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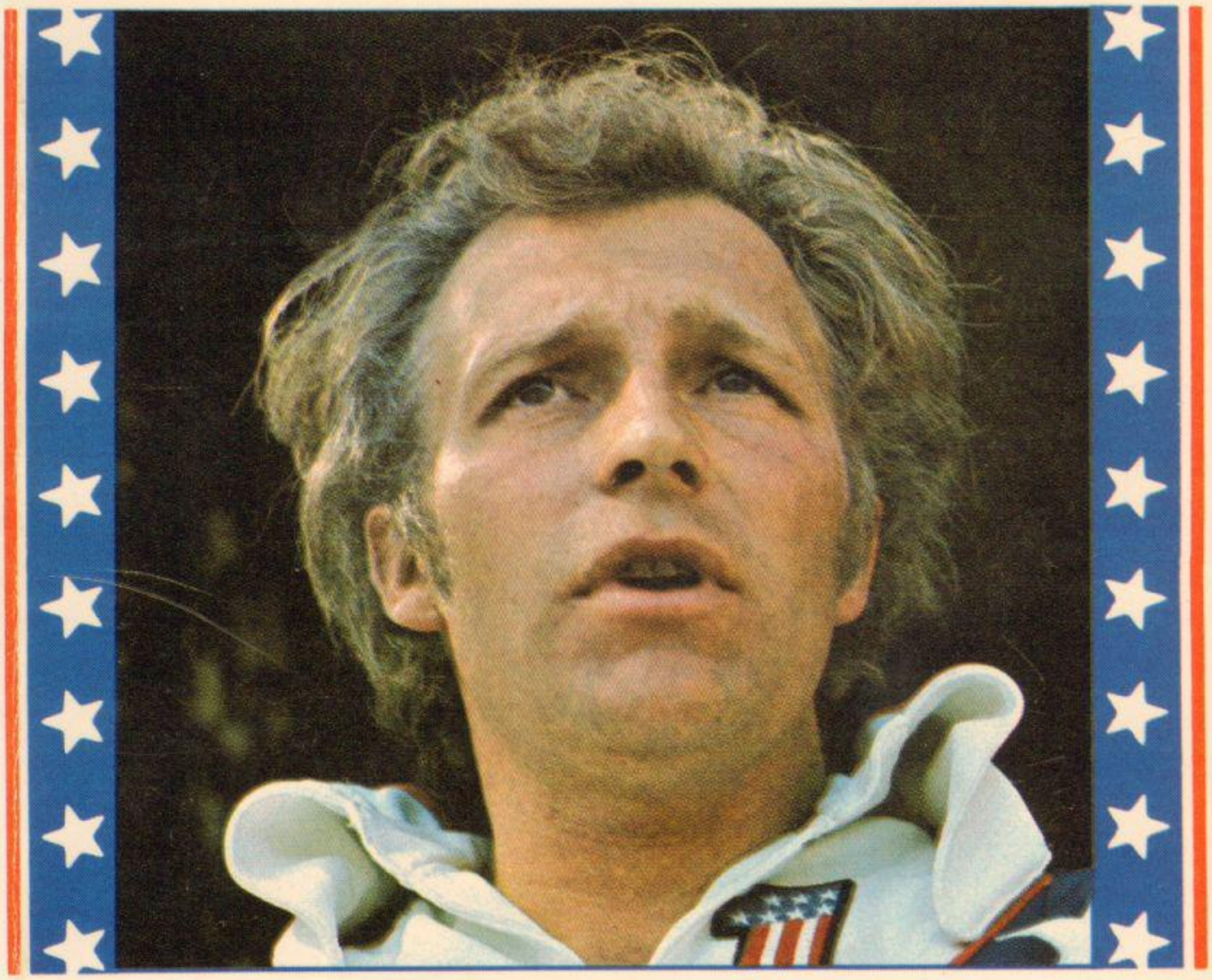
EVEL KNIEVEL

ON TOUR



by Sheldon Saltman
with Maury Green

WITH PHOTOS OF EVEL IN ACTION

X-RATED EVEL

"I've made love to more beautiful women than all you guys put together even know. . . . Hell, I never knew a broad who wasn't a pushover. . . . I've got more broads than you ever saw. . . . *Penthouse* knows it, *Oui* knows it, *Playboy* knows it, and now you know it . . . even my wife knows it, and my grandmother knows it. I don't bullshit anybody.

"I'll be a winner and have the world by the tail, and I'll live like nobody else you've ever seen live on the face of this earth. There's a lot of people that have a lot of dough that like to put it in the banks. I like to spend it. I figure if God wanted me to hold onto it, he'd have put handles on it like a suitcase.

"If I die . . . you've got to bury me with my complete trailer . . . with my bikes and everything inside. But you've got to leave the big airhorn sticking out, so when I think it's time for me to come back and do some good, I'll just toot my horn and I'll drive right out of the grave because I'm really Superman."

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This book is dedicated to Mollie
. . . whose loneliness went unnoticed
while I traveled the Styx.

Introduction

It has taken me more than two years since the eventful day of September 8, 1974, to sort out my impressions of a promotion that achieved front-page notoriety from Oslo to Los Angeles, from Helsinki to Boston; to sift through 132 hours of personal taped conversations; and finally to sit down and write the true behind-the-scenes story of one of the wildest, most improbable adventures in history, the Snake River Canyon Jump, from promotion to plummet.

This is not just the story of a daredevil who, for all his bluster, is probably the most fearless man alive. It is the anatomy of many complex personalities, and proof that man does not live by ballyhoo alone. It is a book about all of us, because all of us are victims of the kind of media build-up in which I was engaged on behalf of the Snake River Canyon Jump. (For example, all three networks did prime-time features on the eve of the jump: 1. A Knievel movie with George Hamilton; 2. A one half hour proposed Knievel series pilot; 3. Knievel's salute on Andy Williams' *Special.*) It is a tale of fear, greed, duplicity, bigotry, and lust, but it is also a tale of love, laughter, tears, and compassion. It is also a searching look at one of the most flamboyant and charismatic celebrities of our time, during the incredible three months I spent with Evel Knievel on tour.

—Sheldon Saltman

Chapter 1

Day One

Lights floated on the butte above the grubby little town that was named after it, like diamonds suspended in tar. The Montana night hid the hideous scars that bulldozers, greed, and Anaconda had gouged on the face of what copper miners once proudly proclaimed "the richest hill on earth."

Down in the town the five big diamonds in the hundred-thousand-dollar ring Evel Knievel always wears on his left hand flashed brighter than the lights on the hill as he waved in response to the shouts and horn toots of his idolatrous constituency, the entire population (about twenty-five thousand people) of Butte. In a more polite society they would have tugged at their forelocks.

Evel slammed the accelerator of the Dodge pickup to the floor, and we charged through the downtown traffic at better than a hundred miles an hour. The cops just grinned; in his home town the Knievel who had baptized himself Evel can do no wrong.

"What I want," he shouted over the motor noise, "is my own 747. With my name all over it. None of those goddamned little planes, because when you land nobody knows who you are. When *I* land, *everybody's* going to know it's Evel Knievel come to town!"

It was an outrageous idea, renting a Boeing 747 for our nationwide tour to promote Evel's Snake River Canyon jump. You might as well rent the Vatican to show porno movies.

But the whole idea of the jump was outrageous. That was what I liked about it.

I'm a promoter, and the more outrageous the idea, the more it appeals to me. According to columnist Wells Twombley, I am "an ingenious Hollywood hummingbird . . . by Phineas T. Barnum out of Jim Moran," a description which I take as a compliment. My wife, Mollie, who knows me better than anyone, bought me a California license plate that reads CON MAN, and I drive it with pride. Among the things that I helped promote were the first Muhammad Ali–Joe Frazier fight, the inaugural NBA-ABA All-Star basketball game, and the Andy Williams–San Diego Open Golf Tournament. I was in on the start of the Phoenix Suns basketball team, and I was one of the creators of the CBS television program *Challenge of the Sexes.* Many times I've been called the king of special-events promoters. Much as I'd love to claim that crown, the title is an exaggeration. In Evel Knievel every promoter of special events has met his match.

After eight years of jumping motorcycles over cars and trucks, he had conceived the idea of the biggest solo carnival act in the history of the world: the Snake River Canyon Jump. He had devised a vehicle, which he called the Sky-Cycle, which was nothing more than a steam-powered thrust engine with a

bucket seat, a Rube Goldberg contraption with aerodynamic attributes approximately comparable to those of Boulder Dam.

Evel planned to fly one mile across the canyon in this aerial steamboat and parachute to touchdown on a kind of pogo stick in the Sky-Cycle's nose. The idea made about as much sense as trying to fly the Atlantic Ocean in a kite towed by butterflies.

But the very charm of the Sky-Cycle was its calculated insanity. If it had made any sense—if it had had wings, or any kind of a proper motor, even an antique World War I Liberty motor—nobody would have walked across the street to watch it. Nobody would pay to watch a DC-10 fly across the Snake River Canyon.

A vehicle that looked more likely to crash than make it was something else. Anybody who would try to cross the canyon in Evel's crazy contraption was plainly defying death, and *that* is something people will always pay to see. It was with something of the sort in mind that the Romans built the Colosseum.

Defying death is Evel Knievel's stock in trade, and he is the world's greatest promoter of his own goods. He had never before had a promoter except for himself, he had never hired a public relations man, and here he was signed to a contract for 60 per cent of the take from closed-circuit television, a percentage estimated to be worth at least six million dollars. At the age of thirty-five he had already made himself a millionaire.

If there is honor among thieves, there is mutual admiration among con men. Evel and I got along fine, right from the start. We talked the same language.

"You and Bob are allowing three hundred and fifty

thousand dollars for promotion?" I asked. My friend Bob Arum is the guy who got me into the deal; Bob heads Top Rank, Inc., a company he formed with Fred Hofheinz (who later became the mayor of Houston), which has grown to be one of the biggest promoters of fights and special events. When Bob made his deal with Evel his cash was tied up in other projects, and he had called for my help in promoting the jump, and for my company, Invest West Sports, Inc., to put money into the project.

"Yeah," Evel replied, "that's what Bob and I decided to spend."

"Could you spend more?" I asked. "Say, half a million?"

"I will." When Evel says he will do something, it's like a proclamation carved in stone.

"You will?"

"If he wants to get the 747."

I was already thinking angles. "You know," I said, "with the energy crisis there have to be a lot of 747s that aren't being used. If we could go to somebody like United, and for the publicity . . ." I shook my head. "But they probably wouldn't allow us to paint the plane."

"Yes, they would," Evel said with complete assurance. "We'd be the first ones."

That was the first time in my entire career that somebody else had shown more confidence up front than I had. Confidence is the key to any promotion; they don't call us con men without reason. More than once Evel's confidence amazed me, it was so absolute.

"Ed Carlson," Evel went on. "He's the one to call at United."

"I don't know him very well," I said, "but what the hell, I'll call him anyway."

"First of all," Evel said, "here's how you do it. You get Roone Arledge to call him from ABC."

I was on a high generated by pure enthusiasm, and it didn't immediately occur to me that trying to involve Roone made no sense, because we were not allowing any broadcast television in the United States—only closed-circuit. Later ABC got involved, but only to the extent that Top Rank contracted for the network to supply the equipment and technicians for the television production. But on that night in Butte calling Roone made sense; even the craziest ideas made sense. In a promotion you start with your wildest dreams and back off only when you have to; the name of the game is chutzpah.

The conversation went on for hours, in a dozen bars—Muzz and Stan's Freeway Tavern, the Elmar, the Acoma Lounge and Supper Club, the Met Tavern —places rancid with the aroma of yesterday's booze and stale beer, and humming with repetitive cowboy talk. Everywhere there were constant interruptions, because everybody wanted to talk to Evel and shine, if only a little, in his reflected glory.

"Look, here's the big deal. Write this down," he ordered me in Lydia's, a surprisingly good restaurant where we had dinner. "We announce a big press conference in New York on the twenty-third, to start the tour. Hi, Carol, you know your dad used to be in the Army with me?"

Carol, a pretty young thing standing hesitantly by our booth with a young man whose name turned out to be Pat, smiled as beatifically as if Evel had conferred sainthood on her.

"I've met you before, when I was a little kid," she bubbled. "I have *so* many kids in my neighborhood that think you're absolutely *great!*"

Evel pulled out a sheaf of cashier's checks as casually as if they were food stamps. "Look at 'em closely," he said, "because they may confuse you."

Pat counted, wide-eyed: "Five thousand, ten thousand, a *hundred* thousand! Wow!"

"You ain't got to the big one yet," Evel advised him.

"Two hundred and fifty thousand!" Pat was properly impressed.

"Hey, I made a good deal today," Evel said. The way everybody listened, you'd have thought he was E. F. Hutton. "Ever hear of the stuff called Right Guard? I did a commercial for 'em. I got *six times* what Muhammad Ali got! No agent. I did it myself."

"You must be one hell of a businessman," I said, as genuinely impressed as Pat. It wasn't until later that it occurred to me that everything Evel does is to impress somebody. *Anybody*. When he's alone, which is very seldom, he probably tries to impress himself.

"Hey," he said, "if God wanted you to hang on to all this kind of money He would have put handles on it like a suitcase. Know what I'm going to do with it?"

Nobody ventured a guess.

"I'm going to spend it," he said, "and I hope I spend every goddamned dime of it. I'm going to spend a million in cash in one week before the canyon jump! I'm going to float this town in booze. There's going to be fifty thousand come here from out of town. Jesus Christ, we're going to have a hell of a party!"

He turned to me, abruptly forgetting Carol and Pat as if we had never been interrupted, and went on, "They fly in a Lear jet, see? And here I am, I've got twenty-five buddies with me, and twenty-five girls. All the girls have suitcases up to their tits, all the guys have their golf bags, and I've got *ten* golf bags myself.

Now TV takes a picture of fifty people standing around the little jet, with all that gear piled up, and I say, 'Get a 747 or I don't go.' "

"And they wheel in a 747 already painted," I suggested.

"No!" It was the Word in stone again. "And I say, 'Have it painted or I ain't going. Get the best airline, and get the best pilots in the world, and paint the 747 for Evel or Evel doesn't go.' You write all this down now."

I was beginning to wonder what I was there for; all I was doing was secretarial note-taking. Evel was putting together the whole program himself.

"And I'll tell you what," he said. "I'm willing to go for another two hundred thousand dollars for promotion, because I know what it will do. I *know* what it'll do!"

"It's just nutty enough that they'll go for it," I agreed. "I'll get on it in the morning. Now, how about the jump site, access roads, that stuff?"

"I got 'em all. I got the highway patrol geared in and everything. It's no problem. I'm going to advertise I don't want nobody coming in. Unless I keep the people out I'll have two hundred thousand there, but I'm not even going to sell fifteen thousand. It's too much. I've got to pay attention to the jump or I'll get killed. How much bigger an airplane can I fly in than I've already flown in? How many Ferraris can a man drive at the same time? I could make five million dollars on tickets right there, but it's not worth it. Let me have the check, honey."

"O.K.," the waitress said.

"Know what happened night before last?" Evel continued. "Some kid was riding a motorcycle on the golf course last winter, tearing up the greens. There's a

five-hundred-dollar reward. Then a friend of mine says he heard it was my kid, Robby.

"I went home and asked him if he did it, and he said yes. I was so fucking mad I spanked him hard. He's not supposed to do anything that will embarrass his daddy, and his daddy isn't supposed to do anything that will embarrass him.

"Then I went upstairs and sat in his bedroom, and he came in and I hugged him in my arms. Then yesterday I went and got him two more bikes, a trail bike and a racing bike. He's got everything. In the garage I got more than twenty vehicles—bicycles, cars, motorcycles, golf carts."

He shook his head. "But I don't know what I'm going to do with that little boy of mine. Last night he goes out in the garage, he gets a can of beer, and he gets drunk on his ass. I was looking for him until eleven o'clock this morning, and I can't find him because he's out there, drunker than a hoot owl. And he's eleven years old. I don't know what I'm going to do with that kid. Hey, honey, make sure the cocktail waitress gets half of that."

"I sure will," the girl said.

Evel continued his nonstop monologue, which I soon discovered was his habit. "I made a quarter of a million dollars this week," he said. "I haven't even touched Arum's check for a hundred and twenty-five thousand, and he's got another one coming. And my toy deal amounts to five hundred thousand dollars this year."

"You've got to be feeling pretty good," I said, not without a touch of envy.

"Well, this morning I did quite a thing. You know, I robbed a bowling alley once; I robbed a lot of places. This morning I called the bowling-alley manager and asked him to come over to my house for a few minutes, and I gave him a check for twenty-five hundred dollars for the bowling league.

"He says, 'What's this for?'

"I said, 'I owe it. I can't tell you why, but I owe it.'

"And he said, 'I can guess. They were only hit one time. It was for seven thousand dollars, but most of it was checks, so you probably ended up with five hundred dollars.'

" 'Give it to the kids,' I said. It was my way of getting even."

We never got the Boeing 747; that airplane is too big and too heavy to land at some of the airports we had to go into. We got a Lear jet instead, painted the way Evel wanted, and I made a nonstop tour of sixty-two cities in fifteen days with that swaggering, death-defying, hard-drinking former safecracker, hockey player, rodeo rider, copper miner, insurance peddler, motorcycle racer, and frustrated architect named Evel Knievel, the most amazing, contradictory, hateful-likable, Jekyll-Hyde character of modern times. It was an odyssey wilder than any trip Homer could have invented.

Chapter 2

The White Muhammad Ali

The morning after my first meeting with Evel Knievel, I had coffee with Ray Gunn at the War Bonnet Inn, where I was staying, and then Ray drove me out to Evel's home.

Ray is a likable man, built like a Mack truck both physically and psychologically—the typical solid, safe, dependable sidekick you always find in the shadow of a temperamental star. For years Ray had had a symbiotic relationship with Evel, working for him for a time, then breaking away, but always coming back.

Now Evel had put him in charge of building the Snake River Canyon launch ramp, which meant that Evel no longer had to fret about that critical detail. Ray had just returned from Akron, where he had built the ramp for another of Evel's jumps.

Evel lives in a large, pleasant house, a three-hundred-thousand-dollar rambling stone structure which he himself designed; it sits amid eight acres of pines and cottonwoods, right beside the 16th green of the Butte Country Club, which is Evel's personal play-

ground when he's at home. He plays golf at least once a day, always with money up, and while there is a lot of big talk about a thousand or five thousand a hole, the actual bets I saw were more like ten or twenty dollars. Even with the millions Evel makes, at a thousand dollars a hole, with his erratic game, he'd go broke faster than a Rolls-Royce salesman in Bangladesh.

Inside, the decor tends to the ornate. There are lots of Americana and mementos of Evel's feats of daring. A four-foot sculpture in Evel's bathroom turned out to be a night light. His daughter, Tracy, who was nine years old then, had a beautiful pink bedroom and bath, with an imported antique bathtub Evel had bought in San Francisco for twenty-five hundred dollars. Hanging in a huge cedar-lined closet as big as my den were two matching sable jackets and two matching full-length mink coats—"his and hers" pairs, of which Evel was very proud. Evel uses the kitchen as his office; it is quite large, a bright room cheery with flowers and gold-and-white wallpaper and a big gilt eagle. The house looks as if someone—probably Evel's wife, Linda—had overridden Evel's gaudy fancies with her own good taste.

Linda is quite pretty, a few years younger than Evel, a sweet and charming brunette so much in love with Evel that she'll forgive him anything. And, as he admits, she has plenty to forgive. After three years of dating her, Evel actually kidnapped her into marriage. With help from a guy named Marco, Evel physically kidnapped Linda from a skating rink; he threw her into the back of his pickup truck, and Marco drove them away to the altar. At least, that's one version of the kidnapping; for every incident in Evel's past there seem to be several versions.

One thing is certain: despite Evel's boasting about a multitude of female conquests, real or fabricated, Linda is his constant concern; when he is away from home he sometimes worries so much about her that tears come to his eyes. But his mood can swing in an instant, like a crazy pendulum; one minute he'll treat Linda like a queen, and the next, for some trivial reason, he'll curse her and bawl her out in front of friends or strangers. Evel always does what he pleases, and Linda does what he pleases too.

His friend Harry "Muzzie" Faroni, co-owner of Muzz and Stan's Freeway Tavern, one of Evel's hangouts in Butte, told me about the time Evel was in San Francisco and Muzzie suggested to Linda that they fly there and surprise him.

"That's not a good idea," she told Muzzie. "I don't want to surprise Bob because I don't want to upset him when he's getting ready to jump. Why don't we call him and let him know we're coming?"

Like most of Evel's friends in Butte, Linda calls him Bob. His real name is Robert Craig Knievel, Jr., He acquired the name Evel years ago when he spent a day or two in jail at the same time as an inmate named Awful Knoful. George McGrath, a family friend and the county tax assessor, liked the alliteration and began calling young Bobby by the name of Evil Knievel, because of his youthful escapades. Evel liked the name, but he changed Evil to Evel. Maybe the change brought him luck, because little Bobby Knievel, the scourge of Butte, who progressed from stealing hubcaps to safecracking, had become Evel Knievel, town hero and international celebrity. Like Linda, Butte will forgive him anything.

One thing Evel never lets Linda worry about is money. That morning she offered to fix me breakfast.

Then I noticed that she had about five pounds of grapes and about the same amount of cherries in the refrigerator.

"God," I commented, "cherries are so expensive now!"

"Oh, I don't know," Linda said. "I don't even know what they cost. All I know is if I want some, I buy some."

While I was there Evel was on the telephone much of the time, and I noticed that every long-distance call he made was collect. He'll buy drinks for a barful of strangers, he carefully cultivates his public image as a free-wheeling big spender, but he watches every buck.

One of his calls, to Playboy Press in New York, was a nonstop chewing-out about a book contract. "Your cover letter was fine," he said, "but there's a jillion things inside the contract that are not included in the cover letter that just destroyed whatever the cover letter has to say. It says if Playboy goes with the book club then I'll only be paid five per cent royalties instead of fifty per cent. I'm gonna lay it right on the line. You people are in the book business. Now there are a lot of things you have that are a dead issue, a lot of books you can't make a dime on. But in order for you to survive you have to use some of the things that are a success; you don't offset the things you've made a mistake at. In this case you would be using me to go ahead and offset that thing, and I would be receiving very little or nothing to help keep your business going."

I don't think the guy at the publisher's managed to get in more than a couple of words. Evel kept right on talking:

"In this goddamned contract it says that I'll have

the right to get 10 books from you people for giveaway. Now you're talking about where your company has the rights to do whatever they want with a million of 'em. Jesus Christ, this is such a one-sided jerk contract I can't believe it! The goddamned New York lawyer who drew this son of a bitch up ought to have his ass pushed out the window!"

Evel talks that way all the time. It's a mode of expression he picked up in the mines, and he uses it without thinking, like old friends who call each other "you old son of a bitch" and slap each other on the back and down a drink together. Evel calls his good friend Muzzie a "little guinea bastard" to his face. I don't believe he intends to demean anybody, but when he gets mad, especially about business, the copper miner in him comes out of his mouth.

After showing me the house Evel took me on a tour of the grounds, where some of his buddies—everybody in Butte is a buddy of Evel's—were putting up an eight-thousand-dollar stone-and-cinder-block wall. When we walked out one of them said, "Hey, isn't it time for a beer?" It was ten o'clock in the morning. Evel invited them all in for beer, and he gave them all a tour of the house.

About that time the mail came, and it was like the morning mail delivery at Sears, Roebuck. There must have been a thousand letters.

When I commented on it, Evel shrugged and said, "It's like that every day."

And there were dozens of telephone calls: to the manager of the Butte airport, to find out whether it could handle a 747 (it couldn't); to the bank concerning the photocopying of some papers I was to take home to Los Angeles (Linda ran that errand for us); to several auto dealers where he had some of his cars

up for sale ("How much can we sell the Dodge for? Forty-nine hundred? How about the Chevy? Sure, they're all free and clear except the Chevy.")

"I've got over a hundred thousand dollars' worth of rolling stock," he told me. "I want to get rid of some of them and get some cash." This from a guy who was carrying close to half a million in cashier's checks in his pocket! Evel does not trust banks.

He had a Dodge, a Chevy, a Buick, a Mark IV, two Ferraris, one gold and one silver, and I don't know what else. The horn of the silver Ferrari plays "Bridge on the River Kwai," and the gold one plays "La Cucaracha."

We hustled through a lot of business. We picked some photos for the promotion kit, we talked about the tour itinerary, we discussed posters and he autographed several Knievel posters for my kids and friends' kids, and he raced me around on a breakneck Knievel's tour of Butte to show me Evel Knievel posters in store windows and Evel Knievel motorcycles on sale and some of the cars he was selling. By eleven thirty in the morning I was on the plane for L.A., and exhausted. It was the first time in my life that I had spent twenty-four hours so close to a human tornado.

For the next several days I was busy laying out the itinerary, arranging art work and printing, checking with Vince McMahan at Top Rank in New York (he was trying to find an airplane for us; we had given up on the 747), worrying about getting Evel Knievel decals put on the plane that we didn't have yet, conferring with Mike Malitz of Top Rank about the closed-circuit promotion, talking with Zeke Rose, the publicist for the Ideal Toy Company, which

makes Evel Knievel Toys, who was going to accompany us on the promotional tour, and lining up columnists and wire services to do stories on the Canyon jump and persuading talk shows to invite Evel as a guest—all the routine stuff that goes into a big promotion. We were gearing up for the biggest promotional hype since World War I ("Evel Knievel wants *YOU!*").

"It's like catering twenty bar mitzvahs at once," I told Zeke Rose on my thirty-seventh telephone call to New York in one day.

"Well, not hardly," Zeke said quietly, giving me a laugh I needed. In the weeks ahead Zeke was to give me many a needed laugh, not to mention the friendship and support that kept the entire Snake River Canyon Jump project from collapsing.

On June 16, Father's Day, my daughter Lisa brought me breakfast in bed in honor of the occasion, and then I took off for New York to attend the Jerry Quarry–Joe Frazier fight at Madison Square Garden with Evel, who was flying in from Butte. He brought several of his buddies with him: Muzzie; Big George, whom Evel sometimes calls Pussycat; Sandy Acoma, the Butte handball champion; Bulgie Sallow, a Butte fireman whose real name is Rod; and a carpenter named Eddie, a golf hustler who can shoot 66 if the money warrants.

Bob Arum tossed a pre-fight party for Evel at Jimmy Weston's on Fifty-fourth Street, and it was like old home week in the fight business. Howard Cosell and Frank Gifford were there, and Howard Samuels, who was running for Governor of New York at the time, and former champions Kid Gavilan and Ike Williams, and Ferdie Pacheco, and Angelo Dundee, who is

Muhammad Ali's trainer, and Dick St. John, Evel's lawyer and the son of Adela Rogers St. John, and the Greatest Himself on Earth, Ali.

Ali was singing and reciting poetry and telling how he planned to be a pallbearer at Howard Cosell's funeral, which Howard didn't seem to think was terribly hilarious, when in walked Evel with his buddies.

"Hold it, everybody!" Ali yelled. "I am the Greatest, but this man is the Farthest Out, the Wildest, the Craziest, the Most! Let's hear it for Evel Knievel!" That was Evel's introduction from a man who had never met him.

The music combo blasted a fanfare, and everybody was shouting and crowding around to shake Evel's hand and talk to him. It's like that wherever he goes; the biggest people in the world act like kids, they're so impressed.

Almost the first thing that Ali said to Evel was "You know what you are? You're the white Muhammad Ali!"

And Evel came right back with "Then you're the black Evel Knievel!"

They laughed uproariously, and for the rest of the party they used those names for each other. Ali took Evel's big diamond ring and put it on his own finger and pretended that he was going to punch Evel, and Evel just stood there and said, "Now I'm going to see how tough I really am." Ali loved it.

In a quieter moment I talked with Ali about his upcoming fight with George Foreman in Zaire.

"You're no longer with me," he said. "You're not coming to Africa on the fight."

"Can't," I said. "I'm with Evel on this thing all summer."

"You're with the real money," Ali said. "The man may be crazy, but you're going to make a lot."

I told him, "You're getting five million for the fight in Zaire. Evel will get ten million for the canyon jump."

"He deserves ten times as much," Ali said. "He's crazy, like I said, but I respect him and I like him."

That's the gracious side of Muhammad Ali, which the public rarely sees; there is no jealousy in the man. He and Evel, the two most successful self-promoters in all of sports, spent the whole party talking and joking together, an instant two-man mutual-admiration society.

After the party a bunch of us piled into Bob Arum's limousine and headed for the Garden. Bob, his boys Richard and John, Evel, Bulgie Sallow, Sandy Acoma, Eddie the carpenter, Dick St. John, and I were in the car. And right in front of everybody, including Bob's pre-teen and just-teen kids, Evel began his daily discourse on all the women he had taken to bed.

"I've made love to more beautiful women than all you guys put together even know," he said as we coasted down into the alley beneath the Garden. "Hell, I never knew a broad who wasn't a pushover."

"No kidding?" Bulgie said, hanging on every word.

"Hell!" Evel said. "I have made love to every woman in Butte, married or single!"

I squirmed in my seat. Nobody said anything; nobody knew what to say. Nobody except Evel.

He looked around the car, unabashed, and he grinned, and he winked at Bob and me, and he said, "Of course, wives of present company excepted. I wouldn't do that to a friend."

A little calculation throws a lot of light on Evel

Knievel's sexual braggadocio. Butte is a city of mayb 25,000; in the copper-boom days, which Evel likes t talk about, it boasted 100,000 people and 1,40 whores, but those days vanished when strip minin replaced underground mining. Say half of the preser population is female, and half of the females are screwing age. If Evel began screwing at the age fifteen, he had been at it for almost twenty years whe he made that boast. That means he would have ha to go to bed with approximately 6,250 differen women, or almost one new girl per day for twent years! That calculation does not include his home work or any fun he might have had out of town Evel's constant tall talk is part of his charm.

But Evel is the personification of *machismo*, an even when his fans doubt, even when it's their ow wives he talks about, they *want* to believe. Othe men live out their fantasies through Evel Knievel.

This was evident when he was introduced in th ring before the fight, just after Ali, who naturally wa first, and just before Joe Louis. The crowd went wild It's a revealing commentary on America in the 1970 that a carnival performer has become a national hero but we are bored, our traditional mores are in disar ray, and we hunger for a hero. Evel Knievel may b junk food, but he satisfies the hunger.

After the fight we were all invited to Frazier's part at La Maganette, and Evel, as usual, was the life o the party. That was where I met Joe's older brothe and look-alike, Tom Frazier, who was to be a pilla of strength in a moment of hideous, freakish danger.

The party went on and on, and about four o'cloc in the morning most of us moved on to the Tittle Tat tle. Girls were coming out of the woodwork at all o us, but I was getting tired; I had lots of work to do the

next day. When I left to return to my hotel, the Drake, Evel was surrounded by a chorus of beauties, including a tall, slinky model named Liz, who was looking at him as if he were Prince Charming.

In the next three months I was going to see many a night end the same way.

Chapter 3

Takeoff!

From the night of the Quarry-Frazier fight until our promotional tour for the Snake River Canyon Jump was to begin, June 24, we had six days to put the whole show together. I stayed in New York, and during those six days I must have worn the dials off a dozen telephones.

Problem number one was getting the airplane. I finally hired a Lear jet from Jet Fleet Corporation in Dallas; it would almost fit into the cocktail lounge of a 747, it cost a dollar and a half a mile, it carried two pilots and six or seven passengers, and although it had a toilet under a small jump seat, we couldn't normally use it because we covered the jump seat with press kits, hundreds of them. As a result, we all developed cast-iron kidneys and oversized bladders. For the two weeks that we practically lived aboard that plane, our in-flight booze consumption established new *Guinness* records, and we broke all Olympic sprint marks racing for the nearest men's room after each landing. By the end of the tour my

legs were in better shape than O. J. Simpson's, but I felt as though I needed a stomach transplant.

My original itinerary called for a tour of thirty-nine cities in twelve days. But, like everything else connected with Evel Knievel, the thing kept getting bigger and bigger, until it finally encompassed sixty-two cities in fifteen days.

"What I've got to get from you are the following," I told Ed Oliphant, the Jet Fleet dispatcher, by telephone. "Airport we will go into, facility at the airport, estimated time of departure from each place in order to meet the schedule. And the paint job—on the fuselage, very big, in gold leaf outlined in black, as if it's handwritten, 'Evel Knievel.' Halfway down on both sides is a black number one, with seven stars, and a blue Harley-Davidson logo. And then on the tail, in gold leaf, a guy on a motorcycle doing a wheelie. What I'm really looking at is a twenty-thousand-dollar-to-twenty-five-thousand-dollar budget. I'll tell you what we'll do with you. We expect thirty million people; if you can come in on a low bid, I'll give you a spot—thirty seconds—as part of the closed-circuit telecast."

