

THE  
MAY 1989  
LEONORE  
LEMMON  
INTERVIEW

TRANSCRIBED BY  
LOU KOZA

# THE LEONORE LEMMON INTERVIEW



**June 1959 to May 1989**

# 1959

Reported June 17:

## **About Leonore Lemmon:**

Miss Lemmon, daughter of Broadway ticket broker Arthur K. Lemmon, first made news in 1941 when she was the center of a Stork Club fistfight. The brawl started when her dancing partner's wife objected, and it ended when she was banned from the club. A month later she eloped with Jacob Vanderbilt Webb, a Vanderbilt heir. They were divorced and she was married to British Entertainer Harish Menzino. This Marriage also end in divorce.

## **Reports of Leonore's prediction:**

"He's going to shoot himself."

The others treated her remark as a joke, but she uncannily continued: He's opening a drawer to get the gun." Then a shot was heard.

"See there -- I told you!"

## **On why George Reeves shot himself:**

"Because he was known as Superman to 9 million children, but he couldn't get a job." "They stopped shooting the series a year and a half ago. They had 105 chapters finished, and they can show them for the rest of their lives.."

"That combined with the fact that a woman never got off his back...A woman who wanted him, never left him alone...For the past four months, she had been calling him 20 times a day, starting at 7 in the morning. I don't say that's the reason, but it was one of the motivating factors. I think everything just kind of swooped down on a very sensitive man."

Miss Lemmon who said she and Reeves were to have been married Friday, said Reeves had retired when Bliss and Miss Von Ronkle appeared. She said Reeves' came down stairs, objected to the lateness of the call and ordered the visitors out.

"When Reeves went back upstairs I had a premonition he was going to shoot himself." "Then we heard the shot."

There were reports that after Reeves left, Miss Lemmon blurted out: "He's going to shoot himself." But today, sobbing uncontrollably, she denied that she had predicted his suicide moments before it occurred. "I'm not clairvoyant." "I'd have stopped him if I knew what he was going to do." She said that the shooting



actually took her by surprise. “We didn’t have any beef.” “He just went upstairs and shot himself. It was that simple.”

But while it surprised Miss Lemmon, it didn’t shock her. It was easy for her to explain her fiancée’s suicide. “It was just that his heart was broken because he couldn’t get a job and bring me the things he wanted to.” She said that because he lost his “Superman” job Reeves began looking for a job in the buffoon world of wrestling and last night had been scheduled to go two rounds with light-heavyweight champion Archie Moore. “It was too much to take.” she said “after 20 years as an actor you can’t forget dignity.”

Reported on June 23:

**Regarding the money missing from George’s home:**

“There is no mystery about the missing money,”

“First of all, it was \$4,000, not \$5,000. I found it in traveler’s checks in George’s name and turned it over to my attorney in Los Angeles.”

**Regarding her engagement to George Reeves:**

“Why then would she (Helen) send a diamond ring to George to give to me?” said Miss Lemmon, she sent the ring three months ago and I’m wearing it now.”

Reported on June 25:

**Regarding two other bullet holes in the room:**

Parker said Miss Lemmon had admitted firing one of the shots “accidentally” before June 16.

**Advise from lawyer:**

“It’s a shame, but he ( the lawyer) said to me, “Lem, listen to me, hold still and say nothing.” She added that (Edward Bennett) Williams wasn’t worried and neither was she, but “I better take his advise because it looks from reading the papers like I been kind of noisy. It’s gotten so much out of hand, it’s like a circus.”

**Regarding other will:**

Miss Lemmon said “there must be another will” and indicated plans to fight for at least a share.

She admitted the actor had never told her personally that she was to be his beneficiary. “But he often told other people.”



# 1989

## THE LEONORE LEMMON INTERVIEW

Interviewer: Your name is Leonore Lemmon, two m's. Is that correct ?

Leonore: Yes, two m's in Lemmon.

I: First I want to ask you. You don't have to answer if you don't want to. How old are you ?

L: Must I answer that ?

I: No.

L: Well sixty and change.

I: And what do you do for a living ?

L: I write.

I: What is it that you write.

L: I'm trying to write a book with hope I will be published.

I: What are you writing about ?

L: I'm writing about me and the people around me that I have known for the last forty years.

I: Does that include someone like George Reeves ?

L: Yes, but George Reeves is not an interview. This was a very, very gentle man, and a very normal man. There was nothing exciting or out of the ordinary about him. He was very giving, thoughtful. As I say, gentle. Uh, this was a good man. Uh, no hang up, no hang ups at all.

I: How did you meet George and when ? Do you remember ?

L: Well, I can tell you (ha ha) how I met him because...and it is kind of a silly story. I was in Toots Shore's. And somebody said, you got to meet George Reeves. Uh no, they didn't say George Reeves, they said "Superman." Now at that particular time I just left Cuba and there was a dirty man in Cuba who used to do sex exhibitions and he was called Superman. I said, "Ahh, come on!!" And that's who I thought they meant. The dirty man in Cuba.

