

Steve Garrin

Out Of The Box And Into Production

by Robertson Watson

Born in Philadelphia in the mid 1950s, Steve Garrin's first three years developed under the guidance of his Grandmother while his mother completed nursing school and his father saluted to military service during the Korean Conflict. After his father's return, the family relocated to Pennsauken, New Jersey, across the street from The Campbell Soup warehouse where Steve spent time watching workers load soup onto trucks.

Home life was not always so *mmm mmm good*. The eldest of four children, his parents divorced at age 11, ingraining responsibility at an early age. Steve's greatest childhood influence, his newly single mother, worked the late shift as a nurse. Grandmother, the other character-building force, was also the designated baby-sitter. And Steve? Well, he rose for the early shift delivering bread from the back of a truck between 2-5 a.m. "I worked at night and would come home, take a shower, get ready and go to school. I needed to contribute to the family income."

The soft spot of his childhood was love of laughter, his *funny guy* status, and an uncanny ability to mimic comedic as well as cartoon characters. "I was always good at voices. Mr. Ed... Jerry Lewis..." But his idea of somehow molding this passion into a career received a resounding "don't do it" from the practical and well-meaning universe of Mother and Grandmother. "They wanted me to be a Doctor, (my mother was a nurse)... that would guarantee making a living."

Age 18 led to Washington D.C. and American University. Working his way through college as a cook, he honored his family's wishes, achieving a triple major in Physics, Biology and Chemistry in preparation for

becoming that *Doctor...* all the while keeping a finger on his pulsing heartbeat, the entertainment industry.

He minored in Theatre, co-hosted a popular late night radio show called *The Space Man and Steve Show*, and wrote for the *Eagle*, the campus newspaper. Here he gained an understanding of industry infrastructure and awareness of how all components converged into a production. "This experience made me value all jobs and really care about all people in the industry. I became a people person."

Being a people person, he and his roommates were known for having those typical jam-packed collegiate parties. At one such *soiree*, he met, fell in love with, and later married an English major named Debbie Deutsch. "This was the beginning of the best phase of my life."

The late 1970s hosted professional success in the world of hospitality at The Apple of Eve Restaurant in The Loews Hotel. With an eye on solution and taste for excitement he captivated new customers and broke sales records by creating and executing innovative takes on concepts such as radio contest giveaways and disco nights.

Within two years, promotion advanced Steve to New York City where he continued working in management at Loews and later the Warwick Hotel. From hotels he traveled to pots, pans and pizza ovens as the regional sales representative for WearEver.

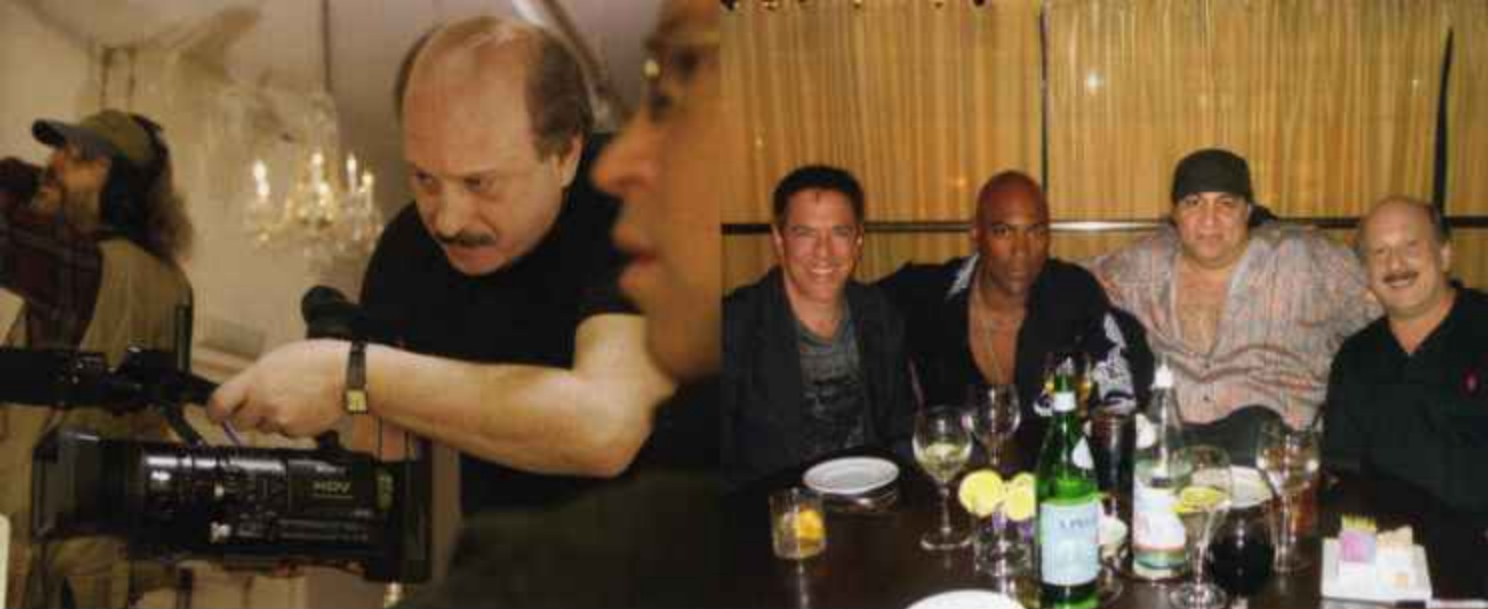
In 1986 he broke records again, selling over \$1,000,000 worth of those ovens to Dennis Riese of The Riese Organization.

