

2015 12 01 Tuesday Todd Robbins The Master of the Macabre

AB: "Tonight is going to be really weird.

Todd Robbins is really weird.

And I ... I say that as a weird person myself – he's really weird.

Anyway, you'll find out."

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AB: "Coming up in a moment, ah, is Todd Robbins.

### TODD ROBBINS

And he is a New York City-based performer and creative artist, who has spent decades now specializing in arcane forms of popular entertainment, offbeat amusements, and intriguing deceptions.

Throughout his life he has been immersed in the dark worlds of sideshows, magic, con artists, and seances. In addition to being a featured performer, Todd has often been called upon to speak as an authority on, well, all things unusual – that would be us, right? And has been a consultant on numerous TV shows and movies.

He has appeared on more than one hundred (100) shows , including *Masters of Illusion*, *The Tonight Show With Jay Leno*, *The, ah, Late Show With David Letterman*, *A Thousand Ways To Die* (which I'm embarrassed to say I've watched many episodes of), ah, *Good Morning, America*. Currently host of, ah, *Two Nightmares on Investigation Discovery*, a show presenting bizarre true tales of mayhem, that all have an erotic twist, possibly one that could, well, happen to you.

So, Todd Robbins is very weird.

You have ... you have no idea how weird, but you will.

Do you know anybody that eats light bulbs for real?

He eats light bulbs ... for real ... crunch, crunch, crunch (!)"

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AB: "Here, ladies and gentlemen, is Todd Robbins, ah, from New York City.

Hi, Todd."

- TR: "Hello, Art. It's an honor to be on the air with you."
- AB: "Well, it's an honor to have you on, ah, although that is yet to be really determined as the night rolls on." (Art chuckles).
- TR: "That's true."
- AB: "Um ..."
- TR: "That's true."
- AB: "... okay, so ..."
- TR: "Lemme ... lemme just ... lemme just say that it's ... it's an honor to be on with you, because you're a true original. But I have to say, it is one of the greatest honors of my life that the fact that you find what I do *weird*. You that have encountered everything and have met everyone and have been to the ... the four corners of our world, and found all the strange things ... to think what I do is unusual, I find that a ... a high honor and high praise indeed."
- AB: "Well, then definitely feel honored, 'cause, I mean, what you do is weird.  
A lot of it is just, you know, really, really interesting, and right down, ah, sort of the path that I travel on a nightly basis.  
But yeah, some of what 'chu do is weird, Todd, you gotta admit, right?"
- TR: "It's ... I like to jokingly say: 'It's a pathetic plea for attention, but it gets it.'"
- AB: "Hmm ... hmm.  
Yes, I ... I watched *A Thousand Ways To Die*."
- TR: "'Umm-hmm."
- AB: "You ... you know, I'm kinda curious about that show since you have apparent involvement with it, huh?"
- TR: "Umm-hmm."
- AB: "Okay, so *A Thousand Ways To Die* was pretty brutal stuff, and usually it showed or re-enacted, ah, these horrible, horrible, horrible deaths!  
Um, I remember one they were ... this guy was cutting in the ceiling. I can't remember ... he was gonna spy on somebody, I believe it was. And

he was cutting and cutting, and cut around ... and round and round – it was in the bathroom, right? So he could spy on this girl, I guess.”

TR: “Umm-hmm.”

AB: “And, ah, and what happened is he cut too far and the bathtub fell on him.”

TR: “Yeah.”

AB: “Killed him, yeah.”

TR: “Yeah, it ... it’s ... it’s just amazing, ah, the ... the depths of, ah, ridiculousness that, ah, we find in human behavior.”

AB: “And depravity.”

TR: “Yeah, yeah.”

AB: (laughs).

TR: “Often ... often hand in hand.”

AB: “Yes indeed, I’m sure.

Um, so, you are originally from, so, ah, southern California? Is that right?”

TR: “Yeah, yeah. That ... that explains why, for a lot of people, why I do the unusual things that I do, but it goes a little further than that.

I grew up in the Long Beach, California area, ah, kinda on the outskirts of the town there and sorta on the border with Orange County.

And, ah, Long Beach ... a mixed town; it had the downtown area ... had, ah, kinda seen better days.”

AB: “Hmpf.”

TR: “And it sprawled into the ... the former farm and, ah, the reason it was called Orange County was because of all the orange groves.”

AB: “I know, but who moves from California *east* to New York?

You obviously ... you did.”

TR: “Yeah, I did, because you ... you know that was part of it. In growing up there in the suburban area, it was exactly what my parents wanted. They

grew up in the Depression, they fought in World War 2, and they were looking for *'Pleasant.'*

They were looking for something that was clean, that was safe, that was quiet."

AB: "Yeah."

TR: "It was, you know, the American Dream. It was what they had fought all their lives for and dreamt of. And ... and they had it.

And growing up there – it was pleasant. It had everything you could possibly want ... *except character.*

Everything was sort of manufactured. The lawns were all manicured and landscaped. And the houses were all uniform. And ..."

AB: "Heh."

TR: "... you know, it's ... there's a reason out of this environment came things like 'Grunge Rock' and ..."

AB: "Oh, yes!"

TR: "... and excessive drug use.

To me ... I didn't turn in that direction. But what happened was I was just always interested in kind of, ah, other things ... things of the past that people had forgotten about and sort of discarded.

And ... what happened was a, ah, I was fascinated by old show business.

I would, ah, had bronchitis when I was a kid growing up and would stay at home. And the local stations played these wonderful old black-and-white movies from the ..."

AB: "Hmm."

TR: "... ah, the thirties and forties (1930s – 1940s). And they often repackaged some of the silent films – put on a soundtrack and sound effects to it.

And so I ended up growing up, you know, watching Charlie Chaplin and Harold Lloyd, and Laurel and Hardy, and W.C. Fields, and the great comedians, and all the great classic films. And I just found this more interesting than what was coming our way at ... at the local, ah ... ah, multiplex."

AB: “Hey, look at more interesting than what’s going on in radio today.”

TR: “Oh yeah, very much so.

Very, I mean ... oh, you get into radio, because, you know, this is the medium of the imagination. You’re printing word pictures into the minds and hearts and souls of ... of people listening ... .”

AB: “I know, but a lot of that’s gone, Todd. It’s gone.”

TR: “Oh ...”

AB: “It’s gone.”

TR: “... it’s true. It’s true.”

AB: “Replaced by formatic radio ... everything’s the same.

Anyway, um, yeah, so ...”

TR: [Unintelligible – ‘We’ve lost that’ (?)].

AB: “... you went from ...”

TR: “Well, I’ll tell you what the real turning point was. When I was ten (10) years old, a magic shop opened in our neighborhood ...”

AB: “Ah!”

TR: “... in a little strip mall, a little dingy, little strip mall. And I ... I went in there – and I had never been in any place like this – and there were these shelves filled with unusual paraphernalia. They were specifically designed to deceive the senses, to create illusion. **And I just found it great!**

And I would go there on Saturday afternoons and take magic lessons, a little sleight of hand ...”

AB: “Hmpf.”

TR: “... and, ah, buy tricks there. And I’d hang out.”

AB: “Ah.”

TR: “The thing I enjoyed most ... it was almost like a little clubhouse. There were a bunch old-timers, who used ta hang out there and they would sit

and, ah, do card tricks for each other and smoke unfiltered Camels [cigarettes] and swap lies.”

AB: “Right.”

TR: “These guys were ancient. They were like forty (40) years old!”

AB: (laughs!)

TR: “And, ah, you know, here’s a kid just kind of ... just taking all this character in. **And it instilled in me a desire to really find real magic in our world.**

And so I saw all the magic I could. And I would watch all the variety shows, which you know, *Ed Sullivan* and *The Hollywood Palace*, and even the talk shows like *Merv Griffin* and things often had variety performers.

And I would wait to see the magic acts.

And then I would see whatever I could live. And a carnival came to our neighborhood. And there on the midway between the rides, that had been approved by bribed safety inspectors, and the games you couldn’t win, there was this large white tent with colorful banners out front that depicted strange unusual people doing remarkable things – *it was the Sideshow (!)*

And there was a guy standing out front, the outside talker – people called him a ‘barker’ – but the correct term is a ‘outside talker.’ And they would ... he would talk people into seeing the show: ‘Buy a ticket and come in.’ And one of the acts he was talking about and pitching was the magic act, so I went in to see the magic act.

And it wasn’t that impressive that, but the guy swallowing a sword, someone eating fire, someone lying down on a bed of nails – these things captured my imagination because ...”

AB: “Umm-hmm.”

TR: “... this was all real. There was no deception here. The sword was real, the fire was hot, the nails were sharp, and it was extraordinary ability beyond the capabilities of the average person. And if you think about that, that’s a pretty good definition of ‘*real magic.*’

And it turned out one of the guys had worked in a sideshow and he could teach me how to eat fire. And I learned that and also learned a wonderful act called the ‘Blockhead Act,’ which is the ability to take a large nail and

hammer it into the center of your nose right into the nasal passage. (AB gasps).

And, ah, you know, my doctor said: 'I needed more iron.'

And I ... I learned how to do that. And I also wanted to learn all the back story. I wanted to know where he learned it and where it came from and all that.

So I started ..."

AB: "Can I ... can I stop you, Todd, and ..."

TR: "Sure!"

AB: "... you know, I know ... I don't even know where to stop you ... um ..."

TR: (laughs).

AB: "With the nose thing, for example ..."

TR: "Yeah!"

AB: "... um, okay so for example, to drive a nail into your nose ..."

TR: "Yeah."

AB: "... for real, or is it an illusion?"

TR: "No, it's real. The ... it's ... it goes straight back into the nasopharynx. It goes into the air passage into the top of the throat. It looks impossible! And it's all based upon, ah ... ah, a principle of ... of anatomy. And since most people slept through Anatomy [class], it seems like a miracle!"

AB: "And if you get it wrong?"

TR: "Well you get it wrong, you ... you ... 'That's All Folks!'"

Ah, that's the thing. There's a risk in all of this and so I was very fortunate to learn the proper technique, because if you ... there's many places that nail can go, there's only one (1) place it should."

AB: "No doubt."

TR: "Yeah. So you have to really learn the technique behind it. And learn how to be ... how to do it from someone who knows what they're doing. It is

very much the old style of ... of, ah, you know, the mentor and apprentice. It's really ..."

AB: "How ... how many beginners get it wrong?"

TR: "Well, the sad fact is there are a number of people who have seen me on the internet do it and – along with the other things that I do – and just decide: 'Oh, I'm gonna do it.'

And I get emails from people saying: 'Okay, I ... I wanta hammer a nail into my nose. What should I ... what should I do?'"

AB: (laughs).

TR: "And I say that: 'You should stop!'"

AB: (laughing) "Y-y-yeah!"

TR: "Um, because they don't know what they're doing and they're going to end up hurting themselves.

Um, it's one of the reasons I started up a sideshow school in Coney Island, ah, many years ago. To pass these techniques on so that people ... these ... these traditions are carried on and they're carried on properly so people don't hurt themselves."

AB: "Well, you know, shows how bad I am.

There are some people I know, that if they were about to try that, I'd say: 'Yeah? Cool! Go ahead.'"

TR: "Go for it!"

AB: "That's right." (laughs).

TR: (laughing). "Yeah. You know, they ... they ... it improves the gene pool."

AB: "Well ... all right."

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AB: "So, what is the Magic Castle in Los Angeles?"

TR: "Ahh! The Magic Castle is a private club for magicians, that it is in a beautiful Victorian house that's on a hillside there in Hollywood right above the old Chinese Theatre, which was originally Grauman's Chinese Theatre.

And right above that, ah, the next block up on the hillside is this great old house, ah, that was started up in 1963 by two (2) brothers, who were, ah, sort of amateur magicians and had a great love of it. And their father was a magician.

And they started up the Academy of Magical Arts.”

AB: “Hmpf.”

TR: “And it is just this wonderful place that ’cha go in this little tiny room and there’s a receptionist there to make sure that everyone is properly attired. You have to wear a coat and tie for men, and women have to be in, ah, very dressed up, ah, preferably dresses, but you know it’s ... it’s a little more flexible these days.

And then once you are – [they] make sure that everyone’s over twenty-one (21) – you go over to a bookcase and there’s a little ceramic owl with, ah, glowing eyes and you say to the owl ... you whisper: ‘Open Sez-A-Me,’ and a bookcase slides back (AB laughs) and you enter this wonderful world where anything can happen and it usually does.

Ah, it’s been going on for about fifty-three (53) years now, and it is just an amazing ... a wonderful place. There’s theatres all over it! There’re magicians doing card tricks for each other.

There’s a little music room – a little parlor where they have a piano ...”

AB: “So is ... it’s ... it’s, ah, magicians only?”

TR: “Well, it’s magicians and their guests. You have to know a magician member to get into the place, so it has that exclusivity quality to it.”

AB: “Because one would assume that secrets are being revealed?”

TR: “Not so much. I mean, does ... ah, magicians kinda get together in session, which means they’ll sit off in the corner and they’ll do card tricks for one another and show it, but they don’t normally reveal it to, ah, the laity ... to the general public, because really all magicians have is their ... their secrets of how they create their illusions.”

AB: “Yes, sir!

Ah, what was the recent movie about magicians?

*The Illusionist*, I believe, wasn’t it?”

TR: “Well there was *The Illusionist* and also *The Prestige* was, ah, the ... the other one. There were two (2) of 'em that came out about the same time about, ah, sort of the Victorian era of Magic.”

AB: “So then magicians really are very competitive, very secret, and, ah, and so forth, right?”

TR: “Yes, ah, because like I say it is ... it is that wall that they, ah, insist upon putting up. And when I do magic I do the same thing because you ... you don't wanta see behind the curtain, 'cause often it's ... it ... the ... the illusion is much better than the reality.”

AB: “Okay, so I've gotta ask you then about the TV shows that have been on that, um, *specialize in doing nothing other than exposing* how a magician does what he does. How do you feel about those? I imagine not well.”

TR: “Well, you know, I ... I don't really ... I don't think it has any impact, because the fact is that people don't have a real good reference point for it.

