



## Nebraska Native Cavett Talks About Depression

BY MARK ANDERSEN

Lincoln Journal Star

Thursday, Jun 19, 2008 - 06:49:20 pm CDT

Homegrown wit and network TV icon Dick Cavett has come to NET Television Studios on this Thursday to enthrall a group of mental health professionals with insight into his own depression, which he calls, "a black, dismal mud."

Next he's off to judge amateur comedians for the Great American Comedy Festival in Norfolk.

In between, a handler has arranged some minutes for private interviews, but his speech has run long, and Cavett is taking time with a circle of admirers, chatting them up, signing his name, moving on to the next.

"What? Are we meeting UNL students?"

"Where are you from?"

The girl from North Dakota smiles bashfully.

A man tells Cavett that his own father often spoke of Cavett's father as a legendary high school teacher.

And finally the interview can begin. But it doesn't.

It's more a series of anecdotes to connect the dots: Jack Parr, Johnny Carson, Marlon Brando, John Lennon — faces from a time when color television was tinged in green.

And the status of Cavett's depression?

He's fine, he says.

When he speaks of depression, he doesn't mean the blues. For him, it's two serious bouts with deep depression — his two big ones. Which segues to a racy anecdote from his show: "And here they are, Jayne Mansfield."

He suffered one bout of depression while host of "The Dick Cavett Show."

From inside the disease, Cavett says, he thought he looked sick.

"Mr. Brando said look at it," he says. So he watched the tape. He'd done fine.

Marlon Brando, Cavett adds, “was an experienced student of automatic pilot.”

Some depressed comedy writers can do that, he says. They put it on autopilot. But then he’s also known a couple who had to quit their jobs until the lithium or amitriptyline (both drugs for mental illness) kicked in.

“There’s a new drug every month it seems,” he says.

He spoke with a man from a pharmaceutical company once, telling him how amazed he was at how far depression treatments had come.

But the man said, no, “we still don’t know what it is.”

Cavett marvels at the workings of brain chemistry, recalling the upbeat demeanor of a man who had killed his wife and family. The man’s manner had been similar to Bob Hope’s.

“Now he (Hope) never had a down day in his life.”

Which turns to musings about Hope’s brain chemistry.

Since Cavett was featured in a 1992 Time magazine article on the emerging science of antidepressants, he’s been called upon often to talk about the once-taboo disease.

“I didn’t want to be the poster boy for depression,” he says.

But the letters he gets from people who have decided it’s OK for them to seek treatment if Dick Cavett did are gratifying.

And soon enough, the minutes set aside for the interview have vanished.

Cavett sets to work on an untouched lunch before his coming on-camera interview. He asks if there’s evidence of chocolate cookie on his face.

No, all the crumbs are inside the reporter’s notebook.

At one point in the rambling, Cavett pauses, and then looks up to share Jack Parr’s best piece of advice.

“Don’t ever do an interview,” he says.

That’s boring. It becomes a matter of what color is this? How many is that?

“Make it a conversation,” he says.

*Reach Mark Andersen at 473-7238 or [mandersen@journalstar.com](mailto:mandersen@journalstar.com).*