

LAUGH, CLOWN, LAUGH!

By JOSEPH W. LaBINE

Three months ago a spangled crop of circus performers hit the sawdust trail amidst promises of the biggest season since 1929. Today, many of them are hoping to get home without selling the tent.

The circus season has hit rough waters; in some parts it has flopped altogether.

At Scranton, Pa., a few weeks ago, the "Big One," Ringling Brothers, Barnum and Bailey, folded its tent in a sea of mud and headed back to winter quarters at Sarasota, Fla. Strikes, poor attendance and rainy weather was responsible.

This thing wouldn't have happened in the days of old P. T. Barnum or John Ringling, peers of the circus world. But it happened this year, for the first time in 54 seasons; it happened in a profession whose followers traditionally carry their banner through mud, water, starvation and payless paydays. We recall something about that old bromide, "The show must go on!"

Maybe the performers aren't doing their part, but that isn't likely. Maybe the audience is to blame, for the circus has won popular approval more than half a century with the same elephants doing the same tricks and the same clowns turning the same somersaults, year after year.

Time Passes, Customs Change.

These past 20 years have been fraught with change in the entertainment field. "The Perils of Pauline" on the silent screen gave way to talking pictures; chautauqua expired as a popular pastime, because people no longer cared for that kind of culture; the radio came along and made provincial America cosmopolitan.

Through it all came the circus, unchanged. Whenever a progressive manager suggested adopting a new technique there was always someone to object, because the circus is one kind of entertainment that thrives on pure sentiment. It's always been a ballyhoo game, a loud-mouthed bag of tricks which everyone knows to be phoney but enjoys for that very reason. It's never been bigger than the man in the checkered suit and derby hat who yells "Right this way!" out of one corner of his mouth, the other corner being preoccupied by a cigar stub.

So maybe the audience is to blame for the Ringling recession. Maybe father's getting tired of sitting on a hard bench year after year, eating indigestible peanuts and watching the elephants. Perhaps America is now revolting against the old-time circus just as it revolted against chautauqua.

They Call It "Collegiate."

But you can't make the old time sawdust-trail followers believe that. If the "Big One" never hits the road again, veteran circus men will always insist that it died because John Ringling North tried to mod-



ernize the show this year and thereby destroyed its charm.

That's a fruitless argument because John Ringling North, grandson of "Old John" Ringling, insisted he was only trying to regain a bit of the old Ringling touch by arranging new costuming and hanging for the circus this year.

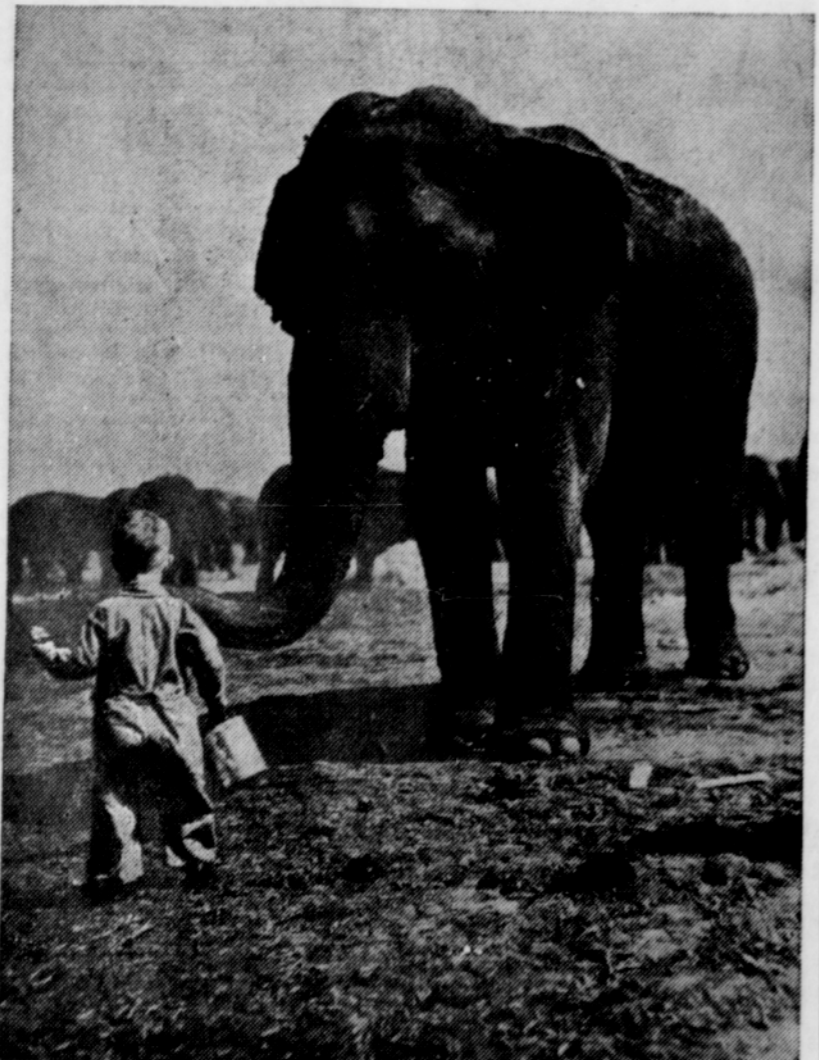
Under the Smaller Tops.

