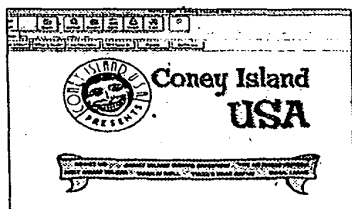


Kids, Don't Try This at Home

Never ask Fred Kahl whether he really can swallow a sword because, without a word, he will slip the four-inch stylus from his electronic organizer deep up his right nostril. Then, pointing to a photograph of himself — arms outstretched, head back, an épée buried to the hilt down his throat — he will shrug, as if to say, "Same idea." Until he is asked, he does not remove the stylus.

For six summers until he retired last year, Mr. Kahl was the Great Fredini in a Coney Island sideshow. But in his other incarnation, Mr. Kahl, 33, is a project manager at Funny Garbage, a Silicon Alley Web site designer. Last summer, he developed a site about Coney Island U.S.A., a nonprofit group that operates the sideshow where Mr. Kahl learned his skills, as well as a museum at 12th Street and Surf Avenue on Coney Island.



CONEY ISLAND U.S.A.

(<http://www.coneyislandusa.com/>)

The son of two college administrators from Albany, Mr. Kahl still swallows swords 30 to 40 times a year in shows, but he couldn't support his growing family on a performer's meager income. (His wife, the former Kiva Shliuger, performs regularly as a fire-eater known as Combustible Kiva, the Queen of Kerosene.) Unlike his friend Michael Wilson, the Illustrated Man, who is tattooed head to foot, Mr. Kahl said he was not

"visually arresting" enough to make the "big money" from private parties, television appearances and music videos.

WHAT YOU SEE One of the most striking pages is Mr. Kahl's paean to his art, the Great Fredini's CyberSideshow (<http://fargo.itp.tsoa.nyu.edu/~fredini/index.html>). The site includes an X-ray movie of a man (not Mr. Kahl) swallowing a sword, as well as a version of Mr. Kahl's master's thesis in applied computer technology at New York University. And it has panoramic shots of Coney Island performers and a soap opera-like narrative. "I think of it as Coney Island Meets Twin Peaks," he said.

Another page is about Melvin Burkhardt, Mr. Kahl's predecessor as the Human Blockhead. Now in his late 80's, he still performs in his hometown, Gibsonton, Fla. Mr. Burkhardt was able to shmooze with audiences for minutes or hours, and Mr. Kahl presents some of Mr. Burkhardt's carny patois. ("I'm the Human Blockhead. I have here a common ordinary ice pick that I will jab into my head, but I'm not going to drop dead.")

On the same site, Whirl-i-gig, another Web site developer, has done the pages for the 16th Annual Mermaid Parade in Coney Island. It is set for June 27, with David Byrne, the rock musician, as king of the parade. The photo album of past parades is a delight, even without Mr. Kahl's deadpan narration. "And here," he said, clicking his mouse, "are mermaid biker chicks."

LINKS More than 30, including "World of Coasters" (<http://www.rollercoaster.com>), which has a roller-coaster glossary (TPM, for example, means "theme park mentality," referring to roller coaster operators' rules that are seen by buffs as overly strict.)

WHAT YOU GET An engaging and technologically sophisticated site that may frustrate some Web viewers because it works best with a host of "plug-ins," or special application programs.

ANTHONY RAMIREZ