



Looking Down, But Not Looking Back

Despite a Paralyzing Accident,
Family's High-Wire Act Goes On

By JOYCE WADLER

The wire is as thick as your thumb, but not treacherous; the tatted and rarely seen Dominican Pyramids.

The Great Walkers lost two men performing it in 1982: a third was paralyzed. The Guerreros of Colombia, who may be the only troupe in the world to do the feat without nets or safety rigs, pray each time they step out.

"Ea el nombre de Dios," they say out loud. Before the act, they ask God to look after them. After the act, they give thanks. When the youngest leader, 29-year-old Walter, their star, fell last month in another dangerous trick and crushed his spine, his sister Jataca, holding Walter's hand as he lay on the floor of King Don, uttered the prayer.

"Save my brother's life," she said. Walter is now in a rehabilitation hospital in Florida, paralyzed from the waist down.

Tonight, with Walter, his wife, Angélica, and a third partner out of the act, and three family members hastily recruited from Florida and Europe to replace them, the Guerreros will be the last troupe to perform "The Tower" at the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus, which opens at Madison Square Garden. In the act, four men walk the high wire, balancing two acrobats, who balance another.

Whether, during their two-week run at the Garden, they will be able to attempt the act is no sure thingness because — with the 29-year-old Jenny Guerrero Edwards at the summit, balancing precariously on the spot of a chair — they do not know. Balancing on the chair, Ms. Edwards said, requires "100 percent confidence" and with three replacements coming in, they are not there yet.

"We've got to accomplish in two weeks what

The Guerreros family's Pyramid act bottom, from left, Brian French, Capitola Acevedo, Werner Guerrero and Werner Guerrero; middle row, Ara Guerrero, left, and Jataca Guerrero French, and, top, Jenny Guerrero Edwards.

The Basics Of the Pyramid

THE WIRE Five-eighths of an inch thick, 23 feet long, 20 feet above ground.

WEIGHT FOR TOP PERSON 36 feet.

LENGTH OF ACT 2½ minutes.

WEIGHT HELD Men at bottom support the weight of about 220 pounds, including a 40-pound balance pole. Women in the middle support about 150 pounds, including a 26-pound balance pole.

THINGS TO KNOW If you're on the bottom, never take your eyes off the wire.

SAFE TRAINING The first thing tightrope walkers learn is to grab the wire when they fall. They are taught this on a low wire — six feet high — by repeatedly stepping off the rope.

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Jataca Guerrero practices on a low wire as Ara, her sister-in-law, stretches.