

Oral History Interview
with
Jill Jones

Interview Conducted by
Tanya Finchum
June 15, 2011

The “Big Top” Show Goes On:
An Oral History of Occupations Inside and Outside the Canvas Circus Tent

Oklahoma Oral History Research Program
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An Oral History of Occupations Inside and Outside the Canvas Circus Tent

Interview History

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The recording and transcript of this interview were processed at the Oklahoma State University Library in Stillwater, Oklahoma.

Project Detail

The “Big Top” Show Goes On: An Oral History of Occupations Inside and Outside the Canvas Circus Tent aims to preserve the voices and experiences of those involved with the work culture associated with Hugo, Oklahoma’s tent circus tradition.

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Legal Status

Scholarly use of the recordings and transcripts of the interview with Jill Jones is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on June 15, 2011.

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About Jill Jones...

Jillian Jones was born in Hugo, Oklahoma. She graduated from Hugo High School in 1995 and soon thereafter married and moved to Soper, Oklahoma which is a short distance from Hugo. While working at Angie’s Circus City Diner in Hugo, Jill became acquainted with David Rawls who, at that time, owned Kelly Miller Circus. In 2003 David hired Jill for a part-time position managing a reading program sponsored by his circus. Before long, Jill took over advertising tasks for the circus and at one time or another has performed duties in all office positions. In 2006 she became the office manager of Kelly Miller Circus.

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Oral History Interview

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Hugo, Oklahoma



Finchum *Today is June 15, 2011. My name is Tanya Finchum. I’m with Oklahoma State University Library, part of the Oklahoma Oral History Research Program at the library. Today we’re in Hugo, Oklahoma, to speak with Jill Jones who is with the Kelly Miller Circus. So thank you for meeting with me today.*

Jones Thank you for asking.

Finchum *Let’s start by having you tell us a little bit about yourself. Where you went to high school, where you were born, that type of thing.*

Jones Okay. I was born here, actually, in Choctaw County, here in Hugo, at the hospital here in Hugo. I was born and raised, spent all my life in Hugo. I graduated in ’95 from Hugo High School and actually, moved just a small ten miles to the west, to a small town named Soper. I met my husband and we have been married for fifteen years. We live in Soper now. So we’ve never traveled far away, or I’ve never gotten far away from here, anyway.

Finchum *Brothers or sisters?*

Jones One brother, one sister. Both are younger. I’m the oldest of the bunch. Both of my parents were raised in Hugo. My dad was actually born and raised in Hugo. My mother was born in Virginia but moved here. My grandfather, he passed away way before I was ever born. He traveled. They were out in Virginia when my mother and my aunt were both born. I think by the age of three, she was a Hugo-ite, too.

Finchum *By traveling you mean for jobs, or for...?*

Jones Actually, on a truck. It was not a milk truck-milk truck, but along those lines. I don’t know a lot about him. He was killed in a wreck when my

mother, I think, was only in second, third grade. I don't know a whole lot of history about him.

Finchum *Well, when you were in high school, did you have a plan of what you wanted to do, as far as work?*

Jones I actually did. I wanted to be a lawyer. I was very, very geared towards it from about eighth grade, honors all the way through until about my junior year. I think I did what's called the 'natural work-school overload' on me. I had a conscious decision after graduation to take a year off. I had every intention of going to college after that year and met my husband. I didn't make it. (Laughs)

Finchum *Not yet, anyway.*

Jones Not yet, not yet. I really enjoy it here so maybe if ever I stopped playing circus, I might look into actually going on into school.

