

Oral History Interview
with
Luciana “Lucy” Loyal

Interview Conducted by
Juliana Nykolaiszyn and Tanya Finchum
September 19, 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: Ashley Sarchet, Tanya Finchum

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 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 ...

Lucy Loyal is the sixth generation 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 and Miller Brothers Circus. Lucy was already performing at this time. By 1965 her family had moved to Hugo and was performing for the Carson and Barnes Circus.

Lucy began performing in the circus around the age of six and would go on to become a bareback rider for much of her circus career. After a knee injury, she developed a comedy act which she performed for over fifteen years, officially retiring in 2002. Since that time, Lucy has remained involved with the circus and is currently training her grandchildren in bareback riding techniques. Throughout her career Lucy has worked various jobs within the circus such as running the cookhouse, selling tickets, billposting, and costume design. In addition to training horses, she also worked a dog act.

Lucy has four children, Armando, Josie, Mona, and Tina and she continues to call Hugo, Oklahoma home where she is surrounded by family, friends, and furry animals.

The “Big Top” Show Goes On

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

Luciana “Lucy” Loyal

Oral History Interview

Interviewed by Juliana Nykolaiszyn
& Tanya Finchum
September 19, 2011
Hugo, Oklahoma



Nykolaiszyn *Today is Monday, September 19, 2011. My name is Juliana Nykolaiszyn. Also with me is Tanya Finchum. We’re with the Oklahoma Oral History Research Program at the OSU Library, and we are continuing our interview with Lucy Loyal. Thank you for joining us one more time.*

Loyal Thank you for having me.

Nykolaiszyn *Well, Lucy, we learned a lot about your family history in our last interview, and now we want to get into your working history.*

Loyal My working history.

Nykolaiszyn *You’re working history.*

Loyal Okay.

Nykolaiszyn *We know you started as a young child, learning, but when can you remember, the first time, being in the ring, on your own, doing your thing?*

Loyal Oh, gosh! Whew! Okay, I had practiced quite a bit, and I only did simple things in the show like swinging ladder, which is very simple. Anybody could do that. I could go through it one time and take you out there, and you could do it. And I think, basically, all circus children start with—like if they’re going to do aerial work—is like swinging ladder and web because that’s just the basics. I had kind of done that off and on, and I’m going to say I was probably about six. Then I remember practicing the riding act, the horses, always practicing, but never actually getting to do—stand up by myself or anything like that.

I always did the pyramid with my dad. I remember doing pyramid and

stuff. We had a horse named Ginger, and Ginger decided, I guess, he didn't want to work that day. They had put him in the ring, and my dad started doing what we call the tails. They grab their tail and turn flips and at one point you let go, and then you grab again. Well, my dad let go, and the horse decided that's it. So he jumped the ring, and he ran out the back door and was out in the field. Everybody went chasing him. So we're just standing there, and I holler at my mom, "Put Dolly in." I had a horse named Dolly, by the way. (Laughs) So I said, "Put Dolly in! Put Dolly in!" And Mom's going, "What are you going to do?" I said, "Just put Dolly in." She put Dolly in, and they helped me up, and that's the first time I ever stood up and did knees and get back up and do another knee, until I guess they got tired of watching me do knees up and down until my dad got back in. I had to have been maybe about ten, ten years old, eleven years old when I did that. Big mistake, because from then on I had to do it in the show. (Laughs)

Nykolaiszyn

And at ten, what show were you with?

Loyal

I was with the Al G. Kelly and Miller Brothers Circus, which D.R. Miller owned along with his father and his brothers, one brother, Kelly. Then, in later years, Carson and Barnes, the owner was a man by the name of Jack Moore. We went on Carson and Barnes in 1963. Of course, I performed the riding act and worked elephants. I rode them. I didn't actually work them. I rode elephants and did mounts and tricks and things on the elephants. And I did web, and I did a single trapeze act. Then in '64, we went back to Al G. Kelly Miller and did the whole year of '64 with Al G. Kelly Miller. Then in '65, we went back to Carson and Barnes. Eventually, Mr. Miller bought Carson and Barnes.

So we've been with Mr. Miller pretty much all of our lives—my life, I should say. Since 1956 I was always in combination, would you say, with D.R. Miller and his family in circus. Like in my one interview with you, we were talking about the monkey, Debbie. Of course this happened on Al G. Kelly Miller, where the chimp and I wore her costumes and stuff. I got her hand-me-downs. But no, at a young age I began performing. I'm going to have to say back in '54, we were with a circus called Tom Packs for a while. It was an indoor show, and all I did was what we call a spec, where you put on a costume and you parade and stuff like that. I'd go stand with my dad in the act while he juggled, but as far as performing, I didn't then. I would have to say '56 is when I actually started performing in the show.

Nykolaiszyn

And you gravitated towards the horses?

Loyal

Yes, I would be considered a bareback rider. That was what I was. I loved horses, and then from bareback riding—well, basically, when

you're in the circus, you learn to do little—it comes—well, to me, it came very natural. And I'm sure to a lot of people it does and to a lot of people it doesn't. It's like somebody wakes up and they can sing. Well, I can't carry a tune, believe me. I was very natural, but the horses were my base, I would say, what I did the best. Then I learned to ride elephants, and I could ride the elephants as well as I did the horses because the horses were running. The elephants weren't running so it was pretty easy. I did single traps, and I did a fair single traps. I wasn't the greatest trapeze artist that ever—I was nothing compared to my cousin, Dolly. Let me tell you, I wouldn't make a good pimple. But I did single traps, and I did cradle, where I held my niece while she did tricks. The only thing I didn't do was juggle, play in the band, or do a flying act.

Nykolaiszyn *Did your father ever try to teach you how to juggle?*

Loyal Yes, I just didn't like it. I still don't like it. I know it takes a lot of practice to be a juggler. You have to practice pretty much twenty-four-seven to be a good juggler, and you have to like it. I didn't want to stand there all day, juggling balls or hoops or whatever. I just didn't like them. (Laughs)

Nykolaiszyn *Well, going back to bareback riding, what were some of your signature tricks?*

Loyal I just did a principle act. I wasn't ever as good as my aunts or my uncles. I wished I could've been, and probably would have been, had my grandfather lived a lot longer and had I stayed in Florida, rather than moving to Oklahoma, where my aunts were. But my father was limited in teaching me. My father was a fair rider. He was a good little rider, but he wasn't anything like my uncles and my aunts. Now, what my dad did have over my aunts and my uncles was he could break the horses, which they could never do. And that's why they always had good horses was because of my grandfather and my father. They always used to tease him and call him the guinea pig because they would take—he would always go with my grandfather. But then, later, when my grandfather got to where he couldn't function as well and stuff, my dad was the one that broke the horses, and that was why they had good horses. And up to the day—well, not now—but to the day he was here we always had good horses. We don't have good horses anymore. (Laughs)

I'm not as good as my father. But he was known for his breaking the horses, and he was a fantastic juggler. But like I said, I didn't like the juggling. And he did, he had balancing trapeze. My father, he—I don't know how to explain my father. He was a very smart man. He didn't go to school. He was, I think, maybe third grade, if he got to the third grade.

But he taught himself. He could read English. He could write in English. He was smart at math, and he could tell you anything about history you would want to know. And how he knew it, I have no clue. But you could ask him dates, even about American history. You could ask him about dates and—like the Louisiana Purchase, for example. He could tell you that. I have no clue.

Nykolaiszyn *Were there some important lessons that he passed on to you that just stick out in your mind?*

Loyal That stick out in my mind? This is one of his lessons—don't snob your friends on your way up because you're going to meet those same friends on your way down. He taught me to be very conscious-worthy of things. Use them until you can't use them anymore and then try to use them somewhere else. Like, you have, say, an old washing machine, and it breaks down, and it's no good. Well, find the parts out of that old washing machine and use it somewhere else so it doesn't go to waste.

My father—this is the truth—we were in Canada, 1966—I take it back—'68. We had an old, green '57 Chevrolet truck that he put this box on and we carried our horses in it. My mother and I and my brother were behind him, and he's driving this truck, pulling this trailer and the axle breaks in this truck. We were in British Columbia and back then, there weren't any highways. It was just all like dirt country roads. It was horrible, and we were like on the side of a mountain. You could look over and see the river. We didn't have an axle to put on this truck so Papa got out one of his iron stakes that he uses for the trapeze, to put in the ground to guy the trapeze to, and how he rigged that sucker to go into—because I remember him pulling off these tires, these wheels, and he pulled out this thing, this like a big, long thing. It had like—I don't know—like a spindle or something on the end of it, and it had little ridges around it and stuff. Well, anyway, I remember him pulling all of that out, and I remember him getting one of our iron stakes that we used for the trapeze, and he fixed it somehow and put it in there, and we kind of just moped into wherever we were going. But we were on the side of the road for like six hours or so. We were there a long time. But I wouldn't trade any of it for anything. Give me a million dollars, I wouldn't trade it.

Nykolaiszyn *Well, going back to riding, take me through an ideal performance.*

Loyal An ideal performance.

Nykolaiszyn *What would you do?*

Loyal The tent would be packed. (Laughter)

Nykolaiszyn

Definitely ideal!

