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FROM THE STREETS..

UNICYCLES

By Vashti McKenzie

Once upon a time, there was a man named Jerry

One day, as a youngster in Tampa, Fla., he crawled under a tent flap of the Ringling Brothers, Barnum and Bailey Circus. He watched a unicycle act on the high wire.

King could not afford to buy himself a unicycle. And, no fairy godmother popped in to make one magically appear.

King thought, "if ever he had a son he would buy him a unicycle."

As fate would have it, King grew up and started a family. In 1958 when his son, Charles was six years old, King bought him a unicycle.

Charles practiced riding the one-wheeled machine in the hallway of the family's Bronx apartment house. When Spring came, Charles took to the streets. He found himself besieged by a cadre of youngsters wanting to learn to ride.

King decided to teach them

Out of about 200 eager youngsters, a core of 12 riding experts emerged. And, not only could they ride well, but they were wizards on the basketball courts.

The little group challenged other groups to play. They became the Harlem Globetrotters on one wheel, dazzling crowds and unsuspecting local teams with their athletic ability.

They entertained at halftime during New York Knicks, Washington Bullets and Boston Celtics games. They organized a New York to Washington, D.C. unicycle

Television happened to_

...TO THE CIRCUS

It started as just a father's dream. He couldn't have it . . . so he gave it to his son. Thus began an exercise that led to the King Troupe which has been in the circus for 10 years.

"Tonight Show," "The Merv Griffin Show' and "The Cavett Show."

And it came to pass that one day Irvin Feld, producer of the Ringling Brothers, Barnum and Bailey Circus heard about the "Street Cyclists."

He asked them to audition for the circus, on the sidewalks of New York outside Madison Square Garden.

Feld knew a good thing when he saw it. He hired The King Charles Troupe in 1969. They became the first all-



get ready for the next number.

black circus act in the world.

Now, ten years later they're still living happily ever after traveling the sawdust trail with the Blue Unit of "The Greatest Show On Earth."

"My father had a vision of doing this long before I was born," said Charles King relaxing after a second Sunday afternoon show at the Baltimore Civic Center, recently.

"He said he'd teach his son how to ride and through that a lot of other kids learned. He used the unicycle as a tool to fight the evil that exists in the black community."

That is essence of this fairy

The elder King developed a program to teach morals and build character using the unicycle as a prop.

"My father never liked the term 'Keep the kids off the street'," said Charles. "A kid has to be in the street. It's where he lives.

"The real victim of the Southeast Bronx is the kid who really is good, with lots of talent but with no direction," he said.

Keye Wash joined the King