Finchum *While you were in school did you have classmates that were hooked with the circus in some way?*

Jones Yes, but the odd thing is even growing up here in Hugo, I was never circus oriented. I never really was the kid that wanted to go to the circus. I think, maybe as a kid, a few times I went. My parents have pictures of me and my little brother but not my sister. She actually was a late bloomer so maybe a few pictures. I was just never circus oriented. As a matter of fact, when I came into the circus industry, I was so clueless, absolutely clueless. I thought that the circus consisted of showing up in a town, putting the tent up, and putting on a performance. I wish it was that easy. (Laughter) I wish it was that easy. Even though I did go to school with Sasha Frye—she was, of course, Rawls back then—and her and Kristin [Byrd Parra] were probably the closest in my age. There was, probably, almost a four year gap there. I even had a few friends along the lines that did circus. I never really just had a tie-in or interest as a youngster.

Finchum *Well, then, we'll come then to how you came to be...*

Jones In the circus?

Finchum *...in the circus.*

Jones I actually worked at Angie's Circus City Diner, and I had to do a lot of night shifts. I have children, and so that was really hard on me. I would come in at eleven, be there at nine o'clock, and missed a lot of time with the kids. David Rawls, which at that point in time was 2003, owned

Kelly Miller Circus. He would actually come in almost daily when they were in their winter months, into the diner. So we kind of got to know each other on that end. I knew his wife from years and years before.

We were actually talking one day as I was checking them out and he said, "Jill, if you know of anybody that's looking for a job, I need somebody out there." He said, "Right now it's not full time, but it's just a small reading program that we do, but send them our way." I'd already had thoughts and had already talked to my family about, "I'm going to start looking for something else, even if I take a cut in pay, even if I take a cut in hours," because my kids rodeoed. They also played summer league ball, and so it took a lot of time away. I went and talked to David, gave my notice that actual day, and two weeks later I was circus, and I've been here ever since. That was in January or February of 2003.

Finchum

And who showed you the ropes?

Jones

David. I was very, very fortunate with David. When I first started here, the only thing I did was a small program. It's actually a program that we don't use anymore. It just became hard to do with the schools. What we did was a reading program. It was a reward system, kind of like the BOOK IT! or the Pizza Hut, which I think Pizza Hut is the BOOK IT! or they do like the Six Flags. What it was, the top readers in each class received a circus ticket. We made it as simple as possible. We told teachers to go ahead and implement it and attach it with maybe the AR Reading program or something that they already had going on, but it was tedious. It just got to where more and more of the schools went, "Eh, we've already got so many programs going on. Even though it's an attachment to a program, it's still tough to do." But that whole year I only worked part-time.

Within probably three months of being here, I was very fortunate that the office manager of the time, we actually worked together at the diner. Her brother owned Angie's Diner and still does, and so she was doing the advertising. She was also over accounts payable, the checking, and things of that nature. I took the advertising from her, and then I started doing the advertising. From there, I kind of switched around to every position that was in this office at some point in time.

In 2006, David was thinking about going back out on the road, and so he offered me the office manager position. Curiosity kills the cat. I was very curious in the route side of it, how we got from place to place. I would start questioning about the intricate details. I guess I kind of started in 2004 a little bit, doing that, but then really started working one-on-one with David in 2006. Of course, he ended up not having to go back out on the road, 2006 was his last season of owning Kelly Miller

Circus. I went in thinking, "Circus, just circus," and it's such an intricate, intricate organization, business. So many people just think, "There's nothing to it. There's no structure." It is probably one of the most structured jobs I've ever been in in my life.

I'm real fortunate with David. He, of course, knew the ins and outs. He created Kelly Miller, and so I was able to pick his brain across the board. When he sold in 2006, I was really sad, really, really sad. Not so much as, never-get-to-see-them-again-type scenario, but I was like, "Wow! Circus is over." For somebody coming in, thinking, "Oh, circus is nothing," and then it wasn't probably, not even a month later, he called me and said that our current owner, which is John Ringling North, II and Jim [Royal], that they were potentially going to purchase Kelly Miller, and would I come back in and finish out putting together a route for 2007. So I came back onboard, started working with David on putting a route together for 2007 and then, of course, John and Jim purchased the show in January of 2007.