Loyal

I don't know, it would just kind of depend on what kind of a mood I was in, because I never did anything the same way. To me, it was boring. Like everybody has a routine that they keep. We'll just use, for example, the trapeze act. They'll go in, they'll climb up on their bar, and they'll sit on their bar. And then, maybe, they'll do a half-angel, and then they'll come back around, and they'll go to their knees and then take one leg off and touch their forehead with it and come back around. And it would be consistent every day, the same routine, twice a day. Well, that's too boring for me. So it just depended on how I felt that day. I might ride in, I might walk in, I might run in, I might run in and do summersaults or flip-flops or something. Sometimes they would be expecting me to come in in my costume and stuff, and I would come in dressed like some bag lady with no teeth, and I'd black out my teeth. I would get with the band and have the band play "St. Louis Blues" or something, and I'd come in doing like (gestures)—but I'd do something different most of the time, just to blow their minds.

But a normal routine would be I'd come in on the back of the horse. I would go around the ring several times. Then I would get up on the side and turn and look at the audience as I was going around. Then I would swing back around, and I would take my head and try to touch my toes, hanging off the side of the horse. Then I would stand up, and then my dad would throw me my hoop, and I would do my hoop routine. I threw the hoop back, and I would sit down and style. Then I would get back up, and I would stand sideways on the horse as he ran, and do turns. Then my dad would throw me my jump rope, and I'd jump normal rope. Then I tried to do like the boxers, where they intercross them, and I'd do that. Then I would give the rope back, and I would turn, and I would stand up backwards, and that's hard. And I could hardly ever do it because I would fall off.

Then I would dance on the back of the horse. We have a thing that we call banners, where I would jump the banners. It was a big pole, and there would be—you know, like the maypoles? Is that what they call them? Where they have those streamers out like that. Well, they would be around the ring, anywhere from two to four. It just depended how I felt that day. (Laughs) It's terrible, isn't it, for me to sit here and say—take advantage of them. And I would jump the banners. Sometimes I would take the horse and strip him "nude," is what I would call him. And that would be take his bridle off, take the harness off, and let him just run nude. I would vault back on him, grab his mane and vault back on and ride him nude and jump the banners. Then I would grab his mane, go to my knees, grab his mane and do a roll-over where I would

roll off. Then I would style, and I would leave.

Then, in later years, I got a bug. I was always messing around during the show, during my principle act and stuff. Like I was telling you where I would come in, and I'd have them play "St. Louis Blues," and I'd dress like a bag lady or something. I always wanted to do comedy, because I loved to make people laugh. So I got a wild hair up my behind one day, and I went to Mr. Miller and his daughter Barbara, and I said, "I have an idea. I want to try it, and you tell me what you think." I'm going to tell you it was 1985. It was in '85. It's like when you try something and eventually you get it perfect. You work out all the little glitches with time. Well, the first time it went over tremendous. It went over tremendous. They brought the horses in, and then they would get up and do the pyramid. And at that time, I had three horses. Alfredo [Curiel] and Moira [Loter Curiel] were on the pyramid, and you were little then. But you were little, weren't you, Mona? And you did it, too. That was later, when you held...

M. Loyal

Me and Armando.

Loyal

Oh, that's right, her and her brother. It was Alfredo and Moira, Armando and Mona, and they did the pyramid. And then they would make an announcement that they were looking for a young lady, twenty-one years of age or older, who was wanting to run away and join the circus. And if they were interested to, "Please come and see the ringmaster," and they might get a chance to audition right now, but she has to like horses. Well, we had this announcer who was Latin. So he's making this spiel, "We're looking for a young lady, twenty-one years of age or older, who wants to be a whore bareback rider"—he couldn't say horse. (Laughter) So we got to where we said, "Don't even say that! A whore bareback rider, just say 'who wants to learn to run away with the circus.'" (Laughter)

So anyway, we did that, and then, of course, I would come out. I would go to the back and we would adlib, like I was from...but I wore a skirt and a sweater, and I had a slip. And that skirt, trying to keep that skirt and stuff. So then eventually, with time, like I said, after awhile, you work out the glitches, and I started wearing pants. And I would buy those pant suits. I don't know if you remember, they're hard to find, anymore. They were pretty much out of cotton, and the top matched the pants. They were kind of loose, so I bought a bunch of those and they worked out perfect, because when they pulled my skirt off, of course, I still had the slip, but still. So then when they'd pull the pants off, I would have bloomers on. And then that gave away I was with the circus, because who wears bloomers down here? Nobody.

So then I eventually just bought underwear, old lady's cotton, thick underwear. And then when they did pull them off, it looked like you were really from the audience, and I would run out. And then eventually, I wouldn't run out, I would stay on the ring. I would, at the end, ask the audience, or the announcer would ask the audience, if they wanted to really see me ride, and they would say, "Yes!" Then I would undress the horse. I'd make him nude with nothing on, and I would vault up and sit. Then I would eventually stand up, roll over, and get off and style, and we'd all style. But that was my favorite, was the comedy. I loved the comedy act.

I want to tell you a story about the comedy act. There was a man by the name of Frank Curry, and he was a big circus promoter in Nashville, Tennessee, for Ronald McDonald. Every year they put on [a show] like the Shriners do, but it was the Ronald McDonald Circus is what it was, in Nashville. And I went to work Nashville, that big date, and did my routine where they pulled my pants off. Well, a lady and her daughter got really upset. They went to the main office to complain, that how could they embarrass me that way. They had to come and get me, and I had to go up there and explain to them it was part of the act. That it wasn't just some random person that they pulled out of the audience. And that happened like a couple of times. Then, another time, in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, the Shriner, his wife got all upset and thought I was some drunk that went out there. And how could they let this drunk lady ride the horse and stuff, and got real, real, real upset over it. But I had a lot of fun doing the comedy. I had a lot of fun.

Nykolaiszyn *How many years, approximately, did you do the comedy?*

Loyal Do the comedy? I did it from '85—well, not the whole year of '85. I'm going to say in about September of '85 I started the comedy—or August. And then I did it 'til, let's see...I think, 2002 was the last time I did the comedy, 2002. Yes.

Nykolaiszyn *Well, throughout this time, are you teaching others how to work with horses, how to ride...?*

Loyal I have my grandchildren that I'm teaching. My granddaughter, Zefta, is a natural. She is so good. She's so good on a horse, but she has that cocky attitude. It kind of reminds me of me, I guess, when I was young. (Laughs) If she keeps it up, she'll be a good rider. Not as good as my aunt Zefta Loyal, but she'll get close. And then I have another granddaughter. Her name is Lily. Her father's in the service. In fact, he left yesterday for the desert. Since they came from California and she has been staying here, we enrolled her in gymnastics, with Alfredo. Within two weeks she did round off flip-flop, round off summersault.

Now, she does round off, flip-flop, flip-flop, flip-flop, flip-flop. And now, she's getting them tight, and she's learning the horses. So we're going to get her where she can do like Zefta did on the horse. Lily, she's going to be a good gymnast, hopefully, on the back of a horse. (Laughs)

Nykolaiszyn *Is it important to pass on your knowledge?*

Loyal To me it is. I think every walk in life, I think the grandparents and their parents should pass their knowledge of their family's history and should be proud of their history, whether they were farmers or welders or bookmakers or whatever, should be very proud of their heritage. In fact, I was working on some of the cheerleaders' outfits. They got them in and they were too big, and so I had to take them apart and fit them. They were all talking to me because I had some costumes hanging, and "Oh, you make those?" I said, "Yes." "Oh, I wish I was in the circus!" I told them, I said, "You can be in the circus, but you should take pride in your heritage, what your ancestors did, what your family did, and how they came here, and what all they went through," because a lot of them had to cross this country in covered wagons. I'm sure if they would just do research and ask their grandparents, those grandparents could tell them what their grandparents did. I think that's what our children's generation is lacking. They have nothing to give them any kind of self-pride, and they should have that.

Nykolaiszyn *You mentioned that you are a jack-of-all-trades when it comes to the circus...*

Loyal Master of none. (Laughter)

Nykolaiszyn *So outside of the horses and the riding and the elephants, what else were you involved with?*

Loyal I can cook in the cookhouse. I know how to cook for, like, two hundred people plus. I've billposted. That's where I go out and put out tickets and put posters up for the circus, in every town that you go to. I've put arrows up. And the worst town to put arrows up in is Chicago, Illinois, on a Sunday when there's traffic. Let me tell you. I don't know how many times I almost got ran over! The show was somewhere in Indiana, and we had to go through Chicago. "Lucy, we need arrows. You need to go put up the arrows." I don't know if you know what the arrows are. Okay. And so, I said, "Okay." They said, "Here's the synopsis sheet. It's a sheet of paper that has all the directions and the contacts, and whatever. I said, "Okay." And I'm going, "Oh, my God! It's okay, but we're downtown Chicago, and we're on the interstate." The traffic was horrible!

Like, when you're putting these arrows up, you have to give them enough time so they can switch lanes, to turn, and stuff. So you start two miles back and you put "slow down, left turn," or whatever, where you have your arrow. And you have one going down and one turning. And then a little bit further, maybe half a block or so, then you put two arrows down, two arrows turning, so they catch that one. You just keep doing that until you get to the turn, and you've got to make sure there are plenty of arrows up, so they all know that that's the turn. So you have them on this side of the interstate, and you have them on that side of the interstate. And holy! And there you're standing like this and the cars are zooming past you on the exit thing, and you're right there on the—it was awful, awful! But I did that several times.

