little context to that?
- Peggy Williams: [00:06:21](#) Yeah. Mattel Toys, um, Mattel Corporation, I wanna get the dates right here. I may have to look them up. Mattel owned the circus for 10 years or owned Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey. The Felds continued to manage the circus and hired the acts and do the rehearsals and managed the tours, but Mattel

was the parent company. And so, a lot of things changed during that. Mattel, I think, did not realize how expensive it was to have animals because you have veterinarians and you have tents and you have all these different, you know? You have dumpsters and you have, uh, shovels and wheelbarrows and a lot of things that you don't normally think of the backside of the circus when you're looking at the circus.

- Peggy Williams: [00:07:08](#) Um, so, a circus is a very costly thing to run no matter how big it is or how small. And, um, they made a lot of line item cuts, and the education department, certainly, was one of them 'cause it didn't change the quality of the show. So, we were separated out and Allen Bloom, this was 1980, hmm, early in 1982, like February 1982, when Allen Bloom, who was the chief marketing officer at that point in time and worked hand-in-hand with Irvin Feld, who was, um, still alive then, he didn't pass away till 1984, uh, 1982, Allen Bloom called me into his office and this was the second corporate office that I had.
- Peggy Williams: [00:07:55](#) I, actually, had worked in the office there, and I'm, I'm saying second corporate office because in my history, personally, there's been four major corporate offices in the Feld Entertainment-
- Scott O'Donnell: [00:08:05](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Peggy Williams: [00:08:05](#) ... and the current on being in Florida.
- Scott O'Donnell: [00:08:07](#) Where was the first one?
- Peggy Williams: [00:08:08](#) Well, the very first one was in Washington, D.C. and it was 1015 18th Street Northwest, and that was just the business office. It wasn't a production office. They didn't make props there. That was somewhere else. They didn't fix the trains there. That was somewhere else. It was all down in Florida, but that was that office. And then, then they moved to 3201 New Mexico Avenue, which because they, they literally ran out of space, you'd walk in the office, there were boxes up against every wall and every hallway was lined with boxes. It was just ... They outgrew it, you know? They added more shows.
- Peggy Williams: [00:08:42](#) They bought, um, they bought Ice Follies and Holiday on Ice, which soon within several years be- you know, those were old brands that needed refreshing, and that's a gift that the Felds have especially Irvin Feld refreshed, uh, Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey, put it in buildings, reduced the labor

requirement and refreshed the, the wardrobe and everything was, uh, you know, added 50 years to the longevity of the show.

- Peggy Williams: [00:09:09](#) Well, they did that in the office, um, to they, they had to get into another office because of these other shows that they had bought. So, they bought Ice Follies and Holiday on Ice, turned it into Disney on Ice, which is still going today for after what? 35, almost 40 years, I think. Anyway, uh, back to the offices, they, they moved to 3201 New Mexico Avenue, which is right by American University in Washington, D.C., if anybody knows that area. And, um, that's where I worked with Dr. Fenner and with our, our beloved Judy, who handled more correspondents in a week than I've ever handled in my life. She was ripping and tearing. It, it was just really stacks the stuff everyday. Happy teachers on the other end.
- Peggy Williams: [00:09:54](#) Um, then they outgrew that office and they moved over to Vienna, Virginia, um, 8607, um, what's that? What's the name of the street? Westwood Center Drive.
- Scott O'Donnell: [00:10:08](#) Yes.
- Peggy Williams: [00:10:08](#) 8607 Westwood Center Drive, 22182. How do I know this? I don't know. And that was an amazing one because, uh, Mr. Feld had, uh, um, bought that building when it was built, and he was the proprietor of the building later on. He sold it and leased the space that he still needed. And after that office, the whole kit and caboodle, the corporate offices went down to Florida, where the trains were being refurbished and the productions were rehearsed and everything is now under one roof, but it took 50 years, and they're still doing well today with that corporate office, but it's a really big building, but it's full, right? They keep adding brands, and then they reduced the Ringling brand.
- Peggy Williams: [00:10:49](#) Anyway, back to education. So, we got really popular responses from teachers, and I was doing ... One year, I did 70 seminars in different cities. I was, I was in the air all yearlong every weekend. I was doing Saturday morning teacher seminars. And I still hear from some of those teachers. Um, but what happened to my job in the education, um, uh, department when it got cut, Allen Bloom called me into his office and said, "Well, I guess you know we work for Mattel." I said, "I do. We've done many PR parties for Mattel." Now, they, they have a different feeling about education than personally I do or, um ... And he said, "I, I have to ... I regret to tell you that they have, they have, uh, your job's come to an end because they have, basically, eliminated your, your, the department."

- Peggy Williams: [00:11:46](#) So, um, wow was I surprised 'cause I was in the middle of so many fun projects, and people were using these materials. We were getting requests from English-speaking countries like, like, uh, Australia, New Zealand, Scotland. I mean, you know, we were sending stuff overseas, where circus never played, where Ringling Brothers would never play.
- Peggy Williams: [00:12:07](#) And, um, but that's how that was. It got real popular and then it got stopped. And the saving grace is that aol.com came into being. It was one of the early popular, um, internet uses, and they had an area that's ref- AOL kids only. We couldn't put teacher materials there because that would have made it for teachers. This is for kids. So, we started making the, redoing the materials, so that kids could access them directly if they could get on the AOL kids-only.
- Peggy Williams: [00:12:42](#) So, there was a, there, there was now a much cheaper way to do it, but we had to redo everything. Everything had to become digitized, the art and everything. So, we had to spend some more money redoing the digitization. In the meantime, Mattel sold the, sold the whole company back to the Felds.
- Peggy Williams: [00:12:59](#) I mean, this all happened in, in jump steps, but, um, the education was still in high demand, and, um, Mattel after 10 years of owning the circus got out of the picture. They had expanded quite a bit in their holdings, and, um, maybe, maybe too many at one time, and so they kinda backed down, and selling the circus back to the Felds was one of the things they did, and which made us happy, made us ... because you could get an answer from the top and it would make sense for that circus, right?
- Peggy Williams: [00:13:33](#) So, but back when they actually did cut my job, I had a meeting with Allen Bloom at 4:00 in the afternoon on a Tuesday, and he said, "So, your job is gone," and he said, "So, you know, we, we need to clear your office out." That's always the hard thing, when you get the cardboard box and you have to clear the things out of your office. And I'm like, "Oh, no."
- Peggy Williams: [00:13:54](#) I started like, you know, like a typical woman. I had a little tear in my eye. He didn't have any Kleenex in his room. I said, "Allen Bloom, you ought to know, if you fire a woman, you need Kleenex in your room. I'm just saying. That's not a clown thing. That's real. I'm a woman. You just fired me." I mean, we were good friends, right? And I ... There's nothing I could do about losing my job.

- Peggy Williams: [00:14:14](#) So, he said, "But wait a minute, wait a minute. I want you to go home and get a good night sleep and have a nice dinner, you know," and I went, "Hmm, easy for you to say." (laughs) He said, "Well, Kenneth has an appointment with you tomorrow morning at 10:00. So, go home, have a nice ..." I said, "I'll, I'll just go say goodbye to him." I was always ready to say goodbye because I couldn't believe my fortune anyway with the circus. But, um, the next morning-
- Scott O'Donnell: [00:14:38](#) We're, we're back to that contract going back-
- Peggy Williams: [00:14:40](#) Exactly. (laughs)
- Scott O'Donnell: [00:14:41](#) The next job for-
- Peggy Williams: [00:14:42](#) Not a pen like this, right?
- Scott O'Donnell: [00:14:43](#) Yeah.
- Peggy Williams: [00:14:44](#) So, the next morning, I spoke with Kenneth, and he said that there was gonna be some management changes on the blue unit and there would be an opening for, uh, assistant performance director, would I be interested in going back on the road on the blue unit, right, which are totally people I don't know because I've been on the red unit or in the corporate office or in teachers' conventions in like almost every state of the union, did not get to go to Hawaii, though. I was upset about that. Why? Right?
- Peggy Williams: [00:15:11](#) Anyway, um, I said, "Sure. I would love to," and I, I thought, "When, when would this happen?" And he said, "Next week." (laughs) And I'm like, "Man, they don't ..." (laughs) You don't sit on it. You, you say yes or your, your opportunity is gone, and I thought, "So, I would live on the train 'cause I really like living on the train. There's so many benefits to seeing the country mile-by-mile, waving to all those little ladies who are pinning up their laundry on the clothes line, and the the train tracks run through their backyard, and they never liked them because it's soot and all that, except when it's a circus train, then they just freeze, frame and wave to all the people on the vestibule. It's a big deal, right? And it was a big deal to us who live on the train. So, I thought, "Wow! I'm going on that train, too. That, yeah, I think, yeah." So, I said, I pretty much said, "Let me ... Can I tell you tomorrow morning?" and, and I wanted to stop on my way out of his office and say, "Yeah," (laughs) but I had to think it over, right? 'Cause I was in a lease and in an apartment with roommates and work it all out over night. Came in the next day

and said, "Yes, I would love to. Tell me where I need to report and, um, tell me how, tell me how I'll get there." (laughs) And so, and I did, and I reported in, um, Charleston, West Virginia, which was two weeks before Washington, D.C. So, I was on the other year's unit. We'd be the second year tour as we called it 'cause you'd go to the first, hmm, 45 big cities in the first year, and then you'd do another 40 cities or so or 45 more the second year. We did about 85 or 90 cities in a two-year engagement tour with the same production.

