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Being Evel

By Davis Coombe

announcer:

is brought to you
in living color.
(theme music playing)

carson:

evel knievel.
he's probably
the only man in history
who's become really wealthy
by trying to kill himself.
it's true.
he is somewhat of a legend.
he does incredible stunts
with motorcycles,
and he has broken,
i guess, more bones
than anybody in history,
and yet he keeps at this.
so let us meet the gentlemen.
here is evel knievel.
(lively music plays,
applause)
johnny knoxville:
i grew up in the '70s.
and evel knievel
was the '70s.
he captured my imagination
like no one else.
some of you may have seen
this film before.
this is a jump that you made
at caesars palace.
what happened?

knievel:

landed short,
ripped the handlebars
out of my hands,
and i bounced for 60 yards
into the dunes parking lot.

carson:

you're an incredible man.

knoxville:

as a daredevil.

i thought of him

as a superhero.

no one ever went for it

like that before.

he invented that.

since then, it has taken off

in a major way.

that's such a large part

of our culture now.

he inspired all that.

but there'll never be

another evel.

i know i've been called a lot

of things by a lot of people,

- a crazy man or a con man...

- carson:

...but when you head down

that long white line,

you better have had

made your peace with god,

and you better know

what you're doing

because a con man

ain't gonna get there.

i didn't know

the story of the man.

and it was, you know,

pretty complex.

california judge has ordered

motorcycle stuntman evel knievel

to serve out the rest

of a jail sentence behind bars.

i'm a grown-ass man,

and some of the stuff

is tough to reconcile.

it's a crazy story.

it's just fast, faster,

and disaster.

(t. rex's "20th century boy"
plays)
friends say it's fine,
friends say it's good
everybody says
it's just like rock n' roll
i move like a cat,
charge like a ram
sting like a bee
babe,
i wanna be your man
hey
well, it's plain to see
you were meant for me
yeah, i'm your boy,
the 20th century toy
yeah
20th century toy
i wanna be
your boy
20th century toy
i wanna be your boy
(music fades)
i was a member of
the sportscasters association
of los angeles,
and we used
to have monthly meetings
on a thursday at a place
called red tractors.
anybody who was anybody came--
tommy lasorda.
billy jean king was there.
mohamed ali
when he was cassius clay,
first made his appearance here.
they were legitimate athletes
in their chosen professions.

saltman:

there was this this commotion
on ventura boulevard.
there was this nutcase
going up and down

doing wheelies.
i didn't even know
what a wheelie was
until they explained it to me.
people didn't do wheelies
up and down the road.
i mean,
that was crazy,
on a rear wheel on a motorcycle
going 80 miles per hour?
(imitates motorcycle engine)
everybody stopped and would go,
"oh, look at that."

kelly:

sports announcers
of that day and age
were taken aback by this guy,
who of course
turned out to be evel knievel.
if you told me
that he was gonna be
world famous,
i would say you're nuts.
if you're going to try to
understand evel,
you gotta go back
to his childhood.
his parents split up
and left town,
and he was basically raised
by his grandparents.

bob rowling:

did the best they could do,
and he was just rambunctious,
i guess.
maybe he didn't have
that attention as a young boy
when he needed it.
(chuckles)
truth is, i think,
that bobby was kind of angry
with his father because

he didn't get to stay with him.
that's what i think.
he wanted to be
with his father.

pat williams:

at my grandma's house,
and he and i
were wrestling around,
and i punched him
in the mouth.
and he lit on the back
of his head.
and i said, "bobby?"
and nothing.
i thought, oh, my god,
i killed him.
and instantly,
he had these wild eyes
'cause he knew
what had happened.
and across the kitchen,
there was a door
that was slightly open,
the pantry door,
and he ran at that door
and slammed it shut
with his head.
and that half-stunned him again.
and he turned around
sitting down,
and he pointed at me,
and he said, "did you see that?
nobody can hurt me.
you can't hurt me.
nobody can hurt me."

jim blankenship:

growing up in butte, montana,
without a father would--
would be hard to handle,
i would think.

knoxville:

butte, montana,
was just a tough-ass
mining town.
when the mines were going full,
the bars were open 24 hours.
there was a lot
of prostitution.

man:

3,000 whores at that time.

man:

drinkin' and fightin'.

williams:

to cope in butte.
sometimes coping meant
with your fists.
you fought.
you stood up like a man.
you fought,
and you were taught that.
and that's part
of the butte credo
is you just don't back down.
knievel was a fighter
from the get-go,
even during grade school.
he'd get a little obnoxious
at times.
you know,
you'd have to settle him down.
well,
you couldn't dare him.
if you'd dare him,
he'd do it.
i remember when bob
got his first motorcycle.
i don't know
why he had two tires.
he always rode around
on the back one.
you never knew what he was gonna
do with that motorcycle in town.

i mean, he'd be riding it
all over raising--
raising hell with everybody.

pat burns:

the cops chase him.
you just couldn't catch him
on a bike
when you were in a patrol car.
(rock 'n' roll music playing)
linda bork knievel:
one day i go run up
to the store,
and who's up there,
but big bad knievel, you know?
he was a character.
(laughs)
i was scared,
but i was kind of flattered,
you know?
gee,
he's paying attention to me,
and then one day he just said,
"you're gonna marry me."
(laughs)
the story
is that he kidnapped her.

rowling:

if he kidnapped her or not.
you know, that might have been--
that might have been something
that they were planning
together anyhow, who knows?
yeah, i guess i was kidnapped.
i think i was just walking home
from school that day
when he said,
"get in the car,"
you know?
(laughs)
i don't know, i was just--
something just almost like
overtook me,

and he drove me down
to dillon and, uh,
danged if we didn't
get married there.
he had some weird ideas
about how life should be lived.
and he--
he thought that he should be at
the top of the heap, you know?
i figure that's why he did
the stuff he did to make money.
he'd run 'em,
there'll be a shady side to it.
he was happier
if there was something
a little shady about it.

linda knievel:

he made up his own job.
actually, he started working
as a security officer at night.
he had a route
where he used to go around

at 2:

3:

and check all the different
establishments.
you'd pay him to be sure
the doors were locked
and everything,
and if you didn't pay him,
you might be robbed
within a month or so.
he broke into my place.
he might have got 40 or \$50,
something like that,
but not that--
nothing big.
yeah, he was-- he ran a racket.
no question about it.
the police called me up
and told me

that there was a known
safecracker in town.
now i knew they were talking
about evel.
he was a crook.
a con-man,
i guess you'd call him.

knoxville:

at the age of 19,
he starts a semi-pro hockey team
and convinces
the czechoslovakian
national team
to come to butte
to play them.
(laughs)
and the czechs kill 'em.
like, smoke 'em 22 to 3.
but i don't think evel
was that upset about the score.

pavlovich:

i think he left
in the middle
of the second period,
and the money disappeared.
there was no more money
to pay 'em.
so, you know,
draw your own conclusions.
where did the money go?
(laughs)

williams:

butte likes people
who bounce up against
the edges of the envelope.
they're forgiving
about some criminal activity,
but they don't
particularly like criminals.

tonning:

he had three kids at the time.
he threw all of his
burglar bags in the river
and decided to go straight.
so knievel gets this job
selling insurance
for combined
insurance company,
and it was run by this guy,
w. clement stone,
who wrote a book called
"success through a positive
mental attitude."
i feel healthy.
i feel happy. i feel terrific.

jay tamburina:

i think it really changed
his thinking drastically.
i mean, he was that way
to begin with,
and it just intensified it.
he was a legendary salesman.
when he was selling insurance,
he was selling insurance,
and he was selling
a lot of it.

tamburina:

to the mental hospital
in-- in--
i believe it was deer lodge.
and he wrote 271 policies
in this hospital,
mental hospital.
this was a super record,
nobody had ever written
that many policies
in a week ever.
and he talked to the president
of the company at that time
and said, "i'll break
every record in the company,
"every single one

that exists,
and you make me a vice president
after i do that."
and mr. stawn says, "sorry,
that isn't gonna happen."
well,
knievel didn't like that.

knoxville:

so he picks up his family
and moves
to moses lake, washington,
where he gets a job
selling honda motorcycles.

gunn:

a good living at it,
but it wasn't
good enough for him.
he says, "i think i need
to do something weird,
"some kind of a stunt
so it'll get people
to come down here
and see the motorcycles."
so he had this crazy idea
about doing this jump.
he says, "i'm gonna jump over
cougars and rattlesnakes"
i said,
"you gotta be kidding me."

gunn:

that mountain lion jump
was i wore a white coat
like a doctor,
and evel introduced me
as the veterinarian,
which was a crock of bull,
but...
so he brings 'em down
and put the cougars underneath.
and they're scared to death.
they won't come out.

