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Robert Pershing Wadlow (1918 - 1940)

From Alton, Illinois, the World's Tallest Man

Robert Pershing Wadlow, born February 22, 1918 to normal parents in Illinois, Robert Wadlow weighed a healthy almost nine pounds. While this may seem like a normal start to life, who could have guessed that the baby would one day be known as the Giant of Illinois.

By the time Robert turned one-year old he was already over three-feet tall, and weighed 45 pounds.

His growth spurt started in infancy, and he kept growing throughout his entire life thanks to a hyperactive pituitary gland problem. The condition caused his system to produce an abnormal amount of human growth hormone. Robert would continue to grow until the end of his short life.

In his early teenage years he was well over seven-feet tall which, combined with his quiet disposition, earned him the nickname “gentle giant.” He was a Boy Scout, and enjoyed photography and guitar.

In high school Robert was popular and active in many extracurricular activities, even serving as the advertising manager for the yearbook. He was completely accepted by his peers. However, when he attended college he





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lost that acceptance and struggled with the stares. It bothered him so much that he dropped out and returned to his parents quite penniless.



That is when his brief stint with Ringling Bros. began. His 1937 contract was brief and had strict conditions and terms. First, Robert would only attend shows at Madison Square Garden and the Boston Garden. He would display himself only two times a day for three minutes. He refused to allow any exaggeration of his height via media releases or standard height enhancing sideshow trickery like platform shoes, top hats and trick photography. Furthermore, Robert would only display himself in the center ring and refused any association with the sideshow. Despite all of these restrictions, Robert proved to be incredibly popular.

Robert was so popular that following his time with Ringling Bros. he signed a fabulous contract with The International Shoe Company. The deal included quite a bit of travel and personal appearances and in just under a year

Robert had made over 800 appearances and traveled over 300,000 miles. Perhaps most importantly, the company provided Robert with free shoes – a big deal when you are a size 37 and your shoes cost over \$100 a pair (2015 cost = \$1659.00).

Robert broke the world record as the tallest man in history when he was 19, but he didn't stop growing. He measured in at eight-feet, four-inches tall at that time.

In addition to requiring custom clothing to accommodate his size— he required massive 37AA size shoes— he needed to have customized furniture as regular table and chairs were not large enough.



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Eventually his hands would grow to be too large for him to participate in his favorite hobbies, but this wasn't the only downside to his larger frame. The physical toll on his health would ultimately bring his life to an abrupt and premature end.



He suffered from weak legs, and commonly experienced loss-of-feeling and numbness in his limbs and extremities. He depended on specially designed leg braces and a cane in order to move around—although he never used a wheelchair.

It was during an infection from a blister caused by one of these ill-fitted leg braces that Robert's health took a serious turn for the worst. He underwent blood transfusions and emergency surgery in an attempt to save him, but ultimately the efforts of doctors were



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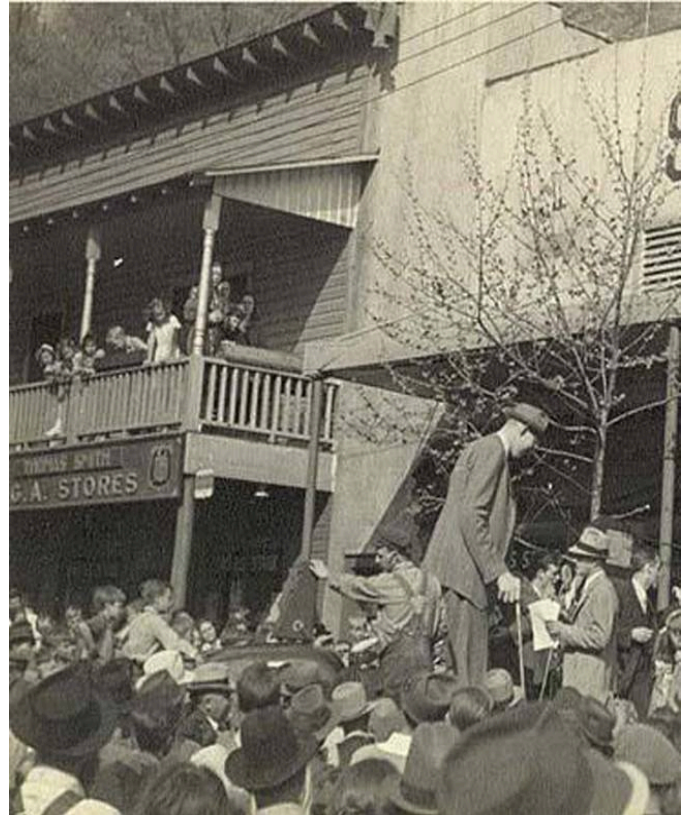
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futile. His condition continued to decline because of an autoimmune disorder, and he succumbed to the infection. He died in his sleep on July 15 1940 - he was only 22 years old. When he passed away, he measured 8 feet 11.1 inches and weighed an astounding 439 pounds.

Robert Wadlow's body was viewed by 33,295 within 28 hours after his death. His funeral was attended by 40,000 mourners. It took twelve pallbearers to hoist his thousand pound casket. Robert was buried in Oakwood cemetery in Alton, Illinois on July 19, 1940 and required two normal size grave plots.



A life sized statue of Robert Wadlow still stands in his hometown of Alton, Illinois.

[VIDEO] The Story Of Robert Wadlow - Documentary [runtime 26:38]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fQHI15sUDjE>





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