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Joseph Carey Merrick, born in England on August 5, 1862, is better known as The Elephant Man. Through horrible physical deformities which were almost impossible to describe, he spent much of his life exhibited as a fairground freak until even nineteenth-century sensibilities could take no more. Hounded, persecuted and starving, he ended up at London's Liverpool Street Station where he was rescued, housed and fed by the distinguished surgeon Frederick Treves. To Treves surprise, he discovered during the course of their friendship that lurking beneath the mass of Merrick's corrupting flesh lived a spirit that was as courageous as it had been tortured, and a nature as gentle and dignified as it had been deprived and tormented. The subject of several books, a Broadway hit, and a film, Joseph Merrick has become part of popular mythology. Here, in this fully revised edition containing new details, are the true and unromantic facts of his life. This is an extraordinary and moving story, set among the brutal realities of the Victorian world, telling of a tragic individual and his survival against overwhelming odds."

The True History of the Elephant Man Details

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From Reader Review The True History of the Elephant Man for online ebook

Eden Banzhaf says

I have always wondered how a man with so many problems faced the world. I read this book to see how he must have felt. Unfortunately there is very little from John's own mouth. However, I found this book very interesting and of great worth. It is well researched and compares and contrasts information from various books to allow the reader to draw a conclusion from the facts. Nicely written!

Kc Chapa says

The story of Joseph Merrick was super interesting. But I rated this a 2 because I didn't want or need to read the life histories of the few people who were close to him. I just wanted to read about Merrick. The description of the pure delight that Merrick felt and exhibited with every day things brought me to tears. I wished I was there back in the day to meet him and possibly be a friend. It made me happy that he didn't die lonely.

Kate Baker says

A fascinating read. I have had a long fascination with Joseph Merrick, in college I stage managed the theatrical production which only fueled my interest. This book did an excellent job of introducing characters and drawing a time line of Merrick's life. The detailed involvement of Dr. Treves was exceptionally well done and - from what I had known and read before - certain details were clarified or more clearly stated.

My favorite part of the book happens to be the three Appendixes at the end of the book which show the inner Merrick, but also how his life touched Dr. Treves. Overall a terrific book. I wish the psychology of Merrick and Treves was a little more detailed, but I would not pass this book up.

Additionally, if you decide to read this, I would recommend reading the Preface, at least the first 3 pages to understand the evolution of this book and the authors behind it.

Sarah says

A thorough look at the life of Joseph Merrick, more commonly referred to as the Elephant Man. The descriptions of Joseph and his life were very informative. Joseph had many unpleasant experiences in his life due to his severe deformity. He went from place to place and for most of his life was unable to keep a job due to his deformity. Luckily, he received help from Doctor Treves of the London Hospital and was able to live the rest of his life in rooms at the hospital. He began to experience friendship with many people and have experiences that he would not have had without the assistance of his friends. He was able to go the theatre and spend time in the countryside of England. Despite his physical appearance, he was very kind, intelligent and loved to read. There are photographs of Joseph in the back of the book. During parts of the

book the authors would describe how some people reacted to Joseph's appearance. After looking at the photographs I was not horrified by his physical appearance. I could understand when first seeing him why a person might be startled or surprised, but there were enough people in his life that looked beyond his deformity and were able to get to know him as a person.

MAP says

We're so used to novels like Phantom of the Opera, Hunchback of Notre Dame, Beauty and the Beast, featuring "deformed" men, often looking for love from some beautiful girl, that it's hard to remember that this story is NOT fiction; like it says in the title -- it's the true history of the Elephant Man. And there's no girl, no romance, no happy or semi-happy ending to tie everything neatly together. Just the story of a young man trying to survive.

Although the authors can go into WAY too much detail about facts no one cares about, it's obvious they did their research on the life of Joseph (yes, Joseph) Merrick and worked very hard to get into his mind without making too many assumptions. Some of the descriptions and quotes will literally make you mist up. I recommend this book to anyone and everyone. It's an incredibly moving book.

Get the updated version. They uncovered the diaries of Louisa Knightley (sp?) after the first version and some of the quotes from her diary are indispensable.

Karen Garrett says

The majority of this book is either reprinted passages of other's work or details of the lives of other people. Maybe 45 pages total focus on Merrick, leaving the reader unsatisfied.

Natacha says

This book was awing. This book is overwhelmingly sad but the story is amazing and absolutely true. I cried after almost every chapter.

