

## Bill Nye

*'Almost Live' writer and performer, 1984-1999. Interviewed via Zoom, June 13, 2024.*

"In the spring of 1984, they conceived of a show to feature John Keister. And so the premise, which was pretty good, Ross Shafer had been kidnapped, and how much is the ransom? \$300. Even in 1984, that wasn't a whole lot for a TV host. So John Keister goes to a cash machine to get the money, and I'm in front of him wearing a pyramid hat, and going on about prime numbers and making him screw up his code. Then I fall, and he meets his wife. This is if you remember the layout of downtown. John meets his wife and she says, 'Yeah, go through Nordstrom. It's faster.' So he does, and he ends up at the Clinique counter. And the guys who have kidnapped Ross accept some Clinique facial supplies. John says, 'I don't have the whole \$300.'

"So it was really good. I just really respected that John included me. John Keister thought I was funny and included me in 1984. So then I messed around submitting jokes in 1985. But I got hired six weeks at a time in 1986.

[How you knew John] "We would see each other at comedy clubs, Swannie's Comedy Underground, mostly. I would do those, and on Monday nights would be open night, and I'd see John and see Ross Shafer. If nothing else, I'm as inconsistent as inconsistent can be. But once in a while, I was funny enough that they offered to include me. So I quit my day job Oct. 3 1986, to pursue this silly thing.

"I was going to see where it went. So I did some bits with Ross at 4:35 in the afternoon when he was on KJR. And it was Ross who just said, 'You know, you could be Bill Nye, the Science Guy, and I would answer listener questions.'

"He had an 'If you call now, you also get two tickets' to something or other, and that had to do with the first 'Back to the Future' movie. The answer that he was looking for was so many so many — he said on the radio — 'gigawatts.' [Soft 'g'.] So I called him, because they would recognize my voice from the open mics and stuff, and they passed me through to him during commercial break. And I said, 'You can say gigawatts [soft 'g'], but we in science prefer gigawatts [hard 'g'],' and that led to me answering listener questions every day. Pretty soon after that, Ross just muttered the phrase 'Bill Nye, the Science Guy,' and I did my first on-camera Science Guy in January of 1987 on 'Almost Live!'

"That was the household uses of liquid nitrogen. You know, we all have liquid nitrogen around. Of course we do. And so it was funny. I claim it was funny. You can watch that on the electric internet. Ross was very gracious. He would go along with the bit and play the role of the every-person viewer, so I could be just nerd turned up to 11, and it had legs, as they say. It came out OK. But Ross just thought it was really funny. So I was asked to do Science Guy bits regularly.

"I did not write the first one. Oh, my goodness. Joe Guppy wrote 'Speed Walker.' Joe Guppy is a genius, man. The way it worked informally in the writer's room, if you are in it, you're expected to write it. So Joe came up with it. But he wanted me to play Speed Walker from the get go. But that was such a hit because in the Olympics, it was this big thing, 50-kilometer race-walking races, and it was all the rage. There was a U.S. guy that was competing very well against these guys from Scandinavia and this and that, and people were talking about it.

"It was funny because it does look — it is a funny thing. I inherited this deal with from my mother's side of the family. I am very loose-hipped. I can do that without much trouble.

"It was funny, and it was a surprising result. Somehow he was able to go across the Tacoma Narrows Bridge and get to Kingston before the ferry. He was able to out-walk the Monorail. And if duty called, he would go right through the pink Elephant Car Wash if he needed to. At one time, he went right through Green Lake. He just walked right into Green Lake and came up the other side. Frankly, I really enjoyed the athletic challenge of it, and I'm not kidding.

"The Monorail guy got the Monorail to go as slowly as it would go. I've been involved in electric vehicles for a number of years. Nowadays, they call it cogging. The electric motor has an armature, and it will jerk. So the Monorail will jerk-jerk-jerk-jerk when it's going really slowly. So apparently if you're a Metro bus driver in those days who received accolades, for one month it was considered an honor to drive the Monorail. And the guy was so nice. He got it to go just as slowly as it could, and I was just race walking as fast as I could. I barely could outdo it, just barely, and that was cool.

