

The Astounding Story of a Woman With Four Legs and the Unusual Life That She Lived

YAS! | By Fred Foster | May 11, 2023

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Let's be honest; there are parts of our bodies that we struggle to love. Whether you wish for curly hair, smaller hips, or smoother skin, there's always room for improvement (and someone else who lives in our ideal body). But we are all wonderful in our own way and should strive to love our imperfections. This is much easier to achieve when we have two arms and two legs — but more difficult when you have *four* lower limbs!

In 1868, Josephine Myrtle Corbin was born with four legs. Imagine her parents' horror when they were handed a newly born babe with such an unthinkable deformity! It was the start of a challenging life for Myrtle, filled with hardship and triumphs. Are you intrigued? Let's dive right into the fascinating story of the four-legged girl and the interesting life she lived.

A Highly Unusual Birthing Experience

Pregnancy is a gift and a time of excitement. In the modern age, women and their partners visit the doctor with great anticipation, watching the ultrasound scan over their swollen bellies and identifying the various features of their growing baby. Yet in the 1800s, this technology didn't exist, and parents had to anxiously wait until the big day

before they got their first look at their bundle of joy.



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In 1868, a couple got more than they bargained for when Josephine Myrtle Corbin was born in Lincoln County, Tennessee. While she was breathing just fine, doctors noticed that she had a rare fetal anomaly called dipygus. The child was perfectly healthy from her head to her belly button, but then her body split to have two pelvises, which further split into four lower limbs.

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Learning To Live With an Abnormal Body

Learning to walk as a toddler is challenging enough with an average body. Toddlers struggle to stand, stumble over their own feet, and hobble a few steps before crashing down. Now, imagine the difficult task of learning to walk with *four* legs. The extreme challenge was compounded by the limited mobility of Myrtle's legs, which were not up to scratch.





When Myrtle was born, her two inner legs were discovered lying flat on the belly. While they could move, their mobility was extremely limited. At first glance, her inner legs appeared as a parasitic twin, but closer inspection revealed that her pelvis split during fetal development. As such, each pair of legs had one atrophic leg, which was smaller and offered limited development.

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Doctors Did the Best With What They Had Available

Medicine and technology have come a long way since the 1800s, with significant advancements and insights helping doctors deal with myriad medical deviations and adaption. Yet, during Myrtle's life, these resources were significantly more limited. At the time, medical reports suggested that each pair of legs had distinct genital organs. These organs were both external and internal and supported by a pubic arch.



Based on these medical reports, each set of legs acted independently of one another, with separate bowel movements and daily functions. The only time that they were in sync was during the menstrual period. By these accounts, Myrtle could be experiencing a loose stool on the one side, with constipation on the other. Doctors were dumbfounded — and the world was amazed!

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Barnum Circus Welcomes Myrtle With Open Arms

Needless to say, Myrtle attracted a lot of attention. People would stop and stare, astounded by her abnormality (and wondering if it was real). Luckily, the condition didn't impact Myrtle's life span, and she continued to grow and age as a normal child would — but she didn't have the same experiences. When Myrtle turned 13, her life took an interesting and wacky turn.



When she became a teenager, Myrtle joined Barnum Circus, a famous traveling circus that P.T. Barnum founded in the United States in the mid-19th century. The circus featured many attractions, including exotic animals, acrobats, clowns, and other performers. Among these performances was the collection of “freaks” born with unique physical attributes or medical conditions that set them apart from the general population. They were often displayed for the entertainment of circus-goers — and Myrtle was among them.

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The Unethical Craze of Freak Shows

While exploiting individuals with physical differences is now widely considered unethical, the legacy of the Barnum Circus "freaks" lives on in popular culture and the ongoing conversation about disability rights and representation. Popular performances included Tom Thumb, the tiny man standing just over two feet tall, and Chang and Eng Bunker, the conjoined twins introduced as "The Siamese Twins."



When attending the circus, audience members expected to see human anomalies. So, when Myrtle first stepped out on stage, they were confused. She was an attractive girl with no freakish features. She seemed perfectly normal, besides her large hips and clubbed right foot. Then, she lifted her gown, and the crowd was left speechless as they stared at her four legs.

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Leading a Successful Personal Life

You may think someone with four legs would struggle to find a life partner, and under normal circumstances, you'd be correct in your assumptions. But Myrtle was lucky enough to find love. As an attractive young woman, she would often get the attention of

enough to find love is an attractive young woman; she would often get the attention of young men — only to have them find out about her unique form at a later stage.



One man, in particular, stole Myrtle's heart. When she was 19 years old, Myrtle exchanged vows with James Clinton Bicknell, and the pair looked forward to a happy life together. Yet the following year, Myrtle started experiencing pain in her left side and went to see a professional named Dr. Lewis Whaley. After a thorough examination, the doctor shared his findings with Myrtle — leaving her shocked!

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Breaking the Happy New With the Young Couple

As it turns out, Myrtle was experiencing pain in her left abdomen because she was pregnant in her left uterus. The couple was astounded by the news, with their disbelief dominating their facial expressions. With all of the other symptoms that Myrtle experienced regularly, the last thing that she expected was pregnancy. But there was another reason that she had her doubts about the verdict...



