

# CWM Audio 14

## Lee Stevens Interview, August 7, 2015

### INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT Part 2

Scott O'Donnell: We're back.

Lee Stevens: Live.

Scott O'Donnell: By popular demand here at the Robert L. Parkinson Library. You were telling us about your time on King Brothers Circus, and you were doing props, having an interesting experience in your book. Tell us about the Bazan troupe.

Lee Stevens: Yeah. What fabulous people. They're just absolutely fabulous people. Antar always was such a ... He didn't have an enemy. He didn't. He looked at the world totally different than anybody else. If we all saw it blue, he'd think it was shade of green, almost blue, but not quite because the poor thing is still trying. I mean, he was that way. He'd help anybody, talk to anybody. He'd talk to a pole if that's all there was. I mean, he was just an outgoing, friendly, loving, warm person. I didn't have to live with him. I wasn't married to him. I wasn't one of this kids, but he was the same way and if they were here, they'd all say the same thing. He just was just a nice, wonderful sweet person; compassionate, very compassionate.

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He was very strict in his beliefs. The more you got to know him over the years and over time, and years later we worked together often. I mean, it's so many so that he worked in Winchester Cathedral and You're the Cream of My Coffee for the Revolving Ladder Act. It was called [inaudible 00:01:29], him and his wife. She was one of the Dukes from the Duke family in Texas, a big American circus family; Beverly Duke. They were great. Their son Omar Antar and their daughter Lisa, and I was never in the act, but I assisted it, and he was the only one that ever tipped me. Well, Heinz Rucker did, too. They gave me a dollar a week for helping them carry the props back to the truck at night to load them up on the camper. That was great. Bars of soap, picnics, things like that.

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He always kind of had an eye out just to make sure I was okay, so sweet people. Heinz and Patty Rucker, at the time, they were doing the sword balancing and the uncaged leopard act. Patty's been around forever. She was born in business. She's Bob Tell and ... God. What's her mom's name? God forgive me. Oh, Lord. Anyhow, she was one of the cows or the cow and the daughter, and good people, fun people, nice people; just good, old show people. Heinz I worked with years later when I was up and coming. All these people kept coming back into my life, which is it's unbelievable that it would work that way between the Wuzons, Heinz and Patty, Bill Kay. Bill Kay, not the producer. Bill Kay the act. He did a Roman Ladder act and I think he did a plate-spinning act. Then all the Duke's family was there.

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The Rawl's family were all there. David ending up owning his own circus. He was clowning back then, so it was quite unique. Henry and Sandra Thompson had the sideshow, so I was starting to learn to eat fire. I didn't know there was people there trying to eat me, however, a lot of doors opened up because of my youth and naivety. Did I nativity or naivety?

Scott O'Donnell: That's a nice way to put that, yeah, very nice.

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Lee Stevens: It was fun. It was great. I thought it was during the show, to me. Oh, my God. They had a five-piece band. I can't pronounce his last name. Oscar, he had the band. A fabulous band, it was just great. Oh, Dot and Sonny Badette were there. I'm just trying to go through the whole thing. Paul Duke had the elephants. Phil Chandler ended up being on the sideshow there. Linda was there. Way back then it was wonderful. It was just wonderful. It was good.

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Scott O'Donnell: Good years.

Lee Stevens: Yeah.

Scott O'Donnell: What was the transition from being a prop hand or a tent crew worker to a performer? What was your first performance opportunity?

Lee Stevens: The Wuzon kids, the boys, started teaching me how to juggle and walk a rolling globe. It was Patty Rucker's globe. She did a rolling globe act, too. Just between shows, we'd run in and play on the props, and that brought it out even more, so it

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became more and more and more burning, so I kept saying, "I want to be in the show. I want to be in the show," which never happened. That's summer Bill Valentine came to visit in New York State somewhere. I forgot, but we were upstate. He lived upstate, so it was near his hometown, and he was actually coming to hire Beverly and Anta to work Clown College that winter. Anta went and told him, "You got to take this kid. I don't care what you do, but if you want me, you got to take him." I didn't know that for a long time. That's how I got to Clown College. He said, "You get out of here. This is another step. Take this step. See where it goes."

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I'm forever grateful to him, always was. Just always was. A lot of things that we were with the Garden Brothers. I'm jumping way ahead and because of Beverly and Antar's, their daughter was married to Ian Garden, Jr. at the time and she worked in their office. With just them dropping hints and saying different things, and Ian had an affinity for me the way I performed, and I was very lucky the man liked anything I did. It sounds conceited. I don't mean to sound that way, but I was damn good. I wouldn't be here if I wasn't. He said, "You sell shit to a shit shoveler.

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Whenever you go out, just go out there. You're a performer. It doesn't matter. You know there's an audience. You know they're looking. You know you're being looked at. You know how to handle all that. Just go."

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[00:06:30] Well, they were influential, to get to the end of the point, to us getting a sea lion act together, which Garden Brothers funded for us. He wanted it. Nobody was able to do it and he thought that because nobody could get them, that was all the more reason to do it, and we did. We overcame all the litigation and all the paperwork, and two-and-a-half years of getting it all together, but we did it. It was mostly back to Anta and Beverly both prompting and dropping hints, and saying this and, "Give him a chance. Maybe it'll be good." Whatever they said, I know that they were there at that point, too, so it was pretty cool. Let's go back.

Scott O'Donnell: Let's go back to Clown College because I think that'll be interesting for some people who only know you as the-

Lee Stevens: It wasn't for me, but ...

Scott O'Donnell: Yeah, only know you ... I mean, case in point here. Our clown Neil Scoy here was floored yesterday when I told him that you went to Clown College. He had no idea. He goes, "Damn," he's only known you as the Baboon Master, if you will.

[00:07:00]  
Lee Stevens: Yeah.

Scott O'Donnell: He was very intrigued to find that, so tell us a little about your time at Clown College.

Lee Stevens: Again, I was so much younger than most of the people, who were in their mid to late 20's. Some were in their 30's and 40's, actually. I never been around anybody who smoked a joint, any of that stuff, so I was so far out of the inner circle of everybody having drum circle. What the hell is a drum circle? You're howling at the moon. What are you doing? I'm tired. Shut the hell up. It's ridiculous. It was still the end of the Hippie Movement and everybody was still wearing flowers and shit. I was so anti. Just, "What? No." I loved the fact that Lou Jacobs was an instructor. Otto was there. We did a live mass ... Even though we had a trick, I mean, it was amazing the people that were there.

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[00:08:00] Mark Anthony, we did the carving classes with Mark and just phenomenal people that they're all gone. Real 50-year troopers, how do you beat that? How do you teach somebody to be funny? You can't. We had the usual run of people walking around being stupid. "Oh, I'm a clown." You know, stereotypical birthday TV show clown. Bingo the whatever, so it was ... I took it very serious. I took all the skill things that we were being taught, the unicycle, anything like that, and all the web sitting, all the acrobatic stuff, and all the falls, and different things like that. I wasn't funny. I felt funny, but I was a New York funny, and that's not the same as what they were looking for. I was a kid. I mean, I had no clue. I had no reference points. Everybody wanted to be Amal Gooster. Everybody wanted to be Lou Jacobs, and everybody wanted to be Otto or whoever walked in.