Peggy Williams: [00:16:55](#) So, I was gonna learn a new production, an entire new cast, new people from all over the world, two more languages I hadn't, uh, experienced before because there were people from, um, the, the, it was Czech Republic. Some, we had some people from, um, another, oh, Paraguay and some other places I never experienced their native language, and I always like to hear how they talk to each other. It's just so beautiful how many language there are.

Peggy Williams: [00:17:24](#) Anyway, so, I get out there, and I was be- I was replacing the assistant performance director whose name was Mr. Wandrey, and he helped train me, actually, for about a week. His name is Ross Wandrey. He lived in Houston, and he's back there now. He had been there for a number of years helping Charlie Bowman, but they wanted a, um, they wanted a different energy with Mr. Bowman at this point, so they thought I could maybe fill that void.

Peggy Williams: [00:17:51](#) And, um, I was the first female assistant performance director. So, and later on, I was the first female performance director. So, it was just like, I was kinda like the experimentation. If it works here, maybe we'll do it another, another girl will have a chance. That was my personal pressure that I put on myself. I wanna make sure that this is done well, maybe not right, but at least well and, um, whatever this is, you know.

Peggy Williams: [00:18:17](#) So, I learned about doors, you know. Doors is a term that we use in the circus and in theater as well, where the production manager, manager or assistant, in my case, assistant, would call doors, meaning, that if people were rehearsing in the arena between shows and you call, "Doors five minutes," that means they have to get out of the ring. We have to prepare the show for the doors that are going to be open. So, that was one of my duties, and I have ... (laughs)

Peggy Williams: [00:18:45](#) I mean, I used to wear, I used to wear a watch. I don't wear a watch anymore 'cause I have a phone with a clock in it, but I used to wear a watch and I would always wanna make sure I

had the right time, that we were all going by the right time. Some people set their watches 10 minutes ahead, not me. I wanted the right time, right?

- Peggy Williams: [00:19:01](#) So, I went up to Mr. Bowman, one of my first days that I was calling doors, and he's got a really big ... He's a big German guy, very robust of voice, and he was standing in the arena and put his hand up, you know, with all the digits on one hand held up and he'd go, "Five minutes to doors," (laughs) and everybody would like stop immediately. He was very in-command. Well, I'm not him. I'm different. So, I would go around and, and, um, say, "Doors," but I kinda walk, you know, and say it personally, not just bombast it from the curtain. It's just a different style.
- Peggy Williams: [00:19:37](#) And, um, but before I did that, I went up to Charlie and I'm looking at my watch and I said, "Um, Charlie, can you, can you tell me the right time?" And he looked at his Rolex and he said, "I always have the right time. It's a Rolex." And I went, "I'll change my Timex now." (laughs) I, I suited my watch. You, you know, he pulled it all the way up, so I could see the gold chain break slit, the gold chain necklace and, "I always have the right time," and I said, "Okay. I'm gonna remember that." (laughs) That changed my teeny-weeny little Timex and went out and called doors. That was my day two with him.
- Scott O'Donnell: [00:20:23](#) And who is Mr. Bowman?
- Peggy Williams: [00:20:24](#) Mr. Bowman? Charlie Bowman is possibly one of the best cat trainers we've seen in this past century. He's, he was from Germany and, um, he was the headline, headliner for ... Oh, gosh! How many? Several decades on the blue unit as the tiger trainer and presenter, and he was a, a really good trainer and his cats did amazing things, and he was very courageous to go in the cage with him and do some of these things. And, um, he was also the performance director. So, what that meant for whoever was his assistant meant that you're just in-charge of it. He's half the show because when someone does a cage act, there's a lot of preparation, mental and spiritual preparation. And I'm remembering how this morning's practice went with the tigers because they practice every morning. And he would, if he's putting a trick in, he would really focus and he'd talk to the cats, and the cats would go into the cage and he would be presented in there, and then he would present with the cats what they had learned.
- Peggy Williams: [00:21:23](#) And after that, he took about 45 minutes to unwind. It was, um, that's a really tense job. And so, I was, basically, in-charge of all the time in the show that he wasn't out there, which was at

least 50% of it. So, I had to watch everything. We didn't have, uh, electronic communications when I worked with him. Now, the production manager and we don't use performance director anymore. We morphed into production manager.

Peggy Williams: [00:21:51](#) And, um, they have electronic communications attached to their shirts and they can just simply, you know, talk to it sitting in the seats, and they can know if the act behind stage is ready. We didn't have that. I had to physically go through the curtain back and forth, watch the show, um, and see what the next act was ready. And when there was an emergency, we're running around like crazy backstage. Very rare, but occasionally, a piece of rigging would break or an animal would not, uh, not ... would, something would happen with an animal like a zebra took a detour or something and, um, it wasn't ... the next act wasn't ready. And I had to communicate that without the benefit of electronic communications.

Peggy Williams: [00:22:34](#) And now, it's much more efficient. They can sit and watch the show and if there's an issue with the spotlight and the angle in which it's projecting on a high wire walker 'cause we used to use spotlights that were al- already installed in the arenas and we would hire local spotlight operators to come in, and we'd have to have one rehearsal and teach them all the cues of the show, which is dicey. I mean, that's a lot of information in no time flat. And sometimes, uh, the angles of those spotlight stands was not adjustable, and it would shine in someone's eyes and they couldn't see their rope or their, whatever they were doing in the air.

Peggy Williams: [00:23:12](#) So, there would be a lot of adjustments with the lighting, but then, we morphed into a system with electronic lighting hanging from our own frames, and it was much more efficient because the people calling the lights also had all these massive computer boards and they could dim and do any kind of color they wanted to. It wasn't just amber or the traditional gels that would kind of burn out eventually, and you had to replace them. Now, it's all, um, what's the name of that kind of digital lighting? It doesn't get hot. It doesn't increase temperature.

Scott O'Donnell: [00:23:44](#) LED lighting.

Peggy Williams: [00:23:45](#) LED lighting. So, you could have any color you want, and it opened up a lot of custom colors that we didn't use before. Never used to use green or some of the darker yellow mustard tones 'cause they, they make you look washed out in the, in the lighting. I can't say enough to Feld Entertainment about the increase of electronics and lighting and sound and the ability for

the audience to see and hear the show no matter where they're sitting. That has just continually improved. And, um, now they do projection mapping and all kinds of stuff in the production.

- Peggy Williams: [00:24:20](#) So, I've seen that, I've seen that go from mercury vapor lights in the arena, and the sound system would be what they used for basketball game, (laughs) to being able to hear the ring master having black track lighting, where the costume for the ring master would have some kind of receiver in the shoulder pads and these are all trade secrets that are now very common, but Feld was one of the first shows to try that with the ring master, so that no matter where the ring master walked, the ring master didn't have to walk to a specific spot to put his feet and then do his announcement. He could be more, a little more casual and a little more flexible. If something was going on on the floor, they didn't need to avoid. He could walk anywhere and those lights will follow him by the sensors in his shoulders.
- Peggy Williams: [00:25:08](#) So, it was much more compact and very professional, a lot, a lot fewer errors as long as the trackers are ... Every now and then, (laughs) we'd, we'd get interference from a local ambulance or something that was on the same frequency, and things would go a little wonky, but you just work through all that technology and you, you, you pick a code that's not a common. You learn to ask the local EMTs what the code is, right? So, you don't program your lights and your sound and all that according to that. So, we had all those things happened, um, on occasion. You just keep learning from what's out there.
- Scott O'Donnell: [00:25:46](#) What was like, life like as an associate production manager? What did you think it was gonna be and what did it end up being and what's the circus behind the circus life?
- Peggy Williams: [00:25:56](#) Ooh! Okay. Automatically, got a bigger spot on the train 'cause it was a management room. So, that, that was welcoming, right? Um, although-
- Scott O'Donnell: [00:26:06](#) Oh, oh, crumbox.
- Peggy Williams: [00:26:07](#) No, crumbox. No. (laughs) No, and I ended up, I ended up, actually, with a quarter car. That's, that's the position I was in when I ended up with a quarter of a car, um, which was plenty of room for me compared to what I'd been used to and with, and I, and it was full width. It didn't have a hallway down that side of the train because of the middle vestibule, you could make it full width. I like coming in from both sides. I love light. I love light. So, that was a huge boost.

