

This sample comprises selections from each chapter of *Three Stages*.
***** indicates a cut and ... indicates a deletion for brevity within a paragraph.

Chapter One: A Big Small Town (Bristol, Tennessee 1935–1948)

We were Southern Baptists. In this context “southern” is not a regional distinction but a denominational one. Southern Baptists were the true Baptists. We believed the (King James version of the) Bible literally. And I mean literally – with one exception; when Jesus turned the water into wine it meant grape juice. (Yeah, right!) Yet another questionable teaching. But the Baptists of our ilk had a really slick rule about sin. It was called the “unpardonable sin”. Guess what it was... Questioning!

And there were lots and lots of other sins beyond the obvious Ten Commandments kind: dancing, drinking any kind of alcohol, going to the movies. If it was fun there was a pretty good chance that it was sinful. (Strangely, in retrospect, smoking was not a sin. Almost all the men did it. I think maybe it was a sin only for females.)

One night while we were hanging out at the station [Dad was on call for electrical emergencies and Mom was at choir practice] a call came in about a drunk on State Street. [Dad] and I rode along and when the miscreant was spotted he was staggering right down the middle of the street. Years later when I first saw a *Keystone Cops* silent movie this event always came to mind. One of the Tennessee cops got out of the car and approached the guy and as he reached for him the drunk wavered over to the Virginia side. [Bristol is half in Tennessee and half in Virginia.] The officer tried to coax him back to Tennessee and soon the inebriated gentleman lurched back but was barely out of reach. The cop made a grab and missed sending his quarry back into Virginia. This little dance went on for a couple of minuets (pun intended) much to my delight. I laughed so hard I nearly wet my pants. Finally the Virginia boys showed up and the malefactor was taken into custody by I don’t remember which authority but it was a scene I’ll never forget.

Chapter Two; Another Planet (Los Angeles 1948–1953)

... As we gradually became acquainted with other members [of Fountain Avenue Baptist Church in Hollywood] we discovered, much to our surprise, that nearly half of them worked in the movie business. A few minor actors, many technicians and artisans and (Are you ready for this?) two bona fide movie stars; Roy Rogers and Dale Evans, “King and Queen of the West”. I have to give Mom and Dad credit for flexibility of mind. Once that incorrect idea about the sinful denizens of the movie profession had been erased we all began to go to (carefully selected) movies.

Roy and Dale had a cute daughter, Cheryl, and I dated her a few times in (or after?) college. When I’d stop my car inside their compound I’d be met by Bullet, Roy’s German shepherd (Trigger’s companion in the movies) who would gently take my hand in his teeth and lead me to the door.

[Audobon Jr. High, Hollywood] ... I got my first leading role in a musical. In *Ride ‘em Cowboy* I played the hero, Terry O’Brien. This was an all boys choir so my leading lady was played by a boy soprano in a blonde wig. This fine performer, Marvin Inabanett, later changed his last name

to Ingram and achieved a modicum of fame in the '50's pop group, The Four Preps. We gave three performances and I had the time of my life. Believe it or not, Roy Rogers and Dale Evans came to see me play a singing cowboy.

Chapter Three: I'm a Poet (Whittier 1953–1956)

Wearing a sweat suit to prevent excessive pain upon hitting the water flat on either my back or belly, I started attempting to learn inward, twisting, reverse and back dives. It wasn't pretty but it was often loud. The noise made by a 190 pound boy in a sweat suit hitting the water flat from a three meter springboard sounds something like an exploding hand grenade. But with some rather limited coaching from Dr. Johnson I finally managed to execute at least two from each category. I got all my real coaching from the other divers at the meets. Once they realized that I was no threat actually to win (this occurred during warm-ups) they were very generous with tips such as "point your toes". I had fun and Whittier College had a diver. When the letterman banquet was held at the end of the spring semester Dr. Johnson saved me for last. I'll never forget what he said. "Ben Bryant, Whittier's first diver, has a very unique style. It can best be described as Grandma throwing a wet wash rag off the back porch." Everyone, including me, had a good laugh and I got a letter on the swim team.

