

Interview with Mark Albright
Interviewer: Dorothy Flanders
December 7, 1976

Q: Okay, Mr. Albright I've talked to you many times and know you have a lot of interesting stories to tell and I wonder if you could start in the beginning. I know you were born in Mt. Vernon, maybe you could tell us the date you were born.

A: I was born in Mt. Vernon Indiana, Posey County on September the 3rd 1888 on 1st street. And I lived there until I was about six years old. Then we moved to 3rd and Mulberry.

Q: What was your father's position in ---

A: My father was manager of the [Harmony Company], and later as I said before it became the American [Harmony Company] and my first experience in the community business was as a clerk on the [IN Flecher], she had, she was a stern wheel steamboat and in the winter and fall we towed corn from points along the Ohio, the Wabash, and even the little Wabash River into that mill at Mt. Vernon. And I worked there after school hours and on Saturday and Sunday and then in the summer we ran excursions up and down the river from as far up as Cincinnati to Carol Illinois. After that I and my brother, he ran the [Mosani] theatre at Mt. Vernon and I worked as a stage manager and we put on such productions as a Royal Slave, The Love Pirate, and Scott Companies. Scott Company played a week's stand and ---

Q: What was the name of the theatre Mark?

A: [Mosani], the old [Mosani] theatre they called it. Of course, in the old days they called it an Opera House and I'll gamble today that very few people know anything about a stage of a theatre.

Q: What was your job as stage manager?

A: Well I had to tend to the lights and shift the scenery and go out and get things for the show like guns and props we called em' and things like that.

Q: These were touring stock companies that came into Mt. Vernon, is this correct?

A: Yes, one or some of em would play one-night stands like as I said before even Uncle Tom's Cabin, they had the dogs and everything else with em. Mark's the lawyer, and little Eva, and Simon [Legry], and so on so.

Q: Can you remember any actors or actresses that were in some of those plays.

A: Well the only one I can remember was [Miller Shusker], he was a Jewish man and he later on opened what was called a [Vaudeville Circuit] where he booked [Vaudeville] acts and sent em to different towns in the United States and well I do remember seeing posters back in the old dressing rooms in that theatre of some great lady actress from New Harmon Indiana, her name was Golden but I do not remember her first name.

Q: How old were you when you started as stage manager, you were quite young then weren't you?

A: I think I was about twelve years old.

Q: And you started working on the boats you told me when you were twelve too?

A: Yes, well we, I sandwiched in between the boats and the theatre.

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Q: And your brother then was a few years older than you was?

A: He was nine years older than I was and he had already been in the show business, was showing before he took over this opera house. He has been with [Mario Brothers Midshow], he's been with, well I was trying to think of the name of the other show. He was with a bigger stock company, now that was a show played week stands and then he came back to Evansville and he and I bought a merry go round and we played towns, kind of like New Harmony, Carmine, Union Town Kentucky, Equality Illinois, Harrisburg Illinois, Eldorado Illinois on fairs, picnics and fourth of July. And I'll tell you one thing, this experience I had while riding on the merry go round. We were playing the town called Equality Illinois and there was a young couple that just got married and for their honeymoon they bought two dollars' worth of merry go round tickets and rode the merry go round for the [ties].

Q: Now, I know it was your brother who then introduced you into show business and you later went into the circus, but I, let me get back to some of the boats, I know that you can tell the names of many of the boats that were in the river. Could you tell us the names of some of those ships?

A: Well when I started with the IN Flecher, Captain IN Flecher, he was the captain of the fleet. We had the IN, the GK Flecher, the John W. Love, the W.R. Markle, the scarab, and I think he rented one boat called the Nelly. We also had a model barge, a model barge is built like a steamboat, that is the bottom of it is, and it was a covered barge and that was what we ran the excursions with.

Q: Now most of the boats were barges and they were used for transporting grain, was this what?

A: Well what we called flats, that was a barge with a scowl bowel, they were for corn, but we also loaded corn on that model barge, the Bell Vernon.

Q: And you did run, he did also run one excursion boat you said in the summer time?

