
Jupiter's Gazette

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Elastic Boy, The interview



Good morning fellow readers! As some of you may know, an exciting but weirdly disturbing sideshow is making an entrance into our peaceful and calm city of Jupiter.

During this one-time performance, before hitting America's roads again, a spectacle like you've never seen before will be shown. All kinds of oddities will be displayed for citizens' biggest pleasure. On this special occasion Miss Elsa Mars, the owner of the said "Fräulein Elsa's Cabinet of Curiosities" agreed to let us interview one of her most famous little protege, Elastic Boy.

Searching for a little advertising? A good reputation before the big show? Little did she know that in Jupiter's Gazette, no one can keep the curtains closed for too long.

With our journalist, Lisa Raachini, the backstages are always revealed to the spectator. One thing's guaranteed: our favorite interviewer surely did not let the stage's spotlights blind her and keep her away from finding the truth behind those strange human circuses.

Oliver Olsen, aka Elastic boy



Lisa Raachini

Journalist and co-founder of Jupiter's Gazette, Lisa makes interviews since the really beginning of the newspaper more than 5 years ago. She studied criminology and criminal justice at Florida State University for 4 years where she started to find an interest in journalism. After her degree, she created this (fabulous) newspaper and since then, never missed an occasion to give us an interesting interview: former politicians, incarcerated criminals, unexplained events' witnesses, she did them all.

On this cold Thursday night, I arrived at the place I was given by Elsa Mars' assistant: a big and empty parking lot with at most two working streetlamps. If the circus tent wasn't visible on the other side of the field, I would have sworn I was at the wrong place. I walked between performers' caravans with goosebumps before finally seeing "Elastic Boy" written on one of the doors. After taking a big and deep breath, I knocked. A few seconds of silence followed, and then, the door slowly opened...

Surprisingly, I enter to a normal looking room. I am quickly greeted by a man, approximately 30 years old. We silently look at each other before he decides to make the first move.

E.B: Hello, you can put your coat there, I'll make us some tea.

He points at the coat hanger and heads to the kitchen side. I do as he said and then proceed to take a seat on one of the two chairs facing each other in the corner of the room. He comes back with two teas and sits as he gives me one.

E.B: It's the first time I'm getting interviewed so I'm a little nervous.

L.R: Don't worry, it's always a bit scary even when you're used to it.

E.B: [little laugh] going up on stage feels like that too.

L.R: To begin with, can you introduce yourself? I was intrigued before coming here because Elsa Mars' assistant wasn't able to give me your name. Your real name I mean, apart from your stage name "elastic boy".

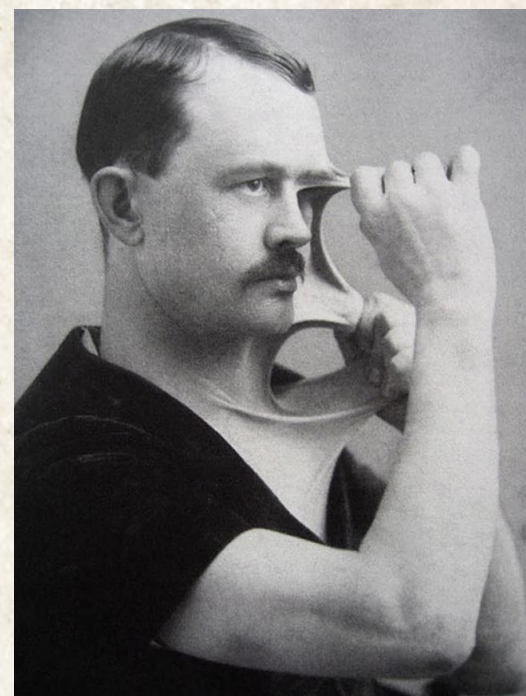
E.B: That's on purpose, the man on stage is a completely different one from the one off it. I like to separate them. Of course, I am them both, but they're completely different parts of my personality. That's why I asked Elsa Mars to make sure my name never leaves this place. Whenever I come here, I am Elastic boy. I can introduce myself, but you must tell me "who" you want to hear from.

L.R: Well, I think Elastic boy and the man behind him have important things to say. I believe we should listen to them both.

He stares at me without answering. Getting scared that I offended him in some way, I was about to say something else when he began talking.

E.B: Well, I'm elastic boy...and Oliver Olsen. I am 33 years old, and I'm a freak.

He lifts his arm and pulls the skin of his face and throat, which seems to magically stretch in front of my eyes.



