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From Rhubarb to Smirkus: A Young Performer Goes on Tour

By LEE WICKS

MONTAGUE CENTER – For Lucia Mason, climbing is woven so deeply into her being that she has only hazy, long-ago memories of when she started. On the other hand, I will never forget seeing her near the top of a huge old maple tree in her yard at dusk on a summer evening years ago, her arms and legs spread wide as the tree swayed in the wind. It was an image of freedom, ease and confidence.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Lucia Mason, 17, working the ropes. The teen was chosen to tour with Circus Smirkus this summer.

Lucia said, “I really like being high in trees. It’s peaceful, a time to be alone. At high levels the tree gets thinner and you feel it bend more.”

Her father, Chris Mason, said, “Lucia has been climbing since the day she was born.”

Jeanne Weintraub Mason.

A few years later in a barn in Montague Center, an older, poised and trained Lucia wound herself in green silk and performed feats of daring and grace with fabric and on the trapeze. She and her neighborhood friends had started their own youth-run circus, the Traveling Rhubarb Circus (TRC). From a few kids performing cartwheels and handstands in a Montague Center churchyard, the TRC grew to include a dozen kids between the ages of 7 and 17.

Her years of passion and commitment paid off this spring, when Lucia won a coveted spot in Circus Smirkus, the country’s only traditional traveling youth circus. Thirteen-year old flier Serafina Walker, of Greenfield, also won a place with the troupe.

Last fall, both girls submitted audition tapes to Smirkus headquarters in Greensboro, Vermont, and were subsequently invited to participate in live auditions in January. Serafina, Lucia and 28 other performers ages 11 to 18 were selected for the 2016 Big Top Tour.

The performers will travel to Greensboro in June for three weeks of rehearsals at Smirkus headquarters, then hit the road on June 25 for a 66-show tour that touches down in 16 cities and towns in the Northeast.

Circus Smirkus will be at

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the Three County Fairgrounds in Northampton on July 14, 15, and 16. Tickets sell out fast and can be purchased at smirkus.org or phone at 1 (877) SMIRKUS.

At the kitchen table in her home in Montague, Lucia reflected on the years of practice and hard work that will actually allow her to “run away with the circus” this summer. Winning a spot with Circus Smirkus was competitive. Hundreds auditioned for one of the 30 available slots.

Lucia was prepared. She has put in hours of training to build strength, stamina and flexibility. Behind the glamorous performances stand years of effort. The calluses on her hands bear testament to this, along with a couple of rope burns on her legs.

She attends the Four Rivers Charter School in Greenfield, where she is an excellent student, and also plays on the Girls Ultimate Frisbee team. She will be a senior next fall. After school she travels up to Brattleboro to train at the New England Center for Circus Arts (NECCA), and then comes home and starts her homework.

Travel Expenses!

To help cover some of the costs associated with the Circus Smirkus summer tour, Lucia’s family has set up a crowdfunding campaign on GoFundMe.

This is the link to the campaign site: gofundme.com/SeniorLucia (You can also find



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Lucia Mason poses next to fabric used in her acrobatics.

At NECCA, Lucia is a member of the Advanced Youth Troupe, where she specializes in fabric, rope, and cyr wheel (a giant hoop she spins inside of). “Sometimes I envy my friends who are home schooled and actually have time to sleep,” she said.

Funny thing is, Lucia doesn’t look tired. She looks strong and thrilled with her accomplishments so far. She is proud of her callused hands. Her red hair and freckles bring Pippi Longstocking to mind, and years ago she dressed as Pippi for Halloween. Despite the physical resemblance, it’s actually the force field of her personality that is reminiscent of the adventurous heroine of the children’s book series.

She’s just started working with

on ice and had nothing to do with the daring things she does high off the ground. A full time career with a circus would be a dream come true.

When does a pastime become a passion? For Lucia, it was gradual. “You can’t just have fun on your apparatus,” she said. “Over time you learn there’s more to it than that.”

“You begin to create the building blocks that will get you to the next level: You create a daily routine; you get to another level and then another, always competing with yourself. You build confidence. You don’t perform unless you feel confident. It all comes together. Being a professional circus performer would be my ideal job.”

Even an ideal situation can require hard choices, Lucia said. She will not be able to participate in the Traveling Rhubarb Circus this summer. “While I love putting on circus shows with my friends, the thought of being able to travel with a national youth troupe from town to town in the true mud show fashion was too good to pass up.”

She added, “I am excited to be training with world famous coaches and performing with other kids who are just as passionate about circus as I am.”

The summer won’t be all spotlights and sparkles. Lucia and Serafina will join their fellow troupers in doing such tasks as taking care of props, selling tickets and popcorn, and working cooperatively with the tent crew, light and sound technicians, equipment riggers, costumer, musicians and others who travel with the one-ring show.

But the payoff is the opportunity

...day she was born.
"She has always been drawn to any challenge that involves strength and balance," added her mother, ...
Circus Smirkus will be at Cheshire County Fairgrounds in Swanzey, NH on July 11 and 12, and see **CIRCUS** page B5

...being quiet. (You can also find her campaign in the GoFundMe website by searching for "Lucia" and "Smirkus".)

She's just started working with ropes and she loves it. She practices new acts with a thick crash mat below her. Her one and only injury was caused last year from slipping

But the payoff is the opportunity to spend the summer with teens from all parts of the country and the world, bringing their love of circus to each performance. 