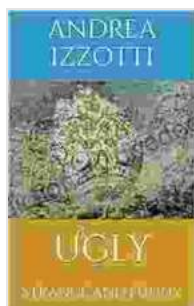


# Ugly, Strange, and Funny: The Unforgettable True Story of the Birth of Freak Shows

In the Victorian era, freak shows were a popular form of entertainment. People flocked to see individuals with unusual physical characteristics, such as Siamese twins, bearded ladies, and dwarfs. These performers were often exploited and ridiculed, but they also found a way to make a living and find happiness in a world that often saw them as nothing more than freaks.

One of the most famous freak show stars was Chang and Eng Bunker, a pair of Siamese twins who were born in Siam (now Thailand) in 1811. The twins were joined at the chest and had a shared liver and digestive system. They were initially sold to a slave trader, but they eventually gained their freedom and became successful performers.



## Ugly: strange and funny (Born to be free) by Andrea Izzotti

★★★★☆ 4.6 out of 5

Language : English  
File size : 22952 KB  
Text-to-Speech : Enabled  
Screen Reader : Supported  
Enhanced typesetting: Enabled  
Print length : 48 pages  
Lending : Enabled

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Another famous freak show star was Julia Pastrana, a woman who was born in Mexico in 1834 with a thick beard and a receding hairline. Pastrana

was billed as the "Bearded Lady" and was exhibited as a medical curiosity. She was eventually married to a dwarf named Tom Thumb and they had a child.

Commodore Nutt was a dwarf who was born in Massachusetts in 1842. Nutt was only 25 inches tall and weighed just 17 pounds. He became a successful performer and was known for his sharp wit and sense of humor.

These three individuals are just a few examples of the many people who performed in freak shows during the Victorian era. These performers were often exploited and ridiculed, but they also found a way to make a living and find happiness in a world that often saw them as nothing more than freaks. Their stories are a reminder that even the most different among us can find a place to belong.

### **The Exploitation of Freak Show Performers**

Freak show performers were often exploited by their managers and promoters. They were paid a pittance and forced to perform in degrading and humiliating conditions. They were also often subjected to medical examinations and other forms of abuse.

Despite the exploitation, many freak show performers found a way to make a living and find happiness. They developed a sense of community and camaraderie with other performers, and they often found solace in their faith.

### **The Resilience of Freak Show Performers**

Freak show performers were incredibly resilient individuals. They had to overcome the challenges of living with a disability, as well as the prejudice

and discrimination of the general public.

Many freak show performers found ways to use their disabilities to their advantage. They developed unique skills and talents that they used to entertain audiences. They also found ways to connect with audiences on a personal level, despite their physical differences.

## **The Legacy of Freak Shows**

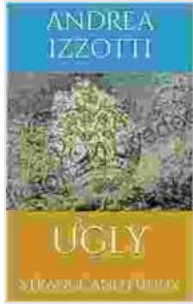
Freak shows have a complex and controversial legacy. They were a form of entertainment that exploited people with disabilities, but they also provided a way for these individuals to make a living and find happiness.

Today, freak shows are largely a thing of the past. However, the legacy of these shows can still be seen in the way that people with disabilities are often treated. We still tend to view people with disabilities as being different and inferior, and we often exclude them from society.

The stories of freak show performers can help us to challenge our assumptions about people with disabilities. These individuals were not freaks. They were human beings who had the same needs and desires as everyone else. They deserve to be remembered and celebrated for their resilience and their courage.

## **Additional Resources**

- Sideshow World
- Freak Show Archives
- Freak Shows: History, Ethics, and the Medicalization of Human Difference



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