

# the **VIDEOPHILE** Interview:

## Jim Lowe, editor/publisher



Maureen Panus

Jim Lowe stands in front of old movie posters

Jim Lowe was born in Charleston, West Virginia, early one chilly February morning in 1940. His childhood passed no more eventfully than many another. Television had not yet reached that corner of the world, so his entertainment consisted of such things as radio, sitting in the first row at the Saturday afternoon movies (complete with a serial and lots of "selected short subjects"), yo-yos, going to the carnival, comic books, balsa wood airplanes, bubble gum trading cards, trying to see up girls' dresses, and hiking mountain trails. After high school, he struck out for Florida, graduated from college and law school, and eventually landed a job with the Florida

Legislature, where he has served as director of the House of Representatives Bill Drafting Service for many years.

Along the way, he developed a consuming interest in popular culture, in its many varied forms, the most recent manifestation of which has been publication of *The Videophile* magazine. As a child, he sometimes thought of becoming an astronomer, or maybe a cartoonist, but was never very good at responding to the question, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" He still isn't.

Today Jim lives rather quietly with his teenage son in an "A" frame cedar home, on a wooded lot, in Tallahas-

see. He drives a 1957 Thunderbird, and the comfortably cluttered environment of his home abounds with trappings of one who has enjoyed a long affair with nostalgic memorabilia—a 50's style juke box, movie posters (Zsa Zsa Gabor in *Queen of Outer Space*, Sidney Toler in *Shadows Over Chinatown*), and original comic strip artwork. He has reluctantly agreed to this interview on the outside chance that its inclusion in the 1979 *Videophile's Annual* will prompt enough purchases from the morbidly curious to justify its publication. He realizes that, in some ways, such an interview is an ego trip, but he hopes that no one will notice.

**TV:** Can you remember the first time you ever saw television?

**Lowe:** Yes. It was in a hotel room in Cincinnati, Ohio, around 1947. I was there on a trip with my family. Back in those days one of the most common things on the air was the old black and white cartoons with the dog and cat characters that all looked somewhat like Felix the Cat. That's the only thing I can remember seeing.

**TV:** Did it occur to you at that time how big a part of your life television would someday become?

**Lowe:** I'm sure it didn't. No one in our town had a television set then; there was no station within reach. Up until 1950 my electronic media entertainment was provided by 78 rpm phonograph records and network radio broadcasts. I can remember very well being a fan of a great many popular radio shows.

**TV:** What were some of your favorites?

**Lowe:** Well, I recall *The Jack Benny Show* being my favorite. But I also used to listen to the kids' serials after school, especially *Tom Mix* and *Sgt. Preston of the Yukon*. Then there was *The Phil Harris Show*, *The Shadow*, *Dimension X*, *Edgar Bergen*, *Gangbusters*, and, of course, *Big Jon* and *Sparkie* on Saturday mornings. (Hey! Hi! Hello There! There's No . . . School . . . Today!) Oh, Gosh, there were lots of them. Two of my favorites were *The Fat Man* and *The Mysterious Traveler*. What many younger people don't realize is that there used to be a full schedule of network programming on radio every night. There were four networks, the three we now have, plus Mutual, so over the years there were hundreds of different radio programs. Nowadays if a show lasts three seasons it's a smash, but many radio shows ran for 10 years or more.

**TV:** Did you miss radio when television came along?

**Lowe:** No. As is often the case, the initial excitement of a new thing overshadows the loss of the old. Many radio personalities like Arthur Godfrey and Red Skelton made the transition to television and their fans were anxious

to see them—to see if they looked anything like we had imagined them. Television was in its infancy then—perhaps it still is—and for a number of years network radio and television existed side-by-side. The change didn't happen over night.

**TV:** When did you get your first TV?

**Lowe:** In 1950. It was a Zenith, and at first there was only one station that it could receive: WSAZ-TV Channel 3 from Huntington, West Virginia. I tell you, we watched everything, *The Big Picture*, *Industry on Parade*, even the Indian head test pattern. As I recall, the station didn't come on until around 4:00 in the afternoon.

**TV:** How about color TV?

**Lowe:** I guess I saw it pretty soon after it came out. The father of one of my schoolmates bought one of the first

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**Nothing makes us  
angrier than the fear that  
some pleasure is being  
enjoyed by others but  
forever denied to us.**

**—Charles A. Reich,  
*The Greening of America***

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color sets in Charleston. I got a glimpse or two of it from around the hall corner when I was at his house. I've never thought about it before, but I expect that some of my son's friends have the same feeling of wonder that I did when they come in and see my projection set and recorders. I didn't get a really good look until much later, when my grandparents in Ft. Lauderdale bought an old round-cornered Magnavox. In the early days of color, many people took the attitude that they would "wait until it's perfected." I imagine that some of them still are.

I recall that when color first started, it was fairly common to see a commercial in color, but color programs themselves were pretty scarce. The story of the struggle to launch color programming and the battle to establish a color standard is an interesting one — perhaps we could recount it in *The Videophile* someday. RCA was in the unique position of

promoting color TV by manufacturing the receivers in quantity on the one hand, and broadcasting color programs over its subsidiary NBC network on the other.

