



The Tiny General

1 Born in the USA in 1838, Charles Sherwood Stratton was a perfectly formed baby with bright eyes, light hair and rosy cheeks. At the time, Charles was actually considered to be a large newborn. However, at the age of six months, he stopped growing and remained 64 centimetres tall until his teens. Doctors could

not explain this, considering that Charles's parents were of average height.

2 One day in 1842, a stranger came to Charles's hometown. He asked to meet the four-year-old, whom he later described as "the smallest child I ever saw that could walk alone". The

man was Phineas T Barnum, who became known as the greatest showman in the world.

Barnum could tell the tiny boy was smart and had a good sense of fun. He also thought that Charles could make him wealthy. That very day he made a contract with Charles's father, hiring the boy for a month at three dollars a week.

3 A few days later, Charles and his mother arrived in New York to stay in rooms at the American Museum. Barnum changed Charles's name, and pretended he was older, to create an interesting stage identity for the boy. He renamed Charles, Tom Thumb, after a thumb-sized fairytale hero who was given by King Arthur's magician Merlin to a poor childless couple. To make him sound even more exotic, Barnum also added the title General. Very soon, dressed in a tiny soldier's uniform, General Tom Thumb was displayed in Barnum's American Museum. He was billed as an eleven-year-old dwarf who had just arrived from Europe.

4 By day, curious people flocked to see the showman's new exhibit. By night, Barnum worked hard to educate Charles in reading, writing and arithmetic. He also trained him in showmanship, singing, dancing and acting. Many of the little boy's performances consisted of him dressing in historical costumes and performing a role for the audience's amusement. His most convincing role was the French Emperor, Napoleon. The public adored General Tom Thumb! By 1843, Charles and Barnum were touring North

America. Charles's pay went up to seven dollars a week, and by the end of the year his weekly salary was twenty-five dollars.

5 In 1844, Barnum decided to exhibit Charles overseas. The six-year-old was smuggled into England under his mother's shawl. Soon members of the nobility came flocking to see the wonderful child. Among the early callers was the United States ambassador to England. He was so pleased with Mr Barnum and his tiny ward that he promised to arrange a meeting between Tom Thumb and Queen Victoria, the British monarch.

6 The General, on meeting Her Majesty and numerous other members of the Royal Family, bowed gracefully and exclaimed, "Good evening, ladies and gentlemen." A burst of laughter followed. The Queen then took him by the hand and asked him many questions. For the next hour, Charles performed his songs, dances and imitations and was only allowed to depart after he had conversed with all those present.

7 The second time that Charles performed for Queen Victoria he met her son, Edward, the three-year-old Prince of Wales and future King. When asked how he felt, Charles said, "The prince is taller than I am, but I feel as big as anybody." Then he strutted up and down the room as proud as a peacock, amid laughter from all present.

8 Soon Charles was an international star, appearing before kings, queens, heads of state and hundreds of thousands of people throughout Europe.

Although Charles became very wealthy, he was on show for the whole of his life. He rarely had privacy. He certainly did not have a fun-filled childhood. All of his companions were adults. The only children he came into contact with were strangers who stared and laughed at him.

- 9 Charles died young, at the age of 45 in 1883, measuring 102 centimetres in height. He was so beloved that over ten thousand mourners attended his funeral. These days Charles is still on display. If you ever visit the Bridgeport cemetery you can see him, a statue standing on top of a twelve metre high marble shaft.



Questions

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| <p>1 When he was born, Charles was considered to be</p> <p>a small for his age.
b a talented performer.
c big for his age.</p> <p>2 Who was “the greatest showman in the world”?</p> <p>a Phineas T Barnum
b Charles Stratton
c Merlin</p> <p>3 How much was Charles earning by the time he first visited England?</p> <p>a three dollars
b seven dollars
c twenty-five dollars</p> | <p>4 The second time Charles performed for Queen Victoria he</p> <p>a measured just over a metre in height.
b bowed gracefully.
c met the Prince of Wales.</p> <p>5 How much did Charles grow between the ages of six months and 45?</p> <p>a 38 centimetres
b 43 centimetres
c 102 centimetres</p> <p>6 What is the significance of Charles having a memorial statue?</p> <p>a It shows people exactly how tall he was.
b It is a reminder of how funny he was.
c It demonstrates how well loved he was.</p> |
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Vocabulary

Find words in the text that match the meanings below. The word is in the section shown in brackets.

- 7 A formal agreement (2)
8 Having a strange or interesting appearance (3)
9 “A piece of cloth” worn by a woman (5)
10 Spoke to and discussed (6)
11 Walked and paraded yourself (7)

Alphabetical Order

The following words appear in the text. When placed in alphabetical order, which one would be **first**?

- 12 contract, create, centimetres, cheeks
13 down, depart, describe, displays
14 born, baby, billed, Barnum
15 songs, shell, statue, shaft

Back To The Text...

- 16 Charles’s salary increased.
a true b false
- 17 Another good name for this text would be:
a Charles Meets the Queen
b Little Man, Big Entertainer
- 18 Charles had a normal childhood.
a true b false

Sequencing

Look back through the card to find what happened first. Choose **a** or **b**.

- 19 a Charles and his mother went to New York.
b Barnum made a contract with Charles’s father.
- 20 a Barnum taught Charles how to read and write.
b Barnum named Charles, “Tom Thumb”.
- 21 a Charles toured North America.
b Charles met Queen Victoria.

Think About This

- 22 The word *imitations* in section 6 could be replaced with
- a stories. b impersonations.
c jokes. d poems.
- 23 What is unusual about Charles’s memorial statue?
- a It is at Bridgeport.
b The stand is taller than the figure.
c The statue is only made of marble.

Challenge Option

Vocabulary: How many words can you make from the name TOM THUMB?

