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[Intro]

Steve-Why, hey there! And welcome again to another episode of Thinking Sideways. As always, I'm Steve, joined, of course, by...

Devin-Devin...

J-And Joe.

S-And once again, we've got a mystery.

D-What?

J-Uh huh.

S-Yeah. We do.

J-It's a pretty scary one, too.

S-It, well, no it isn't, but you know what the thing is? I had so much fun last week, or not last week, last time that I hosted doing a wrestling episode, that I decided we'd do another one.

D-It seems like it's been a million years since that, we did that episode.

S-It really does.

D-Yeah.

S-Cause in our world, it's been a month.

D-At least, at least.

J-Uh huh.

D and S-Yeah.

J-Three weeks.

S-Ok, well we're not actually going to do a wrestling story.

D-Well, a little bit.

S-Kinda. It's kind of, kind of a wrestling story.

D-Yeah.

S-We are, this week, for anyone for who, as Devin would say, didn't read the episode title, going to be talking about Mr. Andy Kaufman.

J-Yeah.

S-And you might say, "Well, why?" Well, the mystery is is Andy Kaufman really dead or not?

D-Dun dun dun!

S-Cause he's one of those people who has had sightings of him for years.

J-Uh huh. He's the new Elvis.

S-I like Andy a little more than I like Elvis at times.

J-Uh, yeah.

S-So I'm ok with that. I'm going to get so much hate mail for saying that. Sorry.

D-You are.

J-I know (laughing).

S-I'm sorry (S and D laughing). So let me give everybody just the quick, real brief version, and then we'll get into some details. So a brief introduction to Andy Kaufman. He was a comedian. He had, his career was in the 1970s, the late 70s, mid to late, and then early 80s. And he is known for being a character on the TV show "Taxi." He died at 35 of a very rare form of lung cancer, on the 16<sup>th</sup> of May 1984. But because of all of the stunts and the crazy things that he had done over the years, a lot of people really didn't believe that he had really died.

J-Uh huh.

S-They were sure that it was a prank.

D-Well he was, I mean, he was known as the guy who would take a joke a little too far.

J-He often did.

S-I think "a little" is an understatement (D and J laughing).

D-Well, I'm trying to be generous here (Steve laughing). I don't want to say bad things about dead people.

S-Oh, no, no, there's nothing bad. Andy took jokes...

D-Way too far.

S-...to the nth degree.

J-Yes he did.

D-He, like, he took it to when it stopped being funny, and then kept going.

S-And then eventually started being funny again.

D-Uh huh. There's a really interesting "Radiolab," I'm sorry to digress for a second.

S-Yeah.

D-A really interesting "Radiolab" episode about this, in which I encountered one of my favorite comedians in the entire world for the very first time ever, and her name is Kristen Schaal, which you all know her. She's got the voice. You know who she is. She's Louise on "Bob's Burgers."

S-Hm.

D-Yeah. Anyway, they did this show called "Kristen Schaal's a Horse," where it was him and, or I'm sorry, it was her and a male comedian on stage, and literally he would just go, "Oh, Kristen Schaal is a horse! Kristen Schaal is a horse!" Like, for 15 minutes straight while she danced around on stage. And it's that progression, it's a very well-studied thing now, where it's like, it's funny for a minute, and then it's not funny, and then it's really not funny, and then it's hilarious again (Joe laughing). Just like this story I just told.

S-Yes. It is. And thank you for sharing, Devin.

D-You're welcome.

S-I don't know how to follow that, so we're just going to start talking some more about Andy Kaufman. As I briefly mentioned, started his act in the 70s. He started in comedy clubs. And he wasn't always that well received. He, as we had briefly mentioned, he, his style of comedy was different, and it was not what people were used to. And it really, really put people off, because, I mean, we've all been to a comedy show. The typical thing is a comedian gets up there, and he does his schtick of jokes and for five, ten minutes, whatever his time is, and then he gets down.

J-Ok.

S-And he leaves the stage.

J-But Andy didn't really think of himself as a comedian.

S-No. He didn't. He was more of a, a, it was a...

J-Performance artist?

S-Performance artist, thank you, Joe. That is exactly it. It was art, and so Andy would get up there, and he would do very weird things that people didn't know how to do, how to react to. So let's give an example. Let's actually give a Kaufman example, here, which would be the character known as Foreign Man.

J-Yeah. Which if you've every seen "Taxi," it's basically the same character.

S-Yeah. Latka, the character he played was Latka, and that was based on the Foreign Man character. Absolutely right. So, here's what happens. Andy, as Foreign Man, would walk up on stage, and he'd be rather nervous, and moving his hands around and flailing, and looking at the crowd wide-eyed. And then, when he spoke, he had this weird clipped accent that nobody recognized, and this kind of high-pitched voice.

J-Uh huh.

S-And it was funny. And he would tell everybody that he was originally from Caspiar, which was an island in the Caspian Sea. Both his accent, and the place are made up, of course. And then he would go on to tell jokes, and they were terrible (Devin laughing).

J-Yeah.

S-Because he intentionally told the joke wrong, like he didn't get how a joke worked.

D-Uh huh.

S-And the audience would, at first, kind of "heh heh heh," and then people would get angry, and they'd start to boo, and then other people in the crowd would start to say "shut up!" and try to defend him. And he would keep doing stuff. He would say, "Well," in his funny accent, which I'm not going to try to replicate...

D-Thank you.

S-...cause I can't pull it off.

D-Uh huh.

S-He would try to then say, "I'll do an impression for you," in his funny little accent. And he would say, "I'm going to be," I don't know, let's just say Lyndon Johnson. And then he would turn around, and he would turn back to the mic, and in the exact same voice and accent, say "Hello. I am Lyndon Johnson." (All laughing).

J-Yep.

S-And of course, people would laugh at the first one, and he would do three of these or four of these at a time. And by this time, the crowd is just kind of losing it, because they just don't know what's going on.

D-Well, it's funny, cause it's so absurd. Right?

S-But it's also bad comedy, when you paid to get into a comedy club, you get angry cause this guy looks like he's bombing.

D-Uh huh.

S-He's bombing in the worst sort of way.

D-Uh huh.

S-And he doesn't even get it. And then he would say, "Wait. I'll be Elvis Presley. I'm going to do an impression of Elvis." And he would turn around, and then would start the music. They'd actually start the music for Elvis, and he would really quick, his hair was always kind of slicked back in this weird style, and he would pop his collar up. He'd brush his hair real fast while looking away from the audience. And then just before the lyrics hit, he would turn around, and he would do a dead-on Elvis. He could sing, and sounded really close to Elvis. And the crowd would lose their mind.

D-Uh huh.

S-Cause it's like, holy crap, this is amazing.

D-Yeah.

S-And then the song would end, and he would immediately flip back into the Foreign Man voice and accent, and say "thank you very much." And be done. And just leave.

D-This sounds very familiar. Like, there's one, at least one comedian right now that I can think of that does comedy like this, right?

S-Uh huh.

D-That's Sacha Baron Cohen.

S-Yes.

D-He does...

S-That is a great example. Borat.

D-Uh huh.

S-Borat is the modern equivalent of Andy Kaufman's Foreign Man character.

D-Yeah. Yeah.

J-Oh yeah. That is a fun character too.

S-Oh.

J-Although I couldn't in, uh, what was the movie?

S-"Borat?"

D-Yeah.

J-Yeah, "Borat." Ok.

S-Named after the character (S and D laughing).

J-Yeah, yeah, Sacha Baron Cohen, yeah.

S-See, here's the thing. Guys like Sacha Baron Cohen and Andy Kaufman, they committed to a character. And Kaufman did not break character.

J-Uh huh.

D-Ever, yeah.

S-Almost never do you see him break character. He doesn't crack up. He is so wholeheartedly committed, cause that's his performance art.

J-Oh yeah.

S-And he's making art.

J-Here's the thing about him too, is that he was so into his characters. He was actually a non-drinker and a vegetarian.

S-Yeah.

J-But when he was, if his character ate meat and drank booze, then that's what he did.

D-That's what he did.

S-You're talking about Tony Clifton, who we're going to talk about later, yeah.

J-Yeah.

D-Uh huh.

S-The Tony Clifton character. But, yeah, he was, he was amazing. And he was also really weird. I will say this right now. I think Kaufman's a weird dude.

D-Well yeah.

J-Yeah, he was.

S-I also think that he was a creative genius in his own way.

J-Uh huh.

S-Like, the things he came up with...

J-Excuse me? You're saying "was?"

S-Ok...

D-Is.

J-Was or is?

S-Or is, you're right. I apologize.

J-Ok.

D-Spoilers.

J-Yeah.

S-He, in his performances, *was* a creative genius and could continue to be today, if indeed he is still alive.

D-And performing.