A: Yes, and I'll tell you one little experience I had. When the boys loaded the corn and they were mostly colored boys, two men were put to sacks and these sacks would weigh from 150 to 160 lbs. They would lift them on the boys' shoulder, and they would carry em off the boat over a stage plank and put em in, on the ground where the team who's wagons could pick em up to take em to the mail. And they got the boys to carry the corn, received one penny a bag, well some of the boys were able and were smart enough in that time and would take a word of the captain, how many sacks they carried off the barge or barges and they would, the captain would pay em and they would divide the money up amongst themselves but I worked with one crew, every time one of the boys would have to come by me, I'd give him a penny for carrying the sack of corn.

Q: Well, now do you remember what you received as a salary when you were working on the barge as a young boy?

A: Well I'll tell you, I think it was about three dollars a week.

Q: Three dollars a week.

A: Of course, I made some extra money when I worked in the, we had a little confection merry stand that we backed down to the barge and I got a little commission from that, I don't really remember what it was. But I do remember we made some lemonade one day and there was a lady came up, this

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lemonade was made with tartaric acid, water, sugar, and coloring and the lady came up and bought a glass of the lemonade and she said, I was behind the stand, and she said that lemonade sure looks queer, I said lady if you had as much tartaric acid in you as that lemonades got in it, you'd look queer too.

Q: Sounds to me like in your childhood you really were work oriented you, there wasn't [Interrupted]

A: [Huh]

Q: In your childhood, you did a lot of working, you didn't, was there play, as a young boy did you play games?

A: I had everything in the world, my youngest brother [Tunyas] died when he was four years old, I was six years old, and I was made the pet then of the family. I had ponies, dogs, pigeons, bicycle, horses, and everything, rabbits, everything that a kid could want. My mother would buy it for. If she wouldn't buy anything for me, like I wanted a horse, I say alright if you don't buy it, I'll go to dad and he'll buy it.

Q: Sounds like you had a good childhood then. You started work you said at twelve, what was the reason for you starting work if you had all these things, just something to do?

A: It was play, it was, I was a young fella and I loved the river and I liked all the people I worked with and it was more fun than really work. That's what it was. Of course, the merry go round and later on the circus, that was a different proposition.

Q: And how old were you when you started in Circus? Didn't you say your bother introduced you to the circus?

A: Yes, I think I was sixteen, about sixteen or seventeen when I joined Latinas Big Three [Lorraine] Wild Animal Circus in [Timonium] Maryland. We went east as far as Maine, as far you can go in Maine, around Fort Camp and Van Buren and then of course we doubled back down through the United States and closed in the south. I think we closed in Georgia or North Carolina. After I left Latina, I went on the Sparks Show. John R. Sparks is Salisbury North Carolina and that was the show beautiful. There were two kinds of circus men, now I'm gonna tell you, the Sunday School Show or the Simon Pure Show as show folks called it, was a show that had no grabs, didn't even have hoochie-koochie dancers, had nothing, but the Griss Show or Grab show and I was with several of em, had Alabama and the forty thieves. Everything from short change orders in the connection which is between the menagerie and the [Day Show Ten] to the Three Card Monty and the shell game and a dancing girl in the back of the side show.

Q: That's interesting. You were telling me that there's a lot of circus lingo. In other words, circus people don't use the same sort of language that we do, could you tell me some of the phrases?

A: Well, an actor was called a caker, a clown was called a joy, a musician was wind jammer, a driver of horses if he drove four horses, he was a skinner, if he drove more than four, six, eight, or ten horses he was a long line skinner. There never was such a thing on a circus as a tent, everything was tops and canvas and the names of all different things were slang or circus phrases. As I told you the other day I

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could stand up and talk to a circus man and use English and you wouldn't even know what I was talking about.

Q: Give me an example.

A: Well supposing I say, where is the paper today? Is it in the blues, long, or short? Well I don't think you know what I meant there.

Q: No

A: What I simply meant was there free tickets in the free blue seats or were they in the long side of the reserved seats or on the short side of the reserved seats?