Surprised by the news, Myrtle exclaimed, “I think you are mistaken; if it had been on my right side, I would come nearer believing it.” Confused by her comment, the doctor asked his patient a few more questions. Eventually, the lightbulb flickered on when he learned that her *right* genitals were predominately used for sexual intercourse, making it unlikely that she would fall pregnant in her left uterus.

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Could Myrtle Have Babies?

You may be wondering whether Myrtle’s body could fall pregnant, grow babies to a healthy weight, and birth them without complications — and you wouldn’t be the only one. After all, seemingly healthy, normal-bodied women struggle with pregnancy and fertility complications. Myrtle’s double pelvis and duplicate lower body certainly complicated her reproductive system. But it didn’t hinder her ability to have children!

complicated her reproductive system. But it didn't hinder her ability to have children.



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Sadly, Myrtle's struggled with severe illness during her first pregnancy, and Dr. Whaley was concerned about her health complications. After consulting with colleagues, he recommended an abortion eight weeks after Myrtle's examination (she was between three and four months pregnant at the time). Luckily, this was a once-off struggle, and Myrtle continued to have four perfectly healthy children once she retired from show business.

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An Irreplaceable One-of-a-Kind Show

It's common practice for the entertainment industry to repeat successful formulas and methods. Consider how all sitcoms follow the same story arc, pop songs have a similar beat, and how movies tend to follow the hero's journey. During Myrtle's era, her performance in the Barnum Circus was a raging success, and other circuses tried replicating the act. Of course, they struggled to find a woman with four legs.

10

ST. PAUL MUSEUM

10

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BEGINNING MONDAY, MARCH 31,

The Greatest of All Living Wonders,

MISS MYRTLE CORBIN!

The Living Four-Legged Girl.



She Can Dance, She Can Walk, She Can "Wiggle," She Can "Whirl," This Twenty-Two, Four-Footed, Twenty-Two, Four-Footed Girl.

SEE THEM ON TWENTY TWINKLING TOES.

She's Alive!

SEE FLITS ABOUT ON 4 FAIRY FEET.

She is the Only Living Human Quadruped in the World.

THEATRE NO. 1, THEATRE NO. 2.

World's Fair Comedy Co. Dan McEvoy's Hibernians.

10 Cents

Christmas Week, Commencing Monday, Dec. 31.

3 GREAT HALLS! 3

JOSEPHINE MYRTLE CORBIN.



CHRISTMAS DAY,

Museum Open 10 A.M. to 10:30 P.M.

Presenting for the first time the bewitching sensation of the 20th Century,

MISS JOSEPHINE MYRTLE CORBIN,

The Four-Legged Girl.

A Beautiful Young Woman, 16 years of age, presenting 4 Legs, 4 Feet, 80 Toes.

Miss Corbin was born near Charleston, in Tennessee, seventeen years ago. She has two sisters and three brothers, and being the eldest of the family. Her appearance in the world with twice the ordinary number of perfectly formed legs and arms amazed her parents, but created the greatest excitement in the neighborhood. At first she was exceedingly delicate and fragile, but her parents secured the services of some of the most eminent physicians to guard her health, the result being that she grew to maturity and beauty.

Miss Corbin is a deeply intelligent young lady, and the public, who generally mistake her condition for weakness, are astonished to find her and are utterly amazed.

She Walks on 2, 4, 6, 8, and 4 Feet. Don't Miss Seeing Her. Come Early and Avoid the Crowds.

HENRIETTA MORITZ,
Germany's National Wig.

BARNEY NELSON,
The Polar Wanderer.

PROF. GARST,
An eminent Physiologist gives demonstrations of character lines.

On the Fifth Stage on the Third Floor, the Renowned Prestidigitator,

ROTTAIR,
Will present his marvellous entertainment.

PUNCH AND JUDY,
Brought from London, to delight the children.

On the lower stage the strongest cards that money can secure will furnish the entertainment.

READ THIS CAREFULLY.

AJAX,
Mind Myrtling, Swindling, Swindling, India Rubber Frolics.

FREDDIE PEASLEY,
Cynical Vandal.

CHARLES O. HOWE,
King of the Air.

