

## America is Great

Dave Cohen

I get letters every day (from girls and women **and** men) telling me how my life story is a personal source of inspiration for them, how my life has served them as a positive way of striving for goals. I am so gratified by that fact. A woman with daughters told me once that hearing about my achievements has totally changed her perspective of how you can be successful, that truly I am what it means to be an American, that I should write a book about my accomplishments. I don't know about that!



I will not deny the fact that I have been lucky, in addition to talent, genes, God, and a personal drive which comes with perseverance. This combination led to opportunities in commercials, and then to guest starring roles on shows such as Frasier and ER and Touched by an Angel, and then finally into permanent roles on the TV series From the Secret Mixed Up File of Mrs Basil E Frankwhiler (as Claudia) and Dastardly Dog (as Alex) on Showtime Kids. Sometimes old videos of those commercials and shows come up on programs like Before They Were Stars and The All New TV's Bloopers and Practical Jokes (though I don't see what's a blooper about it). I won't say that I ever became a famous TV actor because I didn't, but I did all right for myself in terms of money and exposure, and that is what paved the way for my singing career, history turned out to show.

What happened was I was fourteen and I hadn't done any acting for almost half a year, because I was concentrating on public high school which I had just started. Also I was concentrating on my boyfriend of the time Danny Laughton, who was the older brother of a girl I costarred with on Dastardly. Sad but true. Now, with age, I can see how **stupid** I was about him. You learn from your experiences is a fact of life. Anyway, what happened was that I had done some singing on Dastardly (if you've never seen the show, it's about a troupe of girls who solve mysteries with their dog, and it's done with songs), and the producer was asked by Mitchell "Kid Boy" M<sup>c</sup>Daniels (who discovered Christina Aguilera from the Mickey Mouse Club) if any of the kids on the show had any talent. He gave my name along with

Bethany Deprise, Heather Laughton, and Christina Farncourt and he had us all come in together to possibly make into a girl group that was I guess supposed to be like All Saints except younger.

Well, we tried out, we sang together and by ourselves, for my solo songs I sang “2 Become 1” by the Spice Girls and “Show Me Love” by Robyn. Then after we all tried out, it turned out he only wanted to pursue me with a singing career. And my singing career was born!

The songs for the first album were all written by Kid Boy, but we really worked on how to perform them together. One thing he told me was that if I was really serious about gaining success, I would have to have an enlargement done, which I wasn't too thrilled over, and neither were my parents especially my dad, because I was fourteen at the time. But I argued that number one Kid Boy would pay for them, number two who knew how long until Dad lost his job again and we would need my income (my dad worked in banks, but never for very long), and number three it couldn't hurt to have them in the long run. Plus my agent was in favor of it. It turned out we (me and Kid Boy) couldn't get it done without my parents' permission, so Kid Boy needed to sit down and have a talk and assure them of things, and after that they signed on the dotted line so to speak.

The real breakthrough came from the album's second single “Love You (Every Day)” which got airplay everywhere and made it to number 3 on Billboard's Top 40 Countdown. After that it was like fast-motion movie-life: first, Kid Boy got me to join the 98 Degrees and Rising Tour with 98 Degrees, and turned it into the 98 Degrees and Rising Tour Featuring Me. For a brief span in 1999 I dated Brad Keegan from the band, but we called it off mutually. After that I had performances everywhere, and I was a featured audience member at award shows, and basically it comes down to I started to get recognized in the way that you do when you get famous. Like I could get into bars (at the time I was fifteen) for instance is one of the minor things. Or I hardly had to pay for anything when I was out. I went to perform and have interviews on talk shows such as Jay Leno and Rosie O'Donnell before her show went off the air. My life became the life of a professional singer.

