



# ERIC IDLE

ALWAYS LOOK  
ON THE BRIGHT  
SIDE OF LIFE

A SORTABIOGRAPHY







**ALWAYS LOOK  
ON THE BRIGHT  
SIDE OF LIFE**



**ERIC IDLE**



Crown Archetype  
New York

Copyright © 2018 by Rutland California Weekend, Inc.

All rights reserved.

Published in the United States by Crown Archetype, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC, New York. Simultaneously published in Great Britain by Weidenfeld & Nicolson, an imprint of the Orion Publishing Group Ltd, a Hachette UK company, London.

[crownpublishing.com](http://crownpublishing.com)

Crown Archetype and colophon is a registered trademark of Penguin Random House LLC.

Photo credits appear on [this page](#).

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available upon request.

ISBN 9781984822581

Ebook ISBN 9781984822604

Cover design: Michael Morris Cover photographs: (portrait) AF archive/Alamy Stock Photo; (cloud) Wallace Garrison/Photographer's Choice/Getty Images; (grail) Lord\_Kuernyus/Stock/Getty Images  
v5.3.2



prh

Life has a very simple plot,

First you're here

And then you're not.

# CONTENTS

*An Apology*

- 1: CRUCIFIXION?
- 2: A SCAR IS BORN
- 3: LUCKY BASTARD
- 4: SHOWBIZ!
- 5: GATESHEAD REVISITED
- 6: THE ARTFUL NUDGER
- 7: AND NOW FOR SOMETHING SLIGHTLY COMPLETELY  
DIFFERENT
- 8: WHITHER CANADA?
- 9: HERE COMES THE SON
- 10: THE DIVORCE FAIRY
- 11: LOVE LIFE
- 12: THE MIRACLE OF BRIAN
- 13: THE BRITISH EMPIRE STRIKES BACK
- 14: A VERY NAUGHTY BOY
- 15: THE BOLLYWOOD HOLE
- 16: THE MEANING OF WIFE
- 17: CINEMA: HALF SIN, HALF ENEMA



18: BRIGHT SIDE RETURNS

PHOTO INSERT

19: THE QUEST FOR A MUSICAL

20: THIN WHITE DUKES

21: RUN AWAY!

22: GOOD AT DINNER

23: PYTHON REUNION?

24: GEORGE

25: BRIGHT SIDE ON BROADWAY

26: THE TONY FAIRY

27: DIVA LAS VEGAS

28: BRIGHT SIDE GETS BRIGHTER

29: THE LAST LAUGH

30: THE SPEED OF LIFE

31: TOGETHER AGAIN AT LAST...FOR THE VERY FIRST TIME

32: BREXIT THROUGH THE GIFT SHOP

*And Finally...*

*Photo Credits*

*Index*

*For Tania, Carey, and Lily*



## AN APOLOGY

Graham Chapman once said: “Life is rather like a yacht in the Caribbean. It’s alright if you’ve got one.” I have been traveling at the speed of life for seventy-five years now and I still don’t have one, but then again, I wrote “Life’s a piece of shit, when you look at it” while reminding everyone to look on the Bright Side, a line that I discovered recently is at least as old as Coleridge. This book is partly the story of that song and partly the story of a boy who became me—if you like the memoirs of a failed pessimist. I still remain foolishly optimistic, even with the threat of global warming, which worries me slightly less than personal cooling, and so I have written my recollections, before I forget everything and develop Hamnesia, which is what you get from being an old actor.

Of course I have faults, but you won’t read about them here. I’ve glossed over all my shortcomings. That is after all the point of Autobiography. It is the case for the Defense. But I will own up to not being perfect. I have British teeth. They are like British politics: they go in all directions at once.

Writing about yourself is an odd mix of therapy and lap dancing; exciting and yet a little shameful. So here is my own pathetic addition to the celebrity memoir. On the advice of my lawyer I am leaving out the shameful bits, and on the advice of my wife the filthy bits, but as usual in my career, I will leave you wanting less.

If this isn’t exactly what went down, it’s certainly how it should have happened.



Look at the  
bright side  
always.

—SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE

# 1

## CRUCIFIXION?



**I**t's October 1978 and I'm being crucified. I'm thirty feet up on a cross in Tunisia singing "Always Look on the Bright Side of Life." Beneath me in a troglodyte courtyard, dug out another forty feet below ground level, an Arab woman sweeps her front yard. She never looks up. We've been here for three days. It's the final scene in *Monty Python's Life of Brian* and the song I wrote echoes across the desert to the distant hills. John Cleese has

the flu. The rest of the Pythons seem fairly cheery. There are twenty-three of us on crosses and only three ladders, so between takes if you need a pee there is a desperate wait. I suppose if that's the only moan you have about being crucified, you are on the whole lucky...

There's something a little chilling about turning up for work and finding a cross with your name on it. Oh sure, they weren't using nails, and we had bicycle seats to perch on, but it makes you think, hanging up there for three days in your underpants, gazing out at the desert. Perhaps everyone should be crucified for a few days, because it does give you a good perspective on life. Especially if you are singing a song that references your own passing:

*Just remember that the last laugh is on you...*

And don't think the irony escaped me. I have always known this last little giggle at my expense lies somewhere in the future. I only hope there's a good turnout.

The song was supposed to be ironic, but it ended up being iconic. I mean, you can't have much less of a future to be bright about than when being crucified. But people began to sing it in real wars and in real danger. It struck a chord somehow and now people sing it everywhere. Including football matches, and funerals. Especially funerals. As of this writing, it's the number one song requested at British funerals.

So here I am, up on a cross in Tunisia singing it for the first time to Graham Chapman. How the hell did I get here?



## SHOWBIZ!

**S**ummer term in Cambridge. Always the best of times. The colleges were out and there were lots of girls about in their summer frocks. The exquisite couple Gita and Sonny Mehta (he, later a distinguished publisher at Picador in London and Knopf in New York, and she, a respected author) held court in their superior digs, packed with books, while I lived in a tiny room above a smelly restaurant as we rehearsed for three weeks in the Footlights Club.



Humphrey Barclay and me performing John Cleese's "Secret Service" on  
*Festival Special*.

Edinburgh was a blast. We all dossed in a walk-up sixth-floor cold-water flat, but finally this was showbiz. At the tender age of twenty I made my first television appearance on Scottish TV's *Festival Special*, with Humphrey Barclay, the director of *Cambridge Circus*. Doing a John Cleese sketch, naturally...

*Footlights* '63 was a sold-out smash, mainly because we had all the best sketches from the *Footlights*' West End hit. Harold Hobson of *The Sunday Times* said, "They attract admiration as effortlessly as the sun attracts the flowers," which was nice of him because the next night we nearly killed him as all the sets collapsed when the revolving stage utterly failed to revolve in the world premiere of Henry Miller's only play, *Just Wild About Harry*, directed by Stephen Frears. This legendary disaster had brought all the London critics up to Edinburgh.

The Cambridge Amateur Dramatic Club had discovered that Henry Miller once wrote a play that had never been produced. Nothing would prevent them from giving a world premiere to this piece at the Edinburgh Festival. Being Cambridge, they had decided to turn an old Baptist church into a modern theater complete with a revolving stage. For six weeks, heavily bearded men sawed and hammered away, but by opening night it was clear that neither the theater nor the stage was ready, and there was nothing to do but delay. Being Cambridge, they had thought about that too. Holding a press conference, they said that the "very minor changes" demanded by the local Watch Committee (who censored plays and public performances in Scotland) were so egregious that they must first contact Henry Miller to see if he would even permit them.

There was some delay in contacting Henry Miller in California. When he was finally reached, not only did he seem surprised anyone was putting

on his play, but he had no objection to whatever they wanted to do with it. So that was alright. For Cambridge, a perfect storm in a teacup. They could go ahead. Headlines were written, tickets were sold, and the play would open on the morrow. Except it didn't. The first scene passed safely enough as I, who had been co-opted into the play amongst the thespians, exchanged a few words with a specially engaged professional little person, while we pretended to paint an apartment in San Francisco. Okay, she was a female acting a male, but it's not that easy to find short people on short notice for amateur productions of unwanted Henry Miller plays. And Cambridge has always been notoriously gender-lax. And a jolly good thing too. Still, so far so good, the audience applauded dutifully. But the theatrical dream ended at the same time as the scene. The revolving stage refused to revolve. Twenty minutes passed. Of pushing, shoving, heaving, and cursing. No matter how many pushers and shovers and heavers and cursers, the stage stayed firmly locked in place. The actors in the next scene remained firmly offstage. Finally, with one last desperate heave, the revolving stage lurched; the heavy flats began to shake and then slowly collapsed into each other like a pile of dominoes. The theater critics fled up the aisle for their lives, leaving poor Harold Hobson alone up front in his wheelchair. Henry Miller's only play was dead. That show lasted only one night, but our revue was a different story. We were a big hit.

We naturally checked out our rivals, the Oxford Revue. Where we appeared bright and frothy onstage, they were cool and sardonic. They also had girls. Bastards. They did something called Rejects Night, where they took sketches that hadn't quite made it, and tried them out on an audience after their main show. This meant we could go along after our own show, and it was here that I first met the lovely, funny Terry Jones. Dark-haired, deadpan, handsome, with the looks of the movie star Anthony Newley, he too brought a tremendous seriousness to everything he did, including singing a song which sounds like an early precursor of

“The Lumberjack Song.”

*I was Miss World from 1907 to '24...*

*I was Miss World, lovely belle amour...*

Totally ignoring the transgender implications, it lamented the fact that, sadly, age meant:

*No one wants to see me, anymore.*

Next summer Terry would go on to star in the West End in the Oxford Revue *Hang Down Your Head and Die*, a bitter polemic against capital punishment. Oxford, as always, was far more serious about everything.

A year later in Edinburgh, in 1964, I met the unforgettable Michael Palin, who had joined Terry Jones in the Oxford cast. I first saw him onstage and he bowled me over. He did an extended character monologue about an old Northern performer who came on to begin his terrible act with an appalling song, only to notice that on the stage beside him was a large gift-wrapped present. He tried to ignore it but couldn't, and stopped his song to take a look at it.

He read the label out loud.

“To Mikey, with love from the audience.”

He was overcome.

“Oh, every people. I'm touched. I'm speechless. This is so special for me. I had thought perhaps my act was over, and that people didn't care anymore; that somehow, I was too old and nobody remembered me. But now this. From you. The audience. It means so much to me. Well, there's only one thing I can do to thank you, and that's to sing my song, ‘When Love Breaks Your Heart in a Million Tiny Pieces.’ ”

With tears in his eyes, barely able to restrain himself, he began to sing.

*When love, breaks your heart, in a million tiny pieces—*

*Boom!* The present exploded.

The look on his face as he quietly limped offstage was brilliant; and that's Michael Palin, really. He writes real character sketches and acts them with genuine emotion. I became very aware of this writing talent of Michael's when I was adapting *Spamalot* for the stage from *The Holy Grail*. I loved putting in Mike's writing, because it was always character-driven.

"What, ridden on a *horse*? You're using coconuts..."

"One day, lad, all this will be yours."

"What, the curtains?"

"*Not* the curtains, lad."

Albeit unknowingly, by September 1964 all the future Pythons (save for the wild-card American animator) had met and admired each other.

## AND NOW FOR SOMETHING SLIGHTLY COMPLETELY DIFFERENT

So much has been written about *Monty Python*. There have been memoirs, diaries, books about the Pythons, books by the Pythons about the other Pythons, articles about the books about the Pythons, countless interviews, autobiographies, documentaries...*so many* documentaries. I honestly think there are more hours of documentary about *Python* than there are hours of *Python*. So, to the mass of mangled memories do I now add my own muddled, prejudiced, and deeply cynical account of what I think might have happened? Of course. But you, dear reader, who have already parted with far too much money on this book, can feel free to skip ahead to the dirty bits.\*

George Harrison once said to me, “If we’d known we were going to be the Beatles we would have tried harder.” I think the same could be said of *Monty Python*. How on earth could we possibly know we would become *them*? At the time, we were only doing another show, and a fill-in show at that, while we waited for our big break on ITV. Who decides these things? The gods of television, or a little old lady in a cottage near Luton? Well, obviously the latter, but she’s very hard to find.

Why was *Monty Python* so successful? Was it *really* so very different? Of course it wasn’t. People seem to think that it somehow sprang full-blown from the head of some mad media Medusa, but that’s not true at all. In the mid-Sixties, there were a host of similar shows all evolving,

banging into each other and disintegrating: *The Frost Report*; *I'm Sorry, I'll Read That Again*; *Twice a Fortnight*; *Broaden Your Mind*; *How to Irritate People*; *The Complete and Utter History of Britain*... All of the eventual Pythons were involved with all of the eventual Goodies in one show or another. *Monty Python* itself was the result of a collision between *Do Not Adjust Your Set* and *At Last the 1948 Show*, when the creators of the former (me, Mike Palin, Terry Jones, and Terry Gilliam) rammed into the remnants of the latter (John Cleese and Graham Chapman).

So, of all the TV shows on air at the end of the Sixties, what made Python so successful? Well, we were young. We were ready. We had done Malcolm Gladwell's recommended ten thousand hours of preparation. (See *Outliers*.) We were digital, and we were in color—only by a few months, but that was vitally important. *Python* began right at the start of the digital era, which meant that fifty years later the show physically still doesn't look as dated as it would had it been shot in black and white and on film. Thanks to new technology we can polish the dots, so that visually the show looks even fresher today than it did when it was first transmitted back in the Stoned Age. Additionally, we were both the writers *and* the performers, though the writers were definitely in charge. Importantly, the show is encyclopedic. *Python* isn't just one type of humor, it is a compendium of styles. While the cast remains the same, the writers are constantly changing, though you never notice which hand is on the tiller. So there is visual humor, verbal humor, clever humor, silliness, rudeness, sophistication, and brazen naughtiness, constantly alternating, which means there is something for everyone. I found that while people said they liked it, not everyone could agree on which particular bits they liked. Also, we were at the BBC, who opened up a new time slot for us late on Sunday nights, when the Queen normally came on-screen sitting on a horse and television closed down. They didn't know it, but there were a whole lot of people who liked to stay up after the pubs closed. I often joke about



“executive-free comedy,” but the BBC really did leave us alone, especially at the beginning, and by the time they wanted to intrude it was too late. Plus, we could be physically daunting. Six large men, three over six foot, occupying a BBC office were enough to intimidate the bravest program planner, even if we hadn’t already established on our show that we considered them foolish, ignorant, hopeless idiots, without degrees...The fact is, we scared them. We didn’t know what we were doing, and insisted on doing it.

The legendary chaotic Python first meeting with Michael Mills, the head of Light Entertainment, did take place at the BBC on May 23, 1969. We had met previously at John’s apartment in Basil Street, so we were not entirely unprepared, but we had reached no agreement on anything. That state would persist till the end. We couldn’t agree on the title of the show. We didn’t know whether there would be music (er, *perhaps*) or guests (er, *maybe*) or film (*oh yes film*, good idea). In the end, faced with our confident uncertainty about what might be in our show, Michael Mills finally said, “Oh just go away and make thirteen.” We could do what we liked, but what would it be? Even we had no idea.

On *Do Not Adjust Your Set*, Terry Gilliam had created highly surreal animations in a free-flowing style that inspired Terry Jones to proclaim that this was how our new BBC show should be. These arresting animations bookmarked the Python show, and added a stylish Victorian framework that provided apparent connections between completely disparate sketch material. No punch lines, everything would just flow. This, and our attempts to link skits by ideas, theme, and content, made *Monty Python* something slightly completely different from the start. Even though we didn’t know what we wanted, we knew absolutely what we didn’t want. We were determined not to make the usual kind of BBC light entertainment show where someone said, “And now for something completely different” and some prick sang. In fact, so determined were we

not to do that, we co-opted their very slogan and used it as a catchphrase. We were the antithesis of the satire boom of the previous generation. Nothing was topical (so it could last) and the comedy was generic: types not individuals. But it was our attitude that came across. Python was in your face, challenging, and very silly. It was not immediately popular, there were complaints, the executives hated it, but it filled a hole in their schedule and the BBC wisely ignored the disapproval. So, *Owl Stretching Time* began. So, *A Horse, a Spoon and a Basin* started. So, *Whither Canada?* commenced. So, *The Toad Elevating Moment* came into being. So, *You Can't Call a Show Cornflakes* appeared. We still had no title for the show. The BBC were going nuts. In their contracts, they called it *Barry Took's Flying Circus*, because he had set up the fatal meeting. But each of our scripts that came in had a different, and to their minds worse, title. Finally, in late July, with the series already filming, they presented us with an ultimatum. They had to print tickets for the audience. They must have a title.

We all liked *Flying Circus*, but we couldn't agree on whose Circus it should be. Michael wanted to surprise a little old lady in Suffolk called Gwen Dibley by naming the show after her, but while that was funny, there were legal issues. In the end John suggested *Python*, and I suggested *Monty* after a chap with a mustache and bow tie in my local pub, the Dog Inn, Mappleborough Green. *Monty* had echoes of the great British general Montgomery, who, at El Alamein, was the first to defeat the Nazis; as well as sounding like a sleazy Soho theatrical agent. So, *Monty Python* it was. But what was the show to be? We still hadn't a clue.

We tried discussing what it should be about, but failed hopelessly. So we just went ahead and wrote what we felt like and then came together at Jonesy's house in Camberwell and read out our sketches. If we laughed it was in, and if we didn't we sold it to *The Two Ronnies*. Fortunately, I had written one sketch for Ronnie Barker that had been turned down. If you

read it silently it obviously has no jokes. “Is your wife a goer, know what I mean, nudge nudge, say no more, say no more, say no more, know what I mean, nudge nudge.” Where’s the comedy in that? But when I read it aloud *in character* they all hooted, and it was almost the first thing accepted by us.

We became fairly good at editing our material. “That sketch was really funny until page three and then it just went on and on.” Honesty from people you trust is very useful, and often we would swap sketches around and let someone else have a go at finishing a piece. When it came to voting, I was always outnumbered. Mike and Terry were a team and John and Graham another, and when they read out their sketches they always had a partner to smile and laugh along. I faced five people. But then on the other hand I’m still with me. Terry Gilliam came in and out of the writing sessions and was a very useful free-floating radical. Early on we stopped him reading out his cartoon ideas, which consisted of a lot of *bangs*, and *booms*, and *biffs*, and told him to just go away and make them.

We never cast the shows until we had finished the writing, so we could not be influenced by any acting preferences. It was usually obvious who would play what, and the authors of the piece would get first dibs. John and Graham had settled into a kind of classic sketch form begun in *The Frost Report*, where John would be the aggressive protagonist responding to interruptions from a very silly man. (Marty played these roles in the ’48 *Show*, but in *Python* Michael made a superb foil for him.) Graham played authoritarian but hopelessly weak figures responding helplessly to exterior chaotic forces (colonels, King Arthur, Brian, etc.). Terry Jones specialized in aggressively noisy, frumpy women, and Terry Gilliam was given anything that involved long and heavy makeup, so it was no surprise when he married Maggie Weston, our makeup lady. The rest of the characters, often a whole raft of them, were designated Mike or Eric, and then the authorship would decide who played what: Nudge for Eric, Ken Shabby

for Mike.

