

Oral History Interview

with

**Luciana “Lucy” Loyal
& Zefta “Dolly” Pirtle**

Interview Conducted by
Juliana Nykolaiszyn and Tanya Finchum
June 30, 2011

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

**Oklahoma Oral History Research Program
Edmon Low Library • Oklahoma State University
© 2011**

The “Big Top” Show Goes On

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

Interview History

Interviewers: Juliana Nykolaiszyn, Tanya Finchum

Transcriber: Miranda Mackey

Editors: Amy Graham, Tanya Finchum, Juliana Nykolaiszyn

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.

Funding for this project was made possible by the Library of Congress American Folklife Center as part of a 2011 Archie Green Fellowship awarded to researchers Tanya Finchum and Juliana Nykolaiszyn with the Oklahoma Oral History Research Program at the OSU Library.

This project was approved by the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board on May 6, 2011.

Legal Status

Scholarly use of the recordings and transcripts of the interview with Zefta “Dolly” Pirtle and Luciana “Lucy” Loyal is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on June 30, 2011.

The “Big Top” Show Goes On

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

About Luciana “Lucy” Loyal and Zefta “Dolly” Pirtle

Lucy Loyal and Dolly Pirtle are sixth generation members of the Loyal Repensky family which came to America in 1932 to join the Ringling show. Repensky was the maiden name of Jules Loyal’s mother and only Loyals performed. Natives of France with a long history of performing in numerous circuses around Europe, this horseback riding act included various acrobatic formations and feats accomplished on horseback. Their act included a seven person pyramid based on five horses. At one time it was considered one of the highest class equestrian troupes in the United States.

With time, and as the members of the troupe married, members of the Loyal family developed specialties of their own. The Alfonso Loyal Repensky troupe quickly earned a reputation as an excellent bareback riding act and Lucy Loyal, the daughter of Alfonso, was one of the stars. Lucy was born in 1949 in Sarasota, Florida and in 1955 her family made their first trip to Hugo, Oklahoma where they joined the Al G. Kelly Miller Show. Lucy was already performing at this time. By 1965 her family had moved to Hugo and was performing for the Carson and Barnes Circus with whom Lucy continues to be associated. Lucy’s children and grandchildren are involved with the circus industry.

Dolly Pirtle is the daughter of Zefta Loyal Perez and Raymond Perez. Zefta was a member of the Loyal Repensky family and performed in the bareback horse act. Dolly, at a young age, learned aerial acts and performed on the trapeze until she graduated from high school. At that time, she married and left the circus life. Dolly, instead, pursued a career in law enforcement and is a retired detective in Henderson, Texas. Even though she did not devote a career to the circus, she has very fond memories and can still perform a trapeze routine, if only in her mind.

Both Lucy and Dolly have cherished memories of their grandparents, aunts, uncles, parents, cousins, and themselves as their lives evolved around the center ring. Circus provided them many life lessons from practicing hard to laughing much...and how little water is absolutely needed when showering!

The “Big Top” Show Goes On

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

Luciana “Lucy” Loyal & Zefta “Dolly” Pirtle

Oral History Interview

Interviewed by Juliana Nykolaiszyn
& Tanya Finchum
June 30, 2011
Hugo, Oklahoma



Lucy Loyal



Dolly Pirtle

Nykolaiszyn *My name is Juliana Nykolaiszyn and with me is Tanya Finchum. We’re with the Oklahoma Oral History Research Program at the OSU Library. Today is Thursday, June 30, 2011, and we’re in Hugo, Oklahoma, interviewing Luciana Loyal, also known as Lucy—a little easier to say—and also, Zefta Pirtle, but we like to call her Dolly. Does that sound right?*

Pirtle *That’s good.*

Nykolaiszyn *All right. Thank you for joining us today. We really appreciate it. We’re going to begin with Lucy. Lucy, I’d like you to tell us where you were born, what year, and give me a little bit of background on your parents.*

Loyal *Okay, I was born in Sarasota, Florida, in 1949 at Sarasota Memorial, and my doctor’s name was Dr. Miller, but the pediatrician was Dr. Olson. Now, my father was born in Milan, Italy. My mother was born in Florence, Italy. My father’s name was Alfonso Loyal. My mother’s name was Lilia Panini. My father came to the United States in 1932 with Ringling Brothers Circus. My mother wasn’t from show business. She was, as we call, a townner, but her uncle joined the circus. He joined a teeter board act. Somehow or other he met my father’s sister and he married my aunt Albertina. He was here in the United States before the war broke out in Europe, the Second World War. Mom, of course, was in Italy, in the war.*

Well, after the war my uncle would write to my mother, or his sister, and my mother was his favorite niece in Europe. Somehow or other, through the writing she sent my uncle, or her uncle, a picture. My father just happened to see this picture and asked my uncle if he would mind if he wrote to her. So my father would write my mother and they fell in love

through these letters. Then in 1948, the family brought my mother over from Europe, into Baltimore, and that's how come I'm here. They got married and here I am! (Laughs)

Nykolaiszyn *All right. Dolly, tell me a little bit about where you were born, what year, and then a little bit about your parents.*

Pirtle I was born in Chicago, Illinois in 1944 at the Cook County Hospital. My father's name is Raymond Perez. My mother is Zefta Loyal-Perez. She came to this country in 1932 with Ringling Brothers. In fact, Lucy and I are first cousins. Her dad is my mother's brother. There were five other brothers and sisters that were also involved in the circus. We wintered in Sarasota, Florida. My dad's family, they were somewhat circus. They were in it for a little while and then they got out of it. That's how my mother met my father, was with the Ringling Brothers, because they were performing with them also.

I grew up in Sarasota, Florida. I was in the circus, did flying trapeze, did trapeze, and after I got older I was in Sailor Circus, which was part of the Sarasota High School. That's where I went to school. Then I met my first husband, and he was from Texas, and I ended up moving to Texas. I got out of the circus and I ended up going into law enforcement and became a detective, and then I married a sheriff.

My mother, however, stayed in the circus. She stayed in the circus until she retired. She always told me, she says, "Dolly, I will retire center ring. I will never stay long enough to where I'm going to be in the side ring," and that's what she did. She retired in 1954, I believe it was, in the center ring. She said, "I'm getting on up in age," and she says, "I know what's getting ready to happen." She says, "It's not going to happen to me." She got out of the circus. She always had that feather in her hat. She always said, "That's my feather in the hat because I was center ring from the day I went in until the day I retired." It was real important to her. She was very, very talented.

Finchum *How old would she have been?*

Pirtle She was born in 1916 and I'll let you do the math. Well, she retired at 54 so what are we looking at there, twenty or thirty years? Thirty years, something like that.

Loyal '26, '36, '46, '56...

Pirtle So it would've been...

Loyal ...almost fifty years—or almost forty-five years, something like that.

Pirtle But yes, she just made a point that she didn't want [to be moved to the side ring]. She saw too many of them end up like that. She says, "That's not for me."

Nykolaiszyn *Your family name, when people hear it, automatically images pop in their heads of the history. I really want you to tell me about your family's circus tradition, because it goes back many generations.*

Loyal I'm what—seventh generation? We're seventh generation. My children—oh, no! Am I seventh?

Pirtle I would say we are the sixth generation, your son's seventh, and your grandchildren are the eighth.

Loyal ...eighth generation.

Nykolaiszyn *How did your family get involved with the circus business?*

Loyal Well, we did a little research. Well, we didn't. Back in Napoleon's time, the Loyal family is like Smith. There are a lot of Smiths everywhere. Okay, the revolution broke out. Well, the Loyals kind of scattered, I guess. A bunch of them went to Germany, some went somewhere else to Italy and some stayed in France. Ours stayed in France and he used to break horses for Napoleon's army and at the end of each—conquest, would you say? When they would conquer something, then he would give grants to his soldiers, where they would want land or whatever. But ours didn't want that. Ours wanted canvas, as much canvas as he could get, like those tents that they used to make. Our family used to have one pole and they had a ring. They would work out in the street with their horse act. They would get—was it like contributions? Where they would donate...

Pirtle Donations.

Loyal Donations. Well, then when he worked for Napoleon. I guess worked for Napoleon—that's what he wanted, he wanted canvas. So they made their first tent and that's how the Loyal family got started doing the bareback riding.

Pirtle Then the Travaglia family, which is going to be our grandmother's side...

Loyal On our grandmother's side.

Pirtle They had a circus in Italy for years, years, and years.

- Loyal** ...years and years.
- Pirtle** We can't even tell you how far back that goes, because we don't know. There's no one alive to tell us. But my grandfather ended up marrying my grandmother. You saw how that came about. It was an arranged marriage because they were both quite talented with horses and doing circus. He really wasn't in love with our grandmother. He was in love with her sister. But because she was so talented and he was so talented, the family thought, financially, that was the smartest move. It didn't matter what they liked so that's how they got together. In 1932, they came to the United States with Ringling Brothers, and they went back. They went back to Europe, but then the war broke out. When that happened, they came back and they stayed permanently.
- Loyal** I'm going to bust in there real quick. The first time they came was 1929.
- Pirtle** '32 is when they came and stayed. You're right, I got it wrong.
- Loyal** They came in 1929. Then they went back to Italy. Then they came back in '32, and that's when they stayed here, in '32.
- Pirtle** That's correct.
- Loyal** Then the war broke out. What's so funny is my mother's uncle, his name was Aldemaro. We called him Zio [Uncle] Tattu or Zio [Uncle] Chanto. He wasn't from show business, and he wined up marrying my father's and her [Dolly's] mother's sister. Then when my mother married my father, it made double cousins and aunts.
- Pirtle** We used to joke around and say, "Well, you're your own grandfather." (Laughter) We can't piece that together. There's really no relationship there, but there is.
- Loyal** And that's like Adriano "Nucci" [Catarzi] that made the disks. That would be his first cousin, but yet, it would be his aunt. So it's really, "Uh oh, that doesn't sound too good," but pretty much all the families are real tight. Even though we don't live close to each other, we are a real tight family. That's the way it has always been through the generations in Europe, with all of us.
- Nykolaiszyn** *How did your parents learn what they learned about the circus?*
- Pirtle** Our grandfather taught his children. And then when they had us, he taught us. Let me tell you what, it wasn't a fun experience, because we would go to school all day long. Our parents insisted that we got an

education because they weren't afforded that opportunity. We would go to school all day, and when we got home we practiced every single day. Sometimes we didn't practice on Sunday and that was only because he didn't want to. He would be tired or whatever. But we practiced every day. It was like we went to school and then we went to school. He was very, very strict with us.

Loyal There would be tricks that he would invent on his own.

Pirtle He came up with a one-man flying act that I did, one person. He rigged this thing up—I've got pictures of it, I'll show them to you later—and he wanted to take me to Europe with that, but my mother told him, "If you're going to take my daughter to Europe it will be in the summertime." He said, "Well, she doesn't need to go to school. She's going to make a living doing that." She said, "No, Dad. She's going to go to school. If you want to take her in the summertime when school's out, you can do that." Of course, they argued back and forth about that, but Mom just kept her foot down about that.

But back to that flying act. You would take a web, which is a long rope-looking thing. You would go up to this bar, trapeze, you would reach up above the trapeze, you would stand on that and then you would work your way up. He had these straps that made loops. You would put your feet in these straps and go across those straps to this other bar...

Loyal Upside down.

Pirtle ...upside down. My cousin used to say, "How are we supposed to get from that bar to the other one?" and in Italian, you would say, "*Come una mosca*." That means, "Like a fly." You would have to go across these straps to get to this other bar. Then you would hang from that, he would bring a trapeze up to you, you would swing, you'd do the trick, and you would catch the other bar. You didn't need a catcher. You were a one-man flying act, and he had me doing this crazy act.

Loyal I'm just a few years younger than Dolly, not much. (Laughter) But I remember. In fact, she had forgotten all about that trapeze.

Pirtle I had forgotten what happened to the bar, yes.

Loyal And I said, "Oh, you know Dolly," I said, "I was going to get this bar one day, over at the old winter quarters in Sarasota," our winter quarters. I said, "I saw it leaning up against this thing," and I said, "I remember this trapeze that used to hang up in the backyard." It's like a square and it had one trapeze at one end and one at the other, and I said, "I remember you practicing on it. You would be on this and you would do

like a forward somersault.” The two bars would meet and she’d be on one end and I said, “You’d do a forward somersault,” and she would literally catch by her heels on the other trapeze. And she’s only like six, seven, eight years old. I was a lot smaller, but I remember her practicing. I would be down there practicing, or she would be practicing. I’d be watching. Dolly and them were more the aerial-type people...

- Pirtle** Yes, I never did care for the horses...
- Loyal** ...and I’m strictly horses. I don’t know if I got it from my father and grandfather...
- Pirtle** You got it on the Loyal side, period. They’re all horse people.
- Loyal** ...but the horses, those are the most beautiful animals God ever put on this earth, are horses. I eat, sleep, and drink horses.
- Pirtle** That’s true.
- Loyal** And I still go out right now. In fact, I was up real early this morning taking care of horses.
- Nykolaiszyn** *What acts were your families known for in those early years? When you’re growing up, what are your parents doing?*
- Loyal** Oh, gosh! They did everything. They were known, though, as bareback riders, as equestrians, but they did everything. Like my uncle Joe [Galasso], he was hand balancing, handstands, and my aunt’s husband, Zio Tattu [Aldemaro Catarzi], he was teeter board. I mean, they all had their—how would you say it?
- Pirtle** They all had their specialties...
- Loyal** Specialties.
- Pirtle** ...but they were all versatile. They could walk in there and they could be a one-family circus. They could. They could be a one-family circus. They could tumble, they could fly, they did wire walking, they did horses, they did the cannon, they did cloud swing, they...
- Loyal** Juggling.
- Pirtle** Juggling.
- Loyal** The trapeze...

Pirtle If it was done, they did it.

Loyal Yes.

Pirtle And so that's what I'm saying. The family was big...

Loyal High wire...

Pirtle ...and they could actually have done a complete circus. Of course, you got tired of looking at the same ones over and over again, but they could've done it.

Nykolaiszyn *I could see how that could be very attractive.*

Pirtle Oh, yes.

Loyal The tricks that my uncles and my aunts did, very few others ever accomplished. There were tricks that many of them never even attempted to do. And they've never done it since. They've never done it since. My uncle Giustino [Loyal], he did somersault from the first horse to the fourth horse in Madison Square Garden. And it was just to show—there used to be, among the circus performers, a lot of rivalry. Is that the word?

Pirtle That's correct.

Loyal Competition.

Pirtle Rivalry is a good word for it.

Loyal Competition and rivalry about, "Okay, so he did somersault from horse to horse. Oh, well, he did it from the first horse to the third horse." So when they went to Madison Square Garden, there were two other riding acts there. There was Cristiani's and I believe, if I'm not wrong, [Edwin] "Poodles" Hanneford's.