Young people today can't really appreciate the fascination that accompanied the introduction of both television and color TV. It was not at all unusual for crowds to gather on the sidewalks in front of appliance store windows. You could watch the TV on display in the window and listen to the sound over a speaker that the store had put out on the sidewalk. It was the same with color TV in bars. Today you see a similar phenomena where a lot of bars are installing 7' projection sets so that "the boys" can see the ballgame on the weekend.

**TV:** Do you think we can look forward to other advances that will cause similar excitement?

**Lowe:** It's happening right now. A person who has his own satellite earth station is now the equivalent of the neighborhood bar that once had the only color TV around. I know of one such person who, when a local pro football game is being blacked out by the network, has a very large crowd over to watch it being received directly off the satellite. I would imagine that 3-D or holographic television would draw quite a crowd of long necks, but I don't expect either of these to become a common medium for regular network broadcasts. Perhaps "ham" TV will grow to international proportions one day, who knows?

**TV:** So television has been a part of your life ever since?

**Lowe:** Except for when I was in college, I've kept in pretty close touch with television. I was there when Elvis first appeared on the *Dorsey Brothers' Show*, when scandal hit the big quiz shows, when Nixon and Kennedy went after each other, and when Ed Sullivan brought the Beatles over from Liverpool. [We have since learned that he was also there to cheer for Gorgeous George on *Wrestling from Hollywood* and even admits to having seen Miss Francis on *Ding Dong School*.—Ed.]

**TV:** So you were primed for the introduction of the home video tape recording machine?



A comic book fan from way back (1946).

**Lowe:** Well, yes, I guess you could say so, but it was not my interest in television alone that led me to purchase a VTR and later to start *The Videophile's Newsletter*. I've always been a fan of popular culture in general, and a collector (some would say pack rat) as well. I've collected everything from newspaper comic strips and bubble gum trading cards to rhythm and blues records and movie posters. Bottle caps, matchbook covers, fruit crate labels, girlie magazines, stamps, coins, original art, you-name-it. I've had an appetite for these things as long as I can remember. Movies and television were different. It wasn't possible to collect them. Or so I thought. Several years ago I learned that a number of folks were collecting 16mm films. I flirted with that briefly, but it was too expensive and too much of a hassle to haul out the projector, screen and everything. I had also heard, about 1971, I guess, that a person could buy a 1/2" tape reel-to-reel video recorder for \$1,000 or so. I checked into models being offered by Akai and Panasonic, but a \$1,000 purchase at that time in my life was in the realm of pure fantasy. I had just shelled out the bucks for the down payment on a color TV about that time and that was the most expensive thing other than a car that I had ever bought.

**TV:** What are your favorite television shows and what sort of thing do you collect on video tape?

**Lowe:** I don't have that many current favorites. I do watch *The Young and the Restless* every day. Since Norman Lear's *Fernwood* shows went off, it's the funniest thing on the air. I usually manage to see: *Lou Grant*, *The CBS Evening News*, *One Day at a Time*, and *60 Minutes*. I also enjoy Tom Snyder's shows, *Taxi*, *Quincy*, *Saturday Night Live*, and *Body Buddies*. Over the years, some of my favorites have included *The Tonight Show* with Steve Allen, *You'll Never Get Rich* (Sgt. Bilko), *The Honeymooners*, *Amos and Andy*, *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, *Mission: Impossible*, *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman*, *Your Show of Shows*, and *Colombo*, among many others.

My collection consists primarily of this same sort of thing, with emphasis on really enjoyable shows that are not

**You're only given a little spark of madness; and if you lose that . . . you're nothing.**

—Robin Williams

likely to ever be repeated. I'd much rather have tape tied up in such things as *Kaz* or *The Richard Pryor Show* than in *Star Trek*, for instance, which will probably always be readily available. I also record feature films on pretty much the same basis, so that I am more likely to have a copy of Hazel Court in *The Man Who Could Cheat Death* than *Citizen Kane* or *Casablanca*. I continue to believe that, ultimately, the video disc will be the format of choice for feature film collectors.

**TV:** Out of curiosity, what are some of your favorite movies?

**Lowe:** Over the years there have been only three movies that I considered my absolute favorite. Up until I was about 14 or so, my favorite was *King Solomon's Mines* with Stewart Granger and Deborah Kerr. I've seen it 10 or 15 times and, frankly, I wouldn't mind seeing it again right now. Then,

the original *Frankenstein* with Boris Karloff and Colin Clive became my favorite. I now realize that its sequel (*Bride of Frankenstein*) is a superior film, but all of the first three in that series have scenes that I continue to enjoy. For the past 10 years or more, my favorite has been Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove*. Neither Peter Sellers, Sterling Hayden, nor George C. Scott has ever given a finer performance. Peter Bull and Slim Pickens were also superb. I consider it a near perfect movie, and it may very well be my favorite from now on. Some, like *Barry Lyndon* or *The Deer Hunter*, are really fine films, but do not necessarily lend themselves to multiple repeated viewings. Among those that I expect to see and enjoy several more times in the future are: Disney's *Song of the South*, *The Counterfeit Traitor*, *The Masque of the Red Death*, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, *The Maltese Falcon*, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, *Harold and Maude*, *Willie Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*, and *The Man Who Came to Dinner*.

