

Interviewee: Peters, Margie
Interviewer: Shannon Calloway
Date: February 27, 2008
Category: FSU; Circus
Status: Open
Tape location: Box #57

Calloway: Ms. Peters. you are aware that this is being recorded?

Peters: Yes, I am

Calloway: And that's okay with you?

Peters: Yes

Calloway: Okay. What brought you to the FSU Circus to begin with?

Peters: Well, I went to school at Florida State University. and while I was at school I had to work. And I ended up getting a part time job with the Circus. in the office. It was on OPS basis, and I started working there after I was in classes. And so I became familiar with it. And then my husband and I graduated from Florida State and we left Tallahassee. And at that time Richard Brinson, the director, had said if we ever came back to Tallahassee to look him up if I needed a job. So about two years, maybe two or three years later, we came back and I went there to look for a job and it just so happened that one was opened, because Wynne Hernandez, who was there before, she had left. And so I was hired as what they called a circus technician at the time. [laughs] And then I just worked up to budget account manager and associate director doing the things that needed to be done. It was in April of '78 I came to work for the FSU circus full-time.

Calloway: And when you were in undergrad. when was that?

Peters: That was '73- '75

Calloway: Okay, and what were your duties at that time'?

Peters: Just filing and typing up, receiving reports, doing paper work in the office that needed to be done.

Calloway: And then when you came back, was it the same thing, or more involved?

Peters: It was a little more involved. It entailed costumes, and then I started working with the music for the shows and doing the logistics for travel, and then in the early '80s I was given the budget to work with. So, and then I think even at that time I did a little bit of personnel

(duties) when we hired OPS workers, because the riggers were the guys that were in the show, they would go off but they would get paid to rig, and so I would do that paperwork for them to be hired. You know, they would make like a one time fee of 25 dollars or whatever it was at the time.

Calloway: Is that rigging for shows?

Peters: Rigging for road shows, not for home shows or on campus, just for when they went away. And then, I think, I can't remember--- I think that gave them the money, or something, for food or something, I can't remember how it worked.

Calloway: And then the girls would follow them up like, the next day?

Peters: Usually what a lot of it was is the girls would follow them up, or if it was a big--- like a tent rig, the guys would go up one weekend and then they would come back for classes and then everybody would go up the next week, and usually Dickie would stay that week between to watch the tent. [laughter].

Calloway: I had read in the book that when you first came you helped coach ground acts?

Peters: Right. I didn't do anything too--- [laughs] Of course, I didn't know anything about flying or anything like that, but I could hold safety lines for rolla, I used to do perch pole, and then I would help instruct cloud swing, I don't think they do that anymore, and ,you know, bicycle, things like that.

Calloway: And had you any experience costuming, or how did you get into that?

Peters: I think it just was by default. [laughter] Because it was my fault. [laughs] But I had had sewing experience, you know, through highschool and growing up. But maybe because nobody else wanted it, so I ended up working with the costumes. It was fun, because, you know, I do enjoy sewing and putting things together. The other thing I kind of liked about it was that I didn't necessarily have to come up with all the ideas, because a lot of the performers, the girls, could come up with ideas and I just had the knowledge to figure out how much materials or how much supplies to go get. And then make it happen.

Calloway: So how involved were the students in the costuming?

Peters: They were just about as involved as they are now, they had to--- what I developed over time, I guess, was to have girls--- I mean, guys weren't excluded but we just didn't necessarily have guys at the beginning--- they would construct the costumes for the acts that they did. And so if I could assign everybody to get involved, if one girl knew how to sew that would be good, if one didn't maybe she could punch rhinestones. Somehow everybody did fit into that act, because, you know, it's just too much on one person.

Calloway: And what about with music, did the students kind of help pick the music or---?

