

Ye Olde Curiosity Shop focus area opening of
“Telling Our Westside Stories: Work”

Friday, Oct. 24, 2014

“Birthplace of Seattle Log House Museum

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Marcy Johnsen

...in Seattle, and I certainly do, being born and raised here in Seattle. It’s always my pleasure because I was lucky enough to grow up in this very house — before it became a museum — and so I have this affinity for this house, this place, this land, and all that we do. And the fact that we have community partners is so terrific. So to have Ye Olde Curiosity Shop as a partner and having this exhibit is just so terrific. Thank you all for coming, and I hope you enjoy our panel. I’m sure we will.

Clay Eals

OK, I get to have some fun here because I used to be a journalist. If I were to have a gravestone it would say, “Journalist.” And so what we are going to do today, instead of making people make speeches, is I am going to ask some questions. I want to introduce you to the people whom you are going to hear from today. We have three generations of Jameses here today, and their family members. We have Joe James, who is the grandfather — grandfather? You are, but you’re also the grandson of J.E. (Joseph) “Daddy” Standley, who founded the Ye Olde Curiosity Shop in 1899, but I also hear that it may have been 1901. Maybe we will clear this up today. We have Joe’s son Andy, and he, you’re hands-on proprietor now. And then we have Neil, his son, and maybe the future, huh?

Neil James

(nods)

Clay Eals

Fourth generation. *(laughs)*

Audience member

Fifth.

Clay Eals

Fifth generation, that’s right! That’s right. And then we also have Peg Boettcher. She’s not part of the technical family, but I would say she’s part of the family, of course. And how would you like to have a job where your business card says that your title is “Chief Wrangler?” I think that’s the best job title I’ve ever heard of in my life. And that’s what Peg’s card says. And she really was the chief wrangler for our focus area of the exhibit. We have in this, we call this our large gallery, a theme called, “Telling our Westside Stories: Work.” And so everything in this gallery relates to work of some sort. Primarily it consisted of information that came from interviews that middle-school students did of elders in our community. But one thing we changed up for this display is that we created what we are calling a focus area over here. *(Gestures to back left corner of room.)* Prior to this being up, we had a focus on the Nucor Steel plant, which many of you know as the Bethlehem Steel plant for decades.

We are focusing on Ye Olde Curiosity Shop now because of the direct West Seattle connections you will hear about, and it's a lot of work, right? It fits the theme perfectly. So we are so glad to have this formal opening ceremony for this focus area right now. You also should know that our totem pole outside and our totem exhibit in the small gallery also are directly related to this family. Because we would not have a totem pole outside, or at Admiral Viewpoint and a long history there, without Daddy Standley's persistent badgering of the city to get the Belvidere View Point cleaned up. He basically said — and we have the letters to prove it — he said, “The place is an eyesore. You've got to clean it up. And if you clean it up, I'll give you a totem pole.” And they did. And he did. That was in 1939.

3:58

Clay Eals

Let's start with Joe. Joe James. Can you tell me, tell the whole crowd here, how you really came to know your grandfather? You lived with your grandfather up until you reach the age of 16, and so you got to know him quite well. Tell us, if we had Joe Standley in the room today, how would you describe him? How would we remember him? What kind of personality was he?

Joe James

He had a great sense of humor and loved to entertain people, talk to people in the shop. People would be looking at something to buy and he'd start talking about it, giving them all the history, and he'd fall in love with it all over again and then refuse to sell it to them. My dad, his son-in-law, who worked in the shop until he died in 1954, he was the one who was the salesman-type that entertained the people and loved to talk to people and show them around the shop and potentially sell them something. He was the salesman and my grandfather was the one who entertained everybody. And what was your other question?

Clay Eals

You lived with him. And I saw an interview of you one time where you said, “He was a one-man chamber of commerce.”

Joe James

He was, in his early days. He loved Seattle and he boosted Seattle anytime he could. And he really was a one-man chamber of commerce. Write letters to people all over the world telling them how great Seattle was. And after having lived back east, and in Denver, which is pretty dry, he just loved the Pacific Northwest.

