

Lesson 2

READ THIS STORY #1, Basic

P.T. Barnum

P. T. Barnum is best known for producing “The Greatest Show on Earth.” This flamboyant man with a big voice was the marketing wizard of the 19th century. It’s reported that he sold forty-two million tickets to his traveling sideshow. That was seven tickets for every person in the United States at that time.

Some of his sideshow attractions were real. General Tom Thumb really was a dwarf, and Jumbo was a giant elephant. But Barnum believed that the public loved to be fooled. Many people paid to see “The Light of Asia,” a rare white elephant from Siam—until the white paint washed off in the rain. An elderly black woman claimed to be 161 years old and the nurse to George Washington. She was a big hit. But it turned out, she was born and raised in Brooklyn. She had never been to Mt. Vernon, George Washington’s home.

Despite his ability to make millions, Barnum made many bad investments. He once became so despondent over being swindled out of yet another large sum of money, that he considered suicide.

As he got older, Barnum confided to a friend that he wanted to know what people would write about him after he died. A friendly newspaper editor decided to grant his wish. So Mr. Barnum was able to read his own obituary two weeks before he actually died—a ghostly feat.