Ah, they ... they ... I mean, I look at the ... those things – I know exactly what's ... what's going on ... the mechanism behind it, but people forget details. And it's often kinda disappointing. And the fact is when they, ah, the *Masked Magician* special, ah, came about, ah, about fifteen (15) years ago, everyone was like: 'Oh, my goodness! This is the worst thing! It's gonna bring magic to ...”

AB: “Right.”

TR: “... and no one's gonna wanta see magic!

And the irony of it is, the first one got great ratings, the second one got lesser ratings, the third one got far fewer ratings ... before it was all gone ... !”

AB: “Yeah.”

TR: “People really don't want to know. They like a mystery!”

AB: “Oh, you're right about that. They ... they like a mystery.

Ah, one real question for you: Is there any such thing as '*real magic*'?”

TR: “Ahh! That's ... that's a whole long topic we can talk about.”

AB: “Yeah, okay, well we’re comin’ up on a break, so you think about how you wanta answer that.

We’ll take a break and be back in about seven [minutes].

You’re listening to *Midnight In The Desert*.

Todd Robbins, my guest.”

\* \* \*

AB: “And I’m serving you up a stern warning: You’re gonna hear about a lot of things tonight, you know, like driving a nail into your nose, eating light bulbs, [unintelligible], um, and a lot of things.

You’re just gonna hear about all sorts of things ...

### **Do Not Try These Things!**

Um, that’s as stern a warning as I can think to give. Ah, maybe there’s a [better] way to say it:

### **You May Die If You Do Some Of These Things**

That’s pretty stern I guess.

Ah, Todd, welcome back!”

TR: “Thank you ... thank you.”

AB: “Um, yeah, we’ve gotta say that, huh? Because you get enough ... thousands, tens of thousands, or hundreds of thousands of people.

You say something like this, and somebody’s gonna take that nail and give it a try.”

TR: “Yeah. I, you know ... to a certain degree.

I ... you know ... that ... that ... but on the other ... the flip side of it is, I don’t want anyone to give this a try who doesn’t know what they’re doing. If they’re really interested, the thing to do is to search out some ... some sources. Ah, and then ... we can get into those later where they can look if they’re really, seriously interested.

But just ... there’s no ‘fail factor’ in any of this stuff I do, when it comes to the old sideshow skills. You ... you do it wrong, you end up hurting yourself ...”

AB: “Hmpf.”

TR: “... and ... and everyone that does it for any extended period of time does end up hurting themselves to some degree.

But hopefully if they have learned properly, it ... it, ah, diminishes, ah, the ... the danger and the risk.

You can't completely eliminate it, but you can ... *but you have to know what you're doing!*”

AB: (laughs) “Okay, um, well ... right, the craziness.

So what I asked you before the break was: ‘Is there any **real magic?**’

Now I investigate the paranormal – every aspect of it you can imagine.

I have come to believe that a great deal of it is true and some of it's baloney. Ah, but if I ask you about magic, have you ever encountered ‘real magic?’”

TR: “I've encountered many mysterious things ... coincidences ... whatever, you know, however you wanta define them, but there's ... there've been many strange things that have happened, ah, through the ... the years that make you wonder.

And I ... I love mystery. Ah, that's one of the reasons I love this show and have listened to you for so many years, because I love mystery.

**Because it's just things yet to be understood.”**

AB: “That's true.

Well, how do you define magic? As that ... as things yet to be understood?”

TR: “Ah ... Yes! Yeah, I would ... I would ... yes, exactly!

Ah, because we ... though we may love a mystery, but people want answers ... and that's where the problem comes in.

When you settle for easy, comfortable answers that feel good, but might not be true.

And there's a ... a number of people out there who will be more than willing to deceive you ... to take your money ..."

AB: "Yes!"

TR: "... on many levels, ah, and ... and provide you with answers.

Ah, and that's where ... then that's where we get into a whole area, now that you kinda scratch your head and say: 'Why ... why are people believing ... believing this stuff?'

AB: "I say it all the time."

TR: "Yeah."

AB: "I really do.

But, ah, I still have hopes and some understanding that a lot of it really ... I mean, it is real to the degree that you said that we don't understand it.

I've had things happen in my personal life completely beyond, ah, you know, any random chance for happening. *They were real (!)*

Ah, not many of them – just a few – but enough to know that there's substance here somewhere."

TR: "Umm-hmm, ..."

AB: "... so ..."

TR: "... exactly.

And that's ... that's what, you know, keeps me going is wondering what, ah, tomorrow is going to bring? What, ah, new discoveries and advancements!

And you know, what you're talking about at the top of the show, about, ah, you know, discovering something that looks like a dome on Mars – let's find out more about that!

There will be plenty of people who will give you an answer.

And you go: 'Okay, and why do you think that?'

Let's find out more! Let's investigate! Let's ... let's go further with this."

AB: "Have you seen it?"

TR: "I haven't. I'm ... but I'm going to! I'm gonna take a look at that as soon as we, ah ... ah, finish here tonight, believe me."

AB: "Okay, so you don't have a computer in front of you right now?"

TR: "No, I ... unfortunately I don't."

AB: "Okay. Well, you're one, ah, very rare American. Almost everybody has ..."

TR: "Well, I do ... I do ... I do have a computer. It's just not right in front of me. I'm here in the living room, 'cause I wanta be nice and comfortable and enjoy ..."

AB: (laughs). "Good."

TR: "... the ..."

AB: "Good ... good ... good ... good.  
All right."

\* \* \*

AB: "So, this Magic Castle ..."

TR: "Yes?"

AB: "... apparently there's a ghost ..."

TR: "Yeah!"

AB: "... in the Magic Castle that plays the piano. Does even requests occasionally ... that kind of thing ... *A Ghost That Plays The Piano (!)*  
Now ..."

TR: "That's the illusion that they create. Her name is Irma. The story they tell – and it's always a good ..."

AB: "All right."

TR: "... story."

AB: "Okay."

TR: "Ah, that there was a family who lived in the house who hated music, except for this one daughter. And she would go up to the attic to play the piano that they had ... had sort of thrown up there and ... and hidden away.

And when the Magic Castle was opened, they found that old piano up there. They brought it down, they were gonna have someone to play it, but they discovered that the ghost of Irma, who passed away many, many years ago, is more than happy to come down and play requests for people ... ."

AB: "Hmpf."

TR: "And she, you know, you'd walk in there and say: 'Irma, it's so good to see ya! How ya feeling tonight?'"

And Irma plays: *I Feel Pretty, Oh So Pretty (!)*"

AB: (laughs).

TR: "Always seems to be in a good mood!"

AB: "Yes!"

TR: "And she'll play '*Makin' Whoopee*' and say: 'Oh, well, who ... who is it on the other side you're gettin' your ectoplasm, ah, with?' (AB laughs).

And she plays *I'm Just Wild About Harry*, (AB laughs) and so it's ... it's fun that way. It's really ... it's a lovely, lovely thing."

AB: "Yep, sounds like fun."

TR: "Umm-hmm."

AB: "Um, all right."

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AB: "Now ..."

TR: "Yes?"

AB: "... my producer when ... when she got hold of you, she told me: 'Art, ah, Todd Robbins, ah, eats light bulbs (!)'"

TR: "Umm-hmm."

AB: "I said: 'Yeah, right.'

I said: 'You know, ah, Heather, those are made of, you know, some sort of, ah, sugary substance, just like the windows in movies that break so easily and look like they're real.'"

TR: "Candy glass ... candy glass."

AB: "Candy glass, that's right."

TR: "Umm-hmm."

AB: "And she said: 'No ... no, no, no, no! Ah, Todd act- ... actually eats light bulbs.'"

TR: "Yes. Yeah."

AB: "I said: 'You mean like a Phillips or a GE (General Electric) standard sixty (60) or a hundred (100) watt light bulb?'

She said: 'Yes.'

I said: 'I don't ...' I actually said: 'I don't believe it,' Todd."

TR: "Well, it's ... it's true.

Ah, I can ... I can give it ... it a little background on this. It's ... it's an old stunt that goes back to the fakirs of India – ah, I have to be very careful saying that word on the air."

AB: "Umm-hmm."

TR: "Ah, the fakirs of India. And, eh, those amazing high holymen that did things like being buried alive and sustaining themselves, ah ... ah, underground or lying down on a bed of nails or doing all kinds of things that just pushed the ... the limits of what the body can do.

And one of the things they would do is they would, ah, take a glass – and even before there were light bulbs – they'd take panes of ... of window glass and bite into it and chow down on ..."

AB: "What!"

TR: "... this broken glass.

And this is something that in the early nineteenth century (1800's) a troop of ... they used to refer to them as 'Indian jugglers,' but not jugglers in the modern, ah, what we think of jugglers, but they were these performers that were doing things different than traditional sleight-of-hand magic."

AB: "Yah?"

TR: "And they ... they came to England and they were a huge hit there!

And then the members of the troupe broke off. They taught other people and little by little it got passed around, so by the middle of the nineteenth century it found its way into the 'Dime museums,' which were the ... the sideshows of their day. P.T. Barnum had the most famous one here in New York.

And they would demonstrate strange abilities such as taking a sword and shoving it down the throat and eating glass, and ... and swallowing fire ... putting hot fire ..."

AB: "All right, well let's deal with one at a time if we can ..."

TR: "Sure."

AB: "... and this is eating glass."

TR: "Yeah!"

AB: "Now, there ... there's just no way. Ah, I ... I can remember once, ah, working in Las Vegas. This was years and years ago, and I would bring my coffee to work at the radio station with me ..."

TR: [Unintelligible].

AB: "... and, ah, you know, in a thermos."

TR: "Umm-hmm."

AB: "And one day I poured my coffee as usual and apparently I dropped something because it had kind of all this flaky stuff that looked just exactly like glass. And I had been drinking it! And I thought: 'Oh My God! I'm dead as a door nail – *I've been drinking glass!*'

It really wasn't glass ... it was just that flaky stuff."

TR: "Umm-hmm."

AB: "Maybe some of it was glass – I'm not sure.

People called me and said: 'For God's sakes, eat bread! Quickly, eat bread!'

Ah so, here's the question, Todd: Ah ..."

TR: "Umm-hmm."

AB: "When you eat light bulbs ..."

TR: "Yeah?"

AB: "... and I'm told, hmm, you've eaten [more] light bulbs actually than anybody else in the world ... is that right?"

TR: "Yeah ... yeah ... yeah."

AB: "Yeah?"

TR: "It's somewhere in the neighborhood of five thousand (5000) !!!"

AB: "Five thousand.

So it's ..."

TR: "Yeah."

AB: "... not a trick? It's not an illusion? You really eat them?"

TR: "Yeah. Yeah, like so many things, ah, it's all based upon principles of physics and anatomy.

And with anatomy, it's amazing how adaptive the ... the human body can be!

Ah, it's ..."

AB: "Ah!"

TR: "... there's a way of chewing up the glass. And a great deal about it is that, you know like we were talkin' earlier, a magician does a trick ... : 'How did 'cha make that ... how did 'cha know what card I selected?'

And they'll say I can't tell you.

But this stuff ... the ... I find it's more interesting, the more you know."

AB: "It is."

TR: "And again, I'm not trying to encourage anyone. I'm not ... I'm sort of explaining this, but I'm not instructing people on how to do this."

AB: "No, God ... no! Don't do it, folks."

TR: "No. There's a way of chewing up the glass and swallowing it so it doesn't cut the mouth and throat."

AB: "All right."

TR: "There's a diet and regimen I go through every day to keep the glass moving through my system, and it takes about two (2) days to go through.

So the first part of it is, um, it's ... I ... I walk you ... as I take a light bulb, I bite into the metal part and spit out that. The ... the ... the ... little, ah, threaded part that goes into, ah, the, ah, socket."

AB: "So that says where you bite – right above that?"

TR: "Yeah. And that's actually the most dangerous part. That ... that, ah, doing it, 'cause I have no real control of how that's going to break. And that's often where I'll get a little cut on my lip or gum, ah, when I bite into that.

Ah, and then once it's broken then I can kind of gingerly bite into the glass and start chewing it. And I keep it in the soft areas of my mouth and on the tongue, because there's a lot of elasticity there."

AB: "Yeah?"

TR: "You can take a ... a knife blade and actually press your flesh into it. It's the lateral movement that actually cuts it. *But putting pressure on a sharp edge will no cut*, ah, unless you put just so much it's going to ... it's going to penetrate the flesh.

But it's amazing how much pressure you can put! It's the same principle as lying down on a bed of nails. But anyway ... so I will take the glass and I will chew it up. And here's ... here's part of the risk ..."

AB: (coughs) "Pardon me."

TR: "... is that as I chew it up and I'm going to swallow it: If I chew it up too fine, it's possible that it can get powdery and get into my ... my blood system, into my, ah, into the blood and cause all kinds of harm, including the possibility of stroke."

AB: "I'm sure."

TR: "But if I don't chew it up fine enough, the pieces are too large – it'll go through the intestinal tract and it can lacerate. So what I'm doing is well, I'm joking and trying to keep it moving and entertaining, I'm judging how fine the glass is. And then once I get it to the consistency I want, I then take water and I basically flush it down, because I don't want my throat constricting on this because it can ... that's where you can get cuts."

AB: "So, in no way are these light bulbs fake?"

TR: "No ... no. It's ... it's getting harder these days because incandescent bulbs are becoming rarer and rarer."

AB: "That's a true statement, yep."

TR: "And ... and the CFLs [compact fluorescent lamps] those squirrely, little things that you probably have right above you, ah, and the LEDs [light emitting diodes] are not consumable. Ah, there's a great deal of mercury in the, ah ... ah, those CFLs, and so I'm not going to be biting into those because of that.

Um, I ... I can if I'm very careful and don't inhale the, ah, the gas if you want me to, but ..."

AB: "Aj!"

TR: "... I could do that. But, ah, wonderful, you know, standard 'Edison bulbs' as they call them, um, I, ah, I can ... I can do those. And so I've been stocking up as I do this."

AB: "So you're actually buying extra bulbs in case they some day become ..."

TR: "Yes."

AB: "... antiques?"

TR: "Yes. And the irony is that you can still get 'em here in New York, but they're now being manufactured in ... in Mexico and places like that, because they can't do 'em here.

