

SCHWARZKOPF & SCHWARZKOPF

RAY COKES

MY MOST WANTED LIFE

ON-SCREEN, OFF-SCREEN AND IN-BETWEEN
THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY

ENGLISH
VERSION

Special Edition:
Hand-signed by
Ray Cokes!

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*To my angel Lily,
without whose guiding light
and endless love my story would
not have reached these pages.*

Intro

A Personal Message to My Mother and Father

Dear Mum and Dad,

The time has come to publish the story of my life. If I wait any longer, I won't be able to remember anything at all. So, to avoid any embarrassment, shock and the possible excommunication of your eldest son, please put your curiosity to one side now, along with this book. There are just too many naughty things mentioned (some of them illegal), and it may be too much for you to bear. Especially for you, Mum. I worry that you won't understand – or worse, that the image you have of your (lovely) son may be tainted forever. This is also a risk that I am taking with my readers – they too might disown me after my various revelations – but I won't feel as guilty towards them as I will to you, my parents. Anyway, most people reading this tome may well not be surprised by many of my wilder antics and may even expect it of me.

So, Mum, Dad – please close the cover now, ask my brother and sisters to quote you the family-friendly passages and donate this book to one of your beloved high street charity shops.

Thank you. I will phone on the weekend, as I always do.

*Lots of love
Ray(mond) xxxx*

P.S. Dad, you're still here, I guess? I knew I couldn't dissuade you that easily, but that's ok as you're more worldly than Mum and definitely not as easily shocked. Not that she is judgmental (she is) or old-fashioned (she is), it's just that I have had a previous encounter with Mum's opinions on the modern world, and it told me all I need to know about her probable reactions to this book.

It happened when I was about 35. Mum was settled on her flowery patterned sofa watching her favourite local news show on TV, and, as so often happens on these occasions, she asked me to join her on the couch with the cup of tea she had made me from an already used tea bag. ("You have to save money, Raymond, there's plenty of tea in those bags for at least three cups!")

During these broadcasts, she always makes me laugh with her fawning admiration for the (dodgy) newsreader and her disdain for his (invariably much more) capable female co-host. Once the show is over, Mum usually utters the same wistful comment, "Oh, Raymond – can't you get a job reading the news?"

To which I invariably reply, "No, Mum, I'm too young/old/unknown," depending on how I'm feeling, "and I'm definitely not serious enough to be a news anchor."

This happens almost every time we watch a show on British TV together and, despite my protests, she still doesn't really understand why I don't want to return to England to be a game show host/newsreader or even a full-time chef in a local restaurant. ("Television won't always be there, you know, Raymond, you should think of getting a proper career.")

As you may recall, for many years Mum didn't even believe I was a TV presenter. She'd told me that, despite spending all day every day for a week watching the box, she had not seen one show with me as the host and was convinced that I was, in fact, lying to her and actually on the dole claiming welfare. I explained to her that she couldn't see me because I was on satellite television and she didn't have a satellite dish or cable. She only really understood when we finally got the satellite dish installed at your house and she could watch me on MTV. Quite surprisingly, I remember her

not being impressed at all – “Do you have to pull those silly faces all the time, Raymond? It’s just so silly. And what terrible music you play, can’t you show a Cliff Richard video?!”

Anyway, back to the newsreel. On this particular occasion, there had been an item on the tragic death of a teenage female due to Ecstasy – in reality, due to the fact that she had drunk too much water during the e trip and had flooded her brain – the main thrust of the story being that drugs are dangerous, evil and that they kill our children.

Mum was immediately back on her soapbox.

“Oh, it’s so awful, Raymond, why do these youngsters do it? Everyone who takes drugs should be sent to prison, and everyone who sells them should be taken out and shot!”

It’s strange how many times I had heard that particular expression from older people – “they should be taken out and shot” – it seems to be your generation’s remedy for most of society’s ills.

No matter, back to Mum and her rant. Usually during these outbursts, I would just nod and pretend to agree, a safer, easier approach than trying to convince your parents of something they clearly can’t understand and don’t really want to understand. This time however, I had decided to speak out and challenge her opinions.

“Mum, you can’t just believe everything they say on the news,”

I bravely offered, “drugs aren’t that bad, you know, millions of people take them every weekend, and they don’t die. More people die every year from drinking and smoking than they do of illegal drugs.”

