

MEZB. RADLEY'S

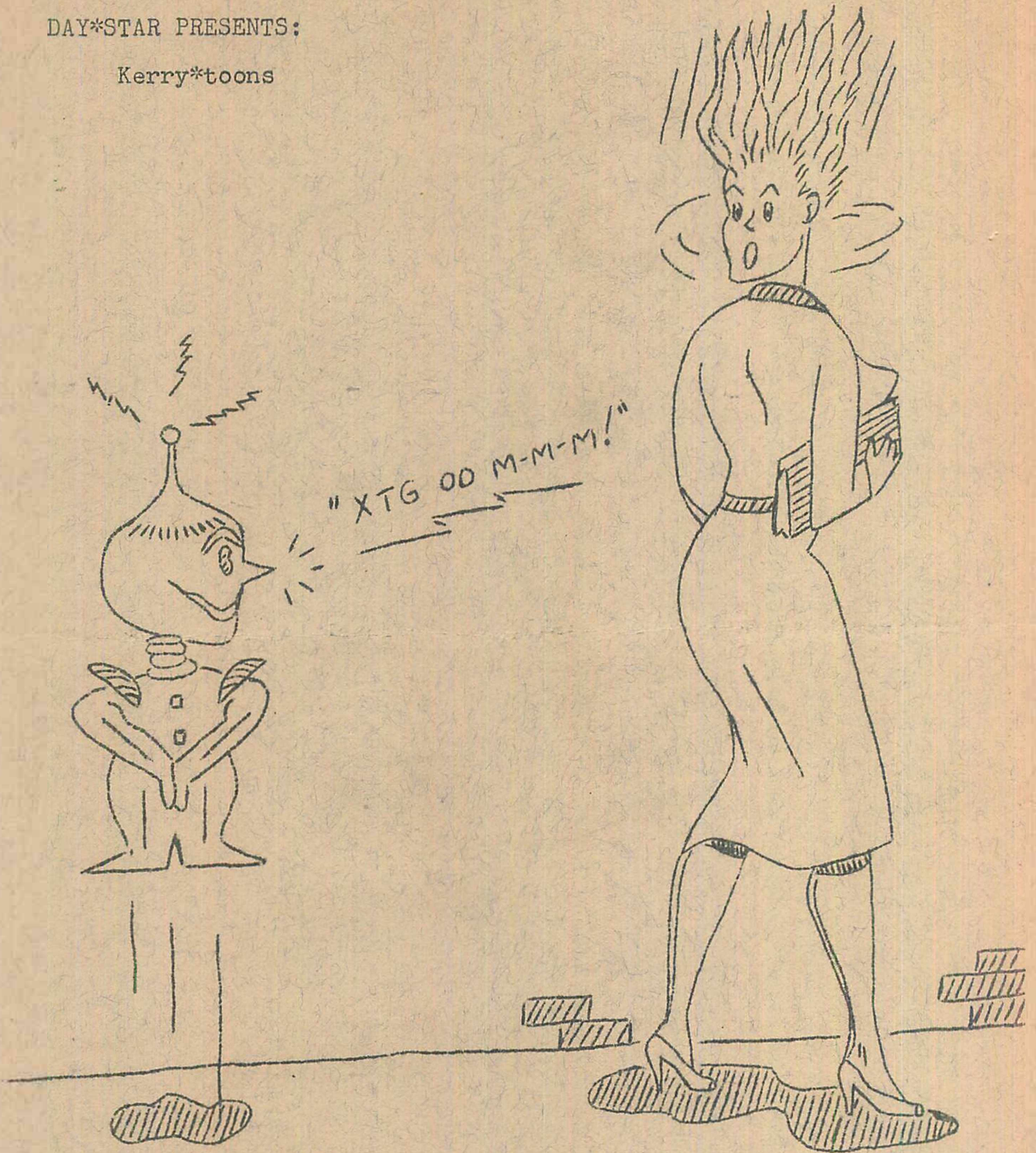


PICTURE TRICK

NUMBER 2 - KERRY

DAY*STAR PRESENTS:

Kerry*toons



(Translation: "So YOU'RE a girl!")

KERRY

A SWINGING GOOD TIME

Editorial Ramblings

I was really amazed, on reading my first N'apa mailing; to find out how many of the members I know. Belle Deitz, of course, was in Detroit, though I didn't believe we were formally introduced or that we spoke to one another. She gave me a bit of a shock by her pronounced resemblance to another Belle I used to know very well indeed; so much so that I tried to observe her rather more closely than true politeness, perhaps, would allow.

I think I also brushed against George Raybin, but I retain no face or form to go with the name. Bjo Wells, of course, was my room-mate at the Con (and by the way, Bjo, you owe me 2½ minutes of your time; since that isn't enough to draw me a cartoon, perhaps you'd answer the question you never had time, in Detroit, to answer, namely, how do you twist up your hair in a chignon and keep it there? Mine comes down in straggly ends!