- Peggy Williams: [00:26:36](#) Um, the hours were even longer because I was the one who had to deal with all the publicity, and all the early morning PR. You know, someone from the show needs to go with them or make sure that they got there or be connected with the publicist. And we didn't have cellphones yet at that point in time, so there was a lot of coordination, a lot of rechecking, a lot of going into the promoter's office and using the phone sometimes with the curlicue still. Other times, just, uh, you know, we could use a speaker phone and, um, I mean, I'm talking about ancient technology, uh, compared to today, but that's how we did it.
- Peggy Williams: [00:27:13](#) So, um, the hours were longer because I had to watch every show. Um, I very rarely got vacation. Um, I think I went six years without a vacation because Mr. Bowman was o- otherwise occupied sometimes, too, with his duties as executive performance director for Ringling Brothers. So, he would go to the other unit and then I'd have the show by myself, w- which was, which was, um, challenging but fun and, um, I'm the one that got to know the performers really well because I was always asking them to do things, you know.
- Peggy Williams: [00:27:50](#) And, um, when you ask someone to go on early morning TV to perform a contortion or whatever the act is, you learn how much time it requires them to prepare to get up and warm their bodies up before this. You just don't get up, put your costume on and go do a contortion act. You rip your muscles, you know. You have to warm up long time. So, I learned a lot about that kind of stuff and I learned a lot about-
- Scott O'Donnell: [00:28:17](#) When you say early morning TV, we're not talking like 7:30, right?
- Peggy Williams: [00:28:20](#) Oh, we're talking about 5:00 AM, and some, some of them are radio. I mean, the foreign performers didn't do much radio, but they would do performances and sometimes someone from the, the, the ring master or some other person, um, who was wearing a costume would interpret for them.
- Scott O'Donnell: [00:28:35](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Peggy Williams: [00:28:36](#) So, we, you, you had to know who you could ask. So, my biggest funny PR thing was that second week I was working for Charlie Bowman, right? So, we used to have these forms that were three pages deep. They were yellow, pink and blue paper. They were the, um, R- RCI paper. Was it RCI?
- Scott O'Donnell: [00:28:58](#) I think so. I think so, yeah.

- Peggy Williams: [00:29:00](#) Yeah. Anyway, National Cash- NCR paper, whatever it was. And they were, um, hmm, we're still typing on an old typewriter. This was 1982. So, I mean, a Remington with ... You really have to have strong fingers to ... I did all the daily reports, and my fingers got very exercised. Now, it's really lazy with, um, keyboards, but you had to really push those buttons to, to get it to go through three copies, right?
- Scott O'Donnell: [00:29:25](#) That would surprise people, too, because most people that go to watch a circus-
- Peggy Williams: [00:29:29](#) They have no idea.
- Scott O'Donnell: [00:29:30](#) ... don't realize the paperwork, operational, the world behind-
- Peggy Williams: [00:29:34](#) Oh, my gosh! The daily reports?
- Scott O'Donnell: [00:29:37](#) Yes. Yeah.
- Peggy Williams: [00:29:37](#) Oh, my goodness! I'll get to the daily reports, uh, because I had to record everything that was going on in the show. And if, if, if, if a flyer missed a trick, if they didn't catch the triple, I mean, all of those things were recorded. So, I always had some little notebook and I was writing down for every single show, and then in between shows, I'd fill in that part of the daily reports, so I didn't forget the details or someone, um, had an accident or if a piece of rigging broke or it could be if the lights, uh, if we had a power failure, which, oh, my gosh! That was so amazing.
- Peggy Williams: [00:30:10](#) We had a power failure while Mr. Bowman was in the ring with the tigers. And, um, and I was at short change. It was a real small building, too, as far as the backstage area. So, um, we couldn't really ... We ... The ring master had to yell 'cause his microphone was off, too. The powers ... It was the grid that got hit in the city. So, the whole area was out of power. And they got it back up very quickly, but he was in the cage with the tigers, and the ring master is looking at me like, "What do we do?" And I say, "Tell everybody to stay seated. Don't anybody run. Don't anybody scream," you know. You don't wanna panic with the tigers and a guy in the cage 'cause the tigers have the advantage of sight in the dark. They ... Their eyes work different in the dark than ours do.
- Peggy Williams: [00:30:57](#) So, he's just having spotlights on him and he can see all these tigers and now, now, they can see him better than he can see them and they're all the way around him. So, we're like, "Whoa!" So, one of the guys from his crew, he had a dedicated

crew that took care of the tigers and clean them and exercise them and make sure that they were fed on the, you know, schedules and all that stuff. He, he said, he said, "I'll bring two jeeps in and we'll shine the, we'll shine the jeep. Uh, we'll line the jeep up at the beginning of the hippodrome track on both tracks, and we'll cross the beams of the lights on the jeeps across the ring, so Charlie can see the cats."

- Peggy Williams: [00:31:36](#) That's the only light in the arena, except those little red exit lights, which must have been on the generator. That's all you could see with two ... And, and they did this really quickly. The men have talked about this, "What do we do if ...?" Right? You have a contingency plan for many things. Uh, and this was the first time this had ever happened to my knowledge, where the whole power grid in the city was, a portion of it was out.
- Peggy Williams: [00:31:58](#) Anyway, so they did. They, they placed these two jeeps very quickly. I'm thinking within a minute, within a minute. Charlie wasn't in there a whole minute before these lights came on and shined across the ring and the cage guys, uh, started, uh, letting the cats exit on their normal routine. Charlie stood in the middle. The cats didn't know what to do either 'cause it was a new thing, and he had control of them so well. Bit-by-bit, they were all put back in their tour cages and taken outside, so they could be in the light again 'cause it was a daytime show when the power went out, but the building was dark inside.
- Peggy Williams: [00:32:32](#) So, it was interesting to see how nobody panicked. Even the audience didn't know what to do, they knew better than get up and run and scream. And so, the ring master was like, "You don't yell at them." And one of the concession persons, who used to sell programs out in front of the building brought in the battery-operated megaphone that, that he'd say, "Programs! You can't tell the clowns from the dancers without a program," you know. They brought that in for the ring master to talk to the audience. And we made it work and, eventually, the lights came back on 'cause the cats were right before intermission.
- Peggy Williams: [00:33:09](#) And, uh, you know, the, the, the concession people with the twirly lights came in and sold a whole bunch of those to the audience and it was just ... Thank goodness! We didn't need to call an ambulance for the tiger trainer. That could happened, too, but no. It was fine, but, uh, he was very, very interesting to work with because he, he was very commanding to the cats and the people, to the cast. What was your other question?
- Scott O'Donnell: [00:33:37](#) So, the daily reports.

- Peggy Williams: [00:33:39](#) Oh, daily reports. Okay. So-
- Scott O'Donnell: [00:33:41](#) Walk us through the ... What's-
- Peggy Williams: [00:33:42](#) Okay. So, in those day, the way to move something really quickly across the country by like a, a report file or whatever, this was before emails and before, before faxes, yeah, we had to finish the daily reports. I sign them. Charlie sign them, take the copies that we keep in the manager's office and put the rest in a ... For a while, it was DHL and the other time, it was FedEx. So, we went, we had, had to go and FedEx something every single night after the show. We had to find a FedEx box and had to pick up the next morning and send them out. Sometimes the building would have pickups everyday. Those buildings were rare back then.
- Peggy Williams: [00:34:21](#) Now, they probably all do it, but now it's done electronically and they have the reports within an hour after the show, and it would include, you know, attendance and it would include, um, anybody whose act was out or any- anything that went wrong, anything that went gloriously right like, like the tiger thing went glorious- gloriously right. There was another thing that went even more gloriously right, and we waited all season for this.
- Peggy Williams: [00:34:47](#) There's a flying trapeze artist named Miguel and he and his family, their last name is Vasquez, they attempted the quadruple somersaults in the air every single show, and they miss it. And, uh, there was a little box at the bottom of the form. We customized the form because that attempt was made everyday and I had to put, "Made it," yes or no little check boxes and, um, a little number, a little line where we would write, you know, uh, did he do it two tries or one try, and did he succeed, and, and, um, it was so, it was like 274 performances into the season, and we were right there, and we were in Tucson, Arizona, and he made it. He made the quadruple somersault for the first time in front of a paid audience in the world.
- Peggy Williams: [00:35:40](#) And then, and we were like, "Yes!" I can't do no. I got to do yes," and Mr. Bowman was there and he saw it, too, and he said, "I go call Kenneth." (laughs) He went for the phone. He went to the phone, payphone on the wall. I could see him. He was so e- excited about this accomplishment, he had to call Kenneth at home. It was wonderful to see him to call for a really good reason, you know. Still quarters in the pocket. (laughs) Yeah. I don't know. It was 1984 when he did that.