they were like kitty cats.
but the snakes,
holy -- !
we put them
in a big refrigerator carton,
and they were pissed off.
so he goes around the track,
and then he goes up the ramp.
and, well, the minute
he went up in the air
i could see
he wasn't gonna make it.
by god, he was about
three feet short.
his back tire hits
the refrigerator carton.
and the snakes
go flipping into the crowd.
talk about people running
and getting out of there.
-- !
(laughs)
the poor guy from vantage wants
us to help catch his snakes!
(laughs) i said, "you gotta be
kidding me!"
and he just rode back
on his motorcycle,
went up the jump,
and waved at the crowd.
he didn't-- he didn't care about
the snakes.
people started talking to him,
you know, "what--
you know,
what can you do next?"
and he started thinking about
that kind of stuff.
that's when he come up
with the idea
of starting a stunt show.
i told him, i said,
"they're gonna eat you up, boy.
you'll never make it."

tim perior:

i was a bartender
at marty's bar
in orange, california,
and this fella comes in,
sits at the end of the bar,
and we start talking.
well,
he's a motorcycle daredevil,
and he had
jumped rattlesnakes,
and he wants to do a big
ramp-to-ramp jump.
he said,
"people will go wild,"
and he just convinced me.
somehow i was able
to get two pickups,
a tractor,
and 40-foot trailer.
the logo on the side
was "evel knievel
and his motorcycle
daredevils."
well, the name evel came
from his wild years in butte.
he was given that name
by the cops.
he was in jail
with a guy named "knaful."
and they said, "well,
better lock up the doors
pretty good tonight.
we got an awful knaful
and evil knievel in here."

blackenship:

and he liked that.

perior:

he changed it to e-v-e-l
because he didn't
want to sound too evil.

what he did is get a bunch
of people working with him.
good guys like sweet savage
and eddie mulder
and klesh fargo.

gunn:

so he started thinking up
different stunts to do.

perior:

the flaming boards,
we'd soak 'em in gasoline
and light it on fire.

leeuwen:

first board and just go boom!
and the sparks,
the stuff would fly in the air!
and then, boom!
hit the second one!
sparks would fly!
and, boom, hit the third one!
hit the fourth one,
and the fifth one...
somehow, bob got this midget
called butch willhelm,
and talked him
into joining the show.
bob said, "he will do
everything i do in miniature."
and he would crash
on every single one.
so then it looked like when bob
was going to make his jump,
something terrible
is going to happen.
he was such
a crazy son of a bitch.
he'd do these stunts,
and he never tried 'em before.
one time he had a motorcycle
run at him
about 60 miles an hour,

and he jumped up,
but he didn't jump
high enough.

perior:

hit him and flipped him over.
he was sprained
from his waist to his ankles.

man:

point is when he decided
he was just gonna stick
to jumping the motorcycles.

robbie knievel:

the equipment my dad jumped on,
compared to what's
going on today--
unbelievable.

leeuwen:

the thing weighed 500 pounds.
it'd be like jumping a dump
truck over all those cars,
but he'd do it anyway.
i was the speedometer
for evel.
i had stand there
and watch him and say
you're going fast enough
or you're not going fast enough.
i guess you'd call it
guesswork.

perior:

and further with each show.
the only thing is
those stands were not full.
not by any means.
how do you convince people
to come to a sport
they had never heard of?
we were \$52,000 in debt.
bob kept spending money

we didn't have.
and that's when i decided
i had to leave.
well, of course, then he saw
that he didn't need the team.
he went on his own.
now it would just be him
looking for his big break.
- (dramatic music plays)

- announcer:

spanning the globe...
spanning the globe to bring you
the constant variety of sport.
few years, i was singing it
in my sleep.
the thrill of victory
and the agony of defeat.

announcer:

and the agony of defeat.

knoxville:

and the agony of defeat,
and they always showed
that skier,
where you never knew--
the word was he died.

tony hawk:

that's what you remember
from "wide world of sports."

announcer:

of athletic competition.
i remember, like,
the crazy stuff that they would
show once and a while.
skateboarding was on
"wide world of sports."
i remember that.

announcer:

abc's "wide world of sports..."

we were in the business
of sports theater.
sports was drama.
sports was a story.

announcer:

the thrill of victory.
i loved it.
like i covered some of
the weirdest things myself.
as long brought in an audience.
america loved it.

announcer:

of athletic competition.

leeuwen:

rush home from church
and watch abc
"wide world of sports" at 1:00,
and that was
the biggest show on tv.

announcer:

abc's "wide world of sports."

knoxville:

that the motorcycle race
at ascot speedway is featured
on "wide world of sports."
so he fast-talks the owner
into letting him do his thing.
before we get back to racing,
i'd like to introduce to you
a most unusual young man.
this is evel knievel,
and his specialty in sports
is to take a motorcycle
up over a ramp
and leap through the air
some 90 feet.
that's what he's gonna try to
do today over 15 automobiles.
- you're trying 15 today?

- well, the parachute's ready.
motorcycle's ready
and i'm ready.
and i'm not
gonna miss today.

reporter:

and he's set to go.
he'll build up speed
as quickly as he can.
and here he goes!
he makes it!
a beautiful leap
as evel knievel
gets the roar approval
from the crowd.

leeuwen:

at "wide world of sports."
biggest race of the year.
biggest dirt track race
of the year.
and i won it.
i won the race.
and you think anybody'd
remember it? no.
they know knievel.
they remember knievel
out of that whole deal, not me.
and i won 100 laps.
road my ass off.
so e
so evel got his foot
in the door,
and now he's going
to knock it down.
if you was to think of the most
outrageous thing you could do,
what would it be?
it'd be jump those fountains
at caesar's palace.

robbie:

where it came from,

how a guy would go down
caesar's palace strip,
look at the fountains--
what was he thinking?
where did that come from?

knoxville:

to do this stunt in vegas,
but no one knows
who the hell he is.
so he switches
into hustler mode.

kelly:

every news outlet,
told them that evel knievel,
famed stunt motorcyclist,
was going to jump
caesar's palace
come saturday morning,
be there.

knoxville:

jay sarno.
the guy who runs caesars,
and each time he would call
as a different person,
and each time, he would
mispronounce his own name.

evel knievel:

my name was larsen.
i was with sports illustrated.
i said, "you ever heard
of 'evel neevel'?"
he said, "who the hell's this
'evel neevel'?"
so i waited two more days
and i called him back up,
and i said,
"this is dennis lewin from
'wide world of sports,'
do you know evel knievel?"
he says, "'avel navel.

evel neevel. evel knievel.'
who is this crazy guy?"
he said,
"everybody's calling me up
about him.
he said, i think
we got a deal with him.
i don't know. call back."
(laughter)

knoxville:

like a lot of his stunts,
caesar's palace
was one of those
that he dreamed up and sold
before he even knew
it was possible.
and then on the day,
he's got the crowds there,
and he doesn't know
if he can make it.
he's just got to go for it.
robin knievel-dick:
i talked with him for a while
before he jumped,
and he was very unsettled
about the jump.
you could tell he was nervous.
he was making runs
at the ramp and,
you know,
we could hear the motorcycle.
and we could hear the crowd,
and then the doorman--
the doorman got on the phone
and told us what went on.
(woman screams)

tonning:

that was horrible.
i thought he was gonna--
i thought he was dead.
i was horrified to watch
my friend look like a rag doll.

linda knievel:

he was unconscious.
but he was hurting.
so off to the hospital
we went.

knoxville:

he had a broken wrist,
two broken ankles,
crushed his pelvis.
and then somehow,
word gets out
that he's in a coma
and might not make it.
he told that story,
but he wasn't in a coma.
in fact,
i flew down there,
and it hadn't been
but like two days
since he'd had the wreck,
and he was awake
when i walked
in the hospital room.
(laughs)
he had the press come in there
and play it up.
"oh, i'm about to die.
don't know if i'll make it."
well, this was knievel.
that's what he did.
he played it up
right to the end.

knoxville:

pretty soon, the crash footage
was everywhere.

geraldo rivera:

caesar's palace.
we saw that fall
and his body flopping
and his head hitting,

and, you know,
all of the agony of that
and the broken bones.
that piece of film was amazing,
to see him go over and over
and then roll all the way
up to the wall and it--
that's one of the great
pieces of footage of all time.
boy, he was national news
all over the place.
(cheers and applause)

gunn:

he became instantly famous.
this guy somehow had captured
what america needed.
he came along
at the right time.
there was a certain cynicism
throughout the country.
society was changing.

man:

in government.
well,
i'm not a crook.
when i look out
my window...

man:

battered by many years of war.

hamilton:

apart at the seams.
must be the season
of the witch
must be the season
of the witch.

williams:

down on ourselves,
and along comes this kid
from butte, montana,

who showed us who we were
and wanted to be again.
he wears red,
white, and blue
stars and stripes, too...

earle castine:

i guess we were looking
for some sort of a hero.
we had superman and batman and--
but this guy
was the real thing.
evel knievel's
for god and country, too...

sullivan:

people wore black.
that was what
evel wanted to change,
and that's where
the red, white, and blue
leathers came from.
he wore red, white, and blue
because he was patriotic.
he loved his country,
but he also saw
that that would
give him a boost
to his image,
and people
were respecting him more.

