



# Tom Thumb: The Remarkable True Story of a Man in Miniature

*George Sullivan*

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When Charles S. Stratton was born in 1838, he was a large baby, perfect in every way. But then he stopped growing. At age four, though a happy and mischievous child, he was just over two feet tall and weighed only fifteen pounds—the exact same size he had been as a seven-month-old baby. It was then that the notorious showman P.T. Barnum dubbed him Tom Thumb and put him on display, touring him around the world as a curiosity.

A natural performer, Charley became enormously popular and wealthy, more so than any other performer before him. In this spirited biography—the first on its subject—George Sullivan recounts the fascinating adventures of Tom Thumb, and raises challenging questions about what constitutes exploitation—both in the 19th century and today.

## **Tom Thumb: The Remarkable True Story of a Man in Miniature Details**

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**George Sullivan**

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## From Reader Review Tom Thumb: The Remarkable True Story of a Man in Miniature for online ebook

### Heidi says

A fascinating story about a little person, probably the most famous little person, who made a mark on the world. The book provides not only a biography of Charley but also a look at entertainment in the 19th century. Charley spent most of his life on the stage. One wonders though, what made him so successful? Was it Barnum's superb but often deceitful marketing? Was it Charley's own talents? Was it his size? Or was it a combination of all three. That would be an interesting topic for discussion. Deceit in entertainment is another topic that this book raises, but doesn't analyze.

The book is very well written and could make a fascinating read-a-loud. The pictures have clearly been carefully chosen to match the text, always a good thing in my opinion. One of my pet peeves is when the photographs don't match the text on the page. The only problem I had with the book is the picture of mermaids with their chests uncovered, however, the picture does relate to what is being discussed in the text. Overall, a great look at a fascinating topic.

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### Suzanne says

Tom Thumb was the character from a fairy tale, right? Wrong. In this book Tom Thumb: The Remarkable True Story of a Man in Miniature by George Sullivan, Tom Thumb is a real person. Charles S. Stratton Was born January 4th 1838 in Connecticut. He was a large baby weighing in a eight pounds. But it was not long before his parents discovered that thought he was perfectly formed in every way, he was not going to grow "normal" size, and doctors could not explain why. Charley as he was called was often stared at and made fun of though he felt just the same as everyone else. But when P.T. Barnum discovered him to be a perfect man in miniture, he immediately signed him up to perform at the American Museum on Broadway in New York City. Barnum changed his name to Tom Thumb after the fairytale character who was small. Barnum lied (humbled) and said the boy was eleven years old and he was really only five. Charley performed his entore life for Barnum all over the world and made both himself and Branum wealthy.

I was prepared for this to be a dull biography, but it was anything but dull. P.T. Barnum was as much a part of the story as Stratton. I loved learning how the public was so entertained by unusual people and how museums were a major entertainment at that time. Sullivan does a wonderful job of weaving in history: the civil war, slavery, the reign of kings and queens, and even presidents are covered.

Anyone who likes to learn abuot people would like this book, history buffs in particular. It was fun to discover that what I thought was just a children's story character was also a real man.

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### **marymurtz says**

Meh...it was okay. I received an advance galley from the publisher and the formatting was nutty so it was difficult to look past that.

Having gotten that out of the way, I found the story interesting. I had no prior knowledge of this character from history, how P.T. Barnum made him famous and how he traveled the world.

The book read like a school report, with little insight into the characters, little attempt by the author to inject any humanity into any of the subjects. It appears this author has cranked out many books this way, and that's fine. I just recall reading Darin Strauss's excellent "Chang and Eng: A Novel" based on the lives of Chang and Eng Bunker, the original Siamese Twins. The book conveyed all the life events of these men but made it compelling and vivid, in a way that let the reader stand right next to the characters during the story.

This book seemed to be not much more than a dry recitation of facts in chronological order, accompanied by photos. And hey, that's fine. But with such wildly amazing subject matter, there was a lot more room for creativity here.

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### **Victoria Whipple says**

What a fascinating life Tom Thumb led. From a young age it was apparent that he enjoyed being the center of attention, as well the fact that he wasn't growing at a normal rate. This book tells the story of how P. T. Barnum and Charles Stratton came to know each other and build both of their careers. Of course Barnum was interested in Tom because he was a "freak". This is what Barnum specialized in, giving people odd and strange marvels to see, for a small price. However, Barnum never treated Tom as an object, or as a lesser person than himself. He not only prized Tom's friendship, but also his many talents that he was allowed to showcase in Barnum's museum and traveling shows. Sullivan does an excellent job of telling the story of the two friends. He also does an excellent job of explaining criteria make someone a "little person" as well as some of the medical and genetic conditions that may cause some people to grow at different rates and to different sizes. The story of Tom Thumb is a fascinating one, and as Sullivan points out Tom Thumb was the original American celebrity, making a fortune by being an entertainer who was sought after by royalty, as well as the common man. The book tells Tom's story in chronological order, using sidebars, photos, and other features to enhance and explain the text. This should make a welcome addition to the standard biography book reports. TCP/THMS

