

Oral History Interview
with
Mike and Martha Moore

Interview Conducted by
Juliana Nykolaiszyn and Tanya Finchum
October 8, 2011

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

Oklahoma Oral History Research Program
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Interview History

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

Project Detail

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

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Legal Status

Scholarly use of the recordings and transcripts of the interview with Mike and Martha Moore is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on October 8, 2011.

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About Jack and Angela Moore...

Jack and Angela Moore were married in 1939. After Jack returned from serving in the navy, he found a partner and began a tent picture show that had a circuit in east Texas and west Louisiana. They started acquiring animals, and named their show the Jack and Kelley’s Bear Track Shows. They started de-emphasizing the movies and emphasizing country western and animal acts that they contracted for out of the Louisiana Hay Ride. They soon changed the name of the show to Tex Carson’s Jamboree and Wild Animal Show, dropped movies, and mainly showed in Texas and Louisiana. The family moved to Hugo, Oklahoma in 1952.

When the Moores arrived in Hugo, Jack struck up a friendship with D.R. Miller, who was a partner in the Al G. Kelly and Miller Brothers Circus, and they formed a partnership. Jack had the Tex Carson show, which was already an existing show, and D.R. leased Mabel the elephant to the show, contributed some equipment, canvas and some other items to the show. With the addition of the elephant, in 1953 the name was changed to Tex Carson’s Circus. In 1958, Jack changed the name to Carson and Barnes Circus.

Jack died in 1969 at the age of fifty, leaving behind Angela and their four children, Wanda, Mike, Martha, and Madelyn. Jack is buried in Showmen’s Rest, part of the Mount Olivet Cemetery in Hugo, Oklahoma. In 1970, Angela Moore sold her half of the show to D.R. Miller and retired from the road. She later married Ted Akeman, a former magician and clown. Angela died in 1997 after having spent much of her life in the circus business.

About Mike Moore...

Mike was born in 1942 in Marshall, Texas. At the age of six, his first job in “show business” was to sit by the projector and keep it from jumping when his parents owned a tent picture show. Around the age of eleven, Mike’s first circus job was caretaker for the show’s beloved elephant, Mabel. A year or two after that Mike and his sister, Wanda, performed in the show with Mabel. From there he held various other jobs such as candy butcher, prop boss, water man, sideshow canvas boss, and eventually took on management tasks in the business office of the circus.

Mike enrolled in Oklahoma State University (OSU) in 1960 and paid for much of his schooling by continuing to work with the show during the summer months. He married his wife, Kay, in 1964 and they toured the summer of 1965 together. Mike earned both his bachelor’s and master’s degrees from OSU. His career took him away from the circus into the area of computer software. He is now retired. Mike and Kay have three daughters and reside in Rockwall, Texas.

About Martha Moore...

Martha Moore was born in Jefferson, Texas in 1950. She first performed at the age of six when she styled the Pick Out Pony act with her father. As she got older, Martha did other tasks and acts for the circus such as horseback riding, engraving jewelry, taking tickets, picking up trash on the lot after the circus had left, walking the tight wire, trampoline, and performing the swinging ladder, swinging anchor, the rolling globe, and the web. Around the age of thirteen, Martha began working with Mabel the elephant. She also did the "Miss Electra" sideshow act. As a daughter of the owner, she often did whatever needed to be done. Martha last trouped with the circus in 1969.

After graduating from Hugo High School, Martha enrolled in East Texas State University where she majored in art. In 1971 she graduated from Bauder Fashion College and started a career in the art world which spanned being a colorist for a textile manufacturer to a commercial artist to the wholesale clothing industry to interior design. Today Martha is a working artist making her home near Lake Texoma with her husband, Joe Henderson.

The “Big Top” Show Goes On

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Mike & Martha Moore

Oral History Interview

Interviewed by Juliana Nykolaiszyn
& Tanya Finchum
October 8, 2011
Rockwall, Texas



Nykolaiszyn *My name is Juliana Nykolaiszyn. Also with me is Tanya Finchum. Today is Saturday, October 8, 2011. We’re in Rockwall, Texas, interviewing Mike Moore and his sister, Martha Moore. Thank you for having us today.*

Mike Glad to have you. Go Cowboys!

Nykolaiszyn *That’s right. This interview is part of the Oklahoma Oral History Research Program and our circus project, taking place in Hugo, Oklahoma. We’d like to begin by learning a little bit more about you and your family. Mike, I’m going to start with you. Could you tell me where you were born, the year you were born, and a little bit about your early life?*

Mike Okay, well, I apologize for my voice because it’s hoarse. It doesn’t hurt. It’s what radiation will do for you. But anyway, I was born in 1942 in Marshall, Texas. My father, his family was from Marshall, and my mother and her family were from Jefferson, which was about fifteen miles away. They got married in ’39. Our older sister, Wanda, who now lives in Arizona, was born in ’40, and I was born in ’42. Martha, she will tell you, was born in ’50.

My father was in the navy. My mother was a stay-at-home mom. After he got out of the navy, he formed a partnership with a former vaudevillian actor or magician or clown or whatever he was, named Kelly Swim. They secured an old army surplus tent, hospital tent. This was the days before television so they had a tent picture show that had a circuit in east Texas and west Louisiana.

Dad would come over to Dallas here and rent some western movies and some colored revues, like Duke Ellington and others that would appeal

to the market in east Texas. Then they would show these movies. My job, one of my jobs at the time when I was real little, was to sit by the projector and keep it from jumping, because that was something that needed to be done. So that, I guess, would be my first job in show business. I wasn't even in grade school yet, but he started acquiring some animals. A wrestling bear, a monkey, a mean monkey named— what was the monkey's name?

Martha Which one? Fuzzy or the Rhesus monkey?

Mike The Rhesus monkey.

Martha I don't remember his name, but he was mean. (Laughs)

Mike But anyway, they...

Martha I've got a story about that monkey. (Laughs)

Mike They called the name of their show Jack and Kelly's Bear Track Show. They started de-emphasizing the movies and emphasizing some country western acts that they contracted for out of the Louisiana Hay Ride, which was the Louisiana version of the Grand Ole Opry, based in Shreveport. So they changed the name of the show to Tex Carson's Jamboree and Wild Animal Show and dropped movies and still mainly showed in Texas and Louisiana. Where he got the name Tex Carson, it was a purely made up name. There wasn't any person ever named Tex Carson, but it sounded interesting to my father.

Martha He had a good imagination. He said it had rhythm to it.

Mike He knew of the circuses that were based in Hugo, and how he found out about that, I'm not sure, but Marshall's not that far from Hugo. So he moved us to Hugo in 1952. I'll back up a little bit. Mother started going out and helping with the show in the late '40s, early '50s. They had a house trailer. The kids, which consisted of mainly Wanda and I and then Martha in the later years before we moved to Hugo, we would go out during the summer, three months during the summer, when we weren't in school. Later, when we moved to Hugo, we would generally, before we got into high school, would leave when the show left, which was in March, and come back when the show returned, which was in October, which would mean that we would miss a month or two of school at the beginning and the end. Hugo, since it had to deal with so many circus families, was able to deal with that. They were very good at catching the kids up and helping them leave early, because it was like migrant farm workers. The kids have got to work.

When we were in high school we needed to be in school longer so we would stay in boarding houses, in Hugo, and then catch up with the show at the end of May and then come in early at the beginning of September. We had longer summers back there than they do now. Now, they start in mid-August and move into June. I don't know what the circus kids do now. A lot of them are home schooled, but I don't really know.

Getting back to Hugo, the main circus family in Hugo was named the Millers. Obert Miller had a dog and pony show back in the '30s and at some point, they moved to Hugo, either in the late '30s or early '40s. And at some point it became the Al G. Kelly and Miller Brothers Circus. Obert had two sons, Kelly and D.R., or also known as Dory. They ran that show and were partners in several other shows, also based in Hugo, Cole and Walters being one of them. Anyway, my father struck up a friendship with Dory Miller, and they formed a partnership. Daddy had the Tex Carson show, which was already an existing show, and Dory leased Mabel, the elephant, to the show and also contributed some equipment and canvas and some other items to the show. And since we now had an elephant, he changed the name to Tex Carson Circus. That would have been in, I believe, the summer of '53 was the first year we trouped as the Tex Carson Circus.

Later, in '58, he changed the name to Carson and Barnes Circus. I'm not sure why or where the name came from, although Barnes is an old, old circus name, and so maybe he was trying to play off of that. And Carson and Barnes sounded better than Tex Carson for some reason. So that's how it came to be called Carson and Barnes. My mother continued to go out on the show each year, and she helped mainly in business-related things and making the payroll and paying bills, and sometimes selling tickets, sometimes managing the front door, which is taking up tickets and dealing with the sponsor and all the business management side of things. And the kids, we were workers. We did whatever Daddy told us to do, and that was quite a bit. We quickly learned, unlike the other people on the show who could leave whenever they wanted to, we couldn't leave. So we sometimes had to do some things we didn't like, but we did them and probably overall, it was good for us.

That became the modus operandi all the way through school. Even in college I would go out, and I started college in 1960. I would go out and travel with the show. And by then, I was no longer performing with Mabel, the elephant, and others, which we'll get into in a minute. But I was running the ticket office and paying bills and helping out on that end. My sisters tended to remain in the performing side, up until they no longer trouped. I got married in '64, and my wife and I were in college at Oklahoma State, and we did troupe one summer of '65. And my two

sisters, Wanda, who was married at the time, and, Martha, who graduated in '68. So the last year I trouped was in '65. The last year my sisters trouped was in '69...

Martha

I think '69 was the last year I trouped.

