

The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson

by Gary V. Powell

Kenny wouldn't shut up about Johnny Carson. The same Johnny rubbed shoulders with Gore Vidal and Truman Capote. The same Johnny hung with Bob Hope and Ronnie Reagan.

Jimbo, the younger brother always taking care of Kenny, said, *Crazy, man, crazy.*

Except Kenny radiated genius. Certified, *bona fide* genius. He'd written Mensa, taken a test, and received a certificate.

Mighta been a fake.

Idea was, Jimbo holds a cement block in front of his head. Kenny stands across stage with a thirty-aught-six. He shoots, and the cement block explodes—distance, fire power, and selection of ammo precisely calculated to assure Jimbo's survival.

Simple physics.

Tried it first time in their old man's back yard. Jimbo felt like he'd been tapped on the forehead with a ball peen hammer. Nose bled and ears rang.

No big deal.

These days, they'd post to You Tube, maybe go viral. They'd seek crowd funding through Kickstarter, maybe perform with Cirque de Soleil.

Those days, they went on the road, performed at supper clubs and bars. Jimbo in debt and no construction jobs to be had, Kenny raving about Johnny and Ed.

Chippewa Falls, Cedar Rapids, Vermilion, Cheyenne.
Places like that.

Before Vegas, they added a second act.

Kenny climbs a ladder, drops a bowling ball onto a board balanced across the bridge of Jimbo's nose. Same

principle—distance, wind resistance, and the weight of the ball all gauged to prevent injury.

They took Old Vegas like Ali taking Liston, like Kennedy taking Marilyn—Circus Circus, The Sands, Caesar's Palace. Added a leggy blonde to the act, later became Kenny's first wife. Her job—blindfold Kenny before he fired the thirty-aught-six.

Johnny got wind of them from Vegas. Doc Severenson's band played the same stage where Jimbo and Kenny brought the house down. Doc to Johnny, *These guys are crazy, or maybe genius.*

Night they appeared on Johnny's show Ed McMahon shook their hands in the hall. Carnac the Magnificent predicted the future. Steve Martin danced and played banjo.

When Johnny introduced the Brothers Nowinsky from the west side of South Bend, Jimbo *ACTED* nervous, like he might die, like was there a priest in the audience in case he needed last rites. Kenny joked with Johnny, asked if he'd like to stand in for Jimbo.

Johnny dragged his cigarette, gave the audience his classic pan.

Doc's drummer played a roll while Kenny paced the distance. The leggy blonde tied the bandanna around Kenny's head. He goofed for the camera before taking aim, like *WHERE'S JIMBO.*

The cement block exploded. Jimbo dropped and lay there twitching. The audience gasped. Kenny ran across stage, knelt beside his brother, brushed flecks of cement from his face.

Asked about that priest.

Johnny shrugged and punched out his cigarette. Ed motioned offstage.

Before the paramedics arrived, Jimbo sat up grinning. *All part of the act, folks.*

They took it on tour to Hawaii and Japan.

The Japanese loved them, just loved them.

Kenny went on to invent some medical device, made gazillions. Married, divorced, married and divorced again. Lives on a yacht and sails the world. Grows his fingernails long and remains out of touch.

Once or twice a year, Jimbo, a retired construction worker, shows it to his grandkids, a grainy black and white eight-millimeter. Grainier every year.

Got it on tape. The Johnny Carson show. Crazy Uncle Kenny.