There is actually a company that still has ... has received approval to do so, because they're still needed in certain areas ... certain trades, they need incandescent bulbs; they cannot use the CFL or LED bulbs."

AB: "Well, originally I didn't like the new bulbs, ah, because they didn't provide a nice, warm light. But of course they've got that solved now."

TR: "Yeah."

AB: "So, yeah, the days of incandescent probably are numbered."

TR: "Yeah, I think so. I think so."

However, you know, theoretically you have ... you have to be careful with ... with disposing of these because of the mercury content. And thousands and thousands of these are going to our landfills, and the question is, you know someone said: 'Well you know, there's more mercury in there than comes out of the power plant.'

Okay, but that doesn't discount the fact that these bulbs have mercury in them, and they're going to our ... our landfills and they're ... they're breaking under the pressure of all of that trash and what is that going to do down the road as that starts to seep in?

Are ... is that going to lead to the zombie apocalypse? I don't know!"

AB: "So..."

TR: "I don't know."

AB: "... so ..."

TR: "Bring back the incandescent bulbs."

AB: "Yah ... you're ... you're ... well, unlikely."

\* \* \*

AB: "You're ... you're, ah, tryin' ta keep the art of the sideshow alive ..."

TR: "Yeah."

AB: "... and that is what you do, and that's gotta be pretty tough in this day and age. You gotta almost transfer what you do ... I don't know, to ... to the internet or ... ?

How do you do it? How do you do it?"

TR: “Well, the fact is the sideshow, you know, in its natural habitat, which was in circuses and in carnivals and amusement areas like Coney Island is ... is all but dead. There is a sideshow out in Coney Island. It’s a not-for-profit performing arts group called ‘Coney Island USA.’ There is the Venice Beach Freak Show, a little ... a wonderful little storefront operation in Venice Beach. It was with ... there was ... it had its own TV ... reality TV show a while back.

Ah, but the carnivals aren’t carrying sideshows anymore. Circuses no longer have them. Because in the old days people would spend ... it was the highlight of their year in the rural areas around the ... the country that when the circus came to town, there’d be the parade in the morning and they’d all follow it out ...”

AB: “Sure.”

TR: “... to the lot there. They’d watch the ... the, ah ... ah, the tent go up. They’d bring a lunch and they’d watch them, you know, feed and exercise the animals and then they’re there and they need somethin’ to do, so there’d be some games and they’d have a sideshow, which you’d see before the main show and that would have the guy swallowing the swords and the fat lady, and the tallest man in the world, the smallest woman, and so on and so forth. Strange unusual people that ...

And it just was ... it was something unusual. It was something beyond your everyday life ... *extraordinary!*

And that’s all gone now because you can find this on *The Learning Channel* any given night is, ah, is a freak show.

And so it comes into your living room now. You don’t have to wait for the circus to come to town.”

AB: “Well, I mean that’s why I said you’re weird. You eat light bulbs.”

TR: (laughs).

AB: “So ... that makes you extra weird.”

TR: “Yeah.”

AB: “And for those of you who doubt for one second what I’m saying, um, I’m telling you right now, go to [artbell.com](https://www.artbell.com), click on, ah, [Todd Robbins](#) ...”

TR: “Umm-hmm.”

AB: "... and, ah, then you're going to have – actually you don't even have to click on him – you're going to have ... yeah, you do.

You're going to have the opportunity to see a video ... it lasts about how long, Todd? About ..."

TR: "It ... yeah, of about two (2) minutes or so."

AB: "No, it's actually five minutes and thirty-four seconds [5:34]."

TR: "Five minutes? Okay."

AB: "Yeah, that's right."

TR: "There you go."

AB: "In this they – without any question whatsoever – they show Todd eating I believe a 60-watt standard light bulb ..."

TR: "Yeah."

AB: "... after it's been plugged in."

TR: "I usually ... I used to eat 100 watt bulbs, but I'm on a diet now."

AB: "Yah, yah, yah."

TR: "That was a joke." (TR laughs).

AB: "Right. Um, but you absolutely do do it."

TR: "Yeah."

\* \* \*

AB: "Now, a few questions:

You mentioned the consistency and I'm wondering how do you know that all the pieces reached the consistency that you must have to survive this ..."

TR: "Well ..."

AB: "... um, before you swallow?"

TR: “That’s the second part of it.

I ... I wanta make certain that when I talk about diet and regimen, I ... I mean, there are things I do every day that kinda keep ...”

AB: “Like what?”

TR: “... all my intestinal tract happy with fiber and, ah, little lubricants and things like that ...”

AB: “Yeah.”

TR: “... so that everything keeps moving. ‘Cause I don’t want anything to stop on its way. I don’t ...”

AB: “Aww, no.”

TR: “I don’t want anything down there ...”

AB: “Nooo ...”

TR: “... thinkin’ about doin’ it. (?) Want it all movin’ along (!)”

AB: “Yes!”

TR: “And so ... and then before I do, ah, a light bulb, ah, I will end up, ah, eating, ah, usually a decent meal. And if not I will ingest some ... as much, ah, starchy foods as possible. Someone ... someone said: ‘Eat bread.’ That was actually a very good, ah, a very good thing that they suggested there.”

AB: “Really?”

TR: “Let me tell you, there’s a little quick story ...

I was doin’ a show about the sideshow, ah, off-Broadway in New York, ah, about a ... a decade ago. It was called *Carnival Knowledge*.”

AB: (laughs).

TR: “And it was, ah, it was about my experience working out in Coney Island and the ... and the love of the sideshow and the history of it. And a writer for the *New Yorker*, ah, decided he was gonna do a little profile on me. And he was gonna bust me! He was gonna prove it was a trick (!)

So he brought along one of the heads of gastroenterology at New York University Hospital and ...”

AB: “Okay.”

TR: “... Dr. Cohen. And to see the show and interview me afterwards, 'cause he's going to bust me! He ... he ... this guy.

If anyone would know it's a trick, it would be this guy.

And so we sat down and I talked to the doctor, and I revealed everything. I went into much more detail than I'm going into now.”

AB: “All right. Well, hold ... hold tight. We're at a break. It's a short, two (2)-minute break, Todd. We'll come back and find out how that turned out for you.

We have the video on my website of Todd eating a 60-watt GE (General Electric) [light] bulb. It's a ... it's ... it's a little hard to watch. You're ... you're cringing as you watch.”

\* \* \*

AB: “Todd Robbins is my guest.

And we're just getting into what he does. (AB chuckles).

One of the things he does is eat light bulbs. He has, in fact, eaten more light bulbs than any human on the planet. Thousands and thousands of light bulbs. Real light bulbs.

*It's not a trick.*

I guess in the strictest sense it's not magic. To me, it's magic. Ah, anybody ... if anybody had told me you could eat an entire light bulb and survive, I would have said it was either magic or it was a trick. But no, no ... no, no.

I'm gonna mention this because, you know, my producer said: 'Oh hey, Todd, can you keep a light bulb on hand? And I haven't made up my mind about that. Ah, we'll see what the audience says.

But you know what? There's a video on my website, which is [artbell.com](http://artbell.com). If you click on ... on Todd, ah, you have the opportunity to see him without question, without tomfoolery, without any doubt – he eats a sixty (60)-watt GE light bulb.

And you cannot watch ... **you just can't watch without cringing!** And I think Todd said in the video, one of the things he enjoys *most* when he eats light bulbs is watching the expression on people's faces.

And I get it (!) ... so totally get it, 'cause you should've seen mine!

I just ... I didn't believe it.

Ah, Todd, but you really do that, huh?"

TR: "Yeah ... yeah. It's ... it's actually I think it's ... it's a wonderful thing, because it shows empathy. It's as if I'm making you eat the glass ..."

AB: (smirks).

TR: "... because you are ... we're sort of one at ... we're ... there's a strange bond there when people experience this. They don't just watch me do this – *they experience it!*"

AB: "They do. Ah, they do."

TR: "Yeah, and that's ... that's part of the power of all this.

And then it fills them with wonder (!), and that's a glorious thing! Because finding out what's possible in life is what drives people to do great things with their lives."

AB: "Fills you with a lot of little Ginsu knives."

TR: (grins). "Yes ... yeah."

\* \* \*

AB: "Ah, do ... is it something that you can toughen to?"

TR: "No, it's ... it's just something that the body does naturally. Ah, it's just pretty remarkable what the body can endure."

AB: "Okay, I've got this question:

Ah, have you ever, ah, seriously hurt yourself while doing this?"

TR: "Not doing the, ah ... ah, light bulb.

And I should say that I know what I'm doing.

We were talking before the break there: This, ah, doctor ... gastroenterologist ...”

AB: “Yah?”

TR: “... came and saw me, and interviewed me, and asked exactly what I was doing.”

AB: “Right.”

TR: “And I told him with all the precautions I took, and he went: ‘You know, I should recommend this to my patients.’

So he ...”

AB: (laughs).

TR: “... understood it was completely feasible what I was doing. And doing one (1) light bulb in a show is not a problem.

But out in Coney Island when I was working in the sideshow there, ah, I would eat ten (10) to twelve (12) light bulbs a day!”

AB: “You what!”

TR: “Five (5) days a week. Ah, and so, you know, our season started right around in the spring time – right around Easter. It would run until the beginning of October.

So you do the math on that and that’s a ... that’s a lotta glass!”

AB: “Yeah.”

TR: “And that’s when you start to notice it. That’s when it starts to come through. Ah, takes about two (2) days and that’s not terribly pleasant, I’ll tell you right now.”

AB: “You mean the, ah ...”

TR: “Yeah. Umm-hmm.”

AB: “I can imagine.

Ah ...”

TR: “I’m just glad I’m sitting down when it happens.

Let's just leave it at that! Let the imagination go with that."

AB: "Listen, ah, when I eat hot tacos, you know, I ... I pay."

TR: "Umm-hmm."

AB: "Okay, so ..."

TR: "Yeah."

AB: "I can only just, ah, I can barely imagine."

TR: "Umm-hmm."

AB: "Um, but have ... have you ever had to go to the Emergency Room?"

I guess not. You're saying not, huh?"

TR: "Not ... not for this.

I ..."

AB: "Or to a dentist?"

TR: "The ... the cut ... well, it's ... it's ... it's funny in that, ah, when I go to the ... the dentist, they ... my dentist often has, ah, interns or ... or dental students that are observing.

And, ah, he says: 'Come in here and take a look at this guy's teeth. (AB grins). And see the wear pattern. What do you think caused that?'

And they go: 'Oh, he grinds his teeth at night.'"

AB: (laughs).

TR: "Nooo! No! And then, ah, the next line ... and in the old days I would say: 'And this is what I do, and I underscore (?) a light bulb and bite into it and chow down on it, which would definitely get their attention.'"

\* \* \*

TR: "Ah, the worst thing ..."

AB: (laughs more).

TR: "... that ... well, there's ... there's ... there's two (2) ... I've hurt myself twice."

AB: "Okay."

TR: "Ahh, one was, ah, swallowing a sword.

I ... I ... the cardinal rule is [if] you're having trouble, ya stop (!) You just stop!

If you're eating fire and the wind comes up and it blows the fire – YOU STOP!

Ah, the problem with glass eating ... one of the reasons I don't encourage anyone to do it and one of the reasons I don't teach it when I've taught people how to do things, is because once I swallow it, I can't stop it.

And if it goes in the wrong place at the wrong time ..."

AB: "Right!"

TR: "... I'm in trouble.

I've been very fortunate, but I don't really wanta encourage anyone else to give this a try, because I ... it's a risk I'm willing to take, ahh, but I really don't wanta encourage anyone else ..."

AB: "Well, you know, yeah, you know how you eat sometimes, ah, or drink, it goes down the wrong way?"

TR: "Yeah, yeah, you have to be very careful.

Yeah ... have to be very, very careful, because, ah, I've, ah, once in a while I've had a little, ah, you know, piece get stuck in the back of the throat. And that's not pleasant, but it's ... it's very rare.

The ... the strangest thing that happened eating glass ..."

AB: (exclaims) "Oh, God!"

TR: "... was on ... it was, ah, and you're not gonna ... you'll not find this pleasant whatsoever.

But it's the kind of thing when you meet professional performers, whether actors or magicians or ... or anything, they ... when they get together they tell war stories. They tell about not the great shows they've done, but the

terrible things that happened that they ... they survived. They ived to laugh and joke about it. And this is one of 'em.

It was a ... it was the ... the Fourth of July, ah, about 1993. It was a Friday afternoon at the sideshow. We were doing a performance and we'd done about four (4) shows and had about another four (4) shows to go.

And I bit into the light bulb and I cracked open a tooth and lost a filling."

AB: "Hmpf."

TR: *"And I had an exposed nerve."*

AB: "Hmpf."

TR: "Well, now what the ... the show must go on, so ended up doing the rest of the shows that day chewing the glass on the other side, washing it down with water, keeping it all on the other side as much as possible.

I then called my dentist, who wasn't in – was out of town – and I couldn't find anyone. So I ended up doing ten (10) shows the next day, ten (10) shows the next day, and then about eight (8) shows on that Monday of the ... that ... that extended weekend before I could get to a, ah, a dentist on Tuesday to get that ... that tooth fixed."

AB: "Hmmm."

TR: "Ah, yeah ... yeah!

So when people go, you know: 'I'm a Broadway actor and it's so tough, I do eight shows a week.' Boo-hoo!

When you hear about movie stars – 'Oh, we had such a tough shoot.' Boo-hoo!

Try doing, you know, thirty-some (30+) shows with an exposed nerve, chew-eating glass ... (!) Show business, it's ... it's a grand thing!"

AB: "It's ... it's a grand thing, yes! Ohh !!!"

TR: (laughs).

\* \* \*

AB: "Um, all right, so my producer ... I want ..."

TR: "Umm-hmm."

AB: "... the world to know this. Ah, she's the one behind this. Not ... not me. And not any message ..."

TR: "Umm-hmm."

AB: "... that I'm getting on the computer. I'm getting some messages on the computer.

But my, you know, nice little Heather back there, right? You talked to her, right?"

TR: "Yesss."

AB: "Ah, very pleasant little girl.