North is a Yale man and there were mutterings last spring that the circus was going collegiate. Perhaps it was collegiate to import a giant gorilla, "Gargantua the Great," and set him up for exhibition in an air-conditioned cage, enclosed in steel bars and shatter-proof glass. Perhaps other minor innovations were collegiate. But it will be hard for John Ringling North's critics to put their wagging fingers on the exact reason why his circus failed this year.

Maybe it was the entertainment;



THE HARD WAY—It's bad enough to merely stand on a tightwire but Hal Silvers, veteran big top aerialist, chooses to jump through a stick held by his two hands. It's a good constitutional, says Hal.



BIG AND SMALL OF IT—This youngster feeds his "elfunk" friend some peanuts at winter quarters, Peru, Ind.

maybe it was the public; maybe it was the management.

Fortunately the Ringling recession has not made itself felt so acutely among the lesser circuses. Probably it's because these smaller units play largely to non-metropolitan audiences who haven't felt bad business conditions so acutely. Certainly there's no drought so far as numbers are concerned; the current season boasts six railroad shows (two of them brand new) and 16 to 20 truck shows. Add to that more than 150 carnivals and hundreds of fair and celebration units, and you have a picture of the 1938 circus field.

Tim McCoy of motion picture fame is reviving the days of the 101 Ranch and Buffalo Bill. Clyde Beatty and his cats frolic with the Cole Brothers circus, which has a second show on the road under the name of Robbins Brothers. Then comes Al G. Barnes-Sells-Floto circus and the Hagenbeck-Wallace show. Most of these are railroad shows with 20- to 30-car trains.

This year's experience in the circus industry only goes to prove you should never count chickens before they hatch. Last April the boys in winter quarters said it was going to be a bigger year than 1929, which somebody is forever dragging out of the closet for purposes of comparison. They looked at the greatest advance demand for bookings since the present crop of sawdust was an acorn, and they looked back on two preceding seasons that were the best in years.

From George A. Hamid of New York, one of the biggest eastern bookers of acts for circuses, fairs, carnivals and celebrations, came reports that the demand for new and unusual acts far exceeded the supply.

"We could book hundreds more if we could find them," he said. "The demand for acts for celebrations, such as those around the Fourth of July, is three times what it was last year."

Circus in Retrospect.

Old P. T. Barnum, were he alive today, might say the industry has become so big and complex that it's collapsing. The man who started out many years ago with a combined museum-menagerie-circus might scoff at the huge institution his successors now tote around so painfully on special trains.

