

Dr Cooper: [inaudible 00:00:02]. Today we have a very special guest. And he's very special primarily because he's one of my oldest friends. But secondly because he's a special person himself, Stanley. Stanley, can you say hello to the audience?

Stanley: Hello, audience. What name am I calling you by, sir? I know you're a man of many names. You're a man of mystery.

Dr Cooper: You can call me Cooper.

Stanley: Coops. Cooper. Okay, we'll call you Cooper. That was what I was going to go to, it was my default, but I just wanted to make sure I wasn't using one of your aliases.

Dr Cooper: No. I prefer to be as honest as possible with the audience.

Stanley: Okay. We'll keep it straightforward then, Coops.

Dr Cooper: That a great word by the way, straightforward. A lot of my students don't know what that means.

Stanley: What is it in Portuguese?

Dr Cooper: [inaudible 00:00:55]. But they don't use the word straightforward very much. They don't learn it. It's amazing what students don't learn, what they never pick up.

Stanley: Maybe they don't use straightforward because they are so naturally straightforward there's no need for that word.

Dr Cooper: Actually, you know what, I think they are more straightforward, but there are other words like direct. But maybe a little bit more than ... I think you might be right, actually. And then there's the other side to it, though. Because in Brazil, there's a very common word, in English you would say a black guard or a scoundrel.

Stanley: Yeah, scoundrel.

Dr Cooper: But those words, if you think about it [crosstalk 00:01:46], there's no modern word for scoundrel and black guard. And it's because in the sort of Western societies, or English speaking societies, people are relatively honest compared to Brazil. They're are about 20 words for it in Brazil, especially malandro.

Stanley: Malandro?

Dr Cooper: Yeah, malandro.

Stanley: Means like, liar and untrustworthy person.

Dr Cooper: It really means scoundrel. You can't find a word more fitting for scoundrel.

Stanley: What about sleazebag?

Dr Cooper: That's a great word. And that's one of the reasons I have you on here, because I've always thought you had a knack with words.

Stanley: Yeah, I should've been a writer instead of an animal trainer, but these things happen.

Dr Cooper: That's what I actually wanted to start off, like to explain to the audience. So Stanley is, you know, when I met him, I met him a long time ago and he was ... I was stuttering, you weren't stuttering. But, he was studying ... I don't remember what, I guess it was something that I like. Art? No, it wasn't art. Film. He was studying film.

Stanley: Yeah, I may have been.

Dr Cooper: And, it's funny that I remember you introduced me to a lot of famous old movies, and that's where I started liking old movies. That was in Ireland. And then, all of the sudden-

Stanley: Yeah.

Dr Cooper: All of the sudden, you wind up going to Hollywood and being like, the next thing I know, I visit you in Hollywood and you have an anaconda in your house. That was [crosstalk 00:03:31].

Stanley: That is ... you know what's funny, and very true, is I am in my office in my house now, and I'm looking at a picture of me, right at a picture of me when I was 10, with a very large snake around my neck. A snake that's longer than I was, it's either an anaconda or a python. So it's funny that you would mention that, 'cause I'm looking at a picture of that right this minute. Wearing an Adidas tracksuit in the 80s, 1980s, early 80s, and I've got a snake longer than I am around my neck. I can see from the look in my face that I'm hoping it doesn't decide to squeeze.

Dr Cooper: What's amazing is that must've, maybe that ... and when you had the anaconda, that was longer than you, too, I remember. That's one thing I said, "I'm never going [crosstalk 00:04:27] apartment again."

Stanley: Yeah. Well, as long as they're well fed they're completely harmless. They would never eat you by choice. And you're, frankly, I remember the snake that you're talking about, his name was Edward. And he ... a person was way too big a meal for him. [crosstalk 00:04:52] he wasn't quite long enough.

Dr Cooper: Didn't he eat piglets?

Stanley: Yeah. Eventually we had to, for zoning reasons, we had to move him to a more appropriate home.

