

# Little People, Big Woes



"Me and Miley Cyrus are the largest employers of little people in the world," claims Jeff Beacher (top right), who was photographed at his Hollywood nightclub, Beacher's Madhouse, on July 19 beside 6-foot-7 "Amazon" Ashley Adair and with (bottom row, from left) Ricky "Mini Kanye" Sells Jr., "Wee" Matt McCarthy, "Amazing" Ali Chapman, comedian Lila Hart and Donny "Mini Trump" Davis.

Since *The Wizard of Oz*, the short-in-stature have flocked to L.A., where work can be found in low-paying, often degrading jobs ranging from human lawn jockey to mini Donald Trump. But the recent tragic death of a 4-foot-1 cabaret act known as 'Mini Kim Kardashian' reveals the uncomfortable reality of how slowly things have evolved since the days of the freak show: 'Nobody asked to be born little. We just want a chance to show our talents like everybody else'

BY SETH ABRAMOVITCH • PHOTOGRAPHED BY CHRISTOPHER PATEY

**I**N THE BASEMENT OF THE HOLLYWOOD Roosevelt Hotel, behind a trick library bookcase, lies the cabaret Beacher's Madhouse. Nightlife impresario Jeff Beacher describes his creation as "circus meets nightclub" and rattles off a litany of A-listers who've popped in over the years — including George Clooney, Sandra Bullock, Quentin Tarantino, Leonardo DiCaprio, Michael B. Jordan and Zac Efron. Running this circus pays; Beacher, 43, says he has amassed a \$50 million fortune from his mini-empire. When I visited the club in October, the last time it was operational (it's set to relaunch Sept. 18 after a remodel), the mood inside was raucous, with assorted douchebags pounding \$28 cocktails amid a whirlwind of athletic go-go girls, Hollywood Boulevard-caliber costumed characters and little people — about 20 in all — dashing around with vodka bottles in hand. At one point, Ryan Seacrest entered with two beautiful women, a blonde and a brunette, on each arm. Across the room, a neon sign flickered: "MIDGET BAR."

The first act featured two impersonators, introduced as Mini Kanye West and Mini Kim Kardashian, jumping around to "Gold Digger." The crowd ate it up. (Another routine featured the 4-foot-1 Mini Kim "delivering" an even smaller woman, about 2-foot-6, from between her legs.) Later, a little person dressed as an Oompa Loompa, his face painted a Trumpian orange, crossed the room on a ceiling-mounted conveyor belt to deliver a champagne bottle. It was like watching a minstrel show, one with little people painted orange instead of white actors painted black. A discomfiting feeling settled in.

Five months later, I learned that the woman who played Mini Kim (real name: Kimberly Tripp) had died. Her body was found by her boyfriend, Mini Kanye (real name: Ricky Sells Jr.), on the balcony of the Las Vegas apartment they had shared. He had been out of town, competing in a Micro Wrestling Federation event. The couple had moved to Vegas in 2013 to perform at a new Madhouse location in the MGM Grand, where little people offer aerial bottle service after emerging from a faux elephant's rear end.

"I think I could train any midget to perform," Beacher tells me six months later. "We do funny performances, whatever's big in pop culture. We had Mini Kim Kardashian, who just passed away." I'd been reluctant to bring

Tripp up, as the investigation into her death was ongoing.

"How?" I ask.  
 "Just old age, unhealthy," he says. "A lot of them don't have long life spans. Little hearts and the whole thing." She was 32.

**F**OR AS LONG AS SHOW business has existed, little people have been delighting audiences — usually for the wrong reasons. In the early 1800s, they were billed as "midgets" and put on display alongside oddities like the "Feejee mermaid" in dime museums, precursors to freak shows that served as entertainment for the unwashed masses.

The root of people's fascination with little people is hard to pin down. "There is a psychoanalytic theory that somehow we're attracted to them because we have a fear that we're never going to grow up," says Robert Bogdan, author of the 1990 book *Freak Show*. "But I think that's mostly bullshit. I think people just found them cute."

By the 1840s, P.T. Barnum was operating the biggest dime museum in the country, Barnum's American Museum in New York, and making huge profits off of his midgets. He gave them fake military ranks and royal titles and concocted illustrious backstories. There was the 3-foot-6 Commodore Nutt, who wore a naval uniform and traveled in a tiny carriage shaped like a walnut; Lavinia Warren, a 2-foot-8 fashion plate;



1. "We've got the performers who aren't allowed on *America's Got Talent*," says Beacher. (Pictured: Joe Jonas' 25th birthday party in Las Vegas on Aug. 15, 2014.)  
 2. Sells ("Mini Kanye") and Tripp ("Mini Kim") staged a mock wedding at Beacher's Las Vegas outpost on May 24, 2014.  
 3. A neon sign hanging inside the club's Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel location.

and General Tom Thumb, standing 3-foot-4, who was taken by Barnum from his family at age 4 and whose Napoleon impersonation always killed. At the height of his celebrity, Thumb — who appeared before Queen Victoria and met Abraham Lincoln — was the biggest celebrity in the world.