Q: Didn't you tell me too that they really didn't call it a circus, it was called?

A: No, circus people never call a circus a circus, it was always the show from the Raymond show or the [Cells Logo] show, [Hagranback] Wallace show, John Robertson Show, Walter L. Maine show, or any circus was a show and I made em from the Barnes show, Raymond Barnum and Bailey one season when they had 104 railroad cars and I also made the [Core] show when they had 9 cars but there I opened and closed in one which means I stayed one day.

Q: What was your job? Tell us about some of your jobs that you had when you were in the circus.

A: Well when I first went on the circus, I was a concession man and purchasing agent. Then I got with the casting act which is where one man hangs on the trapeze at one end of the net and the other man hangs at the other end. I guess the distance between us was about 35, I think it was 35 or 36 feet. And I was the one that they threw when I got the peak of my act, I could do a double somersault in the air before the man caught me, but he dropped me in Titusville Pennsylvania and hurt me and when I came back on the show my brother would never let me go back with the acts. He was auditor and [steam Callao] player.

Q: You have an interesting story about the steam Callao too, do you wanna tell us about that?

A: Well yes, there were only two places in the United States where the Steam Callao's were built. That was the JC Nichols Company of Cincinnati Ohio and the Jordan Mesker Iron Works of Evansville Indiana. The Nichols people built a 20 whistle Callao and George Krats people here built a 32 whistle Callao. On a Callao there was only 20 whistles and 20 keys, as well as I remember there was only one bass whistle on a Callao, that is a 20 whistle Callao. And they were, a Callao was built in the shape of a magnet, only the pipe or the other whistles were fitted was round, and on each one of these whistles there was a valve and from that valve there was a wire that ran through the keyboard of the Callao and of course by pressing the key that's where you got the music and my brother as I said he was I think he was with the first show he was ever with was with Buck Skin Bills Wild West, then he went with Gentry Brothers, then wallered around Maine and the [inaudible] Will Latina.

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Q: I don't understand the difference between a Steam Callao and what the other kind is. What is the other type of Callao?

A: A steam Callao and an air Callao are just as different as a piano and an organ. An air Callao has almost, or I'll say as many keys as a piano and any one that can play piano can play an air Callao, but when it comes to playing a steam Callao you sure got to know your business.

Q: And your brother was one of the few people that could play that steam Callao.

A: He, my brother was the best.

Q: And what was his name? I don't believe we had this person.

A: His name was Ernest Albright, but he owned a soaker, on the surface he went as E. Deacon Albright. That was when he was on the grad show, he was so honest he wouldn't take a nickel and in all the grad shows that I was ever with I can honestly say that I never took a penny that didn't belong to me and I had plenty of opportunities.

Q: You must of met a lot of interesting people in your days in the circus.

A: I met and shaken hands with President Taft. He called me on the porch of the San Quentin Hotel in Manchester New Hampshire and talked to me for a half hour about the circus. President Wilson called me on the seats of Niagara Falls New York and talked to me. I don't mean he just called me up there and shook hands with me [inaudible] but he talked to me. I knew Jack Dempsey as well as I, well than any friend I ever had. He was put on a concert on the Sells Photo Show and kind of a boxing match. I also knew Tom [Mits] and his horse, I forget the name of his horse now, I think it was trigger. He put on a Wild West show and I knew Bill Leon who was supposed to be the champion wrestler around the world at that time.

Q: When Jack Dempsey was with the show was that after he had lost his championship?

A: Jack Dempsey as I, well as I remember was with a Sells Photo Show, I think it was 1918 but I am not positive, I do not remember the scene, but I know that he had not fought Tunney before then, and I know that he had not fought George [Carbon Tear] because he fought George Carbon Tear in 1920.

Q: Um

A: I was on the Walter L. Main Show the day that Rudolph Valentino died. I was in a town called Radford Virginia and we got to lose that afternoon that Rudolph Valentino had died.

Q: Did they announce it in, was it during a show and was it announced?