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Everybody's makeup changed that day to suite. I was like, "What the hell is that about?" I was a pretty white-faced, not so much then. That's what I developed into

[00:09:30] and I was just a big picture clown. It was easier to do that. I had a very sarcastic, sardonic sense of humor, as does your executive director. So he understands quite well and, also, the gentleman is running the International Clown Hall of Fame, very much the same type of New York street humor, and I enjoyed Neil Scoy because I'd never seen him. I didn't know he was 12 years old, whatever he is. I did. I really enjoyed the way he worked yesterday in the show here because he changes. I can see that nothing ever stays the same. The routine's the same, but he'll ad lib.

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He'll throw something in. He'll seize the moment. That's a clown. That's what's funny. You can't script it. If you don't feel it, sometimes it doesn't work, but you have to have the balls to try it. If you don't, just stand in the background with the other 65 minions and just wave and jump at the kids.

Scott O'Donnell: You graduated from Clown College?

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Lee Stevens: Yes. Nacumba Su Ladre or whatever you call it.

Scott O'Donnell: Didn't take you to a unit.

Lee Stevens: Oh, no. I was involved in a big scandal. Oh, yeah. I don't know I was until I was. I'm not going to go into all the details, but the upshot was this poor broad Dot was Bill Valentine's secretary. I hope she's dead. She kept notes who was doing who, what was going on, who was screwing who, all of it, anything, every bit of dirt. It was all over Venice. In my mind, that was like the end of the world. Then my name came up in this thing, which I had no part of. I was two buildings away from where all this action was happening. I would have liked to have been in on it, but I wasn't. Had I known, and I went off. I went storming up into the left office of the Venice Arena where Bill's was. Irvnst and Kinison. McKenna didn't even have one then, really. It was on the right side and I just laid this woman out.

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I just went off the deep end. I called her everything from a pig to a dog. I mean, I just did. As I was walking out, I just saw the contract just fade. You know what I mean? It was my own fault and my own doing, and rightly so. It was like if I couldn't handle that, how would I handle life on the road? Which was Bill's thinking and we talked about that years later. He said, "You were in. Everything was there. You were done. You were in. We took someone we didn't want because you screwed up." So a life lesson.

[00:12:00]

Scott O'Donnell: Yeah.

Lee Stevens: Now, I still do it. I don't give a shit. I take it as it comes. It was wonderful, the whole experience. Oh, they had this woman. God, I hope she's dead, too. Sioux Von Bayer, she spelt her name S-I-O-U-X. I immediately hated her. What are you for real? What? She wears patchouli. You could smell that coming down from Sarasota. It's 30 miles to Venice and you could smell the broad when she woke up. I wanted to vomit. To this day, don't wear that shit. It's disgusting. You want to wear camel piss, buy a fucking camel. Sioux Von Bayer and she had this assistant that wore a

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[00:13:00] leotard. There was no Spandex, with no underwear, no bra, and she was 40 pounds overweight. You could count the ridges of cellulite and they're doing yoga classes. Are you for real? Really.

[00:13:30] She had a drum that she got from the Maharishi some shit, and she'd do this, like this. What? Bring the fucking Indian in. What are you doing? I hated it. I hated it. Sioux Von Bayer, really. Get a real name, honey. However, we did this yoga thing, which was all a waste of time. We had a big curriculum. That happened to be a waste of time, but at the end you did this relaxing thing, and your feet falling to the floor. Then your calves. I'd be out, gone, done. I said, "The only thing you can do, honey, is put me to sleep." She was very insulted. We had Bobby Kay as an instructor there. I mean, it was just wonderful. The gorillas were still out back, back in the day. Yeah. It was quite an experience. Well, we destroyed a roller rink in Venice one night. We all went dressed in our clown drag.

[00:14:00] Oh, my God. They weren't ready for that and neither was Bill Valentine. He got very upset. Dick Urban was even more upset. Urban didn't like that fact.

Scott O'Donnell: To Clown College. What's the next stop? Where do you go? What do you get into for performance?

[00:14:30] Lee Stevens: I went out to California from there. I went back to Venice, actually, about a month later with another reject. We were going to get jobs at Disney World because it was just opening. We didn't get them. You had to be a Florida resident first. I went up and I was talking with Bill. Afterward, like I said, he told me what happened, but he had a call from Reed Brothers circus. They were looking for clowns. It was John and Betty Reeds very first year. They were taking the show out. It was the old Ken Jensen route, if anybody remembers that, who was her stepfather. Oh, my God. I flew out to Boise, Idaho. Oh, I was in my mother's kitchen. I went back to New York on a Trailways. You know, the \$87 whatever it was. \$47, a three-day excursion.

[00:15:30] This lady calls up. "Hi. We have your picture and all. We want to hire you. We got to fill out the contract." She said, "What's the name you use?" I had no clue and my mother had a thing of Ajax on the kitchen sink. It was an old aluminum kitchen, the old ones. You know? There was a thing of Ajax and I said, "Ajax." She said, "What?" I said, "Yeah, Ajax the Clown." That's who I became, Ajax the Clown. Now, I got to go from Newark Airport to Boise, Idaho, which was a whole big fralala. I get to Boise, Idaho and nobody knows. No cab company knows the motel I'm trying to find in Boise, Idaho. It didn't exist. Well, I didn't understand what she said and I wrote the name down wrong and, needless to say, some cabby finally took me to the hotel where her and her husband were. The Rodeens were there, Ernst and Lola Rodeens, Ariel Rodeens. It was Trolly's nephew, even though he was older.

[00:16:00] They were there. The Langs were there before ... Susie was born. David wasn't.

Scott O'Donnell: Wisconsin's own.

Lee Stevens: Yeah. Oh, God. I didn't realize how heavy this John Reed drank. It was substantial.

[00:16:30] We're all in the room talking, " La, la, la," so I go, and I'm in the room next door. Now, I'm trying to find these people and nobody knows. There's no record of them anywhere, so I said, "I know they got to be here because they told me they were going to be here." So, finally, I saw a guy coming down the hallway with [inaudible 00:16:47] and all that. I said, "Excuse me." I said, "Do you work here?" He got highly insulted because he was a pretty hot-headed guy. "Do I look like I" ... He started cursing me. I said, "I'm sorry. I'm looking for these circus people. I can't find them." "What circus people?" I said, "John Reed and Betty Reed." "Well, who are you?" I said, "Well, I'm going to be a clown on the show," and this and that.

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[00:17:30] He said, "Are you Ajax?" I said, "Yeah." He goes, "I'm John Reed. Come on in." Well, the party was on and we laughed about that for months. I went there and met the Rodeens, and worked with ... The show clause there was this eight-week contract. Six weeks with an option, so I thought, "Okay. Every six weeks you sign a new contract." Well, after six weeks, you're left in Cowspell, Idaho with a finger up your ass, but nothing. You know what I mean? I was getting \$200 a week. I thought was big money. I met John McKay. It was Yoho the Clown. It was a Shrine clown. He was there and he took me under his wing. He said, "Don't worry. We'll get work," and this and that. He knew the ropes. He knew Paul Kay, and he knew everybody. He did all the Texas dates at the time. It mushroomed into that. Then I lived in Hollywood for a little while, North Hollywood.

[00:18:00] Oh, my God. We're not going to go ... That's nothing to do with the circus.

Scott O'Donnell: No.