Pirtle Yes, Hannefords.

Loyal Hannefords. And so they put the Loyal-Repenskys in the center, because the Hannefords were doing it from the first horse to the second horse and Cristianis from the first horse to the third horse. Well, my uncle Giustino [Loyal] wasn't going to let anybody get away with that so he put a fourth horse in there.

Pirtle Now, you've got to understand the horses were not back to back, like you see them when they do from horse to horse, because it would've

filled the ring up. So they had them angled.

Loyal What they would do, too, is like, say your fourth horse—they'd be all in line, but when he got ready to throw his somersault, there'd be a command my grandfather or my uncle would say or do to them. And the one horse, instead of this it would be one of the two horses that are directly—because he's going to go from the first horse to the fourth horse. This number three horse would pull up beside it so, actually, he's doing it from the first horse to the third horse because that fourth horse pulled up. Then he just drops back a little bit.

Pirtle Then my mom, she did somersaults from horse to horse. She did just about anything that any of the men did as far as horseback riding went.

Loyal She did somersaults through hoops...

Pirtle Through hoops...

Loyal ...through two hoops at the same time. They'd be holding a big hoop and she'd do it through the little hoop and go through the big hoop. She did it over banners, one right after the other—doon, doon, doon, doon, doon!

Pirtle Then two of my aunts, [Claudia] Esterina [Galasso] and Germana [Loyal Zacchini], they followed in our grandparents' footsteps as far as the part of the act that they did. And what is it called?

Loyal It's called the pas de deux.

Pirtle The pas de deux, and the one we were talking about, Germana, she was always what they called the *porture*, which is the one on the bottom. She was the heavy, as far as muscles and stuff went. They would do a balancing, head balancing with the horses moving.

Loyal She...

Pirtle No hands.

Loyal My aunt...

Pirtle They were so quick.

Loyal My aunt Germana would hold my aunt Esterina and go head to head, no hands, stand on their heads, no hands, handstand, hand to hand...

Pirtle My aunt Germana fell in love with my uncle, who had the cannon act,

the Zacchinis. I don't know if you've ever heard of that, but they were very famous. The problem with that was my grandfather blew a fuse because that was a big part of the act. He didn't want to lose her so they snuck off and got married. When they got back and she finally told my grandfather, her wedding present was a slap (laughs) because she disobeyed him. They eloped and everything.

Loyal Yes, and they weren't allowed to...

Pirtle They didn't have any type of marital life until after the season was over.

Loyal Yes, there was no honeymoon. There was nothing.

Pirtle And it's because of the fear of maybe her conceiving a child or something like that. They had a contract. They were married, but they weren't "married" until the end of the season. But he was really, really bad news when it came to the girls getting married, because he needed every one of them for that act. They all were special in their own way. And it took away from the act when they would get married and leave with their husbands.

Loyal When my father—when my mother, I should say, came to the United States in 1948 or '47, and landed in Baltimore, it was going into the night performance. She had never been to a circus in her life, I don't guess. They picked her up at the airport, whoever, it wasn't anybody in the family. They sent somebody to pick her up. When she got there, they took her straight to the dressing room and they plucked her eyebrows and put a costume on her and...

Pirtle Can you imagine? (Laughs)

Loyal ...put makeup. My mother didn't even know what makeup was!
(Laughter)

Pirtle ...and send her out there! (Laughs)

Loyal Putting high heels on her and they all marched in, like you saw on that tape where they all marched in. Well, low and behold, they have a big cape on her and a headpiece and these high heels. (Laughter) They said, "Just landed from sunny Italy, another Loyal-Repensky sister!" She came wobbling out and falls down! (Laughter) Then, the next morning, at five o'clock in the morning, my grandfather had her in the ring practicing.

Pirtle How to walk in heels, for starters! (Laughs)

Loyal She was ready to go back to Italy! (Laughs) Since her and my dad had been writing each other and they fell in love through letters and mail, when it was time for them to get married, my father was thirty-two and he had to go ask his oldest sister, Albertina [Loyal Catarzi]—get permission to marry my mother. And she said no so he went to his father. My grandfather told him, “What did Albertina say?” He said, “Albertina said no.” He said, “Then it’s no.” So a few days later he snatched her up, they took off, eloped, and went to Chicago and got married in Chicago.

Pirtle Oh, I didn’t know they married in Chicago.

Loyal Yes, they took off and got married in Chicago.

Pirtle Well, tell them a little bit about you.

Nykolaiszyn *Well, actually, before we go into that, you’re growing up in ...*

Loyal Sarasota.

Nykolaiszyn *...what is your—both of you, I want you to tell me your earliest circus memory.*

Loyal Of working in the circus or practicing?

Nykolaiszyn *Just in general. Like, the earliest circus memory. When you finally get a grasp that this...*

Loyal I’m going to try. I think I’m going to be about four years old. I’m going to say about four years old and it was Polack Brothers. I remember Jack Leontini, and we were practicing a dog act. Somebody had a dog act. Who had a dog act? Zio Tattu had a dog act!

Pirtle Yes.

Loyal And they were practicing the dog act. That is one of my earliest memories of practicing.

Pirtle My earliest memories were the winter quarters, the Ringling Brothers winter quarters.

Loyal I was a little older than that.

Pirtle They were out there practicing. I remember—I don’t know why I remember this. It might be something I was told, but this is what I remember. They were out there practicing and I remember running out

to the ring. Everybody was hollering at me because I was little, and they were afraid the horses were going to run over me. I was trying to go to where my mother was. My grandfather had a whip and he was hitting those horses, because he was afraid I was going to get trampled by the horses. That's a terrible memory! But that's my earliest memory, was the fear of the horses. And I never did like the horses.

Loyal

Oh, I loved the horses.

Pirtle

I liked the horses. I didn't want any part of doing the horses.

Loyal

I hated practicing the trapeze. (Laughter) My grandfather had a trapeze. My grandfather's house sat over here. (Gestures) It looked like an old, medieval castle. That's what I always thought of that place, a medieval castle.

Pirtle

It kind of looked that way, yes.

Loyal

And he had this fountain and then there was like a row of trees and some bushes and then there was my aunt Albertina's house. Well, right there they would set up these little upright bars where the trapeze would hang on that upright.

Pirtle

Yes.

Loyal

And he would get Dolly and Olympia [Zacchini]—and I was real little—and me, and we would practice. Well, she was already great, but I hated it. And he used to spank me. Dolly knows about the spankings. He used to spank me. But I hated trapeze. I hated it! And I hated tumbling. And I'll tell you another thing my grandfather used to make us do. Back in those days when you were a performer, you had to be able to do everything. You had to be able to act, you had to be able to play an instrument. You had to be able to do all of that. My grandfather, every day, after we practiced, we would have to go in the house with my aunt Albertina, and we would have to sit there and I had to learn how to play a violin. (Laughs) Dolly...

Pirtle

I had a saxophone. (Laughter) And we were so bad. And Nucci had the violin.

Loyal

Nucci had a violin and I had a violin.

Pirtle

I don't know how my grandmother stood the noise! (Laughs)

Loyal

Each one of the cousins had to play an instrument. I think Remo [Loyal] did the trumpet.

Pirtle Gus [Giustino Loyal, Jr.] did the trumpet.

Loyal Somebody had a trumpet...

Pirtle Gus did the trumpet. Remo had a sax too, but let me tell you a story about the saxophone. It was called a soprano saxophone. It was about this tall. (Gestures) It was really a short sax. There was always a method to my grandfather's madness. He wanted me to learn how to play that thing while I was doing tricks on the trampoline. (Laughter) And I was supposed to play this stupid song. I'd have a busted lip all the time! I'm doing the trick and it's going down my throat! (Laughs) I could not wait to get rid of that saxophone!

Loyal My grandfather came up with some real unusual... (Laughs)

Pirtle He got a bear one time, a black bear. The name of that bear was *Martan*, which is Martin in English. He got it when it was like this, little bitty cub. Oh, cute cub! And he kept it down there at the Ringling Brothers' winter quarters. Every day we'd go down there, clean out the cage, and feed the bear. The problem was the bear started growing. He was getting big! (Laughter) He got to looking at us like lunch! (Laughs) We went down there one day and my grandfather had these whips and he called them Vitamin A, B, and C. You never wanted to get to A, for some reason. In school that was good, but with him that was not good, A is not good. When we were practicing he would use those whips.

Loyal Yes, he was like...

Pirtle But, here is this bear and this day we walked down there and me and Adriano, the one that made the video, he says, "Go in there, clean the cage, and feed the bear." I said, "I'm not going in there." He said, "Go in there"—in Italian he was telling me, "Go in there, clean the cage, and feed the bear." "I'm not going in there." He says, "I'm going to go get Vitamin C." I said, "I don't care if you bring A, B, and C! I'm not going back in that cage!" (Laughs) I never did go back in that cage.

Loyal And that bear never did ride the horse.

Pirtle And that bear turned out mean. Oh! He was going to raise it up to ride on the horse, this bear on the horse. I don't know if he was going to put one of us on top of the bear or what! We never got that far. (Laughter)

Loyal My one cousin—and he'll tell you, Gus—my grandfather wasn't a very patient man and when you went to practice or learn something and he'd tell you to do it, he expected you to do right then. There was no learning

time. He told you to do it and you had to do it! And he expected it to be right. How can you do something you've never done before?

Pirtle He had the two cousins that she was talking about do a tumbling act. In this act, my older of the two cousins was supposed to throw Remo up in the air, his brother, get down on his knees, and Remo was supposed to land on his back, on his back, back to back. They practiced and they practiced and they practiced. It was impossible to do it!

Loyal My cousin—Giustino is his name, but we call him Gus, *Bebito*—and he would take my cousin Remo...

Pirtle Throw him up...

Loyal ...and he'd have to throw him up in the air...

Pirtle ...and get down.

Loyal ...and he would have to bend over. Well, while he's bending over, Remo has to be doing a somersault...

Pirtle ...and land on his back.

Loyal ...and land on his back, back to back.

Pirtle ...back to back.

Loyal Well, they never did it! They never could do it! Then when my grandfather got through with them, then my uncle Giustino started in on them.

Pirtle Well, Remo got to where he was calling in sick a lot. (Laughs) He was the one that got all the spankings, because Gus was doing his part. He was the bottom man. He'd get down and his part wasn't the hard part. Remo's part, to land on his back, was hard. So he was always—you know, he was sick a lot. (Laughs)

Loyal My aunt Albertina, who you saw doing the incline on the wire, taught my cousin Remo to do a wire act. He was fantastic. There's nobody, nobody—there was a famous wire walker called...

Pirtle Concolino.

Loyal ...Concolino. My cousin surpassed Concolino in wires. I feel real bad that I don't have a photo to show you of him doing somersaults, one right after the other on the wire.

Pirtle He was really good.

Loyal *Una plancha*—I don't know how to say *plancha* in English.

Pirtle It's lay out.

Loyal A flat lay out. It's a flat, straight...

Pirtle Instead of tucking for a somersault...

Loyal You're straight out. It's absolutely gorgeous. You see the wire. You can see him and he's straight up and down with his feet and his head down, going into—he was fantastic! He was fantastic. But he didn't like circus.

Nykolaiszyn *When you were younger did you have a choice as to...*

Pirtle No.

Nykolaiszyn *You're like, for nothing! (Laughter) ...as to what you wanted to do. You didn't want to really work with horses...*

Pirtle Yes, they tried me on the horses. They tried me on the horses and I could stand up, and I could kneel, and I could do a few things like that, but they could see I wasn't cut out for that. I always was trying to go swing on things so that's where the trapeze came in.

Loyal And see, I was the opposite.

Pirtle But you had to do something. There wasn't any...

Loyal I didn't like the trapeze. I just didn't—and I hated the flying act. I would never let go, is what my problem was. I'm not going to let go, they're nuts! I'm perfectly fine holding on. (Laughs) See, I wouldn't let go.

Pirtle She was down in Jacksonville. I was already up in my thirties when this happened and I went down to see them. She says, "Get up on the flying rig."

Loyal Oh, yes.

Pirtle So I did. I went up and...

Loyal And I'll tell you exactly. It was Alfredo and Morales's flying act.

Pirtle I went out and I showed out, real good, what I could do and I did real

good. I had to be at work the next day. I was already in law enforcement then. So I go home and I go to bed, and the next morning I crawled to the bathroom. (Laughter) There wasn't anything that didn't hurt! (Laughter)

- Loyal** Every muscle in her body!
- Pirtle** I was like, "Oh, my, just let me get there! (Laughter) I'm going, "I'm too old for this! I'm not doing this anymore!"
- Finchum** *But you remembered how to do it, though.*
- Pirtle** Yes, like I said, you don't ever forget.
- Loyal** Once you learn something you never...
- Pirtle** It's like riding a bicycle. You don't forget. Now, mentally I can still do it.
- Loyal** Like Dolly will tell you, she can do all of those tricks in her mind.
- Pirtle** Yes.
- Finchum** *Where were your parents while your grandfather was...*
- Pirtle** On the road with the circus.
- Loyal** They were working.
- Pirtle** We would stay home with our grandmother [Josephina Estella Travaglia Loyal] and grandfather [Jules Loyal]...
- Loyal** And we would go to school...
- Pirtle** ...because they insisted we go to school. As soon as school let out—back then it let out in June—they put us immediately on a plane and sent us to where they were at. Sometimes we actually worked. I worked a little bit with Ringling.
- Loyal** I didn't start working until 1956, '57.
- Nykolaiszyn** *So your early years you were going to school just like regular kids. Are you in Sarasota, I take it?*
- Pirtle** Yes.

Loyal She is.

Nykolaiszyn *You are?*

Loyal But see, we moved to Oklahoma—well, we didn't move—we were traveling on a small circus called Benson Brothers or Kelly Morris at the time, and they're out of Gibsonton, Florida. I don't know where we went to visit Al G. Kelly Miller. I remember them announcing that we were there visiting and my dad and my mother stood up, and we waved, and we sat back down. Mr. Miller had made arrangements with my dad for us to come on their show, which was based here in Hugo, Oklahoma, the original Al G. Kelly Miller Circus. So we moved to Hugo. We came to Hugo in the winter of 1955 to open in March of '56. I hadn't been practicing that long with my grandfather, because I was born in '49. My grandfather passed away in '56 and we had to leave the show. I remember us leaving the show in October to go to Florida when my grandfather passed away.

Pirtle But then my mother worked with Kelly Miller some, too. Different ones did.

Loyal Yes. We were looking at those pictures and there was Lilly Stropitov. You said, "What's her name?" I said, "Oh, that's Lilly Stropitov. I don't remember her looking like that," because I remember her in later years. But yes, your mom and them had all come to work on that Kelly Miller Circus, on Al G. Kelly Miller. That's when our uncle Giustino was supposed to give your mother Vroka, her horse, which he didn't. He sent Cincinnati instead.

