PETER BEAGLE/ Travis Ashmore
Conversation about "The Last Unicorn" and Other writings
By John C. Tibbetts
Raven Bookstore, Lawrence, KS, 13 April 2015

[begins after a brief conversation with his tour manager]

JOHN TIBBETTS: …and I turn to Peter S. Beagle now in Lawrence, Kansas at the Raven Bookstore, thinking that you must have heard this story many times before, huh?

PETER BEAGLE: Oh, any number of times but, in fact, my background is different from Travis's but all the same I was the kid who read everything all the time and who certainly escaped from his own weirdness and his, into another neighborhood than my own and never, the difference is I never paid much attention to "The Last Unicorn." It had been such a nightmare to write that I just wanted to get on to something else and try feeding my kids with some other book because that was most of it, being professional, is the only way I knew to make a living and what mattered really was putting bread on the table.

A book that flows with such lyric grace is a nightmare to write?

It's supposed to look like that.

(laughter)

(indecipherable)

Yes, exactly. One thing I knew growing up with artists like my uncles and writers whom I knew and teachers, my favorite cousin who was a choreographer, another who was a cellist with a very well known string quartet. The main thing was that you got up and did your work like everybody else. You didn't give yourself airs. You just worked hard and, yes, the parallel I always use, frequently use, is watching Joe DiMaggio, whom I saw the last days of whom and Willie Mays, whose first days I saw. If they were going after the same fly ball, which is unlikely, Mays would be running full out, his cap would be flying off because he bought them a size too big; that was part of the drama of it all; his arms pumping back and forth, everything working and he would, he would come up with that ball in the same way that DiMaggio would make it look as if he had it all the way, he just simply glided.

"Oh, I might as well catch this."

Yes. It was like that. Well, I think it parallels with writers. My father's, one of my father's favorite writers was Theodore Dreiser but Dreiser had almost no style at all and drive you crazy just beating you to death with details but finally you'd give in and just go along with the story.

There's a reason that a couple of Dreiser's novels were made into movies. One of them, at least, a classic

"A Place in the Sun"?

"A Place in the Sun." And every time I start reading a novel by Dreiser I get so bored, so irritated that I just drop it but I come back.

But you know, I'm going to follow this thread because Dreiser writes a novel called "The Genius," which is about an ashcan painter.

Yes.

You have an uncle that was part of that movement.

I had three uncles who were painters and I grew up with them as role models because they went to work every day in the studios. Their studios were usually close enough, down in Greenwich Village, that they could slip over to see what the other one was doing. There were twins and intensely competitive, and I hung out with one, my uncle Moses, because he had a sense of humor and he had comic books hanging around the studio which I could come over and read, and I simply learned about what art was as a profession. And I can remember, I sat, the summer of, winter of '62, my buddy Phil Segunick, who grew up to be a painter, and I posed for Moses probably at least once a week, sometimes twice and we'd get five dollars each for the session. But he was never satisfied with that double portrait. All that winter he did the portrait about three times and finally, I know it's in somebody's gallery, but he wasn't satisfied with it, he just would look at it and mumble things in Russian. The few phrases I caught were "?" which means sort of "the devil fly away with it," "the hell with it." And he'd stand in front of the painting with his hands on his hips, just shake his head and say, "?" which is more or less "God help me."

Have you ever said that while you were writing and since you've been writing?

Oh yeah, of course. But the main thing is, well I've told young writers and mostly what I do when they ask me, you know, how do you break a block, I go for a walk, I'm good when I'm walking, or I walk around in circles in the office, but the continual thing that I say and I had it on a card, a faded index card on my office wall for many years was "Think, schmuck," because that's what I always wind up saying to myself.

And not just think but listen. You talk about a voice, several voices in your head, growing up that have maybe forged the way for you as a storyteller to tell a story.

My father was a great storyteller. My mother was the, comes the quote officially artistic side of the family. My father's family were mostly poor Polish Jewish peasants.

And you're growing up where?

In the Bronx, in New York. But my father was the storyteller and I'm good at it. I know, I tell stories naturally, but I got that from him. I got almost nothing to do with writing as we think of writing. My dad could not, and he asked me to do this, could not tell a written joke without screwing it up. He'd be talking, he'd be talking and know he'd have to speak to the American Federation of Teachers, one of whose, he and a couple of pinochle buddies were the founders of the union and so sometimes he had to speak in public and he'd ask me for a couple of gags, a couple of jokes or just write something down. He could do that naturally on his own, he was naturally funny but he couldn't get through, you know, a written joke without messing it up some way. And that's something I grew up with. Language was important.