"Going through Green Lake, you got to exhale all of your air in order to sink. Otherwise, you'll float and it doesn't look right. And that was funny. Going through the car wash, it's silly, it's funny.

"The one with the Monorail, if you remember the beginning of that, the guy tries to steal the Space Needle. Before the Space Needle had that big tourist gift-shop structure at the base, the nuts are still there, the big, threaded studs and nuts were very prominent. You still have got to go looking for them, but they're there. I'm a mechanical engineer, I'm a gearhead. I just always thought the giant nuts were pretty great.

"Another thing that happened with my rudimentary craft skills, I became kind of the props guy or 'Almost Live!' with Bob DeChaineau. He was a carpenter at KING TV, who was just cool. He was just a great guy and very, very good craftsman. He and I would just build all this silly stuff. We rigged up a hot wire for cutting Styrofoam, and I made the wrench for the 'loosening' the nuts on the Space Needle. Someone's trying to steal the Space Needle. Come on, man. It was funny.

"Of course, they're all brilliant. But the other one that I really liked was the guy was trying to blow up the Kingdome because everybody kind of wanted to blow up the Kingdome. It was contemporary with the first Batman movie, and there's an iconic scene in that where Batman has this dark side, and there's a guy, a murderer, and he just throws him off a building. 'Who are you?' 'I'm Batman.' And he drops the guy. But then Speed Walker, 'Who are you?' 'I'm Speed Walker.' And he drops the guy. But Speed Walker is a force for good, so somehow he race-walks down the ramps of the Kingdome and catches the guy.

"They're long ramps for Speed Walker. But he's focused. The guard who plays the guard in that bit was the real guard, and he'd watched the show, and he loved it. That's what happened in Seattle. Everybody was very supportive of the show everywhere you go, and the manifestation of that is the 'High Five'n White Guys.' We could go anywhere, and people would be willing to say, 'There go the High Five'n White Guys. And it was stupid.

[Origin of High Five'n White Guys] "I grew up back east, in Washington [D.C.], and I was perhaps sensitized to being a white guy. And I blurted that out one day with talking with Ed Wyatt. He's got a freaking Australian accent. He's lived there so long. He can't talk Yankee anymore. But we both found parking places in front of KING-TV, gave each other a high five. And that led to the creative moment. But that was a bit that really engaged everybody.

"John had this idea, we're on TV, people will just give us stuff. 'Give me a gallon of gas.' 'OK.' 'Can I have a latte? Espresso?' 'Yeah.' And the people just give it to him because he's on TV. It was I believe his commentary on human nature. And because he's funny, it was funny.

['High-Five'n White Guys' was silly but had an edge.] "That's the nature of a bit like that. It has an edge. It has an edge. Speed Walker has an edge. We're making fun of this Olympic sport.

"Talk about a different era, did you see 'Mime Hunting'? Two guys in the back of a truck driving around downtown, it's now all gentrified, I guess Belltown and a little farther north along Dexter Avenue. Two guys driving around with rifles, real guns in the back of a truck, pointing stuff out and then pretending to shoot people in cold blood.

“That's got an edge. But it's related to that fad of mime, where somebody's saying, ‘Hey, the king's got no clothes on. Sometimes mimes are stupid.’ Along that line, if you want a punch line with a punch word, if you want to go six seconds with a punch word, Ross Shafer is your man. Oh, my goodness. So Marcel Marceau stayed at, I'm going to say, the Tacoma Hilton, and apparently he was not satisfied with the service. They interviewed the manager of the hotel, and the manager said, ‘He should have said something.’ Freaking good joke, man. And Ross can just do that. He can just write jokes. He's just really good. He still can, maybe better than ever. He's really good.

“[Could ‘High Five’n White Guys’ be done today?] “Boy, it would have to have black people reacting to it way more than we did back then. Once in a while, we'd have somebody — nowadays, you'd say somebody of color — reacting to them.

“The warm-up reel, we'd play that for the audience. There's a lot of bloopers, airplanes almost knocking guys over and Casey Jones saying, ‘I've been playing basketball since I before I was black’ or something. And it played well in with the audience. But I'm not sure you could do that now. And that's not necessarily a bad thing. It's not necessarily a bad thing. We were we were up at the time. What are you gonna do?