**T**HE POLITICALLY CORRECT term is "little people," abbreviated to "LPs." "Dwarf" is acceptable, the plural being "dwarfs" — not "dwarves" (which conjures Tolkien or Snow White's pals). "Midget" long has been considered offensive, referred to by many LPs as "the M-word."

More than 200 distinct medical conditions cause dwarfism, but 80 percent of modern cases are achondroplasia. This disorder, which occurs in about 1 in 25,000

births, inhibits the growth of limbs, resulting in adult heights of 4-foot-10 and under, a rate that has remained unchanged for centuries.

Historically, the term "midget" referred specifically to pituitary dwarfism, which produces LPs with proportions similar to average-size adults. Advances in growth-hormone therapies have made that kind of dwarfism extremely rare, though a handful still exist. The most famous of them today is Deep Roy, 58, a veteran actor best known for playing all 165 Oompa Loompas in Tim Burton's 2005 Wonka film *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*.

"I am proportional and I'm very lucky for that," the 4-foot-4 Roy tells me at a diner a few blocks from his Santa Monica apartment. Kenya-born to Indian parents, Roy dresses dapperly (he shops in the Harrods boys' section) and exudes a put-upon sophistication, which has served his career well. He does not involve himself in little-person organizations ("not my cup of tea") and in fact does

not view himself as a little person: "Whether you're a dwarf, whether you're a midget, it's all branding."

According to Stephen Cox, author of *The Munchkins of Oz*, there was a turf war between proportional and disproportionate little people in Hollywood's golden age, and some of those attitudes and resentments still linger. "Midgets felt they were 'above' the dwarfs, and the dwarfs resented that they were not in proportion," says Cox. "In Hollywood, midgets got many more jobs because they were correctly proportioned."

In any case, little people have always been drawn to Hollywood. In the early days, before the non-profit support group Little People of America (LPA) was founded in the late 1950s, movie sets were one of the few places they could meet people just like them. In Los Angeles, they not only found work — they also fell in love, married and had children. In fact, nearly 20 percent of the 10,000 little people in America call L.A. home.

There's a 50 percent chance that two parents with achondroplasia will produce a child with dwarfism, a 25 percent chance the child will be born average height, and a 25 percent chance the child will not survive at all. It's a risk many LP parents are willing to take, one well

documented on current reality television shows with names like *Our Little Family* and *7 Little Johnstons*. (Pituitary dwarfism, by contrast, is not hereditary, though it does tend to recur among siblings.)

Dwarfism is so rare, and a result of so many genetic abnormalities, that it isn't screened for in normal pregnancies. "What might happen is someone would show up for a routine ultrasound," says Colleen Gioffreda, an administrator at Johns Hopkins' skeletal dysplasia center. "They'd see the baby's limbs are shorter and the head is a little bit larger." A test could be given to detect skeletal abnormalities; at that point, the pregnancy would be at least 28 weeks along.

"Little people don't seem to be upset if they have a child with skeletal dysplasia," she says. "It's something they tend to celebrate."

**T**HE WIZARD OF OZ STILL holds the record for the most little people in one film. "Legend has it the studio wanted 300 midgets," says Cox.

In the end, MGM had to settle for 124. That's how many perfectly proportional dwarfs Leo Singer, a German-Jewish emigre who collected little people for his traveling review, rounded up. Singer bought LPs outright from the parents,

typically poor farmers who had no use for offspring they couldn't put to work. The Singer Midgets were treated pretty well, given salaries, meals, lodging and custom-made wardrobes. They performed in A-level vaudeville theaters and populated such attractions as the Midget Village at the 1933 Chicago World's Fair.

(A similar concept, Kingdom of the Little People, opened in 2010 in China, where tourists pay \$9 to watch performances by little people who pretend to live in mushroom-shaped homes. The park has drawn condemnation from LPA president Gary Arnold, who asked, "What is the difference between it and a zoo?")