I've booked, did a little booking. I'm not a very good booker, not as good as B.K. [Silverlake]. B.K.'s what you would call a booking agent. I've booked a few little towns. We're talking little towns. (Laughs) I've waited tables at Denny's. I don't know. I did all kinds of little things, I guess.

Nykolaiszyn *What's your favorite, outside of—we know the horses, obviously. Something outside of the horses, what would be your next favorite?*

Loyal I would say the elephants.

Nykolaiszyn *The elephants.*

Loyal And then the trapeze, aerial work. I love making costumes. In fact, I was commenting with my daughter last night as we were driving back from getting Kylie her homecoming dress. Is that what it is? Yes, homecoming. I get prom and that thing mixed up all the time—how I like to make costumes and sew. I said, "I'd like to have my own little room where I can just spread everything out. And when I get through, I can leave and close the door and know the kids haven't gotten into it." I like breaking the animals to work. I like breaking the horses. I like breaking dogs. And it sounds terrible when you say "breaking" because you really don't break them.

Nykolaiszyn *Is there a trick to it?*

Loyal Yes, it's called treats. (Laughter) Yes, that's the easiest, the fastest, the kindest. And you don't whip them. If you whip them or hit them, or whatever, you're not going to get anything out of them. You just frighten them and they don't want to do it. They're afraid. So when I'm teaching my dogs, I'll go buy a package of hotdogs. I go buy a package of hotdogs. So I want them to get on the pedestal and stay. I'll say, "Here, and I've got a hotdog," but they're cut in little pieces. And I'll

say, “Sit, sit, stay,” and you give them a hotdog. “Stay, stay, stay. All right,” and then whatever, and then you give them a hotdog, a treat. So then, eventually they go, “Oh, well, if I sit there long enough, I’m going to get a hotdog,” or, “If I jump through that hoop she’s going to give me a hotdog,” and that’s how I teach them.

When they’re working, normally I don’t take hotdogs in the ring to give it to them, but they know I have it. I’ll show them that they’re in the little pouch, and they’ll see the little pouch. They’ll go in and do whatever their little routine is, and when we come out, then I give them all their hotdog. “Oh, so if I go in there, and I do it all, when I come out I get my treats.” And that’s pretty much the same way with the horses, with their treats. But even when they’re working, I always manage to sneak one over there to them. (Laughs)

Nykolaiszyn *Was there ever an animal that you took on that you just thought, “Oh, no. I can’t train this animal?”*

Loyal Yes. A friend had a pony drill he wanted me to break. He brought six ponies. Well, he brought eight ponies, eight or nine, something like that. And he said, “Pick out six of them,” which I did. And two of those ponies are hard-headed—I don’t care what you did. They just—they’re horrible. And I couldn’t ever get them to do anything. So I just left them out. I said, “Forget it.” And that happens. Sometimes you’ll pick an animal, and they’re just not for that. Maybe they’ll be better in a different aspect or something. They were just not any good for that pony drill—hard-headed, hard-headed.

Nykolaiszyn *What are some of the smarter animals you’ve worked with? Are horses smart?*

Loyal Horses are smart.

Nykolaiszyn *Elephants?*

Loyal It depends on which horses. Appaloosas are the stupidest horses! (Laughter) Elephants are very smart, very, very, very smart. And you know what? You can’t get an animal to do anything that they don’t already do. Like elephants, “Oh, well, they are not to sit up, and they’re not to do this and not to do that,” but they do it. You don’t have to teach them. If you just stay back and watch them, they do it. They do it on their own. They lay down, they sit up. I mean, it’s just a matter of getting them to do it when you want them to do it, is what it is. And that’s like the horses, the same thing. “Oh, well, horses, they don’t get on pedestals, and they don’t do this, and they don’t do that.” Oh, yes they do. They want that piece of grass that’s over there, they’ll step up

on top of a rock to get to it. They do pretty much what they want to do. You can't teach an animal to do something that they don't already do naturally, except maybe teach a—well, I don't know. I guess cats swim, too.

Finchum *Any particular dog that's a better breed to train?*

Loyal To me?

Finchum *Yes.*

Loyal A Heinz 57's the smartest dog you can get. Some ole mutt is a lot smarter than a pedigree dog. That's my opinion. I'm not a dog person or an expert on training dogs. I do a little training, just simple little things. I don't do hard, hard stuff. Laura Herriott, she would know because that's what her father and grandfather were experts at, at breaking dogs, ponies, horses. They were experts at that. I'm sure she could tell you the smartest. To me, it would be a Heinz 57.

Nykolaiszyn *What's your favorite breed of horse to train?*

Loyal A Belgian. I love Belgians, big draft horses. Belgians are—I don't know. They're just so gentle and just so calm and just so, "Oh, whatever." Like that, "Okay. Let's go. Let's do it." I had one horse, his name was Chulo, and he was big. I'd have to get up, stand on a chair or something to wash his back. Sometimes there'd be a place at the fairgrounds where I didn't bring a chair or something. So I'd say, "Down. Down," and he'd put his head down, and I would straddle it, and he would lift me up, and then I would be on his neck, washing his back. Then he'd let me down like that. That's a good horse. I only had two that ever did that, him, and a horse called McKeag that we had that did that, because McKeag was real tall.

Finchum *How long would their career span be, working with the circus?*

Loyal The horses?

Finchum *The horses, yes.*

Loyal It depends on when you got the horse. We had horses that—oh, my God. Well, let me think, Cincinnati. I think I mentioned him in my interview before. That was a horse that came from the family, my father's family, and I learned on that horse. That horse had to have been thirty-three, thirty-two years old before he died.

Nykolaiszyn *Wow.*

Loyal

And then we had a little miniature we called McKeag Kid, and we bought McKeag Kid. He was already ten years old. And McKeag Kid was, I bet you, thirty-five, thirty-six when he died. He just died last summer. We had him for a long, long [time]. They're like people. They get old, you take care of them, and they get skinny. People look at him, "Oh, my God! He's starving." It's not that he's starving to death, he's just old. The more food you give him, the more vitamins you give him, I don't care what you give him. He's not going to get fat. He's just old. He was just so old, so I had people calling and complaining.

The—oh, what do you call him? The animal control guy came down and I said, "It's McKeag Kid." He said, "Oh, they're calling about McKeag Kid?" I had called him before and told him, "If you get any complaints it's because he's just old." I showed him his paperwork. I had him on senior. I had him on red cell. I had him on weight-gainer. The vet here in Hugo would check on him for me and stuff. And I said, "Here's all the paperwork. He's just old. He's old." These animals, for instance, Chulo or McKeag Kid, they put bread and butter on our tables for a long, long, long time. And I don't get rid of nobody. I take care of them. They took care of me, now it's my turn to take care of them. That's how we look at it.

Finchum

How would you do food along the way for the animals? Would you have to arrange for feed?

Loyal

Oh, okay. Usually every town in the country has a feed store, and you can go in and buy your sweet feed and whatever you want. Then they would call the feed store and find out who has hay, locally, and you buy local hay, if you need the hay. Or find somebody that delivers and they'll deliver it to the circus grounds.

Usually, back in the day, when they had like thirty elephants on Carson and Barnes that one year, the hay that they would have to bring in by the bales. It was like every other day there were hundreds of bales brought in for these baby elephants that they had brought to the country and stuff. In fact, B.K. had just gotten a whole bunch of pictures in with all those baby elephants. I remember the day. She was saying, "Do you remember what year that was? Do you remember when that was?" And I was sitting there, and I was trying to remember if it was '76 or '77 that they brought those baby elephants in. I think there were twenty-two of them. That was the last herd of baby elephants that came into the country before they put the ban on bringing elephants into the country. Boy, that was a long time ago. (Laughs)

And the best feed for me, when I'm traveling, I like the Amish country

because they have good, good feed. Their feed stores are really good. You buy them and they still come in that—instead of paper and stuff, they still come in burlap sacks, big burlap sacks.

Finchum *Well, when did you start with the comedy act?*

Loyal I started that in '85, the comedy act, yes. And that was one of my favorite periods, was the comedy, because it always worked really, really good. It always went real good. One of my favorite places that I ever worked the comedy act was Chicago, Illinois, at Medinah Temple. We were hired there for seventeen days, and we were on a stage in that Medinah Temple. That audience was all sitting right there in those folding chairs, like at a movie theater and stuff. I mean, they're right there on top of you. And to just watch, they were so close, to just watch the faces on these people. And laugh, just to watch them laugh was so much fun, because I started laughing watching them laugh. People laugh different ways, and it's funny to watch them laugh. But that was my favorite—one of my favorite places. Remember that, Mona? [Lucy's daughter Mona enters the room] In Chicago, at Medinah Temple, with all those people doing the comedy act there?

M. Loyal We were on the stage.

Loyal On the stage, yes.

M. Loyal And you could just hear the people. I mean, because they were so close. It went over really, really well, really well.

Loyal And that mechanic would fly out, when I'd fly—I'd fly out, and it was hilarious.

