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John O'Hurley

FROM HIS ICONIC ROLE ON "SEINFELD" TO HOSTING
THE NATIONAL DOG SHOW AND MUCH MORE, THE
TALENTED ACTOR, WRITER AND SINGER
CONTINUES TO ENTERTAIN

BILL LYON
ON NBA MVP
STEPH CURRY

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with AMY FADOO, MARSHALL HARRIS
and JEN DANIELS of CSN PHILLY



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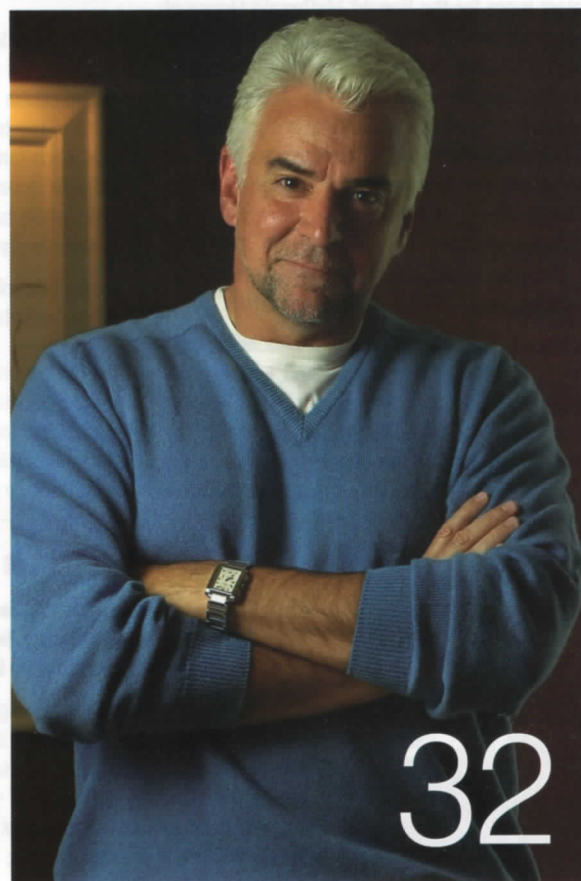


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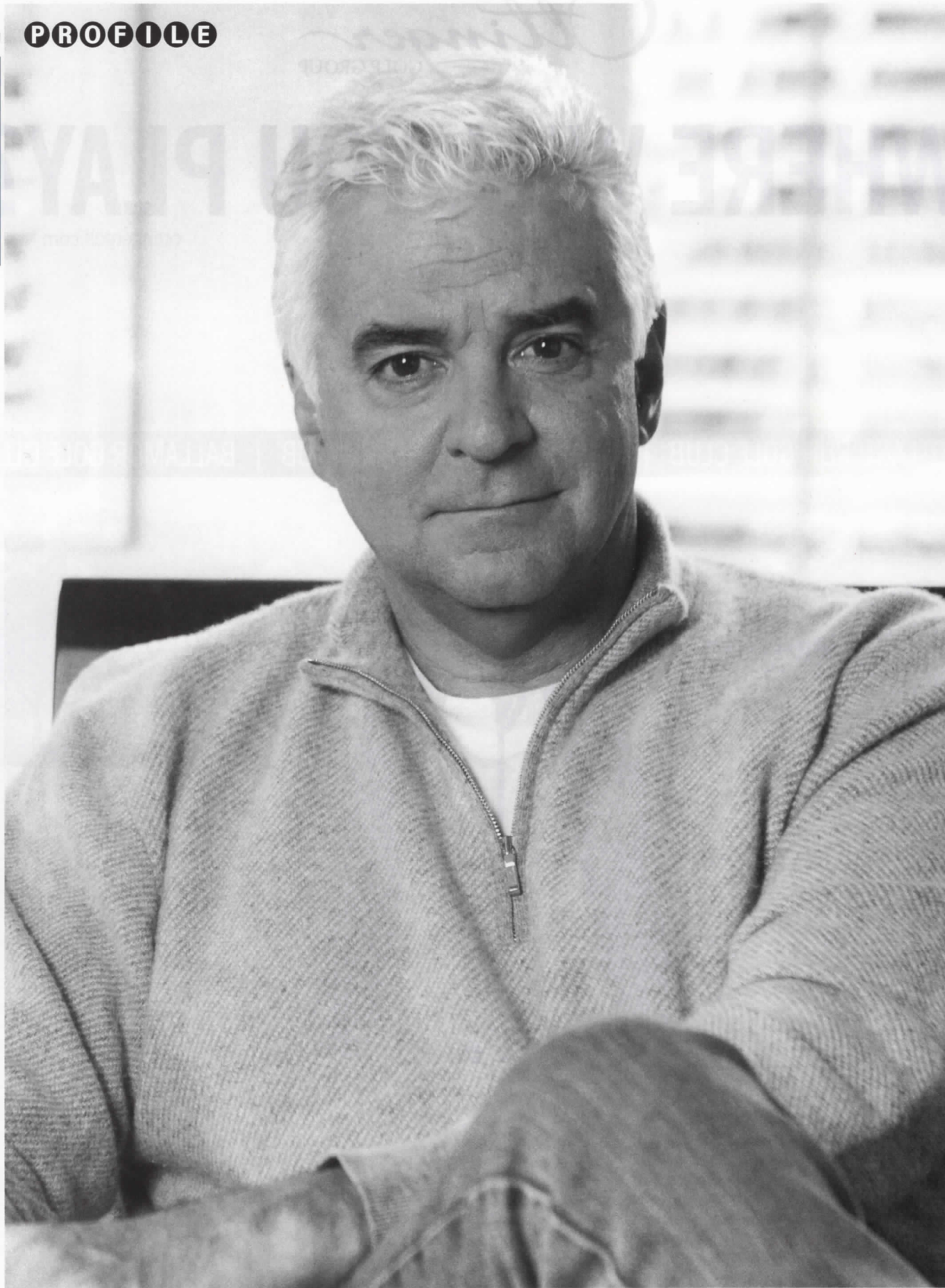
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PROFILE