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### **Melissa Roach says**

Description:

When Charles S. Stratton was born in 1838, he was a large baby, perfect in every way. But then he stopped growing. At age four, though a happy and mischievous child, he was just over two feet tall and weighed only fifteen pounds—the exact same size he had been as a seven-month-old baby. It was then that the notorious showman P.T. Barnum dubbed him Tom Thumb and put him on display, touring him around the world as a curiosity.

A natural performer, Charley became enormously popular and wealthy, more so than any other performer before him. In this spirited biography—the first on its subject—George Sullivan recounts the fascinating

adventures of Tom Thumb, and raises challenging questions about what constitutes exploitation—both in the 19th century and today.

My thoughts...

This book really caught me by surprise....the story of a miniature boy who became one of the most famous persons of his time in the mid 1800s. If you love history, or maybe you are into the fascinating world of P.T. Barnum - for me I love stories about the abnormalities of America. This story will captivate you and keep you intrigued all the way. I have to say that it kept me reading all night for several evenings, simply because the world that Charley S. Stratton lived was quite intriguing. At the young age of 3 years old, this young American from Connecticut was discovered and started to perform in slide shows (although he was showcased as being an 11 year old British boy) along with other "freaks" like Siamese twins, the bearded lady and other such humans who were so-called "abnormal".

I remember every year I would always attend the local festivals/fairs and they would always have the booths where you paid 50 cents or \$1.00 to see such things as "The Miniature Woman" or "The Snake Man". I don't know what it is that fascinated me so, or even other onlookers...but I suppose there has always been an audience for the weird or strange phenomena that cannot be explained. I am not sure if these types of things still exist, maybe they do...but this book really tells the background of such shows. It not only shares the "exploited life" of 'Tom Thumb' but it also tells the background of P.T. Barnum and how his career started as well.

I would recommend this book to anyone middle school age or older, simply because it is a little bit of a mature book. There is no bad language or risky pics (which by the way there a tons of pictures - which I loved!). But the actual way that this young boy was brought up, seems to be very mature at such a young age. I could not imagine being his mother and letting my child be on display or putting on shows - traveling the world and being somewhat "exploited". I love how so many famous people, including Queen Victoria was "humbugged"... You will just have to read the book to find out what that means! I would rate this book 5/5 stars for sure!

To learn more about the book click [here](#). This book will be available to purchase on Amazon (on April 11, 2011).

Thank You so much Net Galley and Houghton Mifflin Harcourt for allowing me to read this book! I cannot wait to read more books from you in the future!

Disclosure of Material Connection: I received this book free from the publisher through the Net Galley review bloggers program. I was not required to write a positive review. The opinions I have expressed are my own. I am disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255 : "Guides Concerning the Use of Endorsements and Testimonials in Advertising."

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## **Katie Bruce says**

Decided to pick this up as background reading for "The Autobiography of Mrs. Tom Thumb," a new adult fiction book which I am currently on hold for (why did my library only buy one copy? why??). Anyways, nothing like a nice children's nonfiction book while you wait, right? This really was an excellent overview of a man whom I knew very little about (ooo, no pun intended there, seriously. That was bad.) He really did begin the celebrity culture in America. I was this book would have touched on a bit more of the cultural events that were going on--I mean, the Civil War was happening, for goodness sake!--although maybe that

would have been outside the scope of this biography. It gets a few demerits for one glaring typo (1944 instead of 1844), just because it threw me off so much that I had to read that sentence several times before I realized it was typo. Plus, typos in children's nonfiction (esp. "fancy" nonfiction like this) make me cringe in general. Other than that, a really interesting read! Hope it won't get too lost on the J biographies shelf. :-/

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### **Rick Vickers says**

Excellent bio on Tom Thumb and his life including his marriage and later years.

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### **Sarah says**

very fascinating!!!

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### **Heidi-Marie says**

Very informative for a person who knew next to nothing about Tom Thumb/Charles Stratton. In fact, I think aside from his name, I knew nothing until I read the children's bio about P.T. Barnum a few months ago. I liked that I read this so soon after that, because I was very familiar with Barnum's life and character--and he played a very big role in Charles' life. Plenty of things I didn't know, so the book kept my interest as I read. I don't think it was as well written as Candace Fleming and Russell Freedman write their bios/nonfiction for kids and teens, but still not bad. I was intrigued by the pictures and found myself wishing I could have seen them perform.