Evel woke me up at four forty-five the morning of Wednesday, June 19, to tell me he was thrilled with the plane.

"Shelly," he said, "tell Bob Arum that I want the Lear to pick me up in Los Angeles no later than three o'clock Saturday afternoon. That's where I'll be. I don't know what's going to happen with my life, and I want to go back to Butte and spend the weekend with my wife and the kids. Then the jet can bring me back into New York Monday morning in time for the first press conference."

I persuaded Evel to call the tour "Evel Knievel Says Goodbye," the idea being not that he was going to retire or die but that he had reached the pinnacle of his remarkable career and wanted to thank all the press and radio and television people who had given him so much publicity all through the years. If a promoter can touch the hardhearted, cynical media people, they'll give him anything.

There were a thousand press kits to be made up, each containing photos, biographical material, a map of the United States showing the jump location at Twin Falls, Idaho, a huge folded color poster of Evel —maybe thirty items in all.

And there were hundreds of hotel reservations to be made, halls to be rented for the press conferences at each stop, promoters we knew in each city to be contacted for local arrangements, a film of Evel's exploits to be put together, more than 350 individual telegrams to the press to be written and sent, scores of private interviews with Evel to be scheduled, displays to be arranged for the sponsors, such as Ideal Toy and Harley-Davidson, talk-show appearances by Evel to be worked into the schedule, head-table protocol to be worried about, and a thousand calls a day to be answered. The world of a promoter makes a three-ring circus look like a still life, but I love it.

Somebody in Dallas goofed in painting the plane—they painted Evel's motorcycle black instead of gold. Evel loved the plane, and he thought the pilots, Art Jones and Jerry Manthey, were great; he had them fly over the jump site at Twin Falls, and when they arrived in Butte he invited them to his home for dinner. But the black paint upset him.

"I spent years fighting those bastards in the black leather jackets," he told me by telephone. "I've been with the Hell's Angels now and then, and I think

they ought to be allowed to do their thing and b
left alone as long as they don't infringe on the right
of others.

"But when I was at the Cow Palace in San Francisc
one of those shitheels threw something at me righ
when I was taking off on the jump. He could hav
killed me. After I made it and rode back, this bastar
is out of the crowd, standing there in the middle o
the arena giving me the finger. I figured I had t
knock him on his ass, and that's just what I did. Th
rest of his mob came out after me, and that triggere
the crowd's hostility and they poured out of the stand
to get them, and I'll tell you, those stupid black-leathe
assholes will never want to go near the Cow Palac
again. They wound up hamburger, which serves 'em
right. And I don't want any goddamned black motor
cycle on my plane! I want it gold!"

"Yeah, Evel, sure," I told him. "We'll get that don
right away. It was supposed to be gold, but th
painter got it wrong."

Next thing I knew, 'twas the night before our tou
takeoff, and all through the night Evel Knievel wa
calling. He had already called a dozen times durin
the day, mostly about the paint job. We couldn't ge
the motorcycle painted gold in Butte, and I had t
fly a painter from Dallas to New York and put him u
at the Regency so he could do it first thing in th
morning, when the Lear was to bring Evel into L
Guardia from Butte.

Then Evel had a friend he wanted to drop off i
Denver on the way.

"How much time will that take?" I asked Ed Ol
phant.

"It'll cost him half an hour."

That was another problem to sweat out. It wa

already past midnight in New York, and our kickoff press conference was set for ten thirty in the morning. Evel *had* to be there; his appearance would be the crown gem in the string of pearls we were throwing to the media. He was due to leave Butte at one A.M. and to arrive at Butler Aviation at La Guardia at nine. Any later and we'd be in trouble.

"O.K.," I said, knowing that Evel had to be handled with tact. "Have your pilot talk to Evel. He seems to like Art Jones. Have Art tell him that he's got to leave Butte half an hour earlier. Blame the weather, blame anything, but don't blame Evel. And let me know. I've got problems at this end if he doesn't get into La Guardia by nine." Problems like that—hundreds of little problems created by Evel's sudden whims and changes of mind—were to become the theme of the tour.

"Good," Ed said. "Don't worry, I'll handle it." Ed was enthusiastic about the project, and I thanked God that Jet Fleet's dispatcher was an old motorcycle buff and an Evel Knievel fan.

At one thirty in the morning, New York time, Evel woke me up. "I'm not going to be there," he announced.

"*What?*" I sat up in bed, abruptly wide awake.

Evel laughed. "I'm only kidding," he said. "I'll be there." He hung up.

At two thirty he called again. "Shelly," he said, "that damned motorcycle is still black!"

"I know, Evel," I said. "It'll be painted gold as soon as you get here. The painter is already here. He'll be at Butler Aviation when you arrive."

Half an hour later the phone awakened me for the third time. It was Evel again. "Say, Shelly, why are you at the Drake and I'm going to be at the Regency?"

I tried to collect my sleep-sodden thoughts. "I get up every morning and go next door to the Top Rank office," I said.

"Yeah," Evel said, "but the Regency isn't as fancy as the Drake. And *I'm* the star!" He hung up again, laughing.

The Belvedere Grill of the Rainbow Room was already jammed when I got there at nine thirty in the morning; I have never seen a press conference so crowded anywhere except the White House. A forest of television cameras had sprouted from a platform facing the head table, and colorful Evel Knievel posters flashed out at the milling crowd from every one of the dozens of mirrors that surround the room. Sunlight shafted the air from the east windows, adding to the bouyancy of the atmosphere, and suddenly I knew that this was going to be the start of the biggest and most successful promotion of my career. Joe Goldstein and Dave Herscher, who were handling the publicity, had done a terrific job of getting all the materials together and drawing out the press.

Evel barely made it. He didn't even have time to go to the Regency to change into his white leather outfit with the red and blue stars and stripes. Dick St. John met him at La Guardia with a limousine, and he changed in the car.

When Evel walked in, the whole room exploded with cheers and applause. That was surprising, because newsmen virtually never applaud at a press conference. But Evel had captured their imagination.

Bob Arum started the program by explaining that the canyon jump would be the biggest closed-circuit event in history in the United States and Canada, and it would be broadcast for home television in other parts of the world.

"One thing is certain," Bob said, "on September eighth the eyes of the world will be on the Snake River Canyon and Evel Knievel. And on September ninth the man sitting on my left will probably be the most famous man in the world. Now, you've heard that from a lot of promoters, but it's going to happen. The name Evel Knievel will be known throughout the world. And make no mistake about it, Evel is going to make it!"

Again the applause cracked the air. I couldn't believe the enthusiasm.

Bob introduced Ed Youngblood of the American Motorcycle Association, who presented Evel with AMA life membership card number 5, the lowest number available at the time.

Finally Bob explained the financial arrangements: 60 per cent of all closed-circuit receipts to Evel and 40 per cent to the promotion. And then he pulled a gimmick that Evel had dreamed up, and which turned out to be the kingpin gimmick of the entire promotion—which, like all promotions, was nothing more than a collection of gimmicks.

"Evel is being guaranteed the highest amount of money for any athlete or performer in the history of closed-circuit television or any other television," Bob said. "He is being guaranteed the sum of six million dollars, but believe me, we won't be happy unless Evel's percentage goes to ten or eleven million dollars. But in any event, Evel, as we promised you . . ." Bob reached into his pocket and handed Evel a check. "Here's the check for six million dollars." He said it as casually as if he were handing Evel a check for a month's rent.

The program came to a full stop while the photographers and television cameramen got shots of Bob

presenting the check to Evel and close shots of the check itself.

It wasn't real, of course; if Evel had tried to cash that six-million-dollar check it would have bounced higher than the space shuttle. Nobody, not even a Rockefeller, has that much money lying around in a checking account. Evel actually had been paid two hundred twenty-five thousand dollars in advance; that was all.

That morning Bob and I had gone to the Chase Manhattan Bank with the idea of borrowing a genuine six-million-dollar check for an hour or two, just long enough for the press conference. We were willing to pay the interest, and we wanted to hire two bank guards to protect the check. But at the last moment the bank decided not to be a party to the scheme.

So Bob made out a Top Rank check and gave it to Evel. It was the "big lie" technique, and it worked; the press was so brainwashed that they accepted that six-million-dollar check as genuine. Actually, Bob was a little worried about it; he wanted the check back after the press conference so that he could destroy it, but Evel just laughed and stuck it in his pocket.

It took a skeptical small-town reporter to ask the question. At lunch after the press conference we got a telephone call from Cricket Bird—that's really her name—of the *Times-News* in Twin Falls. Jack Price, a Top Rank executive, took the call.

"I just read on the AP wire you guys have given Bobby Knievel six million dollars," she said. "Is that true?"

"That's true," Jack told her. "We gave him a check."

And Cricket Bird said, "That's ape shit!"

Evel didn't like that. He said, "I told those people there, including Cricket, that someday I'd come through that place, that entire state of Idaho, like it was nothing but a sea of grass and I was a high-powered jet-propelled lawnmower and just cut up their ass!"

That was in private. Publicly he never said anything of the sort.

"There's a slight error—two-hundred-twenty-five-thousand-two-dollar error," he said after accepting the check from Bob. "Besides the six million dollars, Mr. Arum has already paid me two hundred twenty-five thousand dollars for walking-around money, and his little boys bet on Jerry Quarry at the fight the other night and I bet on Frazier, a dollar apiece, and they just paid me in the other room."

Everybody laughed. Evel had been talking for only twenty seconds, and already he had every reporter in the room eating out of his hand.

The one Evel Knievel toy that Ideal has never made, one that they would make another fortune on, would be the toy that imitates Evel when he has an audience. You just press the button and he talks, and he talks, and he talks, and he never stops; there aren't even any pauses. The toy would have a start button but no stop button.

"I'd like to thank you all for coming," he said, "and I'd like to thank Mr. Youngblood for this award, because it's something that I have worked for for some time. I'd also like to let everybody here know that I always knew, regardless of who said I could not jump the canyon, that someday I would be able to, regardless of the fact that it was not the Grand Canyon but the Snake River Canyon, which I had to purchase part of, and I knew that someday I would get the best people

in the world to go with me, because I was sincere and legitimate in trying to do what I was going to do. I really can't tell you how proud I am to be associated with Mr. Arum and all the people that he's introduced to you today, and needless to say, I feel personally—I don't have to have anyone tell me—whatever I get out of this thing, be it win or lose, there can be no draw. I deserve it, because I've paid the price for success. I've always said that when the canyon jump comes, if I miss it I'll get somewhere quicker where you're all going someday. And I'll wait for you, because dying is a part of living and none of us are going to get out of here alive. If Mother Nature don't get you, Father Time will. And you're looking at a guy that didn't have much of an education—very little—and I've gambled everything that I have on risking my life. I've always felt that where there's a risk there's a reward, so I let it all hang out, and the day of that canyon jump, after it's over, I'm going to be ready to quit, one way or another. The serial number on the Sky-Cycle is seven eleven. It's kind of like rolling the dice at Las Vegas; I hope it comes up seven eleven and not craps. I'll be a winner and have the world by the tail, and I'll live like nobody else you've ever seen live on the face of this earth, and you all be glad of that. There's a lot of people that have a lot of dough that like to put it in banks. I like to spend it. I figure if God wanted me to hold on to it, He'd have put handles on it like a suitcase."

The laughter at this remark, one of Evel's stock clichés, caused the first pause in his monologue.

"In fact," he went right on, "before we get started with the questions I'd like to invite you all to a party in Butte, Montana, which will start two weeks before the canyon jump, and I have pledged to spend a million in cash in that town and I'm going to. There's no Brink's or Armored Car service there, so I'm going to have it brought out from Salt Lake City, Utah. That's the way it's going to be. That's a personal invitation, not for just a couple of hours—that's for a whole week."

That party, like the tour itself, was to grow and grow; unlike the tour, it was finally to collapse from an excess of sheer grandiosity and metamorphose into little more than an ordinary night of saloon-crawling in Butte.

Finally Evel threw the conference open to questions.

"What are your chances?" one of the reporters asked. That, we quickly learned, was always the first question. It defines Evel Knievel's basic fascination: He defies death. People will watch an automobile race because they admire driving skill or they're interested in race-car design or they merely want to see who wins; the fact that racing an automobile involves a high risk of death is not *necessarily* part of the fascination. But Evel Knievel's only competitor is death. If every jump did not threaten his life, or at least offer the possibility of serious injury, he would be unknown. And if he made every jump successfully, without injury, he would be unknown. Failure, partial or complete, is an essential ingredient in his success; without it his act would look too easy.

Evel answered the question by first praising Robert Truax, the affable, crew-topped builder of the Sky-Cycle, as "the pioneer of the Apollo rocket program," a piece of misinformation that Evel repeatedly handed out, to the embarrassment of Bob Truax. Later in the press conference Bob Arum explained, more accurately, that Truax was a retired Navy captain who had been the first project officer for the Thor missile and

had worked on secret satellites and the Polaris pro-
gram. Truax is a brilliant guy, but everything Evel
says comes out bigger than reality.

"Truax says my chances are fifty-fifty," Evel said.
"If the vehicle does not blow up on the launch pad, if
it goes straight up in the air and does not flip over
backward, if it goes two thousand feet up at three
hundred fifty miles per hour, if I can sustain the G
force, if the parachute systems open, if when they
open I come down across the canyon, and if I can get
out of there, I'll be alive."

Somebody else wanted to know how the thought of
jumping the canyon occurred to him.

"It's the truth that I was in a bar in Kalispell, Mon-
tana," he said. "Name of the joint was Moose's Place.
Nothing but draft beer and tomato juice; they call
that a Montana Mule up there. The drunker I got, the
littler that Grand Canyon picture looked on the wall,
and I decided I'd jump it. I wrote Mr. Stuart Udall,
who was then the Secretary of the Interior of the
United States; I said I would like permission to jump
a Sky-Cycle across the Grand Canyon. He wrote me a
letter back that stated, 'Obviously those of us who
have read of your plans do not share your enthusiasm.
However, you have our best wishes for success in your
undertaking.' I thought 'undertaking' was a poor
choice of words."

"What year was that?" somebody yelled over the
laughter.

"It was 1966. So, on getting that word from Mr.
Udall, I went all over this country shooting my trap
off, saying I was going to jump that canyon, for two
long years. I went up there and hired a contractor. I
went up there and made a deal; when I couldn't make
a deal with the Navajo Indians, the Arizona Chamber

of Commerce gave me their blessing. And then Mr.
Udall came back and said, 'You cannot jump the
Grand Canyon. I do not think that public land should
be used for such a spectacular stunt.' Now, you know,
we're talking about really big machinery, the govern-
ment and lawyers, so on and so forth, so rather than
fight and hassle over spilt water or deep canyons, I
just went and bought a canyon. I bought it under the
name of Robert C. Knievel, and ninety days later the
farmer came out there and he said, 'What kind of cows
you gonna load off that chute you got built out
there?' "

The question was entirely reasonable. "That chute,"
an earthen ramp on top of which the 108-foot-long
steel launching guideway was mounted, was perhaps
50 feet high. A canyon-strolling cow 700 feet tall
might have used it.

There were dozens more questions—the same ques-
tions that would be asked at every press conference
for the next two weeks. Evel answered them all in his
Knievelish version of Casey Stengelese, and then he
disclosed his idea for a new toy:

"Next year the Ideal Toy Company is going to make
a lot of Evel Knievel toys, and I think they'll be some-
thing that you'll be proud to have your children have.
One toy I'd like them to make is my own idea; I think
it's the most super toy in the world. You wind it up, it
goes like a little bugger, goes across the floor, and it
grabs this little Barbie doll, throws her on the floor,
gives her a little lovin', jumps back on the motorcycle,
and goes whizzing out the door screaming, 'G.I. Joe is
a faggot!' "

Chapter 4

A Man Apart

Nobody took Evel's advice and put in an order for the Knievel loving toy for his children, but in every other respect the New York press conference was a huge success. We hit every wire service and just about every newspaper in the United States for lengthy stories, and we hit every television news program that night, for pieces running as long as seven minutes. That's like hoping for hamburger and getting beef Wellington.

"Evel's a cut apart from anybody," I told the Associated Press reporter Jurate Kazickas, a beautiful leggy blonde who was sitting with Howard Cosell, Dick St. John, myself, and some others while she waited her turn for a private interview with Evel.

"Ali stood up for something he believed," I went on. "But Evel lives Evel's life; he lives nobody else's life. He's a complete and utter nonconformist, yet at the same time he's volatile, he's material, he's sentimental. He cares about his wife and children. He's a deep man, he's deep."

"He's got the greatest span of anybody I've known since Brando," Dick added. "I handled Marlon for twelve years, and if Marlon's happy he can walk into any room full of people, and I don't care how many divorces there have been, whose kids just died, or whatever happened, in fifteen minutes they're all happy. Same thing with Evel: If he walks in, it's the best."

"How long have you been with Evel?" Jurate asked me.

"I went to Butte, Montana, and met him for the first time a week ago."

"Noooo," she said, drawing it out and looking at me doubtfully. Obviously she thought I was putting her on, so I told her the truth.

"I can tell from that one meeting," I said. "You see, after twenty-five years of doing the kind of thing I've been doing you have an intuitive feeling about the person you're going to work with and live with. What I tell you is what I believe, predicated on firsthand observation, with his guard down, with his chastizing his children, with his worry about his daughter being out late, with his talking to his wife, and my having dinner five nights with him." I was completely honest, because I really thought I knew Evel Knievel. I still had a lot to learn.

"He's very demanding," Dick put in. "Extremely demanding. My wife says, 'Maniac, what are you doing?' I said, 'Hey, he's working twice as hard as I am.'"

"He's the most exciting individual since Muhammad Ali in his early days," I said. "I don't think Ali's exciting today. He's repetitive."

Howard Cosell, missing the point, said, "I disagree.

He did a bit last night at the dinner. He spoke for twenty minutes until he had the house in stitches. But Evel is much brighter than Ali."

"Brighter?" Jurate questioned. She was soaking this up.

"No question," I replied, this time agreeing with Howard. "Innate intelligence."

"How does his ego compare to Ali's?" Jurate wanted to know.

Dick had the right answer: "All I can say is if you put Muhammad and Evel and Howard Cosell together, you've got the ego market cornered."

Even Howard liked that; he knows very well that you can't do what he does, or what Evel does, or what Ali does, unless you have a very large ego. That exaggerated self-confidence makes the difference between mere competence and superstar greatness.

With a dozen private interviews out of the way, we took Evel to ABC for an appearance with Howard on *Wide World of Sports*. We also previewed an ABC film about the canyon jump; it was a frightening production, which analyzed the Sky-Cycle's ridiculous steam engine and gave Evel very little chance of survival.

During the showing I watched his face closely. He didn't wince once; he just studied the film very carefully. When they turned the lights up he told the producer, Ned Steckel, "I like it. It's super. Use it any way you want."

Weeks later Evel would renege on that statement, and later he would withdraw the withdrawal.

As we left ABC Evel decided that he needed new shoes; the gold buckle on one he was wearing had broken. So several of us walked over to Fifth Avenue.

On the way we bumped into Henny Youngman, and, like any fan, Henny wanted to talk to Evel.

"What's that?" Evel asked, pointing to Henny's lapel pin, which was a dime with a safety pin soldered onto the back.

"It's a dime 'n' pin," Henny said, straight-faced. "A *genuine* dime 'n' pin."

"Hey, I like that!" Evel laughed.

"It's yours," Henny said, taking it off and handing it to him.

I told Henny how Evel had kept me awake with his phone calls the previous night, and Dr. Henny Youngman, Instant Physician, looked at Evel very critically, as if he had just seen his X-rays. "You don't have an ulcer," he told Evel. "You're a carrier."

We were still chuckling when we got to the shoe store, only to find that it was just closing. The manager was worried about his wife's worrying if he got home late for dinner.

"Hey, my driver's outside!" Evel exclaimed; Bob Cramer had been following us in the limousine. Evel arranged for Cramer to drive the manager to his home in Spring Valley, so the store stayed open. Evel bought a dozen pairs of shoes in different colors and styles, and between us we made a dozen phone calls from the place.

Next Evel decided that his forty-seven-thousand-dollar diamond-studded gold wristwatch wasn't working, and right then and there he had to have a new watch. It was six P.M., and when we got to Lew Magram's on Seventh Avenue they slammed the door in our faces—specifically, in the face of Harold Conrad, an old-time fight promoter who had just joined us as a consultant and advance man.

Evel's volatile temper flared—nobody insults his

friends and gets away with it. To demonstrate the kind of customer Magram's was losing, he stood in front of the store and signed autographs for half an hour; if he had stood there for a year, there still would have been a line waiting for autographs. He had already bought a dozen shoes, later that evening he bought a dozen shirts, and if Magram's hadn't slammed the door on us he probably would have bought a dozen expensive watches. Eat your heart out, Lew Magram!

"By the way," Evel said to me casually, "we can't go into Chicago as late as you've scheduled us on the twenty-eighth. I made a commitment that weekend in Salt Lake City, and I have to be in Butte that night."

That meant massive changes in our itinerary, which was already packed tighter than a Playboy Bunny's brassiere. But Hal Conrad had wanted us in Chicago earlier anyway, so that Evel could tape an Irv Kupcinet show for which Red Smith, the *New York Times* sportswriter, was also scheduled. So I didn't mind making all the phone calls the change involved.

"Do you have a pencil and a piece of paper there?" I asked Ed Oliphant in Dallas. "Evel has to get into Butte a little earlier; rather than Saturday the twenty-ninth, he has to get there Friday the twenty-eighth at night, so keep all the cities, just make some changes. From Louisville, Kentucky, instead of going to St. Louis we may go to Kansas City, but have a three-thirty arrival time in Kansas City. We'd go from Kansas City to St. Louis, leaving at five thirty and getting into St. Louis at six, as we originally planned. Then on Friday we'd fly at night after St. Louis and stay overnight in Milwaukee instead of Kansas City. Then we'd have our nine-thirty morning press conference in Milwaukee instead of in Kansas City, and then leave

Milwaukee at ten to get into Chicago about eleven for our press conference there. That way Evel would be able to get on the Irv Kupcinet show and maybe make a couple of other shows, and then leave Chicago about seven for Butte. And then there's a layover in Salt Lake City the next night. I just wanted to alert you to that; you can make a separate sheet to figure it out."

Somehow Ed was able to follow my instructions. What I didn't realize, and he didn't either, was that this kind of change, which also involved changes in hotel and press-conference arrangements, was going to occur two or three times a day for the next two weeks. If I ever quit promotion I might be able to get an easy rocking-chair job planning schedules for some sane outfit like American Airlines.

Evel also wanted a piece of carpeting for the Lear jet, so that he could lie down on the floor and nap in flight. Luckily, at dinner that night at the St. Regis I ran into some guys from the Bigelow Carpet Company; they were wall-to-wall because the rug makers were having a convention, and they scrounged up a six-by-two-foot piece of thick carpet for Evel to sleep on. Like a bunch of Arabs, we immediately labeled it Evel's Flying Carpet.

By evening every one of us was as tired as a whore when the Marines are in town. After the dinner at the St. Regis Evel wanted to go to the Tittle Tattle again; it had become his New York local, and he had invited everybody he met on the street to party with him there. But I persuaded him to let Bob Cramer take him to the Regency and tuck him into bed before he collapsed; it was most important for him to be fresh the next morning.

Meanwhile, Hal Conrad and Zeke Rose and Jack Price and I went to the office at Top Rank and worked until midnight, making plans and phone calls.

By the time I got back to the Drake I was wobbly with fatigue. My room was 1758, but by mistake I got off on the twelfth floor, and I spent five minutes trying to open the door of 1258 before I realized what I was doing. I took the elevator on up to 17 and fell into bed at one A.M.

At two thirty Joe Gagliardi, an insurance man in San Jose, California, called and woke me up to say that Bob Arum wanted Evel to take a physical examination so that Top Rank could insure his life because of all the money they had put up front on the canyon jump.

Evel was ahead of Bob on that. At dinner that evening he had told me, "Shelly, tomorrow on the plane I want to make sure that Bob Arum takes out a policy on my life to the tune of what he has already advanced me plus the two dollars which his sons lost to me on the Quarry-Frazier fight. I will pay for it. I think it's only right, because a lot of people could lose a lot of money if I don't make that jump."

I had no idea whether Evel could pass a physical, although he seemed to be one of the toughest, healthiest guys I had ever known. But because of his accidents—at that time he had had thirteen major operations, more than fifty bones broken, some of them several times, and some bone replaced with metal—he would probably make an X-ray machine light up like the outdoor Christmas display at Rockefeller Center.

"O.K., Joe,'" I told Gagliardi. "Evel has already mentioned it. I'll take care of it in the morning."

And I went back to sleep, confident that our star

was slumbering undisturbed. Unbeknownst to me, as soon as Bob Cramer left him, Evel had gone straight to the Tittle Tattle. I don't know how late his revels continued, but he was fresh and ready to go in the morning.

Chapter 5

The Buffalo Shuffle

Two thousand people came out in the rain the next morning to see Evel Knievel off at La Guardia. I could have predicted the rain, because my knee, which is a better forecaster than the National Weather Service, had begun aching the previous afternoon. But I hadn't expected the crowd. They were jammed against the chain-link fence, yelling, "We want Evell We want Evell" The police had trouble holding the fence up and repelling the kids who kept trying to climb over it and get to the painted Lear jet.

But Evel paid no attention to the crowd. He had telephoned Linda, at home in Butte, and for the first time I saw him genuinely upset. He was ready to cancel the whole tour.

"Linda is terrified," he told Bob Arum. "She read a wire story out of the press conference in the Butte paper, and now she thinks I'm going to die. She's a nervous wreck. I don't know what to do about it. I ought to be with her. I ought to go home right now!"

Bob turned white. He could see the whole promo-

tion going down the drain. "She'll calm down, Evel," he said. "You know how women are."

"Fuck!" Evel snapped. "You don't know my wife. In fourteen years we've been married she only cried two or three times. She's a wonderful woman; she don't give me that kind of trouble. But she's scared. She's been scared of this jump since I coaxed her up to the top of that ramp and she looked down into the canyon. And now that fucking paper does this!"

"Look," I said, "that's part of the buildup. It's what we wanted. The press conference was a terrific success, fantastic! Just tell her it's only publicity."

"That's pure shit, Shelly," Evel said. "We got the publicity because I *might* die. What do you think Linda is, some stupid bitch?"

"Hey, everybody," Art Jones yelled. "We're late already, and we're going to be delayed getting out of here because of the weather."

We got Evel into the plane. The runways were crowded and we had to wait in line, but finally we got into the air, about thirty minutes late. There were seven of us on board: Evel, Bob Arum, Dick St. John, Zeke Rose, me, and, of course, the two pilots, Art and Jerry. That was our basic crew, although the personnel changed from day to day and Zeke and I and the pilots were the only ones who made the entire tour with Evel. We were a good group.

Although the original idea had been Evel's, the architect of the project was Bob Arum: medium height, wiry, nattily dressed, dark brown hair, hazel eyes that measured you to the millimeter through thick glasses, a mind that never stopped, intense, quick to anger and sorry afterward, a manipulator, dedicated to success.

Zeke was the Rose of Porter, LeVay and Rose, corporate and financial public relations: a quiet, gentle man with an irrepressible sense of humor, with glasses as thick as Arum's, beginning to bald a little and put on a little weight. He customarily commuted daily to his New York office from his home in New Jersey; he was always first off the plane, to set up displays for his client, the Ideal Toy Company. By Rose or any other name, a very sweet guy, and a moderating influence in the group.

Dick St. John, a former executive of Filmways and one-time partner in the prestigious Los Angeles law firm of O'Melveny and Myers, was a thin, good-looking guy with sandy gray hair and blue eyes. An excellent athlete and tennis player, he liked to get away weekends to his retreat at Big Sur. Dick wanted to be a buffer between Evel and the rest of us, but in the end he and Evel had a falling out, and he was the first—and only—one of us to split from the project.

If there was a leprechaun on board, it was Shelly Saltman—a Jewish leprechaun, a manic personality who thrived on crisis, which was fortunate because the project was one long crisis that lasted all summer. Perhaps an excess of energy was involved; it takes energy to *like* being awakened at three in the morning, every morning, by business phone calls. I was the scheduler, the route mechanic, the coordinator of everything. If Arum was the architect, I was the master craftsman, and Evel Knievel was the finished product.

The product couldn't get his mind off Linda. He knew he wouldn't have a minute to call her again until that night; we were hitting Providence, Hartford–New Haven, Boston, Albany, Syracuse, Rochester, and Buffalo. So he asked Bob to make the call at the first possible opportunity.

"Will you call my wife and tell her not to worry and everything is being taken care of?" he asked. "Tell her you've got faith in me and everything is fine, and explain that the money was paid so all the engineering feats in the world could be done with the best help, and there really is no chance of a problem."

"Of course," Bob said. "I'll call her first chance I get."

"Tell her you want to meet her," Evel said. "She'll like that. Tell her about the response of the people everywhere and how they're with me, and . . ." He stopped, tears in his eyes. "Tell her she's got to be with me the same way, because this is very tough and I've got to do it and I need the support of my wife."

We were all practically in tears by now. I tried to give him a little pep talk. "Hey," I said, "everything's super. C'mon, Evel."

He gave me a weak little grin and the thumbs-up signal, but he didn't say anything more. That morning I learned that Linda is Evel's weak spot. Usually he's magnum tough, and he plays all night when he's on the road, but where Linda is concerned he can sometimes go as soft as butter in July.

By the time we got to Boston Evel's new shoes were hurting him. Because of the accident at Las Vegas, where he jumped over the fountains at Caesar's Palace but crashed on landing at one hundred miles an hour and skidded a hundred and fifty feet like a sack of potatoes, one of his legs is one inch shorter than the other. His shoes have to be specially fitted.

"Get a fucking shoemaker here," he demanded. "I'm limping awful hard."

But we had no time for shoemakers until we got to Buffalo. Evel limped all day. But there was nothing wrong with his mouth.

"Is this stunt going to serve any useful purpose, or is it a stunt for stunt's sake?" one of the Boston reporters asked.

"Could be both," Evel said. "What would you consider a purpose?"

"Well, Lindbergh crossing the ocean . . ."

"There wasn't a useful purpose then," Evel said. "He was a damn fool."

"A lot of people are crossing the ocean now," the reporter observed.

"Right," Evel shot back. "That's why he really wasn't a damn fool. Right now I'm a damn fool. I'll guarantee you one thing. I have traveled this country for eight years I've been in this business, speaking out against the things that gave motorcycling such a bad name in this country. I've spoken out against narcotics and alcohol. I've spoken out for automobile safety and motorcycle safety concerning helmets and all that, and kids in this country look up to me. I'm going to keep my word; I'm not going to let them down. I'm not saying the canyon jump might serve a useful purpose, but the fact that I'm not a phony, I'll guarantee you, is a more useful purpose than the one Spiro Agnew provided this country as Vice-President."

Evel always had that kind of putdown for any reporter who questioned his integrity or his aims. I am convinced that he really saw some grand if vaguely defined design in the Snake River Canyon Jump beyond its obvious purpose, which of course was simply to make money.

"I don't want to kiss their ass for all the money in the world," he told me. "If you demand their respect, you'll get it. There's always two or three that will say, 'What the fuck is an Evel Knievel?' You've got to let them know."

The inevitable question about details of the jump elicited his typical rambling answer, which itself revealed the unscientific, jury-rigged, by-guess-and-by-God nature of this supposedly scientifically engineered project. Most of his figures varied from one press conference to another. As he spoke he diagrammed the setup on a blackboard:

"The canyon itself is somewhere between half a mile and three quarters of a mile wide. I'm not too sure about it because I'm going to go a mile. I can show you exactly what's going to happen. The ramp on this edge of the canyon is only a hundred and eight feet long, that's all; this room here is only about fifty feet across, so it's only twice the length of this room plus eight feet, and there's a track on that ramp that's set at fifty-six degrees—this angle. And what this vehicle runs on is steam, water power. Water is the most reliable source of power in the world—there's no ignition, there's no chance for a spark failure or a fuel failure. We heat water to eight hundred or nine hundred degrees in a heater—let's say this is the heater—and then we let the water into the Sky-Cycle at seven hundred degrees and I get into it and we start the countdown, which lasts approximately thirty or forty minutes, maybe an hour. And Mr. Truax will pat me on the head and say, 'Good luck, the time has come for you to go.'

"This thing will run one hundred and eight feet, just a little farther than this room here, from zero to two hundred miles an hour in about two and a half seconds. When it gets off of the ramp it will go to three hundred and fifty miles an hour. When it gets across the canyon, if I'm conscious I'll pull a ripcord and a parachute will open behind it. There is also a rod that comes out the front of the vehicle like this,

so that when I nosedive into the ground the rod slides back into an oiled tube to cushion the shock. I'm going to come down at about fourteen feet per second, which isn't much of an impact. That's if everything works right.

