

The Big Interview

Episode Number: 218

Episode Title: Gene Simmons

Description: He's the most famous member of KISS, but Gene Simmons is also a tongue wagging, fire spitting, media & marketing mogul.

ACT ONE

DAN RATHER (VOICE OVER)

TONIGHT... ON THE BIG INTERVIEW....THAT MAKE-UP...THAT TONGUE...AND THAT ROCK N' ROLL...FOR FORTY YEARS GENE SIMMONS HAS BEEN THRILLING FANS AS THE FACE OF THE ROCK BAND KISS.

GENE SIMMONS

Even if you hate the band and the music and think it's silly, if you come to our show, you will walk out and say, "That's the best show I've ever seen in my life."

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

BUT THERE'S A LOT MORE TO GENE SIMMONS BEHIND THE MAKE-UP. AND FROM DRUGS, TO PATRIOTISM, TO THE STATE OF THE MUSIC INDUSTRY, HE'S NEVER AFRAID TO SPEAK HIS MIND.

RATHER

You're basically saying that not just rock and roll, but the music business, has been murdered? Is that too strong a word?

SIMMONS

Oh, it's been murdered all right. Not by outside forces, foreign powers. We killed rock and roll.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

OUTSPOKEN SONGWRITER, ENTREPRENEUR & ROCK AND ROLLER GENE SIMMONS...TONIGHT ON THE BIG INTERVIEW.

ACT TWO

DAN RATHER (VOICE OVER)

WE CAUGHT UP WITH KISS AS THEY REHEARSED.... AND READIED FOR THE *FASHION ROCKS* CONCERT IN NYC EARLIER THIS MONTH.

AT 6 FOOT TWO GENE SIMMONS ALREADY CUTS AN IMPOSING FIGURE. BUT ADD THE 7 INCH DRAGON SKULL PLATFORM BOOTS, THE SILVER DESTROYER ARMOR AND THE ICONIC MAKE-UP AND HE'S DOWNRIGHT MENACING. UNDERNEATH THIS WHOLE GET-UP IS A VERY WEALTHY 65-YEAR OLD ARTIST AND ENTREPRENEUR WHO IS WILDLY POPULAR FOR WHAT HAS BECOME GENERATIONS OF FOLLOWERS...

SIMMONS CREATED HIS STAGE PERSONA "THE DEMON" WHEN HE STARTED KISS WITH LEAD SINGER AND GUITARIST PAUL STANLEY IN THE EARLY 1970s. THEIR CONCERTS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN ABOUT MORE THAN JUST THE MUSIC. THEY ARE AN ENTERTAINMENT SPECTACLE. PYROTECHNICS SHOWER THE STAGE, BAND MEMBERS FLY THROUGH THE AIR...AND SIMMONS DOESN'T JUST PLAY BASS...HE SPEWS BLOOD AND BREATHES FIRE.

BUT SIMMONS REALIZED EARLY ON KISS COULD BE MORE THAN A BAND, IT COULD BE A BRAND. KISS MANAGES MORE THAN 3 THOUSAND LICENSED PRODUCTS - SURE THERE ARE T-SHIRTS, POSTERS AND HEADPHONES - BUT HOW ABOUT KISS TOILET SEAT COVERS AND KISS HELLO KITTIES... AND FOR MOST DIE-HARD FANS: THE KISS KASKET....

SIMMONS IS AS MUCH A BUSINESSMAN AS A ROCK AND ROLLER. HE'S THE RECIPIENT OF A LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD FROM FORBES MAGAZINE AND HIS NEW BOOK *ME, INC.* (DUE OUT LATER THIS FALL) SHARES LESSONS HE'S LEARNED IN HIS ROLES AS BOTH A MULTI-PLATINUM SELLING RECORDING ARTIST AND AN ENTREPRENEUR WHOSE PORTFOLIO INCLUDES EVERYTHING FROM A RECORD COMPANY TO A RESTAURANT CHAIN TO HORSE RACING.

AND THIS HAS BEEN A BIG YEAR FOR KISS. THEY'RE CELEBRATING 40 YEARS IN THE BUSINESS AND WERE INDUCTED INTO THE ROCK AND ROLL HALL FAME. I MET UP WITH GENE SIMMONS NOT FAR FROM WHERE HE GREW UP IN NEW YORK CITY.

GENE SIMMONS

When I was a kid I used to go up and down these streets...

RATHER

Everybody agrees that, you know, this was an incredibly successful band. It is an incredibly successful band. But it doesn't have a long list of top ten individual hits. Question, how are you so successful without all the chart topping singles?

SIMMONS

We decided not to play the game. The game of pop groups was to try to figure out those saccharine sweet melodies and choruses that have to do with love and heartbreak and so on so that mom and dad listening to the radio during the daytime would find appealing. The philosophy was to put together an entire statement, a body of work, if you will, as opposed to one song.