Mike

My father died in March of 1969. Fifty years old, he died of lung cancer. Mother trouped another year or two and wound up selling her half of the show to Dory. All of these years, up until that point in time, Dory was essentially a silent partner. He and Dad would work together each winter in putting together the show for the following year, but he was not an active manager of Carson and Barnes. He was managing their family show, [Al G.] Kelly Miller. So Mother sold her half of the show to Dory in '70 or '71, I'm not a 100 percent sure, and basically retired from the road. She wound up marrying Ted Akeman, who was a circus guy from way back, both as a magician and as a clown, and one time, he had his own show, back in the '30s or '40s. They moved to Jefferson, which was Mother's old hometown and retired. He later died in '85, and my mother died in '97.

In the meantime, Dory was running Carson and Barnes, and there still was a Kelly Miller. They combined the two shows. You'll have to ask Barbara [Miller Byrd] what year that was. I'm not a 100 percent sure. It was in the early '70s, sometime. They combined the two shows, and Dory chose the name Carson and Barnes as the name of the surviving entity. So it stayed in that name when Dory died in '99 and his daughter, his only child, Barbara, who married and is now named Barbara Byrd, had two daughters. And so that family is running the show today and even as we stand, they're performing at Fort Worth, Texas, about thirty miles from here. So they're wrapping up their season this year.

The Kelly Miller Circus was re-launched, I believe, in '84 was the information I pulled off of their website, and that show was managed by David Rawls. And Kelly Miller continued up until 2007 when they sold it to John Ringling North II, a descendant of the Ringling Brothers, and that show is still going on as Kelly Miller, under the managership of John Ringling North II. So when you talk about Carson and Barnes, if you talk to different people, you'll get two different perspectives. When you talk to the current version of Carson and Barnes, Barbara and looking back through the lens of time, sees the thread of history going back to Dory's partnership of Carson and Barnes and to their family's original starting of the circus in Hugo, and that's all a single line that she identifies as Carson and Barnes. When Martha and I and my family sees Carson and Barnes, we see the line, the Jack Moore line. The beginning of the tent show in '45 up to the time of his death and selling of the Carson and Barnes line to Dory. So when we talk about Carson and

Barnes, that's what we call Carson and Barnes. When Barbara talks about Carson and Barnes, she's talking about our combined Carson and Barnes and Kelly Miller combination. Both views are valid, they're just different.

The old story is that the winners get to write the history, and it's not unusual. I don't view it as a lot different, then. We don't talk a lot about Kelly being one of the founding members of our line. Likewise, they don't talk about Jack Moore as being one of the founders of their line, but so that's just different perspectives and it is what it is. We concentrate on the—we were influenced mainly by the circus and the formation of the circus in our growing up years, the '40s, '50s, '60s. So that's why it had a strong influence on who we are, although we're dyed-in-the-wool towners now, and we don't like to get up at daybreak every morning and drive to the next town. Been there, done that, don't want to do that again, but I wouldn't necessarily give anything for the experiences we had. I don't know if that's what you're looking for.

Nykolaiszyn

That's fine, and we'll get to the early years of Carson and Barnes, but first, Martha, could you tell us where you were born, the year you were born, and a little bit about yourself?

Martha

Sure. I was born in 1950 in Jefferson, Texas, and I don't remember, of course, some of the early things. I've got a few pictures, but we moved to Hugo from Jefferson when I was two. Daddy moved us to this old fairground [was actually the site of an old cotton gin with a round barn]. We lived in like a tin shack and a small trailer and a little wooden house. It was just really God-awful, and Mother was horrified. I'm sure her family was, too, because her family was pure towners, and they didn't understand what Daddy was doing. He had the vision, and he had the dream. I remember bits and pieces about that fairground. There was a round, tin building that I think they used to have livestock in and that we sat up a ring in there, and it became like a practice barn.

And then my first real memory of the circus and doing a job was when I was six, and there was an act called Pick Out Pony, and that's where Daddy brought the small little pony into the ring and there was a rack in the center of the ring and it had numbers in the slot, these wooden plaques with numbers painted on them. And then the announcer would say, "What is two plus two?" and the pony would go over and pick out four and then drop it down in the dirt. My job was to be a pretty little girl and go pick up the thing and put it back in the rack. So I remember the very first time that I did that, Mother made me a little ballerina costume, and I went out. And whenever I went into the ring, in my eyes, it looked like it was in this huge coliseum and it was packed full of people, and it was way too much overload so I turned around and ran

out. (Laughs) I did get into trouble for that, too. But anyway, I went back the next show, and then that was my beginning of my performing career.

And then the next strong memory, I learned how to do some trampoline. Then when I was ten, Daddy needed a bareback riding act, and Lucy [Loyal] wasn't on the show by then. So he hired this man to train the horse and me at the same time. We didn't know that the man had a drug problem and whenever he was having trouble, he would take it out on the horse so then the horse took it out on me. And I was ten, and we'd be standing, getting ready to go in the back door, and the horse would reach over and stomp on me, try to bite me. There was a trick where you're going around the ring, and you're riding on the horse, then you put your foot in a loop and fling your body back over, and your leg is up in the air. Well, you're pretty vulnerable at that point. Well, he would wait until I got my leg all the way up, and then he'd reach around and try to bite my head. So I didn't develop a love of horses because of that animal. It wasn't the animal's fault. It was the guy who was not treating it right. When Daddy found out what this man was doing, he fired him. So I had one brief season as a bareback rider. And also what he would do is when we were going around the ring, he would wait until I got comfortable and was standing up on his backside and then he'd— (gestures)—there I'd go, spinning out. I'd go flying. But anyway, so that was when I was ten.

When I was thirteen, I learned how to walk the tight wire. Jerry Presley came from an old circus family. I'm not sure where they're all from. Anyway, she was very patient, and we started. That winter, Daddy moved the winter quarters to Hope, Arkansas. We do not know why he did it, but he did. We lived in a mobile home there on the fairgrounds and had all these barns. That's where Otto [the hippopotamus] had a wonderful place to live.

Mike Well, and you transferred school to Hope.

Martha Yes, yes, that was really my first exposure of prejudice against me because I was with a circus. Really redneck, very judgmental. Teachers even made comments.

Mike Unlike Hugo that was used to circus people, Hope...

Martha I never thought that I was any different than anybody else until I went to Hope, and then in Hope, Arkansas, the teachers would make comments about me being a white trash gypsy. Really, it was just devastating to me because I had never experienced any of that in Hugo.

Mike Bill Clinton's hometown.

Martha Well, that's all right. I mean, it was a pretty town, and the fairgrounds was a wonderful facility. We had a place for Otto, the hippo. Most of the year he lived in this big semi truck that had a pool of water set into it. So he had a place to get out and get dry and then a place to stay in the water, because they like to be in the water a lot. Well, this one they built a ramp for him to walk down, and he walked down into this big old pen, and he had made a big wallow, just like a pig. Whenever it got really cold, he would get all snuggled down in his wallow, getting mud all over him and everything like that, and it would freeze over him. And you'd just see these two puffs of steam coming out. It was really a neat thing to see. Anyway, I learned how to walk the wire that winter.

Mike When did you start working Mabel?

Martha Maybe about fourteen or fifteen years old. Mabel was like the first big—I mean, Daddy had the bear first, then he had the monkeys, then he got Mabel.

Mike Oh, yes, the chimp.

Martha The chimp. Anyway, Mabel was like a member of our family. She was such an endearing—and I'll cry—an endearing... (Cries)

Mike If you seen the movie *Water for Elephants* that talk about Rosie the elephant, and the relationship people had, or the circus people had with, I think her name was Rosie, it was very similar. I remember my first job—I don't mean to interrupt here...

Martha No, I need to not cry. (Laughter)

Mike ...was when we first got Mabel, let's see, in '53, so I would have been eleven years old. We were trouping that summer, and my job was to basically graze Mabel because we couldn't afford to buy much hay, and she ate a lot of hay. So Daddy had me take her around to anywhere I could find grass, trying to stay out of people's gardens and things.

Martha She always could sneak out and spot a garden. (Laughter)

Mike But so, my first job on the circus was basically being a caretaker for Mabel. A year or two later, Wanda and I performed with her in the circus, and it was much more of an issue of looking like we were in charge but staying out of her way, because she knew exactly what to do and when to do it and how to do it. And as soon as she did it, she got out of there. But she was a very gentle soul and a very hard worker. She

helped put up the tent, she helped take down the tent, she helped pull up the stakes, she helped pull trucks on and off muddy lots and everything in between, so...

Martha And she was ticklish. You could reach up underneath her right front leg and goose her a little bit and she would turn over and—[imitates elephant squeal]—squeal.

Nykolaiszyn *Did your father have a choice of elephants?*

Mike I don't know how the deal was struck between Dory and him. Dory had the Kelly Miller troupe of elephants. I remember they brought out about ten or twelve at the time. The Millers always carried more elephants than most circuses did. She was already a mature elephant when we got her. I'm guessing she was in her forties, but...

Martha And very easy to handle. Mature is the best word, I think.

Mike So since we didn't really have on our show, the first two or three years anyway, an experienced elephant man, it was a good choice because she was very easy to handle. She never once injured anyone or tried to injure anyone.

Martha No, in fact, one time I was doing—you saw that trick with Lucy [Loyal] standing up on top of Mabel. I was standing on Mabel's head and there was a loud noise, and she turned her head like that and I went flying, and she came undone. She bent down, put her head right next to me, and kind of pushed me a little bit to see if I was okay. So she was truly connected to us. And you could walk up to her and pat her on the backside of the trunk, rub the underside. She liked that real well, and so then she'd take her—hand me your arm—she'd take her end of her trunk and just wrap it around and squeeze your ankle. It was wonderful.