“There was a show in San Diego. We got a copy of the script or the monologue or something. And we all went, ‘No, that's not [us]. We're fine. We're not going out of business.’

“We were created, the show was created, almost contemporary on the heels of ‘Saturday Night Live.’ The style, and the way you're going to try to make people laugh was consistent with the combination of live television and video bits. And the guy who understood that is John Keister. He just had an intuition about it that I still admire. He's just terrific. And the other guy, freaking Pat Cashman. Oh, my God. I come to work, what am I doing here? And then Bob Nelson, Bob Nelson. These guys are so funny. ‘Oh, okay. All right. I'll pretend to be the guy that was having sex with the worst girlfriend in the world. I'll do it.’

“Talking about engineering and why I finally realized that Science Guy thing had to be my thing. You look to be of an age where you remember the Ford Pinto. There's a bad car. It literally killed people and the Ford Motor Company didn't do anything about it for quite a while. But here's the engineering idea that to me is perfectly analogous to creating a comedy show or a Science Guy show. If you have the greatest car welders in the world, you have the greatest car painters in the world, you have the greatest car electrical wire-running people on earth, and what you start with is a Ford Pinto, all you're going to get on your best day is a Ford Pinto.

“So this is what a guy I've worked with very closely called the upside down pyramid of design. If you start with something good at the base, there's a chance it'll grow to be something worthwhile. But if the base is no good, you're just not going to get there from here.

“And this gets into an old question, perfectly analogous. Why do people make bad movies? They do. It almost always starts with a mediocre script, so the writing is the key. Yes, a performance is important. But the writing is what makes it go, everybody. That's just how it is. Yes, having the guy who can swing his hips for Speed Walker is good. But having the idea for Speed Walker, I claim, is harder. Of course, I was one of the writers. Let's just say once in a while I would get a hit, but I was not a home run swinger.

[Favorite sketches] “I really like Speed Walker. And I like the Science Guy's stuff, man, I love the Science Guy. There are a couple of male-bashing bits. I really like ‘The World Girlfriend in the World.’ So freaking John comes to work with — how would I describe it? — a wet bar napkin, and he opens it and he just starts reading or singing:

*She's the worst girlfriend you've ever had  
Every time you think about her, you get mad  
She's the worst girlfriend, you know, it's true  
She thinks it's funny that the joke's on you  
She's the worst girlfriend in the world*

"God, that's just because we've all been there. You know, the expression femme fatale. What is it? What is it that does men in, in every Shakespeare or most of Shakespeare's every drama? Hot, but crazy. That's your problem. That's your problem. And John, I think, believes he had a few. Now, John is an unusual guy. He may have been part of the problem. But we could all, in the modern expression, relate. We all felt his pain. And Tracey Conway understood it immediately, and so she plays it brilliantly.

"And Nancy Guppy, man, Nancy Guppy is so funny.

[Bob Jones' role as program director] "He's like, 'I want to have a comedy show. Let's have a comedy show.' So he hired Ross who had won the stand-up comedy competition. It was the two albums, 'Let's Get Small' and 'Wild and Crazy Guy,' Steve Martin's albums that led to this enormous popularity in stand-up comedy. I was in college, in engineering school when this was happening, 1976, and the guy who had been my freshman roommate, with whom I was still friends — I went into mechanical engineering, he went into material science — he lived with four other people, and they had this new thing, cable television. He said, 'You've got to come over, you've got to come see this.' At that point, he lived behind me, this is in Ithaca, New York, and an area they call College Town. I went to his house, and I watched Steve Martin. He goes, 'Look, this guy's just like you. Look at this. Oh, my goodness, he's making things, he's doing things.'

"I don't know if that's true, but people have said that the way I move in the sort of loose-jointed way is, Steve Martin's the master of physical comedy. If you ever look at his ability as a juggler and rope tricks, let alone banjo, man. Anyway, Warner Brothers Records had this competition. I'd moved to Seattle for a job at Boeing, and a completely different new set of people I hardly knew told me, 'You've got to enter this contest.' So I won in Seattle at Montana's, which later burned down. Anyway, after that, people wanted me to do Steve Martin impressions. 'But your Steve Martin impressions not as good as Steve Martin.' So I started trying to do my own jokes, and that's where I met John and Ross. It was, in my opinion, the enormous popularity of Steve Martin that led to every major city in the U.S. and Canada, English[speaking Canada, anglophone Canada, having one or two comedy clubs Like in a weekend, they just opened everywhere, it seemed to me. So I was part of that wave, and so was Bob Jones. He wanted to be part of that wave. He wanted to be part of it. And it's cool.