M. Loyal That was there.

Loyal Yes, that was at Medinah Temple. Then, Christian's mother, Renata, other than myself, Renata did the comedy, and my daughter Josie did the comedy. Renata did the comedy, and she was hilarious, because she was kind of chunky anyway, right? We got a date to go to Puerto Rico. I didn't want to go to Puerto Rico, because I had some friends the year before that had gone to Puerto Rico, to work Puerto Rico, and they got stranded over there. It was a big mess—or a couple of years before that. I said, "No. We're not going to Puerto Rico." I said, "We are not going to Puerto Rico!" I said, "When we get to Puerto Rico, how the hell are we going to get our horses back if whatever happens? We don't have the money for that." They wanted Puerto Rico, wanted Puerto Rico. I said, "Well, you guys go. I'm not going. I'm going to stay here so if something happens, I can get your happy asses back."

So anyway, Renata ended up doing the comedy in Puerto Rico. I flew to Puerto Rico. Of course, when we do it here, we do it in English. Over there in Puerto Rico, they did it in Spanish, because it's all Spanish. And laughed, that was the funniest riding act I ever did [see]. She was hilarious! Renata was hilarious because she was kind of chunky anyway. And, of course, she changed some of her adlibs from the way I did it here. Since she was real chunky and stuff, Armando would put her on the horse, and she'd just go right on over the horse, come back around, and she would say, "Well, I'm kind of—I can't do that." And the guy said, "Well, who told you to eat so many potatoes?" and stuff. I mean, but in Spanish it was hilarious. She was, she was funny! It went over really, really good.

And Zefta worked, and Zefta was what, three? Three years old. She would run in. We would have a horse standing at the back of the ring, the big horse, and she would run in underneath his belly, and go in and she would do a Brittany Spears dance. That horse they'd take out, and then they'd put the other horse in. She would come get on her father's shoulders, standing up on one leg, and did really good. It was really, really pretty. They had a real good act, real good act. Plus, with Renata it was hilarious, very good. That was one of the best riding acts I had seen in a long time.

Finchum *Had she learned from you?*

Loyal She had learned from me, yes. But Renata came from a circus family as well. I'm going to say Renata's probably five generations of circus family. Her family comes from Peru. Her grandfather on her mother's side, at one time, they all owned a circus in Peru, his father, plus his father, plus his father. And her brothers, right now, are working at Cirque du Soleil in Orlando.

Finchum *So what other foreign countries have you played in?*

Loyal Who, me?

Finchum *Yes. You mentioned Canada.*

Loyal I went to Canada.

Finchum *Cuba?*

Loyal I didn't work in Cuba. I went to Cuba.

Finchum *Oh, but you were there?*

Loyal Yes, I loved Cuba, but I didn't work in Cuba. I haven't worked anywhere other than Canada and the United States. Oh, and Mexico. That's about it. I worked in Mexico. That's almost like the United States, though. When we went to Puerto Rico I was real little, with the family. When they went to South America I was real little. I didn't work.

Finchum *Switching gears a little bit, can you talk a little bit about raising a family while you were...*

Loyal On the circus?

Finchum *Yes.*

Loyal Oh, I loved it. My kids, when they were small, they were always on the show with me. Then when they got school age, my mom stayed home and sent my children to school. Then when summer vacation would come, Mom and the kids would all come to the circus. Then when school would start, they would all go back to Hugo. But if they were still small enough, they would stay with me 'til school age, and then they would go home. But Mona could probably tell you what it was like being a child on a circus, going back and forth.

When I was growing up it was really hard, because my mom and dad were both from Europe, and they had nobody to leave me with to go to school. And I hated school anyway, and I think I told you that before. All I wanted was circus, circus, circus. But as you get older, and you look back and you see the memories and things that the other children have, their friendships that they have, like their class reunions and they see so and so and, "Oh, there's so and so," and stuff. Then you've got the prom, and you've got the homecoming. These are all memories that they could cherish that I didn't have, and wasn't smart enough to think about it when you're at that age. But I wanted them to have that. I wanted them to have the best of both lives, the circus life and the city life. Which I think I accomplished that because they'll go in the store, and they'll run into somebody, "Hey! Oh, yeah!" I'm going, "See?" And now, my grandkids are doing that. But this is the first one that's ever become a candidate for homecoming or anything. I think, Mona, you were—you played tennis, didn't you?

M. Loyal Yes, and cheered, wanted to play football...

Loyal Yes, that type of thing. And then they have their circus friends and stuff. But on the circus we'd get to the circus grounds. It all just depends—we get up in the morning at five o'clock, carry those kids to the pickup or whatever, in their blankets, and they'd be sleeping—unless I pulled into

a gas station, and then they'd all want chocolate milk and a donut or something or, "Can we go to McDonald's?" "Let me see how much money I have. We'll go through the drive-through," and you're sitting there counting the pennies out. Then we'd get to the circus grounds, and I'd start hooking up the lights, unloading the trailer. The kids would probably have cereal or I'd fix breakfast. It just depended. Then they'd all go out and play.

Later, when they got older and stuff, I took them to Disney. We'd have like, maybe picnics or we'd go on Sundays to the movies. Then when they got old enough, we had what we called a Wa-Wa, a bus. This bus, on Sundays, would make several trips back and forth to the circus and to town. They would have a list of everything that was in town, McDonald's, Arby's, China King, whatever. And then they would have a list of the movies, the bowling alley, and then he would take them and for a dollar, you would ride the Wa-Wa, and he would drop you off at whatever location you wanted. Then at such and such time he would be back by to pick you up at that location. Well, when the kids got old enough, you would see this big group. There would be Mona and Josie, Armando, Traci, Kristin, Libby, you'd see all these kids, plus the other performers' kids. They would go in groups. You never worried about them because they were always in groups. Oh, one time they went to Janet Jackson's...

Finchum

Concert?

Loyal

Concert. I think the circus kids are a lot smarter, almost like street-wise type thing because we always are talking to them about strangers, watching out, be careful, you never know, and this and that. But we're always, always—I said being on the circus is an easy picking ground for somebody to just walk up. They can pretend they're looking at the animals and something could happen. At an early age, they knew what drugs were, to stay away from drugs, people that do drugs, I don't know.

M. Loyal

Everybody always kind of watched out for all the kids. Do you know what I mean? Like, all the working guys or the performers or whoever was working on the show always watched out for all the kids.

Loyal

Always watched out for all the kids, yes.

M. Loyal

So it was like a big nursery. (Laughs) You could be anywhere. Your parents might not know where you were, but someone else knew where you were.

Loyal

All I had to do was go out and say, "Hey, did you see Mona?" "Oh, yes. Her and Kristin and Traci and Maria and Vanderhyde, they are all over

near the pie car,” or, “They’re over in the backend of the canvas truck,” or something.

Nykolaiszyn *So it would be pretty easy to know when they got in trouble.*

Loyal Oh, yes. Yes.

M. Loyal That, too. (Laughs)

Loyal Yes, you knew when they got in trouble.

M. Loyal Everybody knew. (Laughs)

Loyal Yes, and it wasn’t just the parent that would discipline them. It was always known through all the circus people. If you catch my kid doing something they’re not supposed to do, you do to them what you would do to your own kid. And that’s how it was. If I caught one of the show kids doing something, oh, yes ma’am! Snatch him up real quick. But that’s how we all were. But things have changed now, from the way they were to the way they are now.

Nykolaiszyn *So it’s different now?*

Loyal Yes. It’s a lot different. I think it’s because the performers that they have here now aren’t from here. They bring them from Peru or they bring them from Argentina, and they have not grown with a—because back then, everybody that lived here, all our kids, all the different families, like Moira, we all went on the same circus. So not only did we live together on the circus, we lived together here, and we always watched out for each other’s family, each other’s kids.

M. Loyal And we were on the circus with the same kids, and we came home and went to school with that group.

Loyal With the same kids, so...

M. Loyal A group of us, not a lot, maybe five or ten kids.

Loyal And now, it’s not like that. They just, “Oh, whatever.” And there’s not that family-ness. We used to have like, on the show we would get together. On Sunday, everybody would chip in five dollars, and we’d have big...

M. Loyal Well, we still do that, though. We still do that on our show.

Loyal Yes, well, they don’t over there anymore.

M. Loyal Well, we still do.

Loyal But you kids would do it on your own. You guys would all chip in to Armando, and just all you kids would have your own little party or group party and stuff, but not off anywhere, somewhere where we can see them. And then we would have like, Halloween parties on the show. The kids would do skits, like the time you guys did the Ninja Turtle thing, the Ninja Turtles. They all...

M. Loyal For Halloween.

Loyal For Halloween...

M. Loyal We always did skits.

Loyal ...and then on the Fourth of July the kids would do things, and they would have baseball games, and we'd all sit and cheer and stuff. We had a lot of fun. We had a lot of fun back then—soccer games. So it was just like one big giant family unit that did everything together. Almost like the Kennedys when they played football. (Laughter) You know my daughter, Tina, right? [Tina enters the room]

T. Loyal Hello ladies, how are you doing?

Loyal And I was talking with B.K. the other day. We were going through these pictures that she had gotten, and I go, "Oh, I hadn't seen a picture of Aunt Torchy!" She isn't my blood aunt, but, to me, she's my Aunt Torchy. That's like all of us in show business. We had like, my Aunt Gerry, my Aunt Flo, my Aunt Isla. They're not blood aunts, but they're ours aunt. The way Mona and I just explained now, how the kids were growing up, that's how I grew up. That's my Aunt Gerry. She kept an eye on me. That was my Aunt Flo. She kept an eye on me. They always knew where we were. So I go, "Oh, look, there's Aunt Torchy!" and B.K. goes, "Yes."