I also enjoy the so-called "Z" movies. Low budget "bombs" that are so terrible you can't resist watching them and shrieking with glee. Good examples would be *She Demons* with Irish McCalla, *The Private Lives of Adam and Eve*, with Mickey Rooney, Mamie Van Doren, Marty Milner, Tuesday Weld, and Frankie Avalon, and *Attack of the 50 Foot Woman* with Allison Hayes. I've always had a fantasy about seeing that last one advertised on a movie marquee as part of a double feature with *Tall Man Riding*.

**TV:** How did you happen to start *The Videophile's Newsletter*?

**Lowe:** When I bought my original Betamax SL-7200 in June of 1976, I was probably the first person in town to have one. It occurred to me that there would be others in a similar circumstance in other parts of the country. As a devotee of popular culture, it seemed to me that one of the most satisfying ways to use my new toy would be to establish contact with folks around the country who would be interested in exchanging off-the-air recordings. So I placed a classified ad in a hobbyist's newspaper, soliciting contact from those who shared this interest, and I suggested in the ad that if the response warranted it, a newsletter could be established as a sort of clearinghouse for

everyone's interests. I got about nine responses at first, so I typed a four page form letter and mailed it out to those nine people. I must have secretly felt that it would turn into a regular thing, because after considering several titles, I put *The Videophile's Newsletter* at the top of the first page, and also the date "September 1976."

**TV:** Is it true that when you started TVN you didn't know the first thing about publishing a magazine?

**Lowe:** No, that's not true at all. Everyone keeps saying that, but the truth is that I didn't know the *second* thing about publishing a magazine.

**TV:** Did you envision that from those humble beginnings a semi-slick, quasi-professional magazine would later evolve?

**Lowe:** To an extent, yes. Contrary to what many readers may assume, I do not have a monomaniacal interest in video, nor do I have a particularly large collection of tapes. Indeed, my ambitions in that regard were satisfied by the contacts I made within the group of initial subscribers. Ironically, I now have little time to correspond with these few people whose discovery was such a joy to me in the beginning. On the other hand, the burden of its growth has been softened by the fact that the magazine now has two full-time employees at the Tallahassee office, and the continuing support that we have received from our contributors, all of whom do it as a labor of love, has been a remarkable source of satisfaction. Joe Mazzini was among the very first people to contact me. His encouragement was largely responsible for the early expansion of the newsletter. A little later Marc Wielage and I got together, and his enthusiasm and virtually endless ability to produce interesting material has been a major factor in the growth of the magazine. Both of these gentlemen continue to support our common effort without monetary compensation, and they are certainly due the thanks of those who relate to what *The Videophile* is trying to do every bit as much as I am. I don't mean to slight the contributions of the many others who have helped out and whose names appear in the credits of each issue, but the magazine as we know it today simply wouldn't exist if it hadn't been for the unselfish contributions in

time, effort and personal expense of these two gentlemen.

**TV:** The staff now includes quite a few contributors. How did they happen to become associated with the magazine?

**Lowe:** They found out about the original *Videophile's Newsletter* in a variety of ways, primarily through publications that are directed at comic book fans and film collectors. Without exception, they made the transition from reader to contributor. Each of them was enthusiastic enough about what we were doing to write or call me and volunteer their services. In the early days, we were able to print almost anything that a knowledgeable person sent in. Now, of course, we have to be a little more selective. Some people still don't realize that we do not pay for any of our contributions. It's not at all uncommon for Marc or Joe, or Art Vuolo or Nate, or

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**Gilbert White discovered the formula for complete happiness . . . It is to be very busy with the unimportant.**

**—A. Edward Newton  
[1863-1940]**

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one of the others to spend a lot of time, or go to great expense, to provide information that they feel is valuable to our readership. When they do, it is simply a labor of love. Oh, I'm sure they have each made valuable contacts as a result of their association with the magazine, but I think the personal satisfaction of participating in this type of forum is the main compensation. Don't get me wrong—*The Videophile* is not an intentionally monastic enterprise. We hope to be able to offer payment to our contributors one of these days.

**TV:** People seem to enjoy the editorial "personality" of your magazine. What background do you have as a writer or editor?

**Lowe:** I haven't really had any formal education or experience that would have specifically prepared me to write or edit a magazine, but I've had related interests and experience that have helped develop whatever talent I

may have along that line. The earliest thing I can recall is writing and drawing my own comic strips. I had two characters, one a rather simple one called "Gerry the Germ" (all about adventures in the human bloodstream) and another, a Dick Tracy sort of strip, in which criminals with distinctive physical characteristics and matching names were featured. I can remember when I was 9 or 10 years old doing a fairly elaborate one of these in color and slipping it into the Sunday comic section early one morning before my parents had opened the newspaper. Much later I wrote a satirical column entitled "Self-Appointed Chairman" for my college newspaper, in which I would poke fun at the usual things like the cafeteria food, and then appoint myself as chairman of a committee to do something about it. That column was written under a pseudonym (Duard), frankly because I was too shy to be confronted by my readers. I used to get a kick out of sitting in the snack shop and overhearing conversations among people who were reading it. ("That's pretty funny." . . . "Who is this jerk, anyway?") I even ran a "Win a date with Duard" contest once in hopes that a certain person would enter and I could declare her the winner.