- Peggy Williams: [00:36:15](#) And, uh, that was also, you know, the, the gloriously not so good times where, when Irvin Feld passed away. And, um, the show I was on was a blue unit. We were in Anaheim and the other show, I'm not exactly sure what city they were in, but, um, we all communicated with each other, "What do we do? Do we have a memorial service backstage on the show?" because we couldn't go to the funeral. That was in Washington, D.C. So, they had a formal funeral in a synagogue in Washington, D.C. and we had memorial services on the shows.
- Peggy Williams: [00:36:49](#) And, um, that was really sad because he was the guy that said, "Welcome to Ringling Brothers," to us. I mean, Kenneth had said it as well, his son, but Irvin, for those of us who had been there a long time, he was, he was our footstep in the show business and, you know, he, he died of something very sudden. It wasn't, wasn't like we knew it was coming. So, anyway, so that was gloriously not fun, but, um, that's life. Yeah. So, daily reports, everyday, driving around trying to find a box to put them in.
- Scott O'Donnell: [00:37:25](#) What was the culture like at that time because I agree with you? I got to believe that maybe there was like, "What's gonna happen to the company and the brand as our spiritual father has--"
- Peggy Williams: [00:37:35](#) Our spiritual father has gone. Well, we were, um ... So, his, his other ... Irvin Feld's brother, Israel, had died in the early '70s like, uh, '72 I believe it was. So, I only knew him for a couple of years, and he had died younger than was expected also. And the fact that Irvin came around and visited the shows, both shows, immediately after his brother had passed away, he kind of put the damper on, "What's gonna happen?" 'cause we didn't have a panic factor then because Irvin was always the answerman, right?
- Peggy Williams: [00:38:12](#) Now that Irvin was gone, and oddly enough, he died going to the funeral of one of our performers who had died on the show. Mickey Anlac was a chimp trainer, he and his wife. And what happened with that was he died of something very sudden, too. I, I think he died in his sleep and in his trailer and no one saw that coming. He was in his early 40s, I think. So, that's very rare. These are very fit people, very healthy people and sometimes things happen, but ... And so, that happened and Irvin had gone to his funeral in Florida, and, um, had a sudden thing happened, uh, that took his life within a day. I think it was really less than a day.

- Peggy Williams: [00:38:56](#) But, um, there was, uh, a, a great attempt to communication, although you had to do it by phone in a public hallway, on a payphone, so, or the promoter's phone, which was used by everybody to communicate with media and all that. Um, they calmed it down. Kenneth came out to the shows. I mean, he was, of course, now, the heir to the Ringling throne because-
- Scott O'Donnell: [00:39:21](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Peggy Williams: [00:39:22](#) ... the two people had bought it from the North family had both passed. So, he was the instant heir, and he had to pick up where his father left off immediately. And that was in the fall, so they were booking new acts for the next, um, uh, rehearsal period, which was gonna start in like November, December. Um, he was, I think, probably never so busy as he was right then, and knew he had to be the answerman for everything and, um, it was, it was, uh, we were all very supportive-
- Scott O'Donnell: [00:39:58](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Peggy Williams: [00:40:00](#) ... of what we need. And, and we had to more into because, you know, the whole thing changed. So, now, you have the next generation taking over, and I've been through that one more time, where Kenneth is moving back and his daughters, the third generation are taking over, and they have different things to think about and different ways of approaching than he did from being raised in the '60s and '70s that his father and uncle did from being raised, you know, in, uh, two decades earlier. So, so, it was interesting. I don't know how it was on any other unit. I know how it was on ours.
- Scott O'Donnell: [00:40:37](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Peggy Williams: [00:40:40](#) I don't, I don't know.
- Scott O'Donnell: [00:40:42](#) So, you were associate production manager and then you became production manager?
- Peggy Williams: [00:40:45](#) Oh, well, we had to ... Well, here's what happened. (laughs) A lot of people said that Ringling has not played under canvass since 1956 when the Ringling show owned by John and, uh, Henry Ringling North was in tough financial position, and they were under canvass still, and they had a thousand people working to put the tent up and take it down many times, uh, every, you know, everyday. I mean, uh, just the baggage got very heavy on the show as far as the number of employees and

the, uh, the strain of ... But, but some of the things were happening, too.

- Peggy Williams: [00:41:26](#) A lot of, um, sport arenas were being built in cities. Luckily, the Felds, uh, or Israel and Irvin Feld, um, had been booking rock and roll people for quite a while and putting them from concert halls like Constitutional Hall in Washington, D.C. to these new sports arenas. In fact, they, they had such power in this entertainment business that they could say to a city that's thinking about building a municipal arena, in other words, the city would pay for it, not a private sports arena, " If you build it, we'll book it for two weeks a year."
- Peggy Williams: [00:42:03](#) They could put that in on a personal letter or conversation and those cities would believe it, and they would come through. They'd do a week with a circus and a week with an ice show. And many, and during that whole arena building, now we're getting second and third level arenas being built in lieu of those old arenas, but these old arenas were the first arenas for sports, basketball, um, well, indoor soccer, indoor whatever else, and concerts, and all that.
- Peggy Williams: [00:42:31](#) The, the Felds had already been booking performers. They knew the kind of salaries that were required and going to arenas was better for the audience. Um, bigger halls, more people come, less performances for the, for the artists. Um, it was all good. So, what happened, um ... Where was I going with that?
- Scott O'Donnell: [00:42:54](#) Tent.
- Peggy Williams: [00:42:56](#) Right. So, when they went off from under canvass, everybody, especially circus fans, I think, and people who loved the tradition in their family of going to the circus in under canvass, which there's many canvass shows out there. Not as many as there used to be, but a lot of them are a lot smaller. None of them certainly are the size of Ringling Brothers, Barnum & Bailey. People would miss the canvass, you know, but they realized that it's not so bad to have a flush toilet either, you know, when you go to the show. And, uh, instead of, uh, the heavy-duty [inaudible 00:43:27]
- Scott O'Donnell: [00:43:28](#) Air conditioning.
- Peggy Williams: [00:43:30](#) Air conditioning, paved parking. So, they didn't have the elephants pull their cars out of the mud after a show when it rain, all those kind of things kinda morphed into arenas aren't so bad. They're clean, they're ... It ... There's not poles we have

to look around. There's this totally open view, and so a lot more seats and a lot more, you know, the crowd frenzy gets, gets going, too.

Peggy Williams: [00:43:50](#) So, um, and everybody was saying, "Oh, Ringling is not under canvass anymore," but actually, there's been a few times it had been overlooked that Ringling did perform under canvass, and I think one of them is when we, we took a three-ring circus to Japan. They never had Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey nor could their news people say, "Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey." It was more like, "Lingling Bros and Barnum and Bairey." It's that what as close as they ... I mean, because their language is, has different emphasis for Ls and Rs, and, (laughs) and that's, that's the story.

Peggy Williams: [00:44:27](#) So, I was, uh ... I worked with Mr. Bowman for about eight years, I guess, and this was 1988 now. And, um, we, we took a show. We took one of the, uh, three-ring circus productions with animals and the performers and everything as a third unit after they did their two-year production. We took that unit with, uh, there were some change in casts, but some of the key cast members were the same. We took it over to Japan and we worked under canvass, different kind of canvass. It didn't look like American tents. It had cupolas and like 12 cupolas at the top and it was vine all, and it was put up by a hundred Japanese workers. Uh, it was just amazing to see them do their morning ... Uh, they all get together in a group in the parking lot, and do Tai chi before they all went to their, the thing that they need to do to accomplish together. And they just, you could watch their mental acuity all focused on the project as they were all doing Tai chi together. And then they'd put the tent up in unbelievable time.