So, currently, I am routing the show. That is probably my number one job in this office, is I actually put the route together, as to where we go. Every town that we go into, I've put my hand in. We are very fortunate that we have an established route that David actually established for the twenty-something years that he owned the show. We have a lot of new organizations, new towns, but our general area that we go in, and the time frame that we go in, was already established. On top of doing that, I just run the office. I oversee everyone that's in here. Then, this season hit me for a loop. My lady that was doing the advertising for three years is actually going to school to be a teacher, and she got a job offer to be a paraprofessional at the school. You can't blame her so she left me. (Laughs) Now I'm also doing the advertising side of this office as well.

Finchum

What all goes into routing?

Jones

Oh, gosh! (Laughs) It is hard. I'm not going to lie. What we normally do is we have every-year sponsors. They are sponsors that have been with us for a number of years, and they're from each state that we go into. Then we also have what's called every-other-year sponsors. Those are the ones that we hit on the off year. Then we have the third quantity, it's called a want date. A want date is the Lions Club that just heard about us and they're interested in us. It's the PTO, and this is a PTO from Missouri, and we get a phone call or e-mail that says, "My cousin lives in Illinois. and she actually goes and watches your show every year." It said, "The Lions Club brings you, you're the great fundraiser to do. Do you come into our state?" Those are called want dates.

What happens is, we kind of determine our starting point every year,

which doesn't alter very much, and then we determine whether or not we're going to exclude areas or a state, which rarely happens. Then from there, I kind of just start looking at our every-year standards. There are some key locations across the board that kind of help route us, and then we just kind of travel from there. I'll look at that. If it's March, for example, I know that the first part of March we're in Texas, and then the end of March we come in and take a small dip into Oklahoma. Then from Oklahoma, we go on into Arkansas, and we've got to make sure that we're at Mountain Home on Easter weekend and those types of scenarios. I'll take my state, I'll take my folder, everybody that is in my folder, which is our every-year towns, our every-other-year towns and our want dates. Then my map comes out and then I start highlighting everything. Then I look at the number of days that I have for that area, and it just kind of goes accordingly.

It's a very long process, doesn't happen in a day, and it doesn't happen in a week. We're not all the way booked right now. For the current 2011 season, I've got probably about twenty days left to put together. Once we get the route together, then what we do is since we have such a rapport with most of our every-year and every-other-year sponsors, it's a phone call. We pick up the phone. Idabel, for example, we'll pick up the phone and it's the Lions Club that brings us to town and whoever our current contact is, we call and say, "It's circus time again. Are you ready to play? Here's the date that we have for you." Then at that point in time, the contract goes out. The majority of our route is a phone call, which is very nice. It says a lot for Kelly Miller, too. You have to have a reputation and it has to be a good one. You have to do what you say you're going to do. If you do that, then it's a phone call. It's a phone call.

We do the phone calls. That's the easy side. Then the hard side is I put together, I tease Jim all the time, what's called "The Perfect Route" every year and then it crumbles. (Laughs) You look at our entire Arkansas run, for example, and I've got eight days and out of those eight days, five of our sponsors took it like that. [Snaps] Three of the sponsors, for whatever the case may be, couldn't play circus for that year. That produces what's called a hole, and that is where the fun begins. You have to start looking for something else in the area. It depends on why an organization says no. For example, maybe Glenwood turned us down for the year and said, "Oh, we've got our 100th celebration, and we've got an event going on every month for the full twelve months. We cannot fit circus into the calendar for the year." We stay away from that area, because that is our sponsor and we'll pick them up the next time.

Then we kind of look at the route, how much we can veer to the east, to

the west, north or south, and we look at roads. You always have to make sure we don't take what we call "the gray roads." On the map, it's the gray roads [indicating unpaved]. Don't ever take a circus down the gray road. It's those kinds of things that you just learn over time. We kind of just start looking at where we can go from there. Then we have what's called booking agents, and those are individuals that we'll send into that area to look for a new sponsoring organization. The routing is a long process, routing and booking because it goes hand in hand. It's interesting and very stressful. Some days I walk in here and I say, "Why did I ever ask to learn any of this?" especially when you book a new town. When you book a new town, you've got a lot of sweat equity going into it. When it turns out to be one of the best days of the season, it makes you feel good. That's the routing side in a nutshell.