Chapter Four: An Innocent on the Boards (California & Texas 1956–1959)

One day that spring ('57) ... I took a day off work and went to the audition. [LA Civic Light Opera's *South Pacific*]

... there were about 500 guys there. We stood in line and, one at a time, walked into a large room containing a piano, a pianist and a table where two men were seated. ... The pianist asked if you were a baritone or tenor, played an appropriate arpeggio and you sang it; "ah, ah, ah" etc. Then one of the guys at the table either said "Thank you." or told you to take another card and fill it out. I got "Thank you".

After the audition I went over to ABC to hang out with [my best friend, Bob Collins aka BC] Cobb. Later when I was going to the parking lot I heard a woman's voice calling my name. I turned around and saw Susan Luckey, a girl I sort of knew from Hollywood High.

We chatted. ... the audition story came up. Susan asked if "Mr. Lester" was there. I had no idea who this was but I described the men and she said he wasn't one of them. Edwin Lester was the founder and executive producer of the Civic Light Opera. She said that she was under contract to him and that he ought to hear me sing. She took my phone number. I went home and forgot all about it.

A couple of days later I got a call from someone at the Civic who told me to be at an address (I don't remember where) two or three days later prepared to sing a ballad and an up-tempo number. Mr. Lester wanted to hear me for *South Pacific*. So I showed up. This time there were ten or twelve guys instead of 500. This was the callback.

... I don't remember what ballad I sang sixteen bars of but the other number I did was *Without a Song*. This time they didn't stop me after a few bars and I sang on. Somewhere in the middle I forgot the words but made up lyrics, which rhymed, and kept going. Later Mr. Lester told me that's what got me the job. I didn't get rattled and quit but instead made the best of a bad situation.

What a job! Instead of working forty hours a week on a line gang for \$90.00 I got to sing *Bloody Mary is the Girl I Love* and *There is Nothing Like a Dame* eight times a week and get \$100.00. I loved showbiz! Not only that, I was "working" with Mary Martin, Georgio Tozzi and Myron McCormick, one of the theater's all time great comic actors. I was hooked. No more football coach, I was now a professional singer/actor ...

The [*General Electric Theatre*] show was titled *Train for Tecumseh* and starred John Cassavetes and Janice Rule. I had one line. We shot my scene at Union Station, I was the Information Booth guy. While the crew was setting up the shot I was standing in the booth wearing my uniform and someone came up and asked me a question about the trains. I remember the pride I felt when I told them I didn't know because, "I'm just an actor." I was an ACTOR!

Anyhow when they were ready we did a rehearsal (in what I now know as a two-shot). John ambled up to me and muttered, "Train from Tecumseh, Tennessee?" And I, in my best Philharmonic voice answered, "**Gate G at 10:40**". The sound man yelled and ripped his headphones off and everyone laughed. Embarrassed doesn't even come close. I was mortified! John was great. He said something like "First movie job? Been doin' theatre, right?" He was very kind and made me feel like a real theatre guy. I apologized to the sound man and we shot the scene with no more laughs. I always loved John Cassavetes for that and later on was very gentle when working with young actors.

Chapter Five: Back to the Biz (California & Arizona 1959 -1962)

... Harold Swoverland, known in the Biz as "the Indian agent". Harold, a one man agency, had a couple hundred clients half of whom were American Indians. A robust garrulous man, he accepted me as a client with great enthusiasm and when I called him two days later he had no idea who I was. When I dejectedly reported this to Wayne he told me that Swoverland had so many clients he didn't know a quarter of them and advised me to go hang out in his office.