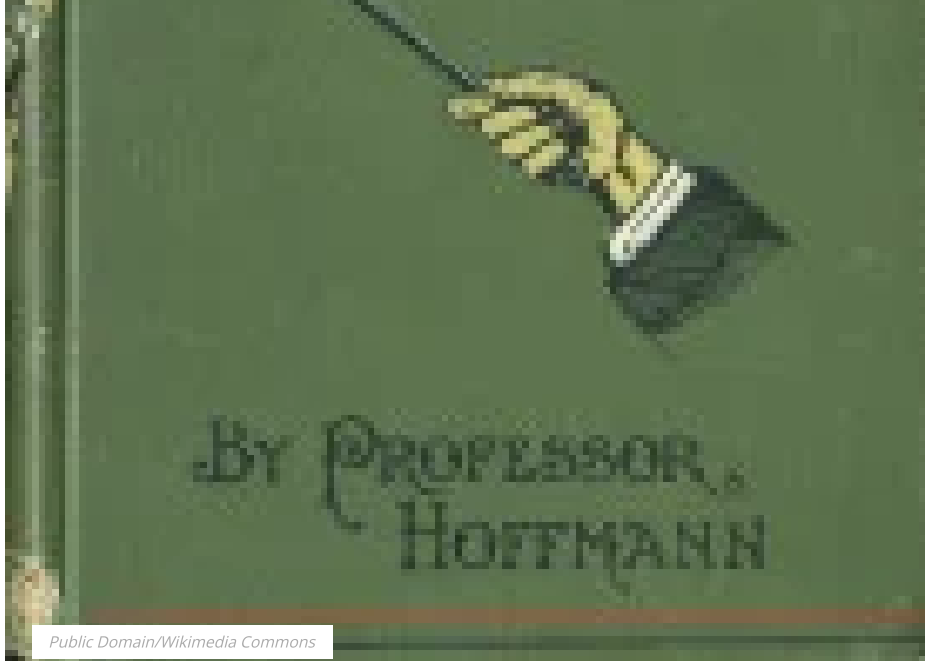
First appearance of
HEFFERNON & McDONALD,
Master artists of Irish music.

P.T. Barnum presented Myrtle as a unique and genuine act, a feat that other circuses could not claim. Doctors were invited to examine Myrtle as part of the performance to prove that they were the real deal. She would also wiggle all four legs upon request. At the height of her popularity, P.T. Barnum paid Myrtle a significant wage of \$450 a week!

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Various Attempts at Replicating Myrtle's Act

At the time, people stood in long queues to catch a glimpse of Myrtle and her four legs, and other circus performers set their minds to replicating the performance to attract the same audience (and their money). Just because they didn't have the real deal, doesn't mean they wouldn't try to make it work (through one ruse or another).

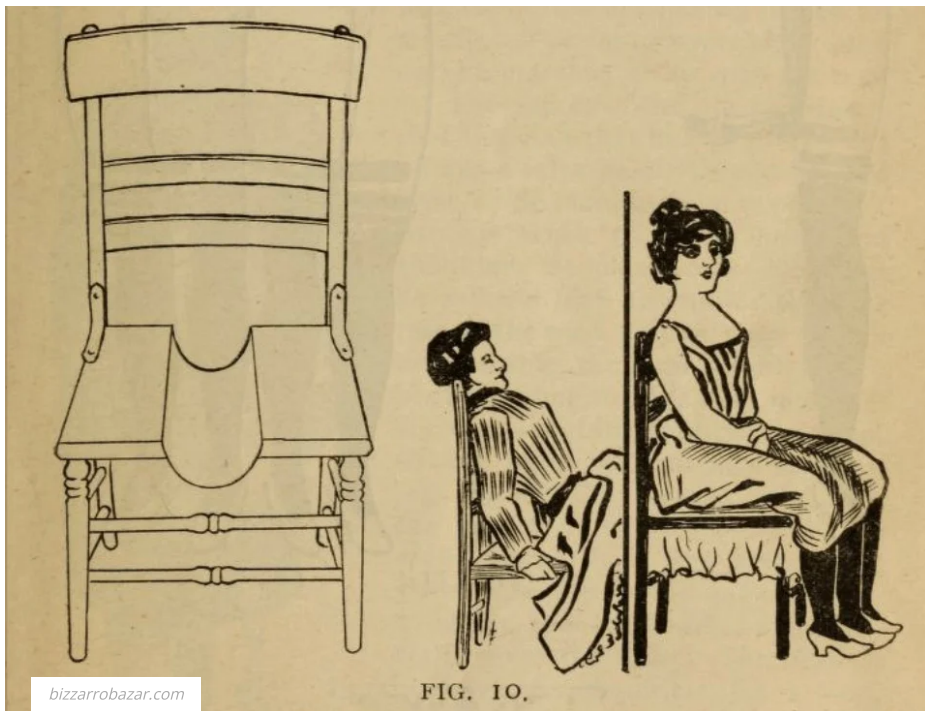


Later Magic is a book written by the magician and author, Professor Hoffman, and was published in 1902. It explores the world of magic and provides a comprehensive guide to a wide range of tricks and illusions. It covers also explores the various attempts to simulate a three-legged and four-legged woman. Consider the following two diagrams as examples of these attempts...

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The First Type of Contraption

There's no denying that you have to be creative when trying to replicate a woman with more than two legs. In this first design, the diagram is fairly easy to follow. It involves a chair against a wall behind which someone sits, prepared to offer their legs as part of the trick. All you need is a chair (with a grooved ridge) and a screen.



