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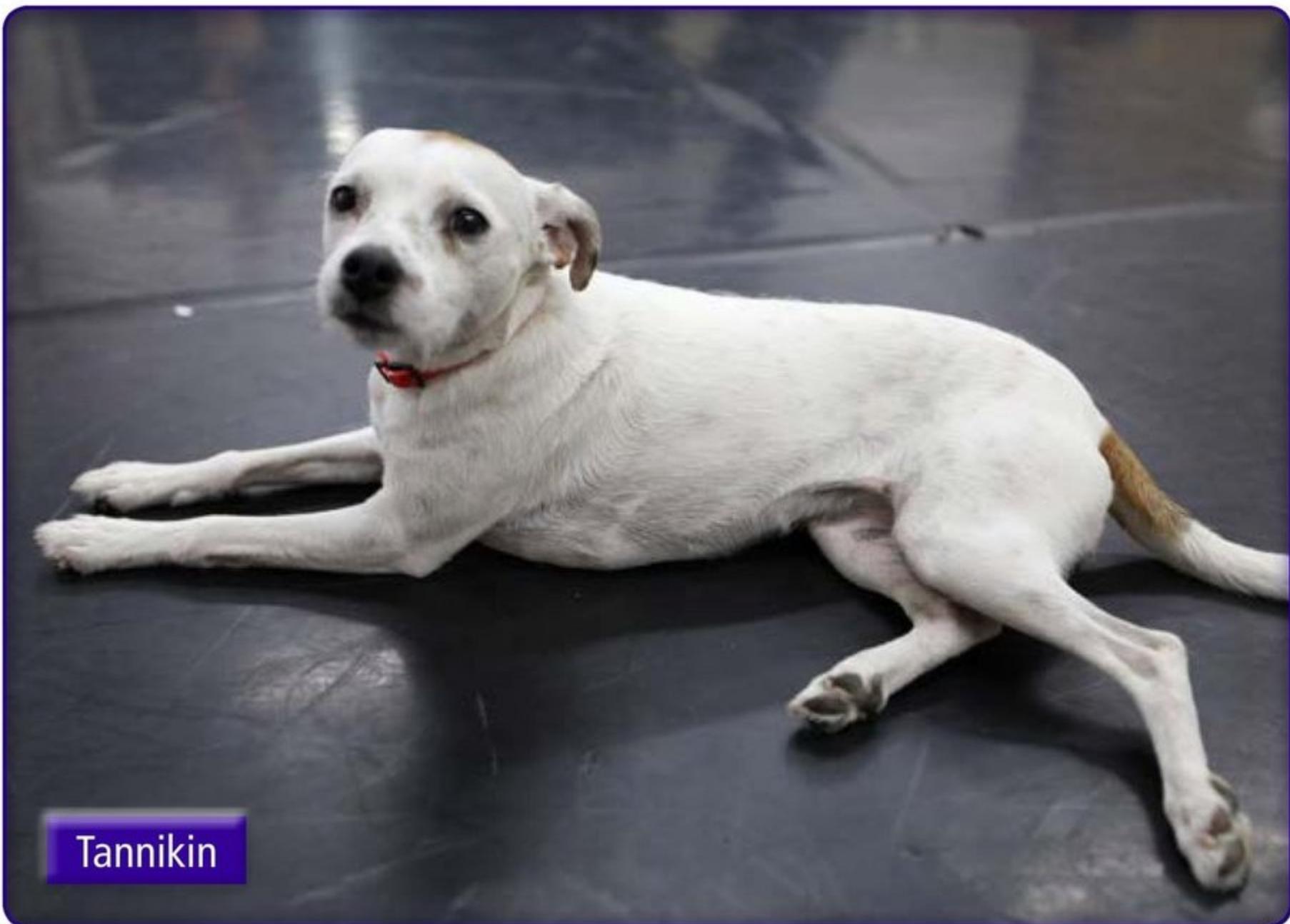
OFF TO
JOIN THE
CIRCUS

Written by Birdie Stark

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Tannikin

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➊ ⚡ I'm Back! ⚡ ➋

My name is Birdie, and I just finished second grade. When school lets out for the summer, I'm off to join the **circus!**

Okay, I'm really off to circus camp. I went last summer, when I was seven. For ten days, we learned how to do things that I'd never done before. Then at the end of camp, we put on a big show.