And how about your voice? You have recorded discs; people have listened to you tell this story, I suppose?

I suppose, you know. I know I'm recorded in various places; there's an audio book of "The Last Unicorn," for instance, but the only thing I'm sure of is that more than anything, I love singing. I worked as a singer at a French restaurant for twelve years on weekends and I've acted in musicals, and whenever I meet a singer I sort of pin them to the wall and ask questions about breath control, care of the voice, diction, phrasing and so on. And most of them have said the main thing is to take care of that voice, take care of it and one opera singer told me, "What you do is you make your body into a column of air, from the soles of your feet to the top of your head, and then you try to get out of your own way."

(laughter) And how important music is, that's something I hope we can talk about more as well but the voice, the voice. Can I ask you to read a paragraph here? Do you see that top paragraph? Let me explain, to me this is one of the great passages in all of fantasy because it relates your story to a world of childhood and to toys. Now Molly is having a vision and if you can see that, if you would read it for me, I'd really appreciate it.

"As though she were standing in a higher tower than King Haggard's, she looked down on a pale pairing of land where a toy man and woman stared with their knitted eyes at a clay bull and a tiny ivory unicorn, abandoned play things. There was another doll too, half buried in a sand castle with a stick king propped on in one tilted turret. The tide would take it all in a moment and nothing would be left but the flaccid birds of the beach, hoping in circles."

It doesn't diminish it in any way to see it as a child's toy box. In fact, I think it enlarges what this book is.

It reminds me, and I hadn't thought of it for a while, of one of the French songs I used to do by a great poet and musician named Georges Brassens. And it had to do with children, you know,

adolescents preparing for a battle on the beach, you know, and then with the kids from the next beach, and then fighting over it all and finally driving the invaders away, the Saracins (?) and "Okay, we lost a couple of racquets, you know, and one beach blanket, but we won." And the girls who were watching were suitably impressed, and he takes that -- because he grew up during this time -- he takes that to what happened a few years later when France was at war with Germany, and where the people who fell down didn't necessarily get up again, and now the song says, now when I watch children scraping on the beach, you know, I don't get in the way, I let them alone because the castle they're fighting over, the sand castle, is already lost, the wave's going to come in and take it, exactly what happened to us. It's a very touching song.

You were a semi-child when you wrote "A Fine and Private Place," what eighteen or nineteen?

I was nineteen and my standing joke about that is that it just shows what you can do if you don't have a social life.

(laughter) Thank you for speaking for many of us.

I just didn't. I was working as a music counselor at a summer camp. I was nineteen and after nine o'clock when all the kids were in bed, there was nothing to unless you had a girlfriend at the girls' camp across the lake, which I didn't, or -- and I mention this very thoughtfully -- you were willing to walk four miles that way and four miles back for beer. Today I'd probably do it, both for the beer and the exercise but back then there was really nothing for me to do but sit down and start writing a novel. I knew I would sooner or later, that's the funny thing about …

Were you at that age then when we are sort of half in love with (indecipherable) death? I mean, this is this book about death.

Death always seems to have run through my work early on, as it did with that same songwriter George Brassens. He personalizes death as something to be mocked, made fun of, encountered on the street as Uncle Archibald did in one of his songs, and I think the song I used to do, he died of cancer at sixty. He had kidney trouble all his life and the song says to his fans, "Don't worry about it; it's just part of show business." It gets to the point, see the white hair, under that I have my real hair. The whole idea is to deceive death, to make death think that everything that can be done to me has been. Don't worry if I seem to walk a little wobbly; again, that's part of the act. When death isn't looking, I dance the way I always did. And finally, if one day you see undertakers carrying off something that looks enough like me to deceive the worms, don't drown the (? Indecipherable) with your tears -- that's how he puts it -- because death will pack up and go home at that point and I'll simply stand up, shake off the dirt and we'll all go home. It's just show business.

Just show business, after all. "Schmendrick is the last of the red hot swamis." I think when I read that sentence, I knew this is not going to be a fantasy the likes of which I have ever read

before. There's a raffish kind of voice in with the lyric pulse.