Another aspect to being a celebrity that everyone deals with is the press, or I should say the Tabloids, which in reality is another species of thing altogether. I don't understand them, how they are allowed to exist. Things get written about you... you want to set the record straight, but what difference

would it make? I'm not saying that I'm this pristine virgin of the hills, but I'd say the ratio of true stories to totally false stories is five to one on the side of the false stories. And it's not like I'm not honest about this anyway. You can just ask me to tell the truth, and I have no problem with that. I mean, of the people I've had relations with, the only ones who were famous were Howie Dorough, Jonathan Taylor Thomas, Ben Stiller, David Duchovny, Billy Blanks (he's **not** gay), Woody Harrelson, Bill Maher, D'Angelo, Jerry O'Connell, AJ McLean, Freddy Prinze Jr, Ed Norton, Sergei Fedorov, Q-Tip, Ryan Phillippe (**before** he married Reese Witherspoon), Owen Wilson, Brian Littrell, Ben Harper, Jake Busey, Tiger Woods, and one particular member of a famous family who I'm not going to disclose the name of because he personally asked me not to, not because I'm being secretive. I'm honest about these things. Which is why I get so annoyed when they print untrue lies about my life. I have **never** done some of the things they describe me as. Not that I wouldn't necessarily, but so much is just not true. You wonder, can't they find something else to write about? But I'm not even going to spend another second giving them the satisfaction of me talking about them.



For instance, one thing the Tabloids never write about is your charity work. Charity work is a major aspect of my life, specifically the KidsCanDo Scholarship Fund I started. The original idea for it was actually my mother's, it came as a way to help out kids from different backgrounds who ordinarily wouldn't get to go to college. My mother is now the chairman of the scholarship, while my father retired from his bank job and now is in charge of the merchandising and internet aspects of my career, I should add as a side note.

Really the origin of the scholarship is from my "Feel It" tour. It is kind of a roundabout thing. What happened was that it turned out one of the sponsors was Broadcast.com, which is owned by Mark

Cuban. We worked out a deal so that I would have their banners showing at the concerts, plus I would do a few commercials for them, plus they would get to broadcast some of my shows over the internet, which is what Broadcast.com does, and instead of paying me money they would give me shares in the company, which at that time wasn't a company that you could buy shares in unless you knew the owner. To be honest it wasn't my idea it was my dad's, who thought it would be to my advantage money-wise. I don't know why he kept getting fired at banks because let me just say that when Broadcast.com got available to everyone on the stock market, my shares were worth **a lot** of money. I sold them (my dad sold them) and it's not to brag to say that all of a sudden I had more than 50 million dollars, which is not something I am embarrassed about, or embarrassed to tell people, because it's the truth. One thing I hope I get across is my personal philosophy that if something is the truth, there's no reason to hide it or be ashamed of it.



So suddenly I had more money than I could ever dream of, on top of the regular money that you get from being a famous singer. I thought up of the idea of doing activities for charity, and my mom came up with the specifics of the scholarship. So far we have sent over 130 kids to college which is truly a matter of pride for me. Other charities that I've got running are the Breast Cancer Fund and the AIDS Fund which I started with Ben Stiller when we were dating.

One thing also that came from my deal with Broadcast.com is that I got to know Mark Cuban, who if you think I got a lot of money from Broadcast.com, let me just tell you that Cubes (that is his nickname) became a **double-billionaire**. He was young too when I met him, younger than forty. I don't want to get into the specifics of how it happened, but we did end up having a relationship for some time, which ended up having effects on other aspects of my life.

One thing about Cubes was that he was really into toys, like gadgets and electronic things. For instance his house was wired so that you could speak into a box next to the refrigerator and a few minutes later certain foods would come out (nothing too complicated food-wise, though). Before I met him I didn't know that had been invented. Or a stereo system in his car that was somehow connected to the stereo system in his house (which a speaker of was built into the walls of every room of the house, you

couldn't even see the speakers unless you knew where to look) so that when he got home from driving, the inside stereo system would automatically know what the car stereo system had been doing, and play the song from the point he'd left off at in his car.

But more than toys, he liked schemes. That is the word for it, schemes. One thing he did (he showed me the videotape, he videotaped **everything**) was somehow use computers to reroute all the calls to the Better Business Bureau to something he set up like a fake Better Business Bureau. It was like the real Better Business Bureau in every way, people answered the phones with "Hello, Better Business Bureau," and they would record all the information that the real Better Business Bureau would, and sometimes if they had enough complaints about a specific place they would take whatever kind of action the real Better Business Bureau would take. No one knew it was fake, somehow. Also, so the real Better Business Bureau wouldn't get suspicious that no one was calling them, Cubes had other people call the real Better Business Bureau with pretty much the exact same complaints that had been complained to the fake one. He also told me that he had computer-hacked into the real Better Business Bureau internet site and replaced it with a basically identical fake one. He had like 45 people working for his fake Better Business Bureau.

