GRIND SHOW
Weirdness as Entertainment

FRED OLEN RAY
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by

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The Headless Girl waits patiently for the next show to begin.
I would sincerely like to thank and acknowledge those people who helped me in the creation of this work. Without the encouragement of David F. Friedman I would have never even dared to venture into the world of outdoor showmanship. Dave did, however, suggest I buy rides instead of shows! Maybe I should have listened to him.

David L. Hewitt has been a real friend and the A.K. Brill catalog he gave me really started the ball rolling. Doug "Pygmy" Higley introduced me to a lot of great show people and Jeff Murray has been a constant source of inspiration (as well as a constant source of show memorabilia - much of which appears in this book).

Steve Armogida has had the questionable pleasure of opening numerous mysterious boxes and crates that have arrived at our offices not knowing what new horror was lurking inside. Laurie Sherman has had to endure the unceasing stare of Shrunken Orangutan Heads and two-faced pickled kittens, and done it admirably, I might add.

Robin Chaney has been a great help providing me with photos, info and dragging a new batch of exhibits out into the field to get my own show back in shape. (Sorry about sending the tattooed human skin over without warning you!)

Doug Hobart's contribution to my life and career (in both film and outdoor) has been one that has spanned twenty years. Everyone should be so lucky.

I would especially like to thank Malcolm Garey, whose name I inadvertently misspelled throughout the book as Malcom Geary, repeating the error perpetrated in an article in the August '92 issue of Carousel magazine. Sorry Malcolm...

I have enjoyed knowing and sharing information with Bryan Forbes and Mark Frierson. Without the assistance of all of these people I doubt I would have (or could have) written this book.

Thank you all.

FRED OLEN RAY
Hollywood, California
INTRODUCTION

Before we go too far, let's get one thing straight. I flat out love the old Circus Side Shows. Nothing would make me happier than to visit a carnival or fair with a handful of back-end shows scattered around. I am still tickled pink to line up to see some poor girl born with a turtle's body or a curvaceous centerfold who has somehow lost her head and still manages to live through the miracle of science - made all the more amazing by the fact that this incredibly sophisticated medical equipment can be easily housed inside the confines of a small tent!

You say you have a full-grown cow with six legs? I'm right there, ready to charge inside with some loose pocket change clutched in my fist.

The problem today is not the shows themselves, it's the almost total lack of them. Today the Side Show or Back-End Show has almost completely disappeared, clearing the way for the multitudes of rides and games that are "considered" to be the lifeblood of the modern day carnival. Where once they were legion, now one has to actively seek out the few remaining Shows on the various carnivals. Like the Drive-In movies theaters, Grind Shows are slowly vanishing from American culture. This sort of extinction is simply not acceptable to the many fans of this type of outdoor showmanship, but how to combat it still remains a mystery.

Many carnival owners still cling to the term "Show" to describe their operations and they go one better by self-labeling themselves "Showmen". Yet a quick visit to most of these "shows" reveal neither a show or any showmanship. Perhaps we've begun to accept that a lot full of rides, games and grab-joints (fast food stands) constitutes a show of some kind. This, clearly, was not the case in the past.

One quick look through Joe McKennon excellent books, A PICTORIAL HISTORY OF THE CARNIVAL (volumes I - III), will convince anyone that things have gone mighty far askew since the old days of outdoor showmanship. Carnivals used to feature only a small handful of rides, (much harder to come by then because they were hand-produced) but the shows stretched out for miles. Shows of every kind and nature used to ring the carnival, bringing almost every type of live and not-so-alive entertainment to the hungry masses.

When motion pictures, radio and television did not reign as kings of the quick entertainment fix, it fell to the traveling carnivals and circuses to supply that much needed form of relaxation, amusement, and amazement.
THE FLYING SAUCER REVIEW, an early attempt to combine the Ten-In-One with the Grind Shows.

John Strong Jr.'s newly framed Ten-In-One Show at El Monte, California, 1992.
Even small rural areas were stopping places for the roving shows, many of which moved almost exclusively by railroad. A visit to the carnival would provide quick, cheap entertainment to suit just about everyone’s tastes. For mere pennies the customers could line up to see a live Wild West show or a high diving exhibition performed by young, beautiful girls in daring, for the time, bathing attire.

Exotic animals from the far corners of the globe and death-defying motorcycle stunts were a common sight. Mystifying magic and revues depicting the shameless harems of India and Baghdad delighted the curious. There were the Pit Shows wherein midgets wrestled giant snakes and ancient mummies were displayed.

The most curious and strong of stomach could find an incredible exhibit going on inside the Side Show or Freak Show where live acts were performed continuously on stage. Here one could see the Human Oddities, those people whom life had dealt an unfair or extraordinary fate. The Fat Lady, the Pop-Eyed Boy, the Human Skeleton, or one of the "working acts" - those acts wherein a special skill was required as opposed to a peculiar physical deficiency - like the Fire Eater, the Human Pin-Cushion, the Human Blockhead - who would pound a six inch spike up his nose, or the Sword Swallower.

Initially displayed as single attractions, (known in the business as a "Single-Ö") these amazing acts were later linked together into one grandiose show called the Ten-In-One (Ten acts under One tent). Walter K. Sibley has been credited with the novel idea of stringing several diverse attractions into one giant exhibition back in 1904. For a time they were called "String Shows", before transforming into the more common nick-name, Ten-In-one, although some shows featured as many as 16 acts under their top.

As author Don Boles pointed out so well in his excellent book, THE MIDWAY SHOWMAN: "To build a show, you must have something to exhibit..." There simply had to be something inside the tent to pique the public's interest. While it is certainly true that the brightly illustrated banners displayed outside the shows were almost always going to be more entertaining than what was held inside the canvas, the show still had to deliver the goods or there would be "beefs" (customer complaints) to the carnival owner and trouble would certainly follow soon after.

What many people outside the business do not realize is that most carnivals are made up of many independent show people (sometimes referred to as "carnies"). All shows own some of the rides, games and grab-joints, but there are many independent owners and operators who book their machinery,
food or games onto the carnival, splitting, or "cutting" the money generated with the carnival owner for the privilege of doing business on their lot.

Side Show and Grind Show operators are almost always independent and don't generally consider themselves "carnies". They see themselves as real Showmen and rightly so.

It is not the purpose of this book to chronicle every Side Show or Grind Show that has ever existed throughout history. There have been far too many of them and the nomadic nature of the carnival industry makes it nearly impossible to keep track of the numerous shows and personnel that have criss-crossed this country over the long years that this particular type of entertainment has been around. It is also not my intention to delve deeply into the Circus Side Show, Ten-In-One or so-called Freak Show. This kind of show covers a lot of ground and the recent interest in Human Oddities has produced more than a fair share of books, posters and even trading cards (called FREAKCARDS). Besides, it is not this type of show that I am most interested in. I love the Grind Show.

A Grind Show is a show that, regardless of what it exhibits or how it is housed, grinds away endlessly hour after hour bringing in the dimes and quarters without a break. It is an exhibit that never ceases operation, does not have show times and usually begs a lower admission price than the bigger tent shows. It is said a Grind Show owner makes his living a nickel at a time.

Grinders are often Single-O attractions and many times the exhibit is not alive - and may never have been! Sometimes the exhibits are complete fabrications and bogus hokum. P.T. Barnum was a great one for exhibiting creatures that never really existed. Replicas of his famous Fiji mermaid (a taxidermied monkey sewed onto a fish body) is still being manufactured and displayed to this day!

Grind Shows usually require very little personnel to operate them. Sometimes only one person is needed to set-up and start selling tickets. Some shows, like the Gorilla Girl illusion require a small army to set-up and operate, but never as many as the Ten-In-One Show, even though as few as four performers sometimes make up the "ten" Side Show acts - the Rubber Girl doubling up (so to speak) as the Electric Girl and maybe even as the target for the Knife Thrower!

This single-minded independence is attractive to certain showmen and certainly costs less than the housing and boarding of Side Show performers (a Fat man can eat a lot if he puts his mind to it!), thus requiring less of an overhead operating expense and making its profit much quicker and cleaner than a big show.
A small Grind Show travels readily, depending on its overall size, and affords its owner the convenience of being simple to operate and easy to maintain and keep control over.