Lee Stevens: Yeah, so that was fine. Then I had to cough up my emergency funds to get the hell out of California.

Scott O'Donnell: You went back to the circus?

Lee Stevens: Back to the circus. I ended up going. What did I do? I kind of floundered around the rest of that year because there was nothing going on. I really didn't know anybody. Well, then I went and saw the Hashi Show and I went and saw the Beatty Show, Sales and Gray. They were all playing the Jersey Shore, close to home, enough where I can get there. Well, lo and behold. I got a job with the Hoxey Brothers, which was Mike Bourbon was producing clown. Toby Valentine was there. There was another clown, the Rabbi. You remember Rabbi? What a trip, and me. Oh, God. I had to fly to Miami. It was my birthday. I flew to Miami and Ott ... I can't remember his name. He had a huge hernia and he was just covered in just ... I mean, just filthy. He picked me up at the airport and I was all dressed to the nines. I had my big platform shoes and I had blue, red, and white plaid pants, big huge bell bottoms.

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[00:19:30] They drove me out to this old dairy farm. There was nothing. There was just nothing. There was elephants tied to a tree. There was just nothing, nothing, and that was my entrance to the Hoxey Brothers Circus.

Scott O'Donnell: Tell us about Hoxey.

Lee Stevens: He was a trip.

Scott O'Donnell: He's a notorious character in the annals of circus history.

Lee Stevens: Yeah. He was. For whatever reason, all these people liked me. I mean, it was just  
[00:20:00] Betty fell in love with me and she wasn't there a lot, but she did and Hoxey always  
looked out for me, and so did the other people on the show. It was kind of neat. It  
was good, old show people. Mike and Margaret McGuire were there, her Sister  
Maureen. All the Diaz girls were there. Stu Miller was there, had the sideshow. Oh,  
God. Avery and Joe Holworth were there. Eddie Hendricks was there. Oh, God. I  
[00:20:30] don't want to leave nobody out. John Hall was the manager. It was a hell of a  
unique show, and it was the year they decided John just designed this round tent,  
one pole, a round tent. The rings were setup like a clover or like a club with three  
rings around the pole, and it was a pretty big show, really. Junior was still doing the  
cat act. They had the five baby elephants, the four big ones, so they had nine  
elephants.

[00:21:00] They had three rings of horses, Liberty Horses.

Speaker 1: Will you let me ... Excuse me. This lady asked to see you. She's here.

Lee Stevens: Okay.

Speaker 1: Excuse me.

Scott O'Donnell: You can go.

Lee Stevens: Did he fart or burp? I didn't get that. Yeah, so it was a hell of a nice show, a really  
nice show. It really, really was.

Scott O'Donnell: Yeah. Right?

Lee Stevens: Al's wife.

Scott O'Donnell: Al's wife.

[00:21:30] Lee Stevens: How fabulous.

Scott O'Donnell: Yeah.

Lee Stevens: He was one of the guys at the Garden. I was going to say Al. I couldn't think of his  
name. The Hoxey Brothers, this was good. All three events, well, a lot of events  
happened there because I was coming of age. I discovered alcohol and all kinds of  
things. There was a camel named Upjohn. It was a young camel and I was supposed  
[00:22:00] to lead it [inaudible 00:21:58]. Okay. So I got this camel that's kicking and making a

little noise. I don't know what the hell camels did. What is this shit? So I'm walking this camel around and half the time I'm dragging him. We came around. Fernandez had a high wire act there, too. I don't know. I never seen him again, so I don't know where they came from. The elephants came in and I don't know if Joe was drinking. Somebody was drinking and the elephants got too close to this camel, and the camel got really pissed off.

He started kicking and jumping. Well, he jumped so high he got his legs caught in the ladder for the high wire, in the rope ladder, so his both feet were off the ground and he was just there throbbing and thrashing and carrying on, and the elephants turned and went through the seats in the back, and I kind of caused a stampede. Well, Bob Mitchell was the ring master. Everybody chasing me with a club. They all had tent stakes and clubs that day trying to chase me down. Junior wanted to kill me. Joe Holworth was livid. We ended up being very close friends. That was one incident. Another one, Stu Miller's wife ... I don't know if they were married. Yeah. They were married then, just got married. She did the hair hang. Mesako Sin was her name in the show. I was Miss Okaka and the clowns followed her.

She went out with her rig [inaudible 00:23:27]. I came in on mine. We get in there and we're doing her hair hang, and the blowup is typical. They hook up the hair and they blow a whistle, and everything comes off, and I'm standing in a big bra and panties, and everybody runs off, and then the elephants came in following us. Well, I'm out there. "Ha, ha, ha." Well, I told you I'd discovered what alcohol was. I'm out there and I'm half shit faced, 17 years old, whatever I was, and the way Mike Bourbon made this frame it was a metal frame. I always had to push my thumbs under and tuck my face so when the thing went up it just went up. Well, they said, "One, two," and they pulled it on two and I wasn't ready, and the thing caught me, and it just went up my face and broke my nose, and the blood was just spewing everywhere.

Before I realized it was happening, I felt all this warm and heat, and I'm looking down. All I was worried about was getting the costume messed up. I did what I was supposed to, jump over the ring curb in front of the house, grab myself and run off, scream and run. The band was fabulous. Kate Charles, oh my God. Everything was a burlesque show. No matter what they played, you kept waiting for Blaze Star to come walking in with a leopard. I'm telling you. It was fabulous. Everything was bump and grind, everything. We had old Frankie the cross-eyed drummer. He didn't know where he was. They had to walk him to the bandstand. I don't know how he played because he couldn't see. Both eyes went the opposite direction.

Charles would just be up there with his big, giant tumbler. It was an old metal thermos. I don't know what was in it, but it wasn't water. It wasn't soda. Instead of going to the left like I was supposed to, I ran to the right and here comes Junior with the big elephants, Immanuel Ruffin, and boom! I go down for the count. Well, there goes the elephants. So it's a second stampede I started. It wasn't good. If I didn't have a broken nose already, he would have broke it. Pete Christiani was there. Johnny Walker was there, Senior, Junior. We kind of grew up basically the

same age. We had a lot of fun. It was a lot of good people. Oh, my God when I think back. It's hard to sit here and ... There's things that it's like surreal, so you don't think about it all the time. How do you go back 40 years or whatever?

[00:26:00] I remember little snippets, but when you're talking like this, oh my God. There's so much. I'll tell you. I hope this becomes a book. I need the money.

Scott O'Donnell: A miniseries at this rate.

Lee Stevens: Here we go with the slant.

Scott O'Donnell: Here we go.

Lee Stevens: Here we go. The New York comes out.

Scott O'Donnell: A lot of clowning or some years of clowning ...

Lee Stevens: Yeah.

Scott O'Donnell: ... On many shows. At some point, you make the transition from clowning to animals. How did that journey happen? Juggling as well, yeah.  
[00:26:30]

Lee Stevens: I was fabulous on the roller bowler. I was the only guy who could do nothing and look great. Oh, my God. It was fabulous.

Scott O'Donnell: I think that was on your promo material.

Lee Stevens: Absolutely.

Scott O'Donnell: Yeah.

Lee Stevens: Absolutely. The guy who does nothing, but looks good. I did a damn good act.

Scott O'Donnell: Yeah.

