



Secrets of the Sideshows

Joe Nickell

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The carnival sideshows of the past have left behind a fascinating legacy of mystery and intrigue. The secrets behind such daring feats as fire-eating and sword swallowing and bizarre exhibitions of human oddities as "Alligator Boys" and "Gorilla Girls" still remain, only grudgingly if ever given up by performers and carnival professionals. Working alongside the performers, Joe Nickell blows the lid off these mysteries of the midway. The author reveals the structure of the shows, specific methods behind the performances, and the showmen's tactics for recruiting performers and attracting crowds. He also traces the history of such spectacles, from ancient Egyptian magic and street fairs to the golden age of P.T. Barnum's sideshows. With revealing insight into the personal lives of the men and women billed as freaks, Nickell unfolds the captivating story of the midway show.

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