



***“STORIES FROM THE VAULTS,”***

**SIGNATURE SERIES OF NEW SMITHSONIAN CHANNEL,**

**FEATURES TOM CAVANAGH AS HOST**

**WITH EXCLUSIVE BEHIND-THE-SCENES ACCESS TO SMITHSONIAN COMPLEX**

New Series of Seven Half-Hours Showcases Extraordinary Objects, and Their Stories, From Vast Smithsonian Collection

Actor Tom Cavanagh is the host of ***“STORIES FROM THE VAULTS,”*** a new series of seven half-hour programs that unlocks remarkable objects and stories from the prized collections of the Smithsonian Institution.

***“STORIES FROM THE VAULTS”*** premieres on the Smithsonian Channel.

Venturing beyond exhibit halls into high-tech vaults, cutting-edge labs, and even back rooms of the world’s most renowned museum complex, Cavanagh and a variety of curators showcase a variety of the Smithsonian’s rarely-seen treasures.

Cavanagh romps, jokes, climbs ladders, peers in drawers, looks behind doors, stares into microscopes, and interacts with stuffed animals and old bones, bringing a contagious enthusiasm and off-beat humor to the series.

***“STORIES FROM THE VAULTS”*** reveals an exciting universe of minds and passions beyond the Smithsonian’s public exhibitions, and illustrates why curators continue to add to the museum’s collections, why scientists depend upon the collections to learn more about the natural world, and why this particular institution is a living, breathing entity.

Each episode of ***“STORIES FROM THE VAULTS”*** is fuelled by a quest. The Smithsonian’s curators, experts and scientists open their collections and their minds in the program’s search for answers. They share their distinctive passions by presenting their most prized, surprising or enlightening artifacts, relics or specimens – standouts among the 100 million or so items in the Smithsonian’s collections currently not on exhibit.

The series uncovers the intriguing history of each object – its origins, how it came to Smithsonian, how it is being painstakingly preserved and studied - and what it might tell us about ourselves, our culture, where we came from or where we may be going. The payoff at the end of each episode is an enlightening – and entertaining – new perspective.

Above all, **“STORIES FROM THE VAULTS”** reveals an exciting universe of minds and passions beyond the Smithsonian’s great exhibition halls, and brings to a new level the institution’s mission, “to increase and diffusion of knowledge.”

#### **Episode #1 - “Stories from the Vaults: Famous Donors”**

The Smithsonian adds 50,000 objects each year to its vast collections. But where do they come from? How did they get to the Smithsonian? The premiere program looks at what President **Teddy Roosevelt**, author **John Steinbeck**, and even comedienne **Phyllis Diller** have contributed to the Smithsonian holdings.

Cavanagh is accompanied by a curator who oversees specific collections and is a repository of fascinating information about the items donated. At the Smithsonian’s Natural History Museum, he visits with Dr. Hans-Deiter Seus, reviewing animal specimens donated by Teddy Roosevelt before he became president. Roosevelt took a year-long expedition to Africa – “a mythical destination for explorers at the time,” according to Dr. Seus – resulting in Roosevelt’s bagging 500 big-game animals and donating their skins and skeletons to the Smithsonian. Many of the specimen tags still on the skins were filled out by Roosevelt himself.

Collections manager Linda Gordon, who oversees 580,000 mammal specimens, tells Cavanagh that the benefit to science of such a collection is that it lets scientists track significant environmental and ecological changes.

Cavanagh then spends time with curator Dave Pawson, a deep-sea diver and submersible operator, who cares for the Smithsonian’s 35 million invertebrates. Pawson tells Cavanagh that part of the vast collection was donated by writer John Steinbeck and his seafaring partner, marine biologist Edward F. Ricketts. After Steinbeck won the Pulitzer Prize for “The Grapes of Wrath” in 1939, the two men collected marine animals along the coast of California in a boat called The Western Flyer, chronicling their adventures and discoveries in “The Sea of Cortez: A Leisurely Journal of Travel and Research,” published in 1941. Many of the species they found are named after them.

Entertainment Collection curator Dwight Bowers supervises a completely different set of items – one that includes the jokes, clothes and other memorabilia of Phyllis Diller, the first woman to have a stand-up comedy career in the television age and a record holder in the Guinness Book of World Records (for getting 12 laughs per minute). The Smithsonian holds Diller’s remarkable catalogue of jokes, written out on index cards and filed by subject – an extraordinary collection of American humor from a specific era in our nation’s cultural history.

#### **Episode 2: “Stories from the Vaults: Superlatives”**

With more than 151 million objects amassed in one place – from the microscopic to the gigantic, from the ancient to the modern – it takes a unique identity to stand out among the rest. For this program, Tom Cavanagh goes in search of The Most Misunderstood, The Best, and The Tiniest ... all within the Smithsonian collections.