There were stories that the Munchkin actors, who mostly were put up at the Culver Hotel, got wasted every night and engaged in orgies. Those rumors, refuted by the Munchkins themselves, were seemingly started by the film's producer, Mervyn LeRoy, who pressed crewmembers each morning for gossip about their antics the night before. The stories also were spread by Dorothy herself: In a 1967 TV interview with Jack Paar, Judy Garland called them "little drunks" who "got smashed every night" and had to be rounded up "in butterfly nets."

For their contribution to Hollywood history, the Munchkins were paid less than Dorothy's dog, Toto, who earned \$125 per week for her owner and trainer. Singer Midgets were paid \$50 per week (\$900 in 2016 dollars) and never saw their names on the big screen.

"It was monumental and it will never happen again," Cox says. Today, only one Munchkin survives: Jerry Maren, who played a Lollipop Guild member in green. At 96, his family says he's too frail to submit to an interview.

**O**N APRIL 7, AT THE RED Rock Resort in Las Vegas, several hundred LPA members met for the Western states spring regional, where LPs and their families attend panels with names like "Acromesomelia Meet and Greet" and "LPA Fashion Show: Inspiring Confidence." I was invited by the LPA's treasurer, Thomas Hershey, 53, a former executive at Sony Pictures who oversaw visual effects and postproduction. Hershey, who gets around in a motorized wheelchair, greeted me at the hotel Starbucks.

"I'm undiagnosed," says Hershey, 4-foot-8. "They don't know what kind of dwarfism I have. I have a lot of similarities to achondroplasia, which explains my head." (His skull is slightly misshapen.) "I have a lot of similarities to cerebral palsy, which affects mobility. I may have both." Hershey grew up in Vero Beach, Fla., the son of a lifelong Navy man who specialized in explosives. "He was the head of nuclear materials, so, you tell me."

Gifted in math and computer science, Hershey attended MIT as an undergrad, then moved to L.A. in 1986 to attend UCLA's MBA program. His wife of 13 years, Gina, 3-foot-9, died of ovarian cancer in 2014. These days, Hershey oversees LPA's District 12, which encompasses California and Nevada and has about 700 members, many of whom work in the entertainment industry.

I ask Hershey how the LP community feels about Beacher's Madhouse. "It's a varied reaction," he says. "There are those that don't begrudge anyone entertaining people and taking advantage of their physical attributes. I fall into that camp: Do what you need to do, if you can look yourself in the mirror afterward."

LPA executive director Joanna Campbell, an average-size woman

whose daughter was born with dwarfism, tells me the official LPA stance on those kinds of gigs is that “it is their choice. We try to stay overall neutral.”

Still, the LPA will not hesitate to step in if it feels that a business is exploiting little people or putting their lives in danger. It recently demanded that a club in Canada put an end to “dwarf tossing,” a spectator sport in which LPs are thrown onto mattresses or against Velcro-covered walls. It also sent a letter to a London nightclub that provided costumed dwarfs to VIP tables for an “Alice in Wonderland” night. Neither complaint garnered a response.

Peter Dinklage, arguably the most celebrated LP actor of all

time, protested dwarf-tossing in his 2012 Golden Globe acceptance speech for his work as Tyrion Lannister, the scene-stealing character from *Game of Thrones*.

His speech sent viewers to Google the sad tale of Martin Henderson, an LP who was tossed by a drunk man during the Rugby World Cup, rendering him paralyzed.

Dinklage, 47, typically resists being a spokesman for the dwarfism community. (“I can’t preach how to be OK with it,” he told an interviewer in 2012. “There’s days that I’m not.”) Still, the 4-foot-5 star, who declined to speak for this story, has several projects relating to his height now in development. One is a biopic of Herve Villechaize, the *Fantasy Island* star

who killed himself in 1993; another is a movie called *O’Lucky Day*, which Dinklage has described as a “very different take” on leprechaun stories.

The LPA hopes that Dinklage’s success will help change attitudes in Hollywood. “Maybe now that he has hosted *Saturday Night Live* they’ll think twice about the jokes they’ve made at little people’s expense,” says Campbell — referring to a running gag in Bill Hader’s popular *Stefon* sketches in which he described “midgets” in demeaning situations. Then there was the scene in Martin Scorsese’s *The Wolf of Wall Street* that featured DiCaprio’s character, Jordan Belfort, leading his staff in a dwarf-tossing match. LPA leaders

pleaded with producers to reconsider, to no avail.

I ask Martin Klebba, the 4-foot-1 actor who plays Marty in the *Pirates of the Caribbean* films (he flies backward after firing a large gun in the 2007 installment *At World’s End*) why more LP stars don’t speak out against the exploitation of little people.