I knew a guy who had grown up in show business. His father was a movie man. I worked with him on a couple of scripts which never got made but he told me that from a point, boy's point of view, a child's point of view, if he could have nominated any three people for sainthood, it would have been Jimmy Durante, of whom he said you could warm your hands with that man, Jack Benny and Sophie Tucker, the last of the red hot mamas. But I remember that thing he said about Durante, you could warm your hands with that man, and it struck me. I'd like somebody to say that about me.

Yeah. Can we somehow pin down a time or a place when "The Last Unicorn" was given life? Were you at a desk, a walk, hearing a voice in our head? How did it happen?

My memory of working on it was mostly in the back bedroom, in a shack. Our back bedroom

The family's?

Yes, me and my first wife and the three children, and I remember that quite often I'd be home with the little ones, and if they scratched at the door or asked me to come out and play with them or tell them a story, I had to do that. Fair's fair. But they kept their end of the bargain when I told them, "Alright, I've got to go back to work and you guys entertain each other, nobody kill anybody, no fighting, no biting," and they'd keep their end of it and I'd go back to work. And most of the time, you know I was just racketing around with my motor scooter trying to find a cheaper place to shop for food, but I associate that book a good deal with that time. I had started the book when I was twenty-three and I gave up on it for a couple of years.

And what year would that be?

1962. And then '64 I was raising children and so I had to quit it and do magazine work, nonfiction, anything that would bring in money, juggle money the best way I could. And it gave me an excuse, I was so tired of that book, you know I was just stuck on it, and the only reason I ever went back to it was that my wife liked what I had and wanted me to go on. She wanted to know how it came out, and she pushed me to the point where I threw out the eighty-give pages I had and started all over, and I would read it to her and the kids as I was going on because I was too scared to show it to anybody else, and if they hadn't liked it I probably would have quit for a second time, and probably for good.

"The unicorn lived in a lilac wood and she lived all alone." Well, I've heard of opening lines before but I'm going to read you another passage which Schmendrick says and I'm wondering is he talking about a writer as well? Here it goes, "The magic knows what it wants to do, but I never know what it knows, not at the right time anyway. I'd write it a letter if I knew where it lived ." Is that a writer speaking?

That's an artist. It's very much, I grew up around painters, as I've said, and actors, and there are days when you really are connected with what you're having to do and days when you just fumble around and tell yourself, "Think schmuck!" And I've told people it's easy enough to write when it's flowing, when it's coming easily, but there are the days when nothing is happening and you still have to sit there. Write something else, write a letter, write a poem, but you have to keep the lines open just in case the artistry or whatever you want to call it decides to show up, decides to call. And I remember a cartoon I once saw in "The New Yorker," I think, it's clearly a poet, he's sitting there at his desk, he's got a quill pen, he's got a Lord Byron's shirt that's cut down to here, and he's looking over at a large lady in gown who is sprawled on the back of a couch who is saying to him with some irritation, "No, I will not get up and make you a sandwich. I'm a muse, not your mother." Yeah, it's like that. You have to coax her and sometimes you have to write something you know you're going to throw out the next day, but you still have to be writing.

Now, inevitably when people say,"What's it about? What's the meaning of 'The Last Unicorn'?," I know you have ways that you say this. Choose one of your favorites for me, if you will.

Well, it's like sometimes when I know people want to get in touch with me, I'll sometimes say, "Well, by all means, if you ever get to Oakland, try and find me." It's like that.

"If you ever read this book, try and find it."

And try and find me in it because the nearest thing to autobiography, as I've said many times, is the butterfly.

The butterfly appears to the unicorn very early.

Yeah, and that's summer of '62 when I was sharing a cabin with my oldest friend Phil, the painter. He was painting every day and coming back with more oil on the canvas, and I started "The Last Unicorn" because I had to show him that I was working too. I had to have pages if he was going to come home with this landscape with more paint on it, and as far as I know, I just started it then to have something to show Phil. We talked about that some years ago.

Was he the first person to read, see it?

Yeah.

And his last name is

Segunick. The guy I came across country with on the motor scooters. And Phil told me some

years ago, "I hated that damned landscape. I would have quit in a week but you were back at the cabin writing this book." Complete misunderstanding on both sides and that gave me something to do. I had published one book before and had a second one turned down, and I wasn't sure who I was or what I was doing. I didn't even think of myself as a fantasy writer, I just wrote what I liked to read. It comes down to that for all of us. Jack Kerouac didn't end well really but he did say something that was perfectly accurate. When he was asked why he wrote so many books so fast, his response seriously was, "Well, you know, one day I'm going to be an old man on the beach in Florida and I'm going to need a lot of good stuff to read." In the same way Disraeli, who started as a novelist, was asked, "Well, Mr. Disraeli," at some dinner or other, "have you read any good books lately?" And Disraeli's response apparently was "Madam, when I want to read a good book, I write one."