It was like a scene from a Damon Runyon story. There was an old guy in a porkpie hat chewing on a cigar stub, who was Harold's constant companion and always seemed to be reading *Variety*. I never found out who he was or what he did. The guy was like furniture. I had to reintroduce myself to Harold the first three or four times I dropped in but finally he began to recognize me. After a few weeks he actually sent me for an audition at Buena Vista studio. I was very excited since it was my first reading for a feature movie but when I walked into the casting office I noticed that I was the only man there who was over four feet tall.

It was a call for midgets. ... I said goodbye. [to Harold]

... The name of the [*Alfred Hitchcock Presents*] episode was *The Woman Who Wanted to Live* and it starred Lola Albright and Charles Bronson.

I played a guy ["Fat Boy"] driving a hot rod on a lonely road where Lola was fixing a flat. There were two other guys with me and we stopped and started hassling her. A wounded Charles Bronson got out of her car and told us to back off and leave the lady alone. I pulled a switchblade and began waving it at Bronson at which point he pulled a gun. In the rehearsal when he pulled the gun I dropped the knife and backed away. The director said, "No, no. Keep waving the knife." I said, "Are you serious? He has a gun!?" The director said, "Fat Boy is not as smart as you are."

... Charlie was, and you may find this hard to believe, one of the funniest guys (not counting Robin Williams) I ever worked with. He was very friendly and loved to tell jokes. Mr. Hitchcock, who came to the set briefly, was very cool and standoffish.

Chapter Six: Sin City and the Road (Vegas/USA/San Francisco 1962-1964)

... My next-door neighbors [in Las Vegas] were morning people – loud morning people. The wall in my bedroom, against which my bed stood, was the opposite side of their living room wall. This infelicitous juxtaposition often caused an abrupt awakening and bodily levitation less than three hours after I had retired. I never met these ungracious folks though I did leave several polite notes requesting more solicitude in the early hours. No appropriate response was forthcoming and the raucous awakenings continued. My only recourse seemed to be fighting volume with volume.

I had one of those record players with which one could either place a stack of LPs to play consecutively or play just one. (Remember them?) If the arm was left off the spindle the single record would play over and over until the machine was turned off. One night I went to my apartment before the midnight show, put the player against my bedroom wall, selected Stan Kenton's *Cuban Fire*, the loudest record I owned, cranked the volume to the maximum and set it to repeat play. I then went to work.

I never heard another peep out of my neighbors.

... the *I'm Gonna Wash That Man Right Outta My Hair* scene. In case you're one of the six people who have never seen the show, there's a "SeaBee shower" on stage operated by the "Billis Bath Boys", in this case, me and another guy. After a chorus of the song Nellie gets into the shower and washes her hair. When that time came instead of going into the shower Joan walked off stage. (Note: Joan's understudy was home sick.) One of the nurses, Gay Edmund, who had never played the role or even rehearsed it was standing next to me. She said, "What should I do?" I asked if she knew the role and she said she did and I said, "Get in the fucking shower!"

She did, I pulled the handle and she washed her hair. While Nellie is in the shower De Beque, the man she's ostensibly washing out of her hair, enters, the nurses all giggle and run off. Nellie comes out of the shower with a towel over her head, sees his feet and stops. De Beque slowly lifts the towel. When Bill Miegs [De Beque] saw Gay's face he nearly shit a brick. He didn't know Joan had walked off. The man was a stone pro! After a brief pause he composed himself and went on with the scene.



Frankie Avalon and me in *Wish You Were Here*

... The audiences were made up almost entirely of teenaged girls. Whenever Frankie was on the stage all you could hear was their screaming. ... You couldn't even hear the orchestra. It was pandemonium.

The adjoining dressing room building was, like the theatre, circular. The four entrances were evenly spaced around the circle with one leading into the theatre and the opposite one the "official" stage door. That entrance would be so mobbed with girls that it was nearly impossible for Frankie (or anyone else) to get out after a show. After the first couple of performances Frankie, his Manager, Bob Marcucci, and I devised a strategy for getting him out unscathed. We found a very large overcoat that I'd put on. Bob would have Frankie's driver pull up to one of the other doors and Frankie would get into the coat behind me so we resembled a large, four-legged hunchback. Bob would open the limo door, we'd run out and dive into the back seat and the driver would roar away.