S-And possibly performing. But, you know, as we talked about, he, we said this several times, there was the performance art. And he's quoted once as saying, quote, "I'm not trying to be funny. I just want to play with their heads." So he really did just want to mess with the audience.

D-I think there's definitely a group of people, I think I'm kind of one of these people on a lot of different levels, but you know, to me being funny isn't so much that other people laugh, are laughing. It's as long as I think it's hilarious.

S-Uh huh.

D-Right? And so if I, if I, or, you know, Andy are kind of pulling the wool over someone's eyes in a hilarious way, that's extra funny to me. Versus, you know, everybody else is laughing but I'm kind of, like, I know this joke, you know?

S-Uh huh.

D-Inside and out, and it's kind of lame.

J-Uh huh.

S-Though, that kind of joke though. Going up on stage and telling the same "Yo mama" joke...

D-Yeah.

S-...you know, five nights a week.

D-The same story five nights a week.

S-It's, it's no fun.

D-No.

S-But going up and pulling the wool over people's eyes and getting them all to react in crazy, different ways. That's gotta be just so gratifying.

D-Absolutely.

J-Yeah.

S-Absolutely.

J-Apparently. He liked to do it, so yeah.

S-He really did, because over the years he, as I said, he pulled so many pranks, and so many hoaxes, and so many gags on people. And he took them to such a degree, that people no longer knew what reality was. An example, this is not a Kaufman example, but this is the kind of same reaction, and maybe we've talked about this before, but was it Alan Funt?

J-[Audio cuts here. Can't understand what he says.]

S-Funt, yes, thank you. Alan Funt. So, he did "Candid Camera." And people began to realize when he was around, there was a camera going on, and a gag was happening.

D-Uh huh.

S-And he gets on an airplane. And this was, Joe, do you remember this? It was in the 70s.

J-Yeah.

S-He gets on an airplane, and this was the thing at the time, the airplane got hijacked (Devin laughing). And they said "Fly us to Cuba." And the passengers on board are all kind of nervous until one person realizes that Funt is on the plane...

J-"This has got to be a joke." (Laughing).

S-"Ha ha ha. Alan Funt! It's 'Candid Camera!' Where do you guys have the camera at? Ha ha ha!" And he's like, "No, it's not a joke! It's not a joke! It's not a joke! Cut it out! They're serious. They're real guns!" (D and J laughing). And everybody's like, like the whole plane is laughing on their way to Havana (Steve laughing).

D-Well, Havana's nice.

J-That's the best hijacking story ever.

S-But, but yeah, it was, that's the kind of thing, like, he had done this so much that nobody believed him when he told the truth. And that happened with Kaufman. Nobody believed him when he would say things. "Oh, you're making this up. You're totally making this up."

J-Hm.

S-He just did such crazy stuff. That having been said...

J-You mean Funt, or do you mean Andy Kaufman?

S-Kaufman.

J-Oh, ok.

S-Funt really, I mean, he had one bit, and that was it. But Kaufman, he had a whole slew of them. Which brings us right now, we're already through the story, because as I said, he died in 1984. Nobody believes he died. Or a bunch of people didn't believe at the time that he'd actually died. So we have two very simple theories. Is Kaufman dead? Or is Kaufman alive?

J-Or is he alive?

D-Or, you know, is Kaufman dead but at a different date?

S-Possible. I roll that into the "Andy Kaufman is alive" because...

D-Yeah, absolutely.

S-...that means he faked his death.

J-Yeah.

D-Either he faked his death...

S-Or he really died.

D-...or he really died at 35.

S-At 35.

J-Yeah. I think that he probably faked his death, and then he was probably planning on coming back after a year...

D-Oh my God, spoilers!

J-...yeah. And then what happened is, is like, he was all making his plans to, to make his come back, you know, in about a year, and he got run over by a bus (D and S laughing). And I'm thinking that probably his last thought was, like, you know, "Oh, this sucks, but God, I love the irony."

S-That's actually probably true (laughing).

D-Probably, yeah.

S-Ok. So let's go into theory one, which is that Andy Kaufman really did die in 1984.

J-There are people who believe this.

S-There's a lot of people who believe that because officially, and this is, I pulled up his death certificate, by the way, because you can find this on "The Smoking Gun." He died of renal failure caused by metastasized large cell lung carcinoma, also known as lung cancer...

J-Uh huh.

S-...on the 16<sup>th</sup> of May, 1984 at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles. He was diagnosed in November of 1983. He'd had a persistent cough, and he finally went in to the doctor. And they finally figured out what was going on. And they gave him radiation therapy, but that didn't really do anything because metastasized cancers spread. They're moving around.

J-Well, the lung cancer, like, it goes everywhere. My dad had lung cancer.

S-Uh huh.

J-It got into his liver, his bladder, his brain.

S-Right. And that's what happened to Andy, is the same thing.

J-Yeah.

S-And so Andy, he also believed in natural medicine. He was really big into meditation and trans, uh, is transcendentalism, is that the, no that's not the right one.

J-Yeah.

S-He was really into the spiritual side of things. And the belief that the brain could cure a lot of things. So he did these natural medicines, and these natural diets...

D-Work with his vibrations and...yeah.

S-Yes. And his aura and all of that kind of stuff. He was trying to fix it. And the radiation didn't do any good. It just couldn't take it out. So what does he do? He, he starts following what a lot of people would consider fringe medicine, to the point that he actually went to the Philippines in, I believe it was 1984, months after he had been, been diagnosed. And he underwent "psychic surgery." I think it was six weeks. He went under the "psychic" knife for a six week period. So he stopped all of his Western medications, and he seemed to be fine. Soon as he came back home, he immediately started going downhill. And at that point, he then passes away, ok? Well, the reading I've done says that Kaufman had an open casket.

J-Uh huh.

S-And I believe that to be true, because there are many, many sources that, this is terrible, and Andy kind of brought this out in people, but people went to the funeral, and they went to pay their respects at the casket, and they were poking the body.

J-Uh huh.

S-Like, "Hey Andy, I know it's a gag. Stand up, you jerk."

D-Uh huh.

J-Yeah. Although I got to say, usually they don't have an open coffin funerals for people who died of cancer, because you really do look like hell.

S-And he did look like hell. There was, there was a report of him being in a show with his girlfriend a month or several months prior, and because of the radiation he was losing his hair, so he had his head shaved in a mohawk, which I think is awesome.

J-Yeah.

S-But he's also wearing this kind of weird leather outfit. But he was so emaciated that it was hanging on him.

D-Uh huh.

S-And that's when the world really kind of went, "Oh, oh. He might, sort of maybe be telling..."

D-Might actually be sick.

J-Yeah.

S-"...he might be telling the truth. Either that or he's really committed to this."

J-He dieted, yeah.

D-Like, unhealthy committed.

S-Yeah.

D-Yeah.

S-So yeah, but it, apparently people were poking the body. So that leads me to believe that it truly was open, and they thought he was just playing a sick joke on them.

J-Uh huh.

S-Kaufman was laid to rest in Beth David Cemetery. You can actually go on, it's find a grave dot com, I think is the website that, that's the famous one...

D-It's the web...yeah.

S-Yeah. Where you can find all the famous people, and you can see his headstone. It's there, so it's not like he's mysteriously disappeared.

J-It's actually...

D-Yeah, but if I were going to pull a, you know, "I'm dead" prank, I would get a tombstone (laughing).

S-I'm not going to, I understand that.

J-Yeah. But do people, fans go by there and leave graffiti like they do with Jim Morrison's grave?

S-I have no idea.

J-Yeah.

S-To be honest with you, I have no idea if they just stand there and do their monologues. I have no idea.

D-Most fans probably just think he isn't actually there anyway, so...

S-So why bother?

J-Yeah.

D-...why visit?

J-Yeah, that's a good point.

S-So, let's go ahead, in this theory we're going to go ahead and move towards statements and things that were said by people who knew Andy closest. The first one is going to be his brother.

D-Is this to support the fact that he actually died?

S-Yes.

D-Ok.

S-This is, we're in the theory that Andy Kaufman actually did die, so this is his brother...

D-Right, so now you're presenting your evidence?

S-I'm submitting my evidence.

D-Ok.

J-Uh huh.

S-Prosecutor.

D-Got it.

J-Yeah.

S-Barrister? Your Honor? I don't know.

J-He sort of, Michael did it kind of both ways, really.

S-Well (sighs). Ok, let me run this through, Joe, cause I know where you're heading with that.

J-Uh huh.

S-Some things I think caught Michael off guard and he got caught up in them. But he had always said, for many, many years, that he believed that his brother had died. And was positive. He knew his brother had died, he now believed he knew his brother had died. Except that several years back, I actually think in was in 1999, he said a man approached him with a note, and gave him a note, and the note was supposedly from Andy, and supposedly looked like it was Andy's handwriting, saying meet me at this diner at a certain date and time, cause that's before I'm going to come back and reveal that the whole thing was a prank to the world, where he went. And Andy never showed. And then a few years later, some woman came forward to him, and she started saying that she was Andy's daughter. Now Andy did have a daughter. He had a daughter, I think she was born in 1969. But this girl was saying that she was 24 years old...

