

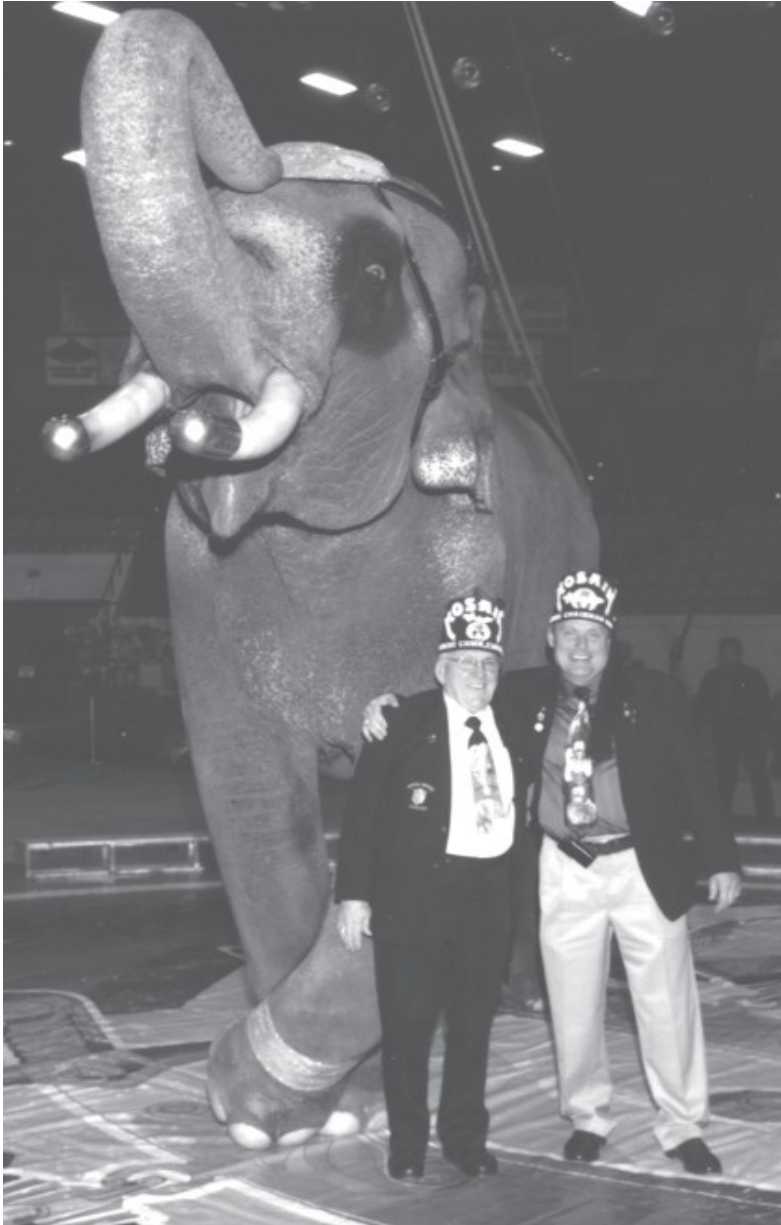
TED BURGIN

THE MAN WHO BROUGHT THE CIRCUS TO TOWN



Ted Burgin
John Rodgers

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You never know where life is going to take you. It took me to the circus. I'm 84 years old and for thirty-three years I was Chairman of the Kosair Shriners Circus.

J.R Riggs, the man on my left in the photo to your left, is the new circus chairman who will bring the circus to the children all across Kentucky in the future.

I am grateful to all the people who helped me make the Kosair Shriners Circus a success year after year. The roadblocks I started years ago were my most successful fundraising effort. I would like to thank everyone who donated to these roadblocks.

I want all the business people who support the Kosair Shriner's Circus to know I appreciate all the help you give to the circus. I especially want to thank my friends Sam Swope and the late Skip McMahan for their loyalty and generosity to the Kosair Shriners Circus and to Kosair Charities

Sam never said no to the circus and Skip gave thoroughbred horses to Kosair Charities that were sold at auction to raise funds for the children .