Chapter Seven: First Bites of The Apple (New York City 1964-1967)

... I arrived in The City on Tuesday, had two auditions on Wednesday and got both jobs.

The setting of the show [*Hang Down Your Head and Die*] was a circus with two ringmasters, James Rado and Remak Ramsey. The condemned man, a white-faced clown, was played by Gerome Ragni. This is when Rado and Ragni met. A few years later they would write the book and lyrics for *Hair*. I was a black-faced clown.



Me

Ragni

Near the end of the show there was a scene where Ragni (as the condemned) was to be taken from his cell by four “warders” and marched to the scaffold to be hanged. This action was accompanied by the reading of a description of an actual hanging. The direction was that one warder was behind him, one each at his sides and the fourth (me) in front of him just inside the cell door. As the guy behind him took his hands to shackle them behind his back Ragni was to “go berserk” and try to escape. Fine, we could choreograph that. But no, Murray and Ragni wanted to “do it naturally”. They said that there were four of us and one of him so he should just do it and we should react.

At that point I said, “Wait a minute. You want Jerry to go crazy, try to get away and then you want us to ‘naturalistically’ subdue him and carry him out. Is that what you want?” Both Ragni and Murray enthusiastically said, “Yes!” I replied, “Okay, I just wanted to be sure.”

We got into position, the guy behind him grabbed his hands and Jerry went nuts, flailing his arms and trying to run past me. I put my head in his gut and tackled him, as a linebacker would tackle a running back, slamming him to the hardwood floor and knocking him out cold. Now Murray, the stage manager and the other actors freaked out. As someone attended to the groggy Ragni I said to Murray, “Is that what you want eight times a week?” I had made my point. After a short break for Jerry to recover we properly and carefully choreographed the escape attempt. I received silent nods of approval from my fellow actors.

When I walked into the lobby of Theatre Four (where I’d seen *Boys from Syracuse* about a year earlier) eight or ten other actors, all appearing to be in their forties, were waiting. I gave my

headshot and resume to the guy in charge and sat down. A minute or two later an actor followed by Mr. [Howard] DaSilva came into the room. They shook hands and the actor left. Mr. DaSilva took the next resume from the guy and looked around the room espying my youthful face. "What are you doing here?" he barked in his inimitable growl. "To read for the Cop and Doctor." I replied, standing up. "You're too young." he said as he turned to reenter the house.

Here's where it gets strange. I'd never done anything like this before but I had nothing to lose and besides, he'd pissed me off. I followed him into the hallway and aggressively told him I was twenty-nine and would by now be a resident if I were a doctor and a detective if I were a cop, or words to that effect. He stopped, turned and stared at me for a few seconds and said. "Okay, okay, you got the job. Be here at nine in the morning for rehearsal."

I was flabbergasted, as were the other actors who'd witnessed this brazen display of chutzpah. I had the job. Amazing.

Jerry Orbach was the star of our show, playing "Larry Foreman" the role originated by Howard DaSilva.

Jerry and I became friends across a poker table. ... Jerry was the best player I ever saw. His acting skills were a big help but it was his personality that really made him great at the game. Jerry was the personification of "cool". We remained friends until his untimely death in 2004.



Les James Chris Walken Me

... The bulk of both [fight] scenes were fully staged with brutal dancing and realistic looking combat. In certain sections we were split into "fighting pairs" and given an area of the stage where we improvised struggles with each other. ... The *Rumble* guy, whose name I've forgotten (we called him "Aunt Jemima" because of the red bandana he wore) was a different story. Our fight had a motivation. He told me that before the run was over he was gonna kiss me on the

mouth. You want to see me put up a fight!? He was bigger than I, maybe stronger but my desire to keep my “virtue” intact always won the day.