Grind shows can be simple, sometimes fitting entirely inside a ten by ten foot tent. More recently the shows have begun to be built into mobile trailers and cube trucks like those rented by U-Haul, but the showman's preference still seems to be the old-style canvas tent as this lends a circus-like atmosphere to the proceeding and gives the customers the impression that there is a much bigger exhibit inside than there might actually be. In simple English - the public still loves a tent!

As a small boy growing up in Florida I marveled at the various shows that appeared at the Florida State Fair in Tampa and The Sarasota County Fair. While I was often too intimidated by the idea of actually facing these horrors eye-to-eye to go inside, I became entranced (enchanted?) by the incredible artwork that adorned the exteriors. I will never forget the image displayed outside the Spidora show in the early 1960's that showed a worried doctor and nurse showing a horrified mother her infant child born with the head of a girl and the body of a hideous black spider! Promises made over the loudspeaker that the Spider Girl was very much alive inside and ready to talk to the public insured my absence from that show!

At the same fair I saw the terrific Motordrome where motorcycles roared furiously around the inside on a large silo-shaped arena, criss-crossing each other only inches from a flaming death. Likewise, the Freak Shows with their banners depicting such attractions as the Turtle Boy and the Alligator Skinned Girl always made me queasy. Throughout our young lives we are taught by our parents not to stare at those less fortunate folks who are afflicted by physical deformities, yet here they were - ready to be stared at for a price and the talker outside was doing everything in his power to entice the crowd (called a "tip") to line up for a ticket. Getting the crowd together was not so difficult. Outside the big tent would stand a small stage (a bally platform) and the talker would bring out a few of the performers - usually some of the "working acts" like the scantily clad Electric Girl, and he would attempt to build a tip by telling the crowd what marvels they were going to see inside. Building a tip was easy, it costs nothing to stand outside and look, but "turning a tip" (getting the crowd to pay up and go inside) has always been considered a fine art.

My own nervousness about looking at the Human Oddities kept me safely outside the Ten-In-Ones for many years, but as I grew older, bolder, and a bit more curious I began to join the tip.
Inside the tent, usually poorly lit and stuffy with the overpowering smell of old canvas, the performers did their acts, sometimes winding up by offering a souvenir photo card of themselves for a quarter. These cards have now become valuable collectors items, and are sold and traded by the avid fans of this rapidly dissolving media. As mentioned earlier many of the acts depicted outside were performed by only a handful of people inside. At one of Ward Hall's shows I saw his midget attraction, Pete Terhune, do several acts, including the Iron-Tongued Wonder (apparently putting a steel hook through his tongue and then lifting a bucket of sand with it!). Likewise Ward Hall once framed up a Pygmy Village show that promised six big acts. Little Pete was the show's only pygmy (called an Albino Pygmy no less - Pete's a Caucasian!), but he did, in fact, perform six acts. Remember, Hall's bannerline specified six acts, not six pygmies!

However, the Human Oddity and Working Act show never held the appeal for me that the Grind Show did. Maybe they seemed safer, more in control, and what they offered was usually more exciting and unbelievable than the Side Show.

In Sarasota, my childhood stomping grounds in the mid-1960's, I saw a Wild Jungle Girl (an ordinary black lass with a great costume and bad manners) and even a Werewolf! Now, even as a kid I knew there was no such thing as a Werewolf, but the artwork outside (this show, like the Wild Girl, was housed in a trailer with barred windows in which to look through) was so spectacular I just had to go inside to see what was in there. This kind of alluring artwork is, of course, the key to successful showmanship. It creates a sense of urgency - a "must see" feeling in the public. Or at least it's supposed to.

Inside the gloomy trailer was a man wearing a pretty good Wolfman mask and furry matching gloves. While the mask was good, it was the very same one offered for sale by Don Post Studios to youngsters like myself on the back cover of Famous Monsters Magazine for around $39.95. To his credit, the guy did jump up out of nowhere and scare the bejesus out of me, so I guess I did get my fifty cents worth.

I once saw a Torture Show which exhibited small models of Biblical atrocities inside a dark walk-through trailer, but even as a youngster I was not easily impressed. Likewise, my brother John (who really preferred the Freak Shows) and I went in to see the "Giant Killer Korean Rats - Scavengers of the Battle Field!" Outside the artwork depicted a troop of bloodied screaming soldiers wrestling frantically with the large carnivorous rats, while their more fortunate companions lay dying amidst the relics of war. Inside was the placid Capy Bara, in fact the world's largest rodent. It had no tail, looked a little like a miniature
horse and openly dined on lettuce and carrots. I still think the show owner should have at least placed a human skull or some bones in the cage to give it a little more credibility. Giant Rats are still being displayed today, at one point being touted as originating in Viet Nam and later from the sewers of Moscow (can the Desert Storm rats be far behind?). The public really despises rats and it's become a good perennial attraction, even though, thanks to *National Geographic*'s TV Specials, the bloom has long since fallen off the Capy Bara rose.

What I would like to accomplish in this work is a record of limited sorts of the Grind Shows of yesterday, and more importantly to me, those of today and the people who own and operate them.

We will look at the artwork and the exhibits. Where the shows have been and where they are going. We will hear from some of the principals of this elusive and sometimes mysterious business, and on the creation and operation of my own attempt at becoming a Grind Show owner with my TERRORS OF THE AMAZON show. It is time someone took a good lingering look at this form of true Americana before it disappears completely, taking with it a unique style of entertainment which today is struggling to survive.

Sit back and enjoy the show and as the "Fearless Young Showman" David F. Friedman would wish you - "Dry lots and Red Ones!"

Old-Style FAT LADY Single-O Show from the late 1970s.
CHAPTER ONE

WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT

Before things get too far along it would be a good idea to lay out the ground rules of being a Midway Showman. It will be much easier to understand what's going on if the peculiarities of the carnival are explained somewhat.

Being mobile, the carnival takes on a strange life of its own, separate and diverse from that of a normal community. The carnies do not seem to be governed by the normal laws of any one State or town since they move through them so quickly. Likewise, the carnival people sometimes resort to their own form of justice when dealing with thieves and others within their ranks who would disrupt or interfere with their business. There are stories of carnival weddings in which the bride and groom go once around the carousel (supposedly backwards) and are then considered hitched... at least until the end of the season.

It is not uncommon for a Grind Show operator to find his loudspeaker wires cut during the night if they are annoying the games owner across from him. Tires flattened and car windows smashed are not unusual acts of revenge if the perpetrator does not acknowledge the unwritten laws of the lot. Physical violence can sometimes break out, but the carnival people try not to engage each other in such an open fashion, because, believe it or not, they do consider themselves to be something of a raggedy family unit.

As in other things the carnival has a language of its own and being aware of the basics, at least in the manner in which they pertain to the Shows, would be helpful in understanding the following text. Be advised that some of these terms are a bit outdated, but still crop up occasionally when old carnies are sitting around cutting up jackpots. With that in mind, here is a short glossary of Carnival terminology (not intended to be complete by any means).

CARNIVAL GLOSSARY

AT SHOW: A show in which professional Boxers or Wrestlers took on members of the audience in an exhibition match. Bob Noell (his show was cleverly entitled Noell's Ark) used to travel with a very unusual show in which some brave and/or stupid patron was encouraged to wrestle one of Bob's large apes. The apes usually dismantled the customer in quick order, much to the delight of the crowd!
BABY SHOW: A show which displays preserved babies, usually deformed in some way, in formaldehyde jars.

BACK-END: The back portion of the standard Midway (most Midways are horse-shoe shaped). This is where most Shows were located. Thus, they are referred to as Back-end Shows or Back-End Pieces.

BALLYHOO: The free show that is presented on the small stage outside the Side Shows in order to gather a "Tip". This is where the talker gives his spiel and tries to work up a crowd of paying customers. Most often referred to as simply a BALLY.

BANNER: Large canvas paintings depicting the various sights to be seen inside the show. They come in various sizes and are erected on what is called a Banner Line - a series of poles that usually reach heights of 14 feet or more, making the banners easily seen from great distances.

BEEF: Customer complaints.

A BLANK: A spot or date where no real money is made. Bad business. Savanna, Georgia has long been considered a "blank" by many carnies because business there has never been good - they say.

BLOWDOWN: What happens when strong winds get hold of a bannerline or tent top and bring it crashing down.