And that was just the beginning of his "schemes." They started to get more, I guess the word for it would be "sinister." He had people imitate police officers. He had this giant underground homebase built on his property, like a huge cave lined with computers and TV screens, and the TV screens mostly showed inside pictures of people's houses who didn't know they were being broadcast. Also he had a huge room built down there for his crazy gun collection, which was not just regular guns, but weird guns that shot things other than bullets like electricity balls and plastic pills filled with gas that made you sleep. The room had a moving floor and a voice-listen-box so that if you said the name of a gun, the floor would move around and the gun would come to you. He said he wanted it to be like in The Matrix. This was all going on while we were going out, at the beginning when he first became a billionaire it was the Better Business Bureau thing, and by the time I called it off I was finding out about his plans with kidnapping people and messing with people's ability to use electricity.

I guess his general plan was to just be destructive. He had a bunch of goons and he was their leader, they started with him on the Better Business Bureau thing and then stayed with him as he did crazier and crazier stuff. He gave them uniforms, which were a spandex bodysuit decorated to look like a real workday business suit, except it had the logo  $x^3$  on the chest which was his personal logo (he had it on his towels for instance). When he wasn't working at his Broadcast.com job, he started dressing in a costume himself, which was some kind of hard rubber suit which made it look like he had more muscles than he had, like Val Kilmer in Batman III, and had  $x^3$  on his chest and on the outside of his biceps and on his back. He would go out at night with his gang in like 10 Lamborghini Jeeps and do things like dump a thousand gallons of red food coloring in the San Ancito reservoir, videotaping the whole thing. At the beginning we watched it together as a way to do, I guess the word for it would be "foreplay," which struck me as weird even at the time, because if you think about it he was getting turned on by watching himself in a costume.

I want to highlight the fact that at the beginning of me and Cubes being together he was a really fun guy who knew how to have fun and be thoughtful. Once I got back to my hotel room and there was this huge box as big as half a minivan and inside the box it was filled to the top with rose petals, but under the rose petals was Cubes himself, who was naked with a bow wrapped around his head, so he could be funny and touching at the same time. That was probably the best memory I have from when things were good. But if you think about it, which I didn't until after things had ended, even that whole thing was just an excuse for him to do a scheme.

One of the things that came to signify to me that it was the end of me and Cubes was once I asked if I could come along with him on his next scheme. He said no it was too dangerous but we could watch the tape of it later, which was the answer I expected. But finally I convinced him to it by first of all promising to be totally out of the way, and mainly by offering to videotape everything myself, which I made hints that that would make the experience sexier than ordinary. So he filled me in on the plan, we were going to kidnap the president of Flexcorp, which was a company that made things that were semiconductors. I asked him if this was out of revenge or was it for his own advantage in business and he said that it was just for sport, he wanted to kidnap and release many of the people who ran the biggest

companies in the world as a challenge. (Only later did I learn that it was more than for sport, because the man who we ended up kidnapping that night, Cubes had a chip implanted in his foot, and I don't know what that chip was for.)

So that night we drive hours north to the middle of California somewhere, this line of Lamborghini Jeeps, and pull over in a place that looks like suburbs. Then we get out, and first Cubes puts on a black Lone Ranger mask to cover his eyes, then all the goons put on these full-face masks with Cubes' own face on it, except that there's a Lone Ranger mask built into the mask too, so unless you really know what Cubes looks like or he was right there next to the mask, you wouldn't know that the mask was supposed to be of Cubes wearing a mask. I don't know why he would bother to have the masks made up to look like his face if the first thing he was going to do was disguise the face by painting a black mask on the mask. Whatever. Then we run up to the house and someone attaches a thing that looks like a huge calculator to the security system and it beeps off and the door clicks open, and then twenty five guys wearing Cubes masks run into the house and run off in specific directions as if they know exactly where to be going to. Cubes wants me to follow him with the camera, and since he's the last one in, I'm the last one in behind him.