Finchum *And other reasons for excluding, if you decide not to even go there to begin with?*

Jones Well, it's normally that we wouldn't necessarily do an exclusion on our part. Now, sometimes there is. We might not take a town—we've got a New York town, for example. They actually wanted us for this year. Our route altered slightly because we picked up a new stay, which was further east of New York. We extended one of our stays in one of our ongoing locations. When you do that, when you give to one area, you have to take from somewhere else. Our Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and New Hampshire section we gave to them, and it actually cut our New York a little bit short. What happened was we weren't able to come down as far south into New York that they are so they didn't get to play circus this year.

Those types of things happen. Our sponsors are really good about understanding and we are too, on the flip side. If we had that phone call from Glenwood that said, "It's our 100th celebration and we can't do it," that's fine. That is fine. We would not dare go into that town and look for somebody else. It's the Chamber of Commerce. That chamber of commerce is our organization. We always give a right of refusal to ongoing sponsors.

Finchum *Good business sense.*

Jones Absolutely. (Laughs) Absolutely.

Finchum *Is there a certain amount of mileage that you try to stay within when you're going from point A to point B?*

Jones Yes. The traveling side of the circus will tell you 'as short and sweet as possible,' and that is true. What I was taught is try to always stay a

county apart, and you want to stay thirty to fifty miles. The county apart makes a lot of sense in the majority of areas that we play, because we play Hugo. That's the size of towns, and smaller. I mean, we play a lot of two thousand, three thousand population towns. If we come into Choctaw County, and Hugo is the county seat, it would not be feasible for us to travel twenty miles to Rattan and play there as well, because the feeding pool from this area is all of those. You would pull from a good twenty, thirty mile radius. The county apart, that's a good reason as to why there. Thirty to fifty miles—the rule of thumb is they don't normally travel outside of thirty miles. What that means is if my husband and I were going to take our three kids to the circus, if the circus was forty miles away, we might not travel, especially with this economy the way it is now.

Finchum *Gas prices.*

Jones Yes, absolutely, absolutely. That has actually been very helpful to us, kind of a flip side. People are staying more local now, and so when we get into areas where there are other attractions that can happen. Sponsors, especially every-year sponsors that we kind of know like the back of our hand, that maybe have seen a slight decrease within the last couple of years. This year has seen an increase in attendance, because people are staying local. It's a double-edged sword, there.

Finchum *Do you travel with them occasionally, or go visit, watch them somewhere when they're performing?*

Jones No. Usually, Hugo and Ardmore and then if they're close enough in Texas, if just by chance, but as a whole, no. The traveling side is seven days a week. I mean, they play a different town every day. They get Easter off, they get Mother's Day off, and they get travel days. The travel days are usually one to three days. The circus travels from February to October. Those are their only days off they get. Now, the front-end side, which is us, we're easy. We're Monday through Friday. (Laughs) We get to go home at four o'clock, five o'clock every day, but it is very crucial that we're here every day. We're a super small office. There's only a few of us in here. We are in constant contact daily with the traveling side. The traveling side of our circus shows up on circus day and they work their magic. Our side of the office works with those civic organizations to get us there.

Everyone in this office, we are behind the scenes. We are the guys that are dealing with that chamber of commerce to make sure they get tickets and posters, to make sure that all their permits are intact, to make sure that the circus grounds that we're going to be playing on are good, solid grounds and make sure that it has dumpsters and whatever receptacles

for the trash and the manure, and you have to have good access to water. We are the ones that help them make circus day happen. On the advertising side of my job, I start working with sponsors about seven weeks before their circus date, every day—or not every day, necessarily—every week. I'm in contact with them, making sure that they can get newspaper and radio if it's available. We offer them an entire press folder that has about five different sections of advertising ideas and tools and suggestions. My job is to help them utilize all five of those sections to the best of their ability.

