

Q&A

ALL TONGUE

Gene Simmons opens wide on Iraq, racial profiling, and Hollywood idiots

By Joel Keller

LICKER LICENSE Gene Simmons has never been shy about expressing himself with his most valuable asset

Gene Simmons is the kind of guy who does and says whatever he wants, whenever he wants. Schedule an interview with him on Monday afternoon, and he'll call you at 10 p.m. on Sunday. And when the legendary KISS front man is ready to go, you'd better have your recorder handy, because he's always got something incendiary to say.

The "king of all beasts" (his words) cannot be tamed—at least not by anyone other than longtime girlfriend, former Playmate Shannon Tweed, and their two children, Sophie, 14, and Nick, 18. Their efforts are chronicled in the A&E reality series **Gene Simmons Family Jewels**, currently in its second season. In honor of Memorial Day, Simmons recently taped a special one-hour episode in which he and daughter Sophie get a taste for basic training at Camp Pendleton in San Diego, then visit wounded soldiers at a veterans hospital in Long Beach. The experience inspired him to put on a subsequent concert for troops about to ship off to Iraq.

On the phone to *Radar* from L.A., Simmons exercised his oversize tongue on a range of issues, including the Iraq war, the need for racial profiling, and the "enemy of Western civilization," Sean Penn.

RADAR: You seemed to have a deep respect for the soldiers you met at Camp Pendleton. What did you come away with?

GENE SIMMONS: It is embarrassing what's happening to America nowadays. I'm embarrassed. The same thing happened in Vietnam, and I lived through that era. It was unbelievable. The answer seems to be, from some political experts, just get up and leave and the bad guys will decide, "Hey let's disarm and everything's going to be okay." I'm so fucking sick and tired of such idiotic behavior.

I'm guessing you're not in favor of the Iraq troop withdrawal bills being proposed right now in Congress.

It's not the policies and the bills; it's how we treat our military. It's how we treat our young men or women who go out there, at 18 years old, and risk their lives. There's no fame, they're certainly not getting rich, and a lot of them are dying, simply for something they believe. By the way, it's a volunteer army, all volunteer. The fact that anybody would have a fucking thing to say about that is astonishing. And the VA hospital that Sophie and I went to, it's about an hour and a half down the road from Malibu. These morons can't get up off their asses and out of their \$10 million homes, get into their SUVs, and drive down to the VA hospital just to say, "Hey, what you do matters." Doesn't matter what they think of President Bush. It matters that 18-year-olds are getting out there and risking their lives. I didn't see a single person there. That's the most embarrassing thing. I'm furious at Hollywood.

"As an Israeli, I want you to look at me first. I want you to search my anal cavity and look at my tax records. I want you to look at me first, and then at every guy named Muhammad"

No visitors at all?

No. Of course, if it means getting on a jet and going to Washington, D.C., to get in front of media, they're all there. But they won't get into a car where there's no media and just go and shake the hand of a vet. And we met, as you know, Vietnam vets and Korean vets and Iraqi vets, and it just breaks your heart.

GENE THERAPY A wiser, gentler Simmons visits with soldiers at Camp Pendleton

Do you think the troops in Iraq don't get the respect they deserve?

I think it's worse than ever. Because it's never talked about. It's just never talked about. We used to have a dialogue. I mean, there were peace marches, and people forget this, but the Vietnam vets that came back were spat at. Now, it's just apathy.

But it seems like these people are protesting the war, not protesting the troops.

I don't see the difference. Aid and comfort to the enemy is when you do it through media and there are big headlines like "We've Lost the War" and things like that. What makes you think that any graduate of any madrassa in the Middle East doesn't blow that up? In other words, make a big copy of it and show it to everybody.

So someone like Sean Penn for instance ... you don't support what he's doing?

Oh, I think he's the enemy of Western civilization. I think he's a terrific actor, but a political knucklehead. By the way, the difference between the Warren Beattys and Sean Penns and perhaps the Hannitys in the salons of the world is very little. The people who hate you don't care what political side you're on. They make no distinction between far left and far right. They just hate you. It's so stupid. And the biggest problem, of course, is that media, no matter what you say, is skewed a certain way.

Given your Israeli background, are you more sensitive to what's going on in the Middle East?

No, actually, I'm an earthling more than that. I'm completely in favor of a Palestinian state, and I'm completely against any other country in the Middle East having nuclear weapons. I believe that, if allowed, it would be the beginning of the end. Because once a graduate of any madrassa in the Middle East straps on bombs that can take out cities, you're done.

Sean Penn and I are exactly alike, we just see danger in different degrees of distance. It's a distance philosophy, and it goes something like this: If there's a guy with a gun a mile away, I think it's the same thing as if that gun is pointed right at my head. We don't want to die by some madman's hand. The difference is, I'm very proactive and want to take that guy out before he becomes a menace. In other words, I do think there's a military option with Iran.

I didn't know you were so political.

Oh I'm not shy. And by the way, I voted for Bill Clinton. But I also voted for George Bush.

I believe that most people are like me, which is why sometimes Republicans get in and sometimes Democrats. Very few people are either like Hannity or Sean Penn. Most people are centrists, and by the way, I get along with Hannity just fine. On political issues, foreign policy specifically, O'Reilly and I get along just fine—we agree on foreign policy. I think the war's been handled poorly, but there's no choice. You gotta get there. The Second World War was handled terribly until D-day.