Dr Cooper: The funny thing is, so now I can look you up on the internet and stuff, and I read actually a couple days ago that you're the biggest, most sought after reptile trainer for the movies. Or is it amphibian? And I thought [crosstalk 00:05:27].

Stanley: Well, you know [crosstalk 00:05:27], I kind of-

Dr Cooper: [crosstalk 00:05:28] who ever heard of reptile trainers for the movies? And yet-

Stanley: For some strange reason, a strange series of life events, I ended up trying to, and sometimes succeeding, train creatures that people thought couldn't be trained because they're front brains weren't developed enough. And yeah, it's just about ... there aren't that many people who do it, usually when you think animal trainers, you're thinking obviously dogs and cats, and horses, well that's it's own subdepartment. Horsemaster is it's own thing entirely.

Stanley: But, yeah usually you're thinking animals that are capable, pigs, animals that are capable of producing a wide range of kind of seemingly emotional behaviors. You don't think about a snake. But there will be times in a film shoot, or in a movie, a television show, times when you want a snake to do something specific and your two choices now are to get the snake to do that thing you want it to do in reality, or to have a computer generated snake, right? To have a special effects snake, which will do whatever you want it to do, but it's extremely expensive. So my goal is to coax the snake, that's a good word, coax. Trick a snake-

Dr Cooper: [crosstalk 00:06:56].

Stanley: ... cajole a snake.

Dr Cooper: Wow.

Stanley: Cajole, coax.

Dr Cooper: Cajole?

Stanley: All these great words.

Dr Cooper: That's why I [crosstalk 00:07:03].

Stanley: [crosstalk 00:07:04]. Things that people try to do to other people, as well. Coax, cajole, trick, convince a snake, or a frog-

Dr Cooper: Hoodwink.

Stanley: ... yeah, hoodwink. I have hoodwinked a few snakes into doing something that he wouldn't normally do, and even if it takes a little while to do it, which it sometimes does, it's a whole, that hour it takes to get the snake to do what you want it to do, it's a whole

lot cheaper than making a computer snake, 'cause a computer snake costs tens or thousands of dollars, if not more, to create.

Dr Cooper: Yeah, and that's what's amazing to me, because I was just, before this interview, I was looking at all the movies and TV shows you've been involved with, and they actually have pretty big budgets. I think, and yet when it comes to amphibians and reptiles, they prefer your skill. I mean, one thing I wanna talk about is success. I know you're not a celebrity, like everybody knows who you are. But, Hollywood knows. When people want to train, I guess I will call them animals because I know you like to call them animals. I would call them reptiles.

Stanley: Yeah. Well, either way.

Dr Cooper: And it's kind of amazing, 'cause I remember when you didn't know where you would get your next meal and now you're like ... at least you live right next to a lot of famous people. And-

Stanley: I wouldn't say next to famous people. I live within a few miles-

Dr Cooper: Well, in the same neighborhood.

Stanley: In the general city.

Dr Cooper: Vicinity.

Stanley: Using vicinity, that's a good word, vicinity. Could mean I live next door, could mean I live five miles away. The vicinity.

Dr Cooper: But, I mean, I've met some pretty, a famous singer around you before, and they seem to ... I mean, you have a very big name, and so I've found that, you know-

Stanley: Well I think a part of it is that I do something that's different.

Dr Cooper: Yeah.

Stanley: Like I said, there aren't that many people who do this, 'cause it's a very ... it's a difficult thing to do, and it's ... what you can get the animals to do is limited, compared to what you can get a Jack Russel Terrier to do. And it takes a lot of patience ... you know, if it takes 10 tries to teach a Jack Russel Terrier to do something, a simple maneuver, it will take a snake 10,000 tries to learn the same maneuver because they just don't ... the computer in their head is not as powerful. Like they've got an Apple TV, not a Mac Book Pro going on. So it takes a while. You really need to drill them, and drill them, and drill them on something using pretty typical conditioning methods. And it's just a person who has the patience to work with a snake this way, is really gonna be the person who can do my job. And I'm lucky that I'm a very patient person.