This lady, something else, tiny, teeny little thing, and I was going to go to Oklahoma City one year with her to work the Shrine Circus, at the auditorium that was downtown. And at one time, there was a hotel called Hotel Black. I don't know if it's still there or not. So we were leaving Hugo. We left during the night sometime, and I don't know half where we got. I'm going to say we probably got up maybe around Ada, maybe, Purcell, somewhere over there, and the transmission went out of her car. So some truck driver picked us up with some semi, somewhere. I remember loading all of this crap, handing it up to her so we could go. And she said, "Well, hand me my purse," and I tried to pick up this

purse. I couldn't pick up this purse, and I said, "Aunt Torchy, what have you got in this purse?" I was probably about twelve years old. And so I opened that purse—you name it, she had it in there. She had tools. She had sewing stuff. She had makeup. She had silverware. You name it, she had it in there. That purse weighed a ton! And I was telling B.K., I said, "My, God!" She said, "Yes, and that's how she travels. I bet you didn't know there was a gun in the bottom of that purse." (Laughter) And I said, "No! How in the hell could you find it with all that crap on top of it?"

But, anyway, so we get to this Hotel Black, and she told me, she said, "That's where all the circus people stayed." Well, they must've stayed back in that hotel back in vaudeville time, because there wasn't any when I got there. (Laughs) We did that Shrine Circus there in Oklahoma City. We were there a week, and then finally, a friend came, picked us up, and brought us home, because the car was in the shop. I remember doing web and doing all the production numbers there. The Zoppe family was there. They did their riding act. God, I was just a kid. I remember her putting my makeup on, because I didn't know how to put makeup on. But that was my first Shrine date I ever did. It was in Oklahoma City for Tom Packs, Jack Leontini was the producer. I'll never forget those names.

Then I'm trying to think of what other shows I did. I went and I did what we used to call the Texas dates. I think I was about thirteen, fourteen when I did the Texas dates. It was Houston, did Houston, did Dallas, Fort Worth, Corpus Christi, San Antonio, and I think it was Galveston. I think those were the five, the five cities—or it might've been Austin. The five cities, I know it was five cities we did. My favorite one, though, was Houston. I really liked Houston and that Astrodome, back in the day. You could look out. You could see the prison from our dressing room. (Laughs) Isn't that terrible? The city jail, rather, I should say. That's terrible! Now, I was about thirteen. And then what other dates did I do when I was a young girl? I think I worked Minneapolis, St. Paul, I'm not real sure. I know I did San Antonio another time for the police department, for the police.

Nykolaiszyn *You have a great memory about the places you've been.*

Loyal Oh. (Laughs)

Nykolaiszyn *I would think that you're on the road so much that each place, it'd be easy to forget.*

Loyal I spend a lot of time on the side of the road, broke down. (Laughter) I'm serious. I am so serious! And my daughter can verify that.

M. Loyal We all make fun of her because...

Loyal I could get in your car with you, and we could go, and we'll break down. Believe me!

M. Loyal Brand new car. No, she'll break down.

Loyal We'll break down somewhere! In fact, Moira got this brand new white truck, and she said, "We're going in my truck." I said, "Okay." And we get going. I don't know how far we get, and we break down. She looks at me and she said, "I can't believe this! I'm broke down—and you're with me!" It's the truth. So everywhere I go, I can tell you where I broke down. I remember the spots. You come through McAlester, right?

Nykolaiszyn *Yes.*

Loyal Okay. You know that toll coming to Hugo, when you come through McAlester? I broke down right there. I had to sit over on the side of the road for two days. Okay, up there by Miami, Oklahoma, there are two different spots that I broke down at two different times there. I can tell you. I've broken down all over the place.

M. Loyal We broke down in California, in Arizona. California, we were stuck at that truck stop for like a week in the 120 degree heat...

Loyal Hope, it was Hope, Arizona. I can tell you exactly where it was.

M. Loyal ...with three horses.

Nykolaiszyn *What do you do—I mean, this is in the days prior to cell phones. What do you do when you break down?*

Loyal You hitchhike to town or have somebody go into town and have a mechanic, tell them you need a mechanic or something like that.

Nykolaiszyn *Would the circus realize...?*

Loyal Well, now, for instance like Carson and Barnes or Kelly Miller, either one, they have a mechanic shop. It's a big semi, and it's like a garage, a traveling garage on wheels. We have our own wrecker, we have our own tire truck—well, we, they—and this big semi is like a garage. You walk into the semi, there's everything imaginable that a garage would have that they have in there. They carry extra motors, they carry extra axels, they carry extra whatever. They're the last ones to leave the circus grounds. Everybody leaves before the mechanics leave, and then the

mechanics will sit there, maybe, an hour, hour and a half. They'll have their breakfast, do whatever they want, and then they leave because they want to make sure that they get going. So the first person they come to that's broke down, they pull over. If they can fix it right there, they fix it. If they can't, they have the wrecker, they hook it up, and they tow it in. And believe me, they've towed me many, many times—many a time, many a time! (Laughs) Yes, in fact, I helped pay for Bill Parker's house as many times as I've broken down.

But Carson and Barnes, Kelly Miller, Culpepper, they always take care of their people, the mechanics. Now, the private vehicles, ours is a private vehicle, they would charge us just like going to a garage and doing it. But everything that belongs to the show, that's their expense, that's show equipment, they work for the show. That's why they're there, to take care of the show equipment. But should an individual break down with his own private vehicle, they'll fix it, but it's like going to the garage. Unless it's something major, like a motor or a transmission, well, then they tow you to a garage and they'll charge you for the towing.

And then we have, like I said, the cookhouse. They served coffee and donuts in the morning before they leave at five o'clock, or sweet rolls, it just depends. And then when you get to the circus grounds, we have a thing called a pie car. It's like a snack shop. You can go in there and order an egg sandwich or big breakfast or whatever, and they make it. Then at eleven—at eleven or eleven-thirty, cookhouse?

M. Loyal I don't remember.

Loyal I don't remember. They'll have cookhouse and they'll have—it depends. Maybe they'll have scrambled eggs and sausage or hotcakes or whatever, or maybe grilled cheese sandwiches and soup. It just depends.

Nykolaiszyn *You'll have to tell me about B.K.'s cookhouse because she made a point...*

Loyal That's the best cookhouse that ever, ever has been! And let me tell you, right now, Kelly Miller is the only other cookhouse that you can kind of go, "Okay, you can compare it to B.K.'s cookhouse." Kelly Miller, right now, has a great cookhouse, but they're fixing to lose that cook they've got. I don't know what they're going to do. But, oh! B.K.'s cookhouse...you get up in the morning, "Beep! Beep!" whatever, six o'clock, seven o'clock, and you have coffee and donuts. Okay. We go to the next town and within thirty minutes you're there and it's breakfast. She has milk on the table, cereal on the table, mustard, ketchup, mayonnaise, salt, pepper, jelly, butter—not one kind of jelly. They have

strawberry or blackberry jam or whatever. Sometimes they have that apple butter, too, on there. Okay. Then over here they have a thing with the coffee and a thing of orange juice sitting there. The milk's on the table. Then you go up to the window. Normally, all the cookhouses will make just scrambled eggs and bacon or whatever. You go to B.K.'s cookhouse and the cook says, "How do you want your eggs, fried or scrambled?" and I about fell over. "I like mine over medium, please." (Laughter) Like that, and then the next day they would say for breakfast, "Pancakes or waffles? Bacon or sausage?" Maybe the next day it's biscuits and gravy or something else. Plus, you have cereal on the table. Yes, that was breakfast at B.K.'s cookhouse.

Then, at noon—and you just got through eating, and here it's noon! And then they have sandwiches. You have ham and cheese or, you want bologna and cheese or do you want salami and cheese? Do you want tomato soup or chicken soup? Well, it was usually chicken noodle soup or beef barley soup. And then some days they would have, like, grilled cheese and tomato soup or grilled cheese and some onion soup or something. And then suppertime, fried chicken, mashed potatoes, green beans or corn—I mean—and then your dessert, whatever the dessert was. Then the next day it might be roast beef. And then she'd go over, "Billy! You're not cooking supper tonight." "What do you mean I'm not cooking?" "No, we're taking everybody out to the restaurant for supper. I made arrangements over here at this little restaurant to cater us our supper, so you could have a day off."

Nykolaiszyn

That's nice.

Loyal

Yes, it was. There's not too many circuses—I don't know of any circuses that do that. She was, she was very good. I'd work for B.K. in a New York second, anytime. I always used to tease her, "When are you guys taking out another circus? When are you taking out another circus?" She was a good boss to work for. The first time I ever saw B.K...we got fired from her mother-in-law's circus, right? And they didn't know that B.K. had hired us. Well, I wasn't in charge of the business, my dad was, my dad and my mother. And here, I'm already, what? I had just had Mona. Mona was just a little baby, a few weeks old, maybe three weeks old, something like that, a month at the most. So her mother-in-law fired us, and I just assumed we were going to come home, but B.K. had hired us on their circus, on Fisher Brothers.

