

STEVEN
KASHER
GALLERY

VICE

VINTAGE PHOTOS OF A JOLLY 70S CIRCUS

By Jill Freedman, June 19, 2017



Veteran photographer Jill Freedman captures the gaiety and joy of being under the big top.

Photographer Jill Freedman's work has taken her through the untamed heart of the America—from the front lines of poverty to rooftops raging with fire to life and death situations with street cops. In 1971, she found herself in the backstage of a bigtop. She published photos from her experience of traveling with the Clyde Beatty-Cole Brothers Circus in her photobook *Circus Days*.

When she got to know the characters behind Clyde Beatty-Cole Brothers, she found a chosen family, many of them outsiders who joined up for better pastures. "It was a ticket out of town," Freedman said. In this circle, "no one had real names," with workers taking on monikers like "Little Bobby" and "Doniker Mike." Besides the people, she was moved by the wonder of the show and the personality of the animals. A lifetime animal lover, she hated their captivity, and made a number of photos that showed their power and grace. On the move with the crew over two months, she loved the fact that something was always going on—drawing all the people together and then exploiting the labor of the elephants to raise the tent, doing two shows, tearing it down, and heading out every night to the next town, with the constant elbow grease of the workers who produce the circus, called roustabouts.

While making *Circus Days*, Freedman used a stabilized printing process to review some of the photos, so these prints were not treated with a fixative. She eventually put them into a large stack, and they sat on a shelf, untouched for years. Because the prints were never treated, they stuck together, turning into a big brick. She forgot all about the photos, until she discovered the congealed stack of prints recently. She contemplated breaking the pile up with a power drill or asking the kids playing basketball across the street from her home to help her smash it apart. But after some careful picking and peeling, the stack finally relented.

STEVEN
KASHER
GALLERY

Below you can check out these previously unreleased prints of images from Freedman's Circus Days period. The weight of these photos she came away with from that time is the poignance of a space created to strike awe, and an admiration for those who made their way pacing in front of crowds or looking for home in the company of strangers.