BLOW-OFF: An extra attraction inside a show, usually hidden behind a canvas drape, for which a separate admission is charged. Sometimes it will be a pickled punk or Human Pin Cushion.

BOUNCER: A fake human fetus in a jar. One made of rubber.

BULLET: Buzz words like "ALIVE" and "ADULTS ONLY" painted in brilliant colors on a banner cloth.

CUTTING UP JACKPOTS: Basically this is carny lingo for standing around and swapping lies. Many times done at the cookhouse.

CUT-INS: Getting your electrical power hooked up. It is not uncommon to offer the Cut-In man a token of some sort, whether it is a ten spot or a six pack of beer. Failure to do so sometimes results in your power getting abruptly terminated.

CUTTING MONEY: Splitting up the money you make with another carny, for whatever reason.

DING: Any of the many extra charges that are leveled against the show owner, such as power cut-in, insurance, motorhome space (if you have one), etc. Also used to
refer to an extra fee that show owners charge the patrons to see some special, like the contortionist girl twisted inside her box or to view the blow-off attraction.

**DRY LOTS**: Those dates in which there is no rain. Rain, of course, being the vilest enemy of the carnival.

**FIRST COUNT**: The opportunity to be the first person to count the tickets taken in on a show, assuming that at least the first count will be the correct legitimate one.

**FIXER**: Just that. A man who "fixes" things with the local authorities - usually beforehand and most times after there have been complaints about shady game operations.

**FORTY MILER**: A carnival that never travels more than forty miles from their home base.

**FRAME UP**: The term used to describe building up a new show.

**GAFF**: A faked, rigged show attraction such as a taxidermied pig with a fifth leg sewn onto its body, or third eye added. Barnum's Fiji Mermaid was one such famous gaff.

**GEEK**: A performer who works in pit shows handling snakes and such. Often portrayed as a wildman, the act is usually handled by an old drunk. Not very common today - people see too many old drunks on the street for free!

**GLOMMING GEEK**: A Geek that bites the heads off of live animals! Not around at all to my knowledge anymore.

**GRAB JOINT**: A quick food stand.

**GRIND SHOW**: A show that by-passes the bally stage approach and just "grinds" all day continuously.

**HALF A YARD**: Fifty dollars.

**HEAT**: Trouble with the law or complaints from disgruntled customers.

**HEY RUBE**: A physical confrontation between locals and carnies. A call of "Hey Rube" meant trouble was brewing and that assistance was needed in a hurry.

**ILLUSION SHOW**: A show that presented an illusion. Usually magic in the older days, now more commonly used to refer to a Spider Girl, Headless or Gorilla Girl type show.

**JOINT**: A concession stand or fast food counter.

**LECTURER**: The talker that gives his spiel inside the show.

**LOT**: The grounds on which the carnival sets up.

**LOT LICE**: Patrons who hang around the Midway, but never seem to be spending any money.

**MARK**: The customer or patron (i.e.- sucker) who spends his money on the Midway. Remember that carnies see themselves as separate and apart from the people who frequent the shows. Carnies will almost never buy food from a Grab Joint, unless it's a beer.
MITT CAMP: A carnival fortune teller.
NUT: What it takes in cash each day to break even.
PATCH: Another kind of "Fixer".
PIT: A sectioned off low canvas divider in which an act or attraction is displayed inside the tent. Also referred to as a Pit Show. Many times used for a Single-O small animal, geek or illusion show such as Baby Betty, the girl with no arms or legs.
PICKLED PUNKS: A preserved human fetus in a jar.
PRIVILEGE: The money paid to the carnival owner for the opportunity to play on his lot.
RED ONE: A very good spot financially.
RIGHT HAND SIDE: Since it is believed that people will naturally gravitate to the right side of the Midway as they walk into the horse-shoe shape, this has become the most desirable location for independent operators.
ROUTE: The line up of dates and locations to be played by the carnival.
REHASH: The disreputable practice of selling the same ticket for than once and thereby cheating the carnival owner out of his fair share of the take.
SAWBUCK: Ten dollars.
SCRATCH: Money.
SPOT: A date or location played.
STILL DATE: A spot played that is not connected to a fair, festival or other event, such as setting up in a shopping center parking lot. These spots are never very good and only serve to fill out the early spring part of a route until the more substantial dates approach.
TALKER: The man who does the talking, or splicing outside the tent show. Never referred to as a BARKER, except by those who don't know any better.
TEAR-DOWN: Breaking down the show for travel to its next spot.
TIP: The crowd that gathers in front of a bally to see the free show (a show incidentally in which little or nothing ever happens) given by the Side Show to entice the marks inside.
TOP: A canvas tent.
WALK THROUGH: A show in which the patrons "walk through" and look at the exhibit as opposed to sitting or standing and having the show performed for them.
WITH IT: A phrase that lets other carnies know that you're with the show or in the business. "I'm with it."
YARD: One hundred dollars.
SWAMP MAN! a variation on the Wild Man themed Grind Show.

WILLIE WRIGHT WENT WRONG! Drug Abuse trailer show,
Doug Higley's PYGMY JUNGLE Show. "The World's Smallest!"

BIG CLEO was actually a fabricated Mummy.
CHAPTER TWO

WHAT'S OUT THERE?

Throughout history there have been an extraordinary variety of shows in the carnival. Some no longer exist. Progress and the quick availability of movies and TV have killed a certain portion of the outdoor shows and it is easy to see why.

Prior to the advent of "adult" type films and the proliferation of Topless Strip Bars, the "Girlie" or "Cooch" shows were very popular. The bally platform would be filled to capacity with beautiful girls in attractive robes and the spiel would go something like this:

"Now folks, I want all of you to pay particular attention to the red kimonos the lovely young ladies standing up here are wearing. These kimonos are made from the finest velveteen available. The reason I want you to pay attention to these red kimonos is because once you get inside, that's the last you'll ever see of 'em - but, I guarantee you'll see everything that's underneath."

Inside, of course, would be a fairly tame version of a burlesque show with some naughty-but-nice strippers performing on stage. Occasionally the acts, desperate for a little extra scratch, would take things too far and the law would soon be involved.

Another casualty of the modern era was the so-called Jig Show in which black performers staged musical dance routines to a delighted audience. As America became more socially aware and "correct", this type of entertainment faded away.

The standard Freak Show displaying human oddities has nearly vanished from our culture as well. Many states have passed laws prohibiting the exhibition of handicapped people, apparently not realizing, or caring about, the life of financial hardship they were forcing on the anxious performers, who without the Side Show, had no other means of earning a living.

The legislature has stripped these people of their ability to travel and see the country, meet and socialize with friends who are similar to themselves, and find a friendly atmosphere where they could "fit in". And they did this supposedly for their own good!

Many Side Show oddities earned enough over the years to buy their own homes and retire in comfort. When Dick Brisbane, the Penguin Boy, was asked if he didn't mind being stared at for

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1 A YOUTH IN BABYLON 1990, Prometheus Books 18
a living he snapped sharply: "Do you think they (the people) don't stare at me on the street when I walk by? At least here I get paid for it!"

Thanks to the small minded politicians, who pretend to represent the best interests of all of us, the Human Oddities show is disappearing quickly. Occasionally a carnival patron will encounter a "Working Act" show that strongly resembles the old Ten-In-One and may even feature a Midget, Fat Lady or Giant. The law doesn't seem to feel ashamed of letting these people earn a living.

Some states have even passed laws prohibiting the exhibition of live animal oddities, and the ASPCA has been especially antagonistic towards Freak Animal shows. For some reason they seem to steer clear of Reptile shows.

For different reasons, revulsion being perhaps the strongest, Baby shows are having a tough time of it, although there are still a few around. There are, in fact, laws in most states that prohibit the transportation of human corpses. Which, in effect, means you can own a two-headed baby, but you can't take him on vacation with you! This law also applies to Shrunken Human Heads and Mummies, so the Grind Show operators have had to resort to using gaffs. What is really annoying is that museums and attractions like Ripley's Believe It Or Not can display all the heads and mummies they want, simply because they are not mobile. What, in fact, is the big problem here?

For a moment let's take a look at what's out there in the way of Grind Shows today. Since we've been talking about the Baby Shows we'll begin there.

ATOMIC MUTATION MONSTER! Actual exhibit is unknown, but most likely a Freak Animal or Wild Man Show. 1970.
Two-Headed Baby Show built into the back-end of a truck.