Peggy Williams: [00:45:34](#) So, we worked under canvass in Japan. We tripled the elephant population of the entire country of Japan in one day because we took 16 elephants. They had five in the Tokyo zoo. So, now they had 21 in the country, right? Little things like that, they don't realize if they hadn't been a zoo-goer, but now they could go to the circus and they would sit there in the seats and, you know, the, the Japanese aren't known for like extraordinary ruckus, "Yeah!" screaming and yelling like maybe an American audience.

Peggy Williams: [00:46:06](#) They're kinda held back a little and especially the women, they were like, they were counting the elephants as they came through the curtain and, and looking at each other and holding their hands in front of their mouths and ... I don't know why they do that, but they did, and maybe they didn't wanna smile

too much or, or be astounded or whatever. I say, "Bring on the elephants," you know, never had that problem, but at any rate, they were amazing. The audience loved seeing the elephants. Um-

- Scott O'Donnell: [00:46:35](#) What's the logistics of that? How did you get elephants from mainland America to Japan?
- Peggy Williams: [00:46:35](#) Oh, my gosh! (laughs) Oh, my gosh! Okay. So, here's what I know what the logistics of getting the show there. Ringling Brothers have been going for 100 and some years, uh, at this point in time, 120, 118, I don't know, 1988, 118 years straight. 70, yeah. Yeah. And, um, we, we didn't have a book that said, "The length of everything, the weight of everything and the value of everything on the show." That yank of rope, that pulley, that, that web, that rigging, that canon. We had a canon ball that went over there, all that stuff. So, we had to make a manifest of everything on the show that has not been done since 1968 when the show was sold and all that stuff had to be listed and put as a value, okay?
- Peggy Williams: [00:47:20](#) So, we had to make a manifest to ship things over. We also had to be very, uh, um, knowledgeable and thanks to our veterinary crew and some wonderful advisers we had about shipping things internationally. We had to ship each type of animal at a different time to get it over to Japan because ... And Japan's an island, so they have really strict incoming animal laws, right? They had, they had, um, quarantine times for each animal, but like for, for, for some animals, it was eight weeks.
- Peggy Williams: [00:47:53](#) I think the dogs had to go over there eight weeks or so in advance and, and other animals, uh, horses was n- not that long, but it was ... Elephants was, I don't know how many days, but ... So, we had to back step all of the ... When we're sending the animals and the caretakers over there and then there was quarantine areas, where they're used to having people come and sit for days or weeks and they can't leave 'cause if they have a disease related to the animals, that would be bad to introduce that into Japan.
- Peggy Williams: [00:48:22](#) So, so there was all these qualifiers, but they all had to be done at the same time. So, we shipped, uh, we flew some of the horses, uh, the fuzzies, so the small animals, we flew those, you know, lamas and ponies and all that, but when it came to elephants, we actually flew the tigers and the, and the lions. We had a tiger act and a lion act, which was rare to be seen in Japan. They flew on a commercial, um, airline called Flying

Tigers at the time. Oddly enough, they could, they could do cage the animals to transport and-

- Scott O'Donnell: [00:48:59](#) I flew in on a plane with a cat act.
- Peggy Williams: [00:49:01](#) You have?
- Scott O'Donnell: [00:49:02](#) I have.
- Peggy Williams: [00:49:02](#) Oh, my God!
- Scott O'Donnell: [00:49:04](#) It is a once a lifetime [inaudible 00:49:05]
- Peggy Williams: [00:49:05](#) Did they growl? I mean, were they-
- Scott O'Donnell: [00:49:07](#) Yeah. So-
- Peggy Williams: [00:49:07](#) You had a ... They noticed the change in temperature, uh, atmosphere, sure.
- Scott O'Donnell: [00:49:11](#) So, we were traveling with Daniel Raffo's tigers-
- Peggy Williams: [00:49:14](#) Oh, yeah, yeah.
- Scott O'Donnell: [00:49:15](#) ... on a Lufthansa flight.
- Peggy Williams: [00:49:16](#) Where were you going?
- Scott O'Donnell: [00:49:17](#) We were, uh, flying from, uh, Hanover, Germany to Miami. It was, it was a flight that we did.
- Peggy Williams: [00:49:27](#) Why? To bring them over to-
- Scott O'Donnell: [00:49:29](#) Yeah.
- Peggy Williams: [00:49:30](#) ... to bring them to America?
- Scott O'Donnell: [00:49:30](#) Correct. Yeah. Daniel Raffo's cats, yeah, to bring them to America. And I remember-
- Peggy Williams: [00:49:34](#) Oh, my gosh!
- Scott O'Donnell: [00:49:35](#) ... it's, it's probably five hours into the flight and we're over the ocean. All of a sudden, one of the tiger roars.
- Speaker 3: [00:49:42](#) You keep them down in the baggage area, the tigers?

Scott O'Donnell: [00:49:45](#) Yeah. Uh-huh (affirmative). And-

Speaker 3: [00:49:46](#) And they're awake?

Scott O'Donnell: [00:49:46](#) And, and-

Peggy Williams: [00:49:48](#) Yeah.

Scott O'Donnell: [00:49:49](#) ... 500 people went ... Grab each other's knees and looked at each other and like-

Peggy Williams: [00:49:54](#) Oh, this was a full plane of people?

Scott O'Donnell: [00:49:55](#) It was a commercial flight.

Peggy Williams: [00:49:57](#) Oh, my! That wasn't an animal-only flight.

Scott O'Donnell: [00:49:59](#) Yeah.

Peggy Williams: [00:49:59](#) Oh, my gosh!

Scott O'Donnell: [00:50:01](#) We were on a Lufthansa 747 flight and the tiger roars and everybody grabbed the knees and looked-

Peggy Williams: [00:50:07](#) Oh, my gosh!

Scott O'Donnell: [00:50:08](#) ... and then the pilot came on and it was [inaudible 00:50:10] and all I could hear was tiger or Tigger or something like that.

Peggy Williams: [00:50:13](#) Tigger, yeah.

Scott O'Donnell: [00:50:15](#) Like everybody looked like, "What? I can hear them. What?" We're on a flight to Miami.

Peggy Williams: [00:50:22](#) Oh, my gosh!

Peggy Williams: [00:50:23](#) That's crazy. No.

Scott O'Donnell: [00:50:24](#) The mental journey was lion and cats.

Peggy Williams: [00:50:25](#) I mean, you think of how many times we've flown big animals around the world to get to America for a couple of years. The big horses, the pad horses from ... that the Bulgarians would ride in the Romanian riding acts, they brought their horses. We supplemented more horses here because if a horse, you know, goes lame or something, you have, you still have to have the act running. So, they, uh, got more horses when they were here,

but they brought their standard horses over, and these are big. They're like up to here, up, you know, up to my eyeballs. Their backs, they're so tall and they're so large. Um, and we would fly them, but the elephants, no, we didn't fly them.

Peggy Williams: [00:51:05](#) By the way, Flying Tigers became, was purchased by FedEx, and FedEx has an animal delivery service now, which i- is the remnant of the Flying Tigers airline, uh, and they, they work their animals out of Memphis, um, to go to those international flights, and they fly primarily race horses and then other animal acts, but constantly, race horses, very high level animals in the performance and race business. So-

Scott O'Donnell: [00:51:31](#) Elephants-

Peggy Williams: [00:51:31](#) Elephants, right. So, the elephants are in Florida. They needed to go by truck to Oakland, California to get on a ship. So, to be fair to the elephants, they need, they need frequent rest and exercise from transportation and we always build that in to our train schedules when the elephants would travel by train. We had water stops and sometimes water stops were significant number of hours, where they would take them out and exercise them and get them back on. Muck out the cars while they were doing that and, but, uh, that's, that's typical of circus travel. You've got to let your animals exercise whatever they are.

Peggy Williams: [00:52:15](#) So, the, the ... It took about four days to get to Oakland, California 'cause they had to stop at different farms along the way to let the animals rest and the people, too. And, uh, they got to Oakland, and they finally got on a ship that took 11 days to get to Yokohama. And, um, one of the elephants, I mean, you're not, you don't know this. You never know this in advance. One of the elephants got seasick, right? So, it just didn't have any appetite, right? So, by 11 days of not eating much, you could see a, a, a slightly diminutive size in the width of the belly. Our animals are pretty well-fed, anyway. They're, they're actually called a little overweight. So, um, so, I guess that elephant lost 500 pounds in 11 days.