A: No, it just was, well it was what we call on the circus a grapevine. Well I'll tell you one thing about circus people. Now they had just as much heart in em' as anybody else. I remember the day that President Hardy was buried and the funeral. I do not, I know it was 23 or 24 and radios had not been effect very long but we had one of em on the circus and during the funeral services they stopped the show and turned on the radio and when the hens came over the radio some of the boys in the big band were, could play by ear and they caught up the hens and played em right so and I don't believe there was a dry eye in that big top.

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Q: I'll bet. You have some interesting stories to tell about the wild animals too, you have? You have an interesting story about jelly roll, do you wanna relate that to me?

A: Well jelly roll was a boy that worked in the menagerie with a manager in the menagerie or boss in the menagerie whose name was Scotty. Jelly roll was named that because he was always buying jelly rolls and cakes and he was a retarded boy. Scotty was the roughest toughest seasoned trooper that ever was on the circus and sometimes when he talked or swore his language would blister the gold, he bought with a sunburst of a parade wagon. Well there was another, on the show we had also in the menagerie we had a bad lion named Satan and Satan was just about two thirds grown and nobody ever took him on parade or no one was allowed to go near his cage and to clean the cage out there was little doors at the bottom and they used an iron scraper to scrape out the cage and across the menagerie in the another cage we had a bird, I think you call it a [Yun]. Well when they sweep out her cage, they called her your heinous, when they scrub out her cage, they took a broom, well as I said that when they cleaned out Satan's cage, they scraped it out. We were playing New Bedford Massachusetts and I was in the menagerie with Scotty sitting on a bale of hay and Scotty said it was noon and Scotty told the boys to go over and see if the Flag was up, that meant was lunch ready, well all the boys went but Jelly Roll and Mike, that was one of Scotty's helpers. He said you two clean out her heinous cage and Satan's cage and then go over and eat. Well I sitting there on the bale of straw or hay with Scotty and he grabbed me by the shoulder and whispered, and said " Don't move, don't look" and of course I couldn't help from looking and instead of jelly roll cleaning out the cage from the bottom, he was in the cage with the lion and that lion was crouching in one corner and digging his claws in the oak boards of that cage and of course we thought that the next minute he would be torn to pieces but instead of that he swept out the cage, reversed the broom, hit the old lion over the head, said move over beasty, the lion moved over and he swept where the lion had been, he took the broom and hit him over the head again and said move back and the lion moved back. He finished sweeping out the cage jumped out of the back door of the iron cage and threw his broom down and said that Scotty said can I go eat, Scotty didn't hear him, Scotty had fainted.

Q: Didn't you tell me you had written that story then sold it someone for, to be published?

A: Yes, I sold the story many years ago to a magazine, I think the magazine name was the White Tops. Well I joined a sport show and I was a purchasing agent and had the cotton candy concession, I did not receive a salary, but I was given a concession free. Well we opened in Salisbury, I went into the town on, I remember the date well, on the 17th of April and we did, the show did not give its performance til the afternoon of the 19th. Well I went to the hotel and went in the lobby and I met the assistant manager and he gave me a list of what I was to buy, well I don't remember what was on the list, only one item, it was four padlocks for the possum bellies which are bins under the sleeping cars where supplies for the candy stand like bags of peanuts, boxes of Cracker Jacks, boxes of popcorn and things like that are stored. Well I went in to buy the padlocks in this hardware store, I bought the locks and started out and a girl walked in and I said to myself, they sure do raise em pretty here in North Carolina, but I thought she was a town girl and course we would only be there two days and I would never see her again but the day the show opened was my 21st birthday and when I went to the lot show grounds with my brother he put his hand on my shoulder and said Mark there's your birthday present. I looked at the most beautiful circus I ever saw, and my brother woke me up out of a daze and said well you've been

