

# Ready, Set, Go-Go!

My brief, happy career  
in "show business."



**I recently watched a documentary about** a camp for kids whose entire lives had been devoted to getting into show business. When these kids played peekaboo, they did Bob Fosse jazz hands; their first sentences consisted of the words "start spreading the news." Seeing how hard they worked—singing and dreaming and tapping their tiny hearts out—made me feel really crappy, because for me, getting into show business had been a breeze. Seriously. I was eighteen, and I did it without ever strumming a solitary guitar chord, without ever spinning a plate, without ever hitting a single note on-key; without, in fact, having any discernible talent whatsoever. I owe it all to one man: Joey Moynihan.

It was the late sixties, the summer after my first year of college, and I was visiting my

family at an Air Force base on Okinawa, in the middle of the East China Sea. It was a very odd place for me, a newly minted hippie with official Trotskyite-in-training glasses and jeans with a peace sign embroidered onto the frayed hind end (which my father, a colonel running the tiny island's military school system, described by saying, "Your ass is hanging out").

I enjoyed doing three things there. The first was holding my father responsible for the Vietnam War; the second was haranguing my mother about purchasing white sugar and informing her that she was feeding granulated death to her six children; and the third was mooning about my deliriously handsome, cheating rat of a boyfriend who was not only sleeping with all my slut-bunny girlfriends but had managed to convince me that I had gotten crab lice from the dog. (Somehow the nuns back at my old school never covered where either babies or crab lice really came from.)

After my mother told me that I was a giant pain in the patched ass and that any time I felt like taking over the shopping and cooking I could just have at it, I stomped off to my bedroom to sulk. As I brooded about King Crab back in what the GIs called either "the world" or "the big PX," a deejay on Armed Forces Radio announced that there was going to be a dance contest and that the first prize was an all-expenses-paid, two-week trip to Tokyo. Every male on earth believes he has a sense of humor, and every female believes she can dance. The fact that I'd slopped around the floor a few times was enough to make me believe that I was a shoo-in. Suitably | **CONTINUED ON PAGE tk**

**FOOT LOOSE AND DANCING FREE:** Most people assumed I performed in a cage. This bird was never caged.

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deluded, I signed up.

The judge was a stumpy fireplug of a man named Joey Moynihan, a comedian who dreamed of being Bob Hope and was looking for a Joey Heatherton to use as a foil during his act. This Joey aspired to a Rat Pack coolness that translated into suits with a sinister midnight sheen, a diamond horseshoe pinkie ring, Wolfman Jack hair slicked straight back with Vitalis, and frequent drenchings in Brut cologne. His Filipino manager, Mickey, turned out to be fond of patronizing prostitutes and sending his wife back in Manila 3-D postcards of the Blessed Virgin Mary that made it appear that the Holy Mother was crushing a serpent beneath her bare foot. Mickey put on an album I'd brought containing the most danceable song of the day, "Brown Eyed Girl," by Van Morrison. (Attention, campers: If you cannot dance to "Brown Eyed Girl," hand in your derby and cane.) Because of my talent at being Caucasian, female, and of legal age on an island where that combination was rare, I won the contest.

I spent two weeks with Joey and Mickey touring the military clubs around Tokyo. (A sew girl who lived on a narrow path lined with habu grass, named for the venomous pit vipers that slither through its leafy confines, had stitched up a couple suitably sequined and fringed outfits for me.) The first night, I danced to the musical stylings of Watty Watanabe and the Nabe Notes as they played "Baby Elephant Walk" and "Watermelon Man," the two most *undanceable* songs ever except for what the band played at the club the next night: "I Dig Rock 'n' Roll Music." It was impossible to explain to Joey that although a song might contain the words "rock and roll" in the title, it was still, essentially, a folk song and, as such, was impossible to dance to.

For his own Borscht Belt reasons, Joey called me Zelda. I recall exactly one joke from his "act": "I'm gettin' old. I'm gettin' old. Just this afternoon I was chasin' Zelda here around the room, and when I finally caught her, I couldn't remember why I was chasin' her." Rim shot, followed by my vaudeville look of maidenly outrage.

Years later, I ended up writing a novel that centered on my two weeks in show business, and afterward I found out that most people assumed I'd danced in a cage. I'd like to set the record straight: This bird was never caged. Or even shod. Though go-go boots were very popular among the lovely Okinawan ladies of the night, it was impossible to find a pair large enough to fit my Paul Bunyan-esque feet. So

no cage, no go-go boots, and, most important of all, no skanky behavior. Even my employer believed that "go-go" was hippie-speak for "do me." Joey informed me regularly that he "shot blanks," as if my fear of giving birth to a pinkie-ringed Wolfman Jack baby was the lone reason I didn't succumb to his stumpy-armed embrace.

On the last night of the tour, knowing that I would never see Joey again, I asked him if it was possible to get crab lice from a dog. In retrospect, I admire his restraint in answering. "This guy sounds like a real jaboni," he said, adding that I could do better. He, for example, was available.

That night, while the house band tootled through the drunken blats and trills of "Baby Elephant Walk," I sang "Brown Eyed Girl" to myself and danced to the music in my head as I thought about my faithless boyfriend back in "the world." I popped and twirled the fringe on the dress sewn by a girl who lived amid pit vipers. I made my dance a prayer to the Blessed Virgin Mary—the one who saved the world from sin by crushing a serpent beneath her bare feet.

And I added some jazz hands. ♣

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