Jeff Murray's Baby Show at Sylmar, California, 1992
THE BABY SHOW

People have always been intrigued by the possibility of human monsters. The thought of a child being born with two heads or one large cyclopean eye in the middle of its forehead still fascinates the public. To this end, the Grind Show owner has supplied the Baby Show, or Punk Show. These shows go far back into the history of the carnival and still attract attention today.

In the past, unborn fetuses were easily obtainable from Mexico and there were several importers in America who offered such specimens to the Grind Show impresario. Babies with one head and two bodies, or arms and legs shaped like flippers were certain to raise a gasp of awe from the marks as they filed past the row of formaldehyde jars.

The show usually sidestepped its own subject matter artfully in advertising the show. It was labeled "The Mystery Of Life" show or some such impressive medical hokum. Sometimes they even promoted the punks as being "Nude as Nature Intended", forgetting to mention that the "nudes" were, in fact, preserved babies.

As the heat rose through the years, Showmen took to displaying bouncers, babies made of rubber or soft vinyl, in the jars. In this way they were able to continue the show without breaking any applicable laws, and the public, mostly unaware of the gaff, didn't seem to care one way or another. The remaining problem with the Baby show is that many people find this type of entertainment distasteful and repulsive. More than a few carnival owners have refused to book an independent Baby show on their Midway for fear of reprisals.

To combat the public's aversion to the punk show the operators have taken on an Anti-Drug slanted theme in presenting the Baby show. Now the public is warned to "Beware the Horrors of Drug Abuse". This, supposedly, gives the show an educational and moral value and makes it appear more family oriented and socially aware.

One type of Drug Abuse show dispatches with the babies altogether, opting instead for an apparently burned-out youth in a wheelchair with sunglasses on and a python around his neck listening to rock and roll music (usually The Doors). This is an inexpensive show to frame up, but it is ultimately disappointing to the public. Inside the patrons are dinged for another quarter to watch the drugged-out hippy push a pencil up his nose!

While there are several Baby shows still in existence the one I find most fascinating is Jeff and Sue Murray's HORRORS OF DRUG ABUSE SHOW. Jeff and Sue co-own HarMur Productions and prefer the old style tent show over the trailer constructed shows like those operated by old time showman Pete.
Hennen. Jeff's Baby show features a colorful banner-line painted by Mark Frierson, one of the last of the banner painters, that is attractive and repellent at the same time. He uses a good sized tent that promises a lot of room inside for the marks and he feels that the show works best in the Hispanic neighborhoods. Something about the punks excites the Latin crowd, and business on those particular dates is usually very good.

Jeff's show features bouncers which he stores dry until the opening day, at which time he places them in large, specially made jars and fills them with water diluted with a little coffee. The effect is disturbing. At a date in Sylmar, California, one Mexican woman staggered out of the tent on a particularly hot day, grabbed the ticket box for support and promptly leaned over and threw up. While not exactly an ideal situation it did serve as great publicity and helped sell a lot of tickets to marks whose curiosity had been set on fire.

Jeff's show then traveled to El Monte, California, where he was told that there was not enough lot space for both his Baby show and his large Mystery Museum show (also housed in an attractive tent). The shows had to be combined into one big top, but Jeff still didn't feel like the show would bear more than fifty cents a head and so his business was basically cut in half.

Up the midway, in a terrible location between a concession and a grab joint was a Two-Headed Baby show owned by John Strong Jr. Elsewhere on the midway (on the right hand side) Strong was featuring a Ten-In-One of working acts. Admission was one dollar. This big tented show featured a Fire Eater, who was also the Electric Man, a Human Blockhead who also lay on a bed of nails, a Rubber Girl, a Sword Swallower (Strong himself, who also doubled as the Magician and talker) and a quick, but comically phoney, Spidora illusion. The crowd was dinged a silver donation to look into Miss Fancy's (the Rubber Girl) contortionist box and an additional fifty cent ding was required to see the Headless illusion blow-off.

Business was fine when I was present, but the El Monte spot was not quite big enough to support a show of this size. Strong's Baby show was unfortunately poorly framed even though it did feature a real two-headed specimen as opposed to Murray's bouncer version of the same thing. Whereas Murray was getting fifty cents per person for his combined Mystery Museum and Baby show, Strong was trying for the same figure for his Punk show and wound up getting almost no money whatsoever. (see Photo) The rules are still simple: The best presentation gets the money.
John Strong Jr.'s less than impressive Baby Show (1992).

Strong's authentic two-headed baby exhibit, complete with Birth Certificate.
THE FREAK ANIMAL SHOW

Just as people have been enthralled by the world of Human Oddities, the desire to observe freak and/or strange animals has been profitable as well. Freak animals are born far more frequently than Human Oddities and can be kept much more economically. There have been many cases of farm animals born with extra legs, tails, ears, etc. Simple deformities like these usually do not cause the animals any discomfort and their internal structure remains unharmed, leaving the owner with an animal that will probably not die on him any quicker than a normal healthy one.

Animals born with two heads or bodies usually have incredibly mixed up internal organs as well and usually live only a short time. Anyone fortunate enough to acquire a healthy two-headed calf can be assured a good steady income for his show. Most two-headed animals are either taxidermied or, worse yet, preserved in a jar, which like the Baby show tends to either disgust and/or amaze people.

Certain show owners feature an entire menagerie of freak animals by obtaining a few healthy freak specimens and filling out the marquee with odd-looking, but natural creatures, like the Devil Chicken and the Hairless Dog. Hairless dogs sometimes generate heat because people naturally assume that it is an ordinary dog with some kind of disease and therefore inhumane to display it for profit. They are, in fact, a natural breed of dog, the Chinese Crested, that just happens to be hairless, but try explaining that to an irate animal rights activist!

Gary Loraditch of Wisconsin has maintained an oddity museum and a freak animal menagerie for many years. In his show, which features a very impressive bannerline, are a 5-legged cow (see Photo), a 5-legged sheep, a 4-horned ram, elephant skinned dogs, pygmy goats, a goat with no ears (called a La Mancha goat), miniature horse, devil chicken, hippy chicken, silky chicken and, of course, the vulture chicken (1/2 turkey - 1/2 chicken).

Loraditch's show recently went up for sale with all the trimmings, which included his bannerline, tent, and goose-neck trailer for a sum of $10,000. Likewise, the Kissell Brothers carnival recently advertised their two freak animal trailer shows - a four horned ram in one, a miniature horse in the other, complete with show trailers for $3,500 a piece. Certainly, anyone interested in starting up a freak animal show can find everything they need out there to get on the road with as few hassles as necessary.
Many times animals are displayed as Single-O attractions; this can work successfully for the Grind Show operator who does not wish to be burdened with the care and upkeep of so much livestock. Some animals such as the South American Capy Bara (The Giant Killer Rat) are not all that large and easy to keep. They presently cost about $500 to buy and exist on a strictly vegetarian diet. A Coati Mundi costs around $250 and can be exhibited as the Crazy Mixed-Up Mystery Animal. Something as simple as an Armadillo (cost $25) will often be displayed as Midnight Flesh-Eating Grave Robbers, but don't try this down South where they are as common as raccoons! Even Turkey Buzzards have been displayed in a grandiose manner as Graveyard Scavengers.

Miniature horses, Giant Steers and Gargantuan Pigs are also common Midway attractions. There are earless goats and goats with four natural horns that can be bought easily and presented as oddities as well. Larry Lundwall exhibits a Mouse Circus which features mice, whose frantic running on a treadmill powers an animated miniature carnival complete with Ferris Wheel. Animal shows truly come in all shapes and sizes.

A good freak animal, such as a six-legged cow will stand alone (no pun intended) as a Single-O and save the owner much trouble in transportation and feed costs as well as bringing in
almost the same money as a larger show. Remember, these animals have to be kept and cared for in the off season, even though they are not earning any money!

Some show operators exhibit animals that are not alive, such as large sharks and pickled specimens. When the movie JAWS was popular in the mid-1970's, Side Show master Ward Hall successfully exhibited a mounted or frozen shark. Shark shows date back to the early days of the carnival and are still in evidence today. Delbert Malone’s Killer Shark Show was recently featured in the Outdoor Amusement Business Association (OABA) Newsletter (October '92) along with Geronimo, his miniature horse show. Every miniature animal is billed as "The World's Smallest". Well, why not?