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looking at the shell now let's go see what's in the egg. So he went to the [Calliup] and I opened up my cotton candy stand and the show was what we called a [regent], that means a big day, a bad day was a bloomer but when the ticket line opened of course most of the people went in the show, well I walked through the marquee entrance through the menagerie into the big top, went into reserve seats and sit down. I watched the spec which you, they called it extravaganza. It's generally led by the big band and always they open the feature of the circus and you know it was a parade around the living room track. Well I watched that, the show costumes were beautiful new, all the trapeze were nice and new and I watched the acts, and of course after a while I lost interest cause I've seen shows for about 5 and a half years now and I said to the lady, I was sitting right close to her, she was takin tickets at the middle gate of the reserved seats, I said when is the feature act, she said right now there's the ring master stepping on the first stage, well the ring master got up and made the announcement and it was Flowery and I told the lady I said he sure smearing the mustard thick on that brown mac and the lady says wait til you see the act you'll be surprised, well I wasn't surprised I was stunned, because when I looked at the girl that was to do the act it was the same girl I'd seen in the hardware store and the merchants of that town had given the show a beautiful floral design was placed on the first stage, the girl walked over and picked a rose from the floral alter or whatever it was and put it in her mouth, went over to the tapes, a tape was a rope covered with cloth that was rigged up to raise the performers to trapeze, bars or whatever act there gonna do. Well she did her act with that rose in her lips, well I had, I had to feed the girl, so I went around past everyone on the track.

Q: Okay

A: When she walked past, I started to say something, but my mouth wouldn't work so she smiled at me and tossed me the rose, well I don't wanna go on.

Q: Alright, that's an interesting story and she [interrupted]

A: Well it's written in the [interrupted]

Q: Yes, and but she was the love of your life wasn't she Mark, she was in, she was later then killed in a trapeze accident.

A: [inaudible]

Q: Yes. Okay. Mark we just got through telling the story of Rose and you never did marry, did you?

A: No, I've never been married.

Q: How many seasons were you with the circus total? I know you don't say years you always say seasons but how many seasons were you with the circus?

A: 27

Q: And you did a variety of jobs in those 27 years.

A: Yep

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Q: I imagine you know all about the circus.

A: I know it from the runs to the last turning torch at night.

Q: Yes, maybe you could tell us a little about when a circus arrives in town, a little bit about how they get themselves set up.

A: Well when a show first arrives in a town the runs are pulled out from under the wagon and after the flat cars have been turned around or switched these runs are hooked onto a flat car and I'll say they are 20 feet long, they are steel with the edges turned up and two men guide these wagons by the tongue which is not a circus term, it's called a pole and they are pullers, they guide this wagon down the runs and to hold this wagon so it will not go too fast is a hook rope, one end of the rope has a big iron hook on it, the other end is looped around what is called a snubbing post and this iron hook is hooked onto a ring in the heavy running gear of a wagon and the pullers let this wagon down easy because the man on the hook rope eases these loops off of the snubbing pin and allows the wagon to go down slow.

Q: How, these wagons are the menagerie wagons and everything in the circus that's transported on the flat cars goes in the wagons, is this true?

A: Everything that is loaded on a circus is loaded in the wagon. The only thing that is ever loaded on the flat cars are the runs and the turning torches and the turning torches are placed, the last thing that is picked up at night, they are placed on the corner showing where the wagons must turn to get to the runs to be loaded on the train.

Q: Okay now you're taking the wagons off the flat cars and where, where do you go from there?

A: Well the minute that the wagons are taken off the flat cars they are picked up by the drivers and a man that is a driver on a circus is called a skinner and any man that drives more than four horses is a long line skinner, as I say I was on a circus for 27 seasons. We had a boss hostler on every show, and he was the head of all the drivers, he carried a whip but in my 27 seasons I never saw a horse hit with a whip.

Q: Alright then when the wagons were hitched up and the drivers were there, I'm not using the right terminology I know, but did they parade down the streets to the ...

