HOW MERV GRIFFIN ENHANCED AND EXTENDED THE LIVES OF MILLIONS

Leo Durocher, the irascible baseball manager famous for saying, "Nice guys finish last," would have hated Merv Griffin - for no one in the history of the entertainment industry (of which professional sports is a part) proved him more wrong.

Here was a singer whose only hit song was *I've Got A Lovely Bunch of Coconuts*, a dancer who couldn't really, a short nebbishy guy with little charisma, bland looks, and even blander personality - and he becomes an extraordinarily rich and famous Hollywood celebrity.

Without scandal, without making enemies, with being the nicest fellow you'd ever hope to meet. How did he do it?

By having incredible business smarts coupled with an equally incredible emotional intelligence.

I first met Merv in 1977. Intrigued by my book, *The Adventurer's Guide* which explained how regular folks could have great adventures around the world, he had me as a guest on *The Merv Griffin Show*.

We hit it off so well that I ended up being a co-host for his shows featuring famous adventurers and explorers as guests, such as Thor Hyerdahl, Jacques Cousteau, and Lowell Thomas.

Whenever I got back from my latest adventure, living with cannibals in New Guinea, skydiving on the North Pole, taking elephants over the Alps, I'd get a call from Merv asking how soon could I be on the show.

One conversation with Merv, however, ended up affecting the lives of millions for the better, quite possibly yours. Millions of people in America are alive today, will live longer, and are in better health because of this one conversation I had with Merv. It wasn't on his show. It was in a restaurant at the Riviera Hotel in Vegas.

That's where I was living in 1978. Merv was in town and we had dinner. I was with my fiancée Jacqueline and Merv was with Eva Gabor. Jacqueline, who was French, and Eva (sister to Zsa Zsa) who was Hungarian and spoke French, began chatting up a storm. Merv and I talked about who would be good to have on the next adventure theme show.

Then a thought occurred to me. "Merv, I've got this crazy idea," I told him. "In fact, I'm undoubtedly the only living entity in the Milky Way Galaxy crazy enough to think of this. There's this friend of mine, one of my dearest friends, who is a hermit. He's so paranoid about anyone knowing about him only a handful of people know his real name. The thought of him going on

national television is just off the wall.

"His folks were farmers and he was raised on a farm in Illinois. He loved science, though, and got a scholarship to MIT. All incoming freshmen at MIT have their IQs measured, but they couldn't measure his. The upper limit they can extrapolate a score to is 220. His IQ was so far beyond 220 they didn't know what it was. It could be 300, they had no idea, for MIT had never seen an intelligence like his.

"But it's not simply that he's hyper-bright. He has this almost super-human capacity to explain absolutely anything - *anything*, like what's a quark, how a refrigerator or a nuclear bomb works, why do we get old, what easy and effective ways could anyone in your audience do to actually slow down the aging process in their bodies - and explain this so simply and so clearly with visual metaphors that anybody can understand.

"So I can't get it out of my mind. Something tells me that if he went on your show he would completely blow your audience away."

I could see how fast Merv's brain wheels were rotating by his wide-eyed intense stare, but all he said was a soft, "wow..." Then he said, "Okay, I'll have Peter (Barsocchini, who booked his guests) give him a call."

Now my eyes got wide. "No, no, he can't do that!" I exclaimed. Merv was puzzled. It was the dream of so many countless people to be a guest on the Merv Griffin Show that he said with amazement, "He doesn't want to go on my show?" Merv didn't know any such critter existed.

"Merv," I replied, "this is a very unusual guy. We have IQs of chimpanzees compared to him. I have to talk with him about this, see if I can get him to agree. Like I said, he's a hermit. But he's such a good friend, almost like a brother, that I know he'll hear my idea out. I had to ask you about it first. So now I'll talk to him and see if Peter can give him a call.

Merv shook his head in wonderment, and said, "All right, Jack. Let me know. By the way, what's your friend's real name?"

"Durk Pearson," I answered.