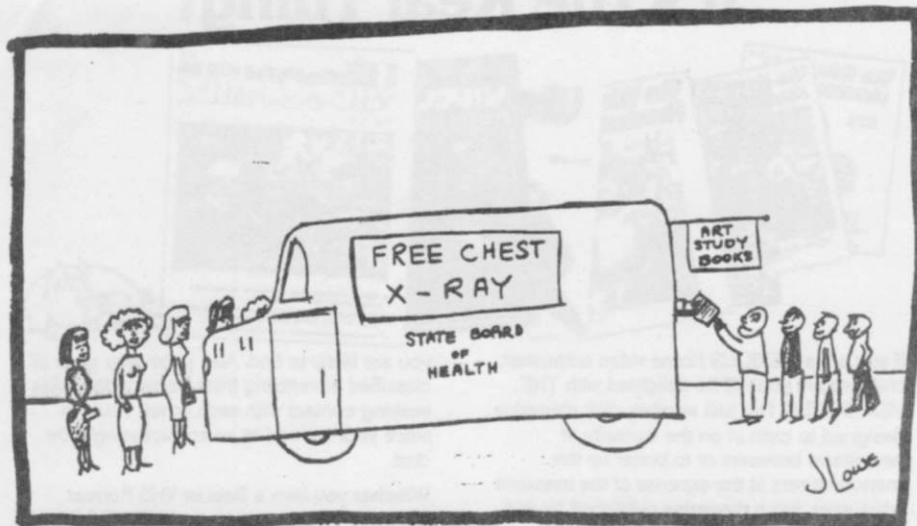
**TV:** How did that work out?

**Lowe:** Naturally, she didn't enter. Oddly enough, I got so interested in a girl who was helping me promote the contest that I started spending my time with her and forgot about the whole thing.

**TV:** And how did *that* work out?

**Lowe:** Well, let's just say that over the years I have found disappointment to be a good builder of character. About that same time I spent the Summer of '61 writing some atrocious articles and drawing some brilliant cartoons, all of which were converted into a nice collection of rejection slips from major magazines.

My heaviest writing and editing experience has been with the Florida Legislature. Over the years I've been involved with the drafting of literally thousands of legislative proposals. Our staff includes legal editors and legal proofreaders, and we handle virtually every bill that is introduced in the House of Representatives. What little I know about grammar and punctuation



Example of "brilliant" cartoons.

has come from association with these people and the constant exposure to, and concern with, the precise use of the language.\* As to any "personality" that the magazine may have, I've just felt, especially in the beginning, that I knew my audience pretty well and that it was most comfortable for me to speak directly to them. I think it's refreshing to encounter unpretentiousness now and then, and with a subject as critically insignificant as the collecting of network television shows, I think it would be hypocritical to approach it in any other way.

**TV:** Many of your readers wish that *The Videophile* could be published more often. Just what is involved in putting out an issue?

**Lowe:** I'll try to answer that without going into unduly boring detail. The first few issues of *The Videophile's Newsletter* were monthly. It was relatively easy to do at that point, because each issue was no more than 20 pages, contained no advertising, and was written almost exclusively by Joe Mazzini and me. But even as early as the third or fourth issue, it began to be a chore. I was typing all of it (except Joe's pages) myself, having it duplicated, sorting the pages and stapling the copies by hand, licking the stamps and address labels by mouth, and driving them to the post office.

By the time we got to issue #13 or so, I was spending nearly every even-

ing opening mail, sending out back issue orders, and planning for the next issue. By that time, I had a small postage meter and had enlisted some after-hours help in keeping the mailing list current. The work involved in typing, pasting up copy, and generally preparing the pages for the printer had become far more time-consuming than could be appreciated by someone who was not doing it. I was fortunate to have the tireless Ms. Sharon Wright to assist me, else the whole thing might have gone by the boards along about then. Circulation was something like 2,000 paid subscribers, and it was becoming obvious that something drastic would have to be done before I lost the handle on the whole enterprise.

So, on October 1, 1978, we opened a small office, furnished by an old metal desk and file cabinet lugged over from my house, and the remarkable Joyce Hilliard was ensconced as General Manager. Joyce had been my administrative assistant at the Legislature for many years and, with the promise of free flight and rainbow chasing, I managed to lure her away from myself. At that point, we leased an IBM System 6 information processor to handle the mailing list and compose print copy, solicited financial support via my famous "Bald Faced Plea" [TVN #15], and began to get more serious about building circulation, attracting advertising and improving the content and appearance of the magazine.

I could go on and on forever on this, but just let me say that until you have attempted to publish a small magazine, you cannot begin to imagine the variety and magnitude of problems and other considerations that may confront you.

**TV:** Give us a couple of examples.

**Lowe:** O.K., here's a minor one. I made the decision, early on, to mail the magazine in an envelope. As a collector, I didn't want my magazine to be defaced with a mailing label or torn up in the postal system. The envelopes we use are white and of the self-sealing variety . . . but, you can't buy such an envelope. Oh, you can buy white ones with a metal clasp, or you can buy manila envelopes that are self-sealing, but no one wants to open and close thousands of metal clasps as part of an envelope stuffing party. It turns out that if you want 10,000 or more you can have 'em custom made. So, we have our envelopes custom made and printed at a plant in Jacksonville, over 150 miles away.

