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SIMON & SCHUSTER
New York London Toronto Sydney New Delhi

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About the Author

This book is dedicated to all the animals that my wife, Beth, and I have rescued over the years. Here is a painting I did of one of them. Her name was Sophia.

INTRODUCTION

Or: How Simon & Schuster Bamboozled Me into Doing Another Book

It's been over twenty years since my last book, and I vowed I would never do this again. The experience was miserable for me. Writing a book is extremely hard work—the kind of work that was required of me in college when writing a paper analyzing Ingmar Bergman and Federico Fellini movies. (I was a communications major with a minor in journalism, and I graduated one of those cum laudes—magna or summa, I can't remember which.) What made writing books even more grueling was my obsessive-compulsive disorder. I've struggled with OCD my whole life, and if you want to torture someone with OCD, just make them write a book. They will obsess over every single word, endlessly deliberate over each comma and period. It is excruciating. For the past two decades, publishers had been after me to write a third book, but I didn't want to subject myself to all that pain and suffering, and besides, I had enough going on with my radio show and the few years I spent judging on *America's Got Talent*, so the answer was always no.

So why did I do it? Because Simon & Schuster handed me a finished copy. Tricky bastards.

Here's what happened. In April 2017, I agreed to take a meeting with this guy Jonathan Karp, number one top muckety-muck at Simon & Schuster. A mutual acquaintance, Vinnie Favale—at the time vice president of late night programming for CBS—had put him in touch with my longtime agent, Don Buchwald. Like I said, I usually shot down publishers, but I googled Jonathan and something in his impressive résumé grabbed my attention. Before joining Simon & Schuster, he'd worked for another publisher, where he started his own imprint that only released twelve books a year. While most big publishers put out hundreds of books a year, Jonathan had decided to do just a dozen—one

book a month—focusing on projects he passionately believed in and putting the full force of marketing and publicity behind them. This was speaking my language. I had always been disappointed that publishers were so academic and didn't think of a book in the same way one might think of the opening of a movie. Book promotion had a lot of showbiz catching up to do. Apparently, Jonathan agreed with me. "Sure," I told Don, "I'll meet with him." I had zero intention of doing a book, but I figured it'd be an interesting conversation.

Jonathan came over to my apartment. (Though I'd take the meeting, no way was I leaving the house for it.) He walked in with a finished copy of this book you are holding in your hands—an actual bound version, with a cover and everything.

"You don't have to do a thing," he said. "We want a book of your best interviews, and we took the liberty of putting it together to show you how easy it is and how little work you'll have to do."

Crazy, right? I was impressed and flattered. I've been wined and dined in my career, and after spending so many years hustling and striving it is always enjoyable when someone tries to convince me to come work for them, but this took it to a whole new level. Surely no one in the history of publishing had ever gone to so much trouble to get a dude to write a book. It was intoxicating and appealed to my ego, and at the same time addressed all my concerns about another literary effort. Free money. No work. I've always dreamt of such a wonderful occurrence. In fact, many years ago when the religious right was raising millions of dollars from their base to try and force me off the air, I would think, "If they just took that money and paid me not to broadcast, we would all be happy and everyone could get on with something more important than banning penis jokes." So when I held this lovely book in my hands, I was psyched. Just put my name on this and I'm going to get paid? C'mon, let's go.

I showed the book to my wife, Beth, hoping she might be impressed to find me emerging from my office with a finished tome. She would marvel at the brilliance of her husband who could crank out masterpieces at speeds only known to the Flash and Superman. In her eyes, I would be a regular Howard Dostoyevsky. Of course, she looked at the book, turned to me, and said, "What's going on here?" She was having none of it. She knew a scam was afoot.

I went ahead and signed the contract anyway. What do they say? Whenever something seems too good to be true, it probably is. Well, it was.

Jonathan had suggested I could just flip through the finished book and tweak it here and there, maybe write a little intro. One afternoon I sat down in my office to put in what I expected would be just a few hours of work. Not months, not days—hours. Suddenly, reality crept in. "These aren't really my *favorite* interviews," I thought. "Uh-oh. I don't really *love* the picture on the cover. Oh no. Hold it—wouldn't it be way more interesting if I could craft a book not only featuring my interviews, but one in which I write about my experiences in broadcasting? What if I could explain to some aspiring radio personality the art of the interview, offer a primer on my approach, chronicle how it has evolved over the years? Forget a little intro. What if I wrote an introduction for *every* interview—shared what I was thinking at the time and what I thought looking back now?"

Oh no, here we go again with the OCD—those nasty thoughts that were going to screw up the simplicity of all this. I ended up throwing out that finished book and starting from scratch. I would look in the trash and say to that book, "Curse you! Why aren't you good enough for me?" My agent, Don, told me I was overthinking it, and perhaps he was right, but I couldn't put out a book that didn't authentically represent me and my journey.