“Really, Raymond, are you sure?”

“Yes Mum, alcohol and cigarettes are drugs too, you know; just because you can buy them in the shops doesn’t mean they are good – it simply means that they are legal, you see what I mean?”

“Oh yes, I suppose you have a point there,” she replied and continued, “but why are those drugs ok and the others not, then?”

“Because the government have decided to make them illegal, that’s all,” was all I could think of without going into the history

of drug usage and government prohibition with various attempts at keeping the people in line and under control.

I was on a roll now and decided to go full steam ahead.

“I know lots of people who have taken drugs.”

“Do you really?” Mum asked.

I didn’t notice any shock or anger in her eyes, so I carried on.

“Yes, I do, and they’re not junkies like you see on the news, they’re just normal people leading normal lives.”

Then came the question I was dreading, but nonetheless determined to answer honestly this time.

“And have you taken drugs, Raymond?”

“Well, Mum, yes, I have.”

“Really?”

“Yes.”

When I answered in the affirmative, once again there was no anger or disappointment in her face, and there seemed to be a genuine desire to know more, so I duly obliged.

“I’ve tried cocaine, LSD, marijuana and Ecstasy. Not heroin, because I think that’s a terribly destructive and addictive drug and besides, I hate needles as you know.”

She laughed and acknowledged that I often faint when I am having a simple blood test because I am so afraid of the syringe.

“Drugs can be dangerous,” I continued, “but if you know what you are doing, you’re sure they are of good quality and you do it responsibly, then you should be ok. Of course, there is the odd death, but that’s often down to the person, an allergic reaction or a terrible accident rather than the drug itself.”

“I see,” Mum answered, “so you’ve tried all of those drugs? How did you get them? And what happens when you take them?”

I was pretty amazed, flabbergasted even. Mum was showing genuine interest and seemed to be challenging her own deep-rooted thoughts.

I proceeded to tell her all about the dealers, the costs, the effects, the highs and the lows of recreational drug use.

She asked many questions, and I answered as frankly as I could whilst she sat back in her comfy sofa, smoking one cigarette after the other (her drug of choice) and taking it all in.

This was a major breakthrough for me. I hadn't wanted to come out and admit to Mum that I would enjoy an occasional, great fun drug experience, but now that I had, I was delighted to be able to enlighten her and shift those opinions away from the sensationalist press propaganda which she had so readily absorbed.

As I finished my sermon, she paused, sighed and leaned forward to put out her cigarette. She then looked up at me, stone-faced, staring directly and deeply into my eyes, saying nothing for what seemed like ages until suddenly she broke into a smile and uttered, "Raymond, you're such a naughty boy!"

A most reasonable reaction to such a clear and honest appraisal of the reality of drugs (at least my take on them), and so I smiled back.

"I know, Mum."

"You're so horrible," she continued, and then, as she got up to switch off the TV, she finished with, "fancy joking with your old mum like that! You could have given me a heart attack! You haven't really taken drugs, have you? You're just having a laugh with me, you silly bugger!"

In that one instant, I understood that I had been a fool to think that I could change the prejudices and concerns of an old-fashioned, doting mum, so I said the only thing a loving, responsible son could say under the circumstances.

"Of course I haven't, Mum, drugs are dangerous, they ruin lives, and drug dealers should be taken outside and shot!"

"Thank God for that, Raymond," she laughed out loudly, "you had me worried for a moment there, you bad boy! Fancy another cuppa?" And with that, the conversation was over. Never to be breached again.

By now, Dad, you will understand just why I don't want Mum reading of my fun forays into the wild ways of the world.

Mind you, having said all of this; should Mum hear the truth about my mildly bohemian and hedonistic ways, she may well not be that shocked and may even proclaim with a big laugh at her own joke, “Oh, Raymond, why do you do this to your mother?!”

In general though, and certainly true of your generation, older people don't tend to change their views or politics that easily. And mums worry. Mums always worry. Why would I want to add to that?

So, Dad, please see to it that Mum retains her idealistic image of her near perfect son and just gloss over the more outrageous exploits in my story. Oh, and try not to judge me too harshly yourself either, I really am a genuine, generous and responsible man of the world who just likes to have a little walk on the wild side sometimes.