Peters: No, the music--- of course the music was for years and years the same, so like even when you'd go into the grocery store you'd hear that music and you'd go, "Oh, that's Mexican cloud swing". [laughs] You know? It'd remind you of that. And when Wynne Hernandez did music at the shows they used reel to reel tapes, and so that was really, you know it was like the Wizard of Oz, you know with that guy behind the curtain? And then when I started it wasn't that way, thank goodness, but it was cassette tapes. And so, we still had to do that, but it wasn't usually suggested by the performers. I think mostly the administration worked on the music for the acts. A lot of it was Dickie, and I don't remember when the other coaches were working if they did much with that. And then when Chad came in he had a little bit more input, I think. And then the students started suggesting.

Calloway: How has technology effected that, has it made it easier or more complicated or---?

Peters: Well, if we ever had a good sound system it would be a piece of cake. [laughter] It's a little bit maybe trickier of course when the sound goes out. But I think the CDs and the Mp3s and things like that--- you just have to stay with it, that's all. Now the system itself has improved because before we had huge monstrosity- type players that we had to transport, especially when we were on the road. And nowadays its more like a club gig or lightweight with everything being portable and having more volume and more power or whatnot. And it's a little bit easier to set up on trips and that kind of thing. But, you know, I don't miss the tapes or nothing like that. But I guess we still had to have it when we crossed over to CDs. We still had to have a deck that had CDs and a deck that does tapes, just because we used old music. Like, if we had flying trapeze music, the Blue Danube, on tape and then we had to find it on CD or something to bum it on CD. But it was, I think it was pretty much all CD when I left.

Calloway: I think so.

Peters: I think it is.

Calloway: You had said earlier that you were circus technician and then budget manager. Was there--- how many assistants were there? Because when I was there it was you and Dickie and Chad---

Peters: That's about all it was. [laughs]

Calloway: Okay, I wasn't sure.

Peters: Every now and then we'd try to hire somebody to help, maybe with the office or something. But it never really worked out, it was always pretty easy. I always thought there should be more coaches, but the students would help with that. You know? Everybody would come, either volunteer to come help do the class and if you did bicycle then you would help

some team work bicycle that sort of thing. We just didn't have the money to hire a lot of people. We didn't have the money for positions. We had three positions, three full time positions and that was it. And so we couldn't hire a part time coach and we couldn't hire somebody to just do costumes and that sort of thing.

Calloway: And you guys managed to take care of it.

Peters: Right, we were a mom and pop. [laughter] Usually it was always--- I think from what I remember it's always been, you know, a director, an associate director, and an assistant director which would be the coach. And there was even a period where there was no coach, and it was just me and Dickie. And that was that year, that long, before we hired a coach. So that was tricky. There was this one time in that year that he had a show and I had a show in the same weekend. And so he took the one show up in Georgia and I took the other show in Florida.

Calloway: Oh, my gosh! So two separate road shows?

Peters: Mm-mm. That was tricky. And then one time--- we had a coach, but a former coach had gotten married one weekend and he invited Dickie and the new coach to go. And I think he may have invited me, but, you know, I just wasn't that involved because they were in the wedding party or something. And we had a road show that weekend. So Dickie and the coach took the riggers and rigged it, and then came back and I took the troupe over and did the show in Panama City and then tore down and came home. [laughs]

Calloway: How would you select what students went on road shows?

Peters: Well, it depended on a few things. First of all, it depended on what the sponsor wanted, what kind of show. If it was a big show, you know, with a tent and all that sort of thing then obviously we took more people. If it was just a small local show and all ground acts then that's kind of self eliminating, too, because you take people that can do those acts--- skating and bike and that sort of thing. But for the majority of shows you have almost a core group of troupe that would go. You would have people that either had the experience up at Calloway Gardens in the summer, and they were your basic core group come September when somebody wanted a road show. Because they had been rehearsing all summer long, basically, and doing shows, so that was sort of the ready-made thing. Then maybe the semester would go on if you had people from the class that picked up real well or real fast on an act you might could ask them. Usually by January or February if you had another road show you could say, "These people came back or this bike group came back or this rolla group came back, and let's go ahead and take them." Because if we were taking a bus, for instance, the bus handled 57 people so you might as well take them, because it's costing the same for the bus no matter if 10 people go or 50 people go. The only almost difference is hotel rooms, but then you could double up. A lot of times we would put the girls together, because four to a room for girls is nothing. Four to a room for boys--- they get a little touchy about that. Which I never thought was fair anyway, I thought if they girls should bunk up then the boys should too. But they never did, not much. And then that