So here we are . . . two years later. You now hold in your hands two years of work and labor. Perfection—or as close to it as I can come. That's my problem: everything has to be perfect. And since we're talking about the art of interviewing, let's go ahead and call that rule number one: Nothing is casual. Everything requires work, research, and thought. Agonize. Take it seriously. Don't leave it up to someone else, and don't phone it in. There is no such thing as a shortcut if you are going to turn in good work. If I ever enjoy the process, I know I have somehow produced something worthless. I've prided myself on putting energy and time into everything I do, and this book has been no different. I ended up devoting way more of my life to this than anyone thought would be required. I invested so much in it that I'm sure I will never ever go through this again. I swear I mean it this time.

My hat is off to Jonathan Karp. That whole concept of handing me a finished product worked. It got me to sign on and agree to write a book, even though this in no way resembles what he brought me—except for the binding. What a smart plan: show him the end result and we'll lure him in like the fish that he is.

Yet there is another reason I decided to do this book. It wasn't just Jonathan's craftiness, it was the timing of it. Had he come to me with the book idea now, I'm not sure I would be receptive to it, but around the same time he came to meet with me at my apartment, I was in the middle of dealing with a serious health scare, which I've never talked about until now.

I never mentioned it on my show, which is hard to believe, because there's nothing I won't talk about on the radio. My instinct is to blurt out everything on the air. I've turned my show into a confessional, and often my best material arrives when I force myself to go past my desire to keep things private. This time I said no to that urge. I just wanted to forget this whole thing, and until now only a handful of people knew about it.

On Wednesday, May 10, 2017, I missed a day of work, and I remember the date exactly because I never miss work. Even when I was on the air in Detroit, I would drive through ten feet of snow to get down to the radio station. It didn't matter. I got to work every day.

Apparently my perfect attendance did not go unnoticed. I missed this one day on the radio, and it turned into bigger news than the return of Jesus H. Christ. There were so many stories in the press. "It's like he disappeared! What's going on?" Reporters were even calling my parents' house. What was I, five years old? They were checking in with my mother as if I had missed school, and I was surprised that anyone cared that much.

The show was off the air that Thursday and Friday for a scheduled vacation. For the next week there was all this weird speculation that something was wrong. Then I showed up that Monday, and I just made fun of it. I said I couldn't believe people were making such a big deal out of this, and that I was just sick with the flu.

I was lying.

About a year before, in 2016, I had gone for my annual physical. Same doctor I go to all the time. I'm used to him saying, "Everything's good. You take really good care of yourself. I wish all my patients were like you."

This time he said to me, "Everything's go—" Then he did a double-take at my chart and said, "Whoa, whoa, whoa."

I said, "What's 'Whoa, whoa, whoa'? You're scaring me."

"Nothing too alarming," he said. "It's just your white blood cell count looks a little bit low. Let's do another blood test in a month."

A month went by and we rechecked it, and it was even lower. The doctor said, "Look, I don't want you to worry, but why don't you see this doctor at Sloan Kettering."

"*Sloan Kettering?*" I said. "That's the cancer place!"

The Sloan Kettering doctor did *another* blood test and my white blood cell count was even lower than the last time. This doctor said, "Well, there's nothing we need to do right now, but if it gets any lower, we could always give you a round of chemo."

"*Chemo?!*" I said. "Oh my God. This is crazy."

He said, "I just wanted you to know there are some things you can do, and we can treat this."

"Treat *what*?" I said. "What are we talking about?" Then I thought better of it. "Actually don't tell me that. I want to be kept in the dark." I'm so paranoid about my health. If I start googling, I'll go into a tailspin.

He said, "I want you to come for a blood test every month."

When you go for a blood test at Sloan Kettering, you're actually in with people who are getting chemo. The atmosphere was intense, life and death, as they were testing my blood for changes. I was in a panic, I was angry, and I was thinking, "This is it. This must be how I go. This isn't supposed to happen to me. My grandfathers had long lives, and my parents are in their nineties. This can't be happening."

There is a wonderful man I got to know over the years named Dr. David Agus. He's an expert in cancer, teaches at the University of Southern California, has written a few bestselling books, and was Steve Jobs's doctor. Just a fabulous guy. I contacted him and told him what was going on with me.

Without missing a beat, Dr. Agus said, "Do you eat a lot of fish?"

"Yeah," I said. "My wife, Beth, and I are into animal rescue, and we stopped eating meat. We even stopped eating poultry. So in order to get protein, I eat fish, like, twice a day."

He said, "Go get your mercury level checked."

