

The Shocking Nearly True Tale of the  
Jewish Nazi Who Invented Sea-Monkeys

A new play

by

Michael David



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#### *THE SETTING*

A bare stage, save for a variety of sizes of posters that line the walls.

The posters are ads from the back page of 1960's comic books, ads for Amazing Finger Chopper, Crazy Crabs, X-Ray Specs, Hot Pepper Gum, Polaris Nuclear Subs, Amazing Hair-Raising Monsters and a Secret Spy Scope, among other products marketed to preteens and teens.

The comic book ads open to reveal set pieces, sometimes small to expose a single person, sometimes large enough to reveal an area that fills the stage.

Scenes move quickly, flowing one into the other, without pause, and never a full blackout. The primary transformation of the stage is accomplished through lighting, specific and aggressive.

#### *THE CHARACTERS*

HAROLD VON BRAUNHUT, an inventor

YOUNG HAROLD, eleven-year-old Harold

JOSEPH DUNNINGER, magician, illusionist and mentalist

YOUNG YOLANDA, 1960's porn actress

DAVE, a Sea-Monkey

AQUARIUS, a Sea-Monkey

BILL, a Sea-Monkey

ANTHONY D'AGOSTINO, a marine biologist

#### *THE OTHER CHARACTERS*

MAMA BRAUNHUT, Harold's mother, played by the actor who plays Aquarius

WENDY, Young Harold's childhood friend, played by the actor who plays Young Yolanda

PAPA BRAUNHUT, Harold's father, played by the actor who plays Bill

MR BAXTER, pet shop proprietor, played by the actor who plays Bill

STAGEHAND, Dunninger's assistant, played by the actor who plays Bill

BLACK ANT, from Uncle Milton Ant Farm, played by the actor who plays Dave

ARTHUR "SPUD" MELIN, co-founder of Wham-O, played by the actor who plays Joe Dunninger

RICHARD KNERR, co-founder of Wham-O, played by the actor playing Dave

RACHEL, a bartender, played by the actor playing Aquarius

RICHARD BUTLER, founder of Aryan Nations, played by the actor who plays Anthony D'Agostino  
JUDGE, played by the actor who plays Dave "THE PROFESSOR" (played by Howie Mandel), a gentle, German mad scientist  
HOWIE MANDEL, creator of "The Amazing Live Sea-Monkeys" TV show, played by the actor who plays Joe Dunninger  
EUGENE MEYER, a *Washington Post* reporter, played by the actor playing Bill  
OLDER YOLANDA, played by the actor who plays Aquarius  
GEORGE ATAMIAN, vice president of ExploraToy, played by the actor who plays Anthony D'Agostino  
OTHER MAN, KKK member, played by the actor who plays Harold KLANSMEN (5), played by the actors playing Young Harold, Dunninger, Young Yolanda, Dave and Aquarius

#### *THE PUNCTUATION*

Two slash marks -- // -- indicate overlapping text.

#### *A DISCLAIMER*

The character of Harold and most others who populate this play are based on actual lives found in numerous biographies and historical documents. But the words of these characters are mostly works of fancy; poetic license has been taken.

All men kill the thing they hate.  
Unless, of course, it kills them first.

— James Thurber

ACT I

(YOUNG HAROLD, dressed as a preteen boy in the late 1930s, enters and stands center)

YOUNG HAROLD

In 1958, that's twenty years from now, a man named Harold von Braunhut walks into a pet store, sees a bucket of tiny brine shrimp being used as fish food and markets those shrimp to children via mail order by giving them human faces. Harold makes millions of dollars, funnels that money into an illegal gun-running operation, is outed as a white supremacist who supports the Ku Klux Klan, funds the Aryan Nations, says Hitler was an okay guy, and inspires a Saturday morning TV show starring Howie Mandel.

(pause)

Then, things got weird.

MAMA BRAUNHUT (O.S.)

(with a strong Yiddish dialect)

Harold, come inside! Your father soon home will be.