wilson:

of those mountains
in his star-spangled suit,
with his cane, and he said,
"i am gonna face death."
he opened the door
and invited people
to buy a ticket
to watch truth.

rivera:

disillusioned generation,

where you didn't trust anybody,
because even the president lied,
here's a guy,
he's gonna risk everything.

man:

he did it! he did it!

knoxville:

you know, there was three
tv stations back then,
and when evel was on abc,
everyone knew it.
that's what you did
that night is watch,
and that's
what you talked about
for the next
few weeks afterwards.

wilson:

he was so popular that out of
the top-ten-rated
"wide world of sports" shows
in the 37 years of the show,
he holds seven of them.

announcer:

motorcycle daredevil
evel knievel!

hoffman:

he was the talk of the world.
he was the greatest reality show
before reality shows existed.
are you ever scared
before a stunt?
- do you have fear?
- i am not scared.
when i go off that jump,
i will say i have some concern,
but i don't think i've ever been
afraid of anything.
if i know something's

going to happen,
i try and train myself
to where i have complete control
over my mind and my body.
i relax when i hit
instead of freezing up
and being scared.

williams:

he said to me one time,
"you know what
i was really good at...
was the take off.
you know what i was bad at
was the landing."
but he said,
"it was the bad landings,
that's what brought
the crowds out."
you know, bobby used to say,
"nobody wants to see me die,
but they don't
want to miss it if i do."

announcer:

and just to go up that ramp
and take a look at the distance
that he's got to, in effect,
hurdle aboard
his harley davidson machine.

gifford:

if he wasn't just perfect
when he left that ramp,
something awful
was going to happen
between the time he left there
and came down way over here.
if he told ya he was gonna
do something, he would do it,
i mean, even if he knew
it was gonna kill him.

linda:

you were always--
the question of whether or not
he might not make it alive.
i would think my dad would die
every time he jumped.
it was stressful.
it was hard on us.

pavlovich:

you know, and got hurt,
then he'd go out,
he's gonna do it again.
and everybody says he's nuts.
he got hurt the last time.

evel knievel:

especially surgeons,
have been amazed
at how i can keep going.
he had...
recuperative powers
that were beyond
normal people.

knievel-dick:

they would say,
"you'll have this cast
for eight weeks,"
and he would take it off
in three.

man:

just some abstract plumbing,
but this is actually
the right hip
and right femur
of evel knievel.

evel knievel:

probably become immune to pain.
i've learned to live with pain
for so long that i think, uh,
what would hurt an average
person doesn't hurt me so much.

kelly knievel:

when we were growing up
and my dad broke bones,
and he was in pain,
he never bitched about it.
he never complained about it.
no, no, i'll be all right.
i'm gonna jump some more.
it was just he accepted that
that's what he had chosen to do
and it's something
he just had to deal with,
and that's the way
he dealt with it.
to be something
a little extra special,
no matter what i want to do
if i like to do it.
to be a champion
or to be the best.
even though i've been hurt
so many times,
and live like a lot of people do
that live in a...
a gray twilight world--
these kind of people,
they don't even know victory
or defeat because they've
never tried anything,
and this is something
that i feel compelled to do,
and i am going to do it.
i had
sort of been brought along
the way of a teen idol.
mm-mmm.
i had enough
star power going,
but i kept trying
to toughen up my act.
i thought, god,
if i could get
a really good western

or i get good action movie...
and i was looking for sort of
a modern day western character.
who would that be?
i remember seeing the footage
from caesar's palace,
and i thought,
yeah, that's the movie.
in my mind there was only one
guy that could do this right.
john milius,
he'd written "dirty harry,"
"jeremiah johnson,"
and of course later
"apocalypse now."
milius just wrote it as though
he was writing it for patton.
it had this sort of
mythic sound to it, you know?
and it's got this man
who thinks he's a gladiator.
and i was excited
to show evel this.
so he tells me
to come meet him in hollywood
at the saharan hotel
that was up on sunset.
he's been up all night.
got another huge wound.
kotex pads all there.
and he's lying there
like a posh in a bad motel.
and that's when it all
got crazy.
he took a bottle
of the wild turkey,
and i heard the snap
of the turkey,
and he drank half that thing
down and he'd sit down.
i said, "well, i wanna tell you
that we've got a great script,
and i just brought it to you,
and i want you to read it."

he said, "you read it,"
and i said,
"well, i have read it,
and i really love it.
i think it's great."
he said, "no, i want you
to read it to me."
and i just i didn't want
to read the script.
i mean,
it was just crazy,
the idea of me reading
the script to him.
but he was dead serious,
and i saw this gun.
and he put it right to my head.
and i thought,
he means this.
you know,
this is really real stuff.
my performance
on reading that script
was the best
i've ever given,
and i probably should have
gotten an academy award.
ladies and gentlemen,
you have no idea
how good it makes me feel
to be here today.
it is truly an honor
to risk my life before you.
an honor.
before i jump my motorcycle
over these 19 cars--
and i want you to note,
there's not a volkswagen
or a datsun in the row.
(motor revving)

ron wichman:

evel was not happy with it,
i don't believe,
from what i understand

talking to him.
i don't believe
he was at all happy
with george hamilton in that.

hamilton:

appreciated me
climbing into his leathers
and getting on his motorcycle,
but what happened is,
by osmosis,
when he went to see it
in the theater,
when he came out,
he was saying these things,
and they were
extraordinary words
coming out of his mouth
that john had written for him.
they told the wright brothers
to fly was impossible,
and they probably told
neil armstrong
the walk on the moon
was impossible.
they said that shepard
and glenn would never
get around the world,
and they said that armstrong
wouldn't step on the moon.
you know, he was using
a writer's words.
and this is the evel
he's become.
i'm all alone
when i jump those ramps.
there's only two things
that keep the rest of 'em
from doing it,
and that's fear
and the big hole in the middle,
and as long as i can
stand alone and be the best
at what i am doing,

i'm gonna continue to do it.

wilson:

named evel knievel,
and then tried
to live the part.
he never broke character.
he had the evel knievel
persona,
and that's what he presented
to the world.
we don't want guys in gray hats.
we want black and white.
evel represented that.
he definitely
thought of himself
as the guy in the white hat,
the good guy.
if i look like i'm rigging up
for a trip into outer space,
you're right.
nobody should ever ride
a motorcycle without a helmet.
i never do.
he was somebody
who was seeking what many
of us do in our own way,
and that's recognition,
and if you get
into his background,
you can understand that.
he wanted identity.
he needed that.
he just wanted to be loved.
(peter frampton's
"show me the way" plays)
i wonder
how you're feeling
there's ringing
in my ears...
thank you very much.
believe me,
it's a pleasure
to be back here

in portland, oregon,
and on behalf
of my sponsors,
the mack truck company,
the harley davidson
motor company,
and the bucyrus-erie
train and steam shovel company
in milwaukee...

kelly knievel:

my dad, he invented
the licensing business.
i mean, how many people
can you think of
that had their names on products
before evel kn--
i mean, there was a few,
but he really elevated the art
of the licensing business.

knoxville:

with everyone--
mack truck,
harley davidson,
but that's not the one
i remember.

announcer:

and his stunt cycle.
he's the only rider
to do so many stunts,
mid-air summersaults...
evel knievel has become
a legend in his own lifetime.

zeke rose:

with the evel knievel toy,
the president of 'ideal'
called me aside and said,
"this is gonna be
a really big item for us."

boy:

it's an evel knievel rally!
for me, there was only one
action figure
when i was growing up,
and that was evel knievel.
it was as cool as you could
possibly get at the time.
it came with a motorcycle
you could wind up.
when you wind it up
and you stop and it takes off--
you just wind it up,
and if you're building
the suspense,
you don't know
what's gonna happen,
but you know it's gonna blow up,
and it's not gonna be pretty,
but you're lucky
that this toy's evel knievel,
- 'cause he can take it.
- that's awesome.
wow. go evel!

announcer:

stunt cycle comes with figure,
winder, gt wheelie stand,
and front flip bar.
new from ideal.

rose:

the toy sold out.

pavlovich:

more money off of ideal toy
then he did
on any of his jumps.
i was with him one time,
he showed me two royalty checks,
and both of them
at that time
were half
a million dollars each.
both of 'em.

two checks.
i told him, "well, you made it.
you're on the pinnacle.
"you said you were gonna
be a millionaire.
you are a millionaire."

wilson:

it was an amazing time.
the money was rolling in
by the millions.

kelly knievel:

he went, he went first-class.
yeah, my dad liked
to spend money.

robbie knievel:

there's five ferraris,
two lear jets,
five other airplanes.

linda knievel:

oh, he needed a bigger boat
oh, how about a yacht?
how about another yacht?

tracey mccloud:

with helicopters on top.

leeuwen:

painted on the side of it.

reporter:

he's no easy rider.
he's proud of the material
things his money can buy--
his cadillac's, his \$140,000
luxury-appointed van.