I got my mercury level checked and it was through the roof. Normal is around seven. Mine was in the thirties. I cut down on fish, and my mercury level began to drop. After a few months my white blood cells went up. I was so relieved that Dr. Agus thought of this. If not for him, I might have been at Sloan Kettering hooked up to a slow drip of chemo and deprived of my Samson-like mane. Certainly I know that losing my hair would not be the worst part of chemo, but just imagine my face with a bald head. Not a pleasant thought. My hair has always been the lone redeeming quality of my appearance. Hardcore fans know I have really nice feet, but what good does that do me? No one ever sees those. I need my hair. When it comes to looks, I quote the Jay-Z song: I have ninety-nine problems with my face, but my hair ain't one. Despite whatever rumors you might have heard, I don't wear a wig and I don't use dye. A full head of dark, luscious curls is the only natural gift I've ever possessed, and I wasn't ready to give it up, so needless to say I was incredibly grateful to Dr. Agus.

He said to me, "I want to give you some peace of mind. If you ever get out to California, I've got a facility where we can do a full body scan on you, and you'll know for sure you're doing well."

Up until then, Beth had no idea what was going on. I didn't tell her about those monthly blood tests at Sloan Kettering. I didn't want her to worry, so I would just disappear for a while and go over to the hospital. With my gigantic ego, I was sure she would wonder why I wasn't home. Good reality check: she had no idea I was gone. When Dr. Agus suggested going to California, I finally explained everything to Beth. We both figured Dr. Agus was simply being cautious and looking to reassure me. We always enjoy going to California, so we looked at it as an opportunity to visit friends, like Jimmy Kimmel and his wife, Molly. A couple months later we flew out, and I got the scan.

"Everything looks great," Dr. Agus said. "But when you get back to New York, go and get an MRI, because on your kidney there's a little spot. Sometimes

these little benign cysts develop, and they can burst, and it makes it impossible to get a clear look. I don't think it's anything but get the MRI just to be safe."

I went back to New York and got the MRI. Dr. Agus called me and said, "I don't want to scare you, but I'm going to send the MRI over to a kidney specialist that I know. I want him to take a look at it." This is why I love Dr. Agus so much. He is so thorough and conscientious.

The kidney specialist looked at the MRI, saw the spot, and said, "You have to get this thing removed. There's a ninety percent chance it's cancer."

So much for peace of mind. Now I was *really* flipping out. They told me the surgery was a simple procedure. They would make seven incisions in my abdomen. That didn't sound so simple to me. The survival rate for something like this is high when they catch it early. I went ahead and scheduled it right away. I wanted it out of me.

I chose not to talk about it on the air. One of the things about being on the radio is, if you mention anything, people start to call in with all sorts of similar stories. "Kidney surgery? Oh, yeah, my brother went in for that . . ." And the stories never end well. The person always dies. The power of suggestion is something that overtakes me. I'm very susceptible to this kind of amateurish speculation. I didn't want to hear any of that.

My personality is that I block stuff out. I'm rather stoic, but I have to tell you, I was scared. My co-host, Robin Quivers, had just been through treatment for cancer. What she experienced was a nightmare—chemo, radiation, operations. Her original surgery took around twelve hours. When she went in for that, I kept calling the doctor for updates. I cried at the thought I might be losing Robin.

She is not only a loving and giving human being but someone who I am deeply connected to. How many professional relationships have lasted thirty-eight years, especially in broadcasting? How many times have you heard those rumors that your local friendly morning show actually all despise each other? When I first got into radio I was alone and scared. I knew the day I met Robin I had a newfound inspiration to go and explore innovative ideas and concepts because I had a true friend who had my back. She more than anyone is my

courage on the air. It would be impossible to describe my feelings for her and I am blessed and lucky that we ended up together.

Besides Beth, Robin was one of the few people I told what was going on. I also told my daughters, though not until I had scheduled the surgery. I didn't want to scare them. They were very worried yet so supportive and a tremendous comfort to me.

I decided I would do my show in the morning, and go in for surgery in the afternoon. That way I wouldn't miss work, but then the surgeon called and said, "I can take you in earlier." So I had to cancel the show at the last minute, and that's what caused the avalanche of newspaper articles.

The surgery took a couple hours, and after it was over and I woke up from the anesthesia, the doctor walked in and said, "The surgery went great. We'll have the results in a few hours."

Those hours were terrifying and moved so slowly. When I'm on the radio, time flies, but in the hospital room every minute felt like an eternity.

The doctor finally came back in.

"Great news," he said. "It was just a tiny little cyst."

It was nothing.

Nothing was wrong with my kidney.

The sense of relief was orgasmic, but the thought that I had gone through all of this for nothing really screwed with my head. I was so angry at myself for once again being overly neurotic about my health.

I had to stay in the hospital overnight. The next day there were all those articles about how I missed work. It became a big thing in the media, and it seemed to me they were implying that I had done something horribly wrong by missing one day. I was lying in my hospital bed wearing one of those gowns where your ass hangs out thinking, "Are you kidding me? I might have had *cancer*."

I went back in to work Monday morning and every day after, but that surgery knocked me on my ass. It really walloped me. I had seven scars from the incisions, and it took me a full year to get back to feeling normal, to get to the point where I could start moving around comfortably.