5:58

Clay Eals

When you were a youngster, did the sales bug infect you because of him?

Joe James

Well, of course, when you are a kid, something like the shop really appeals to you. It did the same thing with my son here (*gestures to Andy*), and also our grandson (*gestures to Neil*). But it was an interesting business, and I enjoyed it. Of course, the war came along, too. I started there when I was 12 in 1936 during an international convention of the Shriners, and I enjoyed working there. And then in high school, I'd work after school, and I'd work on Saturdays. But it was fascinating, and you'd meet a lot of interesting people from all over the world. I never could figure out exactly what I wanted to do. But as I got older and older, it just seemed like I would come back in the shop after the war and after I graduated from university. So I spent almost 60 years there, really.

Clay Eals

Now, most of us in this room are familiar with Ye Olde Curiosity Shop, but let's pretend nobody knows what it is. How would you describe it to a stranger and what is its appeal?

Joe James

Well, curiosities really stretch people's imaginations. We tried to handle items that were curios as well as maybe had some practical value. But it just seems like everybody is interested in the odd things and all that. That's what we tried to handle. And also we tried to be fair with people. But we sold an awful lot of Indian items in the early days. We'd deal directly with the Indians almost on a daily basis. They'd come in there with their totem poles and their baskets or Indian masks. The shop is fascinating to people because of the variety and odd things from all over the world.

8:10

Clay Eals

Can you describe why your grandfather focused on those items up in Alaska and B.C. and brought them on down here? What was the appeal to him?

Joe James

Well, we would have to go back to when he was 9 years old in the third grade in Steubenville, Ohio. He got a book from the teacher for having the neatest desk in the class. It told about all the wonders of nature and artifacts from all over the world and curios. And it so whetted his appetite that he spent the rest of his life collecting curios. As a boy, he used to roam the banks of the Ohio River and get Indian artifacts, and all kinds of Indian items. He collected those. And also across the river in nearby West Virginia. But, he just was very fascinated with it and spent his whole lifetime time collecting.

Clay Eals

And when did he arrive in Seattle?

9:25

Joe James

Well, he worked in his father's grocery store in Steubenville in – this goes back a little ways, but I'll make it brief – and when he was about 21 years old he heard about the Denver Gold Rush, and so it whetted his appetite. So he packed up and went to Denver. He had been working in his father's grocery store, and he started his own grocery store there in Denver. The first day he worked for somebody else, he was so upset about the way he was cheating the customers in the grocery store, he quit and went outside the town, and went on a little knoll to raise his hand up to God and swore that he would never work for anybody else as long as he lived. So he started his own grocery store there, which was a big success also, because, any interesting item, any curio, he'd tack it up in the grocery store. They said pretty soon you couldn't see the groceries from the curios.

Audience

(laughter)

10:36

Joe James

So then, he had his family there, he had four children. My mother was the youngest. They had three girls and a son. And he heard about the Gold Rush in Alaska. He packed up his four kids and the curios that he had collected up to that point and got a ride in a caboose on the train and went to Seattle. Met an Indian there, and he helped him build a little shack there on the waterfront, and he had his curios in there, and that was the beginning of Ye Olde Curiosity Shop. He made a success out of it because he was friendly to all the people going in and out of Alaska. And they'd bring him beautiful items from the Eskimos — carved ivories, and carved Indian items, and all that. They'd bring them into the shop, and my grandfather would give them a fair price for the items, and that's the way he got started.

We still have Eskimo curios and Indian curios, but over the years it's changed a lot. A lot of the Indians still carve totem poles, but they don't want to carve these small ones anymore. They want to carve something they can get several hundred dollars for, you know? So, it's kind of slowed up that part of the business, but he just made a success of the business because of his personality. He treated the Indians with respect, and also he always treated the customers fairly.

12:05

Clay Eals

Now there's a difference between being a collector of curios and being a business person and selling things. Did he collect these things with the purpose of selling them or, how did he determine what he was going to sell, and what he was going to display permanently?

