

Jack Pickering

Here and Now

If you'll remember not to stare or faint, but just be friendly, you can come along to the show.

We're going down and meet the bearded lady, the India rubber man, and Sealo, the boy who with flippers instead of arms.

The every-day word for it is "freak show," but that word is one they do not like. "Call us 'curious people' or 'oddities of nature,' but not freaks," they say. "If you want to say, 'Look at



the freak hat that woman has on,' that's all right, but give us a break and let us forget the word as applied to ourselves."

You'll find, if you give them a chance, that these are very pleasant people. They're in the Ripley Show, so named because most of them have been in the Believe-It-or-Not drawings and exhibits at the two recent world's fairs, and just now they are in a building on lower Woodward avenue, a block from where old Wonderland used to be—if you remember it.

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Sealo is the best natured of the lot. In fact, his is a bubbling disposition, and the rest enjoy being him around. Sealo was born without arms, and his hands, smaller than average, grow directly from his shoulders.

He's the least self-conscious. In fact, he is the only one who uses the word "freak," and he'll tell you all about himself. He sold papers in Pittsburgh before he went into show business.

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Sitting up on his own private stage, he says he makes an excellent salary, has his own automobile and a chauffeur (because he can't get a license, of course), and has been all over the world.

"Down in Cuba," he said, "we got some rum to bring back with us, and the fat lady smuggled it in for us, hidden under her dress. They never noticed. And then there was Dolly, the midget, who had quite a case on me . . ."

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In other words, don't feel sorry for them, because, honestly, there is no need to. They enjoy life. Indeed, they do. Take Christine, the Crocodile Girl. She's happy. She has a quick, friendly smile. In fact, I'll defy you to find a sweeter smile than the Crocodile Girls. Off the stage, she spends her money buying nice clothes and expensive wigs. And her hobby is—sewing!

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Frances Murphy, the Gorilla Girl, so named because she not only has a luxuriant beard, but is covered generally with downy fur, stops to talk to the Half-Girl, wee Frieda Pushnik, who was born without arms or legs. "Gorilla Girl," indeed! Frances passes the time talking to Frieda about the book she is reading. Just now, between shows, the Gorilla Girl is reading "The Sun Is My Undoing."

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Then, of course, there are the Texas-born Sullivans; LeRoy, a roper and knife thrower, and his wife, Roxy, championship shot with a rifle, who shoots the fire off LeRoy's cigaret while he smokes it.

Sullivan asks if I'd like to hold a cigaret in my mouth while he cuts it in half by throwing a knife from the far end of the platform. "Why not?" I say. Sullivan asks me to stoop down a few inches because he's used to throwing at his wife, who is shorter than I am.

You feel the knife whistle past your face and it bangs into the boards and hangs trembling by its point. The cigaret falls in pieces.

"Nothing to it," says Sullivan, "except that I paused a split second to see if you would duck. After all, I never threw a knife at you before and didn't know what you'd do."

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Next time, he promises, Roxy will shoot a cigaret out of my mouth. Meantime, where can they get some bullets—.22 shorts are as scarce as gold, and bullets are their business.

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Rita Rizelle, the sword swallower, now is swallowing neon signs . . . Harry King begs, "Don't call me a barker. That's old-fashioned, like sawdust. Call me a show salesman." . . . The Monkey Girl—born with a long tail—combs her blond hair between shows . . . Captain Lewis, the India rubber man, ties himself in a knot while he talks to you, because that's comfortable, and sitting up straight isn't.

But those are incidentals. Otherwise—nice people!