Reptile shows have been popular since the very first showman raised his tent on a dusty sand lot. People are still fascinated by giant snakes and lizards, but with the advent of common pet stores selling reptiles and tarantulas as pets the Reptile Show operator has had to acquire bigger and bigger specimens in order to stay in business. The Giant Snake show at the 1992 Florida State Fair did itself a great disservice in its overly modest presentation, for these were truly the biggest snakes I have ever seen in my entire life! Their Giant Alligator show was equally impressive, although at such a great size the gator was not apt to be very active. A sign posted at the back of his pen read: "This Alligator is ALIVE - For $10 We Will Make Him Move!"

More recently, Giant Flesh-Eating Frogs have become popular. The frogs, of which there are several types (Buffo Marinas - also called the Cane Toad, being good, but illegal in some States), are extremely easy to maintain. A little water, a good tropical temperature supplied by a household water-bed heater, and a steady supply of small mice will keep them happy for years.

Show owner Malcom Geary caught a lot of heat once when he fed live mice to his frogs in front of some marks who in turn alerted the local wildlife officials. The officials informed him that throwing in live mice would land him in jail. Malcom argued that mice were what the frogs ate naturally, but the officials were adamant. Malcom asked if he could feed the frogs the mice if the rodents were already dead. Their answer was yes. Malcom then grabbed a mouse by the tail, swung it around quickly and smacked its head on the edge of a table and proceeded to throw it in with the frogs. The wildlife officials then proceeded to throw Malcom in jail!
Showman Malcom Geary and his GIANT RAT Show under construction at his Florida home.

The Kissell Brothers' miniature Horse and 4-horned Sheep Shows.
Malcom Geary was soon released and is still happily in the business, but the Giant Frog show is not among his repertoire. He now exhibits live bats in his Twilight Creatures Show. (see Photo) While I was visiting him once I noticed an old, disused wooden box about three feet square and only one foot deep, with a screen cover on it and some 2 x 4 legs nailed on it. On the side was painted the words "Killer Frogs". I asked him if this was what the frogs had been exhibited in and he said it was. I pointed out that it was an awfully small exhibit to be held in such a large tent as the one he used and he looked at me slyly. "The big tent is not to hold the frogs," he said, gesturing with his hands. "It's to hold all the people who want to see them!"

When I decided to frame up my own show, TERRORS OF THE AMAZON, we decided to feature Giant Frogs as part of our exhibit. The frogs, truly monsters, were acquired from Berkeley, California’s East Bay Vivarium for around $450, but upon arrival we discovered they would not eat. For almost a month they refused the mice we offered and after I took them to Florida to join up with our show I began to get worried. The paint job on the show had cost $3,000 and it advertised Giant Flesh-Eating Frogs among our other horrors. What if they died?

As a last resort I bought a bag of live crickets from a local Orlando, Florida pet shop and threw them in. The frogs went after them like a kid after popcorn and the very next day they started on a steady diet of white mice. They have been good eaters ever since!
This GILA MONSTER exhibit says the beast was 'captured' alive (the word 'captured' being hastily added on by hand), which seems to imply that it has now ceased to be alive!
THE ILLUSION SHOW

A popular and fun type of Grind Show is the Illusion show. Most likely it is never advertised as an illusion, but many carnivals require some kind of admission of its fantasy element somewhere on the outside. I particularly like the bullets UNREAL and UNBELIEVABLE in use myself. These greatly concealed truths help avoid beefs later and keeps the operator from being charged with misrepresentation (although the Grind Show almost always relies heavily on misrepresentation as its bread and butter and the public loves it!).

The Headless Girl illusion is a favorite and dates back to the carnival's early days when "Doctor" Heineman first brought his "Headless Olga" show to America from Blackpool, England in 1937. Since then the illusion has been framed in numerous variations, but the show itself has changed little. It has been displayed as The Headless Centerfold with gaffed newspaper articles displayed outside mimicking the Jayne Mansfield automobile tragedy of the late sixties in which the blonde Hollywood bombshell lost her head for real.

Recently it has been framed as a Headless Bikini Girl who unfortunately lost her head while surfing to a shark attack! As usual, the show owners have had to keep up with the times in order to continue grinding those dimes and quarters. (see Photo)

The illusion itself is fairly easy to construct. For years the famous A.K. Brill catalog offered the blueprints for framing such a show. The only draw-back is that a living girl with a good figure was required to sit in the illusion for hours on end while the scattered patrons passed by. Sometimes two girls are employed, one playing "nurse" while the other portrays the headless girl and later switching roles for a break.

The operator's imagination is required to come up with some kind of amazing equipment in order to keep the decapitated lass alive and breathing. Often it is laughable, but adds immeasurably to the charm of the show.

If the Headless illusion is a keeper it is rivaled closely by Spidora, the living girl with a spider's body. Spidora has been around forever. A 1928 photo from the Conklin & Garrett Shows features a Spider Girl Grind Show (called Spidoro) even at this early stage in outdoor showmanship. The illusion was also featured in Tod Browning's 1927 silent feature film, THE SHOW, years before he made his infamous movie, FREAKS.

The spider girl has the same draw-back as the headless in that it needs a living girl present at all times in order for it to grind. Unlike the headless show the Spidora show leaves the hapless girl's face on display to be subjected to the taunts and jibes of the marks. No one bothers to talk to a headless girl, but a
girl whose head is out in the open is a ripe target for abuse from
fun seekers on the Midway. A phoney nurse or doctor standing by
is a good remedy to keep this "fun" from getting out of hand.

Like the headless show and many others, plans for this
illusion were sold to showmen by the A.K. Brill company. Brill,
who was a lover of carnivals and an anti-government proponent,
published a catalog of plans from which carnies could build
everything from Ferris Wheels to cotton candy makers. The Brill
book featured blueprints for Midway games, Fun Houses, Side
Shows, Grind Shows, food stands (recipes included!), riding
devices, and Circus equipment. This dates back to the days when
carnies had to pretty much build their own rides (not the case by
any means now) and other operating paraphernalia. For a few
dollars the prospective showman could buy plans for building a
Gorilla Girl illusion, Spidora, Headless, Baby Betty, the Turtle
Girl, and other shows too numerous the list. They even sold
instructions on how to walk on hot coals, drink molten lead,
swallow a sword, and stick long sharp hat-pins through your skin
without getting hurt too badly!

In this period of time they even sold plans on building your
own tent, but modern mass production has made many of the
blueprints obsolete. They are still treasured as collector's items
and fetch considerable prices. The company was purchased
outright a few years ago by Hollywood filmmaker, David L.
Hewitt, who plans to make them available again to enthusiasts
for a modest price. The catalogs alone are worth purchasing by
any fan of this form of old-time entertainment.

The most profitable and difficult illusion to operate is the
Gorilla Girl illusion. Within the walls of the tent the marks will
watch as a beautiful girl in a bikini slowly transforms into a huge
blood-thirsty ape. The show is amazing in that the
transformation happens right before your very eyes via a simple,
but extremely effective beam-splitter effect (very often supplied
by a sliding glass patio door) which is situated at a forty-five
degree angle.

The show begins with a live bally show in which the talker
brings out the exotic (if you can find one) girl in a leopard skin
bikini. He explains that the girl was found living wild in the
jungle and that through hypnosis she will revert back to her
primitive gorilla state before the wide eyes of the audience. This
usually gets the crowd moving into the tent and the general
admission for a Gorilla Show is about $2 - (twice the asking price
of a live Ten-in-One).
A nice variation on the HEADLESS theme attempts to update the show to more modern times. This show is built into the back of a truck.

A very nice SPIDORA show in a trailer set-up.
The GORILLA GIRL Show.

A closer look at the GORILLA GIRL banner art.
Inside, the marks see the girl standing within a cage while the lecturer tells the crowd that she is being put into a deep trance. As he urges her deeper and deeper into her trance, the transformation begins, and before you know it she has changed into a hairy gorilla. The marks are warned not to make any sudden moves, but before you can count to three the gorilla has broken out of the cage and is charging towards the screaming audience! The lecturer fires off a blank gun to try to stop the impending panic (or perhaps assist it) and one of the show hands whips open the canvas at the entrance to allow the terrified customers an easy, quick escape.