12:21

Joe James

Well he, of course, collected things to sell. But sometimes he'd have an item that was pretty rare, and he'd be explaining it to a customer and telling them about this item, and he'd fall in love all over again with it, and he wouldn't sell it. He was there during the 1930s. Of course, we all remember the Depression. Well, the younger people don't, but the Depression in the 1930s was something else. It was a question of whether to sell things and survive or hold on to it and go broke. My father was there, and his son. The three of them ran the business. But it was quite an art to stay in business during that Depression. They did. They survived it. They had to part with a lot of things that they would have liked to have saved. But you can see, with all the things we have there now, there's just so much you can keep and so much you have to sell. That's how the shop survived over the years. We've gone through a couple of wars and a couple of depressions, and the real bad Depression in the 1930s, and the shop was able to survive. And we don't have anything anybody really needs. I mean it's not like you have need for food or clothes. But people have a love for the unusual, and for curios, and they like to collect things. We cater to collectors and the people who really appreciate Indian art. We've supplied Indian art to museums all over the world, all during the history of the shop.

14:12

Clay Eals

I want to get to the others as well. (*addresses audience*) And you all have a chance to ask questions, as well. It's not just me. But before we move on, I want to ask you, Joe, about totem poles. If you worked there starting at age 12, and you knew him through age 16, you experienced your grandfather's love for totem poles. Why was he particularly attracted to those, and why did he want to bring them to Seattle?

14:44

Joe James

He was very appreciative to the Indians and Indian art and treated the Indians with respect. And totem poles were one thing that were available in that part of the country. He'd buy totem poles and baskets directly from the Indians and always give them a fair price. That's what created his love, I think, for Indian items.

Clay Eals

One last thing, can you reach back into your childhood and figure out the first curio that really fascinated you in the shop? What really bonded you to the shop? Something that was kind of fun, that made you think, "Oh, I want to go back."

Joe James

(laughing) Well, we had a lot of unusual things in the shop, but we had a mermaid in the shop. My uncle, who worked in the shop, was kind of a handyman. He rigged up a couple of lights in the eyes. People would be looking at it, and they'd press a button and would turn these lights on and startle the people. That was the one thing, we always said, it was the one thing in the shop that wasn't real. But it still fascinated a lot of people.

16:07

Clay Eals

So, Andy, you came into the business. I mean, it isn't a necessity for people in a family to stay in a family business, right? In fact, there are lots of dramas out there about people trying to break away from that. How did you get involved? What are your earliest memories of the shop?

Andy James

Well, I used to come down after school in grade school and sweep the floor or whatever. I got into it just a little at a time. I guess I just, over the years, I realized I really liked going down there, and every time I thought about something else, I realized I really kind of liked working at the store, so it just stuck, I guess.

Clay Eals

What did your classmates at school say about the shop? Did they like going down there with you? Or were you an odd duck because of that? How did it work?

Andy James

No, I think everybody thought it was pretty cool. I probably didn't appreciate it as much as I did in later life, you know? You grow up with something, and you take it for granted a little bit. But people appreciated it and kind of knew what it was.

Clay Eals

Can you tell a story on your dad a little bit on some specific thing he might have brought to the shop that his grandfather didn't? In other words, how did this add or change over the years in your dad's hands?

Andy James

Wow. Well, I guess I would think one of the biggest things is Sylvester, our mummy.

Clay Eals

Describe that a little bit in detail.

Andy James

Yeah, everybody knows Sylvester. The story we got was he was found in the Gila Bend Desert in Arizona. He was shot and perfectly preserved within 48 hours. In later years, we have had him studied quite a bit, and we find that the timing's about right, and he's certainly real but he was actually preserved intentionally with arsenic because the people who examined him said he is the finest example of an arsenic mummy they've seen. Arsenic was a very common preservative around the Civil War time. So that's probably the biggest deal known for him over anything else.

Clay Eals

And who brought Sylvester into the store?

Andy James

Well, my father did.

