

The true story of the greatest showman

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This spring I saw the film *The Greatest Showman* which was inspired by the life of P. T. Barnum.

I love musicals, and when I saw the preview for this movie, I couldn't wait to see it. I was not disappointed! The movie was filled with amazing songs and dance numbers, plus it was a touching story with a great message. Many critics gave the movie somewhat negative reviews, which I didn't understand. After reading reviews, I discovered that many felt the movie did not accurately portray Barnum's life. That made me curious to learn more about the differences between the movie and the real life of P.

T. Barnum. The movie begins with P. T. Barnum as a young child living with his father. His father worked as a tailor with Barnum as his assistant.

The movie shows young Barnum becoming friends with a girl named Charity. They instantly made a connection, but Charity's parents sent her off to finishing school. They kept in touch over the years, and when she was grown, Charity left her family to marry Barnum. They had two children named Caroline and Helen. They lived in a tiny apartment and didn't have a lot, but they were happy. Barnum tried to support them by working for a shipping company.

When I researched Barnum's real life, I discovered that his father was really a storekeeper, and his mother was around during his childhood. He was married to Charity Hallet for 44 years, and they actually had four daughters – Helen and Caroline like in in the movie, plus Frances and Pauline. In the movie, the shipping company Barnum was working for shut down, resulting in him losing his job. Barnum then went on to open a museum of wax figures

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and stuffed animals because he felt that people would pay to see the exotic and unusual exhibits. It failed to sell enough tickets to make a profit. So he turned the museum into a live show, later referred to as a circus.

He searched and searched for unique people and acts to create an exciting and shocking show. Barnum's "circus" eventually became successful with sold out shows every night. In real life, Barnum had many jobs before buying the museum such as being a shop owner, director of lotteries, and a newspaper editor. Like in the movie, he eventually opened a museum consisting of wax figures and stuffed animals. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, he then turned his museum into a carnival of "live freaks, dramatic theatricals, beauty contests, and other sensational attractions." Not all of these acts were represented in the movie.

In the film, Barnum's circus was selling out every night, but it wasn't enough for him. He wanted to attract the upper class to his show. When he and his troupe of performers were in England to meet the queen, Barnum met Jenny Lind, an opera singer who was very well known in Europe. Even though he had never heard her sing, he made her an offer to tour America and get a cut of the profits. Barnum invited all of society to her first show, and she gave an incredible performance that brought everyone to their feet. She went on to tour America with Barnum.

Midway through the tour she tried to kiss Barnum, but he refused. This caused her to quit the tour and leave Barnum with a huge debt and a scandal to deal with. In reality, Barnum heard Jenny Lind sing at a sold out concert in Europe and then offered her a great deal of money to go on tour.

She donated all of her profits to charity. She didn't leave the tour because of a love affair with Barnum, but she left because she didn't like how Barnum was running her tour or promoting her to the public. She continued to finish the tour under new management.

Barnum still made \$500, 000 from the tour, even though she quit part way through. In the movie, after Jenny quits the tour, Barnum heads home to see his family. Just as he returns, he discovered that his circus was going up in flames. The fire started due to protestors, and everyone got out alive. The building collapsed and couldn't be saved. This, along with the Jenny Lind scandal, causes Barnum to go bankrupt, and his family is evicted from their home.

A fictional business partner in the movie loans him money to start again so their family of performers could stay together. He goes on to buy cheap land down by the dock, and sets up a tent to perform in. In real life, his building was burned to the ground twice, but they don't know if the cause was protestors. Barnum then decided to team up with other circus owners to launch a traveling circus called " The Greatest Show on Earth." Throughout the movie, the message was that Barnum appreciated the unique qualities of his acts, and they all were a " happy family. However, many feel that in real life, Barnum looked at his performers as a way to trick audiences and make money.

It is believed he got his start by purchasing a blind slave named Joice Heth. He told the public that she was the 160 year-old former nurse of George Washington. He himself wrote about getting her drunk and pulling her teeth

out to make her look older. He made money by putting her on display in New York, and taking her on a tour around England. After she passed away, he even charged people to view her autopsy! Other examples include “ Tom Thumb,” a 25 inch tall man in the movie who was actually only five years old in real life. Barnum had him drinking and smoking cigars as a part of his act.

He also displayed African American men in a cage and called them “ wild men.” This made him money in real life, but was not included in the movie. It seems the real P. T. Barnum would do whatever it took to make money, even if he had to create fake exhibits that many people considered hoaxes.

Perhaps some people consider the movie a hoax because it didn't tell the whole truth of his life. I think Barnum would have liked the movie because it tricked the public in order to make a great deal of money. In the end, I still love this movie, but now I think of it as mostly fiction. It still has a great message and makes you feel good with all of the singing and dancing. However, whenever I watch this movie, in the back of my mind I will be thinking about the real P.

T. Barnum and some of the things he did in order to become known as “ The Greatest Showman.”