

TRIBUTE TO ARVEL VICTOR ALLREAD, WJU #130

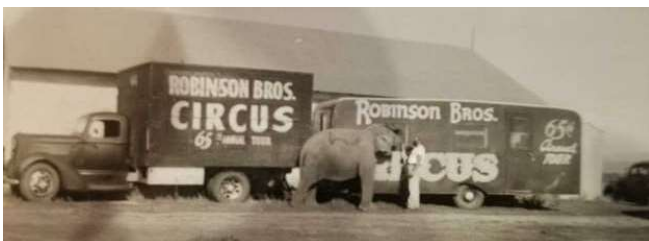
By Terry Allread, WJU #4153

My father was born November 11, 1918 in Marysville, CA. He was a windjammer from the time he was 9 1/2 years old. By then he was playing both trumpet and baritone. On May 11, 1928, Al G. Barnes Circus had come to his hometown, and after a conversation and audition with band director Charles "Spud" Redrick, he sat in with the band for the matinee performance. At age 17, he met band leader Eddie Woeckner (WJU Hall of Fame 1999) when the Al G. Barnes circus again played Chico on May 5, 1936.

With that die cast, following his discharge from the 21st Army Air Force band, he returned with his wife, Grace, to her father's ranch in Red Bluff, CA. While helping out on the ranch kept them busy, paying jobs were few and far between. So after a few months, Arvel began to write letters to some of the circus folk he'd met along the way before the war. As a result, in 1946, he and Grace joined the C. R. Montgomery Wild West show for the season, with Arvel in the band, under the direction of Jack Bell (WJU Hall of Fame 2019), and Grace on the front gate.

When the season ended, Arvel returned to college at Chico State, to get his music teaching credentials. But the experience on the road had given them ideas for the future. So after working with Louis Goebel's Lion Farm to acquire animals, they hit the road from 1948-1949, on the California fair circuit with the Great Pan-American Zoological Exhibit.

In 1950 they acquired Sparton Bros. Circus, re-framed it as **Robinson Bros. Circus**, and took it out for the 1950 season.



Robinson Bros. Circus - Arvel in 1950 with Susy

However, having now received his teaching certificate in 1952 and with four children to support, Arvel and Grace decided to leave the sawdust behind and pursue his teaching career. In 1963, Grace opened a retail gift shop named Handcraft House with unique items from all over the world.



Arvel conducting an elementary school band in 1965

During his 35 years of teaching, Arvel and Grace would stay in touch with their showfolk friends and would join up whenever a circus would come within 150 miles of Chico ... Arvel in the band, Grace on the front gate.

During this time they also began their collection of everything circus related. In 1972, Arvel joined Windjammers Unlimited, becoming a life-long member as WJU #130.

In 1985, Arvel organized and directed a circus band for a concert on September 8th at Matao, CA for the National Convention of Circus Model Builders. In that band were Windjammers members Arvel Allread (WJU #130, director/ euphonium), Don Covington (WJU #119, piccolo), Ray Koskela (WJU #270, tuba), and Jack E. Franklin (WJU #481, calliope builder). Additional Windjammers members in the audience were Larry Henri (WJU #677), Earl Schmid (WJU #371), and Joe Stegan (WJU #335).

Jack Franklin reported it was "a band concert of good circus music, presented by a number of California Windjammers and friends. With a background of model circuses of



Carson & Barnes Circus in 1983. Arvel Allread is hidden behind the drummer, playing trumpet. Charles Stevenson (WJU #55; Hall of Fame 2014) on baritone as bandleader.

different scales, posters, side show banners, and several full size circus wagons, thirteen circus musicians let everyone know how good, traditional circus music should sound."

Arvel explained to his listeners how each selection fitted a certain act in the three rings, saying, *"It was music with a reason; music to enhance the acts, not compete with them."*

Jack commented further that *"Arvel led the band in the manner reflected by Merle Evans, one hand for the horn and one hand for the band. Only his horn was not a cornet or trumpet, but a large baritone. During the rehearsal, Arvel proved to be not only a capable musician and director, but a man who could bring out the best in all those who were working with him."*

In 1986, upon retiring from his career as a music teacher, Arvel (and Grace) joined the Carson & Barnes Circus. The band that season was comprised of Charlie Stevenson (Director/Baritone); Bruce Knowlin, Paul Cippon, Jose Calderon (trumpets); Arvel Allread (Baritone); Bob Gardiner (Drums); Curtis Ninny (tuba); and Mark Smith (Trombone).

In a ***Circus Fanfare*** article (June, 1987, pages 9-10) by Charles Bennett, Jr. (WJU #1) about the 1986 C&B band's music program, Charlie writes: *"Charlie (Stevenson) and Arvel do a great job on the horns. Allread is very strong and does a great job on the solo in 'Jungle Queen' and on the beautiful counter-melody in 'Gallito'."* Also, April and May 1986 recordings of the C&B band are on the WJU website.

Arvel was slated to take over the Carson & Barnes band as bandmaster in 1987. For several years prior to that, he had played on C&B parttime or fulltime for Charlie Stevenson (WJU #55, WJU Hall of Fame 2014; see Hall of Fame article in August 2025 Fanfare).



Arvel was a strong supporter of traditional circus music and planned to continue to feature it on C&B. Unfortunately, he died March 2, 1987 just prior to the start of the circus season, so, he never got the chance to lead the band. C&B persuaded Charlie Stevenson to stay on another season, but for the 1988 show, C&B was left without anyone who could organize a band, supply music, and recruit musicians. Thus, the decision was made to go with recorded music instead of a live band. That event marked the end of live music on Carson & Barnes.

From 1988 to 1995 Grace would continue to join Carson & Barnes during the summer months and then continued until her death February 18, 2006 collecting any and all types of circus materials year round.