Certainly it's a far cry back to the night of April 22, 1793, when George Washington watched John Bill Ricketts leap through a hoop from the back of his galloping horse, regain his footing and do a dance on the saddle. That was one of the simple joys of a simple people, yet circus showmanship today is substantially the same, merely augmented.

It can be recalled that even in the earlier days the circus was a humbug proposition. P. T. Barnum, an old man when he reached the prime of circus life, chortled with inward glee at being called the "greatest humbug of his time." He knew the value of advertising and was a genius at getting his name in the paper.

It's interesting to speculate what will become of the dainty French equestrienne and the almond-eyed maid from Tokyo, the Hindu mystic and the rosy-cheeked English athlete, all of them members of the Ringling circus, all of them temporarily out of a job now that the "Big One" has closed shop for the year.

For old followers of the open road this will be a catastrophe. It will be summer, with no circus tent to move night after night, no blaring midway. Just summer with green grass, birds and free air, a phenomenon many of them have never before seen.

This summer you're apt to find some top-rank circus talent filling out the season with smaller shows, anxious to make a living however they can.

And next fall they'll find the road that leads back to winter quarters and home, or wherever they spend the cold months. Many of them will shake their heads and mutter: "Never again—I'm through."

But next spring they'll be around again and somebody will remember the bromide:

"The show must go on!"

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"He Wanted to Live"

By FLOYD GIBBONS
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Today, I've got a swell yarn for you. It's the story of one of the greatest disasters in the history of the Virgin Islands—yes, and it's a lot more than that, too. It's the story of a heroic deed and a darned swell illustration of what the will to live will do for a man—or a boy. Fellow Adventurers, let me introduce to you Harry Ziellian of Brooklyn, the man who wanted to stay alive. And now let's get on with his story.

It starts in St. Thomas on the Virgin Islands in the year 1907, 10 years before the United States acquired that territory from Denmark. Harry's father was a judge under the Danish government. He lived in St. John, but Harry and his brother Ed had gone with the local cricket team to play a match with the team of the St. Thomas high school and were returning on the sloop Sea Gull. There were 21 people on the Sea Gull including the entire St. John cricket team and a woman with four young children. They set out from St. Thomas about six-thirty in the evening on July 13—sailed out of the harbor close-hauled in a freshening breeze.

Their Sloop Capsized in the Gale.

In three-quarters of an hour that breeze had become a gale. A few moments later a "spinner" struck the sloop broadside and knocked it completely over.

In less time than it takes to tell it the sloop capsized and sank. Harry was sitting at the stern, and he dove into the water as she went over. He called to his brother who had gone below a few minutes before the spinner struck but he got no answer. For a while he treaded water. As he did so he felt a small body rub against his and raised it to the surface. It was a little boy—the four-year-old son of the woman who had been aboard the Sea Gull with him. He was dead, and Harry let his body go again. It was four miles to shore, and it would be a miracle if Harry got there himself.

Three Began the Long Swim.

Four miles to shore in a raging gale. Yes, it would be a miracle if thirteen-year-old Harry Ziellian made it. But Harry wanted to live. He turned toward land and began to swim.

He had barely started when he saw his brother Ed and his pal, Jimmy, passing him. He called to them and told them not to swim so fast—to save their energy if they ever expected to get ashore alive. Guided by the lighthouse at the entrance to the harbor of St. Thomas, they swam on.

"For a while," he says, "we could hear yells and cries from people who were still afloat, but after an hour all was still except for the break of the waves as the wind continued to lash the sea to fury. We swam for another hour, then Jimmy began to tire. Soon he was in a bad way.



Harry dove as the sloop went over.

I swam to the windward side of him, the better to protect him from the waves and put my right hand under his left armpit. When I got tired, Ed would relieve me. This went on for quite a while but eventually Jimmy became so tired he couldn't raise his hand. He sank for the first time and grabbed my shirt as he came back to the surface. I went under and would undoubtedly have drowned if Ed had not come to my assistance."