Pirtle Cincinnati was getting up in age, too.

Loyal And I learned to ride on this horse called Cincinnati. He belonged to the family way back when. When that horse died, he was thirty-two years old. But I learned to ride on Cincinnati. He was a golden Palomino Belgian. Papa would try to retire him, because by then we had younger horses. He would get loose off the truck and he would come running into the tent, this poor, old horse, and he would get right in his place. He was always the second to the last horse.

Pirtle I didn't know he did that.

Loyal Oh, yes. Cincinnati would get loose, and he'd come in and he'd get between Dolly and Chulo every time.

Pirtle Dolly the horse. (Laughs)

Loyal Yes, we named a horse Dolly.

Pirtle I really need to clarify that. (Laughter)

Loyal The very first horse I had was named Ginger. Here, I'm like five or six years old when we got Ginger. But then when we came to Al G. Kelly Miller, Papa bought horses. One was named Pat and Dolly; we named her after you...

Pirtle Thank you.

Loyal ...and we had our very first, Chulo. Well, I had Cincinnati and Cincinnati would get loose and he'd always come in and go right between those two horses, and Papa couldn't get him out. We had to finish the act.

Pirtle Her father was such a fantastic horse trainer. He was very good, patience.

Loyal My dad wasn't known for being a—I mean, he was a rider. He was an average rider. He was good, but he wasn't anything like my uncle Giustino or my aunt Zefta. But what he lacked in being a bareback rider, he made up for training the horses. My uncles and my aunts will all tell you, the horses that my grandfather and my father put out, nobody else ever...

Pirtle And not only that, Lucy, they had no act without the horses.

Loyal Well, that's true.

Pirtle You had to have that so his part was so terribly important.

Loyal I was telling you about the somersault from the first horse to the fourth horse, the horse that threw my uncle, my grandfather and my father taught him. All they had to do was like tap him in a certain place or step in a certain place on him and the horse automatically knew to give them that extra buck to throw them up. In fact, there is a picture that you have—it was on that thing—of your mother doing the somersault and you can see where the horse is...

Pirtle You can actually see where...

Loyal ...where she's throwing...

Pirtle It's kind of like giving her a boost.

Loyal ... where she's giving her the boost, because there's a certain way that she can touch her or whatever and that horse would give her that boost.

Nykolaiszyn *Well, what goes into training a horse?*

Loyal Patience.

Pirtle You need to talk to her about that.

Loyal A lot of patience and it's consistency. Is that how you say that? Consistency?

Pirtle Yes.

Loyal Doing the same thing over and over and over. You don't beat them, you don't hit them, you don't smack them in the face. That's where a lot of people get the wrong conception—it's treats. When they do something good—okay, you teach them—this is the way I was taught. Okay, you want them to learn to run the ring. First, I walk them around the ring several times a week, whatever, so they know...

Pirtle Repetition.

Loyal ...the outlay of the ring and whatever, that they know that's what they have to do. Then, you trot them a little bit so they don't get dizzy. Horses are like people, you run in a circle you're going to get dizzy. They've got to learn to run a little bit, stop, maybe one round, stop, run around, stop. When they get that, then you add another round, then you add another round, and then eventually, they're not getting dizzy and neither are you, because you stand there and go like that too, you get dizzy. So they get it and then they go around maybe four, five, six times, and then you stop them so that gives them time. Then after awhile, it doesn't bother them anymore.

But it's consistency. Whenever they learned and we'd stop them, "*Bravo, good boy,*" and you pet him and you give him little sugar cubes. Or now they have treats for horses so I just go down and buy the treats because [with sugar cubes] they slobber all over your hand and get it all sticky! (Laughs) Those treats are a lot easier. They're not all sticky! But when we used to practice and stuff, I would always go so I could steal those sugar cubes. I'd be sitting there, "Can I have one?" (Laughs)

Pirtle You were eating the horses' treats?!

Loyal Yes! I used to like the sugar cubes. (Laughter) I'd just go over to practice just so I could have sugar cubes.

Pirtle I didn't know you did that! (Laughs)

Loyal Sure did! But it's just consistency and patience, a lot of patience with the animals. That's pretty much all animals. It's like everything, you always get one rotten apple somewhere along the way and it spoils it for everybody else. But no, I tell you something, my grandfather and my father and I were taught this—we take so good care of our horses. They're the ones that put the bread and butter on the table. You have to take care of them. They are the ones that make your living. Without those animals, you have nothing. You can walk to a coke machine. You can walk to the water spigot or your water fountain or whatever and get a drink of water or go make you a sandwich, but those horses don't. They depend on you. All animals depend on you, the elephants, the lions, the tigers, the dogs, the ponies—they depend on you to take care of them.

Before any of us, especially with my father, our horses ate before we ate. A horse got taken care of before we got taken care of, always. That was instilled in us ever since that—well, with me because I did the horses, but instilled, I think, in pretty much all my cousins, that the animals were first and pretty much everybody in show business that has animals. You have to take care of them first because they depend on you. They're like part of the family. I was sitting here and I was telling Dolly, "Oh, yes I remember this horse." She said, "Well, how do you remember?" I guess from being around my father. She says, "Oh, Manalique, I don't remember that." "Oh, I remember Manalique!" And I remember Palermo.

Pirtle I remember the names on some of them.

Loyal I remember New York.

Pirtle I remember them.

Loyal And I remember Cincinnati. I remember the name Vroka, but I don't remember Vroka.

Pirtle I remember Vroka.

Loyal They had a horse called Marna, and she never remembers Marna. She was a white horse.

Pirtle But you were more into the horses.

Loyal That's true.

Nykolaiszyn *How were names decided?*

Pirtle On the horses?

Nykolaiszyn *Yes.*

Pirtle Here's what I think. I honestly believe it's where they got the horse. One of them was named New York—think about it—one of them was named Cincinnati. One of them was named—there was another one named after a town. I don't remember what it was. But I think that they didn't know what else to call them so they named them after...

Loyal Oh, there was Cipolla! Do you remember Cipolla?

Pirtle I remember Cipolla. But the rest of the names, I don't know how they came up with those names.

Loyal And cipolla is onion.

Pirtle Why would they name him Cipolla?

Finchum *Was it white? (Laughter)*

Loyal Yes, my horses.

Pirtle And why was that one named Dolly?! (Laughter)

Loyal Papa named her Dolly. I don't know why he named her Dolly. Then another one, his name was some other name and he was so pretty that they called him Chulo, which means beautiful in Spanish. Que chulo, que chulo, so they named him Chulo. Then I got some Belgian horses back in, oh, I want to say late-'80s. Somewhere in the '80s and wait till I tell you their names. One was named Alexander McKeag. The other one was named Pasquinel. The other one was named Clay Basket and one...

Pirtle I don't even want to know! How'd you know about those names—I do want to know!

Loyal The other one was named Seccombe. I'm so into that *Centennial*, that miniseries, *Centennial*. Have you ever seen that miniseries, *Centennial*? I was into that miniseries, *Centennial*, and it's about a French—how weird—a French, oh, what do you call them? A trapper, a French trapper, a Canadian-French trapper that came to the United States back in the cowboy days. He's the mountain man, and these were characters out of that movie, and his name was Pasquinel. Oh, and then I had

another one name Jake, Jake Pasquinel, that was the son. Then I had Mikey, well that was the other son. (Laughter)

Nykolaiszyn *Were you raised in a bilingual household?*

Pirtle Yes.

Loyal Yes.

Pirtle In fact, when I first started school, I did not speak English. I spoke Italian. I understood it, but we didn't speak it, because my grandmother and grandfather didn't speak English. So we didn't speak a lot of English.

Loyal My grandmother, till the day she died, I think she only knew maybe five words in English, hello...

Pirtle She'd say, "Come here," when she wanted you to leave and, "Go away," when she wanted you to come here. (Laughs) She knew a few words, not many.

Loyal Yes, none of them spoke any English.

Pirtle In fact, my grandfather never spoke English. He spoke Italian and when he'd get mad, he'd speak French because he's French. We were talking about that yesterday. Why did we speak Italian instead of French? Because they were both French nationals, but my grandmother was Italian. The last name Travaglia, that's Italian. That's not French. She spoke more Italian than she did French.

Loyal But I think when they went to Italy, because when they were with the Travaglia, which was in Italy, the Travaglia side of the family, because where they did the high wire and everything it was all in Italy.

Pirtle It was because the Travaglia circus was in Italy.

Loyal Then my father was born in Italy.

Pirtle My mother was born in Sicily.

Loyal So they pretty much left France and went to Italy, I think, because of the circuses. I'm not real sure.

Nykolaiszyn *How old were each of you when your grandfather passed away?*

Pirtle He passed away in '56 so I was twelve when he passed away. And

you're five years younger than I am so that would've made you about seven.

Finchum

Who took over his role?

Loyal

My uncle and my aunt Albertina took over the role and that's when, a little bit later on, the family kind of went their separate ways.

Pirtle

Yes, I want to say Mom stayed just a couple more years.

Loyal

I think when they finally dissolved everything was in 1959, and I'm going to tell you Zia [Aunt] Albertina, and your mother came to Gil Gray in Dallas. It was Papa, Momma, your mother, Zia Albertina, they were going to put a riding act together for Gil Gray, and I don't know what happened.

Pirtle

They couldn't get them all together because my aunt Germana married my uncle Bruno [Zacchini] and they had gotten out of the circus. He had rides and stuff in the carnival.

Loyal

And then Zio Giustino went to the Ringling show.

Pirtle

He started his own troupe and he separated. And then my other aunt, Esterina, married and they went to New Jersey. So it just...

Loyal

And then Zia Simona [Loyal Pedrero] was with Zio Eddie [Pedrero]...

Pirtle

So they kind of just—it was time. It really was time. They were getting up in age.

Loyal

The only one, actually, after the family busted up—all of them went into carnival business with having rides, dark rides, and glass houses and all of that stuff, spook houses and stuff, except for my father. My father stayed true to his...

Pirtle

His heritage.

Loyal

...his heritage in the circus.

Pirtle

Now, my uncle Giustino, in a way, did stay.

Loyal

Yes, he did, because of my cousin.

Pirtle

He did that, but he also was going up to Sailor Circus, and he was helping train those kids.

Loyal No, no, and I forgot, not only that, he was ringmaster on the Ringling Circus.

Pirtle He did that.

Loyal And he was an equestrian director, in fact.

Pirtle Right. But he stayed active with Sailor Circus. He would go and they would call him Papa.

Loyal Papa Loyal.

Pirtle Papa Loyal and he'd go up there and he'd help train all those kids at the high school. He did that up until he got to where he was unable to do anything like that anymore.

Loyal Yes, he got Alzheimer's and he couldn't do that anymore. But they loved him dearly, they really did, up at Sailor Circus. My cousin Timi—I forgot. I'm sorry, I left him out. Timi finished high school and he went to Sailor Circus and everything, but Timi had the blood in him to be a bareback rider. Let me tell you, he is as good as my uncle.

Pirtle The only one out of his four children, out of Giustino's four children, that, as far as I know, didn't do anything with circus was Danny. Gus did...

Loyal Danny didn't do anything.

Pirtle ...he did horseback riding, Remo did wire, and Timi did horseback riding.

Loyal No, Danny didn't do anything. Then Timi, of course, right now he's somewhere in—where'd Armando say they were? In New Hampshire and when I talked to him earlier he said, "Oh, I passed Timi yesterday. They were in Massachusetts. They were setting up in Massachusetts. I couldn't stop. All I did was drive by, but I saw the truck and the trailer and stuff with the horses."

Pirtle I think what's impressive about all of this is the fact that you go back eight generations and there's still some family still doing circus. That's a long, long time. My cousin, Timi, is training his daughter. She's [Lucy] got her kids doing it, and her kids have got their kids doing it.

Loyal My grandkids.

Pirtle That's a long time.

Loyal I told you the story about my aunt Zefta and my aunt Esterina and my aunt Albertina getting a little ticked off at me because my last daughter, Tina, was supposed to be named after one of the aunts. They got into a squabble over which name.

Pirtle Well, it's all your fault. If you'd had seven like you intended to, you'd have had a name for every one of them. (Laughter)

Loyal I know! (Laughter) Anyway, my son, when he had his first son and he's named after my father. His name is—well, my father's name isn't Christian, but his name is Alfonso. Christian's name is Alfonso Joseph after my father and my brother who passed away. Then their second child was a little girl, and they promised if it was a girl, her name would be Zefta. So my aunt Zefta was here for the birth and everything, and she was so happy that there was a Zefta after—well, her name is Zefta.

Pirtle Well, she couldn't count on me, because I had all boys. I was a big disappointment to her! (Laughs)

Loyal So we had a Zefta and boy, she was the happiest thing. Now, my aunt Zefta's youngest daughter, Gina [Bowman Priddy], her son got married and we finally have a little Zefta, another little Zefta. My daughter, Mona, we call her Mona—her name is Simona after my aunt, the youngest aunt that passed away. Her too, for a long time I named her after her and finally, one of her daughters, they named their daughter Simona.

Pirtle Yes, the youngest one, Monique.

Loyal Monique named her daughter Simona. Of course, I have Josie. Her name is Germana, but we call her Josie, but she's named after my aunt Germana. She's kind of built like my aunt Germana, too. Too bad she didn't have the sense my aunt Germana had! (Laughs)

Pirtle I haven't seen Josie in a long time.

Loyal She looks just like Zia [Germana]. Just like Zia.

Pirtle I was a kid the last time I saw her.

Loyal What's funny is, when we went to Florida, they have this thing that they call...I can't say it.

Pirtle Saint Armand's Circle.

- Loyal** Explain to them what it is, Dolly.
- Pirtle** It's in Sarasota, Florida, and it's on the way out to Lido Beach, and it's called Saint Armand's Circle because it is a circle. They've got little stores and shops all around this circle. It's a big tourist attraction area. In the center of that, it's like a small park. It has got benches and things like that. All the way around that thing, they have different circus performers. They've got plaques that are in the ground. They are round, they're not square like a plaque, but they're round and they have their dates and what they did and so forth. Our family is in that Saint Armand's Circle.
- Loyal** Every year they can...
- Pirtle** Every year they put a new circus family or performer in that circle. It's really kind of a neat thing.
- Loyal** We went down for that and of course, my youngest daughter, Tina, was little. She was, I want to say maybe five, and she remembers her aunt Germana and she says, "All I can remember is that she wouldn't call me my name. She would always call me Piccinina. 'Piccinina! Piccinina!'" This is Fegan, I'm Cesa! (Laughs) That's the names our aunts used to call us all the time.
- But circus is in our blood, actually. We were talking about the new generation and everything. Now, my granddaughter Zefra, she stands—I'm going to send that DVD with you and you can see her standing, practicing, and learning to ride, which she rode when she was little until she was about maybe four or five years old and then she didn't ride anymore. She was strictly in school and that was pretty much it. She started practicing again, I want to say a couple of years ago, and she's doing really, really, really, really good. They're all practicing. All my grandkids are pretty much practicing. They love the circus. In fact, I think Zefra left yesterday. Zefra and Renzo left yesterday for Kelly Miller to be with Armando on the show.
- Finchum** *No Vitamin A, B, and C?*
- Pirtle** Oh. (Laughter) That stuck with you, did it not? It stuck to me a lot, too!
- Loyal** There's a little bit of Vitamin A, B, and C. That was so funny because on that DVD my cousin made for us, none of us talked about what we were going to say or anything. They just came in and they said, "Oh, Nucci's going to do a DVD out there. He wants to interview you. Would you go out there and give him an interview?" It's so funny because nobody really paid any attention. Well, everybody was inside and just

one at a time, “Oh, Nucci wants you,” and they’d go out. So when we got the DVD and we’re sitting there looking at this DVD and going, “Oh, my gosh! He’s talking about A, B, and C! Oh, my God! She’s talking about A, B, and C!”