"No" they said, "This is Superman." I said "Alright, alright." In Toots Shore's. So somebody introduced me to Superman and I said, "What do you do?" He said, "I fly." And I said, "That's very nice. How do you fly?" He said, "You just have to touch me in the right place." I had no idea since I had never seen Superman on television at all. I was not...that was a little kids program. I never saw Superman.

So, oh..I went to a dinner party that night. And there was an abundance of squab. So I said, "Where are you?" He said, "I'm at the Gotham Hotel." I said, "Hang tough." And I picked up the squab and I picked up a bottle of wine. This is two o'clock in the morning and I brought it to him and said, "There you are. Warm wine and cold turkey, I don't know whatever. And uh, we saw one another...and he was constant with telephone calls. And I thought, well I am not a California girl. It ah, it doesn't like me and I'm not particularly found of LA, Beverly Hills business.

I have bad eyes and I don't drive because of that. I would prefer not to. So I ah, I went out there.

I: Why did you go out there?

L: To him.

I: How did that happen. You met him in New York. You brought him the squabs and the champagne. So what happened after that? How long after that did George ask you to come out?

L: Oh well, he asked me all the time. A couple of times a day. He was in town for a week and we saw one another for dinner. He called a few times a day. I guess he was what you would refer to as smitten. I mean thoroughly. And he had reason to go back to California. What that reason was, I don't know. But I would imagine it was filming something, whatever it was all about. And he kept calling, "You got to come out here, you got to come out here." And as I say, I'm a New York girl. I'm either here or London. I don't think California people care for New York people. That's my thought. I don't feel...first of all because of my eyes I don't drive and that it's (California) all curvy and I don't know the terrain. I don't know about that



out there. And they got a local type of snob. In Beverly Hills and if you're not of the right places, or what they call the right places, you're not in. And I'm not connected with the in thing. I, Ted Williams, Clark Gable, those people are my friends. From here to there, they're transplants. But George didn't have a lot of friends. Just people that worked on Superman with him. And I'd never seen Superman. So when I saw the pictures, I said, 'Hey there kinda, they're good, they're fun.' You know there's a reason for that being. But I didn't know...I mostly knew writers, directors like Johnny Houston. You know people same age thereabouts.

I: So he asked you to come out ?

L: Yes, many times.

I: And did you go out ?

L: Yes, I did.

I: Tell me about that.

L: I don't like it out there. I went. Unwillingly, but I went. Because I was really,...I was stuck on him. I was. We were going to be married on Monday. And he shot himself on Friday or whatever, one of those days. It was a three day difference, and I thought to myself (interruption of background noise)... What made him commit suicide was Superman. It's as simple as that. He could not get a job and directors loved him, producers loved him. I mean, you know people that really liked this man. But they said, "Oh we can't do that because if we put you in this picture people are going to say, "LOOK there's Superman." He was just typecast into a thing he couldn't get out of. And he could not work and there's the whole story. And you can't call home to Mommy for money. You know like once a month, that's no good.

I: Had he discussed these things with you ?

L: No, but it was quite evident. He was not depressed. He was not a down person. Uh, uh, no.

I: What do you remember of that night ?

L: I'll tell you something very funny about that night. And I mean funny (odd). You want to talk about rejection, it's not the first time with me. George usually left the front light on. On the house, the outdoor light. And if people came by and



they saw that light on, they would either call or rap on the door, ring the bell, you know, do one of those things. And usually we were up. This night, some unknown reason I couldn't sleep, and this is funny, I say rejection. (pointing her fore finger upward) up there (Referring to George) doesn't want me. I went down stairs and I turned the light on. And I unlocked the door. And some man named "Bud" something or another, I have no idea what his last name is. (He) Saw the light on and drove into the driveway and I said "Come on in and have a drink." He rang the buzzer. And that's the man that made those statements, "Bud" whatever. I have no idea what his name was. A very funny name. (Micro phone above is being adjusted) Shall I lower my voice darling. Why not darling ? So as I was saying this is strange because...we were sitting there, this is about midnight, maybe one o'clock, the same way I would say to you, "if you don't make me a drink I'm going to punch you in the nose." And you fell down and broke your nose. It would be just about the same thing.

But I was sitting there with Bud and I heard this shot. And I said "Ahhh, that George there, probably going to kill himself" That's all I said. And I said...this is about ten minutes or fifteen minutes later. "Bud go upstairs and see what the Hell he is doing. And that's when he came down stairs. I can give you a little more of the story because I didn't call the police immediately. Because (slight little chuckle), I had a friend of mine was doing a story on the fighter named Charles, Ray Charles, no that's the singer. The boxer Charles. Colored boxer, big, big, strong heavy weight. (Archie Moore) Well, my friend Bob Condon was in bed with a friend of mine in the guest room (room above the garage) and I thought I think it's best that she get dressed and he got the Hell out of here. So how do I get him out of here? Now George is upstairs cooled. This dumbbell guy, craziness, bigmouth. I don't know whatever his name is. Is sitting there and I got Bob Condon in bed with Carol Van Ronkel. So she's like a size 2. I said, she driven down, she saw some cars outside, so she put on nothing, a robe over a nighty. And I said "Ah, Oh boy." To put her into my cloths, she looked like a baggy pants comedian. You know one of those things. Well..and Condon, how am I going to get rid of you ? Well, I have had a friend since Bob Benchley days, that's how far back I go...with Polly Adler. I said this is wonderful for the Superman image, Polly Adler. Someone's going to make a connection there, and there isn't any.