Ed kept Harry's head above water, but poor Jimmy went down. He clung to Harry a few seconds and then sank. There was nothing Harry and Ed could do about it. They were lucky to get out alive themselves.

Both boys were tired now—dog tired. BUT THEY WANTED TO LIVE. They kept on swimming. "We had been swimming for at least three hours," Harry says, "and the shore seemed no nearer than before. Suddenly we heard a voice calling and for a time we did not answer for fear it might be a drowning man who would pull us down with him as Jimmy had almost done. But at length we swam in that direction and found Louis, Jimmy's brother, captain of the Sea Gull."

How the Two Lads Saved Louis.

By this time all three of them were all in—so far gone that they agreed to swim apart so that if one went down he wouldn't try to drag the others with him. They swam for another hour. Then, suddenly they heard Louis calling. "I'm going down," he shouted. "I've got a cramp in my leg!"

Ed and Harry swam to him. One on each side, they held him up until the cramp had passed. Louis kept his head. If he had lost it and fought them, all three would have gone down together. After that they swam on again. They were swimming in a daze, almost dead with fatigue, BUT THEY WANTED TO LIVE!

More hours passed. They kept on swimming. At last they felt bottom under their feet and half-stumbled, half-crawled up on a sandy beach. It was then between two and three o'clock in the morning and they had been swimming for seven or eight hours. Exhausted, they dropped on the beach with the waves lapping their feet, and fell into a dead sleep.

It was morning and the sun was shining brightly when Louis awakened the other two. They walked up the beach in search of other survivors, but there were none. Then they walked to the cabin of a native woman who fed them and got a boat to take them home.

There's a sequel to that story. A month later the H. M. S. Ingolf of the Danish navy steamed into the harbor, and shortly after that the officers of the ship were drawn up before Harry's home while Governor C. M. T. Cold presented Harry and Ed with life saving medals awarded them by the king of Denmark for their rescue of Louis. They wanted to live, those two kids—but they weren't too busy at it to help the other fellow.

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Prairie Chicken Hard to Shoot

The prairie chicken, owing to its wariness and choice of open range as habitat, is one of the most difficult of game birds for hunters to bag. It usually rises far ahead of the hunter and out of the range of shot.

Name Murray Means "Seaman"

The name Murray is of Celtic origin and means "seaman." We consider it a different name from Murphy, Murtagh or Murrough, but it is only a little different, says an authority, as these last three all mean "sea warrior."

World's Robust Health

The world's robust health shows itself in the way it gets through times of transition, floundering always with each new ledge it reaches, but climbing ever upward.

Young Spiders Take Flight

In autumn each year young spiders take flight like the birds. They spin a thread and allow it to fly in the wind. The insect cuts this loose and clings to the end, and if conditions are favorable it goes on a long voyage.

Earliest Battle of Armageddon

The earliest battle at Armageddon so far known, was fought in May, 1479 B. C., when Thutmose the Third of Egypt defeated the Asiatic allies. This feat was duplicated in September, 1918, A. D., when General Allenby led a British division against Turks near the site.

Identification of Handwriting

Identification of handwriting is a matter of great importance in law cases which involve questioned documents.

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And Plenty of It

"Don't you ever do anything on time?" roared the boss to his new clerk. "Sure," said the clerk. "That's how I bought my car and radio."

Z-Z-Z-Z!



Prairie Dick—Well, what does that tenderfoot I shot think of me in an argument? Friend—Not much; he says you nearly bored him to death.

On Every Hand

The stump orator was attempting to raise the crowd to a pitch of enthusiasm. "What," he bawled, "do we see on every hand?" "Four fingers and a thumb," came a voice.

What's This?

Mistress—You know, I suspect that my husband has a love affair with his stenographer. Maid—O, I don't believe it. You are only saying it to make me jealous.—U. of P. Punch Board.