J-Conceived after he died.

S-Which would have meant that she was conceived and born after Andy died.

J-Uh huh.

S-Absolutely right. And that he had left Hollywood and one of his reasons to do that was to raise her.

D-Hm.

J-Uh huh.

S-Except that it was very quickly found out that A, the logic of the math doesn't work.

J-Yeah.

S-And B, she was an actress. Her lineage was very well known. People very quickly figured out who her father was.

J-Ok, so she has a real father, not Andy.

S-Yeah.

J-But...

S-So that whole thing went sideways.

J-Yeah. And I thought I'd heard somewhere that Michael, Andy's brother Michael, had actually recruited her to do, to play this role.

D-I read that too.

S-I have too. Michael has always asserted that he didn't do it. The story I think you're talking about is that, according to her, she met him in an art gallery. And he said, "Oh, you kind of look like you could

be part of my family. Let's do this thing." Yada yada yada. He has always attested that that is not really what happened, and that she came to him saying who she was.

J-Uh huh.

S-And then he fell for it.

J-Uh huh. Poor guy.

S-He has since always, he has since gone back to the "Andy Kaufman died, and I know my brother's dead."

D-Hm. I wonder, I mean, not to speak ill of any one, but I bet he got some money from the, like, media attention.

S-No. No, this, that, this thing went south and turned...

D-Really fast?

S-Really fast.

D-Like, maybe he was trying to get some money from the media? I don't know.

J-Maybe he wanted some attention?

S-Well, that's a good point, because there is the Andy Kaufman Award, or it's not the Andy Kaufman Award, what is it? There's a, a comedy award thing that they do that is in his name, and...

J-That's when she, when she showed up with her, her allegations, right?

S-Correct.

D-Uh huh.

S-She showed up on stage at that.

J-Yeah.

S-And so it is possible that it was a way to generate publicity for the event.

J-Or for her.

S-Or for her.

D-Yeah.

S-I don't know. The, the interesting thing is, is a lot of people think "this is going to make my career." And that tends to tank their career.

D-Yeah.

S-She is no, I've not found anything about her since, so she just kind of (makes popping sound with his mouth) disappeared.

J-Yep.

S-She got blacklisted.

J-Yeah. I can see why.

D-Yeah.

S-Let's move to the next character in this theory, which would be Bob Zmuda, which is...

D-Real, real human being.

S-Real human being.

D-Yep.

S-He, he was actually Andy's right-hand man. They, they worked together, they were co-creators together. They made a lot of the skits and the gags, and masterminded a lot of it.

J-Yeah. And Zmuda took over one of Andy's characters at some point in time, too.

S-Uh huh. Right, right. So they, they worked together for years and the, the problem with Zmuda is that he's not a trustworthy character because he was in on all the gags, and he goes back and forth. He changes his story a lot. He said "No, Andy really died. No, Andy's really alive and he's hiding somewhere in Arizona. No, Andy really died. No, Andy's really alive and he's hiding somewhere..."

J-In New Mexico. I though Albuquerque according to some people.

S-Yeah, that is one of the most recent sightings that came up. But so he, he is really a hard one just because he switches his story up and changes camps all the time.

J-Yeah. He at one point switched over and made that, wrote a book about how Andy's coming back, right?

S-He's written more than one book, Joe.

J-Oh, has he? I only heard about the one.

S-Yeah. His, yeah, we'll talk about his most recent book here in just a minute, but he's written some. To be honest though, the Kaufman family doesn't really like him that much. They, Andy Kaufman's dad, for many, many years tried to broker peace with everybody who was involved with Andy. And did either of you guys watch the, the Jim Carrey movie, "Man on the Moon?"

D-No.

J-No, I never saw that.

S-Ok, it's based, it's a movie about Andy Kaufman.

J-Yeah.

S-It's actually a fun, entertaining movie. I laughed out loud. And it's one of the few times that I didn't mind watching Courtney Love on screen.

D-Hm.

J-Oh, Courtney's in it?

S-Yeah.

D-Well, and speaking of actually crazy people, Jim Carrey (Steve laughing).

J-Yeah.

D-Yeah.

S-Yeah. So, yeah, it's not a bad movie. Well, what Andy's dad did is he tried to bring Bob in to, to kind of fill in some gaps, and get some of the story. And Bob then began to exert his influence and his opinions on things, to the point that it really, it pushed the family out, and the family has said that the movie is, the portrayal of Andy Kaufman in that movie is a Bob Zmuda creation.

D-Hm.

S-It's not actually Andy.

J-Really?

S-It's what Bob made in his tellings of it.

D-Was Andy close to his family when he was alive?

S-Um...

D-I mean, cause that's, right, that's one of the things you get a little confused about, or that are easily, you know, it's easy to get a little confused there because the family has one picture of him and Bob had another picture of him. And depending on who Andy spent the most time with, and...

J-It sounds like he and Bob were pretty inseparable.

D-Pretty close.

S-They were pretty tight.

D-Yeah.

J-I'm thinking they were very...

S-They were very tight.

J-Yeah.

D-Right.

S-And so the, the thing is is, yeah, I see how Bob would have a clear picture of Andy.

D-Or a different picture.

S-But Bob has also, Bob is a spin doctor.

D-I think if I were in this story, I would be Bob.

S-He is an amazing spin doctor.

D-I would be Bob.

S-And that's the problem...

D-Yeah.

S-...is that he spun the thing so many ways that it's hard to know how honest he is being to the actual story of Andy.

J-Uh huh. Probably not.

S-Yeah. Let's go to character number three in our story, which is going to be George Shapiro [stumbles over the name]. George Shapiro, pronounce that name correctly. George was Andy's manager, and he is a very well-known name in Hollywood. And he's a pretty credible guy. He's a pretty credible, would you call him a witness? Uh, participant?

J-Was he there when he died?

D-Character witness maybe?

S-Character witness, I'll go with that. I don't believe that he was actually in the hospital when Andy passed away, but Bob was in, or I'm sorry, not Bob. George. Shapiro was in on almost everything that Andy was up to. He was his manager.

D-Yeah, you would need your manager to be in on this stuff.

S-Yeah, you need your manager to back you up and help you out.

J-And also to procure the fake death certificate, you know?

S-Or whatever.

J-And find a stand-in to die for you, you know?

S-Yeah. So Shapiro's always said, "No. He actually passed away. And I would know. I would have been running this whole thing."

D-Uh huh.

S-"So, no I'm sorry, but he's really gone." We've got one last person in this theory, which is going to be Andy's girlfriend, Lynn Margulies. Lynn and Andy had been together for about a year before he passed away, and she has always maintained that it's not a stunt. It's not a gag. And this is something that we were just about to touch on earlier, which is Bob Zmuda's latest book. She co-authored it. Although, I'll be honest, I didn't read the book. I read a lot of reviews, and a lot of synopsi [sic] of it, and it's very strange, because whereas Bob goes back and forth about the fact that Andy might or might not have died, and then kind of semi-settles on he did, she spins this weirdo story about how, oh yeah, no, Andy actually died. But by the way, Andy was bisexual and he didn't died of cancer, he died of AIDS.

D-I don't, I guess I don't understand why you think that's a bizarro story.

J-Yeah, it doesn't seem that strange to me.

D-I know that my sarcasm is sometimes so sophisticated that you don't understand when I'm making a joke, but I'm not making a joke right now (laughing).

S-I, I, ok, there's a very huge difference between cancer and AIDS.

D-But think about the symptoms that anybody had reported of him. Coughing. AIDS. Severe weight loss. AIDS. What else?

J-Yeah. And actually, AIDS leaves you, does actually leave you open to certain things like cancer too.

S-I, I get that, but she, she pulled it out of nowhere. It was very new, and nobody else, I mean, she was saying that Andy was patrolling the Castro District looking for men, which has never come out. And those kind of stories always come out.

J-Yeah...

S-So...

J-...it's kind of hard to imagine him cruising around the Castro District and not being recognized by a lot of people.

D-Yeah. Yeah.

S-That's my problem is that when any of these very famous people who were doing things, trying to keep them of down low, suddenly the revelations come out 30, 40 years later, it's like, "Well, that's weird."

D-Well, he was a very talented character actor, so it's possible he was just putting on a character when he was trolling for men. But no, I mean I think, I mean, frankly the idea that he had AIDS isn't so far-

fetched to me, and also the fact that in the, you know, '80s, that there would be a spin to say no, he died of cancer to hide the fact that he died of AIDS. In the '80s, that is also not shocking to me.

J-That's not, yeah, that's not.