Lee Stevens: It was better than Sammy Johnson's. That's another story. It's a different archive.  
[00:27:00] Yeah, so I decided the easiest way to get into the animal business was with dogs because I didn't know where to buy a monkey. I wasn't going to buy an elephant. I started with one little poodle then I got two then I got three. I ended up with six and I was actually on Stu Miller's Magic Show, "Magic Time U.S.A." Merle and Audrey Johnson were the promoters for that. Jack King was the organist. It was fabulous. They still had a big stage show and Stu was the kind of guy the older it was the better it was. He was very old school, so he was trying to reinvent the old Thurston big stage magic, the touring magic show and, in fact, he did it for good or bad or whatever. He did it. They promoted the hell out of it, so it was a good run.  
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[00:28:00] He had quite a lot of people. We were all dedicated. In fact, one of your ring masters beholden to me. Actually, I got him his job here. He was disenchanted on

one of the years I was there and really was disenchanted. I said, "You know, this is what you should be doing. You're tall. You're good looking. You're goofy because you're from the sticks of Arkansas but, other than that, lose your twang. You'll be a hell of a ring master." I think he was here 10 to 12 years. I'm not going to mention his name, but it wasn't Mr. O'Donnell. Yeah and he still lives in town. I hope you see him today.

[00:28:30]

Scott O'Donnell: Still got some twang, too.

Lee Stevens: Peter does? Does he really? "Y'all."

Scott O'Donnell: "Y'all."

Lee Stevens: But he looks good in the top hat. He plays the role well. I'm happy for him. He did good. He was here a long time. He was back on Stu's show. There was a lot of people. Rabbi was there. The Langs were there with their chimp act. They were funny. They were good people. Flo and Irv were really nice people. Bobbie and Janie are, too, and the kids. Just good, old show people. So I did that for ... I was there off and on several years, actually. He ended up taking his own show out without Merle and Audrey. He started doing his own thing and I was still part of that. That's where the dogs came in. We spent, I don't know, three or four weeks at Shrimp's house and, actually, I found a poodle in barbed-wire fence on Highway 24 between Sheldon and Cantlan, Indiana and Illinois. I didn't know what it was.

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I didn't know what it was. It was some white thing jumping and flopping in barbed-wire along the highway and I just pulled off the highway and it ended up being this little three-pound poodle/four-pound poodle who was fabulous. He was my high wire dog. He did great. His name was Myty. Shrimp had a bunch of old ... I guess they were rabbit cages at one point in an old building she had. She had a big farm, so I went and said, "Those old wooden cages, they're just thrown in there. You need them?" "Well, I don't know. Why? You need them?" I said, "Well, I'm going to put my dogs in it." "Well, if you think that'll work, go ahead." I had a little pickup with just the topper on it, but three of those cages fit across the front and two sides, so I kept buying dogs that fill up the cages. When I filled up the cages, I had enough dogs. That's how it started.

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Then it became the Champagne Poodles. I had stopped drinking at that point, already. I'm going a little fast, now, because you people look like you're sleepy, especially this guy. What's his name?

[00:30:30]

Scott O'Donnell: Pete.

Lee Stevens: Pete Shrake? I'm sorry. If I was Harold Alazona, you'd be wide awake. Thanks. So that was the beginning of my dog act. Her husband Gersh was alive at the time, and he was funny. He'd say, "Go for a ride." Okay. He always had a bottle of moonshine or vodka under his seat because she wouldn't let him drink, so I'd have to drive him around until he finished his bottle then we get to the driveway and I'd get out. He'd get in. Like, she couldn't see us through the window, and he'd drive up the lane

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like, "Hi, honey. I'm home." It was fun. Then he took me to a guy that built my first set of props. Not the infamous mirror balls, but just regular props. That was it. I started my animal career.

Scott O'Donnell: Did anybody help you with that or how did you know how to train animals?

[00:31:30]

Lee Stevens: Actually, I bought a dog from a guy named Mr. Lucky in Brooklyn. I can't remember his real name, but his business was Mr. Lucky, and he did a lot of trick dogs. He did "Annie," Annie's dog on Broadway. He did a lot of Bob William's Springer Spaniels for Louis. He trained a lot of the Louis. When Bob was working, he just ... You had five Lou's because, God forbid, something happen. You ain't going to miss a show and he'd switch them out. So if you look at different tapes of Bob William's act ...

Scott O'Donnell: Different Louis.

[00:32:00]

Lee Stevens: ... You'll see different Louis.

Scott O'Donnell: Yeah, a great act.

Lee Stevens: He knows dogs. Yeah.

Scott O'Donnell: [inaudible 00:32:03]

Lee Stevens: It's been tried, but never accomplished because it's like Gaylord. It's the person. The animal is a prop. Gus Augsberg with his monkeys in Vegas long before Barrasini's. Two monkeys, the act was showstopper, absolutely showstopper, but his wife sat in the front row and queued the monkeys. Gus was just a comedian. He just talked. It was the same routine for the monkeys, but he never the same thing twice because every audience was different. He was that quick of a guy. It was a spectacular act, two little monkeys, excellent. Those kind of people, you know, it's just right there.

[00:32:30]

Scott O'Donnell: They got "it."

Lee Stevens: They got "it." They got it.

Scott O'Donnell: It's tough to define "it."

Lee Stevens: Yeah. Well, my "it" was, "Hmm. What I lack in training I'll just bamboozle them or bull shit. So what do I do next? Well, let's get 16 mirror balls." Actually, it's 19 mirror balls at first and have them all sit up on mirror balls, and rhinestone the props, and have fog machines, and bubble machines. I opened with a high dive. Everybody closed with the high dive. Not me, I opened with it. Now, top that. My thing became I always start where everybody finishes, so that's what I did and I just-

[00:33:00]

Scott O'Donnell: As Joyce [inaudible 00:33:27] Bell once told me. "It was the most razzle dazzle dog act I've ever seen."

Lee Stevens: Is that what she said?

Scott O'Donnell: Yeah. She sure did.

Lee Stevens: I was the first person, the first act, that she hired the first year they went out, and she was so thrilled that the Big Apple ... I didn't go with Big Apple. I went with Big Bells instead of Big Apple. Financially, it was a stupid mistake; however, it was a wonderful part of my life being with them, too. Wonderful, wonderful people. I was always on it. I was the first act she booked, the first act that worked in the tent. I opened the show. It was a hell of a show, too.

Scott O'Donnell: It sure was.

[00:34:00]

Lee Stevens: It was a strong show, a very strong show back then. I became Lee Stevens and the Champagne Poodles, and it's funny. This is John Harry's story. May he rest in peace. I knew them, but I didn't know them. We're at Nordmark, and we're playing Sarasota, the infamous Sarasota. Everybody hated it because everybody came to cut you up. I did the act and so on and so on. Now, I knew Laura from Carson and Bonds. We had trouped together. We had a great time. Oh, my God, Carson and Bonds. I'll go back to that, too. John Harriet comes up and I'm kind of walking. He said, "Mr. Stevens." I said, "Yes, sir?" "I'm John Harriet. This is my wife, Mary Ruth." "I'm so honored to meet you. I have a wonderful time with your daughter." He said, "You know, if you ever get any tricks in that act, we're all going to be in trouble."