Significantly, *Monty Python* was not released in America until 1974, after we had finished on U.K. TV, so we were not seduced by personal fame. We didn't have to cope with the hot blast of instant celebrity that the *Saturday Night Live* cast faced. With the exception of John Cleese, who was famous from *The Frost Report*, no one had a clue who was who. Looking back, it is amazing that John even wanted to be in another gang show, his fourth since leaving Cambridge—*I'm Sorry, I'll Read That Again*; *The Frost Report*; the '48 Show; and now *Monty Python*. In fact, he soon tired of *Python*, and no wonder: he had been writing and performing sketches on TV and radio since 1965.

In the meantime, I got married. I had fallen in love with a beautiful Australian actress called Lyn Ashley, whose painted breasts I first saw on a poster outside my local cinema advertising the Michael Winner film *I'll Never Forget What's'isname*, in which she starred with Oliver Reed. Some friends had set us up on a blind date for a weekend, in a wincingly cold Elizabethan mansion in Suffolk. The wind howled through it. The kitchen with its Aga stove seemed to be the only warm spot, and the house was infested by kids. We found the hostess was fighting with her husband, had taken to her bed, and refused to emerge from her bedroom. I enticed her out with a bottle of champagne. Some kind of order was restored. Lyn and I found a warm spot in the guest wing and became acquainted, while I fought off the blocking moves of her mother's poodle. We soon moved into my apartment in Redcliffe Square, flew off to Mihas in Spain, where I bought a ring, and one year later, in July 1969, when *Monty Python* commenced filming, I managed to wangle the first week off to get married. We were married in the Kensington and Chelsea Registry Office and my new mother-in-law, Madge Ryan, threw a huge party at Adrienne Corri's house in St. John's Wood. (Both actresses had appeared together in Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange*.) Then off we all went to the seaside. The

Pythons to Devon, me to Nice. While the others took the bus to Torquay, I flew with my new bride to Cap d'Antibes, where Lauretta and Marty Feldman had invited us to join them.



Sixties Wedding Day, July 7, 1969. Matching Ossie Clark outfits.

*Monty Python's Flying Circus* began broadcasting on BBC1 at 10:55 p.m. on Sunday, October 5, 1969, with the second show we had recorded, subtitled *Whither Canada?* The original audience consisted largely of little old ladies who had been bused in to the BBC Television Centre thinking they were going to see some kind of a circus. Neither they nor we had a clue what they were in for. While there were some very funny sketches, there were also some very odd moments, like Terry Gilliam popping up in

the middle of a sketch dressed as a Viking with a ferret through his head, saying “However.” I think these were attempts by us to flex our muscles and experience the joys of this newfound freedom. We did them because we could. As if to keep us in our place, the BBC would unexpectedly take our show off the air from time to time and replace it with an episode of *The Horse of the Year Show*. Occasionally, different BBC regions put out their own local show instead. This led to some confusion amongst our audience, a confusion we were keen to exploit. We began to shoot false openings, in one case ten minutes of a totally fictitious pirate film before the buccaneers passed John Cleese at a table, who announced blandly, “And now for something completely different.” It didn’t matter. No one was watching. We could do it to make ourselves happy.

This sense of being apart, in a different TV world from the comforting domain of light entertainment, was very liberating, and oddly we began to attract a following. After the first season the BBC made us do a record, which was a disaster since they recorded it in front of a dead audience live on a Sunday morning in Camden Town Hall. None of us liked it, after which we simply made our own albums. The finest example of this was a three-sided record, *The Monty Python Matching Tie and Handkerchief*, where we ingeniously cut double grooves on Side Two, to create two shorter, parallel sides. Which track played depended on where the needle dropped. There was no announcement or warning. To further puzzle listeners, we started both of these mini sides with the same bad gag—“And now a message from the Swedish Prime Minister”—so they couldn’t even try to find the side they wanted. Confusion was good.

We were still “outsiders” and rebellious. We took exception to BBC Light Entertainment inviting us to their Christmas party because the invitation said *Black Tie*. The first year we simply didn’t attend, but the second year John Cleese and I determined to make a protest. We decided to go overdressed. We turned up at the BBC in top hats, white tie, and

tails, complete with gloves and canes. Our arrival at the party caused quite a stir. Eric Morecambe came over to me and said, “John Cleese just bit me on the neck and flew out the window.”

We all agreed that our show would never play in America. They just wouldn’t understand it. And besides, with its nudity and its naughtiness it would never be allowed on TV there. So when some serious American TV producers approached us, we laughed. It appeared they wanted us to make our show for America. We laughed more. Alright then, could they buy our format? Now we really laughed.

“We don’t have a format.”

“Then let’s *not* sell it to them.”

We laughed even harder.

John’s friend Victor Lownes, who ran the London Playboy Club, commissioned a movie from us of highlights from the first two seasons, because he felt there was an audience for *Python* in colleges and it should be a film. We shot *And Now for Something Completely Different* in an old dairy in Hendon for eighty thousand pounds. Our TV director, the wild Scotsman Ian MacNaughton, was appointed director. Ian had begun as an actor but had joined the BBC, where he became involved directing shows with Spike Milligan. This is what attracted him to us. He wasn’t available for our first four TV recordings, and John Howard Davies had stepped in. As a young boy, Davies had played Oliver in David Lean’s classic movie *Oliver Twist*.

“Please, sir, can I have some more?”

He would go on to direct *Fawlty Towers* for John Cleese, and Ian directed all our subsequent *Python* shows. It was Davies who brought Carol Cleveland into our show, when we needed a real woman to play the sex scene in my “Marriage Guidance Counselor” sketch. The gag just didn’t work with a guy in drag, and Carol would remain a fixture whenever we wanted a real female. She was a jolly good sport and came on



the road with us on our tours. *And Now for Something Completely Different* was the first of the movies she did for us.

MacNaughty, as we called him, was definitely “a Scottish loony” with a penchant for whiskey. John pilloried him mercilessly as a drunken director in “Scott of the Sahara,” and then claimed it wasn’t him at all but Joseph McGrath, another hard-drinking Scots director. Ian would be fine until lunchtime, when he could never resist going into the pub and then would have to go and lie down afterwards, so usually one of the Terrys took over. We weren’t in charge of the final cut, none of us liked it, and it was memorable only for a controversy about a fart, when the American producer said:

“Keep the fart, you’ll lose Disneyland.”

We kept the fart.

Columbia ended up releasing the movie, and eventually Victor Lowmes’s boss Hugh Hefner bought it, so it had its uses getting us into the Playboy Mansion in the Eighties, when that seemed like a good idea.

In 1971, we tackled the publishing world when I took on the editing of *Monty Python’s Big Red Book*, which naturally was blue, and then *The Brand New Monty Python Paperback* (1973), whose cover deliberately contained grubby finger marks, so that people kept returning them to the booksellers. Terry Gilliam refused to have anything to do with the first book, snorting disdainfully, “Comic books don’t sell.” I suppose his experiences with Harvey Kurtzman’s *Help* magazine in New York, where he drew cartoons and shot *fumetti*, had clouded his judgment. His assistant Katy Hepburn was helping me design the book and I had to get her to break into his studio and steal bits of his artwork. Fortunately, Terry was wrong, as that first Python book flew off the shelves, into massive reprints, inventing the Christmas comedy book market.

Books, records, films, TV shows, slowly the Python tentacles wound around the neck of an unsuspecting public. I persuaded the Pythons to do a

live stage show for three nights at midnight at the Lanchester Arts Festival in Coventry, selecting the sketches and putting together a show that we briefly rehearsed. The audiences went nuts. I think it was the first time they found that other people liked our show too. The BBC didn't pay us much, but after Coventry, Tony Smith and Harvey Goldsmith offered us a ton of money to tour the U.K., so we set off on the road. It was a fairly disastrous start, thanks to a stoner sound engineer who was in charge of our radio mikes. He hadn't a clue which of us was which, so you could clearly hear Graham in his dressing room but nobody onstage at all. We finally persuaded the management to dispose of him before we were forced to kill him, and the show soon got into a groove.

Graham's drinking, at first a secret, now came to the fore. Often he would be late onstage for his sketches, particularly with poor Mike waiting around to start Ken Shabby. Once, John and I heard the ominous silence from the audience and both leapt onstage at the same time from opposite sides. Then, as if we had rehearsed it, we fell in behind each other and played Graham's part in tandem, to the hilarity of Mike, who giggled helplessly. Finally, Graham came lurching on as the Colonel, seemed not to notice, and launched into the beginning of the sketch again. After the show, he was furious and accused me of upstaging him.

"But Graham," I said, "you weren't *on* stage."

He never said a word of complaint to John. The only time I ever saw him lose it was when John hid his pipe as a prank and Graham went totally berserk. (Yes, we *know*, Dr. Freud.) He was a very mild and patient man but the alcohol turned him into a beast. He would go crawling round the floor at parties, putting his hands up ladies' skirts and barking like a dog. It was great when he finally managed to conquer his alcoholism. John would occasionally bait Jonesy until he exploded in a fit of temper, but on the whole we got on very well for a group of six outsiders. Just look at the work we managed to achieve in the fourteen years between 1969 and

1983. Five movies, forty-five TV shows, five stage shows, five books, and countless records, including a hit single. So yes, we did okay, but fame still beckoned.

---

\* Fat chance. There aren't any.

## WHITHER CANADA?

I remember quite clearly the moment I realized Monty Python had become famous. From the British tour, it was evident we had achieved celebrity, but by the Canadian tour this fame had turned into fanaticism. I can pin this instant with precision to the June day in 1973 when we arrived at the Toronto airport for Monty Python's First Farewell Tour of Canada. As we came into the arrivals lobby there was a tremendous scream. Instinctively, every one of us turned around and looked behind to see who was coming. Surely some famous rock group was arriving? Then came the dawning revelation: it was for us. There were screaming fans waiting at the airport. They held banners and signs and went totally crazy. We responded with surprise and a little embarrassment. Terry Gilliam reacted by lying down on the baggage carousel and riding around, to John's evident disgust. To be honest, we were not entirely sober. We had begun the flight quietly enough, scattered throughout the Air Canada first-class lounge, but when a stewardess asked if passenger Cohen would identify himself, Neil Innes began it. He rose to his feet and said, "I'm Passenger Cohen."

"No, I'm Passenger Cohen," I said, raising my hand.

"*I'm* Passenger Cohen," said Gilliam, getting into the Spartacus gag.

"No, I'm Passenger Cohen," said Carol Cleveland.

The stewardess was utterly bewildered as eight different people insisted they were passenger Cohen from all over the first-class lounge. Then the bar opened...

So, suddenly we were face-to-face with Canadian adulation. The promoters stuck us on the upper level of an open-top double-decker bus, and we were followed into Toronto by cars honking and people yelling.



Me and Terry on top of a bus at the Toronto airport.

The Canadians were nuts about *Python*. They had been watching the TV show since very early on, and there had been mass protests outside CBC when they tried to take it off the air. These fans were crazy.

“Shut up,” John would yell crossly at the screaming audience as we appeared onstage. “We haven’t done anything funny yet.” But they only laughed more. They had come for a good time and nothing would stop them. At one show in Winnipeg the curtain rose to reveal the entire front row dressed as a caterpillar. You can’t really fail with an audience like that.

Graham went off happily visiting bars recommended to him by his useful *Gay Guide to Canada*, suffering only on Sundays when he legally couldn’t get a drink anywhere except in his hotel room and then only with food. Nancy Lewis, a U.S. record executive and our number one supporter in the early days, remembers visiting him and finding piles and piles of

trays of untouched Caesar salads outside his door that he had ordered with each round.

Tony Smith, our promoter, had never been to Canada and had no idea of the huge distances between cities, so it was essentially a dartboard tour, where we ping-ponged back and forth across the lakes and plains. To make matters worse, Air Canada was on strike and after the first show in Toronto we never saw our set again; we were always one gig ahead. Fortunately, we had the movie reel and the costumes with us, so we needed to find only tables and chairs and a dead duck wherever we went, for a gross sketch about cocktails. “Twist of lemming, sir?” We joyfully sang “The Lumberjack Song” dressed as Mounties in Regina, the home of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Of course, Graham found a gay Mountie afterwards. That’s rather the point of the song.

We all reacted differently to this newfound fame. John decided to leave. In my case, fame went to my balls. It would have been impossible not to have been affected in some way, especially when we went on down to California, where the Sixties were still raging. The North American Female proved to be very grateful. The Canadian boys assumed that we were all on drugs, and thoughtfully supplied them. I was an English boarding school boy let loose in a candy store. Was I becoming an asshole? I’m afraid so. Back home I had a lovely wife and a newborn baby. What was I thinking? Clearly, I wasn’t. Men have a brain and a penis, and only enough blood to supply one at a time. The fact is, until quite late in life men think with their dicks. It’s a pity, it’s regrettable, it’s unfortunate, and I say this with no pride, but it’s true. The inevitable fall lay ahead.

The BBC had offered us a fourth season, and John was definitely not keen on the idea. For him, the Canadian tour was the tipping point. He hated it. He took to dining alone at a table in the same restaurant as the rest of us, reading a book and pointedly ignoring us as we got rowdier and rowdier. He had some silly idea for a sitcom he wanted to do, about an

angry hotelier, set in a British holiday hotel in Torquay...Well, good luck with that. He decided to turn down another *Python* series. Graham broke the news on the flight to our final gig in Vancouver. To those of us who were enjoying the newfound adulation, John's decision seemed crazy. To Graham, who needed the money, it was disastrous. He persuaded us to do a fourth season without John.

Meanwhile, California lay ahead. Nancy Lewis had told LA record executive Neil Bogart that we were the next big thing, and persuaded Buddah Records to put out a Monty Python album. They flew us down to San Francisco to promote it and then on to LA, where we checked into the legendary "Riot House" on the Sunset Strip. This Hyatt House hotel had earned its soubriquet from the destruction wrought in it by visiting English rock stars such as Keith Moon, who threw television sets out of its windows and drove cars into its pool. We were soon leading lives of careless abandon in the California sunshine. Graham legendarily took a limo to a restaurant just across the street. He hadn't realized it was that close. The rest of us enjoyed our first taste of America.

Our promotional appearances were mainly on radio, where we tried to explain to puzzled DJs that we were not a circus, and this culminated in a big television appearance on *The Tonight Show*, though sadly without Johnny Carson. David Brenner was sitting in for him. He gave us a heartwarming intro: "I've never heard of these guys. People say they're funny. Please welcome *Monty Python*."

We were supposed to do half an hour of our best material. The curtain went up on Graham and Terry J. dressed as Pepperpots, screeching in high-pitched British accents. We called these loud, over-made-up ladies Pepperpots because of their physical resemblance to real pepper pots.

"Oo 'ello dear. How are you?"

"I've been up all night burying the cat."

"Is it dead?"



“No, but it’s not at all a well cat, so I thought best to bury it to be on the safe side.”

To say the response was underwhelming is an understatement. The audience stared at us openmouthed. This very same material that had just carried us across Canada on gales of laughter was greeted with total silence. Two British men in drag screaming at each other about a dead cat? We were from another planet. It was short, it was fast, and it was fucking hilarious. We did the half hour of material in twenty minutes and then ran outside, where we collapsed on the grass screaming with laughter. It was hysterical. I think it’s one of the best laughs I have ever had. There is nothing funnier than nobody laughing.

Terry Jones and I fared slightly better when we performed “Nudge Nudge” on a late-night music show, *The Midnight Special*, for George Schlatter and Ed Friendly, the producers of *Rowan & Martin’s LaughIn*. It repeated happily for many years, so the sketch became very well known in America. Elvis called everybody “Squire” because of it...



The semi-legendary “Nudge Nudge” sketch.

Meanwhile we spent our time at the Hollywood Bowl, where we saw Gladys Knight & the Pips, enjoyed Little Richard at the Rainbow Bar & Grill, and were up and down the Strip like yo-yos. Well, more like dildos. At the time, people thought we only made records, like the Firesign Theatre. They had no idea that this material came from TV shows. To them we were simply recording artists.

On our return to London, the BBC were less than keen to find they had lost John Cleese, and they punished us in typical BBC ways. We were relegated to BBC2, and were not allowed to use the words “Flying Circus” in the title. For the fourth season, we would be known simply as *Monty Python*.

“Oh, gee, we are so scared.”

There were many funny things in those six shows—“The Most Awful

Family in Britain,” “Queen Victoria Handicap,” “Woody and Tinny Words,” “RAF Banter”—but for me, something was missing. John, of course. Not his writing, because he did contribute a lot from all the material we had cut from *The Holy Grail*, and even his performing was not so badly missed, as we had all learned a lot in three seasons; but, importantly, the balance was lost. John had kept Terry J.’s explosive Welsh determination in check, and without him that didn’t happen. So, when the BBC offered us a further seven shows, it was me this time who said no, on a long walk with Michael on Hampstead Heath.

This turned out to be a good thing, for while John didn’t want to do any more TV, he *was* keen to do movies, and all of us were soon happily engaged on writing a new movie, which we were determined we would control and direct. At the second writing stint for what became *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, we decided it should be entirely about King Arthur and his knights, without any of the distracting modern stuff set in the Harrods toupee department (which we used in the fourth series). John also appeared onstage with us again in March 1973 at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, for four weeks, and this time it was impossible not to notice we had become quite a big deal. Almost every single British rock star filled the boxes, from David Bowie to Elton John to Mick Jagger. Some of these rock stars now generously stepped forward to fund our next movie, which we made on a tiny budget of two hundred thousand pounds, filming for five weeks on location in Scotland. These original investors for *The Holy Grail* were Robert Plant and Jimmy Page of Led Zeppelin, Pink Floyd, Tim Rice, Jethro Tull, Island Records, Chrysalis Records, Charisma Records, and Michael White. Bless them for it. They didn’t want to interfere, or control, they just wanted to help us make our movie. I think Tony Stratton-Smith, Graham’s great drinking pal and head of Charisma, our record label, was largely responsible for bringing them all in. He even had a horse named Monty Python.

Carol Cleveland wasn't available for *Monty Python Live at Drury Lane*, so my wife, Lyn Ashley, played her parts. Lyn had appeared in a few Python shows, including one of the two German shows we made. The Germans had come to us and said, "We are German, and we have no sense of humor, so we want you to come over to Germany and make a Python comedy special for Bavaria TV." The clincher was they wanted us to come over for a writing recce so they could show us some of the places we could write sketches for. Nobody had ever heard of a writer's recce and it seemed like a free piss-up to us, so we flew to Munich and were met at the airport by a Bavarian band, huge steins of beer, and a big sign saying WELCOME PYTHONS. Then they put us in cars and took us to Dachau.

What the hell was this?