Because there are a lot of bands, Wang Chung. That was a band that had two number one hits. "Everybody Wang Chung tonight." You can't tell me who's in the band. The band came and went. Lots of bands have had number one singles, it means nothing.

RATHER

Do you consider yourself more a musician or more an entertainer? Or can you make that difference?

SIMMONS

I don't think it matters. You know, this-- self-aggrandizement where artists, artistes perhaps, insist on being taken seriously. And I have inspiration and stuff like that. I-- I consider it-- I consider what I do in all areas, whether it's in restaurant chains or football or rock bands as the working man's ethic. And I like the novelist who gets up every day, and from 9:00 a.m. until 10 p.m. or whatever that time is, sits in front of his, then, typewriter. And whether he feels the inspiration or not, puts in the time. G-- it's time for work. Inspiration, as far as I'm concerned, is highly overrated. Put in the time. And that's what I do. I have-- I have a working man's ethic. I get up at the crack of dawn, go up-- all day, do all sorts of things until I'm dog tired--

RATHER

So you're a preacher of the gospel, perspiration will beat even inspiration?

SIMMONS

Success is 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration. The harder I work, the luckier I get. There's just no substitute.

RATHER

Well, no one would deny that you worked hard. Let's tick off the things that you have been involved with and are involved with as an entrepreneur. I mean, there is the band. There's Kiss.

SIMMONS

I don't think people understand just how big it is. We have a forthcoming TV series with Warner Brothers that's scripted. We have a forthcoming-- motion picture that's fully funded, in fact, by the motion picture company I'm a partner in. We have a cartoon show that's funded called *Kiss Girls*. We have the Kiss Las Vegas golf course that's fully active right across from the Hard Rock. Limo services, I mean, 5,000 licensed products. It has grown-- it has gone where no band had gone before.

RATHER

To reach the top and stay at or near the very top of anything, for as long as you have, is a wonder to me. How have you done that?

SIMMONS

You know, there is such a thing as having the right thing at the right place at the right time. I'll grant you that. You have to be lucky. You have to be talented. And there's just no substitute for being relentless. You know, anybody who-- for-- that first genius who came up with the phrase, "Just hit the nail on the head," doesn't understand how life works. You gotta hit it on the head, and you gotta continue to hit it on the head over and over and over again. And then eventually, if you're lucky, the nail goes all the way down. And it doesn't matter; there are people who are better looking, who run faster, who are smarter, who are doing everything-- the tortoise won the race, not the hare.

RATHER

Well, you've seen a lot of changes. Let's talk about what's changed in the entertainment industry.

SIMMONS

It's sad and even pathetic that in this new age of technology, the laws of the land haven't kept up with technology. So there's not gonna be another Beatles. There's not gonna be another Hendrix or Kiss or anybody else. Because there's no structure. There is no record industry. There's chaos. So what you do is you work hard at doing what you do. And I work hard at what I do. And I wanna get paid. I already put in more than 10,000 hours. There's a 10,000 hour principle that if you spend enough time, you get good something. It's a good idea. But the next 15 year old kid that plugs into his Marshall amplifier, or has the talent is not gonna be able to earn a living, because there isn't a record company to pay advances non recoupable plus royalties, plus put up posters all over, plus tour support. It's chaos out there. Because the freckle-faced kid next door believes he's entitled. You have enough money. Why do you care? I wanna get-- take your creation. And I just wanna make as many copies as I want without paying you for it.

RATHER

And they can do that?

SIMMONS

They do it all the time. Now, by the way, it does not affect me. This is gonna sound out of context. I'm rich. Okay? I work-- I worked for every penny of it. And you're not supposed to say that. I'm rich. I'm happy. The sad part is the next kid who's got the talent, who's got the will, the powe-- you know, and wants to put in the work, does not have the same opportunity. In fact, he may have no opportunity, because the masses have the entitlement mindset.

RATHER

Of they get it for free? And--

SIMMONS

Everything for free.

RATHER

Get on the internet, get it up, you get it for free.

SIMMONS

And I know people are up-- upset when I say things. All information to all people. You would understand what that meant if you wrote a book and spent a year writing it and nobody paid you for it. They all just made copies, and everybody got one. Then you'd understand. "Hey, it's my book." "Yeah, but you have enough money. Don't worry about that."

RATHER

I take your point. But to those who would say, "Listen, if rock and roll is dead--" do you think rock and roll is dead?

SIMMONS

It is f-- the nail has finally been put into the coffin, yes. And that's because I'll play a-- short game with you. From 1958, for 25 or 30 years after that-- let's give it 30 years. T-- 1958, for 30 years, makes it 1988. Okay? From then until 1988, oh, name 100 bands, even hundreds of bands that have become iconic. Well, let's see. Elvis Presley, the Beatles, Rolling Stones, you can-- on and on--

RATHER

The list is long.