And she's coming from Burbank and I called her and said, "Will you get Condon out of here." So Polly puts on her cloths, takes Condon away. I said, "well that's one away." Now I'm trying to think how am I going to get Carol out of here and I don't want her husband (Rip Van Ronkel) to know she's doing business Mr. Condon. This is all going on while I'm trying to get them out. Now I call the police and I just sat there. When they said...somebody said in the newspapers I was making jokes. Well I don't find any humor in suicide. That doesn't sound to me

like a big fun evening. That's complete nonsense. And that's blasime. That's as far as it went and..(Police said)"You gotta get out of here." I said, "That's alright too." But where do I go ? But with Mrs. Van Ronkel to out there in the Canyon to her house.

I: Can I refresh your memory ?

L: Why not.

I: This is an article that was written, I don't know when...

L: Oh my. God knows what goes on with the articles.

I: Let's see if you remember this.

L: Alright my dear.

I: Ok. [reading from article] *Reeves most notable and final outburst occurs just a few days before he was to be married. When he was entertaining a very special house guest, fiancé Leonore Lemmon.*

L: That's quite true.

I: ...*Reeves met the twice divorced New Yorker in January while visiting Manhattan to talk about one of his film projects.*

L: That's true.

I: ...*The thirty-five year old Lemmon who made headlines in 1941 for throwing punches at a man in New York's posh Stork Club.*

L: Throwing punches ??

I: Say's right here. ...*Found Reeves to be a sensitive man, a gentle man.*

L: Yes.

I: ...*Shortly thereafter meeting him she went to Los Angeles. Reeves smitten with her class of good humor soon proposed.*

How did he propose? Do you remember ?



L: Made a definitive statement uh, "We are going to be married Wednesday." Or whatever day was in mind. I'm not...I'm not to sure. I did not like California. I did not like Los Angeles or Beverly Hills and I said, "Well, let's try for San Francisco. (suggesting George said) "Fine." He was amendable to anything. Very outgoing, easy person, very easy. The only thing that killed him was something very easy...SUPERMAN killed him.

I: I want to continue, ok? *They were to be married on Friday, June 19<sup>th</sup> in Tijuana, Mexico.*

L: I didn't care where, I said "Ok."

I: ...*Writer Richard Condon.*

L: That's right.

I: ...*Writer Richard Condon was to be Reeves' best man.* Is that correct ?

L: (pause) No, that's not right. Richard Condon is the author of the "Oldest Confession" and a number of very hot books and movies and whatever. It wasn't Richard! It was Robert. It was Bob Condon. That's who was in the kippers with my friend.

I: Ok, here we go to the night in question. ...*On Tuesday, June 16<sup>th</sup>, 1959, went to bed shortly after midnight.*

L: Yeah.

I: Expand upon this if you want to. ...*In the story that ultimately was accepted by the police. Five minutes later the front door rang and Leonore answered it.*

L: That's correct.

I: ...*Slipping into his robe, Reeves came down surprised to see friends Carol Van Ronkel and William Bliss.*

L: AHHH, that's his name Bliss. Couldn't think of his name.

I: ...*The couple had come they said to have a party in the honor of the impending marriage. But the combination of a searing headache and the lateness of the hour caused Reeves to snap uncharacteristically "Get out."*



L: No.

I: ... *"It's too late for this nonsense."* Now tell me your version of the story.

L: No, no, no. He never came downstairs. I tell you when I talk about rejection (pointing up). It's the man upstairs that doesn't want me and I always had a question mark in my mind. Did he have me in mind to shoot as well? As he would shoot himself I tell you why I say that.

It was his habit to leave the light on outside and he turned the light off and the bell, that buzzer or ding-dong or whatever the Hell it is..off. He turned it off. And for some unknown reason I went down the stairs and turned the light on and turned the buzzer on for the door bell. And I couldn't sleep when I was downstairs. Carol, this dumb guy whatever, Bliss his name, Bill, Bob, Bill, whatever, was driving along and saw some cars in the driveway and he stopped and I opened the door. He's the big mouth that caused all the dumbbell nonsense. And I opened the door and we sat around and had a few drinks and I did say, no reason at all, I just heard a shot and I said "ah, that George is probably going to shoot himself." I did say it, but the same was just off the top of my head. No reason why I said that. But I heard the shot. Well I'm not aware of a gunshot. I, I, he had the gun that Toni Mannix had given him. Big hot shot guy Toni, ah Eddie Mannix with the Unions, and the picture business. And he had it in his night table. I said "What the hell do you have the gun for?" I'm not fascinated with guns. "What's that for?" He said, "Well Toni gave it to me." I said, well...I, I, thought to myself, oh a long time later, what makes me think that had that door bell not been on that he would have shot me as well. And I still have that question mark in my mind. As if (implying) "I can't have you where I'm going, you're going too." That's the kind of thinking. Because he made preparations to shoot himself, he knew. I didn't realize that at the time.