We were in the habit of stuffing all the envelopes ourselves, but when it got to the point that we were lugging two station wagon loads of 31 large canvas mail bags to the post office, I said, "Gee, Hugh Hefner must really have a big truck to be able to drive a couple of million copies of *Playboy* to the post office every month." Enter, . . . the mailing service. To our delight, we found that our printer could deliver the copies to a local mailing service which would do all of this for us . . . for a fee, of course. The fee was very reasonable, only \$15 a thousand, unless you wanted them in envelopes, in which case it was \$65 a thousand. Guess who still wanted envelopes?

The result is that we are going to the expense of having custom made envelopes and paying a nickle extra for each copy to be stuffed into them. Needless to say, this is a significant added expense when you are talking about mailing multiple thousands of copies. We do expect to continue this policy, at least for our first class mail subscribers, but we are looking into the possibility of "sleeves" for the rest.

Another example of how complicated things can get would be the production of one of our covers. The color logo we use was designed by a graphics artist, but the colors themselves are created by several color overlays prepared by someone else who has experience in such things. We encountered unexpected delays with each of them, which explains, in part, why issue #16 was mailed so late and did not have the color in the logo.

\*Fanatic completists will undoubtedly want to pick up a copy of *Florida Study and Comments on the Uniform Commercial Code* compiled, edited, and indexed by Mr. Lowe in 1966.

*We feel this advertisement untruthfully depreciates our reputation and unfairly characterizes the nature of Video Magazine.*

2003 Apalachee Parkway/Tallahassee, FL 32301

**PLAYBOY** February 1978, trumpeted: "The Videophile . . . will tell you practically everything you want to know about this new industry."



We never got a response to my letter, but Marc Wielage and Art Vuolo ran into Mr. Rosenfield at the 1979 Consumer Electronics Show and, after an

initially cool reception, they had a rather pleasant chat. I've never mentioned any of this in *The Videophile* and I think we've restrained ourselves pretty well considering how easy it would be to take pot shots at some of their editorial positions and product reviews.

**TV:** So you've decided to mend your fences rather than escalate the situation?

**Lowe:** I've struggled with myself on this. See, I've got a mean streak that sometimes has to be suppressed. The mischievous little kid that would like nothing more than to provoke his adversary just for the sheer joy of it. We're a rather small, almost underground, publication, so I suppose we could get away with about as much irreverence or lampooning of our competition as we care to, but we also have to maintain a certain level of responsibility. Let's face it, *VIDEO* is a struggling young magazine itself. Maybe some day if it, or *Home Video* or some other one, becomes the type of magazine that is too self-important and makes it a habit to pontificate on all manner of home video topics, then we can use them as an outlet for our natural tendencies to deflate authoritarian figureheads.

**TV:** We get the impression that you don't think your own magazine will ever be that "well-established."

**Lowe:** That's right. We anticipate that we will always appeal primarily only to a hard core of video enthusiasts. We aren't aiming at the mass market. Our experience and inclination dictates otherwise. Many of our early readers probably feel that we have already become too "slick," but I feel that we will be most comfortable in the role of a magazine which is small enough to enjoy true personal contact with its readers, while at the same time being large enough to have access to information which is as current and reliable as that you will find in any other source. We hope that we will never get so big that we have to pull our punches in the product reviews, for instance, for fear of losing a major advertiser.

**TV:** What does the future hold for the magazine?

**Lowe:** Well, it's not as if we were presently at the pinnacle of success.

Some of this conversation might lead someone who has never seen it to believe that *The Videophile* is sitting on all the newsstands right between *Playboy* and *Illustrated Street Vans*, or something. The truth is that we are still struggling to become the very minimum of what we would like to be: an attractive, informative, and appropriately irreverent source of enjoyment and enlightenment for those who are seriously interested in home video. So, I would say that we have plenty of room for improvement. The temptation to extend ourselves is very great. We really enjoy having the T-shirts and other products, and would like to do more along these lines. However, they represent a drain on both our finances and the limited amount of spare time that we have to devote to the development of such things. We do hope to be able to put together a tour to Japan in October of 1980. We anticipate being part of some home video conventions,

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**Nobody, my darling  
Could call me  
A fussy man—  
BUT  
I do like a little bit of  
butter to my bread.  
—A. A. Milne  
[1882-1956]**

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possibly sponsoring our own someday, and we would like to sponsor a contest for those who are into the amateur production of their own short features on video tape. All these plans require time and money to develop. To be frank with you, we have been more interested in serving the home video hobbyist and having a good time doing it than in turning a profit. I've never been particularly ambitious when it comes to being a financial success. I think that those who chase this particular pot of gold have a pretty good chance of being disillusioned in the long run. But, it would be nice if we could someday turn enough profit to pay our contributors, improve the printing, and maybe even start a small retirement fund for the publisher.

**TV:** In any case, *The Videophile* has come a long way from its origin as a newsletter. Have you ever considered publishing another special interest

magazine or newsletter?

**Lowe:** Yes, it has long been an ambition of mine to publish *The Steatopygiophile's Newsletter*.

**TV:** Hmmmm. *The Videophile* has been accused of having a bias in favor of the "Beta" format. What is your response to that?