SIMMONS

Motown, The Supremes, and in blues, in country and western. It just-- amazing. From 1988, that includes, by the way, U2 and Madonna, Michael Jackson and all that pop stuff. From 1988 until today, give me ten or one iconic superstar that's gonna stand the test of time.

RATHER

Nirvana.

SIMMONS

Because they recorded two records. Okay. So maybe I'll give you Nirvana. So that's one.

RATHER

Can't think of another.

SIMMONS

How about that.

RATHER

But I was unprepared for this test.

SIMMONS

But nobody is. Because they'll go, "Oh, one of the pop girls," but they're terrific. I love Brittany Spears and Rihanna. They're all terrific. Stand the test of time? I say no. Iconic? Not a chance. On the-- on par with Beatles, Elvis, Motown, all that stuff? No. And that's because there used to be a process and structure is everything. If there's a structure, it's logic and then it's competition just like Mother Nature. And who decides who reaches the top? The people. Of the people, for the people, by the people--

RATHER

So when they were buying records, buying albums.

SIMMONS

The people voted--

RATHER

--The marketplace--

SIMMONS

--with their dollar. That's right.

RATHER

Well, as I understand it, you're basically saying that not just rock and roll, but the music business, and in many ways, the entertainment business has been murdered? Is that too strong a word?

SIMMONS

Oh, it's been murdered all right. Not by-- not by outside forces, foreign powers. We killed rock and roll.

ACT THREE

DAN RATHER

You've dealt in the world of rock and roll and entertainment. But you don't have a reputation of having ever, ever been deep into drink.

GENE SIMMONS

I've never been willingly drunk or high or smoked--

RATHER

Or deep into drugs.

SIMMONS

--cigarettes in my life. Nah.

RATHER

How did you avoid that when so many others didn't?

SIMMONS

Well, honestly-- I just-- if I can verbalize it, I just couldn't imagine breaking my mother's heart.

And in my opinion, and I have to say that so that people don't get upset again, "You don't understand. It's a disease." Oh please. Leave me alone. All the drinking and the drugs and everything else is a selfish idea, to my way of thinking, because it hurts the mother who gave you birth, the people who love you, and it winds up being a selfish, arrogant act. And then of course when everybody else doesn't understand, you play the victim card. "You know, I'm-- I'm unhappy, and you're not giving me enough money to live off for the apartment. And I just wanna get high." And I have no patience for that. And you're right. As far-- I would support you in the sweeping generalization. Predominantly, the rap world, the rock world, the entertainment world is filled with drug addicts and alcoholics. I stand by every word I just said. I see 'em every day. And it is a culture of ruin. It just doesn't work.

RATHER

You haven't been into drink, haven't been into drugs, fair to say that you've had a weakness for women?

SIMMONS

Oh yeah. I'm-- I'm the male of the species. And you know, I went from-- from famine to feast. When I was very young, 12, 13, 14, I didn't do so well with girls. And, you know, I desperately wanted their companionship. I didn't know if I wanted a girlfriend or if it was just sex or anything. I just was attracted. And then I joined a band. (SNAPS) And it was like Tinkerbell just put the dust all over me. And all of a sudden, I mean, that happened a long time ago. You could wake up next to somebody whose name you never bothered to learn.

RATHER

Would you agree that's narcissistic? And in its way, is, if not a disease, a malady that could be equated with drink, drugs, some of the others?

SIMMONS

It's an interesting-- you know, either prognosis or thought. And maybe I'm not the one to determine that. But I will tell you that while the people around me were getting high and drugs, I was-- I was-- guilty as charged of going after the pleasures of the flesh, absolutely.

RATHER

Well, bluntly put in somewhat uncomfortable language.

SIMMONS

Oh, I'm not uncomfortable with any language--

RATHER

Instead of getting high or getting drunk, you were getting laid.

SIMMONS

Quite a bit of it.

RATHER

Is that the reason you said later in life that, quote, "Fame creates monsters." Were you one?

SIMMONS

Perhaps. I don't think it was meant to grab power and to be unkind to people. It was self-satiation. I just couldn't believe that it was from famine to feast. And I could have anything I wanted. This sort of-- I mean, I love cake. And I can imagine this wonder world, where I'm thrown into a bakery. You can eat anything you want, and you'll never gain a-- pound. I'm going, "Oh my God. I'm gonna gorge myself." And that's what I did for decades. Thousands, Dan. And I neither say that in humor or-- or-- or with arrogance or bravado. Just I'd never had it. And I-- maybe it's fair to say somebody else should figure out whether it's a sex addiction or not. But I certainly went into it head, hands and feet.

RATHER

You've been in relationships with some-- some famous women. You've dated some of the biggest superstars of all time. Anything you can share with us about Cher?

