

# The Way He Does It

by Jeffrey Ford

You've got to see the way he does it. It's pretty remarkable for a man his age. He does it with a cigarette jutting from the corner of his mouth and a look in his eye like there's nothing finer in all creation than doing it that way. There's a certain grace to his movements, a certain cosmic aplomb in his manner. Occasionally he'll grunt, and some claim to have heard him call for his mother when he's almost finished. His eyes get really wide, his lip curls back, and you can see the sweat form on his brow. He probably uses more muscle groups while doing it than he would if he were swimming the butterfly. On special occasions he will do it by candle light with soft music playing in the background, but it's more expensive to see him do it that way.

There was a time when he didn't charge for the sight of it, but that was back when he was perfecting his method. Then, when he'd do it, he'd become red in the face and would often wet himself with the exertion, but he seemed to do it more out of obsession than any sense of advancing his craftsmanship. A fellow by the name of Roger Brown, one of his old neighbors from that earlier time, has said, "When he would do it in those days, he wasn't nearly as refined, but, my God, the energy with which he did it. You'd think he was going to go right through the back wall of the house."

There are many theories as to how he came up with it. Of course, as with anything this remarkable, there is plenty of sensationalist speculation. One such item of foolishness is that it had been taught to him by extraterrestrials who'd contacted him by way of an AM radio channel, and another is that when doing it, he is possessed by the Holy Ghost. The most bizarre conjecture has to be that it had been a common practice among the populace of the lost civilization of Atlantis and that he had dreamed the ancient technique through his collective unconscious. When interviewed in 1989, he, himself, attested, "I just got down on the floor one day and started doing it. As I was doing it, I asked myself the question, 'How can I do it better?'"

Others had tried it, both male and female, attempting to copy his methods. To name two prominent examples, there were Nettie Stuart and Branch Berkley. Stuart got farther along with the process than Berkley, but in the end they both killed themselves doing it. Berkley inadvertently set himself on fire, and Nettie Stuart broke a rib doing it, which in turn impaled her heart. Their families got together and started a fund, the proceeds of which would be used to try to bribe people away from trying it. Few took the money, and the ones who did not perish in their bid for glory, you can see today, hobbling down the street or talking to themselves outside of convenience stores. We tend to treat these failures with equal parts of the tenderest pity and the sharpest derision.

He swore he would never fully disclose his secrets, but back in the 70's, before his fame became manifest, he did release an audio tape in which he described each step of the act while doing it. Although he narrates as if you are there in the room watching him, and, therefore, is never quite specific enough for the listener to visualize what exactly he is doing, it is said that from his voice alone a certain mystical energy can be garnered. The following is an excerpt from a crucial part of that recording:

*...so when you utilize the tongue and eye in unison, man, it feels good. Then you take this and put it around behind, like that. When you've got that where you want it, then you've got to quickly grab this and tense up like it's all there is in the universe. You'll start to notice a little swelling and that's when it gets creative. If you feel like screaming here, go ahead and scream. Be my guest. At the last second, just let it all go and snap your head back. This will lead you to do it the way it was meant to be done.*

Once, when he was asked by the press what his wife thought of it, he quickly replied, “Oh, she loves it. The kids love it too,” but by then everyone knew that his wife had left him because of it. Still to this day, she is bitter over the memory of it and told me, “He’d do it right there in the living room with the kids running around him. Call me old fashioned, but how many times was I supposed to be witness to that? The day he did it in front of my parents, I gathered up the kids and went home with them. In the months that followed, he would call me late at night and tell me he was going to do it to me. I didn’t see how that was possible, but still I went out and bought a gun.”

It wasn’t until the early 80’s that he came to the conclusion that his abilities were a proverbial gold mine. He started doing it in public when he’d lost his regular job as a night watch man at a chemical factory. One lonely morning when his refrigerator held nothing but a half a beer and a head of cabbage, he went down to the corner of 8th and Dupin and just started doing it, right there on the sidewalk. In no time a crowd gathered, and within minutes bystanders were tossing hand fulls of change; one and even five dollar bills. One old gentleman in the crowd threw him coupons to Burger King.

It was only six months after the historic 8th and Dupin performance that he got his first gig in a cocktail lounge. He was the scourge of many a torch singer and hypnotist. Who could top him? And he always demanded to go on first. He would take half the door money and a quarter of the liquor profits of a given night. His public loved to drink while they watched him, and he requested that they drink Pink Ladies. This alone was the reason for that drink’s great surge in popularity in the mid-80’s. The T-shirts he sold at his shows, bearing a photograph of him in the midst of his passion were the creamy color of Pink Ladies.

An anecdote which is often recounted about these nightclub years concerns his preoccupation with handsome women. One of the acts that he worked with at The Republic, a seedy place down on the waterfront, was billed as Prince Mishby and His Virgin Bride. Mishby, a lanky young man, wearing a high collared shirt and a bow tie, with arms as thin as pipe cleaners and a high reedy voice, tap danced while his beautiful wife sang arias. The couple would then break into a patter wherein Mishby would speak to his bride in lascivious double entendres and this would set the crowd of sailors and waterfront toughs into paroxysms of laughter. On their third night of sharing the same bill, Mishby caught our subject besmirching the Virgin Bride in her dressing room.

What followed was, to some, unpardonable. To others it was as inevitable as big fish eating little fish. Not only did he have his way with Mishby’s wife, but afterward, when the tap dancer lunged at him with a pen knife, he did it so brutally to the lanky young man that from that day forward Mishby had to go about on a board with wheels. “He did it to me without remorse,” Mishby now attests, “and no one came to my rescue. In fact, they cheered him on as I screamed in agony. I guess when you can do it the way he does, no rules apply.”