“The World’s Seventh Most Interesting Man”

John O’Hurley doesn’t sit still very often, but when he does, he has an extraordinary life to reflect on.

BY KURT SMITH

HE FIRST TIME

John O’Hurley read a *Seinfeld* script, he instantly saw the genius of the Show About Nothing, even if he didn’t consider it genius at the time.

O’Hurley had to be nudged to play off-the-reservation catalogue owner J. Peterman, a role that, given his own eccentric demeanor and storytelling ability, he seemed born to play. When he gave in and read the script, he couldn’t believe that *Seinfeld* was the number one show on TV because the show didn’t read funny.

“It was the un-funniest show to read,” the portrayer of the now iconic character remembers. “There’s no setup. If I showed you, say, a *Golden Girls* script, you can see, setup setup setup, punchline, setup setup setup, punchline. Generations of script writers lived off of that form.

“Then *Seinfeld* came in. It grew out of standup comedy, observational humor. It was basically the notion of being in an elevator, that is New York, the sense of small spaces and rudeness and everything is always on edge, relationships or whatever. It was all about conversation, because everybody talks in New York. That’s why Peterman existed, because he was not only about language, he was about the long form. The writers got to write monologues every week, rather than writing one or two lines for each character.”

If you’ve ever looked at a J. Peterman catalogue (yes, J. Peterman is a real person), you can see why it appealed to sitcom writers whose strength was dialogue. A typical en-

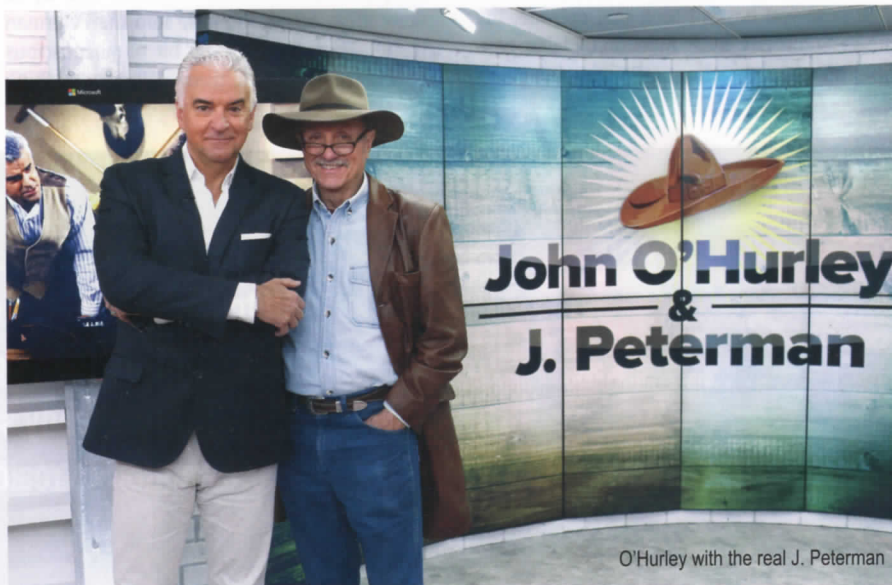
try reads like this one, for the “Grace Under Pressure” cotton T-shirt: “MI6 operatives sat at noirish watering holes with Gestapo and Portuguese secret police, all waiting for the other to reveal the whereabouts of the Nazis’ cache of gold or an allied shipping lane. Wealthy refugees negotiated the sale of their art collections. Prostitutes doubled as informants. You’ve heard of Casino Royale? That’s this place.”