SIMMONS

Oh, she's a wonderful lady, a loving mother, caring-- she was wonderful. I treasure the time we had together, and she's still a friend. I didn't understand Hollywood. I didn't understand-- anything about Los Angeles. I was thrust into the deep end of the pool. Coming from New York, you didn't see anybody, you didn't know anybody. I was just in a band, and you go from city to city. And-- and then when I met Cher, and, you know, we just palled around and got along, and then just decided to live together. Anybody would come over. Dolly Parton or, you know, the Charlie's Angels, or one second it's this, one-- and you live in Malibu, and it's, like, some bizarre world where only famous people lived. And then one day she got up and said, "Let's go jog." And I said, "Jog? What's jog?" I had never heard of the word. In New York, you didn't run anywhere unless somebody was chasing you. "No, we're gonna run on the beach." "Where to? Why? What--" I didn't understand. So I put on my silk purple shirt and my snakeskin boots. And I didn't know where we were going. And she was laughing. And I'm tryin' to, you know, run in the b-- and then Neil Diamond came one way. And then Barbara Streisand came the other. And I said, "I've landed on Mars. I have no idea what I'm doing here. I clearly don't belong." She was great, a great lady.

RATHER

I interviewed Diana Ross not long ago. And it comes to mind that you also had a relationship with her.

SIMMONS

I did. Wonderful mother, loved her kids, worked her way up from being a 16 year old girl, you know, in the ghetto. And-- she's a self-made woman, and just great. You know, in the dictionary, there's the word lady. There should be a photo of-- Diana right there.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

BUT FOR THE PAST 3 DECADES ONLY ONE WOMAN HAS REMAINED CONSTANT IN GENE'S LIFE...FORMER PLAYBOY COVER GIRL SHANNON TWEED. THE COUPLE LIVES IN BEVERLY HILLS WHERE THEY RAISED THEIR TWO CHILDREN NICK AND SOPHIE...AND FOR SEVEN YEARS INVITED CAMERAS INTO THEIR HOME TO GIVE A BEHIND-THE-SCENES GLIMPSE AT THEIR FAMILY LIFE IN THE TV SHOW *GENE SIMMONS FAMILY JEWELS*.

SIMMONS

We treated all of it, the good, the bad and the ugly. And I was the ugly part of it. And ironically enough, you know, the thing-- reality shows break families apart because it's too real. Ironically enough in our case, I saw the goodness of our family and the good parts of me, but I also saw scabs and the wounds and all of myself. Because it's tough to look at yourself and say, "Oh my God. I'm-- I really am causing pain to my family." At the end of the day, at the end of my life, 'cause we're all gonna take a turn at that, who do I want around me? Some stripper or somebody that could care less about me? Or do I want my family? My children, Shannon, the-- the woman I love?" You know, the arrogance of youth and the folly of youth in my case, I don't wanna speak specifically. I wanna stand up to my responsibility. I'm an only child. And all my life I thought nobody should be able to ask me where are you going. Where am I going? Who wants to know? So my errant ways, as they say, has been a-- life of arrogance and selfishness. And, you know, the only way-- the only way to cure any of that is to be completely up front about it and to stand guilty as charged of being who I am. In fact, I had an album that I named-- I don't know if I'm allowed to say, *Asshole*. May I?

RATHER

Yes. This is cable television, you know?

SIMMONS

Asshole. There you go. I named it that because in-- in-- it was one of the song titles. But in a very real way-- I was one. I'd like to think I'm no longer.

RATHER

And in *Gene Simmons Family Jewels*, people get to view this bumpy ride?

SIMMONS

Oh yeah. All of it. You-- you'll see the infidelities. You'll see Shannon being hurt. You see her-- w-- wanting not to stay together. And arrogantly, I stayed together with Shannon. How about that? Here's the selfishness part. She stayed together with me for 29 years, faithfully, with all the trials and tribulations. Without demanding anything. And finally when the kids were grown up, there was a point in time where either we were gonna break up or I was gonna stand up and be a man. So we've been together 31 years, but married only two.

RATHER

I don't know of any couple who could match that record.

SIMMONS

I-- it took me an awful long time to-- grow up. In my case, and it's not a defense, just an observation. My father left me when I was a little boy of about seven years old. It's not a unique story. Many fathers do abandon their families, shamefully. And I always tried to validate that.

Like, "What did I ever do as a little boy? Like, what did-- what did I ever do?" I was a good boy. I did well in school. Why did my father leave me? I just couldn't fathom-- this was the pillar of the family. He was a very big man. He's passed on now. But he may have been as big as 6'8", 6'9". And to me he was like a giant of man. And the pillar of strength wound up being the weakest pillar of the family, and just ran out.

RATHER

Excuse me true or untrue that you felt so strongly about this as life went on that you declined to be with him on his death bed?