Anyway, I walked the tight wire when I was thirteen, fourteen, trampoline and web and ladder and elephants. What else did I do? Oh, also, when I think I was about fourteen, I would walk the rolling globe. That was the hardest thing I ever did. Walking up a ramp, walking down a ramp on a rolling globe is the hardest thing you can do. It's the hardest thing I ever tried to do. When I was sixteen, I learned how to do an act that I did not do. That's what they call the death slide. You learn to hang by your neck. If you don't know how to hang by your neck, literally, you can kill yourself pretty easily. There's a spot behind your ear where if you put the loop in the wrong way, you will not, so you really do have to learn how to do it. I was going to climb the ladder to the top of the tent and slide down. And for some reason, that act never happened even though I learned how to do it. Another act that my father wanted me to

do, it's the only time my mother told him no, after I told her I wasn't going to do it. Me just telling him I wasn't going to do it didn't mean I wouldn't do it. But we had—was it the Zacchini family who shot out of rockets?

Mike Cannonball.

Martha Cannonball?

Mike Human cannonball.

Martha Yes. And the reason I didn't do it is because Mr. Zacchini was—what's the right way to say it? He would not be safe for a young girl to be down in an enclosed space with, and so I wouldn't get down into the cannon part with him. The hardest thing about that was learning how to land in the net. Basically, it was a big tube that two people, or one person, would get down into, and it was just kind of like a big spring. They let go of the spring and it would shoot you out. The dangerous part was how you landed in the net. But he was too much of a dirty old man for me, and I wasn't going to get down in that cannon with him. (Laughs)

I really enjoyed web a lot, and you don't have to diet or anything whenever you're climbing a rope twice a day. It takes a lot of strength, and we would always get the rosin on our hands to help us climb. And when you put your hand up in the loop of the web, you'd get rosin on your wrists so by the end of the season, you had almost like a brown scabby callus around your wrist, and then also around your ankle so you could put your foot up in the loop and hang upside down and then swivel. So you'd get that callus around your ankle and your wrist by the end of the season. But it was fun. It was a fun thing to do.

Ladder was pretty boring. It was a thing just swinging back and forth and hanging upside down. That wasn't that big a deal. I remember one time, I think we were showing somewhere in Kansas or something, the winds were terrible. And the wind was picking up, and I was hanging upside down and swinging back and forth. I looked down on the ground and the center poles, which were holding the tent, which is what was holding me up, were lifting about a foot off the ground. You don't feel too secure with the center poles lifting up off of the ground.

Mike The wind had gotten underneath the canvas.

Martha Yes, the wind had gotten up underneath the canvas and was lifting the whole thing up. Basically, my day would consist of get up about five or six, depending on how long you could stay in that warm bed, and then it was my job and later on, my little sister's job with me. We'd get up and

pick up the lot. They would hire town kids in the evening to clean up the litter, but they always missed some things, and we had to leave the lot perfectly clean or we wouldn't get our deposit back. And so picking up snow cone cones and cotton candy cones and popcorn boxes and old drink things in the wet dew was what we did. We had to get it clean, and I started doing that when I was about six, I think. We'd do that, and then we'd get in the car, and I started driving the car when I was about sixteen. It was the last car following up all the trucks so in case any of the trucks broke down, we'd go get a part from the mechanic.

So I'd drive the car, get to the lot. Then you'd clean. I cleaned out a concession stand, and usually it was cotton candy or snow cones. And it was not pleasant, but it was something that had to be done. And then I would take up tickets or sell tickets on the sideshow. Then I performed in the sideshow a couple years. I did sword box and also, I was Miss Electra one year, where they have a copper plate. I stood on the plate barefoot and they ran electricity through it, and I held a florescent tube and it lit it up, and my hair would go out like this, and watches haven't worked right on me since. (Laughter) Computers go crazy. Mike can tell you that. Electronic things and I don't do together. They go crazy around me.

Then I would go and sell coloring books between the front door and the tent. I'd sell coloring books before the show started, then I had a robe on because I had my costume on underneath the robe, and I'd go to the back yard and get ready for the spec. You all have heard about spec, where they call it Spectacular, where they would have a parade of animals and performers that were going to be in the show make a big entrance and go around the track and go out. And then whatever acts I was doing that season, walking wire, riding the elephants, doing aerial things, that sort of thing. And then the end of the show, we had a couple hours between shows, and that was about the only time we had off. When I was a kid growing up, there were varying amounts of kids on the show, anywhere from five to thirty, all together. We would kind of run around together like neighborhood packs, go exploring and everything. And then when the evening show started, that was the whole thing all over again. It was a very full day. We worked six and a half days a week.

Sunday night was a ritual where you had to go out to eat and go to a movie. And sometimes we would follow the same movie from town to town to town, and it didn't matter because that was part of the ritual. That was what you did. And sometimes Mother wouldn't go, and we couldn't understand how she couldn't go to the movie. I'm sure she wanted some peace and quiet, because you imagine raising four kids and having a husband, and you working yourself, in a trailer that had no running water and sporadic electricity, and you have to do laundry and

cook. She did all the laundry, cooked all the meals, plus worked fulltime, plus took care of all of us. She had a very hard life.

Whenever you live in that environment, they call it mud shows, mud usually everywhere, dirt or dust blowing. You have to take baths and there's no hot water so you have to heat up the water to take your baths. You never could get enough hot water, enough water hot enough. So today, I still, whenever I take a bath, I take it all the way up to the top and get it as hot as I can stand it because I can, and also I leave lights on because I can. (Laughs)

Nykolaiszyn *Mike, your early life, did you do a little performing and then start more on the business-end?*

Mike Yes. I know you can't see this on the camera, but it's for your information. I tried to summarize the various jobs I had. The elephant watcher I've already mentioned and the elephant trainer, done in conjunction with Wanda, was more or less my second job on the circus. My next job was what was referred to as the sideshow canvas boss. I was in charge of several working men that when we would get to the next lot, we would unroll the canvas for the sideshow and banner line and whatever and erect it and prepare it. The sideshow then was mainly a menagerie. It wasn't Miss Electra-type acts that we had later. So it was mainly taking care of the animals.

The scariest event I ever had was one of the working men was showing off in front of some local girls and was going to hand a piece of meat to the lion, and the lion nabbed him. Of course, the lion was up in the cage. The working man was standing on the ground, and so he had his arm in the lion's mouth. I had to take a meat fork through the bars, get the lion off to let the guy go, which he did. And, of course, he was passed out, and there was blood everywhere. So that makes an impression on a young boy. The next type of job that I had—I might say, throughout all of this I did what was called a candy butcher, but I'll get to that in a moment. Another job I had was prop boss. Other than work the elephants and sometimes work a pony drill, I didn't do that much performing. I was what was called a prop boss. I was in charge of the people that were putting the elephant tubs in and out of the ring, putting up the wire walker paraphernalia.

Martha He was really important.

Mike Hanging the aerial rigging, doing all the stuff that you see guys screwing around doing at any performance venue, and that's...

Martha The whole show was really about timing. Everybody had to do their job

for all the other jobs to work so it wasn't an option of just not showing up or calling in sick. You didn't call in sick. I've taken up tickets with a temperature of 104 before. I've performed. When you're sick, you go on anyway. That saying, "The show must go on," is more real in the circus business, maybe, than any, I don't know. And Mike was particularly good at making everything move and work and connected like you didn't notice it. That's when it's really done well so whenever you don't notice the prop man, when you don't know, whenever everything just runs seamlessly. And in every lot we moved to, it was a different location. The sun was coming in a different way. All the electric lines had to be laid just right. Everything all had to work all the time.

Mike The job that I had for a number of years was as a candy butcher, which I don't know where that name comes from, but all that means is you're a seat vendor or you put up the stands out front. You prepare the popcorn, the snow cones, the cotton candy, the whatever, the Coca-colas, and you take it in and sell it in the seats.

Nykolaiszyn *Would you have a pitch you would say?*

Mike Not that much. It's like the peanut vendor at the Rangers ballgame. You may holler, "Peanuts!" but I didn't get much more elaborate than that.

Martha Michael is reserved.

Mike I didn't have a comedy routine to put on. Another job that we all had was referred to as a sail maker. Frequently our route would take us up through Oklahoma and Kansas, Nebraska, the Dakotas, where there is nothing to stop the wind, and the wind tears the hell out of the canvas tents. And so what we would frequently have to do is we'd spread the canvas out in the morning and then get the stuff that sail makers use to sew canvas sails and then sew the tents back together and put them up again. (Laughs) That was a job, a behind the scenes job, but a necessary job that many people had to do.

Another job that I had was as water boy, which for a number of years Daddy got an old fire truck from somewhere. Each morning I would go down to city hall and get a permit to open up a fire hydrant and fill up the truck and take it back to the lot and go around to the various animal locations and fill up their buckets. And then I would go around to all the house trailers. They would set their buckets out front by their door, and I would fill that up. I didn't get paid by the show, but I did get tips from those households that wanted water. (Laughs)

Martha And they changed that. By the time I was in my teens—or I started at thirteen, I think—they started writing a paycheck for me. I think it was

probably more for tax and their business records than it was for me, really, but that meant, then, I had to pay for my clothing, and whatever I wanted came out of that money. It was, I guess, more like an allowance, but it was in a paycheck form. Really, all of us on the circus did multiple jobs. You weren't just an aerialist or you weren't just a sword swallower or whatever. Almost everybody did multiple jobs. That was just the way it was. And you've heard the saying, "cherry pie?" What that means is that when anybody hollers "cherry pie," it means drop what you're doing and come and help because everybody gets a piece of the action. I loved those kinds of [sayings]. "Hey Rube," we didn't hear very often because, frankly, I remember very few times when there were fights or trouble on the lot or anything like that. One time I had a lot of changes that were really fast together. The lot was always set up the same way.

Mike If there was room.