"Now this thing goes so fast, two hundred fifty miles an hour in two and a half seconds, that's five G's, positive G's, when you're thrust backward into the seat. When it gets to the top of its altitude, which is two thousand feet, and the chutes open, then I'm going to have negative G's, where I'll go forward. So I'll have a positive G and a negative G. Five and a half a man could stand, ten could kill him. So there's a timing device on the chute system so if I've lost consciousness the parachute will open automatically. If that timing device fails, we have another device that will activate the parachute system when the vehicle tips to forty-nine degrees. So we've got a backup system for a backup system for a backup system."

"Will you be totally enclosed?" a reporter asked.

"No, I'll be just like this," Evel said. Now he was holding up a toy Sky-Cycle, which Zeke Rose had had to buy at retail because he couldn't get one from Ideal fast enough. "The only other thing that mine will have that this doesn't is just a windshield, that's all."

"What's the purpose of the windshield?"

"The purpose of the windshield is to keep the wind off of me," Evel said. He shook his head and looked around at the other reporters. "I don't believe this guy. 'What's the purpose of a windshield?' Motorcycle riders get bugs in their teeth. I don't want to have bugs in my teeth."

In both Providence and Boston Evel was mobbed by the fans—men who wanted to shake his hands, women who had a crush on him and wanted to touch

him, kids who wanted his autograph. In Boston a little girl about two years old, finger in her mouth, came up with an older brother.

"Are you a boy or a girl?" Evel asked her.

She was too shy to answer, but her brother said she was a girl. Evel signed an autograph, and the brother looked at it as if it were the Kohinoor diamond and said, "My friends will never believe you really wrote it."

And a black cameraman from one of the television stations came over and said simply, "God bless you, Evel!"

On the flight from Boston to Albany Evel chewed me out about the security arrangements. "Where the crowds are going to be this big we got to tell the policemen to announce to the kids that I'm going to come through and I'll be able to shake hands with a few of them along the fences, instead of just waving at them. I'll go through if you take me though, but you got to have those policemen set up because I won't stop, I won't get trapped. I have to have it explained in front of me so I won't be a prick. It might take us a day to get professional at this thing."

"In Providence they couldn't get to you," Zeke told him, "and they were asking for my autograph just because I know you. I mean, I wasn't signing your name, I was signing my name."

That's how it was everywhere. We all signed hundreds of autographs, as if we were celebrities and not just Evel's associates.

And here already, on the first day of the tour, Evel was taking charge, giving the orders. He had had to do that for years, and in the process he became an instinctive take-charge guy. One of the press photographers in Boston came up to Zeke as we were leaving

and said, "You know, he's right—he doesn't need a public relations man."

Evel himself said it accurately: "A lot of reporters who have never met me before are star-struck. No, not star-struck—they're astounded." And those astounded reporters, not just sportswriters but guys at city desks and even science specialists, reacted to Evel's talent for promotion, his raunchy humor, his no-nonsense honesty and courage, by giving the Snake River Canyon Jump probably the most widespread publicity that any special event ever received.

We were only halfway through our first day out of New York and the success of the tour was so unexpectedly great that Bob Arum wanted to add more cities.

Evel said, "Let me give you some more towns that I'd like to go to: Spokane."

"We'll go there from Seattle," I said.

"Another town: Tulsa," Evel said.

"Well, we could squeeze it in between Oklahoma City and Houston."

"Hey!" Evel exclaimed. "Get one with a shoe shop! And let's go to Calgary."

Bob Arum asked, "What about Tampa and Orlando?"

"We took Tampa out," I said. "But Tucson—they'll come right down the pike from Phoenix."

"And now," Evel went on, "El Paso, we got Dallas, Fort Worth, San Antonio, Albuquerque. California, we got San Francisco, L.A., San Diego. We should definitely go to Reno and Vegas. They're my two biggest; I almost got killed in Vegas."

"Why weren't we going to Vegas?" I wondered. Then I remembered, "Somebody—oh, it was Mike Malitz—said they knew you well enough in Vegas."

"The local kids will turn out to see us," Evel said. "Hell, we might want to do some business in the future with some casino. Vegas is a sewer; on one side of the sewer there are suckers, on the other side there are thieves. And no matter who wins the money, it all goes in the sewer. You know who told me that? It was Jimmy the Greek.

"We got to go to Columbus," Evel said. "That's got to be. That's headquarters of the American Motorcycle Association, and you know what they're going to do for us publicity-wise. Tell Ed Youngblood to set the whole thing up, get the press out."

We were all charged up, flying higher than the Lear. When a promotion is going well you believe that there are no limits to the possibilities, and you forget that you have only so much time and energy.

The press conferences, one after another for two weeks, were like reruns; Evel should have been paid residuals. But he always managed to inject something new at each stop.

"Do you find it hard to get insurance?" a reporter in Albany wanted to know.

"I don't need life insurance," Evel replied. "Christ, I been a millionaire before today. The insurance companies are all a bunch of baloney. I used to sell insurance for Combined Insurance Company of America, headed by a man called W. Clement Stone. I sold a hundred and ten insurance policies for that company in one day, two hundred seventy-one in a week, and they gave me a permanent Grand Diamond Award and tossed a party for me in Denver at the Hilton. I told the vice-president, Mr. Matt Walsh, who is now the president, that if he didn't make me the youngest vice-president in the insurance industry he could go to hell.

"I didn't want to be in the insurance business, and thank God they didn't want me to be a vice-president, because I was so young. So I quit. I quit the day before they found out how I sold the hundred and ten policies. You know how I sold the hundred and ten insurance policies in a day? And the two hundred seventy-one in a week? In an insane asylum in Warm Springs, Montana!"

"Were you visiting, Evel?" a grinning reporter asked, tongue in cheek.

"I was visiting, yeah. I dropped by to say hello. God, that's nine years ago. I go by there, duck hunting now, once in a while, and I still see guys standing around that I sold insurance to."

When the laughter had subsided another reporter asked, "Everyone has a fear of something, like snakes or whatever. You have no fear of anything now?"

"I don't like snakes, and I don't like the words Snake River Canyon," Evel admitted. "But I jumped a bunch of snakes once. That was my first jump for money."

"You jumped a bunch of *snakes*?" The reporter sounded as if he thought that wasn't a very high attainment.

"I jumped a couple of mountain lions and a whole bunch of snakes, fifty or sixty rattlesnakes in a box," Evel explained. "And just before I got ready to jump, the guy that owns the mountain lions comes running out and says, 'Wait a minute, wait a minutel I don't think you're going to make it. I want my lions on the takeoff side.'

"Thank God he did, because I hit the box and knocked the end of it off, snakes got all over. There was a whole bunch of people on this hill, and it looked like the whole hill got up and went away.

Snakes all over the place, and I was the only one that had a piece of transportation."

There is an ancient show-business axiom: Always leave 'em laughing. And Evel always does. He leaves 'em laughing, astounded, impressed, and—this is very important—uncertain. Not about him, but about themselves, because while almost everything Evel tells about himself has an element of truth, to the average guy it is unreal. It is like fiction. The average guy wouldn't do the zany things Evel Knievel does, for any amount of money, and that makes the guy wonder, "Is there something wrong with Evel, or is it with me?" It's a disturbing question, if you have to ask it.

I was the flying bartender and music maestro; I served the drinks, and I put the music on the loudspeaker system. On the way to Buffalo everybody was feeling good because the tour was going so well, and we all began to act a little crazy. Evel was feeling especially good, because Bob Arum had managed to call Linda from Albany and reassure her that Evel was not headed straight for the cemetery from the brink of the Snake River Canyon.

"Hey, get those pilots drunk!" he yelled, bourbon and soda in hand. "Get those pilots drunk!" Of course, the pilots never touched a drop of liquor.

Bob wanted a diet drink, but I couldn't get to the locker because Zeke had grabbed me by the pants, a pair of green pants that Evel didn't like. Pretty soon everybody was following the leader and kidding me about my pants.

"You got to change clothes tomorrow," Evel told me. "I can't have no little publicist going around with me in those goddamned green pants."

Evel was wearing a purple suit that he had been wearing for a year and a half, a suit with a tear in the

crotch of the pants. Linda had been after him to have it fixed or throw it away, but he had paid no attention.

"Look at you!" I yelled. "You're all just jealous because you don't have green pants. Go fuck yourselves!"

Everybody laughed, and Evel began lecturing Bob Arum and Dick St. John on the evils of smoking, and next he was telling Polish jokes and demanding that we call him Evel Kowalski, and he was ordering us to get Sky-Cycle jackets for all of us to wear so that we'd look like a team, and then it was how much he liked the new gold paint that was put on the motorcycle at La Guardia but the Harley-Davidson logo was coming off in the rain and we had to get a new one, and his shoes hurt, and Bob Arum was leaving us that night but he was to meet us in Chicago and we'd all go to Butte and Salt Lake City together, and Zeke said, "Up yours!" to the world in general and fell asleep, and I asked Art Jones to radio ahead about the crowd, and Evel said, "Shelly, you're worse than an expectant father," and he bragged about how he used to blow safes, and then we were dropping into Buffalo and after all the rain it was a beautiful, sunny late afternoon.

Zeke woke up, looked around, and said, "This place looks like a garbage dump."

It did. We were jammed into that little Lear jet, seven sardines in a two-sardine can, and there were paper cups and half-eaten sandwiches mashed into the floor and spilled drinks everywhere.

Zeke handed the wastebasket to St. John, calculating that Dick would be offended at being offered the role of janitor. He was, and he shoved it back.

"Take it and shove it up your ass!" Evel yelled.

Bob Arum bent over double with laughter; that was remarkable for Bob, because his intensity of purpose

leaves him few opportunities to let go. We were all on a terrific high, looking ahead at millions of dollars on September 8.

But nobody can stay forever on a high, and after the press conference most of us crashed out of pure fatigue. Lenny Silver, of Transcontinent Record Sales, Inc., Evel's record distributor, who was based in Buffalo, joined us in Evel's suite at the hotel, and his son Larry arranged for a shoe store to reopen that night and fix four pairs of Evel's shoes so they wouldn't hurt him. The regular price was ten dollars a pair, but Evel insisted on paying a hundred and twenty dollars total, and he signed fifteen Evel Knievel posters, one for each person who worked in the store.

Dick St. John wandered in without any shoes. He had taken them off because his feet were tired, and now he couldn't find them anywhere. He never did find them.

Evel got into a sentimental mood, and he told me about a wild dream he had had the night before. He had dreamed that he was in the Sky-Cycle, with me beside him, and it blew up. The dream had upset him because in it I got killed.

"Nobody would know," I said. "My name wouldn't be mentioned. The headline would be 'Evel Knievel and Associate Killed.'"

He laughed at that, and almost immediately, right in the middle of all the talk, he fell asleep. The long day's action, and maybe the action of the long night before, had finally zonked out the Iron Man.

But my phone wouldn't let me nap. Zeke Rose called to let me know that the next day's Cleveland press conference had been moved from the Hangar Restaurant to the Sheraton Airport. More phone calls to make. That change was going to cause trouble, but

I was too tired to anticipate it that night in Buffalo. After doing a twenty-minute beeper interview with Paul James of KSL in Salt Lake City, I took the phone off the hook and stepped into the shower. Then, feeling better, I went down to the hotel bar for a drink.

A rock group was bouncing music off the walls so hard it felt as though they were playing ping-pong with my head. But after a while I adjusted to their amplified decibels, and at about eleven in the evening in came Evel Knievel, wide awake and itching for action. As usual, he got it: the congratulators, the autograph seekers, the adoring females.

And before long he was up on stage, the rockers being off theirs, and he was telling the crowd that he was already psychologically in the countdown for the Snake River Canyon Jump, and he recited a poem that he had written about it, a poem that we included in the press kits. It's a long, emotional poem entitled "Why?," and it ends like this:

> To be a man,
> to do my best,
> to stand alone is my only quest.
>
> Success is a term that has broad use,
> for having none in life there is no excuse.
>
> For you, what I do is not right—
> but, for me, it's not wrong.
> What I have been trying to tell you all along
> is that it's got to be.
> You ask why?
> Well, just like you, I've gotta be me.

It was hardly great poetry, but that noisy, carousing nightclub audience stopped drinking and talking,

the bartenders stopped making drinks, the waiters stopped serving—nobody moved a muscle. You could have heard an eye blink. Evel might have been leading them all in his personal prayer.

Evel ad libbed a new ending for the poem:

> I said I would jump the canyon
> when I was damn good and ready—
> well, now I'm ready!
> Happy Landings!

When he finished there was silence—absolute dead silence—for several seconds. Then suddenly the place exploded with a cheering, stomping, standing ovation that seemed to go on forever. The poem later became a hit record.

By the time I was able to tow the spellbinder back to his suite to go to bed, we were once again on Eastern Knievel Time: It was three o'clock in the morning.

Chapter 6

The St. John Syndrome

The St. John Syndrome got its name from Dick when he lost his shoes. It was to strike again several times during the tour. It struck me at seven o'clock the next morning. I had just cleared several telephone calls for Evel—I always had the hotel route his calls to me so I could screen out the autograph seekers and the amorous women, and arrange for interviews if the caller was a reporter—and I was shaving when Dick and Larry Silver knocked on my door, thinking I was still asleep. I let them in, there were a couple more calls, and when I went to finish shaving I couldn't find my razor.

It took me half an hour to find it. I had packed it in my bag, still wet with soap, alongside the new Memorex tapes which Larry had found for me in the middle of the night at Evel's request; I was taping everything that everybody said, in preparation for writing this book. So I had to unpack and start all over again.

"Where can I get some No Doz?" was Evel's first question of the day.

"I thought you wanted to put in half a dozen more cities," Zeke said.

Evel just gave him a dirty look.

On the way to the airport our limousine was accompanied by two Continentals furnished by Jimmy Constantino, the owner of the Western, where we had had dinner the night before. One Continental was full of bodyguards; the other was a spare in case the first one had a breakdown.

Jimmy had done something similar at the restaurant, where people lined up halfway across the room to get Evel's autograph. But the minute our food was served the fans left us alone. I thought that was a very nice indication of the courtesy and consideration of the people of Buffalo. But it wasn't that at all, as we discovered when we started to leave the restaurant. Suddenly a couple of burly guys were walking alongside us; they were the bodyguards, and Jimmy had ordered them to escort us and make sure that Evel was not bothered or molested. Of course, Evel can take care of himself in those situations, verbally and if necessary, physically, but it was a thoughtful gesture on Jimmy's part.

At the airport a bunch of guys from Jack Paar's airplane helped us load our baggage aboard while Zeke paid bills and Evel signed forty pictures he had promised to people at the hotel. Zeke was carrying the toy Sky-Cycle, and when Larry saw it he laughed and said, "Big kids never put their toys down."

"It's my bread and butter," Zeke exclaimed. "I love it, I love it!" And he kissed the Sky-Cycle.

"Let's do it, baby!" Art Jones said to Jerry Manthey. "Let's get going!"

And we were off again. The first thing I did was spill Evel's morning pick-me-up of coffee and bourbon. It was lucky that Bob Arum had left us, because I spilled it on his seat.

Once Evel had his booze he was all business, describing to Dick St. John the design he wanted for tickets for the $125,000 motorcross he was sponsoring at Twin Falls during the week before the canyon jump, diagramming the jump-site areas for press and VIPs, charting ticket-sale projections, telling Dick to get his bank accounts in Butte straightened out, and issuing orders about a million things to everybody within earshot.

After needling me all the previous day about my green pants, Evel approved of the blue pants I wore this day; they were identical except for the color. "I like blue," he said. "That's my color." He was wearing a white Irish linen suit and a white shirt with vertical red stripes. Or was it a red shirt with vertical white stripes?

"Zeke," I kidded, "you can wear my green pants. I hate them by now."

Zeke shook his head. "Shelly, your green pants were burned last night." Whatever happened to them, they were missing when I unpacked that night in Detroit. The St. John Syndrome had struck again.

Evel erupts with ideas as regularly as Yellowstone's Old Faithful. This morning he decided that we should all have white pants to match the white jackets he had ordered for us—jackets with a Sky-Cycle on the back and a big "Number 1" on the front. They were to be our press-conference uniform; we were going to pick them up in Detroit, where a guy named Yosemite Sam was having them made up.

And as we got out of the plane at Pittsburgh, where

a big crowd was waiting for us, Evel pointed to the gold motorcyclist doing a wheelie on the tail of the plane. "There's got to be some dirt coming off that back wheel," he said. "The plane looks like it's going seven thousand miles an hour, but that motorcycle looks like it's standing still. It's got to kick up some dirt."

Evel spent half the time in Pittsburgh talking with the telephone company in Butte. He was concerned again about Linda and the kids; this time it was the possibility of kidnapping that bothered him, and he wanted a private telephone line installed between the house and the new guard shack he had built at the front gate.

"Has the tourist business in Butte picked up, with all the publicity you're getting?" a reporter in Buffalo had asked.

"Oh, sure," Evel said. "They're coming from all over."

"What do they do in Butte?"

"Drive by my house," he said.

Now that thought worried him, and he was very agitated because the telephone company couldn't install the private line the day before yesterday. He was giving them hell. Evel reminded me of Mr. Dithers, Dagwood Bumstead's boss in the *Blondie* comic strip: He was always keeping somebody in a dither. Usually it was one of us, so I was glad to have him on the telephone company's back for a change.

"I *know* they're new shoes!" a girl in Pittsburgh insisted to her girl friend. They were arguing about Evel's shoes.

Zeke and I were standing close enough to hear, and I asked, "How do you know?"

"He still has the price tags on the soles," she said.

Zeke called this to Evel's attention a little later, and Evel said, "What the fuck do you want on there, cow shit? They'll wear off. Anyway, I'm proud of what I paid for them. I got them in New York, not in Butte, Montana."

But as soon as we were in the air again on our way to Cleveland, he took out a knife and started scraping off the tags.

"This is no time to slice your wrists," Zeke said, kidding.

"Yeah," Evel said, glaring at him. "But I may slit your throat!" He looked at me. "Where do we have to be tomorrow?"

"Indianapolis, Louisville, Kansas City, and St. Louis," I told him.

"Why can't we go back to Kansas City and stay there after St. Louis?" Evel always liked Kansas City.

"There's no reason," I figured. "We go to Milwaukee the next day, and it's the same flying time from Kansas City as it is from St. Louis. I'll take care of it."

"And, hey," Evel went on, "remind Bob Arum that the Ideal Toy logo has to be on the plane. I want all my sponsors on the plane."

"Right on!" Zeke yelled.

"There'll be a painter in Detroit to put it on tonight," I assured Evel. The Lear jet was beginning to look like an Indianapolis race car; you couldn't see what it was for all the logos.

Coming into Cleveland was like coming home for me. I had been promotion manager for WJW-TV there, and I was planning to see a lot of my old friends. In my own territory I *knew* we'd have a great press conference.

We bombed out! Completely! It was a disaster! In the tenth largest city in the United States, only one reporter—from radio station WERE—showed up.

Evel was furious. "I want to tell you something," he said, with a voice as penetrating as a laser beam. "I want to tell you right point-blank, and I want to call Bob Arum on the telephone and tell him. Bob is using fight promoters for this thing, and they're a bunch of jackoffs, all of them! We don't need them. Rick Case is the man to handle your deal here. J. C. Agajanian is the man to handle Los Angeles, not the fucking jackoffs Arum deals with. He deals with a bunch of old fucking jerks. Goddammit, I mean it! It's a bunch of bullshit! We should have had over two hundred here. Get some old fucking guy like you had up in Albany or wherever the hell we were yesterday. In Buffalo that guy can't help but be a success because of the market he's in; that's one thing. But when you're in a big city you've got to be a super-smart son of a bitch and a good merchandiser. You've got to be able to sell something that's fantastic to the public. Not a fucking old idiot, I'm telling you!"

He sure was, and we listened. "You're right, Evel," I said, in what I hoped was a soothing tone.

"I don't care if you think I'm right or wrong!" he snapped. But he was cooling down—to somewhere near the boiling point.

"It was a big disappointment," I admitted. "I'm embarrassed. I thought this was my town."

Evel didn't want to lay it on me; he knew that the local ballyhoo was not my department. But he had to lay it on somebody.

"We've got a real definite what I consider a problem in this promotion, of which this is the first we have run into," he said. "Top Rank is a successful

boxing-promotion company. They have dealt for years with the old, legitimate, established-type boxing promoters. They belong associated with an Evel Knievel about as much as a truck driver belongs associated with my Lear jet. Top Rank has got some of the best people in the world taking care of the promotions all over the country, with the exception of some cities where Mr. Arum has made the decision not to go with the established promoter but to try and go with a new guy who has never made a closed-circuit deal in those cities, per se, as of yet. Here in Cleveland they haven't made a deal yet. I'm arguing for Rick Case to take it because his thinking is on the pulse of the young people that will want to see this thing. Against this rock-freak acid-festival boxing promoter, I don't like it! And I'm glad that we had the mix-up we did here, because it just goes to show you who's right and who's wrong. I only made one mistake in my life, and that's when I went to bed and thought I didn't wake up and found out I really did and I was dreaming."

That got a nervous laugh from all of us, which calmed him a little more; but he still had a lecture to finish.

"We got to make this thing a big sellout to top the one million three hundred thousand that Ali-Frazier did," he said. "We want to top that by six hundred thousand or seven hundred thousand people. But you can't do it with guys that are a hundred and five years old and can't get their ass out of bed in the morning."

I broke in, because time was running short. "I think we should go, Evel. We've got to go."

"We're on the move, big boy," he said. He made it sound like "little boy." But we moved.

The only thing we could think of that could be responsible for the disaster was the last-minute switch

of the press conference from the Hangar Restaurant to the Sheraton Airport; that was done because the Hangar didn't serve booze, and in that kind of promotion you need to serve booze because the press expects it. That's an angle the local promoter should have checked more carefully before he booked the place.

It wasn't until a day later that we learned the real reason. The fault was entirely that of the man who had blamed us and bawled us all out, Evel Knievel himself!

Evel had been in Cleveland only three weeks earlier, and he had held a press conference and told the reporters everything about the Snake River Canyon Jump. And he had never told us about it. Our press conference, coming so soon afterward, was as much in demand as Yassir Arafat at a Seder.

After the Cleveland bombout and Evel's tirade, the chameleon changed character again and he did something very beautiful: He took time out to visit the burn ward of the Children's Hospital in Akron.

It was Evel's idea, and he would have no press, no publicity. None at all. It was for the children, not for Evel Knievel.

With a police escort we drove to Akron at a hundred miles an hour. Art and Jerry flew down and met us, otherwise we never could have made this side trip, because we still had a press conference in Detroit before our day was done.

Unbeknownst to us, Evel had had ninety Evel Knievel toys flown out from New York. He went into the ward alone, pushing a gurney loaded with those toys; he wouldn't let any of us go with him. I don't know what happened in the ward, but when he came out he was crying.

"This little kid," he said, his voice breaking. He

stopped and started again. "I took the toys and put them beside each kid's bed. Some of them woke up and some didn't. But this one little kid, he woke up and said, 'Hi, Evel,' and I said, 'Hi,' and gave him the toy. And a little later his dad came down the hall with tears in his eyes and he said, 'You know, my little boy hasn't been out of bed for three weeks, and he got up and walked into our bedroom in the hospital and brought us this toy to show us.'"

He shook his head and swallowed, and he said, "Little kid hasn't been up for three weeks, and they had such a hope that he'd come out of the thing, but he took a turn for the worse. He's got a temperature that could kill him. But he got up today, for a little while." He looked at me for a moment, and then all he said was "Leukemia."

And he couldn't talk any more for a while.

But his spirits rose again as fast as the Lear jet taking off for Detroit, and even faster when I put a bourbon and soda in his hand. He was sweating a little, and he did a thing I saw him do many times. He took off his copper bracelet, one of those gadgets that is supposed to keep the wearer healthy and prevent arthritis, and he dipped a napkin in the bourbon and cleaned the bracelet with it. It worked—the bourbon removed the green scum.

"Did you read my story in *Oui* magazine?" he asked Zeke.

"Sure, I read it," Zeke replied. He sounded rather vague.

"Oh, you prick!" Evel chided. "You just look at all the filthy pictures. Why didn't you look at my story?"

"It'll cost you if I read it," Zeke told him.

"They wanted me to pose for a centerfold," Evel said. I think maybe he meant some other magazine,

one for the girls, because so far as I know *Oui* always has a female centerfold. "I told them I'd do it for ten thousand dollars if they'd let me wear a red-white-and-blue jockey strap, and they turned me down."

Another thought struck him, and he added, "Hey, let's give out the *Oui* story instead of the *Sports Illustrated* in the press kit. It'll make a bigger hit, especially in Salt Lake City!"

He darts as fast as a hummingbird from one idea to another, but what seems like a non sequitur really isn't when you analyze it; it's more like Albert Einstein laying out a mathematical analysis and skipping half a dozen intermediate equations because he assumes that any idiot will understand how he got there. From *Oui* to religion isn't all that big a trip if you go by way of Salt Lake City.

"I think religion is like politics," Evel said. "You never see a poor priest. I went to mass the other night with this girl. She wanted to go, so I go; I don't care. She took confession. And you know what, I'm sure she went to confession again afterwards; her sin was that she was disappointed. So the priest was telling me that he always has a place to sleep, he always has good food to eat, he never really wants for anything because people are always inviting him. He gets a lot of fringe benefits."

"But does he have any fun?" Zeke asked.

"Fun? Well, the Mother Superior once caught a priest kissing a nun, and she said to him, 'It's all right as long as you don't get into the habit.'"

At the Detroit press conference Evel disclosed that he and Bob Truax had been arguing about whether he would be conscious enough to activate the Sky-Cycle's parachute system at the climax of the jump, rather than having to depend on the parachute's being

triggered automatically. Truax thought Evel would be out; Evel thought not.

"I've done all the research on this that I can possibly do," he said, "and I think I'm as smart as Mr. Truax; I don't care how many men he's put around the world or on the moon. I'm going to red out. A red-out is when the blood comes to your mouth, your nose, your ears, your head, and you hemorrhage. But you only hemorrhage if you have blood there to start with. If the blood all left your head at the same G force, if it's all in your stomach and your legs and your feet, it's going to come back to your head again. That should equalize the pressure and wake me up. When I take off I'll black out. When the parachute system comes out I'll red out. If I had not blacked out first, when I red out I'd hemorrhage so bad that it might kill me. What it will do is wake me up faster than Mr. Truax thinks."

Not being a medical man, I had no idea whether Evel's red-out theory made sense, but I had a suspicion that there was more to the problem than he had dreamed of in his purely mechanical physiology. What interested me more was the "Mr." which always prefaced the name Truax when it came out of Evel's mouth; it seemed to indicate a certain respect, an unconscious tug at the forelock. There were a few people whom Evel almost invariably referred to as "Mr.," and Bob Arum and Bob Truax were at the top of the list.

"Mr. Truax thinks I've got only a forty per cent chance," Evel continued. "He has taken down all the statistics of the rockets that have burned on the pads at Cape Kennedy, all the statistics of the Russian rockets that have come back into the atmosphere where the parachutes never opened, and these people had

billions of dollars to spend on these projects and I've only had a million to spend on a total of three Sky-Cycles, and the first one went into the river on a test shot, and he's saying I have a sixty–forty chance. I'm saying it'll work."

"Will you eject?" one reporter asked.

"No." It was, once more, the Word engraved in stone. As it developed, this particular stone was tectonic; by jump day it had been so shaken that it crumbled.

"After all the backup systems I told you about, I have two more backup systems," Evel said. "I can say the Lord's prayer in ten seconds; that's one. And if that doesn't work I'm going to spit against the canyon wall just before I hit it, and I'm going to turn around backwards and they'll carve me into that baby like those Presidents in South Dakota."

"How would you describe yourself?" another reporter asked. "A lot of people say you're the biggest con artist in history, and other people think you're the biggest daredevil."

"That's a tough question to answer. I have been called a hustler or con man sometimes because what I've thought about doing was so farfetched that people thought maybe it was a big hustle. To me it's not, but if you want to call it a con or a hustle, go ahead. I'll tell you why: because then I will have become the first con man in history that ever came through. I don't care what you call it, because I know that the day is going to come when I'm going to walk to the edge of that ramp and look across the canyon and I'll want to jump it. In the middle of the canyon I have built a make-believe mirror and I'm looking into it, and the only guy in life you have to be right with is the guy you look at in the mirror every morning when you shave, and that's me."

"Do you feel a sense of responsibility, doing these wild things? The kids see you do that, and, you know, kids pattern themselves after ball players—"

"They do," Evel agreed, interrupting, "and I think the greatest compliment they could pay me is to do that, but—"

"Jumping over garbage cans and stuff?" the reporter shot back argumentatively.

"Whatever. Would you rather see your kid a bum, a beggar, or a wino or an alcoholic, instead of trying to be like Evel Knievel?"

"I'm not going to see him get hurt on a motorcycle," the reporter huffed.

"Can he get hurt playing football?" Evel demanded.

"Sure."

"Can he get hurt playing baseball?"

"Sure."

"He can get hurt just getting out of bed," Evel said. "He can get hurt like I could have riding a bike or motorcycle, when I was a young kid. But I was a kid that would rather take a chance in life, let it all hang out. People all over this country don't know victory or defeat; they did not have the guts to try. So if the kids want to go out and risk their necks like me instead of being nothing at all, I say go and I don't care what the hell the establishment says. Instead of wanting to work in the copper mines in the dark earth a mile underground, with a helmet on, sweating, earning a hundred dollars a week and taking a chance on being suffocated by falling rock and earth, I wanted to get out and see the rest of the world. I wanted to go to New York, Detroit, in an airplane, and I did!"

"Does your wife ride a motorcycle?"

"No. She did once with me and she fell off, and she ain't never got on since. That's fifteen years ago."

"Does she watch you jump?"

"Yeah, she's been my bookkeeper, my cook, my lover, my girl friend, the mother of my children, everything. She's super. Superchick, that's what I call her."

"What's going to become of that canyon after you jump?"

Evel replied, "I don't give a damn if they fill it up with popcorn!"

We spent a long evening in Detroit, because we were told, erroneously, as it turned out, that the Detroit City Motel, where we had reservations, had burned down. We checked into the Holiday Inn in Hazel Park, Michigan, but Art and Jerry had already taken our luggage to the Detroit City Motel, and it took me hours to collect it. I had promised Evel I would get his clothes cleaned, and Jack Hertzberg, the Detroit rep for Ideal Toy, had arranged for a cleaner to stay open late. The cleaning bill was sixty-three dollars, including fifty dollars just for the late hour. Jack was also considerate enough to go out in the middle of the night and find me some new socks—several pairs in various colors, because I like colorful California-style clothing.

While I made another million telephone calls, give or take fifteen, a whole gang had gathered in my room: Evel, Jack, Zeke Rose, three guys from the American Motorcycle Association, a Sears, Roebuck man who was their biggest buyer of Evel Knievel products, and Jurate Kazickas, the beautiful AP reporter we had met in New York, who was flying with us the next day.

A remarkable thing about the promotion was that it attracted reporters who ordinarily wouldn't have bothered to cross the street to cover what was essentially a carnival act. For example, Jules Bergman, the ABC science reporter, did a television special on the canyon jump. Jurate was another example; she was a top byline reporter who had covered important events like the 1973 Middle East war and the war in Vietnam, where she had been shot. She told us she had the scars on her derriere to prove it.

By one thirty in the morning the whole gang had begun to get a little zany. That can happen on a tour like that, when you get more tired than you realize and you're operating on adrenalin alone.

Evel was expounding about the Israelis and the Arabs; Jurate's comments on the Middle East had gotten him started. "The world is all fucked up," he said. "The way the Jews and the Arabs could stop fighting is if the politicians took the jets away from the Jews and the tanks away from the Arabs. They'd have to go back to sword fighting. Hey, know what I'm going to do? I'm going to send six million dollars to the Arabs! I'll get Bob Arum, the Jewish entrepreneur, to stop the check. I'm going to send him a telegram tonight saying, 'I've donated the six million dollars to the Arab nations. Cancel everything. Love, Evel.'"

Everybody laughed but Jurate; she thought we were all nuts. And she was more than convinced when Zeke suddenly wanted to have his palm read.

"What are you, worried about the jump?" Evel demanded. "You don't have to make it."

"I'm worried about my toys if you don't make it," Zeke said. "Who'll buy them?"

"Forest Lawn," I suggested.

Before long Evel's eyelids were drooping, and Jurate said, "You must be very tired."