A: They went first to a, a suited driver picked up the wagons they were taken to the show ground, but before even the first wagon that arrived on the show grounds the boss canvasman and his men were there with what they had laying out pins, they were an iron rod about 3 foot long with a sharp point and a loop at the top in each one of these loops was a different colored rag, these laying out pins where four of em were placed where the center poles would go, the rest of em were placed where the stakes would be driven then the canvas was spread out, first was what we called a round end which was about a 100 from a 125 feet to a 175 feet, it just depended on the size of the show. Well then after these round ends had been laid out the next thing was what was called middle pieces, they were generally 50 to 75 feet wide and they were laced onto the round end, some circuses used two of these middle pieces, others used three, then of course at the back of the show tent was another round end and these were all latched together and on each one of the round ends and the middle pieces were hooks that were hooked into what was called a bale ring, it was just an iron ring, I'll say a foot and a half in diameter,

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then the top that was attached to a block and falls, this falls was pulled by horses, a team of horses sometimes by the canvas men, and sometimes by elephants, the tent was raised about halfway up then the side poles were placed around the top and tied off with what we call guidelines to the stakes with a half hitch and you had to know how to throw a half hitch because if it rained that half hitch would swell so that no one could untie it. Well the tent is halfway up with the side poles in it. The tent is further pulled up and the quarter poles which are poles between the side poles and the center poles are placed in it and the tent is raised all the way up. As it is raised the guide lines are loosened or tightened, it just depends on how the tent is raised. After the tent is raised and all of it, the first thing that happens then is the canvas men come in and drive what is known as toe pins, they are square stakes and from these stakes is placed what was known as stringers. These stringers were placed at the end of the toe pin and under each stringer was placed a jack. This jack was shaped like an A with a notch in the top. The first jack was about two feet high. The second one was about four, maybe the last one would be fifteen or twelve feet high. The stringer fit into these notches on the jacks, well the stringers and the jacks are placed against the toe pin this stringer is always placed, then the seats are laid in notches on the stringers and of course the reserve seats are netted off so that no one can get em. The blue seats or free seats are at the front end of the big top and at the back end of the big top. After the seats are in then comes the property men or riggers, these riggers adjust all trapeze and all of the cars handle bars and anything the performers have to perform on, but the performers always supervise this to see that everything was tied off alright. Then at about ten thirty in the morning, sometimes it would be later than that, the parade would go out, it was led by the big band, the animal cages from the menagerie, ladies and gentlemen on horseback, elephants and wound up with a steam callio. The parade would parade through the main parts of the city and be back maybe in an hour and a half. The big show would open at one o'clock and the performers would start at two. The admission on shows run in those days, one time I played a town called Biddeford Maine and we showed for twenty-five cents. Later on, the admission all run up as high as two dollars.

Q: Was there reserve seats, what?

A: No, the reserve seats were always extra, I think the price of them run from fifty to seventy-five cents.

Q: I think another interesting thing to bring out is from the time that the flat cars hit, hit the city or came to the city til the time that the tents were up, how long did you estimate that took?

A: Well I'd say from the time the first wagon was unloaded at the runs to the big show was up, I would say two hours. But of course, that varies on the condition of the lot or show grounds. If the lot was wet of course it took more time than that and if the canvas wet the same thing happened.

Q: And you told me at one time what you saw someone raise the top or the canvas in, what was his shortest time you had seen this done?

A: Well I knew one boss canvas man, Whitey [Lucker], who put up a big top, I do not mean put the seats in, but the top and the menagerie top went up in 54 minutes. Of course, he had a bunch of helpers with him.

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Q: How many would you say, estimate?

A: I would say that he had 75 men working with him.

Q: And you said these men traveled with the circus, all the workmen?

A: All working men traveled with the show and of course they came and went and the longer a fellow would stay with the show and working that, the more they raised his salary.

Q: What would you say his salary was?

A: Well, in those days I would his salary run from 8 to 10 dollars a week.

Q: But this included his meals?

A: Yes, his meals and a place to sleep and a working man's car, of course they were bunks all the way down the car, were three high and two men slept in those [burchs], which made 6 people in the three [burchs].

Q: Were they double size or were they small?

A: Well I'd say that they were very small.

Q: In other words, it was a kind of a cozy deal.

A: If one man had to turn over, he'd have to wake the other fellow up and tell him he was gonna move. Of course, in the summer lots of the working men slept on the flat cars or in the canvas wagon or even in the plank wagon.