Martha If there was room. It was always maybe oriented one way or another, but there was the midway and then on the left-hand side, I think, is where what they call the front yard was, and that was where the management people parked their trailers, and then on the opposite side of the big top was called the back yard, and that's where all the performers parked their trailers. Well, because our trailer was here and Daddy refused to let me go through the connector thing, I had to go all the way back around the back side of the tent to get back to the back door to go in. Sometimes I ran like crazy, but one time...

Mike Most performers were...

Martha Parked right there.

Mike ...their trailers were in the back yard...

Martha ... so you could make changes pretty easy, and sometimes it was scary because of the places that we were set up. But anyway, one night I came into the trailer, and there was a man sitting in the trailer. It wasn't locked because I couldn't carry keys anywhere, because I had on these costumes. And so I came into the trailer one night, and there was a man sitting in the trailer. And I said, "What are you doing here?" He says, "Oh, I have a meeting with your father." I went, "Oh, okay. Excuse me just a minute." I was going to go in the back of the trailer and change, and he started following me back there. I saw that he did not have good intent. So I leapt out the back door and went running and screaming for help. And, boy, I tell you what, everybody on the lot just kind of converged on that trailer and drug him out, and he was beaten up pretty badly.

It was very much a protective environment. I thought I was worldly when I left the circus, but I was actually extremely naïve, because I had lived in a very structured, safe environment my whole life. And that's probably the opposite of what people think circuses are growing up for kids, but everything was regimented. There was a time you had to be at a certain place, and there were no excuses for you not being there then. Everybody kind of watched out for you. I mean, there were lots of parents. All the eyes were your parents' eyes.

Mike

I'll interject my job story here. There's a couple of analogies that help people understand what it's like living on a circus, at least back in the '50s and '60s. Martha likes to use the analogy of it's like a farm. You get up early, you do your chores, you take care of the animals, everybody's got multiple jobs to do, everyone works very hard. And the parents, in particular, have a huge multitasking-type environment to go through. So there's, I think, a lot of similarities between the circus life and farm. I've never been a farmer, but I can imagine what it's like.

The other analogy that's particularly appropriate for Oklahoma is like an Indian tribe, a nomadic Indian tribe. You're self-sufficient, you're moving from location to location. You have a very tight-knit almost family-like feel, even though not everybody is a part of the same family. But it's a one-for-all, all-for-one type of mentality, and so I think the combination of those two environments are pretty close to what it's like growing up on a circus.

Martha

There was a saying that we used to have that if you had someone on the show and they stole money, for example, if they were selling tickets and they stole money, you just didn't let them sell tickets anymore. You found something else for them to do. They weren't automatically thrown away or ostracized or sent away because they were caught doing something or did something that didn't work. So I grew up with that belief that it's a really, a very non-judgmental [environment], because there were all different types of people from all different countries, a lot of different countries. All different walks of life and types of people were on the show. It wasn't that there wasn't a lot of judgment. There was judgment from the circus people about towners, and that was really pretty strong, but I understand why. As far as judgment of how anybody lived their life, like I said, it just wasn't there.

Mike

Some circuses, basically, did not treat the public well and were cheaters and had pickpockets and had all kinds of thieves. So the image that "towners" had, particularly back then, was not very high of circuses. What they would frequently confuse, however, is circuses and carnivals, which to the average person, they're the same. Circus people get really pissed off being compared to carnies. I'm sure carnies probably feel the

same way.

Martha

Well, yes.

Mike

But carnivals do have a little bit worse reputation than circuses do, and particularly these straight laced circuses, which I think ours was at the time, didn't feel that we necessarily got a fair shake with the attitude and opinions of people who didn't know.

Martha

The circus people thought that carnies were thieves, and the carnies thought that circus people were fools, because they didn't make as much money. So that was pretty clear. We both were still on—I don't know what kind of scale you call it. In the hierarchy of things, we're probably about equal, but one didn't think too much of the other, but we still thought that we were smarter than the townner people. I don't know what created that feeling, that we thought we were smarter. The reality is we weren't smarter, we were more flexible and more adaptive. We had to be because whatever came your way, what—weather or conditions. When we went in to California every year, we had to change several things to be able to go into the state. So we had to stop on a dime, change some things about the trucks, and change the way some of the setups were simply to be legal in California. So we weren't smarter by any means. Anybody who had lived that hard a life isn't too smart, really, but we were very close and very tight. And on our show in particular, people seemed to like to come back, and they would want to come for more than one season.

Mike

Other performers.

Martha

Other performers, other families, and so they would ask to come back on our show many times. Not every time, but many times. So because of that, as I was growing up the kids, they were like my neighborhood kids because we kind of grew up together, like the Loters and the Rawls and everything. So we knew each other over a series of years, because they kept coming back on our show.

Mike

Our father was a very Jekyll and Hyde-type person. He was extremely charismatic and charming when it had to do with the people that worked for him. And most people that worked for him, I would think as you interviewed them, probably spoke reasonably highly of Jack Moore and enjoyed their time on the show. The way he was with his family was quite different. He was a tyrant, because he figured out very early that he didn't have to be nice to us to keep us around. He had to be nice to those other people or they'd leave. And so we sometimes got the brunt of [his anger]. Looking back on it now, having owned a business of my own and so forth, I'm not sure I would have acted any differently, but I didn't

like it at the time. (Laughs) Although, he was not as hard on Wanda and I as he was on Martha and our younger sister Madelyn.

Getting back to my job description, there's two other things. One thing I did very early, starting when I was around fourteen like Wanda, was drive a truck. These trucks were not always in the best condition. The brakes sometimes were problematic. And going through the Rockies, like we frequently did, it was actually scarier going down the hill than coming up, because coming up you just put it in the lowest gear you had and creep up the hill. Coming down, you know that the brakes are not good enough to always stop you so you put it in the lowest gear again and just ease on down the hills. We had very, very few accidents so I guess the trucks were okay.

Martha You know the term, "Follow the arrows?" Did you all talk to people before about that? Okay.

Mike My last few years, particularly when I was in college—and by the way, Martha mentioned earlier about earning money on the show. I essentially paid my way through college completely with the money I was able to earn during the summer. Luckily, I had some small scholarship from OSU because I was valedictorian in high school, and that was like two hundred dollars a year or something. Tuition wasn't that much in the early '60s, but it still cost several thousand dollars a year to go to OSU. So in those years I worked in the office, which consisted of selling main show tickets, checking up with the committee after the show, paying some local bills. I never did the payroll, Mother always did that. And then I was in college by then. I was no longer working inside the tent. But I'd say '65 was the last year I trouped, so Martha and Wanda and to some degree, Madelyn, continued to perform up until the last year you were on the show.

Martha Yes, it was really a thing where if Daddy needed an act and he didn't have it, then he had to figure out some way for us to create an act, or something, to fill the hole in the program, basically is what it boiled down to. So that's how we ended up doing so many different things. By the time Madelyn came along, the show was bigger, and she didn't have to do as much. She did a dog act, I think. Oh, the other thing I did, too, was a seal act one year when I was about fourteen. They'd bite. (Laughs) But anyway, it was wherever the hole was, whether it was in sideshow or in the big top.

Mike Starting around, I don't remember which year in particular, but the early '60s, Daddy and Dory would go down to Mexico each year and book some acts. And these were frequently large families that really had their own circus in Mexico. They were playing real small towns and

whatever, and they would close the show down and here comes ten of them or ever how many. And between six to ten people, they might do twenty or thirty acts. Well, when you're trying to fill up three rings—and in some cases we had five rings...

Martha

How long was the show? Was it an hour and a half?

Mike

Right. Yes, there's a lot of content that you had to have, and these Mexican families, some of them were from Central America, but most of them were Mexican. So Daddy and Dory would go down there and get them through customs and then take them back at the end of the year, because they had to check them out.

Martha

We provided the living quarters and everything for those families.

Mike

And they ate in the cookhouse. So it was a good deal for them, and it was a good deal for us, but the...

Martha

And I learned a little bit of Spanish, so that's good.

Mike

...the performance tended to have a rather Hispanic look, except for the blonde and the occasional other person that would show up. (Laughter)

Martha

Yes, well, it was just a mixture, really, that's what the thing was. And like I said before, it was in an environment, it really didn't matter who or what or where you came from. You were a part of the show so you were a part of the show. You were dealt very much with on a person to person basis. Not to say that there weren't disagreements, there were. There were family feud-type things that happen any time you get human beings together. But we were all working so hard, we didn't have a lot of time for a lot of things like that, because the adults were generally, in the two hours we had between the show, taking a nap or resting a little bit, and the kids were out exploring. Sunday night was about the only time for any kind of social, true social activity.

Nykolaiszyn

How would you learn to do the different types of jobs you've had?

Martha

Well, like walking the tight wire, in the wintertime, the Presleys came to Hope, Arkansas, and every day after school, I went and worked in the barn, learning how to walk the tight wire. And on the death slide thing I learned, I was working on in between shows. And rolling globe I learned in between shows. I would use that as practice time. You know how you see circus movies and they show people walking around in their costumes all the time and practicing all the time? You're not going to do that at all. First of all, you're not practicing in wardrobe. It's too expensive and too hard to keep clean and everything. But if you needed

to do a new act, then in between the shows was about the only time you had to work on it.

Mike

The animal acts were normally broken in during the winter. Sometimes the circus would book animal acts, like the seal act she referred to, [Walter] Jennier had a seal act, and also his daughter was a contortionist and did some aerial acts. So they would book that family on for the season. Other times, we would book a herd of two or three elephants that could go along with the three that we had. And that was a standalone act that came on. There might be a horse act or the Loyals may have a riding act or something. They have their own horses. So a lot of times you would book acts that in the summer they would go out with a particular circus. In the winter, they would go around and play independent dates, like Shrine circuses that would book a set of acts for Kansas City or something. If it were in the case of the Mexican families, they would have a whole plethora of acts that you would pick and choose from between juggling and acrobatics and aerial and whatever.