On our way, we got lost and passersby denied all knowledge of the location of the camp. We finally arrived as it was getting dark, and they said it was closing.

"Tell them we're Jewish," said Graham.

Probably his finest moment. Anyway, they let us in. Luckily, they let us out again.

We puzzled over why they had taken us there. Surely they didn't expect us to write sketches set there. Were we supposed to be filming *Dancing in Dachau*? The grim reality of the camp precluded all humor. In the end, we decided they'd probably just wanted to get the worst over with. After that, things lightened up. Our hosts took us to Salzburg in Austria and to mad King Ludwig's extraordinary Neuschwanstein Castle in Bavaria, where we would film for both shows, once at night with the wolves howling.

The first show we made entirely in German. We wrote the script in English, they translated it into German, and we painstakingly learned the words parrot-fashion. It meant we did a lot of visual humor, including "Silly Olympics" and "Philosophers' Football," filmed on the old Bayern Munich ground. We were billeted in a small but friendly guesthouse, where

the proprietress was shocked one morning when Graham appeared at breakfast with four young men. She told him with some embarrassment that there was a special hotel down the street “for your kind” where he would be made welcome, and he moved in there and had a delightful time. It was Oktoberfest and we completely lost Graham for a couple of days of filming because he was having so much fun. When he resurfaced, he flew back to London to accept a Sun Award on behalf of *Monty Python*. He took the statuette from the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Reginald Maudling, put it in his mouth, dropped to his knees, and then crawled off the stage through the audience barking like a dog. It made the front page.

One day, halfway up a mountain, John and I wrote a song called “Eric the Half a Bee,” while he was dressed as Little Red Riding Hood, still my favorite performance of his. We had finished shooting a *Fliegender Zirkus* scene and broken for lunch at a typical Bavarian cuckoo-clock restaurant. John wandered into the gents dressed in his full dirndl and skirt, to the shock of a stout German burgher in lederhosen. Since it was cold in the Alps, we ordered a delicious bottle of schnapps, and so we were not entirely sober as I pulled out my guitar and we wrote a very silly song.

*Half a bee*  
*Philosophically*  
*Must ipso facto half not be.*  
*But half the bee has got to be*  
*Vis-à-vis its entity*  
*D’you see?*  
*But can a bee*  
*Be said to be*  
*Or not to be*  
*An entire bee*  
*When half the bee is not a bee*

*Due to some ancient injury?*

*La di dee One two three*

*Eric the half a bee.*

*A, B, C, D, E, F, G,*

*Eric the half a bee.*

*Is this wretched demi-bee*

*Half asleep upon my knee*

*Some freak from a menagerie?*

*No, it's Eric the half a bee.*

The rest of the crew moved off to film Michael playing Buzz Aldrin. We finished the bottle. It was a delightful afternoon. What the Germans made of our speaking German on the TV show I have no idea, but they invited us back and this time, instead of painstakingly learning the German words, we sensibly spoke English and they dubbed us.

Terry Jones also had his finest moment in Munich. He and I had flown there one cold February to set up this second show. It was Carnival at the time and Münchenerers celebrate this with a festival called the Nockherberg, where they brew *Starkbier*, a special black beer so strong they close the beer kellers at ten to stop them killing each other. The feast has been held since 1891 in a vast hall, the Paulaner, where everyone sits on benches at long tables. It was so big that there were *two* German bands, one at each end. The one on the main stage was conducted by a man with a metal claw instead of a hand. For ten marks, anyone could come onstage to borrow the baton and conduct the oom-pah-pah band. In one corner near the stage, I was shocked to see a table of older men wearing Nazi insignia.

The evening progressed with beer and sausages, and after a couple of hours my attention was drawn to the sight of Terry Jones appearing

onstage. He took the baton from the claw of the conductor and advanced on the audience. He had a glint in his eyes I recognized. Oh no. He began performing a strip tease, flapping his jacket back and forth across his body like a stripper, then provocatively removing it and twirling it above his head before flinging it away. He removed his tie, salaciously rubbing it between his legs, before chucking it tantalizingly into the audience. People in the hall were beginning to notice what was going on, half fascinated, half horrified. He began unbuttoning his shirt, bumping and grinding to the beat of the band, and then, turning around, he slowly removed it. He spun back round, arms high, revealing his naked chest, demanding applause, and then put his tongue out and began playing with his nipples. He moved inevitably to his trousers. *Shit, he's going to take his pants off*, I thought. *We're going to get killed*. Slowly and to some encouragement he removed his belt and then began to slide down his zipper. He unbuttoned his trousers and began to slip his pants down when the irate conductor raced onto the stage, grabbed him, and physically dragged him offstage.

“We have to go,” I said to our hosts. “Get the car.”

I raced to the side of the stage and managed to hustle Terry out of the hall, away from the Nazi table, who were indignantly watching this English boy. Somehow we managed to escape unharmed. It was the bravest and maddest thing I ever saw him do.



CINEMA: HALF SIN, HALF ENEMA BEFORE WE FIRED HIM, DENIS O'BRIEN HAD TOLD JOHN CLEESE THAT AFTER *LIFE OF BRIAN*, IF WE MADE ANOTHER MOVIE HE WOULD NEVER HAVE TO WORK AGAIN. THIS PERSUADED JOHN TO JOIN US IN WRITING WHAT WAS THEN CALLED *MONTY PYTHON'S FISH FILM*. THE PROBLEM WAS WE HAD NO THEME. FOR A WHILE WE WORKED ON WORLD WAR III, WHICH WAS SPONSORED BY ADVERTISERS, AND THEN IT BECAME ABOUT A PARTY OF EXPLORERS IN THE HINDU KUSH. WHILE WE ATTEMPTED TO BRING SOME SENSE TO A BUNCH OF DISPARATE SKETCHES, GILLIAM WOULD SIT DOODLING, PINNING UP IMAGES ON A CORKBOARD. ONE OF HIS SKETCHES WAS PARTICULARLY MEMORABLE. IT WAS A FAMILIAR SIGHT, A TYPICAL LONDON OFFICE DRAPED WITH THE CANVAS THEY USE WHEN WASHING BUILDINGS, EXCEPT THAT IT WAS BILLOWING LIKE A SAIL. IT LOOKED AS IF THE BUILDING WAS JUST GETTING UNDER WAY, AND IT WAS RIPPING OUT A HUGE ANCHOR FROM THE PAVEMENT. THIS IMAGE WOULD FORM THE BASIS OF HIS *CRIMSON PERMANENT ASSURANCE*, THE SHORT FILM THAT WOULD OPEN OUR NEXT MOVIE, IF WE EVER GOT TO MAKE IT, WHICH WAS LOOKING INCREASINGLY UNLIKELY. WE WERE GETTING NOWHERE.

We decided to go to the West Indies again for inspiration, this time choosing Jamaica. We spent a frustrating two weeks in a very pleasant house in St. Ann's Bay near Ocho Rios. But we were no closer to having a movie. It was still just a pile of sketches. No plot, no through-line, no consistent characters. We were on the point of abandoning the whole business and just having a holiday, when towards the end of our stay I came down to breakfast with an idea.

"I've been thinking that what this really could be all about is 'The Meaning of Life.' "

They loved that idea, even John, who said later it was particularly annoying, as he had been looking forward to the vacation. We set to work in the short time left to us, chopping, changing, and shaping our material to this theme.

We had taken some time off to explore the beauties of the island, and I spent a wonderful day with Terry Gilliam looking at Firefly, Noël Coward's delightful little house, with its fantastic view of the sea, and Ian Fleming's Goldeneye. I didn't know then that I would play Noël Coward in the movie and that "The Penis Song" would be called the "Not the Noël Coward Song." We moved on to Port Antonio, where we took an amazing river ride on a log raft down the Rio Grande, poled by a highly skilled young Jamaican, amongst some of the lushest and most perfect scenery I have ever seen. As we floated gently through this paradise, Terry would not stop moaning about Denis O'Brien, for whom he had also made *Time Bandits*. He went on and on until I finally said, "Terry, for God's sake, shut up and just *look* where you are. We can talk later."

When we got back to the house, we had a business meeting. Denis O'Brien owed us a million dollars from the Hollywood Bowl movie; what on earth were we going to do to pry it out of him?

"Why don't we seize his yacht?" I said. "We're in the Caribbean, it's moored not far away—we should just go and sail it off. He's not going to

tell anyone that Monty Python has taken his yacht. He'll look like a total prat. We'll thank him for lending it to us and let him know that as soon as he pays us our money he can have his boat back."

To my surprise, everyone thought this was a great idea. They all voted in favor of it, except John.

"No," he said. "We can't."

"Why not?"

"It's piracy," he said.

That's the trouble with being trained as a lawyer. They know these minor little details about theft and piracy. I'm proud to say Monty Python voted five out of six to become pirates, but the Python veto rule held. Everyone had the right to veto a vote. A surprisingly effective and fair rule, which meant that no one could be forced into doing what they didn't want to do. But for that, Denis O'Brien would have sold off our TV series, for which we would still be paying him 20 percent. I dragged my heels. When we all came back a few months later, everyone had changed their minds. No wonder he hated me.

We returned to London with a theme and a title but no plot. I thought the screenplay still needed work, but John was reluctant to have any more writing meetings. I've always felt that was a pity, as it seems to me it could have used one more draft. It was really only a sketch film tenuously held together by a concept. It occurred to me later that we could easily have made it as *The Seven Ages of Man*, about the same central character growing from birth to death but darting backwards and forwards in time, so that his birth is in one era, his childhood in another and so on, but not in any historical order. I still think this might have been a good idea, but then hindsight is always perfect. I may have come up with this thought when I was working with John Du Prez to adapt it as a Broadway musical. The trouble was it already *was* a musical, but as an idea for the stage it was disastrous, as it had no common characters and no plot. It's a revue.

*The Meaning of Life* was shot in 1982 at Elstree Studios and in Scotland, where the Zulu warriors went on strike. Despite that, it was a fairly happy experience. Because we needed ten million dollars, we had sold the movie to Thom Mount at Universal. We refused to let him see the screenplay and simply gave him a budget and a short poem I wrote.

*There's everything in this movie  
Everything that fits  
From the meaning of life in the Universe  
To girls with great big tits.  
We've got movie stars and foreign cars  
Explosions and the lot  
Filmed as only we know how  
On the budget that we've got.  
We've spent a fortune on locations  
And quite a bit on drink  
And there's even the odd philosophical joke Just to make you  
buggers think.  
Yet some parts are as serious  
And as deep as you could wish  
But largely it's all tits and arse  
And quite a lot of fish.  
Other bits are childish  
And some parts frankly rude  
But at least we've got a lot of nice girls All banging around in  
the nude.  
So take your seats, enjoy yourselves  
And let's just hope it's funny  
Because it's not only done to make you laugh But to make us  
lots of money.*

*Yes, sit back and have a good time  
With your boyfriend or your wife  
Relax and just enjoy yourselves  
For this is The Meaning of Life...*

Amazingly, Universal said yes to this. Many years later, when I met Thom Mount again, I said what a brave punt I thought that was and he said not at all. Because he had green-lit our movie, many American comedians who were huge Python fans, amongst them Richard Pryor, beat a path to his door, and he made several very successful comedies. Ours was apparently not among them because, although it cost only ten million and took in twenty-five, the studio assured us for many years that it was still not yet in profit, even after the video release. Finally, in the Nineties when I had learned the Hollywood game a bit better, John Goldstone, our producer, came to me and said that Universal was requesting permission to release it as a DVD, and since these had not been invented when we made the movie, they didn't have those rights.

"Tell them no," I said, "we're still not yet in profit."

Miraculously, the next day the movie was in profit. Like God, the studios move in mysterious ways.

The film contains many great things, including "Every Sperm is Sacred," wonderfully choreographed by Arlene Phillips and magnificently shot by Terry Jones. I always regret I was in Australia when the final editing decisions were taken and they removed my blond French cooking lady, who I thought was funny. Still there were "The Galaxy Song," "The Penis Song," "Christmas in Heaven," and I'm fond of our title track, "The Meaning of Life," which I sang in a Charles Aznavour voice. John Du Prez and I were really getting into our stride composing songs, and "The Galaxy Song" is still one of my favorites.



"The Galaxy Song," from *The Meaning of Life*, 1983.

Terry Gilliam took his sketch of the office building under sail and turned it into a movie about rogue accountants, complete with our Accountancy Shanty.

It's fun to charter an accountant...

*The Crimson Permanent Assurance* was originally supposed to be a short six-minute insert toward the end of our movie, but no one has ever found it easy to stop TG filming and he took over a whole soundstage next door and kept on shooting till he ended up with an eighteen-minute film about old accountants, threatened by takeovers, who declare war on the City and set sail for adventure. It's wonderful but, of course, was far too long when we tried it in the main body of the film. Instead, we decided to put this Gilliam sequence before *The Meaning of Life*. At the Cannes Film Festival in 1983, it surprised and delighted the stuffy French cinephiles at our screening, and I'm convinced the brilliance of it persuaded the Cannes jury to award us the Jury Prize, although Orson Welles was on the panel

and he must have loved Mr. Creosote.

For our press conference, as a send-up of Cannes, we had the bright idea of posing for the photographers on the beach exposing our nipples, a gag which was immediately ruined when a French starlet walked topless behind the rows of assembled cameramen and they all took off in pursuit of her. Terry Jones then shocked the festival by announcing that we were certainly going to win, because *we had bribed the jury*. They trumped his gag by awarding us their Jury Prize. At the closing awards ceremony, Terry went one better when he accepted the prize and announced that the jury would find their bribe money taped behind the plumbing in the gents' toilet. You've got to love Terry.

I have often found that bad movies are much more fun to be on than good ones. This was certainly true of *Yellowbeard*, written by Graham Chapman, Bernard McKenna, and Peter Cook. In those days executives seemed to feel that if you could lure one or two Pythons into a project, the audience would think it was a Python film. It never worked. What they failed to notice is that it's the *writing* in Python that makes the difference, and it takes all of us. Graham was very sweet to me now that he was sober, and said that if John and I agreed to be in his pirate film, he would get a green light. I agreed to do it if they would shoot my part in three weeks, so I wouldn't have to stay on location kicking my heels for months. John agreed to an even shorter time constraint, which meant he wouldn't even have to go to Mexico. The good news was that Marty Feldman was going to be in it, although when he came into our London kitchen, gaunt and chain-smoking, Tania and I were shocked by his appearance. He was emaciated, though very happy to be back in the U.K. working with all his pals again. It was like old times, returning to his homeland after a long and successful career in Hollywood. Well, it was certainly successful at the beginning when he worked with Mel Brooks on *Young Frankenstein* and *Silent Movie*, but when he began to write, star in, and direct his own films

he had several flops. Hollywood thinks that failure is somehow contagious, and when he threw a party nobody showed up. Yes, it can be that cruel. Anyway, it was fun for him to come home and hang out with Peter and Graham and John and me. We had a delightful week filming in Rye before we flew to our location in Mexico, where Customs immediately impounded all our costumes until the right amount of money found its way into the right hands.

The movie had attracted a stellar cast of funny actors: Spike Milligan, Peter Boyle, Madeline Kahn, Kenneth Mars, Peter Bull, Cheech and Chong, James Mason, and Michael Hordern, whom Peter Cook dubbed “Hordern Monster” after he complained loudly and bitterly at the hotel’s front desk for shrinking his laundry. The whole lobby watched in fascination. Peter said it was a better performance than his *King Lear*. Unfortunately, as we often say about Hollywood, the studio had chosen a newcomer to direct, a pleasant man whose previous experience was working as a sports director for American TV. Who knows what they were thinking, but Mel Damsky seemed certainly out of his comfort zone directing comedy. The comedians were flown in serially, so at no stage was there a general read-through for everyone to get on the same page about the style of comedy we were playing.

*Yellowbeard* was not a success but the “making of” documentary, *Group Madness*, is quite fun. Peter Cook was in great form and, as with all films, we had acres of time on our hands to spend hanging around in the pool at our luxury hotel. Peter would spend the day bobbing up and down in the water, improvising in that peculiar nasal E. L. Wisty voice: “The funny thing about the Universe is, we know where the light comes from but where does the *darkness* come from?”

“The speed of light is 300,000 kilometers a second, but *what* is the speed of darkness?”

He had given up drinking, and one evening he suggested we needed to



find some grass. I agreed to accompany him, but where to look?

“No problem,” said Peter, “we shall find the nearest bordello.”

My wife gave me an old-fashioned look, which Peter noticed, reassuring her with his incredible charm that I should come to no harm. Somewhat skeptically, she agreed to let me go, so off we drove to the local Mexican brothel. It wasn't far. A small door in a white-walled street led into a cantina, a square open to the sky with a band and a bar and lovely girls who were happy to dance, or there was a low cabana to the side with discreet rooms if you wished to dance horizontally. There were tables for drinking and strings of colored lights, and when we entered it had the air of a private party where the guests had yet to arrive.

Peter was an instant hit. He ran in shouting loudly in cod Spanish, shook the hand of the barman, seized a beautiful tall girl in a shiny red bathing suit, and stormed onto the deserted dance floor, where he began the most unimaginable shaking jitterbug. The girls went nuts. They danced around him and he boogied with them all, flinging his arms around, his hair wild, occasionally sinking to his knees or exaggeratedly twisting low. One minute it was a slow night in a naughty nightclub, and the next it was a one-man fiesta.

The whole place loved Peter; the band became animated, the barman grinned as he shook his cocktails, people flocked in to watch, and every girl was mad to dance with this wild, crazy Englishman who radiated goodwill and, yes dammit, innocence. It went on for hours with the band going nuts and the girls lining up to fandango with this wild spirit. We were filming the next day, and as midnight approached I made my excuses and slipped away. My beautiful young wife was waiting at the hotel; it would be hard enough to persuade her we only went to score some grass without staying all night. My last sight was Peter leading a line of ecstatic ladies in a conga line. He waved cheerily, tapped his nose, and yelled, “No problem, Eric, we're in...”

In the morning, we learned what had happened. Peter had taken the tall girl in the red bathing suit back to her room. Once inside, he asked casually if she had any grass. “Of course,” she said, reached under the bed, and brought out a huge load wrapped in newspaper. Peter asked her how much for it. She cited a derisory amount and the deal was made.

“I have to go now,” said Peter.

“*What?!*”

She broke into tears. How could he possibly leave? Didn’t he think she was beautiful? She was utterly distraught.

“I only wanted some grass,” Peter explained as gently as he could, but she was inconsolable. It wasn’t a matter of money. It was honor. It was Mexico. It was her reputation. Poor Peter tried hard to convince her that, honestly, she was really beautiful, and normally he would have been torn up with desire for her, but he had only come for a dance and some grass. He had, he said, to spend a long time reassuring her.

“Been easier to shag her,” said Marty, getting to the nub.

This would be Marty’s last film, and he is very funny in it. He died on his final day in Mexico City, when he had a heart attack in the hotel and the traffic was so horrendous the ambulance couldn’t make it in time. He would have lived had he been in LA. He was only forty-eight.