SIMMONS

It's true. It's true that I-- once my father-- left us and me, I never saw him again. I-- I did my duties as a son. I supported him throughout his whole life, bought him a house, paid his bills, did all that stuff. But I-- somewhere I didn't want to rekindle the relationship and have a social thing. 'Cause I just couldn't come to terms. Okay, you gave me life. I'm gonna take care of you for the rest of your life. But I don't wanna be together, discuss anything. So when our TV show went to Israel because Shannon tricked me, my now beloved wife. She said, "Let's go to Israel and show your son Nick, you know, what Israel looked like." So we're going round Mossad and stuff. And then we wind up outside of Tel Aviv. And when I went around the corner, I saw it was a very small private cemetery. And over there in the corner was the headstone of my father. And that's when I knew I'd been tricked to confront my own mortality and what's life about and so on. And I broke down. It was very, very, very hard.

RATHER

Your own mortality and what's life's-- about, you said. What is life about?

SIMMONS

You know, it's a-- it's a tough question to verbalize. First my mother-- my mother was 14 when she was taken to the camps of Nazi Germany. So throughout my entire life, I never wanted to hurt my mother the way my father did. So because of that, I can rationalize it now. I never wanted to get married. So I never did. I got married at 62. I'm 65 now. And so my lack of commitment had to do with I never wanted to become my father. And so I always thought you

could have your cake and eat it too. Well, look, I'm not married. I could do whatever I wanna do. And later on in life, when I f-- started to get a sense-- once you have enough money, once you have the fame, once you have the position, it's probably time to grow up.

RATHER

Fair to say you-- you've settled down?

SIMMONS

Oh yeah. You mean other women? Not one.

RATHER

Well, that b-- and I wanna pursue this.

SIMMONS

By the way, I would-- I would tell you if it was the case.

RATHER

I understand--

SIMMONS

I've been arrogant all my life.

RATHER

-- That I believe. But for so long-- you met her, you fell in love with her, lived with her, but for so long you continued to-- I draw a deep breath to use the word cheat.

SIMMONS

Oh, more than that. It was gluttony to the excess. I never wanted children. And I said to her, "Do you wanna live together? Wanna hang out and stuff? Yeah? I'm not gonna marry you. I put it down in writing. We're not gonna get married. I don't want children. I don't ever wanna have children." 'Cause I didn't want another child to feel what I felt like when a father walked out. I thought I was gonna do it. Well, guess what? Nick is 25 years old, 6'8". Sophie is gonna rule the planet. She's writing books and p-- acting, and she's the queen of the household. She's 22. In fact, we're having dinner right after this interview, I'm proud to say. And I didn't-- I-- I did not become my father. I'm a good father.

ACT FOUR

DAN RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THE AMERICAN DREAM IS ALIVE AND WELL IN GENE SIMMONS. AN IMMIGRANT TO THE UNITED STATES AT AGE EIGHT, SIMMONS' HUMBLE BEGINNINGS IN ISRAEL HAVE LONG SHAPED HIS OUTLOOK ON LIFE, AMERICA AND HELPING OTHERS.

GENE SIMMONS

When I was a little boy in Israel we had nothing. It was a rocket hole and the one bedroom that my mother and I shared and my father on the weekends would go off to war and hitch a ride to the front lines, which could have been the next city over, 'cause you're surrounded by countries that hate you and want you gone. At the end of the day, the room went pitch black. There was no electricity. We had-- an outhouse. I'd never seen toilet paper or Kleenex. Never heard of it, never saw it. Didn't start brushin' my t-- my teeth until I was 11 years old. Never heard of a toothpaste or toothbrush.

And one day, a cardboard box came through the mail. And my mother opened it up, and there was a can of peaches, which I'd never seen before. I'd never seen food inside of a metal container. And there was a ripped sweater that was too big for me. But I put that on like it was, you know, a kingly robe. I wore that sweater every day proudly, even with the-- I remember the tear here. I didn't s-- I never saw anything so beautiful. And my mother took a rock and broke open the can of peaches. It was a big one. And she let me have, you know, the nectar, the-- and to this day, I-- I remember that sweet-- I'd never tasted anything so sweet. And what that care package did for me-- all of a sudden, I had the sense that the world cared, because I didn't know who it came from. All of a sudden, the world was a better place. All of a sudden, we were not alone. I'm-- I'm just tryin' to control myself so I don't start, you know. So I promised myself that later on, if I ever did well in life, I'd make sure that other little boys and girls around the world (THROAT CLEARING) would feel that hope, that thing. So I-- I personally support 1,400 children throughout Africa. Not through organizations. I've got some people who bring fresh food. We clothe them. We educate them. But you can eat as much as you want as long as you come to school.

RATHER

Does that come, in any way, you started first going to a religious school, did you seriously consider becoming a rabbi?

SIMMONS

I did. My mother put me into what we call yeshiva, which is basically a serious theological seminary. And my mother thought that I should be a rabbi.

RATHER

You've done so much. You've seen so much. You've had a lust for life, which you've fulfilled in so many ways. Are you still a religious person?