That’s the real J. Peterman. It was as if the character’s lines wrote themselves.

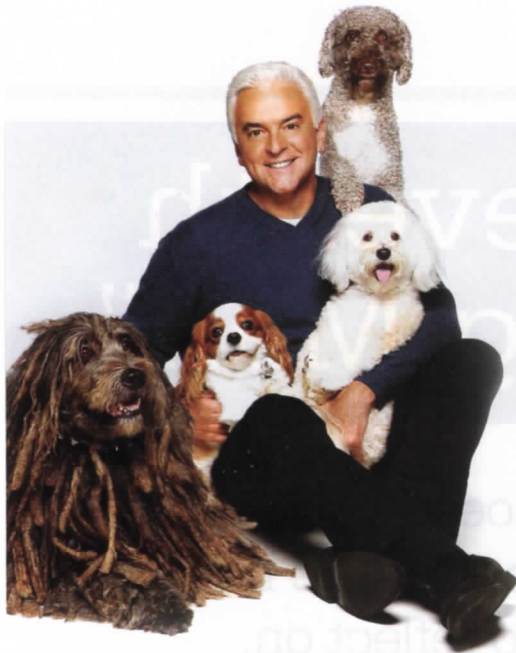
“They wanted him to sound the way the catalogue was written,” O’Hurley recalls. “They didn’t even have the full script written,

because it was the most disorganized show on television. So all they had was the catalogue and a couple of lines. I’m going through this and thinking, ‘OK, this is 40s radio drama and bad Charles Kuralt.’ So it had this sort of Centurion poet standing on a cliff type of feel about everything. Even a walk to the men’s room was an adventure. (*imitating Peterman voice*) ‘I have no idea what I’m going to find serving a basic desire!’”

The J. Peterman catalogue not only still exists, it’s partly owned by O’Hurley now. The two men have walked on Madison Avenue together and heard New Yorkers shout “Peter-



O'Hurley with the real J. Peterman



O'Hurley spends time in the Philadelphia area each year, hosting the National Dog Show "It is the happiest day of the year. It's as simple as that."

man breaks down and runs off to Burma, leaving the company operations in Elaine's hands.

The Urban Sombrero—a hat that combines "the spirit of Old Mexico with a little big-city panache"—turns out to be a colossal flop, to the point where Elaine overhears men on the subway talk about how the Urban Sombrero ruined their lives. In the show, Peterman reacts to the idea with similar distress, muttering "the horror...the horror."

Indeed, if you were working for a clothing firm and heard someone suggest the idea of an Urban Sombrero, you might imagine you were in a *Seinfeld* episode. It took 20 years of cajoling from the fictional Peterman to persuade the actual Peterman to make this essential "sky piece" available.

What caused the eventual change of heart?

"I think he finally realized that at some point he was going to have to embrace the *Seinfeld* audience of 80+ million and try to draw them across the aisle into the Peterman world. There was a little bit of unconscious reluctance to accept them. When you think

about it, I've basically stolen his identity; I've become his company. All of a sudden this poor man has nothing left; he's lost his identity. He never understood, I don't think, the *Seinfeld* phenomenon."

Pop culture reverence aside, for us Philly area folks, O'Hurley points out the advantages of the Urban Sombrero as an ideal Jersey shore accessory.

"It's the absolute answer to the SPF problem. When you can't decide between 15, 30, 60 or 70 and you go, oh my God, what do I choose? The Urban Sombrero. And not only that, it says, I think I'm gonna take a nap. Why not do it with a little bit of a panache?"