Clay Eals

Can you hand the mike back to him? How did that happen? That must have been a big decision of yours.

18:58

Joe James

Well, a lady called us from a town in Arizona and said she had this mummy. And it sounded a little bit fishy to us, you know. We've had a lot of odd things offered to us over the years. So, anyway, we asked her to send us some pictures, which she did. She sent all kinds of pictures and articles all about Sylvester, and the more we saw the more we knew that he was authentic, and we ended up buying him from her. She told us all the stories about him. She had inherited him from her father, who owned him originally. In fact, it might have been her grandfather because there were two generations there. She had this mummy and didn't want it in her house. She had it in a storage locker somewhere and was paying storage on it. So we were able to buy it from her for a good price. He has been a fantastic experience for people to see him from all over the world. We've had these two people come in that do mummies as a living out of a university back east.

Audience member

Quinnipiac.

Joe James

Quinnipiac University (in Connecticut), that's it. And they've traveled all over the world, and they've studied over 600 different mummies. They said Sylvester was the best-preserved that they'd ever studied. And it was just by accident that he was baked in this hot sand and then preserved later on with this arsenic. So he's really been quite a showpiece for us. We had a little postcard made of him that gives a picture of him and the history behind him, and we've sold thousands of those postcards.

21:09

Clay Eals

So Andy, tell us how long you've been at the shop. When did you start and tell us some of what you've been able to bring to the shop yourself.

Andy James

Wow. That's a tougher question, I guess. I was in the third grade, I guess probably, when I first started going down there. It's hard to say exactly. Let's see. Wow.

Audience member

He keeps things working.

Andy James

That's true. There's always some old, weird thing that you've got to make work, especially some of the old arcade machines and such. One of my favorites, I think, is our organ out front. It's an old merry-go-round organ you might think of. That always needs work. And some of the other things. It's enjoyable and a challenge to find parts and to make sure you understand how something works and how to put it back together.

Clay Eals

So you're the handyman?

Joe James

He's good with his hands.

Andy James

Seems like it. I guess you could say that, yeah.

Clay Eals

So what's the future in your eyes? Is it going to be turned over to the next generation, do you think?

22:37

Andy James

Well, we sure hope so. Neil's interested, and he has a brother, Justin. He does pretty well, too. We just finished a little thing last night in conjunction with Ripley's that has the exhibit at the Science Center right now. And Justin was really good at talking to people, and Neil enjoyed the event, too. It was really great. We're hoping one or both of them will be involved, for sure.

Clay Eals

So, let's move on to Neil briefly. Neil, how long have you been at the shop and do you like the shop? What do you like about it?

23:21

Neil James

Well, I started working at the shop about 10 years ago when I was 14. And I've been at the shop ever since. When I first started there, I was doing things like putting shop stickers on things or pricing things in the warehouse or whatever. But I love going down to the shop and the fact that, no matter how many times you go in there, you can find something you've never seen before in some corner that you have no idea what the story on it is or what it is. There are just so many interesting items everywhere. It's really great.

Clay Eals

Can you talk a little bit about the place of the shop in the city of Seattle? What role does it fill for people? I mean, I don't think there's another one is there?

Neil James

(Shakes his head) It's a great place to go when – I hear people say that whenever they have family in from out of town, they always take them to this place. It's a place to go and see things, and everybody from little kids to adults can be mystified at something that's in there. There's stuff for everybody to see and to think about. Leaves you with questions.

Clay Eals

Well great. Peg, can I ask you to take the mike now, and could I ask you to also move over to the display? Because I'd like you to walk over there and point out things that people ought to see. Everybody, Peg Boettcher is the hand-on genius of this display and, when I say genius, I'm not trying to exaggerate, because this display, in a very tiny amount of space, really closely approximates the feel of the shop. So, can you kind of, for the audience, can you go around and point out what you tried to do with this space to recapture the feeling?