Q: Can you estimate what the population of, I know all circuses are different sizes, but you know just estimate what the total population with the performers and the workers.

A: On Shows?

Q: Yes, on shows.

A: Well I would say the whole personnel of the circus taking the sideshow, the working men, the performers, and the roughnecks, razorbacks and everything on a show with 40 flats or with 40 cars would run about 250 men.

Q: Now does this include the performers too?

A: That includes performers, men, women and everyone and a circus never carried what we called excess baggage, which means if you didn't perform, if you wasn't a performer or a workman you could not be with the show and people that joined the show late in the season after the worst weather of spring was over, they were always called a first of May.

Q: Mark you wanted to tell us another story about one of your jobs that you had when you were at the circus.

A: Well as a Purchasing agent I bought everything from 50 cents worth of [Rasin] for the backs of the bear back rider's horses to a steel flat car and of course I've had many strange experiences but one of

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em I think is kind of funny. I was in the town of [Bangar] Ontario, there was not a soda fountain, or they did not have ice cream or ice there, but my first job of the morning was always to buy ice for the cookouts, for the candy stands, the [privilege] car, the sleeping cars and so forth. I finally rounded up in this town of Bangar a man that had an ice house. He cut ice in the winter and stored it in this ice house in the summer in sawdust. I had the [gilli] wagon, that is the wagon we haul stuff to and from the circus. I went out to this ice house and I had the manager's son with me. He was 12 years old, his name was Danny Ordum, well across from this ice house was a perfume factory and I noticed that there were four or five nice looking Canadian French girls looking out the window and watching us. Well my mind went from the ice to the girls and the ice man said to me, how much ice do you want? I said give us about two ton and little Danny spoke up and he said Mr. Mark are you sure you want that much, I said why Danny, he says it's 3 dollars a hundred, I said give us two hundred pounds. The same season I was in a town in Kansas, I do not remember whether it was Hutchinson or what town it was, but I got off the show train that morning, walked up the street and saw a sign that said Consumers Ice Company. I went into the office and said to the man behind the desk, I'm the purchasing agent for Howls great London Circus and I would like to have two tons of ice for the show, how much is a ton, he said 10 cents. I said mister I'm not kidding I got a lot of work to do. He said I'm not kidding either it's ten cents a ton, he said if you walk up the street you can buy it for a nickel a ton. I said well what's going on here, he says there's an ice war here and that same year in Brownsville Texas I got off the train walked up to a boy about a half a block from the show train and I said son where's the ice factory, he said no savvy, which I think in Spanish meant don't understand, well I tried another boy and he said no savvy. I got to thinking to myself that all of the kids here in this town speak Spanish. So, I said if the boys speak it, to myself I said this, I'll try a girl, so I walked across the street and I saw a girl on the corner and I said young lady do you speak English, she says no I don't but the boy on the corner does.

Q: Mark you had another interesting job in the circus and that was selling cotton candy, could you tell us a little bit how you make cotton candy, and what it costs you to make it, and what you learned from it?

A: Well cotton candy as far as I know was first invented by A.T. Deets of Toledo Ohio and was first shown or used in the St. Louis world's fair. Now that was sometime in early 1900's. That, then for years it died out and a boy on the Sells Photo Circus, I'll say some thirty years later opened up a cotton candy stand. This cotton candy was made out of nothing but pure sugar. The head of the cotton candy machine had tine slits in it and underneath the head was a fire, a gas burner. That heated the sugar into a syrup, a syrup came out of these tine slits and cooled before it hit the edge of the pan. I'll say about a tablespoon full of sugar would make a piece of cotton candy or a ball of cotton candy as big around as a basketball and it cost about a quarter of a cent to make one. In my day I sold cotton candy for 10 cents a roll and today I think from what I've seen that the boys get 35 cents for it. If I could of sold it in my day for 35 cents, I'd a been a millionaire.

Q: How much did you, was your tape or a season, you had the concession stand for cotton candy was that true?

A: Right.

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Q: And how much did you realize yourself in a season?

A: In a season what [we had] total?

Q: Yes, what was the total amount of money, I think you mentioned to me a sum that you ...