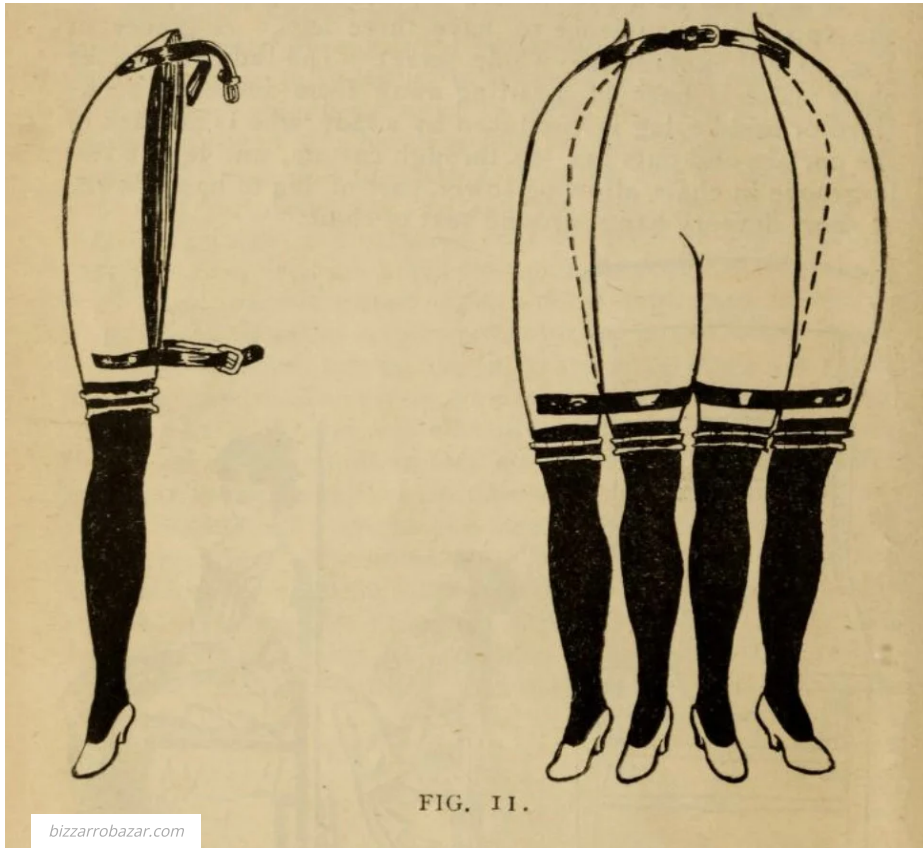
The chair has a groove where the second person's legs sit comfortably without riding up the performer's bottom. The "third leg" slides perfectly in between the other two original legs and completes the act. The audience won't suspect a thing when viewing the

woman from the front! Even better, all three (or four) legs can be wiggled on a whim for added effect. Figure

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The Second Type of Contraption

While the first contraption is a worthy idea, it costs the circus owner the wages of *two* performers (who don't even have any notable "freakish" features to draw the crowds). The design in Figure 11 is a more cost-effective (albeit less believable) solution to making the audience believe that the performer has four legs. All that's needed is a little bit of craftsmanship...

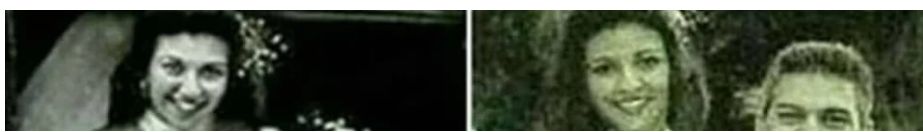


The performer's original two legs are in the middle of the body, fully movable and believable. Attached to the side are two prosthetic legs that appear similar to the originals — only they are less dexterous. Just a couple of belt straps and perfectly-sized hips, and you have yourself an attempted ruse — but it just can't compare with Myrtle's original act!

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A Modern Version of Myrtle

Considering the unique aspect of Myrtle's condition, you'd think it's unlikely that another person would ever be born with the same one. However, more than a century later, a woman named Ashley Braistle was born with a rare condition known as polymelia. The congenital anomaly involves accessory limbs attached to various body regions without affecting the rest of the individual's appearance.





While Ashley lived during a time when “freak” shows were frowned upon, she did share a few similarities with Myrtle. For example, she lived a happy life and found love, even marrying a plumber from Houston in 1994. The love affair began after Ashley appeared in a newspaper interview saying that she was looking for an “easygoing and sensitive guy,” and Wayne was ready to fulfill the role!

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Ashley Finds a Devastating End

While she lived with polymelia, Ashley wasn't limited in any other way, and she got married and lived a full life. In fact, she was an avid skier who enjoyed hitting the slopes and cruising through the snow on her four legs. Unfortunately, it would also be her love for skiing that led to a horrific tragedy and her untimely death on May 11, 1996.



St. Louis beauty slams into fir tree

GORGEIOUS Ashley Braistle went looking for a husband and found the man of her dreams — thanks to *Weekly World News*.



COURAGEOUS Ashley in action.

Famous 4-legged woman dies in skiing accident

By JOE BERGER / *Weekly World News*

ZERMATT, Switzerland — Dazzling Ashley Braistle — the four-legged secretary who met and married the man of her dreams with the help of *Weekly World News* — has been killed in a spine-chilling skiing mishap on the slopes of the Matterhorn!

The excited bride died instantly May 11 when she got her legs tangled up and hurtled headlong off a steep trail, slamming into a towering fir tree at an estimated 40 m.p.h.