O'Hurley spends time in the Philadelphia area each year, hosting the National Dog Show in Oaks that has become almost as much of a Thanksgiving Day tradition as the Macy's parade. The National Dog Show was created way back in 1879 by the Kennel Club of Philadelphia; O'Hurley has been hosting it since 2002.

man!" at O'Hurley, ignoring the in-the-flesh Peterman.

One of the catalogue's newest offerings is the Urban Sombrero, in an ongoing and humorous Kickstarter campaign that has raised \$96,000 as of this writing.

In case you haven't seen that episode, the Urban Sombrero is an invention Elaine conjures up when the chronically unstable Peter-



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Like the Peterman character, it seemed an obvious choice to make O'Hurley the emcee of the show. Coupled with his game show host experience (*To Tell the Truth* in 2000, and *Family Feud* from 2006 to 2010), he has an exceptionally thoughtful appreciation for canines. He's authored three books about dogs and their impact on our lives: *It's Okay To Miss The Bed On The First Jump* is a *New York Times* bestseller, and "The Perfect Dog," a children's poem, has been adapted into a children's musical that is now part of National Dog Show Week.

"If you have a dog in the room," O'Hurley relates, "everyone comes and pets the dog. If there's a dog in an elevator, everyone is looking at the dog. Whatever the natural behavior of the dog is, everyone is going, awww. They calm us down; they round the edges in our lives. They take the brittleness out of things. That's what dogs do."

"If you're around 2,000 of them, they don't care if they win. Everybody else seems to be happy so they're happy. And they're appreciated, and they know it, and there's a sense of energy that they know that something important is going on. All of those things lead to just a great environment for everybody."

"It is the happiest day of the year. It's as simple as that."

The well-traveled host not only says nothing

"I'm very, very lucky. I've been in the right place at the right time, but all of those things I did, I did because my imagination said I'm supposed to do this."

but nice things about visiting Philadelphia, he can do so without even dropping the name of an iconic sandwich shop.

"My favorite thing about Philly is the authenticity of the history there. The actual documents, walking around and actually being in arm's reach from some of the most important legislation that was ever done in this country, the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence."

"I did the musical *1776* many times, and I think that every time I pass that building, that they all stood in and sat in, and how sweaty that must have been and how miserable they must have been, and yet to put their names on any one of those documents was basically signing a lynching mob. I think of that every time I pass that building.... My goodness, the courage they had to do what they did."

"On top of that, I love walking up and down the streets and seeing the preservation of the areas. I love staying in some of the little boutique hotels. We love Oaks too, mostly because my wife refers to Neiman Marcus as the moth-

ership out there in the King of Prussia Mall, which is the best place in the world to shop."

You don't have to be a *Seinfeld* fan or a National Dog Show viewer to have seen John O'Hurley's visage frequently.

He is a theater star who has played King Arthur in *Monty Python's Spam-A-Lot* and currently still plays Billy Flynn in the long running musical *Chicago*. On stage, he possesses a fine singing voice. Tom Williams of *Chicago Critic* opined it best: "John O'Hurley brings a big voice and a commanding presence."

He is a self-taught classical pianist who has released several acclaimed CDs, and is now starring in his own creation called *A Man With Standards*. "It's my one-man show of the music of the period when I grew up, a period of time when men had standards. It's basically piano, and I expanded it all the way up to a full orchestra. It's fun. I have all these melodies in my head, I've got to get rid of them somehow. It's a dangerous place up there."

He has ballroom dancing skills too; he made

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it to the finals of the first season of *Dancing With The Stars*, and won a dance-off following a hotly disputed (to say the least) loss in the original final.

And he was probably the most elegant host of *Family Feud* in the history of the show.

"I'd worked with them on a show previous called *To Tell The Truth*. You remember, will the real so-and-so please stand up? They were looking for a new host for *Family Feud* and I said yes. It's a different style of hosting; with *To Tell The Truth* I sat down, I had a nice little thing to read with a story, panelists, that type of stuff. With *Family Feud*, there's no script; you are literally out there hoping the net will appear.

"That was when I began what I call the prayer. I say God, let me be surprised. That's all I say, and that's what I say before I go on stage. It relaxes me to say that I'm not in control of this thing, so I can go out and relax. It was like hosting a cocktail party; we really cared about the fact that all these people came to your party."