wilson:

into his office,
opened up a huge safe he had,
and there was a gold-platted,

full-sized motorcycle.
but you know what?
you could hardly see it
because it was covered
in cash,
like it had been thrown
in there like confetti.

tonning:

a big, beautiful home
on the 18th green
with this huge iron gate
with a great big "e.k."
right in the middle of it
was the actual handle.
you know, for butte, montana,
that was-- that was the stuff.
if i'm risking my life for it.
i'm gonna spend
every damn dime of it!

kelly knievel:

had an affinity for clothes.
he liked to dress with flair.
he'd walk into a store
and see a sweater he liked,
and he'd just buy one
in 20 colors.
come on with me and i'll
take you on a little tour
of my office and dressing room
and show you what you can buy
with a few dollars
if you're willing
to jump a motorcycle
over 19 cars.

man:

evel was very flashy.
walked with a cane
with diamonds in his cane,
and his jewelry had diamonds,
and he had gold all over.

robbie knievel:

he always loved elvis.
and they traded
the belt buckle and the cape.
my dad was a big fan of
liberace for being a showman.

evel knievel:

all the money in the world
can't buy your way into heaven.
it can't buy
your way out of hell.
it was made to be spent
right here,
and i'm gonna
have the best clothes,
best boots, best diamonds,
best cars, trucks, motorcycles,
booze, and women
on the face of this earth
just as long
as i can keep going.

gene sullivan:

money and fame and fortune,
it's like the women became
almost an equal part of his...
thrust from day to day.
part of it was that women
were extraordinarily
attracted to him.
i know because he and i'd go
out drinking once in a while,
and, hell, they'd line up.
and he'd pick
the prettiest one.
he's unbelievable.
he's got more fire in him.
he's unbelievable.

leeuwen:

he'd turn the hat trick
half the time,
because i'd see him

do three a night for a about
week when i was there.
hang on.

bobbie knievel:

i mean, back in the '70s,
every woman
wanted somebody like that.
i was always mad 'cause
he was maybe cheating on my mom.
i'm the other woman...
linda was aces--
aces.
i mean,
she was the nicest woman
that he could have ever married.

tamburina:

you know, she stood by him,
and a lot of times,
he didn't treat her right.
hi, good-lookin'.
you going swimming again?
linda bork knievel:
he didn't hide anything,
and that's probably where
i'd get a little upset with him.
he'd come home with a little
lipstick on his collar,
and i'd get
a little ticked off.
i'd like to take you
out to dinner somewhere
in a real nice
quiet little spot,
get you swacked
and take you home someplace.
i'd think,
i married this guy.
i don't know,
i just--
you don't leave that man
unless he wants you to.
let's say i i died

and landed in heaven.
bang, i'm there, okay?
here i'm sitting there in a
white robe on a hard marble slab
next to jfk,
martin luther king,
and some pope.
now, what the hell
would evel knievel have to say
to any of those three guys?
i couldn't carry on
an intelligent conversation
with 'em.
i want to go
to my own kind of heaven.
uh... it's got draft beer
that doesn't make you fat.
it's got a lot of beautiful
girls like you running around,
and my wife won't get mad
if i go out with any of them.
he was okay before he became
evel knievel,
and then, you know, it's--
people just can't handle
that fame, some of 'em.
he's was small-town guy
from a small town in--
really--
in the span of seven years,
became one of the most
famous people in the world.
i think that he--
he forgot how to be bob.
and when he became evel,
it's like the world
took him away from us.
if you wanna be
in this business
and you wanna be
the best in the world
and you wanna wear
a red, white,
and blue number one

on your back,
you have to be man enough
to handle the consequences.

announcer:

king of the daredevil,
number one, evel knievel!

knoxville:

of the world,
but he was starting to lose
his grip a little,
and that thing with
the hell's angels didn't help.

sullivan:

against the hell's angels
and the biker image.
he used to talk
about the hell's angels a lot,
always putting 'em down.

evel knievel:

thieves, or drug dealers,
i mean,
these guys are dogs.
they belong in penitentiaries.

gunn:

must of got through to 'em.
you know,
they got pissed off.
and san francisco
was one of their main areas.

sullivan:

was the guy
that started the whole thing.
when he introduced knievel,
he says,
"if knievel makes
this jump tonight,
he's gonna set the hell's angels
back 100 years."

wrong thing to say.
he barely made that jump,
came back around,
and i notice a couple
of hell's angels
had come out onto the floor.
and this hell's angel
grabbed him.
well, i'm--
i'm hoofing it.
the hell's angel threw him down
just when i got there,
and i give this guy
a body check.
and he folded like--
just went out.
well, then the war started,
you know?
hell's angels come
bowling in over there
and the people come out
of the stands
and started beating on 'em.
they put two of those
hell's angels in the hospital.

sullivan:

after the cow palace incident,
evel got a little bit paranoid.
he said, "do you have a gun?"
i said, "yeah,
i got a couple of 'em."
well, he says, "those hell's
angel's, you never know,
they're gonna walk in here
with a shotgun," and he says,
"i gotta be ready for 'em."

knoxville:

numerous times,
of course
it's gonna add up
mentally and emotionally
in your head.

it has to.

announcer:

watch that right shoulder.
broken, right there,
the right collarbone.

woman:

are you ever afraid?
if i am, i'm not gonna
tell you about it.

- woman:

- i've been concerned.
i'm evel knievel, honey.
i'm not supposed to be afraid.

sullivan:

being tormented
with the thought of,
you know,
you're not gonna make this one.
you're gonna die at this one.
and so he's doing everything
he can through alcohol,
through being flamboyant,
through, being, you know,
crude or whatever to get
these thoughts out of his head,
but they were eating his lunch.
you know, evel,
you're shaking a little bit.
well, if you did what i did,
you'd be shaking, too.
i could see it in his eyes
sometimes when he'd come back by
to ask me if he was going
fast enough,
i could see
the fear in his eyes.
i knew he was scared,
but he would never--
he would never say no.
you know,

he'd go ahead and do it.
the medicine that he was taking,
the drugs he was taking
for his pain--
plus he was drinking--
he became just schitzo...
i mean, paranoid.

gunn:

about protecting his stuff,
paranoid about
who he let in and...

williams:

and almost as if
he was schizophrenic,
he'd flip
and become ugly about things.
i had to stand two guys down
who wanted a piece of him,
and they wanted a piece of him
because he was being an -- .
he was being a jerk.
i'm the guy who just, you know,
is trying to keep the peace.
i'm the guy
protecting the troublemaker
from the good guys.
you know, and i thought,
i can't do this.

hamilton:

interesting when you--
you are a man
like evel knievel,
and you've created this myth,
and once you're defined,
it's hard to live up to it.
he was always reselling
what he had already sold.
how do you get
any better than that?
how do you get any bigger?

williams:

throughout his life,
he was insatiable.
even when he was
the most famous daredevil
that ever lived,
he wasn't satisfied.
he had to make another half
a million dollars on a jump.
he had to find one more woman
prettier than the last.
he couldn't satisfy himself.
he had to do something else.
he had a friend that, uh--
they were at the bar talking,
and this fella
just made a comment,
"what's your next thing?"
i think he said,
"the grand canyon?"
well, of course that started
wheels a-turnin'.

kelly knievel:

the favorite pictures of my dad
is he is on the rim
of the grand canyon
and there's these
two navajo chiefs there.
and my dad's pointing
at the other side
of the grand canyon,
and they're just looking at him
like this man is crazy.

evel knievel:

was to jump the grand canyon.
the secretary of interior
told me that i could.
i took his word for it.
then he changed his mind.
so i told him to go get hosed,
and i bought my own canyon,
the snake river canyon

in the state of idaho.
and the only way they'll
get me out of the air
is to shoot me out
with an anti-aircraft gun,
because i am gonna go,
believe me.

the jump across the canyon
will be approximately a mile.
it's somewhere between 1,000
and 1500 feet to the bottom.
as you can see, pete,
this motorcycle
is unlike any motorcycle
you've ever seen in the world.
these rockets put out about
90 pounds of thrust apiece.
knievel's original concept
was take a motorcycle,
put a rocket on it--
and that's impossible.
and so the necessity
just required
that he make a rocket vehicle.
our partner was bob treaux,
and he was known as
the father of steam rocketry.
and that was our answer
for getting evel knievel
over the canyon--
basically building
a hot-water tank
and uncorking it
and let it go.
this machine
is powered by steam.
steam is the most
reliable source of power
we have in the world.
and it'll go from zero
to 350 miles an hour
from a dead stop
in eight seconds flat.

reporter:

the super stunt,
billed as the death-defying
event of the century
will be viewed
by almost two million people,
most of them watching on
closed-circuit movie screens.
i'd like to say to you
what evel knievel says
wherever he goes,
whatever he signs--
if he were talking to you
right now, he'd say,
"hey, jim, happy landings."
when there was an event of any
magnitude during that period,
i'd probably get the first call
to do the promotion.
remember,
the first time
i saw evel knievel,
he showed up
on ventura boulevard
doing wheelies
on his motorcycle.
that's when i first met him,
but i really didn't know him
till we did
the snake river canyon jump
when i had control of
the publicity and promotion.
for a brief moment
in our dull, mundane life,
here is a man who, vicariously,
we can live through.
i thought what he was doing
was exciting.
so it's never hard to sell
something you believed in.
and i believed in it.
we did a 30-day tour,
which was my idea,
to do press conferences at,

like, literally 90 airports.
how are you?

reporter:

flies into town each day
in his two lear jets,
his pilot, whacha macullum,
and his co-pilot wear crimson
crushed-velvet dinner jackets.
you ought to see
our socks and underwear.
every day was a party.
there were close to 2500
press credentials given out.
it was bigger than
any ali fight,
and i did them all.
bigger, bigger than
a presidential entourage.
don e. branker was in charge
of all the logistics.

don e. branker:

i was a concert promoter.
i did acts like the stones,
the doors, the who,
and then evel comes along
with a pay-per-view
closed-circuit--
you know, and this was
the biggest event of its kind
in the history
of entertainment.
the unknowns were magnificent.
this sunday
a daredevil hustler
named evel knievel
will try to cross
a canyon in idaho
riding a rocket.
if he makes it, he'll be
many times a millionaire.
if he doesn't,
he'll be dead.