I remember saying to Robin, "My God, I don't know how you did it." I looked at her with new respect. Compared to her experience, I felt like I had no right to complain, but Robin really understood what I was going through.

It wasn't just the pain, it was the fear. I never had any kind of health scare, and I certainly never spent a lot of time thinking about my death. Even now part of me feels that way—like there's no way the world could continue without me—but as you start to get older and your body begins to break down, it does get you thinking about your legacy, what you'll leave behind, what you're proud of.

I'm not proud of my first two books. I don't even have them displayed on my bookshelf at home. I think of them, and of the interviews I did with my guests during those first couple decades of my career, and I cringe. I was an absolute maniac. My narcissism was so strong that I was incapable of appreciating what somebody else might be feeling.

I have so many regrets about guests from that time. I asked Gilda Radner if Gene Wilder had a big penis. Great question. Drove her right out the door. George Michael's band Wham! Everyone I worked with said, "Whatever you do, don't ask them if they're gay. Do *not* ask them if they're gay." Within twenty seconds, I asked them if they were gay. Eminem came on the show once then never again. Same with Will Ferrell.

Possibly my biggest regret was my interview with Robin Williams. When Robin came on the show in the early nineties, I spent the entire time badgering him about how he had divorced his first wife and remarried his son's former nanny. I was attacking the guy, and he was justifiably furious with me. Years later, I realized I finally needed to apologize. I had already done this with some other people. I called them and tried to make amends. Some were gracious. A radio guy I had been awful to said, "You know what, man? I'm so glad you called. I actually felt bad for you that you were carrying around so much bitterness and ugliness inside, and I'm happy you don't have that anymore." Others were angry. A famous comedian I had bashed said to me, "I appreciate that you called, but I don't know if I could ever forgive you. I had to go through a lot of misery, because your fans were brutal." I didn't know what Robin's

reaction would be. He could have hung up on me. He could have cursed me out. I had to do it. It took me twenty years to work up the nerve. I was in the midst of tracking down his phone number, and the next day he died. I'm still filled with sadness over his loss and remorse for my failure to reach out sooner.

Telling Carly Simon how hot she was for a half-hour or spewing sex questions to Wilmer Valderrama—this ultimately led to nothing. It wasn't good radio. It was meaningless. It was just me being self-absorbed and compulsive about asking something that would provoke and antagonize. Those weren't really interviews. They were monologues. Instead of a conversation, it was just me blurting out ridiculous things. I had some real issues.

Then I started going to a psychotherapist.

This was in the late nineties. I had no idea how therapy worked. The only thing I knew about it was what I saw in movies and on television, where people would just sit there and tell stories. So that's what I did. My first session, I sat down in the chair and began telling the therapist anecdotes as if I was on the radio. I hit him with all my favorite routines. I did a thorough and involved set on the Stern family tree, complete with impressions of my family. I put together a few minutes on marriage, then moved into the pressures of the radio business, and closed with the trials and tribulations of raising a family.

After I was finished with my stand-up, the therapist instead of applauding said, "There's nothing funny going on here. Quite frankly, some of this stuff sounds pretty sad." My first response was to get defensive. Who was he to say that? I could tell that story and laugh. I had done it many times. Gradually, after a few more sessions, I realized he was right. He was the first person who ever said to me, "I take you seriously." I had always been hungry for someone to confide in like that, but I had pushed away my hunger. That's often what people who are traumatized do. In order to protect themselves, they act like nobody else matters. They tell themselves they don't need anyone.

The irony is that I've always had an appreciation for others in my work. Yes, it's called *The Howard Stern Show*, but I'm at my best when I have a bunch of people around me, when I can call on them and collaborate. Whether it's Robin or my producer Gary Dell'Abate or our jack-of-all-trades (sound effects, impressions, and so much more) Fred Norris; the staff of incredible writers and

brilliant engineers; my front office, including chief operating officer Marci Turk and senior vice president Jeremy Coleman; my agent, Don Buchwald, and my executive assistant, Laura Federici; my bosses and the sales department at SiriusXM—I consider everyone a part of the team. What we do is like music, in a way. It's like a symphony. That is truly how I've always seen myself: as an orchestra conductor.

Yet that generosity of spirit didn't extend to my guests. I should have treated them as talented soloists and welcomed them to join in our performance. I was just too afraid that the audience would be bored when they didn't get their fix of outrageousness—as if some quiet notes would have destroyed the concerto. Everything had to be one loud, crashing crescendo.

Initially, I went to therapy twice a week. Then the therapist had me up it to three times. Eventually he recommended I make it four. I thought, "Man, I didn't know I was *that* screwed up." I was reluctant to make such a big commitment, but I did it. I completely gave myself over to the process.

The more I went, the more that translated into how I interviewed my guests. I found myself changing my approach because I had experienced what it was like to have someone genuinely interested in my life. Therapy opened me up and enabled me to appreciate how fulfilling it was to be truly heard. That led me to the thought: "You know, somebody *else* might actually have something to say. Let's just sit here and listen and not make it all about you."