YOUNG HAROLD

Coming, Mama!

(YOUNG HAROLD starts offstage but is stopped by something he sees on the ground. He picks it up. It is an old pair of sunglasses.

YOUNG HAROLD puts on the glasses. He looks around. He looks at the sun.

WENDY, 11, also dressed for the late 1930s, skips on. She spots YOUNG HAROLD and stops.

She watches him examining his sunglasses)

WENDY

What 'cha got there?

YOUNG HAROLD

My new glasses.

WENDY

They're not yours.

YOUNG HAROLD

Sure they are.

WENDY

Prove it.

(YOUNG HAROLD thinks about this a moment)

YOUNG HAROLD

They're special glasses. And only I know how to make 'em work.

WENDY

Special how?

YOUNG HAROLD

Well, they give me x-ray vision.

WENDY

("that's dumb")

Nu-huh.

YOUNG HAROLD

They do so. With these glasses, I can look through anything.

WENDY

Prove it.

YOUNG HAROLD

Well, I can see that you're wearing pink and white underwear.

WENDY

That's a lie! Take it back!

YOUNG HAROLD

Can't take it back. It's true!

WENDY

It is not! You're a liar, Harold Braunhut. You're a dirty, lying Jew!

(She runs off.

YOUNG HAROLD takes off the glasses, examines them a moment, then drops them and crushes the glasses underfoot.

A large poster comic book ad opens to reveal the entrance of a pet shop. Aquariums and pet accessories line the shelves.

YOUNG HAROLD stands to the side, wiping his eyes)

YOUNG HAROLD

That was not ...

(collecting himself)

Harold von Braunhut is, uh, headed home to his two-room flat in the Bronx, when he just happens to wander into a pet shop.

(HAROLD, 34, enters the pet shop and stops short at the sight of one of the tanks)

HAROLD

What are *these*!?

(The poster closes, taking with it HAROLD and the pet shop)

YOUNG HAROLD

Harold doesn't know it at the time, but he has just stumbled upon a near infinitesimal life form that will forever change his life.

(Two large posters open to reveal HAROLD'S apartment. It is floor to ceiling with contraptions and gadgets of various kinds.

HAROLD enters through a door in the apartment, carrying a large, water-filled goldfish bowl and a small brown bag.

He sets the bowl on a table that also holds an 'Uncle Milton Ant Farm' and sits to look into the bowl)

YOUNG HAROLD (Continued)

"Hey, guys!" Harold says. "Welcome to your new home!"

HAROLD

(to the bowl)

I hope youse journey wasn't too stressful. But it looks like you're settling in. Now, ya just take it easy and rest. And when you're ready, I'll introduce ya to your new neighbors.

(peering into the Ant Farm)

And youse guys play nice.

(HAROLD takes in both containers)

HAROLD (Continued)

Bee-YOO-dee-full.

YOUNG HAROLD

"Bee-YOO-dee-full," says Harold.

(The two large posters close and HAROLD disappears.)

(As this happens, two other posters open to reveal YOUNG HAROLD'S bedroom. YOUNG HAROLD throws himself onto the bed.

MAMA BRAUNHUT'S Yiddish voice is heard offstage)

MAMA BRAUNHUT (O.S.)  
Harold?! Meyn zun! For why are you crying?

YOUNG HAROLD  
(into his pillow)  
Go away!

(MAMA BRAUNHUT, 32, enters)

MAMA BRAUNHUT  
What has happened? Did you fall down?

YOUNG HAROLD  
No.

MAMA BRAUNHUT  
Then why you cry?

YOUNG HAROLD  
You wouldn't understand. You never do.

MAMA BRAUNHUT  
(sitting on the bed)  
Of course, I understand, Harold. You tell mama what happened.

(HAROLD turns to her with a tear-streaked face)

YOUNG HAROLD  
It's the same as always. The other boys hate me.

MAMA BRAUNHUT  
Hate my *libling*?! Impossible. Why they should hate you?