I did get annoyed that hand-drawn pictures drew Charles and Lavinia (and other little people) even shorter than they were. Because I have seen a few little people in my life, one or two proportionate like Charles--but 2.5 feet-3 feet is not THAT short. Trust me, I'm barely over 5 feet myself, so most little people are over half my height. I guess next to very tall men or women they seem even more intriguing, but to me I don't like artists making them shorter than they were. ANYway, my own peeve in that. It has nothing to do with the book.

I think this is a good Beehive choice that may intrigue a lot of children the way Tom Thumb has always interested people in his day and afterwards.

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### **Linda Lipko says**

In 1842, when P.T. Barnum traveled to Bridgeport, Connecticut to visit Charles Stratton, little did he know that in hiring the five year old tiny 25 inch, 15 pound child, it would be a tremendously wealthy endeavor for both.

Talking Charles' parents into trusting him to care for the tiny imp, in his usual flair for drama, Barnum billed the five-year old American child as eleven, from Europe and gave Charles the title of General Tom Thumb.

At birth, Charles was a large baby who weighed 9 lbs, 8 oz. When, at six months, he stopped growing his

parents became concerned.

Turning a bad situation into a positive outcome, Barnum took General Tom Thumb to his New York City museum and immediately learned that the bright eyed little child had a flair for the stage and a rapport with the audience.

Meeting Kings and Queens in Europe, and Abraham Lincoln in the US, Tom charmed all who encountered him.

Dressed in various costumes, Tom became an immediate success.

Tom Thumb and P.T. Barnum developed a close relationship and when P.T. Barnum's fortunes were lost when his NYC museum burnt to the ground, Tom bailed him out by going on another tour to Europe.

When Barnum hired another small person, Lavinia Warren immediately became an obsession with Tom and he was successful in obtaining her hand in marriage.

Never one to lose an opportunity for stagemanship, Barnum used their wedding as a supreme opportunity to net a very profitable outcome for all.

2,000 guests were invited to a lavish reception at the Metropolitan hotel in NYC. Perched on the top of a grand piano, Lavinia and Tom greeted their well-to-do guests.

When Tom died at the age of 45, the world mourned the loss of a man small in stature and large in life.

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## **Julie Smith (Knitting and Sundries) says**

This review first appeared on my blog: <http://www.knittingandsundries.com/20...>

Here's what I knew of Tom Thumb prior to reading this book: He was a midget who worked for P. T. Barnum.

What I know now: Tom Thumb was a superstar of his time - the nation's first celebrity. He owned a yacht, a stable of horses and carriages, and a magnificent home. He enjoyed rich food and expensive cigars.

He was born in 1838 in Bridgeport, CT, a healthy-sized baby of nine pounds.

When P. T. was introduced to Charles Stratton (later known as Tom Thumb), there were few choices available for people who were different. One could attempt to live a normal life (almost impossible), one could work in a traveling or stationary "freak show", or, in Charles' case, with his parent's permission (and quite natural reluctance on his mother's part), one could be a stage performer.

This is a chronicle of a remarkable man, fluent in both French and Spanish with the help of his tutors, who later became a favorite of Queen Victoria, Louis Philippe of France, and Queen Isabella (then 15) of Spain. A man who later helped pull Barnum from bankruptcy after they had already parted ways. A man who was a good friend and husband. With informative insets and tons of pictures, you'll emerge with a different perception of him, having dispelled any of your pre-conceived notions (mine were that he was taken advantage of, that he was shown as a "freak", that Barnum was nothing but a hustler [which is still partially true]).

I very much enjoyed learning more about Charles Stratton and his life; this book would also be excellent for teachers and homeschoolers to have on hand.

QUOTES (from an eGalley; may be different in final version):

At five, Tom, under Barnum's direction, was drinking wine with his meals. At seven, he smoked cigars. By nine, he chewed tobacco. He never had a day of school.

Citation from The Baltimore Sun: "Were he deformed or sickly, we might pity him, but he is so manly, so handsome, so hearty and happy, that we look at him as being from some other sphere."

..more and more he believed his success was due not to the fact of his smallness but to his gifts as a mimic, comedian and actor.