25:13

Peg Boettcher

Well, the poster behind me, which I don't know if you can see very well, it started with that. I have been looking at that since I started working at the shop 10 years ago. This is what it looked like back in the day. Every single inch of it was crammed with curios and oddities and strange things. And I love that look. It's the kind of thing that people think of when they think of a curiosity shop. It's just filled with odd things that make them wonder. And everywhere you look there's something of interest.

So that's the kind of look when I first saw this shelf here, and Clay and Sarah, actually, both pointed out, that it would be a great way to recreate some of the look of the shop. Fill it with some of the things you would find back in the day. So that was pretty much a no-brainer. And all of these items here *(gestures to top shelf)* I culled from the warehouse. We have a football (field)-sized warehouse, which is a footprint of the shop, and many of the items I found upstairs were ones that were on the floor as well. And our duplicates.

We have more than one iguana, for instance. And lots and lots of moose racks. That's the smallest one I found, which is really charming, because usually they are as big as a Volkswagen bus. And a Native American carving, because there are so many carvings in the shop, bas relief. We actually have a really extensive collection of samovars, which seem to have kind of fallen out of common usage now. But back in the day, they were the soul of the Russian home and always filled with tea. This is one of our smallest versions that would fit on the shelf there.

The Japanese fishing glass floats. It's a connection with the ocean and the sea, which is continued on with our stuffed shark there. And many of the items, even if they're Native made, they are connected with the ocean. Our carved paddles here. I have one that is carved by a Native American *(gestures next to shark)*, and then there were a number of people *(gestures to left corner)* that were carving in the Native style that did not come from that tradition but admired it so much that they spent their lives, like Harvey Kyllonen, carving in that style.

27:33

I also wanted to bring the – it kind of wraps around, I got a little bit carried away there, like the shop, Sarah was very excited to get –this is the desk that came from, as Joe told us, from Denver. This was brought by Daddy Standley when he closed his Denver shop and brought it to Seattle. So, this not only was a desk that he used, but every other subsequent generation. And it has actually been my privilege to work on this desk as well. I never changed a thing. All of the drawers are filled with kind of a microcosm of times past. Emptied, of course, for the exhibit, but carefully labeled. Some of the objects that were used in the shop. This is what people used to seal the packages before plastic bags. *(Gestures to glass box on top of desk.)*

And this little exhibit here tells you all about Daddy Standley's life from his beginnings in Steubenville, Ohio, when he was just a little boy during the American Civil War. It's a little decorative cane he used. And here's the cane he used at the end of his life, just a few days before he passed away in 1940. I wanted to include the family history and the shop history. And crammed every available inch of space, as you can see.

29:01

Clay Eals

Could we all give Peg a round of applause for what she did?

Audience

(Clapping)

Joe James

She did a great job.

Audience member

She did.

Peg Boettcher

Now I can take a breath.

Clay Eals

So, before we open it up to your questions, everybody, Joe, can I give the microphone back to you for a few seconds? I want to bring this back to West Seattle. You obviously remember a lot about the Standley home at California and Palm, and it still stands today. It's going to be the focus of our home tour next spring, and I would like you to just tell us what you remember about this house. I mean, Joe Standley didn't just keep all his stuff at his shop. He called this home Totem Place and there were things all over the yard. Tell us about this home.

29:51

Joe James

Well he had, I think it was, about 17 totem poles in the yard altogether. He had an acre of property there, and his son, Ed Standley, lived on one end of it, and then my grandfather's home was on the rest of it, most of it. That's where I grew up. We had a sunken garden with that shell mound in there. That was quite an interesting site for people. They used to come up to the fence and look at all the different curios that he had sitting around in the yard. Couldn't do that very well today. I don't know how long they'd last. But anyway, if he thought they were interested, he'd invite them into the yard, and the next thing, you know, he'd invite them into the house. So my mother never knew who was going to be coming through the front door.

In his house, he had a beautiful seashell collection, he had a miniature collection, he had an Indian collection, and he had all different collections in the house as well that were kind of an overflow, you might say, from the shop. But people were interested in it. The sightseeing buses in the old days would stop there and let people out to come up to the fence and look at the yard. I understand there is a three-story house in the sunken garden at this point.