Peggy Williams: [00:53:07](#) Now, that sounds like a lot, but if you weigh 10,000 pounds ... Okay. If you weigh 100 pounds and you lose five pounds, it doesn't do anything, right? If you weigh 10,000 pounds and you lose 500 pounds, that's still 5% of your weight, right? So, she wasn't starving by any means, whatsoever. She was drinking water, and, but it just as soon as she got on her four legs on the ground in Yokohama, they had to use those, uh, big cranes, you know, with a baggage car, you know, they put the two elephants at a time on. And we had an odd number of

elephants. I think it maybe it was 17, and they had to figure out how to get the last one.

- Peggy Williams: [00:53:48](#) One had to ride twice to go 'cause they had two at a time, and they'd put them on the ground, and we had all of our wagons at the Yokohama station, and, um, making a corral for them, and what they did, they just kept walking them in circles to get them ground-bound again, and they all got hungry and that one ate and gained the weight back in weeks. So, it was like going on a fast, I think, you know, but who knew? "Are you seasick? Wave?" You're right. (laughs)
- Peggy Williams: [00:54:15](#) So, that was amazing, and then they had to be transported by the shorter trucks they use in Japan from one town to another. We played three cities under canvass. So, we played Sapporo first. That was unbelievable. They had a Hemis Fair there or a World's Fair-
- Scott O'Donnell: [00:54:32](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Peggy Williams: [00:54:33](#) ... Hemis Fair that we played on the Hemis Fair grounds. And so, they had like lots of things already set up. They had displays and exhibitions and, and, and stuff going on. And then we went to Tokyo for, um, two months, and, um, played at near the Ginza, in a parking lot by a rail station in canvass. And then we went to Osaka, and we played almost two months there, same kinda thing. So, it was, it was such an education, but Ringling played under canvass. It just wasn't in this country. So, the historians who aren't aware of that don't have it right. They-
- Scott O'Donnell: [00:55:09](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Peggy Williams: [00:55:10](#) But in America, the last time they played in canvass was Coney Island.
- Scott O'Donnell: [00:55:14](#) Coney Island.
- Peggy Williams: [00:55:15](#) Yeah, Coney Island under canvass for a one ring. So, all these versions, you know, so who's writing the history-
- Scott O'Donnell: [00:55:22](#) And Kaleidescape.
- Peggy Williams: [00:55:22](#) And Kaleidescape, exactly, in 2000-
- Scott O'Donnell: [00:55:25](#) The Mo- Monte Carlo circus.
- Peggy Williams: [00:55:26](#) 1999, Kaleidescape-

- Scott O'Donnell: [00:55:27](#) Yeah.
- Peggy Williams: [00:55:28](#) ... and 2000, right? Monte Carlo circus, 1974. So, there's been ... It depends on who's writing the history, what they know to be the, you know, confirmation of what is right, but there might be others I don't know about, but those four, we know Monte Carlo, Kaleidescape and, and Japan in 1988 and the whole thing happened again in 1989 with a completely different cast and animals because they took another production and extended it for the third year. One production featured King Tusk, which was an amazing elephant, uh, with beautiful big ivory, which most of our asian elephants, the females, don't have big ivory. They, they have little tushes underneath their, their lips, but they don't have the big ivory.
- Peggy Williams: [00:56:14](#) So, that was a really cool thing. Um, but it, it's also extremely a lot of work to go to a foreign country with animals, quarantines, and the amount of paperwork that had to be done in order to make this tour happen was extraordinary. It was a nice that we got sponsorship from someone in Japan to help pay for the costs to bring it over, but the amount of paperwork, to make the manifest 'cause everything on that manifest then had a line item and had to be checked off when it got to Yokohama. So, they opened all these, these, uh, trailers that, that I think you have some here at the museum.
- Scott O'Donnell: [00:56:51](#) Sure, the containers.
- Peggy Williams: [00:56:52](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah, the Ringling trailers, yeah.
- Scott O'Donnell: [00:56:53](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Peggy Williams: [00:56:54](#) They, um, they had wardrobe boxes and, and trunks inside of them. All of which had to be sealed on this side, shipped over there and then opened by breaking the seal with a knife and making sure that what's in the box is what's on the list. And we had a few funny things that happened during that. We had, we had, um ... Okay. So, we had a Western gag. We know the Japanese culture loves American Westerns.
- Peggy Williams: [00:57:26](#) So, the clown number in the 1988 show was a big Western gag. We had a bar. We had a spittoon. We had big shotguns. We had oversized handguns and holsters that George made, um, uh, and, uh, tables and chairs that were super structured underneath, so they could do rolls and backward without breaking the legs, and all of this stuff, right? A breakaway table, and we had, we tossed in the kitchen sink on that gag.

- Peggy Williams: [00:57:51](#) So, on the prop list, silly us, not thinking like inspectors, we wrote down, for the wardrobe list, we had, um, glue guns and staple guns and for the prop list for the clowns, we had hand guns and shotguns and all that. These were hand-carved wooden. They didn't shoot anything, right?
- Peggy Williams: [00:58:12](#) So, they had to, they had to have us at, at the port in Yokohama open all these trailers, open the trunk, dig for the prop and they're holding up all these clown props, and the Chinese, the Japanese guys were in like little white like construction helmets and white lab jackets, and clipboards. They got their clipboards, you know, and they're finding it on which thing, you know, and consulting. I think Mike Falls was the one who was there consulting to find out what exactly is that 'cause the translation might not have been real clear for their manifest. And, um, they wanted to see that said the word "gun".
- Peggy Williams: [00:58:53](#) Well, the next year when we sent the show, a staple gun became a paper fastener. The, um ... Oh, and we also had swords because we had a lady who balance a sword in her mouth and a sword tip on that one, and then she went up and down a ladder, came down the other side without the sword going through her head, which is awesome. Thank you. So, you can't swords to Japan because it's a huge item that they create there to honor their history and they sell them. So, you can't sell swords or take swords there.
- Peggy Williams: [00:59:22](#) So, we, we were in error with our cultural understanding year one. Year two, yeah, we got that right. And then, so, but the one guy that just cracked me up big time, he reached into the clown prop trunk where all the guns were, he pulls out this holster, which putting around him twice. He was so small, and it was so big.
- Peggy Williams: [00:59:44](#) And it had the gun in the pocket. It was hanging kinda funny, and, and he took the gun out of ... It's two-handed, uh, handgun, right? Big, wooden, beautifully carved, painted and everything, looks like a gun, doesn't shoot anything. And he, he said, he, he just held it out and he went, "Make my day!" We were just like, "Aah! You're killing ..." He was very funny, and because that was an American line, a line in an American movie, Western. So, was it Clint Eastwood? I think.
- Scott O'Donnell: [01:00:17](#) Clint Eastwood.
- Peggy Williams: [01:00:17](#) Clint Eastwood's line, right?

- Scott O'Donnell: [01:00:18](#) It's Clint Eastwood, yeah.
- Peggy Williams: [01:00:19](#) So, that was ... So, he just ... I mean, there's all this tension and all this, "What do they think? We're gonna bring contraband?" or ... and the one thing they ... You do not bring drugs to Japan, and they, they have dogs and, you know, everything because you bring drugs there, you're in jail. They have a 99% conviction rate. So, we were pretty careful on who we chose to go, and, um, and this wasn't all done by me. This was done by a number of committees, you know? And we did background checks on some of the new people, make sure they didn't have conviction records, you know? I mean, it was very top heavy with the paperwork and the preparation and, and, uh, yeah.
- Peggy Williams: [01:01:01](#) So, I only went one year then, then another per- person went for the second year with that other unit 'cause they were familiar with those people. So, anyway, that was interesting, though.
- Scott O'Donnell: [01:01:12](#) So, you came back from Japan and?
- Peggy Williams: [01:01:14](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative). I come back from Japan in the fall. It would have been like November, December, and, um, the first three months of 1988, uh, the Felds tried a, uh, another, um, partnership with Disneyland, and it called Mickey Circus Fantasy. So, it didn't say Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey at all, but I was the supervisor there, and I had the radio. My, my radio name was Circus 1 'cause there was no Circus 2. So, they gave me the odd number, "Circus 1, one of your clowns is laying in the gutter again. We don't do that. We don't have hobos here at Disneyland," you know, that kind of different culture again, one that's totally made up and honored by the king of mice himself, Mickey, right?
- Peggy Williams: [01:02:04](#) So, it was a Dick Monday was in the gutter 'cause he was playing the tramp character (laughs) and I had to go, I had to walk with my little one-pound brick-sized radio on my hip. And this was January, February or March of '88 while I'm getting ready for the gold tour to Japan. And I said, "Dick, Dick." He says, "Don't use my real name when there's people around." I said, "Sir, you need to get out of the gutter. I have to have a chat with you." There's all these places you can go behind the, behind the scenes and I took, I took him and I said, "Okay. I, Circus 1, got a call about you tramp clown in the gutter at Disneyland. We don't have gutter dwellers here. You need to sit on a bench, something else. You can't lay in the gutter and taken out. Not allowed." "Oh, oh, okay." And I said, "There you go."

