

Various perceptions of this daredevil were hurled my way prior to my interview with **Steve-O**. My dad, for one, warned me not to submit to any “dares” Steve-O may challenge me to—as if he was going to persuade me to join in on the antics he’s famous for. Well, this is a guy made popular by a TV show named *Jackass* and a man who has received candidature in a top 25 list of “celebrities who have defied death” for his audacious stunts and bizarre materials he has ingested, one item being a light bulb, so considering the aforementioned I guess anything is possible.

“I never swallowed a light bulb whole. I’d break a light bulb and chew the glass into sand. It’s just really horrible for your teeth,” Steve-O assures me as we settle on to the Coffee Bean’s patio in Beverly Hills. Not horrible for your esophagus or stomach? I ask cringing. “Yeah, I’ve got esophageal issues as well I guess,” says the Cali-based performer who still refers to Florida, where his family resides, as home.

As we converse, I find that it is Steve-O’s “unreasonable hunger for attention” and a deep desire to demonstrate how “rad” he is that ultimately fuel him. Every outrageous experience and stunt he participates in serves as proof that he truly lived—thus the endless hours of video footage and his candid memoir “**Professional Idiot**” (out in June).

If you thought you had seen and heard it all, this is a whole new brand completely uncensored. “If it happened and it was crazy, then I put it in the book. I left nothing out. My plan to write the book came first and I lived my life over-the-top ridiculous so that I’d have a *better* book,” Steve-O rationalizes. “There are not a lot of celebrities writing memoirs that actually talk about the intercourse they had with Russian prostitutes...” He goes into explicit detail, but I’ll leave that for the book to disclose.

Exposing such candid history may upset those associated with Steve-O, which he is well aware of. “I’m shocked that [Johnny] Knoxville didn’t take serious issue with a lot of stuff that I had to say in it,” Steve-O says of his friend and cast mate who has read the entire book. “He did in one case. We sort of had different perspectives about the set of *Jackass 3D*. There was talk about how it was a dry set out of respect for my sobriety. I kind of felt like it was being told like I was the wet blanket that ruined everybody’s party, like they really wanted to be drinking, but because I got sober, they couldn’t.”

Steve-O points out that the rule of no alcohol on the set went into effect in 2002 due to a lawsuit brought against an intoxicated *Jackass* cast mate’s incident during the promotion of *Jackass: The Movie*. “The lady wound up suing and being awarded \$7 million dollars, more than the entire budget of the first movie...” Steve-O recalls. “Knoxville was like, ‘hey man, we had coolers of beer on the set of the second movie. We love you, man and we had made a rule, there’s going to be no alcohol on the set because we came so close to losing you...’ I was suggesting that they didn’t respect me in a way that it was important that they show that they do,” Steve-O explains. “There’s no

one of us that’s right... It’s just a matter of perspective. **Jeff Tremaine** (*Jackass* creator) has *not* read the book and for all I know he’s going to have some real problems with it,” he laughs. “But it is what it is, ya know?”

A masterful storyteller, the unbelievable tales of Steve-O’s past articulately roll off his tongue. “Ever since I was a little kid, I really wanted to model my morals, beliefs and lifestyle after the members of **Mötley Crüe**,” he says with a laugh. At the age of 13, the band came to his town a day early for their concert the following day. Steve-O, a die-hard fan, decided he would track them down. Clever as he is, Steve-O figured that the band wouldn’t use their real name for their hotel reservation, and concluded it’d be under their manager Doc McGhee’s name.

After hours upon hours of calling every hotel in the Toronto Yellow Pages, irking his mother by tying up the home phone line, and impressing his father (who only ever wanted him to show initiative and be passionate), Steve-O finally gets through. “This guy answers and I say, ‘is this Doc McGhee?’ He’s like, ‘no, this is Doc’s brother, Scott.’ I’m like, ‘is this Mötley Crüe?!’ I’m freakin’ out. He’s like, ‘how’d you get this number?’ I was like, ‘I just called every single hotel in the Yellow Pages. Is the Crüe there?!’” Steve-O exclaims with reenacted elation.