It would also be Graham’s final film.



With George Harrison on the set of *Munchausen*.



Silly Olympics. Flipper racing.



On location for *Life of Brian* with Terry Gilliam, Michael Palin, and Graham Chapman.





John Cleese with the Virgin Mary.



Lorne Michaels in Venice.



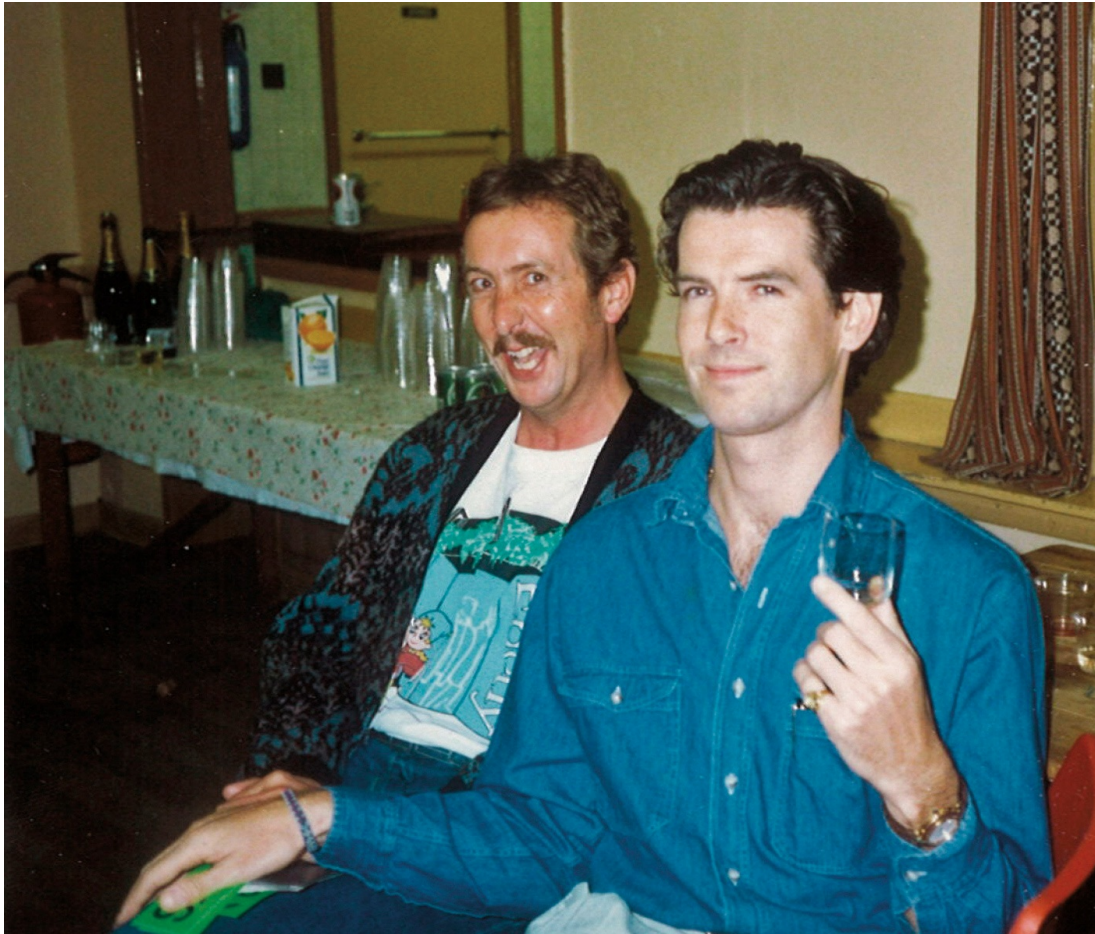


With my son Carey in France.



With David Bowie, his son Joe, and Adam Fisher at Mustique Airport.





With Pierce Brosnan in Yugoslavia.



With Paul Simon in France.



Stephen Fry, Peter Cook, William Goldman, and me. "Carry On Up the Nile."





"I want to be a pirate." With my daughter Lily on St. John's.



With Tania at the Great Pyramid of Giza.







Steve Martin and Lily.



With Billy Connolly at Candacraig, his home in the Scottish Highlands.





Lily with George and Ringo.



With Robin Williams and Steve at Candacraig.





Rotter with otter.





The fabulous Tania.





With John and cheetah, downunda.





With Her Majesty and Ann Howard at the *Royal Variety Performance*.



The amazing cast of *What About Dick?*: Sophie Winkleman, Russell Brand, Tim Curry, Tracey Ullman, Billy Connolly, Jane Leeves, Jim Piddock, me, and Eddie Izzard.





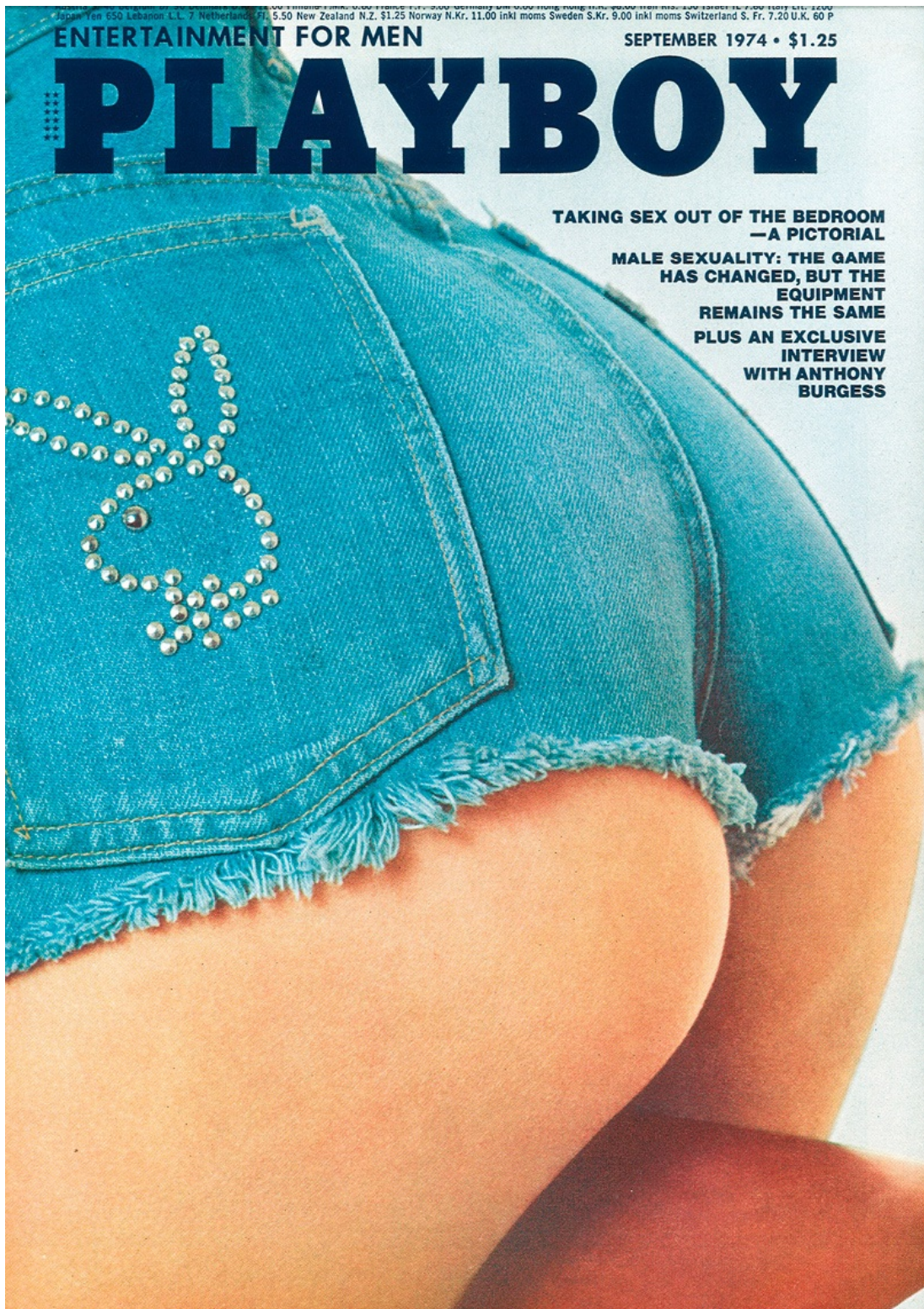
Carey and Lily at the London Olympics.





*The Entire Universe in One Hour* with Noel Fielding, Hannah Waddingham, Professor Brian Cox, me, Warwick Davis, and Robin Ince.





Archival *Playboy* magazine material. Copyright © 1974 by *Playboy*. Used with permission. All rights reserved.

Tania's *Playboy* cover.

## THIN WHITE DUKES

I have met many people in my life and, sadly, many of them were not famous. I agree it's not their fault, though they might have tried harder. Anyway, I'm not writing about them because you don't know who the hell they are, and I'm tired of little notes from my English or American editor saying, *Who's this?* Surely, they've heard of the Queen...?

I believe it is wrong to be prejudiced against people just because they are not well-known. Fame can bring a sad misunderstanding about the nature of life. As George Harrison never failed to point out, "Even the famous have to die," although I think in America they do suspect it gives you a pass on the death thing. Anyway, I have always tried not to hold fame against those who suffer from it. It's really not their fault that just because they possess some talent in a popular performing art, people look up to them, worship them, stalk them, hunt them down, and kill them. "Fan," after all, is short for "fanatic." So I try very hard not to discriminate against the illustrious and eminent.

In any case, it is only after you have achieved fame that you realize that it is a piece of shit. As Bob Dylan observed, "It's only really useful for getting tables in restaurants." It can be very confusing when you see people smiling at you across a room and you panic, thinking, *Have I met that person—or are they remembering me for something I did in a frock a long time ago?* So you end up hopelessly nodding at strangers in airports, and

saying “Nice to see you again” to the wife. “Nice to *meet* you” is always a minefield and to be avoided, unless you can remember with some certainty that you never actually have met a pope before.

America used to be about the pursuit of happiness, but they seem to have exchanged that for the pursuit of money, fame, and Twitter followers. Once you become a celebrity, in today’s culture, not only do people feel they have the right to bother you or shoot you, or demand you pose for “selfies,” and scribble your name on grubby bits of paper, but they get your identity wrong, confuse you with other people, tell you shows you weren’t in, and then ask you what your name is. I always tell them I’m Michael Palin and to go fuck themselves, so I can help ruin his reputation for niceness.

Whenever I checked in to a hotel in the Eighties, I would check in as Mick Jagger. It’s better to be mistaken for a better class of person, don’t you think? Nowadays I don’t do that. I need my sleep. And I bet so does Mick. For a while I was his Bunbury, when he would tell Jerry he was out all night with me. *Yeah, right*. Some of his friends believed it, and David Bailey wouldn’t have dinner with me because he and his model wife, Marie Helvin, thought I was leading Mick into trouble! As if. Eventually Tania cleared my good name, which was only right since I was home every night with her.

Perhaps the best way to ensure that people leave you alone is registering at hotels under the name of a novelist. Although I don’t recommend Salman Rushdie for security reasons. I recommend his *books*, and I was rather startled to find myself entering his latest, *The Golden House*. Yes *me*, personally. It’s a bit scary to be quietly reading a novel in bed and find yourself coming into the scene. I even sing “Always Look on the Bright Side of Life” at the dinner party in the book. I have known Salman for some years, since we met at a Billy Connolly concert in Hammersmith, where his dates were four hefty guys from Special Branch, and we sat

singing Beatles songs with Gerry Rafferty. You don't have to believe me, but *who could make this shit up?*

Anyway, you can register away in hotels as Martin Amis and Ian McEwan, confident in the knowledge that people will leave you alone. I once tried registering as Meryl Streep, but then I felt guilty because she is so damn nice and smart. Notice how cleverly I introduced the fact that I know her. That's name-dropping at its finest, as I said to Prince Charles only the other day. He wasn't there, but I like to talk to myself and if I pretend he's in the room it feels classier. I used to talk to myself in French so that people would think I was quoting Rimbaud. No. *Not* Sylvester Stallone. Nowadays I talk to myself in a Birmingham accent, like Jeff Lynne's, because I like talking like that and if people overhear me they will assume I am rehearsing for some kind of Midlands sitcom with Lenny Henry, or an episode of *Peaky Blinders*. I've been pals with Jeff for a long time now, and we've played guitars and drank a lot of red wine. One night, quite late, we'd had a few and were playing away when Jeff said:

"Let's form a group."

"Okay," I said.

"What should we call ourselves?"

"The Fuck You Two!"

So began a legendary duo that was dedicated to never writing, recording, or releasing anything at all, and was constantly on the brink of splitting up. The FU2 is still my favorite group. Even though I did once write "Toad the Wet Sprocket" in a sketch and nearly drove off the road when I heard them announced on the radio in California. They sent me a platinum record. I think "Blind Lemon Pie" was also borrowed, from *The Rutles*.

*What has this to do with the price of cheese?* I hear you ask. Well, it's all by way of being a preamble to my meeting with David Bowie, and how we became friends in the Eighties. I wasn't particularly a Bowie fan when



we met, and early on he asked me to collaborate with him in making a Ziggy musical, handing me a tape of *Diamond Dogs* to listen to. I didn't know how to respond so I said, "It's very loud." Luckily, he laughed. That was the great thing about David. He would simply explode into laughter. He was surprisingly normal and he loved comedians. He pursued comedians like he pursued musicians, like he pursued everything really, with a high seriousness. I met him for tea in Hollywood through our mutual friend Bobcat Goldthwait, the rowdy comedian and now brilliant director, in the Pink House we stayed in above Sunset.



We had almost met when we were on the road in the U.K. in 1973. His tour went up the east coast while Python's went up the west, and both

tours collided in Edinburgh, where we all stayed at the same hotel. There were carrot-haired weirdos at breakfast, but only Terry Gilliam was smart and hip enough to go to his show. I ran into David again in the Eighties when we were both guests of Lorne and Susan Michaels on St. Barts in the Caribbean. David and Coco Schwab, and his young son “Joe,” now Duncan Jones, the amazingly good movie director of *Moon*, *Warcraft*, and *Mute*, were staying with Lorne and a house party of friends. We immediately launched into North Country gay dresser chat, and spent two days improvising camp dialogue.

“Well,” I said, “you’re not going to wear *that* onstage, are you?”

“If looks could kill I’d have been a slab of herring.”

“Oo, get back in the knife box, you’re too sharp to live.”

David was very funny, and for days we bantered interminably in these panto voices until the rest of the group became thoroughly sick of it and begged us to stop.

Back home, David invited Tania and me to visit him and Coco at their Swiss villa in Vevey. One night they took us to dinner with Oona Chaplin. Here we learned the story of how after Charlie Chaplin died, and was buried locally, two Polish men had the idea of digging up and kidnapping his corpse. They called Oona and demanded two million dollars for the return of the body.

“Keep it!” said Oona brilliantly.

Two days later the body was returned. Not a brilliantly thought-out crime.



David and Mick and the cake. Far right, Tania's mom, Algea, and niece Kris.

Because of our friendship, I wrote a short scene for David in *Yellowbeard* and he came down to join the party in Mexico. I even jumped into his jock strap once when he casually canceled his appearance as the Pied Piper in Shelley Duvall's *Faerie Tale Theatre*, and she called me in tears to fill in for him. You have not seen disappointment till you have tried on a jock strap for a dresser who has designed it specially for David Bowie. So it was me who had two hundred rats crawling over him in Toronto, and not him. Not just any old rats either, but *Hollywood* rats, trained in LA and flown to Canada on a one-way ticket, a journey which for them ended up as snake fodder in the Toronto Zoo. A perfect metaphor for showbiz. One minute you're in a movie, the next you're being fed to the pythons...

Tania and I spent many good times with David. He and Mick both came to our wedding reception. They sweetly brought out the cake for a very nervous Tania to cut. There was a huge bouquet of flowers from Mike Nichols, and on his card to Tania he gave her excellent advice for her



wedding night: “Act surprised.”

Tania and I went to Welwyn Garden City in 1983 to see David on his Serious Moonlight Tour, and to Cannes for the opening of *Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence*, where the French medical students were on strike and had put plaster of Paris and bloodied bandages on every statue in town. We even went on two cruises with him, the first to the Windward Isles, where we were marooned on Mustique with Iggy Pop, as the rented yacht hadn’t made it across the Atlantic, and they stuck us for a week in Princess Margaret’s rather pretty Oliver Messel villa. Before dinner I made the mistake of asking for a rum punch and Mrs. Lane, Princess Margaret’s steely-eyed cook, said severely, “We. Don’t. Meddle. Wid. Rum.”

Oops. Bet she didn’t say that to PM, as everybody on the island called the Queen’s sister. She would put religious tracts under our pillows with red warnings about the devil. I kept a sharp eye out but I never saw him. At least under the pillow. One day there was a terrific shrieking from a terrified cook. A bird had gotten into Mrs. Lane’s kitchen and she was freaking out. I went in and calmly opened a window and it flew out. She never bullied me again. I think she thought I had saved her from the devil.

Finally, the boat arrived and we left the island on a wonderful yacht. One night we hoaxed the crew by telling them it was going to be Drag Night. With Bowie and Idle on board they decided they had better make a real effort, and so at cocktail time a fully glammed-up staff emerged on deck, dressed to the nines, with the captain leading the way in a blond wig, twinset, and pearls. When we emerged, dressed normally, they realized they had been had. Being British, they were still game to go ashore with us for dinner in their frocks and wigs.



Drag night. With David, Iggy Pop, and a conned crew member.

Another time, we cruised the Italian coast with the beautiful Iman, and David took us to Campo di Thermi, where he had done his first gig. He spoke movingly about his dad and how proud he had been of him. David was himself a proud parent, bringing up Joe, of whom I am a strangely useless godfather, and I was always happy that he had a daughter with Iman.

I could never get him to be friends with George Harrison, though. I would say to George, “He’s wonderful and brilliant and funny,” but then George would become very much a Beatle, “Oh *Bowie*,” he would say contemptuously, to rhyme with “Bowwow.” I even got David as far as Henley once, but George would not admit him. Stubborn buggers, Beatles.

In 1987, Tania and I were on holiday in the South of France with Robin Williams and family, and David invited us to come for lunch to see his new yacht. Steve Martin and Michael Caine were nearby filming *Dirty Rotten*

*Scoundrels* and we all turned up at the quayside to find a simply enormous boat, with David waving from the top deck. We all stared at this huge vessel in stunned amazement.

“Fuck me, Eric,” said Michael Caine. “We’re in the wrong business.”