Stan Mazin, who played “Bernardo” (kills Riff at the end of the first act) had ... a running battle with Chris Walken who punched him in the mouth about once a week. The *Rumble* begins when Riff swings at Bernardo but the actors are not supposed to actually hit one another. It’s called “acting” for a reason. Anyhow, Chris was lanky with long arms and a limited spatial consciousness. From time to time he would misjudge the distance between them when he swung at Bernardo thereby causing his fist to come into sudden contact with Stan’s mouth. Stan found this somewhat inconvenient and was not shy about sharing his displeasure with Chris (and anyone else within a hundred yards). On several occasions actual sutures were needed to repair Stan’s wounds and thus he was dubbed the “stitch queen”.

In October I got a role in my first (and only) Broadway show. *Pousse-Café* was a musical based on the classic movie, *The Blue Angel* with a book by Jerome Weidman and music by Duke Ellington. What could go wrong? As it turned out, everything.

Finally [after disastrous runs in Toronto and Detroit] we were back to New York and a week’s hiatus was declared before we went back to rehearsals. Both [director] Altman and [choreographer] Gordon were fired and replaced by José Quintero and Valerie Bettis, a matched pair of train wrecks. Later Gordon was brought back to help with the choreography. Bettis need all the help she could get. Alas, there was no help for Quintero who consumed a fifth of scotch every day by mid-afternoon. This is NOT an exaggeration.

... Mickey Leonard wrote a song for us four students called *The Eleventh Commandment; Thou Shalt Not Get Caught*. Although it was put in the show it was never staged. For two or three of the last previews we just sort of stood there and sang it. The four of us improvised some staging in the dressing room before the show opening night.

The closing notice went up the Monday before we opened on Friday March 18, 1966. Total Performances: Three.

Chapter Eight: Life After Broadway (1966-1967)

One night Marie [“Kim” in Gretna Playhouse production of *Bye, Bye Birdie*] had me over for a macrobiotic dinner before the show. I didn’t care too much for the “cuisine”. It tasted like ground up place mats to me and was very salty. Hence I drank a lot of apple juice with the meal. What happens in ones’ stomach and intestines after such a repast is not salubrious especially if one has to wear a skintight costume and shake ones’ bootie all over the stage two hours afterward.

To say that I was bloated with gas would be a gross understatement. By show time I could hardly walk. I did everything I could think of to release some gas – jogged around in the trees, did jumping jacks – you name it but nothing worked. How I got through the first act and all the gyrating in that tight gold lamé costume I’ll never know. By midway through the first act the entire cast was aware of my discomfort and, I must say, some were unsympathetically amused.

There’s a scene late in Act I where Birdie is an overnight guest at Kim’s house. He comes to breakfast the next morning, disheveled and grumpy in a leopard skin robe. With Kim close

behind him, he briefly peruses the elaborate buffet, pulls a can of beer out of his pocket, takes a swig, belches loudly, says. "Call me for lunch." and exits. By the time we got to this scene I was in agony. I felt as though my guts were about to explode.

As I reached over to lift the lid of a chafing dish a tiny piccolo fart escaped. I was praying that no one heard it. Alas, Marie (Kim) let out a tiny giggle. That was all it took. I broke up helplessly into laughter. I later learned that Marie was the only one who had been aware of my colonic high note but breakups on stage are contagious and within fifteen seconds the entire company, including the small orchestra were roaring. The audience, without a clue as to what was so funny, were carried along with the merriment. After a moment or three I pulled out the beer, popped the top and took a drink but I was still so convulsed I couldn't talk so I simply strolled off stage leaving the wrecked scene behind me.

The poker games resumed now with the addition of Jeff. [friend from *Pousse-Café*] He introduced me to a comely asian girl ... the original "Slum Goddess" in the centerfold of New York's first underground newspaper, *The East Village Other* ... As lovely as she may have been my memories of her are not fond.

She gave me crabs!