S-I'll give you that. I won't, I won't say that there's no way that's possible...

D-Sure.

S-...because so much around Kaufman was a spin job, so that's absolutely possible.

D-Well, it's genuinely, I think, I'm fairly sure, I mean, correct me if I'm wrong, but in the '80s that was still a thing...

S-Uh huh, oh yeah.

D-...that people were spinning. Even in the '90s...

S-Oh yeah, no it was hidden with a lot of very famous people.

D-Because it was the, quote unquote, "gay disease."

S-Right.

D-And so, you know, to not sully his, I'm rolling my eyes right now while I say this...

S-Yes.

J-Yeah.

D-...not sully his...

S-Legacy.

D-Yeah.

J-Well, let's, you know, let's say that, you know, you, none of us think the less of Andy for being gay.

D-God no.

J-If he was bisexual.

S-If indeed that was the case, yeah. Or bisexual, whatever.

J-But, yeah, but, if family, especially his parents, probably would have wanted to keep it hushed up. Even if Andy himself wasn't that secretive about it, you know?

D-Uh huh.

J-I'm sure his parents would have wanted to keep it hushed up.

S-Uh huh. No, and, and I will say that if, if it was that, it did come about, Andy was notorious for liking prostitutes.

D-Yeah. Well, he could, I mean...

S-So.

D-...and frankly, he wouldn't have had to be bisexual to get AIDS.

J-Uh huh.

S-That's why I'm bringing this up, is I don't want to, I don't want to pigeon hole it one way.

D-Yeah.

S-And I don't want to say anything negative to either side.

D-Uh huh, yeah.

S-But he had a predilection to, to putting himself into very risky scenarios.

J-Uh huh.

D-Yeah. I mean, he totally could have had AIDS.

S-So, this, that, that's what I've got here on, on this.

D-Great. Roll credits.

S-No (laughing).

J-Yeah. No, no.

D-There's more?

S-Stop it!

D-Aww.

S-There's, there's one funny thing that I want to point out, and I'm notorious for doing this, and people probably hate me, cause they think it's minutiae and who cares? But, I find the relationship between Andy and Lynn, over time, very funny.

J-Uh huh, why?

S-People lament that they were soul mates and it was this perfect relationship and yada yada yada, and all this stuff. And it turns out that's not the case. According to Michael and some other reports that I've

read, that yeah, actually, they had for the last six months, both of them been complaining about the other and had to leave. But Andy got sick, and so they didn't do anything.

D-The last six months, yeah.

S-I find it funny though, when it gets elevated to this, this level. If you, if you watched "Man on the Moon," that's one of those places where I see that happen.

D-Well, I mean, you know, again, it's like, ok, they were together for a year.

J-Yeah.

D-And for literally half of that...

J-For 35 years...

D-...they're saying, "Well, we probably don't need to be doing this anymore." It really means that, you know, a couple months in they probably were thinking, "well, we don't need to do this," but he got sick and she was like, "Well, I'm going to be the jerk who leaves the dude with cancer, or AIDS. So I can't do that."

S-Yeah (laughing).

J-Uh huh. Yeah, no.

S-That's looks pretty bad.

D-That looks pretty bad, even if it's only been a couple months. Well, you know?

S-Uh huh.

J-Yeah. Yeah, that's kind of admirable that she, uh, you know, stuck it out.

D-It is.

S-Oh no, that is.

D-That's crazy to me.

S-Most, a lot of people would bail.

D-Would, yeah, absolutely.

S-Understandably.

J-Oh yeah.

S-It's a tough thing to handle. We're going to move on to theory number two. Which is that...

J-He's alive.

S-Or Andy did not die at that time.

D-Yes.

J-Oh, ok.

S-And he faked his death.

D-I think that's...

S-Whether he's alive today or...

D-That has to be the...

S-...not, it's that he did not die at that time.

J-Well, if he were still alive today, he wouldn't be that old really. So he'd be...

S-He was 35 in '84, so...

J-Born in '49.

S-He'd be in his 60s.

J-He would be, what, 67?

D-Yeah.

S-Something like that, yes.

J-67 years old. That's not old.

S-That's not crazy old.

J-No.

D-It's not (laughing).

S-Listen, little girl...

D-I mean, it's not ancient (laughing).

S-Listen, little girl, you shut your mouth! (Laughing).

D-I like how this, like, goes in the little, you know, Joe says "That's not old at all," and Steve goes, "Yeah, that's not *that* old."

J-It's not crazy old (laughing).

D-And like, you're right, it's not *that* old.

J-It's old, but it's not elderly yet.

D-No, God, no.

S-Listen, take your piece of taffy and stop that (D and S laughing).

D-Ok!

S-It's in the other room.

J-I've got some peanut butter cups.

D-(sighing) Warm out of your pocket's the best kind.

S-Let's, let's go into this. So Andy had been pretty excited, or pretty interested in the concept of faking his own death.

D-I think obsessed is the term people used.

J-Yeah.

S-Well, it is, but I don't know that obsessed is right. But it came up quite a few times. And to get into this, you have to get into the mindset of, to a little bit we've got to leave the land of logic behind, and just fall into the, the character, or the characters of Andy Kaufman, to kind of think in his realm. Cause he...

D-That's his favorite thing.

S-...he had a different way of going about stuff.

J-Yeah, he was a strange, twisted character.

S-Uh huh. He, yeah.

J-I don't mean twisted in a really ugly way.

S-No, no, no.

J-Not like serial killer kind of way.

S-No, no. He just...

J-But there was something a little warped about Andy.

S-I think it was great, though.

J-Oh yeah.

S-Absolutely. So let's sort out some things that he did though.

J-The, the, I was around when Andy was around, you know? And I remember, I remember all of this stuff.

S-Uh huh.

J-I can't believe how damn long ago it was (Steve laughing). Holy crap, that was a long time ago. It just doesn't seem like it's been that long. But holy crap, it's been, like...

S-We were watching the, so we're going to talk about this later, but there's a bit where he's on Letterman, and we were watching that Letterman bit, and it's Letterman's episode number 82.

J-Yeah. He looks so young.

D-He's a baby.

J-Yeah, he is (laughing).

S-Letterman looks so young in that. And he had so much hair.

J-Oh, I know.

S-Early '80s hair.

J-Yeah, I had more hair back then too.

S-I did too.

J-Hm.

D-You guys are looking at me like I was alive.

S-No, no.

J-Yeah, Devin had no hair.

S-No (laughing).

D-I had no hair (laughing).

S-You, yeah. Ok, we're moving on.

D-I didn't exist in any sense of the word.

S-We talked about in the beginning Andy's, this is going to play into some of the stuff we're going to talk about in a moment, but we had talked about Andy's Foreign Man character, and I want to tell you

some of the things that he would do with that character, because that's going to help us flow through this. So when Andy got big enough, of course, in I think it was 1979, cause "Taxi" ran for five years. So it was '78 or '79, "Taxi" started. 1978 or '79. And he got brought on as the character "Latka."

J-Yeah, I don't think he was originally on the show. I think he came on...

S-Oh yeah, he was.

J-Oh, I thought he came on a couple of years after the show started.

S-No, he was, I believe he was on it from almost the very beginning. He might have come in a year late. I got to be honest, I don't have the IMDB up in front of me...

J-Yeah.

S-...and I can't remember off the top of my head.

J-I didn't watch, I didn't exactly watch that show religiously myself.

S-Yeah. But, but the point is, he came in and it, it launched him into the spotlight. And of course, he was then able to go around and do tours and have comedy shows and, again, we're talking about what do people expect? They expect you to go up on stage and tell your jokes, and do all your stuff.

D-You do your Seinfeld voice and you're done.

S-Yeah, exactly. And he, he wouldn't do that. I mean, he, so one of the things that he would do with the Foreign Man character, and this is actually what he did when he showed up on "Saturday Night Live" in 1975, is he gets up there, and all he does is he walks up and he's got a record player, cause records were the thing then. And he starts playing the theme to "Mighty Mouse."

J-Uh huh.

S-And just standing there.

J-I remember seeing him do that. It's hilarious (laughing).

S-Dumbstruck. The whole time as the...

J-Except for the chorus.

S-Except for when the chorus comes, and then he gives this super emphatic lip sync performance of, I think it's the "here I come to save the day" line.

J-Yeah.

S-And he just gets into it! And then he just drops back into completely "I don't know what the hell is going on" mode (Devin laughing).

J-It's great. He's standing there to the right of the record player, and then he's just standing there, you

know? And then all of a sudden it goes (singing) “Here I come to save the day!” And he lip syncs and then he swings his left arm outward and upward, and he gazes up into the air...

S-Like he's Mighty Mouse.

J...(singing) “Here I come to save the day!”

S-Yes.

J-And that's it.

D-I just want to say we can't do this for every single one.

S-No.

J-Yeah, good point.

