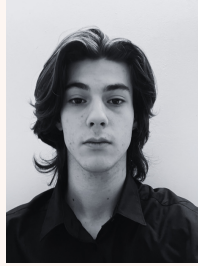


# Miami News

This week on Miami News, Amaury Devai, moving away for Portland, goes to the Big Apple to interview a former freak show performer : Stephan Bibrowski, "Lionel, the Lion-faced man". This Polish man went from country to country his whole life while working as an entertainer, before settling down and retiring in New York City, where he has accepted an interview with us. He will be sharing his experience as a social outcast, as well as his life story.

Amaury Devai.

This European journalist saw a rise in popularity after covering the Teapot Dome scandal back in 1923. He hasn't stopped since, bringing the people what they want to know about their favorite politicians, authors, or even his own editors. He has only recently started getting involved in show business, airing out Hollywood's dirty laundry, and is now moving on to smaller, independent entertainers.



**Amaury D.-** Tell me, where you born in America, Stephan, or did your career bring you to our country?

**Stephan B.-** Well, I was born in Poland, in 1 1890, in a village called Wilczogóra, with, according to my mother, a one-inch thick fur coat, all around my body. She used to think that I was born like that because she saw a lion maul my father to death when she was pregnant.

**A.D.-** And how did you end up working in a circus?

**S.B.-** When I was 4, my mother sold me, to a German impresario, called Seldmayer, he raised me, although he wasn't exactly a good father figure, and trained me to do gymnastics. I travelled Europe for many years with his troupe. I looked like an animal, and the crowd loved it. They were also quite fond of me talking to show a more gentle side. Seldmayer was quite proud of his pet monster. Looking past the nonexistent wage, and the weird looks when I went outside, it wasn't so bad. The circus was my family, and by the time we went to America, I was 11, and I had grown accustomed to living as a freak.



**A.D.-** You said the circus was your family, growing up, did they treat you any differently than "normal" kids? Usually, freak show performers are sadly persecuted by their own colleagues because of their appearance, was that the case in Seldmayer's circus?

**S.B.-** I was quite lucky that Seldmayer found me when he did, because, in a way, the whole troupe raised me, everyone played a part in my education, the acrobats taught me gymnastics, the few who spoke Polish taught me German, and later, English. The circus was the only thing I knew, but looking back on it, it was a decent home for a kid like me.

**A.D.-** Did you stay in the same circus for your whole career?

**S.B.-** Not too long after coming to America, I was sold again, to the Barnum and Bailey Circus, it was a particularly difficult moment, as I had to leave my family, but apparently, Seldmayer didn't see it that way, and sold me regardless...

**A.D.-** So, did you ever try to make sense of your condition, or did you just accept that you had to live with it?

**S.B.-** Well, to be honest with you, I wasn't particularly interested in knowing what was happening to me since I already knew I couldn't change it, but a handful of doctors sought me out. After examining me, they came up with a diagnosis : I was apparently born with a rare genetic defect called hypertrichosis. It felt good to know, but as I said, it couldn't be cured so I just had to live with it.

**A.D.-** What was it like living surrounded by freaks?

**S.B.-** It was nice to be surrounded by people who knew what I was going through, but at the same time, it made me realize how lucky I was to have been taken into this business as a child, because I was never fully exposed to society, which, according to my new friends, was very harsh on people like us. I was expecting to take care of everyone, because unlike some of them, I was fully mobile, but surprisingly, everyone had everything figured out, whether it be a wheelchair, or walking on their hands, or even carrying each other around.

**A.D.-** How long did this go on?

**S.B.-** I toured with the circus, both in the US and in Europe until 1920, when I settled in the US, and I moved to New York City, where I was still a popular attraction. I retired a year and a half ago from the whole entertaining business.

**A.D.-** Do you have any plans for the future, or will you stay in New York?

**S.B.-** I am thinking about moving back to Europe, probably in Berlin, and settling down for good, far away from the circus.

**A.D.-** Well, I'll leave you to it, thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this interview today.

**S.B.-** I should be the one thanking you, this has been a big step towards finally making people understand how freaks feel, although we should remember : I am very lucky to have gotten out when I did. Other folks have to work like this until they are elders, if they survive until then.

**A.D.-** Best of Luck, Stephan.