(laughs)

rivera:

in many ways.
i was a little crazy.
he was a whole lot crazy.
and you just
had to dig his courage.
it just didn't seem to me
that courage would be enough.
(chuckles) i'm tellin' ya,
that looks a lot further than
i thought a mile would look.
it was the kind of stunt
where you would actually see,
probably,
a guy kill himself.
it was so audacious.
it was so daring.
it was so almost impossible
in many ways
but for his confidence.
what about the g-forces?
i mean, when you start something
that's gonna be going
350 miles an hour,
aren't you gonna be
knocked out almost?
yes, i'll wake up,
see the other side of
the ground way over there,
wherever the hell i'm at,
and i'll pull a rip cord
and open a parachute
behind that sky cycle.
are you saying that
you're gonna be unconscious
when you're up in the air?
to 2,000 feet,
i probably will be, yes.
so that means you
have to regain
your consciousness.
that's right,

but i can do that.
i'll do it.

doug malewicki:

evel had no training.
he had no training
for pulling gs
like a centrifuge
or even in an airplane,
zero parachute experience.

spro:

a dead stick kind of thing
where it was spring-loaded,
and if he passed out
and let go of the handle,
the parachute would come out.
go!

rivera:

three of the steam-powered
sky cycles built.
the original,
called the x1,
was tested without a pilot
about three weeks ago.
it ended up
at the bottom of the canyon.

evel knievel:

that was a test shot.
we made some mistakes.
if i'd have been in it,
i'd have ended up dead,
but i don't think
that's gonna happen.

campoy:

what the press did not know
is that the first one
was designed to fail.
we purposefully
underpowered the rocket
so it wouldn't make it

to the other side.
he wanted it
as a promotional thing.
he wanted it to crash
in the water
and let people see that.

campoy:

we did convince evel
to do a real test,
but he'd only do it
if it was done in secret
so the press
wouldn't get any pictures
of it or anything.
we thought it would make it.
but there was a problem
with the parachute.
it deployed early...
and it also landed right
in the middle of the river.

saltman:

knievel was there to see that.
i saw it, and i was wondering
at that time
what was going through his mind.
i was thinking to myself
that he was really looking
at his mortality,
and thinking,
you know,
this might not be
such a good idea.
however, give him credit,
he was going through with it.

branker:

we're batting zero for two,
and the world is watching us.
i mean, i-- i felt that.

man:

you'll make it!

you will!
you will!

saltman:

more and more surly,
screeching orders at everybody
that he could,
belittling--
he belittled little people.
he was just mean.

branker:

about a week out
is when we started
sensing things
not going our way
with the press,
'cause the press
is up here living now,
an the press started
to see the real evel.
do one thing for me.
i do not
ask for your respect,
i demand it.
shelly gathered everybody
around evel's trailer and says,
"why don't you just have him
stand up so we can see him?"
'cause there was a big crowd
of people there.
and evel heard that
and came out, and, uh...
- i said have a smile
on your face.
- i don't smile at anybody.
all right, get him out.
get him out. out.
go on, get out of here.

watt:

down the stairs with his cane,
and he grabbed my camera,
and he's a pretty strong guy.

and grabbed my camera
and started pushing me back
and whacking me and the camera
with his cane.

man:

to that cameraman
for roughing him up?
i wouldn't apologize,
and if i see the little
son of a bitch again,
i'll throw him out of here,
how's that?

saltman:

as hard as we tried,
a lot of evel's true temperament
came out to the press.

man:

you should apologize.
well, i wanna straighten
you out right now.
number one, i was in
the sky cycle all day.
number two, you are a guest
of mine in my press area.
do you understand that?
and so was he.
number three,
when i've been up
there all day
and all the blood's come out
of my legs and my feet
and gone to my head,
and i come down
to want to get some rest
and get along with you people,
you don't tell me to come out
and stand up and smile!
if i want to come out
and try and get along with you,
you should at least allow me
to sit down and smile!

so tell him i said
to kiss my ass!

kazikas:

where we were all
kind of sitting around
and saying, "the guy's a jerk.
he's just a jerk.
he's a bully.
he's a bore.
what are we doing here?
the rest of the press
can now thank you
because i am going to leave.
how's that, boys?
sayonara.

man:

and it started getting crazy.
every biker
in the united states
that didn't have a job
was there.

branker:

different motorcycling groups,
none of which you'd invite
to your house for dinner.
they gonna have a good time.
everyone gets loose around here.

high:

it was like a woodstock,
but the evil twin
of woodstock.
it was like not a happy
flower children
sitting around in the rain.
those guys were--
i mean, they were really rough.

tonning:

all over their bodies
drinking beer

and screwing in public
and all kinds of--
yeah, it was-- it was bedlam.
(whistle blows)
roach clips! papers!
hash pipes!
come get them while they're hot!

rundle:

from butte high school
that was there.
it was not a place
for a butte high marching band
to be that day,
i'd have to say.
right when we pulled in,
there was a man
and woman naked, uh--
you know, having sex
right there under a tree.
i saw all the people
that were drinking
and smoking pot,
and they were pretty wild.
(band playing "the stars
and stripes forever")
we fired up the band.
it's like
the whole place arose.
oh, they--
the crowd went wild, yeah.
absolutely, they were totally
prepared for a celebration.

lisac:

just started mingling
and just wanted to play
our instruments.
they tugged and pulled,
and next thing we know
we're separated a good 100 yards
away from the rest of the band.
so we were basically fighting
for our lives,

as far as i was concerned.
at that point,
they just stuffed my tuba
full of everything--
beer bottles, popcorn,
peanuts, rocks.
i pulled a bra out of there.
i never played a note.
we also had with us
the drill team,
and the drill team,
their name was the purple bees,
and a good friend of mine,
they tore her dress right off.
totally tore her dress off.
i guess
we all thought of this
as something different than
what it was really gonna be.

john hood:

the crowd were given
oh, beer,
and when the beer
was closed up,
that's when it got
kind of rowdy.

rundle:

the beer trucks over--
the semis, over on their side,
shot the locks off,
and everybody was walking
through the camps
with cases of beer.
next thing you know,
they took the outhouses,
and they took 'em down,
and they started
just dumping them over,
and they lit them on fire.
the place was absolutely
out of control at that point.
things got as bad as it could

get bad without somebody dying.
that's as simple as that--
just as bad as it could be.
i could hear
out in the darkness,
i can hear the girls
being raped.
i can hear fights going on.
you know, i can hear gunshots
going off, you know,
but there's nothing
i could do.
and finally i reached the point
where i said,
"you know what? i'm gonna call
the national guard in."
so i called them up,
and he says, "don, i'm sorry,
"but our men are split up,
"and i just can't
come out there to help you.
you're on your own, son."
and i hung up that phone,
and i felt like crying.

reporter:

than 33,000 paid admissions.
as you can see,
they needed control.
they were perilously close
to the edge of the canyon
some 600 feet straight down.
what i was concerned about
is that there was this canyon.
there's this killer canyon
in front of you,
and they put up
a standard cyclone fence.
i mean, just push it,
and it'd fall over.
and i thought to myself,
everybody's gonna rush
to that edge of the canyon
to see what happens.

and then you're gonna have
people pushing from behind,
and like the lemmings
in the sea,
they're gonna go
right over the edge.

campoy:

i thought it was pretty ironic
how don e.

solved the security problem.
he went down to where
the hell's angels were camped
and hired them to come up
and provide security
for us there.

i went there and i explained
to them what i'll do.

"here's what i'll do--

i got \$1,000 in cash,

"and i want you

to guard the fence

and keep the people

on that side of the fence."

and the guy said,

"are you bullshitting me?"

i said, "am i gonna bullshit
with you guys here?"