D-Cause this can't, this episode can't turn into us being, re-enacting...

S-Re-enacting, no, no, no, no.

D-Ok.

S-No, but...

D-But this is fine. I just...

S-So...

J-Yeah, yeah, good point.

S...the reason I bring this, this particular bit up, is this is now, like I said, Andy's able to travel around, and he starts going to tours, and he wants to screw with people. So he would go to a comedy show and he would walk out on stage, and everybody would applaud, and they would be excited. And he comes out on stage, he's wearing a jacket, and he would look at the crowd, and in a English accent, obviously faked English accent, he would pull out a book, and it would be “The Great Gatsby...”

D-(With English accent) “Good day, guvnah!”

S-And he would begin to read from “The Great Gatsby”

J-Uh huh.

S-And at first, kind of like we've talked about, people would laugh.

J-Uh huh.

S-And then they'd get angry.

J-Yep. And then they start grumbling and booing.

S-And he would, he would respond to the crowd in character, you know, “stop it,” you know? And blah blah blah blah.

J-He would say, “If you don't quiet down, I shall put on the record.”

S-At which point they would go bananas, because yes, it's going to be “Mighty Mouse.”

D-Uh huh.

S-And he would finally give in, and he would play the record, which was him reading “The Great Gatsby.” (D and S laughing).

J-Yeah, yeah.

D-Oh, God, this man is my soul mate. That's all I can say (laughing).

J-Yeah.

S-Which is hilarious! And it's great. But if that was all that he had done, and this entire legend was based upon that, that would be a weak foundation. But it's not, because there's other things. There's a guy who, in 1979, the guy's name is Alan Abel. Abel faked his own death, I think he was at a ski resort, and he faked a heart attack. And, like, the paramedics showed up, and they hauled him away and all this stuff. And these were all people that he had set up to come in.

J-Oh, by the way, Alan Abel was, he was the guy that founded the Society to Clothe Naked Animals, correct?

S-Right (laughing).

D-Yes, yes.

J-So obviously a good sense of humor.

S-Yes. No, he was a giant hoaxer. He was known for hoaxes. But he pulls, he does this, and he does such a good job that “The New York Times” runs an obituary for him.

D-It's so good (laughing).

S-The next day he comes out and tells everybody that he's fine and that the tales of his death have been “grandly overstated” and something something something.

J-Uh huh, yeah. So...

S-Kaufman watched all of this, and loves it. And pesters Abel about how did he pull it off? What details did he do? You know, just trying to get every detail. To the point that Abel didn't like him, cause he was a pest. He kept bugging him for details on how he did it, and annoyed the crap out of him.

J-By the way, did Abel ever render an opinion on whether Andy was dead or not?

S-Not that I know of.

J-Yeah.

S-I read a few things from him, but nothing was ever related to the Kaufman alive versus dead conspiracy.

J-Uh huh.

S-He never actually seems to have spoken to it.

J-Uh huh.

S-Let's talk about, there's an album that came out, it came out relatively recently. It was 2013.

D-20..yeah.

S-It's called "Andy and His Grandma."

D-Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes!

S-Who, God, who was it that helped narrate the...

D-Bill Hader.

S-Bill Hader? Ok.

D-He's my favorite.

S-This is, this is a series of conversations that Kaufman had recorded on the phone, unbeknownst to people. So he's talking to his, his friends, his business partners. Bob Zmuda is one of the people that's on it, specifically on the track we're talking about. He's also talking to some "ladies of the night" that he knows, which is in the beginning of that track, which is really awkward.

J-Yeah. The one who wants the "blank" tapes.

S-Yes. Exactly.

J-Yeah.

S-In the, the "I want those tapes" track, he and Bob talk for, God, it's like two and a half, three minutes, maybe four, about "Well, what if we, what if I faked my death?" And how would they go about it? How long could they pull it off for? These things. Like, he talked about it there. So he, he not only had been talking about it with, trying to get the information from Abel, now he's talking to Bob, and they're kind of fleshing it out, at least in this one recording that we know of, if not other conversations. We're now going to move to, from that, so we got those two bits there. We're now going to go to the over-the-top character for Andy Kaufman. We briefly mentioned him before, when Joe and I were talking, which is

Tony Clifton.

J-Yeah.

D-Yeah!

J-Yeah, interesting character.

S-I love, I love the description that I have worked up of Tony Clifton. Tony Clifton is Andy Kaufman's foul mouthed, big jowled, booze drinking, giant sunglasses and black toupee wearing, terrible singing lounge singer.

J-Yeah. He was like, kind of like a really bad Elvis.

S-He was a terrible Elvis.

J-Yeah.

S-He was, he drank, he smoked, he ate red meat. He badgered audiences. He was crude and foul to everybody. The Clifton character was the exact opposite of Andy Kaufman. Whereas Andy Kaufman's, like his Foreign Man was meek and mild and very polite, Clifton was the opposite.

J-Yeah. He was, Andy Kaufman was really a very good actor.

S-Uh, yeah (laughing). Yeah.

D-Yeah. I mean, particularly when you look at the pictures, just physically...

J-Uh huh.

D-...I mean, he seemed to have made himself into a different person.

S-He did. He had a big gut. The, the Clifton character would wear a suit with the ruffle-front shirt, and he had giant Elvis glasses on...

D-And he did have jowls, and Andy didn't really have those jowls.

S-No, those were definitely, definitely, uh, what is it? You know this...

J-Mutton chops?

S-No, he had the mutton chops, but they he had the, the prosthetic...

D-They were, they were...

J-Oh.

S-The fake, the fake chin and everything. Make him look fat.

D-I was trying to figure out if you were looking for the specific, like, latex prosthetics, or just... (laughing).

S-Latex. That was, that was the word I was looking for. No, he, he did this stuff, and one of, this is one of those things, so the, the Clifton character had been around for a long time. And when Kaufman got picked up on "Taxi," he worked into his contract that Tony Clifton could be, could be on the show four times as Tony Clifton, in random episodes which would also not have the Latka character on them. And, in other words, Andy Kaufman's known character on them.

J-Uh huh.

S-And the studio agreed to this request. It sounds like they didn't know who Clifton was. He was evidently made out to be some great...

J-Yeah.

S-...great lounge act.

J-Yeah. They probably thought, "You know, it's Andy Kaufman. It's going to be great."

D-Yeah.

J-Yeah. Except that it wasn't great.

S-Except, yeah. He showed up and he was such a monumental ass to everybody, to the point that security showed up...

D-Oh my God.

S-...and they escorted him off of the studio lot and told him he was, he could never come back again (laughing).

D-Well...

S-And all of the other appearances were, that had been in the contract was cut and scrubbed.

J-Yeah, yeah, yeah. So it's like, Tony Clifton can't come back, Latka can?

S-Right, because I think that, at least in the beginning, they didn't realize that Clifton was Kaufman.

J-Uh huh.

D-Hm.

S-They didn't get it.

J-Yeah.

S-They didn't know. It sounds like Shapiro probably knew, but the studio didn't understand it. So,

eventually, though, people do figure out. They're like, "Wait a second!"

D-"Wait!"

S-"It's funny. Andy's never around when..."

J-They've never seen them together, yeah.

S..."when Tony's around." So what he did is he got Bob Zmuda to get good enough at the character that suddenly the two could show up at the same time, and they'd show up on stage together.

J-Yeah. And that way, that way Andy could say, "Hey, it's not me."

S-"It's not me!"

J-Yeah.

S-"This guy, I think he's great, but it's not me." (Devin laughing). Again, one of those things that he just, he took it so far and he worked so hard. But here's the thing about the Clifton angle. There's a, a movie script, I think it was written in 1980, and Bob Zmuda and Andy Kaufman write it. And it's called "The Tony Clifton Story." Now, this thing's hard to read. Did either of you...?

J-I didn't actually find a copy of the script.

D-Yeah.

S-Ok. I found a copy of it, and it's effing weird.

J-Hm.

S-I've read scripts before. Not a lot of them, but I've read scripts. This thing was so far into left field. Somebody had converted it to, to Microsoft Word, and it was 124 pages of absurdity, where Clifton is the star character, and Kaufman discovers him. And all of this weird stuff happens. And evidently Andy Kaufman was pretty excited about the idea of breaking the fourth wall.

D-Hmm.

S-Either of you guys heard of the fourth wall?

J-Yeah.

D-Yes.

J-Yeah, it's when you, when you...

S-Ok. I'm just asking, because I have to ask these things, but...

J-Yeah. It's when, when you look out the TV screen to your audience and you speak to them.

S-Right. Because the three walls...

D-It's the Frank Underwood effect.

S-Yes.

J-Yeah.

S-So...

D-It's not, I'm just, frankly, you know, it's a theater, so...

S-Uh huh.

D-...it's before TV.

S and J-Yeah.

D-So.