“What are you going to see?” says Klebba, 47. “A bunch of little people protesting outside the place? Then that will be on the news and look funny to the masses, a bunch of little people waddling around with protest signs.”

Arguably, a direct line can be drawn between these performers, typecast as elves and leprechauns, to Hattie McDaniel, Oscar’s first African-American acting winner, who played nothing but maids until her death. More than 150 years after Barnum debuted his world-famous midgets, their modern descendants — bereft of good roles, beset by health problems (spinal compression, bone malformation and neurological issues, to name a few), cruelly commoditized and toothlessly defended — remain closer to the past than the future.

So why did I see a minstrel show where others saw a fun night out? Particularly now, with Hollywood on high alert about its representation of marginalized groups, how is it that the hand-wringing never extends to this one — not even among LPs themselves, at least not consistently? Perhaps it’s because Hollywood’s little people are at once beholden to the entertainment industry, which remains their biggest employer, and enslaved by its vision of them, which, in 2016, largely remains that of the eager-to-please freak.

I bet Kimberly Tripp felt that.

**T**RIPP’S DEATH, WHICH had occurred a few weeks earlier, was on everyone’s lips at the LPA conference in Las Vegas. Many attendees knew her or someone who knew her.

“It’s almost like we all went to the same school,” says Terra Jole, star of *Little Women: L.A.*, a Lifetime reality show in the *Real Housewives* mold. “And if you’re a little person in the entertainment industry, 99 percent of the time, I know you. It’s very 90210.”

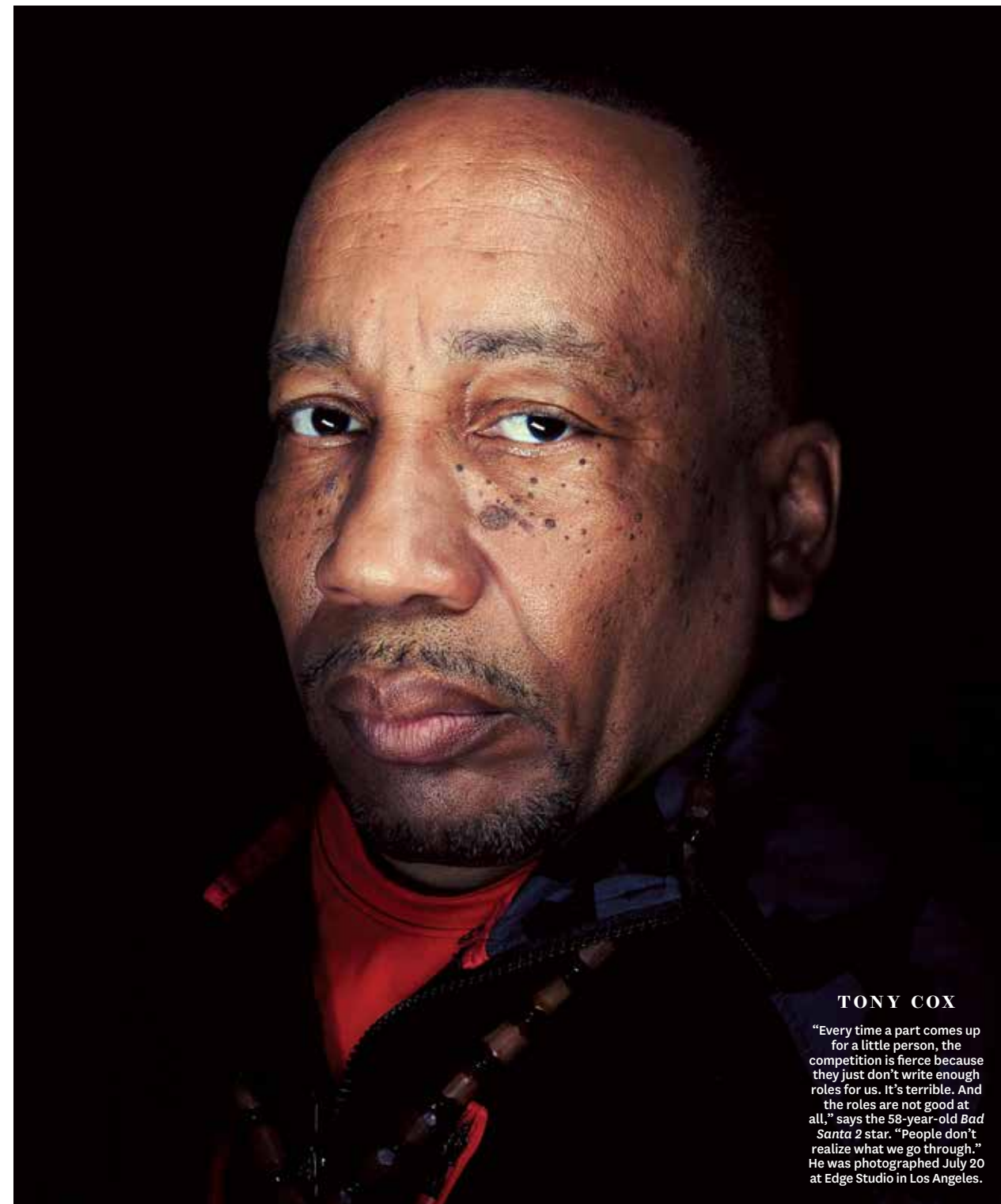
Jole, 36, did not envision herself as a reality star. In 2001, against her mother’s wishes, she drove from San Antonio to L.A. to pursue a career as a singer. “I was like