would give them the experience of going on a road show, which was kind of nice, you know? Because ultimately, why rehearse if you're not gonna do a show? And why would anybody want to rehearse all year long and not go anywhere? You know? I mean, there were sometimes they didn't really want to go on the road, they just wanted to do home show and that was all, but most of the time they wanted to go somewhere, we'd try to take them because it's also an educational experience just to go somewhere. Especially when we'd go to places out of the country, when we went to the Bahamas and the Virgin Islands, that sort of thing. It's a whole other culture, a whole third world out there that a lot of students aren't familiar with. Of course, going to the Bahamas was different because the Rotary Club sponsored us down there, in East Nassau. So they were more community oriented. They, again, more for community service, that kind of thing. And, like, when we first went down we did it to benefit a home for the aged, so we took down smoke detectors for the home--- for the senior citizen's center, and we took that with us and then all the Rotarians helped us and we ended up where--- we started taking a couple of the people, they would go eat dinner with the Rotarians, you know, and get to know their family and all that. Everybody would kind of get to know each other a little better. And then we took an act back to the senior homes, so that they could do acts. And the performers could actually see what they were down there to benefit. And it made it just a little bit more interesting. I mean, because how many times did we go places and nobody knew why we were going or who we were there for, we were just performing and then they left. And this was just so neat, so nice.

Calloway: It really means something.

Peters: And maybe because we had the time to do it, because if we did it in May school wasn't in. So we were there for 10 days for instance, so two weekends. And it made it just more meaningful, personal. So I mean, we had the luxury of time in a way. And we would perform in like, parades going down the street, with the little kids coming up to the school yard, against the fence just yelling and screaming and that kind of thing. And then we did shows for the kids, almost like we do here with the just for kids shows.

Calloway: Yeah

Peters: And that's how we would decide who would go to some of those good shows. [laughter] Of course. Yeah, we had the ultimate decision. If they weren't gonna be working on stuff all year long, and they can't go to Bonifay--- but they can go to the Bahamas? Forget it. I don't think so. [laughs]

Calloway: You got to weed them out for those trips.

Peters: That's right. If they don't come out and work and pull their load, why would we take them? We didn't really maybe know everything that was going on, but I don't think much passed us. [laughter]

Calloway: I think it's still that way

Peters: Good. It needs to be.

Calloway: Well, it's such a small group. Everyone's always in every else's business.

Peters: Yeah, it's like "As the World Turns." "As the wagon wheel turns." [laughter]

Calloway: You had mentioned the Callaway kids. And so, in your opinion, how much does the summer at Callaway effect the regular circus season?

Peters: Well, I know that it was a huge benefit as far as budget goes, because it was almost two-thirds of the budget for working all summer, for three months. And so it was good to have because everything depends on money. The equipment, the maintenance, any new equipment, repairs--- I think we repair more than we buy equipment--- still that was a huge part of budget. As far as students, I think 99% of the students that went to Callaway were good for the circus. If they didn't come back--- there were very few that didn't come back and do circus, but most of them did. So ,I mean, it just had to help.

Calloway: Yeah--- And like you were saying we're such a family together, such a small unit.

Peters: And that, you know, the people that were the guests of Callaway became so much attached. And that helped to the exposure of circus because we did probably see maybe, I don't even know if there's any tangible amount that you could document of people, but there were circus brats, Callaway brats, that came to FSU because of it.

Calloway: Yeah. And they want to join circus, things like that

Peters: Right, so I mean, I think it was always a good relationship.

