
THE DAILY NEWSLINE

CIRCUS ODDITIES



Malak Huard :

Malak Huard was born in 1911 in Charleston, a city located in South Carolina. She attended primary and elementary school before continuing her studies at the Missouri School of Journalism located in Columbia at the age of 20. Following this, she developed an interest in sideshow performers and initiated a series of interviews. In 1948, she published her first book, 'Circus Oddities: The Lives of Sideshow Performers,' in which she highlights the lives of these sideshow performers.

THE INTERVIEW

FRANK LENTINI THE THREE LEGGED MAN

Malak Huard has long been interested in the lifestyle of these people. In fact, it has now been 2 years since Huard published her first interview with Stephan Bibrowski, the "Lion-Faced Man". Since then, she has published five interviews with sideshow characters.

Today, our intrepid reporter, Huard, unveils one of the most heart-wrenching stories in her interview with Frank Lentini, known as the 'three-legged man,' without hiding the painful truths behind these shows. This interview marks the sixth episode in her long series of interviews with sideshow performers. Through these interviews, she sheds light on the most painful stories and denounces the treatment of these people in this industry."



1652, June, 15th

Hrd: Good afternoon. Firstly, I would like to thank you for agreeing to do this interview.

Ltn: It's a pleasure.

Hrd: Most of the time, when I ask for an interview, people take some time before accepting, but you did not. Can you tell me why you accepted so quickly?

Ltn: I accepted because I think it's the only way for me to express myself and be understood by people.

Hrd: So, you don't feel understood?

Ltn: Why would I be? They don't listen to me, I am not even considered a human by them, but more like a sideshow attraction.

Hrd: Do you want them to see you as an ordinary human?

Ltn: I don't ask for much, and I definitely see a big difference between how I'm being treated and how they treat each other.

Hrd: How are people reacting when they see you? It's not everyday that you see a three legged man!

Ltn : i feel like most of people, when they see me, can have 2 kind of reactions, the first one is that they can feel disgusted and would try to avoid me and walk away , it mostly happens with children, some times it happens that they cry. the other reaction is that people can pity me, and i know they will try to do well but their pity makes me feel more bad then better.

Hrd : So you're asking for a middle ground between these two reactions ?

Ltn : That's right, but of course people will always treat me differently and it's because i'm different, i won't deny it... I just want people to understand that those behavior are not really the most appreciated, it makes me feel like an animal or a monster.

Hrd : And do you think you're considered as a monster ?

Ltn : Yes, they made me feel guilty for being different. Most of the time, I wish i was born without any particularity, because it's to hard to handle this judgement. And when you are a child, it's even harder.

Hrd : I forgot to ask you, can you present yourself ?

Ltn : Of course, my name is Frank Lentini, but you probably know me as the « three-legged man ».

I was born in Italia in 1889, so today, I'm 63.

Hrd : You told me that the judgment of people were hard to handle, did your parents support you?

Ltn : My parents ? they are one of the biggest reason of why i wished i was born a normal child. Parents represents the only one who can truly understand you and support you no matter what happen right ? so is it the case only for normal people ?

Hrd : How your parents were feeling about this?

Ltn: they actually felt disgraced to have such a child with this abnormality. they tried to find a doctor who could impute my third leg, but it was impossible, sadly. It was definitely a shame for them to have me, and when I was 4 month only, they gave me into the care of my aunt.

When they saw that i was able to do everything, as walking, jumping... like a normal person, they accepted me more.



Picture of Frank lentini young

Hrd: That's a really sad story. So you probably felt lonely.

Ltn: Yes.

Hrd: And how is it now? Do you still feel lonely?

Ltn: No, thanks to God, I now have a family that supports me. I have a partner; her name is Helen Shupe, and I have four children from another woman. I feel lucky to be surrounded.

Hrd: Can you tell me more about your career as a sideshow performer?

Ltn: Actually, my career began at a very young age. I can't even remember when exactly. I feel like I always performed. When I was eight, I moved to the USA. For our family, this country represented the land of promises and possibilities.

Hrd: Hw it was after you moved?

Ltn: Actually, this country opened the doors of the sideshow business to me. I joined the Ringling Brothers Circus, and that's what earned me the name "The Great Lentini." We can say that I had a great career.



Poster of Frank Lentini - Ringling brothers circus.

Hrd: A lot of people know you as "The Three-Legged Football Player." Can you tell me where this show name came from?

Ltn: Yes, when I was young, I kicked a football with my third leg. Not a big deal, right? But since then, I am mostly known for this feat.

Hrd: About your children, do they have any additional limbs?

Ltn: Absolutely not. They were born with two legs, just like a normal person. My case is an exception, and it does not affect my children in any way.

Hrd: Can you explain why you have this third leg? What is the medical reason?

Ltn: I was born with a parasitic twin.

Hrd: Is it something like a fusion of your twin and you?

Ltn: It's really difficult to define; my twin is attached to my body at the base of my spine. So, this third leg on the right comes from this twin. I also have a little foot protruding from my knee.

Hrd: So you actually have three legs but four feet?

Ltn: Yes, that's right. I also have two sets of genitalia. The parasitic twin is a very rare phenomenon. But if it wasn't, I wouldn't be special, right? (laughing).

Hrd: How can you explain the occurrence? How can your twin and you merge?

Ltn: It happens when your conjoined twin stops developing. He was attached to me while I continued to develop until my birth. When this happens, the healthy twin, which in this situation is me, can be born with extra limbs or organs. In my case, it was an extra leg and two additional feet.

Hrd: Does this peculiarity cause you any medical complications?

Ltn : For me, it did not engender any complications, but I know that it might for some people. The only thing I can complain about is that my three legs are not the same length. My three legs have different lengths, and the third one is much smaller than my two principal legs.

Hrd : Can you use your third leg as the two others one ?

Ltn : No, I can't, it's not possible for me to walk with this leg, I can only straighten it. And even if I was able to walk with this leg, it would be useless as this third leg is so much smaller.

Hrd: Can you name a person whom you would describe as your role model? Someone who has inspired you.

Ltn: Of course, the first person who comes to mind is Myrtle Corbin. She was a woman, a very famous sideshow performer who also had a parasitic twin. She had four legs so our two cases are very similar. She is my model, she helped me greatly in accepting this uniqueness. Thanks to her, I realized that having this third leg does not make me a monster!

Hrd: Do you have a message to convey to those who are reading this interview?

Ltn: Yes, for people who have a peculiarity, who feel different from others and perceive it as a weakness, I would like you to know that your peculiarity is your greatest strength. Don't feel bad, guilty, or pitiful because you are different; it's what makes you unique and will propel you to the top.



**myrtle Corbin
1868-1928**

This interview was really impactful. The perception that society has of those considered "freaks" is entirely false and unfounded. They are not monsters; they are humans. They can speak out and take a stand when they want to, They can deliver a powerful message to society and to all of you who are reading this.

Source:

https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frank_Lentini ,And
[https://historydaily.org/story-of-francesco-lentini\(his youth, his carrer, information about his life\)](https://historydaily.org/story-of-francesco-lentini(his_youth,_his_carrer,_information_about_his_life))

<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/23513-parasitic-twin>
(for information about his parasitic twin)

<https://www.appalachianhistory.net/2019/05/she-had-one-husband-four-children-and-four-legs.html> (for information about myrtle corbin)