Pirtle If you look at it, every one of us talked about A, B, and C. (Laughter)
Well, how could you forget that? That wasn’t a pleasant...

Loyal But see, I didn’t say A, B, or C. I said, “I remember a lot of spankings. I got a lot of spankings. I got a lot of spankings.”

Pirtle Well, for your information, it’s A, B, and C! (Laughter)

Loyal I said, “Oh, I remember them.” Christian was looking at it, and he had a bunch of his high school friends here. They’re looking at it and they’re laughing. When it got through with it he says, “What is with you people? Everything is an A, B, or C or you’re going to die! (Laughter) You’re talking about drowning and the other one’s talking about getting blown up.”

Pirtle In her video, her best memory of the family was when we were in Cuba...

Loyal With my cousins.

Pirtle ...with your cousins...

Loyal I love them!

Pirtle ...and we were hiding under beds because they were bombing in Cuba. They were blowing it up.

Loyal I remember the revolution! The revolution!

Pirtle The revolution, that was her best memory. Now, what is it with you? (Laughs)

Loyal I said, “And it was fun!” To me, it was fun. My grandmother would snatch us up and, a bunch of us, she took our clothes and tied us together so we wouldn’t get lost. We’d be running down the street and we’re all hooked onto each other. They’d hide us under the beds and stuff because of the bombs. I remember one of the hotels. Yes, and I said, “That was one of my funnest times.” And it is! It was! It was for me. Oh, I had a lot of fun with my cousins. I thought it was fun.

Back then, on the circus, too, it was a lot different. Everybody looked

out for everybody's child. We could go outside and we could play and say so and so, Canastrelli's, who lived over here, their kids were outside playing and the Bisbinni's, they lived over here in their trailer and their kids were—everybody watched everybody else's children. They were always supervised. Maybe we weren't directly, they weren't directly outside standing over them, but we always knew there was always somebody watching us. The kids could go outside and play and stuff and you didn't have to worry about anything. Anymore...it's like I tell my daughter Josie, who is on Carson and Barnes, I said, "Josie, watch Maya. Josie, watch Juju. Josie, watch—you don't know who's out there." Before, you used to know everybody. Anymore, you have no clue. These people are coming from different parts of the world and we don't know. Things have changed so much from when we were on the circus.

Pirtle

When we were kids on the circus and we were going back then, the Ringling Brothers had the trains. We would have almost a whole train for ourselves because we had a big family. Inside the train there would be like an isle going up the middle and then there would be what they call state rooms. My uncle would have his room and then my mother and then through this whole section over here. I remember when we would come into town, it was so exciting to see all those people standing out there, watching you. We thought we were important. It wasn't us, but us kids liked it. We'd go and stand on the end like, "Here we are!" (Laughter) And they weren't looking at us, they were looking at the elephants and the horses, but we thought we were important. (Laughter) I used to love that part of it. Just riding the train and going from town to town and watching them put the tent up.

Nykolaiszyn

When you were growing up did you think, "This is what I want to do, too"?

Pirtle

I think I did when I was little, but then it got to be a job, because they started working me in the circus when I was like six. They would take me out of school and take me to South America and Central America and Cuba, and then I have to come home and make that work up at school.

Loyal

We were talking about that this morning.

Pirtle

It got to where I felt like I had to do it. So when I got older, I pulled away from it because it was so pushed on me all my life that I wanted to run away from it. And I did. I left.

Loyal

And see, I was the opposite. I hated school. I was telling her this morning how I hated school. I don't know, I was trying to explain to her, I said, "Dolly, I hated it. I literally hated it." I said, "I would be taken out

of school in March. I would come home in November. I would have to do all that catching up.” I hated school. It’s not that I was dumb or stupid or anything. My mother left me here one year in 1960 with a lady named Ruby Doyle. I called her Aunt Ruby and I used to make straight F’s. I’ve gone to school with everybody in Hugo, Oklahoma, “Oh, Lucy? Yeah! I know her. I went to school with her.” (Laughter) “Oh, yes! I went to school with her!” I have class pictures with everybody in Hugo! (Laughter) And I love every one of them.

Pirtle And some of them are nineteen! (Laughter)

Loyal I made straight F’s. I did. I made straight F’s. The only thing I made an A in was conduct. I could keep my mouth shut. I didn’t know anything to say!

Pirtle I guess that was your second career, right?

Loyal Anyway, when I stayed home that year with Ruby, after Mom and them left and went on the road, I made straight A’s. I made straight A’s. My teacher kept going, “Lucy, how are you—are you cheating?” I’m going, “No.” They’d say, “Okay. Well, tell me what this is, what you read, or my multiplications and all of that.” It was due to Aunt Ruby because Aunt Ruby would make me sit there and apply myself and do my work. If I didn’t do it, I didn’t go play. I stayed there until I learned it so I made straight A’s.

Well, summer vacation came and I didn’t go on the show. I stayed here with Ruby and then school started, I still made straight A’s. Well, Momma and Papa came home off the road. Back then, Momma used to pay Ruby fifty dollars a month for me to stay there and go to school. Well, Aunt Ruby would say, “Well, leave her with me, Lilly, Alfonso. You don’t have to pay me. Just so she keeps me company,” because her husband got a job in Dallas and he would only come on the weekends. Her kids were all grown and out of school. Her youngest one graduated the year I stayed with her. And so, of course, me, “No. No.” I wanted to be with Mom and, of course, Momma didn’t speak English that well. Papa really didn’t go to school. I think he was third grade and that was about it. Momma graduated, but it was all in Italy. So they never pressed me or made me do my work, and I could care less because I didn’t want anything to do with it anyway. I wanted show business and show business it was.

I finally quit junior high. I was fifteen years old, just getting ready to go into the ninth grade. Here I am going into the ninth grade with eleven year olds—I don’t think so! (Laughs) So I quit school and at times, I regret it because I didn’t get to get involved in the senior prom, and they

have the high school reunions and things like that, that I think I would've enjoyed. Now that I'm older, I look back and think, "Oh, well, that would've been a nice memory." And do this and do that. When I had my kids, I made sure my kids went to school, got an education, and got the best of both lives, got the circus. Now, my two oldest ones were never going to be in show business and where are they? On the circus. They both went to OU. Mona went one day longer than Armando. Josie, she didn't want anything to do with college. Tina graduated and got married to a young man in the service and that's about it, though.

Pirtle

See, my children are just the opposite. I Americanized my children, totally. They know about the circus, they know what I did, they see the pictures, but they were never involved in it. In fact, two of them have businesses, appliance businesses, and my middle boy has a career in the navy, but they're totally out of the circus. Do I have regrets? In a way, I do. I wished I had spent a little more time teaching them some of the things. But back then, I was really, really pulling away from it.

Loyal

Now, my grandkids, we push them. We keep them in school. I have two that are going to graduate this coming year, but they're both involved in the circus. Christian is absolutely—he wants to go out and buy his own horses now and stuff. Kylie, of course, is with her mother. You asked me about the costumes. Those are for Kylie's mother's mother-in-law's circus. Kylie this year did web in the circus, her first year to do web in the circus. Of course, Kylie did hula hoops a couple of times when she was little, and she did work in the riding act with me when she was smaller. Zefta worked in the riding act, Christian worked in the riding act, and Channing? No. Maya? No, not yet.

But my youngest grandson, Argio, who's the same age as Lexie, about three, he's a clown on Kelly Miller. And a very good little clown at that! He loves it. It's in his blood, I think. All of them, though, practice riding. On the DVD I'm going to let you take, you can see them all practicing. But it's like everything, circus has its good times, it has its bad times, it has its happy times, it has its sad times. Dolly, she left the circus. I love the circus. I couldn't exist without the circus. I couldn't. There'd be no way. Even now, I'm so still involved in it.

Pirtle

But I think that it was so engrained in us that I could be out of it and walk over and be in it.

Loyal

Yes.

Pirtle

I understand it. It's part of my history. I don't have the fear of ever losing that for myself, but I did lose it for my children.

Loyal Lots of times, I feel—I don't know—I feel lost or something. Now, I'm going to sound really stupid! (Laughs) I hadn't done it in a while, but you've seen those metal washtubs that they sell? I went and bought—in fact, I've still got it. I went and bought one and I—this was at the old place—and I'd go outside and I'd fill it up and I'd get a sheet—I know you're going to think I'm stupid—and put up a clothes line, and I would get those clothes pins and I'd put it all up, and I'd put that tub in there where the water spigot is, and I would go take a bath in it so I could feel like I was on the circus. Doesn't that sound—I know it sounds stupid, but it's a part of me that I miss and I like and I enjoy. I said, "A lot of people can't live without their buttons and their cell phones, their computers," I said, "What are they ever going to do if they cut the water? What are they going to do if there are never any lights? How are they going to survive?" I'll survive because I know how.

Pirtle That's right.

Loyal I know how to do without any of that stuff.

Pirtle My mother had three buckets and she had her name on every one of them and Lord, do not get one of her buckets! (Laughs) She would send somebody to go get her water, because when you first get on the lot and stuff, there was no other way to get clean. There wasn't any showers like they have now. Later on in life, they ended up having trains or areas where you could go shower, but back in those days they didn't.

Loyal Self-contained trailers.

Pirtle We didn't have that.

Loyal We didn't have self-contained trailers.

Pirtle And Lord, you didn't touch that bucket of water. She'd have her three buckets of water—don't even look at them! (Laughs)

Loyal Do you know, today, I could take a bath in a gallon of water?

Pirtle Yes.

Loyal And wash my hair and rinse my hair and take a complete bath in a gallon of water.

Pirtle But it was out of necessity, it really was.

Loyal Now, we have those self-contained trailers, where you have your running water even though there's only so much water that can fill in

that tank. When we're on the show, "Okay! The trailer's full. You get wet, you shut it off, you soap up, you rinse off." That way there's plenty of water for the rest of them. We come home and they turn the water on and when they get in they shut it off, they get soaped up. I said, "No! You can leave this one running!" (Laughter) "We've got running water!" But it's just a way they learn to conserve and the same with the lights. Oh, God! I don't want any lights on. If you're not in there using them—and you're lucky you've got lights on right now! (Laughter) Because on the road, the lights came on at a certain time, they went off at a certain time. You better have everything you needed done that needed lights.

In fact, I'm going to tell you a story. My mom and dad had just gotten this new trailer. It was a Midway. Our lights went out. Well, way back when, they used to have those candles. They still have those candles. And so you'd have it in a candle holder and I'd put it up on this little shelf by the window. Well, low and behold, the little wind came up behind it. I left it on and went and did the riding act. When we came back the front of the trailer was on fire...

Pirtle Oh, wow!

Loyal ...because that curtain had caught on fire.

Pirtle That's scary.

Loyal Well, they got it out though. We still had a trailer. (Laughs) You remember that old Midway, over there. Did you ever notice that burnt area. It was darker.

Pirtle I never knew why. I do now! (Laughs)

Loyal Now you know. They cleaned it all and everything and they, I don't know, with sand paper. They varnished it, but it was always darker than the rest because that side of the trailer was on fire. (Laughs)

Finchum *Was that a major decision when they decided to get a trailer?*

Loyal Yes. When my father and my mother first got married and everything—and back then, it was like the whole family was together and they got one salary. I'm going to use this for an example. Say they got fifteen hundred dollars for the week and there are how many in this family? There's my grandfather, my grandmother, my aunt Albertina and her husband, there's...

Pirtle There were seven kids and their spouses.

- Loyal** ...and their husbands and wives. Well, that fifteen hundred dollars, you might've gotten ten because the money, my grandfather controlled and my aunt Albertina. They paid for all—everybody ate together. I mean, everything was there.
- Pirtle** All your needs were taken care of, but the money went into a pool and so in the wintertime they would have money to survive on.
- Loyal** To survive on, okay. Now, if the aunts or the uncles or whoever made extra money, that money they would use to buy their own trailer or whatever. But say they didn't, it was a family trailer. If they just made a decision, my grandfather and my aunt would make the decision or my grandfather, aunt and my uncle Giustino, who were the oldest, are the ones that took care of the rest of the family. When my father married my mother, they got them a car. They either had a car or they had a trailer. Well, they couldn't bring a trailer because they didn't have anything to pull it with. They chose a Woody. Do you remember what a Woody is? Okay, they had a Woody, and so they would go when they worked, wherever the buildings were, they always had stalls for the horses and stuff. Papa pulled that little Woody right up next to there and Momma would unload it. She'd move into a stall. She's put her bales of hay and they would drape something over it.
- Pirtle** That'd be the table. (Laughs)
- Loyal** She put her little electric stove up there and stuff. She wrote back to her mother in Italy, "I feel like the Virgin Mary." (Laughter) "I'm living in a stall. All I need is a cow and a sheep!" That's how they did for a real long time, but it always went through the older family, the eldest. If they had the money, they'd buy them, "Okay, now you get the trailer," like that. Unless they had a side act or something that they did on their own that didn't conflict with the family and they made extra money, that money was theirs to do what they wanted with.
- Pirtle** I remember one year my mother and dad had bought a brand new trailer. They already had the car, they had a Buick. We pulled in on the lot—I guess I might've been about six or something, maybe even seven—they pull in on the lot and he says, "Where do you want to park this thing?" She points to some tree. My dad backs it up over there and by the time he gets it about lined up and ready to set it up she said, "Well, I think I want to go over there, because Simona's parked over there." So he moved it again and he put it over there. Well, then somebody else came in, one of the other sisters and she said, "Well, you know, there's a shade tree over there." He moves it the third time. The fourth time when she wants to move it, he pulls it up where the tree was at and he backs it

into it. He said he hit the tree, but then he says, “You’re parked!”
(Laughter) She didn’t move it anymore, but he was moving it all over that place!