Well, at least I used to – I'm way too old for that now. Honestly!

Prologue

*“Oh, that God the gift would give us
To see ourselves as others see us.”*

ROBERT BURNS

In 2011, I visited Berlin to attend a birthday party of a friend, and instead of just partying, I ended up questioning myself, or at least my reputation as a TV presenter, as I had never done before.

I arrived fashionably late and was greeted by my friend Markus with a huge hug and a huge spliff. I took a small toke on the joint and immediately handed it back to him; his joints were way too strong for me and, because he had given up cigarettes but still craved them, also contained far too much tobacco. So many ex-smokers I know more than make up for their previous addiction by smoking too many joints. In any case, there was no point in getting too stoned too fast before I had met the other guests. It may surprise you to hear this, but when I am not in front of a camera or microphone, I am quite shy, and so marijuana-induced paranoia would not be conducive to a good start to the long evening ahead.

Markus then proceeded to march me around the room and introduce me to his friends and colleagues, many of whom were unknown to me. Most of them, however, recognised me as the guy from MTV. I am still happy that people remember me from that period – television celebrity is after all an ephemeral thing,

and I am always deeply touched by their friendly and sincere attitude towards me.

As I made my way around the guests, somewhat unnecessarily introducing myself, I came across a large, surly man who looked like a Viking. As I reached out to shake his hand, he grabbed mine with a much too firm grip, pulled me towards him with a slightly crooked smile on his face and began to speak, “Yes, I know who you are, you’re Ray Cokes from MTV.”

So far so good, I thought. But little did I know what was to come next.

“I’m Max, and this is Nina,” he continued, gesturing to the overweight blonde on his arm. “Don’t even think about fucking her later, you understand? She’s my wife!”

This declaration was obviously not a joke, he was seriously warning me off any sexual approach to his partner.

I am not often left speechless – my quick wit and charm usually help me diffuse difficult situations – but this time, I just stood there stunned, as my friend looked on aghast, clearly aware that this outburst had somewhat disturbed me.

As I gathered myself, trying to come up with a suitable riposte, my overactive mind went into meltdown. Why would this guest confront me in such a way? Could it be that I had a reputation as a philanderer who had no respect for other men’s women? I admit, I have never been backwards in coming forwards in press interviews – unabashedly declaring myself to be a naughty boy – and I have often flirted on camera with female viewers, but surely these playful traits didn’t make me an insufferable womaniser? As I continued to search for some justification for this unfriendly remark, I thought that perhaps my new acquaintance had actually borne personal witness to my occasional forays into Europe’s finest swinger clubs, where such activity is encouraged. I had indeed been recognised at these establishments by other hedonists, and though at first I was a little embarrassed, I eventually learned to live with it – after all, we were all in the same place for the same reasons. It was possible then that this couple had been to the same

club at the same time as me, but I felt sure that we would not have been play partners as they were definitely not to my taste.

All of these thoughts rushed through my mind, and once I had pretty much ascertained that I had not met them before and this was purely his take on my persona, I eventually answered him, “Of course not, your wife is too large and too unattractive for my taste, and I wouldn’t desire her even if she offered herself up Nyotaimori style, covered in my favourite sushi.”

Well, as a matter of fact, my actual words were much more polite: “Of course not, who do you think I am? I wouldn’t dream of it. Nice to meet you too!”

A little later on, I felt less concerned by his insulting remark and convinced myself that his concern had nothing to do with me but was rather borne of insecurities about his possibly nymphomaniac partner. I arrived at this conclusion simply because his wife, who was wearing a tight, revealing top, actually spent most of the evening pushing up and out her large breasts, proudly showing them off to all onlookers whenever her husband wasn’t looking.

With this in mind, I continued chatting, drinking and relaxing until another dubious encounter sent me once again reeling off into the muddy waters of self-reflection and inner doubt.

By 1 a.m., everyone was either very inebriated thanks to the strong German lager or totally stoned due to the powerful Turkish weed. Unless I am with a circle of close friends, this is usually the time I make my excuses and leave as it is typically around this time that people unfailingly muster up enough courage to either approach me for ugly, drunken photos – which usually end up on Facebook – criticise me for something I said or didn’t say to a pop star or worse, lunge at me with that drunken, confused mental state of, “I know youuuuu. H-eyyyyy you’re from the TV. Yeshhh, you did thattt, er, whattt wasch it? Yeash. I knowww youooo ... whatch your naymme again?”

