

Kinky Friedman

BA '65, PLAN II, FORMER COUNTRY-WESTERN SINGER, MYSTERY WRITER WITH 23 TITLES PUBLISHED WORLDWIDE, FORMER COLUMNIST FOR TEXAS MONTHLY MAGAZINE, CO-FOUNDER OF UTOPIA ANIMAL RESCUE RANCH, HUMORIST, 2006 CANDIDATE FOR TEXAS GOVERNOR
AS TOLD TO ARUNI GUNASEGARAM

I DON'T THINK OF MYSELF AS SUCCESSFUL, and I believe that's the key to actually being successful. However, there have been a couple times in my life when I really felt successful — one of those was when my band, the Texas Jewboys, packed the houses and pubs in England, Ireland, and Scotland 30 years ago. I noticed how young and educated our fans were, and the energy they exuded made me feel that this was what it was all about. Another success story is the Rescue Ranch, a haven for stray and abused animals that I partially support with the sales of my Kinky Friedman brand salsas (www.kinkyfriedman.com). I am very proud of the work Rescue Ranch has done and continues to do.

I was the first Jewish country-western singer to make it in Nashville — and I may very well have been the last. I hit a wall in that career, though, because of several big handicaps: I was a college-educated, upper-middle-class Jewish boy whose parents had never divorced, whose wife had never left him, and whose dog had never been run over by a truck. I had no reason to be depressed, and I believe that's a prerequisite to being a country singer.

I do think people generally tend to assume the wrong reasons for their success. They start thinking that it has to do with a certain skill they have acquired when really it just has a lot to do with lightning (luck) striking over and over again. I think there's evidence of this in the fact that once people reach the pinnacle of success, as defined by the Western world, they fall out of touch with their art. A friend of mine, author Larry McMurtry, says that once you reach the age of 60, you can no longer write great fiction. I guess that's why I ran for governor — my run as a writer is about to dry up.

I've been what I would call a cult writer — I'm probably as recognized around the world as a lot of best-selling U.S.



ARUNI GUNASEGARAM

novelists like John Grisham or Danielle Steel, but my fans just don't seem to band together to make me rich! Another colleague of mine, Sandra Brown, is a very successful romance novelist. She told me once that she gets all the money, and I get all the fame. Of course, many of the great people whose names have stood the test of time — like Van Gogh, Jesus, and Mozart — ended up in pauper's graves, so I guess I'm on the right track. We don't even know who the Tom Clancys or Michael Dells of Van Gogh's age were — I believe that most of the names we hear on a constant basis today will be forgotten in the next 50 to 100 years. So, I guess I could say that success to me is endurance through time.

I've spent my entire adult life smoking about eight cigars a day and not having a real job; I'm able to do that because of the perception of "success" I've achieved, which allows me to do or say almost anything. Most people think I'm joking when I'm not. All I'm really doing is sailing as dangerously close to the truth as I can without sinking the ship.

The "Success to Me" series is prepared by Aruni Gunasegaram, BBA '92, MBA '98, an Austin entrepreneur, and Pam Losefsky, an Austin writer and editor.