"okay, you got a deal,

mister."

(laughs)

saltman:

on the morning of the jump,

i looked at him

and i saw a very pensive,

very reflective,

very quiet man.

he didn't look comfortable.

i don't know why he would

look comfortable,

climbing into a tin can

to fly over a canyon.

reporter:

bob treaux himself,
the chief engineer
testing the wind.

spro:

was not the right direction.
we recommended to knievel
he delay the launch.

pavlovich:

"you know, bob, i don't think
you ought to do it.
"i think this is crazy.
i think this thing
isn't gonna make it."
he says, "i can't back out now.
too much has been said.
they'd call me a coward."
he says he's not gonna do that.
"i'm going and that's it."
i've got a team behind me
with mr. treuax
and all of those boys are 100%,
and... i think we'll do it.
i wish the wind
wasn't blowing so hard,
but i think we'll do it.

saltman:

there was no braggadocio.
there was no bravado.
as the time counted off,
he'd said to his family,
"let's pray."

robbie knievel:

yeah, i remember my dad
brought me in the trailer
and that...
truck...
(sniffles)
the whole family.
and he hugged me

and says, "i love you."
and he didn't know
what was gonna happen.
he was like,
"god, take care of me."
linda and the children
were crying,
especially the little girl.
yeah, that was a very
sobering moment.
you know,
suddenly i realized...
have i had a hand
in getting a man killed?

reporter:

there he goes up the ramp
toward the launch site
and towards the vehicle.
and he's being introduced
to the crowd now.
i've never been afraid
in my life of dying.
i think that a man
was put here on earth to live,
not just to exist.
and today
is the proudest day
of my life.
i'm living a dream
that they thought could never
be done, but it'll be done.

saltman:

of a roar, a silence--
like an eerie silence
fell over the crowd
because this guy truly
might be going to his death.

branker:

evel got out of the crane
and into the sky cycle,
and the whole time,

patriotic music
is being played,
and at that time,
even i got emotional a bit.

spro:

fecundo and i strapped him in,
and got a couple of pictures
of him in the cockpit.

campoy:

a lot different than he did
when we started this project.
his hair was gray,
and he was really serious.

saltman:

we had a big clock--
10 seconds,
nine seconds.

branker:

you look at the audience,
no one's even breathing.
five... four...

announcer:

three, two, one.

saltman:

something failed.
it fizzled.
it went down like a bullet.

reporter:

the main chute is out.
there she goes.

reporter:

it's going to crash.
just missed the rocks!
david, i can't see anything.

berg:

i had my camera.
i'm taking--
click click click click.
(whooshes)
right into the canyon.
i turn around, and the first
fence just goes flat.
just, shwoop.

man:

that's exactly what it was.

branker:

people out of the sky.
it was right out of a movie,
you know?

reporter:

appears to have landed
in the snake river.
evel definitely tried
to get out, but he couldn't.

reporter:

even i am very scared.

pavlovich:

i thought he's gone.
they're not gonna
get to him in time.
he's gonna drown.

tonning:

running up
looking over the edge,
and linda was scared,
and the boys were scared.

robbie knievel:

i thought my dad was dead.
i was screaming, crying.

saltman:

my helicopter,

got over the canyon,
and there from the muddy banks
on the side of the river...
was evel waving.
and i said this--
thank god that
son of a bitch is alive.

reporter:

is standing
in the boat and waving.
he is alive and well.
(reporters overlapping)
i don't know what happened.
i don't know what happened.
just-- i think--
i don't know. i just can't say.
i'll have to let bob
and the fellas examine it.
bob, what happened?
well, this right here
is the cover
to the parachute canister.
it obviously came loose
much too soon, right on the pad.

campoy:

is it went up.
i knew immediately that
the chute had been deployed.

malewicki:

because of a mechanical problem
with the design.
you didn't do
a damn thing wrong.
the can is wrong
on the thing.
it blew up right there
on the launch.
- blew up by accident?
- yeah, it was our fault.
it's not your fault.
these things happen.

yes, we should have run
one more test.

campoy:

it was clear to me,
or to us,
that it was a mechanical
failure,
but there was another story
being banded about
back at the press tent
that perhaps
evel had released
the chute early.
i told people
that that's what happened.
when i went to the press tent
after the jump,
the press was asking for me
to come and make a statement.
i told the press that he--
his hand came off of the bar.
i really liked
the rocket crew.
they're just a bunch
of nice guys.
i just knew that the m.o.
of how he treated people
nothing was ever his fault.
i told people
that that's what happened.
and if by chance that took
a little bit of the pressure
off of the rocket team,
then so be it.

campoy:

that it was evel's fault.

reporter:

question remains--
was this the legitimate attempt
of a brave man,
or was it the great rip-off

of 1974?

wilson:

then the press tore him up.
'cause they think that he,
along with me,
had perpetrated a fraud.
hero or hustler?
or for americans,
are those the same thing?

reporter:

against the snake river canyon,
and the canyon
was the sentimental favorite.
evel would have liked his jump
to have been huge
front-page news,
but it was overwhelmingly
squashed
by the big news of the day,
which was the pardon
of nixon by president ford.
that was a major transition
in the country.
maybe he had outlived
his novelty
because i think people
just might of got tired
of listening to it.
and that's when he came back
to butte and--
an he was-- i don't know
if he was depressed or what.
he just, uh...
i thought sure he'd
just give up after that,
say, "well, you know, i'm done."
england swings
like a pendulum do...

gunn:

been to england before.
he thought a new crowd,

new group.
i can snow them a little
more than i can the americans.

rose:

the teddy roosevelt speech,
be good to your parents,
wear a helmet.
two by two
westminster abbey,
the tower, big ben...

reporter:

is alive, well,
and back in action in famed old
wembley stadium,
london, england,
for a jump that will be made
over 13 london buses.

wilson:

when he arrived in london,
he had only sold 3,000 seats
for a 100,000-seat stadium,
and he was in trouble.
there was some press there
to meet him.
he looks at the press,
and what did he do?
"i'm so glad to be here
in england
where we came
and won the war for you."
holy... oh?
and they start writing.
he knew his job,
which was to get people
in wembley stadium.
we drove around london,
just making friends.
how you doing?
what's your name?
stephen.

reporter:

so the yankee pied piper
collected the young and the old
and led them all
to wembley stadium.
80,000 people showed up
to watch the man do it.

gifford:

into the arena of wembley
where the buses were lined up,
and he said,
"i can't do that."
i said, "what do you mean
you can't do that?"
i said, "pull a few buses
out of there.
come on, it won't hurt
a thing to do that."
now i go over
and grab our producer,
i said, "doug," i said,
"evel says he can't do that."
he really didn't think
he was gonna make it.

gifford:

to talk to evel,
and talk him out of it,
and he was in a trailer.
we knocked on the door,
and he said, "oh, no.
i'll give it a go.
i'll give it a go."
it was always,
"i'll give it a go."
and he was right.
he couldn't make it.

announcer:

here is evel knievel!

gifford:

one has to wonder after

the snake river,
one has to wonder
why you continue?
well, i sometimes think
that maybe i should quit,
but you always
want to keep going,
and i'm kind of proud of that
red, white, and blue number one
i wear on my shoulder,
and i want to keep it on there.
i'm glad you're here today.
you know,
i've never had an accident
when you're around.
- good luck.
- thanks.

gifford:

that outside of the jump
at caesar's palace
where he was severely injured,
that this will probably be
the most difficult jump
he has ever made.
he hurt himself in indio
1967 caesars palace.
here he goes.
and he will go.

wilson:

though.
the motorcycle was ghostly.
it was tumbling after him,
sort of.
then eventually,
it landed on him.

gifford:

and he is hurt.
oh, my god.
(motorcycle revs)
the man you see now
leaning over evel is john hood.

that's his chief mechanic.

hood:

he's gotta be hurt on this one.
and i kneeled down
and said, "are you okay?"
i got his helmet off
and he said, "help me up."
and he wanted the microphone.
i wanna stand up and walk.
now, help me up.
he wants to talk.
he's gonna talk.
ladies and gentlemen...
of this wonderful country...
i've got to tell you
that you...
are the last people
in the world
who will ever see me jump.
because i will never ever,
ever jump again.
i am through.

knoxville:

was one of the worst
as far as injuries would go.
he broke his hand, back,
re-broke his pelvis.
after wembley,
i went home to edit.
phone rang.
"hello, doug? evel."
he's calling me from
his hospital room in london.
"doug,
you can't use that quote."
"what do you mean, evel?"
"you can't use that quote,
that quote where i said
i wouldn't jump again."
and i said, "well, why?"
"'cause i may jump again."
when the jump was over

in london,
i said that i'd
never jump again.
that was the pain in my body
overpowering the brains
that i'm supposed
to have in my head.
i will jump again,
but 13 is an unlucky number.
this time
i'm gonna jump
14 buses.
somehow he gets the idea--
i am not gonna go out
with a crash.
i'm gonna go back
to the united states,
and i'm gonna jump 14 buses.
that's just who he was.
you can't do it and say
you're the best in the world
and then fall off
and get up and say, i quit.
not if you're
an evel knievel you can't.

reporter:

family entertainment center,
located just outside
of cincinnati, ohio,
is jam-packed with people
who have come to watch
evel knievel
out of retirement,
and here he comes right now,
robert craig knievel, evel.

knoxville:

on this jump.
uh, it was a different evel.
i mean, he actually did
practice jumps.
i'm gonna go, frank.
there's no wind gonna stop me,

not even a hurricane.

wilson:

it was a very gutsy jump.
the doctors told him
just don't ever do that again.
you know, one little slip,
wrong thing,
and he'd probably
have been paralyzed.

reporter:

everything is go.
and the total concentration now
is getting that bike
off the approach ramp
and on to the landing ramp.
and he's not hesitating.
he'll go.