Dr Cooper: That's what I was gonna say, I mean ... to segue into patience. 'Cause I'm not patient at all, and I know you've been patient with me over the years, 'cause some people can think I'm a little bit strange. But, you know I just got married in July and-

Stanley: I know, congratulations to you. We've spoken since then, but a public congratulations to you.

Dr Cooper: Thanks very much. And you know, I do my thing and I'm becoming one more ... I'm successful at what I do, but I always wanna do more things, and I need inspiration. And then I thought of you, and I thought, you have two kids, right?

Stanley: Yeah.

Dr Cooper: And I thought, you know, I'm gonna have kids, soon. And I was wondering if you could ... and I thought, well what's gonna happen then to my inspiration, is it gonna dry up? I mean, I don't have patience like you, to deal with three things at once. You deal with the anacondas, you deal with your wife, you deal with two kids, that's four right there, and then probably frogs and turtles.

Stanley: Sure, so why do you think that having kids will dry up your inspiration? Maybe it'll become a source of new inspiration, more inspiration.

Dr Cooper: Well, I guess I wanted to know what you think because sometimes I worry, you know, having all these responsibilities and then ... for example, I wanted to make a video today, or I want to make a longer television style video movie, like 20 minutes or something, and I wanna create it. Sometimes all the ideas come in to my mind, and I feel like everything's perfect. And then I have the responsibilities of being a husband and ... which I like, and I love, and everything. And dealing with the business side of what I do. And then I feel like I don't wanna make any videos anymore that day. And you have lots of business responsibilities, and you have kids and a wife, and what's your advice to me about that?

Stanley: Well, I think that once you have kids, right, I think you start to ... at least for me, I can't really speak for anybody but myself. But once I had kids, I never had to wonder why I was doing my work, never had to wonder who I was doing it for, it gives you a really good answer to that question when you've got someone to support who can't support themselves. Your wife, or your husband, as much as you love them, you know that they're an adult and if push came to shove, well they could go out and get a job and support themselves.

Stanley: Your children are helpless, and they can't do that because they're kids. So it gives you a really good, to me I found that it helped me focus myself on what I was doing. And it does take a certain amount of patience, it takes patience to have children, but that's where I guess my ... I have a lot of training in patience, 'cause you're trying to train a frog to jump when it hears a bell, but not jump any other time. That's not easy, 'cause frogs, I will tell you, I know many frogs very well, they're not that smart.

Dr Cooper: I know you do.

Stanley: I know they all have names, I feel like they have personalities, but I could just be projecting. Anyway, frogs aren't that smart, it takes a long time to train a frog to do that and the fact that I've spent so much time training a frog to jump when it hears a bell or to jump twice when it hears two bells, that's a tough one. That took months. Once you have a kid, once your kid is eight months, nine months old, you're so grateful for how smart your ...

Dr Cooper: That's what I was thinking.

Stanley: [inaudible 00:14:53], you know, compared to a frog, both my kids are Einstein compared to frogs.

Dr Cooper: So like with your little girl, when she hears, I don't know how old she is, like two? Or two and a half?

Stanley: Yeah, she's four.

Dr Cooper: Oh, Hadley.

Stanley: Yeah.

Dr Cooper: When Hadley hears a bell, it's easier to train her to jump than to train a bullfrog?

Stanley: You joke, but she was watching ... when she was two years old, she was watching what I was doing and without me even telling her she figured it out and she couldn't understand why the frog couldn't understand that one bell is one jump and two bells is two jumps, 'cause she got it right away.

Dr Cooper: Well, see ... you're saying your kids are smarter than your frogs, but I'm not sure that my students are smarter than your frogs.

Stanley: I'm sure your students are much smarter than my frogs. There's really not, there aren't many creatures who aren't smarter than my frogs. [crosstalk 00:16:11].

Dr Cooper: [crosstalk 00:16:10].