#### TERRA JOLE

“Because we’re little, there are many, many stereotype roles that are provided that makes it easy to get in the industry. I mean, I had my SAG card within months of living here,” says Jole, 36, star of Lifetime’s *Little Women: L.A.* She delivered a healthy son, Grayson, on Aug. 1, but has not revealed whether the baby was born with dwarfism. She was photographed July 21 at Edge Studio.



“Would I be an elf? Yes. I have been an elf all day. I was an elf at Radio City for a really long time. But I took it as, ‘I’m an actress and I’m playing a role.’”



#### TONY COX

“Every time a part comes up for a little person, the competition is fierce because they just don’t write enough roles for us. It’s terrible. And the roles are not good at all,” says the 59-year-old *Bad Santa 2* star. “People don’t realize what we go through.” He was photographed July 20 at Edge Studio in Los Angeles.

COX: GROOMING BY SU MIYAI AT DEW BEAUTY AGENCY; JOLE: HAIR AND MAKEUP BY VAPRIE BAUTISTA AT DEW BEAUTY AGENCY

“There are loads of parts given to average-size actors that I see and think to myself, ‘Oh, I would have loved that.’”

**WARWICK DAVIS**

“I’m just a character actor that happens to be short. And that is a delight. Because then you feel like you’re on a level playing field with the rest of the cast,” says Davis, 46, who appears next in *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*. He was photographed July 23 in Birmingham, U.K.

a vagabond for a hot minute,” she says. To pay the bills, she honed an act as a musical impersonator, playing pop sirens like Britney Spears and Lady Gaga. This led her to Beacher’s stage — what she calls a “horrible” experience.

“He is a very negative person who is not happy with himself,” she says. “I was having to make sure that I got paid ahead of time before I ever did work for him. He would spring surprises on me, like throwing a mini Kevin Federline onstage in the middle of my Britney performance.”

Jole and Tripp met at the Madhouse and bonded on the road as dancers for Ozzy Osbourne. Tripp and Beacher didn’t share “your normal employer-employee relationship,” says Jole, who recalls witnessing Beacher berate Tripp many times. (Beacher insists he never mistreated Tripp in any way.)

Jole and Beacher parted ways in 2009 when Jole was hired to headline a show at Vegas’ Planet Hollywood called *Little Legends*. She claims Beacher saw the move as a betrayal. “He begged for me not to do it,” says Jole. “He stalled my contract and called me nasty names over the phone. I had to change my cellphone number.”

Beacher laughs off that account. “Miss Jole likes to create drama, as she does on her reality show,” he says. “We always have had nothing but love for her. We created spoof skits and characters that we simply told her and the producers that they weren’t allowed to use, as they were owned by my theater group.”

**T**RIPP ISN’T THE ONLY LOST soul. Michael Gilden got one of his big breaks playing an Ewok in 1983’s *Return of the Jedi*. Two decades later, his life seemed to be a fairy tale. He was landing roles on *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* and *NCIS* and raising a newborn daughter with his wife, LP actress Meredith Eaton, who played William Shatner’s love interest on *Boston Legal*. But one day in 2006, Eaton found her husband hanging in their Los Angeles home. He was 44. (Eaton declined to speak for this article.)

There are no medical studies on suicide and depression rates among little people, but the anecdotal evidence is alarming. David Rappaport, a 3-foot-6 English actor who’d starred in Terry Gilliam’s 1981 fantasy film *Time Bandits* and recurred on *L.A. Law*, shot himself



1. Troyer’s breakthrough role came as Mini-Me in 1999’s *Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me*. He’s pictured here in 2002’s *Goldmember*.



