

The Unflappable Marty Ladin

by

Bill "The Book" Richardson
www.ehoremans.com

Edited by K. Ramage
kr_catalina@earthlink.net

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While it might be a stretch to say that Marty Ladin is somehow behind everything that happens in this sport, I would say that he is somehow behind most things, especially if they are funny. I will say that not everyone has acquired a taste for Marty's antics, but personally, I find him to be the funniest guy I know. At work, all the people around me know at least one Marty story, and at home you only have to mention his name and my wife starts rolling her eyes. Yes, she too has had run-ins with the famous Marty Ladin, but more on that in a minute.

What you have to understand about Marty is that he loves excitement, and when it doesn't occur naturally, he will create it at the expense of anyone including himself. I first met Marty back in the late 1980's at the AU convention up in Phoenix. Again, Marty is an acquired taste, and my first taste soured me for almost 15 years. However, my life long friend Steve Baldwin happens to be quite close to Marty and after hearing his many Marty stories I thought maybe I had formed a bad opinion.

In 1999, I held an auction at the Snowbird race and right in the middle of everything, Baldwin introduced me to Marty again. I don't remember exactly what he said, but I do remember that I was quite busy with everything and whatever he said, it ticked me off. He was wearing a cowboy hat, and I looked right at him and said, "I am not sure I have time right now to be insulted by a short guy in a cowboy hat." His face lit up with a big smile like I had somehow impressed him, and we have been friends ever since.

Unfortunately, not every Marty story is fit for public consumption, but maybe for his 80th birthday I can give you a flavor of the famous Marty Ladin. Realize, however, that getting involved with Marty Ladin is like handling a badger.

I just visited in California a few weeks back, and I really had no intentions of any immediate return, but when Marty invited me to his birthday party, I quickly made this a must see priority event. Obviously, I didn't let Marty know this, but I wouldn't miss this event for anything.

When it is important, I have learned to write memos that are completely void of any feeling or emotion. The object is to leave the reader with no edges to grab onto, thereby

giving him nothing to challenge. As you have probably already figured out, Marty is a guy that loves edges, so I give the man a steady diet of material with no edges, and it drives him crazy.

Marty and I rarely talk on the phone with each other. This is because whenever he calls, he is only trying to find out if I am mad at him about something, he wants to get me mad about something, or he is digging for dirt. If he thinks I am mad at him, he goes all sympathy on me, which I play off completely, because I know that in a few minutes I probably will be mad at him anyway, so why spoil the moment. When he is attempting to get me mad, I never lose my composure no matter what he says. Instead, I deadpan the situation, laugh at him, or give him the big picture brush. You can figure out the first two, and the last one is where I say, "Well Marty, things are certainly more complicated than that." He hates that one because I say it in a way that is even more condescending than it already sounds. Marty once told Ed Lorenz, "You can't get to that Book; the man has no feelings. He's like a stone. He just laughs at you while you are whipping him!"

When border skirmishes do break out between us, we don't use the phone to settle our differences; instead, we use common conduits such as Ed Lorenz (A.K.A. Negative Eddie) and Steve Baldwin (A.K.A. Baldwin) to help facilitate our little war. Oh, don't feel too sorry for these middle men, as they have been known to add a little fuel of their own to every fire.

As an example, Marty has been known to call Baldwin several times a day. When he calls, it is not uncommon that I am talking to Baldwin on the other line. Baldwin just loves to blow Marty away by saying, "Marty, I've got The Book on the line, I can't be talking to you right now." That always sets Marty off. "Baldwin, what the hell are you wasting your time with that worthless SOB for? You do know that you are judged by the friends you keep? You're a busy man. You can't be wasting your time with a guy like that." Of course, Baldwin holds the two phones close enough together to be sure that I hear every word and, of course, Marty knows exactly what is going on.

By the way, nicknames are Marty's specialty. There is the Prune, Harry the Hat, Jake the Snake, Baldwin (said in a condescending tone), Rodeo, the Diaper, Book (sometimes pronounced "Bush" as though it were a slip of the tongue), Fast Eddie, the Sizzler, Negative Eddie and so on.

One time several years back, Marty started picking at one of his club members, Carl Loizzi. At the time, Carl was having some troubles of his own, so he was more thin-skinned than usual. Eventually, Carl had had enough of Marty and he really jumped back at him and things got a little tense. About that time, and for other reasons, Carl resigned from a club position. Digging for dirt, Marty called Eddie and asked if he (Marty) was the reason that Carl had resigned. It so happened that both Carl and I were visiting Eddie when this call came in, so Eddie said, "Well, Marty, I am not involved in this, but Carl is sitting right here. Why don't you ask yourself?" By this time, Carl had regained his composure towards Marty, so he deadpanned his way through the conversation pretty much the way I would have done it. I heard him say several times, "No, Marty, my

resignation had nothing to do with you.” As soon as Marty was sure that he wasn’t all tangled up under the bus, he turned around and threw Eddie under the bus by saying, “I knew all along it was that Negative Eddie that was responsible for everyone’s problems. The man is highly negative you know,” and that is how Eddie became Negative Eddie.