Our father, in the later years, he didn't enjoy that much operating the show on a daily basis, but he really enjoyed putting it together every year. Starting in January, after Christmas, they would start putting it together, painting the trucks and going to Mexico and booking the seal act and whatever, producing the show, if you would. Once it opened, it's pure drudgery in terms of making it happen every day, but he really liked the creative aspect of putting the show together. (Laughs)

Martha

And we do all admire him having a very large dream and accomplishing it. His father had a small grocery store in Marshall, [Texas] and his mother was kind of a religious fanatic. She started a mission in Marshall. (Laughs) He tried many different jobs that he just couldn't settle in anything until he kind of went in the back door of show business. So I think all who knew him admired his drive to achieve his dream and his single-mindedness. It was not our dream, but because we were his family, we helped make it real. And so we're all proud of our accomplishment in that what we contributed to make it all come true because when he died, it was the second largest tent circus, and that's something in the country.

Mike

Of course, during the winter, his job was putting the show together. And I'm sure he would start thinking about it before the end of the year, but it didn't really get started until basically after Christmas. And the show would go out in March so there wasn't a whole lot of time there, two or three months. He would have to determine what type of equipment he was going to take, trucks, and what type of canvas he was going to use, and then, of course, what was going to be the makeup of the people on the show. A lot of people, such as the Rawls and the Loters, would come

back year after year. I don't remember exactly how many years, but those two families, in particular, were around for quite awhile. The Loyals actually were on the Kelly Miller show for many years and then a few years on Carson and Barnes.

But anyway, so the personnel, there were essentially three or four classes of—not classes. That's the wrong word—three or four different kinds of jobs on the show. There was, of course, the performers, which would sometimes do other non-performing related jobs, but more times than not were mainly doing multiple acts. Then there was the concession oriented people, the candy butchers, the people running the concession side of the business, both out on the midway and in the tent. The show owned the concession stuff and would basically hire a manager and hire candy butchers to do the concession related stuff. Concessions, like the movies today, are a significant source of income.

The next category of employment was the management staff, who were generally people managing the workers. There was a canvas boss that was in charge of putting up and down the tents. And inside, there was a prop boss, like I played for a while. There were people in charge of putting up and taking down the sideshow. There were people in charge of taking care of local business, going ahead of the show and making the arrangements for proper licenses and all that. There was the twenty-four hour crew that would go a day ahead and put up the arrows. Many times drivers would leave the lot and not have a clue where they're going, and if the arrows were not there, I always at least tried to remember the town I was going to. I didn't have any maps in the truck, but I would be careful in following the arrows.

So there's the twenty-four hour crew that goes just ahead of the show, making sure the lot's available and not underwater. And if it was, try to find an alternate. Going ahead about a week to ten days ahead of the show was the advertising crew that would put out the posters and slap the stuff on the side of the barns. We'd go by the various merchants in town and give them some passes, if they would allow them to put up a poster in their window and things like that. So there was the advertising crew. Part of Daddy's job, of course, was getting all those people hired and organized. Those people, too, tended to stay with you awhile, but there was some goings and comings. Since there were sometimes five or six different shows in Hugo, there was a pool of talent to pull from. Some of the people liked working for Show A rather than Show B.

Martha

Yes, there was a preference, generally, that people...

Mike

There was some preferences. So there's a lot of behind-the-scenes-type jobs, like...

Martha The fixer.

Mike ...the posters. There was a guy that was called a fixer. If somebody got hurt or there was a beef or the lot wouldn't get you your deposits back or some legal issue, then it was his job to BS the way through and try to get it resolved in your favor. Some of them were better at it than others.

Martha One of the best ones we had was Frank Ellis. I don't know if you've heard that name before or not, but if you talk to some other circus people, ask them if they knew Frank Ellis. He was a larger-than-life character.

Mike So in this class of behind-the-scenes-type players, there were other issues like the water boy that I mentioned and the working men that worked for the canvas boss or whatever, putting things up. Amongst this collection of people that would gather, you would also try to figure out, "Okay, who can drive trucks?" And so Daddy would frequently have to, in January, usually figure out "Okay," who his truck drivers are going to be. And if they didn't have licenses, he knew a place in Arkansas you could send off for and get driver's licenses for them, just give them their picture and then go back with kind of a driver's license. (Laughter) You did what you had to do to get it on down the road. I'm trying to think of the other groups of people. I guess those are the main ones. And so part of his job in producing the show was essentially...

Martha There's the mechanic. He was really important.

Mike Yes. We had a truck that, basically, it was like a wrecker. And sometimes we'd have to pull the trucks in, but you carry all your tools with you. And he was always rebuilding engines or transmissions or whatever, there in mud.

Martha I had to follow him. The electrician, that was really important.

Mike Yes, we carried our own light plant, and so you'd string cable all over the lot. And when Kay and I trouped, our living compartment was in the front end of the light plant truck. So you're sitting there, big old diesel engine. And so when the lights went off, you finally had peace and quiet, because they shut the light plant down.

Martha There was somebody else that we haven't talked about yet, and he was with the family for a long time. His name was Chief. We call him Chief. His name was Noah Newman, we think. We're not sure. But he was American-Indian. He said that he was half Indian and half Cherokee, so I don't know what the Indian part was, but that's the way he described it

himself. You know how back in the days, the medieval days, how people would kind of attach themselves to a duke or something like that? They would become like a vassal. He was, like, always there. He was with us all year long. So in the wintertime, like when we had the small little house outside the town of Hugo, it had a small barn, and we kept some of the animals there with us and some of them were out at D.R.'s. But some of them stayed with us, and he stayed in the barn with them and took care of the monkeys and took care of the elephants, primarily.

One time, he was moving a monkey from one cage to the other, and the monkey bit him. And then he bit the monkey back and the monkey died. That's how we found out that Chief had TB [tuberculosis]. That's true. (Laughs) But he was always very, very kind, and he seemed to be able to communicate with the animals on a subliminal level. At some point that wasn't conversation, he could get animals to go and move and llamas that are mean to calm down and everything. He would sometimes go buy presents for the children on the show, because he really didn't have any family that we knew of or anything. He was attached to us, in a way, so he might go to town to a novelty shop and bring us back a salt and pepper shaker or a scarf or something. He was very proud that he had picked that out just for us. He was a real special person that was with us for a long time. Actually, there were a lot of people that came back year after year that became a part of the core group that, year after year, traveled together.

Mike So in addition to pulling together—getting back to what Daddy did to produce the show—necessarily populating the show, because every season was essentially a new season. It's not unlike the Texas Rangers. Some of the people are the same, some of them are different. You get rid of some. You go out to acquire others. So there's some similarities there. The other part that he would have to do related to that, of course, is figure out the performance. "Okay, the first act is going to be this, and the second act is going to be three rings and around this, this, and this," and etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. In one of the eras, he got the idea that bigger is better so they went from three rings to five rings. All that did was...

Martha Complicate it.

Mike ...make the rings smaller and make more issues about, "Okay, how do you fill up all this stuff?" Well, the answer is Mexican acts that could do twenty or thirty things...

Martha That's whenever that changed.

Mike ...and whatever.

- Nykolaiszyn** *Now, in the earlier years, you were mentioning that he was bringing in kind of famous people.*
- Martha** Well, not early. Later, actually, is whenever he did the Tim McCoy and the...
- Mike** Tim McCoy started in '58 or '59.
- Martha** Was it then?
- Mike** Yes. And he was there for three years. And the Sky King was there in '64, '65.
- Nykolaiszyn** *What was the reasoning behind that?*
- Mike** Name recognition. Tim McCoy was a famous movie star of the Tom Mix era. This was right after talkies began, and he was originally brought to Hollywood as an interpreter for an Indian tribe they imported, Hollywood did, from Montana, I think. And Tim came along as the interpreter and sign language and all that stuff. Some enterprising producer said, "You're a tall, good looking guy. We're going to make you a movie star." So they did. And he was one of the top two or three western stars of his era. So that would have been in the '20s, I guess. So here we were in the '50s, which is thirty years later, but there's still a lot of people around that remember the Tim McCoy movies.
- Back in the '30s and '40s, it was fairly common to have Wild West shows. Buffalo Bill was the best known, but Tim McCoy had a Wild West show also that was quite large, but eventually wound up going bankrupt after two or three years. So he had a history of road shows. I don't know for sure how he and my father made connections, but he agreed to kind of be the headliner, if you would. And it was purely an attempt to—since our main routes were always in the midwest and in Canada—virtually every year we'd go to Canada, and the west. While Daddy had the show, we never once went on the East Coast or the southeast, in Florida or whatever. It was always kind of a Michigan, west...
- Martha** West of the Mississippi.
- Mike** We would go up into Ontario in Canada so that's about as far east as we'd go. We started going into Canada in the late '50s. There wasn't very many paved roads up there. They were mainly gravel and mud. But there also wasn't very much entertainment options, and so we had better luck showing the small towns in Canada than we did in the States. We

got into the routine of going to Canada each summer. I don't think they've been to Canada in a while.

So the production of the show—essentially, you've got to fill about, at any point in the year, between one hundred and two hundred positions. That's a fairly good job required, to do. Once the show went out, his main job was troubleshooting. If an issue came up with a truck breaking down or the canvas spool quit working or there was a local beef with somebody that felt they got cheated on something, then Dad would have had to do it. He was essentially a troubleshooter. During the performance he would pretty much serve as a ringmaster. I mean, he wouldn't dress up in a fancy suit, but he would make announcements and kind of oversee the ebb and flow of the performance.