He had a miniature log cabin there and he had a tea house that he built for his daughter, my mother, back when she was 18 years old. It was a beautiful, authentic Japanese tea house. Later on, they converted it. They put cedar lining in there, and it had a little den for myself. But it didn't last too long.

My mother got ill. They isolated her out in this place but in three years she had been cured of tuberculosis. In those days, that was really quite a feat. Because a lot of people, once they got it, that was it. She liked it out there so much we could hardly get her to move back in to the home after she got well.

Clay Eals

What made it fun to grow up in that house?

32:23

Joe James

Well, we had a lot of fun. I had a basketball court in the back end of it, and I used to roller-skate all around the house and down Palm Avenue. We had a croquet set there in the sunken gardens. We had a lot of things in there that would be interesting for kids to play with.

Audience member

Tell them about the playground being –

Joe James

Oh, they used to have a playground contest in Seattle. They would judge people's homes as a playground for the kids. We won it three years in a row, and they asked my mother if it would be OK if they gave her the second prize this time. Otherwise, people wouldn't be interested in entering the contest because they never could win. (*Laughs.*) So, it was a popular place. It was a fun place to grow up.

Clay Eals

OK, I am sure there are some questions in the audience that people have had for their whole lives about the Curiosity Shop or anything behind it. This is your chance. You've got the horses' mouths right here.

Question #1

How about the colored masks? They come from where?

Peg Boettcher

The question was about the carved masks in the corner there. They are made of alder. They are contemporary. They were carved, how long ago, Tammy, was that? About 12 years ago or so. I wanted to use a representation of items that we are still accepting and selling. Current work from folks. These were carved all by the same artist who, I believe, is of the Tlingit group.

Question #1 (cont)

They're very attractive.

Peg Boettcher

Yeah. Many people who visit the shop, even if they've never been to the area before, they're always really taken with the art. That's one of the first things they say is how beautiful it is. How powerful and colorful. I thought it was necessary to provide some little glimpse of that in this exhibit.

Clay Eals

Other questions?

Question #2

Also the plates. Are those contemporary?

Peg Boettcher

The question was if the plates that are on exhibit next to the carved masks are contemporary. They span the history of the shop. The shop was always interested in providing interesting souvenirs for people who were visiting Seattle. So, the first plate was actually from Daddy Standley's day. I believe it's from about 1917 or so. And they go down through the history of the shop. They had the Space Needle, is in one of the plates. And the very last one, that's contemporaneous. That is something we actually sell in the shop today. So I wanted to, because we've had 115 years of selling souvenirs and creating them, I wanted to represent that as well.

Clay Eals

Other questions?

Question #3

I have two questions. When did Sylvia come to the shop, and how did she get there?

36:15

Joe James

Well, we had Sylvester on display there.

Clay Eals

Joe, can you start out and describe who Sylvia is?

Joe James

Sylvia is a full-sized mummy in a glass case. This gentleman came into the shop, and he saw Sylvester at that time, who is a full-sized mummy in a glass case. Very wonderfully preserved, his mustache and the hair on his body. He's perfectly preserved. We mentioned that earlier, how that happened with the arsenic. Anyway, when this gentleman came in, I think we'd had Sylvester maybe about 10 years or so. We got him in 1954 or 1955. This fella said, "Sylvester should have a companion. I've got a female mummy that I would part with if you were interested." So she's not very pretty. (*Laughs.*) But she is made for Sylvester. We finally worked with him and made a deal, and we bought Sylvia. She has been displayed on one side of the back door in her case, and Sylvester is on the other side. And that's how we happen to have her. When Sylvester was found, he had been in a desert. Sylvia was found in a grave in Central America, where they were buried in the ashes and all that. And she just slowly dried out, which really preserved her. We thought it might be nice to have a mate for Sylvester, so that's why we got Sylvia.

Clay Eals

Yes, go ahead, Mr. Hosterman.