I: Miss Lemmon, you were starting to tell me about how things might have been had the doorbell been disconnected and the light turned off.

L: I give you my word of honor, cause upstairs, for refusal, they don't want me (pointing up). Don't ask me what made me come downstairs and turn the light on. I have no idea. I just couldn't sleep and turned the light on. Had I not, the people driving by saw the car, saw the light on and came in. Oh, his name is Bliss! (looking up shaking her head), wrong name. (Implying he was anything but Bliss)

I: You were also going to tell me about the preparation you think George, can you please tell me about that.

L: I don't know that there were preparations, I don't know that. He was not a down person. This is a very up, even person. Very, very easy, no highs, no depressions, no lows, none of that. No. He was a...the most normal person I'd ever known. No temper, no flare ups. I start throwing things. Then again, you know when you're Hungarian and Irish you figure to throw things.

There was no evidence, he was not a down person. The only thing I can think of is turning out that light and double locking the door. And I still have a question mark in my mind, would I..had I not gone downstairs was I supposed to be part of the act. I have to think that because I don't know. It's terrible thing to say but if you are in bed with somebody and they shoot themselves, it would seem to me they would shoot you also. I know I would. You want to go to bed and try it? He-he (joking). I mean it. It would seem that like if I can't have you nobody else will. Suicide is so damn definite, that you go with somebody else. That's my thought. I'm not death minded so. They said, some newspaper lunatic, I was downstairs making jokes with the press. The Hell I was. I was trying to get Mr. Condon and Mrs. Van Ronkel dressed to get them out of there before there was more havoc involved. Because then Van Ronkel was married and I just didn't think and I don't think now that at that time. I thought there was no reason to louse up the Superman image. And Jake Leibowitz, if he's still alive, the man that owns Superman. You know the rights and what you have. If he still alive, he must be making a fortune because it (Superman) still exist.

I: What was George's state of mind that night ?

L: Absolutely fine, he was not a down person.

I: But according to this article he had just had a car accident a couple of months and he was under pain and taking drugs to kill the pain.

L: No

I: Also according to the report he had .27 percent alcohol content.

L: Yeah, so?

I: That's awful, awful high, no that's...mixed with drugs.

L: He wasn't taking any drugs. No he wasn't taking any drugs, he was a drinker. Not out of hand. Not ricocheting off walls. But he was a drinker. Not anything monumentally, happen to have a fair capacity for booze. But not anything to write



home about. I mean he wasn't slurring words or staggering. No, he was in good shape.

I: Where you both drinking that night ?

L: Yeah.

I: Where you drinking a lot that night ?

L: That depends upon what you call a lot. I mean nobody was loaded. There were other people that dropped in, had a couple of drinks, nothing monumental. I mean, it wasn't party time. But that depends upon what you call a lot. As I say a large capacity for hooch when it's in your system, but booze didn't cause this. He was not depressed, No he was not. But I know that he had many calls from casting people and producers and they almost apologized to him. They said, George, we can't put you in this, they (the audience) are just going to look and say, "There's Superman." And this went on for many months. And that's a downer right off the bat if you can't go to work. And he could not get a job.

I: Wasn't he about to start a film in Spain, and about to start a new life with you? You were getting married in three days.

L: Yep.

I: Sounds like he would have been happy.

L: He wasn't happy because he couldn't work. And you can't call mommy for money every month.

I: When he left the light on, was that an invitation for others to come (in) ?

L: No, yes, but he turned the light off that night.

I: The house had a reputation for parties. For a good time, come by. Is it safe to say this was a party house ?

L: No it isn't safe to say. Well, he didn't know that many people, or didn't mix with them. No it was not a party house. Three or four people would drop in, but I wouldn't call it a party house. If I have a party time, go. I'd make preparations for a party. One of those things, but no.



I: But when you put the light on because you couldn't sleep, wasn't that a way of letting people driving by, you know...

L: It was always on. But this night he turned it off. That's what I'm saying. And it was only by saying "what the Hell is the light doing off." I turned it on. And that's how come them people dropped by, cause they saw the light on and they saw the cars in the driveway and there was that girl in the kippers with Mr. Condon.

You make very sure that say's Bob Condon, Robert Condon. Not Richard, because Richard is a very well married and a very well known author.

I: So how many people where at the house at this time ?

L: Two.

I: Besides yourself ?

L: Yes.

I: So you were having a party ?

L: I wasn't having a party. That dumbbell came by, Mr. Bliss, whatever his name was. That's all there was, no activity, no party.

I: There was activity going on in the other room.