"Meeting Dennis Riese was one of those life-defining moments. We have since partnered on business projects in addition to becoming close friends." 1986 was also the year he made the transition to his lifelong dream of making a living in the entertainment industry. "I knew I wanted to find a way to do what I loved. I say to everyone, if there is something you want to do in this world, and it's a passion that you believe in and you love, do it. Because, how can you be happy doing a job that you don't love?"

After a series of 3 a.m. slots of standup at Catch a Rising Star, and the Improv, he discovered the recording studio and voiceovers. A famous unnamed casting director listened to his reel and said, "Do you have a day job? Keep it." Believing in his own ability, this only fueled his desire to succeed.

Within months he accelerated to professional gigs as the voice of—who else? That old childhood standby, Mr. Ed... for Nickelodeon promos. National voiceovers for Brothers word processors, fax machines and P-Touch would follow. Performing snowballed into producing, directing, recording, and editing voiceovers, radio programs and books on tape. Establishing his own company, VideoActive Productions became a full-service digital audio-video pro-

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duction and post production house where Steve provided all of his services under one roof. From this out-of-the-box self-created house he directed and produced Broadway legend Carol Channing reading her book on tape entitled *Just Lucky, I Guess*, video edited for George Benson, Diana Krall, Juliann Schnabel, and oh yeah... won an Emmy in 1996.

There was also the life changing crisis-cross with that icon named Joe Franklin, whom he met while appearing on *The Joe Franklin Television Show*. Steve and Joe partnered to form Memory Lane Inc., collaborated to develop Joe Franklin Comedy Clubs with Dennis Riese, and later produced Joe Franklin Radio Show interviews for WOR, and Bloomberg Radio. "I love Joe. He's like a father to me."

But the depth of his own sense of fatherhood was shaken to the marrow in 1992. Happily married to Debbie with two children, Todd and Liza, the July 4th weekend started out as a celebration that ended in a downward spiral of anything but fireworks.

Playing peekaboo with two-year-old Liza, he put her in a stroller for a family outing. She commented that she couldn't see when he covered her left eye. Within five minutes he realized she was blind in her right eye. Within 24 hours she was diagnosed with Retinoblastoma, a rare potentially life threatening illness. A week later her eye was enucleated, and after 18 months of grueling chemo-

therapy and radiation treatment she was cured. "It really united our family. We were closer than ever. It was life changing. It made us realize how fragile and vulnerable life is.

"I am so proud of my family. Todd and Liza are great, healthy, well-adjusted kids. They are each their "own person." Todd works at ABC's *One Life to Live*, and Liza, who graduates from high school this year, is focused on fashion merchandising. And Debbie is the program coordinator in the Concerts and Lectures department at The Metropolitan Museum and the person he calls his biggest supporter.

So what's up next for Mr. Steve Garrin? Co-producing the Drama Desk Awards, co-producing the upcoming Joe Franklin Mockumentary, co-producing Rock and Roll Concerts at Hawaiian Tropic Zone Restaurant, Bar and Lounge with "Little Steven" Van Zandt, collaborating with photographer David Spindel for a John Lennon photo book project, and teaching—not just for the money—but because of a desire to give back by helping to develop new talent. In an early session of his highly acclaimed VoiceWorks® Voiceover Boot Camp, he shares a message with his students, which reads: Make your priorities your biggest rocks. Put those in your rock jar first and you can fill the rest of the jar with the pebbles and sands of life.

And what are his biggest rocks? "My work, because it is my passion, my friends and



(Clockwise from left) Steve in Action (photograph by Gen. Nishin); Dennis Riese, John Benavott, Steve Van Zandt, and Steve Garrin; Steve and Debbie at Drama Desk Awards (photograph by Batman)

colleagues, because I really care about people. And his biggest rock? "My family. They are my greatest inspiration." **M**

For more information on Steve Garrin or VideoActive Productions, go to www.videoactiveprod.com. To see Steve Garrin (in action) go to Hawaiian Tropic any Wednesday night.

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