The crowd of screaming marks running from the tent is a sure fired guarantee of a new tip forming and the next show will be on its way soon. The show requires about five to six people to operate - There is, of course, the girl and the man playing the gorilla. There's the talker, the ticket taker, who also opens the back flap at the climax and at least one person inside to operate the illusion itself. The actual show is not overly expensive to build, but requires space and a good sized truck to cart it around in.

At the Meadowlands in New Jersey (held at Giant Stadium under the Amusements Of America Shows banner) our Amazon exhibit was unfortunately located next to the Gorilla Show. While we did a gross of about $3,600 for the entire date (10 days), the Gorilla show was doing about $2,000 a day! In effect, they literally killed our business, which shows you how lot location can affect a show's income.

Because of the high help overhead, the Gorilla shows are not nearly as numerous as other types of shows, but carnivals actively seek them out and the public loves them. It is, in fact, a kind of cross-over between the Grind Show and the Ten-In-one Side Show in that a live act and bally show are featured.
MYRNA THE MERMAID utilizes a girl-in-a-fishbowl illusion that is older than the sea itself! Abbott's Magic Co. sells one ready-made.

Jeff and Sue Murray's early attempt at grinding. LIONELLA - THE LION-FACED GIRL!
THE MUSEUM SHOW

The museum format show has always been an old standby in the Grind Show business. It offers the public a variety of (often seemingly unrelated) exhibits that have a weirdness or strangeness in common.

Today, in lieu of live freak shows, there have sprung up numerous freak "museums" in which photos and mannequins representing the more famous freaks are exhibited. These sometimes generate beefs in that the public might not be aware of the museum nature of the show and are disappointed when no live or real freaks or oddities are presented. Capt. Boswell's Palace of Wonders is one such show.

Jeff Murray operates a Mystery Museum Show that features a variety of interesting items such as pickled freak animals, taxidermied freaks (such as a gaffed two-headed squirrel), shrunken heads and some things too strange to be defined (even Murray himself doesn't know what's inside some of those jars!).

Up in Tahoe Paradise, California a Grind Show enthusiast named Doug Higley has attempted to create the "World's Smallest Side Show" (now there's a twist). The show, which seems to change its theme every other month, is housed in a six by eight foot open trailer which tows behind his car. Over the last year or so Higley has exhibited a Bigfoot Museum, a Myth and Mystery show, an Amazon Pygmy Mummy show, and most recently, a Sea Monster show (the creature for which he baked in his kitchen oven). He pursues this as a hobby and has had some success.
CHAPTER THREE

"WHO'S WHO?"

BOBBY BROOKS

One of the longest operating Grind Show entrepreneurs still around is Bobby Brooks and his Attractions Unlimited. After 30 years in the business, Brooks is still actively traveling the country with his string of Single-O's, and according to him, each year just gets better and better.

Based out of Key Largo, Florida, Brooks entered the carnival business as an owner/operator of concessions, games, and rides, but has for many years relied strictly on Side Shows and Grinders (six in total) as his sole source of revenue.

He believes in the hop-scotch method of booking dates (playing selected dates on several different carnivals throughout the season) and splits the shows off to different spots as he sees best.

He carries a complete tool truck and a staff of ten people. "My stuff isn't new," he says (one attraction, the Horror Museum, is 21 years old!). "But, it's in first-class shape. My shows have always been family oriented, and all give exactly what they promise."

"That's the key. Lots of shows say one thing and show another. Word gets around that it's a rip-off, and then everybody's unhappy. I'm giving people now what I've given them all my life - the best shows I can give."²

Brooks believes that his shows move an estimated 50 people through an hour, and on a good day as many as 100. He said he was happy to do 200 a day.

His shows include a Drug Abuse show, a Giant Rat (Capy Bara) called "Big John", a Horror Museum, Headless, and Spidora.

Bobby Brooks guesstimated that his 1991 expenses would to be around 15% of his take and the general upkeep each year for all of the shows is around $5,000, except new show front paintings which are done every few years at a cost of about $1,000 per show. Each attraction gets 75 cents a head and the customers seem happy to pay it.

² Amusement Business July 1991
"Also, if I've learned one thing these last 29 years, it's that you've got to do it all yourself," he remarked. "I build, paint, operate, repair, clean, and oversee everything myself. If you can't be there by your shows at all times, there's no use having them. They just won't run as well as they should." 3

**CAPT. HARVEY LEE BOSWELL**

Capt. Harvey Lee Boswell (so-called for his active military service in the Merchant Marines, where he suffered an accident that has left him in a wheelchair for forty years) has been around the carnival community for more years than anyone can remember. His best known attraction is his Palace of Wonders Museum, which features wood and plaster replicas of famous Side Show freaks, pickled specimens and other oddities. Many of the banners lining his top are the work of Fred G. Johnson (and may be worth more than the exhibits inside the tent!). Boswell and his partner, D.C. Collins, have been known to exhibit some of the world's most bizarre oddities, including dissected human heads and Grave Jelly, a gooey substance that forms as a residue inside the casket as the body decomposes. Placed putrefied in a jar, it makes for a very revolting exhibit. The Captain has displayed the mummies of Marie O'Dea and Gold-Tooth Jimmy, a member of the Purple Gang as well as Rob Bob, Boswell's most famous punk.

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3 Ibid
Rob Bob has two heads, four arms, and three legs, and is said to be one of largest punks around!

He framed a Grind Show around the Frog Baby, another pickled specimen, and even removed it from the jar once to pose for a photo. Boswell held it in his hands, dressing himself as a doctor.

For a man confined to a wheelchair, Capt. Harvey Lee Boswell has certainly gotten around!

**JACK CONSTANTENE**

Jack Constantene is one of the few Grind Show operators who has claimed to become a millionaire via the Midway. He has specialized almost exclusively in live acts, mostly midgets, and fat people, and is said to have made a fortune. For years he featured little Eddie Taylor (the World's Smallest Man), Ruby Saddler (the World's Smallest Woman), Fat Albert, and some miniature animal shows.

His show front Southern body trailers are some of the best in the carnival world, and the artwork framing them is excellent. His show people tend to be black and he plays mostly the southern states where business has been good.

On the road since the late 1970's, he entered the carnival trade by purchasing one of the earliest known versions of the Drug Abuse Show.

[Image of a carnival attraction named "Alive: World's Biggest Man" with a man standing in front of it.]

*Jack Constantene's FAT ALBERT Show.*
LOU DUFOUR

In the 1920's Lou Dufour was the King of the Baby Shows. In 1927 he had no less than 20 shows out in the field, which he labeled "The Unborn" Show. He owned his own carnival, the Dufour Exposition Shows, which at one point moved on 25 company owned railroad cars.

With partner Terry Turner (an R.K.O. Pictures executive) he brought the "Ubangi Savages" Show to the states in 1931, causing a stir by opening the exhibit with a massive premiere in the 5,000 seat Massbaum Theatre in Philadelphia before joining up with Ringling Brothers Circus.

At one time Dufour boasted a grand total of 38 shows under his control, and a gross of $500,000 at the 1939's New York World's Fair, a remarkable sum made even more incredible by the prewar depression days of America.

MALCOM GEARY

A native of New Hampshire, Malcom Geary stills prefers to play the Yankee states with Billy Burr's Funorama Shows even though he is now based out of Tampa, Florida.

Malcom has been described as a showman who would try anything. He once framed a hippy chicken show around the then hit song "The Funky Chicken" that operated on the principle that a bird placed on a hidden hot plate could be made to "dance" about frantically to the strains rock and roll music if the heating unit was cranked up substantially! He attempted a Dracula's Daughter Show featuring a "daughter" who suspiciously looked like a man wearing a bad wig and a Mystery Museum, but his mainstay seems to be the live animal show. He was the first to feature the Giant Frogs, and carried Rat and Snake shows as well. Recently he went on the road with his TWILIGHT CREATURES Show, which features live bats and a stuffed African monstrosity I traded him for a mounted Giant Rat (Nutria) for my Amazon show.

His home itself is like a museum with many oddities and taxidermied animals in residence, including a five-legged pet beagle that accidentally hung himself on his chain one day and now sits patiently, stuffed, in one corner.
WARD HALL

No discussion of Side Show entrepreneurs can commence without the name Ward Hall cropping up almost immediately. For ages Hall has been the dean of Show operators and one of the most visible of all showmen. In his time Hall has ruled over a massive Side Show and Grind Show empire that at one time featured no less than four complete Ten-In-Ones on the road in addition to an incredible eighteen Grind Shows!

