

I sang a four-line song about a golliwog. Please don't judge me – it was a different time. But I do remember the reaction. There was a lot of laughter as I repeated my verse three times. I loved it and was hooked.

I have included many more stories of my stage appearances throughout the book – some highs, some lows – and it could also be titled 'How I Got Started In Show Business'. It was all by luck, really. A bit like hitch-hiking. You just say 'Yes' and see where you end up. And I suppose I still think like that today.

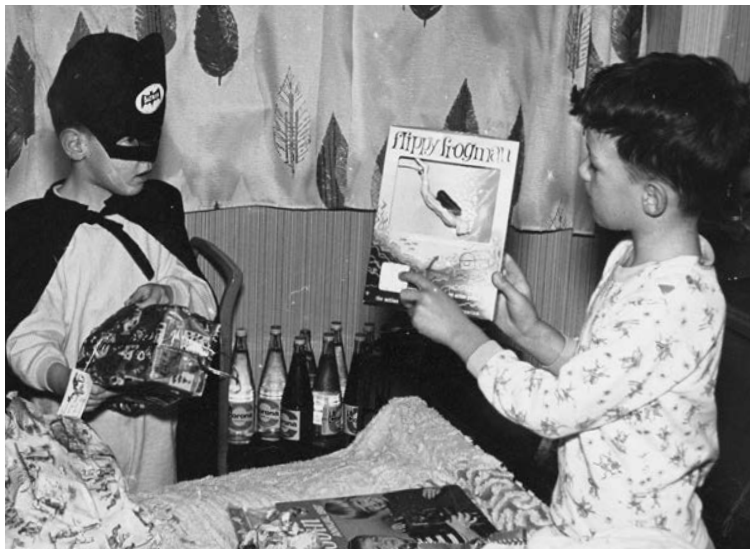


Having spent the first three years of my life in Portsmouth, where I'd been born, we moved to Farnborough. I have few memories of those first three years, other than being Noddy, falling in the fish pond at my third birthday party, and the cheers from the crowd at Moneyfields football ground across the road from our house. I loved a hat in those days. Oh, and whelks.

On Friday nights my dad had a poker night with his mates while their wives would meet up at someone else's house. I would be allowed to sit at the table in my high chair. To keep me quiet when I was teething, my dad would give me a large whelk straight from the fridge and I would chew and suck it for hours while they drank, smoked and played cards.



My brother Neil arrived in 1961. Although he was two years younger, from the age of six he was the same height as me. This, and the fact that my mum always dressed us the same, meant that we were always mistaken for twins. To be honest, he was cleverer than me and better at football too, but I got the looks. He has always been there for me even though our paths took us in opposite directions. He became a vet after seven years of study at Bristol, and then gave it all up later to become a vicar.



The last addition to our little family was Rosalind, who was born in August 1967. She is the kindest, most optimistic person I have ever met, and a constant inspiration.

We moved to Farnborough in the summer of 1962, and that autumn I started at Cove Manor Infant School, where I had my first brush with death. One break time, we were all out in the playground under gathering black clouds when there were a few drops of rain. The dinner ladies blew the whistle and we were told to wait for our classes to be called. As we stood waiting, a flash of lightning speared down from the firmament and hit the tarmac about 10 feet from me. Everyone within 50 feet was knocked over and there was a black scar left on the playground (there must have been a metal sewage pipe under the ground). It took the rest of the afternoon for us all to stop crying.

At the age of six I moved 200 yards across the playing field to Cove Manor Junior School. I loved my time there. I lived for the playtime football matches – to the consternation of my mother, as I went through pairs of shoes each term. It was one of these games that gave me my outlook on physical violence. In fact, it was the last time I ever punched anyone.

I was 10 years old at the time and was going through on goal when I was hacked down by a clumsy challenge by Alred Reed. I jumped to my feet, screaming for a penalty. Graham Harvey was having none of it. We argued, a circle forming around us. Graham had picked up the ball, as it was his, and was saying, ‘Game over, game over!’ I can remember it so clearly. The red mist descended and I gave him a right jab square in the face. I felt his nose collapse under

in a suit heading to Zaragoza and he dropped me off at Jaca.