Finchum

Who creates that?

Jones

The press pack, our entire sponsor book? We have what's called a sponsor packet, which consists of a press pack, it consists of a step-by-step guidebook, and then a variety of little things in that, press releases, press photos, things of that nature. The original sponsor packet was put together way before I came. Obviously, it came from David and his family. Now, over the years it has been altered, it has been condensed, it has been put as short and sweet as you can get it. The thing that we know in this office is, say it's the Idabel Lions Club and Suzanne is our contact. My job is to play circus all day long. Suzanne works at the bank. She doesn't play circus all day long. Everybody in this office tries to make everything as easy on a sponsor as you can. The books have gotten as short and sweet as possible, but the packets all derived, like I said, I'm assuming, from David.

Finchum

There used to be route books. Do you do that anymore? Give out route books?

Jones

No.

Finchum

You don't publish them like you used to?

Jones

No.

Finchum

What are some unusual venues that you've booked? Do you have any that are out of the norm?

Jones

As a whole, no. Now, Jim is the one that decides the crazy stuff. If we are going to do something off the wall, I promise you it is coming from Jim. (Laughs) I am straight laced across the board. I take that back. I didn't book it. Here again, David actually got us to this location and now it's a staple. It's one of the locations that sets our mark and that's Kelleys Island, Ohio, and that is an actual island. The circus, as a whole, gets ferried to this island. Animals, elephants, tigers, camels, circus people, everybody goes via a ferry out to this island. The whole island is

amazing. Of course, I've never been there, but everyone that has said that when they start getting ferried on, the whole island is out. This might be midnight or one o'clock before the ferries start crossing over and they're all lined up. They do pajama parties to welcome the circus coming on board. So that one, probably, is not the normal at all.

Finchum *And how long would they stay there?*

Jones We only stay two days. We stay a Monday and a Tuesday. We travel on that Sunday night. After the last show on Sunday, everything gets torn down, and then they start making the travel over. Then we do that again, but we pull them out that Wednesday morning.

Finchum *So, in a year's time, you really don't have an off season, yourself?*

Jones No.

Finchum *You're working twelve months a year?*

Jones Yes. The traveling side, when they come in, as a whole, 95 percent of them go their separate merry ways. Acts are seasonal. If I have a clown act, I might be in the show this year and they might not hire me back. I might find somewhere else to go. Acts are not lifers. They're not here forever, necessarily. Then, of course, it's the same thing with the working crew. They might be back or not. Everyone goes their way until February, when the circus starts back up again. Then there is a very small percent that actually have to work here in our winter quarters. They're the ones that are painting the trucks again, getting all new tires, making any repairs to anything that needs to happen. They do the complete prep for the next year, but our side and our office, twenty four/seven. Well, not twenty four/seven, five days a week, every week, January through December. We do shut down the week of Thanksgiving, and we shut down approximately two weeks for Christmas holiday. Aside from that, this office is open. It never ends, though. I mean, Jim and I will actually start, probably, at some point in time next month [July]. We will start looking and putting together the route for 2012 so it never ends. It never ends.

Finchum *It's a cycle.*

Jones It is, absolutely.

Finchum *Some exciting things along the way, too.*

Jones Probably lots of exciting things.

Finchum *When it comes together, it's got to be exciting.*

Jones It's a lot harder than people think. Kind of reverting back to how I was explaining, in this office we're the front end. We're the ones that do all the dealings with the sponsoring organizations. The traveling side, they've not had contact with these people, and so if we didn't work together, if we weren't a complete circle, we could sell the circus all day long. If we didn't have a good circus, I can sell it once but I'll never sell it twice. On the flip side, if the show is amazing and we can put the best performance on that we can, if we don't help our sponsors fill those seats, it doesn't matter how good the acts are or how good the day was because nobody was there to see it. It is a complete circle and we have to work together. I think a lot of times people don't get that and maybe a lot of people in the industry don't get that. You really have to have that constant contact, and the traveling side provides what the home office side says we will provide. It's just that, back and forth.