Stanley: [crosstalk 00:16:13] frogs are about.

Dr Cooper: [crosstalk 00:16:12] about your ... you're always very humble, but I think your frogs are pretty smart.

Stanley: You wanna know who's smart? The turtles.

Dr Cooper: Turtles?

Stanley: They move slow, so people mistake slowness for stupidity. But they're not. A turtle's every move is very, very deeply considered. And thought through. That's why they move so slowly.

Dr Cooper: Even the younger turtles, or just the 200 year old ones?

Stanley: Well younger is relative when it comes to turtles, 'cause as you say they do live quite a long time. Some of them a little longer than us. Although, I don't train those, because that would be against the law. Just in case anybody's listening from various regulatory boards and bodies in America, no I do not own or train Galapagos turtles. That would be in violation of United States Fish and Wildlife Service.

Dr Cooper: It's funny you have to worry about these things these days, because I would never think of you as [inaudible 00:17:12] a Galapagos turtle. But, moving on to age. So you're middle aged, and about ... are you? I don't wanna call you-

Stanley: Yeah, I'm in my 40s, that's being, if you're gonna be accurate. I hope I'm middle aged, 'cause that means if I'm middle aged I'm gonna make it to 90, which would be great.

Dr Cooper: Oh, well you know, I think you will, actually.

Stanley: I hope so.

Dr Cooper: And, you know, I'm about three or four years away and I've been thinking about it now. And I wonder, like ... I mean, I know we're different, I'm a performance artist and teacher and you're a trainer, but I've always thought of you as being artistic. I mean, you're the only one who does what you do. I'm wondering if you feel like as you get older you lose something, or are you worried about that, at least? 'Cause I worry about it. I worry like, "What if my ... ", 'cause I rely a lot on sort of dynamic manic stages of thinking, and I worry about, well, what if that [crosstalk 00:18:28] dries up when I get to be your age? So I'm just, that's only a couple years away. Like five or six. So I'm just wondering-

Stanley: Yeah, you know, it's hard to say-

Dr Cooper: [crosstalk 00:18:39]

Stanley: For me-

Dr Cooper: 'Cause nothing's dried up for you.

Stanley: For me the main-

Dr Cooper: [crosstalk 00:18:43] about the future.

Stanley: For me, the main ... I do, I guess sometimes. But for me, the main creative thing I did was find this path through life, this career basically, that wasn't really much of a career.

At least not one that anyone was doing all that successfully. And that was the main creative act that I took in my life. And then from then on, once I decided this is what I'm gonna do, and this is who I'm gonna be, from then on it was all a question of just refining what I do. By refining, I mean working on it, making it better, coming up with new, more sophisticated, more effective ways of doing that thing I decided I wanna do. So, I'm not that worried about it, because for me there's always ... because of what the creatures I work with are so limited, for me there's always a very ... there's a long way for them to go. And I know that a lot of the things it would be fun to try.

Stanley: For instance, [inaudible 00:19:54], I was thinking it would be great to teach a snake to be able to tie itself into like a figure eight knot. Kind of a creepy, it would feel like the snake was intelligent, the snake was trying to tell you something, you know, they'd get a sense that this animal that's not trying to tell you anything, it's trying to give you a message. That's probably beyond a snake's capacity to accomplish, but it's something I do work on in my spare time. So there'll always be that next level of things for me to try to train my animals to do.

Stanley: And I have a good method that I use, there are different methods that I sue to accomplish these things. And it's always, for me there's always another challenge down the road-

Dr Cooper: See that's what I was wondering.

Stanley: ... when it comes to my ... yeah, definitely.

Dr Cooper: So you have that excitement about, I guess you don't think you'll ever deal with birds or anything, but it's all that excitement-

Stanley: Well, there are people who do that. Once I do that, I'm in somebody else's territory, and there are people who have been working birds ... mammals, forget it. Everybody does that. and even birds, there are people with ravens, crows, owls, pigeons. There are people who train all these animals to do various things. I think that if I was gonna go in any direction, I would go in the opposite direction. I would go down to insects, [inaudible 00:21:24], what can I train an insect to do?