Calloway: And like you were saying, it's such an important part of our budget that we couldn't really function without it.

Peters: Well, it would mean more road trips, it would mean more other ways of getting that money if we didn't have it. And that's what, even if the circus were to stay in Tallahassee all summer, we couldn't have generated that at all. So it was a huge amount, it was a really nice thing to do. And I suppose--- I know now they're starting something else in Panama City, so who knows if that will do as much. But, at least it's a start. Because I don't know if Callaway will--- I mean, everything changes. Who knows?

Calloway: It's becoming a lot more---

Peters: Because we have 10 year contracts. We have like a contract, and then nine years of addendums. They just change the dates and the amount. But it's been going since like--- '65? '66 or something.

Calloway: Right. I mean, it's been told to me about Callaway being so corporate now, it's starting to neglect the Circus, and so the relationship is just kind of unstable

Peters: Yeah, that's what I hear, but I don't know because I never really went to Callaway. I didn't need to go. When I first started, back in the late '70s, early '80s, I went on leave without pay for the summers. Because the director and the coach went up to Callaway Gardens, which I guess was fine for me, because being married--- even though Dickie was married, his wife went up with him. You know, then I stayed here with the family, and then I usually just did other work for the summer. And then it didn't change until, I don't know when it changed, I think the '80s, maybe about mid- '80s, I was hired at FSU for the full time. And then in the summers, that's when--- probably because I was working on the budget--- I'd have to do fiscal year stuff, close it off, and then I did correspondence with people for sponsorships, things like that over the summer.

[Tape stops]

Calloway: Alright, the tape is back on. I was just about to ask you about advertising and marketing for homeshows--- how we got the word out and things like that?

Peters: Well, we tried, I guess, several different things. I mean, we did radio, we did television, we've even done billboards. The circus, when I started, used to be--- or FSU used to be trimesters, so the circus was always the first two weekends in May at that time. And then when we changed to semesters it went to April, the first two weekends of April. Because, I'm trying to remember, there was a time also where we did shows in March. Because Callaway had their Azalea festival in April, so we'd have to go up to Callaway to do the Azalea festival.

Calloway: You performed at that?

Peters: mm-hmm

Calloway: Oh, okay.

Peters: I think that was probably in the '80s, because I remember--- this is probably an aside anyway, but my second son was born in '83, and he used to celebrate his birthday in April. And he'd celebrate it in school, he'd celebrate it at the Circus, and he'd celebrate it at Callaway. And it was about at that time. So, anyways, that was--- for some reason we had the homeshows in March. And then the Azalea festival stopped, so that's when we said, "Let's do it the first two weekends of April." And what we tried to do was keep it consistent, so that everybody would know what time of year. Just like when we used to do it in the first two weekends of May all the time.

Calloway: Okay

Peters: And then, you know, like the newspaper, television, all that sort of thing. We tried to get the word out as much as we could. Television is real expensive. Our budget, really, almost the whole time I was there, was only like \$1 50,000 a year. And out of that came everything: paying three full- time staff came out of it, all the expenses: transportation for road shows, per diem for all the road shows, all the costume stuff, advertising, maintenance and repairs for the building, even. You know, even utilities, phone and that sort of thing.

Calloway: Oh, my gosh!

Peters: In other words, we'd have to be balanced ever year, too. We couldn't spend more than we made, which meant that we had to make \$1 50,000 a year. And that's what I said, Callaway, it was over half, I think, or maybe close to it. And salary, that included matching social security, and insurance, that sort of thing. And usually, that traditionally comes to 60% of your budget, of what you got paid then [laughs]. So that didn't leave a lot of extra. And that's one of the reasons why sometimes we'd have to take road shows, because home shows just didn't bring it in.

Calloway: Yeah, you'd have to supplement.