This is not a gift to be treasured. I bring this up in the context of the poker games because a few days after this unfortunate invasion of my naughty bits, having painted my crotch with that purple goo one used in those days to kill the little fellows, I went to a game at the home of one of the *Pousse-Café* dancers. In case you don't know about this stuff, in addition to getting rid of the crabs, it metes out god's punishment for carnal knowledge in the manner of a blowtorch. I had a very difficult time even remaining seated let alone keeping my mind on the cards.

Chapter Nine: Betsy (1967)

Sitting in the front row was a lovely young woman with a Shetland Sheep Dog at her feet. I didn't know who she was but it was as though there was a pin spotlight on her and all the others in the room faded from view. Her presence hit me like a velvet sledge hammer. It was confusing.

... I learned that the mesmerizing lady's name was Betsy Hepburn and that she was playing "Carrie", the comedienne, who marries "Mr. Snow". I was thrilled with her voice and the comic personality with which she sang. She was really good and that was a relief.

... we worked on my big number, *Soliloquy*. This is a seven minute tour-de-force and I'd sung it many times but knowing that Betsy was ten feet away hearing everything, I sang it better than ever before and socked the high b-flat on the end with all I was worth. Then we broke for lunch.

I asked Betsy if I could take her to lunch. With some reluctance she accepted and we went to the snack bar across from the Inn. As we were eating our sandwiches I told her that I felt like I knew her. She replied that she knew we'd never met. I agreed that that we'd not met before, that wasn't what I meant. I just had the feeling that I knew her. This was the absolute truth. (It was several years later that I learned the concept of reincarnation.)

Betsy and I had written our own vows and, of course, I blew my "lines" but somehow got through the ceremony anyhow. (Betsy, naturally, knew both hers and mine.) After I kissed the

Bride and the recession began we turned to walk out and I caught my heel on the little rug on the step and nearly fell. To this day, forty-five years later she still thinks I was doing shtick!

Chapter Ten: The Magazine, The Met and Moodus (1968–1969)

Sam [Morgenstern, opera coach] finally arranged an audition for me at the Metropolitan Opera with George Schick, Rudolf Bing's right hand man. I sang in a small concert hall inside the Met building for an audience of one. Opening with Mozart I then sang *Recondita Armonia* from *Tosca*. Dr Schick got out of his seat, came up on the stage, shook my hand and asked if I'd like to work with the Metropolitan Opera Studio. I'd never heard of the Met Studio but I accepted the offer.

Then it was time for summer stock auditions. Howard Da Silva and my idol, Alfred Drake had formed a company with the ostentatious name "The National Lyric Arts Theatre" and were planning a season of two new shows and one revival (Rodgers & Hammerstein's *Allegro*) at the Goodspeed Opera House in Connecticut. Every unemployed singer in the theatre wanted to get into this company. ... they hired both of us.

Howard Da Silva was a delight in every possible way. While Alfred was a fine comic actor, as a person he seemed to be lacking a sense of humor. He was a very private man. Not unfriendly or standoffish, just cool. Howard, on the other hand, was Mr. Warmth and riotously funny. As a director he was gentle but firm and treated everyone equally and with respect.

... fall of '68 was ... when I learned that during presidential elections, at least in those days, marijuana was hard to come by. It had something to do with the authorities cracking down during election seasons. Nobody, including our building Super, Norman (a serious pot head), could find any dope. Leave it to Frank to come through. He met a guy at a party who said he could get some but only in quantity, minimum purchase four pounds. That was a lot of grass but the price was wholesale, \$150.00 a pound.

We put together a small consortium of several friends ... and sent Frank to make the buy in a Queens parking lot. We all eagerly awaited his return in our apartment and after a long hour and a half there he was with the briefcase filled with the (purported) controlled substance.

The first thing we noticed about the "bricks" was that they were very sticky. Siggins, the resident expert, inspected the goods and declared that it was most likely "Mafia grass". These fine Sicilian importers were known to soak their product with molasses to increase the weight. Fine, there was plenty and it was cheap, no problem. We turned on the hot water, put a handful in a strainer and rinsed it until the brown water turned clear, put the stuff on a cookie sheet and into the oven to dry.