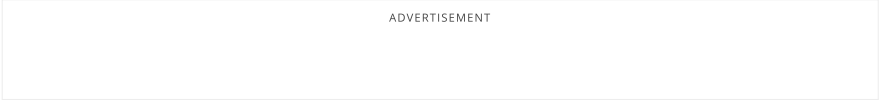
“Ashley was skiing a black diamond (expert) trail and she should have stuck to the intermediate trail — I begged her to stay on the intermediate trail,” said horrified hubby Wayne Braistle. “But she was feeling so happy, so inevitable that nothing could stop her from skidding that

HAPPY COUPLE: Leggy Ashley and her jubilant groom Wayne Braistle were all smiles after their wedding two years ago.





Ashley was hurtling headlong off a steep trail when she slammed into a tree at an estimated 40 miles per hour. Her husband shares, “Ashely was skiing a black diamond trail, and she should have stuck to the intermediate trail. But she was feeling so happy, so invincible, that nothing could stop her from skiing that trail. And when she hit that tree, suddenly everything I had to live for was gone.”



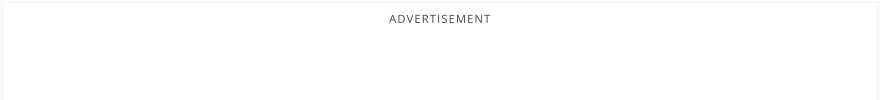
Now, are you ready for the punch line?

It Was All a Trick

Ashely's story was shared far and wide, causing many people to invest in her tale and shed a few tears over her tragic skiing incident. However, it all bubbled over when people learned that Ashley's entire story was just a fabricated act to gain attention — similar to the tricks that appeared in the circus and “freak” shows from Myrtle's time.



As it turns out, Ashley was a fictional character invented by a fake news tabloid in the 1990s. The media outlet, Weekly World News, put together the photographic hoax to sell the story, alongside other stories about Hilary Clinton adopting a baby alien and Abraham Lincoln being a woman. The story of the four-legged woman was a success until the newspaper's author decided to kill the character in a skiing accident in the Swiss Alps in 1996.



Duplications in the Modern World

While Myrtle's story is certainly one-of-a-kind, it's not entirely unique. Today, a number of individuals are born with caudal duplications, a rare medical condition that affects a small number of individuals worldwide. Typically, it occurs when a person is born with an extra set of coccygeal, sacral, or lumbar vertebrae which can lead to a range of physical abnormalities, including deformities of the spine, hips, and legs.

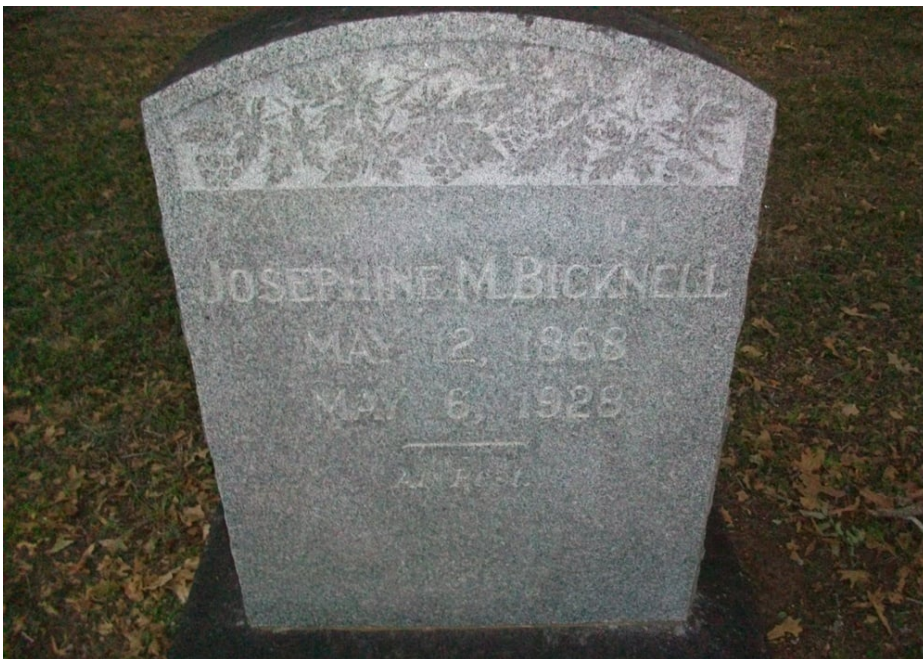


With modern medicine, it's possible to get treatment for caudal duplications, which can vary depending on the severity of the condition. For example, treatments may involve surgery, physical therapy, or other interventions. There have been wonderful success stories of caudal duplications being corrected after birth in 1968, 1973, and 2014. Unfortunately (or not), these treatments weren't possible during Myrtle's time...

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Myrtle Lived a Long and Happy Life

After joining the circus at a young age, Myrtle managed to earn a decent chunk of change. By the time she left the circus, she had a husband on her arm, and she was preparing to grow her family (which she did successfully). You'd think Myrtle's condition would impact her life and cut it short, but she lived to a week before her sixtieth birthday!