Peters: I mean, on one hand, I guess if we didn't make it, it was okay, because it didn't get taken from you. Or if we made more than \$1 50,000 it didn't get taken, but it did carry over year to year. So that way, if we made \$160,000, then \$1 0,000 would roll over to the next year. And then we had also the foundation account, which is almost like a savings account. We'd put money in there when people donate money, it goes into the foundation account. And then that way it could be drawn upon if we needed it, which we did for--- I think it was the sound system that we bought one year, we went ahead and took it out of there. Of course, the new tent, every time we needed a new tent we had to have some kind of a campaign going to get money for that. And that would be through donations, primarily. We had a loan--- when Dr. Sliger was President we had a really hard time getting him to help pay for the tent. Because when you buy the tent you can't pay over time, you have to pay for it when you get it.

Calloway: Oh! Ugh!

Peters: So if its \$150,000, you pay for it then, and then you could get it. So we had a loan, and we ended up paying off the loan--- it was like an eight year loan we paid off in four years, so that was really good.

Calloway: Wow!

Peters: We wanted to make sure that if we had to ask for another one they'd give it to us. [laughter]

Calloway: Yeah

Peters: Grants, sometimes we get grant money. Even though I'm not a grant writer I would apply for some through the Convention and Visitor's Bureau, so that would help with the advertising, for instance, on the home shows. But that's all we had to advertise for were the home shows. The road show sponsor advertised for the road show. You know, we would give them pictures or whatever else they wanted, but they did the advertising. So all we had to do were the home shows, really. I was gonna say that the club--- the circus club had their own account. Selling ornaments and that sort of thing, it all went to the club, who could turn around and do what they wanted to do. The club also helped because they sometimes would buy materials that the circus needed like mats or safety cabinets for the paint or something like that.

Calloway: So the Circus is not- for- profit, and is the club?

Peters: Not- for- profit, right [laughs] I think they were supposed to have an account through FSU student activities, and I think they do, because in the springtime they would have to apply for money, and then that way they could turn around and use it if, for instance, the club wanted to go on a trip to go see some other circus, and see how it works or something like that, they could do it if they wanted to. They could also purchase the mats or whatever equipment they wanted to, but that means you go through a purchase order process through FSU. The foundation account you didn't have to do a purchase order, and that's primarily the one we used for parties. You know, supplying the food for parties or if we had pizza parties for the tent going up or something like that, it was through the foundation account. Because you couldn't always do food through the purchase order.

Calloway: Kind of moving away from that, the FSU Circus is a really traditional three ring circus. And there's kind of a new circus, with Cirque du Soliel, and really artistic shows. How do you think that's going to affect our circus, or do you think it will? Or is that competition?

Peters: I don't think its competition, necessarily. I mean, to me, it's more a fine arts--- Cirque du Soliel is more of a fine arts type of showmanship. I always liked our American. traditional circus because of the tent, the sawdust that we've always kept. You know, we've kept it that way on purpose. We probably could have requested a permanent facility, but we always liked the tent because it was a fun way to advertise. When anybody sees the tent going up, they start calling us, "Well. when's the circus?" Because it's inevitable that they would see it.

Calloway: Yeah

Peters: Now it's a little different only because the road that goes past the circus is not Pensacola Street anymore. There used to be a bridge over there. [laughs] Pensacola used to run straight across between the University center and the Circus. It connected all the way across from what you see now.

Calloway: Oh, right.

Peters: So when everybody traveled Pensacola street saw the tent going up. Now they don't see it because its kind of hidden on campus. You only see it if you're going down Chieftain Way or to the baseball field or anything like that. But anyway, back to the Cirque du Soliel type shows--- I've noticed, and this is probably because we've got a new director now, that things--- money is being spent now in advertising, and I think it's through a marketing group and I think they're on campus--- they seem to be advertising it that way. As more of a Cirque- type thing. A fine arts performance. And I'm not sure if I agree with that. I've noticed the ads, and I've noticed it because when I see circus it catches my eye.

Calloway: Oh, yeah.