Finchum *Two-way communication.*

Jones Absolutely. Communication is key around here, key around here.

Finchum *While we're speaking to that, what are your different means of communication these days? Of course, cell phones.*

Jones Cell phones.

Finchum *When you do the contracts are they faxed, are they snail mailed?*

Jones They're actually mailed, and I'm sure it can be changed. I'm a creature of habit so the format that we have is just a carbon. We've got the original and the carbon. We mail the contract if it comes from this office. If it's one of those phone call sponsors, then we mail the contract. There's an informational sheet that goes along with it that gives our office all the pertinent information that we need, who's our contact, how do we need to advertise, the circus grounds that we're going to be playing on, things of that nature. Once the organization receives it, about 75 percent of the time it sits on their desk for a while. They don't understand the urgency, and understandably. I do understand that.

On our side, if we don't have a contract back within three weeks of sending it, we're sweating, just instantly, but then they mail it back to us. A contract is not a contract until you have it in your hand, obviously. Once the contract hits our office, then we do an entire workup and the ball starts rolling from there. With the sponsors, we're very fortunate that we have phone, we have fax, we have email with us and the traveling side, the road side of the circus, it's the same thing—e-mail.

Finchum *Computers have helped?*

Jones Oh, yes. I'm not born and raised circus. I don't know lots of history of circus. I couldn't tell you, probably, six different circuses. I just don't know it, but to hear stories. I've heard about how they used to have to do things, and I thought, "Oh my goodness, I don't know..." and they still did it. Obviously, still did it because there are shows from the '30s, even, I guess, before and they're still trekking down the road. It's amazing how they did.

Finchum *It's amazing to me how they figure out where everything goes on a lot.*

Jones Oh, I know.

Finchum *They've got certain sized lots.*

Jones It is. The logistics side can be a lot, a lot of fun, again, not from experience. We have what's called "The Perfect Lot Layout," and that is ideal. We require a three hundred feet by three hundred feet area, but that perfect lot happens when we're on a five hundred feet by five hundred feet area. If we ever get into a lot that's not that perfect little square and you have to alter your perfect layout, yes, it can become fun. That's where the true art of circus is. I think those types of situations, that's when it really starts happening, because it's easy to go if everything works perfectly.

That's like this office. I come in and I probably go out with a headache more than I come in without one, but at the end of the day, I know things are happening and it's a true test. I think if you get in a very daily rut routine in circus, you're probably in trouble. You probably are. But for the traveling side, they deal with more dilemmas that we do, especially dilemmas that just hit you like that. At least our dilemmas, for the most part, we have time to discuss and mull over something. The twenty-four hour man goes in the day before, but he shows up and the circus lot is underwater, well, you've only got twenty-four hours to...

Finchum *Figure something out.*

Jones ...to figure something out, yes. Those are the days that you, probably, are griping to no end under your breath, but at the end of the day, when you've worked and you've still made it happen, it's worth it. I think probably the only thing that I hate about not getting to travel is my sponsors are very dear to me. Even the ones that are very short and sweet and to the point, they're doing this as a fundraiser. So the chamber of commerce is bringing us to town and they're donating the money to

the school foundation for new equipment. The Lions Club is doing it for the "I Care," and so I want every single one to make money. I want them to make all the money that they can. Especially when you start working with them, and I get the side to deal with them from contract all the way through, they become friends.

I have ones that we talk all year long. We instantly became friends with them the very first season that I started working with them. It's very rewarding at the end of the day when you show up and you put on those performances and we get phone calls back from the sponsors and they say, "We've got letters, we've got phone calls, we've got people that have come up to us and said, 'What an amazing family event that you've brought to town.'" That makes it worthwhile. Then we'll get the letters, some very heartfelt letters. We had one where a family was heading to the circus, and they had to bypass the circus, and they went to a children's hospital instead to find out that their daughter had leukemia. You get that letter the next year saying, "We didn't have to bypass the circus this year. We were there. She's in 100 percent remission." I don't care how bad your day could get, it will put a smile on your face. Absolutely.