Even though I have worked more hours for the circus than could every be counted, the circus has given back more to me than I have ever given to it.

The circus provided me with the opportunity to become a leader and a better man than I could have ever achieved without it. I've always wanted to do good and make my life count. The circus provided me with this opportunity.

However, I was an unlikely candidate for the opportunities that have been made available to me.

I came from a poor background and I had a limited education. But, every since I was a small boy older people saw something in me that I could not see for myself. For this reason older people have been willing to help me.

After I returned from World War 2, it was Ted Broecher, who made the funds available to help me become a member of the Blue Lodge and later a Shriner.

It was Ted Mueller, President of American Standard, that provided me the opportunity to become a jockey at the age of seven. Older and successful people have always given me a chance to prove myself. I've tried my best over the years to never let them down.

Now I am the older person and I want to share my story with the hope younger people might read it and catch a glimpse of what they can do with their lives if they try to do what is right.

I am not a saint but I have tried to do what is right. The secret to doing what is right is knowing what is right. With so many views on so many issues, I can understand how young people today might have difficulty knowing what is right.

I am not going to lecture anyone on what is right but I am going to share some stories with you about my life which influenced my success in life.

The stock market crashed in 1929 and dad lost his farm and all the money he had in the bank. He could not get to the bank in time to withdraw his money but he tried. Thousands of banks closed and millions of people lost everything. Still, my family was lucky. Dad got a job as the farm manager for Theodore Mueller, who was President of American Standard and also was

the owner of Shady Brook Farm in Harrods Creek. It was a horse farm and my dad and I trained horses for Mr. Mueller.

I was five years old and it was 1932. This is the year the parking meter was invented in Oklahoma. There was 24% unemployment and 13 million people did not have a job. Many people went hungry. They lived in their cars and went from town to town.

Gas was 10 cents a gallon. A loaf of bread was 7 cents. You could rent a house for \$18.00 a month. But, my family was not effected by any of these sad situations. But, I saw plenty of people pass by in their cars, walking and some riding on horses. Others traveled in wagons pulled by horses because they did not have a car or the money to pay for gas.

People sympathized with the plight of these folks and at the same time feared them. The people were so desperate and had so little, good people were afraid they might be harmed if they tried to help them.

1933 was the worst year of the depression. I was six years old and unemployment was almost 26%. One in four people were out of work. Potatoes were 18 cents for 10 pounds and bread had increased to 8 cents a loaf.

In 1934 and 1935 life began to improve some. It was not a lot of improvement but it was better. I remember feeling guilty for having such a lucky life when it seemed like everyone else in the country was struggling to survive.

At seven I had everything a seven year boy could imagine. My life was exciting and full of expectation. In some ways it was Christmas everyday because I was living the dream of a rich child as a very poor boy.

Tucked away in the most eastern part of Jefferson County, Kentucky was a place where aristocracy and poverty shared a vast oasis. As a seven year old child, living in poverty, I felt like I was living in paradise. Because of my dad's job, every cultural advancement at that time was available to my family

The year of my seventh birthday introduced a great technological awakening in America much like we have now. We no longer had to entertain one another with our antics. Radio took us all over to worlds unknown. It made us laugh, cry and sing.

1935 was a year of events that changed the world and made it what it is today. Fibber McGee and Molly was a new program on the radio, Dick Tracey was the next new radio program introduced that year. I heard Babe Ruth hit his 714 homerun on the radio. My family was the first in Louisville to get the first Monopoly game that was introduced in 1935.

In 1935 my dad was still working for Mr. Mueller and because he did we received opportunities and gifts no one else could expect at that time. As I said earlier many families were forced to drift from city to city looking for work, food and shelter. But, my family was safe from the disaster of the depression

In 1935 President Roosevelt got the Work Progress Act and the Social Security Act passed. These two acts saved America from the darkest days it has every known until now.

In 1935 humans were plotting acts that were against the very soul of humanity. Hitler was rearming the Germans and the Nazi party adopted a new flag the Swastika.

While Hitler prepared for the slaughter of millions, Iceland was the first to make it possible for physicians to perform legal abortions. The smell of death was in the air in 1935 long before the nations became entangled in a war that would remove millions of people from the earth.