"I am, honey," he said, "but a little lovin' and a

couple of hours' sleep and a beer will wake me up. And I want that in your story."

Jurate hadn't eaten yet, so Zeke and I took her out to dinner. The tour was following the pattern: Evel got to bed at four thirty.

Chapter 7

The Gift of the Knievel

The morning of the fourth day of the tour, Thursday, June 27, dawned bright and sunny in Detroit, so it was only natural that when the St. John Syndrome struck again it would be my sunglasses that were missing. Also my toothbrush. As a result, I spent the whole day squinting through coated teeth.

Several people came into my room while I, as usual, had the telephone glued to my ear. The next time it rang Jurate answered, "Joe's Bar and Grill."

"Shelly there?" It was Evel, and to him Jurate's little joke wasn't funny. He was still smarting over the Cleveland bombout that he had caused. "I'm canceling everything!" he said irrationally. "I don't want anything fouled up. Call St. John immediately and tell him I don't want him going to Big Sur this weekend. I want him going in advance to make sure these things go well."

"O.K., I'll tell him," I said.

He was calm enough by the time we got to the airport, where some kid apparently made of brass

walked right up to him and said, "Hey, Evel, can I have a six-pack of beer?"

Evel told me to get some beer out of the plane, but I pretended we didn't have any; I couldn't tell if the kid was of legal drinking age.

On the plane Evel spent quite a while showing Jurate pictures of his family and telling her that he was a frustrated architect.

"If I'd had my druthers," he said, "that's what I'd have been in life—an architect." I hadn't heard him say that before, but there was probably some truth in it; the design of the house in Butte was excellent.

"Hey!" he shouted at me, holding up his breakfast bourbon and soda. "With what I'm paying I want some booze in it."

"There's one shot in it," I told him. "You want more?"

"All right, forget it then." He turned back to Jurate and began telling her how upset he was that Andy Granatelli had had no faith in him when he needed help. "Four years ago I wrote a letter to Andy and told him that I had a dream, which was the canyon jump. I said if he'd give me twenty-five thousand dollars I'd put his STP logo on the Sky-Cycle. 'When I jump the canyon I'll be alive and my face will be a little cleaner than Mario Andretti's,' I told him. 'You can kiss me if you want to.' He turned me down when I needed the help.

"Just today I got three telegrams that all stated the same thing: 'If you're interested in making three or four million dollars, contact me.' From Mr. Big Shot, L.A., Mr. Big Shot, New York. But they're too late now. They should have gone with me a long time ago."

"Everybody wants to go with a winner," Jurate observed.

"Yeah," he said. "Shelly, who's that girl in Canada going to have her own doll?"

"Debbie Lawler, the Flying Angel," I said. "It's the Debbie Lawler doll."

"That's right. I designed it. I'm with Marvin Glass Designers, and we do eighty per cent of the toy designs for a lot of companies."

"She challenged you to a jump," I reminded him.

"Look," he said, "it's like a midget challenging Muhammad Ali, a hundred-and-four-pound girl challenging me. It could be treacherous for her. After all, scars don't really hurt a man, but they don't look pretty on a girl."

"You really are a male chauvinist," Jurate said.

"Well, that's all right. Anyway, it's time for me to quit. Entertainers—and I'm an entertainer, whatever else they call me—entertainers only travel because they need the money. If they didn't, they wouldn't travel. And if you've got the money it's time to quit, and I've got the money. I've *got* the money!"

Evel probably meant it at the moment, but, as everybody knows, he didn't quit after the canyon jump. As of this writing I hear that he is thinking about jumping from one to the other of the 110-story twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York. I hope they don't let him; it would be too dangerous. But of course that's why he thought of it.

Evel's remark to Jurate about quitting told me that he doesn't know himself. Entertainers don't quit because they can afford to; they quit because of some condition which makes it impossible for them to perform. Like death. Bob Hope still entertains, and he needs the money about as much as he needs busfare to his bank. How many shows has Frank Sinatra done since his first "retirement"? Evel didn't understand

that performing is an ego trip, a disease for which money is no cure. And there is only one palliative: applause.

If that day was Thursday, it had to be Indianapolis, Louisville, St. Louis, and Kansas City. Friday it was Milwaukee, Chicago, and back to Butte. Jurate wanted to go to Twin Falls to see the jump site, and at my suggestion Evel invited her to continue with us; he offered to make a special stop for her in Twin Falls, and she accepted.

Between Indianapolis and Louisville Evel ordered Art to take a short side trip to Danville, a small town on the prairie of east-central Illinois. Evel wanted to play a gag on a friend of his, a guy with the real if improbable name of Watcha McCollum, who ran an airport service there, and who had been trying to sell Evel a perfect million-dollar diamond ever since he heard about the six-million-dollar check.

When we were over Danville Evel got Watcha McCollum's office on the radio and talked to the guy's secretary.

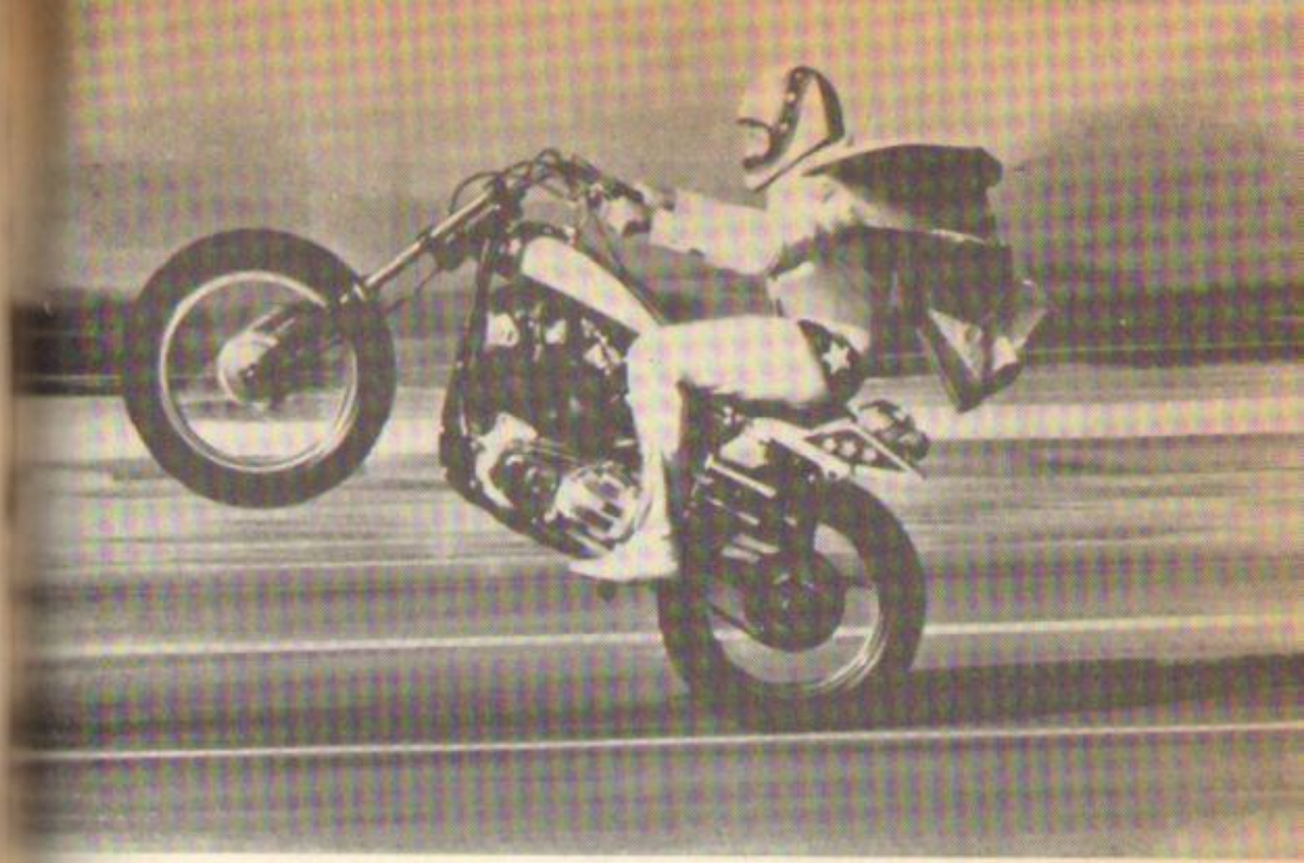
"Hey," he said, "this is Evel Knievel and I'm right on top of you. I've got my six-million-dollar check and I want to buy six of those million-dollar diamonds that your boss has been calling me about."

"I'm sorry," the girl said. "He's out to coffee."

Then Evel had Art buzz the airport. We got clearance and came down twenty feet off the runway at six hundred miles an hour; everybody there knew that Evel Knievel had gone through Danville like castor oil.

"He'll be back soon," the girl said excitedly. "He'll be sorry he missed you."

"You bet he will!" Evel shouted gleefully. "Tell him he missed his opportunity!" He handed the mike back



The famous Evel Knievel wheelie.

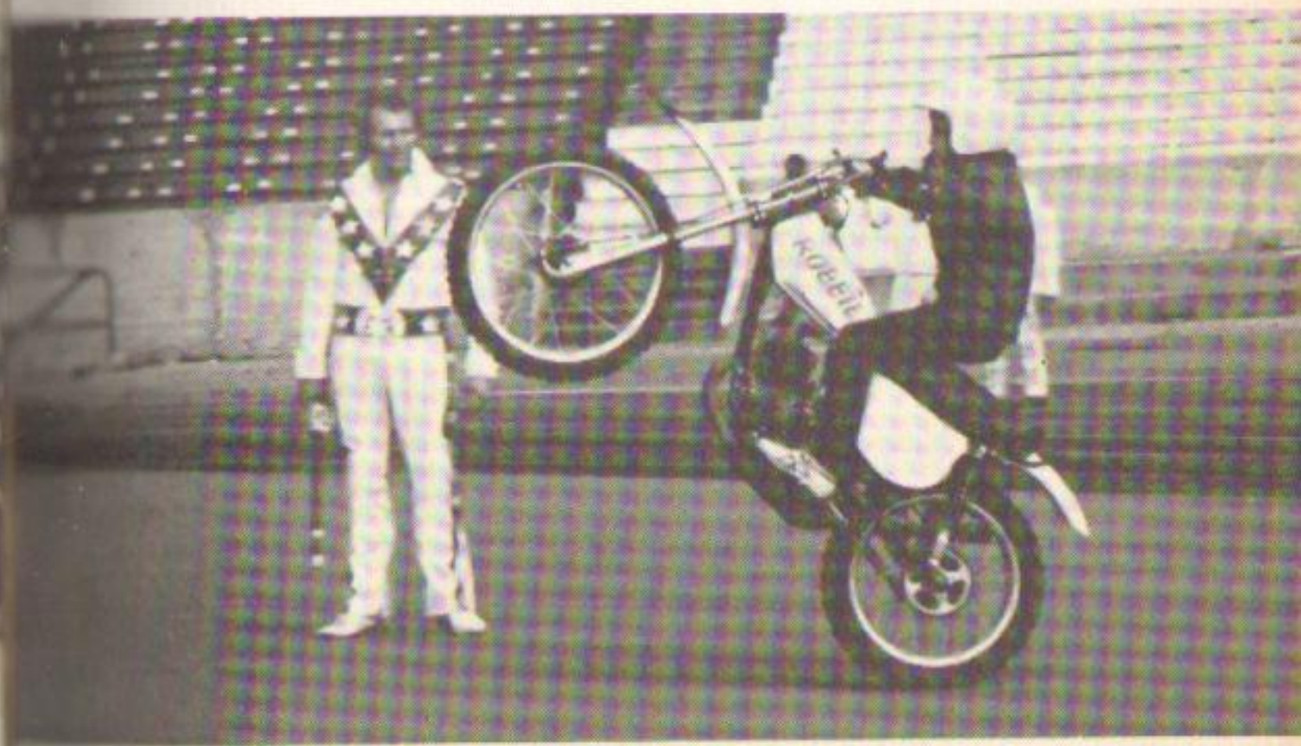
Evel on the ground (center) with the "crew" (left to right) Jerry Lyons, Shelly Saltman, Zeke Rose, Art Jones.

Evel jumping the fountains at Caesars Palace, Las Vegas. He broke numerous bones on this jump.

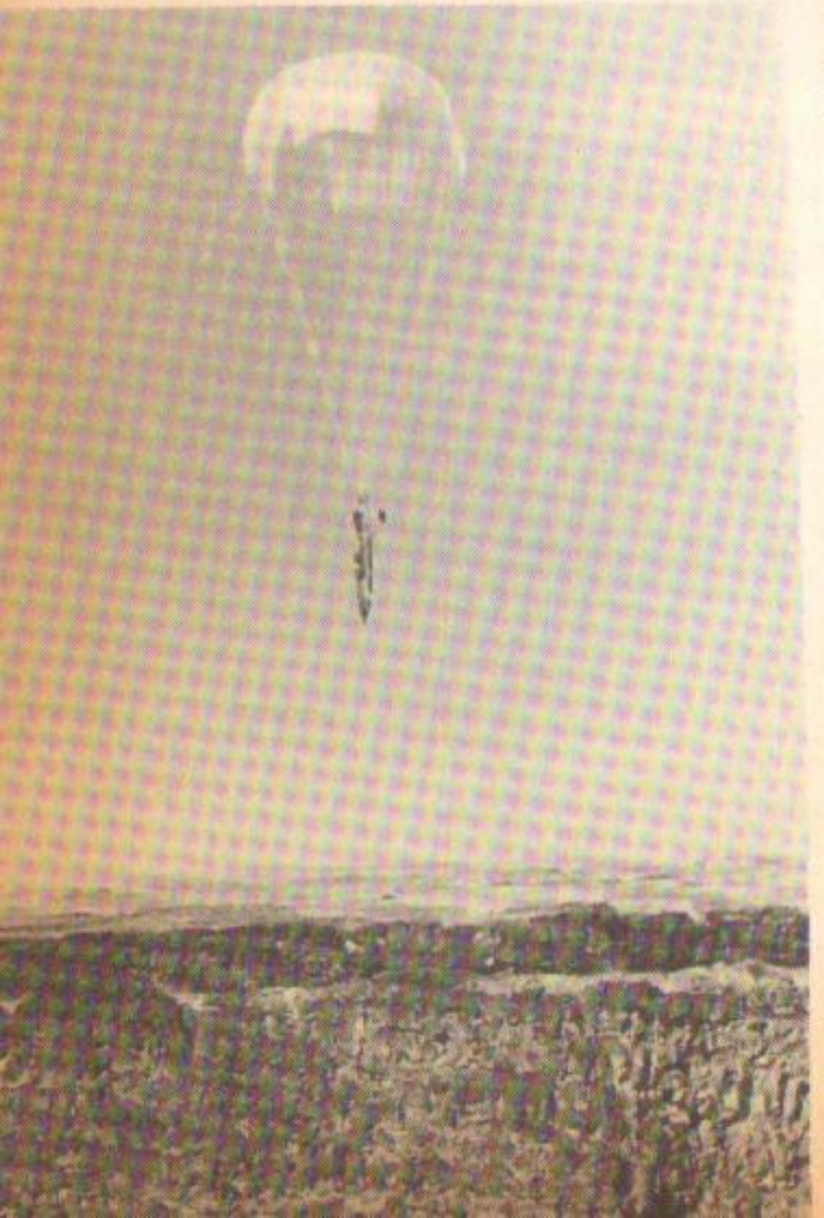
The Toronto jump, where Evel successfully cleared nine Mack trucks. (WIDE WORLD PHOTOS)

Like father, like sons. Robbie and Kelly on their custom Harley-Davidsons. (WIDE WORLD PHOTOS)

Robbie performs a wheelie for proud father Evel. (WIDE WORLD PHOTOS)



Evel demonstrates how the Sky-Cycle X-2 will soar over the Snake River Canyon.



The sky-cycle never made it to the other side of the canyon. With Evel in it, it drifted nose-down into the canyon. (WIDE WORLD PHOTOS)

to Art Jones and turned to us, laughing. "That dumb son of a bitch!" he said. "He'll be screaming at that secretary when he gets back. He'll be shaking his fist at her and yelling, 'Why didn't you call me? Why didn't you call me?' "

Art turned around and said, "I hope I didn't pull up too fast. We were pulling about two and a half G's."

"I don't know how fast we were going," Evel told him, "but the booze in my glass suddenly was floating all around the cabin, and when you pulled up I caught it again."

Most of Evel's practical jokes are similar to the Danville incident: put-ons, not malicious, but frustrating to the other guy. Evel can take a joke on himself, but never in public. He wrote Zeke and me a note that said:

> Please don't ever insult or kidd [sic] me other than in private or we will have to part company.
>
> Thank you
>
> Evel

But he never hesitated to insult *us* in public; it was his daily ritual at every press conference. One of us, usually me, would be talking business to a reporter or on the phone and Evel would stop in the middle of a sentence and yell at me, "Shelly, shut up!" or "Shelly, get that goddamned phone the hell out of here!" But for himself, he was ultrasensitive.

In St. Louis, when a reporter asked whether he felt any fear, Evel answered in vintage Knievelese:

"If I do, I'm not going to tell you. If I'm afraid, I'm not going to admit it, even to me. I'm supposed to be Superman, so I try and fool myself. But none of us wants to die. I have a death wish, but it involves a very

good-looking lady when I'm a hundred and five years old; it doesn't involve the canyon when I'm thirty-five.

"There were two or three things I always wanted to do. I wanted to drive the Indy 500, I wanted to jump out of an airplane with a parachute, and the third thing had something to do with Liz Taylor. I've replaced the Indy with the Snake River Canyon, I've jumped out of the airplane, and Liz is getting a little old and a little fat and I don't know if I'd want to fool around with her anyway."

When he was asked what provisions he had made for his family, he took off on one of his idea-association monologues; it must have gone nonstop for half an hour.

"Well, I think differently that way than a lot of people do," he said. "I have seen the sons and daughters of actors who have become drowned in alcohol and narcotics because of the money that's been given to them that they never learned to appreciate. They'd make you sick. I believe that there is no child in this country that should be given an education; he should earn it, and if he don't want it he should have his ass kicked in. I don't think that anybody ought to be given a lot of money that don't know the value of it or what to do with it. My kids, I hope, in their travels with me have seen people in all walks of life, and that will help them live life themselves.

"I have taken care of my family adequately. The millions that I have made over and above what it takes to take care of my family adequately I'm going to spend, because I have earned the right to spend it any way I see fit. There were fifty people right down here in the bar a few minutes ago and it was a privilege for me to buy them all a drink, and that's the way I like to live and the way I am. It's me, and I would

hate to die. The worst thing that could happen to me on the canyon jump is to die knowing that I still had a million in my pocket that some lousy bastard, some lawyer or banker that did not deserve it, could get his hands on. That would make me sick.

"When I told a banker in Butte that I got six million two hundred twenty-five thousand dollars he really flipped out. He asked what I did with it, and I told him I put it in an Eastern bank and get eleven and a half per cent on it, and he said, 'O.K., pal, I'll see you later.' It's the first time he ever called me pal in his life. This guy wouldn't loan me twenty-five thousand dollars on my signature for the last ten years.

"I remember a day I had trouble picking a color on a Ferrari, a silver one or a gold one, so I bought two of them. This was a couple of years ago. Two Ferraris; I've still got them. I couldn't decide between a Cadillac and a Lincoln; I bought two, one of each. I couldn't decide between a Dodge and a Chevy pickup; I bought two, one of each.

"So when it came time to build my house, I thought I'd buy on this golf course. There were two houses there. I couldn't decide between either house, so I burned the both of them to the ground and built one myself. Townspeople didn't like that very much, but I did it.

"Now this guy has always told me, 'Put the Ferraris in the garage, save your money in my bank, take care of your wife and kids, leave your kids the money, and live conservatively.'

"And if I died tomorrow or got killed, whatever, the first thing this guy would do is go down, knock on my door, and try and drive the Ferraris, he'd want to sleep with my wife, he'd want to live in my house in my bed, he'd give my kid a good swift kick in the ass,

run my doggie over the hill; he'd do everything that I'm doing and live the same way I would, because he'd have my money. But he never had the guts to earn it.

"And I feel since I'm earning it, I deserve the right to spend it, and boy, I'll tell you what, I'm going to blow it! I'm going to blow it like you can't believe. We're just making up the list for my party I'm going to have in Butte, Montana. I'm going to invite the Pope; he's number one. And Aristotle Onassis and Jackie, Liz and Richard, O. J. Simpson's coming, Bart Starr, A. J. Foyt, Mario Andretti, all the race drivers, all the PGA golf players, all the Indy 500 drivers. I'm going to have Muhammad Ali there, Hank Aaron, everybody! And I'm inviting Elvis Presley, and the Queen of England, and I'm inviting you guys and the whole city of St. Louis. How's that? The whole city's invited! I'll buy all they can eat and drink. I'm going to spend a million in cash. I'm going to back a Brink's armored car up to the Freeway Tavern and I'm going to take a wheelbarrow full of money and dump it on the floor and I'm going to spend it there, on food and drink. If you think Jesus Christ had a party with those twelve disciples, I'm going to have a *hundred* and twelve! He should have had eleven; eleven's a lucky number, you know. You can't believe how big the party's going to be. I'll tell you how big the party's going to be: Montana's thinking of flying in the whole state of Idaho so we can have enough French fries to go around!"

I guess he answered the question; that reporter wanted a word and he got the unabridged dictionary, with Evel's life philosophy thrown in free. The party in Butte kept growing until New York City couldn't have accommodated it with Philadelphia's help. The

guest list of notables and celebrities was so gigantic and so eclectic that if everybody Evel talked about inviting had attended it would have resembled a combination of the Congress of Vienna and the Bolshevik Revolution. Fortunately, we never got around to printing the invitations.

During another round of revelry and phone calls on our overnight Kansas City stop, our plane was rechristened. Instead of being known as the Evel Knievel Lear jet, somehow it acquired the name of *Montana Rare Bird*. From that moment on, that's how we were identified to all air traffic and bird watchers.

The *Montana Rare Bird* took off at seven thirty Friday morning, June 28, with Evel leading his troops in song—the "Evel's Air Corps" version of "Wild Blue Yonder," which nobody can remember three minutes after singing it.

And within not many more minutes Evel was sound asleep with his drink in his hand.

It was a quiet, restful flight until he woke up and began reading a newspaper. After a while he looked up and inquired of nobody in particular, "Who is the CIA?"

Jurate looked at him in disbelief, then looked at me. I shrugged. She looked back at Evel and said, "It's a government organization."

"No wonder!" he yelped. "This chicken-shit country! I'm glad I've got all the gold and diamonds I've got; I can depart for some other place if everybody keeps ruining this country!"

"You could do that," she agreed noncommittally.

"Hey!" He had a better idea. "I think I'll start the Evel Knievel six-million-dollar Impeach-the-President Fund! I'll give a million to impeach his ass!"

Evel seemed to have assumed the roles of all three

of the Magi; he had gifts for everyone. I don't know how many ways he thought of spending that phony six million dollars, or big hunks of it: the party in Butte, the donation to the Arabs, buying diamonds, and now a million bucks to start a fund to impeach President Richard Nixon. Evel talked bigger than the Shah of Iran.

In Milwaukee he ordered drinks for everybody in the bar at the Marriott Hotel, as he does in almost every bar. The bill came to $75.42, and he offered the $6-million check in payment.

The bartender looked at it, and his eyes almost bugged out of his head. He gulped and said, "Sorry, sir, but I can't make change for that."

Evel laughed and dug into his own pocket to pay the tab. He couldn't have cared less; it was smart advertising, and it helped to keep his ego properly inflated.

The first question at the press conference concerned his cane: Does he have anything in it?

"No," he said. "These guys I'm traveling with are a bunch of lushes. I go to sleep and the cane's gone. Even Jane . . ." He paused and looked at Jurate, sitting among the reporters. "Even Jane takes a little drink once in a while. In fact, tell them your name; they won't believe."

"Jurate," she said. It's pronounced as if the J were a Y.

"Karate?" Evel kidded. "Erotica? How many times have I got it wrong? But if I ever meet another one, I'm sure going to remember it."

Evel's cane is his constant companion, his most consistent prop. He needs it because of the short leg, but it's also literally a walking bar. It contains four little vials, in which he carries bourbon, Scotch, vodka, gin

—whatever suits his fancy of the moment. He always has a drink at hand.

"In the past eight years I've had to walk with both crutches and a cane," he told the reporters. "Sometimes I feel the cane has become part of me, really. When I'm home I don't pack it around so much, because I like to play a lot of golf; I don't stick it in the golf bag, because it gets fouled up. That cane's worth about ten thousand dollars. It opens up, and inside it there are flasks; I carry orange juice, 7-Up, Pepsi-Cola, that kind of thing."

"What kind of a bike are you going to use for your jump?" somebody asked.

"It's not a motorcycle, it's a Sky-Cycle. Now please don't be offended if I don't tell you too much about it. If everybody knew what I know about jumping canyons in something that won't fly, they'd all have one and maybe they'd all be jumping canyons and cities and whatever. In this case, Howard Hughes doesn't have one, Russia doesn't have one. I got the only one in the world."

Again I almost broke up, imagining the KGB snooping around trying to steal the plans for that carnival carriage of Evel's.

"How do you practice this?"

"You don't practice this," Evel said. "There's no practice."

"So it's a one-time shot?"

"Yeah. I'm not coming back for any late show, I'll tell you that." Abruptly he referred back to an earlier question about the Caesar's Palace jump, in which he was severely injured. "When I jumped that fountain, the doctors said I'd die. When I didn't die, they said I'd never walk again. I walked again, and they said I'd never ride again. Well, I can, and I think one rea-

son is because I never drank much booze, maybe a beer a day. And I never have taken any kind of narcotic, never a narcotic."

I had to suppress an almost irresistible desire to giggle; Evel's "beer a day" remark had to be the grossest underestimate since Custer counted the Sioux at the Little Bighorn. The whole press conference was becoming a comedy show, but the press didn't know it.

Another reporter wanted to know, "How much do you think you'll gross from the jump?"

"About twenty," said Evel, who had lost the capacity to think in quantities of less than a million. "I'm taking into consideration the live gate, which I'll make a million on. Tickets are twenty-five dollars a whack; I'll sell forty, fifty thousand. Also in the popcorn, peanut, T-shirt, poster, photograph, beer, hot dog, popcorn . . . oh, already mentioned popcorn. O.K., two types of popcorn."

The reporters loved it; Evel always makes good copy. But when one of them asked, "What are you going to do with all that?" Evel again gave them an insight into the psychology of the half-educated kid who climbed out of the mines to the top of the world—at least, the top of his conception of the world.

"What am I going to do with it? Look, when I was sixteen years old I quit school and went to work in the copper mines. When I was down there at thirty-seven hundred feet they gave me a big title: I was the Diamond Drill Hole Cleaner. Boy, when they hung that on me I knew I was going to go some place else. You know what a drill hole cleaner is? In the mines you drink water from level to level; it drips down through little holes. Well, I had a diamond drill and bit; I had to turn that drill in there to make sure the

water flowed freely. Two of the kids that I quit school with and went to the mines with were killed in the mines. Duffy was crushed in a skip, and Norman fell to the bottom.

"I just decided to get the hell out, and I did. I've been a motorcycle rider, hockey player, rodeo rider, sold a little insurance, did a little stealing, didn't have good brains when I was real young. But what the hell would I do with all the money? I'm going to try to find a way to give it to some institutions—I hope, a children's hospital."

There went that six million dollars again! It was a good thing for both Evel Knievel and Bob Arum that the check was rubber.

And there was a rather backhanded, or perhaps backsided, compliment for Linda: "She has been at my side for fourteen years. She has been in bed with me in a hospital, in Detroit when I was hurt. The doctor, a great orthopedic man from Ann Arbor, asked me, 'How long has it been since you've seen your wife?'

"I said, 'A month.' My back was broke, and my collarbone broke.

"And he said, 'I want a double bed brought in for him.' And he let her sleep with me in the hospital.

"And at Caesar's Palace she never left my bedside for thirty-seven days. She can't type, she can't cook, she can't sew, she couldn't boil water without ruining it, but, boy, she's a good wife, I can tell you that."

That wasn't the last we were to hear about Linda Knievel's cooking. Evel's disparagement of her culinary abilities, which seemed to me to be completely unwarranted, was to place us in the middle of the most embarrassing family scene I have ever had the bad luck to witness.

Chapter 8

The Games of Evel

Evel Knievel has some kind of compulsion about watches; he must own a hundred of them. Nothing but a strange compulsion could have made him think he needed a new watch that night he tried to buy one at Lew Magram's in New York. But the watch he wore when we flew into Chicago from Milwaukee was a chronological obscenity.

He showed it to Jurate, and she said, "It's a picture of a man and woman making love . . . " She paused, staring at it, and yelped, "Oh, my God!"

"It's the best fucking watch in the world," Evel boasted, with absolute accuracy.

The visible part of the watch's movement consisted of a man extremely and unnaturally well-endowed, constantly making love to a beautiful woman with every beat of the escapement mechanism.

"Hey, Art, can you fix this watch?" Evel asked the pilot.

He handed it to Art, who put on reading glasses to examine it. Art shook his head slowly, unable to take

his eyes off the thing, and for a moment or two I worried that we might crash because of that damned watch.

A few minutes later Evel accidentally gave Art real cause for alarm. Bob Arum and Dick St. John were both rejoining us in Chicago; they were the only smokers in the group, and in the cabin confinement of that little *Montana Rare Bird* the smoke was extremely annoying to the rest of us.

"We just made a law," Evel announced. "Arum or St. John can't fly if they're going to smoke."

I suggested to Art, "When Arum and St. John get on the plane, we want you very discreetly to keep the 'No Smoking' sign on, O.K.?"

"Tell them we got fuel problems," Evel said.

Art whirled around in his seat. "What?" he cried. "Fuel problems?" He checked the instruments and looked back at us again. "Where? What is it?" He calmed down when we explained, but for a moment there he thought we knew something he didn't.

It was a gorgeous day as we came in over the Loop, descending toward Midway Airport, which still gets a lot of regional airliners and private aircraft although the big traffic now goes into O'Hare International. Down below it was smoggy, and at twenty-five hundred feet we could actually smell Chicago; it was as if Arum and St. John had already joined us.

"Hey, I burped it up again," Evel exclaimed. "We'll all take a vote on it." He had taken aspirin in bourbon and Coke again, as he did almost every morning, and with the burp his hangover cure was effective and he was ready for anything.

"Know what I'm going to do with the six million dollars?" he inquired. "I'm going to take it and buy

Vietnam and put those sons of bitches back twenty years!"

We had canceled the Chicago press conference; the hour had been changed a dozen times or more, and that always annoys the media. Besides, our principal reason for coming to Chicago was for Evel to make an appearance on Irv Kupcinet's popular television show. But the real reason for the cancellation was that Evel had belatedly informed us that we had had a big press conference there only a week earlier; we didn't want another Cleveland-type bombout.

However, Harold Conrad, the old pro, used his press contacts and invited his friends in the media to his small suite at the Executive House. He found the place mobbed by radio, television, and newspaper reporters.

"All I can tell you is that I'm ready for the jump," Evel announced, his vanity inflated by the flatteringly large turnout. "When the jump is over, I'm going to walk over to the edge of the canyon, climb down, I'm going to walk across that river, go back up the other side, and say, 'Gee, it wasn't so hard after all.'"

Walk across the river? I began to wonder whether Evel had a Christ complex.

But he charmed the press, as usual. He also charmed Stepin Fetchit, the famous old character actor, who came to the press conference to see Evel and get his autograph.

As the conference broke up Dave Condon of the Chicago *Tribune* told me, "Shelly, after the jump leave the ramp up, because if it doesn't gross twenty million dollars Arum will jump off." Dave was never at a loss for a funny line; he's the guy who broke up his good friend Father Theodore Hesburgh, the president

of Notre Dame University, when the university was trying to find a successor to retiring football coach Frank Leahy. Father Hesburgh had issued a statement to the effect that whoever they picked would be a man like Leahy, with the same sterling character, impeccable integrity, etc. ad nauseam. Dave whipped off a signed telegram to the good father which merely said, "Tony Accardo not available."

While we were relaxing in the bar, waiting for the Kupcinet show, Evel came up with the wildest idea yet to promote the jump! He wanted to ride the tail of the *Montana Rare Bird* in flight!

"How about me hanging on to the tail of that son of a bitch?" he said. "We could do it legitimately. I could put on some kind of oxygen mask, the right kind of helmet, and sit on the tail of the airplane!"

We were always looking for screwy things, the wilder the better, but that was too much even for a bunch of crazy promoters; barnstorming and the jet age don't mix. Evel could outvote all of us put together, but that once we gave his idea the thumbs-down. I really believe that if we had agreed, he would have tried it.