Finchum

A human touch.

Jones

Oh sure, absolutely. Even though we are a business and at the end of the day we don't want to see a red anywhere, if that doesn't get you, if getting the letters, getting the comments, or the traveling side being fortunate enough to see it on their face, I think you're in it for the wrong reason.

Finchum

With the sponsors, is there a certain percent they get and you get, or is it the same for all of them or do they negotiate that?

Jones

No, we have a one-set contract that we do with every single one of our organizations. It is a percentage that they receive on all ticket sales. Obviously, their tickets that they have, that they can sell, they receive a greater percentage of. Even on circus day they still receive a percentage of the tickets. Now, we have one altering contract and that comes out not normally. A lot of times in the Chicago area, education foundations are the majority of the organizations that take the irregular contract. That's where they actually buy us out. They buy our seats is what they do. On that contract, they receive 100 percent of their ticket sales, but it's hard for a Hugo-sized location and a rotary club to do that. It's hard. The key with the education foundations is their pull that they have. The number one place that an organization can target is, obviously, a school. I will read my son's Friday take-home folder before I will read that newspaper. Anytime that an organization has an in within the school, it's

an automatic plus.

Finchum

A lot of things have to come together at the end of it.

Jones

Oh, absolutely, absolutely, and we haven't even touched on probably 25 percent of what—I mean, you can talk for days. I know I could. I could, literally, talk for days on everything, especially when we are training people in here. We brought in Catie. She's actually in our office. This is her first season here and told her from the get-go, "It's hard and it takes a full season before it makes sense because a lot of it doesn't..." and now that she's in the swing of things, she goes, "You're absolutely right." This is, sometimes, overwhelming. Each department in this office, one relies on the other. What one does affects the other and then, obviously, everything that we do in this office affects what happens on the show. It's just one of those wheels that continually run.

Finchum

What are a couple of the characteristics you look for in an employee, a new employee? What do they have to be able to be like or do?

Jones

There are two positions in this office that interact 100 percent with the sponsor. With both of those, I think, the number one key is communication. Having that gift to talk and not be afraid to pick up the phone. A lot of people can go, "Oh, I can do that. I talk on my cell phone all day long." It's totally different, totally different. They have to be able to instantly pick up the phone and talk to Bob with the Geneva BID like he's your best friend. Then, I want somebody that is going to be dependable. The thing is since we are a small office here, if Catie calls in sick for the day, I'm not Wal-Mart. I can't pick up the phone and call somebody else to replace her for a day. Everything that she had to do for the day sits on her desk, every sponsor that she needed to call, if she had a deadline she had to meet. If she's not here today, it doesn't get done.

Dependability is huge, huge in my book. And then just having general office skills. You don't even have to work a computer with your eyes closed, because that's all teachable, trainable things. I can't train you to be a natural on the phone, and I can't train you to come to work every day. Those are your work ethics. Those are key with me. I can teach them circus, I can teach them what to do in this office, but I have to have them here every day, and they have to be able to pick up the phone before I can teach them anything.

Finchum

In your eight years that you've been here, have there been a few changes in the way you do the work?

Jones

Slightly, but not as a whole. I mean, the design that David had was, basically, fool-proof. It really was. We're basically going off of

everything that was taught. Now, we have made small alterations. We've added a few things, taken away a few things, but the office, what each person does in this office—we have the advertising, which right now, that's a secondary job for me. The reason is because in the heat of the season, I can't pull away from my other jobs in this office to sit down and train someone, because it is very time consuming. The person that comes in here and does the advertising and works with the sponsor on getting the word out, in my mind, is the most important on this side. If you don't help the sponsor, push the sponsor, guide the sponsor, and he doesn't get the word out, who's going to know the circus is coming to town?