Joseph (the Elephant Man) was to find employment because of his disabilities and disfigurement. Finally, he got the opportunity to escape this nightmare by being the entertainment in a freak show, he was able to make a decent living by doing this and begin saving money to buy a house. But England at the time was undergoing changes, and many begin to become uneasy with shows that displayed "freaks" and the police started to put an end to them. But this also eventually meant Joseph's only way of earning money was being taken from him. Having been robbed of the money he was saving, he sent a message to a doctor who expressed interest in him while he was part of a freak show. The doctor broke some laws and took care of him into the hospital, eventually, the public began being filled with compassion, and sending in the pounds to provide for Joseph to have his own room where he could read books, visit people and have some enjoyments during the last years of his life.

What I liked most about this book was that the author was able to include Joseph's childlike wonder and excitement thoughts as well as the thoughts that were of rich emotions and religion.

I would recommend this book to people who are interested in American Horror Story: Freak Show.

Laura says

I would have given this 5 stars, as it was such a good read! However, I found that the focus was completely taken from Joseph Merrick in many sections to less important characters, and these sections tended to ramble with unneeded information.

Maureen says

I saw the movie many years ago and now want to see it again. Bradley Cooper is currently playing the Elephant Man on broadway. I would see any play about the elephant man. This book begins very straightforward explaining the culture of that time period. It began slowly, but the details while slowing the start of the life of Joseph Carey Merrick in the end enriched the book. Amazing Detail in the research. I recommend the book highly to anyone who has a heart and curiosity about this man or what it must be like to live as an outcast. This is a very sad book but very moving. I am still thinking about Joseph Merrick. His entire life was so hard and was hard for anyone in that time period but his was brutal. So many things happened to him in his 27 years. From being rejected by his father, to working in the workhouse/poor house to being a 'side show freak'. No medical information to help him. He was constantly uncomfortable and could barely talk. This is a very thorough book on Joseph Merrick. I learned a lot about him and the people of that time period.

Therese says

\$1.99

With so many books to read and so little time to do so, it is rare that I read a book a second time anymore. This needed to be the exception, especially when I got such a good deal on it for my Kindle. It had been a long time since I had read this story, and I wanted to see whether it would touch me in the same way as it had before.

Most people have heard of "The Elephant Man" but I would be much happier if he was called by his given name of Joseph Carey Merrick. He was born in 1852 and he didn't start showing signs of deformity until about age five. This book says that his mother, and later on a younger sister, were also crippled that we know nothing more about them other than that his mother died when Merrick was 11. A younger brother had also passed away leaving his father to look after two young children with disabilities.

It wasn't long before he remarried and the proverbial wicked stepmother made Joseph's life unbearable. You might not think that he was educated but he was, and after reaching a certain age, each person in Victorian London was expected to contribute to their well-being. There were few exceptions. Joseph did his best but through no fault of his own, people were so frightened of him that after he failed to contribute to the family income, his father turned him out. After work failing, he admitted himself to the "workhouse" for those who

will not work, cannot work, or were unable to work.

After being here for some time, he checked himself out and met Tom Norman, a freak show operator. This seems unspeakable in our day and age, but yet he begged not to be sent back to the workhouse. He wanted to make his own way and not be a burden on society.

During this time, the shop was set up across the street from London hospital, and he soon became a curiosity to a number of people in the medical field, most notably Dr. Frederick Treves. It is recorded that he became friends with Joseph Merrick, and while he looked after his well-being until the end of his life, it doesn't seem to me that he knew a lot about Merrick other than what he observed during his time with him.

There are chapters in this book that drag on about Dr. Treves and a few other people came across Joseph Merrick, and while he may have retained a quiet dignity about him after finding "acceptance" in a tucked away room, the fact remained that he never came true acceptance or friendship for a place to belong where he could be himself.

I can't imagine such an existence, and I wondered how he would be treated today. We treat him any better? Unfortunately I don't think so, but perhaps life might have been a wee bit easier since we have made much progress in the medical field, but I keep questioning the mental and emotional trauma that he suffered, just as others do today.

Jessi says

I love Joseph Merick and this is the most complete and reliable history of his life available. Excellent read.