Oliver Olsen

L.R: I thought the word "freak" wasn't well perceived in the sideshow performers' community. Apparently, you don't see it that way if you use it yourself. Can you tell me more about your opinion on that term?

E.B: Well, I believe it's a word I hated for too long. The truth is, it's not the word that's the problem, it's what it represents, what it points out about me. I am different from other people, that's for sure. It was something hard to accept when I was younger. I hated this word because I hated myself, I hated that it described me.

But now that I ended up coming to peace with my situation, if you call it being a “freak” or something else, the result stays the same.

People used “freak” against me, but I decided to have more power than a word.

L.R: I understand your condition must have been hard to accept. Can you tell us more about what it was like to grow up with a physical difference like yours?

E.B: When I was a kid at school, I wasn’t very...integrated. I tried to hide my skin condition but when other kids found out, they made me go through hell.

L.R: Why weren’t you able to keep it to yourself?

E.B: The only way for me to keep it a secret would have been to remain untouched during all of my school years.

L.R: That is obviously impossible, I understand. Can you tell us more about how they discovered it?

His gaze suddenly looks darker, as if the light in his eyes shut off.

E.B: The day people at my school found out is one of my

saddest memories. It was my first year at school. At the beginning, I didn’t tell anyone about my “freak side”. But if you look closely, you can see that my skin is extremely thin and has a translucent look. They immediately saw that there was something weird about me but didn’t think much of it. At some point, we were playing one of those games where some kids run, and others much catch them.

I was getting chased by a boy from my class and eventually, he ended up catching me. He grabbed my arm and my skin stretched extremely far from my body since I was trying to run faster. He screamed so loud everyone stopped moving and started looking at us.

It’s the first time in my life I felt like a real monster.

L.R: What happened after?

E.B: I became my school’s humiliation. They would force me to show them how much I can stretch my skin just so that they could make fun of me. If I refused, they would pull it themselves. I always had dozens of bruises.



Oliver Olsen’s arm when he was younger

He shows me a picture

E.B: I was an attraction to them. You can say I always was a performer in some way. [he sadly smiles] I was extremely weak, so I

had absolutely no way of physically defending myself, even against girls. My classmates would call me names, push me, hit me and throw things at me all the time. I had no friends at all.

During class, I was mocked because I would struggle to read even the simplest sentences.

L.R: Kids can be horribly mean creatures... Did your family support you through all this?

E.B: No, sadly they didn’t. At home, it wasn’t any easier. I lived in a small town where rumors traveled faster than light. From a very young age, when people at my school found out, my parents couldn’t sell any milk because people were scared my condition was contagious and that their skin would end up like mine if they drunk it. For my parents, I was a shame before I even had a name.

[cynical laugh]. They owned a farm so a strength like mine made me useless. I hurt my shoulder once just hay picking with a pitchfork because it was too heavy for me. If you add that to the fact that I never was a brilliant student, they quickly understood they wouldn’t be able to get anything valuable from me.

Inevitably, when I was sixteen, they kicked me out.

L.R: You were so young...where did you go?

E.B: I left my little town in southern Texas and was homeless for about two years. At some point, I made it to California. That's where I met Miss Mars and became Elastic Boy.

L.R: Your meeting with Elsa Mars must have been a big turn in your life.

E.B: It sure was. It has pros and cons but it sure is better than having no roof over my head.

L.R: Can you tell me what cons you have to face?

He suddenly looks preoccupied and doesn't seem to want to answer my question.

E.B: Uh... Well... The rhythm of sideshow circuses can be very exhausting and... I've been noticing that using my "ability" so often has pretty bad repercussions on my body over time.

L.R: What are those repercussions?

E.B: Stretching my skin as much as I am doing during rehearsals and performances leaves a lot of bruises, even more than it used to. I have many scars on the areas of my body that I use the most during our shows. Somedays, various parts of my body hurt me so much that I can't even get out of my bed, and this pain only get worse and

worse.

L.R: Why do you stay in the circus? You could leave the stage behind and try to find a new job that wouldn't put your health at risk that much.

E.B: You can't imagine how much I would pay to just be able to think like you do. I have no choice at all. What could I possibly do except from that? I don't have a place in society. It's either that or nothing at all. At least here, I can make some money for myself. I wouldn't be able to find a job out there.

The circus saved me from the poverty my body destined me to.

L.R: Did you tell Elsa Mars about your problems?

E.B: I haven't.