Peters: I see it in the paper, I see it somewhere else, online or anything. But everything is black. And for years and years I've always rebelled against anything all black like that. Because, even, I had girls that were in the circus wanting to wear black all the time. And I'm always like, "Well, it's not a funeral, it's a circus, for one thing." Just, black is just so harsh for me. It doesn't show up well at all in pictures or anything. So I don't know. But that's just my opinion. I don't like it. You know, I like--- the acts, it's okay to wear makeup and that sort of thing, and even some of the music, I'm not sure. But I really like the idea that--- I would want them to stay more traditional.

Calloway: It's more our circus.

Peters: It's more unique, yeah. I don't think it's gonna draw that crowd in--- I remember a few years back there was a Seven Days of Opening nights cancellation, so they had some circus acts go down to the Civic center--- the FSU circus go down and perform. And that was kind of nice. We did it almost like we did Pow Wow, when we did that.

Calloway: Right, okay

Peters: No, I take that back--- scratch that. They had another circus come in, that's what it was. It was, I can't remember the circus--- but anyway, FSU's PR department, they gave us free tickets to go down and see the circus during Seven Days of Opening Nights.

Calloway: Oh, okay.

Peters: So that was real nice, because we got to watch them. But it was so--- and we got to go behind the scenes to watch them too.

Calloway: Oh, cool.

Peters: But the thing that I was so amazed at, and I mean, they were a good group of kids, they were from Canada and all, so they were a lot of fun, and they were all college- aged kids kindof like ours. But the thing that struck me so much was the civic center was packed because it

was Seven Days of Opening Nights and it was under the performing arts. What I didn't understand is how can all these people patronize that, and not patronize the FSU Circus only because it's a traditional American circus? A three ring circus under a tent. I don't understand how the performing arts can be divided like that.

Calloway: That's so interesting.

Peters: And I thought, you know, say if they paid \$20 to get into the civic center, per ticket. And if that \$20 was paid to the FSU circus for, I don't know how many they sold out, even if it was 5,000 people. You know? I mean--- I didn't understand why we can't seem to get that same group of people as the performing arts, because that's what we are is a performing art. Even though it's not fine arts, you know?

Calloway: Right. It's a performance, and it's art.

Peters: That's just--- I didn't know what the answer was to that, how they could do that, but it just struck me. The whole civic center was full. I mean, even if half those people came to see our circus, I don't know, it'd be interesting.

Calloway: Yeah. Well, I'm out of questions.

Peters: Oh, okay.

Calloway: Do you have anything you'd like to add, or did. I miss?

Peters: I'm not sure, I'm not sure what you want, what areas---

Calloway: Just anything that comes to mind.

Peters: I don't know, because being there for a while, a lot of the years ran together for me. I was never real good with what year something happened. You know, if you did swinging trapeze, I think that someone who did swinging trapeze 10 years ago, you should know each other. [laughter] I know that's not true. But I know that the Alumni Association was formed, the Circus Alumni Association was formed, and that was really instrumental through Sue McCollum, but she's passed away, that was in the '80s. And then the circus club started probably early '90s. I think that was Scott Wright and Julie Pipkin were the first co-presidents--co-chairs. And we used to do a lot of concessions with the FSU football team at the stadium. And we would sell things. But it was really productive, cause we'd bring in 4,000 dollars, something like that. And I think we're still living off of that much money right now.

Calloway: Probably. [laughter]

Peters: But I was club advisor, because I know with Dickie, and guess it was Speedy at

the time who was coaching. They would see all the performers all year because they would be at Callaway too, which was fine because I was used to do paperwork and budgets and that kind of thing. But those were two big things probably that spawned off of the Circus. But I think it's worked out pretty good. It wasn't always fun doing those concessions when nobody would sign up. We'd have to have, like, 50 people.

Calloway: That's a hard sell.

Peters: Yeah, some people wanted to go to the games and stuff like that.

Calloway: Well, thank you so much for your time, I appreciate it.

Peters: Well, if you think of anything, just call me.

Calloway: Absolutely. Let me just turn off the recorder.

Transcription Ends