

# Flying High

**Trapeze Artist Kaely Michels-Gualtieri**

**How a nice Jewish girl  
joined the circus**

**By EVAN GRANT**





**F**or many people, it would be hard to set aside one's life and choose a life of travel and adrenaline that the circus has to offer. For an 18-year-old girl from Washington, DC the choice was very easy. After finishing high school, Kaely Michels-Gualtieri strayed from the normal path of a Jewish teenager, joining a traveling circus as a trapeze artist instead of going to college.

As a senior at the Field School in Washington, DC she was given the opportunity to intern at the Circus School of San Francisco as the first intern the school had.

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It was from this two-week experience that she knew she wanted to perform as a trapeze artist.

She went to trapeze school in Italy for a year, then for another three years in France. Choosing the circus over college would be hard for any student, and Michels-Gualtieri was only going to do it for a year before college.

"At first I regretted the choice not to return to college, because all my friends were doing it. However, after nearly six years of doing this I have realized it is also an educational experience — traveling to all these countries and learning different languages"

When asked if her Jewish heritage has played a role in her life as a trapeze artist, she said, "Yes, definitely it has helped me. I was brought up to question things and if something didn't seem right to me I would question it.

"That's something you don't see from the other performers. I do this because of my Jewish background."

Michels-Gualtieri also is an EMT or emergency medical technician. This is very rare for someone who spends most of their time ascended 30 feet above the ground. Michels-

## 'I still get nervous before every show'

Gualtieri believes this has been helpful when something goes wrong and a fellow performer gets injured. She is there, prepared to help before anyone.

Even after years of performing with countless shows Michels-Gualtieri says, "I still get nervous before every show." This nervousness is calmed by the help of her boyfriend, Jonathan Ankers.

"When you are 30 feet above the ground it is nice to have someone you trust holding you. It takes away a lot of the fear that comes with performing."

Ankers also works and travels with the circus, always right

by Michels-Gualtieri's side to have a "pre-show dance party" to help calm her down.

**T**o succeed in this art there are necessary skills that a performer must have.

"When I was starting I was not the strongest or most flexible, but I had a great will to do this and be good at it. That's the most important part. I will always be a little bit scared to go out there and perform, but I have a great will to do it and that is why I succeed."

Michels-Gualtieri did not go to trapeze school lacking







Kaely Michels-Gualtieri

background. She was a competitive gymnast competing since age five.

"If I had not done gymnastics I wouldn't have gotten to the school in Paris. It gave me the background and skill set that I needed to begin my training as a trapeze artist.

Along with a specific skill set and background, it is also to the performer's advantage to be smaller and "have a low center of gravity," Michels-Gualtieri said. At just 5'3" Michels-Gualtieri is one of the taller performers in this art. In the Olympics the male and female gymnasts are all very short and strong, with a "low center of gravity."

For one to go from living the life of a modern Jewish teenager in Washington, DC to joining the circus is a big step and takes some serious getting used to. "Everyone that I travel with and perform with was born into this lifestyle and grew up in it. For me it took some getting used to."

"When you are with these people traveling the country or the world they have to become like your second family."

Although the circus is like a second family, the performers have to become used to letting go and not being attached to people or places because of the constant change and travel.

For Michels-Gualtieri the decision to choose a different route in life was one that she does not regret and very much enjoys.



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