Chris says

In Whitechapel Road, London there is a small shop which sells saris. 127 years ago the same shop was used for a very different purpose; to exhibit a man whose body was so terribly disfigured with evil-smelling skin growths he was nicknamed 'The Elephant Man'. His real name was Joseph Carey Merrick and this book is about his life and the people who knew him.

I won't go into masses of detail surrounding Joseph as I am sure most people have heard of him, he is famous even today because of his (mercifully) rare medical condition and the tremendous suffering he went through in a largely uncaring world. His mother died when Joseph was 10 years old and his father re-married shortly after. Joseph's step-mother was cruel and impatient towards him forcing him to leave home and enter the workhouse. Eventually he began working in freak shows, exhibiting himself to the public for money. It was in this capacity that he met Sir Frederick Treves; a young surgeon from the London Hospital. Merrick left London shortly after this and went through all manner of very unpleasant experiences before he finally returned and moved into the London Hospital. Here he was cared for by the doctors and nurses before his death at the young age of 27.

The book is very informative and well put together, it is clear a lot of hard work went into it and I'm glad I

had the opportunity to read it.. It was very interesting to read how many myths surround Joseph, one of the biggest being that his first name was John. An interesting fact is that Joseph attributed his frightful condition to his mother being scared by an elephant when she was pregnant with him. I am left with the strong impression that Joseph was a kind and gentle man, popular with those who took the trouble to know him and certainly not a man deserving of what happened to him. I am thankful he was cared for before he died.

The book doesn't claim to know everything and sadly a lot of the details of Joseph's life have been lost over the years. Some very good photographs are included as well as a two page 'autobiography' believed to have been written by Joseph himself.

Belle says

I thoroughly recommend this. It's well written and well researched. When I started reading I worried that the writing style might be slightly too medical for my liking but this was not the case. In fact the way in which it was written helped keep the story from being too upsetting. As it was, I was moved to tears when reading of Merrick's entry to the workhouse to the point where I had to take a reading break. I felt overwhelmed by how a person must feel to be so alone, as Merrick had been. Reading about Merrick's experiences and in particular his admirable personality and resilience was particularly humbling.

This book is a quick read at only 246 well spaced pages. Well structured and extremely interesting. Not just detailing Joseph Merrick's life (and the people that he mixed with) but also giving insight into the late 1800's with regard to entertainment, Victorian ideals and even high society. There were numerous photographs, not just of Merrick but also of the various traveling shows and convoys. The social history aspect was fascinating.

Exceptionally thorough - a round up at the end also gave updates as to the fate of Merrick's friends and associates plus provided copies of literature that the authors used within their own research; including a short autobiography written by Merrick himself.

John Martindale says

A very detailed and factual history of a interesting, tragic and moving story.

~Spoiler alert~

Joseph (the Elephant Man) being unable to find employment because of his disabilities and disfigurement, had to be a part of a work-house which was for him pure hell. Finally, he got the opportunity to escape this nightmare by being the entertainment in a freak show, he was able to make a decent living doing this and begin saving money to buy a house. But England was undergoing changes, and many (understandably) begin to become uneasy with shows that displayed "freaks" and the police started to put an end to them. But this also eventually meant Joseph's only way to earn money was taken from him and he dreaded having returning to the work house more than anything. Having been robbed of the money he was saving and left destitute, he sent a message to a doctor who expressed interest in him while he was part of a freak show. The doctor broke some laws and took care of him into the hospital, eventually, various appeals to the public resulted in people being filled with compassion, and sending in the pounds to provide for Joseph to have his own room where he could read books, visit people and have some enjoyments during the last years of his life. What I liked

most was the little the authors were able to include about the inner-mind of Joseph, of his childlike wonder and excitement, of the rich emotions and religious thought.

One issue the book brought to my mind again is how sympathy with those being "used" and the rage against capitalist who are doing the "exploiting", can result in removing the only means of employment for certain people. Such it is with things like sweat shops, though it is such a horribly low wage, in developing countries it's the poor folks only hope of improving their situation. But of course, the working situation and conditions seem unjust to westerners, so we protest and seek to get such exploiters put down. If we succeed we pat ourselves on the back, while totally oblivious that all these people who freely preferred the sweat shops to the alternatives, are now in far worst shape, even more desolate and hopeless than before. If we are to do away with things like sweat shops, freak shows, money for plasma, etc... because we feel these things take advantage of the poor, we need make sure charity or other ways of earning a living replaces the void.