Dr Cooper: So, you get excitement from, I guess maybe you haven't ... I guess you probably have thought about insects. The way you said that, I got that impression.

Stanley: Yeah, it occurred to me, I'm like, "How simple can a creature be," simple in terms of just it's mental, neurological makeup, "How simple can a creature be and still learn how to do things that we recognize as interesting, difficult, different, specific behavior?"

Dr Cooper: You know, I was looking at an ant, just if you wanna have any inspiration, I was looking at an ant the other day-

Stanley: Sure.



Dr Cooper: ... and I was thinking, "I bet that ant is smarter than me."

Stanley: Well, maybe not one of them, but taken in groups of millions working together as they do, 'cause they're social insects like termites, or bees, they do amazingly sophisticated things. One of the things that has occurred to me that I've been working on in my spare time, is what could I get a colony of ants to do?

Dr Cooper: I have a good idea.

Stanley: That no one's ever done. What do you think?

Dr Cooper: Well, imagine if you made like a sequel to "The Shining" and you got all the ants to crawl around together, and they created the word "redrum" on the wall.

Stanley: Yeah, see, I think already we're ... already something potentially valuable has come from this call, even if it teaches no one anything. [crosstalk 00:23:06].

Dr Cooper: You can take that idea.

Stanley: That we've already-

Dr Cooper: [crosstalk 00:23:08].

Stanley: We've already brainstormed something interesting.

Dr Cooper: You know, I was wondering, I think I thought about that because I was wondering, do you ever feel like Jack Nicholson in that movie "The Shining"? You know, that-

Stanley: There are definite times when the futility of trying to, say, get a gecko just to name one creature, to run up a branch and stay there. The futility of this endeavor sometimes makes me feel like Jack Nicholson banging on that typewriter in the middle of an empty hotel.

Dr Cooper: And then you feel like you're looking at a bartender, and then all the sudden you're looking at a bartender from 100 years ago?

Stanley: That part hasn't happened yet, but you know, there's time.

Dr Cooper: I have one last question for you.

Stanley: Yeah.

Dr Cooper: So this is gonna seem like a kinda strange question, but ... I know about the year you were born, I think it was 1971, maybe 1972.

Stanley: Yeah, that's right.

Dr Cooper: And I was actually ... 'cause when I met you, you were studying film and stuff and I was looking at ... I decided to look at ... and I know you love music. That you've recommended a lot of ... have you ever heard that song, "I'm Turning Japanese"?

Stanley: I have.

Dr Cooper: I knew it, you've heard everything.

Stanley: I'm trying to remember, I should know the name of this artist. It wasn't the Tubes, was it? No, that was-[crosstalk 00:24:53].

Dr Cooper: The Vapors.

Stanley: The Vapors, you're right. Very good.

Dr Cooper: And I listened to that, actually. And then I was thinking, I'm gonna give you a list ... 'cause I know you love film, like me, and I don't know too many other people that do ... of all the directors who are in full bloom when you were born, and then all of the musicians who were. So listen to this; John Huston, Martin Scorsese, Francois Truffaut, Stanley Kubrick, Francis Ford Coppola, Akira Kurosawa, Woody Allen, Ingmar Bergman, Federico Fellini, Tarkovsky, Polanski, Lumet, Gaidai, Bunuel, Herzog, Fassbinder, and there's one more on the list I can't read right now ... Wenders. It's pretty amazing.

Stanley: Yeah.

Dr Cooper: And then here's the musicians; The Who, Rod Stewart ... popular musicians. The Who, Rod Stewart, John Lennon, Joni Mitchell, Van Morrison, Sly and the Family Stone, Bob Dylan, Neil Young, Led Zeppelin, Paul Simon, Johnny Cash, David Bowie, Rolling Stones, Stevie Wonder, Leonard Cohen, [crosstalk 00:26:03]-

Stanley: Jesus.