Hall entered the business through the circus as a property man and had worked in various capacities in almost every phase of the carnival and entertainment business. He has appeared in numerous motion pictures (mostly for the late K. Gordon Murray - exploitationeer extraordinaire), and even produced his own Broadway-style theatrical musicals (MILLION DOLLAR DOLL).

He has worked with all of the great side show attractions like the married odd-couple, Percilla the Monkey Girl (whom I had the pleasure of lunching with in Gibtown) and her spouse, Emmett the Alligator Skinned Man (they eloped one night after a show!). For many years Hall was partnered with knife-thrower Harry Leonard until Leonard’s death in 1965. Shortly after this, Hall connected with a young man named Chris Christ and a new Side Show dynasty was born. Hall and Christ Shows literally ruled the Midways.
With Hall's midget buddy, Pete Terhune (whom I have had the honor of watching work), they framed dozens of different themed shows, including the infamous Pygmy Village Show with little Pete as their only pygmy!

"In early September (1965), we jumped from Canton, Ohio to Abilene, Texas," Hall once remembered. "Some (automotive) breakdowns caused a late arrival at 3 p.m. opening day. We rushed up the Baby and Fat Shows, then after working on the sideshow for a couple of hours I went to check the Grind Shows. Billy Judd on the Baby Show ticket box reported good business but he said, "When people come out they give me some strange looks. They sure aren't happy. You'd better look to see what's wrong." Moments later I came out holding my sides with laughter. No wonder the customers came out with dirty looks. In our rush to open, we neglected to put the wax babies in the jars. All the people had seen were containers of water."  

Hall framed many a Grind Show in his career including Barbara Schaffer's "World's Smallest Mother" show, which is the one I bought from her. In fact, Hall and Christ's signatures were still on the trailer registration when I got it! Other amazing shows included a Snake Girl illusion, which is similar to the Spidora, many Baby shows, Torture shows, and a Mummified Giant show.

In July of 1977 while at the Gray's Lake Fair in Illinois, police cars roared onto the Midway and the show was was shut down. Chris Christ was jailed for illegally operating a "World's Strangest Babies" Show in that it violated the "possession and transportation of a corpse without a license" law mentioned elsewhere. The exhibits were seized (only a few of which were real) and Christ steadfastly stood his ground, preferring to go on trial rather than pleading guilty and paying a $100 fine. He returned to Illinois in October and was acquitted, but the news service wires had eaten up the story and Hall & Christ were asked to drop the Baby Show from their future engagements.

PETE HENNEN

Pete Hennen started out in the late 1960's with partner James Dinsmoore. Together they owned and operated their Ten In One show, MIDWAY MARVELS. Dinsmoore soon discovered that the carnival life was not to his liking and Hennen went on alone, later becoming one of the biggest showmen in the late 60's and early 70's. Labeled by Jeff Murray as a "veritable genius" Hennen framed many a Grind Show such as "The Last of the Tree
People" (a family of boa constrictors, although the trailer front depicted some kind of human pygmies), Monica Rand - The Body Beautiful (a Headless show), a Barnum Museum, The Strange Sisters - an incredible exhibit that featured a gigantic 50 foot bannerline to show off two pickled punks, and one of the best Girl to Gorilla illusion ever. He did, in fact, build the Gorilla illusion that was featured at Circus, Circus in Las Vegas and featured in the James Bond movie, DIAMONDS ARE FOREVER.

Pete operated live shows on and off as well, including the Hells Belles Ten-In-One, which featured an all female show (made up of women and drag queens!).

For years he provided services to other showmen, building illusions like the Gorilla Show, selling punks for $50-75 a piece, and even repainting rides and shows out of his Kissimmee, Florida headquarters. He is now retired in Georgia.
FR. JOHNSON

While not a showman or carny, Fred Johnson must be mentioned for his incredible contribution to the world of outdoor showmanship.

Born in 1892 (and still with us), Johnson began his career at the age of fourteen as the carnival world's premiere banner painter while working as an errand boy for United States Tent & Awning in Chicago. He worked odd jobs on and off for years (at one time painting trucks for the US Army) before finding his niche as the king of the banner painters.

Banners have been employed by showmen since the earliest days. They were needed to be able to quickly reach the patrons and instill in them a sense of urgency, a "must see" feeling that compelled them into the shows. The large canvases were usually bordered in orange, a color that makes them instantly visible from across the crowded Midway, and dotted with bullets like "Alive" or "Real" if the specimen happens to be pickled in a jar. Pickled Punks were usually ballyed as "Born to Live!" although they were, in fact, not alive by any stretch of the imagination.

In the early days of the carnival, banners were not considered the art pieces as they are today. Then, they were seen only as advertising devices, with little regard for their creative merits.

Johnson's brilliant colors and vivid portrayals (usually concocted without ever seeing the attractions he was actually painting) have now become sought after collectors items bringing record prices. Some are still in use today on certain shows!

Johnson is now retired in Sun City, Arizona and still going strong at the age of 97.

JEFF MURRAY

Jeff Murray entered the Grind Show business after several years in the mortuary trade. Having always been enthralled by the carnival he purchased his first show for $3,200 from a Miss Lilly Sneider. Sneider, a German immigrant, had been married to a carny who was an excellent builder and welder. He was unfortunately decapitated by a giant fun-house barrel which broke loose while he was working under it and the widowed Sneider began to divest herself of the couple's Midway equipment.

Murray bought the show sight unseen and drove to Federal Way, Washington, to tow it back to his California home. It was called the Arabian Giantess and featured a very phoney-looking 9 1/2 feet tall mummy. Jeff played the show on weekends, terming himself a "weekend carny" and a year later, when the
Jack Constantene's Headless Woman illusion show.

King Tut exhibit toured America, he re-framed the show as the Egyptian Giantess and played it some more!

He met his wife Sue in a bar and grill he owned and the two went into a partnership to buy Dean Potter's Ten In One show. The couple drove to Chesterfield, Virginia to pick up the show and started booking it on their way back home. They had only one performer, old Curly Frisbee, a road-weary Side Show marvel who could, and would, do just about anything.

Curly taught Jeff and Sue how to perform the Blade Box (contortionist act), and the Electric Girl, and he handled the Fire Eater, Pin Cushion, Blockhead, and Sword Swallower himself. Curly Frisbee even attempted a poorly rendered ventriloquist's act, although as Murray remembers, "His mouth moved about twice as fast as the dummy's!"

As the years went on, Murray began to specialize in Grind Shows like his Mystery Museum, Baby Show, Veronica the Snake Girl (a girl in a pit of live snakes), and Lionella the Lion-Faced Girl (a gaffed show utilizing a partial mask that was laboriously glued onto the poor girl's face everyday with spirit gum adhesive). While Jeff Murray has always veered away from live animal shows he did frame up a Mickey Mouse Circus similar to Larry Lundwall's. Unfortunately Jeff's mice spent most of their showtime asleep!

DEAN POTTER

Dean Potter began his carnival Side Show career as a half and half (a gaffed hermaphrodite) for Pete Hennen's Ten-In-One,
and I am told he/she was quite beautiful. He later owned his own show which played successfully at the Big E (Canadian National Expo). He has framed numerous Grind Shows like Rose Marie - The Snake Girl (an illusion based on Spidora, but with a reptile's body), Bloody Mamma - a truly gigantic snake, and Barney - the Six-Legged Bull (see photo elsewhere).

**FRED OLEN RAY**

When I first decided to get into the Grind Show business I was uncertain as to what I really wanted to exhibit. I was extremely green and had little idea what this business was all about. Through the AB (Amusement Business - a weekly paper) I purchased a variety of taxidermied freak animals (our two-headed calf is amazing) from a man in Canada (who had advertised a shrunken human head - which I didn't get) with the idea of framing a HORRORS OF TOXIC WASTE show, but didn't feel like I had enough critters to actually make an acceptable show.