Whilst I genuinely enjoy meeting people who know me from TV, there is the odd occasion when their enthusiasm can be a

little overwhelming, especially when under the influence of drink or drugs.

Should I find myself trapped in these rare situations, I rely on the words of wisdom imparted to me by my good friend Robert Smith of The Cure. Once, when we were drinking together at a bar, Robert had been approached every other minute by drunken fans who proceeded to loudly proclaim their love for him and, thanks to the even louder music, in doing so, were spitting in his ear, even sometimes on his face. I watched, in awe of his calm, kind and generous attitude to all of those fans, and said, “Robert, I get recognised too and it’s lovely, but you’re super famous, and people just don’t leave you alone. It’s great to see how you handle it all.”

“It’s simple, Ray,” he replied whilst spitting in my ear. “I prefer to give people the benefit of the doubt. Most of the time, people are cool, and I’m happy to give them a smile and wish them on their way even if I am tired or don’t feel like chatting. It only takes a minute.”

I totally agreed, but he had other information to part with too.

“Moreover, if they are invasive or horrible, always respond in a friendly manner. If you don’t, they go home and tell five of their friends that you’re an asshole, and those people then tell five of their friends that you’re an asshole and your reputation as a now confirmed asshole is set in stone even if there’s not an iota of truth in their story and it was in fact them being out of order.”

This simple mantra has served me well throughout the years and I use the five-friend rule whenever the situation gets out of hand. Smile, keep calm and carry on – whatever the circumstances.

Meanwhile, back at the Berlin Birthday Bash, I had the chance to use this knowledge as I had failed to act quickly enough and leave before the evening descended into troubled territory. I had, of course, kept well clear of the stern Viking and his flirtatious wife and was grateful that the other guests were very friendly and courteous towards me. I was enjoying some fresh air on

the balcony, laughing and chatting with a few friends when two young guys I had been introduced to earlier approached us. Each had bloodshot eyes, a beer bottle in hand, big grins on their faces, and as they struggled to remain standing, one of them managed to slur, “H-heey Ray. Shorry to bovver you, but doyouminnd if we, er, ashk you shumfing?”

“Sure,” I replied hesitantly, “go ahead.”

“Doyouhaveanycoke?” he said, his words tumbling uncontrollably from his mouth. “You knoww, not coke a cola,” he laughed, “cocaine, man. We’re fucked up and we need some, haveyoutgot-any?”

“No, sorry, guys, I’m way too old for that, can’t help you, I’m afraid,” was my immediate reply.

They didn’t give up that easily though.

“Come on, maaan, you musht have some coke, you’re from MTV, rock ’n’ roll maan!”

To which his friend added, “Yeah, and you’re Ray Cokes, Ray COKES, geddit?! Hahahahahah!”

And with that, he collapsed to the floor in a fit of uncontrollable laughter, quickly followed by his friend who probably thought that it was the best joke he’d ever heard.

In another setting, this may have made me laugh too, but as it was, it just served to remind me of an awful, embarrassing moment, which occurred at the after show party of a notoriously decadent Euro indie band trio. I was in the VIP room of the club, accompanied by the lead singer who had just snorted a large line of some rather fine Columbian cocaine off the cover of his band’s latest CD. When it came to my turn to hover over the white powder, straw in hand and firmly inserted into a nostril, the door suddenly burst open, and we were confronted by two female fans of the band who took one look at their hero before staring down at me and proclaiming, “Oh, wow. Ray Cokes? – He certainly does! Ray Cokes COKES!”

In the time it took me to attempt to hide the evidence as they stood there giggling, a huge security guard came bursting through

the door, and whisked them away. It was too late though – they had witnessed my debauchery and would now probably adhere to the five-friend theory by attesting to their closest allies that Ray Cokes does indeed do lines of Coke, as his name would suggest. I can still feel the embarrassment now at being caught.

Anyway, I digress, as I often do. As a close French friend once said to me, in her beautiful native tongue, “Ray, *tes histoires, ce sont des histoires à tiroirs.*”

Loosely translated, this means I make a short story long.