We walked over to the Merchandise Mart to do Kup's show, with Bob Arum lecturing Evel every step of the way. Evel had been ranting about the "potato-picking, sweat-farming guys in Idaho" who objected to the jump because they were afraid of what thousands of visitors would do to Twin Falls, and that got Bob worried. He was afraid that Evel's abrasive comments might ruffle enough local feathers to force cancellation of the jump, and he was even more afraid of rumors that it might be canceled. That kind of word of mouth can be fatal to a closed-circuit special event.

Bob was talking very seriously, and when Bob talks seriously about business, which is any time he talks about business, he gets as intense as Mean Joe Greene sacking a quarterback.

"Evel," he said, "one thing I want you to understand as far as closed-circuit is concerned, the worst thing that can happen to us in booking this event, people having put up bread and all that, is any fear that the event won't come off."

"I understand," Evel said.

"Remember that," Bob persisted. "Anything you should say in criticism of Idaho or Twin Falls can hurt us. It can blow us out of the water."

"I'm not going to cut off my nose to spite my face," Evel said testily. "I'm saying my inner feelings to you. I mean, I'm a businessman. I'm not going to go to Twin Falls and tell them all to go fuck themselves. I've handled those jerks for four fucking years; I can take them for another two or three months. I hope they get trampled to death, those cotton-spud farmers. Regardless of what you think of me, you're going to say, 'How did he ever do this?' You go out there and say hello to the landowner that I leased the jump site from, the guy that I swindled so slickly and unbelievably. When you say hello to him he'll be stuck for an answer, that's how dumb he is. I swindled him because I was honest with him. I used my real name, Robert C. Knievel; he didn't know I was Evel Knievel."

Red Smith of *The New York Times* was on the show with Evel, along with two actors, Elliott Gould and Donald Sutherland. Evel got along fine with Red and with Kup, but he thought the other two guys made no sense at all. Evel and Red argued about who was the greatest fighter of all time—Evel said it was Ali, and

Red said that either Joe Louis or Rocky Marciano would have killed Ali—but they understood each other.

After the show we rushed back to Midway for the three-and-a-half-hour flight to Butte via Twin Falls. There had been a kidnapping in the news, and that triggered Evel.

"This kidnapping bullshit!" he exploded. "I'm telling you, you get as much notoriety as I've got, you never can tell. When some dumb son of a bitch is going to come after me, you know? Hey, look, I'll tell you, if you ever catch me without a gun, I'll kiss your ass. Ever! And I mean it. Ever, *ever!* Here, right now, any time!"

Bob Arum, always thinking promotion, jumped in with "You know what the greatest caper of all time would be? Right before either Ali or George Foreman leaves to go to Zaire for their fight, some kidnapper should grab them. The promotion is in so bad and so deep, they'd get a lot of bread together to get them loose."

"Do me a favor," Evel said. "Don't kidnap me before the canyon jump."

Bob looked at him, and his mouth fell open. "Jesus Christ!" he said slowly. "What publicity!"

Evel looked at Bob as if he had just discovered America ahead of Columbus. You could see the wheels starting to turn in his head. "Oh, Christ!" he said, getting up steam.

"Where . . . is . . . Knievel?" I intoned dramatically, giving it my best Lowell Thomas interpretation. "Knievel kidnapped! Is he . . . or is he not . . . going to jump?" Suddenly I had a chilling thought. "No, can't do that. It will hurt tickets."

"Oh, we'll just do it for a couple of days," Evel said

enthusiastically. "Then I show up and I say, 'Hey, I was at a retreat.' "

" 'I was at a monastery!' " I quoted him in advance.

" 'I went to see a yogi!' " Evel quoted himself, adding, "or whatever they call it."

" 'Zeke took me to have my palm read!' " I yelled, loving the game. Zeke gave me a dirty look.

Bob, the businessman, was already tired of the game. "You're looking at this thing like it's the normal closed-circuit where everything gets sold the day it happens," he said. "That's what Shelly is doing, too."

"No, I'm not," I objected.

"Yes, you are!" Bob advanced on my position like a tank. "I know what I'm talking about. These tickets are going to be gone months before the event."

"Hey!" Evel broke in with an enfilade attack on Bob's argument. "Now let me tell you something else that you got to know about. I had the smallest advance gate in the history of the Astrodome, and the biggest live gate in all of history. Somebody said the Elvis Presley crowd was the biggest in the history of Houston. Bullshit! I had ninety-nine thousand in Houston, and there's nothing to top that! Because the people that come to see me are the type of people that go to race tracks; they aren't the theater people, they aren't the boxing-type people, they don't have enough moxie, enough time, enough brains or sense, or enough in their checking accounts to send for something. They're the kind that take their money on the spur of the moment and go and buy, and the same thing may happen here."

"Let me show you what we're doing," Bob said. "We're opening up Madison Square Garden, first location, July fifteenth. The tickets are going on sale four to a customer, unless a guy can prove that his

family is bigger, because we don't want any scalpers. We'll see what happens."

I never saw a demographic breakdown on the closed-circuit audience, but if they were anything like the majority of the people who showed up at the jump site, I'd have to agree with Evel. Most of them couldn't think ahead to the next minute, let alone the next day.

On Saturday, June 29, we flew from Butte to Twin Falls to Salt Lake City. In addition to the pilots, there were just Evel and Linda, Zeke Rose, Bob Arum, and I on board. The cabin of the plane had been cleaned up, and so had most of Evel's four-letter language. With Linda around he was a different man, reading the newspaper or talking business while Linda made notes, and he made no boasts about other women. It was a quiet, restful flight; the only thing normal about it was that Evel started off with a double bourbon in 7-Up.

We buzzed the Snake River Canyon Jump site before landing in Twin Falls, and for the first time I really appreciated what beautiful country it is. But the sight of that huge gash in the earth, and the thought of Evel sailing over it in his ridiculous steam scooter, gave me a chill.

From the way Evel buttered up the press in Twin Falls you would never have guessed that these were the same Idaho people he had been calling "jerks" and "sweat farmers" only the day before. Maybe Bob Arum's lecture had made an impression.

"I have had a lot of help in this state from everybody," he said, "starting at the top, like your Attorney General, Tony Park. He told me this would be a good thing for Twin Falls, this county, and the state. Mike Gray, who you all know is a friend of mine, has stood

behind me from the first time I came here and talked about it.

"I wanted to jump the Grand Canyon. Thank God I didn't! The state of Idaho is much more beautiful, the people are one hell of a lot better, and I'm glad I'm going to be out here and jump this one.

"I think this thing can draw two hundred thousand people, at twenty-five dollars a ticket. That's a lot of money for me, besides the money I'm making on closed-circuit television. I don't know what I'm going to do with all the money anyway, so, rather than create a problem, especially in this state, this county, and this city, I'd rather go with Mr. Arum's advice. He has asked, and I have agreed, to go ahead and let Boise, Salt Lake, Pocatello, Twin Falls, Butte, every place in this area have closed-circuit television so that we can ease the pressure. I promise not to sell more than fifty thousand tickets to this whole thing, the motorcycle races and everything. I don't want more than fifty thousand, and I don't think we could handle it. I don't think it would be a good thing for the community.

"You know, everybody has helped—the state highway patrol, your county police officers, your city police here in Twin Falls, and your local sheriff.

"I hope that every American, and people from all over the world, will come here and spend money, will make the industry for tourists in this city bigger than what you've ever had, and that it will help make this a better community for you people that live here. I want to leave this little city and the people in it just like I found it, with a smile on their face and a handshake."

All the names Evel mentioned were locally promi-

nent, and that, plus his humility and the Chamber of Commerce plug for tourism, got us an excellent press in Twin Falls. But underneath the local attitude remained one of fear, suspicion, and distrust, and in the final hours before the canyon jump that attitude was to surface when events got out of control, with the result that many lives were seriously endangered by lack of cooperation from local officials.

Now I wish that the punishment Bob Arum invoked for uncooperative citizens of Twin Falls had actually been imposed on them.

"Anybody in this town that doesn't cooperate," Bob said, "Howard Cosell is going to live at their house for a week."

If that had been the law, Cosell would have had to spend the rest of his life in Twin Falls, Idaho.

Jurate Kazickas joined us again for the flight from Twin Falls to Salt Lake City, and she and Linda got into a typical rambling female conversation, mostly about the Knievel children and their pets. Evel looked back at them now and then, kind of frowning, but he didn't say anything. Not then.

"Oh, my, the children work like men," Linda told Jurate. "They clean out the garage and move great big things. When they wash a car, they have to get it perfect. Bob thinks of a million things for those kids to do. You know, I used to think that one of the most wonderful things in the world would be to be an astronaut and go to one of the other planets, but, boy, I don't think I could stand five minutes off the ground."

"Do you motorcycle at all?" Jurate asked.

"No, I'm scared to death of them. I'll take a horse any day."

"They're dangerous too," Jurate said.

"At least I'm not as scared of them."

"Do you ride much?"

"Horses, yeah, somewhat." Linda sighed. "I always thought I was going to marry a rich rancher. Evel tried it for a while." Her tone indicated that ranching and Evel didn't suit each other.

"I'm afraid of horses because it's so high up," Jurate said. "You have dogs, don't you?"

"Yeah, we have two hunting dogs that we keep in kennels all the time. They're the greatest little dogs in the world. They get hardly any attention at all; you go up to them and they just love you to death. And then we've got a poodle. Isn't that a terrible thing I've done to that poodle? He's not clipped or anything; he's the toughest little dog in the neighborhood."

"If you see one that still has all its fur on, it looks like a different kind of dog," Jurate observed.

Linda said, "Yeah, we didn't know it was a poodle, otherwise we never would have bought it."

"Have you ever been to New York, Linda?" Jurate was probing, testing, not knowing exactly what she was looking for, but hoping to turn up some kind of feature angle for a story on Linda.

"We were right down in the heart of the city," Linda said. "I wanted so much to take the kids on a guided tour or something, but Evel wouldn't let me. He was afraid something would happen to them."

"Have you ever been to Europe?"

"No, but I've been lots of places."

"Do you like to travel?"

"Once in a while," Linda said. "But I wouldn't spend my life on it. When you have children, you can't. They want their friends, and to stay home, stuff like that."

Evel kept going on this flight with a triple bourbon in Dr Pepper, and most of the time he kept Linda busy taking more notes and memos. He would yell at

her about something, then apparently remember that people were around and wink at us. It was a strange performance.

Once, when he thought nobody was looking, he leaned over and gave her a lover's kiss and said, "I love you and I'm glad you're here."

We had a press conference in Salt Lake City, but our real reason for going there was for Evel to accept the Golden Plate Award of the American Academy of Achievement, an organization which honors successful men and women in all fields of endeavor. Evel and John Havlicek of the Boston Celtics received awards for sports; others honored that night included film producer Mervyn Leroy, actor Jimmy Stewart, actress Cloris Leachman, singer Wayne Newton, and Larry Mahan of rodeo fame. At the awards dinner some hundred and fifty high-school students from every state were present, the idea being that by rubbing elbows and ideas with outstanding people they might get some helpful inspiration before they went off to college.

But that had nothing to do with our promotion, and Zeke and I were not invited. Instead we went to a porno movie, which was terrible. But what else is there to do in Salt Lake City?

Evel found something. By eleven thirty that night he had split from the Golden Plate affair and was back in his own element, celebrating at an all-night private club where a two-dollar membership available to anybody entitles you to buy a drink. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which dominates the politics of Utah, frowns on alcohol, but for two dollars the Saints will look the other way while you drink.

I took my phone off the hook while Evel celebrated, and I went blissfully to sleep.

Chapter 9

Back to Butte

As we started to board the *Montana Rare Bird* in Salt Lake City to fly back to Butte the next morning, Sunday, June 30, Linda didn't move fast enough to suit Evel.

"Come on, Linda!" he said impatiently. "Get your ass on that plane!"

Something in Evel's attitude toward Linda made us all feel protective toward her, perhaps because she was such a genuine lady and so likable. Certainly none of us liked to hear him talk to her that way; we sounded like a chorus in response, all of us at the same instant telling him to stop picking on her.

Evel's answer was to give her a swat on the behind, the kind of swat that says, "Get moving!"

"Hey, cut it out!" I objected.

We all got on the plane very quietly, feeling uneasy. It was a feeling that had been with us since Linda had joined the group. Up to that point, despite Evel's perpetual braggadocio, the sleep we lost trying to keep up with his nightly revels, the colds and sore throats

that Zeke and I had contracted because of the lack of sleep, and the constant hassle of changing our schedule every time Evel changed his mind, there had been a camaraderie among us, an esprit de corps. We had been a merry band of adventurers with a common aim. Then, suddenly, it seemed that the merriment was gone; only the aim was left. It was as if Linda were a foreign substance whose introduction had altered the chemistry of the group. And what happened as we boarded the plane was only an omen of worse to come.

After I had served Evel his morning bourbon and soda, I broke out a package of peanuts and offered some to Linda.

"He doesn't allow me to eat them," she said.

"He doesn't? Why not?"

"He won't kiss me if I smell of peanut butter," she explained.

Evel had parked his Jeep station wagon at the airport the previous day; it was there waiting for our arrival. But Evel couldn't find the keys. Suddenly he started screaming at Linda like a madman.

"Dammit," he yelled. "Where did you put those keys?"

"You had them last," she said, very quietly.

"The hell I did!" he screamed at the top of his voice. "Empty out your bag!"

"Bob," Linda said, still very controlled, "they might be in your red-white-and-blue jacket."

"The shit they are!" he shouted. "I know I gave them to you. I know it, goddammit, don't tell me! Empty that bag!" He grabbed it from her and dumped the contents all over the tarmac. I thought Linda was going to cry, but she didn't. The keys were not in the

bag, and Evel yelled at her again, "Why do you carry all that shit with you, anyway?"

Zeke and Art and I got down on our haunches, picking up Linda's stuff, and I said, "Evel, why not get that jacket out of your bag and take a look?"

"Fuck that!" he said. "What do I need all this trouble for, anyway?"

"Look," I said, "the keys have to be some place. Take a look in the jacket pockets."

At first I couldn't believe what was happening, but now I was starting to get mad. I had to fight to control myself, because I knew that if I started yelling it would only make matters worse. Evel has to be handled like a half-tamed ocelot when he gets in one of those angry, irrational moods.

Finally he opened up his bag and pulled out the jacket, and, sure enough, the keys were in one of the pockets. Now he was embarrassed, but Evel can never admit that he is embarrassed, any more than he can admit that he ever made a mistake. Just at this time a Western Airlines crew out of Idaho Falls happened by, and we got to talking with the captain and the hostesses, but Evel couldn't let the thing drop, not even in front of strangers.

"You troublemaker," he said to Linda in what was his idea of a kidding manner, "you put the keys in my pocket just to make me look bad."

Linda wouldn't even answer. She just stood there, lips tight, eyes transparent steel-gray, with tears behind the steel.

"Come on, now," Evel persisted. "You did it just to make me look bad. Admit it, honey."

Suddenly she grabbed his booze cane out of his hand and struck him across the ass with it, pretty hard.

The smile remained on Evel's face, but it disappeared from his voice. "I ought to give you one in the mouth for that," he told Linda. He made a fist and fingered that big diamond ring. "This would make one hell of a scar on that pretty face."

Zeke, who is one of the mildest guys I ever met, spoke up, very low and slow: "Evel, if I didn't think I'd get my ass kicked in, I'd take a punch at you myself."

If Evel actually had thrown a punch at Linda, all three of us—Zeke, Art and I—would have taken him on, and the Snake River Canyon Jump would have ended right there, before it got off the ground.

But Evel backed off. Zeke's remark had surprised him; he was used to hearing nothing but praise and compliments. Now he looked at the three of us, and he realized that he was all alone in this world. Completely alone. Abruptly he laughed and said, "Hey, I'm only kidding. Come on, let's get in the car."

And as we started to pull away he said, "We'll all go to dinner at nine tonight." Then he looked at Linda and changed his mind. "No, maybe I can take Linda's cooking for one night. We'll eat at my place, and I can be with Linda and the kids." That was the closest thing to an apology that any of us heard.

He drove us to his house before taking us to the War Bonnet Inn, and on the way he pulled another shabby stunt. He was driving; Linda and I were also in the front seat, and Zeke and Art and Jerry were in the back, with Zeke on the jump seat; Bob Arum and Jurate Kazickas had both left us in Salt Lake City. Art was drinking a bourbon. It was his first drink on the tour, because under FAA rules pilots can't touch alcohol within twenty-four hours before flying; because of

those same rules, we had to take a day off, so this was Art's first opportunity to relax and enjoy a drink.

"Watch this," Evel said.

He gunned the Jeep to eighty miles an hour, then suddenly slammed on the brakes. Zeke fell out of the jump seat, I almost went through the windshield, and Art spilled his drink all over the car. Linda recovered herself and glowered at Evel without saying a word. Only Evel thought it was funny; nobody else laughed.

Very quickly Evel had the car back up to eighty, and he slowed only when we saw a Montana highway patrol car parked at the side of the road.

At the house Linda offered to throw our dirty clothes into the washer and then iron them for us, because we wouldn't be able to get laundry done at the motel on a Sunday. She was always doing something thoughtful like that.

Art succumbed to his passion for perfection and decided to clean the Jeep's windows right then and there; it was dusty from being parked overnight at the airport.

"Linda, get some rags and help Art clean the windows," Evel ordered, as if she were a servant. He was playing with some of his Evel Knievel toys.

Obediently Linda went to the kitchen and got some paper towels.

"Hey, smile!" I said, trying to raise her spirits.

"It's not over yet," she said. "Imagine him doing that to me in front of those pretty girls!" She meant the Western Airlines hostesses.

Evel drove us to the Inn, but within an hour he phoned. "Linda says you and Zeke are two of the nicest guys in the world and it isn't fair that you have to go through all this when you should be home with

your family," he said, "so I want you out here within an hour. Do the calls later. I've got a golf cart waiting, and we'll have a couple of six-packs of beer."

The calls couldn't wait; our contact men, the wire services, newspapers, and radio and television stations had to be notified of our changes in schedule. But when we finished we headed for the Butte Country Club. A golf cart was waiting for us at the pro shop, and we found Evel on the fourteenth hole. He had just made a twenty-foot putt, and he was jumping up and down and yelling like a big kid.

That golf game was as zany as everything else Evel does. They were playing a sixsome—Evel, Muzzie the barkeep, a fellow they called The Greek, Jerry Lyons, the handball champion we had met in New York, a guy whose name I never learned who just sat there in a cart and drank beer, and Doc Kelly, a florid-faced, friendly guy who looked a lot like El Gordo, the character in the Smilin' Jack comic strip.

No sooner had Zeke and I driven up than Muzzie thrust cans of Lucky beer into our hands.

"Hey, I want a beer," Evel said. "Give me one of those Lites."

"It's like drinking warm piss," Muzzie said.

"I brought that stuff all the way from Milwaukee," Evel said. "Give me that Lite. I'm not going to put on all that weight; I don't want to look chubby in my leathers."

They made up new rules as they went along. The Greek was seven strokes ahead, and just as he teed off Evel yelled, "Achoo!" Another time Evel threw his golf club between The Greek's legs as he drove, and he hit Evel's club instead of the ball.

"Tell you what," Evel suggested, "since you guys are all storekeepers and friends of mine, why don't

you extend credit to me and I won't pay you anything, but on September ninth if I'm still alive I'll pay you double." He got no takers.

When they reached the eighteenth green Linda came out on the course, looking very attractive, and said, "O.K., you guys, I'm making dinner tonight, and you've heard I'm a bad cook. But enough of the teasing. The steaks you brought back from Kansas City, I'm cooking them tonight."

"Listen, no cooking outside," Evel ordered. "We're going to have good food." He looked at the rest of us. "Linda's going to make up for it." He couldn't seem to let the subject go.

As they finished the eighteenth and began the first hole—they had started on the back nine—Evel made another peculiar comment: "There must be something wrong with me. Do you realize that everybody who has built a house or bought a condominium on the golf course has either died or lost his wife, and I'm the only one who hasn't done either? And here I am facing the canyon on September eighth."

"Hey, Evel, if you go, Linda's mine," The Greek kidded.

"I don't mind the girl," Jerry Lyons said, "but I like your golf cart."

Doc Kelly's car was parked by the first tee; he opened the trunk and began passing out more drinks. He insisted that everybody take a swig of some homemade wine. Art Jones had joined us by now, and Doc forced a glass of the wine on him, too.

That stuff must have been fermented in old jock straps; it would make hair grow *inside* your chest. Zeke and Art and I managed to pour ours out on the ground without being noticed, but the others drank

theirs. Maybe it was the Old Jock strap that did it, but Evel seemed to go crazy.

Doc had three grandchildren with him, plus three other kids, and they all wanted Evel's autograph on their Evel Knievel posters. He took them for rides in his golf cart, and at the second tee he drove head-on into a barrel, nearly knocking the kids out of the cart; they squealed and screamed and loved it.

Pretty soon Evel was bubblegumming it all over the golf course, bumping other carts and trying to make his cart do wheelies, and finally, with Doc beside him, he charged the cart at a big mound like Teddy Roosevelt leading the Rough Riders at San Juan Hill. The mound was soft loam, and instead of climbing it the cart practically buried itself in the dirt. Evel was like a big kid at play, and it occurred to me that he is like that most of the time.

We were supposed to have dinner at nine o'clock, but by the time we got to the house it was eleven. There were several other people there, and we sat at the bar in the living room, drinking and talking.

It was my first chance to chat with Evel's "Mom," as he calls her; she is really his grandmother, who raised him after his parents got divorced, and Evel has great respect for her. Elderly as she is, she takes no nonsense from him, and he pays attention when she speaks. She confided to me that she was quite worried about the canyon jump.

"I've never had such a sense of impending doom," she said. "I love Bobby, and all I can hope is that this whole thing will be over shortly and everything will be fine again."

"You know," I told her, "should this mountain not be the one, I think he'll find another mountain to climb."

She gave me a long look before she answered, "Yes, that's his way. He'll always need another mountain."

About this time Evel began bawling out Robby for having failed to clean the dog kennels.

"Dad, I'll do it," Robby promised.

"When will you do it?" he demanded, like a drill sergeant.

Robby said, "I'll do it right now!" and skedaddled.

Jim Simovich, the buddy who was building Evel's new fence, spoke up: "I think Robby should get to bed, Evel, because he's my cowhand and he's going to go trailing with me at four o'clock tomorrow morning."

"Jim, can't you use him at noon instead?" Evel asked. "Because I'm not leaving until noon, and I'd like to have the kids around. I don't see enough of them."

That was another aspect of the Evel Knievel paradox. One moment it's as if he doesn't care about his family and all he wants to do is horse around with his buddies; the next morning Linda and the kids are the most important thing in his life.

When Linda called us in to dinner, we found that she had set a beautiful table. She brought out the Kansas City steaks, charcoal-broiled medium rare, just the way I like them, with rice and a nice salad. I was hungry, everything tasted marvelous, and I couldn't understand why Evel constantly criticized Linda's cooking.

Chapter 10

Mutiny!

Monday, July 1, was the day that Captain Evel Bligh came close to creating his own *Mutiny on the (six-million-dollar) Bounty.*

Art Jones drove us all to the airport in the Jeep station wagon. But Captain Bligh, sitting in the jump seat, decided to navigate despite the fact that by then Art knew the streets of Butte as well as he knew the airport landing pattern; the previous day Evel had lent him one of the Ferraris and a motorcycle, and Art had spent half the day roaming the town and the surrounding countryside.

"Turn left here!" Evel ordered abruptly, and Art obediently turned off Main Street into an alley. "You see," Evel told him with a superior tone, "you don't need flight plans to be flexible. When your leader gives you a command, you must obey."

Evel, to whom FAA rules meant about as much as the price of parsley in Afghanistan, always got annoyed when Art had to take the time to file a new flight plan because another of Evel's whims had forced

us to change our complicated schedule. And Art always got annoyed at Evel's annoyance, which he considered childish. After a week confined in the *Montana Rare Bird* together, and especially after Evel's performance the previous day, those two got along about as well as two bulls in rutting season. Art didn't say anything in response to the Captain Bligh act, but I could tell that he was steaming inwardly. So we started the day in a bad mood.

"I made a deal with my kids," Evel said, changing the subject abruptly and looking at Linda.

"What was the deal?" I wondered.

"I told them that if I ever holler at their mother again in front of them that one of them can punch me, and I'll give them each one hundred dollars. I said, 'I might punch you back,' but they both agreed it'd be worth it. And they said, 'If we knock you down, can we have two hundred dollars?' I said, 'You got it!' "

He kissed Linda good-bye at the airport, so apparently they had smoothed over their differences. But she reminded me of the guy in the Li'l Abner strip who always walks around with a little rain cloud over his head.

"Maybe I'd better send Linda some flowers when we get to Phoenix," Evel said as we took off.

"You sound familiar," I told him. "Whenever I say the wrong thing and get my ass in a sling, the next day I make sure the flowers come."

"Remind me," he said. "Don't you let me forget."

Pretty soon he was back to boasting: "I've got more fucking broads than you ever fucking saw."

"You said that on television," I reminded him.

"*Penthouse* knows it, *Oui* knows it, *Playboy* knows it, and now you fucking know it," he said. "And if you don't like it, lump it. Even my wife knows it, and my

grandmother knows it. I don't bullshit anybody. And you do the same fucking thing. The one difference between us is that your wife and grandmother don't know it, God rest her soul."

Evel obviously views other men as made in his image, doing the same things he does but not talking about it.

And then it was back to business. He told me about a stunt he had done in Barstow, California; he wanted me to get the film and use it for promotional purposes.

"I'd stand out in the middle of the race track, and they'd run a motorcycle right at me. I'd jump and spread my legs, and the bike would go right underneath. I got the most beautiful film of it in Barstow. It shows this motorcycle coming at me, and then"—he clapped a hand to his groin—"it hits me right in the balls. I did a triple back flip and landed on my back in the dirt. This fucking highway patrolman comes out, and I'm lying there with my eyes open, and he covers me up with a blanket."

"Thought you were dead?"

"That's right. The guy that shot the film was standing right next to me. I never let anybody use it, but you can use it."

By the time we neared Phoenix Evel was about to lose a twenty-five-dollar bet we all had made about holding our water until we landed. I don't think his customary takeoff bourbon and soda had helped him.

"Art," he groaned, "I got to get out of this airplane or I'm going to piss right on the runway. My balls are singing 'Anchors Aweigh.' "

"Hey, Art," I said, "will you waive the twenty-five dollars if he has to go?"

Art shook his head. "No waivers."

"There's only one thing I hate more than Jews, and

that's Indians," Evel said, grinning. Art had told us that he was part Indian, "a real American."

Evel got up to go to the relief tube, and I yelled, "Evel has to pay everybody! That's a hundred dollars he owes this crew!"

He never paid off.

It was logical, at the press conference in Phoenix, for Evel to relate how the Department of the Interior under Stuart Udall had first granted and then denied him permission to jump the Grand Canyon. But this time he put the blame on Barry Goldwater. He quoted the director of the Grand Canyon National Park:

"If you ever state publicly that I have said this, I'll say that you're a liar. But Mr. Goldwater came to me and said if you were going to jump the Grand Canyon, he would stop it. But don't you say it, Mr. Knievel, because I'll say it's not true."

"Have you asked Barry Goldwater?" a reporter questioned.

"I did inquire of Mr. Goldwater three times; I didn't receive any answer, other than that he was not an attorney and he was not in office any more, and I should be referred on to someone else. The only way I would have to retaliate against Mr. Goldwater would be to say that he could have no Evel Knievel toys on sale in any of his stores, but I'm not that small a person. I don't hold any grudges against Mr. Goldwater or Mr. Udall."

Another reporter asked what permission he had obtained to jump in Idaho.

"First of all," Evel said, "I'm filing a flight plan with the FAA from Butte, Montana, to Twin Falls, Idaho, and vice versa. I own both spots. In Twin Falls a farmer who owns three thousand acres has planted a flag there with my name on it and has given me permission

to land on his land. The Bureau of Land Management, who is giving me the opposition, falls under the jurisdiction of the Department of the Interior. Now let me ask you a question: Since I had permission in writing from the Department of the Interior to jump the Grand Canyon, and since the Bureau of Land Management is controlled by the Department of the Interior, what in the hell good would a permit do me from the Bureau of Land Management? If they gave it to me today, it may be no good tomorrow. What I am saying is, in effect, that there aren't half a dozen politicians in this country whose word is worth a crap. I'm going to jump regardless; let them do what the hell they want to me. But if they throw me in jail, they'd better have a big jail, because the kids of this country will tear the jail to the ground."

That was the day that Evel offered me a piece of all his future action. "Shelly," he said on the plane, "if you give me twenty-five thousand dollars cash, you can have one per cent of my gross from now on for the rest of your life."

Zeke heard it, and the pilots heard it. Art looked back at me and exclaimed, "Wow! That's a hell of a deal!"

It was an astonishing offer, and it came right out of left field. I don't know what prompted it, unless it was that Evel, despite his constant gripes, really liked the way I had put the tour together and appreciated my ability to swing with his sudden whims and reshuffle the schedule faster than a Vegas dealer can bury an ace.

"Thanks, Evel, but no thanks," I said. At that moment, after all the hassles we had been through, I wanted no part of involvement with Evel Knievel for the rest of my life. Money didn't mean that much to

me. I would have been obligated to run all of his pro-
motions, or at least to keep close watch on them; tha
would be as frustrating as trying to keep ten thousand
fleas in a sieve.

In Denver Evel chewed out Zeke because Zek
wanted to hold the press conference where it wa
scheduled, in the Beechcraft executive termina
lounge. Zeke's toy displays and posters were all set up
in the lounge; his local representatives were waiting
there. But Evel decided to meet the press beside the
Montana Rare Bird.

"You've got to go inside because of the Ideal Toy
men," Zeke insisted.

"I do what I want," Evel said bluntly. And he did
Zeke was furious, because it was his bread and butte
that was at stake.

Next Evel complained to Zeke about the sandwiche
he had arranged through the Beechcraft people. "
want hot hors d'oeuvres," he said. "I can't eat thi
shit!"

I was the next one to get it, on the plane leavin
Denver.

"Did you send the roses?" I asked.

"Goddammit, you forgot to remind me!" he snarled
"Am I supposed to remember everything? I gave yo
one thing to remember and you didn't remind me!"
Maybe I should have reminded him that it was hi
problem and his wife, not mine.

Twenty minutes out of Denver, Evel changed hi
mind again. He had already refused to stay overnigh
in Denver, and we had changed all our reservations t
Omaha, where we had the first press conference th
next morning. Now suddenly he said, "Let's go t
Kansas City. I got friends I can see there."

We all voted against him, but all he said was "Fuck you guys!" His vote counted more than all of ours, and Art turned the plane toward Kansas City. We had to radio ahead for still another change in reservations.

Evel wouldn't stay in Denver, because his real mother lived there and he didn't want to see her.

"My mother's never taken care of me," he said. "I'm taking care of the woman that raised me, my grandmother, and that's all there is to it, you dig?"

Aside from his family in Butte, Evel seems to avoid any emotional involvement; his friendships are surface connections. He knows everybody, but nobody is very close to him; he won't let anybody get close. That's another paradox in the man, because Evel really needs friends; he keeps people at arm's length with his constant kidding and boasting, but he needs to be surrounded by people every waking minute. That's why he stays up all hours of every night, drinking and holding court for his fans and his buddies, and if he has a girl in every port it's for the same reason: He doesn't want to be alone in a hotel room. Evel got very little sleep on the tour, perhaps because whenever he was alone he couldn't stop thinking about the canyon jump, which for all its zaniness was a truly fearful thing. Maybe he was just afraid of the dark. One thing is certain: His insecurity is as big as his ego.

Another bourbon and 7-Up and two beer chasers for Evel got us to Kansas City. Evel's friend Butch Cavelli, the owner of a place called Mother's, picked him up, and the rest of us took the rented limousine. Art and Jerry were staying at a Holiday Inn near the airport, so they could catch a little more sleep, while Zeke and I went to the Plaza Hotel.

On the way the pilots were discussing whether to call Jet Fleet in Dallas and tell them to send out two more pilots. They were both fed up with Evel's griping and screaming and indecision and bossing them around.

"I don't know how you guys take the insults he throws at you," Art said. "If he threw half of those insults at me I'd walk back and cold-cock him. The one thing is, he can't insult me, because no matter what he thinks or how many times we change course, I'm still the captain of the vehicle and his life is in my hands—canyon jump or no, and whether he thinks he can fly a plane or not. That's ridiculous!"

"Look, you guys are great," I said. "Forget about quitting on us now. We can all work together and the hell with him!"