**Lowe:** Are you saying that there is some other format?

**TV:** You know, the "VHS" format.

**Lowe:** Oh, yes, of course, the VHS format. I think I can answer you in all honesty on this one. Yes, I *personally* am biased in favor of the Beta format, but I want to be quick to add that I own a VHS recorder, I use it virtually every day, and it is not uncommon for me to recommend it to someone who writes or calls, when it appears that his or her particular needs would be best served by such a choice. This subject has been beaten to death in the pages of the magazine, so I'm reluctant to expound on it at length here. The simple truth is that the Beta format had the field to itself when we first started publishing, and nearly all of us who were initially associated with this whole thing got entrenched in the Beta format. It may not be possible for me to be objective, but I still feel that it is "the better" of the two, especially if you can afford to be concerned about subtle differences in quality. This controversy is very likely to become academic one of these days when some further advance of the art makes both of the present leading formats obsolete.

**TV:** How did you happen to get mixed up in the famous "Betamax" copyright lawsuit between Universal Studios/Walt Disney Productions and the Sony Corporation?

**Lowe:** It was just a stroke of good fortune, I guess . . . and I'm serious about that. I wasn't too thrilled about it on the day back in February of 1977 that the U.S. Marshall was waiting at my office when I got back from lunch. You don't usually wake up in the morning and say to yourself, "Gee, I'd really enjoy being served with a subpoena from a federal court today." But after I got used to the idea, I felt pretty good about it. We would never have been able to keep in such close touch with

the legal proceedings if it had not been for the several depositions that Marc Wielage, Joe Mazzini and I were compelled to submit to. It enabled us to keep all the readers informed about what was going on, and I imagine that our involvement had something to do with the subsequent growth of the magazine. As to how they found out about my activities in the first place, I've never been completely sure. I do know that the motion picture industry monitors film collectors' publications, so it may very well be that they noticed my initial ads in there. I do know that there was at least one of the early subscribers who turned out to be a stool pigeon, someone who solicited trades, want lists, and the like and then turned around and handed over his correspondence to the MCA attorneys. I also know that when I sat down with the attorneys for the initial deposition on February 25th, 1977, they already had photocopies of the early issues of the newsletter in their possession. Keep in mind that we were in our infancy then, I think they had only examined the first four issues. Apparently they could imagine, even at that early date, how a wide-spread practice of off-the-air taping and exchanging of tapes could easily develop with the growth of the home video industry. They would have liked nothing better than to have nipped the whole thing in the bud.

**TV:** What's it like to be questioned by attorneys at a deposition?

**Lowe:** Well, they make you sit on a very low three-legged stool in a room that is extremely hot and totally dark except for a light bulb hanging from a frayed wire just above your head. Teams of questioners, wearing black hoods and working in shifts, usually keep . . .

**TV:** You're putting me on, I can tell.

**Lowe:** Many people don't know what a "deposition" is. Essentially, it is the same as being examined and cross-examined by attorneys in a court room, except that no judge or jury is present. It usually takes place in an attorney's office, and a court reporter or stenographer is commonly present so that a transcript of the testimony can be prepared. The purpose of such a deposition is to accumulate information, in advance of a case going to trial, which will support the point of view that

one party or another intends to advance. Sometimes, as in the case of our own Marc Wielage, a witness who gives testimony at a deposition will also be called as a witness at the actual trial as well. In my case, the attorneys for Universal Studios were attempting to establish the basic fact that I, as an example of the average video tape recorder owner, was, in fact, making off-the-air recordings of films that were copyrighted by Universal and Walt Disney Productions and, further that I was building a permanent library of such recordings. The Sony attorneys were simply trying to establish that they were in no way associated with my activities. After several hours of sometimes monotonous questioning, and jockeying for legal position, the Sony attorney quipped that, in his opinion, the entire trip to Tallahassee was "a folly and a detour."

**Most of us, if you will  
pardon me for betraying  
the universal secret,  
have, at some time or  
other, discovered in  
ourselves a readiness to  
stray far, ever so far, on  
the wrong road.**

**—Joseph Conrad  
[1857-1924]**

**TV:** You found the attorneys to be likeable sorts?

**Lowe:** Oh, yeah. At one point, we took a break and Universal's attorney, the legendary Stephen Kroft, and I found ourselves standing next to each other in the men's room. He said something about hoping that I didn't think he was coming down too hard on me. I told him that I realized he was doing the job he was being paid to do. You see, legal battles are much like political or diplomatic battles. You disagree with each other, but in a courteous manner. At one point, I politely informed him that I would not disclose the names and addresses of my subscribers and he informed me, in a most pleasant manner, that he intended to petition the federal court to force me to disclose this information.

**TV:** Did that ever happen?

**Lowe:** No. They soon found other fish to fry. Marc Wielage had moved from Tampa to Los Angeles. They found out about his collection, went after it like the strike at Sutter's Mill, and found that it was more convenient to hassle someone who was in the geographic jurisdiction of the court, than to commute to Tallahassee in further pursuit of me.