Quite a dandy.

Oh, he's an old favorite of mine and crazy about his wife MaryAnn.

Have you seen the George Arliss movie? It has its moments.

(overlapping) I never saw Arliss at all.

So when you're writing, you're kind of on the road the way the unicorn and Schmendrick are on the road and there's a passage here where when they take to the road, "the road rushed the unicorn." Could you read that?

"It rushed the unicorn along, tugging at her feet like the tide, fretting at her, never letting her be quiet and listen to the air. Time had always passed her by in her forest, but now it was she who passed through time as she traveled. It seemed to her that she had heard autumn begin to shake the beech trees the very moment that she stepped out onto the road."

Mortality.

Certain mortality, yes.

When did you know that this book, or did you ever know at the time that this was a very special book that would really help to define

No, I didn't know that. I didn't know any of it. The only person who did know was the old novelist Robert Nathan, who is the nearest thing to a mentor as I ever had. And it was Robert who called me from Los Angeles when he read the book and he never even noticed the dedication. He said, "This is going to be the book people know who don't know that you ever wrote anything else." Because the same thing had happened to him with "Portrait of Jenny." He said, "You watch. Check the obituaries when I die," and he was a good forty, forty-five years

older than I, "Check the obituaries; they'll all say 'Robert Nathan, author of *Portrait of Jenny* and many other books died in Los Angeles today.'" Yeah, that's exactly what happened, I did check. And he would shrug and say, "Well, sometimes you catch lightening in a bottle; you just can't assume it's ever going to happen again. It'll change your life. 'Portrait of Jenny' certainly, and you'll go back and forth with it because you'll write books that you'll like better, and they very well go out of print and nobody may know them, and that's the way it is."

So talk to me, if you would then, to those who have read "The Last Unicorn" but those who have not read the book that you most want them to read. What book would that be?

The one, I very rarely re-read "The Last Unicorn," interestingly. When I'm having a bad day and know I can't write an English sentence, I'll go back to an out of print book called "The Innkeeper's Song" and the stories that derive from that book, there's a collection of stories set in that world.

I don't know it. You'll have to

It's called, in this country it's called "Giant Bones." Anywhere else, it's called "The Magician of Karakosk" and other stories. But it's all set in that world I just made up for the one book, I never expected it to survive, but I had such a good time there that, you know, I went, I go back to it almost as a refuge, as a playground. And I go back to a pretty well-known sonnet of Shakespeare's where he writes "When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes I all alone beweep my outcast state, And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries, And look upon myself, and curse my fate, Wishing me like to one more rich in hope, Featured like him, like him with friends possessed, Desiring this man's art, and that man's scope, With what I most enjoy contented least." It's a great comfort to know that Willie the Shake had days like that.

(laughter)

That's what I always called him. And my friends and I always called him that, but if Shakespeare can doubt himself, compare himself to other writers, other people, maybe there's hope.

So the people who come to you with their favorite book of yours, besides "The Last Unicorn," what book is that?

Well, the other day, somebody came up to me with a beloved copy of "The Folk of the Air" and that I sometimes refer to as the runt of my litter. I worked on that one for eighteen years, four complete drafts, and I still think it needs another draft, but there's too much other stuff to do to go back to it.

Well, I've got to tell you the Pulitzer Prize-prize winning critic Michael Dirda, formerly of the

"Washington Post" said when you go talk to Peter Beagle, ask him about "Folk of the Air."

Really? Michael Dirda said that? I'll be damned.

We're old friends. And I always keep him, keep track of who I'm seeing these days. Now why, I didn't ask him why, why would he have said that.

Lord, I don't know. I know that the main character in there, Joe Farrell, is sort of my, I don't know, my literary alter ego.

A musician.