Cubes never runs, he walks. He walks up the stairs and down the hall and we pass one of his goons every twenty feet or so, standing against the wall like they're protecting it personally. He walks into the bedroom and there is some middle aged woman out cold on the floor, and an older man who is in being held in place by two goons in his bed, and also they are covering his mouth so he can't yell, but you can tell that he's trying to yell. Then Cubes walks up to him and shoots him in the arm with something that looks like a gun and in a few second the man is also out cold like the woman. The two goons pick up the old man and carry him out of the room, then a few goons lift the unconscious woman back on to the bed, one of them leaves an envelop for her by leaving it on her stomach, and then all of the goons follow the first goons out the door, Cubes is the last one, and I follow him. We get back to the jeeps and all get in, the old unconscious man in the jeep with us, and as soon as we start to pull away the goons pull off their masks and start to whoop it up, cheering and yelling.

Though Cubes doesn't whoop at all in front of his goons in the jeep, he tells me later when we get back that that was the best one yet, that it's what having a billion dollars is all about, and that it's making him really hot, and it's time to watch the tape. Needless to say, that was the end of that. At least, that was the end of me and Cubes' relationship on a personal level, because after that night I left him.

I have to add here that this was the hardest decision I ever had to make, because for almost ten months I had lived with Cubes, and though it's embarrassing now and today we're basically enemies he was pretty much my whole life at the time. The relationship had taken away from my singing, and I had lost touch for almost a year with a lot of my close friends and family including Kid Boy and my parents. You can just imagine what it was like to walk out that door.

But at that moment of walking out the door I decided to right the wrongs that had befallen the people who Cubes had affected. Apart from personal feelings to inspire me, I knew quite a lot of secret things that would lead to people getting hurt or even worse. It was one way I could take control of my life back.

So the first thing I did was apologize to my parents who were at the same time relieved to have me back and angry with me for being so **stupid** about a boy (**again**). I didn't deny it to them. Then, I started what I called my Personal Recovery Road Program. I started training harder than I ever had before physically, I hired a personal trainer and a judo expert and I even got skilled in guns, which Cubes had discouraged me from, plus I naturally feel uncomfortable around them. But I hired a psychologist to get me over that, and I was fine about guns after that. I was running five miles every day and lifting a lot of weights for a girl.

Then I had a special suit made for me which in some ways was like Cubes' suit but was a design I designed myself, with no stupid **x<sup>3</sup>** logos on it. Instead it was all gray with a thin navy blue stripe running up each side. It was heavy, but first of all it was bullet-proof which would probably be useful just in case, and second I was in good enough shape now so that it wasn't too bad. Also I had a special belt made to hold weapons and devices. The next step was to start training in my suit, which I did in a gym that I paid to have made private and turned into a personal obstacle course that my judo sensei and others helped me

practice combat in. I was trying to be fully ready by the beginning of April (at this point it was March) because that was when I knew for a fact Cubes was going to perpetrate a scheme.

The truth was that I knew more about Cubes' doings than he thought I did, especially at the end when I realized how serious things were getting with him and his crazy schemes, and I took matters into my own hands and did a little poking around. April 1<sup>st</sup> was when he was going to launch his satellite, which I had intuition had something to do with the chip I saw him putting into the kidnapped CEO's foot. I knew where the satellite was being launched from (his secret cave bunker, that was easy to know because I was there and I saw it and the launching pad). So I thought sneaking in and putting a wrench in his plans before the launch was a definite positive step in the direction of my own Personal Road of Recovery.

So, I sneak on to the premises which I am familiar with, after all I had been living there for ten months. To get to the cave, you've got to go through a tunnel connected to the basement of the house, which I get to undetected, but at the point where I try to enter the electronic code to open the tunnel door the problem is that he's changed it. This is a problem I anticipated. My plan is to wait for someone who knows the code to enter it, and then to knock him out and enter, which is what happens, one of the goons inputs the code and I creep up to him using a martial-arts way of walking and chop him on the neck.