The Natural History Museum’s Hall of Mammals customarily displays life-like animals in animated poses – a male orangutan, for instance, frozen in mid-swing, emitting an aura of power and grace, its arms outstretched and its shaggy, rust-colored hair fluttering in a

breeze. Only on closer inspection does the illusion of life fade. The ape's hands grasp plastic pipes rather than branches, upholstery nails line the inside of its arms, and a large fan generates the wind.

The process of transforming dead animals into this state of permanent play is the charge of Smithsonian taxidermist Paul Rhymer. To achieve this life-like grace requires a stomach of steel and the skill of a surgeon.

"People think taxidermy is all blood and guts, but it's not," Rhymer tells Cavanagh, gesturing at the nearly blood-free tabletops littered with inside-out animal hides, carpentry tools, foam limbs, and other odds and ends. It's a painstaking craft that requires the skills of a naturalist, artist, tailor, carpenter, and hairdresser – all rolled into one. In the program, Matthews shows Cavanagh how he prepares and stuffs a red-tailed hawk, sent to the Smithsonian after it was accidentally killed.

Then, in search of "The Best," Cavanagh moves to the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History where he views a 300-year-old Stradivarius cello, considered one of the top instruments preserved anywhere. With his fun approach, Cavanagh sets up his own cello challenge. He listens, without looking, to the Stradivarius as well as an ordinary cello, and guesses which is which. He correctly identifies "the Strad," due to its sonorous tone and tremendous vibration.

Who would guess what comes next? The same Strad is actually sent by the museum for a CAT scan within the Museum, measuring the cello's exact width, precise angles, and curves. This information is shared with instrument-makers worldwide.

The final segment is an examination of "The Tiniest" – 1500 pages of the Holy Bible reduced 400 times down to one image the size of a dime. Cavanagh speaks with Shannon Perich, a curator for the Photographic History Collection at the National Museum of American History. She tells him of the history of microphotography – its invention in 1870, its use in wartime, and its applications today.

Other subjects for the remaining programs in **"STORIES FROM THE VAULTS"** include:

**Episode 3: "Stories from the Vaults: No Place Like Home"**

The Smithsonian Institution is the ultimate home for the nation, the collective memory for much of its history, natural history, science and culture. Among the millions of treasures housed at the 19 museums, its artifacts and specimens reveal how many different kinds of homes have been invented by humans and other species.

This episode goes behind-the-scenes to show four very unique homes: Spacesuits, that sustain the life of an astronaut in space; the tipi of the plains Indians; travel trailers at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; and a life form -- the microscopic nematode, or roundworm, that is able to make its home in every type of ecosystem.

**Episode 4: "Stories from the Vaults: Beauty"**

The Smithsonian Institution has a lot to reveal about what humans find beautiful. This episode explores beauty through the eyes of three Smithsonian curators who share their expertise about orchids, advertising, and ants.

**Episode 5: "Stories from the Vaults: Firsts"**

There are several ways to approach the quest to define what is “numero uno.” This episode explores the history of commercial aviation from the cockpit of a jumbo jet, traces the legacy of Thomas Edison through drawers filled with early light bulbs, and delves into the pre-history of the videogame revolution.

**Episode 6: “Stories from the Vaults: Life After Death”**

What is the difference between life and death? It’s a mystery reflected in arts and religion. The living and the dead find a home at the Smithsonian, where researchers study and explore this fascinating subject.

**Episode 7: “Stories from the Vaults: Random?”**

This episode of *Stories from the Vaults* finds that the Smithsonian collection is anything but random, but its range is extraordinary. Its tremendous breadth makes the storehouse so flexible for researchers and scientists. Photography’s role, as both historical record and art, exemplifies the multiplicity of meaning behind a single object. The Zoological Park houses animals, but also keeps the DNA of species in cold storage to answer questions by researchers not even born yet. Any one object in the collection could seem random, but each has a scope that encompasses answers to questions as yet unasked.

“**STORIES FROM THE VAULTS**” is produced by Caragol Wells Productions. Pamela Caragol Wells is executive producer. For the Smithsonian Channel: David Royle is Executive Vice President, Programming and Production; Tom Hayden is General Manager.

**ABOUT SMITHSONIAN NETWORKS:**

Smithsonian Networks (SN) is a joint venture between Showtime Networks Inc. and the Smithsonian Institution. It was formed to create new channels that will showcase scientific, cultural and historical programming based upon the assets of the Smithsonian Institution, the world’s largest museum complex. The networks will feature original documentaries, short-subject explorations and innovative and groundbreaking programs highlighting America’s historical, cultural and scientific heritage. Visit them on the Internet at [www.smithsonianchannel.com](http://www.smithsonianchannel.com)

For information, contact:

Aimee Gautreau  
914-238-2698  
[aimee@gautreauinc.com](mailto:aimee@gautreauinc.com)

Michael Shepley  
212-786-9064  
[shepleypr@aol.com](mailto:shepleypr@aol.com)

Jackie loachim  
Showtime Networks, Inc.  
212-708-1220  
[Jackie.loachim@showtime.net](mailto:Jackie.loachim@showtime.net)