At first, not making it about me was difficult. I had to learn to say no to myself. *Stop talking. Start listening. Let someone else shine and have a moment. Trust that the audience will remain there.* Saying no, disciplining that narcissistic part of myself that needs constant attention, was not as simple as it sounded.

What made my maturation even more challenging were the parameters of terrestrial radio—how success was solely defined by ratings. It was so competitive on the dial. Every station was fighting for the same advertising dollars, and the advertisers naturally went with whoever had the highest ratings. The ratings service measured every fifteen minutes. They tabulated how many people were listening through each quarter hour. It wasn't merely the size of a broadcaster's

audience that got them high ratings, it was how many fifteen-minute blocks they could drag their audience through.

This became a science to me. I obsessively watched the clock, and as I saw the quarter hour coming up I would typically blurt out something so random and whacked out that I knew it would keep my listeners tuned in. This strategy obviously didn't lend itself to doing serious interviews. When I would have a guest, I would think, "If this person goes into a long explanation about something, if they're droning on about their latest project, my ratings will drop off." While my crazy behavior could mostly be attributed to my personal issues, it was also somewhat methodical. It was job security. I had young children to think about. I had a mortgage and car payments, just like my listeners.

Having success only made it worse. When I reached number one in the ratings, there was nowhere to go but down. If I wanted to keep my job, my ratings couldn't dip in the slightest. At least, that's how I saw it in my pessimistic view of the world. This was an unrealistic assessment of the situation. A few ratings points here and there weren't going to be a game changer. However, I wasn't about being realistic. I wanted to dominate. I put constant pressure on myself. It was a miserable way to live.

As I continued with therapy, I became increasingly frustrated. I was trying to grow as a person, and I was eager to bring that same growth into my work. I was excited to have real conversations. I thought, "What if I could listen to my guests the way my therapist listens to me?" I did the best that I could, but the format of terrestrial radio just wasn't conducive to that.

This wasn't the driving force behind my move to SiriusXM in 2006. The driving force was getting away from the FCC and also the excitement of building a brand-new business. The money wasn't bad either. The added bonus was that it allowed me to fully embrace this new, more mature interview style. If listeners didn't like it, they could turn to one of Sirius's other channels. Rather listen to grunge? Turn to Lithium. Want show tunes? Try On Broadway. I didn't see these other channels as competing with me, the way I did on terrestrial radio. I looked at all of Sirius as my universe. As long as people were listening to Sirius, I was satisfied. That really freed me to experiment.

When I first got to Sirius, people thought I was going to be even more X-rated than I'd been on terrestrial radio, since I didn't have to worry about the FCC and government censorship. That was my plan at first. Starting out, we did crazy segments, like a "Crap-tacular," for example, where we weighed a man's doody. He'd win prizes if he made a certain amount of excrement. Can you believe it? You can do that on satellite radio. You can do it all day. What I soon realized is that when you're able to do the most shocking things you can think of, then nothing is shocking anymore. You can't be a rebel if there aren't any rules. Instead, the most shocking thing I could do was to grow, to change, to go somewhere fresh, to boldly go where no man had gone before—like at the beginning of *Star Trek*.

The problem was at first Gary had a hard time booking guests to do serious interviews. Hollywood publicists still saw me as a lunatic. They didn't know I'd been going to therapy and was trying to change. It took a while to convince them. One thing I think helped was the four years I spent as a judge on *America's Got Talent*.

There were many reasons I decided to do *AGT*. For starters, I had just bought a whole new John Varvatos wardrobe and I needed to show it off. Number two, I had calculated the risk of being a ratings failure and it wasn't high. The show was on in the summer—our only competition was reruns—and it already had a built-in audience. It was also a relief to be a part of an ensemble. The show was the main draw, not the judges. Before my experience with therapy, this would have been a reason *not* to do the show. Like a moth to a flame, I would have craved the spotlight. I would have demanded to be the focus. In light of the work I'd done on myself, it was a welcome change to play more of a supporting role. I was as anxious to try that on as I was to try on my new John Varvatos shoes. (By the way, lest anyone reading this think JV is slipping me a couple bucks under the table for these mentions, let me assure you that's not the case. I just like his clothes. Although what a great idea to sell advertising in one's book. Maybe next time.) I was additionally excited about working on such a large-scale production. I'd spent most of my career in toilet bowl radio stations where it was a one-

person operation. There were times when I'd literally be working a tape recorder with my feet while using my hands to splice and edit. *AGT* had a crew of hundreds. It was thrilling to be a part of such a juggernaut. And though the previous seasons had been filmed in Los Angeles, the producers were willing to move the entire operation to New York to accommodate my radio schedule. It was also the realization of a childhood fantasy. Growing up, I wanted nothing more than to be a game show host. Gene Rayburn of *Match Game*, Bill Cullen of *To Tell the Truth*, Wink Martindale of *Tic-Tac-Dough*—these were all radio guys and professional announcers I loved. They were hired for TV because they had such a smooth presentation and delivery. They looked relaxed and appeared to be having so much fun. I thought it would be the greatest to have one of those long microphones and make snarky comments to contestants. Serving as a judge on *AGT* reminded me of that.