The second thing we then noticed was a distinct farmyard odor emanating from the oven. Undeterred we pulled out the warm cookie sheet and found that the contents were dry. Joints were rolled, pipes were charged and the smoking began.

The third thing we noticed was that this shit didn't taste like ganja. And its only effect was a harshness in the throat that promoted coughing. A close inspection of the leaves revealed the terrible news. We had purchased four pounds of extremely expensive alfalfa!

Chapter Eleven: Group One, Uptown & Swan Song (1970–1972)

... On Monday, May 4th the Kent State massacre happened. The following Friday, late in the afternoon, I met Frank Zappa at his Number One Fifth Avenue suite, tape recorder in hand.

Our conversation began with my quoting one of his lyrics; “Mama! Mama! Someone said they made some noise. The cops have shot some girls and boys.” He replied that he didn’t think that put him in the Nostradamus category. And we went on from there talking about politics, music, dope, marriage – you name it. We talked about it.

We spent nearly all of Frank’s free time together that weekend and talked about everything. Mostly he talked, I asked questions and listened. But when we were on music it was more a conversation than an interview. We were both fans of Shostakovich, Stravinsky, Bartok, Honneger, Milaud and the like. He turned me on to the music of Edgard Varèse, one of his earliest influences. He said that his high school music teacher gave him a record of Varèse and he listened to it over and over because, “It was some nasty stuff and I wanted to figure out what he was doing.” (Or words to that effect.)

I was surprised what a gentleman Frank was. ...

... *The Ballad of Johnny Pot*, ... was to star David Carradine and Betty Buckley. ... it was a major role, third billing after Dave and Betty ...

... I knew that Bob Collins had been talking with David about shooting a low budget movie with him that coming summer. On the first day of rehearsal, after the introductions, we sat around a table and did a read through. This was S. O. P. for a new show and I always found it exciting and enjoyable; the first time these words had been spoken by actors. I loved it!

After the read we took a break and David was being “cool” if not exactly unapproachable. He was sitting alone on the floor smoking a cigarette. Without saying a word I strolled over to him and handed him my Group One [BC’s company] “East Coast Vice-President” business card. He looked at it then at me and grinned. The beginning of a strange but interesting friendship.

... David was unbelievably inconsistent. He drove us all crazy. One day he’d be absolutely brilliant and the next the lights were on but nobody was home.

His performance or lack thereof aside, he and I, launched by the BC/Group One connection, became pretty tight. He was staying at the Chelsea Hotel, two blocks from our apartment and almost every night he was there. Betsy would feed us, we’d smoke some dope and David would tell stories. He was the only guy I ever met who could outtalk me when we were both stoned. One night he performed the entire Peter Sellers movie, *The Bobo*, and it was hilarious. Later when I saw the movie I called him in Hollywood and told him that his rendition was better than the movie itself. And it was.

His hound, Buffalo, was with him every night. “Bo” was fond of cheese and when he snatched half a gouda off the coffee table David whacked his snout and the well salivaed cheese fell on the raya rug. David picked up the cheese and the attached remnants of the rug and popped the whole thing into his mouth. Betsy was appalled. But that was David Carradine. BC called him a mad man and he wasn’t far off.

Earlier that summer ['72] I had run into Theo Bikel and when I told him I was beginning to do film production work and was thinking of quitting acting he had said. "No one should be an actor if they can live without it."

I could live without it and after the contractually required four weeks [Boston production of *South Pacific*] I called Chris [Hewett, director] and gave my two weeks notice. He was pretty pissed off for a while but when we saw him backstage after a Broadway show a few years later he had forgiven me.

So I "hung up my makeup kit" as it were and though I did a few more commercials as an actor Luther Billis, fittingly, was my last performance on the stage.