2. Tony Cox (right, with Billy Bob Thornton) will reprise his role as Marcus in 2016’s *Bad Santa 2*.

3. Roy played all 165 Oompa Loompas in Tim Burton’s *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (2005).

4. Davis portrayed Griphook (and other characters) in the Harry Potter films.

at the height of his fame in 1990. Three years after that, Villechaize shot himself outside his North Hollywood home, writing in a suicide note that his dwarfism had left him in intolerable physical pain.

“We have plenty of doctors dedicated to orthopedic concerns,” Hershey says of LPA’s health care program. “But we don’t have anyone in our pocket as far as mental health, which is insane.”

Substance abuse is common. Henry Nasiff Jr. — known to millions of Howard Stern fans as Hank the Angry Drunken Dwarf — was a regular on the show for years; he’d arrive to the studio each time with a two-liter Sprite bottle filled with vodka. Nasiff, who was not paid for his appearances, would entertain Stern’s audience with his self-pitying tales of life as a little person. He died at his parents’ home in 2011, with ethanol abuse listed on the death certificate as a contributing factor. He was 39.

Verne Troyer, who grew up in an Amish community in Michigan, has seen lots of drama since his breakthrough role as Mini-Me, a tiny clone of Dr. Evil, in 1999’s *Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me*. “I had a bit of an alcohol problem,” the actor says during a visit at his North Hollywood home.

That is an understatement. Troyer, 47, nearly died of alcohol poisoning in 2002 after breaking up with his fiancée of two months, *Playboy* model Genevieve Gallen. In 2005, he got extremely drunk

on VH1’s *The Surreal Life* and urinated in the weight room of the home he shared with wrestler Chyna and *The Brady Bunch*’s Christopher Knight, footage of which went viral. In 2008, TMZ released portions of a sex tape he made with his then-girlfriend, 5-foot-6 Ranae Shriver, whom he’d met at the Playboy Mansion. Then in 2009, his ex-girlfriend Yvette Monet filed for a restraining order against him. “That was a bad period in my life,” says Troyer of his hard-drinking years. “I’ve learned from it, and I move on.” After two stints in rehab, Troyer, now single, says he’s now “sober ... I mean, I drink occasionally, but not to the extreme that I did.”

At 2-foot-8, he is a record holder for being the shortest actor. For his last major role, he played a killer gnome in the 2015 indie horror movie *Gnome Alone*. “I hadn’t seen a lot of parts come my way, so I decided just to do it.”

Tony Cox knows the routine. The star of the 2003 black comedy *Bad Santa* has had to take his share of costumed roles over the years. His IMDb page includes such parts as “Willy the Ewok,” “Midget Nut” and “Lawn Jockey #1,” but Cox has earned a reputation in Hollywood as being a true actor’s actor. He is set to reprise his breakout role in *Bad Santa 2*, opening Nov. 23.

The 3-foot-6 Cox recalls his first acting class. “The teacher looked at me and said, ‘You’re black. That’s a strike against you.’” Cox recalls. “Then he said, ‘Turn around.’ I remember feeling like a

piece of meat. So I turned around and the guy said, ‘The only thing you’ll ever be in is a costume.’”

**V**EGAS WASN’T THE RIGHT environment for me,” Beacher says, munching on a McCarthy salad at the Polo Lounge, where he is a regular (this despite a waning Hollywood boycott of the place; Beacher is not a man of political correctness). “I was drinking and gambling and having a lot of sex with groupies.” It was fun, he admits, until he’d grown too fat to have sex.

His drug of choice has always been food (“I have insecurity issues, abandonment issues; I was adopted”). He often ate “six baskets of bread” before settling in for nine-course steak dinners. He tipped the scales at 415 pounds in October 2014, when he checked himself into a holistic resort and dropped 100 pounds. Then Beacher, who is 5-foot-7, had gastric-sleeve surgery, losing another hundred, followed by a procedure that removed the excess skin.

“The whole Vegas lifestyle is based around partying,” he says. “It’s a very surface, materialistic, lonely, miserable life. I just knew I’d be dead if I stayed. So I walked away from a 20-year, \$100 million contract at the Hard Rock.” L.A. suits him much better, he says. “I fixed my head. I’m like Bradley Cooper in *Limitless*. Every day I wake up and anything is possible.”