[00:34:30]

[00:35:00] All I could think, I said, "Mr. Harriet, I don't need them," and I walked away. Fortunately, we became friends. I didn't realize how thin his skin was. I was the topic of show folks for several weeks. Yeah. "I don't need them."

Scott O'Donnell: Well, tell us a little bit about Nordmark because we've done a few of these oral histories lately, and that's a name, and a show that has come up, and very fondly, to a lot of the performers that we have spoken to. They mention it, but they haven't really told us about Nordmark, so if you could ...

[00:35:30]

Lee Stevens: What a wonderful guy.

Scott O'Donnell: ... Give us some context to that, it would be appreciated.

Lee Stevens: Yeah. I joined his show. There was another act that decided they weren't coming back. Fortunately, I just came out of Mexico City with a big show, and I had a horrible, horrible accident. Really, I lost everything I owned except the dogs. It's a prelude to Nordmark. Fortunately, Bill Brinkle was down there as well. He took all his animals out, put them in his house trailer, put my dogs in his dog's cages, and got them back into the States across the Border in one big clump. Jackie Altof and Elkie had the Big Bear Act. They were from Germany, the Circus Altof. They weren't

[00:36:00]

Ringling, so on and so on. Jackie ...

Scott O'Donnell: Jackie's hands that's all I ... Everything I think of Jackie, those.

Lee Stevens: ... His hands.

Scott O'Donnell: Yeah.

[00:36:30]

Lee Stevens: He has a very famous cousin over here, as well. Jackie had all. I had just bought all these mirror balls, and some machines, and so all these special effects, and he had them up. There was an attic over his bears. In actuality, they used to bring poles from Poland in the bear wagons to help them get out of Poland and back to Germany, back to Switzerland to get them out of Poland. They used to lay the people. I don't how many. They'd clamp about 35-40 people on top of the cages, and then they'd put their props and food up in front of it, and they go through all the different countries like that smuggling people back and forth. It's a pretty unique story but, in any case, he got all my props out. I got out of Mexico, "La, la, la, la." Oh, God. See? I have to tell you the story.

[00:37:00]

Jackie had this massive, huge gold bracelet, "The Circus Altof," and he put that up as collateral to the trailer park where we were staying before and after the Mexican debacle, and the guy said, "If you think that much of this guy that you would be willing to give me that bracelet against him paying me, I don't even want a down payment. Just take the motor home. Go back to Florida. Get your life together. Pay me when you can." A true story. It was nice that Jackie did that. Why would he have to? People come in my life that I can't explain. Go back to Nordmark. I get this motor home and I follow Jackie and Elkie with their two rigs back to their place, which Lance Ramos now owns out in Bomb, Florida.

[00:37:30]

[00:38:00]

There we are just 10 acres of fish farms, alligators, snakes, and nothing, but there was an electric pole, and water. They said, "Stay as long as you can. We'll try to regroup." Jackie helped me find a Wells Cargo and then we framed it. Put the dogs in. I bought new cages when you could go to the airport and buy cages for your dogs at that time, so you'd buy the big, jumbo ones. They were cheap because they made their money on the flight, not the cage. Not so anymore. We outfitted the whole thing and, actually, I get a call from Tebow Alexander. God bless him. The guy'd do anything for a cheese sandwich, anything. He carried a tube of KY, lipstick, and anything for a cheese sandwich. The Five Theatrical Booking Agency. Let me rephrase that. He's been everywhere.

[00:38:30]

Scott O'Donnell: Twice.

Lee Stevens: Two times.

Scott O'Donnell: Yeah.

[00:39:00]

Lee Stevens: No. God bless Tebow Alexander. He called. "You want to go on the show? You need work?" "Yes." "Okay. You start three days, Huntington, Virginia." "No. There's no Huntington, Virginia. West Virginia?" "Yes, West Virginia. Okay. How much you want?" "How much are you going to give me?" "How much you want?" "How much are you going to give me." We went round and round. I show up in Huntington with the Nordmark Show and Heinz was the manager then, Heinz and Patty were there so we kind of, "Oh, my God." They really didn't remember me. Why would they? That was nice. A hell of a band, we had a nine-piece band in high school gyms, two spotlights. I mean, theatrical curtains, and it was spectacular. For what it was, oh my God. Overproduced? Oh, it was fabulous. Gaylord and Belinda were there, may she rest in peace. Amal and Debbie Getchy from the Getchys. Lola Dobridge and son, they were there.

[00:39:30]

[00:40:00] I can't remember. Who else? Joe and Betty Eddie, they were there. Heinz was always trying to outdo Bill Garden and Hal and the Hippodrome. They was all competitors in that school show [inaudible 00:40:14] show market. Nordmark had just come out of Trinidad. Went with nothing. Borrowed money. Came back flush and got an office. Got a staff. Got a thing going and he was rocking and rolling.

[00:40:30] They were just pumping it out. Jim, if you had a promoter that was stealing money or screwing up stuff, he would spend the last dime he had. He'd borrow money from Bill Garden to chase you to hell to bring you to court. He did not play. He was a guy who was just from nowhere, just did a lousy, little trampoline act. Just nowhere and built this whole little empire because his life turned around. His morals and scruples turned around.

[00:41:00] He realized, "If you do it right, you'll 35 times the money than you'll make doing it wrong. Why be a shyster when you could do it right?" He did it. Everything was done right. Everything was done right, partly because of Heinz's influence and push, but Jim still hadn't come up with the money. When it came time for him, I was going to buy leopards and do a leopard act before the baboons, and while I was going to get leopards there was a box full of 10 to 12 little, baby baboons in it.

[00:41:30] There was an old guy named Ken Fess, who was somewhat of an animal dealer, somewhat, whatever. All these little monkeys came from a lab that closed in Maryland, and he ended up getting them. I find out later, but that's where they all came from.

He said, "You know? Everybody does leopard. People do a leopard act. What are you going to do? You going to reinvent that?" He said, "Take these monkeys and do something with these monkeys." I said, "Are you crazy?" He said, "No. Take the monkeys." I said, "Really?" He said, "Yeah. They're a lot more expensive than the leopards are." "Okay, fine." So I went to Jim and I was still paying off the accident and getting my shit together." Then I said, "Jim, you've had chimps before," which he did. Rafael Vasquez had a chimp act there and so did Tommy [inaudible 00:42:18]. Brandon? Yeah. She had chimps. I said, "They're not chimps, but I'd like to these monkeys." I said, "Can you front the money?" He said, "You think you could do it? He started." I said, "Yeah, yeah, yeah." "You're going to put them in the show?" "Yeah, yeah, yeah."

[00:42:00]

[00:42:30]

[00:43:00] He said, "All right. Go for it." Anything I asked him like that, which wasn't a lot, absolutely was 100% behind you. He was just a good guy. He really, really was a good guy. He got shafted by so many people because he was a good guy. He had a big heart. He had a little drinking problem, but it really didn't cloud his business decisions, and he surrounded himself with good people. He told me that. He said, "Lee, I am who I am because of the people around me." He said, "See that guy over there?" I won't say his name. "Yeah." "Well, I pay him this much and you know why I pay him that much? Because he makes me this much and he keeps me out of jail, and he keeps the show on the road. If I didn't have him, you wouldn't be here, so always take care of the people around you and have the best people you can around you, and you can't fail."

