

Big Top Oral History Project

Interview Log

LOC Filename: afc2012003_00159_ms02
Interviewee: Mary Rawls (Interview – Part 1)
Interview Date: June 13, 2011

Minute Mark Topics presented in order of discussion on recording

00:00:00	Introduction
00:00:30	Place of birth
00:01:18	About Mary's mother, telephone operator
00:01:55	About Mary's father, sign painter
00:03:33	Mary learned how to do acts
00:04:02	Mother learned how to juggle
00:04:40	Busking on the street
00:05:45	Passing the hat
00:07:35	Family joined a circus in Kansas
00:08:50	Circus caste system
00:09:53	On Water for Elephants book
00:10:18	On movie Greatest Show on Earth
00:10:56	Movies versus circus reality
00:11:41	Prices today
00:12:32	Came to Hugo, Oklahoma in 1940s
00:12:50	Almost getting fired by Herb Walters
00:14:12	Circuses worked over the years
00:14:55	Opening day speech on Kelly Miller by son, David
00:16:00	More on Mother learning how to juggle
00:17:30	Working club dates
00:18:09	Injuries
00:18:44	Wardrobe malfunction on swinging ladder
00:19:34	First wire rigging
00:20:14	Costumes walking the wire
00:21:37	Never attended public school
00:21:41	Taught by father in house car
00:22:31	Voracious reader
00:23:46	Father did some painting on the circus
00:24:18	Father bought a home in Macks Creek, Missouri
00:25:40	Challenges with the house
00:26:46	Playing county fairs
00:27:43	How pay worked as a family
00:28:16	Eating in cookhouse
00:28:54	Meeting/dating future husband, Harry
00:32:10	Poisoning of Liberty horses on show going broke
00:33:30	Kissing Harry
00:35:05	Harry joining family in Macks Creek
00:35:54	Married Harry which impacted family act
00:37:02	Father built Mary and Harry a house car
00:38:11	Married for sixty years

00:40:36 Acts/performing as husband and wife
00:40:54 Performing while pregnant
00:41:57 Buying a home in Hugo, Oklahoma on North G Street
00:43:01 About Mary's kids and their acts/roles
00:45:43 Safety nets
00:46:40 Practicing
00:46:51 Injuries
00:47:57 Changing diapers on the show
00:49:07 Making costumes, especially while pregnant
00:50:30 Finding fabric
00:51:34 Satisfying aspects of circus work
00:52:33 Circus lingo/slang
00:53:50 Performing the loop de loop
00:56:04 Few single girls on the show
00:56:30 Typical day on Cole & Walters Show
00:57:23 Nuns traveling with the circus, Little Sisters of Jesus
00:59:46 Traveling town to town, route slips and arrows
01:00:54 Advance man duties
01:01:26 Laundromat
01:01:57 Payday in cash
01:02:15 The "nut"
01:03:00 Flat-rate salary
01:03:18 Work in off-season
01:04:55 Being a people person
01:05:06 Backyard off-limits for towners
01:06:57 Emotions in/out of the ring with performers
01:07:31 Birthdays/holidays
01:08:33 Mary's children and education
01:09:14 Mailing lessons back to school
01:10:27 Activities in town
01:11:24 Circus as a big family
01:12:33 Neck injury to son on circus
01:17:25 Hugo, Oklahoma as accepting community
01:19:29 Circus folks getting a bad rap
01:21:13 Perceptions of carnivals
01:22:51 On the future of circus
01:23:34 Performers going from circus to circus
01:24:00 Jobs segmented by departments
01:28:17 On the pie car
01:29:54 About butchers
01:30:59 Candy pitch
01:33:43 Mixed marriage on the show
01:35:09 How Mary's father got the name "the human fly"
01:36:49 Parent's names
01:39:22 Favorite circus memory, applause
01:39:57 On running novelty stand
01:41:24 Activities during slow periods on the road, sewing
01:42:39 Advice for folks wanting to go into circus profession

01:44:26	On her world being gone
01:45:20	Current age today
01:45:39	End of interview