Being a filmmaker with access to some of the best special effects artists in Hollywood, I toyed with the idea of creating a mummified space alien and/or a gaffed devil baby (one with horns, a tail and cloven hooves for feet), and eventually had an impressive mummified Alligator man constructed by S.O.T.A. Effects which has been featured in Jeff Murray's Mystery Museum to excellent response.
I eventually settled on the idea of a jungle themed show called TERRORS OF THE AMAZON. I made my first trip ever to Gibtown (carny slang for Gibsonton, Florida - the undisputed carnival capital of the U.S., and retirement villa for many human oddities) where I joined up with my old show biz mentor, Doug Hobart, for the annual "Independent Showmens Convention" in February '92. There, after much looking, I found a Grind Show trailer for sale on the club's bulletin board.

The show belonged to Barbara Schaffer ("The World's Smallest Mother") and consisted of a 28 foot Southern Body trailer that opened out to 58 feet wide and 15 feet high. It slept four people, had a shower stall, and air conditioning in the living quarters, and she was asking a mere $1,500 for it. I quickly bought the show and had it towed, courtesy of my Side Show friend Malcom Geary, over to the Fletcher's Show Painting in Gibsonton where he did a marvelous job of converting it into my Amazon museum.

I had collected different jungle relics like three shrunken heads, a pygmy mummy, a bog mummy, a taxidermied Giant Rat (this one actually a Nutria), a Jivarro Poison Flask, a handful of stuffed Piranhas, some 600 hundred year-old mummy dolls, a Brazilian Wildman footprint (which I made for $2.50 in my mother's backyard using my hand, some plaster and a little imagination - unfortunately in my haste I gave him six toes instead of five!), and some other weird things.

Rod Link, of the Link Carnival, insisted that something 'Alive' must be in the show in order for it to work, so I bought the two Giant Frogs and 'Baby', our python. I later increased our exhibits by purchasing some custom-made items manufactured by Mark Frierson, the banner painter, and the show ended up with about 17 bizarre jungle related attractions.

The hardships we encountered while operating the show on the road are painful to recount. The trailer needed extensive welding and fixing up, but thanks to my versatile step-father, Ray Butler, we got the show on the road in time to make our first date in April on Goodings Million Dollar Midway. We bought an RV (motorhome), but the carnival dings were too great and the boys working the museum resorted to living in the show trailer itself. We bought a one ton truck to pull the show and have experienced many automotive problems, flat tires, muddy lots and other complications while playing our first season, not to mention the horrendous state of the economy in this country. But still, as of this writing, we are out there playing on the Vivona brothers' route (Amusements of America, or Big A as some call it).

We like them.
Our snake, Baby, died after being exposed to two other snakes of questionable health, and we had to purchase a new nine footer to replace her. This was hard in that my step-brother, George Butler, who operates the show, had become quite attached to her. The frogs are doing great and I'm thinking of framing up a new show here in California - the Alligator Man is still waiting patiently out in the laundry room to see some action and the freak animal collection is growing nicely!

**SNAKE KING**

William Abraham King spent over forty years of his life as 'Snake King', the brave soul who captured and sold reptiles to the Grind Show operators.

Born in 1875 in New York, the young King grew up selling hand-caught snakes in the street to vendors who used them as 'attractions' to rope in prospective customers. He later met and married Manuela Cortez (a direct descendent of the Spanish conquistador).

King once claimed to have maintained at least ten thousand rattle snakes at his Brownsville, Texas, reptile ranch in order to keep the carnival buyers happy and well supplied.

After surviving over 200 poisonous snake bites King succumbed to natural causes in 1952.

**JOHN STRONG, Jr.**

John Strong, Jr. has been in the business all his life. His father, Big John Strong, Sr. was the patriarch of his own circus until his recent death, and John Jr. carries on the family tradition via Ten-In-One Side Shows and a variety of Grinders. For many years he was associated with showman Bobby Reynolds and recently purchased Reynolds' Ten-In-One operation for $20,000. For his money, Strong acquired a 40 by 100 foot tent, bannerline, electrical hook-up and staging. This, apparently, is the show I witnessed at the El Monte, California, date mentioned earlier in this book.

Strong has revamped the show recently to capitalize his involvement in the movie, BATMAN RETURNS, in which he played a sword-swallowing henchman and fire-eater to Danny DeVito's Penguin.

The newly framed show now features Flame, a fully-tattooed 28 year old snake charmer, a 500 lb. clown, and Strong's other working acts. He calls the show the Hollywood Circus of Celebrities.

In the past, Strong had been known to separate his acts into Single-O attractions such as the Spidora and Headless. At one point he ran a freak animal show during the day and then
combined the critters with a live stage act in the evenings. Even during his El Monte date he exhibited a pair of elephant skinned dogs inside his Ten-In-One.

He operated a Snake Show on his father's circus, a Giant Lizard (river monitor) Show, and a Giant Rat Show that got him busted in Fireball, California for misrepresentation. He framed up an extremely successful Wild Woman Show that featured either a girl or a man (whichever was available - the men wore wigs) behind bars. According to Jeff Murray, this show was a knock-out at the Fresno, California Fair.

Elsewhere, Strong can be found exhibiting his legitimate two-headed baby, pictured elsewhere in this volume, and continues to frame up new shows all the time.
Selecting a route for a show can be a difficult and arduous task. There is a weekly newspaper (make that Bible) called the AB (Amusement Business News) and in it one can find ads for all the major carnivals, their routes, and what exactly they are looking to book. Many carnivals still book independent shows and you must select an outfit that will be playing areas you want to play with business arrangements that are agreeable to both parties.

Usually the carnival wants 50-60% of your gross, dings for insurance and RV hook-ups, taxes, and other little charges that add up rapidly. POP (Pay One Price) days are killers in that the public buys a wristband that allows them free access to everything on the Midway. If the independent Grind Show owner is not allowed to sell his tickets independently of this POP he is sunk; kids will be flooding through his show while he is stuck with only a small percentage of the gate based on the tickets he sold on the last regular day (usually a bad week day). Receiving a poor location from the lot manager can also hurt the show and getting stiff competition from a more elaborate Ten-In-One or Gorilla Show next door can lead to veritable ruination.

The jumps between dates can be long and over many miles of bad road. The tear-down usually occurs late at night after closing or early in the morning with no more than 2 1/2 - 3 days in which to get to the next spot. Rain can shut down a carnival completely, and the economy of the town being played is a major factor to be concerned with also.

Many carnivals avoid booking shows because they take up the same space as a ride. While a kid might ride the Tilt-A-Whirl three times, he will only go to the shows once. Likewise, most shows can only muster fifty cents a head while rides generate up to several dollars per patron. Many carnival owners believe that audiences today are too sophisticated to be suckered into seeing a headless girl, but the stouter, more traditional showmen are convinced that no carnival is complete without at least one Back-End show.

As the standard Side Show and Grind Shows are being unceremoniously pushed off the dry lots of America, a distinct, unique, and valuable form of outdoor entertainment is being swiftly eradicated. Only the public can revive the interest in the Back-End shows and there is definitely a need for support from the paying audience. Carnivals should be reminded that many patrons frequent the Midways who do not want to go on the rides, but still seek entertainment. There are still people out there who
wish to be amazed, chilled, and delighted by the marvels enclosed within the tents and trailers of the show owners. There are still incredible things to be seen in this world and at all costs the tradition and history of the shows must be preserved.

Hopefully, the day will never come when people sit around and trade stories of the way things used to be when the carnival came to town. When the Electric Girl and the Giant Rat could be seen for a half dollar. When Bigfoot, frozen in a block of ice, was displayed for the amusement of the curious and seekers of the unusual. This, truly a vanishing art form, can not be left to become dust on tomorrow's Midway. As showmen move forward, attempting to update their presentations and keep up with a rapidly changing future, I wish them all the luck one man can wish.

God bless them.
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Fred Olen Ray grew up in the circus town of Sarasota, Florida. His classmates were often circus children and one of his Junior High School teachers was a member of the famous Wallenda family.

He has successfully pursued a career as a motion picture Producer-Director in Hollywood with such well-known movies as ARMED RESPONSE and INNER SANCTUM to his credit. He is the author of THE NEW POVERTY ROW (McFarland & Co.) and was once a magician, specializing in spectacular, hair-raising escapes. His love for the carnival and its Side Shows led him to create his own traveling exhibit. In doing so he quickly discovered the strange, and often bizarre, world that lurks behind the scenes of the Grind Shows.

ON THE COVER

This outrageous Grind Show banner art was painted by Texas artist Mark Frierson for Jeff Murray’s HarMur Productions.