The junction was on the edge of a desert – nothing but sand with a road down the middle – and it was already 35°C at 8am. There was a heat haze shimmering over the tarmac. I have never been so thirsty in my life. I was there for two hours, with no shade. Finally, out of the shimmering heat came a jeep. I thought at first that the driver in a brown uniform might be a policeman, and I'd heard horror stories about how some Spanish local police forces treated hitch-hikers badly. I needn't have worried: it was a guy from the Spanish forestry commission. He was on his way to Pamplona and drove like a maniac to get us there before midday to see the rocket that announces the start of the fiesta.

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Pamplona

The first thing you notice when you drive into Pamplona during the festival of San Fermín is that everyone is dressed the same. From babies aged one up to the 90-year-olds, everyone is wearing the same outfit: a white shirt, white trousers or skirt, a red sash around the waist and a red neckerchief – the national dress of the Basques. It is a magnificent sight. The town had a population of just over 140,000 in those days, but during the festival there were a million visitors over the week. The whole city spent the year looking forward to the start of this week in July. They have a song, which goes:

First of January,

Second of February,

Third of March,

Fourth of April,

Fifth of May,

Sixth of June,

Seventh of July, San Fermín.

To Pamplona we will go, with tights, with tights.

To Pamplona we will go, with a tight and a shock.

Catchy, huh?

However, the fiesta actually begins at midday on 6 July with an event called the *chupinazo*. A huge crowd gathers in front of the town hall where, at noon, a dignitary lets off a rocket from the first-floor balcony. As it explodes high above the town, the crowd goes crazy and the youths of the city throw champagne, flour, ketchup and eggs over each other. The festival has begun. I had arrived in town at 11.30 and, not knowing the form, I had made my way to the large town square. It, too, was full. The people here were older than those in front of the town hall, but they still cheered and threw their drinks in the air as the rocket burst. I bumped into two Americans, John and Linda, who were Interrailing. It was their first time, too. We decided to get rid of our bags and John, who spoke some Spanish, found out that there was a left-luggage office at the bus station.

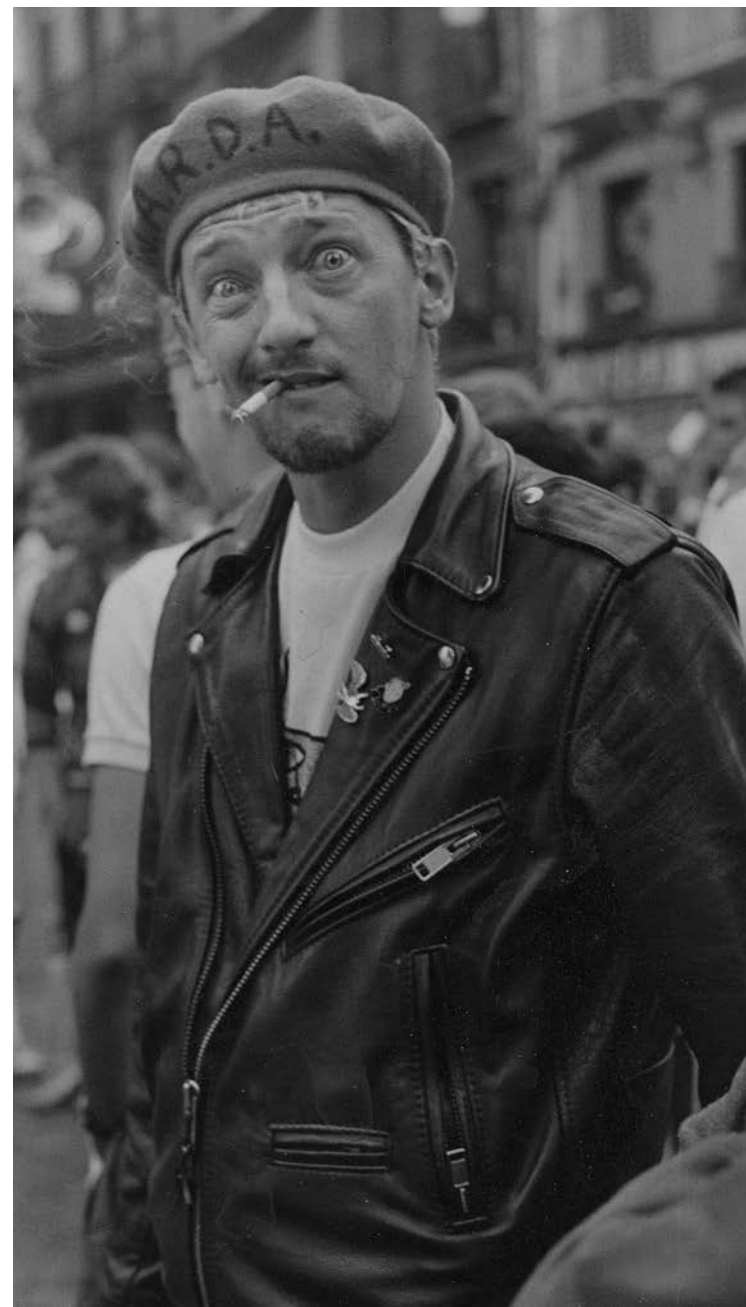
When we arrived we found a sign written on a piece of cardboard that said 'Full'. There were crowds everywhere. Linda and I sat on our bags while John stopped people in the street and asked them what we could do with our luggage. A middle-aged guy stopped with his family; he asked John how many bags we had and then got us to follow him. He took us to an office where he worked on Avenida de Yanguas y Miranda and said we could leave our bags there. We could meet him at 9.30 the next morning to get them back. We thanked him profusely and headed back into town.