Little people weren’t always on Beacher’s payroll. But a decade ago, Kelly Osbourne, a Madhouse

DAVIS: GROOMING BY VERONICA NICKLAUER; TROYER: MELINDA SIEGORD/NEW LINE/PHOTOFEST; ROY: DAVIS; WARNER BROTHERS/COURTESY EVERETT COLLECTION; COX: JANI THUIS/BROAD GREEN PICTURES/REX USA



**VERNE TROYER**

"I was once offered a superhero role — it's almost too stupid to talk about — where when I came out to save lives, it was from under Abraham Lincoln's hat. It was like, 'I don't care how desperate I am, I'm not doing that.'" says Troyer, 47. He was photographed July 21 at his home in North Hollywood.

regular, envisioned 21 little people emerging from a giant birthday cake. Determined to service his starry client's needs, Beacher tracked down Tripp. "Mini Kim orchestrated the whole thing. She put this whole troupe together," he says of Tripp, who had died three weeks before our meeting. "Everyone loved her. It's really sad." Osbourne offered to cover cremation costs, but, Beacher says, "I think I'm going to cover it." (He ended up splitting the \$2,800 tab with Donny Davis, his LP right-hand man.)

It was Beacher's idea to have LPs suspended from the ceiling. "I just thought of it one day: flying midgets," he recalls. The joke wasn't a cheap one, at least in a literal sense: The rig at the Roosevelt was \$250,000 and the one at the MGM Grand cost \$700,000. He says it was worth it. "It's pretty f—ing funny."

Mariah Carey and Miley Cyrus

are among his best friends, he says, Carey having performed a Christmas concert at the Roosevelt space, Cyrus having celebrated her 21st and 22nd birthdays there. Cyrus also copied and pasted its depraved funhouse aesthetic for her infamous 2013 MTV Video Music Awards performance and Bangerz Tour, hiring away several Beacher's performers.

One non-Beacher's little person, Hollis Jane, blogged of her VMA show with Cyrus: "Standing on that stage in that bear costume was one of the most degrading things I felt like I could ever do." Cyrus waved off the criticism, saying she helps little people "feel sexual and beautiful." (She declined to be interviewed for this story.)

As far as Beacher is concerned, his A-list friendships make him a better man. (He's proved savvy at leveraging them to his advantage: He has a deal with Airbnb to put famous people in homes

as a way to market them.) "I like being friends with Number Ones: the best writers, the best musicians, the best actors. I'm really close with great directors like Brett Ratner and Michael Bay. I'm friends with great doctors and great attorneys. You surround yourself with the best, you become what you surround yourself with, you know?"

I ask him if he'd ever received any complaints about his act.

"Years ago, yes," he replies. "There was a little-person group that would send letters. LPA I think it's called. I think it was about using the word 'midget.' There's nothing derogatory about it. I don't do midget-tossing. My team performs. They're theatrical performers. They are rock stars and get treated like it. TMZ runs that shit all the time."

**I** NEVER DENY THAT I'M A short actor. That was, and it still is, my USP: my unique

selling point," says Warwick Davis, a dashing 3-foot-6 movie star who has earned a near-mythic reputation among LP actors. He was discovered by George Lucas, who cast the U.K. native at age 11 to play Wicket, the hero Ewok in *Return of the Jedi*. The part was supposed to be played by Kenny Baker, who also played R2-D2, but Baker fell ill as shooting was about to begin. (Baker died Aug. 13 after a long battle with chronic pulmonary disease. He was 81.)

"A lot of little people can't act, and that's the truth. But Warwick was so good," recalls Tony Cox, who also played an Ewok. "Man, I remember that kid. He could move so good in the costume."

Davis, 46, has dedicated his life to improving conditions for LP actors. In 1995, Davis' father-in-law, a veteran dwarf actor named Peter Burroughs, complained of being "treated like a commodity." His agent would ask, "How many little people do you need?" It was like he was selling fruits or vegetables," Davis recalls. The pair decided to open a theatrical agency, the London-based Willow Management, that specializes in little people actors. Today, they represent about 100 of them, 40 of whom — in what would be the largest LP cast since *The Wizard of Oz* — played Gringotts goblins in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows — Part 2*. Davis played Griphook, the head goblin, among other guises in the film series. Ricky Gervais turned Warwick's colorful existence into a mockumentary series, *Life's Too Short*, which aired on HBO in 2011. In it, the actually upbeat and good-natured Warwick plays a petty, scheming version of himself.

"There's been a lot of talk recently about, is it right to shrink an average-size actor [with digital effects] to fulfill a little-person role?" he says. "On one side, I could say, yeah, you should never do that, you're taking work away from a short actor. Would you cast an average-size actor to pay a disabled character in a wheelchair?" (The answer, of course, is yes, as epitomized by the controversy over the recent Emilia Clarke movie *Me Before You*.)

"But at the same time," he continues, "I understand that within the community of short actors, there might not be a performer with the right capabilities, the right attributes."