Susan says

If you ever think life's dealt you an unfair hand, you should read this book. No one who reads it will remain unchanged. It's the story of Joseph Carey Merrick (B: 1862), who lived with a severly disfiguring disease. The story is told extensively and compassionately. To hear Merrick's story is to see a man, although shunned by society, shone from within.

Wayne Barrett says

3.5

The story of Joseph Merrick is such a poignant one, but there were also moments of happiness. There were acts committed by some that demonstrated cruelty but there were even more that showed kindness and caring of humankind.

I thought the movie version was very good but, of course, figured that Hollywood took a lot of liberties in their portrayal and after reading this I can see where they did. The true story of the elephant man may not have been as dramatic as the movie version, but it was still powerful and, because it is true, I believe even sadder than what the emotion of the movie conveyed.

Joseph's life was short and filled with misfortune and misery, but at least in his final few years he made friends, was surrounded by people who cared for him, and got to experience the life of a normal human being. People had always been terrified of him because of his extremely deformed appearance. It was common for women to faint or scream and run away when they confronted him, and on one occasion when he had been robbed and abandoned in a foreign country by a freak show manager he was not allowed on a train while trying to return to London because the passengers were terrified of him. The first time a woman came into his room at the hospital and greeted him by shaking his hand he broke down and sobbed because he had never had the experience. And as for my comment about him living a normal life, one of his greatest wishes, and one that was allowed by his friend and doctor, was to be allowed into a house so he could actually see what a real home looked like. Up to that time he had only read about them in books.

All in all this was an informative and powerful biography. There were a few areas that felt a little dry and I think the author went into great detail on some areas that I don't think were necessary to the story. That is the reason for my 3.5 rating, but aside from those page fillers, this was a story worth reading.

Candy Tiley says

While the story of the Elephant Man is a sad one the book did nothing to really enlighten the reader or present Joseph Merrick's character. It was a straight, all facts sort of compilation of the things that happened to Merrick told with a very dry presentation.

K.T. says

Although I've always been a great fan of the movies and literature I've absorbed regarding the life of Joseph Merrick, this book offered something the others could not: an honest, insightful view into the life of a truly unique individual. By scouring through the full breadth of resources at their disposal, the authors manage to paint an engaging picture of the world in which the Elephant Man existed. Interviews from those who knew him (and there were others aside from Dr. Treves), details about life in the Victorian and Edwardian ages, small asides delving into the backgrounds of those who played key roles in Merrick's life, this book offers all a Merrick enthusiast could ever hope for.

I think what drew me in the most was their emphasis that, for all the tragedy that surrounded him, in many respects Joseph Merrick still managed to live a full life. Rather than focusing purely on his deformities and wretched circumstances, we are shown a man that was also tenacious, well spoken, imaginative and, above all, appreciative of the beauty of the world around him.

It is easy to be titillated by stories of freaks and monstrosities. How lovely to be treated instead to a small glimpse of the life of a remarkable man.

David Ralston says

I tried to read the entire book, but it was simply too dry. It also contained information that was not entirely relevant, such as a lengthly biographical sketch of Joseph Merrick's long term physician/friend, Dr. Treves. The author's prose was awkward, even confusing at times, creating a frustrating reading experience. The book has well researched information on Mr. Merrick, but it is contained in a dry and lifeless writing style.

Sarah says

An excellent and obviously well researched biography of this most intriguing man, who can surely be counted as one of the most gentle souls to ever grace us.

While some of the details did get a little long winded (for example, there was more than enough mentioned on the Victorian Educational System and the achievements of the many Doctors, Showmen, and their

contemporaries who studied and worked with Joseph, fascinating though it was) from time to time, it happily includes Joseph's own short Autobiography. One of the bigger squabbles that the writer discusses is were the doctors and showman who cared for Joseph horrible self serving human beings or genuinely nice people? I think it's a mix, especially on the showman's part - I believe the doctors had a genuine compassion for Joseph. And though it hurts on some level to say it, I believe the showman did Joseph a service by allowing him the dignity of work (which for someone of Joseph's proud but gentle nature, was important, especially in an era where you were expected to be a working adult contributing to the household by age 12). I don't believe they were cruel to him, but I don't believe they went out of their way for him as they stated, either, and the showman known to associate with Joseph had a way of coloring the truth.

All in all though, a heartfelt, thought provoking and intimate look at the life of this gentle, intelligent Romeo...