**She wants proof.** In other words, she wants you to eat a light bulb on the air.

Now, I don't ... I'm not sure I see the value in it, Todd, in that we have this video of you eating a light bulb ..."

TR: "Umm-hmm."

AB: "And for you to crunch, crunch, crunch here on the air would be kinda interesting, ah, but – but ... but ... BUT I'm not sure that it's proof. I mean, you could have the sound of crunching glass on the phone ..."

TR: "Umm-hmm."

AB: "And that wouldn't be proof.

Now, you wouldn't ..."

TR: "No, it wouldn't ... it wouldn't be proof, but if ... if you ... there's nothing that can be done, ah, for anyone that is listening at home to really prove to them other than if they see me do it live, ahh, in a performance really. And even then, they may be suspect.

I always light up the bulb in a ... in a work light, so they can see it's real, because if it is candy, you know, that bulb burns for a while and candy would melt if it gets that hot. And I hand off the bulb and let everyone examine it.

It's very funny because years ago when I was doing colleges and universities, ... I had a ... a poster that said: 'I'll give ya ten thousand dollars (\$10,000) if you can prove this or any of the other things are *fake!*'

AB: "Have you gotta ... have you gotta Smartphone?"

TR: "Umm, I ... I do. Ahh ..."

AB: "Do you have ... do you have Periscope on it?"

TR: "I ... you know, I don't have it installed. I ... I apologize about that."

AB: "That's too bad, because, you know, we could sort of get you on Periscope, um, I mean, c'mon folks, just the sound of crunching here on the radio I don't think, I mean this video is way beyond anything we could produce, ah, on ... on the radio, ah, save, you know, something going wrong and you ..."

TR: "Umm-hmm."

AB: "... quickly having to head off to the emergency room."

TR: "But you know, having seen the video, now this is going to be done specifically for you, so if there's ..."

AB: "Really?"

TR: "... any moment here, ah, here this is, you know ..."

AB: "Really?"

TR: "... this is being done live ... . Oh, yeah! Art, for you anything!"

AB: "Um ... yeah, but then after you've said that, now I feel doubly bad ... for me ... anything?"

All right, so if you suddenly get it wrong ..."

TR: "Say nice things at the memorial service, Art." (TR chuckles).

AB: "Um, I would feel so guilty ... um ... let's come back to this, okay?"

TR: "Okay. All right."

\* \* \*

AB: "I haven't made up my mind on this."

TR: "Okay."

AB: "Um, so what other things ... I mean, you mentioned for example somebody who can lie on a bed of nails.

Now, you see, that doesn't seem right to me. Ah, you say the skin can take a lot?"

TR: "Umm-hmm."

AB: "I've got pretty sensitive skin when I think of a bed of nails and these ... that's the difference between, ah ... ah, you know, some sort of magic show and a sideshow. In a sideshow these people are actually doing these things, right?"

TR: "Yeah ... yeah.

The thing about a bed of nails is that if you were on a single point, the pressure would be so great it probably would cause a puncture."

AB: "Well, sure."

TR: "But ... and so it's counterintuitive you thinking that if you have a hundred (100) nails or three hundred (300) or five hundred (500) nails, it would make it five hundred (500) times more difficult and more dangerous, and it's just the opposite because the fact is now your weight is spread out all over those ... all those points. And so there's not enough weight on any given point to cause a puncture into the skin."

AB: "Umm-hmm."

TR: "And you can even take it a step further and have someone stand on top of you. I knew, ah, a performer ..."

AB: "Gosh!"

TR: "... friend of mine, who does ... he has seven (7) people stand on top of him while lying down on a bed of nails."

AB: "Ai! Ai!"

TR: "Yeah ... yeah."

\* \* \*

AB: Okay, you know what? I kinda get that one a little bit.

In other words, the weight is of course distributed among all the nails.

So, okay, yeah, maybe that makes sense. I bet it still hurts though. I mean ...”

TR: “It’s not the most pleasant thing.

But you know the ... the irony of it is, ah, it causes, ah, a great deal of stimulation. The ... the irritation of the nails in the ... in the back there. And it causes the flushing of the ... the, ah, blood.

And if you can have a bad back, it actually can cause increased circulation and help relieve, ah, back spasms and things like that.”

AB: “Oh, I have a really bad back ...”

TR: “Ohh!”

AB: “... a really bad one, Todd.”

TR: “Oh, I ... I ... I might ... we ... we have to get together one of these days.”

AB: “*But not that bad.*”

TR: (laughs).

AB: “Todd, no ... I ... I wouldn’t laugh at this.” (AB laughs anyway).

TR: “Oh, embrace the unknown ... !”

AB: “Yeah, right, right, right.”

TR: “Oh, Art!”

AB: “There are other ways to get flushes, you know?

You don’t have to lie on a bed of nails.

Ai, yi, yi, yi, yi!”

TR: “You know the ... the funny thing about it is I wanted for the ... the ... the ... I worked for a number of circuses. And there was the, ah, Russian acrobats, who were, you know, doing these things. This one guy would have, you know, two (2) ... there (3) people stand on top of him and, you know, on his shoulders, do a two (2)-high or three (3)-high in part of the

thing. And it was ... it was a little ... little portable, ah, bed of nails that he would lie down on ...”

AB: “Hmm.”

TR: “... and just rub his back into that to get the circulation going to help, ah ... ah, sprained muscles and, ah ... ah ... ah, muscle spasms ... things like that.”

AB: (smirks). “I don’t know. Ah, carrying around a little portable bed of nails ... good conversation starter (!)”

TR: “Yeah ... yeah. If ... if people don’t, you know, flinch at that, then ... then, ah ... ah, you know you might find ... have found the right person to spend some time with.”

AB: “My producer ...”

TR: “Umm-hmm.”

AB: “... ah, follows up with ... I get messages, you know, during the show.”

TR: “Sure.”

AB: “She says: ‘Yes, let him do it!’

Um ... God! ... um, you know, um, how ... how old are you, Todd?”

TR: “Fifty-seven (57) years old.”

AB: “Fifty-seven (57) and ...”

TR: “Yeah.”

AB: “... you’ve had how many light bulbs in your life?”

TR: “Oh, somewhere around five thousand (5000).

So it’s time for five thousand and one (5001), Art.”

AB: “What have you, ah, got there?”

TR: “I’ve got a, ah ... what is the brand here?”

Ah, let’s ... you know ... this is a, ah, Sylvania.

I usually like a GE bulb, because you know, GE stands for 'Good Eating.'

But, um ..."

AB: "Is there any difference in taste between the brands?"

TR: "No ... no. Ah, the ah, the ones I use out in Coney Island were mass produced. They were a little cheaper and everyone ... really what a lot of people worry about is the coating on the inside – what ... what causes the frosting on the inside – cause there's a belief ... a misconception that it's ... it's some sort of phosphorus thing and it's ... it's toxic.

The reality is it's kaolin. It's basically a white clay that is shot in there and coating on the inside to give it the soft white. And it is non-toxic.

I ... I ... it's very possible in years past that ..."

AB: "But swallowing glass is toxic.

I mean, if done slightly the wrong way or I guess this is something you never hurry, right?"

TR: "Yeah. You ... you have to ... again, do it and do it right. Cause if you don't, you can be in big trouble."

AB: "Okay, um, all right, so you're willingly gonna do this, ah, eat ...?"

TR: "Yesss."

AB: "I'm ... I'm not in any way pushing you or ... anything else."

TR: "I'm ... I take full responsibility for my action."

AB: "It's only radio, so ... ah, people you can back this up by watching the video if you want, but I mean, what you're about to hear I'm not responsible for in any way."

TR: "Exactly. Exactly."

AB: "Fine."

TR: "Shall we?"

AB: "Eat."

TR: "Okay. You can hear the, ah ... there's the metal part.

And here we go: [Sound of glass breaking].

AB: “Ohh!”

TR: “Umm-hmm.” [Sounds of crunching].

AB: “Aagh!”

TR: “Umm-hmm.”

AB: “Ohhh.”

TR: “Umm-hmm. [Unintelligible – This is my most?] favorite part.”

AB: “Don’t put yourself in any danger by talking.”

[More sounds of crunching].

AB: “Ahh!”

[More sounds of crunching].

TR: “Hmmm.”

[Sounds of intense crunching!]

***“And this is the most dangerous part: I’m Gonna Wash All This Down With New York City Water!”***

[Sounds of additional crunching].

“Here goes!” [Sound of drinking water].

AB: “Ahh.”

TR: “Umh!”

AB: “What’s that?”

TR: (laughs). “All gone. There you go, Art.”

AB: “Um, all right. So you washed it down you said with New York City water.

Hah, hah, hah ... funny ... dangerous!

And then ... then ... then I heard another crunch ... ?”

TR: “Yeah, because you know it’s ... it’s hard to get it all down in ... in one (1) swallow, so it was pretty fast and everything, so, um, I still got a few little pieces in the ... in the teeth there.”

AB: “Aaah!”

TR: “I know.”

AB: (grimaces).

TR: “”So there you go.”

AB: “Ah, that was really fast. I mean, really fast!”

TR: “Yep.

Yeah, well, life is short.”

AB: “Ah, but, um, I’m thinking how do you that quickly get to the right consistency?”

TR: “I know what I’m doing.

I know ... I know what ... what the teeth are gonna do. I know what the ... the front incisors and the molars do, and then ... then I can basically move things along.”

AB: “Apparently so, um ...”

TR: “Yeah!”

AB: “... that ... that was actually much faster than the one you do, ah, on the video.”

TR: “Yeah.”

AB: “So ...”

TR: “Yeah, because it’s ... the other thing about it is ...”

AB: “Aah!”

TR: “... there ... there ... there ... there’s so much shock value to this, and when people see ... the natural reaction is to pull back.

And so I've got to really work at keeping them engaged, because the last thing I want people to do is to think: 'He should stop.' I don't want that thought. I want to keep them laughing. I ... you know, I joke about the ... the glass when it goes through ..."

AB: "Yes."

TR: "... what, you know, that's all about. Ah, and, you know, it's ... it's ... it's sorta answering questions as they're coming up in people's minds. So ... and that's why that thing took five (5) minutes to do, because I was yammering away and kinda giving all of the back story and all the things you need to know, so you can appreciate it on a deeper level than just a ... an idiot guy.

This is not ... you know, there was a TV show on MTV where they did all kinds of stupid stuff. This is not that kind of thing. I'm not just doing this ..."

AB: "Yeah."

TR: "... just to prove what an idiot I am.

There's ... I think this is just fascinating, because again it's ... it's ... it's an expansion upon reality. *It's reality ... it's most amazing that someone can actually do this!*

**I'm just happy it's me !!!** ... um, carrying this on – this ... this grand and glorious tradition."

\* \* \*

AB: "Who taught you to eat light bulbs?"

TR: "I learned it from an old guy named 'Red.' Red Garland was his name and he was ... ah, worked and he did a ... an, ah, act. He was known as the 'Human Garbage Disposal' or 'Human Ostrich' at times."

AB: "Wonderful."

TR: "And ... and, ah, he did a whole act where he would light a ... a ... a cigarette and talk, and throw matches in his mouth, and eat those. And then take the cigarette and eat that. And he had a little pot, ah ... ah, little vase of water, ah, clay ... clay pot. And he would ... he would drink some water and then he would say: 'I'm still hungry.' And he would go ... he would take razorblades ... the old raz- ... metal razorblades – you probably remember these ..."

AB: "I do."

TR: "Ah, the steel razorblades. He would chew those up too, because they were ..."

AB: "What!"

TR: "... very brittle.

Now, when they went to aluminum, they became much more flexible, but the old pot 'n' metal steel razorblades were very brittle. And he could break those in his teeth and chew them up like I'm doing with glass. And then you would take a light bulb, and he'd break it and he'd eat ... eat the glass.

I started doing the technique of biting into it and spitting out the metal part and chewing it back about twenty (20) years ago. And that's basically how I do it, ah ... ah, these days."

AB: "Aagh!"

Um, will there come a time in your life when you will say: 'At my age ... at my age – whatever that is ...'

TR: "Yeah."

AB: "... – I must stop eating light bulbs?"

TR: "Ah, you know, when they stop payin' me.

Ahh, and ... and ... if ... if people no longer find it amazing, ah, I will stop."

AB: (smirks).

TR: "Ah, if you know ... who knows, as I get older if I start developing health problems that often come with, ah ..."

AB: "Glass eating?"

TR: "It ... yeah ... why, just old age.

Who knows? Who knows? Ah, but, ah, I'll keep doin' it.

You know, one of my mentors, ah, was a great guy named Melvin Burkhart, who in the year 1929 took this torture stunt from the fakirs of India of hammering a nail into the nose. And he made it into this ...”

AB: “Aagh!”

TR: “... [unintelligible] gut-wrenching act, that when Robert Ripley – *Ripley’s Believe It Or Not* – saw him do it in the 1930’s, he said: ‘Melvin, you’re a Human Blockhead!’ And the name has stuck ever since.

Melvin’s last performance was at my wedding back in, ah, October 8th, 2001. We did a performance at the wedding as part of the ... the whole ceremony.

We had burlesque. We had puppets. We had mu-...”

AB: “Hmp ... hmp!”

TR: “... musical theatre. We had magic. We had a wild west guy doing roping and whipping.

And Melvin did his sideshow act including hammering a nail into his nose. He was ninety-four (94) years old and it was his last performance. He died one month later, ah, November 4th, 2001.”

AB: “Which had nothing to do with the nail?”

TR: “No, I mean, he had been doing it, ah, since 1929, and ... just had such joy at doing it. And put ... he ... he set the ... the form for it.

If you can make people smile and laugh, it takes the stink of the shock value off of it. Or diminishes it. It’s still there, but you play against that, because that’s what makes it interesting. You don’t make it more ... you don’t get in people’s faces and ... and do this, and: ‘Ooh, look at this! Oooh, look at how gross this is!’ Because people will fade – they’ll run away!”

AB: “That’s right.”

TR: “That’s not good! You wanta keep ’em there, so they can really appreciate it, because like I say this is just reality and it’s most amazing!”

AB: “Ah, most weird!”

TR: “Yeah! Yeah!”