(HAROLD stares at his mother a long moment)

MAMA BRAUNHUT (Continued)  
Impossible.

YOUNG HAROLD  
Mama!

MAMA BRAUNHUT  
Such awful boys not friends for you.

YOUNG HAROLD

Then I have no friends.

(Silence)

MAMA BRAUNHUT

Harold Nathan Braunhut, you come downstairs. // I make you--

YOUNG HAROLD

Please go.

MAMA BRAUNHUT

(pleading)

Harold ...

YOUNG HAROLD

JUST GO!

(pause, then gentler)

I'll be down in a little bit.

(MAMA BRAUNHUT stands and goes.

A moment, then HAROLD enters, goes to the chair at the window and sits. He looks down to the street below.

Some time passes, then HAROLD opens the window. The sounds of boys playing kick the can wafts in.

Another large poster opens, revealing a desk, file cabinet and two chairs.

Sitting in one of the chairs is a 50ish JOSEPH DUNNINGER. He is doing a Knuckle Roll by rolling a coin across his fingers.

HAROLD enters)

HAROLD

(heading to the desk)

Sorry to--

(HAROLD and DUNNINGER freeze)

YOUNG HAROLD

After racing motorcycles under the name The Green Hornet, Harold started managing the acts of magicians, mentalists and stunt performers. One of the *first* acts Harold managed was that of Joseph Dunninger, a magician and mentalist.

(HAROLD and DUNNINGER unfreeze)

HAROLD

--keep ya waiting, Joe.

DUNNINGER

Don't apologize, Harold. *I'm* the one who dropped in on you.

(HAROLD sits)

DUNNINGER (Continued)

What's new in the funny papers business?

HAROLD

I've got seven products now on sale on the back page of fifty-four comic books and *Boys' Life*.

DUNNINGER

My grandson ordered your *Crazy Crabs*. Really just a Hermit Crab, ain't it?

HAROLD

Well, yeah!

(laughs)

How's he like it?

DUNNINGER

It arrived dead. Deader than dead.

HAROLD

Oh. Sorry about that.

(The office disappears with HAROLD and DUNNINGER as a living room set opens.

YOUNG HAROLD, 13, puts on a yarmulke, stands centerstage and speaks to someone unseen)

YOUNG HAROLD

(with little enthusiasm)

Welcome, all, to my bar mitzvah celebration. Before I start, the banquet hall manager has asked me to inform you that for health and safety reasons, none of you should get up on top of the tables during my standing ovation.

(holds for laughter)

There are two very special people to thank without whom I wouldn't be here today. No, I don't mean the caterer and Bernie's Tux Shop, but of course the world's best number one mama and papa.

(holds for applause)

Today I am a man. Now that I *am* a man, mama and papa, I think there are a few things we need to discuss. I have a list; you might need a pen and paper.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)  
(with a Yiddish accent)  
It's not funny.

YOUNG HAROLD  
I don't want it to be funny.

MAN'S VOICE  
Well, congratulations. Keep going.

YOUNG HAROLD  
Now that I am a man: Papa, shall we negotiate a sensible allowance?

Now that I am a man: Mama, could you stop spitting in a handkerchief and wiping me down every time you see me?

MAN'S VOICE  
NOT. FUNNY.

YOUNG HAROLD  
(exasperated)  
What am I doing wrong?

(Papa Braunhut, 35, enters the room.  
He wears a business suit)

PAPA BRAUNHUT  
It's your delivery. Don't blame the material.

YOUNG HAROLD  
I wasn't.

PAPA BRAUNHUT  
Because what I've written is gold.

YOUNG HAROLD  
I know.

PAPA BRAUNHUT  
Just relax. You're too tense.

YOUNG HAROLD  
I'll try.

PAPA BRAUNHUT  
Start again.

(PAPA BRAUNHUT is standing just a few feet from YOUNG HAROLD)

YOUNG HAROLD  
Is that where you're going to be?

PAPA BRAUNHUT  
What's wrong?

YOUNG HAROLD

You're a little close.