[00:43:30] He's right. [inaudible 00:43:29] it's right. He had that philosophy. We took a show, had an opportunity. I produced a show for Provigo, a supermarket chain in Canada. It was like the Kroger of Canada. They dogged me and dogged me, and dogged me, and I said, "Okay. I'll take the plunge." I went to Jim and I wanted to buy all the equipment. He said, "You know what? You can just take it. I'm not using it. The show's done." He was done. He said, "Just take whatever you need that's in the warehouse. You need the truck? Just take whatever you need. Don't worry about it. Don't pay me nothing. If it works out, give me something. If it don't work out, you had a shot." That's the kind of guy he was. He didn't have to do that. You know?

[00:44:00]

Scott O'Donnell: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Lee Stevens: The show was we worked six weeks out of the eight we were contracted for. The guy who promoted it did a tremendous job. The brother-in-law of the owner of the marketing company did not go get a corporate sign off from Provigo. We had all those individual stores paying for the show as part of a promotion, but they never had the corporate okay, and the guy deliberately sabotaged this other guy. That's their story. I paid everybody. I paid the clowns \$1,500 a week back then and fuel. Vince Pagliano ...

[00:44:30]

Scott O'Donnell: Wappo.

Lee Stevens: ... What a hell of a funny man. He's funny.

Scott O'Donnell: Uh-huh (affirmative).

[00:45:00]  
Lee Stevens: He's funny. he's not out of makeup. he's like talking to a greasy door nob, but when he's in makeup. No. I'm only kidding. He's a funny man, a nice guy, and he had some young guy with him and they're working well together, and it's always good. Is that my time up?

Scott O'Donnell: No.

Lee Stevens: Oh, okay. I thought it was running on too long.

Scott O'Donnell: No, not at all.

Lee Stevens: I'm kind of bouncing around. I can't help it.

Scott O'Donnell: No. That's okay.

Lee Stevens: You bring up a name and it just ...

Scott O'Donnell: I know.

[00:45:30]

Lee Stevens: ... But Jim was wonderful. He was really wonderful. I saw him just weeks before he died with Dennis House and just he was in a bad way. He went through a lot of personal situations that were not good, and it took a toll on him. It killed him. It killed him. I was happy to see him again at the end of this life, as well as Stu Miller. We had our differences and he can be a very vindictive little person, a very mean person, and if you got to know him, you knew why. I took the time to find out and before he died, I went on his deathbed; I went up and he asked me to forgive him. I said, "Of course, of course." The last thing he said was, "Don't ever be the kind of person that makes your children want to change their last name." He started crying. I started crying and I think he died the next morning. They come and go.

[00:46:00]

[00:46:30]

Scott O'Donnell: Yeah.

Lee Stevens: I don't know why.

Scott O'Donnell: Yeah.

Lee Stevens: They just come and go in your life. Actually, we just inducted him into the Showman's Hall of Fame ...

Scott O'Donnell: Nice.

Lee Stevens: ... In Gibsonton, so it was nice. I did the induction, which was hard. It was bittersweet, but I was glad I did it.

Scott O'Donnell: Yeah.

Lee Stevens: It was a cleansing for me.

Scott O'Donnell: Wow.

[00:47:00]

Lee Stevens: They don't make Exlax. I would have took that, too. Do you love me folks?

Scott O'Donnell: Is thing on? So you got a box of baboons.

Lee Stevens: Yeah. Actually, no. I got three. It was just three.

Scott O'Donnell: Three of them?

Lee Stevens: Was all I could handle and they flew from Tampa to Atlanta, Georgia on an Easter Sunday and I had already just went to Kmart and bought all these little clothes for these monkeys. I said, "Oh, it's Easter Sunday." We stayed at this clay pit across the street from Six Flags, Owl Head Campground. I went to the airport and picked up this wooden crate with holes in it with "Live Animals" all over it and brought it back. They said, "Oh, they got monkeys." I open it up and we're going to put dresses on them. When I opened the box, the little fuckers went everywhere. I don't know. It took us four hours to get them back out of the hills of Atlanta. They opened the box. They saw the light. They shit and ran out. That's what they do.

[00:47:30]

[00:48:00] Well, I finally got them all. I had these nice lab cages that were really very nice, actually.

They were oversized. They were quite comfortable for them and I got each one in it. All they wanted to do is hug each other, and so here we go. I put the three little ones together and they were all huggy kissy. I named them Zsa Zsa, and Eva, and Magda Gabor. I had all these little clothes and little shoes, and little booties. I got one dress on one and a little pair of boots, and she ended up winning the fight, and I got the scars to prove it, so that didn't work. Actually, it wasn't that long. It was about six weeks or so just talking, handling, poking, feeding, nothing, just little things. I tried to think like a monkey and treat them like I was a monkey treating a monkey. Made it a lot easier.

[00:48:30]

Instead of trying to treat them like a person treating an animal, think like they do. What are they like? Make the sounds they make and all that stuff, and learn their little idiosyncrasies. That worked out real well and after that it was just ... The tricks are the easy part. Getting the little bastards to give them your hand or not to eat you, it's like they're Gremlins. You give them too much water, they come alive, but that was the beginnings of the monkeys with Nordmark and I went to Shrimp's house. We had, whatever it was, a month off and I went back to Shrimp's house in one of her buildings. I got these old, cheap kitchen stools at a Goodwill or something and painted them. Made them all bamboo and after the first time at practice you had to take all the stuffing off and all the vinyl off because they just ate it. It was just shredded.

[00:49:00]

[00:49:30]

It was the beginnings or semblance of the great Baboon Act that it has become, and I went from three. We worked 15 at one time. We only did that for a very short period. It was just a personal thing just to say I did it, but we had 15 in the ring. We scaled it down. We kept 12 in the ring for a long time. We had 12 out there and then we scaled it down to nine was about the optimum because you had other animals working on beside you. I didn't want to take a chance of screwing somebody else's act up or having them say something or whatever. Why put all that stress on? It didn't need it.

[00:50:00]

[00:50:30]

Scott O'Donnell: Yeah. Tell us about how you achieved your dream in getting to Ringling Brothers.

Lee Stevens: Oh, God. When I started sleeping with what's his name ... Put the pen away. It was somebody in the concession department, but I won't mention any names that live in Idaho. No. Actually, we were working. I'm jumping ahead and back, so I apologize. The years with Ian Garden were spectacular.

[00:51:00]

Scott O'Donnell: That was seals and ...

Lee Stevens: No, just the first time dogs and baboons.

Scott O'Donnell: Okay.

Lee Stevens: The seals came. When the seals came, we were married already and had our first ... No. She was pregnant with our first kid, with Alexander.

Scott O'Donnell: Let's stop there for a second because you're at a very important part of your life, I think. Tell us who "she" is and how you ...

Lee Stevens: Just a girl who works for me.

Scott O'Donnell: ... Met "she".

Lee Stevens: It's the girl that works for me. It's the girl that made me who I am to tell you the truth. Her name is Judy. Judy, you want her to tell her story or you want me to tell it?

Scott O'Donnell: Both.

Lee Stevens: Both?

Scott O'Donnell: You're both here. We're blessed with it.