Right now, I'm doing that job. I used to do the advertising in 2003 and 2004 and it has not changed, aside from programs have enhanced. The way we do ads are better. The way we do a flyer, obviously, all of those things, as technology increases and gets better, so do we. The steps that I do with the sponsor as a whole, I've not changed those a whole lot since when I walked through the door. It's the same thing with the PR department. I might've changed a few things, might've added a few things to her duties, but as a whole it's the same from eight years ago, which is good. (Laughs)

Finchum

So changes into the future? Next ten years?

Jones

As a whole I hope not, because if I don't have to change a lot of things that means we're doing it right. That's the way I look at it. There's always room for improvement on things. We do an 'after call' with our sponsoring organizations, and we ask them, "Good, bad, or indifferent? Tell us what you think?" because if there's bad, we can't correct it if we don't know it. If there are things that could be easier to a sponsor or is confusing or anything of that nature, again, we have to know it. And so we ask the sponsor, "What can we improve on, if anything?" We do take that. Each year, if there might be a little bit of tweak here and there, it's those types of things. As a whole, we don't have to alter a lot of things.

Probably, advertising side eight years ago, I never pushed an email blast to a sponsor. I didn't push Facebook to a sponsor. I didn't have this amazing color flyer that I email to everyone and tell them, "That's your new link to your website." Now, that's where it's at. Anything web related, anything computer, internet, even with the newspaper, everything is online now. Eight years ago, that wasn't the case. As a matter of fact, when I started in 2003, my Macintosh computer that I used for advertising was not connected to the internet. We created an ad, I would create the ad, I had to print it, and we had to hard-copy mail it. Obviously, we don't do that anymore. Those types of changes are mainly the only ones. Now, on the road side, there are probably changes

every single year, but not structural changes. That base floor, that structure, I don't think it can change. If it does change, then I don't know. I don't know if that would be good, bad, or indifferent.

Finchum *Well, if it's working, no need to change.*

Jones That's it, most definitely. It's interesting. Circus is very interesting. It is a very fun job.

Finchum *And you say, "play circus."*

Jones Play circus. I say "play circus" all the time, and I tell that to my sponsors, because if I can get them to think that it is enjoyable, that it is not just work, because it is work, but there is fun to it. As long as we play circus, and we get the job done, at the end of the day, it's all worth it.

Finchum *I would guess you smile through the phone.*

Jones I do. I do, regardless of whether I want to or not, and there are obvious days where I don't feel like smiling. But you have to, you have to. People tease me here in the office and they say, "I don't know how you do it." We're dealing with a crazy issue and maybe we've got a sponsor that didn't fill out the right permit or something of that nature and here it is, just a day before and we're on a deadline, trying to get things done. Those are the days where you're gritting your teeth, but you've still got to do it. Gives me a headache, but it'll be okay.

Finchum *Customer service all the way.*

Jones Always, always. That is hard. That's kind of something you have to train them on, too. To realize, as far as in this office, part of what has helped me in here and helped me be able to instantly pick up that phone and talk to anybody, whether I've talked to them one thousand times or one time, is to read them. I don't get to see them face to face so over the years—and I guess I kind of have a natural knack to do so—I can pick up the phone and within two sentences I know if I can talk to him all day long or if she's extremely busy and we've got to cut it as short as we can cut it. That's key in this office, most definitely.

Finchum *It seems like you fell into the correct job.*

Jones Yes, yes.

Finchum *It's kind of like being a lawyer.*

Jones Well, I don't think I would be interested in going there ever again, but the talking side doesn't bother me. Jim will tell you real quick that I probably should be a lawyer, because I will not lose a fight. (Laughter)

Finchum *Well, is there anything else you want to add before we close off?*

Jones No, I think we're good.

Finchum *No more secrets to tell us? (Laughs)*

Jones No, no. We've got to keep a few.

Finchum *Well, thank you very much for you time.*

Jones Thank you, thank you very much.

----- *End of interview* -----