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"You've got to work doubly hard if you're in a [costume]. You have to make it live. Get all the emotions out. But I've done better without suits."

**DEEP ROY**

"I see them turn around to get a second look. You hear a lot of people laugh at you. So what? I used to get upset about it, but not anymore. You know, laugh all you can," says Roy, 58, who plays the alien Keenser in *Star Trek Beyond*. He was photographed July 18 at his home in Santa Monica.

TROYER GROOMING BY SUHAN AT DEW BEAUTY AGENCY; ROY GROOMING BY KAT CONNELLY AT DEW BEAUTY AGENCY

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LITTLE PEOPLE  
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 55

Warwick's wheelchair comparison is a telling one, as there exists a division within the little people community as to whether to classify dwarfism as a disability. "You can view it as a disease or a difference," the LPA's Campbell told me at the spring regional. "LPA very much views it as a difference."

Danny Woodburn, 52, who played the hot-headed Mickey Abbott on *Seinfeld*, advocates for actors with all disabilities, and counts dwarfism among them.

"People all of a sudden get nervous about employing you," Woodburn says. "In my life I've had probably 30 operations; I've been in four body casts. My particular dwarfism affects everything from my hearing to my eyes to the cartilage in my bones and to my bone strength and development. But I manage and do pretty well. As my Hungarian doctor said to me before he passed away, 'Dwarfs are very hearty people.'"

**I** RETURN TO BEACHER'S Madhouse nine months after my initial visit for a photo shoot with Jeff Beacher and some of his LP stars: Donny Davis, who plays Mini Donald Trump; the "Amazing" Ali Chapman and her party-animal husband, "Wee" Matt McCarthy, both of whom appeared on A&E's *Freak Show*; and Ricky Sells Jr., aka Mini Kanye West. Sitting among them and looking very uncomfortable is a new addition — Lila Hart, a beautiful, 25-year-old, 4-foot-6 stand-up comedian with spina bifida whom Davis had recently recruited at the Comedy Store.

Two months earlier, on May 20, 2016, the Clark County Coroner had released its findings on Kimberly Tripp. She did not die of "old age," nor did her "tiny heart" give out, as Beacher had suggested at the Polo Lounge. (Little people have the same sized internal organs as non-little people do and, barring any major medical issues, can live into their 80s and beyond.)

Tripp did not commit suicide, nor, as the Las Vegas Police Department had already concluded, was foul play involved. Tripp's death was natural, caused by "complications of chronic alcohol abuse." She had, in effect, during the course of a decade spent as Beacher's Madhouse's biggest little star, slowly drank herself to death.

"She ran this place. Every celebrity loved her. She had a big heart," says Chapman. The 36-year-old Nicki Minaj impersonator giggles as she reminisces about Tripp kicking customers in the head, including John Stamos, while suspended from the ceiling. "She was frustrated. You know, all these drunk people everywhere, and she's dressed like an Oompa Loompa. So she's like, grrr, kicking people in the head." But, Chapman adds, she had never seen Tripp happier than in the months leading to her death. "When she and Ricky got together, well, it was beautiful to see that relationship manifest."

Seated alone on a couch in the far end of the club is Sells. Only 27 and 4-foot-2, Sells has sadness in his eyes but a quiet and confident demeanor.

We speak about wrestling — he's a three-time gold medalist in his league — and the risks of the sport: "One move can end your career. I landed on my head. I landed on my ass. I messed up my knee. People think it's fake, but it's really not." Still, he loves it and relies on it to distract him from his grief, competing in upward of 20 matches a month, held in bars, strip clubs, state fairs, and tattoo and porn conventions.

It was Tripp who convinced Sells to move to L.A. from Austin after they met in 2011 at an LPA convention in Anaheim. "It's tough," he says. "Because I moved out here, well, for her and this job. And now she's not here no more. So, it's like, I'm crying by myself, you know, because my family's in Texas."

Chapman later tells me of her frustrations. "My long-term goal is to be taken seriously and to be a mainstream actress," she says. "Sure, there's Peter Dinklage doing it, but there can be many of us. I mean, I can just be a nurse in a show, or a mom, or a lady walking her dog down the street! Like, do I need to be an elf? Do I need to be a leprechaun?"

Chapman pauses. "But I get it. It's what you do. I mean, here I work at a place and right over there it says 'Midget Bar.'"

I ask her if she ever thought about asking Beacher to take the sign down. "In the beginning, yes," she says. "But I never did. This is his show. I don't have to be here. If I'm offended by that, I can walk out the door. For the things that I get from being here and doing what I do, I overlook it." **THR**