Lee Stevens: Well, I'll tell you the truth. She'll make up stuff. I have a better memory. I was working for Ian. It was the middle of winter, something. It was bitter cold and he made arrangements for the animal acts to stay, Joseph, Mark, and Johnny Weldi, myself to stay at African Lion Safari, so we all pulled in. Oh, my God. What a trip from hell. I was following Highway 6, which becomes a one-lane road over the escarpment, which I didn't know. I didn't know there was two Highway 6s. I don't speak Canadian.

Scott O'Donnell: Eh?

[00:52:30]

Lee Stevens: Eh? It says, "A-hole 6," and I took the wrong one. It was this blizzard from hell, unbelievable blizzard from hell. There was no road, so I just had a girl named Deedee who was carrying Christiani's niece with me trying to find a Safari. There was no GPS. There was no cell phones, none of that back then. I'm just driving and driving, and driving. Finally, I came to a turn I couldn't really make it and people came out of a house and said, "Where are you trying to go with that thing? You

[00:53:00] can't go nowhere with that thing." I said, "I'm trying to get to the African Lion Safari." "Oh." They just stood there shaking their head in the snow. The guy came out and he helped me make this turn around this corner and said, "Just keep going." He said, "You might get there and you might not," but just keep going. Don't turn. Just keep going."

[00:53:30] We ended up [inaudible 00:53:18], and the next morning daybreak came, and I'm outside in my fabulous white parka with white fox trim, in my white boots with the white fox trim. I looked good. I was Liberace on ice. Let me tell you.

Scott O'Donnell: Yeah. I was going to say, "If Liberace was an Eskimo," yeah.

Lee Stevens: On ice. I was fabulous. I see trudging through the corn fields this big, old gray-green thing. I'm looking. I'm looking. I'm looking and I say to the guy that ran the elephant department that time. I said, "What the hell is that?" He said, "Oh, that's just Judy. She's the bird lady." "Oh, okay." Then Judy went by and didn't really pay any attention, just trudging, and she went in this little building. I said, "What's in there?" He said, "Well, that's where the birds are." I said, "Oh." He said, "They have to keep them inside because it's heated." I said, "Oh, heat." That's when I went in and, "Hello. I'm the guy in white and I'm freezing my ass off." She said, "Come on in. I'll show you the birds." So we did. She wouldn't have sex with me that day. It took a while. It was just chitchat. That's the first time I met her and saw her.

[00:54:00]

[00:54:30]

Then that summer she worked "Birds of Prey" and was quite good at it, actually. She was working at Park Safari. It was a sister park at one time over in Quebec. She met the Rosares were there with the chimps and horses. The Riggs were there with the polar bear and the bear act. I don't know. Was Stu Miller in there with the magic show? It might have been. Yeah. He [inaudible 00:55:03] out Ken and Bernie, a nice guy. How much lower can you go than 400 a week? How low can you go? She met Pam and all these circus people and it was all nicey-nicey and I think Pam's mom died that summer, and Pam had left so Judy took Pam's place in the act because she grew up on horses and her parents' farm was right across the street.

[00:55:00]

[00:55:30] They only have 200 acres. The Safari has 2,000 so by comparison it was the little place, a patch of green over there. That's what Judy did and the following winter I'm back with Ian. The Rosares were were on the show that year. Kay was there. Pam and Roger were there. It was great. She came to Toronto to visit Roger and Pam to see the chimps, and the horses, and she fell in love with the animals, too.

[00:56:00] They talked her into quitting school. She was going through university, just to finish the season because we needed somebody and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, whatever they told her. Come and have fun. Come and get drunk. Drink champagne in the morning, all that. As you nod your head, you've been there. She did.

[00:56:30] I was just wondering through the building and there she was shoveling horse shit and playing with chimpanzees. Some more people quit on the riding act and they needed more people on the riding act, and I always told Roger and Pam, "If something happens, just give me a call." Easter break I went back to Staten Island. I drove the whole rig down. It was parked in my parents' driveway. It was fine. I got a

call Saturday. Or was it Good Friday? It might have been Good Friday. Anyway, to come up to Eerie because they need me to go in the act with them and practice. "Oh, okay." So whatever it was, I left Staten Island in a blizzard, drove in a blizzard. Got to Eerie, Pennsylvania in a hellacious blizzard. Parked in this driveway of this old farmhouse, which it's not what I thought. It was the Rosare Farm.

Half the truck was in the road. We finally got it up out of the road and she was there. So now we're going to practice the riding act. I told Roger I used to work for Hannafitz, so he said, "Okay. No problem. You know what you're doing." "Yeah." I was on a horse once in my life, one time in the Boy Scouts, and the son of a bitch ran through the woods, and I never was on another horse as long as I lived. Horses are for eating if you're in another country. Now, we have to ride these 40-year-old whatever they were big, giant horses from this farm to that farm in a hellacious snow/ice blizzard. The cables are falling off the highway. They're snapping. There's people dying. There's cars all in the ditches and it's snowing, and it's snowing, and I'm all bundled up, but I look good because I had my white parka and my white boots.

I did everything, but sit side saddle because I was posing because I didn't know what I was doing. I didn't want him to know I couldn't ride, and Doris Day always sat sideways, so we get to this barn where half the roof was missing, so it was snowing in the barn. They had a ring set up. Roger says, "Okay. Everybody practice fork jumps." You know what a fork jump is? Neither did I, but I had to make believe I did, so I said, "Roger." I said, "You know, I've worked for Hannafitz and they're Irish, and you guys are Italian. Show me how you do a fork jump because I don't think it's the same as Hannafitz." Roger said, "What?" I said, "You show me your fork jump and I want to make sure I do it the way you do it."

He did it, and I said, "Oh, shit. There's no way." He said, "Okay. Here comes the horse," and Brownie or Frosty? She would know. I think it was Brownie comes in and he was heaving. He was 45 years old. I think he pulled wagons for the Goalmar Brothers. The horse comes in and he ran around once, and stops because that's all he did in the act because he couldn't do anymore. I mean, they took care of him. Don't get me wrong, but he was a hundred-and-something years old. He had Hagenbeck-Wallace on his ass. Here comes the horse and Roger said, "Just pat him on the ass. Get your timing. Turn." He said, "Don't do the Christiani skip. Just turn and go. You don't have time for that. You hit the springboard and just do it." "Okay." I said, "Show me that one more time." Now, he's a little bit looking at me. Like, "What are you talk" ... I said, "Just show me one more time."

He says, "Okay." Hit the horse on the ass. The horse came around. Simple, done, and the horse just stops because the horse is done. Their horse already did two times more than it needed to. He says, "Okay. Your turn." I said, "Well, allow me to get more comfortable." I take off my jacket then I take off my vest. I took off my glove. I had a little pair of tights on. I had a pair of white tights and hot pants and ballet slippers. He just stood there and he shit his pants. He shit his pants. He said, "Have you ever done this? What the hell are you doing?" I said, "I never rode a horse in my life, but you needed somebody and, now, here I am. I'm your guy." Oh,

my God. I did the best fucking horse fork jumps you ever saw. I was so good it took Judy, and Roger to be on the inside and outside of the ring just to catch me in the air to pull me down.