(cheers and applause)
boy, busted the motorcycle
right in half, frank.
boy, it did come apart,
didn't it?

- boy, did i hit hard.

- yeah, i know.

thank you.

this motorcycle is the finest
machine in the world,
as far as i am concerned.
it broke in half,
but it held me up,
and all i can say
is thanks to number one,
thanks to harley davidson.
you've been so good
to me through the years.
i would like to tell
all of you something, though,
that-- that as far as
i am concerned,
i have jumped far enough.
today i'm gonna walk away
from here with you,

and i feel that's being
a professional.
that's what i'm gonna do.

knoxville:

the longest jump of his career.
it was the biggest television
audience he ever had,
and it was
the highest-rated episode
of "wide world of sports" ever.
he did some small jumps
after that,
but he never went
that big again.
king's island was...
the gunfighter
putting away his pistols.
if you were on a bike,
you'd do stupid shit,
but you would do stupid shit
in the name of evel knievel.

hoffman:

that's why you had a bike.
i didn't know
you just rode bikes around.
i thought the whole purpose
of bikes were to hit things
and fly off of 'em.

seth enslow:

the neighbor kids
and see who could jump
more neighbors
without landing on 'em
and things like that,
but we just dreamed of having
a motor between our legs.
i loved just going down steps,
and i crashed all the time.
you're like, yeah, i'm gonna be
just like evel knievel
only not as good.

there's no way
that a youngster
is not going
to not want to try to do
what his hero does.
i don't think there's
anything wrong with a kid
wanting to be an evel knievel
any more than he'd wanna be
an o.j. simpson or frank gifford
or be any kind
of a professional athlete.

- reporter:

do you view him as a hero?

- yeah.

- do you really?

- yeah.

he's one of the greatest heroes.

robbie knievel:

he was a hero to so many kids,
but his own son
was his biggest fan.

reporter:

look at this little guy go.
wouldn't you know
it would be the young one
who would steal it.
he's the one that's got
to have the longest wheelie.

robbie knievel:

he totally saw me and him,
and it was like,
"i'm gonna be you, dad."
and the legend continues.
i'm gonna jump the fountains
at caesar's palace
before i end my career.
(cheers and applause)
that was for you, dad.

knoxville:

broke all of his dad's records.
i mean, hell, he could jump
fourteen buses with no hands.
but robbie was jumping
on lighter,
more powerful bikes
that were designed for jumping.

leeuwen:

farther and longer than evel
and all that stuff,
but it didn't matter.
robbie couldn't tell a story.
you know,
he was not a showman.
knievel is the ultimate showman.
a guy could sing
longer and louder
than elvis presley,
but who gave a damn?
he was elvis presley.
my dad was evel knievel.
(laughter)
(applause)

williams:

wasn't jumping anymore
he still wanted to be
in the spotlight,
and he had to find
other things to do
to get himself attention.
yeah, one of his projects
was hollywood.
- viva
- viva
viva knievel

hamilton:

there was one guy
meant to be evel knievel,
and that was evel.
evel had a movie-star quality

about him.
there's no doubt about it.
uh, not when he tried to act.
look at you, you're trying
to destroy yourself.
if you don't believe me,
here's the proof.
i'm not gonna let you
commit suicide around me.
he performed
for the audience,
but when it came
to the acting part,
i guess there's a difference.
- that was too far!
- stop it!
- all right...
- stop it!
- any way you want it, man!
- stop it, stop it!

hood:

once it came out,
it was a movie that wasn't
really well-received.
viva
i guess the exciting part's
is the jump, huh?
you know, we've got
the wallendas on the highwire,
and the mentalist on the edge
of the canyon on a motorcycle...

saltman:

i was gonna take on
the snake river canyon event,
i decided something
very important--
that i would write a book,
a legacy,
that people could read
about the evel knievel promotion
of the snake river canyon.
and knievel, he was my 50/50

partner, and he says,
"don't forget,
just tell the truth."
so with permission,
i carried
an audio-cassette recorder
during the evel knievel tour.
if you listen to the tape,
you can form your own opinion.
and so when i wrote my book,
i kept out a lot of things,
stuff i would
never write about,
'cause remember,
when the book was coming out,
i was still protecting
his image.
evel's attorney,
he checked everything,
told me that it had
evel's approval in writing,
and then the book
was published.

little:

compound one day,
and he throws me this book,
and he says,
"here, keep this.
it'll be worth some money
someday."
i open it up, here's all
his footnotes in there.
the first part of the book--
"x-rated evel."
he writes in there,
"constitutes adultery."
so right from the get-go,
you could tell he was mad.
it just starts,
and you can tell by the--
the farther it gets in the book,
the madder he got.
"this is a lie

and not accurate."
(laughs)
"lies, lies, lies."
i read the book,
and you know what?
i said, yeah,
what's the problem?
he could of said a lot more
worse stuff. (laughs)
i read the book a couple times.
i didn't see
anything in it bad.
nothing.
it was very factual.
very, very, very factual.
i think that shelly,
that wrote it,
was, uh, accurate.
and...
it made him really mad.

saltman:

the 20th century fox lot,
when all of a sudden,
i saw evel,
with a big smile coming at me,
loping along.
and i was actually
glad to see him.
the book was out,
and i was like,
maybe i could even talk him into
doing some promotion with me.
i said, "hey, evel,"
and all of a sudden,
my hands,
they were held behind my back.
they tell me it was two men.
i didn't know them.
it may have been one.
it may have been two.
and he, uh--
he came at me
with a bat,

an aluminum baseball bat,
he said, "i'm gonna kill you,
you son of a bitch."
i did everything i could
to defend myself.
and i remember
putting my hand up,
i said, "what're you doin'?
what're you doin'?"
i was fighting
for my life.
and he was wailing on me,
and then i passed out.

reporter:

knievel came to court
accompanied by his wife linda
and his attorney.
the 38-year old daredevil
faces charges of felony assault
in the baseball bat attack
on television executive
sheldon saltman.

tonning:

knievel could've gotten
away with it.
he could've if he would've
just stopped being knievel
for 10 minutes.

reporter:

interesting hour at division 91
of municipal court
in which evel knievel
fired his attorney
and entered a plea of guilty.
he fires them
and says to the judge,
"judge, i did it,
and i'd do it again.
do what you will with me."
you know,
this old frontier justice thing.

you know, in butte, montana,
you settle things
out in the street.
you don't settle 'em
with lawyers.
and evel always settled it
with his fists,
or sometimes a tool helped.
not with a baseball bat.
that's not butte.
i never knew of anybody
in butte that did that.
if i did not think
there was a much
stronger judge someday
that i will
stand before called god
than the judge i stood before
in that courtroom
in san monica, california,
i would have killed
that lousy little bastard.
i broke his arms
with a baseball bat,
and i think that's
just what he deserved.
i'll guarantee you one thing--
he doesn't write
anything else about me.
- (laughter)
- but i mean--
i think i was a sophomore
in high school at the time,
and i was not proud of my dad
for doing that...at all.
stuntman evel knievel
got a jail sentence yesterday
for beating his former
press agent with a baseball bat.

reporter:

the 39-year-old
motorcycle daredevil
that while as a judge

he found knievel's
admission of guilt
as refreshing,
at the same time,
rafeddie said,
"long ago
we abandoned frontier justice
in california."
with that, rafeddie sentenced
knievel to six months in jail
and three years probation.
judge is a good judge
and he's a fair judge.

rundle:

course, when h
, when he was in jail,
judge is a good judge
and he's a fair judge.
it was like--
i think in his own way,
he played it as a game.

knoxville:

but he's on work release.
so he's only in there at night.
and he would have
his chauffer
pick him up every morning
and take him to the bar.

reporter:

in sharing the wealth.
so this morning
he hired a dozen limousines
to transport
his fellow work release inmates
to their jobs.
you know,
putting him in jail,
he got more press
than anything else.
there was no end
to the shenanigans

that guy would pull.

reporter:

the inmates were amazed,
but the authorities
were not so enthusiastic.

knoxville:

the judge got pissed,
and he revoked evel's
work release privileges.