In the midst of this ugly and cruel world I lived isolated from the worlds inhumanity. I was free and each day I jumped from my bed to ride and train horses for dad's boss. Horses! Horses! Horses! That's all I thought about from sun up until sun down. I loved animals and I loved working with horses.

All I had to worry about were the turkeys on the farm. Dad bought a new 1935 Chevrolet and the turkeys tore the cloth off the door on the inside of the car. Those turkeys would try to eat anything.

I trained horses on Mr. Mueller's farm until I was fifteen years old. I raced horses at the local fairs and I also rode the horses at Ellis Park. When I was not riding horses, I was trapping possum, fox, muckrakes and minks. We sold hides to earn more money for the family. Everything seemed to be perfect when my family lived and worked on Mr. Mueller's Shady Brook Farm.

1937 brought the great flood in Louisville. All the farms around Shady Brook Farm were under water. But, Mr. Mueller's farm was spared. The local grocery store had to be moved to a barn on Mr. Mueller's farm. Neighbors pitched in and shared food and water with one another.

Groceries did not come in packages with clever designs. Most of the food was sold in bulk from barrels and bents. People did not pay always for their groceries with money. They bartered for flour, eggs and corn meal. For example a 3 pound scoop of flour might be purchased for five bales of hay.

Our grocery was located in Louisville on Floyd and Market Streets. We went there once a month maybe. Wolf Grocery had supplies for about anything you needed. At Wolf Grocery you could pay with money or they would accept eggs, chickens and corn as payment if they needed those supplies to sell in their store.

During the 1937 flood people bought their groceries by rowing around the flooded streets in boats. When I go to the grocery today it is almost impossible to believe how groceries were made available to people in 1937.

You could buy hard candy and chunks of chocolate. You could buy a lot of chocolate for a nickel. We killed twelve hogs a year, raised our own chickens and had a sorghum mill for making molasses. We had three beehives, pet rabbits and more than 100 chickens. We ate fresh meat and poultry. Plus, we enjoyed eating fresh and canned vegetables from the garden.

The grocery also depended on our family and others to bring our extra hog meat, beef and chicken meat to them so they could make it available to other customers. Again this was 1937.

During this time our community entertained one another by having mule races through the woods.

My brother Clarence and I won most of the races. Since we broke horses, we were better trained and .

knew how to get mules and horses to race. Those were good times and I loved my brothers Clarence and Raymond. Clarence died ten years ago and Raymond past away five years ago. I miss my brothers and the good times we shared with one another.

When we grew older my brothers and I did everything we could to help one another no matter how big the challenge might be.

We survived the depression and the thirty-seven flood but the worst thing that can happen to a child happened to my family. I was fifteen years old and my life seemed perfect. All of my needs and wants were being fulfilled. Then, dad died. So many thoughts went through my mind. I could feel and see the desperate fear in the eyes of my mom and brothers.

What were we going to do?. Suddenly all our security, our lifestyle and freedom were gone. Dad was the farm manager for Mr. Mueller. For this work dad received a salary, a house, gifts and lots of extras from Mr. Mueller. All of this was gone and we had to move away from the farm. But, we did not have a place to go.

Mom went to live were her sister. I went to live with my cousin. Our beautiful family was spilt apart and sent in several different directions.

I walked to Harrods Creek from Shady Brook Farm and lived with my uncle for a year. One night I decided it was time for me to move on so I wrote my uncle a note to tell him I was leaving. I left in the middle of the night and went to live with my cousin. I lived with him for a week and slept in my attic. I missed dad, my brothers and mom. I needed them in my life but there was no one to turn too. There was so many people in

America going through desperate times that people had become less sensitive to those in need. People soon began to accept that there was just going to be a large portion of the population that would have to go without the basic needs of life. It was too overwhelming, if you were one of the lucky ones with a job and a home, to think about those who had nothing.

Those who did have the means to care for themselves always felt they could lose everything they owned at any moment. This made them less likely to be generous to those who had nothing. Suddenly, I had become a part of that group of people who had nothing and I knew no help was coming.