Myrtle was buried in Cleburne, Texas, at the beginning of May in 1928. As the coffin was lowered into the ground, her husband, James Bicknell, patiently watched the grave being filled with a thick layer of cement — making sure that it dried before leaving. Why, you may ask? He was worried that doctors or other collectors would steal the body!

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The Peculiar Life of Joseph Merrick: The Elephant Man

Have you ever heard of a man by the name of Joseph Merrick? He was a young boy whose deformities turned him into a 19th-century freak show performer known as “The Elephant Man.” Born in England, Joseph’s mother instantly fell in love with her baby boy. He was perfect in every way...until he turned five years old.



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All his mother could do was sit back and watch as her son’s appearance changed before her eyes. Going from a healthy pink to a sickly gray color, Joseph’s skin began to change in color, texture, and shape. His lips swelled, his flesh bubbled and his face grew abnormally large. Soon, Joseph’s mother hardly recognized her baby boy...but she loved him nonetheless. The same couldn’t be said for those around him.

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An Explanation for His Condition

Mary was watching as her son’s appearance changed before her eyes with no explanation. Not only were the doctors not able to diagnose Joseph, but they weren’t able to give Mary any guidance on how to manage the changes either. The only explanation that Mary could come up with for her son’s condition was an incident that happened when she visited the fair.





Before Joseph was born, Mary found herself being pushed into an oncoming animal parade. Unfortunately, she wasn't the only one who got a fright, a marching elephant did as well. Since the elephant had reared up, Mary believed that her fear had caused her son's deformities. Explaining that his changes and pain had been her fault broke his mother's heart, however, Joseph's pain was just going to get worse.

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Saying Goodbye to His Best Friend

As you can probably imagine, Joseph came across a number of people who treated him differently because of the way that he looked. Whether it was with pity or disgust, Joseph was never treated as an equal to those around him. The only person who he could always rely on was his mother.





Sadly, his mother fell ill with pneumonia and never recovered. So, in addition to his constant physical changes, Joseph had to deal with the loss of his mother when he was only 11 years old. According to him, losing her was “the greatest misfortune of my life.” After his mother’s passing, Joseph couldn’t take his classmate’s teasing and decided to drop out of school. If you can believe it, his life was about to get even more miserable.

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His Father Moved On Quickly

By the time he was 13 years old, Joseph’s appearance had changed completely. In addition to all these physical changes, he had to make some emotional adjustments as well. After losing his mother, Joseph had to learn how to navigate life without her. While he struggled to accept her passing, his father had already moved on.



Just 18 months after he had to say goodbye to his mother, Joseph had to say hello to his stepmother. Sadly, she didn’t have the heart of Mary and actively made Joseph’s life more difficult. According to him, “She was the means of making my life a perfect misery.” Without affection from his father or stepmother, Joseph felt like a stranger in his own home. While he tried to run away “two or three” times, he was easily identifiable and was always returned to his father.

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Forced to Work and Earn an Income

It was clear that Joseph didn’t have an easy life growing up...and his stepmother only made it worse. According to her, if he wasn’t going to school then he needed to have a job and contribute to their home’s earnings. So, when Joseph left school, he got a job at a cigar rolling shop. Unfortunately, he was only able to work there for three years before his deformities got in the way.



The changes from his condition had now moved to his hands, affecting his dexterity. Joseph was now 16 years old and unemployed...something that was unacceptable to his stepmother despite his challenges. He spent his days wandering the streets and looking for work, dreading returning home without an offer... even if it was just for lunch! If so, he was welcomed home by his stepmother's taunts where she claimed that half a meal was more than he had earned.

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He Left Home for Good

Eventually, his father agreed to let Joseph work for him and sell goods from his store by going door to door. However, his father didn't take into account how people would react to having Joseph knocking on their door. Not only did his misshapen face make it difficult to understand what he was saying, but his overall appearance made people nervous to open their doors.





As Joseph's sales dropped, his father's anger towards him grew. After receiving a beating from his father, Joseph ran away...only this time he wasn't coming back. While his uncle tried to care for him, he soon ran out of money and was unable to support Joseph. After working at the Leicester Union Workhouse for four years, Joseph began thinking of ways that his deformities could be used as an asset and a way to generate income.

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Using His Deformities to Generate an Income

His whole life, people had stared at Joseph on account of his deformities. Finally, he decided that if they were going to stare, they should at least pay money to do so. So, he wrote a letter to a man named Sam Torr who had his traveling act. After meeting with Joseph and realizing his earning potential, Sam set the young man up with a management team.





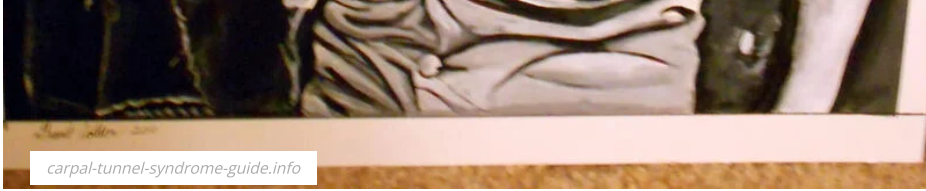
Under the management of J. Ellis, George Hitchcock, and Sam Roper, Joseph was advertised as “half a man, half an elephant.” His “freak show” career started in 1884 while touring Leicester, Nottingham, and London. However, in that same year, Joseph met a shop owner named Tom Norman. He just so happened to display human oddities and took Joseph in.