David was always extremely generous, and in early 1991 he lent me his wonderful house on Mustique to write a movie. Tania and I spent an idyllic six weeks in this lovely Balinese home of many waters that he had built high on a hillside, overlooking a beautiful bay, with our tiny new daughter, Lily, floating around in the pool. I’d had the idea for the film when a friend told me he had been found as a baby in a telephone booth in Sloane Square. This seemed so very Oscar Wilde (*a handbag??*) and it reminded me of some friends of ours who had too good a time at a party and left, forgetting their baby was asleep in a bedroom with the coats. Of course, when they got home they remembered and panicked and raced back, but what if the baby had been gone? I liked the idea of a wealthy, hippie, Sixties upper-class couple forgetting their heir in a restaurant. Searching desperately, they were given the wrong baby (Rick Moranis), who grew up to become the Duke of Bournemouth, while the rightful heir (me) grew up with an Indian family in Southgate. Universal liked my script and I came back to England with eight million to spend, but it was January and it was three weeks before I could find anybody to work.

That Easter, John Cleese invited us to join his expedition to Egypt. It was tough, I can tell you, on a luxury boat with a Jacuzzi on the top deck, floating gently up the Nile, with no one for company but John, Peter Cook, William Goldman, Stephen Fry, and forty other assorted friends. John and Alyce Faye very generously paid for the entire trip and even arranged for the British Museum to give us a private tour before we left London, and for the Cairo Museum to open early so we could gaze undisturbed at the sarcophagus of Tutankhamun. (He didn’t look a bit like Steve Martin.) The boat itself had air-conditioned bedrooms, each with a

private bathroom and a little balcony, where I could sit and play guitar. Tania won the Easter Parade with a hat composed of the many medicaments she had taken with her to avoid almost every known form of tropical disease. People were very grateful for that hat. Peter Cook was in great form and would usually skip the day tours of the temples and pyramids so he could be hilarious in the evenings. He was, but the temples and burial sites were unbelievable, some of them so recently excavated they looked as if the painters had just left. I crossed the Nile at dawn on a tiny boat to fly in a hot-air balloon, as the sun rose over the Valley of Kings. Each day, at teatime, Stephen Fry would read us a chapter of *Billy Bunter on the Nile*, a popular Fifties kids' book, as we glided past villagers in colorful robes winnowing, straight out of illustrated scenes from a children's Bible. Oh, it was rough let me tell you, but I had to get serious and return to London to begin work on *Heirs and Graces*, whose title Universal had changed to *Splitting Heirs*.



John Cleese gave a very fine nuanced performance.

We shot the movie in the glorious summer of 1992 at Longleat, the magnificent palatial home of the Marquess of Bath. Barbara Hershey played the Sixties hippie, and John Cleese a shady lawyer, seen on the [this page](#), giving one of the most emotionally charged performances of his career.

Catherine Zeta-Jones, in her first movie, played the love interest. Catherine was adorable, and Rick made special canvas backs for our chairs: ERIC ZETA IDLE, RICK ZETA MORANIS, BARBARA ZETA HERSHEY. The film went very well and I got to do a nude scene with Catherine, though sadly it was I who was nude.

Halfway through the shooting, Tania and I flew to Florence for the marriage of David Bowie and Iman. David had asked me to make a speech at his wedding, and Tania kept asking him for me just how low I should be. Tell him to make it as low as he wants, David would reply. I, of course, went too far as usual, and I blush to think of it now, but it went down very well with the guests, who included Ono, Eno, and Bono.





“Mawwige, is what bwings us together today.”

The studio was very happy with *Splitting Heirs*, and it was chosen by the French to be the British representative at the Cannes Film Festival. “Chosen by the French” I emphasize, because some of the British press got their knickers in a twist. What was this *comedy* doing representing Britain? Well, getting laughs for one, since it played very well at the screening, but at the press conference I was publicly attacked by Baz Bamigboye and Alexander Walker. The rest of the world’s press looked on amazed as the British tried to eat their own. How dare I? Who did I think I was? I have no idea what Baz was up to, but I reckon Alexander Walker was still seething because we had pilloried him in Monty Python as a pretentious fart with silly hair, even building a special wig which grew taller as Graham spoke. I was very happy when later Ken Russell took a stick to Walker on *Film Night*.



Back home, the tabloids were hounding Catherine Zeta-Jones over a boyfriend issue, and at the last minute she pulled out of attending the festival. I don't blame her, but it meant I had to take the long walk up the famous Palais staircase all on my own. I think it was the loneliest I have ever felt. I decided there and then, *Right, that's it, fuck it, I'm leaving*. If that's how you behave when someone brings eight million back to spend in the country, I shall take my flops to America, where they don't even mind if you are successful. The unexpected press response to my movie in the U.K. caused Universal to have cold feet about the American release, and they pulled back on the spending. I think a lot of the attacks on me were because they discovered I was fifty, and therefore by their reckoning too old for the lead. I had outed myself by writing a cheeky letter to the Prime Minister.

The Rt.Hon. John Major M.P.

## 10 Downing Street

London SW1A.1AA

12th January 1993

Dear Mr. Major,

On the 29th March you and I will both be fifty.

Has it ever occurred to you that, but for a twist of fate, I should be Prime Minister and you could have been the Man in the Nudge Nudge sketch from Monty Python?

I do hope you don't feel too disappointed.

Happy birthday anyway.

Eric Idle

He wrote me an amusing reply about how his cricketing friends always said the first fifty was the hardest, and invited me to 10 Downing Street, but sadly the newspapers found out and had a go at me for being too old. It was enough for me. Tania and I decided to bring up our daughter, Lily, in California. I felt I couldn't survive another fifteen winters in St. John's Wood, and the idea of driving her to school in California seemed far more appealing. It was.

## RUN AWAY!

**A**s a young teenager riding on top of the 148, a double-decker Midland Red bus from Studley to Birmingham, I would pass through a suburb improbably called Hollywood. How could I possibly imagine fifty years later I would end up living in Hollywood, California, in a rambling old 1920s Spanish house? We moved to LA in 1994. Tania and I had been discussing it for some time. She had spent seventeen years in England; only fair if we spent the next seventeen years in the States. We had frequently wintered there, staying in a huge old pink house above Sunset with Garth and Euva, lovely friends who rented out three or four suites to itinerant actors like Albert Finney and Greta Scacchi. The house and the pool were filled with beautiful models, like Janice Dickinson and Lauren Hutton. There was music, ping-pong, dancing, art, food, and excellent conversation. We had stayed there with the infant Lily, but now we would need to find somewhere to live. We would escape the Schadenfreudian nightmare of the U.K. and do a runner. It was almost as if I regretted not running away from boarding school all those years ago. Thaweesee (Wee), our adorable Thai nanny, who made the most exquisite food, would come with us. It wasn't exactly Ellis Island, but I still had to wait downtown with immigration lawyers for green cards and driver's licenses. The only difference? Celebrity. You get spoiled rotten. Finally, a good use for fame. Since I have a pathological fear of filling out forms, waiting in lines, and all officialdom, it was a great relief to be discreetly marched round the back

and asked for autographs.

It wasn't until I moved to America that I truly discovered I was funny. Suddenly I was making Steve Martin and Robin Williams laugh. Chevy Chase told people he wished he were really funny like me. Garry Shandling said he adored the Rutles. It's appreciation by your peers that counts, and being in a group can make you feel insecure. My own TV show after Python, *Rutland Weekend Television*, had no live audience and so I never knew if it was funny or not. Several people went out of their way to assure me it wasn't. My play *Pass the Butler* was hammered by some of the West End critics, though it ran for six months to gales of laughter. My solo film, *Splitting Heirs*, now also suffered critical abuse. In England, my future was behind me. It was time to leave.

I went to California initially to make a speech for John Cleese at the Beverly Wilshire Hotel, where he was presented with the Screen Actors Guild's second annual Jack Oakie Award. The first was to Walther Matthau. There wasn't a third.

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen.

Actually, I am here rather in error. The transatlantic phone line was very bad, it was Christmas, my mother was visiting so I was shit-faced, and I could vaguely hear someone inviting me to a Jackie Oakie evening, and what I heard was "a karaoke evening": so naturally I was very excited.

Imagine my disappointment when I find it is instead some kind of salute to John Cleese, a man who has consistently ruined my life by being funnier, better known, and better paid than me.

A man who hurt me deeply by giving the role I would have been perfect for in *A Fish Called Wanda* to Jamie Lee Curtis.

A man alongside whom I have spent several days being

crucified, perhaps the worst job you can get in show business, with the exception of working for Jeffrey Katzenberg.

Well, I have known John now for thirty-one years, which is perhaps the longest of anyone here. So, while it is an excellent opportunity to make some cheap cracks about him and reveal some tasteless and extraordinary bits of gossip about him that I have picked up over the years, I think I can embarrass him far more successfully by being sincere.

John is quite simply, and it pains me to say this, the best.

Perhaps even more irritatingly, he has turned himself into not just a nice person but a morally fine, caring, thinking, teaching, incredibly generous, wise, and loving human being.

And now he's dead.

Oh, I'm sorry, that's something I was writing for later.

John responded with a very funny speech complaining how nobody ever mentioned his fucking humility, a line Mike Nichols found so hilarious he told John he was going to steal it.

Shortly after this tribute, Tania, Lily, and I were in Encino when the Northridge earthquake hit, on January 17 at four thirty in the morning. We were just four and a half miles from its epicenter in Reseda, in the San Fernando Valley. It had a 6.7 magnitude and lasted for an interminable twenty seconds.

I was awoken by Nikolai, the dog, just after four in the morning, and took him outside, but he just stood there looking confused, so I went back in with him. No sooner had I climbed into bed than the earthquake struck. It was like the sound of an express train coming through the bedroom. I held on to Tania while the bed bounced, until the whole house finished shaking and we could run and check on Lily. It seemed like an eternity and we found her underneath a clown picture, which had fallen off the wall but

fortunately missed her. Downstairs the house was a mess, but Wee and I turned off the gas, swept up the broken glass, and we all went back to bed. The house continued rocking and swaying with aftershocks all night long. Even the dog jumped into our bed after a particularly big tremor. We were on Balboa Avenue, which at one point that night was both flooded and on fire. The wail of car alarms echoed round the valley. It was eerie.

The house belonged to our friend Dave Stewart (of Eurythmics) and, fortunately for us, he was seriously paranoid about earthquakes, and had built it to three times code, so while it bounced a lot, it withstood the initial earthquake and the three weeks of aftershocks. The power was back on by noon the next day and we sat in the Jacuzzi and discussed what to do. Nobody was very keen on returning to an English January. The general consensus was that since that was “the big one,” we might as well stay. Eventually I took some geological maps and discovered where granite and limestone intersected and bought a house there. I would start again.



## PYTHON REUNION?

In the States, I found that Monty Python was really popular. Everyone knew *The Holy Grail*. It seemed to be a college rite of passage. Now, I helped 7th Level turn it into a CD-ROM game. They had been very successful adapting our TV series into *Monty Python's Complete Waste of Time*, an interactive CD, and now I got to rethink *Grail*. I loved this new high-tech world. I had sniffed contemptuously at Timothy Leary in the Eighties, when he said one day everyone would have a laptop computer.

"Why would I want that?" I said in my snobbish ignorance. "I have a pencil."

Now, not only did I have a computer, but I visited Microsoft in Redmond, and ESPN, and several other companies, looking for a home for a Python website. In the end, 7th Level generously offered to bankroll it, and in July 1996 I founded *PythOnline* on the newly burgeoning Internet, where even spam was named after one of our skits. Running *PythOnline* was a quotidian task that eventually became promethean. My ambition had been to create an amusing site to which the Pythons could contribute and where I could vent my occasional spleen and unfold my propensity for satire, but as the Python contributions soon dried up and I was left to deal with it solo, the task became increasingly frustrating. Each day there would be an ever-growing mountain of Python questions, and when I attempted to answer them, the fans would argue with me.

"You're not Eric Idle," they would say.

"Yes, I am," I would reply.

“No, you’re not,” they would insist.

“Then fuck off,” I would add.

“Oh. You *are* him.”

It was an early form of Twitter. How to drive yourself crackers. I found I had given myself a highly unpaid job, a monster that daily demanded new food. But the popularity of *PythOnline* made me think that Python was not dead yet, and I came up with an idea for a final Python movie called *The Last Crusade*, where a bunch of grumpy old knights, loosely based on ourselves, are rounded up reluctantly to go off on a crusade, taking King Arthur’s ashes to Jerusalem. They didn’t want to do it.

“I can’t, I’m too old.”

“The thing is my mother is coming.”

“This is my year off to read a book.”

Promised beautiful women and cash, they are lured to Venice, where they are screwed by the Italians.

Everyone seemed to like the idea of playing older versions of their younger characters, and I went for lunch and a walk on the beach in Santa Barbara with John Cleese, who sounded quite positive about the notion, and so we arranged for a Python Conference at Cliveden, a neoclassical manor hotel on the River Thames in England. Once the Astors’ old family home, in 1963 it had been the setting for the Profumo scandal. Involving sex, call girls, government ministers, and Russian spies, this helped bring about the collapse of the Tory government.

The meeting began rather disastrously when John announced at the outset that he was not interested in making another Python movie. Terry Gilliam, who had just flown overnight from California, where he was prepping a film with Johnny Depp, asked rather acidly if he couldn’t have said that *before* he flew all the way from LA. John then said he was very tired and went off for a nap, so the rest of us began working on the idea

anyway. It was just like the old days of *Do Not Adjust Your Set*, and we were going quite well when John returned and said he wanted to have a business meeting instead. We had a hilarious dinner, and afterwards the four of us (minus John) had an uproarious game of snooker on the very same billiard table where Christine Keeler had contributed to the Tories' downfall. She hadn't been playing snooker, but the balls were definitely Conservative.

Next morning, we discussed doing a live show and, as we had all been getting along very well, we decided to accept an invitation to attend the Aspen Comedy Festival. A few months later, in April 1998, we assembled in the thin Colorado air and filmed a Q&A session in front of an invited audience at the Wheeler Auditorium for an HBO Special. On John's recommendation, I went to see Eddie Izzard perform and loved him so much that I went back the next night. He was truly funny and unique, and I asked him as a gag to come onstage with us at the beginning of our show. When Robert Klein introduced the Pythons to a cheering audience, Eddie came on as well and took one of the chairs.

"How did you all get together?" was Robert Klein's first question.

"Well," piped up Eddie, "we were all in the RAF and we first met in a railway carriage in 1943 and..."

But we interrupted him.



Michael and Eddie in Aspen. Executive transvestites.

“Fuck off, Izzard,” we said, and threw him off the stage. He went off reluctantly through the middle of the audience shouting bits of old Python sketches.

We had one other gag set up. We brought Graham’s ashes out onstage with us, in an urn, and placed them reverently on a low table, with a picture of Graham. We answered a few mild questions, and John was in the middle of a long reply, when Terry Gilliam crossed his legs and “accidentally” knocked the urn off the table, scattering ashes all over the stage. The audience laughed in total shock. We got up and did our best to clean up the mess, shoveling the ashes under the carpet, sweeping them into a tiny dustpan, and even bringing on a vacuum cleaner. The laugh went on for four minutes and grew even bigger as they realized they had been duped. It was certainly the longest laugh we ever got. And of course, we finished the show singing “Always Look on the Bright Side of Life.”

The joyous response of the audience seeing us together inspired some of the group to suggest we do a reunion show, and at a business meeting the

next morning this proposal became more concrete. Mike and Terry were for it, John seemed keen, and even Terry Gilliam didn't seem to mind, though he was mainly there to hang out with Hunter S. Thompson, whose *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* he had just filmed. It seemed the Pythons were really keen on doing some kind of a stage show, and I was designated to explore the options. Believing them to be serious, I set off to find the finance. I came back with a solid offer of ten million dollars from Alan Tivoli, who had been our promoter for *Monty Python Live at City Centre*. Python was to play six nights in Las Vegas, culminating in a live TV performance on New Year's Eve. Not a bad idea and a very decent offer. We were talking dates, venues, and deals. There was a long Python conference call while I was on holiday in Venice. Everyone was in. Then, a month or two later when I returned to LA, Michael suddenly reneged. He *had* said yes, of course, but what he had meant, apparently, was no. He had *always* had anxieties about doing a live show, though he had not shared these anxieties, and he had apparently been very reluctant all along. Of course, it would have been nicer if he had said so earlier. I had spent a lot of time taking meetings and dealing with businesspeople, and now that the offer was concrete he pulled out. But life is too short to fight with friends, and I find at my age I can barely remember to hold a grudge, so although I confess I was a little pissed with Mike for wasting my time, of course I forgave him. It's impossible to dislike him for long. He *is* after all a National Treasure, although, in his case, perhaps a bit of a *Hidden* Treasure.

The fallout from Aspen liberated me. Finally, with Python definitely not going on the road, I was now free to play my own songs. I had been working constantly on music with John Du Prez, and we performed a concert at LA's J. Paul Getty Center in 1999 with backup singers and a band, which became a record, *Eric Idle Sings Monty Python*. The following year this turned into a full-blown two-month, twenty-city tour of



the U.S. called *Eric Idle Exploits Monty Python*.



With my longtime pal and partner, John Du Prez.

On the road with John Du Prez and twenty-one other people—what was I thinking? Certainly not money. William Morris made more than I did, but in hindsight this was a smart move. I enjoyed playing to live audiences across America. It was a nice change from developing movies that never got made. I loved making people laugh, and I really liked singing my songs. Wherever we went, the audiences sang along to “Bright Side.” At Carnegie Hall I stood onstage in full drag as Dolly Taylor, singing “Sit on My Face.”

“Follow that, Brahms,” I said as I looked at his portrait in my dressing room.

In the 1997 James Brooks movie *As Good as It Gets*, Jack Nicholson sang “Always Look on the Bright Side of Life” to a dog.

“Thanks for ruining our film, Eric,” he said to me.

“Thanks for ruining my song, Jack,” I said back.

THANKS FOR TUNING MY SONG, JACK, I SAID BACK.

We had met Jack through our friend Anjelica Huston, and hung out quite a bit with him while Stanley Kubrick was busy driving him and Shelley Duvall mad filming *The Shining* in London (see *Rule One for actors*).

Hans Zimmer, who scored Jim Brooks's movie, asked Art Garfunkel to sing "Bright Side" over the closing credits, and Artie was kind enough to come onstage and sing it for me both nights at Carnegie Hall. A year later Monty Python was inducted into the Hollywood Bowl Hall of Fame, and John Du Prez and I went along with our touring company to accept the trophy. There were wonderful nostalgic clips of us at the Bowl twenty years earlier, and then Robin Williams came on like a blast from a blowgun and torched the audience with a high-octane tribute.

Originally Terry Gilliam was going to join me onstage to accept the award and then we were going to sing "Sit on My Face," but the Bowl nixed that naughty song, saying it was inappropriate for a gala, and so, sadly, Terry Gilliam pulled out. He has very high moral standards when it comes to low moral songs, so that moment of particular public tastelessness would have to wait.

Meanwhile I took the trophy from Robin and said:

It's wonderful to be back at the Bollywood Hole after all these years.

I am proud to be here on behalf of Monty Python to accept this honor.