Marty loves to call Baldwin and give him updates no matter how factual those updates might be, or how many times he has given Baldwin these same updates. One day, Marty caught Baldwin on a bad day. Baldwin told Marty, “Look Marty, you call here far too often so I am going to have to place you on a restriction. I don’t want to hear from you before 10:00 a.m., and, when I do hear from you, I don’t want to hear any of your unfounded gossip. I also don’t want to hear any more gossip about Jake the Snake or Bruno or any of the rest. I am tired of hearing those same stories over and over.” There was a very long pause in the conversation and then in his very best hurt feelings voice, Marty said, “Gee...You don’t leave a fellow a lot to talk about, do you Baldwin?” The next morning instead of calling at his usual 7:00 a.m., Marty respectfully acknowledged the restriction by waiting until 7:15 to call Baldwin with more of his unfounded gossip of course. Again, vintage Marty!

As you probably already know if you have read any of my older articles, my wife doesn’t think much of pigeons, pigeon fanciers, possibly me, and nine out of ten of any other ilk. Before I started carrying around a cell phone, unsuspecting fanciers would call the house and try to treat my wife in the same manner that they would treat their own. Homie, don’t play that at my house! Once, when my wife told a fancier that I was outside, the fancier actually had the nerve to say, “Well, go get him,”...bad for him and bad for me. When things quieted down several months later, she just started letting the phone ring through to the answering machine. This eventually prompted me to get my cell phone so that I could actually talk to people without having to call them back.

One day, I was in the process of typing an article on the computer when my dear wife came into the room and started playing the messages on the answering machine. On came the unmistakable voice of Marty Ladin. In reference to her answering machine greeting, Marty said, “A very nice presentation “Mrs. Book”. When Mr. Book gets home, have him give me a call...oh, at his convenience of course.”

As she was contemplating being called “Mrs. Book,” I start sinking into my chair. Unfortunately, being a lawyer, my wife contemplates quicker than most, so I knew there wasn’t going to be time to escape from the room. I could already hear her softly repeating the phrase “Mrs. Book” like she was storing it away for use against me at a later time. You know how women do. She can’t remember what she had for breakfast or even who I am unless she wants to yell at me about something, but she can remember every transgression that may have possibly occurred over our last 28 years of marriage. By the way, it has probably been six years since this wonderful phone call, and she still brings it up once or twice a month.

Being a guy that avoids leaving edges, I never brought up the Mrs. Book comment to Marty, because that would only have encouraged him. As to my wife and her continued

references to the Mrs. Book comment, as a peace offering I bought a personalized license plate for her car entitled, "Mrs. Book". It has been a couple of years now and it appears to have grown on her, at least it seems that way because I still live at the same address. Until recently, we parked next to each other in the same parking garage at work. My license plate says, "The Book," and hers says "Mrs. Book". How romantic! And all because of Marty!

What prompted me to write this article is that Marty happened to call me the other day. The fact is that I screen all of Marty's calls. Not because I don't want to talk to him, but because one must be prepared before talking to him. Therefore, before calling him back, I checked out the situation by calling Eddie or Baldwin first. In this case, Eddie briefed me on a conversation that had occurred earlier in the week where Marty had called complaining about my articles and his inability to comprehend them. As I mentioned earlier, Eddie has been known to add a little fuel to the fire on occasion, so he suggested to Marty that he should call me posthaste and air his views. Now I at least knew the subject matter of Marty's call.

When I returned his call, Marty started off on positive ground. "Book, I just want to be sure that you will be at my party. It's going to be the biggest event in the Valley in quite some time. As always, you'll have celebrity status you know. Nothing but the best for you Book, of course." Marty giveth. Next sentence and the real reason for the phone call. "By the way, I have been trying to read your articles (whop), but I can never get through them (whop), because they are so boring, Book (whop)." Marty taketh away. Not bad for Marty...three shots in one sentence.

Fortunately, Eddie and I had rehearsed answers to several possible scenarios of which this was one. I said, "Marty, Eddie says that anything that you do not understand is probably on the right track." Notice how Eddie is saying this and not me? This allows the conversation to stay pleasant as I am not the one slinging mud, and Eddie isn't there so that Marty can't retaliate. It is clean with no edges.

Now Marty knows that I have already talked to Eddie before talking to him, and I can hear a slightly deflated tone in his voice. But he is not about to give up. "But Book, your articles are so boring, I can hardly stay awake." "Marty, you are 80 years old, I would expect that, especially around your 7:30 bedtime. Besides Marty, I get a lot of emails from people that like my articles."