**TV:** I get the impression that you really aren't bitter about it at all?

**Lowe:** No, as I said, the experience was not really too much of a hassle, and it gave us the opportunity to have a continuing insider's view to the whole proceeding. There may have been times when we suffered a pang or two of anxiety, but as I kept telling Marc Wielage when he began to worry, "Look at it this way, Marc, when this thing is all over, you'll be a folk hero."

**TV:** You've seen a lot of television from the eyeball side. Have you ever been on television?

**Lowe:** Other than in crowd scenes, or as a member of the legislative staff, there was only once, way back about 1957. I was a member of a rock and roll combo, "The Blue Flames," whose



**Rock and Roll managed to survive  
"The Blue Flames."**

talent and range of material was extremely limited. In fact, there was really only one song that we could perform well at all—a thing called "Tequilla" that was a big instrumental hit by The Champs. There was a local "Band-stand" type show that had live performers on it each week and somehow our group was invited. As I recall, we went down to the studio and rehearsed it once a few days before the show. All my friends were excited about it, but I'm afraid they ended up

being a little disappointed.

**TV:** Why is that?

**Lowe:** They were used to the type of performances that Elvis and Jerry Lee Lewis were putting on. We came out and stood there in front of the camera like a group from the wax museum. If you thought Ricky Nelson was wooden, you should have seen me. All I had to do was strum a few chords and then every so often lean over to the microphone and say "Tequilla" in this ridiculous voice, but I guess I didn't exactly carry it off with the flourish of a seasoned pro. The show was telecast live, and when we came home everyone was saying, "Why didn't you move around more?" "Boy, were you nervous!" and "Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!"

**TV:** That was the end of your career in show business?

**Lowe:** Pretty much. We played for a couple of dances and a junior high school graduation party. Later, in college, I was one of a group of guys who put together a small coffee house that featured folk singing and modern jazz performances. I even produced a record album from the tapes we made there. It's got to be one of the rarest albums in the history of recording. I think there were only 100 copies to begin with. I've still got hours and hours of those tapes. Who knows? Maybe I'll want to sit down someday and hear myself singing "I Gave My Love a Cherry" . . . Then again, maybe I'll want to poke red hot paper clips under my toenails someday, too.

**TV:** Video Technology is advancing at a dizzying pace. What do you think the home video entertainment center of the future will be like?

**Lowe:** The possibilities are very exciting. Assuming that the civilized world is able to avoid destroying itself, there is every reason to believe that the typical home video system of the future will not only be an entertainment center, but a center for education, information, financial transactions, and communications as well. Several technologies such as direct-to-home satellite broadcasting, home computers, 3-D and holographic television, video discs, fiber optics, two-way cable TV, microelectronics, and long distance transmission of photocopies, which are

in many ways developing independently of each other at the present time, can easily be imagined as coming together to form a home video system of awesome capability. Conflicting corporate interests and bureaucratic regulation may keep these advances from reaching us as soon as they otherwise might, but there is little doubt that we are headed in that direction. As Dr. Strangelove said: "The technology required is easily within the means of even the smallest nuclear power. It requires only the will to do so."

**TV:** Do you think a home video center of "awesome capability" will be a blessing or a curse?

**Lowe:** Yes, I do. Anyone who has a passing familiarity with the history of human technology will admit that every tool is capable of misuse. This is true whether you are talking about things like fire, the lever, and the printing press, or things that are more profoundly threatening, like nuclear

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### Let the chips fall where they may. —William "Buffalo Bill" Cody

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power, orbiting death rays, and manipulation of the genetic code. But I am not among those who are afraid that advances in home video will turn us into a race of transfixed somnambulists. Hell, I think a pretty good argument can be made that we are already in *that* condition. Undoubtedly there will be those who choose a life similar to Montag's wife in *Fahrenheit 451*, spending their days in interaction with personalized soap operas. But I don't think any significant number of new people will be captured into this activity. It will simply be an advance of the art for those who are already so occupied. The potential for liberation is every bit as great as is that for enslavement. I think this has pretty much been the hallmark of the industrial revolution.

The important thing is to remember that these things are all toys. Sure, there is great potential for education, and the ultimate emergence of a world community, but I think we must keep in mind that much of what we are talking about serves only as a diversion. I'm hardly the one to be critical of these

video toys, and I'm not. I don't agree with those who look down their noses at mass media entertainment. I think it plays a significant role in human happiness, but we mustn't allow ourselves to be consumed by videomania. There are a great many other meaningful areas of human existence that should also be cultivated. If the advance of TV technology does pose a threat to society, I would say it is in the tendency for us to become a more private, inwardly directed people, inclined to observe the world rather than participate in it.

**TV:** We'd like to ask you some personal questions, if you don't mind. Things that have nothing to do with video, but which the type of reader who buys *People* magazine would like to know. "What's Jim Lowe really like?" That sort of thing.

**Lowe:** Well, O.K.

**TV:** Nothing *really* personal, like how many fillings you have in your teeth, just ordinary things like—do you believe in God?

**Lowe:** This may come as a surprise to you, but it seems to me that my religious conviction, or lack thereof, is every bit as personal as my dental situation. Those who enjoy home video should be able to develop communication and companionship with each other without regard to differences in philosophical and political inclination. You would have to clarify what the term "God" means to *you* before I could even begin to answer, and even then I could not do so without the risk of being misunderstood.