- Peggy Williams: [01:02:59](#) And then I called him back on the radio, I said, "It's handled." (laughs) But we had 70 performers, 35 clowns, which was the largest alley I've ever been a part of.
- Scott O'Donnell: [01:03:08](#) Well, that's a huge alley.
- Peggy Williams: [01:03:10](#) That's a huge alley.
- Scott O'Donnell: [01:03:11](#) That said tramp clown that you just referenced would like to be one of the deans of Clown College, yes?
- Peggy Williams: [01:03:15](#) He did. He was the last dean of Clown College, uh, or yeah. He was the last one here. No. Yes. Yes, he did a year here.
- Scott O'Donnell: [01:03:25](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Peggy Williams: [01:03:25](#) And then two years back in Florida.
- Scott O'Donnell: [01:03:27](#) Right.
- Peggy Williams: [01:03:28](#) And he was, he was a fantastic clown. They just, you know, you don't have tramps at Disneyland. It's just ... There ... Who ... I love the guy, right? I didn't see him as a tramp, right? Somebody with a lovely, bolder character. Anyway, so-
- Scott O'Donnell: [01:03:45](#) There's 35 clowns. That's a huge alley.
- Peggy Williams: [01:03:46](#) 35 clowns and 25 performers. It was a huge alley, yeah. Well, they gave us dressing room space. They gave us everything you could ask for for a behind-the-scenes, um, amusement park situation, and you never saw the word Ringling Brothers, Barnum & Bailey anywhere because it was Mickey's Circus Fantasy. So, you come in to Disneyland and, and I was the only supervisor. I did the payroll and I did, if anybody needed to be docked for whatever. Um, actually, only one person did and because they ... Uh, it was, it's, it's how the rules are set up there, how that all happens, but, um, I think there was a family emergency. He had to leave for two days and come back and I couldn't pay him for not working. So, that was the deal.
- Peggy Williams: [01:04:26](#) We didn't have any negative characters because this was the test run for the cast that went to Japan. So, we had Eric Brown and his dogs, and he had, uh, John and Tina Winn, um, doing, uh, wheel and we had-
- Peggy Williams: [01:04:42](#) Let me see. Sway poles, we had, uh, motorcycle, um, in the globe, and as you walk down main street, we had three acts you

could see right off the bat. One was a tight wire, and, and this is where I really bumped up against the Disney culture and I had to really, I had to really support the circus artist in their authenticity because there were three Hispanic wire walkers, who had mustaches and a little bit longer hair like the Bandidos kind of thing, right?

- Scott O'Donnell: [01:05:12](#) Facial hair.
- Peggy Williams: [01:05:13](#) No facial hair. They wanted them to shave their ... You know, it denied their, their p- their charactership, right?
- Scott O'Donnell: [01:05:21](#) Right.
- Peggy Williams: [01:05:22](#) And, and they said, "We're not gonna ..." And I said, "You're not gonna walk out on me, first of all, that for, for one, you're not gonna walk out on me. Two, we're gonna resolve this with the Disney people, and you're not gonna have to cut your hair because this is your persona in your act. This is what we sold to them, and if I have to go to Kenneth, I will, but I don't think I ..." And so, we were able to work it out. They could do that. They could keep their persona hair. They're a little bit long in Mexican, you know, and mustaches and all that 'cause they have really strict standards for all the employees that work at Disney.
- Peggy Williams: [01:05:57](#) You have to have what they call missionary haircuts. They, they can't ... Your hair here cannot touch your collar, and you, no, no sideburns, and these guys had sideburns. This was part of their persona. And so, we changed their announcement to reflect that they were, uh, cultural parity of something and it worked out fine. Then there was a tight wire. No, that wasn't a tight wire.
- Peggy Williams: [01:06:18](#) Then there was a flying trapeze act, where they had the net going from the top shop over the restaurant to the top shop over something, and, and these lovely Disney people would come out with these ropes, and all of a sudden, they, they've blocked a corridor underneath these, these things. It stopped traffic, so the next thousand people that come in to Disneyland end up seeing our acts 'cause they can't get around them until the act is over. They were only four minutes long three or four times a day. So, and the, the performers loved it. They stay in their trailers, their own trailers in a beautiful trailer park. It had good water pressure, great tasting water, uh, hookups like you couldn't believe, first class hookups. They didn't have to drive a mile for 63 days. You know what a benefit that is, right?

- Scott O'Donnell: [01:07:06](#) I do.
- Peggy Williams: [01:07:06](#) You don't have to worry about anything but tire pressure when you drive out, right? So, then we had the motorcycle in the globe right at the place where all the lands fan out at Disneyland, you know. You get Adventure Land, Tomorrow Land and Western Land or whatever. And they, they took the whole flowerbed off of the, um, that, that spot, that circle.
- Scott O'Donnell: [01:07:28](#) That circumference.
- Peggy Williams: [01:07:29](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Scott O'Donnell: [01:07:29](#) That hub.
- Peggy Williams: [01:07:29](#) The hub, yeah, and, and, uh, put down, um, flat pings and, um, a, a good base for the, for the, uh, globe, for the motorcycles to go in. And the people at Disney were great to work with, which couldn't say Ringling Brothers. So, we were really subtle (laughs) basically. And, um, everybody lasted the whole time. You know, we didn't have any issues at all, really. Minor, you know, minor things, but we had herd elephants, we had stilt walkers in the parade. Minor issues were the stilt walker would start walking in the parade and it would start raining, and the circus on the streets in Disneyland are very sleek when it rains, and that did not go with the rubber on the bottom of the stilts.
- Peggy Williams: [01:08:15](#) So, I had to explain to the Disney people that if this happens again, he's gonna go over and hang on the side of a building until we can get a ladder to him and get him off the stilts because he was walking like eight-foot stilts in the parade, and he was way up there waving. He was as high as, as Mickey, Minnie and, and Cinderella, you know. So, those kind of things come up, but they made sense. It's just, it's just good. So, that was fun. And, uh, it wasn't under canvass. It was totally outside all the time.
- Peggy Williams: [01:08:47](#) And then, then you have things about the characters and this is why I respect Disney so much. They defend their characters' integrity 100% no matter what. For instance, we had a stage show that three of the clowns, who, whose juggling skills were excellent. They put together a little stage show, and they wanted to invite Goofy, who would be just randomly walking by saying, "Hey, folks," to, up on the stage to juggle, and that was the biggest conversation imaginable. Big table like we're sitting at here, a bunch of people there, "Can Goofy juggle?" They got Goofy's ... Every character has a bible. It says what they can and

cannot do, who can get mad, who can be smarter than Mickey, who can be dumber than Donald. I mean, all these kind of things that are character qualifiers, you know. There's a pecking order in the Magic Kingdom.