S-So the thing was what Kaufman liked to do is he liked to try to break the fourth wall, and then twist things to bring the viewer even farther in, and re-establish the fourth wall. Like, he did these weird twists and turns. That's not the weird, the big, big thing about this script. The script is weird.

D-Yeah.

S-What happens, though, very suspiciously in this script, is Tony Clifton dies.

J-Uh huh.

S-Of cancer.

J-Where did he die at?

S-In Cedars-Sinai.

J-Uh huh.

S-Exactly the place that Andy Kaufman dies four years later of cancer.

D-Lung cancer.

J-But here's my question about the script...

S-Lung cancer actually doesn't show up in the script.

D-Oh.

S-It's just, it's unspecified cancer.

D-Cancer, ok.

J-Yeah. But my question about the script is, is that do we actually know for a hundred percent certainty that this script was written by Andy before Andy died?

S-Absolutely not.

J-Yeah.

S-I can't, I can not, I can not validate that.

J-Yeah.

S-Because the copies that I've found...

J-That's what I was wondering about.

S-...were all converted copies.

J-Uh huh.

S-So, it could be that at one point, somebody made it up, and...

J-Or it could be that, that Tony [sic] and Bob actually did write a script, but somebody else did a little editing to it.

S-Oh, Andy and Bob, you mean?

D-Andy and Bob.

J-What did I say?

S and D-Tony.

J-Oh.

S-No, Tony Clifton is a character...

J-Oh, I'm sorry (laughing).

S-...not a real person.

J-Yeah. Tony, Tony...

S-I'm 99.9 percent positive Tony Clifton doesn't exist (laughing).

J-Yeah, no, no. Tony and Bob got together to write, to write a movie about Andy Kaufman (S and J laughing).

D-Actually, Andy Kaufman is the character. Tony's the real guy.

J-Yeah. That could be.

S-No, I, thank you for bringing that up, cause I was going to bring that up. I, I have no way to know if that's true.

J-Uh huh.

S-No way to know that.

J-Yeah. But that, that is another little bit of evidence that he might have faked it.

S-Uh huh. Ok. We have one more big thing that we have to talk about.

D-Yeah.

S-Which is the big one. Would you call it the *coup de grace*? Would that, that's not the right one.

D-It's not, but that's ok.

J-Not the *coup de grace*, but it was, this is one of his greatest gags.

D-Ever.

S-That's, I was trying to think of, his, his best thing ever.

J-And this is one of his, his great characters he played, you know? He's playing himself, but...

D-Uh huh, but a little different.

J-...but, yeah, a jerk.

S-Right.

J-Yeah.

S-So, here's what happens.

D-He's The Green Bastard (Steve laughing).

S-In 1979, Kaufman comes up with, as we said, maybe his greatest prank ever, which is wrestling.

D-Yep.

S-He shows up on "Saturday Night Live." It's his ninth appearance. By the way, remember guys, 1979 SNL is tiny. It's a tiny studio.

J-Uh huh.

S-Itsy-bitsy thing. And he shows up in thermal underwear with black trunks on over the top, saying that he is the world intergender wrestling champion.

J-Uh huh.

S-And that he will pay five hundred dollars to any woman who can beat him at wrestling in three minutes or less. And at that point proceeds to just make fun of women's lib, and just generally be a chauvinist jerk.

J-Uh huh. It was great.

S-It's hila...

D-It's, it's pretty funny.

S-It's funny because in retrospect we know it's a gag.

D-Right.

S-And it's really funny, but it really pissed some people off. And low and behold, some lady gets into the ring with him. By the way, she's a plant, and he beats her in under three minutes.

J-Yeah. Yeah, it's, it's great to watch this interview of him when he's bragging about "Oh, you know, I totally, I just totally kicked their asses every time."

D-I like when he, you know, when he does the whole "Well, you know, I don't think women are dumb. I think women are really great at, you know, cooking and ironing and cleaning..."

S-"Raising the babies." (Joe laughing).

D-"Raising the babies. I think they're really good at all of that stuff."

S-He's, he's hitting hot buttons.

D-He is.

J-Uh huh.

S-Because this is the, you know, this is the women's lib movement.

D-Yeah. And this is early '80s...

S-And he is just, he's just poking fun, and hitting all the right spots. And over the course, that wasn't his first time to wrestle a woman in the ring in this character, and he does this character as himself, as Andy Kaufman, over the course of four years he wrestles over 400 women across the country. And in the beginning, it's pretty clear that most of those women were plants. But later on, he took it far enough, he started just, he would grab, he would pull five women out of the crowd. He would have the crowd vote on which one they wanted him to wrestle, which means they wanted to pick the biggest, baddest lady in the bunch.

D-Oh yeah.

S-And then he would wrestle her. And he would win. He would wrestle them, and it just, it was so absurd, and he kept taking this intergender wrestling champion thing farther and farther. And over four years, he pissed off almost every woman in the country because a lot of people thought he was being serious. Cause again, as we talked about, he never broke character.

J-Uh huh. Yeah. He was, he was willing to take it, just go on and on and on with these gags.

S-Yeah. And, and so he starts moving this gag into Memphis, Tennessee. And he starts mocking women, as he had been, but then he starts also mocking the people of Memphis, and a local wrestler by the name of Jerry "The King" Lawler takes notice.

D-Gets a little involved.

S-Gets a little, gets upset and starts exchanging words with Kaufman, at which point Kaufman starts ripping on Lawler and Memphis. He's sending video tapes, this is the age of video tapes.

D-Uh huh.

S-He's sending video tapes, telling the people of Memphis how to use soap, calling it the "redneck capital of the world." (Joe laughing). I'm not going to imitate him, but he just, he does so many outlandish, over-the-top things, and he, he's of course saying, "Whatever, Jerry Lawler. I don't wrestle women. Or wrestle men. I wrestle women, because I'm the intergender champion."

J-Uh huh.

S-Except that there's a, a time where suddenly Lawler shows up, and they get into it, and he agrees to wrestle him, and he gets him into the ring...

J-And of course, this whole thing was a set-up from the very beginning.

S-Yeah.

D-Yeah.

S-Lawler's in, yeah, so we're going to spoil it. Lawler's, I guess it's not really a spoiler, most people know this. Lawler's in on it from the beginning. And he and Kaufman would sit around and work out the lines and how the gag was going to go. So what happens, Lawler and he finally agree to wrestle. They get in the ring, and Kaufman runs around the ring in circles away from Lawler, until Lawler eventually catches him, and appears to knock the snot out of him, and then deliver two pile drivers in a row.

J-Uh huh, yeah.

S-And Kaufman is laying on the ground. He's twitching...

D-Sorry. For those of us who don't, may not know what a pile driver is?

S-That's where you pick somebody up so their feet are straight up in the air, their head is pointed at the ground. You jump, the wrestler who is holding the upside-down person lands on their butt, and the person who is upside-down lands on their head.

D-Yeah.

S-It's a pile, you're driving, piling, driving their head into the ground.

D-Uh huh.

J-Yeah.

S-And he does two in a row.

D-Right.

J-It looks painful, though I'm sure Lawler was a professional, so I...

S-Lawler's totally a pro.

J-I'm sure he knew how to do it without actually hurting...

D-Yeah, I'm sure they had practiced it.

J-Yeah.

S-I'm sure. But...

D-Anyways, so Kaufman "injures" his neck. Quote unquote.

S-Yeah, he, he's on the ground. He's flailing, he's flipping around. The, and the paramedics show up, and they haul Andy out of the ring on a stretcher. I was telling you two earlier that I had read stuff from Lawler that talked about, or somebody was talking about Lawler was prancing around the ring all excited because he was playing his part of winning. And Kaufman is laying on the ground trying not to move his mouth so that nobody gets it, going "Call an ambulance." And Lawler's going "No way. That's going to cost, like, \$250." "I'll pay it. Call the ambulance. It'll be great for the gag." Which it was, because then people really believed it.

J-Uh huh.

S-Kaufman is then seen running around, screaming about Lawler, in a neck brace, for months and months. And six months later they, they go on TV. They...(laughing).

J-Yeah, they trade insults on the Letterman Show.

S-Was it five or six months later?

J-It was, like, August.

S-Yeah. They're, they're trading insults via video tape back and forth, and this is the day when the kind of Wrestlemania, the wrestler will stand there and talk to the announcer and talk trash, and then go wrestle.

D-That still happens, just so you know.

J-Yeah, it does.

S-Well, back then is when it was new. They first figured it out.

D-How to talk?

S-Ok, that's a lie. That's not true. But, so they're sending these tapes back and forth, and finally there's a, I don't if it was, if it was proffered as a way to broker peace between the two, but they go on the Letterman Show. And they're, we watched this, and they're, they're kind of being civil, and then it slowly starts escalating until Kaufman says something. Lawler stands up and smacks Kaufman in the face, and knocks him out of his chair. At which point Kaufman stands up, and the version we watched together today was edited for foul language.