- Loyal** I remember this one time my aunt Zefta, my father and my aunt Zefta were very close. We were discussing this the other day. My aunt Albertina was the oldest and there was a big age difference between her and her siblings. My uncle Giustino, my aunt Germana, and my aunt Esterina were real close. They were real close because they were in the same age [range]. Then my father and her [Dolly’s] mother were very close.
- Pirtle** They were younger than the other ones.
- Loyal** Then Simona was the youngest and like she said, she was left in Europe. But her mother, I remember—well, I don’t remember them buying this little green trailer—my mom and dad...
- Pirtle** Did it have a crease in the back? (Laughs)
- Loyal** They wrecked their trailer or something happened to their trailer, I don’t know. But I remember we moved into this little...
- Pirtle** And it was little!
- Loyal** I think it’s as big as this couch. (Laughter) It was just a little thing and it was green!
- Pirtle** It was dark green. Like a hunter green. I remember that thing.
- Loyal** It was green! I remember green! Then, one morning we heard [imitates a frog] all over this trailer. It was covered with frogs! It attracted every frog in Florida I think! This little trailer that they had. I wonder if it’s the one they ran into the tree.
- Pirtle** That’s why I asked if it had a crease in the back. (Laughs)
- Loyal** I don’t remember. Then I remember one time, I was still real small when the family—I don’t know if you remember this—the family had their circus. They took it to the Keys. Do you not remember that? When they took it...
- Pirtle** Tell me a little more. I don’t remember yet.
- Loyal** They took it to the Keys. Oh, I can’t remember all of it, but I remember coming back. We were coming back and we were like in a hurricane and

it had knocked down all the telephone poles that were on that, across the bridge or the road...

Pirtle You would remember that if you lived in Miami, going across that to the Keys.

Loyal ...and those telephone poles had all fallen onto—and I remember we were parked along the side of the road because we couldn't go any further because of the light poles. All the circus trucks were in a line and stuff. I guess they must've cut the lights off or I'd be electrocuted by now, but they used to have these blue things on the light poles.

Pirtle Conductors.

Loyal These blue things that were made out of glass and I was picking them all up. Then I remember that somebody went somewhere to get some food for everybody and they built like a bonfire or something and were cooking outside or something. That's how we ate until they got that cleared off.

Pirtle I don't remember.

Loyal Do you not remember?

Pirtle I don't remember that.

Loyal I remember that.

Pirtle I might not have been there.

Loyal Well, somebody was there. (Laughter) I wasn't there by myself!

Pirtle Okay.

Loyal Well, you're saying yes, you remember that and then, "Oh, well, I might've not been there."

Pirtle I don't remember it, okay! (Laughs)

Nykolaiszyn *Was there a point when the family decided to kind of go on their separate ways and kind of split off?*

Loyal Okay. We left in '55 and came here. But then when my grandfather died, they went back to the family and they took their circus to Cuba. They took the circus to Cuba and we came back in—well, whenever...

Pirtle ... whenever we came back. We'd lost everything down there because of the revolution down there. They stayed in a little bit longer and in fact, my mother got with my uncle and they were going to do a riding act.

Loyal That was in '59.

Pirtle That was in '59 and then after that, I think Mother, she went to another circus, and I can't think of the name of it, for a very short time and then she got out of it. That's when she got out of it. They all did that. They all started splintering and going their own ways.

Loyal Their own ways except for my dad. He stayed...

Pirtle But he did splinter.

Loyal Oh, yes.

Pirtle He came over and did his thing, but...

Loyal But we stayed in circus.

Pirtle ...but they stayed in circus, right.

Loyal We stayed in circus.

Nykolaiszyn *How old were you, Dolly, when you said, "Okay, I'm ready to get out"?*

Pirtle When I got out of high school, when I got married. I was eighteen when I got married. I graduated when I was seventeen and met my husband. My mother and I sat down and talked about it. She understood.

Loyal Which was a smart decision.

Pirtle Yes, she understood. I said, "I love the circus and I'll always love the circus, but in most cases it is such a short lived center-ring type thing, unless you're extraordinarily good that after ten or fifteen years, you need some kind of a backup." And that was my thoughts on it.

Loyal When you start out as a performer, you start out as a child, like Dolly. By the time she's thirty-five, that's it.

Nykolaiszyn *That's your lifespan?*

Loyal That's it.

Pirtle It is in that because you're going to get hurt. You're going to...

- Loyal** Your bones and your shoulders wear out, the bones—a bareback rider usually loses his knees at a very young age. They tear out the cartilages or something. My cousin, Timi, has had, I don't know how many, surgeries on his knees where the cartilages or his knee cap or something, or something with his knee. I had been so fortunate that I never let it happen to me until I was going to practice one day. I was breaking a new horse and the person I had had the lead on the horse that goes to their bridle. They just hold it to keep the horse in the ring so he doesn't hurt himself hitting the ring curb. You keep him so far away from the ring curb until he learns to run it without hitting it himself. I was vaulting off and on the horse. Well, normally, you are supposed to—if you get on that side of the rope it will catch you as the horse is running because [they are supposed to] let go of it. Well, they didn't. They pulled it and when they pulled it, it caught my leg and it tore the cartilage out of my knee. I didn't do it on the horse, the person that was holding the rope did it.
- Pirtle** But that's true with horseback riding. With flyers it's usually your shoulders.
- Loyal** Their shoulders. Anybody that does trapeze, it's their shoulders...
- Pirtle** And their neck, their shoulders and neck.
- Loyal** ...and their neck and that type of thing. People that do teeter board, their back, their knees, their neck.
- Pirtle** It's such a high impact part of your body that you use.
- Loyal** Like the cannon, your knees and your back.
- Pirtle** See, I did the cannon for a little while, too. I even did that.
- Loyal** See, I don't have any back problem because I didn't do any of that stuff. I had one knee problem and it wasn't because of the horse. It was because of that idiot that was holding that rope! Should've let go of it. (Laughs)
- Nykolaiszyn** *So a bareback rider could've had a longer career.*
- Pirtle** I think so, yes.
- Loyal** More so than a...
- Pirtle** Than a flyer.

Loyal ...than a flyer. I got on the horse, it wasn't too long ago, but it scares my grandkids. Oh my God! [imitates scared grandkids] Because I have a defibrillator and they are so afraid that I'm going to have a heart attack on this horse.

Pirtle Well, I mean they're probably telling you right when you do that.

Loyal But I got that—on the DVD, I'm on the horse guide.

Pirtle We put our grandmother...

Loyal Oh, yes.

Pirtle They took her out one year and she was going to tell my mother and them how to horseback ride.

Loyal I had gone to Florida...

Pirtle How old was she then, in her seventies?

Loyal Oh, she was close to eighty, Dolly.

Pirtle Yes.

Loyal I had gone to Florida...

Pirtle And they had put her on that horse and she did a round on that horse. She didn't stand up. She just sat on it, but she made a round on that horse and got off and turned around and all the kids were telling, "That's how you do it!" (Laughs)

Loyal I had taken my horses to Florida. I had to do something in Florida and it fell through and I never did do it. They had a big party and I think it was her birthday. I'm not sure when it was. They brought my grandmother and everything and sure enough, they put her on this horse, poor Nonna. [her grandmother] She was up there! She was up on that horse and did her little thing, going around. "See? See?"

Finchum *She didn't perform herself?*

Pirtle When she was young, yes.

Loyal When she was young, yes.

Pirtle Yes, she was very, very talented. Her and my grandfather worked

together.

Loyal Yes, yes. They were. That's why my great-great-great grandmother...

Pirtle We'll show you here in a minute. We've got a list that shows you how far back it goes.

Finchum *Okay.*

Loyal My son—I don't know how my son did this. This has been several years. My son got on the computer and was trying to check back the generations or something, and he found a cousin of ours that had splintered during Napoleon's reign that went to Germany. This cousin has done like twenty years of research on the Loyal family and stuff. Dolly and I were discussing, oh, we need to do this on the Travaglia, on my grandmother's side now and see how many generations and what year they started in show business. For me, I consider myself a bareback rider. That's what I consider myself, a bareback rider. But I worked elephants, trapeze—nothing like Dolly. Mine's a half-assed trapeze.

Pirtle You were good.

Loyal No, I just did a little routine and that was it. I never did anything like you. I did web. I did swinging ladder. I've helped put up the tent, take down the tent, and you've done the same. I remember back when we were kids and the family had their circus. We had folding chairs, red ones...

Pirtle We had to set them up. I remember setting those up.

Loyal I remember red folding chairs and here I am, five, six years old, putting up those red folding chairs. We had red folding chairs up in the seats for the audience to sit in. I've driven stakes, I've put up pony rides, I've taken down pony rides, I've...

Pirtle If you could walk, you pulled your load! (Laughs)

Loyal I did just about everything. Did everything but play in the band and if my grandfather could've gotten me to play that darn violin, I'd have probably been in the band, too! And juggling and I hated juggling. I hated it. My father was a fantastic juggler, but I hated juggling! It doesn't do anything for me, still doesn't do anything for me.

Pirtle I could juggle a little bit, just enough to say I can do a little bit.

Loyal I used to go, "Ta-da! Ta-da! Ta-da!" in the back and that was it, the

juggling. When Tina was little, my daughter, we used to put her in the riding act. She was about three years old. I used to have her stand up at the front and, of course, she didn't do anything. She'd have her hand on her hip and she'd be going like this. (Gestures styling) (Laughter) She came out one day, just crying. At the end they'd run back and they'd get her off the ring curb because she'd stand there. So she came out crying and I said, "Well, what's the matter, Tina? Why are you crying?" She says, "Armando says I can't do Tootsie no more!" because I used to tell her to stand out there and do "Tootsie! Tootsie! Don't cry!" (Laughter) She came out, "Armando says I can't do Tootsie no more!" That was her debut in the circus, doing Tootsie.

But we did everything. I'd sit out on the tent when we'd have blow downs, like a storm would come and it would blow it down. My dad would sit out there—in fact, I've got pictures somewhere—and he would sit out there and sew on that. We used to sew and I learned to do baseball stitches. That's how we used to sit and sew on that old canvas, baseball stitches, hours and hours.

Pirtle I remember we used to make the nets for the flying act. We'd sit out there and put them together.

Loyal The flying act nets?

Pirtle Yes.

Loyal Yes. And just...

Pirtle I think I can still make a mean net! (Laughs)

Loyal I worked a set of llamas once.

Pirtle Oh, wow.

Loyal I'm going to tell you, don't ever work a llama act. Them suckers spit at you! (Laughter) You try to dodge those suckers. I had four of them in that ring and I'm trying to make them go around and up, (imitates spitting) and I'm dodging the spit! Cush! Cush! Let me tell you!

Pirtle She was more into the animals. I didn't have to feed my act. (Laughs)

Loyal And my mother is real funny, because like I said, she didn't come from a circus family. She came from towners, excuse me, but she learned to work elephants, she learned to work chimpanzees, she had a bear act at one time, and worked in the riding act. She never did any aerial work, but she was pretty much the riding act, elephants, and chimps. In fact, I

used to get that chimpanzee's hand-me-down costumes. The chimpanzee, her name was Debbie, one of the chimps...

Pirtle Those are some mean animals.

Loyal ...and she loved my mother. That Debbie would love my mother, and it loved her to death. Anyway, Momma had this little chimp, one of the chimps that she worked, and her name was Debbie. Well, when Debbie would outgrow the costume, I got the costume.

Pirtle You wore a monkey suit? (Laughs)

Loyal I wore the monkey's suit! (Laughter)

Pirtle I didn't know that! (Laughs)

Loyal Are you serious? There was one, it was so pretty! It was pink...

Pirtle Did your momma throw you a banana every once in a while? (Laughter)

Loyal It was pink and green. I'll never forget it.

Pirtle I can't believe you wore a monkey's outfit!

Loyal It had little white pearls on it.

Pirtle What'd you do about the back of it? (Laughs)

Loyal Oh, shhh. No, it was closed up.

Pirtle Oh, okay.

Loyal She wore diapers, Dolly. They wore diapers back then.

Pirtle Okay. (Laughs)

Loyal They didn't have Pampers, they had diaper diapers. But yes, her name was Debbie. I remember Debbie.

Pirtle I didn't know that! (Laughs) I'm sorry.

Loyal You didn't know about Debbie the Chimp?

Pirtle I didn't know about wearing a monkey's outfit!

Loyal It wasn't a monkey's outfit, it was a costume!

Pirtle A monkey's costume!

Loyal It was two-piece.

Pirtle Oh.

Loyal Yes, it was two-piece.

Nykolaiszyn *Oh, gosh, that's so funny.*

Loyal And I always got Debbie's hand-me-downs. That's funny. (Laughs)

Nykolaiszyn *Lucy, do you remember the first time you met D.R.?*

Loyal D.R. Miller?

Nykolaiszyn *Yes.*

Loyal The first time I ever met D.R. Miller. I'm going to say it had to have been in 1956 or the end of '55, beginning of '56. We came to Hugo. Okay. You know where the hospital is, right? Okay. And that glove factory right there, right, that they're turning into a boys and girls club? Okay. That was the end of the road, right there. It was dirt road from the end of the hospital all the way down Kirk Road, past Kelly Miller, past Carson and Barnes. That was all dirt road. And I remember coming into Oklahoma, crossing the Red River. The road was like going down Kirk Road, back in the day because none of that—town ended—well, that wasn't even in town. Okay. Where Angie's Restaurant is? Okay. We were out in the country already. It was Angie's Restaurant, but it wasn't Angie's. It was called Tyler's and it had the old drive-ins, like the old drive-in where you pull up and they come to the car like an A&W, and it was called Tyler's. Then there was a big span of nothing and then that little, red building that's the bar, the Red Star, that was there. There was nothing beyond that. We were already out in the country.

The hospital was over here and the road went out and you went by the hospital right there, a little road went there, Kentucky Fried Chicken, none of that stuff was there. That was all trees, all out in the country. At the end of the hospital, it began the dirt road. It was all dirt road, all the way to winter quarters. I remember Mr. Miller coming up and then I remember him leaving. That was the first time I remember seeing him. It was him and his father, Obert. Then they left and I don't know how much longer—when you're a little girl, it seems like time is forever—here comes Kline, sitting on an elephant. This is the elephant and he was sitting like one foot here and this one over the ear, like that. (Gestures)

He's riding up on the elephant and got off, hooked that elephant, "Tina," made Tina turn around, hooked her up, climbed back up on her head. He pulled us from there all the way to winter quarters. It had snowed here and it was all mushy and nasty and you couldn't go down the road. You would get stuck. You'd go off the road. They pulled us, truck and trailer, or car and trailer, I should say, from there all the way to winter quarters, and then D.R. was there to park us, showed us, parked my mom and dad. That was the first time I'd ever seen Mr. Miller. But later in years, not that many later in years, but later in years, he paddled my butt several times.