A musician, that's exactly it. I allowed Farrell to be the first-rate musician that I've always wanted to be, but also his on-again, off-again girlfriend, Julie Tanikawa, makes her first appearance in that novel. There are other stories where the two of them are together. They've about gotten to the point where they're more or less living together, and the only reason, by the way, that she is Japanese-American, I always knew that was her name, Julie, because that's my favorite cousin's name. But I went to speak to my oldest daughter's English class at one point in high school, high school English, and her teacher happened to be Japanese-American, and I looked at her and thought, "Oh, that's Julie." Things happen like that. And there's a story called "Julie's Unicorn" which derives from "Folk of the Air" because Julie's, Julie had a special relationship with her grandmother and her grandmother is something of a Japanese, not wizard exactly, just knows Japanese magic, and there are things Julie picked up from her. In the story "Julie's Unicorn," she gets so just irritated to her soul just looking at a tapestry, a very old tapestry of a captured unicorn, you know, being brought to a virgin with a knight pricking her with a spear, and Julie literally says to the tapestry, "That's what you think, buster," and liberates the unicorn who, unfortunately, is the same size as it is in the tapestry. It's about 5 ½ inches.

(laughter)

And she and Farrell have to trap, get hold of it because they are at a gallery showing and when they bring it home to Julie's apartment, it is taken in by her cat, although the cat's name is NMC which stands for Not My Cat, she just adopted Julie, and she's got kittens and the cat, before they can stop her, picks up the unicorn by the scruff of the neck the way she'd carry her kittens and puts it in the box with the kittens, where she promptly starts to nurse. And they more or less leave it there, at least she she's safe, but I enjoyed that story, that was fun to write. It felt a little bit just (indecipherable) writing me.

Well, you and say Ray Bradbury, masters of metaphors. I've got a few of them here, just by chance.

That's because you read a whole lot of Thomas Wolfe as a boy.

(laughter) Yeah. "The tiny dry sound of a spider weeping." "The wind that tasted like nails." "His eyes were as bright as new money." That could almost be Raymond Chandler.

Yes, it could be, and I did read, I read a lot more Chandler than I read Thomas Wolfe.

And maybe my favorite. "It was a small smile, like the new moon, a slender bend of brightness on the edge of the unseen." Wow. Now is this a problem that when I, for one, read this, I stop and savor. The momentum of the story perhaps is altered, I guess, but

When I was younger, in high school certainly, I had a great knack for metaphors and similes. In fact, I had such a knack for it that I had to cut them out. I had to, I always had to throttle that back. No, things are not necessarily like something else; they are what they are. And that was something that I had to teach myself. When I was writing the libretto for an opera, based on my story "Come Lady Death," the composer, the opera is called "The Midnight Angel." The music is by a wonderful guy named David Carlson and David had written an opera before and I hadn't, and he prepared me by saying "When you were in high school, junior high, didn't you write yards and yards of soppy romantic poetry?" And I said, "Yards and yards, of course." But then David said "You became a professional. You trained yourself so that you cut it down and cut it down, and made it much leaner." And I said "Yes, yeah, inevitably that's what you teach yourself, other people teach you." And David said "Well try to remember how you used to do it because that's what opera is, big purple crayons." He said "If these people were, never mind subtlety, never mind nuance, if these people were subtle they wouldn't be in an opera." And that was, you know, a different kind of training.

Crayons. G. K. Chesterton, my favorite writer, once said "If it can't be told with colored pictures, it shouldn't be told."

I'll tell you

Let me interrupt, but do we know this opera? Who has heard this opera?

It's been done in, it started in St. Louis, the St. Louis Opera. It's been done at The Glimmerglass

Oh my gosh

This would have been, dear god, it's about twenty years ago. In Milwaukee. Once in Sacramento but Chesterton very simply is involved in one memory of mine when I first met Christopher Lee, after Christopher recorded King Haggard's speech about his first sight of the unicorns. And we were introduced, shook hands, and Christopher, I told Christopher "You just, you know, recorded possibly my favorite, single favorite speech in the book." And he, being Christopher, said immediately "Well, did I do it properly? I mean, we're right here in the studio.

I can go back and re-record it."

(laughter)

We discovered during that session that between the two of us we knew just about all the lines of one Chesterton poem called "The Rolling English Road."

Yes.

Christopher started with "Before the Roman came to Rye or out to Severn strode, The rolling English drunkard made the rolling English road." And I picked up "A merry road, a mazy road, that rambles round the shire, And after him the parson ran, the sexton and the squire." My son has a memory of the three of us in the men's room at the recording studio, solemnly peeing, and Christopher and me reciting that whole poem, in alternate lines or alternate stanzas. Well, that was a, almost a scarifying experience but he said "the two of you in the men's room and the acoustics in the men's room," he remembers.