Question #4 (Mike Hosterman)

Thanks, Clay. I understand that the shop is currently closed due to the redevelopment of the waterfront and so forth. When do you anticipate it might be open again? Are they preserving it the way it was? How are they treating you in this transition?

Joe James

Well, they've treated us pretty well. Andy can probably testify more to that. They've been involved with that. It's taken us a long time to move everything out of there, out of the warehouse. It's been a real job. We hope to be back in business in, what is it, 10 months?

Andy James

Well, July 1st of next year.

Joe James

July 1st, but don't bet on it. We hope to be back in business July 1st when they re-do the seawall. It's a big problem. It's a big project. We've never been closed that much. We've moved three or four times over the years, from one part of the ferry terminal to another, and then to our own building south of the ferry terminal, and then back up to where we just moved up now next to Ivar's. So I was involved in three moves but nothing compared to what this last one has been. And I feel sorry for the kids having to go through it. We hope that when it's all over and we have a space lined up for us on the dock, which is where Ivar's restaurant is. They had to close, too. It won't be quite as big as we'd like, but if we operate it intelligently we'll be able to make a go of it there. But we'll be on the same pier.

Andy James

Ivar's is doing such an extensive remodel that they're getting ready to lease upstairs.

Audience member

That's the whole pier, not just the restaurant.

Andy James

The whole pier, yeah. So, we actually move back into the space that we're in presently in July, and then after the first of the year they're building us another space a little further back on the pier, which we will move into at that point. So we get to move twice. (*Laughs.*) But at least it will just be from one part of the pier to another. The property is becoming so valuable, and that seems to be the right thing for us.

Tammy James (in audience)

But, just to add, the good thing is that we will have a new, 20-year lease so we'll have a great, safe spot for the next generation. So we feel good about that.

Andy James

This is my wife, Tammy, by the way.

Joe James

She's very involved in it. She's been a wonderful help down there. How many years have you been there now?

Tammy James

35 or something?

Andy James

35.

Joe James

She didn't know what she was marrying into. Anyway, tell them a little bit about what could happen upstairs.

Andy James

Well, I guess it's OK. We haven't been told not to say anything. They're in discussions with Ripley's to put one of their operations upstairs. And we would love that since we've had such a connection with Ripley's in the past. Daddy Standley was a good friend of Robert Ripley's way back, and my dad always talks about how Robert Ripley would come into town, and after the store was closed, they would sit around and tell stories. And he bought a lot of things from us when he was starting his collection. And Ripley's knows this. They know the connection and history. And they actually can point out some of the things that came from our store way back. It would be a great collaboration, I think, if the two of us were together. But it's not – nothing's official yet.

Clay Eals

Any other questions? Yes.

Question #5 (Meg Eals)

This is for Joe. You mentioned that Daddy Standley had a moment of faith when he launched his career, and I just wondered if you knew anything more about his faith. You mentioned he raised his hand to God and made this vow, so I just wondered more about that.

Joe James

Well, that was just his manner of promising that he would be his own boss and have his own business. He had deep faith, but he pretty much kept it to himself. He was raised Catholic originally. During the Gold Rush, he had this grocery store in Denver. During the Panic of '93 everybody was having problems, and the Catholics wanted my grandfather to give more money than he was doing to the church. He said he couldn't do that because he was having problems, too, with his grocery store, but he would give groceries to the church if they needed them. No, they wanted the cash. That kind of turned him off a little bit on some religion. But he was very fair and treated people the way he wanted to be treated, and because of that he made a success. It was a big surprise to me how he could come out here to Seattle and open up a little shack on the waterfront in the early 1900s and make a go of it. He had to be well-liked by people. And he treated people fairly. People would bring him these wonderful curios out of Alaska, and he'd give them a fair price. And people appreciated that. That's why he was able to survive.

Clay Eals

Sandy.

45:40

Question #6 (Sandy Donnen)

Going back to the mummies for a little bit, why the names Sylvester and Sylvia and who got to name them?