AB: "I would say ... yes."

\* \* \*

AB: "Um, what do you classify as the strangest performance you've ever done?"

TR: (takes a deep breath) "The strangest performance I've ever done was actually, ah, a ... a kid's magic show."

AB: "Oh?"

TR: "Ah, yes! This was many years ago, I got a call, ah, from an agent here in New York saying: 'Ahh, you do a 'kid's show'?"

And I go: 'Yeah.'

And I was doing traditional magic – it wasn't the sideshow stuff. And it was, you know, just kinda comedy magic and it was all very fun and everything. I had done birthday parties and things like that.

And so: 'Okay, well here's the date and here's ... here's the address.'

It was the Libyan Embassy ..."

AB: "Huh?"

TR: "... in New York City at the height of Muammar Ghadaffi's rule when he was saying 'Death to America.'"

AB: "Right."

TR: "I go there ... you walk in and there was a huge picture of one of the 'freedom fighters.' A guy holding an AK-47 [machine gun], a scowl on his face, and the turban – the whole thing."

AB: "Sure."

TR: "Right there as you walked in and I thought, you know: 'Well, if they don't like me, what are they gonna do? Kill me?'"

AB: "Yeah!"

TR: "And went upstairs and it was for the Embassy ... the ... the kids ... it was ... I ... some Libyan holiday – I don't know even what it was. But they hired me to do a magic act for all the kids of the people that worked in the ... in the, ah, embassy there.

And it was interesting, because all the wives were in the full burqa and they were behind a curtain and could not ... I could not address them. I could not make any contact with them whatsoever.”

AB: “Umm-hmm.”

TR: “But the funny thing is they kept peeking around the curtain to watch what I was doing which I found very strange and very amusing. (AB laughs).

And I was doing jokes ... and they all spoke English. And I’m doing jokes and I’m doing all this kind of physical comedy with the kids, and the kids are roaring ... laughing and then those women, you know, head to toe with just the eyes – you could see them laughing ... belly laughing under the burqa (!) They were just shaking!”

AB: (laughs).

TR: “And you could hear these ... these high-pitched laughs under these ... these cloaked figures. *And it was ... it was very strange!*”

I was ... I was happy it went well – I was glad to get out of there.”

\* \* \*

AB: “Are you, ah, you still feelin’ okay?”

TR: “Oh yeah! Yeah!”

AB: “You sound like you are ...”

TR: “I am.”

AB: “... ah, I ... I just ... it’s like so hard to believe, Todd, and yet I know it’s true. Ah, and ... and for any of the rest of you who didn’t ...”

TR: “The fact that **you** say it’s hard to believe, I ... *that just pleasures me mightily!*”

AB: “It is hard to believe.

I’m sorry, but to me whether you have ground glass or you’ve ... well, chunks are obviously worse – but ... but ground glass is still, for example, goes through the intestinal tract, I don’t care what sort of good foods you’ve consumed, has the potential to ...”

TR: “Yes.”

AB: "... it seems to me to eviscerate you from the inside out!"

TR: "It has that potential, yes.

But I took some precaution before, um, we went on the air here and everything is going to be going through like a broken glass fritter."

AB: (laughs).

TR: "There's an image for ya."

AB: "Yeah, thanks for that."

TR: (laughs extensively).

\* \* \*

AB: "Um, you've been doing this since what age?"

TR: "I, ah, I started learning stuff when I was about ... thirteen (13) ... twelve (12) or thirteen (13) years old.

So, you know, it's some forty (40) – forty-two (42) years now. Forty-four (44) well, yeah, somethin' like ... no, forty-five (45) ... forty-five (45) years now."

AB: "Forty-five (45) years. So ..."

TR: "Yeah. And I'm gonna keep doing it till I get it right."

AB: "I wonder how many thousands of watts or ... or more you've consumed? I mean if you actually added up the bulbs by wattage."

TR: "Yeah, that's true. It's usually ... usually a sixty (60) or seventy-five (75) watt bulb, so I can make the joke about I like, eatin' the hundred (100) watt bulbs, but I'm on a diet ..."

AB: (laughs).

TR: "... you know?"

Um ..."

AB: "Is there any difference by the way in ... in the wattage of light bulbs?"

TR: "No ... no."

- AB: "In terms of your ability to crunch them ..."
- TR: "No ..."
- AB: "... and consume them safely?"
- TR: "... no, the ... the ... this is the thing – I would use the cheaper bulbs out in Coney Island because instead of coating them, they would sandblast them ..."
- AB: "Yeah?"
- TR: "... as part of the process."
- AB: "Right."
- TR: "And it would hit the bulbs on the inside and make the glass look thinner and a little bit easier on the teeth. But that was about the only thing.
- But as I was telling you, there's one funny little story ..."
- AB: "All right ... funny little story. Hold onto it."
- TR: "Yeah, we'll come back to it."
- AB: "Yes ... good."
- \* \* \*
- AB: (laughs). "I'm gonna sample some of, ah, what's typed to me while all this has been going on.
- Todd Robbins is my guest."
- \* \* \*
- AB: "Now Todd has much more to talk about – here he is. ... So I ... there is a lot more ground to cover, ah, Todd ..."
- TR: "Umm-hmm."
- AB: "Or people are going to think you just came on to eat a light bulb ... *and you're here for more than that.*" (AB laughs).
- TR: "Oh yeah, I've done a number of strange things, ah, throughout my, ah, my career."

AB: “Okay.”

\* \* \*

AB: “Well, ah, have you encountered things in your career that *you* could not explain?”

TR: “Yeah. There’s all sorts of, ah, strange coincidences. Ah ... there’s one that perhaps is just a coincidence.

Perhaps.

Ah, and I’m not ... it’s not ... I’m not terribly proud about this, but I’ll ... I’ll make this, ah ... I’ll make this rather quick here.

I’ve done a lot of entertaining through the years – traditional magic walk-around at corporate events.”

AB: “Hmmm.”

TR: “And, ah, it’s ... it’s all ... it’s a challenge especially in New York here. Because you know, I will go into an event and I’ll have a deck of cards in my hand and I’ll walk up to a group of people, ah, at a corporate event and say: ‘Good Evening. I’m ... I’m Todd Robbins. I’ve been invited to add a little fun to the evening. Could ... may I do something for ya?’

And they’ll look and they go: ‘No!’”

AB: “Yeah.”

TR: “And I ... I will say: ‘Well, I tell you what – I’m going to do something anyway and if you don’t like it, I’ll refund your misery.’”

AB: (laughs).

TR: “Um, this one event was many, many years ago. It was for a financial firm. And I knew I was in trouble when I walked into the room and there were three hundred (300) men and twenty (20) women.”

AB: (smirks).

TR: “And these guys were all *bros*.”

AB: “Ah, yeah.”

TR: “They were smokin’ cigars, ’cause they ... part of the entertainment at this ... this holiday event was they had a cigar roll. And they’re smokin’ their cigars and they’re talkin’, and they’re just jocks.”

AB: “Umm-hmm.”

TR: “And I go up to a group and I say: ‘Good Evening. I’m Todd Robbins. How about the idea if I had a little magical evening? ... If I do something for ya?’

And one of the guys – the alpha male of this group, [says] ‘Yeah!’ And he grabbed the deck out of my hands. He says: ‘Yeah, I wanta see a card trick. Jimmy ... and he turned to this friend, ‘ ... take a card!’

And Jimmy took a card. He said: ‘Show it to everyone, but don’t show it to this ...’ and I won’t say what the name he called me.”

AB: “All right ... I see.”

TR: “Ah, it was part of the anatomy, let’s put it that way.”

AB: “Hmpf ... yes.”

TR: “... this guy!

And so he showed the card around and he said: ‘Put it back in the deck!’ And he shuffled the deck and he shoved it back in my hand, and he said: “Now find my ... find his card!’ And again using different little ...”

AB: “Uh-huh!”

TR: “... please.”

AB: “Got it.”

TR: “And I ... I was like: ‘What the heck was going on? Who are these people?’

And I’d like to say that he was unusual, but they were all like that.

Later on in the evening I was doing a little demonstration of an ol’ street con called ‘*Fast and Loose – the Endless Chain.*’ And I prefaced it by starting off by saying: ‘This is a scam. It’s a con. It’s a game. You can’t win.’

‘And lemme show you how it’s done.’

And I would lay it out there and I would throw money down and say: 'Give it a try,' and they would lose. And I would let the money ... I'd throw down twenty dollars (\$20) (AB laughs) and I'd throw down another \$20 and I'd show them and make it simpler for them to win. And they'd still lose and still lose and still lose and still lose until I get to the end and ... and reiterate the ... the theme of it which is: 'This is a scam. It's a con. It's a game. You can't win.'

As soon as I finish the demonstration, a guy came up to me and said: 'You know, I can beat 'cha at that.'

And I go: 'No, you ... know, I guess you didn't hear that: It's a scam. It's a con. It's a game. You can't win.'

And he goes: 'Oh, you're chicken!' Now again, he didn't say 'chicken' – he used a stronger phrase."

AB: "Umm-kay."

TR: "And I looked at him like: 'What!' And I just said: 'Whoa ... okay! You got any money?'"

AB: (laughs).

TR: "And we played for about ten (10) minutes and I beat him out of a hundred and fifty bucks (\$150).

At which ... at the end of it, I threw it back at him and I said: 'It's a scam. It's a con. It's a game. You can't win.'

Three (3) hours this went on. I was engaged for three (3) hours to do this stuff and it was a torturous a- ... affair ..."

AB: (laughs).

TR: "... from beginning to end."

AB: "All little 'Kings of the World', right?"

TR: "Oh, they're so much so that when I walked out of there, I had but one very dark thought on my mind."

AB: (smirks) "Hmf ... hmf ... hmf."

TR: "Which was if I woke up the next day and find out everyone there was dead, it wouldn't bother me."

AB: "Yeah ... yeah."

TR: "Now ..."

AB: "Now that's a rough audience."

TR: "It's a rough audience, yes. And here's the quirky little thing. This is sort of like what we do on *True Nightmares*, a strange tale that has an ironic twist.

All the guys in that room were working at their little cubicles there in their office ..."

AB: "Right."

TR: "... at the top of the World Trade Center ..."

AB: "Ohh!"

TR: "... about a month later. *And all those guys are now dead (!)*"

AB: "Did you one night when you found that out – after having had that thought – um, it must have troubled you some?"

TR: "It ... it gave me pause. To say the least, it ... it made me wonder and I don't wish to harm anyone. Ah, and, ah, you know, that's just a strange, strange ..."

AB: "Wow!"

TR: "... coincidence.

You know, you talk about 'dark matter,' that's ... that's about as dark as it gets."

AB: "That's pretty dark matter, all right."

TR: "Yep.

Don't mess with me, Art, because I'm a very powerful man (!)"

AB: "Yeah."

\* \* \*

AB: “Um, so *True Nightmares*, um, ...”

TR: “Yeah!”

AB: “... I’m, ah, I have not watched. What’s it all about?”

TR: “Well, ah, *Investigation Discovery* is a Discovery Channels ... one of the networks that Discovery Communications has.”

AB: “Oh, yes! Yes, yes, yes ... I understand.”

TR: “And it ... it features true crime. And they wanted to do something a little bit different. Something along the lines of *The Twilight Zone*.”

AB: “Umm-hmm.”

TR: “Or *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*.”

And so, I’m the host. Ah, I am on camera introducing the stories, and the stories are all true, and in each episode we do three (3) stories. And they’re all about murder and mayhem, very quirky that have an ironic twist to them.

And the fun thing about it – the darkly fun thing – is you’ll see a scene in which a man and woman are sitting there, and they get into an argument. She picks up a knife and is gonna stab him. And the camera pulls back from the table they’re sitting at and at the other side of the table eating a salad is me.

And I’ll look up at the camera and say: ‘And this is where things took an ugly turn.’”

AB: (smirks).

TR: “So it has this very dark, wry ...”

AB: “Sure.”

TR: “... humor about it ...”

AB: “Dry humor.”

TR: “... that harkens back to people like Alfred Hitchcock.”

AB: “And again, you need that humor, don’t ’chu when you’re doing this kinda very dark stuff?”

TR: “Yes. And the thing about it is, people run into *Investigation Discovery.com* to find out more about these stories ’cause they think they can’t possibly be true. And then they Google them and find out they are true.

And we did six (6) episodes – this is our ... sort of our ... our test season there ... our premiere. Ah, the episodes have all aired. They do show up on *Investigation Discovery*. They are on *Investigation Discovery* on demand if you have that as part of your cable service.”

AB: “Umm-hmm.”

TR: “Or you can go to *Investigation Discovery.com* and go to *True Nightmares* and they’ll have full episodes there.

And the stories are wild! There’s some ... some things about, ah, serial killers. There’s some things about ...”

AB: “Hmpf.”

TR: “... this quirky fate.

Ah, there’s one story that, ah, happened a number of years ago about a woman who went for a lovely day at a community pool. And, ah, she didn’t swim very well. but she saw the kids going down the slide. And the water was very murky that day – there was a problem with the filtration system. It was safe, but it was all ... it was cloudy.

And she ... it was one of these perfect storms of everything coming together in a strange way with very dark results.

She went down the slide, went into the deep end there, and she drowned (!)

And what people don’t realize is when people drown they usually don’t flail about and say: ‘Help me! Help me!’ They just go into the water and they kind of submit to it, and they drown.

And she ...”

AB: “Hmm.”

TR: "... sunk to the bottom and because of the cloudiness in the water, her body was in the pool for three (3) days and no one noticed."

AB: "Yikes!"

TR: "The pool was open for three (3) days. Kids swimming back and forth. Families cavorting in the water. People having a great time ... and there was a corpse in the deep end.

Finally after three (3) days ... again, the quirkiness is that some kids broke into the pool. They climbed over the fence to take a midnight swim. And they were swimming around and by that time her insides had ... had bloated. There was gas ..."

AB: (gasps a sigh).

TR: "And her body floated to the ... the top, and they were swimming around and they bumped into something. And when they realized what it was ... . Well, let me put it to you this way – they're not going to be breaking in and swimming in pools ever again."

AB: "Right.

Well, um, a lot of these things are like you're eating a light bulb.