It was so fun, I came back this year!

Taiko

Our first class of the day is *taiko*—“great drum” in Japanese. We wheel out thirteen large wooden drums to the center of the marley—that’s the type of floor we work on. Almost everything we do takes place on the marley.

With two or three kids to a drum, we do a drumroll with the tips of our index fingers, pretending they’re drumsticks. Next, one of our teachers hands out the real *bachi*—the straight wooden sticks used to play taiko drums.



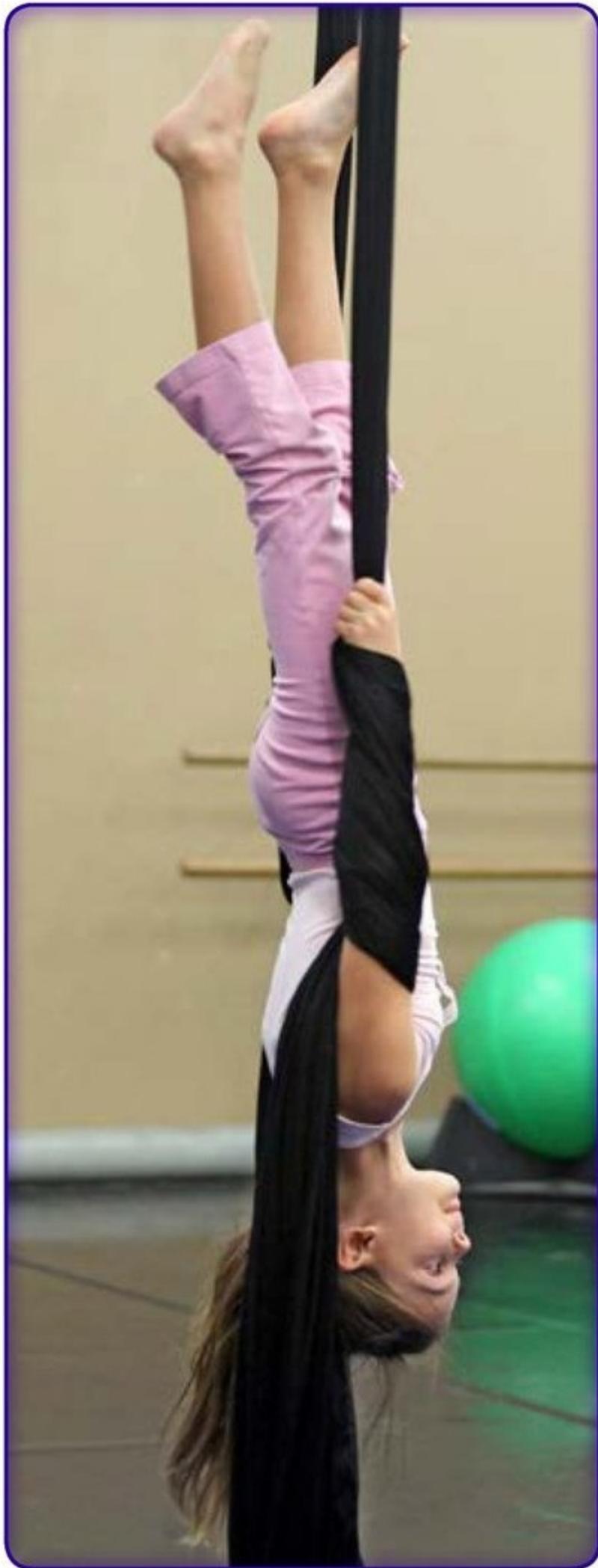


When our teacher gives the command—
“Hai!”—we beat our drums in **unison**.

Thirteen big drums with thirty
drummers beating on them make a
mighty sound. At the end of class, we
bow to our teacher. Then it’s on to
something completely different.



Nola is only eight, but she makes the silks look easy.



Aerial Silks

Aerial means “in the air,” and during silks class, that’s where we spend our time. The silks are pieces of strong black fabric that hang from the ceiling of the gym—about twenty feet high—down to the marley.