I bring messages and thanks from the others. Terry Gilliam sadly can't be with us tonight as they won't let him show his ass, which has been very favorably compared with Spielberg's ass.

Graham Chapman can't be with us tonight, as sadly he is still dead. And John Cleese is finishing a movie

still dead. And John Greese is finishing a movie.

He has to get it back to Blockbuster by tomorrow.

So that just leaves me here tonight.

And so, I'd like to thank *me*, without whom I too wouldn't be here this evening.

I'd like to thank everyone at the Bowl for honoring us in this way.

I'd like to thank Robin for friendship above and beyond the call of comedy.

But above all I'd like to thank America and you Americans for accepting Monty Python's essentially British silliness so warmly, so wholeheartedly, and so surprisingly.

Because, you see, I never wanted to do this for a living.

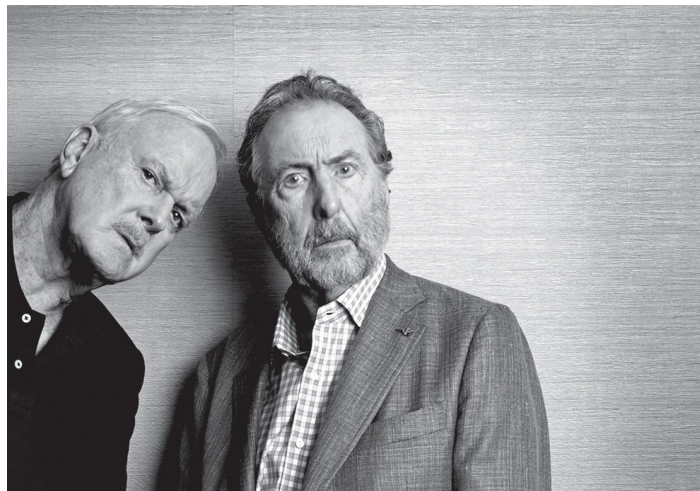
I always wanted to be a...lumberjack...

—and on marched a chorus of Mounties to sing the inevitable with John Mauceri and the Hollywood Bowl Orchestra. Of course, as we exited we naughtily sang “Sit on My Face”...

After Monty Python they honored Stevie Wonder, introduced with a spot-on impersonation by Smokey Robinson. At the end, there was an incredible curtain call, where I appeared holding hands with Stevie Wonder and Smokey Robinson. *I can die now*, I thought as the crowd went wild and two of my heroes held my hands and we bowed onstage at the Hollywood Bowl.

Little did I know I would return within a year for a less happy occasion.

TOGETHER AGAIN AT LAST...FOR THE VERY FIRST  
TIME



**S**hortly after the Python farewell, John Cleese asked me if I would interview him for Writers Bloc Presents at the Alex Theatre, Glendale, about his new autobiography, *So, Anyway...* Of course I would, though I read his book with some trepidation. We are all pretty good at giving out stick. One of the tabloids has insisted for many years we all hate each other, despite all evidence to the contrary, so when it came to his final chapter about the O2 Farewell, I was a little concerned. What might John say about me? I needn't have worried. He gushed. I blushed to read what he had written. It was the kindest and most personal review I have ever

read, from someone who means the most.

John's book event at Glendale was sold out. Fourteen-hundred eager fans were waiting, and the black-market price was over a couple of hundred dollars each. I know, because I sold 'em.

John and I met up at the stage door of the Alex, our tall daughters immediately bonding backstage.

"What on earth are we going to do?" I asked him.

"Oh, just go on, we'll be funny."

We walked straight on, bowed, and then walked straight off again. It was Footlights time. We sat in two red, comfy chairs, and began to chat. Two hours flew by. Memories, anecdotes, jokes; John even threw some sketches at me to cold-read with him. The audience loved it. I loved it. Our daughters loved it. I had known this man since 1963 and here we were back onstage, simply chatting.

In February 2013, on the anniversary of our meeting, I had written a blog about our fifty years together. I think it was the first time he read what I really felt about him. I'm not sure he knew before. He called the next day and talked animatedly on the phone for an hour. Now we could be both touching and funny about each other onstage. And more important, we could be on the road together for months, because our two-hour Glendale chat went out on the Internet and picked up such a tremendous response that John asked me if I'd be interested in touring Florida with him. Sure, why not? I'd never been to Florida. This was pre Merde-a-Largo time, and the alligators hadn't yet come in to drain the swamps. With the prospect of some fine fall weather, and some pleasant places to visit, we could find an audience who were even older than we were. We called the show *John Cleese and Eric Idle, Together Again at Last...for the Very First Time*, and we based it on our first encounter in Glendale, adding some less familiar sketches from the *1948 Show*, inserting plenty of funny clips, and telling our joint story. We claimed to



have met at Trump University and gone on from there...

In the second act, we separated. John did some of his solo tour material and then I came on and sang some tasteless songs. Oddly, this was the first time I had ever sung a solo set with just me and a guitar (*wot no band?*) and so it was in line with my own belief that you must always be trying something new. We finished the show together doing Q&A, ad-libbing happily with the audience, before we ended with “Bright Side.”

I loved being back onstage doing sketches with John. We could both make each other laugh and I’m afraid we did. We giggled a lot through Florida. Towards the end of our tour we engaged a large rock-and-roll bus, and it was great fun riding around reading, writing, kipping, and occasionally sipping champagne. We went north into the Carolinas and Georgia, ending up in Baltimore on Halloween night. Tania visited several times. Lily came to Orlando for a Harry Potter binge. Our crew were kind and very helpful and Simon Garner, an incredibly considerate Canadian gentleman, was the perfect tour manager. My favorite time was somewhere in Carolina, when we had a large and very funny lady “signing” for the partially hearing. I had begun to sing—“Isn’t it awfully nice to have a penis?”—when I suddenly glanced at her and recognized the hand gestures she was making: unmistakable “dick” signs. I giggled. The audience, following my look, began to laugh too. Since the entire song is just a series of dick synonyms, I turned to face her, and continued singing directly to her. I tried desperately not to crack up as she found more and more elaborate hand gestures for that particular part of the male anatomy. She won. I collapsed in hysterics. She got an enormous round of applause from the audience. She was so funny I wanted to take her with us.

The whole tour went so well, and CAA paid so well, that John called a month later and asked me if I’d like to join him touring Australia and New Zealand. *Hell yeah*. So off we flew to summer in Sydney, everyone’s favorite winter destination. After some promo, where John and I slipped

easily into banter mode, I flew up to visit my son in the rain forest. He *does* have a house, but it sounds nicer like that. In fact, it couldn't *be* nicer. Carey practices Tibetan medicine on the Sunshine Coast and gave me a lot of meals and acupuncture. I once told him he'd let me down becoming a healer, as I had been hoping for a crack dealer. One of the funniest things he did was when the Dalai Lama visited the Chinrezig Institute, the nearby Buddhist center, Carey made a huge shrubbery with a plaque, which to this day says: SHRUBBERY SPONSORED BY ERIC IDLE & FAMILY FOR H. H. THE DALAI LAMA VISIT.



"We want...a shrubbery!"

Carey drove me to Surfers Paradise for our opening show, and then we went on to Brisbane, Sydney, and Melbourne. In Canberra we stayed for two nights in the wonderful Jamala Wildlife Lodge, where John and I had tea with a tiger, and bravely petted a cheetah.



The Ascent of Mount Cleese. Without oxygen.

Then on to Perth, Adelaide, and Wellington, where for our final show I played a gag on John. On a previous tour, he had dubbed Palmerston North the “suicide capital of New Zealand.” The locals were offended but, in 2006, encouraged by Fred Daggs—the pseudonymous character of John Clarke, a famous local comedian—they rather wittily named their rubbish dump after John, putting up an official sign at the Palmerston North refuse tip which says MT. CLEESE. On the drive to Wellington, I diverted and made a short film of me climbing it, with which I surprised him on the final night. I’m happy to say I’m the first Python to conquer Mount Cleese, and even Michael Palin hasn’t been there.

After New Zealand, Tania and I flew home via Tahiti, where thanks to the vagaries of the international date line I celebrated three birthdays. (I don’t have to add them *all* on, do I?) Soon, John was back on the phone. This time he proposed a big U.S. tour, all the way from Vancouver, down the West Coast, through LA, San Diego, two nights in Vegas, on down through Arizona to El Paso, across the whole of Texas, ending up in New Orleans. Naturally we had a bus, and a spiffy one at that, but we actually

*slept* in Four Seasons Hotels. It was rough, I'm telling you.

Before we left on this tour I recorded a TV show for the BBC with my pal Professor Brian Cox. He had been gently educating me in the mysteries of science since we met on *What About Dick?* and of course I turned my learnings into a musical. With songs by John Du Prez and choreography by the incomparable Arlene Phillips, we were back at the Beeb making another *Rutland Weekend Television Special* only forty-one years later. *The Entire Universe in One Hour as a Musical* is exactly that. It was broadcast on Boxing Day on BBC2 and again a year later when we sold it to PBS. It's a simple gag. Professor Brian comes in late from Patagonia, where he has been studying electromagnetism for a month, and hence out of cell phone range, to join Robin Ince in the studio at Elstree. He thinks he is coming in to give a simple lecture on the physics of the Universe, but no, in the meantime Arlene and I have changed it into a musical. A serious scientist trapped in a musical is a gag I like, and my proudest moment was getting Brian to climb into full drag to illustrate the infinite possibilities of the multiverse, a universe of infinitely extending universes. (Weren't we small enough?)





Say no more!





I can't think of many double professors of science who would uncomplainingly climb into a red frock to illustrate a scientific principle. Perhaps it's our Oldham connection. Superbly complemented by Warwick Davis, the cast starred Hannah Waddingham, our first Lady of the Lake from *Spamalot* in the West End, and the brilliantly funny Noel Fielding (from the whimsically hilarious show *The Mighty Boosh*).

I don't think I can describe it, except as a nutty show, with science, song and dance, Albert Einstein, the Bee Gees singing about gravity, and a real astronaut (spacewalker Tim Peake, who had just returned from six months on the International Space Station). We ended up singing "The Galaxy Song," with Professor Hawking himself singing at the end. The show was great fun to do, before a live audience, but no sooner completed than I dashed off to join John Cleese on our big tour of the USA.

I liked the shape of the show we already had going, the double autobiography, but I wondered why we couldn't just pick up and continue our story after the intermission, with the various Python breakups and all the coming-back-togethers such as *Brian*, *The Meaning of Life*, *Aspen* and *O2*. Even though it meant quite a bit of work, John thought this was a good idea, and we tried out this new Act Two for a few nights in Victoria, on Vancouver Island, where it immediately worked a lot better. I also wrote a new song to open the show, "Fuck Selfies!" which at least warned people where we stood: Fuck "Selfies"

*And all those stupid gits  
Who want Selfies  
They just get on my tits  
Fuck grinning like a lunatic  
With people you don't know  
It takes them half an hour*

*To get their fucking phones to go  
And then another fourteen other people  
Fucking show!  
So, tell those selfish selfie pricks  
Next time they bloody ask  
To take their fucking selfie sticks  
And shove 'em up their ass.*

It's our kindness and sweetness people like...

Now that the whole show had a shape, it was more satisfactory. It had narrative. A beginning, a middle, and an end. It was our entwined life stories, plus a tale of Monty Python from start to finish. Mike Nichols would have been proud.

We had a blast on the road. We played a very strange hockey arena in Canada, which was, predictably, freezing. The show was going incredibly well, the dates flew by, and soon I was home in LA with two days off for the presidential election. It was supposed to be the triumph of the first woman president of the United States, but unfortunately Putin had other ideas. With the unexpected and unwelcome election of Donald J. Trump, our show became therapy. At Thousand Oaks Civic Arts Plaza the night after, the audience was still grieving. Laughter was tremendously important to them now. They laughed three times harder than before, and sang along to "Bright Side" with fervor. It was never more needed. I sang it with John on *Conan*, where I made a genuine ad-lib, live on the show, when I sang: When you're feeling in the dumps

*Forget about the Trumps  
Just purse your lips and whistle, that's the thing Sometimes jokes  
are just staring at you in the face, and that was one occasion.  
For the rest of the tour we sang that and the audience would  
cheer. The resistance was beginning. Across America our*

*show was sad, glum, people coming out to be cheered up and set free by laughter. And really, laughter is the only sane response to pathological lying.*

For two packed nights at the MGM Grand, we played *Vegas, baby*, staying in suites that were bigger than most private houses. In Arizona, Alice Cooper came backstage to say hello...He even invited us to Thanksgiving, which was most kind, but we had to move on. Texas was waiting, and after hooking up with old friends in Houston and playing all the “blue” cities, we flew to New Orleans for our final show. John and I had a final farewell lunch amongst the Christmas decorations, while outside a parade of leprechauns dressed as green Elvises with pointy ears and black pompadours drove past on scooters. We had done three tours in very quick succession and were still friends. In the Southeast of the States we had played twenty shows to 38,000 people. In our second tour, to Australia and New Zealand, we had played nine shows in seven cities to 36,000 people, and in our final U.S. tour, we had played thirty-four shows in twenty-three cities to 62,000 people. Our combined age was a hundred and fifty.

## AND FINALLY...

I'd like to thank everyone I've forgotten. They know who they are. Without them I would not be half the man I used to be. I particularly want to thank Tania, Carey, and Lily, without whom I wouldn't even be a quarter of the man I used to be. They have taught me the meaning of love and family. So I'd also like to thank my extended Chicago family, my large Canadian family, and my London family, Nigel and the Wrays, for their love and kindness. I should thank all the Pythons of course. I know they were lucky to have me, but I learned a lot from them, even though wild horses wouldn't get me to confess it. A big legally binding thank-you to Tom Hoberman, my lawyer and friend of thirty-five years. Simon Green, my new agent, who had the fortitude to persist in encouraging me to write this book. My publishers, Tricia Boczkowski of Crown Archetype and Alan Samson of Orion Books, for listening to him when he asked them for money. Thanks also to Caspian Dennis for aiding in this task. I must thank my two fantastic assistants, the brilliant and hilarious Alana Gospodnetich, and my wonderful photographic assistant Stefanie Estes, who both helped me enormously, while encouragingly laughing at my jokes. Thank you to Kelly Bush and her IDPR team, including Chris Kanarick and Rachel Hunt, who supported this book early on; the photographer Robin von Swank made me look nice, and my dogdaughter Tasha Goldthwait dressed me up to look swanky for her. Michael Gorfaine fed me sushi and giggled



at my anecdotes; and Steve Martin gave me forty years of friendship and advice. Thanks to Doctor Kipper for keeping me alive; Danny Ferrington for building me guitars; Kevin Nealon and Susan Yeagley for being simply wonderful; Ed Begley and Rachelle; the magnificent Jim Beach; the adorable Olivia Harrison; Ian Miles; Holly Gilliam; Jane Tani; Ian Miles; John and Linda Goldstone; Tasha and Bobcat Goldthwait; Gavin and Yukimi de Becker; Arlene Phillips and Angus Ion; Adrienne Strong; Charles Wheeler; Salman; Joni; Jim and Annie; Jeff and Camelia, Joe and Margery; the Connollys; the Ashers; the Feigs; the Dysons; the Donners; Les Frenais; the E. Grants; Ruth Teale; Lyn Ashley; Sasha Smith; Sarah Polley; Bill Haber, producer extraordinaire; Steve Spiegel of TRW, who took a punt and turned it into a battleship; and Casey Nicholaw for just about everything. Merci to my summer friends in France: the Hopewells, Les Nicholas', Catriona and Jeremy, the Chaters, Dougie and Sylvie, Frank and Chrissie; my London chums, Brian and Gia, Noel and Birdy, Kathy Lette, the Beetles and Jeffrey Archer, who dine me and encourage me; my lovely shrink Barbara for keeping me relatively sane; and of course, my long-suffering musical partner of forty years, John Du Prez. Thank you all. It's been fun.

# PHOTO CREDITS

Interior Art 1 Courtesy of Python (Monty) Pictures Limited

2 Courtesy of the author

3 Courtesy of the author

4 Courtesy of the author

5 With compliments from Scottish Television LTD Press and Publicity Department,  
Douglas 9999

6 Cambridge News / BPM Media 7 FremantleMedia Ltd / Shutterstock 8 Courtesy  
of Python (Monty) Pictures Limited 9 Courtesy of the author

10 Courtesy of the author

11 Courtesy of Python (Monty) Pictures Limited 12 Drew Mara / Python (Monty)  
Pictures Limited 13 © Donal F. Holway

14 © Peter Baylis

15 Trinity Mirror / Mirrorpix / Alamy Stock Photo 16 © Catherine Nicolson

17 Courtesy of the author

18 Courtesy of the author

19 © Bob Gruen

20 © Carinthia West

21 Courtesy of Python (Monty) Pictures Limited 22 © Victoria Juvat

23 © Catherine Nicolson

24 Courtesy of the author 25 Courtesy of the author

26 Courtesy of the author

27 Courtesy of the author

28 Richard Avedon © Avedon Foundation 29 Courtesy of Python (Monty) Pictures  
Limited 30 Courtesy of the author

31 © Lynn Goldsmith

32, 33 Courtesy of the author 34 Courtesy of Python (Monty) Pictures Limited 35 ©  
Alan Kleinberg

- 36 Courtesy of Ewe Mathuen
- 37 © Alan Kleinberg
- 38 © Alan Kleinberg
- 39 © 1983 Celadine Films
- 40 Courtesy of Python (Monty) Pictures Limited 41 © Zoë Dominic
- 42 Courtesy of the author
- 43 NUNS ON THE RUN © 1990 Twentieth Century Fox. All rights reserved.
- 44 © 1989 Harmony Gold Productions, Inc. All Rights Reserved.
- 45 THE ADVENTURES OF BARON MUNCHAUSEN © 1989 Columbia Pictures Industries, Inc. All Rights Reserved. Courtesy of Columbia Pictures.
- 46 © Alan Kleinberg
- 47 © Alan Kleinberg
- 48 Courtesy of the author
- 49 © 1993 Universal Pictures 50 © Brian Aris
- 51 Courtesy of the author
- 52 THE WIND IN THE WILLOWS © 1996 Allied Films Limited. All Rights Reserved. Courtesy of TriStar Pictures 53 Courtesy of the author
- 54 Courtesy of the author
- 55 Courtesy of the author 56 © Brigitte Lacombe
- 57 Anwar Hussein Collection / ROTA *Contributor* Getty Images 58 Frazer Harrison *Staff* Getty Images 59 Leon Neal *AFP* Getty Images 60 Jeff J Mitchell *Staff* Getty Images 61 Geoff Robinson Photography / Shutterstock 62 Courtesy of the author
- 63 Courtesy of the author
- 64 Courtesy of the author
- 65 Steven Siewert / Fairfax Syndication 66 Courtesy of the author
- 67 Courtesy of the author
- 68 © Vincent Graff for Radio Times / Immediate Media 69 © RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY
- 70 Monty Python stamp design © Royal Mail Group Limited. Images licensed courtesy of Python (Monty) Pictures Limited. All rights in the underlying images and the name “Monty Python” are reserved.