"Book, what's an email?" I answered, "Email is a way of communicating on the Internet." Marty says, "You sure spend a lot of time on that intercom." "No Marty, it's called the Internet not the intercom." "Bush, I mean Book (whop), I know what it is called, I am just saying that you are on the Intercom a lot." "Yes, Marty, I have to write back to all those people that like my articles (a quick counter punch)."

Marty thrives on there being a winner and a loser in every conversation and that is why he hates it when I don't leave any edges. With Marty, you know you are winning when he practically shouts, "What?" into the phone like he didn't hear you. However, if you

start to repeat yourself, he will cut you off, because of course, he heard you fine the first time. Really, it is sort of a transitional phase into the next topic.

Realizing that my answers were well rehearsed and he wasn't going to get a chance to throw me under the bus, he turns his sights on Eddie in retaliation for kibitzing. "That Eddie's an expert on the intercom, you know." This of course, is an attempt at digging dirt. If I answer yes, he will know that I am lying. If I answer no, then he will run back to Eddie and tell him that I don't think much of his computer skills, so instead, I say, "I didn't know that, Marty." Marty really didn't care about Eddie's computer skills in the first place, but now we had transitioned to the topic of Eddie.

"That Eddie has to be the laziest man alive. He never leaves that chair of his, you know. He does nothing and he has nothing to do. The man is a disgrace. I don't know how he ever flew so well. It had to be the pigeons, he certainly never did anything to make them win, you know." "Yes, Marty, I know. Those pigeons must be pretty good to have won without Eddie's help, don't you think?" Now he is in a tough position. He knows where I am heading because he knows that I own Eddie's pigeons. If he says yes, then he must admit that the pigeons are good, which he is never going to do on general principle. If he says no, then he will have to admit that Eddie had something to do with their winning.

While he is considering this, I hit him with, "Had I bought pigeons from you, quality would have been an issue as I would have been severely limited by purchasing the skill of the fancier instead of good pigeons." There was no way he was going to untangle this sentence in time, so he resorted to "What?" I repeated, "Had I bought..." "I know Eddie better than I know my ex-wife. Book, I am not one to take any credit where credit is due (news to me), and Eddie did really well years back, but he couldn't do those things today you know. (The club is half the size and with far fewer good fanciers, so I am not sure how he came to this conclusion). If he wasn't so lazy, he'd still be racing."

What an opportunity. "Marty, Eddie tells me that he is over qualified for today's racing." "What?" "I said, Eddie tells..." "My party is going to be one of the biggest events in the Valley in years, course, there are still a couple of people on the fence post, you know (This is Marty-ease for being on the fence as to whether he will invite those people to his party)."

"Now Book, you are coming to my party, aren't you?" "Well Marty, Eddie has a pigeon that I am interested in looking at, so I thought I would probably go over there for that. Maybe I can work you in." "What?" "I said that maybe I can..." "Eddie might pretend he doesn't want to come, but he wouldn't miss this for the world." "The problem is Marty, while Eddie might not miss it for the world, he would definitely miss it to continue sitting in that chair you keep mentioning." "You do have a point there, Book."

"Now Marty, it is pretty hot over there already. You will turn on the air conditioning so that we don't have to sit in your house in 105 degree heat like you made us do that one time, will you? I thought Eddie was going to pass out. My son wasn't too happy either. He doesn't want to go over there anymore, Marty. He got sort of ticked at you when you

let us sit there sweating like pigs, and then just as we were leaving you told Jill (Marty's daughter) to turn on the air conditioning because the massage lady was coming over and she would refuse to work in a hot house." "Boooooo, that was just a mistake, coincidentally, I didn't realize that the cooling wasn't on until just about the time you guys were ready to leave. I was surprised you guys sat there for nearly two hours and didn't mention it." "Well, I am mentioning it now Marty." "OK, OK, we'll see what we can do."

"But you are coming, right Book?" "I will see if I can work you in." "What?" I said, "I'll see if..." "Have you talked with Baldwin lately? The man is all business you know." "Yes Marty, I talked to Baldwin this morning, and you are right, he is having a pretty good season." "I didn't say he was having a good season, Book. I said he was all business. Well Book, you have kept me talking here for a while and I have some things I need to get done. Be sure you make the party, and see what you can do about those boring articles (whop)." "OK Marty, I will try to write something a little different just for your birthday."

I wrote this before going to his birthday party for fear that he will rough me up at his birthday party and then I might be too mad at him to write at all.

Hopefully Marty will be able to understand this article, especially since it is all about him (his favorite subject). Otherwise, the next article will have to be a "Dick and Jane" sequel.

Happy Birthday Marty!!!

Until next time!

Book

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