That name may be familiar to you, but if not, the terms "antioxidant," "free radicals," and "life extension," I'm sure are - thanks to Durk. He singlehandedly started the entire antioxidant/life extension movement with his appearances on the Merv Griffin Show. But that's getting a little ahead of the story.

I first met Durk at UCLA where he was a graduate student in physics in 1966. You won't believe who introduced us: Dennis The Wizard, Dennis Turner, who was also in physics at UCLA.

In 1968 Durk discovered his life purpose - learning how to extend human lifespan (most especially his) - when researching the free radical theory of aging developed by Dr. Denham Harman. By that time I had returned to my business in Vietnam, then moved to Hawaii for a few years, so it wasn't until 1976 that Dennis put me back in touch with Durk.

I had just written *The Adventurer's Guide* and somehow he found me as interesting as I found him. Every chance I got, I paid him and his life-and-lab partner Sandy Shaw a visit at their home in LA. It was like being on another planet. I was transfixed by his explanations of how and why we could live a three-digit lifespan - maybe even four.

After talking with Merv, on my next visit to Durk & Sandy's I asked him, "Durk, what would you think about going on the Merv Griffin Show?"

He responded, "Why would I want to do that?"

"You know, I really don't have a specific answer," I said frankly. "It's just that I've got this feeling, this conviction, that if you went on Merv's show and talked about what you and I talk about when I come here, just like this, something really good will come of it."

This is not a persuasive argument for a super-genius. Durk shook his head. "I don't think so, Jack," he decided.

Frustrated, I blurted out, "Durk, they'll pay you four hundred dollars..."

His head snapped around. "They will? Four hundred dollars?"

"Yes."

"Just for going on some TV show and talking?"

"Yes."

"Really... hmmm..."

"Would it be okay then if I gave Merv's booking guy your number so you could talk to him about it?"

He nodded. The rest is life-extending history.

Merv knew he had something amazing within the first few minutes of Durk's initial appearance. "The fellow is totally un-selfconscious on national television," he told me. "His ability to articulate his knowledge is as uncanny as the extent of it. He is completely unique. I owe you one, Jack."

Durk went on to appear on Merv's show 32 times. When Merv announced he would send Durk's reading list of scientific journal articles to anyone who requested it, he got over 100,000 letters (this was before email). In his autobiography, *Merv*, he described Durk as "the most popular talk show guest in the history of television."

No one had ever heard of "antioxidants" and "free radicals" before Durk began his appearances on Merv, or the very concept of "life extension," scientifically slowing down the aging process. Now millions did, and so did millions more with Durk & Sandy's runaway bestseller in 1982, *Life Extension: A Practical Scientific Approach*.

Almost 30 years have passed since Durk's first appearance on Merv. The amount of anti-aging research, the number of years added to so many lives, the quality of life improved for so many more stemming from it is incalculable.

I catalyzed this, yes - and I'm appreciative of the acknowledgement that someone gave me on a website, How Jack Wheeler Helped Us Learn of Antioxidants - but it was Merv Griffin who recognized the incredible benefit Durk could bring to people's lives and gave it to them.

Durk and I reminisced about Merv the day of his passing (August 12). How completely honest he was - "People with that kind of integrity are really, really rare," Durk noted.

We talked of his business savvy, how *Jeopardy!* and *Wheel of Fortune* cost almost nothing to produce yet were incredibly profitable, how he sold the shows to CBS for $250 million when cap-gains were at 20%, just before they went way up in the 1986 tax "reform."

We talked of what a joy it was to be with Merv personally, how calming and soothing he was to be around for he never raised his voice or got angry, while at the same time telling side-splittingly funny stories *and* asking you penetrating questions that got your mind in high gear.

"The depth of his emotional intelligence was a real key to his success," Durk concluded. We both gave our thanks for the privilege of knowing such a wonderful man.

Merv made a positive difference in many ways to many people's lives. But the role in enabling them to living longer and healthier may be the most profound. Thanks, pal.

Ps: Durk & Sandy continue to develop a wide range of life extension nutritional formulas. They, along with other state-of-nutritional products, are available at either Life Enhancement or the Life Extension Foundation.