"David Silverman won the comedy competition, as from memory, in 1983. Then Ross won in 1984. Then the show started. John asked me to be on in the spring of 1984. Then I did another bit because — and this is still a problem for me. I just go all in, I'd injured myself playing softball and had a black eye. We used it, we pretended that I had walked into the wing of a stealth fighter. It was OK. After that, those two bits, they asked me to be on with Jim Sharp.

"They asked me to write jokes, and I did my best. But I claim that the whole Bob Jones thing was derived from the same thing that got me into it, which was the overnight success of Steve Martin, which was perhaps in response to the Vietnam War, Nixon resigning, everything being so heavy. The politics, everything was such a downer, Steve Martin showed up, just being nuts, wild and crazy. He struck a nerve. I've read his book several times. He points out that by the time he got to those albums, he had distilled it, he had thrown out two-thirds or three-quarters of his act, and he just had the crisp stuff: 'Remember when the world blew up? We all came to this planet on that giant space ark?' So it ends in a 'k.' 'giant space ark.' He doesn't say spaceship, 'space ark.' It's that kind of detail. 'And the government decided not to tell the stupid people because they were afraid.'

"I make my living with language. People who can't express themselves, people who don't have a way with words, sort of no have way, I guess. 'No have way' is just funny, people. Very funny to me.

[Getting to the Science Guy full-time.] "I got very concerned as a mechanical engineer. We built the Ford Pinto, the Chevy Vega, took solar panels off the roof of the White House, abandoned teaching the metric system. And this was the belief that the U.S. was better than everybody, when to me as an engineer, it clearly wasn't. Airbus was starting to compete with Boeing very successfully. And so I got very concerned about the future. And that's why I wanted to do the Science Guy show. And that's why that was a direction I took when it became clear that I had to choose. Jim Sharp. John Keister came to me, I think it was summer of 1992, 'What are you going to do? Are you going to do Science Guy?'

"Because there was a bit. Bo Jackson. There was 'Bo knows baseball,' 'Bo knows football,' 'Bill knows bicycles, Bill knows stuff.' Then it was for cross-training, but this was for cross-dressing. So I was wearing high heels or Easy Spirits playing basketball. And it was funny. It was good. But they pointed out that I had to choose. You can't be trying to protect kids'-show host, safe for your children to watch, with guy playing ambivalent sexuality person, at least not then, 30 years ago. Maybe you could do it now. So that's why I decided to do the Science Guy show and it turned out to be the right thing.

"I let go of trying to write full time-comedy. I wanted to do the Science Guy show because the objective of the Science Guy show was to change the world, and I felt that I could do that more easily with my own show. It's still the objective, doggone.

[In your sketches, no one knew if something would explode.] "Yeah, that's always the charm. The wonderful 'So what's going to happen?'

[You still have a comic persona.] "Well, that's the key to the Science Guy show, man. With me, what you see is what you get. I mean, I am really passionate about science. And I love engineering. I love making stuff, for better or for worse. And so as Bill Stainton points out so articulately, if a local station tried to make a show like 'Almost Live!' today, they wouldn't let it go more than a couple three episodes and pull the plug. Bill Stainton points out who the show, whatever show it is, be it 'Wheel of Fortune,' 'The Tonight Show,' 'Evening News,' 'The Lead with Jake Tapper,' whatever the show is, it has to be an extension of the host.

"So when 'Almost Live!' started, it was an extension of Ross Shafer. Then when John took over, because Ross left town, it took a while for the show to change, to morph into being an extension of John. When you really look at those early monologues of John's, you can see the choppy quality of it. But then like 1988-89, that season, we were in internal-combustion terms firing on all cylinders. It's really an interesting thing.