In terms of this Republican administration, some views about stem cell research, gay rights, separation of church and state, and on and on—I don't agree with any of them. But you can worry about the trees and the environment and gas emissions later. Right now there's a bigger problem, and it's a guy who doesn't care if you're a Republican or a Democrat; he wants to blow himself up and take you out. That's the problem. I think racially profiling anybody from the Middle East ... the Swiss have been good this year, and as an Israeli, I want you to look at me first. I want you to search my anal cavity and look at my tax records. I want you to look at me first, and then at every guy named Muhammad.

So you have no problem with profiling? If you were at the airport, you wouldn't mind being searched?

I'm volunteering. I'm volunteering to have less rights. This whole notion that you can have all the rights in the world while there's an emergency is nonsense. That's why there are emergency hours that are given to law enforcement during times of war. And if the cop tells you to move and you don't move, he'll bat you over the head. That's the way it should be.

What do you tell people who make fun of all the KISS-branded merchandise, like the KISS coffin?

Oh, they're the people who cut my lawn and pick up my garbage. It's easy to sit in the peanut gallery and point fingers. People think that KISS is different from any other band. We're exactly the same as REM and U2 and every other band. They sell T-shirts, too. It's just that we can do things no other band can do. There ain't no Rolling Stones comic books. No matter how much I think Mick Jagger's an icon and has outlived everybody in rock to this day, I don't want to see him in a cape flying through the air.

Have you stopped calling your tours "reunion" or "farewell" tours?

Who cares? Isn't it true, no matter what you say, when you get offstage and everybody's clapping, you come back on, and that's called an encore? Didn't you actually say "goodnight" to the people and leave? What makes you think life is any different? Life is all about supply and demand. This is going to be the last tour. That's it. Streisand, everybody says the same thing. And by the way, when you're saying it, you mean it. And then when the demand gets to be too much to bear, you go, "Okay, they want us."

I've been watching some older episodes of *Family Jewels*, and certain scenes seemed to have been partially scripted or re-shot. Is it staged?

We don't have very much to do with that. The camera crews have to plan where you're gonna go and what you're gonna do. Nobody's told what to say, but in some ways, as soon as you turn on the camera, reality is a version of reality. People are aware there are cameras there, and they change their behavior. Including the bozos. And I wish I had a bat for every one of those guys who jumps up and down behind a newscaster on the street doing a story about a fire. There's some moron jumping up and down. There should be asshole police with bats. As soon as you start misbehaving, you should get the shit beaten out of you. Put me in charge. I'm telling you, I'd fix all that.

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Were Shannon and the kids happy you started the show?

They didn't really like it. We did a 10-part thing with *Extra*—they did 10 five-minute bits and called it *The Simmons*, kind of like an Osbournes thing. Except it wasn't a train wreck. People were shocked to find out [we] were the most charming, polite, responsible people they'd ever met. The ratings were big, and they were sort of shocked. They were fascinated by people who actually behaved well. Whereas everybody else on TV, whether it's Paris, God bless her—I think she's an American institution, by the way—or the idiots of Hollywood ... [In the background, Shannon shouts "Losers!" Gene chuckles.] That was Shannon ... she's shy.... When you watch any reality show, it's a train wreck. You're watching dysfunctional people.

Had you watched *The Osbournes* and thought, *Oh, I don't want to get into this ... I don't want to be portrayed this way?*

We were fearless about it. We are who we are, and we can't be anybody else. And Ozzy's been a friend for 30 years. I think he's a sweetheart. But neither you nor I can speak about his family. That's his family and that's what he does.

TROOP SURGE For those about to Iraq, we salute you **My favorite part of the show is your kids, Sophie and Nick.**

They seem to be naturals in front of the camera and don't mind giving you a hard time.

That's no different than when the king of all beasts goes back to his den. He *allows*—that's with a capital A—his little cubs to come and bite his tail. Then, when he gets back up, something's gonna die. The cubs biting the king's tail doesn't dilute that he's the king of all beasts.

How long have you and Shannon been together?

We've been happily unmarried, this August, 24 years.

And you have no intention of ever getting married?

No. Not interested. If you look at the statistics, it's a disaster. It's like jumping out of a plane and going, well, [the chute] will open most of the time. I'm sorry, what did you just say? It'll open most of the time? You can't even say that about marriage. Most of the time, it won't open.

So you don't like marriage because you think most of them fail?

Well, you don't have any flexibility. The problem with marriage is somebody other than the mother who gave you birth is who you have to answer to. Where are you going, where have you been, stuff like that. That's not gonna fly.

You don't do that with Shannon?

No. In fact, out of both of us, I'm the one who calls her all the time, and she's the one who doesn't want to chat. She's like, "Look, I don't want to talk now, I gotta go do my nails," or something. Well, I just called to see how you are. I'm just a fly around her.

When you were on *The Howard Stern Show* a few weeks ago, you let it slip that you can still sleep with other women if you want to. Is that true?

All men are the same. I don't care what you say. I don't care how you spin it. You're not going to be able to avoid the blueprint that is within your genetic makeup. You know how many sperm you make daily? Not 100 or 1,000 or 1,000,000. It's hundreds of millions every day. So talk all you want; science doesn't lie.

You did two episodes on the show about getting a face-lift. You've always seemed to have a pretty healthy image of yourself. Why submit to plastic surgery?

Well, I didn't think about it much. I'm a Type A personality. Once I decide to do something, I do it all the way.

If there wasn't a show, would you have still done it?

I wouldn't have done a thing. I was stunning, come on.

Are you satisfied with the results?

I'm more beautiful than ever. And in some ways, it's good for God because the world deserves more beautiful things. And that's me.