

Marie Antoinette Comeau Concello

Antoinette Concello, known as the “Queen of the Flying Trapeze,” was born on April 22, 1910. Like her sister Mickey, she grew up in rural Vermont and New Hampshire after her family moved there from Sutton, Quebec, Canada.

She attended St. Mary’s Convent School in Burlington, Vermont and had earned a scholarship to attend the College of New Rochelle in the state of New York when she was 16. Instead of spending the summer preparing for college life, she made the life changing decision to visit her older sister Mickey in Detroit, Michigan, who was performing with the Flying Wards at the Sells Floto Circus. It was there that she fell in love with the circus.

She officially began training to perform in the circus in 1927. Antoinette started with simpler acts like the swinging ladders, the iron jaw, and posing on webs. She then began to catch aerialists. But what she really wanted to do was be a flyer. That dream became a reality when she met her future husband, Art Concello (who was also a member of the Flying Wards). He began to teach her to fly.

Art and Antoinette married in 1929. They had one son, Randall. Unfortunately, their marriage was a rocky one and they divorced in 1956.

Flying and somersaulting came naturally to Antoinette. She was fearless. She and Art formed their own troupe, The Flying Concellos, in 1929. By 1931, they were performing with Ringling Brothers, Barnum & Bailey Circus. In 1933, they were performing in the center ring with Ringling Bros. By this time, she could do the double somersault, but Antoinette wanted even more.

She wanted to accomplish a feat no other female flyer had, and very few male flyers could successfully do; to successfully perform the triple somersault. So she began to practice at the Ward training barn in Bloomington, which Art had purchased in 1935. Antoinette and her catcher, Eddie Ward, Jr. worked hard and trained tirelessly as she attempted to master the triple. The triple somersault was the hardest trick in aerial performance at that time. And while she could do it, unfortunately she was never able to consistently do the triple.

The first time Antoinette did a triple somersault successfully in public was at the Shriner’s Circus in Detroit, Michigan in 1937. The Flying Concellos became the first act to feature a male and female flyer that could both successfully perform the triple. This secured their status as stars of the circus.

She, and other circus stars of the day, made brief cameos in the epic film, *The Greatest Show on Earth* in 1952. And Antoinette also served as a coach to one of the stars of the movie, Betty Hutton.

Antoinette continued to perform as an aerialist until 1953, when she retired from flying after 25 years. She had performed with numerous circuses, but worked the most with Ringling Bros.

She continued working with Ringling Bros for several decades in a new capacity; as the aerial director (1964-1984), even stepping in for another aerialist when they were absent occasionally.

She ended her career in the circus a short time before her death on February 5, 1984. She was buried in the Comeau family plot at Park Hill Cemetery and Mausoleum in Bloomington, IL.

To recognize her achievements and legacy in the circus work, Antoinette was posthumously inducted into the Circus Ring of Fame in 1992.