Martha

And later, whenever he wasn't doing the ringmaster duties, a little bit after Mike had left the show he would sneak into—well, I say sneak in because you wouldn't know he was there—he would go into the tent and sit among a larger group of people so when you were in the show performing, you wouldn't see him there. And if he saw something that he didn't like, he would leave before the act was over with and be at the back door waiting on you whenever you got out. All the girls wore opera stockings, those mesh stockings, and you climbed the rope and you have rosin or you'd get on the elephant, you are going to tear them at times. Sometimes it happens during the performance. Well, that wasn't acceptable. You couldn't show up for an act with a tear in your stockings.

We also wore canvas slippers many times in the acts, and you would wear what were called slop shoes, which were almost like wooden Dutch shoes. And then your feet were in the canvas like ballerina slippers, and then they would go into the slop shoes. When you'd go to the edge of the ring curb and take the slop shoes off, and then you were in the act in your canvas shoes. So especially if you climbed up and did an aerial act, if the soles of your shoes had any dirt on them, then you also got into big trouble. And you never knew when he was going to be there.

Mike

So he was quality control manager.

Martha

Yes. (Laughs)

Mike

That was one of his jobs.

Martha

And, really, if he didn't like the popcorn or if he didn't like the snow cone or if he didn't think the cotton candies were big enough or he didn't like the way the pitch was done, I mean, he wasn't really a

micromanager. There were times he was micromanaging and other times he wasn't, but you never knew when he was going to be there. He kind of created this all-encompassing presence. You just never knew when he was going to be around the corner.

Mike The other type of job that he would do is a form of troubleshooting. General superintendent was another word for canvas boss. If he left for some reason, he would have to play that role until he was able to get somebody else to fill that role. So "fill in" type roles were part of what he did, too. He basically was the manager of it all, and whatever that entailed was whatever needed to be done. Now, what mother did...

Martha Well, in the wintertime, she was primarily concerned with the costumes, so the elephant blankets for the spec or any production number, which was usually the beginning and the end. Sometimes web, when girls came in and did web or ladder, they would wear the same costume, same style costume. For the most part, performers provided their own costume except when there were six or seven...

Mike Production...

Martha A production-type number. Mother and her sewing machine, and elephant blankets are big, and she would have Wanda help her many times and have other people help her and then always on the lookout to see where she could buy costumes. But they're kind of scarce, and they cost a lot. So in years where there wasn't a lot of money around then we made elephant blankets out of terrycloth and put big sequins on them. They didn't look too good up close, but from far away they looked great, and you could wash them. (Laughs) So she had to take that into consideration.

And the other thing, too, is that Mike mentioned earlier about the payroll. And people would come to her many times for loans, and she became the essential banker on the show. She did loan money out, and I don't think she was burned very often. And she took care of the insurance and tax paperwork and keeping receipts and keeping everything in the office orderly. And then besides that, like I said, she had four children and a husband in an eight-foot by thirty-foot space to keep clean, take care of, feed and clothe. Just going to the grocery store, trying to find some place that had laundry—the laundry was a major production. Now, Wanda did a lot of it, also. As Mother was taking care of the office so much, a lot of the laundry-type or grocery shopping thing fell on Wanda. So Wanda worked really hard doing a lot of household duties, plus doing performing and other things, too.

Mike An interesting side note on the banking thing and the Canada thing is

that, of course, the circus is a cash business. You're pulling in cash from selling tickets and whatever, and so you don't have a local bank account you can go down to and make a deposit in. So there were times when sizeable portions of cash would be basically stored under our mattress in our trailer.

Martha The trailer got very heavy.

Mike And in Canada, usually a few days before exiting Canada back into the States, I remember on numerous occasions going with Wanda and Mother with bags of Canadian cash into Winnipeg or someplace like that, going to a local bank, carrying in cash, getting it exchanged for US dollars. And you'd really get some strange looks. Here were this mother and two kids coming in carrying bags of cash, trying to get it exchanged to US dollars.

Martha One time we were, I think it was, in Calgary, and Mother wanted to put it in a briefcase, and it was \$100,000, and Daddy said, "No, you'll get robbed if it's in a briefcase, because you're going to look scared. I want you to put it in a shoebox and two paper sacks." And so Mother and I took—I carried the two sacks, she carried the shoebox, we walked into the bank, and we had \$100,000 in cash. It did freak them out. (Laughs)

Mike Now, they'd arrest you for money laundering or something. (Laughter)

Martha Yes, yes.

Finchum *Most years did it make money—or at least break even?*

Martha Well, no—mostly no.

Mike Well, it obviously did because we stayed in business, but, basically, my father plowed virtually all the money back into the show to make it bigger and better, bigger tent, another elephant, another whatever. So whatever money was made—it was just like I said. I paid my own way through college.

Martha It was very much up and down. There were seasons it was really great, and in those years he would go and buy an airplane. One time he had two airplanes, we had a brand new Lincoln, and we lived in a mobile home. Mother said we looked like white trash. (Laughs) And then there were other times whenever it was very tight. Things got sold during those years so it was very much up and down.

The business directly affected everybody's state of mind on the show, because the other performers who booked in had been on shows that

went bust in the middle of the season. And so everybody would kind of get scared. Everything would kind of get quiet. Everybody would kind of stay to themselves. In good years, there were a lot of parties on the lot. When you have a big circus tent and we had what you call a straw house, that means there's so many people, all the seats are taken that they have to take straw from the animals and lay it around the hippodrome track so people can sit down to watch the show, it creates a fantastic energy. The performers perform better, the audience applauds more. It's just that magic happens then. So it was very much an up and down thing.

Mike Again, it's like farming. There's good crops and bad crops, and so...

Martha Very similar.

Mike But we never closed in the middle of the season. We never went bankrupt, per se. There were some lean winters, but there was never a necessarily bad disaster like that.

Martha Like I was saying earlier, in the late '60s, we were charging maybe \$1.75 for an adult. And during that time period, it cost a minimum of thirty-five hundred dollars a day just to make expenses. We used to say, "to make the nut." You know where that story comes from? But anyway, that was a lot of money then. What would it be these days?

Mike Well, I remember visiting the show, probably—well, Dory was still alive so it would have been before '99. They were showing Carrollton, and I was in his trailer and he said, "Your dad would never believe it, but it costs us over twenty thousand dollars a day to keep the doors open." So it's probably more than that now. It takes money to do it. (Laughs) By the way, speaking of the trailers that they have now. Anytime I visit the show, which hasn't been in a while, and see these, basically, large semis with the walls that come out and satellite dishes on top and the running water and all this other stuff. Well, we never had anything like that. (Laughs)

Martha No.

Nykolaiszyn *What was your trailer like?*

Mike Well, for many years it was eight foot wide and about twenty feet long, and there was a man and wife and four kids.

Nykolaiszyn *And where did everybody sleep?*

Mike Wherever you could.

Martha Well, by the time Madelyn came along, the trailer was longer. It was probably closer to thirty feet long, which is a lot...

Mike Still eight foot wide...

Martha ...in a trailer, it's still only eight foot wide. Madelyn and I had bunk beds in the back, and then Mother and Daddy had the center bed, and then the couch folded out.

Mike By then, Wanda was married.

Martha Wanda was married, but Mike was either sleeping on the couch, or then he was gone. Or we had a camper on the pickup truck. Now, some years, a cousin came and traveled one year, and then she and I had the camper on the pickup or Madelyn and I had the camper on the pickup. To get some kind of privacy was really wonderful.

Mike Still no running water.

Martha There's no running water, and it was clean. We kept it clean.

Mike Yes, y'all had it easy. (Laughs)

Martha Yes. (Laughter) But it was clean, it was warm, and there was no air conditioning or anything. And we lived through it, I guess. (Laughs)

Mike Well, you can ask Kay. She trouped one summer, and we lived in the light plant truck with no running water and slop pot by the bed, or whatever. That was an experience for her.

Martha What happened because of living that way, growing up like that—in fact, one year, in '65, Daddy changed the winter quarters from Hugo to El Centro. We stayed in Hope one year and then came back to Hugo, and then that was in '63. '64 we were in Hugo, and then '65 he moved it to El Centro, California. Now, I don't know why he was trying to find another place, but he was.

Mike Part of that one, I don't know about Hope, but part of the California one, they ended the season on the West Coast. Rather than driving all the way back there, he decided to stay out there and open on the West Coast.

Martha Good business. We had good business in California, usually. Anyway, that year we spent the entire year in that small trailer. As where before, we would at least come back and have a mobile home where Madelyn and I at least had a...

- Mike** A ten foot wide deal.
- Martha** Yes, I had a room. We had something with a door on it. But when I left home, privacy became really important to me because it was something I could control. If I could close the door, and I have my own private space, that was considered the best of all possible worlds.
- Nykolaiszyn** *Where would you stay in Hugo when you were going to school?*
- Mike** Wanda and I stayed in several places, I think, but one of them was a two-story house across the street from—was it the Village Motel?
- Martha** Yes.
- Mike** Right there on the main street. There was a lady that took in boarders, and so we would stay there until school was out and then come in. One year, I remember we were way up in British Columbia, and so Wanda and I had to take the train over to Minneapolis and then down through Dallas. An aunt who lived in Commerce picked us up and drove us to Hugo so that was a long train ride.
- Martha** I went to thirteen different schools in all. I went to more schools than Mike and Wanda did, but because our situation had changed by the time I came along. It was a little bit different. And whenever he needed the act or whatever I was doing, I had to stay in. And Hugo schools or whatever schools I went to, I was really pretty lucky. I made good grades so they let me get by with not being there the whole time. And I lived with a wonderful couple, Ruby and her husband, Ruby and Doyle. He was an electrician. I don't even know how the connection was made, but they didn't have children, and so she took me in. I stayed with her a couple of years.
- Mike** There in Hugo.
- Martha** In Hugo from like September until the show came in. And I stayed with my aunt one year, and I stayed with another, Pat Roderick. She was the secretary at the high school in Hugo. Wonderful, wonderful woman. I mean, I was very lucky with the families that I stayed with. People just took me into their homes and welcomed me in, and I was very grateful to not have to be out on the show right then, because if I could stay in and finish school, that meant I had electricity and running water a little bit longer.
- Finchum** *Did you ever live in the Modern Trailer Park?*

Martha No.