However, my principal motivation for joining the show was to shift the American public's perception of me. I thought, "How surprising and unpredictable would it be to see someone with my hard-ass uber-dude image on a feel-good prime-time network TV show?" Just when people believed they knew me, I'd prove they didn't.

It didn't take long to discover how successful I'd been in changing attitudes. After my first season on the show, I was in a restaurant with Beth when random moms and dads approached our table and asked if their kids could sit on my lap for photos. In just one summer, I'd gone from being America's Nightmare to Santa Claus. Though this was my objective, it felt very awkward. I had become accustomed to being thought of as Attila the Hun. It had become a protective shell that allowed me to keep my true self at a distance. Throughout my career I had put myself in uncomfortable situations, from dressing in women's clothing on the *Late Show with David Letterman* to donning the infamous ass-baring Fartman costume on the MTV Music Video Awards to concealing my face in elaborate makeup to impersonate Michael Jackson on a pay-per-view New Year's Eve special. Yet appearing unguarded and undisguised on *AGT* might have been the most uncomfortable I had ever felt.

I think publicists and their A-list clients responded to seeing this more vulnerable side of me. These days we have so many celebrities who want to do the show that we have to book them months in advance. They're also impressed by how prepared I am for these interviews. I have a team that does exhaustive research on each guest. They spend weeks searching for every morsel of information they can find. They compile it all, I study it closely, and then I write down an agenda of the questions I want to ask. Wherever I go, I carry a small wallet pad with a pen. I also have a waterproof pad in case I need to jot something down in the shower. You never know when a good idea is going to come. You have to be ready at any moment to capture it. By the day of the interview, I'll have roughly ten pages of notes and questions.

My memory is strange. If I read something, I don't retain it. If someone tells me that same thing, I remember it verbatim. So a few minutes before the guest walks into the studio, a member of my team, Jon Hein, will stand in front of my console and read my notes back to me. He regurgitates everything I've written down and all of the research, every word of every page. Instantly I've got it memorized. Very rarely do I even look at my notes during an interview. I have no idea how this works. Maybe that's why I'm in radio: everything with me is auditory. I don't want to analyze it too much, for fear I'll somehow jinx it and lose these superpowers. But I swear, when a guest walks in I know their complete life story as if it were my own.

Gary has told me that when he's watching the monitor in his office, there's always a point in every interview that I'll hit on something that causes the guest's face to change—as if they're thinking, "How in the hell do you know *that*?" Like in my interview with Jon Stewart when I shocked him by revealing the punch line to one of the first jokes he ever told onstage. Their realization that I've put in so much time and effort has a lot to do with why they're so willing to open up to me.

I also suspect guests like doing the show for the same reason I liked going to therapy. These are some of the most famous people in the world. Usually they go on a daytime or late-night talk show and they have five minutes to plug their movie or album or book and tell a couple of well-rehearsed stories.

With me, they have an hour, hour and a half—and no commercial breaks. That's the beauty of satellite radio. If I don't want to take a break, I don't do it. If the interview is going well, I'm not stopping. And if it's *not* going well, I can keep plugging away until it is. I also think that since I have let my guard down my entire career and been honest about myself—my insecurities and my anxieties and, yes, my small penis size—they are encouraged to be honest as well. They can express themselves in something more than a sound bite. By the end of these conversations the audience doesn't see them as one-dimensional celebrities anymore. They see them as regular people no different from themselves. We're all the same screwed-up, complex, beautiful human beings.

These in-depth interviews—that's what I'm most proud of. It's one of the things I want to be remembered for before I die of a noncancerous cyst. I want my show to be funny, irreverent, but also touching. I do this for anyone who has to commute for an hour and a half to their job and finally pulls into the parking lot but doesn't want to get out of the car. *That's* what I want to be my legacy. And that's another reason why I let Simon & Schuster push me into doing this book.

Perhaps my main motivation is my three wonderful daughters: Emily, Debra, and Ashley. I am over-the-top proud of them, and I've always wanted them to be proud of the work I've done on the radio—and on myself. Each of my daughters is unique, and their brilliance and charm continue to enlighten me. I'm lucky to be their father. Girls, I love you. Thank you for making me a dad, and being kind, sweet, and perfect. This one's for you.