L: They were friendly...I guess. (smiling)

I: So what you are saying is after George shot himself you made these people leave.

L: Well, can you imagine me calling Polly Adler to get Bob Condon out of there, because Polly is a friend from 40 years ago. So she says, "What's the matter ? (deep voice). I said you better get Bob out of here, would you please. That's how come it took about an hour to call the police. That's all. To get Carol into my cloths and send her up Benedict Canyon, up the road. I didn't want to tell her husband she was having fun and games.

I: So George never came down and drank with you folks.

L: No.

I: He stayed upstairs ?

L: Yeah.

I: What was his last words to you ?

L: "Good Night." He was in bed, we were both in bed. My hair was up, and I went to bed..and I couldn't sleep, that's all, simple as that. This wasn't four o'clock in the morning. It wasn't all that late.

I: This article is wrong then. It say's, ...*Leonore was surprised by his agitation, because he was angry people came over.*

L: No, he was not.

I: You said, ...*is this a work or a shoot ? Wrestling jargon. Asking whether he was kidding or serious. ...Reeves glanced at her...*

L: Wait, is this a what? Or a what ??

I: Is this work or a shoot ? Wrestling slang, meaning kidding or serious ?

...*Reeves glanced at you, studied the floor for a long moment, glanced over at his guest, he apologized for his outburst and putting on a smile ushered the visitors in. Richard Condon joined them and the group sat around chatting.*

L: You better take that Richard Condon out of there!

I: It's an article, I'm not going to say that. ...*Finally at a quarter past one, according to Leonore, Reeves just went upstairs.*

L: Yeah, there abouts, twelve, one, in there.

I: So he was downstairs ?

L: Nope. Not when anybody was there.

I: ...*Suddenly, Leonore supposedly looked at Condon, his expression was vacant as she said softly, he's going to shoot himself.*

L: No, Condon was not there. Condon was in the guestroom with Mrs. Van Ronkel.

I: ...*Condon dismissed the thought, though everyone in the room felt a chill when they heard a draw slide open. Leonore said, "he's opening it to get the gun."*

L: No, no, no, no. (slightly agitated) That's absolutely absurd. Absolutely absurd if you saw the location of the house and the physical being of the house. There's no way I could hear the draw open upstairs and over that way. No way, never happened.

I did say, "ehh, he probably going to shoot himself." Just exactly like that. Then that dumb man, whatever his name is, Bill Bliss, or whatever his name is. He just saw lights on and came in.

I: ...*And she jumped up to her feet late, Leonore said she intended to run upstairs and would have stopped him...*

L: No, no, no, no. First of all when I said he was probably going to shoot himself, it's just like you say you're going to call California on my phone. Absolute nonsense. No!

I: What made you say that ? Just curious.

L: Just out of the blue. I keep doing things like that. But he was not a depressed man. He was not down. Nope, no, no. He was down naturally because he did not have any hobbies. I'm a golfer. So I know where to go in the daytime or play backgammon or play bridge, whatever. George didn't have hobbies, so doing nothing and not being able to get a job. And the producers really liked this man. They'd call, they were very warm to him, very kind, except they would say, "we can't use you in this because you are Superman. That's the whole thing. It's not more involved that that.

I: Were you surprised he killed himself ?

L: Yes, and angry. Very angry. I don't dwell on death and I most of all I don't accept death. To my way of thinking there was no reason. But to his way of thinking there was.

I: How many guns did he have ?

L: One that I know of, that's the only one. And that came from Toni Mannix.

I: Did he often shoot a gun in the house ?



L: Never. Oh once. Once. I shot the gun. I said, "Let me see that, I never shot a gun like this." A handgun. I put a hole in the picture under the ceiling. Whew, and all I did was just touch that gun. That was quite a gun. I can imagine what it did to his head. I never saw it.

I: You never went upstairs ?

L: Nope, nope, nope. I just sat there.. You know, I was just stunned. Waited till the lovebirds got put together and called the police. That's all. There was nothing for me to do. And Gwen Daily, the girl that marries Irish tap dancers (Donald O'Connor, Dan Daily). I called her, and she came over and she just ripped the bed apart, put everything in the shower. That's what that story was all about. Some kind of story about the bed. And all she didn't want me to go upstairs and see blood all over the lot. So she took all the bedding off and put it in the shower.

I: We're told when you met Reeves, you took him on a trip to Florida. Is this true ?

L: I didn't take him, he took himself.

I: Did you go with him ?

L: I was there!

I: You were already there ?

L: Yeah.

I: So he came to visit you in Florida.

L: Yeah.

I: Because you asked him to ?

L: He asked me. He told me he was coming to see me.

I: What were you doing in Florida ?

L: Just holiday time, nothing.

I: Before you met George did you have any association with Eddie and/or Toni Mannix ?

L: No, but he (George) was with her before that length of time. Eddie Mannix absolutely knew about that affair. But like that...

I: Was he (George) having an affair with Toni when he met you ?