PAPA BRAUNHUT

People will be close.

YOUNG HAROLD

(pause)

But not you, right?

(Silence.

Papa Braunhut moves out of view)

PAPA BRAUNHUT (O.S.)

How's this?

YOUNG HAROLD

That's fine.

(pause)

Welcome, all, to my bar mitzvah celebration.

(The Braunhut living room disappears as HAROLD'S apartment becomes visible. YOUNG HAROLD remains onstage.

HAROLD is staring at the goldfish bowl.

YOUNG HAROLD removes the yarmulke)

YOUNG HAROLD (Continued)

Harold stared at his goldfish bowl for hours on end, straining his eyes to spot even a few of the elusive brine shrimp. And that's when he had a brilliant idea ... Invisible Goldfish!

(A comic book ad poster opens to reveal an ad for "Invisible Goldfish")

YOUNG HAROLD (Continued)

A colorful boxed set came with a small fishbowl, artificial seaweed, gravel substrate, a "Do Not Feed" sign and, of course, your very own "Invisible Goldfish." There was also a one hundred percent guarantee that the buyer would never see the fish. Harold sold out in one week.

(The "Invisible Goldfish ad closes)

YOUNG HAROLD (Continued)

Then again.

("Goldfish" ad spins)

YOUNG HAROLD (Continued)

And again.

(And again)

YOUNG HAROLD (Continued)

He sold out of the Invisible Goldfish seventeen times.

("Goldfish" ad spins 17 times)

YOUNG HAROLD (Continued)

Harold wasn't able to keep them in stock. Kids just couldn't get enough of the nonexistent Carassius auratus.

(The "Invisible Goldfish" ad stops spinning)

YOUNG HAROLD (Continued)

But the success with Invisible Goldfish made Harold even more frustrated in his lack of success with the brine shrimp.

(YOUNG HAROLD starts to exit)

HAROLD

(looking into the goldfish bowl)

I don't understand it.

(YOUNG HAROLD stops, as if he was personally addressed)

HAROLD (Continued)

I'm not overfeeding, but I can't keep these guys from dying on me. Down to three -- no, four -- brine shrimp.

YOUNG HAROLD

I guess they don't make very satisfying pets.

HAROLD

I wish I could just snap my fingers and they could tell me what I'm doing wrong.

(A long moment, then HAROLD'S apartment is gone. HAROLD goes with it.

A jerry-rigged spotlight picks up YOUNG HAROLD, 16, in an ill-fitting tuxedo and top hat.

Before him is a small black collapsible table; a homemade sign on the front says, "The Amazing Mr. Telepo" and on top sits a cracked brandy snifter)

YOUNG HAROLD

Hello! I am the Amazing Mr. Telepo! Now, I'm going to start by taking this handkerchief ...

YOUNG HAROLD (Continued)

... and push it into my fist.

(YOUNG HAROLD pushes the handkerchief into the fist of his left hand)

YOUNG HAROLD (Continued)

I'm then going to snap my fingers and look!

(He snaps his fingers with his right hand then opens his left, revealing an egg)

YOUNG HAROLD (Continued)

It's turned into an egg!

(YOUNG HAROLD displays the egg with his right hand. He then produces the handkerchief from a pocket with his left)

YOUNG HAROLD (Continued)

Now, I thought it would be fun // to teach you--

MAMA BRAUNHUT (O.S.)

Harold! Come now upstairs.

YOUNG HAROLD

In a minute, mama!

MAMA BRAUNHUT (O.S.)

Lunch is ready! Why you are again in that dirty basement?

YOUNG HAROLD

Give me two minutes!

(focusing again on his unseen audience)

Where was I? Yes. I thought it would be fun to teach you this trick. If I turn the egg around ...

(He does, revealing a round hole in the egg)

YOUNG HAROLD (Continued)

... that's where I've hidden the handkerchief.

(YOUNG HAROLD removes the red handkerchief from the egg)

YOUNG HAROLD (Continued)

So here's how it's done.

(MORE)