Pirtle I did not know he did that.

Loyal Oh, yes ma'am. Not only did he get me, he got my brother.

Pirtle I could see him getting your brother, though. He was doing something all the time.

Loyal But one of the things—and I don't know if you remember this, when you were growing up on the circus you're never supposed to hang on the guy lines.

Pirtle I know that.

Loyal I was always hanging on the guy lines. I was always playing wire or something on those guy lines, trying to walk up like Zia Albertina on those guy lines. Always. I was hanging there and you'd be hanging, but you'd be hanging like crooked. He'd come up and let me tell you, "Get off the guy lines!" and paddle! My brother had a bad habit of going under the seats. Another thing, he didn't want you under the seats because you could hit one of those jacks.

Pirtle Right. He was looking for change, I bet you.

Loyal Oh, no. We were looking for candy.

Pirtle Candy?

Loyal You remember those candies that used to come in those boxes? They were like taffy and they'd be rolled.

Pirtle Was it the Crackerjack?

Loyal Not the Crackerjacks, they had taffy.

Pirtle Oh, they actually had taffy in them. Yes, I do and it had the plastic...

Loyal That little paper rolled around it.

Pirtle Yes.

Loyal And then they had little prizes in there.

Pirtle Yes.

Loyal And we were always looking for those things that you put your finger in and you could pull them and stuff.

Pirtle Yes, Chinese handcuffs.

Loyal Well, I don't know what the heck they were called. Then they had those little glasses. That's what came in the Crackerjacks, those little round things that you could hold. If you hold it in the sun and hold it over the thing, you could get a little fire started.

Pirtle You quit making fun, that's where I got my first driver's license.

Loyal Out of a Crackerjack box? (Laughter) But yes, my brother would always go under the seats. Always! Mr. Miller just happened to catch him.

Pirtle Oh, wow.

Loyal Let me tell you. He was something else. My brother was something else. Back in the day, they had what they called banners and a representative of the circus would want to make extra money, I guess, is how it worked. They would go into town, and they would go to the city merchants, and they would go to the grocery store, the hardware store, wherever, feed store, and would sell them banners. "Okay. We're going to make banners"—I don't know how much they charged, twenty-five dollars. I guess they charged by the size of banner you wanted. Anywhere from probably ten dollars on up and so they would come back with a list of these different merchants. They had this trailer and they had paint in the back of this trailer and they would have these big, long, white sheets of paper that came on a roll and they'd cut them. They would, with this paint, would put on there, "So and so's garage," or "So and so's grocery store." Then they would take them in the tent, and they had clothes pins, and they had like laundry lines, and they had those things on them. They'd drop them down, and they'd snap them on there, and then they'd pull them up, and they'd be all around the...

Pirtle They'd be like advertising?

Loyal Advertisement for all these different merchants. Well, needless to say, my brother found the backend of that paint truck, that trailer that had the paint. He painted the whole inside of that trailer. He painted the horses that were tied outside that trailer. Calvin Miller's trailer is whose it was. And he painted those horses' feet red, blue, pink, whatever color they had. I mean, he painted everything! (Laughter) And then he had paint all [over]. They wanted to know who got in the paint...

Pirtle Did he deny it?

Loyal "Not me! Not me!" He had paint all over him. (Laughter) Boy, I tell you what, Mr. Miller and Calvin Miller both got him. Then another time, Freddy Logan, that I was telling you about, his son, they had their trailer parked there and my brother was always in trouble. Always. He was a little kid and his dad worked chimps and his name was Bob Mocks. I can't remember what the little kid's name was. But anyway, they had crawled underneath Freddy's trailer and it was windy, and they were going to have a wienie roast, but the wind kept blowing the fire out. So they got this fire started under Freddy Logan's trailer.

Pirtle Oh, no!

Loyal They set the whole backend of the trailer on fire, because they were sitting there wienie roasting under this trailer! That happened out here at the circus, out at Carson and Barnes back in the day. I'll tell you what. And the old barn, where I practice now these Appaloosa horses, I practiced in that barn. My kids practiced in that barn.

Pirtle Your dad practiced in that barn.

Loyal My dad and your mother.

Pirtle Yes, I remember that.

Loyal And my grandkids are practicing in that barn. If that barn could talk, just imagine the stories it could tell us. There's no telling how many people before us practiced in that ring barn. It's ready to fall, but still.

Nykolaiszyn *Where is the barn?*

Loyal I'll have to take you. Before you leave I'll take you up there and show you the old Al G. Kelly Miller winter quarters. Carson and Barnes' first winter quarters is out of town. When you come in, you come from off the turnpike, right?

Nykolaiszyn *Yes.*

Loyal Okay. Right where the turnpike is, where you get off to come into Hugo and you go under and you come—I don't know if you notice, there is a veterinarian office over that way. Okay. And the sale barn? Okay. Well the sale barn sits right here and there's a road that runs along the sale barn. Well, on this side of the sale barn, the house is still there. There's a house on that corner and that's the original Carson and Barnes Circus winter quarters.

Pirtle Ya'll need to go see that. I'd like to see pictures of that, myself.

Loyal I mean, it's just a house.

Pirtle Still.

Loyal But that was the original Carson and Barnes winter quarters and who the owner of the circus was back then was Jack Moore. Then when Jack Moore, of course, him and Mr. Miller and them, I don't know how later on they were in partner together. This is my understanding, Jack Moore and I believe a man by the name of Franco Richards opened Carson and Barnes up. I'm not sure if Mr. Miller had invested in it or not, I don't know, I couldn't tell you. Then later in years—I'm trying to think, 1963—1963, we went on Carson and Barnes because up until then we were still on Al G. Kelly Miller Circus, which was by Mr. Miller. Then in '63, we went to Carson and Barnes, which was owned by Jack Moore and his wife at the time. Then in '64 we went back to Al G. Kelly Miller and then in '65, we went back to Carson and Barnes and then stayed on Carson and Barnes.

The year, I'm going to say '68—in '68 I was in Florida for some reason, that winter. Zio Giustino was the equestrian director and ringmaster or performance director of Ringling Brothers. They were in Venice, Florida. They were no longer in Sarasota. They were in Venice so it was me and Papa and Zio Giustino wound up going to Venice. Well, Zio had to go anyway, because he had to be there every day, but they wanted me to go and I was supposed to work for the Christensens, in their riding act. So everything was getting set up for me to go on the Ringling show. Papa was supposed to do something. I can't remember what it was.

But then we went back to Zio's house, they got a phone call from Jack Moore. This was like towards the middle or first part of February. We got a phone call from Jack Moore, and he was having a lot of problems and he was in the hospital. He got on the phone to Papa and he told Papa, he says, "I understand you're going to the Ringling show and you're taking Lucy." He says, "Alfonso, I was really counting on you," he says, "because I know you know I'm sick and I'm not doing too

good,” he says, “and Mr. Miller’s going to”—I’m going to back up a little bit. By then, Al G. Kelly Miller had gone broke. What happened was he wound up selling. There were some problems and he wound up selling Al G. Kelly Miller to a man by the name of Joe McMahon, Mr. Miller did, and the show went broke. So then Jack Moore said, “D.R. is coming on the show. He is going to be my manager,” and this and that and the other. He says, “He’s going to take over the duties, but everything will stay the same.” He says, “I really need you to be there. You know how everything works, to help him out, and I’m really counting on Lucy,” and blah, blah, blah. To make a long story short, I didn’t go to the Ringling show.

We came back to Carson and Barnes, and it was 1969. He died two weeks before we went out, but we went ahead and went with Carson and Barnes. In ’69, we were still—we, I always say “we” because to me, that’s like my home—it was a three-ring circus still, and I remember we were in the Chicago, going into Chicago and that was the first year, and D.R. made it a five-ring circus. He had gotten two more middle pieces and more poles. He made a five-ring, and it was the most beautiful circus I had ever seen. It was at Maywood Park, and the police was our sponsor. They had brought truckloads of sawdust and it was absolutely gorgeous, all this sawdust and the lighting. He had hired extra acts to come in. He hired a young man by the name of Martin Leontini, which your [referring to Dolly] mom and them knew the family, because they used to do the hand balancing and tumbling act. Then he hired a bunch of girls called the Cassidy Girls and they did aerial acts, and he had hired some other acts.

From there is where Carson and Barnes grew its five rings. He had worked—gosh, we did Wheaton, Wheeling, Oakbrook, it was absolutely glorious. It was like a month of just in the Chicago area. When we left the Chicago area it went back to three-rings, but then the following year, 1970, it was five-rings the whole year. Then, of course, we went back to Maywood. We went back to Maywood several years and then I’d been on Carson and Barnes. D.R. bought Carson and Barnes from Angela and Hank Hoover or something. I believe in 1970, it became his. That’s the story that I know of like that. But Mr. Miller, it seems like we were with him forever. Barbara and I grew up together. We used to be so mean to poor Barbara. I remember chasing her with a stick with a nail in it and...

Pirtle

Oh my gosh! (Laughter)

Loyal

I was real hateful. I think about things now, you know. And Barbara, in her own right, was a very good little performer. She did bounding rope and she did magic and elephants. She was very talented. She was very talented on the bounding rope. I remember her practicing with doing

tumbling and stuff with a Mexican family and the man, his name was Maurice Mamalejo. When we're on the circus as young kids, even though they're not related to us, they're our aunts and our uncles. Aunt Gerry, Aunt Flo, Aunt so and so, Uncle Dory, Aunt Isla, even though we are not related, but to us we feel like...

Pirtle It's like a sign of respect.

Loyal Like Moira [Loter Curiel], to me, Moira is like my little sister. I've known Moira—I knew Moira before Moira even knew Moira! (Laughter) I knew Moira when Moira was on her way. I've always been around Moira. In fact, Moira and I saved my cousin a couple of times, I think. (Laughs)

Nykolaiszyn *How long were you on Carson and Barnes?*

Loyal Do you want to say with Mr. Miller or do I want to say...?

Nykolaiszyn *In total.*

Loyal In total? Oh, goodness. I'm going to say forty-two years, forty-three years. Then I left and then I'm back. I'm not on the road with them, but I'm still involved with them so I don't know how you want to use that. I'm going to be sixty-two in July, next month.

Finchum *When did you stop performing yourself?*

Loyal When I started performing, I think I was probably about five.

Pirtle When did you stop?

Finchum *When did you stop?*

Loyal Oh, stop! Oh, I'm sorry! Oh, let's see. When did the Towers...?

Pirtle About ten years ago.

Loyal The Towers, it was when the Towers...

Nykolaiszyn *Oh, 2001. September 11?*

Pirtle September 11, 2001.

Loyal That's the last year I performed—no—yes, a complete season. Then I did a date or two for my son, the comedy and that was it in 2002 or something. That was it.

Nykolaiszyn *Even though you were still probably training horses and doing all kinds of things, what was your reasoning behind not performing anymore?*

Loyal My defibrillator. If I had a good heart, I wouldn't be sitting here. My butt would be on the road. It would be performing, if they would let me. (Laughs) I don't think I would look very pretty in a costume anymore. But no, I did comedy there at the last. I did a comedy act in the riding act. I don't know if you've ever seen it or not. It was on *Funniest Home Videos* one year.

Pirtle It was pretty good.

Loyal It was really hard for me to do it because I am so used to riding the right way, that you have to ride like you don't know how to ride. I know how to ride so it's really hard to do like you're not trying to ride. But I'll look for some videos of me doing the comedy and let you have some.

Nykolaiszyn *Yes, that'd be great to see.*

Loyal To me, it seems like I've always worked forever in the circus. I don't remember not working in the circus, except when we'd come home in the wintertime and then I practiced and sewed. I'd go out and sew all winter out at the circus in the basement, or across the street, in the sewing room. I was always doing something with the circus, practicing elephants, practicing the riding act, or something. I wished we'd have filmed you that day you got on the flying act.

Pirtle Oh, Lord.

Loyal The day that Dolly got on the flying act. And that was in the '80s, Dolly.

Pirtle I was in my thirties. I remember that.

Loyal It was in the '80s. I'm going to stop and I'm going to try to think what year it was in. '85—wait a minute...

Pirtle Maybe I was in my forties if you keep going up on that. (Laughter)

Loyal Wait, no, no. It wasn't '85. I've got to go back. No, I didn't have Tina yet. It was like '79.

Pirtle Okay.

Loyal It was like '79, '78...

- Pirtle** Something like that.
- Loyal** It was either '78 or '79 and Alfredo, Moira's ex-husband, it was his family's flying act and nobody knew Dolly. Everybody knew Dolly's mother. "This is my aunt Zefta's daughter, Dolly." "Oh, yes! I heard about your mother. Oh, I've seen your mother. I've seen pictures and videos of your mother." I said, "Well, you know she used to fly." "Oh, yeah?" It was like one of those, "Oh, yeah?" Well, anyways, she got up there and boy, their mouth went—and they go, "Oh, my God! What style—*Que stilo! Stilo tiene! Nina que stilo tiene!*" I said, "Yes, you can thank my grandfather for the *stilo* she's got, her style of flying." And then like she said, she was so sore the next day that she couldn't...
- Pirtle** I can remember that like it was yesterday, trying to get out of that bed and make it to the bathroom to get ready to go to work. I was so miserable! (Laughs)
- Loyal** When Dolly came on Al G. Kelly Miller, because it wasn't Carson and Barnes, it was Al G. Kelly Miller when her and my aunt Zefta came. There was a lady who did trapeze on the circus, but she wore shoes with gimmicks, and she had a net underneath her. She was coming to do an audition for Mr. Miller. I remember that. They told the lady she wasn't working that day. I remember it like it was yesterday. They told her that she wasn't going to perform that day, that they had a young lady coming to do an audition and they wanted to do it during the performance so they could watch her work. So they put up the trapeze for Dolly and, of course, there's no net. There's no mechanic and she's all of what, eleven?
- Pirtle** I don't know.
- Loyal** Something like that and she comes in to work and, of course, her father and my father are there to watch her and she goes up, no tights, no nothing, just a little costume on and does her toes and her flying heel catches and everything. D.R. goes, "Yes, okay." Oh, boy. Talk about somebody getting upset.
- Pirtle** Yes, she was.
- Loyal** There was always a lot of competition in the circus. And here's this little eleven-year-old, doing it with no gimmicks, no net underneath her and...
- Pirtle** You've got to understand, that woman was trying to make a living.
- Loyal** Yes.

Pirtle All I was doing was showing off. (Laughs)

Loyal And she was taking her job away from her! (Laughter)

Pirtle That was funny. It's not funny when you think about it when you're older, but back then I thought, "Oh, I can do that! Let me show you how it's really done!"

Loyal She goes, "Lucy, I do that without shoes!" I said, "I know!" I said, "She has to wear gimmicks." (Laughs) God, kids are terrible, aren't they?

Pirtle We were awful!