The Crüe wasn’t there. Amazed with the kid’s tenacity, Scott put Steve-O’s name on a list for backstage passes and fifth row concert tickets, a major upgrade from the Nabisco sky box (his dad was President of Nabisco Canada). I was like, ‘Dad! It’s totally lame to watch in a corporate sky box, behind a plate-glass window.’ My dad was like, ‘if you want better seats, then why don’t *you* get some tickets for the show?’ My dad to this day is like, ‘yeah, my son rose to the challenge.’ We sat in my fifth row tickets. Afterwards, we went backstage...” he leans over and shows me a photo on his cell phone screen of a beaming 13-year-old Steve-O alongside Nikki Sixx. “And there’s me and Tommy Lee,” he says with a big smile, as the next photo slides into view. I look on amazed. This is just a glimpse into the extreme lengths Steve-O goes to obtain what he wants.

As he continues on with his stories, I find that the range of his radness only grows as the years go on. “I started making skateboard videos when I was 15, but nobody really cared. I wasn’t that great. But, when I started doing all these crazy stunts and filming them, after this girl Tracie broke my heart [during his attendance to the University of Miami], there was a real reaction. So, if you could pin point a time when the stunts really started, I’d say it was when I got dumped by Tracie Smith. I thought my radness would win her back... It was a way to really express my pain.” Did she see these videos? “Sure! She would get an annual video... We’re still friends today. Truthfully, had it not been so important to me to prove myself to this girl, I don’t know if I ever really would of proved myself,” he confesses.

Steve-O dropped out of college in the beginning of his second year, but hung around campus for years after, living as a “vagrant.”

“When I dropped out, my plan was to be a maniac with a video camera and to show the world how rad I am. Some people really enjoyed picking on me. People who didn’t like me their sentiment was, what a loser. And the people who did care about me their sentiment was, what a shame,” he laughs. “I didn’t expect that I was going to have any kind of success in this pursuit of fame with my video camera. In a sense, I was sort of scrambling to fill more footage because I thought I was going to die a pitiful failure at a young age and I wanted proof that I had existed. I was going around jumping off buildings [into 4 feet of water]... all this crazy stuff.” It seems as if Steve-O didn’t care about his safety, but this is not so. “I always picked my battles pretty carefully. I wanted it to *appear* as though I was far more reckless than I was.”

After three years of being in and out of jail and the hospital and couch surfing, a desperate Steve-O, in dire need of a change, moved to New Mexico in late 1993 to live with his sister. His sister, aware of his passion to become a famous stuntman, stumbled upon a solution. “I came home and found a little note on the table and it read: ‘**Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Clown College**, apparently free if you get in.’ So, I called up this number and told them I was rad...” he states enthusiastically. Thinking that a connection to Ringling Bros. would bring “legitimacy to all of my idiotic antics” and fulfill his dream of becoming a stuntman, Steve-O went to Denver to audition.

Around the same time (1997), the skateboarding magazine, ***Big Brother***, came to Albuquerque and Steve-O got geared up to awe. “There was a tour of pro skateboarders and I tracked ‘em down and started informing them that I was so rad,” he reminisces. With a promise given to exhibit an act so shockingly incredible that they would be forced to publish it in the magazine – *BB* conceded to watch. “I set all my hair on my head on fire with hairspray, had my mouth filled with alcohol and had someone use my head as a fire breathing torch to spit a mouth full of alcohol off my head. But they spit all over my face, so my face

and my head were engulfed in flames. And, I stuck my hand in the fireball. So, now I’m going to do a simultaneous fire breathing back flip, but my whole face is on fire. Instead of stop, drop and roll, my thinking is I better hurry up and do this. So, I do it and come up short.”