The interviews collected here represent my best work and show my personal evolution. But they don't just show *my* evolution. Gathered together like this, they show the evolution of popular culture over the past quarter century: from Madonna to Lady Gaga, Paul McCartney to Ed Sheeran, David Letterman to Stephen Colbert, Rosie O'Donnell to Ellen DeGeneres, Joan Rivers to Amy Poehler, Jay-Z to Kendrick Lamar, Barbara Walters to Anderson Cooper. It's not just the evolution of entertainment but of society as a whole. You have Harvey Weinstein and Bill O'Reilly rejecting (as they continue to do even now) any

sexual impropriety, and you have Lena Dunham and Amy Schumer talking openly about their own sexual assaults. Then there is the late Chris Cornell talking about opioid addiction, and Leah Remini talking about Scientology, and Kim and Khloé Kardashian talking about how to make it as a reality star.

Speaking of reality stars, obviously the biggest shift in society has been watching the host of *The Apprentice* become president of the United States. Donald Trump has been on the show dozens of times over the years, in the studio as well as calling in, and he is hands-down one of the best guests I've ever had. He's everything you want out of an interview: funny, unfiltered, and willing to speak his mind. We were friendly off the air, in the rare times we would run into each other at some event in Manhattan. For example, once Beth and I wound up sitting next to him and Melania courtside at a Knicks game. You can see the paparazzi photos online. The way we are laughing and leaning in close it looks like we're best buddies and planned the whole evening together. The truth is we both took advantage of free tickets and wound up sitting next to each other randomly. I've never had Donald over to my place for dinner or vice versa. If we had been close friends off the air, he might have confided to me that he was actually serious about wanting to be president.

In my naivete, I figured like everyone else that this was no different from the other times he flirted with running: it was just a publicity stunt. I never thought he was genuinely interested in the job. I was sure that once he became front-runner for the Republican nomination, he would drop out. That's what I did when I ran for governor of New York in 1994 on the Libertarian ticket. My platform was only three issues, all of them traffic-related:

1. Eliminate the tolls for Jones Beach and the Southern State Parkway, because if you've been battling rush hour traffic to and from work all week and you want to go to the beach with your family on the weekend, you shouldn't have to wait for hours to get through a tollbooth.
2. Reinstate the death penalty and fill in the potholes with the crispy remains of all those executed.

3. Do construction on major roads at night so as not to snarl morning and evening commutes.

The public responded positively to these ideas. Some polls were showing me with 15 to 20 percent of the vote in a three-way race. That freaked me out. Me as governor? That wouldn't have been good for the state. I didn't know what I was talking about. I also realized that I would have to share my tax returns, and I didn't want to make that information public. It wasn't like I was afraid voters would discover a money laundering scheme for Russian oligarchs or strange payments to porn stars. I just didn't feel like letting my plumber know that I had a good year and now he had license to charge me triple for a dripping faucet. My candidacy was a goof, and so I quickly bailed. When Donald started winning primaries, I thought he would, too. Between Trump Tower and Mar-a-Lago, he had such a fun, stress-free life that it made no sense to me why he would exchange that for the pressure of running the country. And Lord knows he didn't want anyone looking at his tax returns. I still have no idea how he managed to avoid that.

Now here he is sitting in the Oval Office and flying around on Air Force One. Two years into his first term, I'm still trying to wrap my brain around it. I feel like I'm living in an alternate reality. Back in the early nineties when I was working on a script for the Fartman movie with J. F. Lawton, the screenwriter of *Pretty Woman*, he came up with Donald Trump as the story's villain. Fartman would save New York when Donald tried to put up condos in Central Park. Had we not abandoned the project, I would have asked Donald to play himself, and I'm sure he would have agreed. I don't recall him ever turning down a cameo. I bet Donald is just as stunned by what happened as I am. I don't think he believed he would win. Caught off guard by the mood in the country and the acceptance of his message, he decided to carry on as long as the impossible kept happening.

Do I support Donald's politics? I'm often asked this question. As my listeners know, I don't like talking about my political beliefs on the air. It's not because I'm worried I'll drive away SiriusXM subscribers who disagree with me. It's because I'm not well versed enough in politics. It's not one of my areas of

expertise. I'm the guy who wanted to fill in potholes with the ashes of dead convicts! By the way, my attitude on the death penalty has totally changed in light of how many people have been wrongly executed. That's specifically why I don't like talking politics: my positions are constantly changing, and that's actually the single most important rule of being successful in radio, ahead of "nothing is casual"—have a definite opinion. What the opinion is doesn't matter. You just need to have a strong one and back it up. You can't be wishy-washy, which is what I am when it comes to casting my ballot. I've voted both Republican and Democrat, and I was a Libertarian candidate. As for my vote in the 2016 presidential election, I'll go into that later, in the chapter on Hillary Clinton. Bottom line, my political views are not good radio.