"I don't know how Shelly does it," Art went on, talking now to Zeke. "He always keeps calm in the face of all that flak."

"Because it's the big picture," Zeke explained. "Shelly is out for something big, and people like Knievel don't bother him."

It was nice to get a compliment, but it wasn't accurate. Evel did bother me. I wanted to like him, but he was the most difficult man in the world to be around. He made a hard job twice as hard with his split-second decisions and last-minute changes; the thousand and one details were always left to me. Thank God for Zeke's help. Many times I felt like a high-priced gofer whose most important chore was to mix drinks for Captain Bligh.

Zeke felt pretty much the same. "I'm about ready to blow up and tell him to go fuck himself if he thinks he can get pregnant that way," he said. "As much as

Evel has done for Ideal Toy, the company has done a lot for him. After all, they spent over four million dollars in advertising. And he won't even go in where we planned, where our displays are set up. So what are we getting out of this?"

Mutiny was in the air, and I was the only one who could stop it. If Zeke was going to quit, I wasn't certain but what I'd quit too, and if we both walked out the entire project probably would collapse. It was very doubtful that Evel could pick up the pieces. But Invest West Sports and Top Rank and a lot of other people had invested considerable money in the canyon jump, and those investments were my responsibility. No matter how I felt, I *had* to try to save Captain Bligh's neck.

"Look, all you guys," I pleaded, "you *can't* quit now. No matter how crazy Evel acts, he *needs* you. *I* need you. And what the hell, it's only one more day before we get a break over the fourth of July. After that it's only six more days. That's it. The end of the tour and you all go your ways. What the hell is six more days?"

"I'll tell you one thing," Art said, "I don't want him asking for any more crazy stunts, like buzzing airports."

"Yeah," I agreed. "I'll talk to Evel about that. I can't guarantee he won't get another idea, but, like you said, you're the captain. All you have to do is say no."

Nobody said anything.

"Come *on!*" I said. "How about it?"

They all looked at one another.

"If you can take it, I guess I can," Zeke said. He really didn't have any more choice than I did. But the pilots were another matter.

After a long moment they nodded and said, "O.K.,"

both at the same time. It was a relief to me; guys like those two are hard to find, and it was good to have them on the team.

When Zeke and I arrived at the Plaza, I asked, "Are you going to go out playing around tonight?"

He sighed. "I guess we have to. Evel wants us to meet him at Mother's. It's time to play wet nurse and maid again."

Mother's was the place Evel had taken us during our earlier Kansas City stop, and many of the same people were there: Butch Cavelli, of course, and Jan Stenerud and some of the other players for the Kansas City Chiefs, and all kinds of Evel Knievel fans. Evel was having a wonderful time, but before long he was bawling us out again.

"You know why I'm so pissed?" he demanded.

"No, why?"

"Because I've been so nice to those pilots. I've let them drive my Ferraris, I've had them to my house, and what do they do? What kind of crap do they do? I want to make a simple trip to Kansas City and they tell me they have to file flight plans! I'm the only one who runs this tour. Those sons of bitches are fired! More pilots are here in Kansas City. I'm the boss. Me! Nobody else! Do you understand? I want you to talk to those pilots, otherwise I'll get rid of them and we'll get a new crew."

I listened with a smile; I never said a word about the near mutiny, and I never let him know that Art and Jerry would consider it a favor if he fired them. When he had finished his tirade I said, still smiling, "Fuck you!"

Evel laughed. "Have a drink," he invited. He turned to Zeke and added, "You too, you Arab bastard."

"If *Der Führer* is buying," Zeke said and Evel

laughed again. Both Zeke and I had taken to calling him *Der Führer* to his face, and he didn't seem to realize that, coming from a couple of Jews, it might be a tongue-in-cheek putdown. And he had started calling Zeke "the Arab"; Zeke didn't mind so long as the Arabs didn't.

In a moment he was on Zeke again about the press conference beside the plane. "That's the place to have it. It looks good, us getting in and out. They see the plane, with all the logos. That's the place."

"I disagree," Zeke said calmly.

"Don't disagree with me!" Evel snapped. "I know what's right. What you're worried about is my holding up the ball for the Ideal Toy people."

Zeke said, "Of course that's my concern. But when you sit down and talk to people straight to straight you get across your message of sincerity. You don't get it across while you're standing by the plane. They look at the plane."

In different ways they were both right. Zeke was right in that the *Montana Rare Bird* distracted the press people from whatever Evel said. Evel was right in that the press people were impressed by the drama of a rapid-fire planeside press conference between hurried landing and takeoff. Basically I inclined toward Evel's argument, because Zeke was selling toys and I was selling Evel. But I just sat there and listened and said nothing; it was not the moment to rock the six-million-dollar boat.

There was one thing Evel overlooked that night. He forgot to send the roses.

Chapter 11

Such Sweet Parting

Evel started the flight to Omaha with another bourbon and 7-Up with tirade. Zeke and I, as usual, were the victims.

"Get this place cleaned up!" he ordered. "What are all these damned press kits? We don't need them. People don't care; they only want me."

What he really wanted, I think, was to get the press kits off the toilet so he could use it, but whatever his reason, he put on another magnificent display of the Knievel temperament.

"There's no place to put them, Evel," I pointed out.

"The hell with that! Get them out of here!"

"Now fuck that!" I said, being as reasonable as he was. "The press guys need all this background information. That's the way they operate. You'd have to answer a thousand questions at every press conference instead of maybe fifty. Why do you think Zeke and I spend half of every night phoning around and lining things up? We don't want to come into a town and look like amateurs."

"Yeah," he said sarcastically, "you're always running up a big phone bill."

"While you're out playing," I retorted.

"I'm not wasting my time," he said pointedly. "I'm out making friends. It's *my* friends you see at every fucking press conference. *I* get them out." He looked at my bulging briefcase and added, "What the hell are you anyway, a traveling secretary? Get rid of all that crap!"

Evel really believed, I'm sure, that the promotion for a multi-million-dollar special event could be run off the cuff, as if it were a Saturday night bike jump at the county fair in Big Chitlin, Mississippi. He saw the crowds and gave the credit to his own charisma, when it was dozens of phone calls every night—to reporters, editors, exhibitors, advance men, sponsor reps, local contacts—that brought out the press and the people. The scope of the planning was beyond his imagination, because he had never worked closely with professional promoters before; when there was a professional promotion—for example, at Caesar's Palace—he had a built-in audience promoted by the hotel and casino public relations experts. At every stop guys we had phoned the night before, if only to remind them, would come up and say, "Hey, who's Shelly?" or "Which one is Zeke?" But that meant nothing to Evel; he genuinely believed that the magic of Evel Knievel's name was responsible for everything, probably even to the food and coffee and booze that were always waiting for us. But on a big promotion like the Snake River Canyon Jump, magic is the product of midnight sweat and fundamental flackery.

The press kits stayed, and pretty soon Evel cooled off and went into his own peculiar, oblique kind of apology.

"You got to realize," he said, "that nobody's got a temper like me. My wife waits on me hand and foot, and I know I treat her like dirt, and when I kick the bucket and somebody else comes along he'll bore her to tears, because I am a special kind of guy. I love her, and today you've got to remind me to send those roses, no matter what else we do. You've got to remind me."

"O.K.," I said. "Do it in Omaha. We'll have time there, because it's just Omaha and Minneapolis today and then we split for the fourth. This is your last chance, or you'll get there ahead of the flowers."

Never have I looked forward to a brief holiday as eagerly as I anticipated that Independence Day. I had thought I could swing with any punch, put up with any kind of personality, but Evel Knievel had rubbed my nerve-ends raw.

In Omaha Evel finally sent the roses. I hope Linda appreciated the effort it cost him.

And it was in Omaha that Evel told how as a youngster in Sacramento he got started in his odd occupation of jumping motorcycles over obstacles.

"I saw a daredevil show at the rodeo grounds—Joey Chitwood and his Auto Daredevils—and I was so excited I went home and busted my ass. I ripped off the barn door to make a ramp, and my brother and I got a bunch of babybreath out of a field and set it on fire, and I jumped over the babybreath on my bicycle. I made it three times, and then we made a bigger ramp and that's when I got into trouble. I didn't make it; I hit the edge of the ramp. I'm lucky I didn't get hurt; I didn't even have a helmet on. And we burned up both barn doors.

"You ask about kids imitating me, and I'll tell you, I hope they do. But I draw a fine line here. Even my

little kid, Robby, he's so goofy I can't believe it. I went home the other night and all the kids were there and Robby says, 'We're having a National Jump Day and I'm the champion, I'm number nine.'

"They were jumping bicycles, and I said, 'What do you mean, number nine?' And Robby said, 'I'm the last guy.' They were all lying down and jumping bicycles over each other, and Robby was the last in the line. He'd be the most likely to get hit. You know what could happen to a kid if he got hit in the stomach or the chest lying down. So I put a stop to that."

It was also in Omaha that Evel, surprisingly, admitted that very little skill is required for his profession. His admission came during the press conference, on a question concerning the skill involved in the canyon jump.

"All I've got to do is get in it," he said. "To be able to get out of it when you have to get out, that's really all the skill that's involved. This shot is like the jump I make on the motorcycle. There's not a lot of skill to jumping a Harley-Davidson over trucks; all you've got to do is get back there and decide when you're going to go, and go. When you're in the middle of the air, unless a Canadian honker hits you in the head, there's no skill. I mean, you can do it."

"This million dollars that you're spending for preparation," a reporter asked, "where does that go?"

"I'll break it down for you," Evel said. "The property lease was thirty-seven thousand five hundred dollars, the access road on the edge of the canyon cost seventeen thousand dollars, the fence so the cattle would stay in the farmer's field and not get on the road cost me ten thousand dollars, the first ramp cost me one hundred thousand dollars, the ramp that's going up now is going to cost me another hundred

thousand dollars, the concession stands and the latrines cost me thirty thousand dollars, chain-link fence around the edge of the canyon cost me fifty thousand dollars, the two-million-dollar insurance policy along with the prize money for the motorcycle races I've had out there for two years to promote the thing cost me one hundred thousand dollars, the Sky-Cycles cost me half a million between the three of them. Then you add labor onto that, it comes to a million bucks, easy."

I can't confirm the accuracy of those figures, since the on-site preparations were entirely his own affair and had no connection with our closed-circuit-television production. Evel's figures varied from day to day, just like his data on the jump speeds, forces, and distances. In Omaha the concessions and latrines cost thirty thousand dollars, but in Phoenix it had been thirty thousand dollars for concessions alone plus twenty-five thousand dollars for latrines and another ten thousand dollars for first-aid stations; the last weren't even mentioned in Omaha. Even allowing for exaggeration for promotional purposes, there is no doubt that quite a lot of money went into preparing the site.

Evel was more precise on the subject of organized religion: He despises it.

"I'll tell you what, I don't support a church," he said. "I don't support the Latter-day Saints, I don't support the Methodists, I don't support the Catholics—but I'd like to have them sponsor me. Hey, Zeke, get the Pope on the phone! If you call religious getting down on your knees in your own bedroom, believing in your own Jesus Christ and not some phony, two-bit jerk con game like Billy Graham and Oral Roberts put out, if you call it wearing a gold piece with the

face of Jesus Christ like I do, then I guess I'm religious. When I go to make that jump I do the same thing that all of you do: I say a prayer, because that's all I've got left.

"But I don't believe in all that crap in the Bible. I don't think that a guy could walk across the water; He probably had trouble swimming. And I don't believe a man and a jackass with a beautiful woman on it were in the desert for months and he never touched her and then she conceived a child as a virgin, and three guys rode up on camels and presented Him with gifts. I just don't believe it.

"For me there's much more to going to heaven than floating off in the clouds and going to some big pearly gates and having some guy give me a harp and a set of wings and telling me to go over and sit down next to JFK, the Pope, and Martin Luther King. I wouldn't know what to say to any of them but 'Hiya.'"

Evel shifts gears faster than A. J. Foyt. Shifting to humility, he went on, "I don't believe in praying for success, so I always say, 'Dear Lord, help me be the best at what I do, help me be able to concentrate on it so that I can get it done, help me be man enough to accept what's on the other side if I don't make it.' I always make three or four runs of any jump to psych myself up. I talk to my men between every run, and they say, 'You're going to do it, you're right on the button, you're going to get over those fifteen trucks, or whatever.'

"All of a sudden I forget I'm Superman, and I say, 'Dear God, please help me make it across this jump. I don't want to die!'"

I believe that was bottom line. Evel has no more death wish than any ordinary man. But he has found a way to live the life he likes by risking the loss of it.

And at the last moment, like any ordinary man, he prays for a little more time.

We wound up the first week of the tour in Minneapolis on Tuesday, July 2, and we split in all directions. Evel took the *Montana Rare Bird* back to Butte to see his family, get in a little fishing, and to be the grand marshal of Butte's Fourth of July parade. Zeke flew home to New Jersey, and I went home to Los Angeles. We were to start the second leg in Miami the next Monday, July 8.

A little vacation had never been so welcome. After a week of hassles, curses, tirades, and unpredictable whims, a tour of duty as Idi Amin's chief flunky would have been a welcome respite. Actually, I was going to spend a few quiet days of tennis, swimming, and loafing with Mollie at the Del Coronado Hotel on Coronado Island, off San Diego; it's one of the few elegant old Victorian hotels left in America.

But Zeke—sweet, sentimental Zeke—got all choked up. He saw the *Montana Rare Bird* off from Minneapolis while I, as usual, was making a telephone call, and he came back into the terminal in tears.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"Well," he said, "Evel got on the plane, and Art and Jerry ran the motors, and I watched and suddenly I felt sad, even after all the shit that we have taken. It seemed strange to cut the cord, that I wasn't going with them, and all at once I felt kindly toward Evel, of all things. I suppose there is some kind of wave that he sends out, some kind of charisma, but goddammit, the man has it! I had a lump in my throat. They were leaving without me, and I wanted to be with them."

Chapter 12

End of the Tour

Trying to unwind after the tour's first tornadic week was as difficult as trying to straighten out spaghetti after it's been boiled, and the constant phone calls to the Del Coronado did nothing to help me relax. But Mollie did; she's an interior decorator by profession, but a psychologist by instinct, and she gave me a new idea, or rather an old idea that simply hadn't occurred to me.

We were sunning at poolside, and I kept getting up and walking around and lying down again. I couldn't relax.

"You're terribly tense," she observed. "I've never seen you so tense."

"You've never seen me after a week with Evel Knievel."

"It's contagious, isn't it?"

I looked at her curiously. "What's contagious?"

"Tension."

"Well, yes." Everybody who has worked in enter-

tainment knows that; if the performer isn't relaxed, the audience can't relax either.

"He must be under frightful tension."

"Evel?"

"Uh-huh."

It was as simple as that. You can catch tension as easily and unconsciously as you can catch a cold, and I had caught Evel's tension. And he had a very bad case of it. No wonder—he was the only one who was going to jump the canyon. Everybody else, including myself, was just going to watch.

I leaned over and kissed Mollie. "I think you just did me a favor," I said. And promptly I went to sleep in the sun.

With new energy I flew to Miami on Sunday, July 7; I wanted to get there the evening before we started, to make sure that all the pieces of the tour had been reassembled. Zeke Rose came in that same evening, with the same idea. And it was a good thing we both did.

The press kits, a complete supply for the second leg of the tour, were supposed to be waiting for us at the King's Inn, where we were staying. They weren't there, and for a moment I was afraid that St. John's Syndrome had struck again. But a call to Dave Herscher in New York got me the waybill numbers, I found them at the airport, and by ten o'clock that evening we had the press kits in hand.

We checked the room where the press conference was to be held, and found that it would accommodate only a hundred and ninety-five people; that had to be changed, and all the media had to be notified of the change.

We also tried to call Evel, to double-check his departure time from Butte, only to discover that he had

had all of his telephone numbers changed without notifying us. I called Bob Arum in New York and caught him watching Evel on the Irv Kupcinet show taped the previous week; Bob was delighted with Evel's performance. He gave me Evel's stepmother's number in Butte, and she told me that Evel was on the golf course and was planning to leave Butte at one o'clock in the morning, which would get him to Miami in plenty of time for the ten-A.M. press conference.

"Hey, kiss my ass!" was Evel's greeting as he got off the *Montana Rare Bird.*

"Up yours!" I said, speaking his own language. I was actually glad to see the guy.

But I wasn't too happy that he had brought along two friends from Butte, George Stanisich and his son Steve. George, better known as Judo, was part owner of that favorite Butte hangout of Evel's, Muzz and Stan's Freeway Tavern. Evel hadn't warned us that they'd be along, and with the big supply of press kits that meant the plane was going to be pretty crowded, especially with various press people joining us now and then.

"Jimmy the Greek doesn't give you much of a chance," one reporter at the Miami press conference noted. "What do you think?"

"Jimmy and I have known each other for some time," Evel said. "George King, who works for Jimmy, was the head man at Caesar's Palace when I made my deal with them. He made a prediction on that jump that I'd probably make it but come down in a disastrous situation. He was right. But I don't know what the Greek said about this jump."

"I understand it's thirty per cent."

"Jimmy the Greek is not the expert. I'm the expert. I don't know what the hell he's betting, but I'm going

to find out today and I'm going to go to Vegas and cover everything he can put up. If he can cover six million, I can cover it. I'll find out how good his odds are."

Evel talked several times about placing that bet, but he never did.

Another reporter said, incorrectly, that we had received a bad press in New York, particularly from columnist Dick Young of the New York *Daily News*, who said the Sky-Cycle was essentially a missile. "What's your response to that kind of thing?" he asked.

"I hope the guy don't get hit by a taxicab with a Puerto Rican driver," Evel retorted.

The perpetual showman started the flight from Miami to Orlando with a bourbon and Tab and still another promotional idea: He wanted to dress the Stanisiches entirely in black, as if they were his bodyguards. He had Art Jones call ahead to Atlanta, our overnight stop, and arrange for a store to remain open until about ten o'clock so that the "bodyguards" could be suited up.

Orlando and Jacksonville went by in a blur; we spent all of twenty minutes in Orlando. Before we got to Jacksonville I mentioned to Evel that we were running seven thousand dollars over budget on the tour, mostly because we kept adding new stops.

"Fuck those New York guys!" he exclaimed. "It's my money. I'll be getting them a million dollars' worth of publicity, and I think I'll double it this week. This week I'm going to spend twenty thousand dollars!" And in Jacksonville he sent off a telegram to Top Rank saying that he didn't like the insult and he would go where he wanted to go.

But Evel lacked his usual vitality that day. After

the Jacksonville press conference we happened to be in a washroom at the same time. He combed his hair and examined his drawn face in the mirror, and he said, "You know, Shelly, I'm the closest thing to Superman, and I'm tired." He sounded very tired.

I assumed that he had played too much in Butte over the holiday. It wasn't until we reached Atlanta that I learned the real reason. Mollie had guessed it.

In a rare quiet moment before we went out to dinner, Evel confided, "Shelly, the pressure is getting to me. It's mounting all the time. You know, I always had a fear of waking up after a nightmare about the canyon jump, and last night it happened. I woke up in a cold sweat, lying there beside Linda, and I really felt that this might be the last one. I couldn't sleep the whole night, and I couldn't sleep on the plane either. I never woke up in a cold sweat before, but last night I did."

"Evel, you'll make it," I reassured him. "You're the only guy in the world who could do it, and you'll do it. Hell, you're just tired is all."

He shook his head. "Sometimes I wonder why I ever said I'd do it. I put it on my own back. Now I've got to do it."

I had never seen him so down. He always gets on a high during press conferences, and afterward there is always a letdown. But that evening I learned that his private moments can be pretty bad.

Those were the moments that shook me up. There were times when I decided that he was an utter bastard with no redeeming qualities, and then I'd get a glimpse of the inner man, I'd understand what he was fighting, and I'd begin to like him again. I felt like an emotional yo-yo on a string that he controlled.

It didn't take long for the temper to emerge again.

Somehow his shaving gear got misplaced when our luggage was carried into the Howard Johnson Motel, and Evel began shouting at the Stanisiches, blaming them. Then the bell captain turned up with it, and Evel immediately ripped off a hundred-dollar tip for him. The reason, it developed, was that he always carries two thousand dollars in cash hidden in with his shaving stuff. That's Evel's idea of mad money.

For dinner Evel decided that we would all go to a place called the Carriage House. The pilots got out of it; Zeke and I didn't want to go, but we decided that we should, to try to get Evel to bed at a decent hour.

Evel took a table for twenty-five; a lot of his friends were there and more kept dropping in: guys named Joe Delaney, Jim Cruikshank, David Cupid, and a couple of fellows called Blaine and Shamberger. Corey McCann, who had Evel's commemorative-coin concession, was at another table with his wife when we walked in, and Evel told me, "Keep Corey away from me. I don't want to talk business."

No sooner had we sat down than he called Corey over, and Zeke and I and the Stanisiches got pushed to the end of the table, like the hired help. The more of Evel's friends who came in, the louder and more demanding he became. It was "Shelly, do this" and "Zeke, make a call" and "Shelly, go get so-and-so." We *were* the hired help.

About one in the morning I tried to get him to go back to the hotel, but he wouldn't budge. "We're going to have a lot of fun tonight. And I want you and Zeke with me, so we'll all be in the same shape in the morning when we make the plane."

About a week earlier Evel had admired a white jacket Zeke was wearing; he asked Zeke to buy ten for him. Zeke called Bamberger's in New Jersey, where

he had bought the jacket, but he could get only one more immediately; he ordered another ten. That evening in Atlanta Zeke hung the new jacket on Evel's door with a little kidding note attached: "Evel, here is a gift from me. Please don't wear your white jacket when I'm wearing mine, because I don't want to make you look bad."

They both wore their white jackets to dinner, and all evening Evel was on Zeke about it.

"Don't you get the idea that I'm the only one who wears white?" he demanded. "I don't want you wearing white any more."

Zeke was embarrassed. "I didn't realize you'd wear yours," he said.

"If you were with Batman or Superman you'd wear a cape," Evel accused him. "You like to copy the stars."

No one would ever have guessed that Evel's new white jacket was a gift from Zeke.

After Atlanta not only the towns but the days began to blur together. It was in Charlotte that we got word that the first Sky-Cycle had been found; it had gone into the Snake River on the initial test shot, and Evel had offered a five-thousand-dollar reward for anyone who found it.

By the time we reached New Orleans, twelve cities and three days into the second leg, I was determined to get some rest; I pretended to have a sore throat and went to bed early. Evel could play night owl without me.

Joe Delaney's sister Judy and her husband picked up Evel and Zeke and took them to a restaurant in the French Quarter; the Stanisiches and a couple of pilots from Dallas followed them in a cab. Judy told Zeke that she had been to the place many times but she

never saw the maitre d' make such a fuss as he made over Evel. The party kept growing, as usual, and Evel ordered a round of drinks for the entire restaurant.

When the waiter brought a bottle of white wine he poured a sip for Evel to taste in judgment. Evel tasted it, and with no warning he turned and spat the wine against the wall.

"That stuff is lousy!" he told the shocked waiter. "Get rid of it!" Then he laughed uproariously.

From the restaurant the group went to a nightclub area called Fat City, and Evel bought drinks for the house everywhere they went. In one spot, where he was introduced by the bandleader and made a few remarks, he gave a waitress six hundred dollars and told her to buy two drinks for everybody. That made him enormously popular.

From Dallas we were supposed to fly to San Francisco, but we went to Austin instead because of a pal. Evel had pals everywhere, and wanted to see them all. We were constantly hassling about keeping the plane headed toward its proposed destination. Time and again, it looked like we would never get anywhere on time.

We had a relaxed evening out, with Zeke paying the dinner tab and Evel tossing a hundred-fifty-dollar tip on the table. And for once Evel turned in early; I couldn't imagine why.

About two in the morning several of us went skinny-dipping in the hotel pool; Judo and Steve Stanisich, Zeke and I were in the group.

Suddenly a guy came out on a second-floor balcony and began firing a .38-caliber revolver into the pool and yelling at us to get out and quit making noise. It's amazing that nobody was killed. We all did the world's fastest vanishing act, running down the motel

corridors stark naked and dripping, shouting bloody murder.

Before long the police came around asking questions; somebody had phoned in a complaint.

"I phoned the complaint," Evel told us the next morning at breakfast. "All that goddamned noise!"

"We could have been killed," I said.

"No way," Evel said.

I looked at him, and suddenly it dawned on me: Evel had done the shooting!

"You son of a bitch!" I said. "*You* did it!"

"Next time," he advised, "just hold it down."

In Los Angeles Evel scared the hell out of me by pretending to be drunk at the beginning of the press conference. In Santa Barbara it looked as though two thousand people had come out to see him; the official police estimate, which we got several days later, was thirty-two hundred. On the way to Portland Evel said he would take us to Lydia's in Butte for dinner that night.

"We'll have lobster and pork chops and all that stuff," he said. "They've got great pork chops."

"I can't eat that," I told him. "I'm kosher."

"Kosher?" he said. "What's kosher?"

And Bob Arum had to explain kosher to him.

Five minutes out of Portland Evel said, "Cancel Portland!"

"Yeah, sure," I said sarcastically. I thought he was kidding; we had a big press waiting in Portland.

"I mean it," Evel said. It turned out that there was a motorcycle-race promoter in Portland he didn't like. After an accident in which one cyclist got his head run over, the promoter had grabbed the PA system mike and played up the danger, meanwhile laughing and eating an ice-cream cone, while the injured man

lay helpless on the track. Evel had seen it, and he had never forgiven the promoter.

We made a pass high over the airport, letting the waiting press know by radio that we were not landing in Portland, and flew on to Seattle. By the time we got there Evel realized that he had made a mistake and he was all apologies to Portland. Too late, of course.

Seattle was the end of the tour. Bob Arum and I were going on to Butte with Evel, but Zeke was leaving us. And before we parted, Evel, acting out of character, paid Zeke and me a compliment:

"I always told you how I never had a PR man and never needed one," he said, "but on this trip I have been with the two best professionals I have ever met in my entire life. You guys did one hell of a great job."

And then we were leaving Zeke in the terminal. I was the last to say good-bye, and all of a sudden he put his arms around me and cried like a baby. It was Minneapolis all over again.

"It's been the hardest three weeks of my life," he blubbered, "but I wouldn't have missed it for the world."

Zeke is the kind of guy who gets emotionally attached to a client and the guys he works with, and it was very hard for him to leave us—harder than it had been when we split in Minneapolis, because after Seattle Zeke would have very little to do with the promotion.

For all of us the tour was over. But my odyssey with Evel Knievel was not.

Chapter 13

P. T. Knievel

Evel Knievel's Snake River Canyon Jump was a synthetic event, the theater of absolute absurdity, P. T. Barnum wandering in the wilderness, a carnival signifying nothing, contrived out of Evel's aspirations and our promotional hype.

Its success depended on the symbiotic relationship that exists between promoters such as myself and the news media. We needed them to get the public interested; they needed us to fill columns of print and minutes of television and radio time. In each case the objective was purely commercial: The media sold advertising, we sold tickets. On both sides it's a con game, and the world is the sucker.

As successful as we were, we'd have done better if Evel had cooperated with the press. But his antic disposition made any cooperation completely unreliable. One minute he'd refuse to pose for a photographer, and a minute later he'd do anything the guy wanted.

People magazine was a case in point. Ron Scott, a reporter for *People*, phoned me in Butte that horrible

Sunday, June 30, to say that *People* wanted to do a cover story on Evel.

"Hey, great!" I said. "Evel will cooperate completely. Publicity like that is the name of his game."

I had no doubt that Evel would break his back to cooperate. When a national magazine such as *People* puts somebody on its cover, two or three other national magazines almost invariably will do covers on the same person; their editors are all label buyers, and they busily buy one another's labels. And that kind of publicity is worth millions. So automatically I went into a sales pitch.

"He really is terrific," I said. "Believe me, I've spent years on the road with the likes of Henry Mancini, the Osmond Brothers, Andy Williams, and Evel is far and away the most colorful guy I've ever worked with. If I were a pioneer leaving my home in Boston to go to the West Coast in a covered wagon, and I needed a trailmaster, he'd be the first guy I'd look for."

"Really?" Ron said. "Sounds like quite a guy."

"He is!" I said. "All I know is I'm happy working with Evel and all the other people we've got. I guess you could use the world 'love'—I love them all. We work hard and we're all basically honest and we have fun at what we're doing."

For all the frustrations, that was really true, and Ron began to catch some of my enthusiasm, as I had hoped he would.

"I'll talk with Evel," I said. "I'll call you, maybe before we leave Butte but definitely no later than Phoenix, and I'll do everything I possibly can to get you your cover pictures and get us our story. You should meet us in Minneapolis—that's the last stop on the first leg of the tour—and you can fly back here to

Butte with Evel and get all the interviews and pictures you want. O.K.?"

"Fine!" Ron said enthusiastically. "I'm really looking forward to this. It's different!"

"You bet it is!" I said. "Super! I'll see you in Minneapolis."

It was super, because when you have an editor who has already decided that he wants a cover story on your star, and a reporter who is enthusiastic about the idea, there is no way you can lose.

Unless your star is Evel Knievel.

"Lookit," Evel said as he drove us back to the War Bonnet Inn after the dinner at his house, "he can come on the second leg with me—after the fourth. But I'll put nobody on these last two days before the fourth. I might take Linda, because I want to keep her near me. And I want nobody coming around here to take pictures of my family. We've already had too many nuts stopping by here; you saw what happened when we drove over to the house today—how many people were out there looking over the fence. I won't have any of that. I already told Bob Arum; we got a deal about that."

And then he got off on the subject of Jurate Kazickas. "And you mark my words, I was nice to that AP reporter—what's her name, Erotica—and I told her I want no pictures of Linda. And as soon as we were up in the air and I didn't know how to handle it, she was busy sidling up to Linda and talking to her. You watch, her story is going to come out and it's going to be a story I'm going to hate, and I'm going to be very upset with you guys."

"It wasn't our fault," I told him. "You could very easily have told her it was your plane and you didn't

want her along, or just told us and I'd have kept her off. It's a very simple thing."

"Yeah, well, you're right, you're right," he conceded as we pulled into the motel. "See you guys in the morning about eleven thirty. We're leaving for Phoenix at noon."

"What about *People* magazine?" I insisted. "They wanted to get pictures of the family. If that's out, it's out. But they'll want you in Twin Falls at the jump site—"

"None of that," Evel interrupted. "I'm spending that holiday with my family, except for the Fourth of July parade. If they want to come here on their own and take pictures of me in the parade, that's fine. And then go on the next leg with us, that's fine too."

It was 2 A.M. in Butte when my call awakened Ron Scott in his apartment in New York. "Evel won't pose for pictures, Ron," I told him. "And he won't go to the jump site. But you can buy an AP shot of Evel there."

"That may blow the cover," Ron said. "We've got to close that cover in a week, and you know we like to get our own shots. We want our own photographer there."

"Well, I hope you appreciate Evel's position," I said. "He's concerned about his family. And we're busy all the time discussing money matters, mapping out loose ends, and personal matters; Evel just doesn't have the time, no kidding. Anyway, those are the ground rules. Do you want to abide by them?"

"Sure. I appreciate Evel's position one hundred per cent. Tell me, is he using his motorcycle in the parade? Will he be doing wheelies?"

"I don't know," I admitted. "But I'll find out and let you know."

"O.K. You realize time is short for us, too. Maybe

I could meet you in Denver tonight, just get acquainted."

"That's probably all right. I'll call you about it."

Later that morning Joe Goldstein called me from New York to tell me that *Family Weekly* also wanted to do a cover on Evel and his family. They wanted to shoot over the fourth, and Joe said that Bob Arum had said he thought it could be arranged.

"Absolutely not, Joey," I said. "He's very definite that there are to be no family pictures. But if the man wants to come to Butte and shoot the parade or take pictures of Evel in a bar, he can. Talk to Bob about it; remind him that he and Evel have made a deal—no family pictures."

We were flying to Phoenix before I got a chance to fill Evel in on my talk with Ron Scott and ask him about the parade and the wheelies. "Do you know where you might be doing one?" I asked. "So that the photographer can be at the right spot."

"Oh, put down the whole street," Evel said.

"So he'll just have to take his chances."

"That's right. Hell, I can furnish the guy with ten thousand fucking pictures. If he wants to come in and bug my ass, tell him to do me a favor. Tell the fucking guy that he can have an hour or so with me at my discretion somewhere else, or he can get on the plane and go from one town to another, and that's it."

That sounded like a change of mind, so I grabbed at the opportunity. "O.K., why don't I put him on the plane tomorrow, from Denver to Minneapolis?"

"Fine. And then the rest he's on his own."

So I tried to call Ron from Phoenix, but his office said he had already caught a plane.