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## Shazzer says

As posted on Outside of a Dog:

I don't read many juvenile biographies, unless they come highly recommended. Luckily, such was the case with George Sullivan's Tom Thumb: The Remarkable True Story of a Man in Miniature. It was included on an ALA list of notable books to be discussed at Annual Conference and received a starred review from Booklist. Going in, I didn't know much about Tom Thumb, outside of his involvement with P.T. Barnum, but I was certainly interested to learn more. What I found from Sullivan was a well-researched, detailed and engaging portrait of a man from his early childhood to his young death at the age of forty-five. I was impressed with Sullivan's tactful handling of the touchy topic of "freaks" and their exhibitions, and the sensitivity he gave to Tom's story. The archival portraits and drawings are a wonderful touch, particular the photographs of Tom and Lavinia's famous wedding ceremony. This will make for the second biography for last year that I'm going to be actively pushing into reader's hands (the first being the wonderful Amelia Lost), but with books still left in my pile, hopefully it won't be the last.

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## Rebecca says

Charles Stratton was a large baby in 1838, but at six months he stopped growing. P.T. Barnum discovered and hired him when he was five, humbugging audiences into believing he was eleven, and set him on the road to becoming the first global superstar. Over his 43-year life, Charles, renamed General Tom Thumb, traveled around the US and the world, performing in a multitude of costumes and earning himself a vast fortune (most of which he spent later in life on yachts, horses, and houses) and a wife just his own size.

I hadn't known much about Tom Thumb, so found this a well-written and interesting biography, with also much information about his wife Lavinia, and about Barnum. There are many period photographs and advertisements, and sidebars about both historical and scientific matters. Tom's dwarfism--the less common proportionate type, in which his body parts were all in proportion rather than just having truncated limbs--was probably the result of a pituitary problem. The author also points out that even though he was exploited by Barnum--drinking at age 5 and smoking at age 7, among many other things--he would not have had much of a future if he had not gone the "freak" route, and that he and Barnum became fast friends. Overall, an interesting read.

## Jacque Stengel says

Charles S. Stratton was dubbed Tom Thumb by P.T. Barnum at the age of five and that name stuck with him the rest of his life. This is a biography of Charles Stratton and to some extent that of P.T. Barnum as well. Their two lives became intertwined as Charles became more famous than anyone of the time could have realized. Many people believe he was exploited because of his diminutive size and others say that P.T. Barnum gave him something that he wouldn't have had otherwise, and Mr. Sullivan showed both sides of the story as well as the amazing adventures of Tom Thumb and Company.

I thoroughly enjoyed this biography of a little person growing up in the entertainment business in the 19th century. Mr. Sullivan did an excellent job of sifting through countless documents and pictures and histories and coming up with this chronological book of events that shaped Charles Stratton and those around him. This biography read more like a book of fiction but with all of the accompanying documents and pictures a reader can come away with a clearer picture of the life of Charles S. Stratton. There is quite a bit of the history of P.T. Barnum and his struggles as an entrepreneur of the time and how he 'fooled' most people most of the time. Although this is classified for the middle school grades, I think those younger than 10 should be able to read this without much help and the topic of the book makes it suitable for adults as well. I'd suggest it for anyone who wants another view of the late 19th century or anyone who is curious about Tom Thumb and his life on stage and on display to the entire world.

George Sullivan has written more than 100 nonfiction books and has probably been quoted in more book reports than wikipedia.

I'll have to give this a 7 thumbs up out of 7. A great addition to your family library!

I was given an e-copy of this book from HMH via NetGalley for review. No other compensation was given and I was not required to give a positive review.

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## Cynthia Housianitis says

Junior Book Project  
Category: Informational #3  
Source: Kimmel

Sullivan, George. Tom Thumb: The Remarkable True Story of a Man in Miniature. New York: Clarion Books, 2011.

Young Charley Stratton is unique in every way imaginable. He is playful, impish, and enjoys the company and attention of adults, but he is only three feet tall. After a chance meeting with P.T. Barnum, young Charley is whisked into the world of show business donning the name Tom Thumb. Although his worldwide fame brings him the adulation of many a crowd, he never finds true fulfillment until his marriage with his companion and fellow little person, Livinia.

Careful to keep his informational text as unbiased and objective as possible, author George Sullivan strives to eliminate the stereotypical thinking of little people, while accurately reporting on their nature as second-class citizens in the nineteenth century. In Sullivan's book, the text comes off with an air of authenticity and authority because Sullivan took great care not to refer to Tom Thumb and his fellow individuals with dwarfism with the culturally-appropriate term "little person." Since the reader is not preoccupied with lingual trivializations of real people and their real struggles, the reader can appreciate the century-old story with a contemporary perspective demonstrating the value and worth of the individual.

Respect for the identity of others (their individual characteristics, traits, and backgrounds) is the foundation for getting along with individuals. With this book, teachers can

Have students understand the concepts of categorizing, making assumptions, and stereotyping.

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