Loyal "I'm better than she is at that," when we were kids. We were terrible!

Nykolaiszyn *Are there parts that you miss, looking back, Dolly?*

Pirtle Well, sure, absolutely, absolutely. If I had to do it over again, I probably would've done it a little bit different. I don't think I'd have given up on my circus roots and gotten out of it like I did. But, like I said, back then it was just like I was running away from it. Yes, I do.

Loyal We were talking and I don't know if you noticed this with Moira and them, how Moira too, her family is right there, her kids, her daughter, her grandkids, and stuff. We were discussing this and my cousin, my other cousin in Florida too, we were discussing this. She says, "Lucy, it's really incredible how you kept the family tradition alive." Basically, like my father and his sister and the others—they all lived there right together. That's how I am with my kids, except for Tina. She's the only one that wanders off every now and then, because her husband's in the military. But they always say when he retires he's going to be close to home, which I understand. They get moved here and get moved there and everywhere. But then, like my daughter, Josie, she's here. My son, Armando, he's here. My grandkids on both sides are here. My daughter, Mona, comes home and stays here and stays quite awhile and then when it's time for her to go work, then she'll leave, but her daughter is here with me ever since she was little. Well, ever since my mom passed away, because my mom used to send all my kids to school and start it off. I kind of took her place, pretty much.

Pirtle You know, I've tried both ends of the stick. I've done circus and I've gone into what you call the townner's life. And no matter what, it's in your blood. It's your roots. It's your history. How many people can talk about that? Very few. We can all talk about growing up and different things like that, but the history of the circus—it's a rarity, it really is. So, yes, it's part of our upbringing and we'll never forget it.

Loyal A lot of times people will ask me, “Oh, well, do you think the circus is dying?” I don’t think the circus is dying. I don’t think it’ll ever die. There’ll always be a circus in some way or some form. Maybe not a big circus, like Ringling Brothers or like Carson and Barnes used to be, all five rings. I always think there will be a small branch of a circus, even if it is just a ring and a small family doing with one trailer, or what we would call a dog and pony show. But I always believe that there will be a little circus. I don’t think it will ever die. I really don’t.

Nykolaiszyn *Do you think there’s something unique about the tent? Ringling performs in large cities, big arenas...*

Loyal There’s a big difference.

Pirtle A huge difference.

Loyal A big difference, big difference. The smell—I don’t know what it is. The grounds, the smell, I can tell the difference of working in a building and working [in a tent]. I’d rather be on a mud show than in a building. The only good thing about a building is when it’s hot, you’ve got air conditioning and when it’s cold, you’ve got heat.

Pirtle And don’t forget the showers.

Loyal Oh, well... (Laughter) Well, no. I bring my own bucket! (Laughter)

Nykolaiszyn *She has a gallon! (Laughter)*

Loyal I want to show you something, Dolly. I’ll be right back. You can continue the conversation.

Pirtle Where are you going?

Loyal Right here to get something.

Pirtle She’s going to bring a bucket. I guarantee it. You watch.

Nykolaiszyn *That’d be awesome.*

Pirtle I just want to see that costume. (Laughter) I really want to see that costume! (Laughs)

Nykolaiszyn *Well, I wanted to know why you decided law enforcement.*

Pirtle Oh, wow. Well, my husband, my kids’ daddy and I, separated and I went

back to Florida. I really needed to go to work so there was an opening as a dispatcher at the sheriff's office.

Loyal She hadn't done trapeze in a while. (Laughs)

Pirtle I started working as a dispatcher there. Then when I came back, we tried to work things out. I came back to Texas and started working. We separated again and I stayed. I started working as a dispatcher and then I went to the police department there in Henderson, and dispatched there for a little while. I walked into the chief's office one day and I said, "I need to make more money. I need to get on the streets," because I was struggling trying to raise my kids. He said, "Well, I'm not going to have a woman on the streets." I said, "I really, really need to make more money." So about two weeks roll by and he called me in there one day and he said, "Are you serious and will you stay if I pay to send you to school?" I said, "Absolutely. My kids are here. I won't be leaving." So he sent me to school. I went into patrol and did that for twelve years. Then they put me in as a detective and I did that until I retired. That's where I met my current husband, was in law enforcement. It was a necessity and I liked it. Don't get me wrong, I really liked it, but it's not the same as circus.

Loyal Okay. We were discussing...

Pirtle If you bring a tub out here...

Loyal No! I didn't bring a tub! (Laughter)

Pirtle Oh, I know what you're putting out there.

Loyal You said don't forget the showers. Well, if it's hot you've got cold water. If it's cold and you've got lights, you've got hot water!
(Laughter) [shows device to warm water]

Nykolaiszyn *Really?*

Pirtle Yes, that's how you heated the water up.

Loyal Well, they didn't have these, really. Actually, this is from...

Pirtle Back then, they used to set them in the sun.

Loyal Yes, this is what I used for my horses when the water freezes in their water barrels. I just run enough light cord to keep it from freezing, but you have to pull it out or unplug it. But then I go, "Hey, yes! We can use these to heat water up! Put it in the bucket and have hot water." (Laughs)

Nykolaiszyn *How's life different on the road? I'm sure you don't have to practice a lot.*

Loyal You do and you don't. It just depends on what you do. If you're a juggler, you practice all the time, whether you perform in the show or not. The minute the show is over and the people are out of the tent, he's in there practicing. A juggler practices twenty-four-seven. It depends. Like the flying act, they like to practice all the time. I didn't like to practice all the time. (Laughs)

Pirtle You'll also see them working a lot when they're not performing, to do something new to put in the act.

Loyal Yes.

Pirtle You'll see them going in and trying to come up with something new to add on to that act.

Loyal Or if they want to learn a new trick.

Pirtle Or if they have a new performer, they'll work with that person.

Nykolaiszyn *So at the end of the season when everybody returns to winter quarters or goes their separate ways, what's happening during that time?*

Loyal A lot of them practice, make new costumes for the next year. A lot of them have winter dates. Well, they don't have them so much anymore, but they used to have a lot of winter dates. They would close and they would go on and go—I'm going to give you an example. They have what is called—it's in Indiana, Evansville, Evansville, Indiana—they have a big Paul Kaye's days. It's a big date. It's one of the biggest dates. It's in, I believe, November, in November. Then they also have one in New Orleans, the Hanneford date, there's New Orleans. I think those are about the last two dates until after Christmas. Then in January and February they'll start up again and they'll have Binghamton, New York. They go to—I can't ever say this town—Kipsy, Tokipsy, New York, or something like that.

Pirtle Poughkeepsie.

Loyal What is it?

Pirtle Poughkeepsie.

Loyal Okay, wherever. And then they have like Memphis. They have a big

date in Memphis, Saginaw, Michigan, and Detroit. They used to have a lot of big dates. Anymore, I'm not real sure of all the dates, Roanoke, Virginia, Atlanta. But like, Ringling has pretty much all those big cities...

Pirtle Sewn up.

Loyal ...sewn up, and they don't go in there very much anymore.

Pirtle I remember them when the family would come in and most of the times they would come in around the first part of November. Now, they weren't necessarily still working with the show at the time. They might still be doing some dates, but when they came in, in November, they did not practice until after January, because there was Thanksgiving and Christmas and they really enjoyed those dates. But as soon as Christmas and New Year's was over with, they were either practicing or they were out on a date.

Loyal Working.

Pirtle Even if they weren't with the show they were going to be with for the season, they were going to find some dates to make money through the winter. If they didn't, they would be practicing. They rested that short period. It was like a month and a half, or so. They did take a break.

Loyal It's really hard for the people with animals, though, that have elephants and lions and stuff, for them to take a break because they have to...

Pirtle Animals forget.

Loyal ...to keep them sharp and stuff like that. I remember Harry Rooks when I was a little girl. He would practice the Liberty horses every day. There were three rings of Liberty horses and there were six horses in each act. So he would have to go through that whole act, I don't know how many times he'd go through the act. Then he'd practice the next group. But it was like an all-day thing. Then he did the ponies and stuff. They would come home after being on the road and the only day he didn't practice was Sunday. That was the only day he didn't practice.

The elephants were the same thing. Right now, when Tim Frisco and those guys come home, when they're home—in fact, men are up there now—he has his elephants or the elephants that he takes. He practices every day in the morning to just keep their mind alert on their thing. It's the same routine over and over, but it's to keep them alert. Consistency, like what I was telling you about practicing or teaching a horse. It's consistency, keeping the same thing up over and over and over.

A lot of the performers, they just come home until after New Year's and then I know we would start practicing, but I would sew. It would start after New Year's, go to the Big House or to the sewing room in the basement and sit and sew and make new costumes for the next year. Have you not been over to the old wardrobe? I will have to take you. You will have to bring your camera. I'll show you where we made wardrobe, where Carson and Barnes makes all its wardrobe and show you all the costumes hanging up and stuff that are still there, that they use at different times and things.

Nykolaiszyn

Who taught you how to sew?

Loyal

Myself, my mother, really. I watched my mother sit and sew. I remember she used to get this...

Pirtle

We all did the costumes. You learned when you're little.

Loyal

She'd get socks and learn to mend everything. My mother couldn't make anything. It was already made and she would put the stuff on it. I remember she would have somebody make my costumes, but Momma would put the stuff on it. Now, the only time Momma did make a costume, and I'll never forget it, she'd go to a secondhand store and she'd buy somebody's old evening gown, that had the tutu that went all the way around, like a prom dress. She would go to the secondhand store and it'd be somebody's old prom dress or something and she would whack it off and hem it. And say it was too big, she would take it up for me on the sides and stuff and put sequins and stuff on it.

Pirtle

My mother used to make all my costumes. She made this one costume...

Loyal

I remember I got one of your mother's. She made me a costume, a blue one.

Pirtle

She made me this one costume that was completely covered in beads and sequins. I mean there wasn't a spot on it. The problem was it was kind of heavy. I almost lost the costume out there, on one of my tricks. One of the straps broke and I just knew I was really going to put on a show out there. It was at Sailor Circus. The problem was, it was so heavy I was having a hard time with the heel-catching tricks, because if you take that costume and weigh it, it was heavy! We had to have a talk about that and she kind of lightened up on it, but it was absolutely the prettiest costume I ever had. It was gorgeous.

Loyal

Your mom made me a costume. It was all black sequins.

- Pirtle** She loved doing it. She was good at it. And she taught me, and her momma taught her. We helped with the costumes. But that costume...
- Loyal** But to cut out the costumes and stuff, what I would do is I would go to a secondhand store or garage sale and there'd be a bathing suit or a leotard and I liked the way it was made or whatever. If it was a bathing suit, I would take it apart and I would use it as a pattern and make my own. If there was a leotard that they used at ballet to practice in or practice their dance in, I would take it and I would get a piece of chalk and I would draw on it what I wanted to cut out and how I'd want it. I'd cut out the holes or cut the back out of it or something and then take it apart and use it as a pattern. That's how I taught myself. Now I know the material for the front has to go up this way. (Gestures) For the back, it has to go this way. (Gestures)
- Pirtle** The costumes now are pretty skimpy.
- Loyal** Well, I'll tell you another thing, too. The costumes her mother made weren't stretch material. They didn't have stretch material back then. She had to have the measurements, your exact measurements. Now, this is stretch material. All I do is cut it out and it stretches any way you want it.
- Pirtle** But back then, you weren't allowed to wear those kinds of costumes. It was not thought the proper thing to wear. So what they would do is they would get this netting that was skin colored and then they would make the costume. But this, up through here, was not your—you didn't see your skin. It was skin colored material. She would fix it to where you had some movement and everything. But now, the costumes really are just a lot skimpier. Back then, you weren't allowed to do that. It's just like when I worked. When I was little, I was not allowed to work without a net because there were laws. You had to be sixteen to work without a net so we'd have sitters underneath us, or somebody. But times have changed a lot, they really have.
- Finchum** *Where would you buy your fabric?*
- Pirtle** She would do, kind of like what Lucy was saying, she would find like a bathing suit or something and she would measure me, and she would take off whatever she needed to take off that to make it fit just me. It wouldn't fit anybody else. She would fix that costume and then she would get material that she liked, that had designs on it, and she would make the costume by using that pattern out of the material that she wanted the costume made out of. Then, where the designs were at, she'd put all the sequins on that. She did a lot of that.

Loyal This is a costume that belonged to my aunt, one of my aunts.

Pirtle This is what I was talking about. See this? (Holds up a vintage costume)

Nykolaiszyn Yes.

Pirtle That's what they would do.

Loyal The Ringling show made this for my aunts. This is one of their costumes. I have one more over at the other house, the old house. This one was a yellow one. Well, anyway, I got to wear this back in the day when it fit me. (Laughter) But it didn't stretch like they have the stretch material now. They had to know your measurements. That's like my aunt would measure. There'd be no way. For me to sew one like this, I couldn't do it because I'm not that good of a seamstress. I wouldn't know how to do it, but the stretch material, hey, it's nothing. This way, that way, and I can do that. But there'd be no way I could make a costume like this.

The Ringling show made these costumes for the family back in the day. If I'm not mistaken, I told Dolly, I said, "Well, I think this one belonged to my aunt Esterina." I said, "I could've told you, had I not washed it," and I washed the name off. But I believe this was hers, one of the costumes they made them in 1932, when they came to the states. I've got a few of their costumes I got to wear. I have one in a picture over there that I used to call it the blue one, the winter costume with the marabou around the bottom. Then there was one they call "The Velvet." I love that red velvet costume. I loved it.

Pirtle I remember that costume. In fact, Momma's got it on in one of those pictures.

Loyal In one of those pictures. In fact, I'm wearing it in one of my pictures. That one belonged to the family, too, when they were on the Ringling show with rhinestones and blue on it. But I remember Mr. Miller's family, Al G. Kelly Miller, bought a whole bunch of costumes that belonged to the family, after. Do you remember the yellow? Well, they were green and yellow, the cancan outfits and all of those. They bought all of those. They had all of those costumes one year.

Pirtle The family wore a lot of feathers, head pieces. But when they took this great big, huge headpiece off, there'd be a small one and it'd have a small bunch of feathers on it. It was so elegant when they walked out there with those big capes and those feathers and everything. Then they'd take the cape off and hand that feather back to whoever was taking it.

Loyal I'm going to ask Dolly if she ever remembers this. Dolly, do you remember the shoulder pad things that they wore under the cape?

Pirtle Yes, I do.

Loyal Those big, metal things...

Pirtle Yes.

Loyal ...that made the...

Pirtle Why are you aging me, cousin? (Laughter)

Loyal No, I said, "Do you remember?"

Pirtle I do!

Loyal I remember them.

Pirtle Thank goodness! Okay. (Laughs)

Loyal Those big, metal things. My gosh! They were heavy! I remember those costumes and those metal things, the capes. They sent them all to my mom and dad for them to use them. Momma took them to the Goodwill. Gosh, I wish...