He continued to work for a few years at places like The Republic, Sweet Regrets, A Slice of Green Moon, which was, in those days, located between Front and Chase in the diamond district. Then one night after his act, he was approached by a heavy, well dressed man, sporting a cane.

“When I see you do it, I am humbled,” said the man.

“Naturally,” he said.

“My name is Arthur Silven, and I would like to represent you. Here’s my card. I believe the scope of your talent deserves a more fitting venue.”

“You’re a fat pig,” was his response.

“But I’m a pig with a bite,” said Silven.

They shook hands, and for the next five years he did it under the auspices of Silven Entertainment.

He did it in concert halls and stadiums as people in the back rows and top bleachers looked on with binoculars. He did it before royalty and heads of state, and dignitaries of foreign powers courted his friendship. The money poured in, and he and Silven became wealthy beyond measure. By the end of five years, though, he had done it so much, so well, and for so long, that he felt he might like to not do it for a while. Silven would hear none of it and threatened a breach of contract suit. So, one foggy night, he broke into the entrepreneur's house and did it to Silven so completely they had to clean up what was left of the agent with a shovel.

Of course, he had a rock solid alibi of having been at a magic show all that evening. There were many at the event who swore they did see him there, and it was recounted that the magician, an old acquaintance of his from his shows at The Republic even called him up on stage at one point, had him get into a box with a sliding curtain, and made him disappear for a solid half hour.

He never served any time for the death of Silven, although the D.A. did fleetingly consider prosecution on circumstantial evidence. As it turned out the case was determined to be too weak. When the photographs of Silven's mangled form hit the tabloids and television, though, the general public was not convinced of his innocence and was put off by the viciousness the attack displayed. As one elderly woman described her reaction to the incident and attendant photos, "It gave me a feeling like when I see a piece of meat at a barbecue that has cooked too long and the flies are risking their lives to get to it, kids have dropped marshmallows onto the hot coals, and there's grease burning too." The international press started referring to him as "The Savage American." The noted ethical philosopher, Trenton Du Block, came out against him as did Mothers Against Drunk Driving.

He walked away from it all and built himself a mansion in the swamps of Louisiana. There, amidst the forbidding black waters and moss strewn cypress, he shrouded himself from the world. It is said that he raised llamas and peacocks behind the high walls of his estate. The only person from the outside world who still had access to him was his valet, Ruben Charles. Charles has claimed that even he, himself, very rarely got to see his employer during these years. "I usually took my orders from a voice that issued from a darkened room," he's said.

"At night," Charles wrote in his memoirs, "I would hear him rummaging around the mansion. Then I would hear him in the backyard, doing it to one of the peacocks. The screams were ungodly, and I would cower beneath my covers. When I slept it was with one eye open. Make no mistake, the day finally came when he did it to me. It was in the trophy room. He charged out from behind a stuffed bear and did it to me like there was no tomorrow."

Charles could not honestly say as to whether his boss had been doing it on a daily basis during their time in the swamp. All the valet could testify to was that the day after a bad storm, when the brick wall was knocked down in one spot by a falling tree and dozens of alligators had invaded the sanctuary, slaughtering and devouring all of the livestock, his employer did it on the veranda, overlooking the carnage, with magnificent precision and beauty.

In September of that year, he let Charles go and sold the mansion to the alleged head of a drug cartel. After this, he disappeared for a time. Scattered sightings of him surfaced now and then over a period of the next few years. Individuals told of encounters with him in far flung locations of the globe. It's since been discovered that certain tribes in the interior of New Guinea carve figures that seem to bare a perfect likeness to him in the act of doing it.

Some believe that he lived a mundane existence with a woman in an apartment in a small town on the Canadian border. Supposedly he'd gone back to working as a night watchman. Judith Nelson, the

woman with whom he'd purportedly been living publicly denies having ever met him, but her family and friends say that she had, for this time period, often been seen in the presence of a strange man who fits his description. One of Nelson's subsequent lovers claims that her body still bore the marks of it having been done to her repeatedly.

When he definitively surfaced again on a street corner in the small town of Fortescue in southern New Jersey, he looked much older. His thinning hair was long and he wore it in a pig tail. A grey beard and the crows feet around his eyes made him appear far less frightening than he had in his youth. It was noted that he'd switched to a filtered cigarette. Still his body was in near-perfect condition, and one could tell from watching him do it that he'd been practicing all along.

The small town audiences he performs for these days, traveling in his van from street corner to street corner, say that to see him do it now is no longer the sublime terror, the agonizing beauty, it had once been. The effect, as I have experienced it myself, has become one of precision and clarity, an exquisite longing for a paradise lost, an empathetic magnate for petty paranoia.

When I went to interview him for the first time down on Money Island at the southern most tip of Jersey, I told him how closely I'd followed his career and that I was thinking about writing a magazine article based on his life. He told me I was in luck, because at his first show that evening on the library field, he was going to do it to the town's mayor. "I thought you didn't do that sort of thing anymore," I said to him. He looked into my eyes and waved his hand in disgust. "Hey, do it to yourself," he said and walked away.

That evening in the summer heat, beneath a huge oak tree on the library field, the people of Money Island gathered to watch him do it to the mayor. He did it so gently, and with such care, a young man in front of me broke into tears. The mayor gasped with delight as if before her eyes she was witnessing a passing parade of priceless treasures, and when he was done with her, she seemed to glow. The mayor declared a town holiday in honor of his art and later, on the high school football field, I watched in awe as he did it again, this time alone, beneath a sky ablaze with fireworks.