I was determined to check out the route of the bull run and obtained a map from the information point at the bus station. I asked the young Basque girl to mark the run on it, and off we went. We did the run in reverse, starting at the bullring. Outside the ring, in front of the box office, were stalls selling all the gear you needed to fit in. I bought a white T-shirt, a red scarf and a sash and immediately put them on. Next to the end stall was the fence for the run downhill to the ring. The course there was 15 feet across and sloped down to two huge red iron doors. The fence was made of enormous blocks of wood between posts that went into the cobbles. The run didn't look that wide and I thought I might be able to jump out if there was trouble, or I could dive and roll underneath the fence. Oh, how naive I was then.

six bulls with their names and weights underneath. That morning the bulls were from the Miura ranch; they come from a different ranch each day – always the best in Spain – and it's considered a great honour to supply the bulls for the fiesta. Each ranch's bulls have their own characteristics; in all the runs I've done, the bad ones have always been against Miura's bulls, which have wide horns and big chests and run very fast.

Feeling very nervous, I made my way back to the square. Nothing much had changed. A couple of lads from Barcelona, judging from their football shirts, were drinking a dark red wine straight from the bottle. I became fascinated by the cobblestones, which had been freshly washed. Two hours before, they had been covered in broken glass and plastic glasses, cigarette ends and food wrappers, but now the dark brown-blue cobbles glistened in the morning sun. Then someone pointed up at the sky and we all looked up to see a hot-air balloon drifting over the town. I just wanted the run to start. I looked up at the clock and it said 7.45. It felt like a year had passed since I bought my newspaper.

I started chatting to two Americans standing next to me who had run the day before. We talked about their experiences and then they told me about the statue. Before each *encierro*, as the run is called, the runners head down the hill, nearer to the holding pen. At 7.50am a foot-high statue of San Fermín is placed in a small niche in the right-hand wall of the



large drawing pad and a black marker pen and would make a big deal of drawing the woman, holding the pen horizontal at arm's length as if calculating the perspective. When John finished, I would turn the pad round to reveal a picture of a stick person in a triangular skirt.

For 'Sorrow', I would steal a handbag or a backpack from someone and run off to the north side of the market. I would run down the side and then cut through the market and back along the south side so I could appear on the other side of the piazza just as the song finished, when I would give the bag back.

It may seem strange, but we were the highest-earning act in Covent Garden in December 1983. This was good news – I had been living hand to mouth up until then. When I first moved to London I had been travelling up from Farnborough, but then Pete Carey offered me a sofa to sleep on. He was living with Jonathan Bell, Mike Pantling and Rick Garrett, all from the grammar school. They had a council flat in quite a rough estate in Hackney (someone was hit with an axe on our landing, and survived). In the flat by the front door they had a phone room that was five feet by seven and had nothing in it but a sofa and a phone. The sofa folded down into a bed, but the bed touched both walls and you couldn't open the door. This was where I lived for a year, without paying them any rent. I tried to