L: I guess so. I know that she paid a man named Santiago to telephone the house (1579 Benedict Canyon Drive) not less than twenty times a day, just for annoyance. We had the phone changed three times, still didn't stop.

I: Did you ever speculate this wasn't a suicide, maybe some angry parties were after George for in discrepancies such as this ?

L: (shakes her head to indicate no)

I: Before George's death, he had two auto accidents.

L: One.

I: What happened ?

L: He ran into a side of a mountain or something. (April 8<sup>th</sup>, 1959)

I: Did he tell you why that happened ? Did he doze off? Was he...

L: I can't answer that because I don't know why. Except I was absolutely enraged. Because there was no excuse for that. He was a good driver, he was not drunk. But why dumbbell thing right into the side of a mountain. I have no idea.

I: Did he start taking pain killers ?

L: He was not on any medication at all. No. I'm telling this man was normal as blueberry pie. I mean it. No he had no hang ups.

I: I'm talking about the pain he suffered because he had twenty-seven stitches.

L: No, no, no. Twenty-seven stitches. But all there was to it. No, no, no. He was very healthy, strong man. I guess he was just plain down because he couldn't get a job.

I: Then he must have hidden that from you pretty well.



L: He certainly did.

I: How much time did you spend together when you were with him ?

L: A couple of years.

I: How do you remember those years ?

L: I don't remember them.

I: How did you remember them ?

L: They were very pleasant. You know, good, happy times.

I: George complained to the police he was getting strange calls.

L: They weren't strange. The calls were about twenty calls a day and night. There would be music playing or the call would hang up. And that went on about ten, fifteen times a day. He (George) changed the telephone number two or three times. It didn't make any difference. The calls still kept coming in. And we called the police and we called the phone company. We tried all those things.

I: Who do you think it was ?

L: Toni Mannix. Paid a man by the name of Santiago to make the calls. Annoyance. She was very angry, but I was there and it went on and on and on. And I said this will just plain drive you crazy. And we changed the phone number, and she got it. Well, naturally she'd get right through the studio through her husband. All he had to do was pick up the phone. The husband was well aware of George, well aware.

I: Did you ever discuss this with George ?

L: Well, there was nothing to discuss. He knew it was Toni. I knew it was Toni. The day that George shot himself or the night; I finally said I'm really going bananas with this routine. I telephoned Eddie Mannix at the studio and he wasn't there. And I was going to say to him, I was going to say to him, Will you just do me a favor and get a mouth piece for your wife. He was not there. I left a message that I called.

I: Did you have any connection or did you know if George hung out with any shady characters because he liked to party, he liked everybody, backroom gambling, he liked a little hooch. Maybe a little illicit substances ?

L: What kind of shady ?

I: Is this true ?

L: George was a drinker. But so far as anything else, no pot, no hash, nothing like that. No. And when I say he was a drinker, a social drinker. And he did not have that many friends, no.

I: Did he start cocaine ?

L: Absolutely not.

I: Would you have know it if he did ?

L: Of course I would know. I mean he would have told me. If you came in here with grass, I'd know it. No, absolutely not.

I: Did you smoke pot or hash or cocaine ?

L: No way. No way.

I: Did your friends come over and smoke pot ?

L: Nope. As a matter of fact, the writers I know out there, and whatever acting people I know were Jimmy and Henny Backus, ah no. Nobody I know is in that department. Not that I know of. I certainly had no inkling that anybody I know having any pot. No.

I: Did he or you or both of you have any connections with underworld figures ?

L: What's underworld...what ?

I: Underworld figures. You know, some union guys, Jimmy Hoffa, Mickey Cohen. Guys who were....

L: No. I used to know hot shot gangsters. The good gangsters. Joe Adonis, Frank Costello, those are the good gangsters. I don't know any dumbbell gangsters from California. My New York gangsters.



I: Did the New York gangsters come out and visit you ?

L: Nahh. What in the world am I going to do with Frank Costello in California ? Frank Costello was a very nice man. He used to have lunches and there would be four or five girls there for lunch. And when the waiter took the plates away there would be a hundred dollars under every plate. Now you can't get sore at a guy like that. Can you?

I: How did you get to meet people like Frank Costello.

L: You had clubs in New York then. Frank Costello was very friendly Sherman Billingsley at the Stork Club, and there you were. I mean those guys were well accepted all over town.

I: Did you ever introduce these people to George ? Ever ?

L: No. They never came to California to my knowledge. I didn't know the California guys. No.

I: Did you introduce them to George in Florida or New York ?

L: No, no. no.

I: Were almost done.

L: You're almost done, I'm almost done. Can I have a drink please ?

I: Sure.

(pause)

L: Yow. Who made that drink ? A good friend ? Wow, rabba dabba doo.

(pause)

I: Why is it...

L: What, what.

I: Why is it that thirty years later people still believe George Reeves death is still a mystery ? A lot of people don't believe it was really suicide. They think there was something funny going on.