I think it took us like two days to get there, and we came pulling on the circus grounds, and Papa stops, and we pull up beside them in the car. Papa goes, "Well, I need to go see where they want me to park. I need to find the..." Well, here comes this lady, running out. She had on a pair of capris and this shirt. Her hair was all up in curlers. We're standing there,

and she comes running up, starts hugging us and kissing us. I'm just kind of standing there, and Billy Griffin comes up, "Hey!" I said, "Who the hell is that?" He goes, "That's the owner of the show." I said, "Oh. Well, hell, she doesn't even know us, and she's hugging and kissing us!" (Laughs)

But I tell you what, I'd give back anything to go back to those days on that circus. It was a nice, small family circus. The happiest I ever was on a circus. Nobody bothered anybody. And then on Sundays, he would set up the sideshow, and he would put this big movie screen up, her husband, Melvin. We would have movies on Sundays. Most of the time they were westerns with Audie Murphy and John Wayne. But let me tell you, we'd have movies, and they'd get the popcorn popper going in the concessions. They'd bring boxes of popcorn in there. We'd have popcorn and sodas and watch movies. And that Dagwood and Blondie are related, I think. I'm not real sure how it works. We would get Blondie and Dagwood movies all the time. He would send them or something, and we would watch movies. That was every Sunday. We didn't work on Sundays, and every Sunday we'd be in the sideshow, watching movies. He'd turn on the generator just so we could watch movies. But a good circus.

- Nykolaiszyn** *Well, fast forwarding just a little bit...*
- Loyal** Sure.
- Nykolaiszyn** *In the '80s you were doing the comedy act...*
- Loyal** Right.
- Nykolaiszyn** *At what point did you know, "My career is starting to come to an end," in terms of riding in the show?*
- Loyal** When I had the surgery. What year was that, Mona?
- M. Loyal** We were on the circus. I was thirteen.
- Loyal** No, with this surgery. When I...
- M. Loyal** Oh, that one. I thought you were talking about your knee.
- Loyal** No, no, no, no. When my career was over, doing...
- M. Loyal** When we started having kids, and we made her stay home. (Laughter) Because she still thinks in her mind she's going to go back.

Nykolaiszyn *Are you ready to go out on the road tomorrow?*

Loyal Yes.

Nykolaiszyn *Yes.*

Loyal Well, I already kind of have it planned a little bit.

M. Loyal Yeah, uh huh.

Loyal See, Josie's supposedly not going to go back on the circus next year. She's supposedly going to get a city-town job. She bought that house. She's going to stay home. Tina's going to be home, and Josie will be home, then I don't need to be home. So I can go on the road. Look at Mona, look at Mona. (Laughs)

M. Loyal Well, I've got to be graduated so that will be on the rest...

Loyal And then by the time Nicky's ready, I'll be way too old for that.

Finchum *What would you do on the road?*

Loyal Oh, I could work in the cookhouse. I could hold the whip. I could sell tickets. I could work in the show. Look at my daughter. I'm only kidding. (Laughs) No...

Finchum *You could do a comedy act without the horse.*

Loyal Yes, I could do a comedy act.

Nykolaiszyn *What's the draw, still, for you now?*

Loyal It's just in my blood, I guess, because I've done it all my life. I don't know. I just—I miss it.

M. Loyal It's just, I think, a lifestyle that you get so used to. It's something that you can't even explain it. Like, I'll be home for three months and I'll be like, "Okay. It's time to go, it's time to go, it's time to go." You have a regular life, but you always want to do that no matter what. Me and my brother both went to college, we both ended up back on a circus. My best friend and her sister, too, both have degrees in business and minors in Spanish, but back on the circus.

[Granddaughter Lexi enters the room]

Loyal Hi, Lexi! Did you go to school? She's going to be a circus performer,

right Honey? She's going to tell me no. (Laughter) Are you going to do your gymnastics? In a few minutes will you show them your gymnastics Granny teaches you in the house sometimes, your backbend? Anyway, no, but I know they're not going to let me. And this is the youngest one, right now, that's here besides Mona's little boy, but he'll be leaving. But she stayed. She's going to be in the circus, right?

Finchum *She has the smile down pat.*

M. Loyal Smile. (Laughter)

Loyal Okay, that's enough, now. That, kind of, though, what keeps me going, too, is because they all—this one and Lily and Zefra and Christian right now, too—oh, Christian's driving me nuts! He wants me to go buy a horse. I said, "Well, we already got so many over at the house right now. Use one of those." "I want my own horse," and he's getting online, and he's looking at horses that are up in Nova Scotia and California and Connecticut. I said, "There's no way!" "Well, they're only five hundred dollars." "Yes," I said, "And two thousand for gas, there and back! I don't think so!" (Laughs)

Finchum *The circus could pick it up as they go through town.*

Loyal That's what I told Christian. He found some in Illinois. I said, "Hey, your dad's in Illinois now. Tell your dad to pick him up for you." So I don't know. "Well, I want my own horse. I want to do my own thing, my own riding act." Yes, he's into carrying on the family tradition.

Nykolaiszyn *What do you miss most about being on the road?*

Loyal Not getting up at five o'clock, that's for sure. (Laughs) What do I miss most about being on the road? I guess moving, because as I'm driving in the mornings, I'm always looking at historical markers and stuff like that. I know this sounds really stupid, but when you're traveling and you get to the town and area, the lot smells different than the one you just came from. Everything's different, smells different. There's never ever any day the same. Every day is different, and I guess that's what I like. There's nothing ever the same. You might think the routine is the same. Oh, we get there, we unplug our lights or plug in our lights and stretch this or stretch that, but you're parked in a different place. It's not in the same place. The scenery's different, and so you stretched your cable like you did yesterday, but something's going to be different that day. It always is.

Finchum *Is the audience much different from spot to spot?*

Loyal

Yes, they are. A lot of towns where they liked, maybe, this act more than they liked that act. They didn't the comedy, it was always a hit. Barbara Byrd always told me, she said, "You know, I can always tell when the riding act is in the tent. I can hear the laughter and the roars over in our trailer." And it's the truth. I didn't do anything. I didn't do anything. I didn't do any summersaults. I didn't do flip-flops or hoops. I didn't do anything. All I did was make them laugh. There's that old saying, "It's not what you do, it's how you do it," and it's the truth in show business.

If you have somebody that does trapeze and throws a triple and just throws a triple, and then you have this guy over here that comes in and throws a single summersault. But if he knows how to throw that summersault and knows how to present that summersault, that's more impressive than that triple that he just did. If he doesn't have any style or any grace to it...and I try to make my grandkids understand that. It's not what you do, it's how you do it.

That's like right now, with Lexi, okay. You have a lot of gymnasts, even in the circus, that do fantastic tricks, but if they don't have a form to it, to make it look nice, it looks sloppy. So I always tell them to make sure their legs are pointed and straight. That's why I always say *punte!* *Punte!* Because you always want to have that *punte*, and it's like walking into the ring. If you don't know how to walk into the ring, it doesn't matter. But if you do know how, just walking into the ring you can take the house down, just walking into the ring. I know that doesn't sound...

Finchum

It's that part of the show.

Loyal

Yes, and you can feel it. You can feel. That's like with Zefta, when I talked with Zefta about practicing the horses. Now, my son puts a pad on his horses. My father would kill him. If my father was here, there would be no pad on no horse. My grandfather would string him. So anyway, every now and then my grandfather used a pad, but it was called a *panó*. It wasn't actually a pad. It was almost like—do you remember in the movies when they put those backpack things on mules and stuff, that sit like that? Okay. And they sit on the horse or the mule, but then it had like a platform on it. My aunt Zefta would get on, and she'd have toe shoes on. She would actually, like a ballerina, be on her toe shoes while the horse was running. She would do things, but we would call that a *panó*. I learned on the *panó*, and it's real hard because when the horse runs, it goes from side to side, almost. It's really hard to stand on. My son, Armando, he made pads, just pads on the horses. It's like cheating, and you're not cheating anybody but yourself by using those, rather than on the back of a horse. That pad keeps you from falling. I don't know how, and they make it. It has ridges on it.

Nykolaiszyn *It's more for the balance of the performer rather than the comfort of the horse?*

Loyal More or less.

Nykolaiszyn *Okay.*

Loyal To me, that would be the way I would put it. I never used one. Don't ever intend to use one. Don't want my grandkids to use one. And my son and I go round and round over this all the time. Well, all my grandkids are against it, because I'm teaching them without that pad. You can see the difference in the riding from a pad and without a pad. Zefta, in fact, I said, "All it is, Zefta, is practice." So they had Dusty here. He wears a pad, so she's sitting on that. I said, "Sit on the side. Sit on the side. Sit on...now, go up." She can't. "Well, I can't." I said, "Why?" "Well, I can't. This pad's not letting me get up." It's not going to. What they have to do is they have to use their hands, and they have to push themselves up. You lose all the gracefulness, and you lose the trick. Rather than just sitting there, and you're on the horse, and you feel it, and you just get up, get up on the horse. So I have Zefta on this other horse without the pad and stuff, and she can get right up. It's like you have that pad, and you can't feel the horse. You can't feel what the horse is going to do.