During this time I found myself daydreaming and remembering the times my family was together. I remembered how much dad and mom enjoyed listening to the Renfro Valley on the radio at night.

I did not know if life would ever get any better for me. I was not able to go to school because I was working three different jobs.

I moved out of my cousins attic and rented an apartment in Louisville above Mr. and Mrs. Bishop. To pay for my room I managed a pool room, cut meat on the weekends at Staen's Store and finally got a job in the CF Vissman meat packing plant when I was sixteen. It was located on Bickel Avenue in Louisville.

Actually, it was the principal at Ballard High School who helped me get back on track. He got me enrolled in night school at Seneca High School and got me my job at CF Vishman.

I worked in the hog killing room. I killed hogs and cows. It was a horrible job but it was a job.

Mr. and Mrs. Bishop were very kind to me. She was a housewife and he managed the gate for the railroad. Mom came to live with me in the two rooms above the Bishops home

When I was seventeen World War 2 was winding down and I joined the army. I got to see my share of the world but missed out on most of the actual fighting. Raymond and Clarence had already enlisted. All three of us got to come home from the war and life was different than it was before the war.

Jobs were plentiful for veterans and I got a job with a man who would help shape my destiny. Ted Broeker hired me to supervise hog killing. Hogs were lined up on a conveyer belt and moved toward me. My job was to spilt the hogs in half as each one passed by me. I could spilt 200 hogs an hour. My work performance was noticed by my superiors and they offered me regular promotions. Ted Broeker the owner of the company introduced me to the Masons and the Shriners. He paid my way through both organizations.

Through Ted Broeker I found my mission for life. He took me to the Shriner's Picnic where there were 1500 kids being helped. I knew then I wanted to work to help the kids.

Family, work and Kosair Shriners became my focus for life. I worked hard everyday in the plant killing hogs and worked my way up to supervisor. When the businesses were sold three different times, I kept my job and continued to supervise the hog killing department of the plant. I was even sent to 28 different plants to teach others what I had learned about hog killing that was so successful.

As soon as I finished my work each day, I went home

grabbed a bite to eat and was down at the Shrine temple trying to pitch in and do what was needed for the circus.

After working on the circus team for twelve years I was made chairman of the circus. I kept that position for 33 years. I instituted a lot of changes that proved to help the circus grow. It wasn't easy. I had to convince some of my senior Shriners why my ideas could work. Once I convinced them and put them into action, they could see very quickly my ideas for the circus were beneficial.

I built trust among my peers and associates in the Shriners. They accepted my ideas because they knew I could make things work. I have been blest a million times while being the Chairman of the Kosair Shriners Circus. The work has helped to complete my life.

While it seems the Shriners has been a huge part of my life, I have always tried to remain close to my family and my church.

I am an active member of Southeast Christian Church in Louisville, Kentucky. I have a section of the church where I am responsible for gathering the offerings and distributing communion. I take my responsibilities seriously and try to do my best to serve God through my actions in and outside of the church.

I try to do what is right even when those who do not understand or appreciate the mission of the church might say I am wrong. I have trusted God all my life to be the leader of my life. My star might not shine as bright as it should. But, without God's leadership in my life, as a star, I would have burned out years ago.

Faith, family and fellowship have been my priorities for the past 84 years. I've trusted God. I've tried to love and be responsible to my family. I have also made myself available to others to share my life and skills to help them experience greater meaning and love in this life.

I asked God everyday to forgive me for the mistakes I make that may be hurtful or unhelpful to others. I have the assurance that God forgives me. Still, I try to do what is right in the eyes of God not because I am such a righteous man but because I know I can only find peace in this life by following what God says is right for me.

I thank God for my wife, my children and my grandchildren. I thank God for the many years he has given me to be with them.





JOHN RODGERS BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

John Rodgers is a retired minister who served twelve different churches during his ministerial career.

He is also retired from four different successful businesses he founded in Louisville, KY.

He is the publisher of Hikes Point News and writes Life Story Books. He is a single father with two daughters and eight grand children.

You can read more commentary and articles by Mr. Rodgers at www.hikespointnews.com.





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