Everything is filled with activity, people walking around doing crucial things, which is to my advantage because when you're concentrating on doing a task you're not careful to watch out for a person sneaking into the base and blowing up the satellite. What I need to do is get close enough to the satellite to put my self-adhesive C4 charge on it which will take care of that and then some, but also get clear enough away from the blast so as to not get injured myself. Luckily the whole room is filled with objects that can hide my location, from computer hardware ten feet tall to I guess you'd call them container pods which contain either clones or robot clones of people I recognize, such as Cubes himself and the CEO that was kidnapped that time, although it's possible they were the real people in there, I couldn't tell the difference and I didn't take time to investigate.

So as I'm creeping from one behind one pod to behind another pod, I'm spotted by one of the goons, he says Hey, you can't be in here, but before he has time to alert anyone else I grab my tazerball

gun from my belt and shoot him, taking care of him. But the commotion alerts another goon, who grabs me from behind without me anticipating, and we struggle. He's stronger, but I know how to use this position to my advantage by judo, and I kick his knees out and in a matter of seconds I've got the advantage as I inject a sleeping serum into his blood with an injection gun, and then say Night Night and pat his head and move on to behind the next pod.

I creep over to the satellite and attach the C4, which means that now I've got one minute to get out of there. My tactic is to create a diversion, which is done by exploding a flash bomb, which is basically just a big flash that makes the room smoky. I throw it to the other side of the cave, away from where I want to be escaping out of, and it does just what it's supposed to, all the goons start yelling and moving extra fast towards different things. Just then, a voice I recognize (Cubes') says, So, couldn't get enough Cubes, and when I spin around to face him he knocks me down with a hit to the face. I flip back up athletically which my skills must be surprising him because for a second he looks confused, with a face of what happened to you?

I don't waste that opportunity to strike, which I do with judo moves to his middle and head. He doesn't go down but it's clear I'm having the upper hand by using my training to my advantage. Another aspect of my suit is that it has metal wrist guards which are supposed to hold my communication devices, but which I use to bash his face. He drops to one knee and looks up at me and laughs and asks me if he thinks that he's about to let some ex-girlfriend of his come in and ruin his whole plan at the last minute, and I say to that Looks like nobody asked you and I kick his head and send him to the ground.

I should say that at this point we are probably fifteen feet from the satellite with the C4 on it and I'm not sure how much time has run down on the timer, so I run as fast as I can away from it, knocking goons out of the way with my shoulder, and when I reach a certain point I dive, which is the moment that the bomb explodes.

I'm pretty sure the blast got Cubes, because it was so strong it knocked my wind out, and if it wasn't for my suit I would have been in a lot worse shape than I ended up as. After the blast goons were scattered all over the floor dead or unconscious, and I looked for Cubes' body but it was nowhere to be found.

After that I alerted the police about the events, and Cubes' operation was put to a stop, though Cubes was never found with certainty.

For a while after that I used my costume and my skills to foil certain crimes which I had information were going to go down, including drug deals and kidnapping cases, which I was largely successful at because of the element of surprise, nobody expects there to be a crime fighting judo girl at the scene, and also because I got even better at doing it with practice. Saving those kidnapping victims is one of the things also that I am most proud of in my life outside of music along with the Scholarship Fund.

I look at my experiences as living proof that personal achievement is a matter of effort and self-belief. Personal faith and self-determination can accomplish any goal. It has proven true again and again in my life in singing and in my life helping people.



And in other areas! I don't want to give off the impression though that my life is totally bounded by singing on one side and my actions for the public good on the other. I like to do things regular people do all the time, that is a big part of my life. Movies! I love to go to movies, I'll see anything with Jude Law in it, I can't even describe him. Sometimes I go out to restaurants or clubs, and I love to be in malls for the shopping. I'm no different from any American, I'm just the product of a little aspiring in addition to it.

But the biggest joy in my life now has got to be my little baby girl Brianna, my beauty baby girl. She's already 14 months old, and a day doesn't go by that she's not a source of inspiration. Being a single mother all comes back to the same philosophy of believing in yourself too, because even though right now I think I've found a pretty special man (if you read the Tabloids, you know who it is, Jakob Dylan) I know that in the end it all comes down to me, the choices I'm going to make, believing that with my abilities, I'm capable of any success.