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He Was There to Enlighten, Not Frighten

By this stage, Joseph’s deformities were extreme and Tom feared that they were too horrific for an audience. Nevertheless, he decided to give Joseph a chance, warning the audience that he was “not here to frighten you but to enlighten you.” Joseph stayed at the back of a vacant shop and was given nothing more than an iron bed and a curtain for privacy.





However, he wasn't complaining...after all, he didn't really need a bed! You see, Joseph was unable to sleep lying down. His head was so large that it could break his neck if he tried. Instead, he slept sitting up with his legs drawn in and his head resting on his knees. Much to Tom's surprise, Joseph's show was successful. While Joseph didn't have much to spend his earnings on, he was saving up for a house of his own.

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Both Horrified and Intrigued

While "freak shows" attracted a large audience, they also attracted a lot of doctors. Doctors were trying to advance the field of medicine and people like Joseph helped them to do that. His show just so happened to be held opposite the London Hospital, where an eager doctor named Frederick Treves was employed.



After hearing about The Elephant Man, Frederick knew that he had to meet him. After everything that he had heard about Joseph, Frederick set up a meeting and he wasn't disappointed. In case you didn't know that it was possible to be both horrified and intrigued, it is and it's what Frederick felt. After getting permission to conduct further examinations at the hospital, Joseph was dressed in an oversized black cloak, a brown cap, and a hessian sack over his face.

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A Thorough Examination Was Done

Once Joseph was at the hospital, Frederick began his examination of The Elephant Man. Not only was the examination extensive, but it was also detailed. Frederick started by taking measurements of Joseph's head (36 inches), right wrist (12 inches), and fingers (5 inches). He also noted that some of Joseph's skin was hanging loose while other parts were covered in warty growths and had an unpleasant smell.





Strangely enough, his condition had not affected his left arm, left hand, and genitalia. There were a lot of interesting things to note but Frederick found that “His head was the most interesting thing. It was very, very big – like an enormous bag with a lot of books in it.” However, since his speech was impaired, the doctor made the mistake of assuming that Joseph wasn’t intelligent. Finally, Joseph had had enough and left the hospital with Frederick’s calling card in his pocket.

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Clamping Down on “Freak Shows”

Finally, Joseph had found a way to use his deformities as something positive. Every day he was making money and getting closer to being able to buy himself a home. However, as business picked up, authorities clamped down on “freak shows.” Authorities finally began to see the issue with displaying people like Joseph as “freaks.”



However, this was how Joseph made his money and he wasn’t ready to let it go. So, under advice from his managers, Joseph traveled to Europe where he hoped authorities would be more lenient. Unfortunately, he was more successful...in fact, his trip cost him everything. After his new manager ran off with his entire savings, Joseph managed to board a ship home to London. Sadly, things got worse before they got better.

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Nowhere Else to Go

Finally, Joseph managed to make his way back to London’s Liverpool station in 1886. While he was able to breathe a sigh of relief, it wasn’t too deep a breath. He still had no money and no place to go. On top of that, he was exhausted and hadn’t been able to clean himself in ages. Joseph was desperate and turned to those around for help...but all that they did was stare.



By this stage, his condition had worsened and his speech was incomprehensible. Instead of helping him, crowds gathered to gasp at the sight that was Joseph. Eventually, he had drawn such a crowd that a policeman noticed and went over to help him. Joseph was exhausted and welcomed the assistance.

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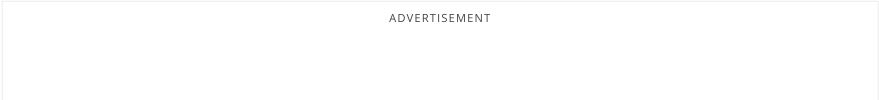
The Doctor Came to His Rescue

Unfortunately, the policeman was no better able to understand Joseph but instead decided to look for proof of identification. While he wasn't able to find out who Joseph was, he did manage to find Frederick's business card. The police decided that it was his best bet and called the doctor for help.





After rushing over, Frederick knew exactly who Joseph was and took him straight back to the hospital. It was only once he arrived at the facility that Joseph truly relaxed and was treated, fed, and cleaned. During his stay, Frederick decided to run more tests...and what he found was heartbreaking. Joseph's condition had worsened and was now also suffering from a heart condition. According to the doctor, he only had a few years left to live.

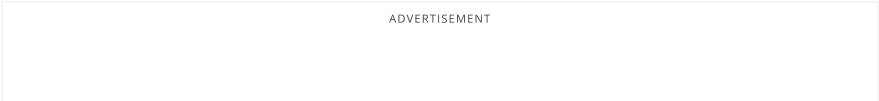


The Public Donated Funds

The longer that Joseph stayed in the hospital, the more obvious it became to doctors that he needed long-term care. Unfortunately, they had neither the facilities nor the staff available to provide Joseph with what he needed. The sad part was that neither did any of the other facilities, so the chairman of London’s Hospital decided to ask the public for advice.