## Insert

- 1.1 Courtesy of the author
- 1.2 © Victoria Juvrud
- 1.3 Courtesy of Python (Monty) Pictures Limited 1.4 Courtesy of the author
- 1.5 Courtesy of the author
- 1.6 © Carinthia West “Hanging Out Archive”
- 1.7 Courtesy of the author
- 1.8 Courtesy of the author
- 1.9 Courtesy of the author
- 1.10 Courtesy of the author
- 1.11 Courtesy of the author
- 1.12 Courtesy of the author
- 1.13 Courtesy of the author
- 1.14 Courtesy of the author
- 1.15 Courtesy of the author
- 1.16 Courtesy of the author 1.17 Courtesy of the author
- 1.18 Courtesy of the author
- 1.19 Courtesy of the author
- 1.20 © Doug McKenzie
- 1.21 © Carol Rosegg
- 1.22 Courtesy of the author
- 1.23 © Vincent Graff for Radio Times / Immediate Media 1.24 Archival *Playboy* magazine material. Copyright © 1974 by *Playboy*. Used with permission. All rights reserved.

---

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U  
V W X Y Z

---

## INDEX

### A

Adenauer, Konrad  
*Adventures of Baron Munchausen, The* (film), 19.1, *photo*, 29.1, 30.1  
Ahrens, Lynn  
Allen, Paul  
“All Things Dull and Ugly” (song)  
Altman, John  
Altman, Robert  
“Always Look on the Bright Side of Life” (song):  
    in *As Good as It Gets* (film)  
    British royalty and, 18.1, 28.1, *photo*  
    election of Trump and  
    as Eric’s life motto  
    foreign translations of, 3.1, 28.1  
    as funeral song  
    in *Golden House* (Rushdie)  
    guitar music for  
    Idle with Idol and, *photo*  
    London Olympic Games, *photo*  
    Macy’s parade float and  
    Mike Nichols tribute and, *photo*  
    *Monty Python’s Life of Brian* and, 12.1, 12.2, *photo*  
    Penn & Teller and  
    Python reunions and  
    released as single record, 14.1, 18.1  
    Silver Disc Award for, *photo*  
    in *Spamalot*, 25.1, 25.2, 25.3  
    sports fans and  
American Film Institute, *photo*  
*And Now for Something Completely Different* (film)  
Armstrong, Lance  
*Around the World in Eighty Days* (film), *photo*  
Asher, Peter  
Ashley, Lyn (ex-wife), 7.1, *photo*, 8.1, 9.1, 10.1, 14.1  
Aspen Comedy Festival, 23.1, 23.2, 25.1

*At Last the 1948 Show* (TV show), 6.1, 7.1, 7.2  
Australia, 10.1, 31.1  
Avedon, Richard, *photo*  
Aykroyd, Dan, 10.1, 10.2, 11.1, 11.2, 13.1, 16.1  
Azaria, Hank

## B

Bailey, David  
Bamigboye, Baz  
Barbados, 11.1, *photo 1*, 12.1, *photo 2*  
Barclay, Humphrey, 3.1, 3.2, *photo*, 5.1, 6.1  
Barker, Ronnie, 6.1, 7.1  
Bart, Lionel  
Beach, Jim, 5.1, 29.1, 29.2  
Beatles, 5.1, 7.1, 9.1, 9.2, 9.3, 10.1, 11.1, 18.1, 32.1  
    *see also* Harrison, George  
Beck, Jeff  
Begelman, David  
Begley, Ed  
*Behind the Crease* (musical)  
Belle Vue Circus  
Belushi, John, 10.1, 11.1, 13.1, 16.1, 30.1  
Bennett, Alan, 2.1, 5.1  
Bernstein, Leonard  
Bertrand, Henry (great-grandfather), *photo*  
*Beyond the Fringe* (comedy show), 2.1, 3.1  
Black, Clint, 11.1, 22.1  
Black, Jack  
*Body Language* (film)  
Bogart, Neil  
Bowie, David, 8.1, 11.1, 13.1, 14.1, 20.1, *photo 1*, *photo 2*, 25.1, 32.1  
Brand, Russell, 22.1, 28.1  
*Brand New Monty Python Papperbok, The*  
Brandt, Willy  
Brenner, David  
British Broadcasting Company (BBC):  
    BBC Radio, 2.1, 5.1, 6.1, 18.1, 19.1  
    BBC TV, 3.1, 5.1, 7.1  
    BBC website  
British Music Halls  
Brooke-Taylor, Tim, 3.1, 5.1, 6.1, 6.2  
Brooks, James  
Brooks, Mel, 17.1, 19.1  
Brosnan, Pierce, *photo*  
Brown, Elliot  
Brown, Jerry



Brown, Joe  
Brynnner, Yul  
Bullock, Susan  
*Burn Hollywood Burn* (film)

## C

California, 8.1, 14.1, 20.1  
*Cambridge Circus* revue, 3.1, 3.2, 4.1, 6.1  
Cambridge University:  
    Edinburgh Festival and  
    Footlights Club and, 3.1, 3.2, 5.1, 31.1  
    Pembroke Players and, 3.1, 3.2  
Cameron, James  
Cameron, John  
Canada, 8.1, *photo*, 25.1  
Candy, John  
Caneel Bay, St, Virgin Isles, 10.1, *photo*, 22.1. John Cannes Film Festival, 9.1, *photo*, 13.1, 14.1, 17.1, 19.1, 20.1, 20.2  
Carson, Johnny  
Cavett, Dick  
Chan, Jackie  
Chaplin, Charlie, 3.1, 20.1  
Chaplin, Oona  
Chapman, Graham:  
    *At Last the 1948 Show* and  
    beginning of Monty Python and, 6.1, *photo*, 7.1  
    *Cambridge Circus* and  
    Canada tour and  
    *The Frost Report* and  
    at Hollywood Bowl  
    memorial for  
    *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* and, 9.1, 25.1  
    *Monty Python's Life of Brian* and, 1.1, 12.1  
    Python reunions and, 23.1, 23.2  
    in *Splitting Heirs*  
    Sun Award and  
    *Yellowbeard* (film) and  
Charles, Jeanette, *photo*  
Charles, Prince of Wales, 28.1, *photo*, 30.1  
Chase, Chevy, 10.1, 21.1  
Chicago, Ill.  
Chopra, Deepak  
Clapton, Eric, 13.1, 24.1  
Clarke, John  
Cleese, John:  
    *At Last the 1948 Show* and, 7.1, 7.2

beginning of Monty Python and, 6.1, *photo*, 7.1  
 at Cambridge University  
 Canada tour and  
 “Eric the Half a Bee” song and  
*The Frost Report* and, 6.1, 7.1  
 “Fuck Christmas?” (song) and, 2.1, 25.1  
 Graham Chapman’s memorial and  
 at Hollywood Bowl  
*I’m Sorry, I’ll Read That Again* and, 5.1, 7.1  
 Jack Oakie Award and  
*The Meaning of Life* and  
*Monty Python and the Holy Grail* and  
*Monty Python’s Flying Circus* and  
*Monty Python’s Life of Brian* and, 1.1, 12.1, 12.2  
 Python reunions and, 23.1, 23.2, 25.1  
 “Secret Service” sketch of, *photo*  
*So, Anyway* biography of  
*Spamalot* and, 27.1, 29.1  
 in *Splitting Heirs*, *photo*  
 touring with Idle and  
*Yellowbeard* (film) and  
 Cleveland, Carol, 7.1, 8.1, 8.2, 28.1, 29.1  
 Coffey, Denise, *photo*  
 Coltrane, Robbie, *photo*  
 Combined Cadet Force (CCF)  
 Connery, Sean  
 Connolly, Billy, 10.1, *photo*, 20.1, 25.1, 28.1, 30.1, 30.2  
 Connolly, Pamela  
 Coogan, Steve, *photo*  
 Cook, Peter, 3.1, 5.1, 17.1, 20.1, 30.1  
 Cooper, Alice  
 Cooper, Tommy  
 Corbett, Ronnie  
 Corri, Adrienne  
 Cortese, Valentina  
 Coward, Noël  
 Cox, Brian, 14.1, 29.1, 31.1  
 “Crackerbox Palace” music video, *photo*  
*Crimson Permanent Assurance, The* (short film), 17.1, 17.2  
 Cryer, Barry  
 Curry, Tim, 22.1, 25.1, 25.2  
 Curtin, Jane  
 Curtis, Jamie Lee

## D

Dalai Lama

Daley, Bob  
Damsky, Mel  
Dangerfield, Rodney  
Davies, John Howard  
Davis, Clive  
Davis, Jeff  
Davis, Warwick  
deadpan comedy, 3.1, 4.1, 22.1  
de Becker, Gavin  
Delfont, Bernard  
Dench, Judi  
Depp, Johnny  
Devillier, Ron  
*Do Not Adjust Your Set* (TV show), 6.1, *photo*, 7.1, 23.1  
Dore, Charlie  
Doyle-Murray, Brian  
Drabinsky, Garth  
*Drag Racing* (film)  
Du Prez, John, 14.1, 17.1, 18.1, 19.1, 23.1, *photo*, 25.1, 25.2, 28.1  
Duvall, Shelley, 11.1, 14.1, 20.1, 23.1, 30.1  
Dylan, Bob, 13.1, 20.1  
Dyson, Deirdre and James

## E

Edinburgh Festival, 3.1, 30.1  
Egypt  
Elizabeth II, Queen of England, 2.1, 7.1, 18.1  
Ellison, Larry  
England, 2.1, 9.1, 9.2, 10.1, 11.1, 19.1, 21.1, 32.1  
*Entire Universe in One Hour as a Musical, The*  
*Eric Idle Sings Monty Python* (album)  
Ezrin, Bob

## F

fame, 7.1, 9.1, 10.1, 14.1, 20.1, 21.1, 22.1, 24.1, 30.1  
Fataar, Ricky, 11.1, *photo 1*, 11.3, 12.1, *photo 2*  
Faye, John and Alyce  
Fayed, Dodi  
Feldman, Laurreta, 6.1, 7.1  
Feldman, Marty, 6.1, 7.1, 15.1, 17.1  
Ferrington, Danny  
Ferry, Bryan

*Festival Special* (TV show), *photo*  
Fielding, Noel  
Fierstein, Harry  
film investors, 8.1, 9.1, 12.1  
Fisher, Carrie, 10.1, 13.1, 14.1, 15.1, 22.1, 30.1  
Fisz, Anoushka  
Flaherty, Joe  
Flaherty, Stephen  
Fleming, Ian  
Florida  
Footlights Club, 3.1, 3.2, 5.1, 31.1  
Ford, Harrison, *photo*  
Forristal, Susan  
Fox, Michael J.  
France, 3.1, 9.1, 13.1, 14.1, 30.1, 30.2  
Friar Park, 9.1, *photo*, 10.1, 11.1, 24.1  
Friendly, Ed  
Frost, David, 6.1, 18.1, 26.1  
*Frost Report, The* (TV show), 6.1, 7.1, 7.2  
Fry, Stephen  
“Fuck Christmas?” (song), 2.1, 25.1  
“Fuck Selfies!” (song)

## G

“Galaxy Song” (song), 17.1, *photo*, 22.1, 29.1  
Garden, Graeme, 3.1, 3.2, 5.1, 5.2  
Garfunkel, Art, 14.1, 23.1, 28.1  
Garner, Simon  
Garr, Teri  
Gates, Bill  
Gavin, Kim  
Geffen, David  
Germany, 3.1, 8.1  
Gilbert, W. S., 19.1, 32.1.  
Gilbert and Sullivan  
Gilliam, Holly  
Gilliam, Terry:  
    *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen* and, 19.1, 30.1  
    beginning of Monty Python and, *photo*, 7.1, 7.2  
    Canada tour and, *photo*  
    as David Bowie fan  
    *Do Not Adjust Your Set* and  
    Harrisons and, *photo*  
    *The Meaning of Life* and, 17.1, 17.2  
    *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* and, 9.1, 9.2  
    Monty Python Farewell Tour and

*Monty Python's Flying Circus* and  
*Monty Python's Life of Brian* and, 12.1, 12.2  
*Not the Messiah* DVD and  
Python reunions and  
short animations and  
*Spamalot* and  
Gladwell, Malcolm  
Goldberg, Whoopi  
Goldman, William  
Goldsmith, Harvey  
Goldsmith, Lynn  
Goldstone, John, 9.1, 12.1, *photo*, 12.3, 17.1  
Goldthwait, Bobcat  
Gooderson, David  
Gospodnetich, Alana  
Grade, Lew  
*Graham Norton Show, The* (TV show)  
Grammy Awards  
Grant, Richard  
Greenblatt, Stephen  
Greer, Germaine  
Guinness, Sabrina, *photo*

## H

Haber, Bill, 25.1, 27.1  
Hall, Jerry, 12.1, *photo*, 13.1, 20.1  
Hamill, Mark, *photo*  
Hancock, Roger and Tony  
Handmade Films, 12.1, 15.1, 19.1, 19.2  
Hanks, Tom, 11.1, 22.1, 24.1  
Harrison, Carey, 5.1, 9.1  
Harrison, Dhani  
Harrison, George:  
    on being famous  
    Caneel Bay, St, Virgin Isles, 10.1, *photo*, 22.1. John celebrity friends of, 13.1, 13.2, 13.3  
    death of, 18.1, 24.1  
    Friar Park and, 9.1, *photo*, 10.1, 11.1, 12.1, 24.1  
    at Hollywood Bowl  
    *I, Me, Mine* book and, 11.1, 24.1  
    Indian culture and  
    meeting Eric Idle and, 2.1, 9.1, *photo*  
    with Monty Python at City Center, *photo*  
    *Monty Python's Life of Brian* and, 12.1, 12.2, 12.3  
    “The Pirate Song” and, *photo*  
    *The Rutles* (mockumentary) and, 11.1, 11.2  
    “the sneaky chord” and

[see also Beatles](#)  
[Harrison, Olivia \("Liv"\)](#), [9.1](#), [photo](#), [11.1](#), [13.1](#), [14.1](#), [22.1](#), [24.1](#), [24.2](#)  
[Hawking, Stephen](#)  
[Hefner, Hugh](#)  
[Helvin, Marie](#)  
[Henry, Buck](#)  
[Hepburn, Katharine](#)  
[Hershey, Barbara](#)  
[Hitchens, Christopher](#)  
[Hoberman, Tom](#), [25.1](#), [25.2](#), [28.1](#)  
[Hobson, Harold](#)  
[Holly, Buddy](#), [2.1](#), [12.1](#)  
[Hollywood, Calif](#), [21.1](#), [22.1](#), [22.2](#).  
[Hollywood Bowl](#), [8.1](#), [15.1](#), [photo](#), [17.1](#), [23.1](#), [24.1](#), [28.1](#), [29.1](#), [29.2](#)  
[Holmes, Samuel](#)  
[Honey, I Shrunk the Audience!](#) (film)  
[Howard, Ann](#), [18.1](#), [19.1](#)  
[Hughes, Terry](#)  
[humor](#):  
     [blasphemy gags and](#)  
     [as coping skill](#), [2.1](#), [31.1](#)  
     [Eric Idle on](#)  
     [gay jokes and](#)  
     [healing power of](#)  
     [irony and](#), [1.1](#), [2.1](#), [18.1](#), [19.1](#), [25.1](#), [32.1](#)  
     [phone gags and](#)  
     [practical jokes and](#)  
     [types of](#); [see also satire](#); [visual gags">](#)  
[Huston, Anjelica](#)

## I

[I, Me, Mine](#) (Harrison), [11.1](#), [24.1](#)  
[Idle, Carey \(son\)](#):  
     [birth and childhood of](#), [9.1](#), [10.1](#), [11.1](#), [12.1](#), [22.1](#)  
     [career in healing and](#)  
     [at Friar Park](#), [photo](#)  
     [holidays with Eric and](#), [photo](#)  
     [at London Olympic Games](#)  
[Idle, Eric](#):  
     [1st television appearance of](#), [photo](#)  
     [acting and](#), [5.1](#), [photo 1](#), [5.3](#), [19.1](#), [photo 2](#), [photo 3](#), [photo 4](#), [photo 5](#)  
     [as anti-authoritarian and pacifist](#)  
     [beginning of Monty Python and](#), [photo](#)  
     [birth and childhood of](#), [2.1](#), [photo 1](#), [photo 2](#), [19.1](#), [32.1](#)  
     [books written by](#), [2.1](#), [19.1](#), [30.1](#)  
     [as British native](#)



- at Cambridge University, 3.1, 4.1, *photo*, 5.1, 32.1
- Canada tour and, *photo*
- at Cannes Film Festival, 9.1, *photo*, 13.1
- Christmas in Barbados and, 11.1, *photo 1*, 12.1, *photo 2*
- Daily Telegraph* fake obituary of
- fatherhood and, 22.1 *photo*; see also Idle, Carey (son); #Idle, Lily (daughter)
- film script writing of, 8.1, 11.1, 12.1, *photo 1*, *photo 2*; see also *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*;  
*Monty Python's Life of Brian*
- first marriage of, 7.1, *photo*, 9.1, 10.1
- folk music trio of, 2.1, 2.2
- George Harrison meeting and, *photo*
- George Harrison's death and
- The Greedy Bastard Diary* and
- guitar playing and, 5.1, 12.1, 22.1
- hitchhiking through Germany and
- as host of *Saturday Night Live*, 10.1, 10.2, 11.1, 13.1
- humor as coping skill and
- as "hyphenate"
- John Cleese tribute of
- last words of
- as legendary Python, 32.1, *photo*, 32.3
- love of comedy and
- making Broadway history and
- milestone birthdays of, 20.1, 32.1
- move to California and
- musicals and, *photo*
- "Nudge Nudge" sketch and, 8.1, *photo*, 13.1
- origins of last name and
- pets of, *photo*
- in *Playboy*, *photo*
- radio script writing of
- Robin Williams and
- at Royal Orphanage ("the Ophny")
- sabbatical in France and, *photo*
- second marriage of. See Idle, Tania Kosevich (wife)
- shrubbery with plaque and, *photo*
- song writing of, 2.1, 8.1, 9.1, *photo 1*, 14.1, 25.1, *photo 2*; see also "Always Look on the Bright Side of Life" (song)
- as survivor of Sixties, 32.1, 32.2
- touring with Cleese and
- TV commercials and
- TV show writing of, 6.1, 7.1; see also *Monty Python's Flying Circus* (TV show)
- Idle, Lily (daughter):
  - attending *Spamalot* and
  - Bagel the beagle and, *photo*
  - children's book written for
  - Disney World and
  - family holiday in France and
  - Harry Potter binge and
  - at London Olympic Games, 28.1, 28.2

move to California and  
 Robin Williams' memorial and  
 Steve Martin's magic and  
 Thanksgiving in Chicago and  
 Idle, Tania Kosevich (wife):  
   *Around the World in Eighty Days* and  
   attending *Spamalot* and  
   in Barbados, *photo*  
   at Cannes Film Festival  
   David Bowie and  
   Egypt expedition and  
   with Eric in Mexico and, *photo*  
   as Eric's bride, 16.1, *photo 1*, *photo 2*, *photo 3*  
   Florida tour and  
   George Harrison's death and, 24.1, 24.2  
   at Hollywood Bowl  
   at London Olympic Games, 28.1, 28.2  
   loyalty to Eric and, 14.1, *photo*, 20.1  
   meeting Eric in NYC and, 11.1, 11.2  
   move to California and, 21.1, 22.1, 22.2  
   New Orleans honeymoon and  
   *Playboy* and  
   pregnancy of, 14.1, 19.1  
   raising Lily and, 20.1, 20.2, 24.1  
   sense of humor of, 14.1, 16.1, 22.1  
   at Tony Awards  
 Idol, Billy, *photo*  
*I'll Never Forget What's'isname* (film)  
*I'm Sorry, I'll Read That Again* (radio show), 5.1, 7.1, 7.2  
 Iman, 20.1, 20.2, *photo*, 25.1  
 Ince, Robin  
 Innes, Neil, 8.1, 9.1, 9.2, 10.1, 11.1, 28.1  
 Ireland  
 Italy, 20.1, 22.1, 30.1, *photo 1*, *photo 2*  
 Izzard, Eddie, *photo 1*, 22.1, 23.1, *photo 2*, 25.1, 25.2, 27.1, 28.1, 30.1

