A Readers’ Theater Adaptation of Tracey Fern’s

Barnum's Bones: How Barnum Brown Discovered the Most Famous Dinosaur in the World

by Mary Pettit

Readers:

Narrator 1          Narrator 2          Narrator 3          Narrator 4          Narrator 5

Barnum          My Dear Professor – MDP (Henry Fairfield Osborn)

Narrator 1: Something exciting happened in Carbondale, Kansas, on February 12, 1873. The Brown family had a baby boy!

Narrator 2: It was even more exciting than the circus, and the Browns adored the circus!

Narrator 3: In fact, the Browns loved the circus so much they named their baby Barnum, after the most famous circus owner in America, P. T. Barnum.

Narrator 4: They hoped Barnum’s important-sounding, unusual name would inspire him to do important, unusual things.

Barnum: I started doing something unusual right from the start!

Narrator 5: As soon as Barnum could toddle, he followed along behind his pa’s plow, plucking up the ancient corals

Narrator 1: and clams

Narrator 2: and snails

Narrator 3: and scallops

Narrator 4: that it unearthed.

Narrator 5: Barnum spent years studying his collection, trying to imagine what the world must have been like millions of years ago, when his family’s high, dry farm was at the bottom of a shallow, swirling sea.

Barnum: I longed to find some bones from species that no one had ever found before!
Narrator 1: Barnum got his chance when he took a course in paleontology at the University of Kansas. He was such a good student that his professor invited him to spend the summer of 1894 and 1895 on fossil hunts in South Dakota and Wyoming.

Narrator 2: Each morning, Barnum set out at sunrise.

Narrator 3: He hiked over mountains,

Narrator 4: across creek beds,

Narrator 5: through streams,

Narrator 1: and around rattlesnake nests.

Narrator 2: Most folks would think this was torture.

Barnum: I thought it was wonderful!

Narrator 3: Barnum, who was an unusually nice dresser, sometimes went prospecting in a fur coat,

Barnum: [Acts out putting on a big fur coat.]

Narrator 4: a suit and tie,

Barnum: [Acts out straightening his tie.]

Narrator 5: buffed black boots,

Barnum: [Acts out a buffing motion across his shoes]

Narrator 1: and a bowler hat.

Barnum: [Acts out putting on a hat.]

Barnum: No matter how I was dressed, I found bones!

Narrator 2: Henry Fairfield Osborn, a professor at Columbia University and an administrator at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City, heard about Barnum’s talent for bone hunting from Barnum’s professor at the University of Kansas.

My Dear Professor (MDP): I wanted our museum to have the best dinosaur collection in the world!

Narrator 3: So far, it had . . . none.

Narrator 4: Most people called Professor Osborn “sir.”
Barnum: I called him “My Dear Professor” because he loved bones as much as I did!

Narrator 5: My Dear Professor sent Barnum back to Wyoming in 1897 to hunt fossils.

Narrator 1: Barnum still didn’t discover any new species, but he did unearth the museum’s first important dinosaurs . . .

Barnum: a Diplodocus longus and an Apatosaurus!

MDP: Then, I sent him on an expedition to Patagonia, in South America.

Barnum: I was gone more than a year! And I was shipwrecked and nearly eaten by a mountain lion!

Narrator 2: Despite all that, he returned to New York City with four and a half tons of mammal fossils.

MDP: He must be able to SMELL fossils!

Narrator 3: Barnum had more than a good nose.

Narrator 4: He poured over maps and geology books.

Narrator 5: He chatted with local people.

Narrator 1: He studied the shape and color and texture of the rock layers.

Narrator 2: He uncovered more and more bones.

Barnum: But I STILL dreamed of discovering something NEW.

Narrator 3: Will Barnum ever find bones of a creature never before discovered?

Narrator 4: Will he live up to his important, unusual sounding name?

Narrator 5: Read Barnum’s Bones to find out!

The End

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