His extreme fiery stunt, which put him in the hospital with second degree burns for weeks, paid off with a “whole sidebar article” in *Big Brother* titled, *The Burning Boy Festival*—with a note at the bottom that read: Steve-O has recently been accepted to Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Clown College. *BB* got a kick out of the fact that Steve-O was a real clown and made him a recurring character in the magazine. Graduating clown college, led to a 6 month stint aboard the Royal Caribbean Cruise ship where he worked as a clown and performer. Not being asked to return for a second contract worked out as blessing in disguise. “I would’ve been floating out at sea instead of filming the *Jackass* pilot. I owe my spot on *Jackass* to the rest of the clowns in my clown troupe who conspired to have me fired behind my back.” Looks like Steve-O had the last laugh on that one. “I swear my life has just been this series of perfectly timed coincidences,” he muses.

STEVE-O RAD TO THE BONE

Words by Vanessa Pascale

Photographer: Eric Williams

Wardrobe Stylist: Melinda Tarbell

Grooming: Krystal X Kaos

Fashion ID: Sweater & Pants Marc Jacobs, Novacas Vegan Shoes

Steve-O explains that *BB* magazine essentially transformed into the TV series *Jackass*. In conjunction with the magazine, *BB* shot skateboarding and stunt video footage from time to time. *BB* editor-in-chief Jeff Tremaine teamed up with director **Spike Jonze**, edited down the film footage to only include stunts and pranks, then marketed it as a show — what was born is *Jackass*. “Another beautiful coincidence, I wasn’t that great at skateboarding, and I’d put all my emphasis on the one element of the videos that would go on to be successful,” Steve-O reflects.

Jackass yielded a spin-off TV show: *Wildboyz*, movies, and Steve-O’s fame. But a struggle with drugs and alcohol led Steve-O to a very dark place during this time. “You know you have a really serious problem when your hallucinations are worried about you,” he reveals about interventions he hallucinated. “I crossed the line into psychosis where I was regularly watching people walk around my apartment who were never f***ing there... I call them hallucinations, some people call ‘em spirits or angels. Getting off drugs, I really made myself accessible. I tore down barriers between me and a spirit world, demons and angels...” he remembers. “I believe in real angels and demons from my firsthand experience. It’s kind of weird to say, but I believe angels are at work, were at work, behind all these coincidences with my life,” he says seriously.

Clean and sober since March 2008, Steve-O is out to prove that sobriety hasn’t robbed him of his radness. Is there a difference in performing stunts sober? “Not too much. I’m probably a little more

careful. As long as it’s not something that’s going to paralyze me or kill me, I’m pretty down for it. I’ve come too far to not really care about myself. I lived my life for a lot of years like somebody who just didn’t care if they lived or died.” His easy ability to laugh about the hard times and see the positivity that came from it is one indicator that Steve-O is in a much better place now.

“My whole life I wanted to be rad. I wanted to show people how rad I am. I would’ve been a great street performer—I would’ve been at the top of my field.”

Steve-O is continuing to make people laugh with his standup comedy tour: **“Steve-O’s Entirely Too Much Information Tour.”** Standup comedy has been a hobby for 4 ½ years now, but turned into something serious thanks to the help of Dane Cook. “He was the one who got on my ass to really buckle down. He helped me out a lot.” Steve-O looks down and realizes the time. He needs to be somewhere in five minutes.

Is there another *Jackass* movie in the future? “I dunno,” Steve-O cautiously says. “The most important thing for me in my life right now is to get to a place where I’m going to be alright without anymore movies, TV shows, tours. My life can’t end when my career ends... When the second *Jackass* movie came out I was sitting there like, ‘man, we’re never going to be able to out do this movie.... The rest of my life is going to be this depressing downhill slide.’ My happiness was so contingent on the spotlight so, I really worked hard over the last three years at finding some separation between who I am and what I do. Before, if my career ended with Steve-O, then I died. Now, it’s gotta be ok for Steve-O to die and for Steve Glover to carry-on. **ML**