SIMMONS

You know, I think that's a very-- good question. I think all of us grapple with that issue. I'd like to think that all the injustices of the world, babies born with AIDS and when they're innocent and there are some very bad people that have very good lives. You'd like to think-- and I'm not just pointing to the holocaust of WWII and Jews, but the Armenians at the turn of the 20th century, a million of them were slaughtered. And there's just genocide across the board, across the African continent and so on. You'd like to think that there's some justice somewhere, and I don't wanna hear a religious person say, "God works in mysterious ways." That's the coward's way out. So I want to believe that there's a greater humane, if lack of a better word, God up there that does watch over us, if we're all God's children. On the other side, I'm grappling every day with the idea and the notion, if these were my children, I wouldn't let them be tortured.

And I understand. Listen, I studied Christianity and Islam and Judaism. I know that Jesus was born, (FOREIGN LANGUAGE) His father was Joseph and then he became a rabbi--- I mean I know all this stuff, but I have some real issues. So I will say the following, and I'll try to be as respectful as possible. My people wrote the book, after all. If God appeared (SNAP) like this, at the-- at this moment, call God what you will. Okay everybody. On your knees. Here I am. I'm God. Just hold your horses. I know you're the eternal one-- "Sit down. I have a lot of questions.

You gave me the mind to think of these questions in the first place. I am your creation. So if you've given me the mind, I have questions. How dare you allow children to suffer? How dare you allow genocide? And it's our fau-- okay. Sometimes you come in and perform miracles.

And other times you let us kill our-- ourselves. The difference between good and bad seems to be a grey issue. The bad sometimes do better than the good." I have a lot of questions. So if God exists, I need a one on one.

RATHER

Thinking back, and in some ways it's an unfair question. And I acknowledge that. What's the worst thing that happened to you in your life?

SIMMONS

Personally, I've never had a bad thing happen to me. I haven't had a bad day in my life. Not since I came to the Promised Land. And let me tell you something, everybody points to Israel. And yes I am proud I'm being from there. But the Promised Land is America. In America, Protestants and Catholics live next door to each other. In Ireland? Not so good. In the Middle East, Israelis and Arabs don't get along with each other. Over here, everything's fine. The gift that America has given the world is a sort of-- I-- I can't put it into words. There's a magic here that exists nowhere else in the world. I'm embarrassingly patriotic about this country. I would-- (SIGH) see? It's startin' to happen.

Before we came to America, my mother and I stood in front of the American consulate. Sh-- my mother was very beautiful, so he put her at the en—the beginning of the line. I saw—I saw (WAVES) and so we went to the front of the line. And I was a little boy. I didn't know what was going on. And he's trying to tell her that she's been accepted to come to America. But my mother couldn't speak English. So he says-- "Do you spee--" you know, she didn't-- couldn't speak English. And they're tryin' to connect. So they settled on (FOREIGN LANGUAGE) "I speak some German." You had to, especially in the camps. So in broken German, he says to her-- "Welcome. You have been accepted to the United States of America." And I didn't know what America was. I'd never heard of it or anything. And he says, "Okay, before you come in, you have to raise your hand, and-- swear allegiance to America." And-- my mother didn't know what to do. So she went like this. And-- (COUGH) sorry. (THROAT CLEARING) So-- I saw that ni-- I didn't know what was going on. And my mother was rigid like that. She just wanted to come to America. And I saw him coming. He got off his riser, and he came up to her, and he put her hand down, and he said, "You're never gonna have to do that ever again." And I didn't understand what that was. But the-- the magic and the blessing that is America is that yes, even if you're the sons and daughters of Nazis, you can come here, and nobody will try to kill you. And you can have all the rights and freedoms that native born children in America have. It-- this is the Promised Land.

RATHER

I had asked you what is the worst thing that happened to you in your life. So what's the best thing that's happened to you in your life?

SIMMONS

The best thing that ever happened to me was coming to America. I mean that honestly-- unapologetically. Once I landed in America with my mother, I-- it was like through-- you know, th-- through the rabbit hole. *Alice in Wonderland* kinda thing. I never saw anything so big. The people were big. The cars were big. The sandwiches were enormous. People had refrigerators full of their own food. You didn't have to go to a store to pour a can of soda. I remember as an eight and a half, nine year old boy, going to the first supermarket across from my aunt Magda's house. And I walk in. And it's like city streets with people going down one street and up the other and stuff. Carrying tons of food. And the food was stacked up higher than-- than the people were tall. I just couldn't fathom it. It was just-- you know, the-- America, the land of plenty. You're goddamn right. I'd never seen-- and to this day, I'm-- I just can't believe how much-- it-- it's wonderland.

RATHER

A question. You're now in your 60s and you've lived a lot.

SIMMONS

And boy, (LAUGH) do I look good.