L: Do they think I shot him ? (shakes her head no) Superman!! That's the reason...there was nothing funny. Absolutely nothing. (pause) Just very, very unfortunate. You know had he hung in, he would have been home free right now. And that man Jake Liebowitz, if he's still alive, I don't know if he is or not that owns the rights to Superman...he's still making a fortune with the reruns. Superman is still on television.

Absolutely normal man that just threw the towel in, That's all. Nothing complicated and no depressions, no downs. Good guy. Really, a good guy. But he could not get a job and directors loved him, producers loved him. They'd come over for dinner. They'd say we can't cast you George. (pause)  
Say la vie' baby.

I: How did you counter the critics back then who said well maybe she did it?

L: I paid absolutely no attention to them. That's absolutely absurd and you know what it is ? I don't know why I said this. I say this because I felt it, the draft out there. And California people, especially in Beverly Hills are very clannish. And I'm a New York lady. I don't think they liked me too much. But I don't know that many people, I didn't then, George didn't know that many people.

I: How long did you live with him out there ?

L: Oh, I don't know, not too long.

I: You didn't move lock, stock and barrel from New York to LA to be with him ?

L: No. I kept my apartment here.

I: Do you believe in the after life ?

L: Do I ? I don't have much dealings with death. I think of people. I miss a number of people. Bob Benchley (father to writer Nathaniel and grandfather to Peter of Jaws fame). I miss people that meant something to me while I was growing up. People like Crosby. I used to go to ball games with Bing. I used to go play golf with Jimmy Dimaret. Those are the people I miss.

I: Do you miss George ?

L: Yes, of course. (pause) A very gentle man, non-complicated, no hang ups, no problems with that man. He had no...if he was down, he was down once. I saw



him when he was down. I said, "George, what is it?" He said, "I just have got to get a job." I'd never shoot myself about not getting a job. That's because I haven't got one. If I don't start writing fast I'll never get anything.

But, he was not heavy furniture, no absolutely not. (meaning: not difficult)

There was no inkling that he had suicide in mind. The only thing that would give me a clue was the gun in the night table draw...and I said why? He said it was a present. I said I don't like guns. I don't even like them on a wall. I just don't like guns. He said, "well it's just there." And that's the gun he used. And that's the gun that came from Mannix.

I: How long after he got that gun did he shoot himself?

L: Oh, I don't know how long he had the gun.

I: Did he often play with it? Was he obsessed with it?

L: Nope. And don't forget that he was with Toni Mannix for seven years. The husband was well aware of that romance or whatever it was.

I: If you could talk to George right now...

L: I'd shoot him...for being such a horse's ass. That was a very, very normal, straight guy. He just threw the towel in. Just could not get a job.

I: What would you tell him if he were here right now? If you could communicate with him right now? Or the next time you see him, if there is an afterlife.

L: Hang tough, something will come up. You'll be alright. (pause) As I told you before George had no hobbies. So acting was the only thing he knew. And he couldn't get a job.

I: How did he spend his time? How did he spend all day?

L: That, there you go, there you go. Nothing to do. And so far as any other activity, no, no. Clean cut, really clean cut. Nothing wrong about this man. Of course he'd get a little bit down. He couldn't go to work because he couldn't get a job.

I: Did you work?

L: Did I ? Oh I worked. You mean when I was with George ? No. I owned a saloon in New York. And I sold it.

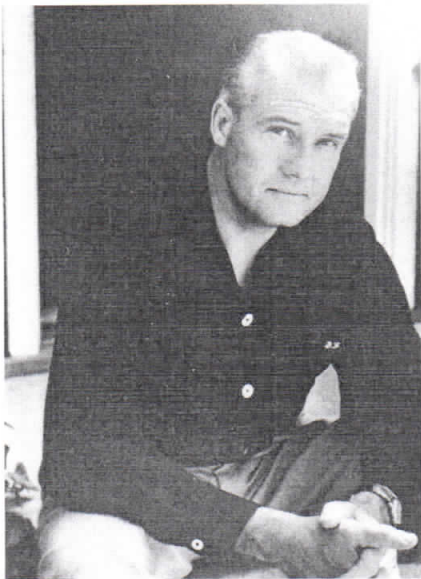
I: Do you think he regretted that he ever did Superman ?

L: No, I don't think so at all. No I don't think so. We were sitting in Chasen's one night and it was very funny because we were having dinner and Bing Crosby was in there with his son Lindsay. And people would come over and ask George for his autograph, and ignore Bing. Ha, Ha. And Bing said, "This is a fine thing." I'd say, "that's fine because he can't get a job." It was true. George couldn't get a job and they're asking for his autograph. And there sits Bing and they just ignored him. Now that's funny, but it was true. And Bing said, "this is fine."

I: And this has been fine. Thank you for your time.

L: You're quite welcome. I hope I didn't bore you.

### END OF INTERVIEW





This interview with Leonore Lemmon was conducted in May 1989. The contents of this hardcopy were transcribed from a video version, which I purchased over seven years ago from a New York collectable show vendor. Throughout the entire interview the camera is only fixed on Leonore Lemmon and because those individuals who conducted the interview are only heard speaking and never seen, it is impossible to identify them, and unfortunately impossible to credit them. I'd gladly do so if I could.