Pirtle She did not!

Loyal Oh, yes she did.

Pirtle Oh, no.

Loyal Yes, I wish I had them now, believe me.

Nykolaiszyn *What about shoes?*

Loyal We had what we call pumps. They were special made. They were made in a place in New York called Griffin's, and I still have the address somewhere in that stuff.

Pirtle Now, my momma's pumps are buried with her, that and her whip is buried with her. She's buried over here [at Showmen's Rest in Hugo]. She asked if we would put that in with her. Now, there was one problem. I couldn't find—well, her whip is buried with her. Her pumps are not. I couldn't find her pumps and I just panicked. After we had her buried and

I went back home, we were trying to get things ready to sell and move out of there and I found her pumps, but it was too late. So I had one pump and Gina had one pump, my sister, and I finally gave her the other one because I thought they needed to be together. So she's got them, but we couldn't put them in with her. I was really upset about that because she said, "Put my pumps and my whip in there," but we did put her whip in there.

- Loyal** So not to change your subject, but Dolly brought a gift for my granddaughter Zefta. It's a beautiful—well, it's aged now—but it's a trunk that my aunt Zefta used to take all of her costumes and stuff in. In fact, it's in the room right there. We are going to have it restored.
- Pirtle** It still has her name on it.
- Loyal** It has her name on it and stuff.
- Pirtle** I just figured that it needed to stay in show business, and her namesake is still in show business. I know Momma would've liked that.
- Loyal** I only wished I could've been alive or born in their era, because I think that was the heyday of circus, to me. I mean, it was...
- Pirtle** It was.
- Loyal** It was the heyday of circus. I would've given anything to have been alive back then. There's a place in Sarasota, it's called Circus City Trailer Park and anybody that was ever in show business lived in that trailer park. I mean, everybody lived in that trailer park. So here in Hugo, we have a Circus City—well, it wasn't called Circus City Trailer Park, but we had a trailer park. You passed it every time you went to Moira's house. There's little storage units there and then there's like a—I want to say garage, but it's not a garage. It's like they have a wrecker there and they have cars that have been wrecked and stuff in there, like a tow yard thing. That used to be called Modern Trailer Park and all the show people used to live in that trailer park back then.

We lived in that trailer park. Moira's mother, her grandmother, her grandfather lived in that trailer park. The Logans lived in that trailer park, the Zaners, the Rawls. Mary Rawls lived in that trailer park! So when you talk to Mary Rawls say, "Lucy wants to know"—I'm sure she remembers that we used to have catechism, study for catechism. I think her father, Willy, was our catechism teacher. We all grew up in that trailer park, Mary Rawls, David Rawls—well, not Mary. Mary was a mother, but her husband Harry, and they lived in the house. David, Bobby, Margie, Suzy, Chris, Michael, Cathy—well, Cathy and Billy

came way later. That's like Gina and Timi, but the Modern Trailer Park. I don't know, did she ever mention that to you?

Nykolaiszyn

No.

Loyal

Have her mention the Modern Trailer Park to you. The owner was Dorothy Turner, was the owner of the trailer park and she was an old show woman, too, her and her husband.

Nykolaiszyn

Well, let's ask you one more question.

Loyal

Sure.

Nykolaiszyn

Let's see, Tanya, what's that question going to be? (Laughs)

Loyal

Ask whatever you want, we'll tell you! We're not shy.

Nykolaiszyn

Well, for Lucy, you could live anywhere. You've been many, many places. Why do you decide to make Hugo your home?

Loyal

This is where my father and mother came to work for Mr. Miller and everything. Okay. The circuses in Florida—I'm not saying we're dying out, but the family was different. They left, Papa left, the family broke up and stuff, and we had work here and they always wanted Papa back every year on Kelly Miller, Carson and Barnes, whatever. My brother and I went to school here and our work was here. Our work was here. Well, then later in years, we've often talked about going back to Florida and stuff. Then my brother was killed in an accident and he's buried here. My mother said she would never leave Hugo now at all, ever. We lived in the trailer park. We didn't own any property or anything and then after my brother died, we bought a piece of property and had a mobile home put on it. She said she would never leave Hugo because of my brother so this is home.

I don't know how to explain it. I'm going to start bawling here in a minute. [Cries] I was always with my mother and father. I never left them. I grew up with them and then after my brother was killed, I knew I wouldn't ever leave. My mother and my father wouldn't ever leave because of my brother so I just made Hugo my home. I was married, divorced, he wanted me to leave and go with him. There were fifteen brothers and sisters in his family. He's in show business. They're from a circus family and stuff and like I said, after my brother left, he wanted me to leave and everything and go with him and his family and stuff. I told him no. I just said, "If I'm going to take care of anybody's family, I'm going to take care of my family. My mother and my father don't have anybody else but me. You're welcome to stay or you're welcome

to go. Your mom and dad have fourteen more brothers and sisters that can take care of them. If you want to bring them along, they can come here and live with me, but I'm not going anywhere. I'm not going."

My brother's buried there, next to my aunt Zefta. My father and mother are sitting right here on the entertainment center, and they're not going to go until I go. When I go, then they can go with me. The kids were all laughing about it and they said, "Well, Mom," Josie, she's kind of the funny one of the family, she said, "Well, Momma when you die we're going to have you cremated and we'll set you up there and Josie, she's going to say, 'Nope! They're not going until I go!' Pretty soon we'll have a whole collection of Loyals sitting up there. (Laughter) Nope! We're not going until she goes!" What's really funny is when we get tornado warnings, being here in Oklahoma, those sirens go off and everything, one of us will grab the picture of my brother, the other one will grab the other urn, one will grab the other urn, and they go with us. When we go on vacation, they go with us. I don't leave them here. When I go to Florida, they go. When I go wherever, they go. People will say, "I was at the cemetery, Lucy. I couldn't find your mom and dad." I say, "Oh, no. They're here."

Pirtle They just took a trip to Florida. (Laughter)

Loyal They look at me like I'm crazy! They say, "What?" I say, "Yes..."

Pirtle They're at the house.

Loyal "...they're at the house watching TV!" (Laughter)

Pirtle What?

Loyal I said, "Well, I leave the TV on." My dad loved western movies so I leave the TV on. They always had the TV on so I always leave the TV on. I said, "No, they're there at home." They look at me like I'm crazy. I'll say, "But they're in their urns." So the kids sometimes go, "Hey, did you hear that?" One of the grandkids will go, "Yes, that was Nini rushing through the house. Didn't you hear her yell at you to shut up?" (Laughs) But, no, I don't know. There's not much to Hugo, but it's my home and I will never leave Hugo. You know, I can talk bad about it, say how ugly it is or whatever, but nobody else better. Like I said, I went to school with everybody here in Hugo. I know everybody here in Hugo. Everybody knows me.

I was getting my kids a haircut one day, my grandkids, not my kids, but my grandkids before they went to Florida for summer vacation. I'm sitting up at the barber shop and it's full of people. There's this old man

sitting over there, staring at me. I said, “Oh, gosh! Don’t let him be putting the make on me, please!” (Laughter) I’m past that. He goes, “I know you.” I said, “Oh, yes? Okay.” I was like, “Was he one of my boyfriends when I was in school or something?” (Laughs) He goes, “Yes, I know you.” I said, “You do?” He said, “Yes, your dad was that little, teeny, skinny, Italian man that used to walk them horses out to the circus every year.” I said, “Yes.” He said, “When the circus would come home, he’d walk them home every year.” I said, “Yes.” He said, “And you were right there, with him, arguing all the way home!” (Laughter) He said, “What’s your name again?” I said, “Lucy Loyal.” He said, “That’s right, Lucy Loyal. I knew I knew you!” But yes, a lot of people will come up and say, “Yes, I know you.” They only know me because my horses are the only ones that get loose.

Pirtle They escape.

Loyal What’s funny is our horses would get loose. And then my brother would be in school, up at high school. They’d say, “Joe! Your dad’s horses are loose!” And there would go my brother with his football buddies and catch the horses and bring them back. And there’d be my dad. Then, later on in years, my horses would get loose. “Armando! Your mom’s horses are loose!” And there’d go Armando, him and his friends would jump in the back of the pickup and go down—because they were headed to Carson and Barnes Circus—go down Kirk Road. They’d be all in the back of the truck, his friend’s pickup. They’d bring the horses back. Now, they call, “Christian! Your grandmother’s horses are loose!” (Laughter) So one day, it wasn’t too long ago, the phone rings and it’s Zefta. I said, “Hey, Zef! What’s going on?” She said, “Granny, your horses are loose.” I said, “You’re in Florida! How the hell do you know?” She said, “Stacy so and so called me and told me your horses are loose.” So Tina and I had to go catch the horses and put them in.

Pirtle That’s funny.

Loyal But yes, everybody knows...

Pirtle Your horses.

Loyal ...my horses are loose or something. It’s so funny. They know where to go. Sometimes I’ll get a call—this wasn’t too long ago—the dog catcher came, “Lucy,” he goes, “Your horses are loose.” I said, “My horses are loose?” He goes, “Yes.” I said, “They can’t be loose. They’re tied.” He said, “No, they’re loose. They’re right up here.” I went with him and I just looked at him and I said, “Finally, once, those are not my horses!” (Laughter) I said, “Those horses belong to”—oh, the man that’s the chamber, Mr. White. I said, “Those are Mr. White’s horses. Those aren’t

mine. I don't have to run after them. I can go home." (Laughter) But yes, everybody knows when the horses are loose, they call me.

Nykolaiszyn

Dolly, was it your mom's plan to be buried here in Hugo?

Pirtle

We had two choices. We could've buried her in Florida, because we have a plot down there. She didn't want to go down there, because Gina and I are both in Texas. She loves her brother so she said, "If I can't go back to Florida, I want to be buried with my brother." So we got her a plot up here. In fact, they had an extra plot and we got it from them.

Loyal

When Momma bought the plot, she bought four plots.

Pirtle

See, she was intending to actually live up here. She really was.

Loyal

She was, like I said, she was going to live in that—she wanted to buy that place where Moira is now and she got sick.

Pirtle

But I couldn't let that happen because I couldn't take care of her up here. And they were on the road and in and out and I told her, I said, "Mom, I know that's what you want to do, but I can't take care of you up there." Gina was down in Austin then, and she certainly couldn't take care of her. She was working and had her kids in school. So I said, "I'll tell you what we'll do. Let me talk to my uncle and see if we can't get one of those plots." That's what we did. She said, "As long as I can be..." with her circus. Plus, she had worked some with the show up here, too.

Loyal

Oh, she knew everybody.

Pirtle

She came up here and everybody knew her.

Loyal

Everybody knew her. She worked with all these people...

Nykolaiszyn

It's family.

Pirtle

Yes, I used to bring her up here two or three times a year and have to rush back to go to work. When I'd get her up here, she really didn't want to come back home. She wanted to be around the circus and everything. She'd have to come home for her treatments and stuff and I said, "You've got to come home."

Loyal

And one of the things was when I was sewing on costumes and stuff, she would sit up there and sew on the costumes. She would give me ideas, "Hey, what if you do it like this? What if you put that on there?" and stuff like that. Zia was a lot of help, a lot of help.

Pirtle But her and my uncle Alfonso were very, very close.

Loyal Oh, they were funny. Oh, gosh! They were funny sometimes. She had just gotten back from the hospital and...

Pirtle I brought her up here.

Loyal To know this family, how they really were, it's funny. I want to say the Kardashians, they have nothing on this family! Let me tell you! She gets up out of the hospital, Dolly brings her...

Pirtle She said, "I want to go see my brother." "Okay. Here we go."

Loyal So they're sitting in there and they start arguing over her mother's name. "You don't know your mother's name?" "Yes, I know my mother's name! Her name is Stella!" "No! Her name is not Stella! Her name is Josephine!" They're fighting over what her name is. Her name is Stella Josephine.

Pirtle Estella was her...

Loyal First name.

Pirtle ...first name.

Loyal They're fighting over the name. "No! Her name was Josephine!" "No, Estella!"

Pirtle Now, you've got to understand my mother's really shorter than I am, okay?

Loyal She's real little.

Pirtle Real short.

Loyal Real little and frail because she has been so sick. A long time ago, my mother used to smoke and so did my father, but they hadn't smoked in thirty years. But she always kept this stupid, blue ashtray, a big, glass, heavy ashtray and he gets mad and he gets that ashtray and he hits her on the head with this... "Now do you remember her name?! It's Josephine! I can't believe you don't..." He's getting ready to hit her again! Dolly grabs it... (Laughter)

Pirtle And I'm going, "You can't hit her!"

Loyal "You can't hit her! She just got out of the hospital! What are you

doing?” But they were like this. (Gestures tight) All of them were like that. My one aunt, they’d sit around this table in their house, my uncle Giustino’s house and their kitchen was huge, huge. They had this big dining room table and I mean it was huge. They’d all sit around this table and then some of us would sit back. This one aunt, every time she had something to say, she’d stand up, she’d push that chair back, and she’d beat on that table, she’d pull the chair back, and sit back down. She’d get back up—do you remember Tetati doing that?

Pirtle I do. (Laughs)

Loyal She would do that and they’d be arguing, but they weren’t really arguing, it was just the way they talked. The way they talked, it seems like they were yelling, but that’s just the way they were.

Pirtle My husband puts it really well. We went down there for Christmas one year and when we got back he said, “First of all, I didn’t understand a word they were saying”—because they all talked in Italian—“but they all talked at the same time. Not only did I have a problem with the language, but how do they know what each other is saying?” (Laughs)

Loyal Then, my aunts and stuff, pulling these chairs out and hitting on the table and arguing, but they’re not arguing, that’s just the way they talk. When we get together, we’re the same way. And people go, “Why are you yelling? Why are you yelling?”

Nykolaiszyn *It’s family. It’s good.*

Loyal On that DVD that we showed you earlier, there’s a part on there where all the families are together at a Christmas party and my grandmother puts on a show and stuff. Well, Christian had his friends over here, right? And he’s a real nice kid and he’s sitting over there, Bryant. I look over there at Bryant and he’s bawling. And I’m thinking to myself, “Why in the hell is he crying? He doesn’t even know them!” I said, “Christian, Bryant’s crying.” Christian goes, “Why are you crying, Bryant?” He says, “Look at the love! Look at the love in that family! Look at the love!” I started laughing and I said, “Oh, you don’t know that family!”

Nykolaiszyn *Well, I would like to thank you for your time this afternoon.*

Loyal You’re more than welcome.

Nykolaiszyn *And really sharing your lives with us. We really appreciate it.*

Loyal Well, we appreciate you coming and doing this for the circus, like Dolly

said. And if there's anything we can help you with, anything else you want to know or...

Pirtle

I didn't know if you wanted to see some photographs.

Nykolaiszyn

I do, yes. I just wanted to get our thank you in.

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