"So the Science Guy show is an extension of me, for better or for worse. If you hate me, you hate the show. If you think I don't suck, there's a chance the show won't suck. But the other thing about the Science Guy show is, we've spent a lot of time making it funny. The people I worked with just had outstanding senses of humor, and so we were all like-minded.

"That's something I won't say I learned. I think you'd have the word 'intuited,' like it became clear to me that it has to be that way. You have to work with people who make you laugh or you're not going anywhere. Everybody's working so hard. The days are so long that you better enjoy it.

"If you manage to immigrate to the U.S., and you're assigned to clean washrooms, it's going to be harder than if you get a chance to write jokes on a local comedy show. So everybody you meet knows something you don't. And you got to appreciate the good things as much as you can.

[How much your future course was set via 'Almost Live!'] "Oh, well, the whole thing, what I learned or was exposed to is that it's a team. And I still I say this all the time, what I still love about television and occasionally a movie is, it's still handmade. All the electronics, all this and that, all the hair and makeup, whatever the hell it is, it's maybe especially hair and makeup. It's still handmade. It's people telling a story with their bare hands, and I love that. You can have all the digital effects you can conceive, but it's the story. It's people trying to evoke emotions in the viewer that I love.

"And you got that from 'Almost Live!', in a sense, just being around it. Yeah. Being around what it means to seven takes to get the joke just right, or lighting, the lighting, the lighting, you've got to spend a lot of time with that.

"Steve Wilson directed every episode. I say he's the Cal Ripken Jr. of 'Almost Live!'. Nobody was there for every show except Steve Wilson.

[1989 April Fool's prank: the Space Needle collapse] "I was there for the Space Needle falling over. But understand everybody who worked in TV news. And KING was much more a news station than an entertainment station. So the news photographer, when something would go wrong with the camera, which in those days was often enough, the camera would be separate from the deck. There'd be a cable, a three-quarter tape to chunk, chunk, chunk, chunk. Anyway, 'I hope that doesn't happen when the Space Needle falls over.' That was a term of art. It was a running joke. And there was an old saying that doing the news is like trying to film or record a car wreck, which was considered a very high bar, virtually impossible. Well, now with mobile phones, you can look at all the car wrecks you want every 15 minutes. There's this catastrophic car wreck, all the dashboard cameras. So having the Space Needle fall over was a very logical thing to make fun of on April Fool's Day.

"There was some of every there was all those five things. Denial, acceptance, anger. What did you guys do? Why are you calling us? It's April Fool's Day. What the hell? Somebody called. 'I almost had a heart attack.' 'OK, I'm glad you didn't, knock yourself or don't knock yourself out.'

"I think everybody had mixed feelings, this sort of lack of critical-thinking skill among the television viewers. But part of it was, this is the early days of electronic before artificial intelligence. And I'm pretty sure the gizmo was called Paintbox as the brand name of the video creation software and machine, and somebody Paintboxed the Space Needle falling over.

"It also had the charm of only being on for a moment. The thing that really kicked it in was the actor, the anchor. He just showed up not quite knowing, 'What, is this a joke or not? OK, I'll read this.' And he read it. He's an actor. He knows what the hell he's doing. He read it so seriously that people bought it. And Tracey's performance was fantastic and just sold it really well.

[The reaction of management.] "It was 'Yuh yuh yuh, you must be careful.' John's feeling was, 'Come on, you guys. Come on. We're a comedy show. It's April Fool's.' On the other hand, a local news station has responsibility. People count on the 13<sup>th</sup>-marrket NBC affiliate not to be screwing around. I can really understand management's point of view. On the other hand, they somebody signed off on it. Somebody got through, somewhere up there. It sounded like a fine idea.

"I was not much around for let's hire a person of color. I mean, it was all they could do to have two women is what I remember Nancy and Tracey. One thing, everybody got older, so it was worthy, ready for a reset.