Overall, I think the interviewer did a great job working with Leonore Lemmon. He asked Leonore a series of questions relative to the events surrounding June 16<sup>th</sup>, 1959. George Reeves is well known as the actor who portrayed the American icon super hero, televisions 1950's Superman. To millions of middle age people throughout the United States of America, George Reeves is the definitive version of the Superman character. To a small number who still remain interested in his life, career and unfortunate death at age 45, he continues to fascinate. Especially regarding his work with schools, charities and hospitals is to be admired. Realistically, with the young audience fan base growing up with other actors as the screen Superman, George being recognition is fading.

It is unfortunate, the interview came to a closing after almost an hour. As a reader, you must be wondering why a number questions weren't asked. For example; What was her relationship with her attorney? When did she call her attorney? What were the events earlier in the day? Why did she not remain until after the funeral? This is just for starters.

Many of the remaining loyal fans would rather remember George for his years alive than the events surrounding his death. To many, Leonore Lemmon is the sole individual responsible for George's tragic end in one form or another and there is little interest they have for her and what she has relative to say.

I have wrestled with the thought of making this interview available to the George Reeves fan base. I finally decided it is important for you the reader to hear her side of the story and be able to judge for yourself if she really cared for George's well being.

Shortly after this interview, Leonore Lemmon passed away on New Year's day, January 1, 1990. The newspapers of 1959 stated Leonore's age was 35 and 38. That would mean at the time of this interview she was no more than 68. However, because of her years of alcoholic abuse, she appeared much older.



After thirty years, Leonore maintained it was the typecasting brought on by the Superman role that made finding other work difficult to obtain.

In the state of Leonore's condition during this interview, it is difficult to know just how much she does or doesn't remember. Her condition after years of alcohol use could be described by some as a state of dementia and therefore any recollections could be or is tainted.

Her response to an incident in the Stork Club in 1941, measures as a mild blip on her map of memory. In fact, not at all. I suspect the only reason it is even addressed is because the newspapers articles of June 1959 made reference to it. Her age during the Stork Club incident would be approximately 20 years old. When her memory is reasonably sharp is during her concern that the interviewer confuses brothers Richard and Robert Condon. Thinking the interviewer will be preparing a feature, she is adamant he not refer to Richard. The fact is all he was doing was reciting a past article for her comments. But she was sharp to correct him on more than one occasion on this issue. Leonore also showed signs of being slightly agitated when newspaper excerpts were read to her. She seemed intent on ensuring she set the record straight. And even after her brief moment to satisfy her alcoholic thirst, she quickly bounced back to answer a number of edgy questions and finish the interview on a positive impression. At face value, one could start to believe Leonore speaks the truth.

Whether Leonore is telling the truth or not, it isn't for me to judge. When she states George did not have many friends, one would immediately counter that as not the truth. However consider this; Leonore was with George in Los Angeles six months. During that time, George did not communicate with his friends on a steady basis. In a magazine article, May 1995: Comics Scene #51, Walter Reed would have this to say about the months George was with Leonore; "When he was going around with this girl (Leonore), I don't think he wanted me to meet her, and so I didn't see him in the months just before he died." It is also possible once friends got word of the Toni – George – Leonore feud they backed off to avoid getting involved, hoping it would soon work itself out. Leonore's comment would seem to make sense. From her point of view; she didn't see much of his personal friends.

Perhaps the most important part of the interview where I do become suspect of her story is why it took so long for her to call the police after George was left dying. It was her most immediate intention to have Bob Condon and Carol Van Ronkel dressed and out of the house before the police arrived. If that was her mission, they ultimately did not get the chance to leave the house before police arrived. The newspapers and police report indicated they both were present enjoying the

company downstairs while they heard the shot upstairs. Also interesting is, the newspapers stated Carol and Bill arrived together at George's house. Now, according to Leonore and this is probably true, is that Carol arrived earlier that evening than Bill. She then spent time in the guest room with Bob Condon. When Bill arrived he was greeted by Leonore. A point of confusion between Leonore and the interviewer is whether George came down from upstairs after Bill Bliss arrived, which the interviewer states agitated George. Leonore states George never came downstairs. During an interview with Mrs. Jan Bliss conducted sometime around the same time of this interview, Jan described a scene where she was to meet her husband and Carol at George's home. That would mean, it was planned that Bill Bliss would be at the house. Perhaps earlier in the day Carol invited Bill and Jan. Only by the time Bill showed up, Carol was in bed with Bob Condon. Soon after, Jan would approach the house. Before entering the front door she heard harsh voices, peered in the front picture window and witnessed George arguing with Leonore. She hesitated entering the house and then turned and walked away. Shortly after, she heard one shot. If Leonore attempted to cover up Carol's behavior from her husband and her argument with George, what else is she concealing? It's difficult to believe the man in the image below would end his own life in the manner officially ruled an apparent suicide. Lou K. 6/28/11