Joe James

What about Sylvester and Sylvia's names? When we got Sylvester, he was already named. We decided we needed a name for his companion, and that's how we came up with Sylvia. It didn't use too much imagination. (*Laughs.*) We came up with Sylvia, but Sylvester had already been named.

Question #7

I wonder what we know about him. Do we know anything more about him? Does the woman who had him in storage know?

Joe James

That's very interesting, and that is an excellent question. When they found Sylvester, they were never able to identify him. They thought it would clear up some murder mysteries and all that. They realized that he apparently had been wanted by the law, and he had stayed away from them. He had buckshot in his face, and he never went to any doctor to have that removed. He died with that buckshot in his face. He didn't want any notoriety about it apparently. But they were never able to identify him. If they could, we probably wouldn't be able to have him. Somebody would have claimed the body. That's a good question.

Question #7 (cont)

How did the lady acquire him?

Joe James

Her grandfather had him originally. And when he died, her husband inherited him. He had Sylvester in all around the Southwest in these side shows and all that and charged money to show him. They also said they had him back in Washington, D.C., for almost a year to do all kinds of experiments on him and all that. A lot of people wouldn't believe that he was real. He not only is real, but they found the buckshot in his shoulder where he was shot. He was on a horse, apparently. They shot up at him. They found the buckshot in his shoulder when these two fellas came up from Quinnipiac University. They've been up here twice to do all kinds of –

Tammy

You took him to the hospital.

Joe James

Yes, we took him to the hospital. I rode within up in the ambulance to the hospital, and they did all kinds of experiments, all kinds of things.

Tammy

MRIs.

Question #7 (cont)

Did they ask the grandfather about him?

Joe James

Well, apparently he was buried in the sand, and maybe some kind of a storm had uncovered him. That's how the grandfather found him originally. And he, apparently, thought, "This would be a great show for sideshows around the area," and charged admission to see him.

Andy James

We're a little unclear about the exact stories because some of the things don't quite add up. These people have done more examinations, and even though they know he is real, they're questioning whether or not some of the stories are possibly made up for the fact that they were taking him on the road. For people to part with their nickels, they had to create a fantastic story that would entice them to do that.

Tammy James

Tell them about the people that were associated with the National Geographic.

Andy James

Yeah, so, the first show was actually for the National Geographic when they first got their cable channel. That was called the "Mummy Road Show." That was a half-hour show. At the time, they said he was so perfect that they were really questioning whether he was real or not. They were pretty cool. They didn't let on until they had gotten into the examination a little bit. But they found out after they took the first x-ray that he was really real. Then they did CAT scans and a lot of things. The latest thing they've done, they just came back a couple months ago with this Canadian company. They're filming a show for, it's a joint venture between the History Channel and the Smithsonian Channel called "Mummies Alive." This one's going to be an hour show. They did some more medical studies, but the focus is, they took a lot of filming and then intend to animate him and bring him to life and show what it might have been like when he was living. How he possibly could have died and tell his whole story and what the world was like at that time. It sounds really interesting.

Audience member

When does it air?

Andy James

I think it gets aired, they're telling us, sometime in June next year. Which is pretty close to when we reopen, which is kind of nice, too. Anyway, that's what we know. It seems like every time they learn something, they bring up another question. They're not anywhere close to any kind of identification as far as we know.

Question #8

Did they take any DNA?

Andy James

No. Well, they addressed that. They said, DNA's great if you have a lot to compare to. He goes back so far, they could take DNA, but it probably wouldn't do much. They've done enough studies to know that he was Caucasian and a few things, but they are quite certain DNA wouldn't do much of anything. It would be a futile thing.

Clay Eals

Well, are there any other questions? On behalf of our organization, on behalf of Sarah Baylinson, our museum manager who couldn't be here, she's got the October cold bug, on behalf of everybody connected to us, thank you very much for coming today. Please avail yourself of the opportunity to have some one-on-one conversation. And thank you all for being here today.

Andy James

Also thank you so much to the museum for hosting this exhibit. It's very wonderful.

Clay Eals

It's our privilege.

Andy James

We appreciate it.