D-Well, we should also mention that at this point Andy Kaufman is still wearing his neck brace.

S-And still in character.

D-Five, five months later.

S-Yes.

J-Yeah, yeah...

D-And still in character.

J-And by the way, I don't think Letterman's live.

S-Isn't it?

J-I don't think so. I thought they taped it in, like, the afternoon.

S-Maybe it's not.

J-Yeah.

S-You know, you're probably, well I don't know if it was at that time. That's my problem. I didn't...

D-Yeah, it's hard to tell.

J-They had video tape in 1983.

S-No, what I didn't know is I actually had never thought to look to see if Letterman was live. But you're probably right.

J-Yeah.

S-It probably is not, was not live. But, he, he freaks out and he starts...

D-Kaufman.

S-Kaufman freaks out and...

J-Yeah.

S-...wisely, and this is the great, this is the part that I love the best, he gets on the other side of Letterman's desk, and puts Letterman between him and Lawler, and starts swearing at Lawler. And saying...

J-He seems to be genuinely angry.

S-Oh, he's...

J-Like I said, he was a good actor.

S-He was spitting mad, foul language, like the beeps? You know how sometimes you'll hear somebody, it's like beep, word, word, word, beep, word. No, this is just, beep, beep, beep, beep, beep, beep. It sounds like Morse Code, they're beeping him so much.

J-Yeah.

S-And they're actually blacking out his face, or his mouth.

J-And apparently, apparently Letterman was not in on it, because...

D-No.

J-...he's, he's like (laughing).

S-He's cowering. Letterman is cowering between the pair of them. If you watch, there are certain angles, and you can just see him, just...

D-Yeah.

J-He's looking a little nervous there, yeah.

S-He's just like, "Oh God, what's going to happen?" And at the end, he grabs Dave's coffee, and he throws it.

J-And that's not Dave, Andy grabs it.

D-Kaufman.

S-Yeah, Andy grabs Dave's coffee, and throws it at Lawler's face (laughing).

D-And then runs away.

S-And then runs away.

D-I encourage you to watch this, if you haven't already.

J-Yeah.

D-Our retellings are long and not quite as good.

S-But still fun.

D-But still fun.

J-Yeah, it's still...

D-Yeah, yeah. But you should watch that for sure.

S-It's, that's the thing. Actually, I would recommend, if you're going to watch this whole thing that happened with Lawler, we may post this up, but there is a YouTube playlist that is almost two hours long of all of the crap that happens back and forth between these guys.

J-Oh yeah, there's a lot of it.

D-It's good.

S-It is so absurd. It is, again, it's just taking the joke and never letting it go.

J-Uh huh.

S-And it just gets funnier and fun...like, I watched it, and after a half hour, I was like "God, I don't know if I want to watch any more."

J-Yeah.

S-And then, twenty minutes later I, I, I'm about to pee myself, I'm laughing so hard.

D-Yeah.

J-And I'm sure that after the Letterman thing, I'm sure Lawler and Andy Kaufman probably, you know, met at the bar around the corner and had a beer together.

S-Oh, I, yeah, absolutely. They, they took it so far at one point, Kaufman is offering money to other wrestlers to quote unquote, "take out Lawler." And then eventually he tag teams with another wrestler, and I can't remember who it is, but they, they beat him. And then Kaufman's running around in a crown, saying he's the king of wrestling. At which point Lawler runs out of a crowd, and throws a fireball of some kind in Kaufman's face, and they show Kaufman in the back room, all burnt up. I mean, like, they just never, this, this whole thing went on for over a year.

J-Uh huh, yeah.

S-On national television.

J-Yeah.

S-Never broke.

J-I know. I remember when this happened, too. It makes me feel kind of old (Steve laughing). But, yeah, cause I remember talking, talking to my friends about it at the time. We were going "Is this for real?" And most of us were, like, thinking not, you know?

S-Yeah.

J-Yeah, but.

S-It just kept going on and on. And of course there's the whole thing when Andy died, they, they, some wrestling announcer asked Lawler about him, and he said very few words, but made it sound like he didn't like him at all.

D-He kept it up.

S-He kept it up. He, I'm guessing must have told Andy "I'll keep the character going." And would not give in. So this, this is, this is one of those things, where this is an example of Kaufman ran a gag that was so above and beyond, and he planned it out so far in advance, and he let it run for so long. And of course, Zmuda, Bob is involved.

J-This is in support of your, your...

S-Of Andy's alive.

J-To get back to, yeah.

S-Right.

J-He's alive, yeah.

S-And of course, Bob is involved in this thing the whole time, so he's the man behind the scenes that nobody sees that's setting things up. So Bob's working tirelessly for him. The only, the only thing in this entire theory that doesn't work is who the hell was in the casket? Which I've seen various, various tellings of. There's two different ways that this goes. One is that Andy never was sick, and he actually met a cancer patient who agreed to...

J-Or an AIDS patient.

S-Or an AIDS patient. He met a sick patient who was willing to stand in for him, and be in his casket and let Andy run this gag. Or Andy did actually have cancer, but the treatments actually did cure him, at which point he found this person who was willing to be his body double and sit in the, or lay in the casket as the case may be (laughing).

D-Uh huh.

S-For him. And that's where the body came from. I gotta say, everything else about Andy Kaufman and how he masterminded this crap, I like, I want to believe. The body double is the only thing that I have a hard time getting behind.

J-Well, it's a tricky part. But, you know, the thing about it is, is that, if he really had lost a lot of weight and everything, and he was looking like he died of cancer possibly, you know, he could have just, he could have just had himself drugged and been laying in the coffin, you know? So that way when people poked him, he didn't react because he was out cold.

S-That's possible.

J-Yeah. And then later on he gets out of the coffin, and it's, it's of course taken off and buried. So, possible.

S-Possible.

D-Have you looked at the pictures of Andy Kaufman, like, when he was sick? Like, when he's emaciated and sick?

S-He looks terrible.

D-It doesn't really look like him.

S-Oh, ok. Are you looking at the ones that are the, the photograph reproductions in newspapers? Or, ok, yeah, some of those, the problem is is that black and white photography was crap, and most of it was done as black and white. And he looks like hell, but it also, I've known some people who got pretty sick, and they didn't look like they had several, a year or so prior.

D-For sure. Yeah.

J-Uh huh.

D-But I mean, you know? Just to, cause I, I, like you, want to believe that Andy totally faked the whole thing for this, I mean, quote unquote "hilarious?" gag. You know, so I kind of, you know, I'm looking for that stuff, right?

S-Uh huh.

D-I'm looking to say well, it doesn't totally look like him, so it could totally be someone else. He did go away for a while.

S-Right.

D-For six weeks.

S-Right.

D-And came back looking totally different, so what's to say that, you know, he, that he didn't take that time to switch...

S-He didn't look totally different, but he, he went down hill immediately upon his return.

D-He looked totally different when he returned.

S-Ok (S and J laughing).

J-For one thing, he was black.

D-Yeah, right.

S-And he answered to the name "Bob Zmuda."

J-Yeah.

D-It was weird. It was really weird.

S-It was very strange.

D-Yeah.

S-The, I, the only, the only, the last thing that I have here, so Kaufman had a weird kind of cult following. I mean, not too long after his supposed death.

J-People are still writing about "Did Andy fake his death?"

S-There's, well obviously three dummies with a podcast...

D-I was going to say, we're still talking about it.

S-...talking about it right now (laughing).

J-Yeah. I read an article that was just published, like, last year.

S-Yeah.

J-You know, less than a year ago.

S-People are still talking about it, and he's still being sighted. I mean, we were talking about the one that was in...

J-The Albuquerque one, ok.

S-...Albuquerque.

J-Where they had the, and by the way, that, that was the worst video ever. I mean, I don't see it. It actually made the news in Albuquerque (Steve laughing). And they, they played some of that security

camera bit, and I don't see, I mean, it could be Andy Kaufman. It could be millions of other people.

S-Anybody.

J-It could be anybody, yeah.

S-And that was the problem. But there's all these cult followings, all these cult sightings. One of the things, it's, it's, I find it entertaining, every five year anniversary of his death, suddenly there's reports that Kaufman said he was going to take it for fifteen years, so he's going to come back this year. Kaufman said he was going to take it for twenty years...

D-He said that?

S-...he's going to come back this year. Twenty-five, thirty, thirty-five, like, thirty-five is the next number that we've got. I really, in my heart of hearts, want to believe that Andy Kaufman is sitting in a retirement home right now getting his giggle over the fact that the entire world thinks he died in 1984.

D-Mostly, actually, I think he's probably in a nursing home somewhere saying to some nurse, "You know, I was Andy Kaufman." And the nurse is like, "I don't know who that is."

J-I think, I doubt that he's in a nursing home yet (laughing).