Mike No. Oh, there in Hugo?

Martha There are a lot of stories. I always thought that should be a novel. (Laughs) A lot of stories. I did, actually. I spent one fall. I stayed with a woman named Dorothy Turner, and I stayed with her. And she was...

Mike In her trailer.

Martha In her trailer, yes, at the Modern Trailer Park. And one night, a man came in to romance her, and she said, "Get out of here! Jack Moore's daughter's in here." (Laughs) So there was always a lot scandal at the Modern Trailer Park.

Nykolaiszyn *Did you think that this was the life you wanted, you wanted to continue in the circus business?*

Martha Absolutely not.

Mike We both ran away from the circus and joined a home.

Martha Really, most of the kids that went to college didn't go back. If you didn't go to college, you stayed because that's the world that you knew. But once you left that world and kind of created yourself in the town world in a new way, it didn't happen very often. Now, what did happen is I am what I call a natural gypsy, and I ended up in work where I've traveled a lot. And I pretty much have to. My eyes need to see something new. They just have to. So I've traveled a lot because of that. I've taken the best from it, I think, because we were lucky enough to see the country like most people don't get to see it. Because when you travel on the back roads, the blue highways, through this country, I mean, we are so blessed.

The amazing things that you see, and you also get to see that there are a lot of different ways to do things. So the way that they may do it in Kansas is not the way that they do it in California or Oregon. But still, they're lovely places. And people are really, I think, more nice than not. A couple of times, in some places you would jump. You'd go into town, and you would encounter prejudice or attitude because you were with the circus, but most of the time people were just curious about you. So the travel, to me, the gift of the travel and the way that we traveled is a blessing. I don't understand why more Americans don't just get in the car and take off to see this country, because when you get off the freeway and get off the plane, there's amazing things to see.

I have some photographs that are taken by state signs of Mike and I or some of the other kids, and those photographs are real important to me, because we worked so much and were so focused on the show. Everything was about getting on the road, getting to the next town, setting it up, getting the show on, tearing it down, taking it down, going to the show. Everything was just like tunnel vision that we traveled all over the country, but we didn't get to see too many of the tourist-type spots. So when we did get to see them, they made a big impression on us. And any time that any of the kids on the show got to go somewhere off the lot, that was considered a big deal and a big adventure. So that's why those photographs of—even by the state highway signs, "Welcome to North Dakota," big deal, but it was a big deal to us to get to do something like that. (Laughs)

Mike Well, you mentioned another thing that's a takeaway that is basically, we learned a work ethic that has stuck with us over the years. I think very similar to the kids that grow up on a farm. They learn what hard work is. Some of them go back into farming, some of them don't, but the ones that don't go back into farming still take those life lessons with them. It teaches you how to work with people you don't necessarily like, but you realize you've got to work with them to get it done.

Martha It's a great place to learn how to be on a team. A team or a tribe, it's really the same type of mindset. All the parts have to work together.

Finchum *What do you miss the most?*

Martha I think that's one of the things I miss the most is that the working together to achieve a goal, because that doesn't happen a lot. When I say, "out here," I mean in the non-circus world. I'm married to a retired air force colonel now, and he said that that's what he misses the most. So I've also found, besides people that were raised on a farm, that I have a lot in common with kids who were raised in the military that have moved a lot, because you learn to go to a new school and be the new person all the time. So you learn to meet people, and you learn to also kind of hang back and watch and wait and see what people do, rather than what they say. Where on a circus, generally, if someone told you they were such and such, that's what they were. So that was probably my most rude awakening whenever I left the circus world and came to the town world. People didn't always tell you the truth and that, really, was probably one of the hardest lessons that I had to learn, all the masks and everything. They're more common in the everyday society. In our world growing up, what you saw is what you got. So that was a nice way to grow up.

Mike It was harder for any environment like that, whether it's an Indian group,

a farmer, or whatever, it's harder to wear a mask. People see through the other people, because they're living with them every day. So both of you learn to accept them that way or you learn to stay away from them that way. You are rarely surprised by something they come up with, because you live with them.

Martha

You know them, because everything is pretty close. It's a tight-knit group, and you learn who works hard and who doesn't. So when you need something done, who do you go to? You go to the people you know can do it.

Mike

And the other thing that you learn is that the people that choose to be on the show, or that you choose to be around, have a genuine interest in each other. Show people are a fairly close-knit bunch, and it's not just because of shared experience. I think it's because of the nature of the beast that we just talked about.

Martha

It's a pretty precarious existence when you stop and think about it. So I mean, if you're kind of living on the edge a little bit, it makes you appreciate some good things a little bit more, maybe, rather than if you've got a fairly safe path. You're not as worried or stressed out about it. I've always been kind of surprised at reactions whenever I tell people, they ask me where I was born or how I was raised, and for a long time I didn't tell them. I just said I was born in east Texas. And then as I got older, it didn't really matter to me too much what they thought, and so I've always been kind of surprised at the reactions I've gotten whenever I've told people that I was raised on a circus.

And there's one thing that I really object to is whenever you see a pundit on TV say, "Oh, this is a circus." I'm thinking, "Well, if it's a circus, it was run pretty well. It operated like it was supposed to." (Laughs) But they're referring to chaos, and it was kind of like the antithesis of chaos because chaos wouldn't have succeeded, wouldn't have been able to pick everything up, pack it away, move to the next town, and reset it up again. I mean, actually, the circus is the opposite. So I think it's very strange when they call a chaotic situation a circus.

Mike

They're really referring to the multitasking aspect nature of it, which definitely existed, but that's not totally unique to the circus. I could have, obviously, at the time I grew up, I was still in college when Dad died and so forth, but it would have been relatively easy for me to step in and carry on with whatever, but I never really had a desire to. And I really felt at the time—this was in the '60s—that there would not be any traveling circuses in another ten years from that time, because of the growing expense, all the laws, the PETA, all of the issues that were, from my viewpoint then, was not going to make it. It was going to

become like a buggy whip maker, something they did at one time, but no longer works. So I've always been amazed that here we are, fifty years later, and Carson and Barnes is twenty miles from here, still showing.

Martha Cirque du Soleil has kind of taken on the newest version of it where it's a mixture of more Broadway than it is circus. I mean, they don't have animals so to me it's not a circus, because they don't have animals. To me, it's a Broadway-type production, an amazing, incredible, entertaining—there's a reason it's so successful.

Mike But there are as many canvas shows today as there was in the '60s.

Martha Really?

Mike Yes. There's always been somewhere between ten and twenty shows in America that are out there slugging it out, which I would have never believed, then.

Martha Well, in retrospect, I can see how really, really lucky we were to have had the experience. I mean, it was really rich field experience. As a kid, in the middle of it, I couldn't try out for cheerleader because I couldn't go to cheerleader camp because I had to work on the show. It's not like I had to work at the drugstore down the street. I was out on the show somewhere in Canada during cheerleading camp. Well, I lived because I didn't become a cheerleader, but at the time, I was just devastated because I couldn't try out for cheerleader. But I didn't learn how to swim, and have a couple of bad consequences from that, because we were working.

So it's like a whole segment that you all experienced growing up of playing in the neighborhood or going to summer camp or learning how to go into the swimming hole or whatever, we didn't have, but we had so many other experiences, too. So to me, I've never really understood also, why people are particularly interested in the circus business, because to me, that was my normal. That was the way life was. You got up in the morning, cleaned up the lot, drove to the next town, set up the show. I mean, that was my normal neighborhood, and I guess the unique situation of it still isn't there. It's not unique to me.

Finchum *Well, today, do you travel in a mobile home?*

Martha No, no. (Laughter) But I would. I would definitely rent an RV. I wouldn't buy one. I'd rent an RV and go somewhere and camp out and have a great time. I really would, but they have running water now. (Laughter)

- Finchum** *When you were performing, did you have a favorite venue, like a favorite town that you performed in?*
- Martha** No. Many of the towns kind of ran together. There was an experience that we had that was really unusual. We showed up in—this was in British Columbia, Victoria, British Columbia, and it was there during a centennial of some sort, and we had a week long booking in one place. That was like nirvana. The most we ever got to stay someplace, sometimes we would have a two-day booking in a town, and everybody was ecstatic when that happened. But we had a whole week, and then we were performing the same celebration at this big centennial park where the Rocky Mounted Police...
- Mike** No, it was the Royal Canadian.
- Martha** Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and we got to meet all of them, and they showed us the film of their training camp, and it was a fascinating experience, and then we also got to go on TV. We did the circus twist. They had their own version of American Bandstand, and so there were about six or eight of us teenagers on the show, and they let us go on the TV, and we made up this silly version of the twist and called it the “Circus Twist.” So that particular week really stands out. And then I also loved California because of the weather. It was so much nicer. And anytime we could get near the ocean, it was just a wonderful thing to see. But in Canada it was illegal to show on Sundays, so in Canada, the other reason all of us liked to go there was we got a whole day off. So that was also fabulous. We worked six days a week instead of six and a half days a week.
- Nykolaiszyn** *When your mother retired, did she want to continue on? I know she ran it for a little bit.*
- Mike** She only went one or two years after my father died before she sold it to Dory.
- Martha** Yes, she retired.
- Mike** That was in '70, '71, and she died in '97. So she had twenty years there of retirement in Jefferson. She did marry again, to Ted Akeman. He died in '85, and so she went another twelve years after that. Her health was not good the last five or ten years of her life. She had some struggles, but I never heard her say that she hated the circus...
- Martha** I did.
- Mike** ...but I never heard her say she loved it.