John Trimble was also in that weird set-up on the 13th floor, and J. Arthur Hayes and I managed, in a brief conversation, to wipe out a misunderstanding...which was responsible for my membership in the NFFF, and therefore for my N'apa membership; so you may really blame PicTrik on him. G.M. Carr and Walter Coslet, of course, are old friends from FAPA; Eva Firestone I have known since the MEZRAB days, and Wally Weber is also well-remembered as the tallest fan at that memorable meal at the Golden Dragon.....

Alan J. Lewis, to me, will probably always be the other Al Lewis; for I met the west coast one first. Ron Ellik, I believe, will probably stay in my mind longer than any other fan at the Detention... he is the only fan I ever stepped on literally, though I have been known to trample on fans figuratively. Steve Tolliver's image remains in my mind tenaciously for looking like a character out of my "Sevener" stories at the Masquerade (I say, Steve, do you really mind being a prototype for the Regis Mastur of THE PLANET SAVERS?) I chatted pleasantly with Alma Hill, a round blue-eyed blonde; and Seth Johnson showed me some fascinating correspondence which I have since come to understand was a hoax, but nevertheless was a very fine and perceptive piece of work.

If the format of this fanzine should be strange, or measure, blame it on the fact that I fecklessly got hold of a bunch of folder-form stencils and I'm trying to cut them in regular, or letter-style form. This paragraph is typed right across the printing scales in mid-stencil and I can't read what I have been writing.

As usual, this Picture Trick is composed entirely on stencil, for the benefit of the 4th mailing of the NFFF Amateur Press Alliance. I refuse to use the foolish word "Neffer" or to refer to the official organ as N'apa Yap unless I must.

The cover and the cartoon on the former page are by Kerry. The rest of the fanzine --- and everything not specifically credited to anyone else -- is the work of the editor, who also cranks the mimeograph, pounds the typewriter and invents nearly everything on these pages; and who's that?

Right;

Marianne Bradley

This is the second page of Picture Trick #2, for the NAPA.....

I was pleased and gratified by the number of people who wrote in about the first Picture Trick; and so many of them were interested in what I had to say about aerialists that I decided to do the same thing again.

A few writers merely made utilitarian remarks. For instance, it was called to my attention that the catcher in a flying act does not, as depicted in Ruth Wieland's otherwise pretty sketch, hang by his knees, but supports his weight by twisting his legs around the ropes of his trapeze. I knew that, but didn't feel quite enough of an artist to re-draw the acrobat in question. I was also told by Someone Who Should Know, with great disdain for my ignorance, that the tape or elastic bands on a flyer's wrists does play a great part in protecting the vulnerable joints from strain; that the catcher, in fact, often wore not only elastic bands, but a leather wrist-guard, padded inside with lambs-wool.

And Ruth Berman reminded me that a trampoline was probably the nearest thing to flying, off a trapeze, outside of Never-Neverland.

Most people, however, seemed curious to know which of the flying maneuvers I meant when I referred to a Picture Trick.

Actually a "picture trick" refers to any one of a group of simple and uncomplicated ~~new~~ tricks on the flying trapeze. Now, please note that I use the terms "simple and uncomplex" in a strictly relative sense. For an amateur, the mere act of swinging on a bar with enough momentum to get yourself back to the takeoff point (without losing momentum in mid-swing) is almost impossible -- just try it sometime! The analogy of a playground swing doesn't hold true -- on a swing, the center of gravity is differently distributed. The body is folded in a sitting position so that the weight of the body, on the swinging bar, keeps the ropes moving. Even so, an inexperienced tot often loses momentum unless pushed by an adult. When hanging by the hands from a trapeze, the center of gravity is below the bar, and considerably greater effort in the shoulder muscles, and better control of the entire body, is necessary to keep it swinging evenly.

So this is the flyer's first problem.

(And incidentally, for perfectionists, I am well aware that aerialists themselves refer to the acrobat who leaves his trapeze, and soars through the air, as a leaper, and that only outsiders would call him a flyer; nevertheless, I prefer the pretty and descriptive word flyer; leaper makes me think of nothing on earth but a frog.

In writing about the flying trapeze, I have spent a lot of time studying and analyzing the various muscular motions involved. So when I speak of simple tricks, please understand that they are simple only when contrasted to very very difficult tricks done by highly skilled athletes, usually men. The difference is the difference between an ordinary good tournament high-diver and the intricate acrobatics done by the world's champion high-diver at the Olympic Games.

The so-called "Picture Tricks" demand considerably less

This is the third page of Picture Trick # 2, talking about flying.

effort, and are comparatively less dangerous; but, depending as they do on balance, and grace of movement, are often prettier than such things as the famous "triple", superb feat of timing, daring and coordination though that is.