When I try fancy moves, I get really tangled! Emma has to hold me while Barry untangles me from the silks.

Some kids (like me) can climb to the top of the silks. That's fun, but what we're learning to do is not just climb the silks but also hang from them. There are lots of different ways to hang—by our feet, by our arms—but they all involve locking the silk around some part of our bodies. Once the silk is locked, it will hold us safely, whether we're twenty feet or two feet off the ground.

Stilts

After lunch, we all put on our stilts. Some stilts you just hop onto, but ours have shoes bolted onto them. Last year, I bought my stilt shoes at a thrift store. This year, since I'd outgrown them, we put my friend's old stilt shoes (which she'd outgrown) on my stilts.

Some kids have trouble stilting at first (I did). Those kids need a stilt partner or one of the teachers to keep them **steady**.

They also have the towers to help them.

Soon, they'll be able to walk between the two towers. Finally, when they're ready, they can join the rest of us on the marley.



Kids use the towers when they're starting. Getting up is often the hardest part.



Even teenagers come to circus camp. Ruby (right) can spin on her stilts. Ceci (left) is amazing, too. She can “pop up” from a backbend on her stilts and just walk away.

“I really do feel like a giraffe!” says Mikaila, who just learned to stilt this summer.

We practice walking sideways on our stilts for the **recital** on Saturday night.

Stilts are fun, but they’re tricky when you need to go to the bathroom!

Clowning

It's time for one of my favorite classes—clowning. Our teachers dump out a huge pile of costumes on the marley: wigs, hats, life jackets, lampshades, wings, bee suits, bow ties. We swarm around the pile, grabbing whatever looks good today.



The wall of mirrors is a great spot to watch your reflection clown around.

Once we're in costume, we each find a place in front of the wall of mirrors to watch ourselves. Everyone strikes a clown **pose** and considers their clown character. What does this clown love more than anything? What does this clown hate? How does this clown greet people?

We walk around the room as the clowns we've created. Although I'm shy in real life, my clown shakes every hand she can. "Very nice to meetcha!" she cries.



Tightrope and Poi

One by one, we set out across the tightrope. It's only a foot off the floor, but that's okay. None of us can walk very far on our own . . . yet.



Other kids are working on their poi skills, swinging soft weights through the air to make different patterns. Poi can be simple, or it can be tricky. It all depends on how hard the pattern is. As we try trickier moves, some of us bonk ourselves in the stomach or the head. *Oof!*

Camp is winding down for the day. Soon we head home, but we'll be back at it tomorrow. We have to get ready for the big show.



• • • The Big Show • • •

It's Saturday night, and people are dressed for the show. Even Tannikin, the camp dog, is dressed in shiny sequins. As the sun sets and the sky glows orange, we put on our stilts in the parking lot. This is the moment we've all been waiting for: showtime.

The big gym door rolls up, and we enter in pairs to the sound of the taiko drums. We dance on our stilts. We do our clown skits. We climb the silks. We do tricks with Hula Hoops and poi, and walk on globes. The **audience** claps and claps—it's starting to really feel like a circus now.



When the **acrobats** have all done their tricks, they make a bridge of fifteen backs, and Tannikin runs across for the **grand finale!**

It has all gone too fast, and the circus is over . . . until next year.



Glossary

acrobats (<i>n.</i>)	people who perform tumbling or other physical tricks (p. 15)
audience (<i>n.</i>)	a group of people gathered to see and hear a performance or presentation (p. 14)
circus (<i>n.</i>)	a performance that usually moves from place to place and has acrobats, clowns, and often trained animals (p. 4)
grand finale (<i>n.</i>)	the end of a performance or show that is often exciting or extraordinary (p. 15)
pose (<i>n.</i>)	a body position that is held for a certain period of time (p. 12)
recital (<i>n.</i>)	a public performance of an art form, such as music or dance, often given by students (p. 10)
skits (<i>n.</i>)	short plays that are usually funny (p. 14)
steady (<i>adj.</i>)	in a stable or firm position; balanced (p. 9)
unison (<i>n.</i>)	happening at the same time or, in music, singing or playing the same notes (p. 6)

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Author's Note: Birdie would like to thank her mom for help in writing this book.

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