**TV:** O.K. We'll let you off the hook on that one. Here's something a little less controversial—are you gay?

**Lowe:** Overall, I'd say I'm a moderately happy person. Possibly not as light-heartedly excitable as you are suggesting, but . . .

**TV:** I think you know that's not what we meant.

**Lowe:** O.K., I know, I know, but, hey, what's with these questions. That's not a legitimate area of inquiry for an interview like this. If you *must* know, I like to believe I'm as tolerant as the next person. I don't ordinarily pass judgment on other people's behavior as

long as it is not exploitative. Beyond that, I can only say that my interest in the opposite sex is well known. Indeed, if Sally Field\* were to phone right now, we'd just have to cancel the rest of the interview.

**TV:** Well, apparently you're going to continue being evasive with regard to these matters, so let me put it this way—what is Jim Lowe really like?

**Lowe:** I don't know that I can answer that to the satisfaction of those few who would give a damn. Like people everywhere, Jim Lowe is a complex individual with normal feelings and desires. He is a somewhat introverted person who possibly reveals himself in print more accurately than he does in person. His views of life and reality are quite liberal, but in his personal habits and behavior he is rather conservative.

He's a soft touch, an incurable dreamer, a registered Independent, a closet blues singer, a hopeless romantic, a reconstructed Southerner, and he dares to eat a peach. He likes raccoons, staying up late, short shorts, rhythm and blues, Uncle Scrooge, woodpeckers, hot sunny days, sleeping late, Dr. Strangelove, Southern fried chicken, effervescence, college basketball, rainbows, irreverent satire, backless Danskins and the West Virginia hills. Among his flaws are his interest in the past and future to the subordination of the present, his impatience with frustrating things and people, and his tendency to be standoffish around strangers. Also he cannot tolerate intolerant people. He admires Justice Douglas, Harry Chapin, Barbara Jordan, Woody Allen, Carl Sagan, Sonny Terry, and his grandfather. On the other hand, he has little time for John Connally, Patti Smith, Bob Haldeman, or Jim Bakker. He's not much to brag about when it comes to dancing, wardrobe, swimming, registered tableware, or being served a new dish.

He's a person who has identified many of the conflicting factors in his makeup and come to terms with them. He is interested in beauty and he perceives beauty in the sublime as well as in the mundane, as should be obvi-

ous. In the words of Thoreau, "I found in myself, and still find, an instinct toward a higher, or, as it is named, spiritual life, as do most men, and another toward a primitive rank and savage one, and I reverence them both. I love the wild not less than the good."

**TV:** I see. So you'd rather not go into it? You've reached what many would consider the beginning of "mid-life." What have been some of your personal accomplishments, and what are you looking forward to? Your triumphs and aspirations, so to speak?

**Lowe:** Well, one evening back around 1956, in the privacy of my bedroom, I set what I have always felt to be the world's record for consecutive loop-the-loops with a yo-yo. About 538 of them, as I recall. As fate would have it, there was only one witness, and I doubt if he was really keeping count.

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### **A fellow will remember things you wouldn't think he'd remember.**

**—Mr. Bernstein  
(Everett Sloan),  
Citizen Kane**

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Seriously, I don't think I can respond to this in the conventional way. There are things that my "role" has accomplished . . . getting a law degree, a good job, or, for that matter, publishing a small magazine, but these things are superficial. Why do you think it is that many wealthy and celebrated people are so miserable? It's because their inner self is starved for the praise and recognition that only their role has achieved. I don't think this is the place for me to delve into the philosophy of life-style, but I will say that one of the most common human failures is to put false and blind faith in goals that have no meaningful relationship to the fulfillment of the spirit. In this respect my accomplishments have been few and of modest significance.

As to the future, I'm reminded of a Charlie Brown episode in which Lucy asks Charlie if he would agree that life has its ups and downs. He agrees, and she says, in that case, would he agree that there is one day in life that surpasses every other. Again he agrees, and she says: "How would you feel if you

knew that day had already passed?"

**TV:** Well?

**Lowe:** I don't think it has.

**TV:** Our time's about up, but we would like to ask you about some references and phrases in your magazine that have never been explained. What's the story on the "Small Potatoes Publishing Company," "TV Wiggles," "Leo J. Weams," "Rubber Novelties," and "the private sea"?

**Lowe:** "Small Potatoes" is merely a descriptive business name that has never yet had any true legal existence. "TV Wiggles" has been explained (TVN #15), "Leo J. Weams" is an anagram, and "Rubber Novelties" is self-explanatory. As for "the private sea," that is, once again, from Thoreau's *Walden*:

*Every man is the lord of a realm beside which the earthly empire of the Czar is but a petty state . . . there are continents and seas in the moral world to which every man is an isthmus or inlet, yet unexplored by him . . . the private sea, the Atlantic and Pacific Ocean of one's being alone.*

**TV:** We really appreciate your spending this time with us, Jim. One last thing, what are the pigs all about?

**Lowe:** Which pigs are those?

\*If you prefer, you may substitute the name Susan Strasberg, Sherry Jackson, Sally Struthers, Vicki Dougan, Brenda Scott, Jan Smithers, Gilda Texter, or Mercè Montello in this space.