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The Advance Man: A Journey Into The World Of The Circus



Synopsis

Publisher's Description"The golden age of the circus had passed but under Irvin Feld, the ruthless, unpredictable, super salesman, another golden age of promotion had just begun. "And so begins the extraordinary tale of *The Advance Man*. It's a history, a love story, and a tale of self-discovery. And as much, it's a captivating inside look at the largest traveling entertainment conglomerate on the globe, Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus. "From dwarfs and lion tamers to Siamese twins, a cast of fascinating characters. But the really exotic are behind the scenes, the promoters. A coming of age tale and a story of circus struggles in a new age of mass entertainment. Enormously readable, as compulsive as popcorn at a Saturday matinee. "

~*~ Ted Bishop, Author, award-winning *Riding with Rilke*"A first-class book that is strikingly original. What Harvard and Wharton don't teach. This is the treatise on marketing and promotion. An illuminating and riveting tale! " ~*~ David Hogan, Producer, *Broadway Heroes*From page one the reader is pulled into the heart and mind of the advance man. I was there and can attest to MacVicar's travails of ponderous pachyderms and hardball tycoons. A marvelous inside treat, superbly done. ~*~ Peter Halbin , former publicist for Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey CircusFrom the Publisher"From here on in you'll be living on the road, your life's belongings in a suitcase. Do you think you'd enjoy that?"And so begins a fascinating journey into the world of the circus as Jamie MacVicar skillfully blends the secrets of marketing and promotion as taught by the masters, a captivating personal tale, and an inside look at an American icon, Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus.Richly textured and meticulously researched, *The Advance Man* is an incomparable bridge from the circus past to the present. It is a spellbinding narrative inhabited by strange and seductive characters: Chang and Eng, the Siamese twins who couldn't be engaged in unlike conversations simultaneously; Irvin Feld, the Napoleonic genius who wrested control of the circus from Ringling's heir; the smallest man in the world who continuously stymied the show's most virile man; the naive, young woman who risked too much aspiring to become a model; the Cleveland tycoon and a host of others from extraordinary everyday people to well-known celebrities.From San Diego to Cleveland to moss-draped, beguiling Savannah, the story illuminates the fabric of American cities~*~their cultures and mores~*~and reveals a tapestry at the heart of who we are. We almost forget that this is a true story when MacVicar leisurely pulls us in and then masterfully sets the hook. "Until now you've been with me and the circus, " a fellow promoter warns. "Wait until it's just you, and you're all alone for weeks before the show arrives. "As events gather speed, catapulting the reader and the advance man down a heart-pounding track, it becomes easy to forget that "sometimes the most complex illusions have the simplest

explanations."Artfully, MacVicar invites us into a world of splashing color while the story within the story comes to light. Whether the reader is a history or circus enthusiast, a student of business, or just the lover of a remarkable yarn, the ride will be memorable, as unforgettable as a childhood night at the circus.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The Advance Man -- Finalist - 2010 Marfield Prize- National Award for Arts WritingUniquely, the Marfield Prize is the only national award devoted exclusively to non-fiction books about the arts; from visual, media, and literature, to the performing arts."A fascinating glimpse into the high stress world of live event marketing. With the book's well-timed humor and pacing the reader is swept along!" --San Francisco Book Review, February 3,2010"Remarkable! A very personal story about life and what is important." --Rocky Mountain Outlook, August,2010"MacVicar's story comes together beautifully. The author is not afraid to take the reader down the long and sometimes dark corridor of memory into a bright arena in search of the glittering destination of the circus itself. Building unity through irony, humor, and rich detail, the result is a cautionary tale about life, and as compelling a book as you are likely to read." --White Tops Magazine, January 10,2010"A first class book that is strikingly original. What Harvard and Wharton don't teach. This is the treatise on marketing and promotion. An illuminating and riveting tale!" --David Hogan, Producer, Broadway Heroes

"The golden age of the circus had passed but under Irvin Feld, the ruthless, unpredictable, super salesman, another golden age of promotion had just begun." And so begins the extraordinary tale of The Advance Man. It's a history, a love story, and a tale of self-discovery. And as much, it's a captivating inside look at the largest traveling entertainment conglomerate on the globe, Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus.