Last but not at all least, he's the father of the first ever third-grader vice president of his school. According to O'Hurley, at the age of nine, his son had already mastered the art of persuading people to eschew politics as usual...which at the school meant voting for a sixth-grader...and won in a landslide.

On his Twitter account, John O'Hurley

The Peterman Monologues

For many years, the *Seinfeld* audience didn't get to see much of J. Peterman at his maniacal finest: delivering a lengthy monologue.

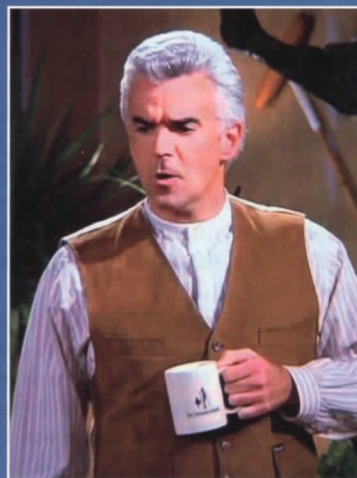
"Every show was ten minutes too long," O'Hurley says. "The first thing to go, we'll cut the Peterman monologue. These things that I'd spend two and half hours on." O'Hurley's all-time favorite was in an episode where he incorrectly suspects that Elaine might be having a fling with a co-worker, and he encourages them with tickets to a circus. He still remembers the monologue verbatim:

"Don't worry, Elaine. I too am no stranger to love on the clock. As a young man, my father apprenticed me to a honey factory in Belize. The chief beekeeper was this horrible hag of a woman with nulled teeth and a giant wart that she called a nose. She was not attractive, even by backwoods standards. But love is truly blind, Elaine, and as the days went on, working closer and closer together, that sweet smell of honey in the air, I knew I had to have that horrible creature. And I did. So you and Bob have a good time tonight."

It may be an exception to the show's script not reading funny, but that classic, sadly, was also cut from the show. O'Hurley says you can watch some of the monologues on the *Seinfeld* DVDs.

"They put a good many of them back in because they're funny. I actually hosted the presentation of the DVDs. They decided when I talked about that, oh we gotta go back and add that.

"It was just lunatic stuff."



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proclaims himself to be the World's 7th Most Interesting Man. When asked who #1-6 are, his answer is no one specific. Just that there are probably only six people in the world having a better day than he is.

It's a humorous worldview of a good-natured optimist whose attitude has taken him far. But truthfully, it's a challenge to think of many people who have led more interesting lives. Not many of us have been a recurring character in the most popular sitcom in history, hosted national game shows, emceed a National Dog Show, made it to the finals of *Dancing With The Stars*, written three books, played leads in traveling hit musicals and released several CDs of classical piano music.

Someone hosting a success seminar could paraphrase that old cliché: You have the same 24 hours as John O'Hurley. Or they could attend one of O'Hurley's own motivational speeches; he does that too. He calls his presentation *The Peterman Guide to Living an Extraordinary Life*.

"I wake up every day with this goal: I have to find a way to stay relevant every single day of my life. And what I live by is this premise, and this is what I speak about: You have two choices in life. You can have an ordinary life, or you can have an extraordinary life, and it has nothing to do with power or money; it has everything to do with the power of your choices.

"God speaks through imagination. He puts pictures in your mind of what you're supposed to be doing. Your rational mind knows everything you're afraid of, and it has an agenda, but your imagination? No agenda. It only knows the best of what you are capable of, and it always pushes you forward to the next thing you're supposed to be doing.

"I'll talk to hedge fund guys on Wall Street, two thousand people in the room, and every one of them is taking notes, and I love that. And I say, if you do not believe that what you imagine has value, what I would ask you to do right now is put your pencils down, get up out of your chair, drop to the floor, curl yourself in a little fetal ball and wait there for the sweet embrace of death. Because you will not improve your life one iota unless you value what you *imagine*, not what you know.

"And everyone picks up their pencils and starts writing again."

"I'm very, very lucky. I've been in the right place at the right time, but all of those things I did, I did because my imagination said I'm supposed to do this."

With all respect to Jonathan Goldsmith, it's a shame that O'Hurley didn't star in the Most Interesting Man In The World spots. The Dos Equis people would have had a lot to work with:

"He was once asked to star on *Seinfeld*...and proclaimed the script unfunny." ■



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