*You can't unhear that!"*

\* \* \*

AB: "Now ..."

TR: "Yeah ... yeah."

AB: "... the range of comments is astounding! Astounding! (TR laughs).

'Worst thing you ever did, Art! Turning off your show! First time ever. (TR laughs). WTF! [WHAT THE FUCK!]'

Then: 'That's awesome! Radio Gold!'

'Oh My God! That's so not okay!'

And you know, it goes on and on and on."

TR: "Umm-hmm."

AB: "It's either 'Radio Gold! God, that was great!' or you know, 'I'm gonna turn you off.'

And ... and too late, Buddy. You can't unhear that!" (AB laughs).

TR: "Umm-hmm."

AB: "Or if you go to the website, you can't unsee it once you've seen it."

TR: "Yes."

AB: "So ... really."

TR: "You know, it's what you said about ... about pickles early on, you know, at ... at the top of the show. (AB laughs). You know?"

If ... if ... if, you know, tune in tomorrow night, and you know, there'll be something different. I guarantee it.

So it's ... so it's an ever-changing landscape."

AB: "Oh! That's for sure! That's what we do here."

TR: "Right."

\* \* \*

AB: "So ... um, why do you like the dark and the mysterious, and the stuff that you can't ever like unsee or unhear? Why?"

TR: "Well, because it's, you know ... I, you know ... we ... you were talking about this earlier. It's ... it's things ... when things become homogenized, it just loses such character.

And where the character comes from is really the darkness. The strange, the unusual things that happen."

AB: "Right."

TR: "And this is ... I think is defining.

As a matter of fact one thing I'm working on right now is a- ... another series which is gonna be sort of a travelogue of me going around and telling the stories about locales all across the country. That these are the stories that the Chamber of Commerce don't want told about the history of places."

AB: "You ..."

TR: "But they're the ones that really define, ah, the terrible things that have happened there.

And again, the fact that we've overcome these and survived ..."

AB: "Yes?"

TR: "... says a lot about the human nature.

And we become, you know, it's the whole thing about that which doesn't kill you makes you stronger.

Ah ... we ... we learn from these ... we ... we grow from these. It's not our successes. It's not our triumphs. **It's the tragedies. It is the disasters.** Ah, these are the things that are ... are fascinating.

And people are, you know ... it ... the ... it's ... well, you see it every time you drive the, ah, a highway and there's a long line of people because there's an accident.

And people just want to take a look ... (!)"

AB: "I know!"

TR: "... and they ... they want to see these because ..."

AB: "I know! I know! I know!"

They won't admit it, but yes, they wanta see it."

TR: "Yeah!"

\* \* \*

AB: "Now, I wanta bring this up, Todd ... because ..."

TR: "Sure."

AB: "... Discovery used to be a really straight-laced network, and, ah, it was almost like, you know, Science channel. You see it on Discovery – it's gotta be true."

TR: "Yes."

- AB: "Discovery in recent years ... very recent years has turned to horrortainment [sic] ..."
- TR: "Umm-hmm."
- AB: "... right? And, um, but you're right ... you're absolutely right and the people out there listening to me know it right now. It ... you can't turn away from it, can you?"
- TR: "No."
- AB: "Well ... you can. I ... I mean the truth is that most will decry it but watch it."
- TR: "Yeah ... yeah. And, ah, you know, there's darkness in us all. And if you acknowledge that ... Carl Jung said that the best way to understand the darkness among us is to come to grips with the darkness in yourself."
- AB: "Umm-hmm."
- TR: "And I think if ... if you understand it's there, that's the best way of dealing with it. That ... so you don't go down the road of these dark people we chronicle, ah, in *True Nightmares*, and that you see doing awful things all around us."
- AB: "Umm-hmm."
- TR: "You just remind us that we all have that potential and we should celebrate the fact that we haven't gone down that road. And we haven't made those choices."
- AB: "Are you fairly sure that that's the effect that it has, that it doesn't cause people to, I don't know, go off the deep end?"
- We ... live in a pretty weird society these days. I wonder how many people watch something like that and then emulate?"
- TR: "Well, I don't think ... I don't feel that's the case.
- When you look in the profile of people, who are doing dark things, there's usually a great deal of repression there. There's a great deal of, ah, you know, sitting on top of all this and feeling that, you know, the ... the world has wronged them."
- AB: "Umm-hmm."

TR: "And ... and so therefore they grab a gun and go off and do something very, very dark and awful to their fellow men."

AB: "They do."

TR: "Whereas if ya have a little bit of a ... a release valve, ah, by watching this stuff – and knowing that 'chu would never wanta go down that route, ah, it ... it ... it maintains sanity as opposed to ... to encouraging insanity."

AB: "Okay. Well, I ... I hope that's right."

TR: "Yeah."

AB: "Um, but it seems like we're facing an increasing amount of this in society right now. Really crazy stuff. Or, I don't know, the media just chooses to cover more of it, but now there's ... there's more of it going on I'm pretty convinced. How 'bout you?"

TR: "I, you know, yeah, it's ... it's ... it's a tough thing. You know, there are so many changes in our world and people find change so threatening that they want to, ah, many people want to revert to fundamentalism on ..."

AB: "Oh, yes!"

TR: "... in many flavors.

And that's fine ... that's fine! If ... if ... if that's what you want, ah, that's ... that's ... you ... you have that freedom. But when that festers and becomes the desire to destroy those which are different from you, that's when you run into the real problems.

Ah, and that's what we see bubbling up, because there have been people who have made a great deal of profit, ah, by spouting hate. And that's ... that's a whole different thing than what we're doing."

AB: "Okay."

\* \* \*

AB: "You say apparently that 'there is no such thing as the Truth.'"

TR: "Yeah!"

AB: "Now when you make that statement, what do you mean – 'No such thing as the Truth'?"

TR: “Well, you know, when ... when you hear someone say: ‘The Truth is ...’ or ‘Let me tell you the Truth’ ...”

AB: “Yeah?”

TR: “... I find more often than not what you’re getting is one (1) of two (2) things that have been mislabeled as Truth.

You either get fact or you get opinion, which is people’s reaction to having experienced fact. Their ... their interpretation of what fact is.

And fact doesn’t require any help from anyone else.”

AB: “Uh-huh.”

TR: “Facts are facts and ... and they ... they stand alone.

And opinion is like I say, people will try to ... to put more weight behind by saying: ‘It’s the Truth.’ And so like I say when someone says: ‘This is what the Truth is,’ chances are you’re hearing either fact being presented or opinion.

And now having said this, the question is whether it is fact or opinion.”

AB: “Having said all we’ve said, ah ...”

TR: “Umm-hmm.”

AB: “... is there anything you can think of that truly frightens you?”

TR: “Oh yeah, oh yeah ... yeah.”

AB: “Really?”

TR: “Ah, yeah, the IRS [Internal Revenue Service].”

AB: (laughs). “Yeah, they’re pretty scary.”

TR: “You know, yeah, there ... there are ... power is really frightening. Ah, there are people out there that will use ... oh, they’ll use fear and they will use influence, and they will use whatever they can to manipulate. And that’s ... those are the things that ... that frighten me, and we see so much of it going on in the political realm these days.

And people that just ... you ... I ... I made a joke on ... on Facebook that, ah, I said: ‘Okay, all right, enough ... enough of this. Let’s bring out the

real candidates for the Presidency. C'mon! Okay, enough of the jokes! Lets' find ... let's bring out the real candidates ... !"

AB: "Yeah, and how did that go over?"

TR: "Yeah, well, people, you know they ... they laughed about that, but it's ... it's kinda sad (!)

You know it's not about leaving a country, it's more about appealing to people to get the vote. Enough votes to get in office."

AB: "All right. Hold it ..."

TR: "It's all about ..."

AB: "Hold it right there. We've got a quick break.

Ah, the Presidency is an interesting topic.

I'm Art Bell. This is *Midnight in the Desert*. Join us as you will."

\* \* \*

AB: "Ah, seances, right?"

TR: "Yeah."

AB: "You ... and, ah, have you ever seen a seance that you regard as legit?"

TR: "Yeah actually, um ..."

AB: "Really?"

TR: "... I ... I ... it's. ah ... yeah.

As ... you know, it's an amazing phenomenon. On my thirtieth (30th) birthday I threw a party. I wanted to play around with, ah, some table tipping, ah, which is sorta like a large version of a Quija Board. And ..."

AB: "Yeah."

TR: "Ah, so I was gonna gather some people together and ... and just put 'em around a table and put them in the right mood and see what we'd come up with."

AB: "Yeah, uh-huh."

TR: “And the word got out and before I knew it I had fifty (50) people, who wanted to come, so I rented a ... a ... a room and set up all these tables and it was ... I just put everyone in the right mood. Candlelight, the whole thing, and ... and extinguished the candles one by one as I was telling them what to expect and what could happen.

And it was an amazing phenomenon what people experienced! The ... the tables moved. Ah, people saw things (!), ah, and people had imagery come to them of a dead loved ones (!) And it was a very, very interesting and powerful experience that had no trickery, no deception to it whatsoever other than what was going on in the ... the hearts and minds of the people there.”

AB: “Well ...”

TR: “And people are still talking about it and that was ... that was almost thirty (30) years ago.”

AB: “Um, how do you come out of something *real* like that without being a very changed person?”

TR: “Oh, I don’t, ah, I ... I don’t think you ... you ... you do come out of it.”

AB: “That’s a fact [?]”

AB: **“I think you are changed – that’s the great thing about it!**

It just ... again, it ties back to the mystery of what was going on in that room. And I don’t really have answers for that.”

AB: “All right.”

\* \* \*

AB: “Well, look I would like to let some people ask questions.”

TR: “Sure.”

AB: “So, ah, let’s do it!

You’re on the air with Todd Robbins. Hi!” ...

Aud: “I was just wondering ... first of all, where do you appear generally? I mean do you have shows that you go on regularly?”

AB: “Good question. Umm-hmm.”

TR: “Yes, I ... I had a show we did off-Broadway called, ah ... ah, *Play Dead*. And, ah, that closed down and we’ve toured it around. We’re actually gonna be opening that in Las Vegas.

But in New York, I’m one of the regular performers and actually one of the producers of New York’s longest running magic show called *Monday Night Magic*. It is every Monday night at the Player’s Theatre in Greenwich Village. You can find out more information at [MondayNightMagic.com](http://MondayNightMagic.com).”

Aud: “Ah! Great! Great!

Now, ah, one other thing. I was with the, ah, NYPD [New York Police Department] for about twenty-five (25) years ...”

TR: “Yeah.”

Aud: “... and, ah, I do agree with what ’cha said, ah, regarding, um, people havin’ a macabre part of their, you know, internally, definitely inside them. [Unintelligible], ah, I’ve been to enough accident scenes and everything else where people just wanta look and see everything that’s going on.”

AB: “That’s right.”

Aud: “And how horrific it looks.

Ah, but the other question I have for you was, ah, basically, do you have any ... do you ever get, just in general, stomach issues, in general?”

AB: (laughs).

Aud: “Because I know I had food poisoning a few months ago and ... I mean, *you’re eating glass* and you don’t get sick from it. Is there anything ...”

AB: “Oh, food poisoning ... your ... you think you’re going to die! It’s that bad.”

Aud: “Exactly! Exactly!”

TR: “Oh yeah, yeah ... yeah, I mean, when it’s, yeah, for the food poisoning. I’ve had, you know, a few strange things happen, but nothing related to the glass, ah, remarkably. Ah, ’cause a part of it is, I have to stay on top of it and ... and keep everything healthy down there as much as possible.”

AB: (moans).

TR: “So, ah, I’ve been very fortunate.”

Aud: "Ah, that's great!

Well, thanks so much. And keep up the great stuff!

I mean, you made me cringe with the chewing on the glass tonight too, ..."

AB: "Ohh!"

Aud: "... so it was totally worth it."

AB: "Totally! But the fact of the matter is, you ... you can do this and at home – *you cannot do this!*"

TR: "No!"

AB: "Folks, and that's the big one! I always worry – I'm sure you must too, ah, Todd – that somebody will try it at home. And, ah, even though what you do is real ..."

TR: "Umm-hmm."

AB: "... people have to understand that if they try it ... well, they could ... if they do it wrong, could they die?"

TR: "Yeah. You know, it's similar to watching Nick Wallenda walk on a wire across a canyon. *If you try that you're going to die!*"

AB: "Umm-hmm."

TR: "If, you know, you watch someone do a triple somersault, you ... you know, or any ... any dangerous stunt.

**It is a stunt (!)** that I know how to do.

And if you try it, you could end up hurting yourself severely."

AB: "Well, I do appreciate the fact that what you do – which you call 'Sideshow' ..."

TR: "Umm-hmm."

AB: "... ah, is *real!*

In other words, ahh, it's not trickery – even though it's bizarre. Maybe, ah, hard-to-watch, and you'll simply remember for all the rest of your life it is real!

So, it's not hokum ... it's not baloney!"

TR: "Yeah."

AB: "You've ... you've really done something that has in some way *probably* changed somebody's life."

\* \* \*

AB: "By the way, if ... if I may, please, ah, as you listened to that light bulb being eaten here on the air, how did ... how did it hit you?"

Aud: "Like I was ... I'm ... I'm pretty good at visualizing. I could actually see him.

Yeah, ah, it made me cringe." (Aud laughs).

AB: "Yeah, okay. All right.

So even on the radio I was wondering, you know? I thought bad enough to actually see it – to hear it, well that's ... now I realize that's also bad."

\* \* \*

Aud: "And it just occurred to me, even if you know how it's done, it's still magic."

AB: "Yeah, but you know again, I wanta draw the line. *This is not magic.* Meaning there's no trick here."

\* \* \*

AB: "Todd, does it take a long time, ah ... ah, to learn how to safely – if there is such a word even – ah, eat glass?"

TR: "It was something I kinda worked up. Ah, it was a step-by-step thing ..."

AB: (laughs).

TR: "Ah, again I'm not instructing anyone how to do this, but I kinda got used to biting a little piece of glass, chewing it up, and then spitting it out."

AB: "Ahh!"

TR: "And then eventually working it up, getting me more aware of what was going on. And then going into the ... the swallowing of the glass.