- Peggy Williams: [01:09:41](#) And, and the, the, the question of, "Can Goofy juggle? Should he be, should he ever be that good at something that he can succeed or is he gonna upset the whole Pluto and the dog kingdom there in the character world?" Right? I had no answers. I had the question. I said, "Look, they ... You got two Goofys that really juggle well, and they were juggling, playing backstage before they got their costumes on or we have another person that could juggle really well, who could be Goofy and is about the right size. We have solutions here if you allow Goofy to juggle."
- Peggy Williams: [01:10:16](#) So, Goofy was allowed to pick up juggling equipment, and I think he, I, I think he could juggle maybe two balls, but three, he couldn't. He, uh, he would drop whatever it was, and he wasn't allowed to succeed, but he was allowed to try it, and that's, that's where he lives in, in their heads. So, he was allowed to be in the show, a character in the show, great photo, trying to juggle. And that's as far as we got, but that was fun. (laughs)
- Peggy Williams: [01:10:46](#) Who knew? So, so, I talked to Mr. Feld on the phone, you know, frequently during those 63 days. I did that for two years. Um, after I got back from Japan, we did another January, February and March. So, I went from totally foreign canvass to totally outdoors with, uh, you know, 35 clowns and another 35 performers, and it was, it was fantastic. I loved it so much working at Disneyland on behalf of Mr. Feld because I get their standards. I mean, it was pounded into me. Nobody can be smarter than Mickey. Got it. (laughs) Right?
- Peggy Williams: [01:11:23](#) So, a lot of opportunities that, um, Feld Entertainment has been courageous to trust people to go out and handle on their behalf, and have it somehow come out good squeaky clean, right, whatever, whatever the requirement is. So, that's been fun, but some things didn't go well, too, but, um, you know, I can't remember what they are. (laughs)
- Scott O'Donnell: [01:11:48](#) So, Disneyland, you transitioned back to a touring unit or you are back to corporate from there?
- Peggy Williams: [01:11:53](#) I, I, actually, went back to Wisconsin and had a home office. I did not go back to the corporate office, um, because there wasn't, um ... Let me see. At that point in time, Feld Entertainment was having a lot of people work from their

homes, uh, marketing, promoters, and they would do the cities around their homes, and, and since I was flying a lot for the education stuff, picked that back up again, um, creating more stuff for online, though. Didn't so much flying, but was, um, creating education materials, and, um, distributing them, and trying to make sure that people ...

- Peggy Williams: [01:12:38](#) Sometimes we'd go to conferences where there are teachers, where there we'd have a booth and, you know, give out free samples and especially if the show was coming to that town or something. So, we did a lot of that, a lot of homeschool reach out, um, electronically because boy, are they good at communicating with their members. Oh, my gosh! You want a group together? Tell one homeschool teacher. It goes to the group.
- Peggy Williams: [01:13:02](#) So, that was interesting, too. So, I worked in the marketing and education outreach, um, thing. And then in 2000, uh, 2006, um, they were still in the Vienna office for the corporate headquarters, and I went to, uh, I moved to Florida. They invited me to move to Florida, um, full well thinking they were gonna do the corporate office down there, but that wasn't part of my understanding. My understanding was to work the winter quarters and, and, you know, a headquarter out of Florida. And, and now, it's very much so headquartering out of the Feld office, not out of homes.
- Scott O'Donnell: [01:13:43](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Peggy Williams: [01:13:44](#) So, they, they've tried a lot of different things, found out what work, found out what didn't work. Um, found out who are trustworthy employees and, um, they moved forward with that, and they pretty much like meetings where people are eye-to-eye now.
- Scott O'Donnell: [01:14:02](#) Those were the Palmetto years? [inaudible 01:14:03]
- Peggy Williams: [01:14:03](#) Yeah. Yeah. So, I was based in the old, uh, rail recycling area of the Palmetto, the old warehouse there. It's not where they would rehearse the shows. They still weren't all together yet, but their goal was to be all together. By now, Venice had closed because the train tracks going to Venice were in disrepair and there wasn't, um, a good agreement about who should pay the price to repair them. So, 1992 was our last year in Venice or was it '91? Anyway, in 1992, we were now beginning to rehearse in, um, in December in, um, the Tampa fair grounds, one of the buildings there.

- Scott O'Donnell: [01:14:53](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Peggy Williams: [01:14:53](#) So, we had all the animals and everybody up there, and wardrobe people would come in from New York. Instead of sending the wardrobe up to New York to be fitted, everything came down to, to centralize in Florida, and the corporate headquarters were still in Vienna, Virginia, and the rail recycling was going on in Palmetto, and they referred all 120 rail cars that went, stayed in service. Um, uh, higher standards for, uh, fire control, for water, for safety, for communications to the train master.
- Peggy Williams: [01:15:24](#) I mean, they just refurbished all the train cars, and kept them, kept 120 of them on the road, and built more elephant cars 'cause we were having babies like, uh, one or two a year at the elephant center. So, that was a, um, a requirement for an additional number of elephant cars, and those have to have, you know, all three wheels on the trucks instead of two wheels at each end 'cause they're so heavy duty load. Um, but these, these guys knew how to build anything.
- Scott O'Donnell: [01:15:50](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Peggy Williams: [01:15:51](#) Everything was just custom, custom built and, um, I can tell that for a fact because now I'm on the board of directors of, um, show people's winter quarters and that is, uh, basically, a place in Seffner, Florida, which is really close to the Tampa, where, where we used to rehearse, to the Tampa fair grounds, and it's where people from the touring industry can use their own rig.
- Peggy Williams: [01:16:21](#) If they, if they need to retire, choose to retire or lose their jobs, they can come there in their own rigs and continue to live like they've been living on the road and be around other people who have been in the touring industry, whether it's fairs, circus, carnival, whatever it is, and that the population of the, the renters there are all from the touring industry. So, they can keep their, their industry stories alive and commiserate one with another.
- Scott O'Donnell: [01:16:46](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Peggy Williams: [01:16:46](#) And we were, uh, d- a train car was donated to us as a community center there for the show people's winter quarters. It's not a place people are gonna live. They were tearing down the walls, and that's the hardest part of it besides moving a train down a highway, that was fun, and the drivers that were moving 'cause it didn't have the big wheels on. It had little

dollies on it. It looked kinda like big on top of little, right? But we got it down the road for 47 miles from Palmetto up to Seffner and, um, had to build a track. Um, and these are things that was never done, done before. So, we relied a lot on the former Feld employees and some people that are in the rail industry to help us out, make it all happen, and it's happened, and it's there now. Now, we're refurbing it inside now that it's, it's, it's a happy permanent home.

- Peggy Williams: [01:17:36](#) We're, um, refurbing it inside, so we can do flat screen TVs, game tables, library, all that kind of stuff. So, I've learned a lot about how well the train cars were built because they're really hard to dismantle. They were very good, what they did, the rail community there.
- Scott O'Donnell: [01:17:54](#) I assume you recall when you were in Palmetto that you had an office space inside of David Larible's car.
- Peggy Williams: [01:18:01](#) I did, and that was so-
- Scott O'Donnell: [01:18:02](#) Did I remember that correctly?
- Peggy Williams: [01:18:04](#) Yes. It was, it was, um, you know, there's, there's pros and cons to having an office in a train car or in a trailer for that matter because Florida is a place where it rains a lot. And when you have a metal roof on a trailer or a train car, when it rains a lot, it's harder to hear on the phone. (laughs) And so, um, that was a little challenge, especially about 4:00 everyday in the summer when it rains consistently in Florida, but, um, I, I shared an entire 90-foot train car with someone from the government relations department, Debbie Fahrenbruck.
- Peggy Williams: [01:18:38](#) She was the one that was responsible for all the permits, for all the animals in every city, state, county, and, and across the country. Um, she knew what permits were needed, and she had some people helping her to make sure that every type of animal we were bringing to town, we already had, uh, permission to bring it there 'cause every county and city is different.
- Peggy Williams: [01:18:58](#) So, she, she had one end of the train and, uh, I had the other end of the train. And she and her dog, her dog did daily runs up and down the hall to, uh, make sure we were both okay. It was great. I was in that for four years, and then, um ... So, it was a beautifully done car, too. It was custom built for a family of five.
- Peggy Williams: [01:19:21](#) David Larible was, uh, um, a clown and his wife, uh, was in the show and his mother was also living on that train car in her

mother-in-law apartment, which is, became Debbie's office. David's living room became, and kitchen, became my office. And, uh, we operated quite well out of there for four year. It was, it was, um ... I would do it again. I would change some things. Um, but we didn't use like the restrooms and stuff. We didn't have it hooked up like that. So, I would change that in the future. (laughs)

Peggy Williams: [01:19:55](#) So, but it was wonderful to, uh, be able to do that. And, um, then that came to an end when they, um, decided to start moving some of the train cars that weren't gonna be put in service again out of the ... And, and that all came from 2013 when the corporate office in Palmetto, uh, not the same location in Palmetto, but six blocks away was created to have everything under one roof, all the corporate offices. People were moved down there like I was. Um, I was moved down earlier than some others, but eventually, people were moved down there, and they have, uh, the train recycling right there because the building that they bought was so huge, it had a railroad track that went right into the building. So, that was great for rail recycling.

Peggy Williams: [01:20:48](#) Um, and, and in 2013, we started populating that building. And, um, now it's, uh, everybody has moved pretty much. There's a few people that still are in Vienna like the legal department and stuff, but most of everybody is under one roof. They have town hall meetings for the whole corporation, um, and they have offices in many different countries. So, it's become, it's become, um, an entertainment corporation, not just a touring show, but every product that they make is a touring product. That's what they're excellent at.