## J

Jackman, Hugh  
 Jagger, Bianca  
 Jagger, Mick:  
   at Eric and Tania's wedding, *photo*  
   Jerry Hall and, 12.1, *photo*, 20.1  
   as Monty Python fan, 8.1, 13.1  
   Rolling Stones and, 10.1, 29.1  
   in *The Rutles* (mockumentary)  
 James, Clive

Jason, David, *photo*  
Jay, Ricky  
Jethro Tull  
John, Elton, 8.1, 10.1, 28.1  
*John Cleese and Eric Idle*, *photo*  
Jones, Duncan (godson), 20.1, 20.2  
Jones, Terry:  
    beginning of Monty Python and, *photo*, 7.1, 7.2  
    *Do Not Adjust Your Set* and, 6.1, *photo*, 7.1  
    Germany tour and, 8.1, 25.1  
    Graham Chapman's memorial and  
    at Hollywood Bowl  
    *The Meaning of Life* and  
    *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* and, 9.1, 9.2  
    Monty Python Farewell Tour and  
    *Monty Python's Life of Brian* and  
    *Not the Messiah* DVD and  
    "Nudge Nudge" sketch and, *photo*  
    Oxford Revue and  
    Python reunions and, 23.1, 25.1  
    *Spamalot* and, 27.1, 29.1  
    *Wind in the Willows* (film) and, *photo*  
Jones-Davies, Sue  
Julia, Raul

## K

Kamen, Michael  
Kaufman, Andy  
Kellum, Craig  
Keltner, Jim  
Kennedy, John F, 3.1, 5.1. (JFK) Kissinger, Henry  
Klein, Allen  
Kline, Kevin, 19.1, 23.1  
Kosevich family (in-laws), 16.1, *photo 1*, 25.1, *photo 2*

## L

Lambert, Adam  
Las Vegas, Nev, 22.1, 27.1.  
Lawson, Wilfrid  
Lear, Edward  
Lear, Norman  
Leary, Timothy, 14.1, 15.1, 23.1

Led Zeppelin  
Leeves, Jane  
Lennon, John, 9.1, 11.1, 11.2, 11.3, 12.1, 14.1, 18.1  
Lerman, Leo  
Lewis, Nancy, 8.1, 8.2  
*Life of Brian Scrapbook*  
Light Entertainment, 7.1, 7.2  
Lineker, Gary  
Lipson, Ric  
London, 5.1, 8.1, 10.1, 11.1, 17.1, 19.1, 20.1, 22.1, 24.1  
    *see also* Monty Python Farewell Tour; Olympic Games  
Los Angeles, Calif, 9.1, 11.1, 21.1, 22.1, 22.2, 22.3, 23.1, 24.1.  
Lownes, Victor  
Lucas, George  
“Lumberjack Song, The” (song), 8.1, 10.1, 24.1  
Lynn, Jonathan, 3.1, 14.1, 19.1  
Lynne, Jeff, 20.1, 24.1, 28.1

## M

McCartney, Linda  
McCartney, Paul, 9.1, 11.1, 11.2, 12.1, 24.1, 24.2, 32.1  
McGough, Roger  
McGrath, Joseph  
McIntyre, Phil  
McKenna, Bernard  
MacNaughton, Ian  
Mamet, David  
Marley, Bob  
Marshall, Penny  
Martin, Steve, 14.1, 15.1, 18.1, 20.1, 21.1, 22.1, 24.1, 28.1, 30.1, 30.2  
Marx Brothers, 2.1, 19.1  
Mauceri, John  
Maudling, Reginald  
May, Elaine  
Mayo, Simon  
*Meaning of Life, The* (film), 14.1, 17.1  
Mehta, Gita and Sonny  
Mexico, 17.1, 20.1  
Michaels, Lorne, 10.1, 10.2, 11.1, 20.1, 25.1  
Michaels, Susan  
Midler, Bette  
*Midnight Special, The* (TV show)  
*Mikado* (musical), 19.1, 19.2, *photo*, 28.1  
Miller, Christine  
Miller, Henry  
Miller, Jonathan, 5.1, 19.1, 28.1

Milligan, Spike, 2.1, 7.1, 10.1

Mills, Michael

Mitchell, Joni, 9.1, 9.2, 32.1

Monty Python:

20th anniversary of, *photo*

40th anniversary of

beginning of, 4.1, *photo*, 7.1

California tour of

Canada tour of, *photo*

celebrity fans of, *photo*

fame of, 7.1, 9.1, 10.1, 14.1, 21.1

Germany tour of

Handmade Films and, 12.1, 15.1

at Hollywood Bowl, 8.1, 15.1, *photo*, 23.1

Jim Beach as manager of

Monty Python stamp and, *photo*

Pythonline (website)

Python reunions and, *photo*

stream-of-consciousness flow of, 6.1, 7.1

success of, 7.1, 7.2, 7.3

UK tour and, 7.1, 8.1, 10.1

see also Chapman, Graham; Cleese, John; Gilliam, Terry; Idle, Eric; Jones, Terry; Palin, Michael

*Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (film):

Cannes Film Festival and, *photo*

Elvis Presley as fan of

filming of, *photo*

LA opening of

NYC opening of, *photo*

popularity in USA of

rock stars as investors in, 8.1, 9.1

script writing of

Monty Python Farewell Tour, *photo*

*Monty Python Live at City Center*, 10.1, *photo*, 23.1

*Monty Python Live at Drury Lane*, 8.1, 9.1

*Monty Python Matching Tie and Handkerchief, The* (album)

*Monty Python's Big Red Book*

*Monty Python's Complete Waste of Time* (CD-ROM game), 23.1, 25.1

*Monty Python's Flying Circus* (TV show):

album recording of

character casting for

comedy book market and, 7.1, 7.2

filmmaking of

"Nudge Nudge" sketch and, *photo*

season without John Cleese and

sketch writing for

title of TV show and, 7.1, 8.1

*Monty Python Sings* (album)

*Monty Python's Life of Brian* (film):

Christianity as theme of

as controversial film

filming in Tunisia of, 1.1, 12.1, 19.1  
Harrison's financing of, 12.1, 24.1  
opening of  
writing script for, 12.1, *photo 1*, *photo 2*  
*see also* "Always Look on the Bright Side of Life" (song)  
Moon, Keith  
Moore, Dudley  
Moranis, Rick  
Morecambe, Eric  
Morris, William, 23.1, 25.1  
Mount, Thom  
Murray, Bill  
musicals, 19.1, *photo*, 25.1  
*see also Spamalot* (musical)  
music videos, *photo*

## N

Nash, Graham  
Nealon, Kevin  
Neville, Richard  
Newman, Randy  
Newmar, Julie  
New Orleans, 11.1, 11.2  
New Zealand  
Nicholaw, Casey, 25.1, 25.2, 27.1  
Nichols, Mike:  
    American Film Institute tribute to, *photo*  
    Christmas in Barbados and, *photo*  
    death of  
    "Fuck Selfies!" (song) and  
    German shepherd Shadow and  
    John Cleese tribute and  
    *Spamalot* and, 9.1, 25.1, 25.2, *photo*, 27.1  
    at Tania and Eric's wedding  
    at 2005 Tony Awards  
Nielsen, Leslie  
Nilsson, Harry, 5.1, 10.1, 12.1, 13.1, 15.1  
*No—That's Me Over Here!* (TV show)  
*Not the Messiah* comic oratorio  
"Nudge Nudge" sketch, 8.1, *photo*, 13.1  
*Nuns on the Run* (film), 3.1, 19.1, *photo*

## O



O'Brien, Denis, 9.1, 12.1, 15.1, 16.1, 19.1  
Oddie, Bill, 5.1, 32.1  
O'Hurley, John, 27.1, 27.2  
Olympic Games, *photo*  
O'Neal, Ryan  
Ono, Yoko, 11.1, 11.2  
Ostin, Mo, 11.1, 24.1  
Oundjian, Peter (cousin)  
Ovitz, Mike

## P

Pahios, Mike  
Palin, Michael:  
    beginning of Monty Python and, *photo*  
    *Do Not Adjust Your Set* and, 6.1, *photo*, 7.1  
    Graham Chapman's memorial and  
    at Hollywood Bowl  
    *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* and  
    Monty Python Farewell Tour and  
    *Monty Python's Life of Brian* and, 12.1, 12.2  
    *Not the Messiah* DVD and  
    Oxford Revue and  
    Python reunions and, *photo*, 23.2, 25.1  
    reputation for niceness of  
    *The Rutles* and  
    *Spamalot* and, 27.1, 29.1  
Pao, Basil  
Papp, Joe  
*Parrot Sketch Not Included* (film)  
Parton, Dolly  
*Pass the Butler* (play), 3.1, 14.1, *photo*, 21.1  
Pembroke Players, 3.1, 3.2  
*Penn & Teller's Sin City Spectacular*  
Peters, Bernadette  
Pethig, Hazel  
Petty, Tom  
Phillips, Arlene, 17.1, 29.1, 29.2, 31.1  
Piddock, Jim  
Pierce, David Hyde  
Pink Floyd, 8.1, 10.1, 10.2, 11.1, 13.1, 32.1  
*Pirates of Penzance, The* (musical), 19.1, 22.1  
"Pirate Song, The" (song), *photo*  
*Playboy*, *photo*  
Playhouse comedy theater  
Polley, Sarah, *photo*  
Pop, Iggy, *photo*

[Porter, Harry](#)  
[Presley, Elvis](#), [2.1](#), [13.1](#), [18.1](#)  
[Pryor, Richard](#)  
[Public Broadcasting Stations \(PBS\)](#), [9.1](#), [9.2](#), [31.1](#)  
[Purvis, Jack](#)

## Q

[Quest for Camelot](#) (film)  
[Quite Remarkable Adventures of the Owl and the Pussycat](#), *The* (children's audiobook)

## R

[radio shows](#), [2.1](#), [5.1](#)  
[Radner, Gilda](#), [11.1](#), [13.1](#)  
[Rafferty, Gerry](#)  
[Ramirez, Sara](#), [25.1](#), [25.2](#)  
[Ranger, C. J.](#)  
[Read, Al](#)  
[Redgrave, Michael](#)  
[Reed, Lou](#)  
[Reiner, Carl](#)  
[Reynolds, Debbie](#), [10.1](#), [22.1](#)  
[Richards, Keith](#), [13.1](#), [15.1](#)  
[Rickles, Don](#)  
[Rivera, Chita](#)  
[Rivers, Joan](#)  
[Road to Mars, The](#) (Idle), [2.1](#), [19.1](#), [22.1](#), [30.1](#)  
[Robertson, Cliff](#)  
[Robinson, Smokey](#), [23.1](#), [32.1](#)  
[rock music](#), [2.1](#), [8.1](#), [9.1](#)  
[Rolling Stones](#), [10.1](#), [11.1](#), [13.1](#), [13.2](#), [15.1](#), [24.1](#), [29.1](#)  
[Ronstadt, Linda](#), [13.1](#), [19.1](#)  
[Rowan & Martin's Laugh-In](#) (TV show), [8.1](#), [10.1](#)  
[Royal Air Force \(RAF\)](#), [2.1](#), [2.2](#), [23.1](#)  
[Royal Orphanage \("the Ophny"\)](#), [2.1](#), [3.1](#), [13.1](#), [22.1](#)  
[Royal Variety Performance](#)  
[Rugoff, Don](#)  
[Rushdie, Salman](#), [11.1](#), [20.1](#)  
[Russell, Ken](#), [5.1](#), [20.1](#)  
[Rutland Dirty Weekend Book](#) (Idle)  
[Rutland Isles, The](#) (CD)  
[Rutland Weekend Television \(RWT\)](#), [9.1](#), [9.2](#), [photo](#), [10.1](#), [21.1](#), [31.1](#)  
[Rutles, The](#) (mockumentary), [10.1](#), [photo 1](#), [10.3](#), [11.1](#), [photo 2](#)

Ryan, Madge

## S

St. Petersburg, Russia

satire, 5.1, 7.1, 9.1, 12.1, 23.1

*Saturday Night Live (SNL)*, 7.1, 10.1, 10.2, 11.1, 13.1, 13.2, 16.1

Sawyer, Diane

Sayle, Alexei

Schlatter, George

Schwab, Coco, 20.1, 25.1

Scorsese, Martin

Scotland, 9.1, 17.1, 30.1

Scott, Tom

Secombe, Harry

Sellers, Peter, 2.1, 5.1, 13.1

Semel, Terry

Seventies, the, 13.1, 16.1

Shandling, Garry, 11.1, 21.1, 30.1

Shankar, Ravi, 9.1, 24.1

Sheene, Barry

Sherlock, David

Short, Martin

Sieber, Christopher

Simon, Paul, 10.1, *photo*, 11.1, 11.2, 11.3, 14.1, 16.1, 25.1, 28.1

Simpson, Richard

Sinatra, Frank

Sinfield, Alan, 2.1, 3.1

Sixties, the, 5.1, 5.2, 13.1, 32.1, 32.2

Smith, Tony, 7.1, 8.1

*So, Anyway* (Cleese)

“Song That Goes Like This, The” (song), 25.1, 25.2

Southern, Terry

Spall, Timothy

*Spamalot* (musical):

“Always Look on the Bright Side of Life” (song) in, 25.1, 25.2, 25.3

on Broadway

debt from

Grammy Award for Best Musical Show Album

in Las Vegas, 22.1, 27.1

Mike Nichols and, 9.1, 25.1, 25.2, *photo*

musical comedy and

Python songs and

Tony Award for Best Musical and

world tour of

Spender, Stephen

Spielberg, Steven, 19.1, 28.1

Spikings, Barry  
*Splitting Heirs* (film), 20.1, *photo*, 21.1  
Stallone, Sylvester  
Stark, Koo  
Starr, Ringo, 13.1, 13.2, 24.1  
Steafel, Sheila  
Stewart, Dave, 21.1, 22.1  
Strassman, Marcia  
Stratton-Smith, Tony  
Streisand, Barbra  
Sullivan, Arthur  
Swinton, Lancashire

## T

Taylor, Derek, 11.1, 14.1  
Taylor, Elizabeth  
Taylor, James  
Taylor, Rip  
Thompson, Emma  
Thompson, Hunter S.  
Thompson, Linda  
Thurman, Uma  
Tivoli, Alan  
*Tonight Show, The* (TV show)  
Tony Awards  
Took, Barry  
*Too Much Sun* (film), *photo*  
Tree, Marietta  
Tree, Penelope, 11.1, 12.1, *photo*  
Trump, Donald, 13.1, 31.1, 31.2, 32.1  
Tunisia, 1.1, 12.1, 13.1, 19.1

## U

Ulbricht, Walter  
Ullman, Tracey  
Universal Studios, 17.1, 20.1

## V

*Vanity Fair*  
*Variety*  
variety shows, 2.1, 18.1  
Victoria and Albert Museum  
Vietnam War, 5.1, 32.1  
Village People  
visual gags, 7.1, 8.1, 10.1, *photo*, 10.3, 22.1  
*Vogue*  
Vosburgh, Dick, 6.1, 22.1

## W

Waddingham, Hannah  
Walker, Alexander  
Wallace, Mike  
Walters, Barbara  
Warhol, Andy, 9.1, 13.1  
Waters, Roger, 13.1, 25.1  
Watson, James  
Weis, Gary, 10.1, 11.1  
Welles, Orson  
West, Carinthia  
Weston, Maggie  
*What About Dick?* (radio play), 22.1, 29.1, 31.1  
White, Michael, 3.1, 8.1, 9.1, 12.1, 14.1  
Wilde, Oscar, 19.1, 20.1  
Wilder, Gene  
Williams, Robbie  
Williams, Robin:  
    as comic peer, 21.1, 30.1  
    death of, 30.1, 30.2  
    failed marriages of, 30.1, 30.2, 30.3  
    fame and  
    in *The Fisher King* (film)  
    in France  
    healing power of humor and  
    Hollywood Bowl and  
    in Italy, 30.1, *photo 1*, *photo 2*  
    *Mork & Mindy* (TV show) and  
    phone gag and  
    in *Popeye* (film) and  
    Prince Charles and  
    in Scotland  
    serious side of, 30.1, *photo*, 32.1  
    on set of *Too Much Sun*  
*Wind in the Willows* (film), *photo*  
Winfrey, Oprah

Winkleman, Sophie  
Winner, Michael  
Wonder, Stevie  
Wood, Ronnie, *photo*, 11.1, 13.1, 13.2  
Woodroffe, Patrick, 28.1, 29.1  
World War II, 2.1, 2.2, 13.1, 22.1, 32.1  
Wyman, Bill  
Wynn, Steve

## Y

*Yellowbeard* (film), 17.1, 20.1  
Yentob, Alan  
Young, Neil

## Z

Zeta-Jones, Catherine  
Zimmer, Hans  
Zmuda, Bob

---

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U  
V W X Y Z

---



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ERIC IDLE is a comedian, actor, author, and singer-songwriter who found immediate fame on television with the sketch-comedy show *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. Following its success, the group began making films that include *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (1975), *Life of Brian* (1979), and *The Meaning of Life* (1983). Eric wrote, directed, and created *The Rutles*, the world's first-ever mockumentary, as well as the Tony Award-winning musical *Spamalot* (2005). He lives in Los Angeles.



Penguin  
Random  
House

## ***What's next on your reading list?***

Discover your next  
great read!

---

Get personalized book picks and up-to-date news about this  
author.

[Sign up now.](#)