Um, so it ... it ... it took a little while, but really once you learn how to do it, you just do it. It's not like ... sword swallowing takes a long time to learn,

ah, because you have to really train your body to do, ah, and have proper alignment, and all that takes a great deal of training.”

AB: “Well, you said that you can put pressure, ah, on ... more pressure than you think ...”

TR: “Umm-hmm.”

AB: “... on skin, but when you’re swallowing a sword, you are sliding by skin with somethin’ sharp, right?”

TR: “Well, the thing about it is, the ... the swords usually are not sharp, ...”

AB: “Even so ...”

TR: “... but they are solid, ...”

AB: “Yeah?”

TR: “... and you have to overcome the gag reflexing. And you have to have proper alignment and just know what you’re doing because there’s so many things you can puncture down there.”

AB: (chuckles). “Yeah.”

TR: “And probably ... yeah, it’s ... it’s just there’s ... it’s ... it is the ... the ... with ... along the lines of ... of, ah, glass eating, ah, it is the most dangerous thing to do.

The ... the thing about it is if you, ah ... um, if you do it and you’re having trouble, you can stop.

Whereas, once you swallow the glass, you don’t have that option any longer.”

AB: “Uh-huh. Well that’s true.”

TR: “Umm-hmm.”

AB: “Yeah, there’s a rumor that, ah, Anton LaVey ...”

TR: “Umm-hmm.”

AB: “... founder of The Church of Satan –”

TR: “Yes.”

AB: “– and I’ve had somebody on from that church – sent you a fan letter?”

TR: “Yeah, I did a, ah, an instructional video. There was so much bad information out there about, ah, sideshow stunts ...”

AB: “Yes?”

TR: “... that I ... many, many years ago I did a, ah ... ah, video clearing up some of the misconceptions and ... and instructing some of the simpler of the sideshow skills. And also giving a little background about the history and all that.

And I was approached by a ... a guy who wanted to do, ah, had some questions about a sideshow stunt that I had, ah ... ah, originated. And he was asking permission to do it. And he said: ‘I ... I ... can I do anything in trade? I ... I ... I’m a performer and I really haven’t originated anything, but maybe there’s something else you’d might like that could be of benefit to you?’

I, you know, do this: I run a haunted house. And I’m also a, ah, a deacon and the regional director of The Church of Satan.’

And I go: ‘Stop. Stop right there.’”

AB: “Yeah, yeah, stop right there.”

TR: “And I said: ‘Really? (!)’

And he goes: ‘Yeah. And so, by the way, ah, Dr. LaVey is a fan of yours.’

I go: ‘Whoa! What? (!)’

He said: ‘I visit him every year and I always like to bring him a little gift. And last year I gave him your video. And he watched it. And it reminded him of his days in the carnival, ’cause he had that background.

And he ... he liked it so much he sent me this lovely note.’

And I said: ‘Could I get that?’

‘Um ... sure!’

And it was thanking him and said lovely things about what I did and how much he admired it, and how much it reminded him of the days of his youth when he worked in the carnival.’”

AB: “Maybe he liked that, you know, the – ah, I don’t know how to put this (?) – that ... that ... the mood that you put people in as they watched you devour glass.”

TR: “Umm-hmm. That ... that might ...”

AB: (laughs).

TR: “... might be part of it.

He ... you know, people that work, ah, in the carnival and sideshows, and places like that, there’s a little phrase called ‘with it,’ which means you’re ‘with it, for it, and never against it.’

And once you get involved, it’s pretty much like being in the military.”

AB: “I guess.”

TR: “Anyone who’s ever been in the military – whether they’re, you know, World War 2 or ... or any of the other conflicts, or even if they never went to war – there’s a bond ... a bond ...”

AB: “Of course.”

TR: “... of all people in the military. And it’s the same thing with the carnival.

That once you are of that ... that community, you are ... you’ll always have a bond with anyone else that is part of that.

So I think he saw that in me, and it reminded him of his days, and there was that.

And I had an invitation to meet him, but I didn’t get a chance to get out to San Francisco in time, and he had passed away.”

AB: “Aww. All right.”

TR: “Yeah.”

\* \* \*

Aud: “And, ah, your guest was talking about like how he swallows glass and gets it to his throat. But coming through the other end ... he has a technique for that? Or don’t ’chu worry about getting cut or something, or what do you do?”

AB: “Well, I guess no more than going through ... I mean, think of it ... it goes through your whole intestinal tract, right?”

TR: “Umm-hmm.”

Aud: “You don’t feel it going through your body or anything?”

AB: “Yeah, actually that is a good question. Do you ...”

Aud: [Unintelligible].

AB: “... I mean, have you spent days in ... in ... in, ah, ever in bed, ah, just with clutching your stomach going ‘Oww!’?”

TR: “Well, like I say, one (1) light bulb isn’t really a problem, but when you end up doing ... when I was doing multiple light bulbs out on Coney Island, *it would get a little grumbly... !* It would get a little ... little, ah, there’d be a little irritation, ...”

AB: (laughs).

TR: “... ah, but you know, it’s just ... it’s bumpin’ around down there and there’s a lot of it. But it all would amount to a happy ending (!)”

Aud: “Would any glass come out the other end?”

TR: “Yeah, yeah, it would.

Basically I have no porcelain left on my toilet bowl. It’s been sort of sandblasted away.”

AB: (laughing). “Oh, stop!”

TR: “We’ll just leave it at that. There’s an image for ya.”

Aud: “Okay, thanks! I love ya, Art!”

AB: (laughing). “All right. Thank you very much for the call. Take care.

That’s another image that I ... I just won’t lose soon.”

TR: “Well, there you go. I’m a giver – what can I say.”

AB: “Y-y-yeah!”

\* \* \*

AB: “Um, do you actually ever go to these so-called seances – the ones that are not the ... the Real McCoy? And you articulated you’ve seen the Real McCoy, which is also something by the way, ...”

TR: “Umm-hmm.”

AB: “..., ah, and ... and bust them? You know, actually ...”

TR: “No, no, because ...”

AB: “No?”

TR: “... again, it’s ... it’s ... oh, I’m going to get into trouble.

But there’s ... you know, so much of the ... the people that are out there these days, they aren’t doing physical phenomenon as they did in the old days. You don’t see ectoplasm flowing forth, you don’t see tables floating through in the air, ...”

AB: “Right, right.”

TR: “... you don’t see ghosts walking around.

You get message services, which is people getting a message from the dead and ... and bringing it forth for the living.”

AB: “Yes?”

TR: “And ... and that’s the majority of the stuff that you’re going to see these days.

And with that you kinda wonder whether they’re really feeling that they are getting something or if they’re just con-artists that are just saying things that people want to hear.”

AB: “Exactly.”

TR: “And even the ones that are blatant frauds, the people that are sitting there are so happy to hear what they’re saying and so eating it up ...”

AB: “Yeah ... I know.”

TR: “... that there’s no win [sic] of standing there and saying this is fake, ...”

AB: “Yeah.”

TR: "..., ah, because they don't want to hear that."

AB: "I do get it. I really do get it.

Ah, even if it's fake, if it's comforting to that person ..."

TR: "Yeah, they're ... *that's what they want.*"

AB: "... then – okay."

TR: "And that's ... that's it.

**That's the essence of con-artistry is that you have to understand not only what people will believe but *what they want to believe*, and then feed that to them – that's where you can make a profit."**

AB: "Yes, sir. I get it."

\* \* \*

Aud: "And Mr. Robbins, um, I wanted to know, you know, I freak out just swallowing a fish bone."

TR: "Umm-hmm."

Aud: "And here you are chewing all these glass bits and what not. What ... what happens to your tongue when you're eating?"

I mean, you know when we eat, the tongue kinda like mingles with the food and stuff like that ..."

AB: "Umm-hmm."

Aud: "... and I can't wrap my mind around all those bits ... .

How do you not get it shredded?"

AB: "Hmpf."

TR: "Well, you know that's the great thing about it, it ... the tongue is very, very, ah, rubbery and, um, you know, one (1) little piece of glass can actually get lodged, ..."

Aud: "Uh-huh."

TR: "... but the irony of it is that when you have a big pile of glass on your tongue, it kinda holds together in such a way that it doesn't cut up ..."

AB: (exclaims).

TR: "... the, ah, the ... the surface there, because there's enough give to it. And then when I drink the water, I wash it all down and it all flushes very quickly and so that causes ... there's no, ah, no real problem there."

AB: "Ahh."

Aud: "It's amazing!"

AB: "... it is amazing and it's, you know, *this is not, again, a trick!*

You know, people look at this, and I ... I didn't believe, when I was told, that he ate light bulbs – *I just didn't believe it!*

And now, he has eaten more light bulbs than anybody in the world. Actually ..."

Aud: "Yah!"

TR: "Actually I'm in *Ripley's Believe It Or Not* for having done that."

AB: "Are you really?"

TR: "Yah. Umm-hmm."

Aud: "Wow!"

Okay, since you ate all those, um, light bulbs, could you remember the very first one that you successfully ate by yourself?"

AB: (laughs). "Your first light bulb ..."

TR: "Again, I was being taught by a guy who showed me. He broke a light bulb ... he took a little piece of glass ... he said, ah, 'Now, now, just take this and bite it, chew into it, and spit it out.'"

AB: "Why not begin with a little night light, you know?"

TR: "Yeah, he just [unintelligible] like, ah, Christmas tree lights."

Aud: "Yeah!"

AB: (laughs).

TR: "They're like, ah, you know, little appetizers.

Um ..."

Aud: "Aw, man!"

TR: "... he was that ... he was that and then a little bit more, a little bit more, a little bit more, and a little bit more until I was up to doing what I'm doing now."

AB: (exclaims) "Hmm! An appetizer." (AB laughs more).

Aud: "I'm still cringing, but you know, thank you for the experience! (Aud laughs).

Thanks, Art!"

AB: "Yeah, you're very welcome."

\* \* \*

TR: "My, ah, my old friend Melvin Burkhart, that ninety-four (94) year old, he used to, ah, as he was hammering a nail into his nose, says: 'You know, it beats workin' for a livin'.'"

AB: "Um, well, does it? Really, I mean, hammering a nail into your nose ... um ..."

TR: "He would also say: 'It's a hard way to make an easy living.'"

AB: "Yeah, you really can't afford to be distracted when you're doing that, right?"

TR: "No ... no. You do need a great deal of concentration."

AB: "I mean, they actually ... they take ... tell me how this is done.

You take a nail ..."

TR: "Umm-hmm."

AB: "... and hold it where on your nose, please?"

TR: "Right into the nostril – straight back ... not up. Not down, but straight back."

AB: "Straight ... really?"

TR: "Straight back."

AB: "That can't be!"

TR: "If you ... if you ..."

AB: "You can't just ..."

TR: "... just Google me, chances are you'll see me with a nail in my nose."

AB: "Now wait a minute. Hold on here.  
If I ... if I just take the end of a pen – ugly as that may seem – and I hold ..."

TR: "Yeah."

AB: "... there's no way!  
If ... if I drive a nail in there, it's going ... oh, where is it going?"

TR: "The nasal passage is how you breathe."

AB: "Oh, come on!"

TR: "Straight back in the top of the throat."

AB: "Ahh, well I could see that if it's going *up!*"

TR: "No, it's actually straight back."

AB: "Straight back?"

TR: "Umm-hmm."

AB: "Doesn't seem like ... that would be possible. Um ..."

TR: "Yeah-h-h."

AB: "... and ... and ... and then they what? Hammer it with a hammer?"

TR: "Yeah, there's a ..."

AB: "Oh, God!"

TR: "... technique for holding it, so when you're doing it you're not getting the full force of the blow of the hammer.

That's the one little trick, little finesse of the thing, but it's ... it's very effective."

AB: "Okay, so the ... the nail is still going, uh, back there?"

TR: "Umm-hmm. And when it gets to the back of the throat you stop."

AB: (grimaces).

TR: "Because if you keep going, you go into the brain and that would be a bad thing."

AB: "Yes. Um, ..."

TR: "Yeah."

AB: **"... don't anybody out there do any of this stuff!"**

TR: "No ... no."

\* \* \*

AB: "Um, yeah, this is ..."

TR: "Go to Coney Island ... if people go to [coneyisland.com](http://coneyisland.com), they'll see where the Sideshow School is ..."

AB: "Uh-huh."

TR: "... there. And they have lessons and will teach people how to do things – not the glass-eating, but the blockhead and the sword swallowing and fire-eating ... things like that.

It's the only real place you can learn in a classroom setting ..."

AB: "Can you explain fire-eating?"

TR: "What was that?"

AB: "Can you explain fire-eating?"

That's another one ..."

TR: "Yes ..."

AB: "All right."

TR: "... yeah."

AB: "Hold on, hold on ... we're at, ah ... this is a break.

Feel free to join us, folks!

Fire-eating's up next!"

\* \* \*

AB: "A nail ... a nail in the nose. A-ha-ha-ha! ... Aagh! Not for me!"

\* \* \*

AB: "And the respect that I have for Todd is that, ah, he's hot – how can I put it? – he's not doing *tricks!* You know, I understand what tricks are, they're not real!

What Todd does is real! It's kind of like, oh, I guess *Ripley's Believe It Or Not!* He said he was in *Ripley's Believe it Or Not!*

Um, and ... and Todd, I'm a big fan of con movies. There is the short con ..."

TR: "Umm-hmm."

AB: "There is the long con. Ah, pe- ... pe- ... these people doing short cons frequently get beat up, right?"

TR: "Yeah, ah, they have to be very careful, ah, when doin' that ... that kinda thing that ... . You know, the ... the great con-artists, and I use 'great' not really as admiration, but ..."

AB: "Hmpf."

TR: "... as just fascination, ah, work on such a level like Bernard Madoff, that people, you know, fight to give them their money. And when they take it from their ... their victim: **the victims thank them (!) for taking their money.**"

AB: "Yes!"

TR: "Ah, it's ... it's amazing!"

But you know, they're ... they're ... they're cons that go on ... small cons that people don't even realize.