He so badly wanted to help Joseph but had no idea how he was going to do it. So, in the form of an article in *The Times*, he outlined Joseph’s case and his dilemma. The public response was overwhelming with both letters and donations streaming in. The chairman finally had a solution...Joseph was going to stay exactly where he was because the hospital had just been given the funds to make that happen!



Joseph Had His Own Space

Now that the hospital had the funds to care for Joseph, they got to work creating the perfect space just for him. The hospital staff was able to give Joseph a decent size room with courtyard access by converting two adjacent rooms in the hospital basement. The best part was that there was not a single mirror insight to remind Joseph of his deformities.



Every day, Frederick would visit and spend time with Joseph. As time passed, the doctor was not only able to understand what Joseph was saying but he also realized that his condition had no cognitive effects. Joseph was a smart young man and the two conversed for hours. That’s how Frederick came to know that Joseph had never spoken to or touched a woman that wasn’t his mother.

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He Experienced the Touch of a Woman

The more that Frederick and Joseph spoke, the more they got to know about one another...and the more that Frederick’s heart softened toward the young man. The doctor couldn’t do anything to change the young man’s past and the rejection that he had faced but he tried his best to make up for it. One of the ways that he did this was by introducing Joseph to a young, attractive woman named Leila Maturin.



Fully aware of his condition, Leila greeted Joseph with a smile and shook his hand. Unfortunately, Joseph made sure that their meeting was brief when he quickly became overwhelmed. After talking it through with Frederick, Joseph revealed that she was the first woman who had ever smiled at him and shook his hand. While the meeting may have been short, its impact on Joseph was everlasting.

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Joseph’s Health Declined Rapidly

Frederick and the rest of the hospital staff made sure that the last few years of Joseph’s life were his best. According to the doctor, Joseph left the hospital on three separate occasions where he got to enjoy walking through nature. Sadly, it wasn’t long before hospital staff saw a drastic decline in Joseph’s health.

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He went from exploring the outdoors to sitting on his bed with no energy to move. Every day, living was getting harder for Joseph as his deformities intensified. One of the things that made it difficult and caused his death was his continuously growing head. On April 11, 1890, hospital staff entered his room and found the 27-year old's lifeless body. Sadly, Joseph had tried to sleep lying down, and had dislocated his neck and suffocated.

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His Condition Is Still a Mystery

Despite having lived most of his life as a social outcast, Joseph got to spend his last few years with people who accepted him for who he was. Frederick even wrote a memoir titled *The Elephant Man and Other Reminiscences* where he detailed their time together. Despite getting his name wrong in his book, the doctor cared for Joseph deeply.



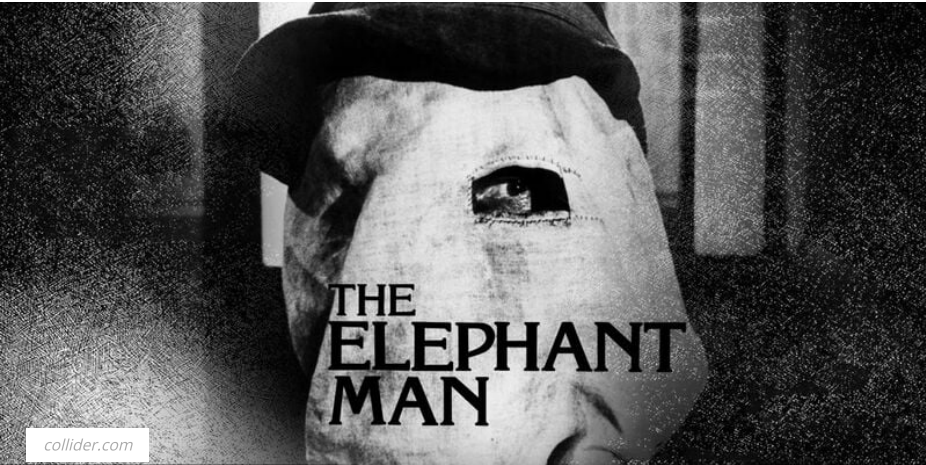
BBC shared that Joseph's skeleton was preserved and is being held at the Royal London Hospital as a scientific specimen. For years, Joseph's condition both intrigued and confused doctors...and it's still doing it!

The Elephant Man Will Never Be Forgotten

From what we know about The Elephant Man, he and Frederick had a very strong relationship...especially towards the end. For this reason, people took his book titled *The Elephant Man and Other Reminiscences* as the truth. However, as time has passed, it

has been shown that his book had many inaccuracies.

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Thankfully, Frederick’s version of events isn’t the only book to draw from. There’s also 1971’s *The Elephant Man: A Study in Human Dignity* by Ashley Montagu to 1980’s *The True History of the Elephant Man* by Michael Howell and Peter Ford to 2016’s *Joseph: The Life, Times and Places of the Elephant Man* by Joanne Vigor-Mungovin. Joseph may have been misshapen but he was still a human and he had a good heart. Whether it be for the advancement of science or his personality, we’re certain that he will never be forgotten.