Do you remember the line when Chesterton is in New York, in the middle of Times Square with all the flashing neon signs, and he says "What a garden of wonder this would be if you did not know how to read."

Oh that's nice.

Isn't that wonderful?

That is nice.

Let me pause just a second. Okay, are we doing okay? Five more minutes maybe? Okay, thank you. Um, music, music, music.

Always.

We can hone in, I suppose, on two parts which I only discovered just recently. What do you make of the whistle that Molly tells Suse to remember in later years, that when you whistle that maybe we will appear and come back to you?

Well somebody will, she says somebody will come to you. Might be an old lady with a soft spot for sassy kids, might be somebody entirely different, and

We can only imagine

I was leaving a bookmark for myself because there will be a novel about Suse, inevitably, and I

just want to remember where to pick up.

Is it possible to imagine what the tune would be?

No, I'll know when I get there.

(laughter) I love it.

I'll know. It's like, I love to write songs, occasional music, but I'll know.

Well, you're a marvelous reader as well as writer, I can tell right away. But I'm wondering, have you written down a lot of the things you've been telling me as a kind of memoir or something, should I know about this?

No. I'll never write any kind of memoir autobiography. When you're on the road so often, and Mark Twain could testify to this. When Twain took to the road to pay off his debts, he was a performer, he knew what stories went over, he used to tell the jumping frog story on stage, but he read his audience. He was one of the very first stand-up comics, if you like, but he was a showman and inevitably I have learned what stories goes over and what image I should probably cut out. I think about that because one of the things we always do is remind people that we leave a large carbon footprint on the land traveling with this van and we use a lot of gas, and so we collect spare change from, for a company that plants trees. They can do, they can plant a tree for ten cents. And in the time that the tour's gone on, we've literally been responsible for planting over a hundred thousand trees. And that reminds me of a guy I knew who went through a really nasty divorce and for some years afterward, wherever he was and wherever she was, he used to send a message to his wife, his ex-wife on the anniversary of the divorce, "In your honor, this day a tree has been uprooted in Israel." It was very nasty and he finally quit but it does stay in my head.

Well, I'm going to ask you to read just one more thing, if you would, "for only to a magician," do you see that paragraph? Somehow again, this seems to sum up a lot about the writer's art, the magician's craft, et cetera.

This is Schmendrick trying to sell himself to King Haggard. "For only to a magician is the world forever fluid, infinitely mutable and eternally new. Only he knows the secret of change. Only he knows truly that all things are crouched in eagerness to become something else, and it's from the universal tension that he draws his power."

And promise me that someday, we'll hear more poems about Captain Cully (?).

Inevitably. In fact there is a poem, there's a thing called The Fifty Two Fifty Project in which for a year, I committed to coming up with a new song lyric or poem, online for subscribers, between

one birthday and the next. And there is one poem there which is Captain Cully (?), years later, remembering Molly. It's called "Aggravating Woman."

Do you remember it?

No, I honestly, only that he's remembering who they were when they ran off to the green wood (?) together.

Because those poems, I heard the Chestertonian voice in those poems.

Well, I can't stand "Lepanto."

You're one of the few…

Yeah, Chesterton stays with me. Chesterton did know stuff and he was, if you will, a born songwriter, and his buddy Hilaire Belloc,whom I don't like either, did say once "It is the best trade in the world to make songs, and the second best to sing them." Yeah, I could go with that.

Peter S. Beagle, the S stands for?

Soyer, S-o-y-e-r. It was not given to me as a name. I just assumed, in those days, that, when I was young, that everybody has his mother's maiden name as a middle name. And as it turns out, of course, Latinos do that. So I just took it.

And although I know you, you privilege Moses, I hope somewhere in the spirit world you'll say "hello" to Raphael.

Oh, Raphael I probably knew best because, Moses was the most fun, Isaac was quite possibly the best painter and Raphael was the only one who died rich, you know. He's certainly the best known, but I haven't forgotten and you probably don't have time for this, this episode where his wife and my mother were translating fairy tales that my grandfather had written in Hebrew.

Oh my gosh.

