

relatives and a few friends. But nobody has been able to assemble all the pieces of the puzzle.

"I suppose," Steve says, "half the blame for not knowing about Edwin belongs to me. I should have taken advantage of the situation on those rare occasions when Mother introduced the subject. I grew up realizing there was another, unknown, person in Mother's life. But she never mentioned Edwin directly. I learned of his existence through relatives, not through her.

"She made vague allusions to some college I might consider attending in the South, because someone very dear to her had gone to a school in that part of the country. Or she'd say there was an important story she wanted to tell me some day. Or there was something she was terribly sorry about, involving someone I would one day want to meet—someone down South very dear to her.

"But as a child I was always confused and alarmed by these conversations. They took place only when she was drinking, and I could never really communicate with her at those times. So I'd simply put the matter out of my mind for years at a time. In the last years of Mother's life, both Jayne [Steve's wife,

about Belle Montrose. She was a fiercely independent woman, more dedicated to performing than to her family. For instance, her mother offered to take Belle and Edwin in after the baby's birth, but Belle said no. A relative remembers Belle saying, "I will never give up show business"—and she never did.

#### Circus Belle

She was capricious, hard-drinking, quixotic—and good company. She was also something of a wraith, spiriting herself away to vaudeville jobs in various parts of the country, joining troupes and leaving young Steve with relatives and friends throughout his childhood.

If she appeared indifferent to her own children it was, perhaps, understandable. She was a child herself when she began her career—a nine-year-old circus aerialist with the famed Watson-Sisters-and-Zamora Troupe that traveled through Europe.

Because of her unconventional ways, Belle was an outcast with her own family. Her friends were fellow vandevilians, more likely to be found at the bottom of a bill than among the headliners. During her teens she fell in love—with the young scion of a wealthy family. She

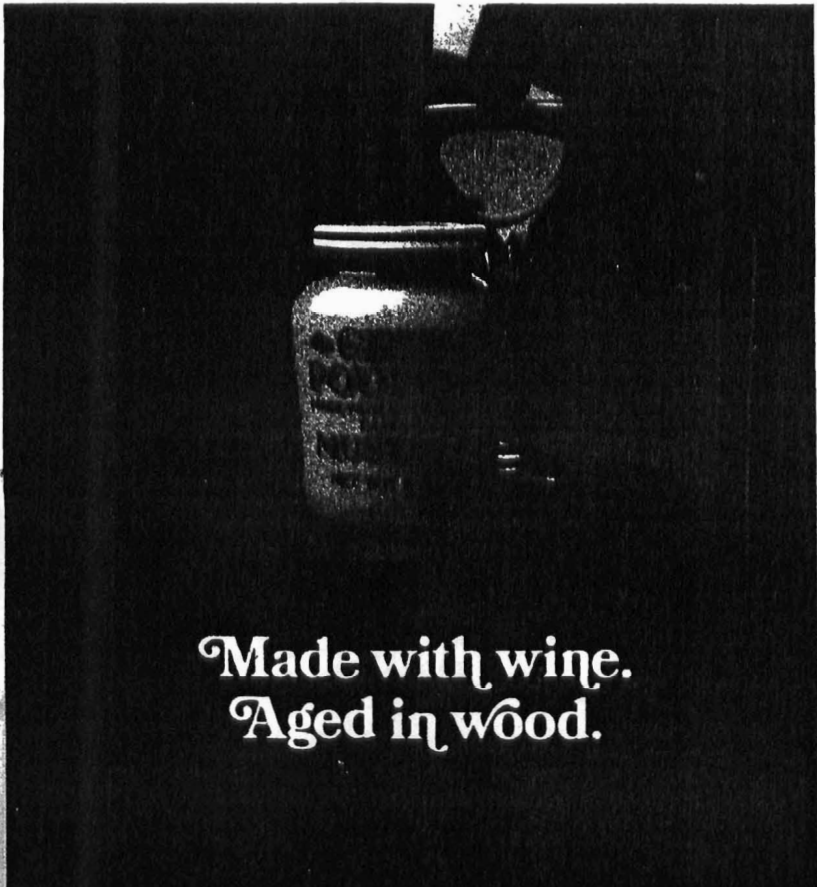
search on the road for four years.

Steve Allen talked to Alma Russell Morse after his mother died. It was his first contact with anyone besides his mother who had actually known the child Edwin. He tape-recorded his conversation with his mother's old friend, who told him: "Belle really loved Edwin, but she worried that he'd never get the right sort of upbringing. She'd say, 'He'll have no father—and I guess I'll just go on leading this gypsy life.'"

Mrs. Morse explained to Steve, "Your mother managed to take care of Edwin up to a point because she got a great deal of help from the rest of us who worked with her. Edwin was such an adorable little baby that we were glad to pitch in and do what we could. He was very lovable. When he was out on the street, he'd often run up and put his arms around a stranger and say, 'Hello, man,' with a big smile on his face.

"One Saturday night the group of us were down at the station in (continued)

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Made with wine.  
Aged in wood.

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