RATHER

You do look good.

SIMMONS

Eh, we don't care. We're men. (LAUGH)

RATHER

But has this abundance-- does this abundance make us soft?

SIMMONS

Yes. I believe the work ethic has been compromised. I believe we're living in the age of entitlement. I believe that-- you know, for-- for-- as an example, our kids, Nick and Sophie, never had an allowance. It's the wrong training when you're 18 or 19 to 20 and you enter the workforce, your hand is still out there going, "Where's the money that I get every week for doing nothing?" And so-- I think what's missing in America is a reminder of what made America great. America was created by the outcasts of all the countries in the world. Yes, give me your tired and your poor, your huddled masses. You bet. And the underclass created the wonder that is America, that is still, and don't kid yourself-- admired and respected around the world. Guardedly, they're jealous. I don't remember the last boatload of people who got up from, you know, the beach and said, "Thank God I've made it to the shores of France." It just doesn't w-- it's America. So what native born American children don't have, in my estimation, and it's shameful, is the realization of the wonder that is America. And that you still have to roll up your sleeves and get to work, damn it. Even if you've got the money. Get up every day, Warren Buffet makes a living. He gets up every day and goes to work. Because it's the love of labor, not whether you have a job.

SIMMONS

My mother-- my dear, blessed mother-- s-- still speaks with a very thick Hungarian accent. "Hello, how is the orchestra?" "Mom, it's a band." "That's right." She sees no difference, but she says, "That's what I said. Orchestra."

I remember showing the first big check, millions of dollars, that I showed my mother. I did that. And she couldn't understand just how much it was. So she folded it up and put it down. She goes, "Wonderful. Wonderful. Now what are you going to do?" That's actually pretty profound. Because--

RATHER

That was very-- very profound. 'Cause of the--

SIMMONS

Yeah. It's, like, been there, done that. Now, will you get up every day and go to work, or will you just sit back and do nothing?

ACT FIVE

GENE SIMMONS

What I want to see is Dan Rather in one of these outfits. "I work hard, I'm a journalist" Come in here. Let's rock, see what the circus is like.

DAN RATHER

We've talked about the changes-- in entertainment and music. What about the changes in the culture? How has the culture of the country changed, or has it?

SIMMONS

The country has become polarized. The country has become liberals and conservatives and Fox and CNN and, you know, all those sort of notions that divide us. And if we're not too careful, it's the-- the fall of the Roman Empire will come from within.

I'm neither Republican nor Democrat. I have very conservative points of views regarding fiscal issues. I'm against entitlement, and very conservative regarding foreign policy. I don't wanna wait around until cockroaches multiply. I wanna go over there, stamp it out before it becomes a disease. Social issues, separate of church and state, gay rights, if you-- if you love farm animals, I don't care. Live and let live. I'm all about that. So what am I? You know what I am? I belong to the American political party. It's called America. What party are you from? American.

RATHER

You've benefited greatly from living in this country. And you've said-- you've expressed a deep and abiding appreciation for that.

SIMMONS

I love America. I wish more Americans said that.

RATHER

When you were coming up, you came here eight and a half years old. Did you face any anti-Semitism coming up?

SIMMONS

Of course.

RATHER

Did you face an anti-semitism when you where starting the band?

SIMMONS

Sure. And that's why I changed my name. I didn't want the Jewish part of Gene Simmons to get in the way of what I wanted to achieve, which is success. But Jews have been doing that since time immemorial, which is assimilation. I assimilated in America and proud of it.

Make my name sound more American, you bet. Because my given name, which I had nothing to do with, by the way, it was given to me. My given name starts off with the sound of a cat throwing up a hair ball. Chaaa-- that's even before you get to my first name. It doesn't work.

Chaim. It doesn't work in America. Chaim. Chaim. They don't wanna say that word. Okay.

I'll make it easier for you. I don't have a problem. And so when I go to a funeral, I dress in the costume that's appropriate. I don't wanna go in a clown outfit in a funeral, because I wanna pay it respect. If I go to your house, and it's a very conservative house, I'll tear my hair behind my b-- you know, or whatever I need to do to respect. If America's giving me all the opportunities I could ever imagine that a native born son and daughter would have, why would I insist on being arrogant and say, "You've gotta accept me for who I am"? As far as I'm concerned, I wanna go to you, instead of expecting the mountain to come to Muhammad, if you will.

RATHER

Let me turn to some things which I think some people may disagree with you. And let's talk about it a little. I'm going down a list. This is not a list of favorite things you have said.

SIMMONS

It's okay.

RATHER

"You said immigrants should learn goddamned English." Quote unquote.