Martha I heard her say that she—it was very hard. She had the hardest role of all. She absolutely had the hardest time. To do everything that she did and then—because also, whenever you take up tickets—she took up tickets on the front door many years—and whenever you’re working with the public, that can be quite hard. And sometimes people would be drunk and would come up and want to kind of charge their way through or somebody would be upset and start screaming and cussing at her. Mother was a very sensitive person, and she didn’t particularly like working with the public anyway, but to have to do it twice a day, and you have to stand on your feet for a long time. So it was physically hard besides being emotionally hard on her, because of her personality. She was really a fairly quiet person. And to have to have somebody in her face, screaming at her, cussing at her over something silly, it was hard on her. I think that she had the hardest job of all of us.

Mike Putting up with us didn’t help. (Laughs)

Martha I know. One of the greatest things about the whole thing were all the characters that we—all the people that were on the show, people like Oddy Doddy. He was the pitch man that after the show was over with, people would come down the midway, like, leaving and going back to their cars, and he would have this big platform thing set up with a big umbrella over it [with lighting]. He’d start talking on the mic, luring them to come over, and he’d start selling them things. Things they no more needed than the man in the moon, but he was so good that you wanted to buy something from him. (Laughs)

Mike Very much like pitch men you see at the state fairs these days. Whether they’re selling pots and pans or selling something else, they’re awfully good at what they’re selling.

Martha He was very, very good. He had a wife named Veda, who, to me, as a little girl she was just like the ultimate of a glamorous...

Mike Sophisticated.

Martha ...sophisticated woman. She had Capri pants that were leopard. She had her hair all fluffed out like she wore a headband. She wore dangly earrings. I just thought she was the most exotic creature, and so I started following her around everywhere she went like a little puppy dog. And she had a jewelry stand, and so she taught me how to engrave the—because it had like those little aluminum hearts and things, and so I wanted to help her. So she taught me how to engrave, and I still have a cake pan that I used to practice on where I wrote the names out with that.

There were a lot of interesting people. There was also Vernon the tattooed man. He was tattooed all over, except for his face. Even the top of his head was shaved, and he had bright orange carrot hair, and he wore it with bangs all the way across and straight down here and then cut off here, kind of like a Dutch boy. (Gestures) And on top of his head he had a tiger face tattooed so he'd take off his hat and show his tattoo. Then he had letters tattooed on the whole inside of his fingers. He had this real complicated thing where supposedly he could write his sentences with his hands, and he never showed me anything I could read, but he was convinced. (Laughs) And I asked him, I said, "Vernon, why did you do that to your body? Doesn't it bother you when you take a bath?" And he said, "No, after awhile you get used to it. You don't see it." And I said, "Well, why did you really do it?" He said, "Well, I wanted to be in show business, and I didn't have any particular talent." So he tattooed his entire body. (Laughs)

Nykolaiszyn *Do you all have favorite circus memories that you always go back to and tell family when you all get together?*

Mike Probably most of them revolve around Mabel.

Martha Yes, Mabel's the best.

Mike Anytime I show a picture of growing up on a circus, I show the one with me standing in front of Mabel so about that and just the general stories that we've talked about here. I have more good memories than I do bad memories. The bad ones are pretty bad, but the good ones are also good. I'm proud and thankful for what I went through. I just wouldn't want to do it again. (Laughs)

Nykolaiszyn *Where do you see the circus going in the next ten to twenty years?*

Mike Well, I've already told you I'm a pretty bad forecaster of where it's going, although I suspect it's getting tougher and tougher and harder. The Cirque du Soleil thing has created "a new interest in circuses," if you will, or they wouldn't have five or six of them, ever how many they've got in Las Vegas. So there's an audience there and that has increased the interest in circus, but it's also changed what people think a circus is into this Broadway-type—what I call a Broadway-type production with incredibly skilled performers. They have some really incredible acts, but to me, it is not the circus as we knew it, or even Carson and Barnes today, which is still a tent show.

I really don't know which one of those two will win out, whether it's the Cirque du Soleil-type indoor show or the Carson and Barnes mud show,

which still retains much of the look and feel. I don't know what it's like living with their fancy trailers and dish antennas and often staying like they are now for ten days in Fort Worth. That's a different environment than we had, but it's still a circus. And my thoughts go back to my freshman composition paper in freshman English at Oklahoma State, I wrote a paper called "The Ever-changing, Never Changing Circus." And the premise was basically how things had changed over the years, but not really. And that the circus was still largely the circus, and that's going on today which is fifty years later. So who's to say it won't be here another fifty years, in some form?

Martha I think, as humans, we just love live entertainment. I think it'll just kind of morph and change, and I don't think it's going to be a whole lot different a hundred years now. I think there will probably be a virtual circus at some point.

Mike I think where it's getting tougher is for the animal acts. There is animal abuse, just like there are people that abuse their dogs.

Martha Or other people.

Mike Or other people, but the point being is that as Martha mentioned earlier, the fact is that we depend on our elephants just like a farmer depends on their horse. And you're going to take care of those because your livelihood depends on them. And I think that's where the circus image, if you will, has suffered because of people that don't really see that or don't choose to see it or don't understand it. I did not see a whole lot of animal abuse over the years with all the different people that were on the show for both the animals that we had or people that had their own animals like an elephant act or a seal act or whatever.

Martha It was like that man that I told you about with the horse. The minute Daddy found out about it, he fired him. He didn't care what the man did on his own time, but he didn't want him abusing the animal. And so the animals, I would say, were every bit or maybe even more important to Daddy than the people were, because he really took great care to make sure that the animals were fed regularly, always had water, that their cages were clean. There was always the sense that the animals came first because they couldn't help themselves. So that was the number one rule in the whole show was the animals were taken care of. Anytime there are animals involved, unless they're running free, if they're in a human environment, there are going to be issues. But within that human environment, they can be treated cruelly or decently, and our experience was that they were valued and treated as well as they could be for that venue.

I think it's really important that people get to see wild animals, and not everyone will go to a zoo, but they'll go to a circus. So in a way, it helps like a little five or six-year-old little boy or girl to see a lion in person or to see an elephant. Then they get the idea, it makes it more real for them. So later on in their life if an issue comes up, maybe about being an environmentalist or not, they remember that their actions have consequences. So I always thought that any kind of exposure to a wild animal was a good thing for them to see.

Nykolaiszyn *When we look at circus history, how would you like to see your family remembered?*

Mike Well, I think Jerry Fox did a good job in pulling together this video that you saw earlier that kind of tells our story from our line on the tree, pretty much as it happened, as long as that story and whatever you all do and so forth. And if we ever wind up writing a book, which we may or may not do, because there are lots of stories to be told that people seem to have an interest in. I think that we're in much better shape now than we were two or three years ago along those lines with the story being out there. So I'm not too worried about how the Moore family, if you will, will be portrayed now that we've gotten this far.

Martha Now.

Mike I think our legacy will be one of a family that built basically something from nothing. And yes, we had help along the way. We had partnerships along the way, as most people do. But the show that is currently called Carson and Barnes, there would be a circus out of Hugo if our family had never existed because there was a legacy there, and there was an ongoing family there, there would be a circus. It just wouldn't be a circus called Carson and Barnes, because that got started this way. And as I said earlier, our interest in the circus, our understanding of the circus, our knowledge of the circus really spans about a thirty year history, '40 to '70. And so when we say circus, that's what we're talking about. When other people say circus, they obviously are coming at it from a different history and a different viewpoint and that's valid, too. It's just that when we say Carson and Barnes circus, we have a 1968 image, which is now, what? Forty-three years ago.

Martha Well, to me, it died whenever Daddy died.

Nykolaiszyn *Is there a story behind his stone at Showmen's Rest?*

Mike He died in March of 1969, and Mother made all the arrangements. There was a Showmen's Rest, then. There weren't very many people in it, but there was one there. I don't know the story of how it got to be

configured as a circus tent.

Martha I always thought it was kind of ironic because, actually, the tent itself used to torture him. That it would get dirty, it would get torn, and it really bothered him whenever the tent started looking raggedy. And I always thought it was a little bit ironic that his monument was the tent because that was kind of his...

Mike Well, but it's a perfect shaped tent that doesn't erode and doesn't...
(Laughs)

Martha Well, okay, okay. He actually was so much in love with the animals. He had asthma and...

Mike He was allergic to animals.

Martha ...and dealt with them anyway despite—he would have terrible episodes of asthma after an act or whatever, but he would do it anyway because he loved handling, he loved the training of the animals. I've got some great photos of him with a bear and with the—we had a lion in our kitchen in Marshall, Texas for a while. (Laughs) And the lion would roar at night and really upset the neighbors. He obviously didn't care so I think that the history and legacy is really his—it's our legacy, but he started it, and he had a dream, and he made it come true.

Nykolaiszyn *Is there anything else you'd like to add before we close out today? I know we only scratched the surface.*

Martha Yes, I mean there are lots and lots of stories. There are a lot of characters that are larger-than-life characters. A lot of experiences we've had and what I've—if we do the book, it will probably be—the only way that I can start on it is by taking a photograph and just write everything I know about that photograph. That's the only thing I can do about it so I thought if all three of us did that, that at some point we could pull it together into something.

Nykolaiszyn *Well, we really appreciate you taking your time out to talk with us and help us fill in the gaps.*

Martha Sure, was it what you wanted?

Nykolaiszyn *Oh, absolutely. Thank you so much.*

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