Jamie McVicar has written one hell of a story and he wrote it very well. I read the almost 600 pages in two nights! As an alum of the Feld Machine myself I flew to Los Angeles in August, 1971, just after my 22nd birthday to work for Ringling as an 'Engagement Director' -- the title the Feld Organization preferred and was mandated. The whole idea of 'promoter,' 'advance man,' etc., at least in title, was discouraged. I vividly recognized the places, scenes, general madness and various individuals McVicar depicts. I was hired by H. Woolcott ('Cotten') Fenner (an extraordinary and thorough gentleman in every respect whom it doesn't appear McVicar even knew. Mr. Fenner when I knew him was in failing health). I can remember only meeting Alan Bloom a couple of times and Irvin Feld a half dozen or so. I take McVicar at his word for the events that swirled around him and don't question his own personal demons and the mental collapse that nearly destroyed him. That is a compelling, sad few chapters. Again, it's a hell of a story! But, I must say I wish it had been that exciting when I was there! I kept remembering Cotten Fenner as I read McVicar's book and can't help but think his whole experience with the circus would have been different had he known Mr. Fenner and 'came up' under his knowledge, guidance, and kindness. One of the first things I learned was that there was still room for decent qualities amidst all that greed, glitzy trash with flash, and copious amounts of elephant dung. Unlike Mr. McVicar, I also learned very quickly that traveling light was essential and no extra personal 'baggage' was allowed. In relative quick order I also learned a hell of a lot about mass promotion, audience control, negotiations, advertising, PR, and the range of human interaction and psychology. I did not stay with Ringling very long even though since a child I had always dreamed of running away to join the circus! Fortunately, I had 'set the alarm' to wake me up from the dream and move on... Sorry for drooning on here... guess maybe I should write my own book! Jamie McVicar's is truly a fine one. Get it. Read it. Learn from it.

Jamie MacVicar joined the Greatest Show on Earth in 1974, a year before I was hired for the same position. From the perspective of personal experience, the advance man nails it! Jamie MacVicar's depiction of a circus promoter's lifestyle, work ethic, tension, stress and glory are insightful and to the point. Many young and enthusiastic men and women have passed thru the Ringing promoter

crucible to lead the live event industry in venue, sports and entertainment management. Accuracies aside, *The Advance Man* is recommended because the arc of the character is rich and you cannot help but connect with the hero on his journey of rise, fall and redemption. This book is destined to make a great movie as the writing is superb and the subject matter is as good as it gets. In reading it I felt my life pass before me as MacVicar describes a young man's journey into a strange and captivating world. Bill Powell
VP of Marketing and Sales
Feld Entertainment

I normally don't read (or like) long books and I started this 672 page behemoth with trepidation. At the end, I was surprised at my reaction. **GIVE ME MORE JAMIE!** While not a novel, it reads as one, a real page turner that was amazingly easy to visualize. This book overall was a great treatise on how important psyche is to successful salesmanship. From his powder blue suit to the bars he visited to the people he met, Jamie painted an amazing landscape with his prose. As a bonus to me, I knew several of the people in which he interacted with in the book and found his descriptions of them to be right on, which makes me believe the rest of this well-researched tome is as accurate. The way he weaved the industry's history into the read was wonderful. Thank You Jamie.

The Advance Man has a lot of information and details that the average circus fan is not usually privy to. It is very readable and hard to put down. It is broken down into short quickly readable sections. Unfortunately, the details of the author's sexual exploits, while probably true, I feel aren't necessary to make the book readable. The detail seems more geared to selling it to movie rights and make it PG or X rated otherwise it reveals some very inside details of Ringling Bros. Barnum & Bailey Circus management. Hard work, long hours and low pay just to bring you the Greatest Show on Earth! **WHOW!!** I just wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't read it for myself!

The words "big book" and "memoir" in a review are often the kiss of death. Not so with *Advance Man*, although its 660 pages deal with the author's memories of his early years as a promoter with the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus. The story is as well-organized, character-driven, and tightly plotted as any adventure novel. In short, it is a good read, as captivating as a fine work of fiction, but with the added authenticity of a true story. You don't have to love the circus to enjoy reading this book. It's really about a young man on a journey of self-discovery, overcoming a host of obstacles, both external (the job) and internal (personal history). And, yes, there's a whole lot of circus going on in the background. But mostly Jamie MacVicar takes us out there with him, alone in a strange town, three months before the circus arrives. He walks us through the week-by-week

countdown of trying to drum up so much excitement that all everyone wants to do when the circus comes to town is buy a ticket and see the show. It's a process that can take its toll on the promoters--the advance men--who are often overworked and underpaid. Some can't take it and quit, some are fired, and some can't imagine doing anything else.

Speedy service and a very enjoyable read

This was a very interesting book on the circus. Not a book I would write a historical research paper from, but it was fun to read.

Fascinating personal story

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