When I told Evel that Ron would meet us in Denver, he suddenly imposed a new condition. "If I don't

get a written guarantee for the cover, I don't want t
talk with him. And I want it notarized. I'm not a
actor, I'm not a singer, I risk my life, and if they'r
going to use me I want a guarantee that I'll be on th
cover. You tell him that."

That was the night, of course, that we wound up i
Kansas City instead of Denver and instead of Omah
I called the Airfield Plaza in Denver, where we wer
supposed to have spent the night, and I got my me
sages but I couldn't find Ron Scott. Then I got a ca
from Bill Eppridge, who was waiting for us in Omah
where we were to have our first press conference th
next day; Bill was a photographer I had known ou
of *Time* magazine in Los Angeles, and *People* had a
signed him to do their photography on Evel.

"Jesus!" he said. "Trying to find you guys is som
crazy game! What the hell are you doing in Kansa
City?"

"Let me tell you, Bill, flying with Evel Knievel i
unbelievable," I said. "He's the nut of all time. Ge
this, we were on our way to Omaha, twenty miles ou
side—"

"Omaha?" he said. "I thought you were staying i
Denver."

"Yeah, well, that got changed too. So we're twen
miles outside of Denver on our way to Omaha an
he changes his mind again and says, 'Let's go to Kan
sas City for the night.' Anyway, don't try to mak
sense of it. I'm glad you're on the story, but you shoul
know there's a new condition: Ron has to come in
with a letter guaranteeing a cover, otherwise there
no story. If Ron's got a letter to that effect, he ca
talk to Evel on the plane to Minneapolis tomorrow."

"Ron's already in Minneapolis," Bill said. "He ha

something else to do and he couldn't make Denver in time. Lucky he couldn't."

"He'll meet us in Minneapolis?" I couldn't see that that made much difference. "O.K., then you can be on the plane with us, taking pictures, tomorrow. We'll be getting into Omaha at ten in the morning, and the press conference will be in the VIP room of the main terminal. You'll see us come in; we're a whole traveling road show."

"He's going to be in the parade in Butte on the fourth, isn't he?" Bill asked.

"He's the Grand Marshal," I told him. "He's going to do wheelies all down the street."

"Great!" Bill said happily. "I'll get some good pictures."

"You bet! And when we come in tomorrow, get permission to get out there on the runway, where you can get the best shots. It's a jazzy-looking plane. If there's any question, call Captain Art Jones; he's the captain of our plane, and the number is N958DM. He'll arrange it."

At seven o'clock in the morning of Tuesday, July 2, Dave Herscher called me from New York about the *Family Weekly* interview with Evel at his home in Butte. I blew my top, because I had already told Joe Goldstein about that.

"There are no interviews with Evel!" I shouted into the phone. "No way. Who gave them permission?"

Dave didn't know. "Larry Borstein of *Family Weekly* thinks they have permission," he said.

"You'd better cancel it," I said. "He won't let anybody talk to him at home over the holiday; that's a deal he has with Bob Arum. I told Joe yesterday that, number one, he will allow no pictures of his family,

and, number two, he will do no stories while he's on vacation in Butte unless we clear it with him first. And right now I'm not going to talk to him about anything more than *People*."

"All right, all right," Dave said. "I didn't know. And look, there's a *Time* photographer going to meet you in Omaha today."

"O.K., I'll handle that. But you'd better have Larry Borstein call me in Los Angeles tomorrow, or maybe I'll have Arum call Evel at home in Butte. But this *Family Weekly* thing worries me. Evel's just likely to get a gun and shoot anybody that comes to his home."

When I told Evel about the *Time* photographer, he laid down the same condition he had imposed on *People*: He wanted a written guarantee of a cover. And even though I had said I wouldn't ask him about anything but *People*, I did ask about an interview with *Family Weekly*. All he said was "Absolutely *no!*"

In Minneapolis Ron Scott was waiting for us, and he showed me the letter from *People*. It read as follows:

Mr. Robert (Evel) Knievel
Dear Mr. Knievel,

This letter will confirm our intent to use a picture of you on the cover of PEOPLE weekly. Because PEOPLE is a newsmagazine, each cover is carefully considered for timeliness. Frequently covers are changed at the last minute to accommodate important breaking news events.

Because we are also a picture magazine the cover story depends heavily on excellent photography. Bill Eppridge, the photographer assigned to this story, has shot many covers for PEOPLE, LIFE and SPORTS ILLUSTRATED. We sincerely hope you intend to cooperate with Bill and Ron Scott, the writer, to the fullest extent.

And best of luck on your upcoming jump.

Sincerely,
John Dominis
Picture Editor

I spent three hours with Bill and Ron, filling them in on Evel and the jump, and when I left Minneapolis for Los Angeles I thought everything was all set. The letter was as much of a commitment as anybody could reasonably ask.

The next day in Coronado I got a call from Ron in Butte. "We hand-delivered the letter to Evel, and he said it's no guarantee, and if we can't guarantee him a cover he won't pose for us or talk to us. What the hell does he want?"

"Hang in there," I urged. "I'll call Bob Arum right away and have him put some pressure on Evel."

I called Bob, and he called Evel, and Evel finally agreed to cooperate.

Up to a point, he did. The halfway point. Bill got some excellent pictures during the parade, and afterward Evel invited them to come back to his house and he promised to pose for pictures. But when he got home he took off his leathers and refused to put them on again. And he wouldn't give Ron time for an interview.

Later Ron and Bill were in the Freeway Tavern, eating pork-chop sandwiches and talking to some of the people I had suggested they get in touch with, and Muzzie took a liking to them.

"What do you guys do?" he asked. "Truck drivers?"

"No, we're doing a cover story on Evel for *People* magazine," Ron explained.

"Why don't you come out to the country club with me?" Muzzie invited. "He'll be there; you can get a good story."

Evel was there, drinking as usual, and he introduced Bill as one of the greatest photographers in the world. He had taken a liking to Bill on the flight from Omaha to Minneapolis. But he didn't really know Ron, and he was pretty cool toward him.

Several holes later Evel changed his mind and sent a golf cart back for Ron, who hadn't swung a club in two and a half years. However, he still had no chance to sit down for an hour or so and get the kind of private interview he needed for a lengthy cover article.

Ron called me in Coronado at one o'clock the next morning, completely frustrated, and told me about his day.

"The hell with it!" he said. "If he doesn't realize the importance of a cover story, I'm not going to do it. I'll just do a hundred and fifty words."

"What about the pictures?" I asked.

He told me Bill had gotten some good action shots, but that was all. "If the pictures come out good and John Dominis wants one for the cover, then I'll see about joining you guys later. I've got other things to do."

Our chances for the cover were slipping away faster than my patience with Evel. But Ron finally decided to meet us in Miami, on the second leg of the tour.

He didn't show up.

In Atlanta I got a call from *People*, saying he'd meet us there.

Again he didn't show up.

On August 23 a guy named Alan Green came to my

room at the War Bonnet Inn in Twin Falls, where we were getting ready for the second test shot of the Sky-Cycle, and he told me that he had taken over the *People* assignment. At first I didn't believe him, because Ron had given me another name for his replacement; I was upset anyway after a tough day, and I threatened to punch him in the mouth. Later I calmed down, and Alan and I got on friendly terms.

But, thanks to Evel, we never did get the *People* cover.

Chapter 14

A Matter of Rights

On the flight from Seattle to Butte, after the tour ended, we picked up Ken Squiers and a CBS television crew who were going to film Evel for the *CBS Sports Spectacular*, and he treated them like kings. He even let them film in his home.

He also told them a story about his hot temper. It concerned a golden Labrador retriever he had owned, a dog that wouldn't obey orders; it persisted in futilely chasing after live ducks instead of retrieving the birds that Evel's shotgun had downed.

"Finally I knew I had to teach that dog a lesson," Evel said. "So I shot him. I shot him in the ass with buckshot. He ran off yelping and came back dragging his tail, and he learned to fetch. It really made me heartsick at my own temper, shooting that dog, but he had to either learn or die."

Linda met us at the airport in Butte, all of the trouble and humiliation of a week earlier forgotten. She and Evel kissed and held hands and devoured each other with their eyes like two teen-agers in love.

She had had something done to her hair that made her feel pretty, and she was sorry that Zeke had left us because he was the one who had suggested the new hairstyle.

The next day we flew to Twin Falls, where CBS wanted to film the Sky-Cycle that had been lost in the Snake River on the first test shot. It had finally been found downriver at a fish hatchery. Evel was still in a cooperative mood, and Ken and his crew got just about everything they wanted. Evel even let them film Robby and Kelly fishing for trout with him, but he did not allow any close shots of the kids; the cameraman had to shoot from about two hundred feet away.

At the jump landing site across the canyon a couple of youngsters rode up on minibikes, and Evel said, "Hey, is this where that crazy bastard's going to jump?"

"He's not so crazy, mister," one of them said. "He's going to make it."

Evel sat on the edge of the cliff, throwing rocks down into the canyon. When he tired of that he pulled out his Browning automatic pistol, showed Robby how to work it, and fired several shots into the canyon.

Next we went to the Blue Lakes Inn to meet Geraldo Rivera, who wanted Evel to appear on ABC's *Goodnight, America* show. Evel didn't know how to pronounce "Geraldo."

"Just as I'm getting used to your Jewish words like *L'chaim,*" he said on the way over, "you throw me this—what's he call himself?"

"Geraldo," I said, and I spelled it. "The G sounds like an H."

"Tell me about him."

"He's a New York Puerto Rican Jewish kid," I said.

"That means he's got a real problem. Being Puerto Rican, he wants to rip off a motorcycle, and being Jewish, he wants to get it wholesale."

Evel appreciated that, and when he met Geraldo he said, "Hey, Geraldo! Enchilada, taco, all that stuff!" They got along fine immediately, and over a beer they made their plans for Evel's appearance on the show.

Whatever was in that beer, within an hour Dr. Jekyll was Mr. Hyde again. We were having a meeting at the Blue Lakes Inn—Evel, Bob Arum, Dick St. John, and I—and Evel turned obstinate again. We wanted him to open a Twin Falls office to coordinate the project, and hire somebody to run it. It was Bob's idea, and it seemed unarguable.

"You can still make all the basic decisions," Bob told him, "but somebody has to handle the phone calls, paperwork, all the little details. It's a flood already, and it's going to get worse."

"Fuck it!" Evel said angrily. "I don't need any goddamned manager to handle my business." He stalked out of the room.

"Dick, you talk to him," Bob urged.

St. John shrugged. "You've got to realize that I'm in the middle," he said. "I'm Evel's lawyer, his business manager. I've got to protect *his* interests."

"Well, protect them! Get him to open that office!" Bob argued.

"You want to protect *your* interest, which is the closed-circuit thing," St. John said. "That's O.K., but it's something else. It's not Evel's problem."

"You're fucking right it isn't!" Evel snapped from the doorway. "I've always handled my own business. This is no different."

Bob spoke with the restrained patience that Evel

had not been able to command when he shot his dog. "Evel, this *is* different. It's bigger by far than anything you've ever done. It's too big for you to run off your kitchen table. Let me make a suggestion, if I may."

Grudgingly Evel said, "O.K., let's hear it."

"Why don't you let Don Branker take over this end of it in Twin Falls. He's here anyway; he's been here most of the time for several months. He knows the score."

"That fucking hippie?" Evel shouted. "No goddamned way!"

To Evel with his Montana morality, Don E. Branker couldn't possibly have been anything but a hippie—not with that long blond hair, that blond mustache, that youthful attitude, those casual clothes. Actually, Don was about as hippie as Bob Hope; he was working on the production of ABC-TV's *In Concert* series, and the previous April he had been in charge of crowd control at the California Jam at Ontario Motor Speedway, the first huge Woodstock-type rock festival at which there was virtually no trouble of any kind. Bob Arum had hired Don to be one of three executive producers of the closed-circuit canyon-jump show. Don's primary responsibilities included the actual production itself and all security arrangements for the television equipment and the ABC technicians.

The problem, and the reason for our meeting with Evel, was divided responsibility. The closed-circuit was ours; the jump itself and the jump site were Evel's. But the two were inextricably interdependent. If the jump failed to go, we would lose our collective shirt, because we would have no show; and if for any reason we lost the show, Evel would lose *his* shirt, because the on-site crowd would never pay his costs. We

were like the married couple who hate each other but can't afford a divorce.

"Evel, you're making a terrible mistake," Bob told him very quietly. "If you don't want Don Branker, O.K. But get *somebody* to handle these details for you, somebody who's here in Twin Falls. This is where the action is from now on. Leave yourself free to think about the jump. Where are you going to sell tickets—out of your kitchen?"

That was the argument that convinced Evel. He set up the office, but he didn't hire Don. He hired Mike Gray, a Twin Falls real estate man, very prominent and a hard worker. Mike was an excellent choice, and he proved invaluable to Evel.

On August 1 Evel called off a planned engine test of the Sky-Cycle X-2 because of a problem with the gyrostabilizer, and in front of Bob Arum and me he made a little speech to Bob Truax about how valuable his work had been to the canyon-jump project, and he handed Truax a check for one hundred thousand dollars as a bonus.

It was a very generous gesture except for a couple of things: The check was dated September 9, the day after the jump was to take place, and it was not signed. It wasn't even as good as the six-million-dollar rubber check.

We finally test fired Sky-Cycle X-2 at daybreak Sunday morning, August 25. Almost all of the press believed that the test shot was a hype, because we did it secretly and, literally, right under their noses. Sixty reporters were asleep in the Holiday Inn when we fired the shot. But if what we had wanted was publicity, we'd have gone around knocking on doors to get them out.

Don Branker had secretly hired local television film

crews, but they didn't know what they were hired for or what they were going to shoot. Their film was solely for Bob Truax's use in analyzing the test. Don met the crews at five o'clock in the morning and gave them their instructions; he did the same with a tow-truck operator whom he paid a hundred dollars to retrieve the Sky-Cycle after it landed across the canyon.

But it never got across; it landed in the middle of the river. That was a big disappointment, because the main purpose of the shot was to test the shock absorber, that pogo-stick rod in the nose of the vehicle. It had never been tested, and we didn't know whether it would work the way Bob Truax had planned or ram back into the cockpit and crush Evel to death.

We had other problems besides the test shot; one of them was girls. They all wanted to be with Evel, but by this time he was totally involved with the jump preparations and with his family, and he had no time for them. Liz, the girl we had met at the Tittle Tattle in New York, had come out to Twin Falls to work for us, and she hardly saw us. But the real problem was a groupie. She had flown in from Texas on her own without Evel's or anyone else's knowledge, hoping to see Evel. I had to listen to an interminable litany about how much she loved Evel, and how after flying all this way she hadn't really been able to talk to him. She was typical of so many kids I had seen too many times before on the concert and sports trail . . . Idol adulation without knowing the star. It was a long sad story.

Linda Knievel came in from Butte for the test shot, so he had even more concern and care. When the test shot went badly it shook up Linda Knievel, and Evel took her home to Butte. What he didn't know was that the groupie had managed to get into his room at

the hotel while the cleaning woman was there, and she had written him a love poem and stuck it in his shaving gear.

Linda Knievel unpacked his things at home and found the poem. Everything hit the fan.

Evel called me and told me what had happened. "Shelly," he said, "I don't care how you do it, but get that fucking girl out of there!"

"O.K.," I said. And less than five hours later the groupie was back in Texas. She cried a lot as she left and said she never wanted to see Evel again, which probably suited him too.

On the twenty-sixth Evel and I flew to Los Angeles for his appearance on NBC's *Tonight* show; I took along films of the recovery of Sky-Cycle X-2 for use on the show. And Evel gave us another problem. He hadn't wanted to make the trip in the first place, and when he found out that he wasn't scheduled as the first guest, he was furious.

"That fucking Burt Reynolds, why the hell should he go first?" he demanded. "Who cares about him?"

Freddy De Cordova, Craig Tennis, and I spent almost an hour getting him cooled off and persuading him not to walk out of the studio. Finally he did go on; he kidded around for half an hour with Sammy Davis, Jr., who was sitting in for Johnny Carson. Evel was a big hit. Nobody would have guessed what a hassle he had created backstage.

The closer we got to the jump, the less cooperation we got from the state and local authorities in Idaho. Their cooperation started out niggardly and dwindled to zero. Absolute zero.

Much of the fault was Evel's. He would not listen to "that fucking hippie," Don Branker. Ironically, Don originally had been hired by ABC to check into

Evel's project when the network was considering buying the whole show itself. Don recommended against it for two reasons: Evel wanted too much money (one million dollars), and the plan included a country-music festival on the north side of the Snake River Canyon, where Evel planned to land the Sky-Cycle.

"That's all you need," Don said, "to have a hundred thousand people on that side and the rocket goes crazy. How do you clear the crowd so the thing can land without killing a lot of people?"

ABC took Don's advice and turned thumbs down. But a month later Bob Arum got interested and hired Don for Top Rank, and eventually ABC wound up renting their facilities to Bob. They also broadcast the jump on *Wide World of Sports* about a month after it took place.

"It's funny," Don said. "I got ABC not to do it, then I got hired by Top Rank to do it, then I hired ABC to come in and shoot it."

As Top Rank's coordinator for the event, Don did his best to steer Evel in the right direction. But Evel steered no better than his Sky-Cycle. The first of many disagreements they had was over the price of admission to the jump site.

"Evel, you can't charge twenty-five dollars a ticket to get into that jump," Don said. "You're not even providing any seats."

"They can sit on rocks," Evel said. "I don't give a fuck where they sit."

"Evel, it's a ripoff," Don insisted. "You've got to cut that price or you'll have trouble. I've seen festivals where they burned everything in sight. I've seen them burn the stage down because they were mad at high ticket prices."

"These are my people," Evel said stubbornly. "If

I tell them not to burn anything down, they won't burn it."

And he held the price at twenty-five dollars. On top of that, he charged as much as thirty dollars for the privilege of parking cars and campers overnight. The high prices eliminated the average family, and what Evel got was mostly riffraff.

Our closed-circuit promotion and the terrific publicity it generated, combined with Evel's constantly changing and always exaggerated predictions of ticket sales, created even more problems. Although Evel scaled down his original talk of two hundred thousand people at the jump and promised to sell no more than fifty thousand tickets, even that figure scared Twin Falls half to death; it was more than twice the population of the town.

Nor was Evel's public image reassuring to the quiet little community. His image was more like a stigma, associated with lawless motorcycle gangs, and the citizens were conjuring up visions of fifty thousand hoodlums in black leather jackets terrorizing the town. They weren't entirely wrong.

Don Branker warned Evel that he would encounter local resistance, but Evel refused to believe him.

"Didn't you ever hear of anti-festival ordinances?" Don asked him.

"This isn't a rock festival," Evel said.

"Makes no difference. They've got some kind of blanket ordinance—every city and county in the country has them in the last few years—and they're designed to prevent rock festivals from happening. They're going to pull it out of the closet and use it against you."

"Not here," Evel said. "I've got friends here. I'm

doing this fucking town a favor, I'm putting it on the map."

Don bulldozed ahead through Evel's arguments. "Listen, let me give you some ballpark figures. They'll say something like for every twenty men you've got to have one toilet, and one toilet for every ten women. For every fifty people you have to have a drinking fountain. Now you're starting to talk numbers. You're talking fifty thousand people. O.K., for fifty thousand people you're maybe talking about five thousand portable toilets. Well, there aren't five thousand portable toilets to rent in this whole goddamned state. And for lack of toilets you're out of business."

"You mind your own business," Evel growled. "I know more about this than you do. This is different from a rock festival."

"Fine. You do it," Don said.

That was three months before the jump. We were down to days before all the details were settled with the local officials.

"You stay there and make sure it's going to happen in spite of Evel," Bob Arum ordered Don. And from that moment Evel never really knew what was going on, although he thought he did. His people met repeatedly with city, county, and state officials and supposedly carried out his orders; actually, they negotiated on the basis of briefings by Don Branker—secret briefings, which Evel never knew about. And of course Don usually attended the meetings with the authorities.

At one time Evel was boasting publicly that he had sold all fifty thousand tickets. Actually, not a single ticket had yet been printed. Evel's talk was typical promotional talk, but it panicked the people of Twin Falls, who saw their worst fears becoming reality.

Don had to go into a meeting and convince the officials that Evel was lying. Fortunately, they were more than ready to believe it.

We had to buy water-fountain heads in Philadelphia at sixty dollars each and fly them to Twin Falls. But we got the number of physicians required at the jump site reduced by more than two thirds, mainly because almost every doctor in Idaho was already on emergency standby for the jump. It took months, but eventually all the figures were negotiated down to feasibility, and Evel never knew how it happened.

"If you asked Evel, he was doing it all," Don said. "Behind the scenes, we were doing it all. And it was all Evel's money we were saving. We had to try to save his neck to save our own."

The most critical battle came as a complete surprise to us, only two weeks before jump day, when CBS tried to steal Evel's show. They almost succeeded, because they had the help of the most powerful officials in Idaho. Don Branker fought that one, too.

We first learned about it when Jim May, Evel's lawyer in Twin Falls, got a phone call from a friend in the state Attorney General's office at six o'clock in the morning. The caller told Jim that CBS and the Bureau of Land Management were having a meeting in Boise at nine o'clock that same morning, and that it concerned Evel's Snake River Canyon jump. Obviously they had tried to keep it a secret from Evel and everybody connected with him, because we were the only people who were not notified.

Jim and Don jumped into a rented plane, flew to Boise, and walked in on the meeting, which was well attended by the press. The subject of the meeting was a CBS request for permission to use the state and federal land on the north side of the canyon—Evel's

landing area. The BLM, which consisted of state and federal officials, controlled the issuance of permits for all such conditional uses. Normally the meeting would have been chaired by the governor, Cecil D. Andrus (who later became Secretary of the Interior under President Jimmy Carter), but it was an election year, and Governor Andrus was conveniently unavailable to handle this hottest potato in Idaho. So the chairman was Lieutenant Governor Jack M. Murphy.

CBS was represented by Kevin O'Malley, who was carrying a check for fifty thousand dollars. The network had offered to pay that amount for the right to put cameras on the north side of the canyon. O'Malley had suggested that the rights be put up at auction, which would give the thing a phony aspect of fairness and impartiality; he was prepared to bid the fifty thousand dollars at the auction. The press was solidly behind O'Malley, because if CBS got its cameras in there, everybody else would be able to get in and take pictures.

Don had already been to the mat with the BLM people concerning the right to use the north side of the canyon, and they had reached an oral agreement that he could have exclusive access for five thousand dollars. We had agreed to pay it. Technically that was for Evel's landing rights, but it also gave Don the right to put our video cameras across the canyon—cameras which, as it turned out, we needed badly during the jump.

Even the five-thousand-dollar fee was a ripoff, because the normal price up to that time for such a conditional use was only fifty dollars. But when the Idaho officials heard about that six-million-dollar check and all the money that apparently was being thrown around, they got greedy.

Now, with the CBS check dangling in front of their eyes, they reneged on our oral agreement and voted to hold the auction at ten o'clock the following morning, with the bidding to open at fifty thousand dollars —a thousand times the original fee of fifty dollars!

And then, as if it were an afterthought, Lieutenant Governor Murphy asked if there was anybody present representing Evel Knievel.

Jim May, who was well known and highly respected in the state capital, got up and introduced Don, who explained his position with Top Rank and with Evel. Don insisted that they had no right to let CBS use the land.

They insisted that they did, and Don said, "I think you people are walking into big trouble." He asked for time to call New York, and the hearing was recessed until after lunch.

"They didn't trust me, an outsider, a long-haired hippie, but they were worried enough to take a break," Don told me later.

He called Bob Arum in New York and filled him in. "O'Malley has got them under his thumb," Don said. "The only thing we can do is fight fire with fire."

"What do you want to do?" Bob asked.

"I want to cancel the jump. Give me full authority to do anything I have to do, including canceling."

"We can't cancel the jump!" Bob said in alarm. "We've got too much invested!"

"I know that," Don said. "But do they?"

After a thoughtful pause Bob said, "You're talking about a million-dollar gamble."

"Look," Don said, "if we have to meet the CBS price, if we have to spend fifty thousand dollars to do something we were originally given the right to do for five thousand dollars, that's a total atrocity! What's

to stop CBS from bidding more than fifty thousand dollars?"

"Let me call Bob Wussler at CBS," Bob said. "He's a friend of mine. I'll call back right away."

He phoned Wussler, who was then heading up CBS Sports, and Wussler stood his ground. He said it was free enterprise, and CBS was willing to spend the money; what we wanted to do was our problem.

Bob Arum called Don back and said, "Do what you have to do."

Here's what happened at the afternoon hearing, as Don Branker related it to me:

"Here's our position on it," Don told the BLM hearing. "Evel Knievel is a performer, probably the greatest performer in the country right now. We have bought the rights to his performance. The particular rights that we have bought are protected by courts and judges throughout the country in rulings on performers' rights. It's no different than when we do one of our musical concerts; we buy the right to put on that show from the band, and nobody else has the right to put on that show in that particular market, television or whatever it is."

It was Kevin O'Malley's turn. "Gentlemen," he said, very suave and assured with his New York suit and his New York manner and the whole BLM in his pocket, "Evel Knievel's Snake River Canyon Jump is a news event. His representatives have been running all over the country saying exactly that, promoting it as a news event. CBS is, among other things, a news medium. We believe we have the right to bring the news of that jump to our viewers, just as we have the right—in fact, the responsibility—to bring them any other news event. And we are willing to pay fifty

thousand dollars for the right to place our cameras in positions where we can obtain that coverage."

What he was hinting obliquely was that CBS had a *right* to steal Evel's performance, and that that right was protected by the First Amendment to the Constitution! It was probably the first time that anybody ever dared to argue that theft was constitutionally protected.

There was no doubt that the BLM was ready and willing to buy O'Malley's argument. And if CBS could cut in live and broadcast Evel's jump, that would ruin our closed-circuit box office and destroy the jump's value for any future television or media sales. The thing had to be stopped in its tracks. We could almost certainly have stopped them with an injunction, but the mere fact of having to go to court would create the doubt that Bob Arum feared and damage ticket sales.

"You bought the rights to that golf tournament you're carrying the day of the jump, didn't you?" Don asked O'Malley directly. "The one you'd like to cut into live for a couple of minutes of the jump itself. How did you get those rights?"

"We negotiated them," O'Malley said. "We own them."

"Well," Don said, "we own the rights to Evel Knievel's jump. We paid six million dollars for those rights. How would you like it if I took my ABC crew and we cut in on your golf tournament?"

"You can't do it, because we have the rights," O'Malley said. "We made a deal with the PGA, and we own the camera positions on the golf course."

"I can shoot it with blimps and helicopters," Don said. "I don't have to touch your golf course."

O'Malley shook his finger at Don and his voice got loud and indignant: "You can't *do* that!"

"You're right," Don agreed calmly. "And neither can you do what you're trying to do."

He turned to the officials, all of whom were ranchers or farmers, or at least familiar with farm problems, and he said, "I was raised on a ranch in the San Joaquin Valley; my parents were in the cow business. Now, if a steer got out of your ranch and into a neighbor's ranch a mile down the road, and your neighbor found that steer with your brand on it, does he have the right to turn around and sell that steer?"

"No," Lieutenant Governor Murphy said, wondering what steers had to do with Evel Knievel.

"Why not?"

"Because I own that steer."

"Can that man sell that steer?"

"If he sells that steer he can be put in jail."

"Well, let me tell you something," Don said. "I own the rights to Evel Knievel. And that's the same as your brand. If you want to sell that right to this man here, the jump is off. We'll cancel it. If you want to have your auction tomorrow, you go ahead and have your auction. We'll not bid on it. It's robbery, you lied to us, you told us we could have it for five thousand dollars and we agreed, and you're going back on that promise. All you're doing is prostituting yourself to the point of accepting more money for something it's not your legal right to sell, and it won't exist because the jump will be off. And I'll guarantee you that we'll have all of our attorneys from Idaho and New York in here immediately, and we'll start a suit against the state for selling something that you don't own."

Maybe it was the argument about the steer, but

something happened overnight. They held the auction, and Don Branker and Jim May went to watch; and nobody bid a nickel. CBS wanted no part of it, not only because they didn't want to get sued but also because they had realized belatedly that their little ploy could start a war among the networks over the rights to all sporting events.

Jim May heard Kevin O'Malley talking to his office in New York afterward, explaining that "Everything was going all right, and all of a sudden this hippie came out of nowhere—I'd never heard of him or seen him before—and he started talking about stealing cattle and the next thing I knew the BLM was on his side. I don't know anything about cattle!"

Jim and Don got a big laugh out of that. Don finally made a deal under which three reporter-photographer teams—AP, UPI, and independent—were allowed on the north side of the canyon to take still pictures. They were placed where Don wanted them, under guards hired by Don.

We didn't get the three video-camera positions we wanted across the canyon, but nobody else did either. If Evel had landed over there, as he planned, he would have broken a law; they were going to fine him ten dollars or something like that for trespassing.

Because the BLM had broken our agreement, we did not pay the five thousand dollars.

Chapter 15

The Last of the Gladiators

During August a change came over Evel Knievel; it was not a complete change, but there were times when he seemed a completely different man.

The first time I noticed the change was August 10, when he called me at my home in Los Angeles at seven thirty in the morning.

"I'm sorry to call you so early, Shelly," he said. "Do you mind?"

"No, of course not," I said. "What's going on?"

"Are you sure? I can call back later."

"Come on, Evel, I'm used to calls at all hours," I reminded him.

"O.K., it's important, I think, and I just picked up the phone without thinking what time it is in Los Angeles. So please forgive me if I woke you." He went on to talk about getting out some publicity for the wire services on all the guys who had tried for various world speed records and died in the attempt.

It was a small thing, and I didn't give it much thought at the time, but never before had Evel apolo-

gized for calling me at an unusual hour. Or for much of anything else, either. It was odd.

On the fourteenth I had breakfast in New York with Jurate Kazickas, who was doing her sixth story on the canyon jump. She was very annoyed with her bosses at the AP; she had covered the story from the beginning, and now because of some political infighting within the organization she was not going to be assigned to the jump itself.

"I talked to Evel at ten o'clock his time yesterday morning," she said. "The phone rang and rang and rang, and finally he answered. He had been sound asleep."

"At ten in the morning?" I could hardly believe it; I thought Evel was shot out of a cannon no later than six A.M. daily, at home or on the road.

"He said he was kind of zonked out and asked me to call him back later, in the afternoon," Jurate said. "He was very nice about it, though." And she added thoughtfully, "It was funny."

"What was funny?"

She looked at me, a little surprised. "He was nice."

Evel Knievel, Mr. Nice Guy? Now I had something new to worry about.

Evel had objected to ABC's plans to broadcast a television documentary on him and the jump a couple of days before the event. He wanted them to pay him one hundred thousand dollars for the rights; they claimed they didn't have to buy the rights to do a story on his career and his plans.

"It's my body and my broken bones!" he raged. "Those bastards are like vultures feeding on me!"

Suddenly he was calling Bob Arum and apologizing for making all the fuss. "I'm a nutty *meshuggener*," he said, using some of the Yiddish he had picked up from

us on the tour. "I'm sorry for the way I acted. I know it's good publicity."

Sports columnist Jim Murray wanted a telephone interview; I asked Evel to be pleasant and cooperative, and he was. Jim was delighted.

"The man on the phone seemed strangely depressed," he wrote in his syndicated column. "He didn't sound like a guy who is about to achieve his life's ambition. He sounded more like a guy who is about to become a motorcycle accident. If you're going to have a motorcycle accident, it's best to have it on the ground, not in any case three thousand feet in the air. Robert Craig Knievel poses a nice problem for the National Safety Council. They won't know whether to ascribe his accident, if it happens, to weekend traffic fatalities or to airplane crashes."

Evel Knievel, Mr. Nice Depressed Guy? I began to wonder what Linda was feeding him.

When I got to Toronto, I found out. *Milk!* The booze hound, who always started the day with a bourbon and soda or a Bloody Mary, had turned into the dairy industry's best customer. I couldn't have been more astounded if he had confessed that he was really Pat Boone.

Evel was on something else, too: tranquilizers.

"I haven't been sleeping well," he said. "I've been taking Librium. I've got a lot of things to put in order before I die on September eighth."

"Come on!" I said. "Don't talk like that!"

"No," Evel said, "I've got to get my will in order, make sure the kids are all right. There are a lot of things I've got to get done."

The next night he was jumping for a world record—if he made it—thirteen Mack trucks at the Canadian National Exposition, but that didn't worry him at all.

The canyon jump did. Evel was preoccupied with death; that explained the depression Jim Murray had noticed, and the Librium explained Mr. Nice Guy.

"My friends have changed, my whole life is changing, and I don't like it," Evel confided in his trailer on the exhibition grounds. "I don't mean you and Zeke and Bob Arum when I say I don't like it. I want you to know that. You guys have been good friends to me all through this, and I appreciate what you have done for me."