Very much like Hans Christian Andersen. The book, I did a foreword for it, and Raphael did the illustrations, and when Raphael was still living in New York then, we were having dinner at my parents' apartment when he began badgering my mother and Aunt Rebecca to show him some of the story they were translating now. And they were very reluctant, "It's not finished; wait until we're done with it." "Come on, I'm the illustrator. You know, I ought to know what I'm going to be illustrating next." So finally they showed him a few pages of this story and he glanced over them too quickly to have really read them and said, " Well, Dostoevsky he wasn't," and my father turned on him and said, "Well, Rembrandt you're not," and Raphael hit the roof. "Yes, I

am. Yes, I am.," And after this when they'd gone home, it was a pretty stiff dinner after that, and after they'd gone home I got my father aside and said, "You did that one purpose. You know Rembrandt is Raphael's God. You could have said 'Van Gogh, you're not,' or 'Kandinsky, you're not' or 'Gaugin, you're not,' it wouldn't have made any difference but you went right for the jugular and I've never seen you do that." And my father said, "I loved that old man. He lived with us for the last years of his life and when you were a baby," he died when I was ten months old, "when you were a baby, you woke up with a nightmare or a stomach ache, he'd come running in from his room and sit with you and pat your back and talk to you and sing to you until you fell asleep again. And I have been listening to Raphael badmouth him for forty years and enough is enough."

Talking to you is like reading a page-turner of a book. One word leads to the next, the next. Thanks so much for your time.

You're very welcome.

It's such a pleasure.

Well, thank you.

Well first I'm going to

(end of Track 1)

Track 2

JOHN TIBBETTS: First I'll interview and talk with Travis Ashmore about this wonderful opportunity for many people who have not had the chance to read "Last Unicorn" or, indeed, meet the author Peter S. Beagle, who brought both to town. Talk to me a little bit, Travis, about how, where did this come from? Whose idea was this?

TRAVIS ASHMORE: Well, this was actually started by a very far-out idea from my boss, Mr. Connor Cocklin (?) who had the notion that there might be a huge cult following for this film and it turns out he's right, so he tested out a screening of the film in a few locations several years ago and said, "You know, I think if we really put our focus in here, we might be able to really do some amazing things by bringing this film back into the forefront for people and sharing it with more generations." So we started back in 2016 (error by Travis?) as a official tour, taking Peter across the country, one screening at a time, and it's proven Connor's notions to be absolutely true. We have a consistency of almost 90% sell-out shows with the proper advanced promotional efforts and we are so excited to be here in Lawrence. I found out that we were going to be playing Kansas several months ago, and I spoke with our booking agent and said, "If there's any place that we need to be in Kansas, it must be Lawrence, Kansas."

It's one thing for many of us to be reacquainted with "The Last Unicorn" and other works by Peter, but talk to so many who have yet to come to the faith!

Well, I would say that I share this with so many people that "The Last Unicorn" is one of those very rare stories that's had the opportunity to be told over the course of generations through different platforms, so there are people that became introduced to the story back in 1968 as a book, then of course there's some people that in the second generation that became introduced to the film which they're going to be seeing tonight at Liberty Hall, and then there was a younger generation that became recently acquainted from the graphic novel version of the book produced by IDW. And we are continuing this tradition of changing platforms and introducing it to more generations to come because we have on the table currently a Broadway musical in the works and also a live-action version of the film that is currently in the plans.

Makes you wonder why this hasn't happened long since.

Well, I think that there's a lot of history about some difficulties that "The Last Unicorn" had during its production as a film and getting off the ground and it didn't have all the type of funding it needed to have to really have the right publicity when it came out, but the reality is is that when it hit home video it's just touched so many hearts and souls that it's remarkable to see the big turnout where people become so excited that they finally get to see it on the big screen the way it was meant to be seen.

Now for you personally, there must have been a time when you did not know the name, you did not know the book and it's all been a new adventure for you.

No, actually I was raised on this film. It was something that, many people have their own sad stories about growing up and, of course, I'm no different and I think "The Last Unicorn" was a wonderful escape for me. I was probably known as the kid in my hometown that was at the video store who would always rent "The Last Unicorn" and if it was checked out, the employees would scatter like cockroaches because they didn't want to break the news to me. So, for me it's always been a great escape moment and helped me through a lot of hard times, and I know that I'm not alone there, and I know that it's, it just for me personally, it's just a pleasure and comes a little bit full circle for me to be a part of this whole process to help bring this story into the lives of more that might have those same things going on and find some, find some happiness and some magic in their lives again.

(End of Track 2)