Examples? One of the most commonly seen, and therefore probably the easiest, is the one where the leaper jack-knifes his body on the bar while swinging so that at the end of his swing, he is hanging by his knees with his hands stretched toward the catcher. The general impression from below is that the catcher has "scooped" him off his trapeze.

Another extremely pretty trick can be done on an ordinary trapeze; I have heard it called a snap-up in gymnasiums, but it is described as a "seat jump" by circus writers. The flyer, while swinging on the bar, pushed the bar down with her hands so that on the end of the swing she is sitting on the bar like a swing. Then, at the end of the forward swing, she does a graceful jump toward the catcher and meets his hands.

A lovely, but rarely seen (so presumably rather difficult) trick is one where the flyer swings all the way around the bar, as a good athlete does on parallel bars. And there are various versions, with different names, of the trick where the flyer "skins the cat" -- bracing the trapeze behind him at the waist or back before he lets go and dives at the catcher.

Most of these simpler tricks are concerned with maneuvering the body in relation to the fly bar, so that the flyer's center of gravity is above the bar and he can leap down toward the catcher. The emphasis in all these so-called picture tricks is in the ability to control the body (mold it into pictures?) and complete command of the position of body and bar. It is obvious that until these have been completely mastered, the flyer would not be ready for the "big tricks" -- where the emphasis is on what the flyer does after leaving his trapeze and before alighting in the catcher's hands. These big tricks include the turning of one or more somersaults and a variety of twists and spins between fly bar and catcher's hands.

Classed as picture tricks also are those pretty maneuvers done in the catcher's hands. One such was beautifully demonstrated in the movie "The Big Circus" by David Nelson and Kathy Grant; as the girl swings from the catcher's hands they shift their grip so that she swings suspended by one wrist and ankle, free arm and leg extended in a beautiful ballet arabesque. Or, having been caught by the ankles rather than the wrists, the flyer throws her body through the loop of her clasped hands, then shift their mutual grip so that, from being suspended by the feet, she is now swinging by her wrists from the catcher's wrists.

These, of course, are variations borrowed from another type of aerial-trapeze act; the double-trapeze or supporting-partner routine, which is not, strictly speaking, a flying act; one acrobat hangs by his feet or his knees from a fixed rigging, supporting a lighter acrobat -- usually a girl -- by feet or hands while she does a variety of balance tricks.

In a regular flying-return act, these

Fourth and last page of Picture Trick, talking about picture tricks/

balance tricks are 'pretty' variations on the necessity for the flyer to turn, in the catcher's hands, half-round as they swing together; when the flyer leaves his trapeze, he is, of course, facing the catcher and thus must turn around in the catcher's hands before returning to his original trapeze.

In most flying-return acts of today, after the leaper leaves his trapeze, a third performer on the pedestal board (takeoff point for flyers) catches the swinging bar as it swings back; then, when the flyer is ready to return, he throws it out again.

However, some of the finer flyers (Ernie Clarke, for instance, a great flyer long before I was old enough to watch anything but a swinging rattle, who was doing triples when my mother, in pigtails, was skinning the cat on a backyard trapeze) do not use a third performer at all.... when the flyer leaves the bar, it is left swinging, so that the flyer's return to his trapeze is dependent on the calculated speed and force with which he has left it...and the precision of his movements in leaving, to keep it moving absolutely straight. In an interview with Ernie Clarke (way back in 1921!) a reporter asked him what he thought about in mid-air. He confessed that on his way up to the top of the tent, he thought about the crowds; but that, the moment he left the bar, he never had more than one thought in his mind -- whether or not he had left the bar even and straight.

This, of course, puts a flyer out of the picture trick class, and out of the scope of this fanzine.

I seem to have a few lines left, and there is hardly time to go from flying to any less lofty subject, so I'll tell, for the edification of people who believe that accidents should get you down, the story of Charles Seigrist, who used to finish up his act by a swan-dive from his high perch, turning three somersaults into a net seventy feet below. One day he fell off by accident and turned over three and a half times, landing on his face in the net and snapping several vertebrae in his neck. The rebound out of the neck also broke his leg. But when the other members of his act reached him, he was trying to get up and finish his act with a flourish.

They carted the old fellow (he was not young then) off to the hospital and strapped his neck into a harness. Some time later, a horrified nurse came into the room to discover that he had wriggled out of the harness and was moving his neck experimentally. They strapped him promptly into a tighter harness, and not being Houdine, I suppose he stayed there. It never occurred to him to think of himself as finished, though accidents far less serious had permanently grounded other flyers; six months later he walked back on the Ringling grounds and next season he was doing double somersaults to the catcher's hands again, with undiminished vigor.

As Dexter Fellows remarked in his book, you can't keep a circus squirrel on the ground. At the age of seventy-two, Charles Seigrist was still flying, and none of the kids in the business could touch him.....what's a little thing like a broken neck? If, that is, you happen to be Charles Seigrist.

There ought to be a moral in that story somewhere. Morals, anybody?