He told Bob Arum much the same thing. He reminded Bob that he had said more than once that there were three things he hated—Jews, New Yorkers, and lawyers—and Bob was all three. And he added, "I want you to know, in case you didn't, that I was only kidding. You are one of the best friends I've ever had."

It was as if he were determined to pay his bills, say thanks to his friends, correct any misconceptions about how he felt, tie up all the loose ends of a lifetime before September 8. I am sure that Evel Knievel had a premonition of death in the Snake River Canyon.

That night was the first time I saw him jump. I had seen films of his jumps, but to see it in person was a totally different experience. Twenty-one thousand people were chanting for Evel, chanting in orderly fashion under the watchful gaze of dozens of Royal Canadian Mounted Police. In the trailer Kelly and Robby were lacing their shoes and Evel was working at a chalkboard, giving them last-minute instructions just like a football coach.

"Ladies and gentlemen, the Last of the Gladiators!" the announcer called out in stentorian fashion, and the rhythmic chanting of the crowd surged into waves of applause. All the lights were turned out except a

spotlight, which followed Evel's one hundred fifty thousand dollar van as it was driven slowly around the stadium a couple of times.

Keith Jackson of ABC-TV greeted Evel as he stepped out of the van, and Evel took command of center stage like the fabulous showman he is.

"Tonight is an emotional night for me," he began, and he truly meant it. Standing only ten feet away, I could see something that the crowd couldn't see: Tears were welling up in his eyes, and he was biting his lip, fighting for emotional control.

"I always wished that my sons could perform with me," he went on, "and tonight they are going to, in my last jump before the Snake River Canyon, perhaps for ever." He continued with his usual spiel about kids wearing helmets and observing safety rules, but my mind stuck on that "for ever." Evel's fear of death was a drum throb beginning to dominate the rhythm of his life.

The kids did their wheelies, Kelly standing on his seat and Robby kneeling, and they got a big hand. Evel sat watching with fatherly pride all over his face.

Then it was his turn. Working up to the big moment, Evel performed several wheelies at eighty miles an hour, and finally the announcer said, "Evel is ready to go!"

He came barreling down the jump ramp, but instead of jumping he flashed past the thirteen parked trucks at about a hundred miles an hour and disappeared into the darkness beyond the landing ramp. He came back and did the same thing three more times, getting the feel of the ramp, checking to make sure that everything was exactly right; his is an art very intolerant of mistakes. On the fourth test he ran up to the top of the landing ramp, then let his bike

glide slowly back as he studied the row of trucks. Each time he made another run the trucks seemed to get bigger, the tension tighter; I was actually sweating.

When he rode to the top of the jump ramp for the fifth time, there was no announcement or signal at all. He revved the motor, and suddenly he came down like a rocket and soared into the air.

Somebody was yelling, "Go, Evel, go! Go! Go!" Suddenly I realized that the someone was myself. My voice was one of twenty-one thousand, all screaming the same thing. I felt as if my stomach had dropped to my shoes. It was an incredible experience to watch that toylike human figure on that toylike motorcycle float through the air, aware in my gut that the motorcycle was real and the toylike figure was a man made of fragile blood and bone and nerves. Decry it if you will, scornfully compare it to the Roman Colosseum as Toronto alderman David Smith did when he tried to force cancellation of the jump, but in the brief seconds that Evel Knievel flew over those thirteen trucks in Toronto I comprehended that he had indeed created a new art form. It was the most incomparably thrilling thing I had ever seen.

The jump was perfect. Evel flew one hundred twelve feet and landed squarely on the big target X painted on the flag-decked landing ramp. The whole thing lasted twenty seconds; it is a very transient art form. In eight years Evel had made about three hundred jumps; at twenty seconds per jump, in eight years he had actually performed only about one hundred minutes. It leaves a lot of time for golf.

Evel rode around the track two or three times, holding his helmet aloft and accepting the applause. And then something remarkable happened. People

began pouring out of the stands; they ran across the field, they climbed over the ramps and the trucks, all converging on Evel and his van. There was no threat, nothing but admiration, or perhaps adulation. But we were trapped inside the van for forty-five minutes. Even a friendly crowd can be dangerous.

Evel was relaxed and congenial, sweat pouring down his face. He leaned back in one of the big black leather chairs, his feet stretched out on the lush gold carpeting, and called for a Wild Turkey and soda after his days on milk.

He fingered the gold Chai, the Jewish symbol for life, that Zeke Rose had given him for good luck; it was on a gold chain around his neck.

"I'm wearing it on the canyon jump, too," he said. "It did bring me luck."

Three days later, in Twin Falls, Evel told a bunch of us, including Bob Truax and myself, that he had lost eight pounds on the Toronto jump; he dropped from 185 to 177.

"Where did you lose it?" Bob asked.

"I don't know," Evel said.

Bob grinned and said, "I hope it was in your head. That's where you needed it the most."

Behind all the kidding, I knew that if Evel lost weight in Toronto, it was because of the Snake River Canyon.

Chapter 16

Countdown

In the week before the canyon jump the promotional blitz, orchestrated by both Bob Arum and Evel Knievel, reached a dazzling crescendo.

You could hardly watch ABC television without seeing Evel, either in Jules Bergman's documentary special or in the movie version of Evel's life, starring George Hamilton.

In Twin Falls, Evel's one hundred twenty-five thousand dollar Motocross stirred up dust all week and interfered with the television crews setting up equipment for the jump.

And in Butte, the Lear jets Evel had rented from Watcha McCollum buzzed the airport every few minutes, while Evel played top banana to Joe Louis and Bobby Riggs in the Evel Knievel Golf Tournament. But the bets were only ten dollars a hole against the fading old Brown Bomber, twenty dollars a hole against hustler Riggs, and not the thousand dollars a hole that Evel loudly proclaimed to the crowd. Outside the clubhouse a Mack truck and a Toyota stuffed

with Chuckles candy were displayed; Mack and Chuckles were among Evel's sponsors, and his father, Robert C. Knievel, Sr., was a Toyota dealer in Butte.

And of course there was the much-advertised million-dollar party in Butte, to which Evel had personally invited several million people, including the entire populations of sixty-two cities. Luckily for Butte, most of the guests failed to show. Only about five hundred came to the party, which didn't cost anything close to a million dollars. But there was a party: Evel sped from one bar to another with a police escort, his bibulous fans racing after him like the Indy 500 field following the pace car. He cleaned out every bar in town and emptied seven trucks of beer.

During that final week Evel also issued his burial instructions. The pronouncement came in a Mexican restaurant to which Evel and his family had taken several of us for dinner—Bob Arum, Lee Arthur, a reporter for KDKA in Pittsburgh who had come to Twin Falls to work on our closed-circuit show, and myself.

The conversation began with Evel laughing about what he called his "gravestone," a six-foot-high granite marker donated by the Rock of Ages Corporation of Barre, Vermont, and placed at the jump site just outside the Evel Knievel Museum, where artifacts such as the damaged Sky-Cycle X-1 were on display. A Sky-Cycle was carved into the monument, and an unfinished inscription: "From this point on September 8th, 1974, Evel Knievel attempted a mile-long leap over the Snake River Canyon." A space was left to indicate whether he succeeded or failed.

"If I die," Evel said, "you've got to promise me this, Linda. You've got to bury me with my complete trailer—you've got to dig a hole big enough for the entire trailer—with my bikes and everything inside. But you've got to leave the big air horn sticking out, so when I think it's time for me to come back and do some good, I'll just toot my horn"—he made a loud horn sound that startled everybody in the restaurant—"and I'll drive it right out of the grave, because I'm really Superman!"

Or Christ, or at least the angel Gabriel.

As the jump approached Don Branker didn't find Evel especially angelic. It seemed impossible to convince him of the need for proper security to control the crowds.

Don's bailiwick was the inner perimeter, which contained the jump site itself, the press and VIP areas, and the television-control trailers—an area totaling a little less than an acre. This area was strongly fenced and well equipped with floodlights, a public-address system with multiple bullhorns, and half a dozen armed guards.

Evel was responsible for everything outside the inner perimeter—the area where the crowds were beginning to gather days before the jump.

"I'm watching these people come in," Don told Evel, "and we're going to have trouble. They're mostly biker types, dirty, hippie, grubby, black leather, a horrible group. Walking trouble. You've got to have more PA system, and you've got to have more fences."

"Why do I need more fences?" Evel asked. Along the edge of the canyon, about forty feet back from the rim and extending maybe three hundred feet on each side of the inner perimeter, he had had a six-foot chain-link fence installed. But the poles were not set in concrete; they were merely core-drilled two feet

deep. And it would be no problem for anyone wanting to get closer to the rim to walk around either end of the fence.

"Why do you need more fences?" Don repeated. "God forbid what will happen if you go down!"

"I'm not going down," Evel said.

"Forget that. What happens if you go down, and the crowd wants to see where you are? They're going to go to the canyon's edge. And when they do, somebody's going to get hurt. Evel, no matter how much money all of this makes, it's not worth one of these people getting killed."

"Mind your own business, for the last time!" Evel snarled.

But when an article warning of the danger appeared in the local paper, the *Times-News*, Evel finally got the message. He enlarged the PA system. He had the chain-link fence extended to a total of about fifteen hundred feet, and about ten feet closer to the canyon he had a second barrier installed—a four-foot snow fence.

Don Branker looked at the fences and shook his head. "If he goes down, those fences will go down in seconds," he predicted. "A big-enough crowd could move Candlestick Park across San Francisco Bay."

I went to the rim of the canyon, and just to look down gave me a sick feeling of fear. It's a sheer drop of six hundred feet, and legend has it that no one ever fell into the canyon in that area and lived. It's an eerie river, the Snake; it yields the bones of its victims only grudgingly, after months or years, and sometimes not at all. It surrendered a thing as big as Sky-Cycle X-1 only after eight months of search.

Two nights before the jump I went with a *Newsday* reporter to the park area at Shoshone Falls, a mile up-

river from the jump site. The toughest of the bikers had taken over that area, and even Sheriff Paul Corder wouldn't let any of his men go near it.

But it was unexpectedly peaceful. Several hundred people were camped among the trees, campfires dotted the darkness, guitar music thrummed against the steady rhythm of the falls, and every now and then naked nymphs ran through the pools of light.

It was the last peaceful scene I was to witness for forty-eight hours.

The day before the jump was the day of the incident that undoubtedly inspired Jack Perkins of NBC News to say, "It's Evel Knievel versus Snake River Canyon, with the Snake River Canyon the sentimental favorite."

Evel had just come off two hours of sitting in the Sky-Cycle while Bob Truax ran tests. Tilted in that tiny cockpit at a fifty-six-degree angle, sweating in his leathers under a hot sun, he climbed out with leg cramps, dehydration, and a mood nastier than a mad mongoose's. At the bottom of the ramp he started yelling at Don Branker because there was no Astroturf covering the bare earth beside the asphalt surface.

"Have some of your people put Astroturf there if you want," Don said. "It's not my responsibility."

"Fuck you!" Evel said, and went on into his trailer for a moment's rest. I ordered some salt tablets for him. Then he came out and sat on the trailer steps to talk with the press.

Jack Perkins's cameraman, an extremely short guy, asked Evel to stand so he could get a better picture.

"I'll do what I want," Evel snapped. He remained seated, glaring at the cameraman.

"You're not being fair to the press," the cameraman complained.

"If I want to sit down, I'm going to sit down!" Evel yelled. "Out!" He gestured for the cameraman to beat it, and vanished inside his trailer.

In a few seconds he came storming out again, yelling at Perkins, "Tell him the next time he looks at me to have a smile on his face!" He pointed his cane at the cameraman and added, "I'm not an actor, do you understand that?"

"That's right," the cameraman agreed.

"And I said 'Have a smile on your face!' " Evel repeated ominously.

The cameraman looked up at him open-mouthed, obviously unable to believe what was happening but also unwilling to be pushed around by the egotistical star. "I don't smile for anybody," he said, unsmiling.

Suddenly Evel flew into a rage. "Get out! Get out of here!" he yelled. "I don't need any crap from you!" He jabbed the cameraman with his cane, and he jammed the camera back into the man's face; the blow knocked the cameraman sprawling and broke his camera lens. Evel stood over him, yelling, "Get out! Get out!"

"I can't get out without my camera!" he said, reaching for it.

"I'll stick it in your ear!" Evel screamed.

By this time several of us had managed to pull Evel back. The cameraman picked up his damaged camera and went off to see a doctor and, I understand, eventually a lawyer.

"Look what it's done to me," Evel complained back in the trailer, apparently with no thought of what he had done to the cameraman. "I can't think straight. I'm doing a lot of things I don't want to do."

That incident, while uncharacteristically violent, typified Evel's concept of press relations. He was accustomed to intimidating newsmen, bullying them into giving him coverage. We had worked with him for more than two months, but he had yet to learn to win the cooperation of the press by treating them with respect. It simply was not in his nature.

The night before the jump I went swimming in the pool at the Blue Lakes Inn, and a blonde girl came out stark naked and jumped into the pool, beside me. She was beautiful, but when she came close I looked into her eyes and there was nothing there. If the eyes are the windows of the soul, she was soulless. I was to see proof of that the next day.

I climbed out of the pool, went to my room, and phoned Mollie in Los Angeles. I was telling her about the Sky-Cycle when I broke down, totally exhausted.

"It's a jury-rigged contraption," I told her. "It's a flying junkyard. My God, the body is nothing but a wingtip fuel tank from a Grumman Albatross, a Navy patrol bomber. Truax has actually used bailing wire to hold it together—no kidding—and when we test fired the Sky-Cycle X-2 one of the parts of the rocket was the lid off a can of dog food! Mollie, you won't believe it, but Truax couldn't afford wind-tunnel tests, so you know what he did? He towed a model of the thing behind a truck on the freeway near Saratoga, California! A model! And the freeway was his wind tunnel! And you know what Truax said?"

"What did he say?"

"He said, 'It wasn't ideal.' Not ideal? That's the understatement of the year!"

"Darling, they must know what they're doing," Mollie said soothingly. "I don't know why you should be so disturbed about it."

Suddenly I found myself crying into the phone, struggling to catch my breath. "I'll tell you why," I

managed to say. "Because I really believe that Bob Arum and I have promoted what will be the world's most public suicide attempt."

After a little pause she said, "Now, Shelly, come down to reality. You only did a job. You didn't ask Evel to jump; nobody asked him. It's up to him."

Mollie brought me back to reality. There was nothing I could do to stop the jump anyway. I collapsed into bed and a sound sleep.

At two o'clock in the morning the phone rang. It was Bob Arum. "Get up and come on!" he ordered. "We're going out to the launch site. There's trouble!"

Trouble? It was a full-scale riot of five thousand people, total mob rule, the most terrifying thing I have ever seen. It was one of those scenes you hear about or read about but never think you will be involved in, an experience so frightening that you literally wet your pants. I know, because I did.

Don Branker was already on the scene. He had been called by Evel's top security man about nine thirty in the evening. Don was in an important meeting with FAA officials at the Holiday Inn, working out final details for helicopter flight patterns. The Sky-Cycle had been officially declared an airplane, and the federal authorities were not about to let that guideless steam rocket collide with a helicopter and scatter wreckage down on thousands of people. The final decision was to permit a helicopter to film the takeoff from a position behind the Sky-Cycle, and the other choppers would be off at a distance until it was safe to move in closer.

Margaux Hemingway, who was working as a production assistant on our closed-circuit show, got the first call for help and broke into the meeting to alert Don.

"Don," she said, "they can't get Evel; he's at home in Butte. But they're rioting at the site. They want you to help."

Don called the site and talked to the guard, who was scared half witless. "They're starting to burn things down!" the guy said. "Somebody's got to do something. There's no control here whatsoever."

"Are you being attacked right now?" Don asked.

"No," the guy said, "but it's really close. They're going to come after us in this inner perimeter any minute."

"Call me back if it breaks," Don said. "I've got this important meeting. I'll get out there when it's over."

What happened was exactly what Don had predicted: People got mad at the prices, and the overnight crowd of five thousand turned into a mob and began looting and burning. We learned later that one of the beer concessionaires was charging five dollars for a six-pack when the going rate was two fifty. Whatever the immediate cause, the riffraff broke into his booth and began helping themselves.

Next thing, the concessionaire was on top of his booth, aiming a shotgun down into the crowd and actually pulling the trigger!

What saved his life was quick action by a security guard who, like so many people in Evel Knievel's life, had an improbable name: Zane Grey. Zane managed to strike the shotgun barrel upward just as the gun fired: otherwise the blast could have killed perhaps a dozen people. The mob, which might have ignored the concessionaire if he hadn't used the shotgun, and would certainly have killed him if he had fired into that swarm of humanity, proceeded to beat him senseless. But he lived.

Next to the beer booth two gigantic semi-trailers

were parked, both loaded to the gills with beer; they held the entire beer supply for that night and the next day for an anticipated fifty thousand people. The mob ripped the semis apart and drank every drop that night; five thousand people drank enough beer for fifty thousand.

And then they started burning things.

To get into the site we had to use a secret road which was really designed for ambulance access. The main access road, which was the only other way in, was completely jammed with incoming traffic.

Once inside the inner perimeter, I discovered that we were an unlucky thirteen—only thirteen people to hold off that beer-drunk, grass-stoned, anger-crazed mob of five thousand. In addition to six armed guards, professionals Don had hired at two dollars an hour more than Evel was paying his guards, the others were Don, Bob Arum, an Indian named Red Cloud, and Joe Frazier's brother Tom, who was the only black face within two hundred miles. And asleep in a pink Cadillac, oblivious to the storm of noise and fire, were Filthy McNasty, the proprietor of the Sunset Boulevard place bearing his name, and his brother.

Don had turned on the floodlights, illuminating a stretch about one hundred feet beyond the inner perimeter. Farther out there was only blackness laced with flame. The beer booths were the first to go, and then the big semis, sucked dry of their cargo, were put to the torch. The other concession stands, the toilets, and automobiles and trailers—almost everything that was burnable—were burning. The roar of the mob was constant, punctuated by occasional crashes, gunshots, and the screams of girls being raped. The screams came from all sides, and sometimes it was difficult to tell whether the victims were

protesting or enjoying; in any case there was nothing we could do about it.

Don and Red Cloud, the only ones among us who could "pass" amid the mob, went outside the perimeter to scout around, and they both came back with the same message: "They're coming to get us."

Over the PA system Don had warned the rioters to stay out of the lighted area beyond our fence. After a time six dirty bikers came marching into the light in a kind of military formation, and one of them yelled, "You have the advantage now because you've got the light, but when the sun comes up you're all dead." And they turned around and marched back into the pitch-black.

"I don't know if it's jive or what," Don said, "but it sounded real to me. They've done all the damage they can do out there. All that's left is us."

"Your guards have shotguns," I said. "Can't they stop them?"

"Oh, sure," Don said, "they can stop a couple, or a dozen. What are you going to do about the other five thousand?"

We looked around at one another. Aside from the guards, Don was the only person armed; he had a .38. Bob Arum found a hammer. I picked up a flashlight.

And we waited.

"There's one thing wrong," Don said. "Too bad I didn't think of it until now. But we're surrounded on three sides, and we've got the canyon at our rear. We've got nowhere to go. If they decide to take us, they'll take us."

He got on the phone to Jim May, Evel's attorney, and got him out of bed to phone all the officials, from the sheriff to the Idaho National Guard, to redeem their promises and come help us. All he wanted of the

National Guard was a line of troopers on the north side of the canyon—the opposite side, a mile away—just to impress the rioters with a show of force.

Half an hour later Jim May called back.

"Nobody is coming, Don," he said.

Don said, *"Nobody?"*

"Nobody. I called the brigadier general of the National Guard, the sheriff, the county supervisors, and nobody will touch it. They've all told me you're on your own."

"Wait a minute!" Don yelled. "You're telling me that *no one* is coming out here to help us? After all the promises they made?"

"They say whatever is going on out there, let it go," Jim May said. "They wish you had never come here, and they don't care what happens."

About four in the morning Don sneaked away to Shoshone Falls and recruited the toughest of the bike leaders, who were having their own party up there. We paid them a thousand dollars, we supplied them with scraps of orange cloth, which they wrapped around their arms or tied to their beards for identification, and we told them to come in at about seven A.M. and take charge. We were going to make our own law.

And we waited for the sunrise. When it came, nothing happened. We'll never know for sure, but I think the leaders of the mob simply got too drunk on their hijacked beer.

At seven in the morning our gorillas came marching in two columns, grubby, dumb, tough, two-hundred-fifty-pound guys who slapped everybody out of their way and terrified the drunken mob. They were the ugliest, most beautiful people we had ever seen. They took complete control, and they kept it.

It was a scene of devastation, ashes, and smolder-

ing ruins that greeted the incoming crowds and the celebrities who flew in by helicopter to take part in the show. Most of the promised celebrities, such as John Wayne, Elvis Presley, Dustin Hoffman, Steve McQueen, never came to the party.

But Jimmy the Greek was there, refusing to give any odds on the jump. "I can't set odds on a man's life," he said. And we had our celebrities anchoring the closed-circuit show: David Frost, Claudine Longet, astronaut Jim Lovell, Bud Furillo.

While they were flying in, I went back to the Blue Lakes Inn, showered, shaved, and returned to the jump site, to see again the beautiful soulless blonde I had encountered briefly in the swimming pool the night before. Just outside the perimeter fence, naked to the waist, she was sucking every man who unzipped his fly and offered her his hardened penis. Time and again she raised her empty head to the empty sky, semen dripping down her chin and onto her bare breasts, and shouted, "For you, Evel!"

Between oral copulations she sucked ice. It was another hot day.

One naive reporter was foolish enough to venture outside the perimeter fence to try to interview the blonde and her goon squad. He was shoved to the ground, and about twenty lighted cigarettes were stubbed out in his face before he escaped, scarred but alive.

In Butte, as Evel and his family were leaving home for the flight to Twin Falls, little Kelly said he had forgotten something and ran back into the house.

Actually he hadn't forgotten anything; he was engaged in a conspiracy with his father and Robby. Evel had ordered a color photograph of the Snake River Canyon Jump site as it looked before the ramp was

built. In the blue sky of the picture he had written, "To Linda, my darling wife. I love you, Bob." Robby had helped him frame the picture, and Kelly had hidden it under his bed.

When Kelly ran back into the house, he took the picture from its hiding place and hung it over the bed in the master bedroom. Evel wanted it there, in case he did not return, so that it would be the first thing Linda would see when she walked into their bedroom.

Shortly before the jump Evel did another of those things that shake your mind about the man so many people called the Beast of Butte. He gathered his own boys and Bob Arum's boys in his trailer and told them, "Whatever happens, I want you boys to know that I did what I have to do." And to Bob Arum's boys he said, "And your father did right. If I don't come back, I want you to understand."

Only seconds later, it seemed, Evel was gone—a powerful spurt of steam, a rocket in the sky trailing orange streams of marker smoke, and he vanished below the canyon rim. The very thing that Don Branker had feared had happened.

And what Don had predicted also happened. The crowd surged toward the canyon rim, the fences collapsed in seconds, and only the biker gorillas stood between some twelve thousand people—the actual crowd count—and a six-hundred-foot plunge. Those ugly, beautiful monsters stood at the brink of the abyss with death at their backs, and they literally hurled people to safety over the heads of the crowd. Not a life was lost. Without those oxlike bikers, the Snake River Canyon Jump would have been a frightful tragedy. In just a few minutes they earned their thousand dollars many times over.

For several minutes nobody knew whether Evel was

dead or alive. He had gone halfway across the canyon before the Sky-Cycle parachutes, which opened prematurely, stopped him, and he had drifted down on the near side, out of the sight of our cameras. Only our helicopter people could see him.

What happened was that the drogue-chute seal blew off at the instant of blastoff, because the seal had not been properly bolted. The same thing had happened on both test shots, but the fault had not been corrected. By the time the Sky-Cycle left the launching track, the main chute was already out. But the thing had so much power that it probably would have made it across the canyon, even with the chutes holding it back, had it not been for a headwind of about twenty-five miles per hour—the maximum for which Bob Truax would give a go signal.

And Evel probably would have died across the canyon, because I don't believe that the pogo-stick shock absorber could have taken a hard landing.

Instead, the wind blew him back to our side of the canyon, and after banking twice against the canyon wall the Sky-Cycle came to rest on a ledge just above the water, with the parachute trailing into the water.

The parachute was all that the people in rescue helicopters could see at first, and they reported to us that Evel had gone into the water.

"The last shot of Evel we had on video, he was tugging to get his harness off," Don Branker said later. "We replayed it, and we were sure he was trying to bail out. We still hadn't found him, we're looking at that, and it's two minutes. There's no way Evel can hold his breath for two minutes. O.K., he's in the river, he's dead. We instituted riot procedures."

The loudspeakers were bellowing the lie that Evel

was O.K., when we really didn't know but we assumed that he was dead. The crowd was beginning to turn into a mob again, because they thought he was dead. Their hero had fallen. And they were starting to crawl over the fences and the television trailers. They were climbing the broadcast tower, where David Frost and Claudine Longet and Jim Lovell were stationed, waiting to interview Evel if he returned.

Don jumped out of the television-control trailer and headed for the tower to rescue his announcers. The first person he bumped into was Linda Knievel.

"Donny, how's Evel?" she asked, completely distraught.

"I don't know," Don said. "I think he's in the water, but I don't know."

"If he's in the water, he's *dead!*" she screamed. She knew he could never get out of the Sky-Cycle quickly enough to avoid drowning.

"I don't know, I don't know, I really *don't know!*" Don shouted. There was nothing else he could say; he didn't dare tell her what he thought.

Suddenly over his walkie-talkie came the voice of Watcha McCollum, who was piloting one of the rescue helicopters. "Hey, Donny, Evel's all right! We've found him! He's alive!"

Because of their blade sweep, the helicopters couldn't approach the narrow ledge where he had landed. He was put into a rescue boat, then transferred to a chopper and brought up to the landing pad. Our gorillas escorted him, bruised and somewhat bewildered, to the interview tower, where he said something of no importance.

Because it was all over. There was nothing of importance to say. There never had been anything of importance to say in the first place.

On top of the ramp, below the interview tower, I fell into the arms of Evel Knievel's father and cried my heart out, I was so glad to see that goddamned, cantankerous, impossible son of a bitch alive and well.

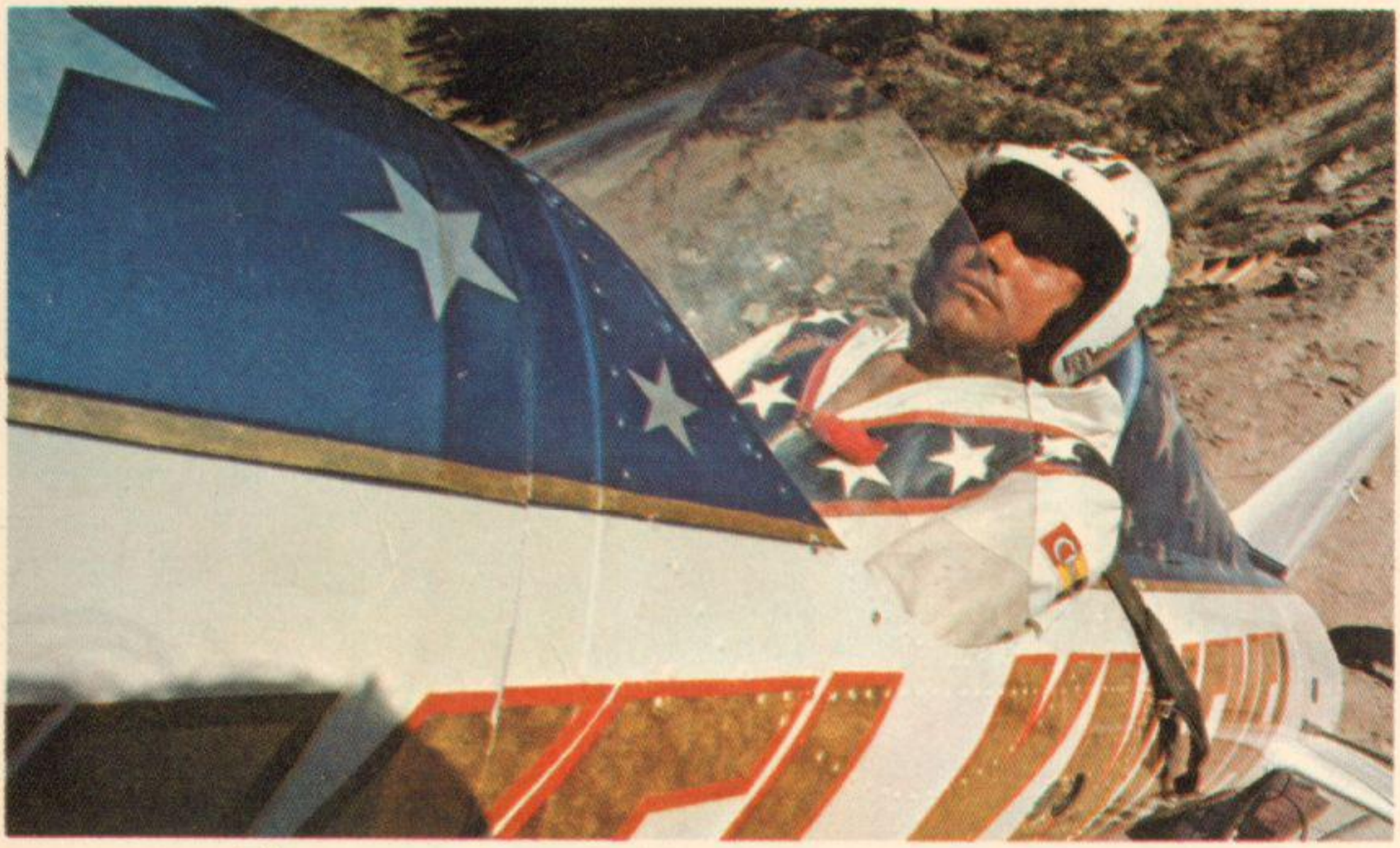
There are many who helped make the tour and this book live. Here is a list of people who perhaps deserve more mention and thanks in the book. I'm sorry if proper appreciation has not been expressed. Also, to those who unintentionally have been omitted, please forgive me.

Thank you all,
SHELDON SALTMAN

Lisa Saltman, Steven Saltman; Dick St. John; Joe Vechio; Jack Perkins; Len Silver; Mike Malitz; Kurt Gunther; Alan Satterwhite; Ron Beckman; Rick Case; Coy Bacon; Jerry Nachman; Jacque de Spoelberch; Bill Bertka, Harvey Bottlesen; Bud Furillo; Craig Tennis; Fred de Cordova; Fred Bezark; Charles Maher; Wells Twombley; Jim Welch, Ned Bornsen; all the Ideal Toy Sales Reps across the country; Shamberger; Muzzie; Judo; Steve; Sandy; the group from Jet Fleet in Dallas; Lloyd, Bud, Cy; Bob Jones; Wicked Ward, Charley Johnson; the folks at the Blue Lakes Inn; Watcha McCollum; Governor Andrus; Ma-

thilde Kapuano; and to Dave Herscher of Joey Goldstein's office—he unselfishly did yeoman's work in following through with all my 1 A.M.–2 A.M. Saturday and Sunday requests; Leo Janus; Bob Cramer—the Limo driver; John Martin of ABC; Tom Hawkins; Lionel Weintraub, Herb Sands; to the thousands of rabbis, priests, ministers, and clergy of all faiths, who prayed and praised though they disagreed and some even condemned our odyssey from the pulpit; Cindy Scott, Terry Brennan, all the HOT-DOG Skiers; Lenny Stogel, Dinny; Rick Talley; Joe Bleeden; Cindy Jackson; John Austin; Jan Strnad and Tom "Scoop" Geren . . . and all the rest who know the facts.

IT WAS TO BE THE MOST OUTRAGEOUS MEDIA EVENT EVER! AND EVEL KNIEVEL AND SHELLY SALTMAN SET OUT TO MAKE SURE EVERYBODY KNEW ABOUT IT.



WIDE WORLD PHOTOS

They say it takes a hustler to know one, and Saltman got to know Evel Knievel very well. On a breakneck nationwide tour to promote the Snake River Canyon jump, Shelly got a good, honest look at the man behind the myth.

Here's everything that goes on behind the scenes—big money, big wheeling and dealing, big hoaxes, parties, booze and broads—

AS AMERICA'S SUPER-STUNTMAN WAGS HIS TONGUE AND SHAKES HIS FIST AT DEATH FOR THE SHEER, CRAZY, MONEY-MAKING HELL OF IT!

PHOTO: COVER/DENNIS BRACK/BLACK STAR

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