[01:01:00] I just floated. I was fabulous. That's all I had to do. Then the hard part was when the horse stopped was not to fall. Everybody was on the horse first. I didn't know that. I had plenty of room. Now, you got four people. I was the fifth person, so I had to get up and get right on the crown of its ass. Judy was on the inside. Roger was on the out to make sure I stayed on, and then the girls dig their feet into your feet to hold you from sliding off. That's how you hold on. Everybody digs their feet into each other. Okay. Now, she's got to get ... Judy's got to get on, so the horse goes around one more time and up she comes and I have to hold the hair of his tail, and she's sitting on my fist. I still have the scar from her ass on my fist. See that? That's where I wear that jewelry to cover the scar.

[01:02:00] I'm holding her and then Roger comes, and he dive-bombed us, and he lays across our shoulders. You know what it's like when a 200-pound guy runs into you and the whole shit goes? It's like the tower is coming down, rocking. It was two chimps, and then you had Roger up there then you had Kenya, his chimp came flying out from under the trampoline. She got on top of Roger, and then a little baby bastard came out of nowhere, another chimp, and climbed on top of her. I was dying. You know how hard it is to be good looking with all that shit on top of you? It's very difficult. Fortunately, I survived the rehearsal. Now, we get to Kitchener, Ontario, the big opening. I'm shitting my pants. I really am because all of us are going to fall down because of me.

[01:03:00] In the meantime, Judy and I started having an affair, a light affair but, nevertheless, an affair. She banged on my trailer desperate and I let her in. She wanted to know if my back was okay. I said, "Oh, no. It's killing me. Could you" ... She says, "Would you like me to rub it?" I said, "Oh, yeah." So she did and I did, and we both rubbed, and here we are 30 years later. It was wonderful. We met on the back of a galloping horse is how we met. We get to Kitchener and we're doing this. We're Arabians, right? We're in Joe and Peggy Zopie's old wardrobe, Roger's parents. It used to be Roger, Denise, and Dennis were the act, and then Joe and Peggy Zopie was the Riding Zopie, not the Alberta Zopies because one was Zope and one was Zopie.

Scott O'Donnell: Yes.

Lee Stevens: [01:03:30] The same damn family, one just sounded better in print. We were Arabians. I had the turban and the big simitar. Mr. Letterman, am I done?

Peter Shrake: We're okay. No. I was double checking.

Lee Stevens: Okay. Folks that's Pete Shrake, the guy who screwed up the first tape. Yes. He is the curator of the library here and the archivist. Did I say that right?

Peter Shrake: Yes.

Lee Stevens: I bet you can't even spell that. Don't try. I had this big simitar. I was good. I'd come in, fabulous good. Scared to shit. I didn't know what to do, but I looked good and I was screaming, "Ala, la, la!" You know how they ... I can't do it no more. I smoke too much, but all the muslims started praying when I came in. That's how good I was. This one comes through the curtain Roman riding, Judy, Roman riding with Kenya on her foot and ... What's his name, Newton? It was Newton, was a baby; Newton standing in her shoulders riding around the track and they come into the ring. Fabulous. I was out there swinging my sword, and all that shit. I didn't do nothing, but swing a sword the whole time. That was the finale. Well, this chimp decided, Kenya, Roger's chimp, and they had nine chimps, but this one was Roger's, hated me because she loved Judy.

[01:04:30]

Now, she's trying to kill me any chance she can because she has to take me out to get to Judy. Well, the chimp was a nurse in the riding act, and she was underneath this big mini trampoline that Roger did. Roger was fantastic, a tremendous performer, a fabulous clown. Really, was outstanding. Really, was a fabulous performer. The chimp would come out. Roger did this thing where you fell. He spun on his head long before break dancing and lay out on the ring. The chimp would run out in the nurse's outfit. Take his temperature. Give him a shot. Wave a flag. Give him oxygen and give him a big kiss. Then he'd shake with the chimp, and then she'd run back under the tramp, and then Roger would get up, "Ta-da!" Then we get ready for the finale. Here comes Brownie, the one-time horse.

[01:05:00]

[01:05:30]

Oh, now I'm shitting my pants because I'm wearing slippery slippers, and all this stuff, and all these people are going, "Hey, ya, ya, ya!" [inaudible 01:05:39] got a 40-piece band and there's 15 spotlights [inaudible 01:05:42] sits in his director's chair with his arms crossed like, "Show me something, stupid." The pressure is on. Well, here goes a girl. Here comes another girl. There goes another girl. There comes me, fabulous. I look good. I hit it right where I was supposed to. Here we go around again. I grab the horse by the ass because Judy's going to come flying. She comes out. Okay. We're good. Now, one more time. Here comes Roger. Now I'm dying because we're going over sideways. Her ass is sliding down my fist between the horse's tail, and my arm is going numb. You know muscle burns? You know how it really burns? That's how it was.

[01:06:00]

We're going this way, and we're getting ready to fall over and, all of a sudden, here comes the wife of King Kong from under the trampoline. I'm telling you if Gargantua was alive, she'd scare him. She came out with her hands up like every hair on her body to kill.

[01:06:30]

Judy Stevens: Off the top of it.

Lee Stevens: Screaming jumps up the front of the horse, climbs over everybody, gets on top of Roger. I had my hand between Roger's cheeks of his ass to hold him up. I had the happy part. I'm grabbing some of his meat and grabbing his ass, and now the chimp decides to eat my ... Well, she started with my thumb then she had my whole hand in her mouth, and I had about up to my elbow down her throat as she was chewing

[01:07:00]

[01:07:30] on me because she wanted to kill me. I think I only did the act one more time and I retired from ... That was a fabulous career in bareback riding, but I had to retire due to unforeseen circumstances. Between my hand up Roger's ass and my hand up her ass, and a chimp trying to kill me, fuck bareback riding. Thus goes my introduction to my wife.

Scott O'Donnell: Yes.

Lee Stevens: Now, we met Easter Sunday formally, basically, or that week, and I was broke already because I was buying stereos and jewelry, and I was having fun, a white fur coat. She had \$3,000.

[01:08:00]

Judy Stevens: [inaudible 01:08:01] pay.

Lee Stevens: Yeah. She had all the money from being Roger and Pam's groom. I said, "Come with me. I had to go do their Canadian B Circuit. I said, "Come on. Come with me. Let's go." She goes, "Oh, no. I can't. I have to go back to school." I said, "What are you talking about? You either love me or you don't." "Oh, I love you so much." I said, "Well, then come with me." "Oh, but I can't." I said, "Well, if you don't come now, you're going to see me again. That's it. Done. I don't play games. Light switch. You're either with me or you're not, plus you got \$3,000. Don't you?" "Well, about that." Okay. I didn't have the gas money to get out of Toronto.

[01:08:30]

Judy Stevens: Two animals acts.

Lee Stevens: Oh, yeah. I made serious money. Ian was very good to me. Ian Garden, a wonderful producer, fabulous showman. He took pride in everything that hit that floor.

Scott O'Donnell: Yeah?

[01:09:00]

Lee Stevens: God forbid if you left out a prop, and it was doors, tough shit. You better figure something out because you're not going-

Scott O'Donnell: I always said it was the Garden Brothers of Canada or the Ringling Brothers of Canada.

Lee Stevens: Oh, it was.

Scott O'Donnell: Yeah?

Lee Stevens: It was. It absolutely was.

Scott O'Donnell: Yeah?

Lee Stevens: As was [Atite 01:09:12] in Mexico.

Scott O'Donnell: Yes. Right.

Lee Stevens: Every country has their, and Garden Brothers, absolutely in that period.