tonning:

i was pissed off at him.
he started believing the hype,
that he was totally impervious,
and he could get away
with anything.
i don't think
he thought about the public.
well, maybe if he did,
he thought that,
"that's what they
expect of me."
the ideal toy company,
which manufactures
the evel knievel toys,
says it has already lost
\$1.6 million since evel knievel
went into the county jail.
we had a meeting at ideal
the next day or the day after.
and i said, "you know--
you know, we don't--
we don't sell toys of murderers
or gangsters or stuff
like that,
and so therefore,
we are going to suspend sales
in the united states."

reporter:

on the toy front,
it may not be a merry christmas

for daredevil evel knievel.
the contracts were canceled,
and he lost
a lot of money, yeah.
it all--
it all started coming apart.
anymore it doesn't matter

reporter:

his experience in jail
was a good one,
but that it has
set him back financially.
i hated to see him lose
everything he worked for
in 10 minutes.
when it was falling apart,
it fell apart very quickly.

mccloud:

the cars, the boats...

robbie knievel:

the lear jets, ferraris,
everything to go
down the drain?
that was hard.
the house that we all loved
got repossessed
because my dad didn't pay
the property taxes.
bank came and got it
and the irs sold it.
we loaded up
all the furniture,
everything of any value,
from the saddles to guns,
and we would just bring
so much out at a time,
and we'd have a garage sale.
the arc of the sky cycle is like
what happened to his career.
he was at the pinnacle,
and then he destroyed

his whole life.

evel knievel:

i just dropped out of sight
and played golf.
i just completely withdrew
from the public.
when i met him,
he was in a bit of a low point.
i mean, he was kinda
just getting by.
hustling golf-- he might make
a couple hundred here,
a couple hundred here.
he lived day to day
at that time.
he didn't keep the fact
that he was married
a secret or anything,
and in two weeks i packed up
what i wanted to take with me,
and we went on the road.

linda knievel:

and i just let it go.
i thought,
the heck with it,
you know?
you know,
after 38 years
of somebody
telling you what to do...
i didn't like him.
(chuckles)
i didn't like him.
nobody wins
you could see that
his health was declining,
you know,
he was getting worse
all the time.
he had a hip replacement,
a pelvis reconstruction,
a spinal fusion,

a liver transplant,
seven or eight bouts
of staph infection.

evel knievel:

i have hepatitis c,
and i got it through
blood transfusions,
and i've been told by
the doctors five years ago
that i didn't have
five years to live.
i'm taking it
one day at a time.
yeah, you really felt sorry
for him, i did, really.
i said,
"you're really hurting."
if you're gonna be dumb,
you've gotta be tough
when you get knocked down,
you gotta get back up
i ain't the sharpest rig
in the 10 pack
but i know enough to know
if you're gonna be dumb,
you've gotta be tough

knoxville:

then the '90s come around
and motorcycle jumping
was just one part
of this whole new huge thing
called action sports.

pastrana:

quickly the sports progressed.
this multimillion motorcycle
jumping, skateboard riding,
surfing industry
as definitely come a long way
from daredevils
to professionals.
in 2006, i was able to land

the first double back flip
on a dirt bike.
no one ever thought
that that was possible.
the bikes have evolved.
the riding has evolved.
they have coaches.
they have schools.
they have camps,
but the spirit
will never die,
and evel was the one that set
our foundation for the future.
the thing about the knievels
that's really captivating
and inspiring to all of us
is the showmanship side of it.
(cheers and applause)
i stay awake at night,
and i dwell on
how to do
what i do in the biggest,
most grandest way
and to continue this legacy.

announcer:

matt's definitely-- oh!

hoffman:

or action sports,
whatever they're commercially
referred to,
is definitely a result
from the way evel dreamed
in the '70s
and how he wanted
to push the limits.
("jackass" theme song plays)
you can do stunts
on television?
(laughs)
(bull grunts)
(crowd groans)
(crash, laugh)

evel had to make his jumps.
the stunts i do,
i know they're gonna fail.
(laughs)
mat hoffman and i
did a tribute to evel.
hello,
i'm johnny knoxville,
and i'm about to back flip
this bike.

hoffman:

push the limits,
get some of our friends
together
and just set some records
and just celebrate evel's life.
and, uh,
that's what we did.
ugh! -- !
and i broke my --
in that tribute.
- oh! oh!
- are you gonna okay?
oh, yeah,
i feel great.
no, really,
i tore my urethra.
thanks a lot, evel.
yeah, i've definitely
been compared to evel knievel.
i think that's because
of the fact
that i have had
some big crashes.
so i figured i'd see how far
i can fly the harley davidson
in honor of evel knievel.

knoxville:

did that record-breaking
harley davidson jump,
he dedicated it to evel.
and when robbie maddison

set the new world record
for distance by jumping
over an entire football field,
he did it
on the 40th anniversary
of evel's caesar's palace jump.
(cheers and applause)
evel knievel was always
in the back of my mind,
like,-- and it wasn't like
we had forgotten about him.
we just didn't really know
what he was up to,
and i think that people started
asking what he was up to.

announcer:

the one and only o.g.!
evel knievel!

hawk:

a new generation
understand how important
he was to us.
somehow we raised
his profile again,
but he deserved that
all along.

krystal knievel:

appreciated that the kids
paid their respects to him,
and they did,
and he was amazed by that.
don't ever forget--
you can fall many times
in life,
but you will never be a failure
as long as you try to get up.

kelly knievel:

liked his role
as a elder statesman
at the end of his life.

he thought it was really cool,
and where he deserved to be,
deservedly so.

i'm looking forward
to seeing what happens
in the next 20 years,
if i am so lucky
to live that long.
i had to have a hip replacement,
a complete hip replacement.
i had to have a hip replacement,
a complete hip replacement.
i had to have a--
you guys,
i'm really having problems.
why don't we--
please.

knoxville:

of injuries and surgeries,
the thing that really kicked
his ass was lung disease.

williams:

if you'd asked him,
"would you rather have lived
this long, bobby,
and be this sick or
died at the end of the ramp?"
i think he would have chosen
the end of the ramp.

wilson:

of years of his life were hell.
he was having trouble
breathing,
and being in that living hell,
he put his life
in perspective.
i think he probably
thought a lot
about the things he'd done
and thought about how badly
he treated some people.

krystal knieval:

he was preparing for the end
on every level.
he righted a lot of wrongs
with people
because he felt
like that was important.
it became important to him.

frey:

a life that he was ashamed of
in a lot of ways,
and he was just trying
to talk to the people
that he truly--
that truly meant
something to him
was the way he put it,
and put it right.

mccloud:

"i was so sick."
he said, "i was just
a sick person with women.
it was so wrong,"
and i said, "ah, dad,
it's so good
to hear you say that."

knoxville:

amends with people at the end,
and that's great,
but it's kind of tough
to put the toothpaste back
in the tube at that point.
he caused a lot of hurt.
well, first time i ever
heard him say "i'm sorry,"
he was pretty much
on his death bed.
yeah, he just said
"i'm sorry."
that was it.

you know...
the most important thing
in life, uh,
that really counts
is your scorecard with god.
the real bob knievel,
the bobby knievel,
that's the guy i knew,
and that's the guy that i loved.
and that's the guy that was
emerging back out of the slime.
(laughs) and, uh,
i was moved by it.

blackenship:

the night before he died.
he said,
"you gotta do me a favor,"
and i says, "okay, what?"
and he said, "say a prayer
for me once and a while."
and i said,
"okay, all right, all right."
and he says,
"i'm worse than you think."
i was on the phone
with evel,
and he started coughing,
and the phone dropped,
and he went unconscious.
(voice breaks)
so that was it.
but it was hard.
i wasn't ready.
he was ready.
and that's what was important.
you just never thought
that evel was gonna die.

knoxville:

he was indestructible,
and then...
it... it just reminded you
that he was human.

i didn't lose the daredevil.
i lost this little kid
who at one time
i thought was my brother.
that's the indelible knievel
to me.

knoxville:

i still think he's a superhero.
and, yeah, i know
a more complete story now,
and some of the stuff is really
heartbreaking, you know?
but to me,
what he did transcends that.
most of us don't take chances
in our lives.
most of us weren't willing
to lay it on the line,
so to speak,
like he was.
what my dad did,
nobody's ever gonna do again.
but there is a little evel
in all of us.
i guess i'd like to have him
remembered as, um...
a man who,
when he was down,
got back up.
you know,
he never quit.

saltman:

in fairness to him,
they should not remember
the evil that evel did.
instead he should be remembered
for the good things he did.
in times of stress,
i believe somebody
on a white horse
wearing a white hat
will arrive.

that's the american way.
life's pretty tough.
(laughs)
life can be pretty -- tough.
and, uh...
you need your heroes, man.
(peter frampton's
"show me the way" plays)

rundle:

he used to always say to me,
he says, "that canyon
has not moved one inch,
and i do not see
a big long line of daredevils
waiting to jump it."
i wonder
how you're feeling
there's ringing
in my ears