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# The Brandenburg 300 Project

## Honors

**Jack Earle (Jacob Erlich)**

**For everyone who looks different and is ridiculed,  
but keeps love in their heart and embodies  
kindness in their lives, and invents a better life for  
themselves and those around them, the  
Brandenburg 300 Project honors Jack Earle.**



"Few children are lucky enough to hear a fairy story about a mythical giant, told by a real-life giant."





Every creature's senses are attuned to identifying the biggest creature in the area, and whether it is dangerous to them. Any other evolutionary path would have been suicide. Species who ignored predators larger than themselves are by and large extinct. It's an important part of our DNA.

There's something about being a giant. The biggest person in the room feels this, knows they have been noticed and assessed for potential danger by every other person. For a big person, this hits home the first time they notice they are in the room with someone bigger than they,

and they make that same friend or foe evaluation.

Now put yourself in the mind of a circus giant, marketed as a freak, a sideshow to humanity. You need to make a living, this is your best option, but the dollars don't make the humiliation stop hurting.

I learned about Jack Earle when researching long golf clubs. Jack's clubs are in the USGA Golf Museum. It turned out one of the original long golf clubs had been made by the Chicago Golf Company for Jack Earle in 1924.

[Jack Earle] only met one person taller than him in his whole life – Robert Wadlow of Alton, Illinois who stood 8 feet 9 and one-half inches. “Wadlow was then almost nine feet tall, and Jack was so flabbergasted to find himself looking up instead of down that his mind went blank and the hateful question popped out automatically. "Hey, Bob," he blurted, "how's the weather up there?" Wadlow took it gracefully, and Jack says it taught him a lesson. "People still ask me about the weather up here," he says, "but I don't really mind it any more. I can even shoot back an answer: hot air at the summit, somewhat cooler in the foothills.”” Jack Earle (8 feet 6 inches), a polymath of great range, was the biggest man in the world after Robert Wadlow (8 feet 11 inches) died.

I was bigger than all of them until I was 8 years old. And through my life was the biggest person in every room I was in until my mid-40's and saw someone my size in a Texas airport. We glanced at each other

with a certain shock and walked away as fast as we could.

I have a sense of what these guys went through. A place where there are no chairs, cars, and the other daily needs of our lives, that were built for us. We figured it out, of course, but it's weird looking at, for example cars, where there has never been a production car we fit in easily or comfortably. Industrial designers had to make a practical choice, set a limit for their designs, and we were defined as clearly unwelcome. Comedians, talk show hosts, and other entertainers joke about you publicly (and daily) in the cruelest terms, getting uproarious laughter and applause. And too often you catch even your friends making the same jokes in private. It's a rejection, a silent humiliation suffered every single day. You are not normal, never will be, and must learn to live with discrimination and even hate.

And yet it is the passionate desire for being normal that shines intensely in our real lives that binds us much more than the unique experiences of great size. After retiring from the Circus they became a wine salesman who inexhaustibly did charity work for children, and whose parents sold jewelry (Jack Earle); or, a shoe salesman (Gil Reichert and Robert Wadlow).

They were by all accounts extremely nice, gentleman. Very loving, very accepting.

It has its advantages. You are safe in more places than other people- at least until you get older. Thieves tend to avoid you – there are easier victims – although the schoolyard temptation to ridicule stays in many people their whole lives. The accumulated insults insidiously hammering away are the downside.

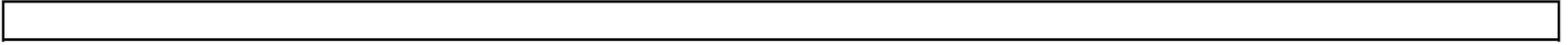
Jack said, "There are thoughts I had as a boy that I still haven't escaped. I remember the grown people laughing at me. But I don't expect the world to be made over just for me. If I had a chance now to become a man of average size, I don't think I'd take it. And when I feel low I can go to my room and lock the door, and I can read or paint or write.""

Jacob Erlich was quietly spoken, mild mannered, warm, supportive kind and gentle. Sensitive and artistic, a gentle giant, "his large eyes peered shyly at you through a huge pair of spectacles." An exceptional athlete, remarkably intelligent, a loving family person, an extraordinary human being.

A poem by Jack Earle from *The Pursuing Shadows*:

Shadowy mists  
Swirl and steal  
Dawn the cornices  
Of my mind,  
Quietly at first  
Then faster and faster,  
Into the deep hiding places  
Of my terror  
They penetrate,  
My steps quicken . . .

And I flee in fear



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