A: Well a season, of course seasons vary, when I had closed with all the way in one season from 3700 dollars in American traveler's checks to 4000 dollars. That means that I made and saved that much money from April to the first of November

Q: So, it was a profitable venture in those days?

A: What was that?

Q: It was a profitable venture?

A: Well of course I didn't have to pay for the privilege because I was a purchasing agent and that purchasing agent took care of my privilege. But the profit as I say, it costs about a quarter of a cent to make a roll of cotton candy.

Q: When you say the privilege does that mean that some concession stands had to pay the circus like a rent for?

A: Yes, some, now the blue moon men and the novelty men had to pay a privilege and then sometimes there were other concessions and I seen what was called Hoopla and things like that, they were legitimate games of skill, but they had to pay a privilege also. Now a privilege would run all the way I'd say from 35 dollars to 85 dollars a week on the shows.

Q: In other words when you were the purchasing agent that gave the privilege of operating a stand without paying into the circus, is that correct?

A: Yes, I didn't have to pay anything for the privilege of running my cotton candy stand because I did the buying for the show.

Q: Were you given a salary as a purchasing agent?

A: No, I didn't receive any salary at all and all I was allowed was a place to put my stand and a place to sleep and a place to carry my paraphernalia. I was not even given my meals on the show, I had to buy my own meals. --- Do you want me to tell you the name of some of the shows.

Q: Yes Mark, I know you've been with many circuses and you have one that you like, you have your favorite but why don't you name off some of the shows then tell us about the circus that you thought was the best show.

A: Well I had my first experience with a circus was called Latina's Big Three running wild animal circus. They opened one season in Timonium Maryland and the next season I joined em in [Haberdygrass] Maryland. The next show was Gentry Brothers famous dog and pony circus. Following that was the Sparks show, the John R. Sparks show the circus and it was the most wonderful show and most beautiful show I was ever in in my life and it was a show that I loved, I stayed with them one season. After that I joined Howl's great London and I played with them two seasons, I think. Then I went to the Sells Photo

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Show, the Hagan McWallace show, the Gentry Brothers and James Patterson show, and the Walter L. Maine show and the Coal show and finally, and the last show I was with was I think I returned to the John Robertson Circus.

Q: Now why did you consider the Sparks show the best of them all?

A: Well the Sparks show had a beautiful performance, had all new canvas, everything was brand new, everything and every act was not common place is seem to be a feature act and the seal act which are not seals but sea lions was one of the most beautiful acts I've ever seen in my life. That is as far as trained animals go. I never liked to see a wild animal act because most of them are trained by cruelty, if you see horses standing on their Hein legs it's because their front feet or front legs have been whipped out from under them forcing them to stand that way. As I say I love the Sparks show and I never will forget it, I can't describe it to you because I hardly know what to say but the show was wonderful, the people were wonderful, there was no draft or nothing out of the way on this show, it was absolutely a Sunday school or Simon Pure show as known in the circus business as a clean show.

Q: Who owned the show, was it Mr. Sparks or why did they call it the Sparks show?

A: The show was managed by Charlie Sparks, I think he was the greatest service man that had ever walked the [Bezallion] road. The show was owned by the Sparks family of Vandergrift Pennsylvania and we showed the town, their home town. Charlie Sparks, I've known him for a season, I never heard him utter an oath and I never heard him ball a man out and he was a very comical man. I was standing in the connection one day with him and the show was about to close, and I was waiting for the [blow] all which is the end of the circus. Mr. Sparks always carried a cane, in front of us was a reserve seat ticket box and the show was having what we call a clown walk around. Mr. Sparks looked at me and he hit the ticket box with his cane, and he said Mark says someday were gonna have an awful accident on this show. Well it kind of scared me, I says what's it gonna be Mr. Sparks, he says one of them clowns is gonna make somebody laugh. As I have told you from this story I spent as well as I can the life of a circus man. I'm gonna tell you the maximum amount of the service people to close this thing. It was this, show folks may never be right but right or wrong show folks.

Q: That's nice.