SIMMONS

I stand by every word I said. I am an immigrant. I am a legal immigrant. And my journey has taught me, dress British, think Yiddish. I can foist and I can force my culture and my religion, my lack of English skills on everybody else. I have the right to be whatever I want to be. And I wanna-- speak fluent Zimbabwean here in America. And you can't tell me what to do. That's true. So how is that gonna earn you a living? The more language skills you have, that's called English. The more people skills you have, the more you know about the culture that you land in,

when in Rome, do as the Romans. I didn't-- I didn't create those. I didn't invent any of those rules. You have a distinct added advantage if you can speak English well. And yes, even without an accent. And I'm talking about a guy who spoke with a very heavy accent. (FOREIGN LANGUAGE) But if I speak another language, I speak it without an accent. (FOREIGN LANGUAGE) Well, that's Hungarian. (FOREIGN LANGUAGE) That's fluent Hebrew. But it's the right sound of the language. Make the effort. It's your responsibility. If America is giving you all the advantages of its native born sons and daughters, for God's sakes, make an effort and learn the culture and the language. You're already getting all the advantages. "No, I don't wanna do anything for it. I just want all the advantages." Eh. Next.

RATHER

This list-- I'm not gonna go on the rest of the afternoon with this list.

SIMMONS

Oh, I stand-- (LAUGH) listen, I've said some stupid things.

RATHER

Well--

SIMMONS

And.

RATHER

Well, would you put-- in that category that while talking about a hypothetical depressed child, considering committing s-- suicide, you said, quote, "I'm the guy who says jump." Unquote. Sorry that you said that?

SIMMONS

I did. It was a stupid moment. And-- I apologized over and over again. And that's not what I meant. You can take anything out of context. I was reacting to the idea that there were a lot of people who wanted attention. Who play the victim card over and over again, drug addicts, alcoholics. It's a disease. You know, anybody who points and says, "I've got a hard life. You don't understand why I'm a drug addict or," it-- you know, it just got m-- under my skin. My mother was in a concentration camp. Shut the fuck up. She doesn't complain about anything. She wakes up every day, makes no excuses about anything. She's alive. And she revels in life. So when I hear people who are born in America, and complain about things. "I'm a victim. You had all the advantages." We had nothing. We had nothing, came to America with nothing, and were given all the access to anything. And it was the rest of-- so, you know, when-- when-- when images of my mother bring up, I say stupid things. Because I try to bitch slap all the complainers and the entitlement people. So it was very hurtful to people who do, in fact, suffer

from a disease called depression. I recognize that. And I stand guilty as charged of making a wide, sweeping statement. And that's my fault for not being specific. But I will tell you that whether it's a child crying just to get attention or whether it's a grown up saying I'm a victim, I'm sick and tired of it. It's, like, shut up. Pick yourself up by two britches. You're alive. You're in America. Stop complaining.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

MORE OF MY INTERVIEW WITH GENE SIMMONS OF KISS, WHEN WE COME BACK.

ACT SIX

DAN RATHER

I'm gonna ask you to rate yourself. Difficult thing to do.

GENE SIMMONS

Oh, it's easy for me.

RATHER

As a bass player?

SIMMONS

Medium. Seven, seven out of ten.

RATHER

Songwriter?

SIMMONS

Six or seven.

RATHER

Husband?

SIMMONS

It's a two pronged question. As a partner before we got married? A two. As a husband, I-- I hope I'm close to ten.

RATHER

We'll have to ask Shannon about that.

SIMMONS

That-- precisely the point.

RATHER

As a father?

SIMMONS

Two pronged. Before? Five or six. Now? And you should ask the kids. I hope it's a ten.

RATHER

Well that would give you an average 8. Not all that bad.

SIMMONS

That was quick.

RATHER

Going back to Kiss. You've had some great nights. You had some great songs, some great albums. What is your favorite moment of the Kiss experience?

SIMMONS

My favorite moment continues to be getting up on that stage, which as far as I'm concerned, is holy ground. It's electric church. What we do is unequalled. In fact, we introduce ourselves with, "You wanted the best, you got the best. The hottest band in the world, Kiss." It is a self-imposed mandate that even if you hate the band and the music and think it's silly, if you come to our show, you will walk out and say, "That's the best show I've ever seen in my life."

Because I come from a period when people used to strum g-- acoustic guitars with their legs crossed and incense growing up, and never looked at-- you know, they look at the gum on the floor and charge you full price for that. "The four guys that put the band together 40 years ago, basically the self-imposed mandate was, let's put together the band we never saw on stage. Let's kick him in the nuts. Let's give 'em something they've never seen before."

So all the rules went out the window. We didn't wanna look like other bands. There's no political content. It's fluff. It's two hours of magic where you forget about the traffic jam, the argument you had with the girlfriend, where is this going, why do I have my mother's hips. Like all that out

the door. Little pregnant pause for our lady friends to have a little laugh. Why won't he call me? Where is this going? Eh. Just for two hours, magic time.

RATHER

Gene Simmons, thank you.

SIMMONS

Thank you.

RATHER

Thank you very much.

END TRANSCRIPT