D-No.

S-Did, did you, ok, did either...

D-Shh, no.

S-You know, you know what I want? I mean, this is, this is, I want this to be true just like what I saw in "Bubba Ho-Tep" for Elvis to be true.

D-Oh yeah.

J-Absolutely.

S-Because that was a hilarious story as well. And I want that to be truly what had happened to Elvis.

D-Yes.

J-Uh huh.

S-Cause, well, I just have a weird thing about famous people like that.

D-Yeah, no, I mean, I think that in my perfect world Andy Kaufman faked his death and, I mean, sure, he faked his death when he was 35 so it makes sense that he would come back 35 years later.

J-It could be.

S-There's a little serendipity in that, yeah.

D-I'm sure that you can, that you can find, that you could pick and choose a number from his 35 years...

S-You could very easily do it in one year increments.

D-You could, I mean...

S-Which some people do.

D-I'm sure that you could, you could say, "Well, you know, 20 was a really sacred number to Andy, so he's going to come back..."

S-"It was some meditation thing."

D-"...so he's going to come back 20..." You know.

J-Are you guys ready to know the truth?

D-Yeah.

S-No.

D-Are you Andy?

J-Yeah.

S-No, I don't want to know the truth (Joe laughing).

J-No, I ain't Andy. But...

S-No, you have too much hair to be Andy.

J-Yeah, I do. But, no, what happened is he did fake his own death. He moved to Mexico and he became Abismo Negro (S and D laughing). Yeah. Who would, unfortunately, as we know, did die. Yeah. Actually, you know, I think that if, if he had faked his own death, he wouldn't have, I don't think he would have stayed away more than a year.

D-I would agree with that.

J-I, I don't think he would have.

D-He would have done an Abel.

J-But...

D-It would have been, like, two days later.

J-Yeah.

S-Well, no, I think Joe's right. I mean, a year is the most...

J-Six months or, at the most, a year.

S-...that you can push that joke.

J-Yeah.

D-Yeah, I agree.

S-Before people consider it offensive.

D-Totally agree.

J-Yeah. But you want to know what I really think? Is that...

S-I don't know if I do, but ok.

J-Yeah, I know. I think that it's entirely possible, what I think really probably happened is that he actually faked faking his own death. I think that probably, when he found out he was terminally ill, and this is, this really kind of fits in with his personality. He probably got together with Zmuda and with his manager, Shapiro, and said, "Guys, we've got to pull off this one last big joke. We've got to convince the world, or at least half the world, that I faked my death." And I, I, and I'm not saying that's proof, that's proven, but I just think that, that fits with his character.

S-No, I get where you're coming from. I get where you're coming from, is the last gag is my death.

J-This is what I'm going to leave, yeah. That's what I'm going to leave the world.

S-I get that.

J-Yeah.

S-Except I don't know that that would be, I, it doesn't fit in his character. Like, his character was always pulling the wool over their eyes for what wasn't happening...

J-Uh huh.

S-...instead of what was really happening, which is the, "I'm alive" is what wasn't happening. So that's why I'm in the camp of I want him to have faked all of it. All of it.

J-Uh huh, yeah. I do too. But I don't think he did.

S-I don't, sadly, I don't think so either, but (laughing).

D-Yeah, I agree with that.

J-Yeah.

D-I want him to, but I don't think.

J-Yeah, I think, you know, as far as faking your own death, and not letting anybody in on it other than a couple close associates is kind of a dick move, you know? And you come back a year, a year or two later, you know, and not everybody's going to be thrilled about it.

S-No.

J-They're going to be happy that you're alive, but they're going to be really, you know, angry.

S-And there's going to be a lot of people that don't talk to you ever again.

J-Yeah.

D-Well, he did...

S-Cause that's a huge emotional trauma.

J-Yeah, it is.

D-He, he did want out of his relationship (S and J laughing).

J-That's a good point, but yeah.

S-That is, that is the ultimate way to get out of a relationship.

D-Uh huh, sure is.

J-You know, I've used that a few times. Fake my death and move away (Steve laughing).

D-Yeah.

J-Yeah.

S-All right.

J-But anyway, that's where I'm thinking it happened, I think that's what happened. I think he probably toyed with the idea before he became terminally ill. He toyed with it, and then when it finally came around, he talked, he talked to Bob and Greg, or George...

S-George Shapiro.

J-And said, "Dudes, dudes, you know, let's keep this alive, ok?" You know? And when you think about it too, because he was a celebrity and, you know, a famous guy and everything, he probably didn't want to fade away. And this was a way to keep his legend alive.

S-It is a way to keep the legend going, absolutely.

D-It's a good way, yeah.

J-Yeah.

S-Absolutely.

J-So that's kind of what I suspect.

S-Well, that's all we've got on this particular one. We will, of course, have some links that will be discussions, or articles about Andy. We might put a link to a YouTube playlist on the website. I don't know what it'll be at this point. But if you want to see that stuff, you're more than welcome to do so. That website, of course, as always is thinking sideways podcast dot com. On the website we do have several different options for supporting the show. We've got merchandise, this will all be on the right-hand side, by the way, in the, in the little column there. We've got shirts, and phone cases, and mugs, and all of those good things. So those are available on Zazzle or Red Bubble. The stickers as well. If you want to do a monetary contribution to the show, you're welcome to do that. We have Paypal for a one-time contribution, so if that's what works for your budget, thank you very much. We appreciate that.

J-Yeah. Really.

S-If you would like to be more of an ongoing donation.

D-Sustaining.

S-Sustaining, as Devin likes to say it.

J-Phones ringing in the background.

S-You are welcome to do that. We have, we have a profile set up, or account set up on Patreon, patreon dot com slash thinking sideways. And that is, just so everybody knows, that is a donation per episode that we come out with, so if you decide that you want to give us \$20 per, be aware that that's going to be \$20 per episode, not just a flat \$20.

D-Unless you cap it at a monthly \$20 a month.

S-Which then, yeah.

D-Then you just donate \$20.

S-Then it becomes awkward.

D-And it's weird.

S-It becomes weird (laughing).

J-Yeah, and also, by the way, we, we drop a regular episode once a week.

S-Yep.

J-And...

S-So it's about four.

J-Yeah, yeah, so occasionally we drop a short or something like that.

S-We never charge for those.

J-We don't charge for those.

S-Yeah. No, those are, those are extras, bonuses, we never charge for that stuff.

J-We're not putting those in there to make more money off you guys.

S-No (laughing). As much as Joe asks me to do it, I decided not to.

J-Yeah. And by the way, this is optional.

S-Yeah.

J-You don't need to contribute if you don't want to.

S-No.

J-It just helps to defray expenses.

S-We make the content because we like to. If you'd like to contribute, we appreciate that. But by no means a requirement.

D-No, we don't expect it.

S-Yep. We are on iTunes. That is, seems to be the primary portal that people find the show through. If you're finding us on iTunes, please do take the time to subscribe and if you're enjoying it, leave a positive review and rating. If you're not enjoying it, go ahead and leave a positive review and rating.

J-Absolutely.

D-And then email us.

J-And then email us.

S-And then go ahead and email us with the things that aren't working for you. You can email us at thinking sideways podcast at gmail dot com. We do, we field conversations, story suggestions, general fan letters. Anything and everything we will respond to all of it.

D-Eventually.

S-Eventually. Sometimes it takes a little while. We're on just about every streaming site that's out there, so I'm not going to name them all, because I don't have that kind of time. But if you use one of those, awesome. Find us on it.

J-Are we on the Facebook?

S-We are on the Facebook. We are on the Facebook, and we have a Facebook page and a Facebook group, both of which are very busy, and very fun. So do take the time to like the page and or join the group.

D-Uh huh.

S-We have a subreddit.

D-We do.

S-Which Devin knows about and I still haven't gone to.

D-Thank God (J and S laughing).

J-I have gone to it, I just don't, I'm just not in the habit of going out there very much.

S-I forget all the time.

D-I know you do.

S-And we also have a Twitter account, so we are on Twitter at thinkin sideways, without the 'g' in the middle.

D-You can see pictures of my weird bruises.

S-Yeah, I didn't, you really shouldn't...

J-You have pictures of your weird bruises?

S-That was weird.

D-You're welcome.

S-Really weird.

D-People liked it. And I get to prove that I'm falling apart at (mumbles) old.

S-Yeah. Yeah. You robotic device, you. Ok, well that's all that I've got on this particular episode. You guys got anything else?

J-No. Just if you're Andy, like you know, find us on Facebook and join the group and tell us what you've been up to.

D-You could just email us, I mean...

J-Or you can email us too.

D-...you don't have to, like, out yourself publicly.

J-Yeah, that's a good point.

S-I'm just going to go ask my Uncle Andy.

D-Oh.

J-All right.

D-Good idea.

J-Yeah.

D-Andy.