I wore shoes, but I didn't like to wear shoes. I liked to ride bareback. And it's like you and the horse become one. You can feel before—like, when he's—I don't know how to explain it, like, oh, I'm thinking about changing my gallop, and then you know, "Chulo, up. Up, Chulo!" "Oh, she knows what I'm going to do." So it's like you can feel what they're going to do before they do it. It's the rhythm and stuff. And I explained to Zefta that, and so Zefta practices without the shoes. She said, "You're right, Granny. You can feel it. You can tell. You know." I said, "Well, can you imagine you've got shoes on, then you've got that pad on top of them? What the heck are you going to feel? They're going to come to a dead stop, and you're going to keep flying. So, "We want to tell our dad we don't want them pads on." I said, "Well, good luck!" And so that's why Christian says, "I want to buy my own horse."

Armando listens to everybody else rather than the way he was taught by my father. Well, that's his choice. They're his horses. He can do whatever he wants. But the grandkids don't like it. We had Lily, the other day, practicing standing up, and I still can't figure out what she was doing wrong. I think she was going up with the wrong leg. She was going up with the outside leg, rather than the inside leg first. Then when she'd get up, she'd go exactly straight, which you are not supposed to.

You're supposed to keep your chest on the inside so that keeps you from flying out and stuff.

Nykolaiszyn

If you fall off the horse during a performance, what do you do?

Loyal

You want to fall inside. You don't want to fall out of the ring. You want to fall in the ring. That's why when you're standing on the horse, you always have your right shoulder kind of even with the ear, a certain way. So you're jumping rope, whatever, if you fall, you always fall inside, rather than fall to the outside of the ring. You fall to the outside of the ring, you've got the ring curb, you have miscellaneous things like stakes, props that other people use in their acts, a teeter board, maybe, maybe a pony pedestal or something that you can fall and hurt yourself on. But you can always save yourself if you fall on the inside. Of course, you have the other people in the ring that can run over to catch you.

This horse that I had called Chulo, this great big Belgian that I had, he was the best horse that I ever had and the smartest horse I ever had. In Philadelphia we worked at the old train depot. They had torn it down, and it still had cobblestones all where we sat up and everything. They brought in a load of—loads of dirt to put in the ring. Well, we have what we call a waterman that has a water truck, and he would wet the... well, he made a mud hole out of it. And with his metal shoes and this mud hole, he happened to—it went through the dirt and got into the cobblestone and, of course, it made him fall. I was standing up and rather him falling on me, he fell outside of the ring. He dropped to the outside of the ring, so I would fall inside the ring. He was a smart horse. I tore the wall of my stomach loose. That's the only time I ever got hurt, that I can say I got hurt.

M. Loyal

You hurt your knee.

Loyal

Yes, but that was practicing. That wasn't in the show. That was Chiva's fault, my knee, she got that rope caught around my knee, and Chulo—no, not Chulo—Pasquinel, was running. Chiva got that rope caught around my knee. Instead of letting go of the rope, she pulled it and he went—he was running that way, and she pulled it this way. It tore the cartilages loose in my knee. But I lucked out because I had one of the—his name was John Little, and he was a surgeon for the Rams, the Los Angeles Rams, in California. He's the one that did the surgery on my leg, microscopic surgery. I was in the process of breaking [new horses]. My dad had already broken them, pretty much, and it was just finishing them off, because my dad had went on Carson and Barnes. He had left and gone on Carson and Barnes. I had gone to Circus Vargas, out in California with the horses, with the horse act. They weren't quite broke yet. I was going to work on their horse until my horses were ready,

which was the following year. And I came back to Carson and Barnes, and that's when Moira and I, we put the riding act together and stuff.

Finchum

Constantly thinking.

Loyal

Yes, always, always. Always thinking.

Finchum

So the last circus you went to was Kelleys Island?

Loyal

I went to see my son to visit at Kelleys Island and kind of wound up working there, doing elephant rides and stuff. I didn't perform in the show or anything, but they were so busy they needed help out on the elephant ride. So I got a bull hook or a stick, or whatever you want to call it, and just walked the elephant back and forth, giving them rides. That was hot, too. It was hot. They were busy. They had a very nice show, very nice show. You guys will have to catch Kelly Miller.

Finchum

We're trying to.

Loyal

Good, good, good.

Nykolaiszyn

Well, as a fan of the circus, now that you're sitting in the stands, what do you look forward to the most when you watch a show?

Loyal

I'm real bad. You don't want me to go watch a show, because I sit there and criticize. (Laughs) That's, I guess, that's what you get to do when you get to be my age. You get to go in there and criticize all these young performers. I would, "No. That looks bad! No, no, no." You know what? I really don't watch the show. There's nothing in here that really intrigues me, unless I know it's going to be a real good performer. And I would have to say this for Adrian Poema, his children with their foot juggling is awesome, awesome performers, their foot juggling. And I did—I saw them last year, work and everything. They're very good. And other than that, I had already seen everything to see. And then rather than go in there and sit there and criticize, I go criticize my son while he's working the elephants, "Oh, you need to comb your hair different. You look awful," or, "Wear a different kind of shirt or something. You look terrible. Do you want me to teach you how to work elephants?" He say, "Don't you have anything nice to say, Mom?" (Laughs)

But I guess I earn that privilege, to criticize. But then there are a lot of acts that are just really, really amazing, very good, good, good acts. One of the nicest acts that was so impressive to me was—I think—I don't know if they were Russian or Bulgarians, was they did a cradle act. What the heck was their name? It was Marinoff. They did a cradle act that was just—I mean, left you with your mouth wide open. The

elegance and the tricks that they did, it was just—it was just unbelievable. They were so good.

Cirque du Soleil has a lot of interesting and wonderful acts and stuff. And I like watching their acts, but I don't like watching them when they dress them like...with noses and make them...I want to see their abilities. I know they want a theme behind what they are doing, and I understand that, but I don't know. Like, for instance, I've been watching—I don't know if you girls watch that *Dance Moms* or something like that, on TV? And I watch these little girls doing dance, and their athletic abilities in it. It's just wonderful, but then they want to put themes that to me, it doesn't make any sense. Rather than showing your abilities, how beautiful they can dance and stuff. Oh, well. I guess each to their own.

Nykolaiszyn

Well, where do you see the future of the circus? Do you think we'll still have it five, ten, fifteen, twenty years from now?

Loyal

I think there will always be a little circus around, maybe not big in any aspect, but I feel that there will always be a little circus. I don't know if there will always be tigers and lions or elephants on the circuses, due to the animal activists, due to whatever. And I can see their point. I understand their point. I understand where they're coming from. They don't want animals to be abused. I understand that, and I agree with them on that. But just because there's one bad apple doesn't make everybody like that. For instance, like I told you about our horses and stuff. I have dogs that I had in my dog act outside in the backyard. They're old. They're ready to die, but I'm not going to go put them down until they've got to be put down. I mean, they served me well for several years, put food on the table, helped me pay my bills, and so why am I going to mistreat them because they don't perform anymore? To me, they're like part of my family.

My daughter Mona, "Well, how many dogs have you still got?" (Laughs) I said, "Four, I think." Let's see, Lucky, that one...yes, I've got four. I said, "And they're staying there 'til they die. When they're ready, then okay, but until then don't worry about it. You don't have to buy their dog food." (Laughs) So anyway, "Well, how many horses you got? You've got a blind one over there!" I said, "Yes, and she's not hurting anybody. She eats. She gets around just like—I put her in her pen. She knows her pen. She has her food. She has her hay. She has her water. Is she hurting you?" "No." "Well, then, what do you care?" I said, "When she's ready to be put down, I'll put her down." That's just the way I feel about it. The animal aspect of it, like the lions, the tigers, the elephants and stuff, it's a shame because some of these kids in the smaller, smaller towns that don't get to go to zoos, that don't get to see

this, will be deprived of that, of not being able to see them.

I'm going to tell you something I remember as a kid on the circus. We'd pull into a town, we'd work the fairgrounds. And in this fairgrounds, they would have the grandstands. Around the track they would have a big, wooden fence, all around this track. On this track, they would have car races, or they would have horse races, or they would have those junky cars that run into each other races, or whatever the hell they do. I can still smell the smell, even though it's been a month since that happened or whatever, and the tickets that you could find on the ground for the races. They would sell—I don't know—those souvenir stands where you'd put your finger in that little thing, like that, and try to pull it, and it was made out of some kind of grass or something. I remember all of that stuff and appreciate all that stuff. None of these kids know what that stuff is. They have no clue—nothing, nothing to let them remember, to think. Their memories are going to be about, "Oh, I went and smoked dope at Johnny's house last week." Or, "I got knocked up at Mary's place." They don't have anything, and those are things that I think, like, with the circus and the animals and stuff that are memories that make character, that build people and stuff.