[The show's writing] "Just the writing, 'J.T. Plumber,' so funny. 'The Ineffectual Middle Management Suck-ups,' it's just brilliant. And the number of phone calls in those days. 'Have you been in our meetings? These meetings are private. You can't—' 'Sir, it's a joke.' But we would write those things. Bob and the world's tallest man competition. 'But you're not the world's tallest.' 'I know, but my family's supporting me, and God willing.' 'But sir, you're not the world's tallest man.' Just that sort of sports overoptimism with Bob Nelson. Bob Nelson's quite a basketball player. He's very sensitive to all that. I just have great respect for Bob and 'Folk Songs of the Slightly Inebriated.' Freaking amazing. 'I think I can beat that train.' It's just so good.

"I didn't write any of that stuff. If I got a joke in the monologue, I thought, 'Man, I am doing OK.' But 'The Date of the Month Club,' I wrote that, that came out OK. And I could be counted on to do whatever it is they wanted me to do. I would do it. But there was a lot of maturing that had to happen after I started. If you look at when the show was really doing well and people had full-time jobs or almost full-time jobs, I had gone. I was moved on. So all those [promo] postcards and stuff, I was not in them.

"When we went to Comedy Central [in 1992], that was the summer when they said, 'Look, man, the turning point was cross-dressing Bill. I'm almost sure Ed Wyatt wrote that. But it was just, 'You got to decide, man.' 'You're right, I got to decide, man.'

"Joe Guppy is really funny, and Nancy, they're all just really funny people. Darrell Suto.

"I did my best to hire everybody from 'Almost Live!' to be an actor to have a role on camera on the Science Guy show because that was the only way people would make money and get residuals. Two things, it's acknowledging, thank you for including me, Bill Nye, early on, giving me a chance. But the other thing was people could do it, you count on them.

"John has the parrot on his head and just keeps going. Ross Shafer did the tilted planet game show as a game-show host. And Nancy did this thing about interstellar space from a porch, a little house on the prairie. They were journeymen, everybody could do the performance that you could count on, but Darrell is really funny.

"I wrote the one where he doesn't tip. The bad guy doesn't tip the server, and it turns out to be Billy Quan's sister. 'You did not tip my sister. Now you must die.' The gal, I played volleyball with her. She's API, Asian Pacific Islander. She got it. She did it.

"That was another thing that Stainton realized that in order to keep the show going, was cast people in the building. People who worked at KING-TV, by casting them in bits, it supported the show. Everybody, maybe not in marketing, but it was a very labor-intensive sales staff, getting avails, commercials and stuff. And getting those people to be on the show.

"First of all, it was, people had an office look. A lot of people working there looked like they worked in an office. They looked good. And everybody just got a kick out of it when they saw, 'I'm on television!' Their families, 'I saw you, Dad.' A lot of that was Stainton's insight.

"It was convenience, but the other thing, I was on the board of AFTRA in Seattle, and I didn't really understand, but it was the 13th market, you could just do whatever the heck you wanted. There was no rigor about 'This person's not a member, this is not signatory' or whatever. That gave the thing freedom.

"Along that line, when we did the Science Guy show, we were able to negotiate a good deal from AFTRA so — I'm talking in general about kids — kids could show up for an afternoon and be on three different shows without having them receive three different full payments. And that was a little bit of a controversy.

“But I’m pretty sure it was permitted because of the tradition that had been established by ‘Almost Live!’, how everybody in the community realized we’re the minor leagues, and we may be good in the minor leagues, but we’re the minor leagues. So we’ll pay, we’ll negotiate minor stuff. It worked out really well. The tradition held over. It worked out really well for the Science Guy show.

[‘Almost Live!’ as a name] “Well, as we say, it’s a better name than three days old. Or then later, it was a better name than three hours old. We would record in the studio, this is from memory, starting at 7:30 p.m. We’d finish by 8:30 p.m. And then, ‘Whoa, whoa, whoa, we got to move this up! It’s the news set! Whoa, we got to move the bleachers.’ But then it would air at 11:30 p.m.

“The show got so popular during a nadir of SNL. We were on at 11:30, 11:35, and SNL didn’t start till after midnight. ‘NBC affiliate didn’t adhere to network broadcast times! What the heck? That’s the backwater.’ So when we did the Science Guy show, this was gonna say, yeah, the backwater really helped us. We were far from Burbank, far from Disney’s main office. So we would just do stuff. You know the old saying: easier to ask forgiveness than permission.

