

arts and entertainment

State fair freaks—'normal in every way except looks'

By Joe Starita

One is middle-aged and happily married. Another's daughter was a high school homecoming queen. A third could stroll through the Nebraska Union without anyone batting an eye.

They go to the polls, pay their taxes, enjoy a good movie and earn enough money each year to take three of every 12 months off.

Yet nearly 20,000 Nebraska State Fair goers will cough up about \$10,000 for the privilege of staring at these three men.

Why?

One is 23 inches high. He was born with a calcium deficiency that left his bones looping in figure eights and his body shaped like a pretzel.

His name is Huey, Huey the Pretzel Man. He is 42 and a 20-year veteran of state fair midways. He is married to Patricia. Patricia is the magician's assistant and helps Huey get to and from the shows in a wheelchair.

Two faces

Another is known simply as "The Man with Two Faces." The left side of his face is fine-featured, handsome even, perfectly normal. The right side looks like it was cloned from a cauliflower patch.

The third is billed as Popeye. At will, he pops out one eyeball, then the other and finally both, his pupils darting and spinning wildly on the tips of the white bulges.

All three are part of this year's Murphy Brothers' Freak Show, which for the third straight fall has pitched its tent on the fair midway.

Inside the red, green and brown tent, there's also a sword-swallower, fire-eater and an Indian rubber woman,

who appears onstage as a contortionist extraordinaire.

But it is Huey, Popeye and The Man with Two Faces who are clearly the core of this freak show as the afternoon crowd pays their half-dollar and files slowly inside.

Freaks make bucks

Craig Wanous, owner of the show, stands off to one side and talks about his job and the people who fill his tent at state fairs around the country.

"These freaks make more than the people who come in here and think we're exploiting them," says Wanous, whose Montgomery, Ala., family has maintained control of the freak show for 35 years.

"They make anywhere from \$150 to \$400 a week and they are normal in every way except their looks."

Wanous says his show draws a cross-section of curious fair-goers who come for one of two reasons: "They either want to see weirdos or they want to see someone they can feel sorry for."

The older persons seem to get more out of the show, he says, because they know the men and women they paid to see are not fakes.

The men and women and children who paid this afternoon are huddled close to the stage watching a sword-swallower who doubles as a fire-eater.

Reads a paperback

Away from the crowd, at the far end of the stage, Huey sits in an old-fashioned school desk, one arm propped up reading a dime-store paperback, most of his 23 inches collapsed in disarray atop the seat.

The magician has finished. The crowd edges slowly over to Huey. They star at Huey as the master of ceremonies describes why Huey looks the way he does. Huey stares back, smiles politely and returns to his book.



Photo by Bob Pearson

"Popeye" said he first discovered his unusual talent of popping his eyes out of their sockets when he was a kid and scared the hell out of his friends.

"I guess the most spectacular freak I ever heard about," Wanous is saying, "was a woman who had two bodies. She had an extra set of arms and legs growing out of her hip."

Popeye, resplendent in gold ruffled shirt, black slacks and tan elevator shoes, has the crowd's attention at the far corner of the stage.

Scary as hell

He says his eye-popping discovery came at age four when he and several playmates were trying to make the funniest faces. For some reason he tried to pop his eyes out, found that he could and scared the hell out of his little friends.

He now pops one out. A few groans. He pops the other. More groans that become louder. He pops both at once and makes his pupils spin and whirl. Many up front turn their heads away.

Popeye says thanks, puts on a pair of shades and strolls outside.

"Freaks just aren't like they used to be," explains Wanous. "They just want to stay home now, collect their welfare and let the government pick up the tab."

"Our people here work for a living and they're proud of that."

"But it's tough finding people to work here anymore," Wanous said.

At stage center, the man with two faces is collecting donations from the crowd. He has shown them his face—both of them—and is passing out postage-stamp size bibles in exchange for donations.

"He's perfectly normal except for half of his face. Like I said, his daughter was a homecoming queen," says Wanous.



Photo by Bob Pearson

Huey, the human pretzel, spends most of his time reading as a throng of fairgoers parade past the freaks at the state fair. Huey's condition was caused from a calcium deficiency.

'Mood works its way' through Sheldon audiences

By Alexander Germaine

It was a pleasure to preview the first of the films coming to the UNL campus this weekend at the Sheldon Film Theater. The two films to be presented; *Like A Rose*, and, *Ain't Nobody's Business But My Own*; are both by Sally Barrett-Page with crews entirely consisting of women.

In a piece of good theater or a good film, one can find a mood that works its way through the audience. Often an actor can portray a mood more than the lines would make one believe he can. The plays of Bertolt Brecht are anti-entertainment and still manage to enthrall an audience with the mood and feelings they create. The films of Ingmar Bergman can do the same.

This is the aura around the first film at the Sheldon Film Theater, *Like A Rose*. It does not look, or pretend to look, like a spectacular film but instead is a down-to-earth documentary of the feelings of some of the women who inhabit the American prison system. It uses emotionally packed

images to create this desired effect.

Real people

The people who make up the film are not different from the lady at Baskin-Robbins or some neighbor you don't know very well. They are real people with real hopes and real dreams that have been interrupted by a real jail term.

Nothing is said about why these women are in prison but it could be any number of things; things that could happen to a woman in college or the mother of five.

Sally Barrett-Page is a talented young director with strong feelings about the role that women play in today's society and the hardships they encounter trying to be independent and make their own way. I would not consider either film feminist, but more on the order of awareness of the things that affect the lives of the women in this country.

The second film, *Ain't Nobody's Business But My Own*, seemed to lack direction while trying to make a somewhat obscure point, if a point is to be made.

Centralized view

A color documentary on the lives of a

few prostitutes, this film neither promotes these women nor condemns them but does seem to give a centralized view of acceptance to the fact that the prostitute exists and probably always will.

Not wanting the film to be sensationalistic, but wanting to breathe life into a well-worn subject, I felt that the direction had wandered away from a goal and flow.

Ms. Barrett-Page kept referring back to the convention of prostitutes in Washington D.C. during 1976 by using scenarios of the parties and gatherings of the girls as they "entertained" the press. "Coyote," the organization of prostitutes, also is mentioned time and again.

The film does merit research and a view of the ladies of the evening, even if it seems to be a shortsighted view.

Both films are informative and offer an experience that most of the people in Lincoln would normally not come in contact with. Not slick or sickly, these two films are a deserving documentation of the lives and struggles of two groups of women in today's society.



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Film maker Sally Barrett-Page