- Nykolaiszyn** *Well, looking back at your long career in the circus, how do you want to be remembered? When people say Lucy...*
- Loyal** She made me laugh.
- Finchum** *Or your horses are loose.*
- Loyal** What?
- Nykolaiszyn** *Or your horses are loose. (Laughs)*
- Loyal** Or your horses are loose! Mona could tell you that. "Nino! Your horses are loose!"
- M. Loyal** Yesterday or the day before, "Your horses are loose down there."
- Loyal** They did! They sure did!
- M. Loyal** I'm surprised they have not been getting fined yet from the police department.
- Loyal** Yes, "We tied your horse up to the fence." They did. They tied the brown one...
- M. Loyal** We used to be at school, "Oh, Armando, your horse is out in the football

field.” I’m like, “Oh, my gosh! This is so embarrassing.”

Loyal And they still do it. Christian—well, Christian was in Florida for his summer vacation. They called him, “Christian, your grandmother’s horses are loose.” Christian called me, “Granny, one of the horses are loose. He’s over behind the football stadium.” I had to go get him, seek him.

Finchum *See, you made us laugh.*

Loyal Oh! (Laughs)

Nykolaiszyn *Well, is there anything else you’d like to add that we haven’t talked about?*

Loyal May all your days be circus days. (Laughs) No, I don’t know anything. Do you want to know more?

Nykolaiszyn *Well, we’ve covered quite a bit, especially with your family and your family history and your career.*

Loyal And I don’t know if I ever mentioned I had a brother who was in the circus. His name is Luciano [Joseph] Loyal. He did bareback riding. I only have that one picture. I think I showed you the one picture. Did I not?

Finchum *I think so.*

Nykolaiszyn *I think so.*

Loyal The one picture of my brother, and he also was a boss canvasman, and he was a butcher. He and I did the riding act one year together, just one year. He and I did a riding act together, and it was 1969. I can even tell you the year it happened. I would’ve liked to have more pictures of that year with him and I doing the riding act. He used to be in the riding act when we were kids. I used to push him around and beat him up, and he’d say, “Some of these days, Lucy, I’m going to get you back when I grow up.” And he was killed on B.K.’s [Fisher Brothers Circus] circus. No, that’s pretty much the circus life of everyday, the same thing over and over, whether it’s rain, shine, hot, cold. It’s fun. It was a lot of fun.

Nykolaiszyn *Wouldn’t trade it in.*

Loyal No. I wouldn’t trade none of it in. That’s just like what I was telling you about the tickets and the fairgrounds and stuff like that, being a kid on the circus. One year—I remember this. We were out in California. I had

to have been about eight years old. I'm going to say it was either '58 or '59, something like that, and they had the irrigation ditches they would have. We were at this—I want to say fairgrounds, but I really can't—and I remember it being fenced in, and I remember this little irrigation ditch coming around. It went behind the trailers and down like this, but then there were some trees real close to it, and the water was just rushing through this little irrigation ditch. It was so hot and all the circus people, all of us were in this little irrigation ditch, playing in that water that was—I mean, we had a ball in that irrigation ditch. That might've been the sewer for all I know, really, if you stop and think about it. But it was an irrigation ditch.

When we were kids on the circus, I remember we used to go exploring. We'd go exploring, and then one time, there was a garbage dump. We were in the garbage dump. I was playing in the garbage dump, getting garbage, out of the garbage dump, people threw away and was playing, making a house and stuff with stuff out of the garbage dump, all of us circus kids. Boy, I bet you we smelled good when we came home! I still remember that.

Nykolaiszyn

Good memories.

Loyal

Yes. See, you don't want to trade that for nothing. Now, they're worried about germs everywhere, and I played in a garbage dump! (Laughs)

Nykolaiszyn

Well, would you do anything differently?

Loyal

No, I wouldn't trade anything. Maybe I'd pick a different husband if I could have the same kids.

M. Loyal

That's why I was looking like, "Hmm, wouldn't change anything. Are you sure?" (Laughter)

Loyal

No, just think, though, Mona, you wouldn't be here.

M. Loyal

I didn't say me—the other ones. (Laughter)

Loyal

I don't think I would trade. I might do some little things different. I think I might've studied harder, in that aspect of things. But as far as the other, no. I think no. I have a lot of good family, kid memories, traveling on the circus. Another time, we were in Canada, 1963. We were in Canada, and my dad had this truck, this bubble-nose truck. He was pulling a trailer that we had. It was a Midway. I remember him going—well, I don't remember him going around the curb, but you weren't supposed to ride in the trailers. Even now, you're not supposed to ride in the trailer. You're supposed to ride in the truck or the car or whatever—and my

brother and I stayed in the trailer, because we didn't want to get up. My dad had jackknifed this trailer, and it was on a dirt road somewhere in Canada. It was like a curve, and that trailer had jackknifed. The trailer had jackknifed out, like this. This back half was hanging off this—kind of like a cliff, an embankment thing. And there was a creek, but it wasn't really a creek. It was a river. I couldn't get the front door open to get out. Brains goes to the back door, I open the back door to go out, and I fell. I mean, this far away from falling into that river. I was really lucky, really, really lucky. But I remember that, and them fishing me out, throwing some rope to get me out. And I'm yelling at my brother not to [come that way], that we'd get him. So we broke the front window and got him out of the front window. But just things like that, that I remember. But now, I wouldn't trade it because I learned something. Look before you jump. (Laughter)

Nykolaiszyn *It's those little life lessons.*

Loyal Yes, yes. (Laughter) And I sit back, and I had met a lot of local children, kids. I would go to their houses, and I would play. I have pictures with them. I don't even know them. I don't even know their names, don't remember their names, but I remember that day, and I remember the house. I remember it was a two-story house. I remember a girl—this was in '64—and her name was Mary. I remember the name of the town. It was Seymour, New York. I wrote her for a long time, but I don't know what happened to her. And I had a picture of her. She was so pretty. Who knows what happened to her. It's terrible. I wonder about people that I had met as a kid, and even after, as I was older, I wonder what happened to this lady. It's so funny how so many lives intertwine with other peoples' lives, and you're touched by someone—like ours, you know? How we met just with this, how wonderful. It's wonderful.

Finchum *And you had your horses.*

Loyal And you have horses?

Nykolaiszyn *Oh, no. Oh, no, no.*

Loyal You don't like horses?

Nykolaiszyn *Oh, I have nothing against horses.*

Loyal Okay, you better like horses.

Nykolaiszyn *Oh, I love horses! I'm about to get kicked out of this house...oh, horses are great! I have nothing against horses.*

- Loyal** Yes, the circus is really—it's a learning trip, actually, through life, the circus is. Being on the circus, not having water, I can take a bath in a gallon of water, and wash my hair and everything, in a gallon of water. Not having lights, and if something should ever happen, I know how to survive without. I wonder how many people in Hugo would know how.
- Nykolaiszyn** *I know where they'd need to go.*
- Loyal** Mona would survive. Tina would—I know my kids would survive because they know how, but I wonder how many others. I think Moira would know how to survive. I think B.K. would know how. We just have gotten lazy, accustomed to air conditioning and light switches and stuff like that, but I know I could survive.
- Finchum** *We know where we'd come.*
- Nykolaiszyn** *I know where I'm going, yes.*
- Loyal** Well, come to my [house]. They were talking about there's going to be a food shortage and all this stuff's going to happen. I'm already thinking of what I'm going to put back.
- M. Loyal** We've taken baths in buckets. We've done all kinds of crazy stuff.
- Loyal** This one year, Mona was with me, it was when we were on Vargas. We're coming home, right? It was hot. It was miserable, and I had hurt my knee. That's when I had that surgery on my knee, and I had that brace on my leg. They wanted to stop and go to a swimming pool, and we couldn't because I had my...
- M. Loyal** It was so hot, and that's when we broke down.
- Loyal** It was called Hope City, a truck stop, Hope City, Arizona, between Blithe and Phoenix. So they wanted to go swimming, "It's so hot! It's so hot!" So I stopped at a K-Mart, and I bought a big, plastic trash barrel. Do you remember?
- M. Loyal** Filled it up with water, and me and my cousins rode in the back, in the camper, in water with the trash barrel. It was so hot.
- Loyal** And to keep from the water getting all over, I bought black trash bags, and I put up black trash bags so they wouldn't get the couches wet. And that black trash bag would run, almost like a shower curtain type to go out the door, underneath the door, so if the water—it would run out on the ground. And that's how they played all the [way back]. It took me like five days to get back to [Hugo]. Well, no, we broke down. It took us

almost, like, ten days to get home.

Nykolaiszyn

Wow.

Loyal

Yes. But that's how I put those trash barrels in there, and they played in those trash barrels so they'd have water.

M. Loyal

But even on the circus if it was hot, we'd go jump in the elephant troughs or the horse troughs, all the kids playing out in the troughs.

Loyal

In the elephant trough and the horse troughs and stuff, yes.

M. Loyal

That was the swimming pool. That would be the swimming pool for us. That was a lot of fun.

Nykolaiszyn

Well, I think this is a good place for us to end.

Loyal

Okay.

Nykolaiszyn

Thank you so much for...

Loyal

Thank you.

Nykolaiszyn

...sharing your life with us and giving us a glimpse into the circus.

Loyal

Thank you. Thank you for coming.

Nykolaiszyn

We appreciate it.

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