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## Her Life's A Real Circus

Multifaceted Performer With Canadian Troupe Is Coming Home

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By MARY BERGIN The Capital Times

Here are the clues.

When Krin Haglund was a little girl, her dad would tip her upside-down every day.

In the Madison family's archives is a snapshot of her at age 6, fixated on performers in Baraboo.

This is a woman who has long loved the circus, but it wasn't until age 21 that she decided to join one. Nothing has shattered her dream, but events have challenged it, and she continues to reinvent herself as a professional clown, comedienne, aerialist and acrobat.

Since 2002, she has performed with Cirque Eloize, a 13-year-old Canadian company that travels the world, most recently returning from the Chekhov Festival in Moscow. It was in Germany two months before that.

Haglund will lead a two-day clowning workshop next month in Madison. The Cirque Eloize cast of 12 will come to Milwaukee in November to present "Rain," a globally acclaimed theatrical and acrobatic tribute to childhood. (See accompanying articles.)

In Montreal, Haglund works at Dalhousie Station, former home of the National Circus School. The circus school moved to the impoverished Saint-Michel district with Cirque du Soleil (headquartered there) and En Piste (a circus arts network), to create the New Circus City.

These enterprises represent the best of the "new circus" - that which involves no animals and which fans consider a complete, serious art form.

"It's a lot of work, dangerous and a strange life," the daughter of Brent and Dayle Haglund says, with a wry smile, over breakfast at Chez Cora's, near Montreal's English-speaking McGill Ghetto, a university neighborhood that is neither downtrodden nor dangerous.

Haglund is a graduate of Smith College, where she studied chemistry and Japanese. She considered a pre-med track, "but I didn't want to spend the rest of my 20s in medical school."

Long involved in gymnastics and modern dance, Haglund spent a year in Japan, learning geisha dance. Then she enrolled in a flying trapeze class at the San Francisco School of Circus Arts, thinking this would become her hobby, "but I walked in, and I started to cry." The circus was where she wanted to be, "but I thought it was too late" at age 21.

It's almost like a priest with a calling, particularly the clown work, which "comes from your soul" when done well. So in 1999 Haglund became immersed in a new type of study - contortion, juggling, high wire, aerial tissue climbing, clowning, showmanship - to hone body and mind into razor-sharp condition.

She was the first woman to maneuver herself inside the Cyr Wheel, an apparatus created by a Cirque Eloize founder. The equipment is as tall as an adult; "the acrobat tames the wheel like an animal trainer," the troupe explains online.

### UNWANTED FREE FALL

Haglund jokes, at first, about injuries. "They're like battle scars," she says. "We take pictures of the good ones."

Her biggest came three years ago, when a high wire broke while she was waiting to begin practice in Montreal. "It wasn't rigged right," Haglund says, and her 12-foot fall resulted in a skull fracture, broken jaw and shattered bones in both wrists.

The free-spirited acrobat suddenly was helpless, unable to open her apartment door, unable to dress herself and unable to



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eat because her jaw was wired shut for two months.

Contortion training came in handy, she says – "I could open my freezer with my foot." Physical therapy became a full-time job – "I'd do it in my sleep." Time mended, healed and changed the rhythm of her life.

Juggling no longer is fun. Tumbling no longer is possible. Bone lengths, in one arm, are uneven. High-wire work is out, but Haglund has returned to the low wire, three feet above ground.

"I'm alive, and I'm working," she rationalizes, describing her work today as "actor/acrobat," encompassing character development more than physical risk, although she still performs on the Cyr Wheel, which requires strength but not hard-impact movement. She also directs productions.

When not on tour with Cirque Eloize, Haglund works as a translator and writes for a public relations firm. She also is a clown emcee for the Dresden Dolls, a Canadian rock band, has taught clowning and directed a show involving immigrant children.

"People who weren't their parents laughed," she says of her success with the latter.

Her own circus?

Cirque Eloize has "more of a theatrical bent" than the typical new circus enterprise. That category includes Cirque du Soleil, which pays its cast a higher wage but "someone originates a role, and then it is inherited" by other performers. So opportunities for personal interpretation and expression are less than at Cirque Eloize.

"What Cirque du Soleil did was open a new market – one where people are willing to spend \$75 to \$100 for a ticket," Haglund says. "It makes circus theatrical, and opened the door for a company like mine" to succeed.

Her plan is to return home, to Madison, and establish her own circus company instead of signing another two-year work contract with Cirque Eloize.

"There is something so magical about doing the impossible," she says, about her love for the circus, and it is satisfying to help others achieve their dreams.

mbergin@madison.com

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