No matter how you feel about what Donald has done so far in his time as president, I think everyone can agree that his slow and steady transformation from a personality to a politician is damn fascinating. That's why I scoured through the archives and included a bunch of my interviews with him. I didn't do it to make fun of Donald or to make him look bad. His metamorphosis is on full display. In one of the early interviews, in 1997, he's calling a Miss Universe winner "an eating machine." By the last interview, in 2015, he refuses to rate Megyn Kelly's hotness on a scale of one to ten. "In the old days, I wouldn't have minded answering that question," he says, "but today I think I'll pass." That morning it became official: a phenomenal radio guest died and a presidential contender was born. Donald hasn't appeared on my show since.

My conversations with him also show my transformation as an interviewer—my shifting interest from his sexual exploits to his political ambitions. Once he was named the Republican nominee and later elected president, several of these discussions were unearthed by news outlets and subjected to endless commentary. My conversations with Donald Trump have become an important part of American history—believe me, I'm as shocked as you are—and so they deserve to be recorded in book form.

Excluding these conversations with Donald, I've provided introductions to each interview in the book so you can see what I was thinking at the time and what I

think now, looking back.

If you're a SiriusXM subscriber, you might have heard some of these interviews before—either live on channels Howard 100 and Howard 101 or on our new app. (A huge thanks to the good folks at SiriusXM for creating an environment where I could do long-form interviews and for being so supportive of my career and this book.) But it's an entirely different experience reading them rather than listening to them. There is wisdom and laughs and so much more that I didn't catch during the original interviews.

There's no greater example of this than my discussion with Mike Tyson about the hunger of drug addiction.✦ When we talked, I was so caught up in the moment that I didn't fully appreciate his profundity and eloquence. As I read back over Mike's words, for the first time I could empathize with what drug addicts go through. (He also told of his own connection to Robin Williams, a revelation that wound up making headlines.)

These conversations are so inspiring. There is a lot to learn from these people, from their climb to success. If they all have one thing in common, it's that climb. The climb is everything. To hear how someone overcomes ridiculous odds and makes it—it never gets old. If you're having trouble finding motivation in life and you're looking for that extra kick in the ass, you will discover it in these pages.

One of the questions I'm most frequently asked is, "Of all the interviews you've ever done, which are your favorites?" It wasn't easy to choose. There have been nearly 1,500 of them in the thirteen years since I joined SiriusXM, plus a few thousand more going back earlier in my career. I took this process very seriously. I spent two years working on this book, with the invaluable help of many on my team as well as at Simon & Schuster—especially Sean Manning, my editor and alter ego on this project, who was there every step of the way. Hundreds of hours of audio were transcribed into more than a million words. I carefully reviewed that massive slab of material and whittled it into what you now hold in your hands.

As you'll see in these pages, there has been a lot of personal growth since my last two books. My view of the world has matured. Oh, don't worry, I still love the most base and juvenile forms of humor: sex talk, fart jokes, ridiculously silly

phony phone calls, and of course the mysterious and often misunderstood "queef." I still take great delight in lengthy discussions with Ronnie the Limo Driver on whether squirting is pee and endless debates about who qualifies as a member of the Wack Pack. No chance your hero has become too highbrow, but I have found a comfortable and meaningful place in the universe.

These changes I speak of throughout the book have moved me in a meaningful and most needed direction that I never would have expected. Empathy, emotional openness, and a genuine curiosity about the beauty in the world have begun to develop. Allowing myself to be dependent and vulnerable is new to me. I feel reborn, liberated, free to be Patricia Marie. (An inside joke for my regular listeners. I promise there won't be too many of those. Patricia Marie is the real name of Wack Pack member Tan Mom, and she made a song . . . oh forget it. Just buy a subscription to SiriusXM already. Regular radio has too many commercials and you can't curse and it's time you just signed up. Stop being so cheap.) The hard-ass pose I've tried to maintain just doesn't work for me anymore. That posture was useful when I was young. It provided an almost impenetrable shell that protected me from feeling need. If I denied my own humanity, I would not go hungry for human kindness, touch, and most important love. It was a safe world but a lonely one—a kind of prison. So finally, after many years, I began to tear down some very well-constructed walls. I needed to do that if I was going to have a successful marriage with Beth, my best friend for the last nineteen years, as well as a deeper and more loving relationship with my fantastic daughters. I once needed solitary confinement but I was now willing to leave the safety of my incarceration and take a step outside.

The journey has been hard, but some really exciting experiences have blossomed because I was willing to dip my toe into new waters. I discovered an interest in not only other people but other passions besides radio: watercolor painting, sketching, photography, chess, and most of all a devotion to animal rescue. These pursuits provided new ways to reach out to the world, which I had kept shut out for so long. All of this has led to a richer, more satisfying existence, and all of this brought me to the idea of this book.

So here it is: book number three. I'm so proud of this book. Do me a favor and throw out the other two. Pretend you're a character in *Fahrenheit 451* and

burn them. Here it is: *Howard Stern Comes Again*. A book about conversation. A conversation that, even though it's overheard by millions of people, can still be revealing and intimate.

✦ For more on this from Mike Tyson, turn to page 528.