Ah, crime has happened. There's something called the 'bottle drop,' which happens I ... I guarantee was happening tonight in New York City in which you're walking along and someone bumps into you, and they drop a ... a ... plastic bag and you hear glass break and you kinda go on your way and they grab you and go: 'You know, you did that on purpose! You knocked that outta my hand. That was a thirty-five dollar (\$35) bottle of Scotch ...'

AB: (exclaims).

TR: "... I was taking it to a friend's party ... birthday party, and you knocked it outta my hand! I'm gonna call the cop!"

And you go: 'Oh, I'm sorry! Here ... .' And you hand them the money ..."

AB: "Right ... right."

TR: "... and you go on your way. And you don't even realize you've been conned!"

AB: "Right.

Well, today they're updating it to things like: 'Hi. I'm ... I'm from Microsoft and ...'

TR: "Umm-hmm."

AB: "... you know the last time your computer booted up, ah, we noticed that you had a terrible virus ..."

TR: "Umm-hmm."

AB: "... and then this comes from India,' by the way, Todd ..."

TR: "Yeah ... oh yeah!"

AB: "... and, ah, and by the time they're done with you, you do have a virus if you follow their instructions."

TR: "It's ... it's no longer your computer."

AB: "Yeah, that's right."

TR: "It's their computer."

AB: "They actually own it until you pay up. It's horrible!"

TR: "Umm-hmm."

AB: "Absolutely horrible! And people fall for it every day."

\* \* \*

Aud: "Ah. have you ever come across this like, ah, I've see like videos of demonic, ah, magic where ... I don't know if you've seen these [unintelligible], ah, videos on YouTube where these guys are doin' magic that just can't be explained."

AB: "Demonic ... magic?"

Aud: "Yeah!"

TR: "I ... I don't ... I'm not ... I'm not exactly clear. I mean, there's ... there is a kind of a dark, ah, form of magic called 'Bizarre Magic,' which, ah, often affects people on a kind of on a different level. It's not about your polite applause so much as it is, ah, drop-jaw awe and, ah, often, ah, dread that, ah, because they're ... they're doing some ... some really, ah, some very, very dark things that, ah, are ... are more shocking than ... than really entertaining.

Um, so, ah, if that's what you're talking about, yeah I do ... do know of, ah, folks that do that kinda stuff.

But demonic magic I'm not ... not quite, ah ... ah, I'm not really familiar with that."

AB: "So caller, what are you talkin' about?"

Aud: "Well, there's just the certain things that they do that just can't be explained. I ... I don't know ..."

AB: "Well ... you ..."

Aud: "How do they get those cell- ... cellphone [sic] in that bottle?"

TR: "Okay. Well, yeah, I mean ..."

AB: (chuckles).

TR: "... that's ... that's a darn good trick!"

Let's put it that ... that way. And ... and there's some *really* creative minds in magic – some young guys that are taking things ... taking things like cellphones and ... and ... and bottles, 'cause everyone has a bottle of water and will do things where it ... it ... it is amazing (!), 'cause that's ... that's their job.

But it is ... at the end of the day it's not ... they're not affecting anyone's worldview on this. It is for entertainment purposes.”

Aud: “Umm-hmm.”

TR: “[Unintelligible] it's just that they're good.

Aud: “ And when you eat the ... yeah, when you ... when you eat the ... the ... the light bulbs, do you have a meal or a base that binds the glass before you do it?”

TR: “Yeah.”

AB: “Yeah, what helps? What helps?”

TR: “Yeah. Yeah.”

AB: “You mentioned you have a special diet, ah ...”

TR: “Yeah, you know that first year out in Coney Island I put on, ah, fifteen pounds (15 lbs.), 'cause I would ... there was a little Italian restaurant around the corner – a family-owned place that would deliver. And I would eat pasta almost every day ...”

AB: (laughs).

TR: “... for lunch, and, ah, it's a part of the, ah ... um ... ah, the perils of ... of doing glass-eating is that you have a tendency to put on all the weight because of all the ... the pasta and things that need to be, ah, eaten ...”

AB: (laughs more).

TR: “... to, ah ...”

AB: “Not the light bulbs.”

TR: “Yeah-h-h.”

AB: “Light bulbs add no weight to you.”

TR: "No ... no."

Aud: "How ... how about ..."

TR: "Roughage."

Aud: "How about ... how about neon ... neon bulbs?"

TR: "Ahh, yeah, you can ... you have to be careful with like fluorescent bulbs that like you would find in ... in, ah, offices and things like that, because the gas inside there is toxic. So it's the same glass as you'll find in incandescent except it's got ... it's filled with that toxic, noxious, ah ... ah, gas."

AB: (groans).

TR: "So you have to break it and kinda let it air out before ya bite into it. A couple times I've done that."

Aud: "Well ..."

AB: "Does that help you, caller?"

Aud: "Yes.

Yeah, I had a guy I knew ate a light bulb once, but it was lit. Ever do lit bulbs?"

TR: "No ..."

AB: "No!"

TR: "... because chances are as soon as ya bite into it, it's gonna go out. Ah, and ... but you still have electricity flowing through there and, ah, it ... it can be a little, ah ... I ... I like to make it shocking for the audience, not shocking for me."

AB: "Okay."

\* \* \*

AB: "I'll tell you a story. I'll tell you a story, Todd.

TR: "Okay."

AB: "Ahh, and this is the truth.

When I was, ah, pretty young after I got out of the Air Force, I ... I went to work for a while as a ... an electrician's apprentice."

TR: "Umm-hmm."

AB: "And I worked for this ... this older guy – and I swear what I'm about to tell ya is true. And, he was a kind of crusty old guy and he could take two (2) fingers, lick 'em, and put 'em across a hundred-ten (110) volts and tell me: 'Okay, that's one-ten (110).'

Lick 'em again, put it on the next one: 'Okay, that's the two-twenty (220).'"

TR: "Yeah."

AB: "Ah, he could do that. And ... and I said: 'You know, this may not be the right career for me.'"

TR: (laughs).

AB: "And, ah, and he said he could do it with four-forty (440) as well, and that's just creepy."

TR: "Yeah, ah, you know, the ... I've known a couple of electricians – the old ... older guys – and there is an old act in the sideshow called 'The Electric Girl Act.'

And you sit someone in a chair and you shoot, ah, use a high frequency generator."

AB: "Uh-huh."

TR: "It's ... it's high voltage, but low amp."

AB: "Right."

TR: "And, ah, it causes skin effect. And you can light up neon tubes in the hands ..."

AB: "Right."

TR: "... and sparks jump from the fingertips and stuff like that.

And I often would bring someone up from the audience and have them ..."

AB: "But ..."

TR: "... ah, and ... and they would, you know, someone would hold a coin and you touch it – *you get a big shock.*

And I got one guy up and he just held it there, and it was arcing like crazy on his finger. (AB laughs).

And I turned to him: 'You're an electrician, aren't you?'

And he goes: 'Yep!'"

AB: "Uh-huh."

TR: "Okay, thanks for comin' up here ... yeah!"

AB: "The thing about what this guy could do though, Todd, is that it wasn't low current."

TR: "Oh, I know! Yeah!"

AB: "This is really high current stuff.

Now he's smart enough not to be taking it across his heart, you know?"

TR: "Yeah."

AB: "Right finger ... left finger ... then you're probably dead 'cause it's going across your heart."

TR: "Yeah."

AB: "But he could do it with two (2) fingers, something I would never even think about – not in a million years!"

TR: "Yeah, I, you know, it amazes me! Now, they know enough about how to be ground and everything so that the shock that guy was getting would probably knock most people back on their ... on their butts, but it was ..."

AB: "I know."

TR: "He was ..."

AB: "I know."

TR: "But he could take it. And he knew from the level of ... of the sensation of how strong that current was."

AB: “Yeah, that’s right.”

TR: “And ...”

AB: “Um, anyway, it turned me away from the whole idea of becoming an electrician.

He said: ‘You’ll get to where you can do that. It’s a lot easier than carrying around a volt meter.’”

TR: “Nope.”

AB: “I went: ‘I don’t know. I like volt meters.’”

TR: “Yeah.”

\* \* \*

Aud: “Todd, I’m curious about something about history that maybe you know.

Sometime in I think in the early sixties (1960s), there was a gentleman, who had a kiosk on the sidewalk, not too far from Nathan’s [a famous hot dog stand in Coney Island], but near Mermaid Avenue ...”

TR: “Umm-hmm.”

Aud: “And he would do magic tricks from there and people would queue up and watch the tricks in the queue, but then eventually get to participate in one (1) trick when their turn came.”

AB: “Hmm!”

Aud: “And this magician had an assistant, who was a little songbird – not a parrot, but a little songbird ... I don’t know what kind ...”

TR: “Umm-hmm.”

Aud: “And this parrot [sic] would deliver props from shelves to the magician or people in the audience who were participating in the trick.

AB: “Hmpf.”

Aud: “And then would return the props to the shelf again when the trick was over. And sometimes the bird would pick a card out of a hand of cards to generate a random number used in the trick.

And I'm wondering if you knew anything about this man or this bird, or what kind of bird it was, ..."

TR: "Ah, you know ..."

Aud: "... or the name of them?"

TR: "... I ... I've heard ... I've heard about this performer and I don't know who it was, I ... I'm sorry to say. But I have heard about this.

I also heard, ah, heard that they, ah, they also do, ah, fortune-telling. That, ah, you would write a question and the bird would go and then bring back an answer ..."

AB: "Heh."

TR: "... ah ... ah, you know, for ... for the question that you asked.

And there are a number of people who have done trained bird acts like that. It takes a great deal of ... of patience, but when it's done and done right ... .

Ah, I have an old friend, who's an English Ringmaster, named Norman Barnett, who has ... basically it's like a dog act what you see ... except it's with budgies ... it's with parakeets. And it's just amazing what he's gotten them to do, ah, just by, you know, training them and spending endless hours.

So I don't know who that was offhand ..."

Aud: "Do you know what kind of bird it was?"

TR: "Ah, it ... it ... it ... it ... all right, it could have been a cockatiel."

Aud: "This was not a parrot. This was like a regular songbird."

TR: "Oh, okay. Ah, finches are pretty good ... pretty smart, ah, in regard to ... you can train them. But I don't know. I can't ... I couldn't say offhand.

Um, we ... actually there is a, ah ... we did a show, ah, as I mentioned, *Play Dead*, and, ah, it's, ah, ghost stories 'n' stuff like that. And we're going to be doing it in Las Vegas – it's opening up some time in the next year."

AB: "Oh?"

TR: "And, um ..."

AB: "Really?"

TR: "... they wanta expand a little bit. So we're talking with a guy who wants to train a vulture to do basically that same kind of act behind the bar so that, you know, when a guy needs some sort of thing, the vulture will jump down and bring him along the bar whatever he ... he needs and then will jump back to its perch.

So, ahh, we'll ... we'll see if that ends up being a reality or not."

Aud: "That's pretty cool."

TR: "Yeah ... yeah ... yeah ..."

AB: (laughs). "[Unintelligible] ... just say: 'Again, it's a trick though, right?'"

TR: "It's ... it's just, you know, ah, animal behavior."

AB: "Just animal behavior?"

TR: "Yeah, just, you know, just spending countless hours of ... you ... you have to take ... you find what the animal does and does well, and what the animal likes to do ..."

AB: "Huh!"

TR: "... and then mold that into some sort of a trick, so it can be done on queue."

AB: "Interesting."

TR: "Yeah."

AB: "Ah, and then I guess if you lose your animal, you lose your act, right?"

TR: "Yeah ... yeah. But the good thing about it is if as an animal's getting older, you usually bring in a younger animal, and that animal will watch the other animal work ..."

AB: "And emulate it?"

TR: "And emulate it, yeah ... yeah."

AB: "Interesting."

\* \* \*

Aud: "Yeah, I ... I wanted to ask about ... about the magic in his show, and how much magic is in there?"

And I'm sure he's a very physical person, but there must be an element of magic in his show. Nobody could do a show with, ah, like that without a cert- ... certain element of, ah ... there must be some magic there, okay?"

AB: "When you say 'magic,' do you mean 'magic tricks' or do you mean 'magic magic'? What are you talkin' about?"

Aud: "Oh, I ... I mean there's a certain element that all humans, ah, understand. There's a certain element of ... of, ah ... ah, things we don't understand and things we can learn."

TR: "Umm-hmm."

Aud: "And that's ... that's exactly what I mean."

AB: "Okay. All right."

Aud: "Yeah, when I ... I ... it depends. I try not to mix because I want people to appreciate when I'm doin' the sideshow stuff that ... that it is all real. It's all based on true ability.

So I stick my hand in animal traps, I swallow swords, I eat fire, eat glass ..."

AB: (laughs).

TR: "... ah, hammer a nail into my nose, walk over broken bottles in my bare feet ... and there's no trickery, there's no deception ... any of it."

AB: "All right."

\* \* \*

AB: "Last thing, this ... very quickly, I want to get it in because I did ask about it. And that is, eating fire. How do you do that?"

TR: "Ya put it in your mouth and you close the mouth and cut off the air."

AB: "And, you have, ah, and then it goes out, right?"

TR: "Yeah, and then it goes out.

You deprive it of oxygen, and that's how you extinguish a torch.

Don't do it! Because if you breathe in, you cauterize your lungs and you die! And that would be a bad thing.

I don't encourage anyone to give it a try, but that's the basic principle."

AB: "But I've seen fire-eaters eat fire and then pull it back out, and it's still on fire!"

TR: "Yeah, there's ... there's a lot of finesse that 'chu can do in terms of retaining the flame in the mouth. Spitting fire. There's all sorts of things.

But the basic extinguishing of flame in your mouth is about closing the mouth, cutting off the oxygen, and the fire goes out."

AB: "All right. All right."

TR: "And there's enough moisture in your mouth to keep the mouth from being barbecued for a few seconds."

AB: (smirks). "Todd Robbins, thank you for being here."

TR: "It's my pleasure."

AB: "We'll do it again sometime. Incredible! Incredible stuff!

Thank you, Todd."

TR: "Thank you, Art."

AB: "Good Night."

\* \* \*

AB: "Well, that's certainly a first for me.

All those twenty-five (25) time zones out there, I'm Art Bell.

Good Night."