Dr Cooper: Derek and the Dominos-

Stanley: Too bad I was only one.

Dr Cooper: Yeah, but I mean ... do you ever think, "Okay it's a good thing," ... do you feel like you're, as an animal, what if there are no movies anymore? 'Cause if you look at what's happened, or no ... music, popular art. Because if you look at what's happened from then to now, maybe ... I mean, I think it's a little bit scary. Even, I have to admit, I'm just a language video maker, but I think I'm the best at what I do. And sometimes I worry that there's no market for my creativity. And I mean, even ... I know you're a little bit different, but you never know when everything will be computer animated and stuff, and creativity like then will be completely ... there will be no demand for it anymore. What do you think about that?

Stanley: See what I think is that this makes it clear to me that you're definitely approaching middle age. 'Cause that's a very old, every old person including myself has these thoughts on all the best things are in the past, and everything is winding itself down. I don't know. Sometimes-[crosstalk 00:27:33].

Dr Cooper: [crosstalk 00:27:33].

Stanley: [crosstalk 00:27:35] sometimes it's not.

Dr Cooper: Do you worry sometimes?

Stanley: Everybody has those thoughts, I'm sure, but I kinda write most of them off to nostalgia for when I was younger, and how new and fresh and great everything felt when I was younger. And now that I'm older and I've seen it all, well not everything seems less exciting. But that's has as much, if not more, to do with me than it does to do with the things we're discussing.

Dr Cooper: So that's your opinion ... see, I hope you're right. Sometimes I worry about it, because you know, like I say that list ... and I looked at [inaudible 00:28:17] and Orwell, and they both had the same theme of at a certain point in society, you know, tastes for artistic endeavor dries up. And that's the other side to it. It may be possible, if that's what's happening. Maybe possible that our intuitions are actually correct, and we shouldn't doubt ourselves about it.

Stanley: Well, then I'm sure a new society will come along and do something else interesting. It just won't be ours.

Dr Cooper: I think-[crosstalk 00:28:55].

Stanley: [crosstalk 00:28:55] the robots.

Dr Cooper: I think you're a very optimistic person in general.

Stanley: Well, fairly optimistic, 'cause if I said that it's the robots it means that we're kind of ... evolution is done with us. But, you know, that happens, too.

Dr Cooper: I think that's ... see, yeah I guess-

Stanley: Look at the snake that I'm looking at right now, it was ball python, he's about 12 years old, his name is Johnson. He's four and a half feet long and there was a time when creatures like him, creatures of his sort, were the top of the pops, man, they were The Who. They were John Huston. They ruled the roost, and now he's in a terrarium in my house and I'm trying futilely to teach him to tie himself into a figure eight, so there you go.

Dr Cooper: Yeah.

Stanley: That's his life now.

Dr Cooper: You just reminded me of the movie "2001".

Stanley: I know, that's really what this conversation [crosstalk 00:29:56] has been leading towards, really, it's all been about that, it's all been about 2001 in human evolution. Been fantastic talking to you, Coops.

Dr Cooper: Can you just say one word of ... 'cause I've always called you "Mr. Reassurance", can you say one word of reassurance to all those people out there who can't, haven't yet learned how to tie themselves into a figure eight, and in terms of English? And just one word of reassurance to them that they can do it.

Stanley: Okay, if they made it this far, they definitely can do it. And they should just think about how much easier it is for them to learn how to speak perfect English with your help than it is for a snake to tie itself into a figure eight. It is a thousand times easier. As hard as it seems, there's some creature out there futilely working at something that is so much harder for it than this is for you.

Dr Cooper: I think that was real good reassurance. Hey guys, you've just heard an incredible voice of reassurance and intellect. And I wanna thank you, Stanley, and-

Stanley: You're very welcome, it's been a lot of fun.

Dr Cooper: It's really ... I'm really grateful for it.