[No brand considerations on ‘Almost Live!'] “At first, nobody called Adidas to get a consignment consideration. ‘Johnny Carson suit sponsored by,’ ‘Pat Sajak’s clothes are from’ — there was none of that. So I would just wear, it would say Adidas, it would say Nike, there was no control. But I was watching [an episode] trying to find this blue jersey [for the MOHAI exhibit], and I saw my me driving my car, my Honda Accord station wagon on the viaduct. And now in Hollywood, they never let an actor drive his or her own car, let alone talk to the camera on a public street. At 50 mph, we just did it.

“And there’s no safety. So there was a bit where I’m going to jump off the back of a boat in scuba gear. This is for the fish show. OK, we’ll save time, we’ll go to Lake Union. So I put on my scuba suit, jump off. I could scuba dive. I’m not a genius, but I can scuba dive. I jumped off. And do you know this business that saltwater is denser than freshwater? So I was wearing a weight belt for saltwater for diving in Puget Sound for another part of the same fish episode. Anyway, I sank, I was at 35 feet like that, man, and I’m just pumping my flippers, just wow, just worried about never coming up. And we just did it.

“Then we were on the Suiattle River, I’m in a kayak. Peter Rummel is a camera guy, and he’s a skilled kayaker. He’s spent a lot of time in Pacific Northwest whitewater. They’re waving, trying to get my attention. It’s really loud. They’re rapids. I go over this waterfall. It’s a small waterfall, but nevertheless is a drop, and I was underwater for several seconds. You’re wearing a PFD personal flotation device, and it picks you up by the armpits, like it’s pulling you up, so when I surface, what happens? ‘SCIENCE!’

“Then I was in the Blue Angels, this airplane ride every August, flying around in El Centro, which is where they train in February before they start. In Top Gun they all have these nicknames, and by tradition, they paint the nickname on the side of the plane. My guy’s name was Snooze, because he puts the passenger to sleep. And this is the plane where they go to a city and get the local weather guy or gal and fly around stuff. So the plane has two seats, it doesn’t have as much fuel, but two seats. So the guy does this at seven and a half G’s, I pass out, and I wake up. ‘SCIENCE!’

“Otherwise what happens? You got to do it over. Anyway, that tradition of just getting her done found its way into the Science Guy show. And that contributed to its success. If you watch the Science Guy show, how many bits we shot in the rain, not dangerous, just stuff. In Hollywood, ‘Oh, we got to come back next week.’ No, no, we just would do it because we got it done. I was in my 30s. I was athletically okay.



"I did a parachute jump. As soon as I learned it, 'Let's go again, man. Let's go again. This is so cool.' I had some really cool times. Just a really cool experience with fantastic experiences that I probably would never have had. Let alone getting flown around by the freaking Blue Angels. And then the A6 we flew out of Whidbey Island. That was only five and a half G's. And I could handle that. So anyway, I was very, very proud of the Science Guy show, and I'm very thankful to everybody at KING, especially my castmates who were so supportive all those years, really life-changing in a great way.

"I remember almost every bit. 'We got to get this done. Get this done. Let's go. Let's go. But the hardest thing for me, I had a job. I'm a professional. I went to four years of engineering school. I have a professional engineer license. And I had a job.

"And so on 'Almost Live!' they would employ you for six weeks, and three weeks with no income. So guys like Joe and Nancy were actors who were used to this, who were used to the freelance lifestyle. And also, they did not have a mortgage. I had a mortgage when I quit my job. And that anxiety about money, that is something I wish I just said to myself, 'Man, just stick with it. It's going to be okay.' But there was a lot of anxiety.

"I remember I bought some really nice ice skates when I quit my job. Highland Ice Arena is still there. And I figured I could afford to go ice skating, no matter what went wrong. I might not be able to afford to go out drinking or take a lady out to dinner, but I could afford to go ice skating. It's the thing where you get a card for 10, and you'd get one free kind of thing. I did go ice skating on usually on Thursdays, go by myself.

"After I left, the crew got jobs, with benefits. I think they were KING employees after I left. But I don't think that would have changed anything. It's just a feature, not a bug.

"Oh, and I haven't had a job since 1986. I haven't. I've been a freelancer since 1986."