Back at the party in Berlin, I left the two young dudes to their laughter and made for the exit. People were now heavily under the influence and starting to inadvertently spit in each others faces from the enthusiasm of their conversation. I too was under the delightful spell of the Laurent Perrier Rose Champagne I had brought with me but had also imbibed some of the strong Turkish weed and was beginning to feel a little of that marijuana-induced paranoia. It now seemed very possible that some, if not all of these party people, thought of me as a silver-tongued, gigolo drug fiend, and I didn't like the feeling at all.

As I said my goodbyes, I loudly announced that I was off to another party, an orgy of sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll, as this was clearly what was expected of me. In reality, I would retire to my hotel room to have a quiet beer or two from the mini bar, a crafty cigarette out of the window and perhaps some sexual, sorry, I mean social networking, before retiring to bed for some much needed beauty sleep, accompanied only by the headlines on CNN.

You too may have heard stories and rumours about me and will have drawn your own conclusions. If so, you will either have them confirmed or denied as you read through these pages. One thing's for sure – in writing this book, I have tried to be as honest and faithful to my stories and thoughts as I possibly can. In order to respect an individual's privacy, some names have been changed and some incidents omitted, but the remaining is the truth as I (try to) remember it.

I present it to you here, dear reader, in full Technicolor – the presenter’s cut, with plenty of bloopers and all of the bad bits left in.

Thank you for reading, be lucky and stay safe.

As ever, your input is my output.

Ray Cokes
Antwerp, Belgium

Fast Foreword

Sometime in the summer of 1994, I had bought a dark blue three-piece rubber suit, complete with rubber tie and rubber handkerchief, from a specialist sex shop in Amsterdam. It looked fabulous and was made to measure by a bona fide tailor. From afar, it looked just like a formal business outfit; only upon close inspection would the viewer realise that I was, in fact, dressed head to toe in kinky rubber. It was purely an impulse purchase, I'm not into S&M or bondage gear – it just seemed like a fun idea to own a suit made of shiny, shiny rubber, which I could wear on MTV and perhaps use to challenge people's perceptions of fetish wear or at the very least give them a laugh at my expense. Little did I know at the time that a couple of years later this very suit would come in very handy and offer me impeccable protection against the adverse weather conditions and equally adverse human behaviour that I would experience during the tempest which lay ahead. A perfect storm from which ultimately only my rubber outfit would survive intact.

I only wore that suit this once.

It was approaching 9 p.m. on Thursday, the 9th of May 1996, on an icy cold, rainy evening on the Reeperbahn in central Hamburg, Germany. Surrounded and supported by some 60 UK crew and a hundred local professionals, I was preparing to launch a big live and free *X-Ray Vision* show on MTV, right bang in the middle of the most notorious sex street in Europe.

I had not wanted to be there at all. I had nothing against the location; I was just very concerned with the content of our show. Or it's lack of content, to be precise.

Before setting out on my mission, I had argued my case and made my concerns abundantly clear to my bosses, predicting that this particular set-up would at best be a failure and at worse a disaster. My reluctance to participate lasted until the final hour, and despite the backing of my producer and against all of my instincts, I was eventually coerced into attending my own funeral.

Against my will, I was encouraged onto a rollercoaster ride, which was to crash land in front of many millions of viewers across Europe and a street audience made up of a few thousand MTV fans, a few curious sex tourist bystanders and a few hundred diehard Die Toten Hosen fans, all un-ticketed, under the influence and uncontrolled.

The scene was set for a live MTV show with a spectacular showdown that has since become legendary, featuring on several of those Top 10 TV Moments shows. This particular event, *X-Ray Vision live from Hamburg*, being the time when millions of stunned viewers across Europe actually witnessed – as it happened – a professional presenter in total self-destruct meltdown in front of five TV cameras and a baying crowd.

Behind the scenes, there were mysterious powers at work, and my version of what happened and who did what to who that evening has never been told before. That's mostly because I had blocked the episode from my memory. Recently however, thanks to discussions with former colleagues and friends, I have now reinstalled it on my hard drive, and we will run the program later.

First, to understand how I got there, you need to know how I got here. Time to rewind.

Da Capo al Coda.