L.R: Why not? Maybe she could call a doctor for you, and he could give you medications. That way, you would still be able to perform while also feeling better.

E.B: Yes. Or the doctor would say that I am unable to continue as a performer and I'd have no choice but to leave and start my life all over...once again. This is a risk I cannot take. Elsa knows it as much as I do. Even she wouldn't call a doctor if I told her.

L.R: But it is Elsa's job to take care of you and the others.

E.B: No, Elsa's job is to keep the

circus alive. And that's all she ever did. She managed to reunite us all and build a show that could work and that would attract people.

L.R: It isn't her that is attracting people. It's you and the other performers.

E.B: That's what the public think. If you look at it closely, you'll see that she does as much work as we do.

L.R: What do you mean by that?

E.B: Elsa is the one who pays for all the material that we need. She's also in charge of the advertising. Even she has her little character when she speaks during the show. Just like there are Elastic Boy and Oliver Olsen, there are also two different Elsa Mars. Her public identity also helps us find our audience.



Elsa Mars, owner of "Fräulein Elsa's Cabinet of Curiosities"

He marks a pause in his speech and seems to be reconsidering his next words.

E.B: Also...I don't know if I'm supposed to say this but... I guess I can tell you since it isn't nearly as much of a secret as it used to be

so...[sighs] Elsa Mars also must create stories around our stage characters. She has to make them mysterious and appealing. And she must maintain them by making sure no one finds out the truth.

L.R: She's lying about freaks' real lives?

E.B: I'm not sure lying is the right word. Would you say actors are lying to you because they're acting on television?

L.R: No but we know actors are portraying a character meanwhile people believe that freaks' life stories are real.

E.B: I think that deep down, people know that it is fake. It is simply more entertaining to convince themselves it isn't...

L.R: It is crazy that you can manage to keep it all hidden to the audience. How do you do it?

E.B: It's pretty difficult in fact. We don't leave the circus pretty often. Some of us have never left it since they joined years ago.

L.R: It seems like a strict way of living.

E.B: It's not our fault people are interested in exciting and obscure things. Nobody would come to see us if it was for our real-life stories.

L.R: What does your social life look like if you can't have interactions outside of the sideshow?

E.B: I am a freak, so my friends are freaks too. It's better to stay with each other. At least here I feel understood. I don't feel like an outsider. People don't give me weird looks; they don't constantly ask questions about my skin. It's where I belong. The freaks are my family, my friends, my....

L.R: lovers?

E.B: I... Yes, I used to have a loved one. Her name was Jolie, and she was everything I could dream of.

L.R: What made her a freak?



Jolie Wilson, the camel girl

E.B: Elsa recruited her because she could bend her knees backwards and walk on all fours.

L.R: So, you met her when she joined Elsa's cabinet of curiosity?

E.B: Yes, she joined us 4 years ago as "the camel girl" and our souls were immediately attracted and connected. She saw me for who I

was and knew how to talk to me. She made me forget everything else: what happened when I was in school, what happened with my parents. If kids at school made me feel like a monster, she made me feel like a man. I like to think I made her feel the same way. We both made each other feel like "normal people".

L.R: Why talking past tense?

E.B: She was diagnosed with congenital genu recurvatum. She got diagnosed two weeks after joining us and had to leave us.

L.R: Does being diagnosed force you to leave?

E.B: As I said, people enjoy watching freak shows because of how bizarre and mysterious we appear. Being diagnosed makes us lose this aura of questioning. When her disease was discovered, she did not fascinate the audience anymore and they simply pitied her.

L.R: But she was the same before and after the diagnosis.

E.B: Yes but after, spectators weren't able to enjoy the show without feeling bad anymore.

L.R: Did they feel bad for her or about themselves?

He doesn't answer and both remain silent for about a minute.

L.R: Is there anything you'd like to say to our readers before this interview ends?

E.B: I'd ask them to be tolerant. I'm not only talking about being understanding towards freaks only, but I'm also talking in general. We all have something about us that makes us different, something that we want to keep a secret from the world. When it's a physical difference like mine, it is impossible. But some monsters remain hidden forever. If my situation taught me something, it's that at the end of the day, we're all just trying our best. That's why we should always be gentle with those around us.

L.R: Thank you for those motivating words and for welcoming me. You opened your heart for us and showed your most vulnerable parts, which I really appreciate.

We both stand up and look at each other. I hold out my hand to shake his. He looks at it with a hesitating look and then shakes it, a smile on his face.

Sources:

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