Confessions of a Stand-Up Comedy Addict

An Honors Project (Honors 499)

by

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Muncie, Indiana

April 15, 1992

July 17, 1992
For my parents, for giving me the freedom to be a little odd, and for my husband Tom, for loving me this way.
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Confessions of a Stand-up Comedy Addict

How many eight year olds go around quoting entire comedy routines from memory? For that matter, how many twenty-one year olds do it? Quoting comedy has always been a way of life for me. Some of my fondest childhood memories are of sneaking into my brother’s room late at night to watch “Saturday Night Live” and “Evening at the Improv”.

It has always been important to me to be able to make people laugh. Watching M*A*S*H after dinner was a ritual in my family. My hero was always Hawkeye Pierce; no matter how terrible his situation got, he always handled it with humor. Playing practical jokes and coming up with wisecracks for every occasion kept him sane. I tend to handle life with the same off-beat sense of humor.

One of my favorite television quotes came from the pilot episode of “Wings”. Two brothers experienced a tragedy; one was depressed, but the other made light of the situation. The sad brother asked him how he could tell jokes “at a time like this”, and I will never forget the reply. He said, “because it’s what I do”. Humor is what I do. I didn’t ask to be “warped” as my mother often calls me; it’s simply the way that I deal with life. It’s what I do.
Graduatin' No-Job-Yet Blues

I've carefully prepared my resume' -- I check the postings every day.

My references are checked (My nerves are simply wrecked).

I had an interview today -- maybe I'll know by May.

I've followed all the rules Yet I'm still unemployed. . . Uncool!

Looking for work has left me spent. Wonder how I'll pay the rent?

My portfolio's in order -- now if only the wait were shorter.
Finding a job is something that really concerns me; if I weren't laughing about it, I'd probably be crying. But as long as I can put the words in rhyme, the whole problem seems a lot less serious. There are, of course, a lot of fun things about being a graduating senior. For instance, I get to feel superior to underclassmen.

Senior Cynicism

Dear Lord, save me from the agony of freshmen majoring in philosophy. They wonder and they wander, all the while trying to ponder how to get credit for a three-day shopping spree!

Actually, I've really enjoyed being a student. Classes are interesting, and when they're not, I can always let my mind wander, which is when I really start to have fun!
Oh No, Dr. Rieger!

Why doesn't he call on me? I know the answer. I know all the answers for this dreadful class. I sit in here day after day, taking meticulous notes and smiling graciously, and he refuses to call on me. I raise my hand and hold it in the air until every drop of blood vacates the premises and pools in my shoulder, all without even a glance from our distinguished professor.

What's that? Oh no, Dr. Rieger! I don't have a question. I was just stretching my arm.

Wonderful. Just wonderful. Now they're all having a nice, neat little laugh at my expense. I wait so long for him to call on me that I could have translated War and Peace into Swahili, and then he moves on without me. Lovely. Just lovely. Now that they all think I'm a drooling idiot, he's never going to call on me.

I beg your pardon? Oh no, Dr. Rieger, I'm afraid I don't know the average weight gain for a pregnant Tibetan elephant.

Gee, I just love this class. I sit in here like a slug on a sidewalk, just waiting for my big chance, and then when he asks me a question I respond with all the mental speed and agility of a sedated tree sloth! I could sit here under the immense pressure of knowing the answer until my brain explodes and all that wonderful information goes oozing out my ears and
he wouldn't notice. But let my mind wander one little bit, and he pounces on me like a ravenous Chihuahua.

_Huh? Oh, sorry sir. What's that, sir? You want me to give an oral report? Tomorrow? But how can I . . . Oh no, Dr. Rieger, I wouldn't dream of questioning your assignments. It's just that . . . But, I . . . Yes sir, Dr. Rieger._

"Yes sir, Dr. Rieger". "Of course, Dr. Rieger". Good grief, if I don't watch myself I'm going to start to sound like Suzie Perkings. "Do you need someone to wash the chalkboard, Dr. Rieger?" "Can I help you with that chair, Dr. Rieger?" I just lo-ove this class. Absolutely the highlight of my day. I trudge in here after a thoroughly stimulating night of detailed preparation and reading from the thrilling likes of "Large Mammals and Their Homes", and I can't say a single thing that doesn't make me sound like I have the personality of cold oatmeal. Meanwhile, back at the ranch, Suzie sits up front polishing her charm. I've had Kleenex that was smarter than her, but she sits up there, all smug and smiling, maintaining her position as the only undergraduate ever to get A's for being perky and helpful. "Perky and helpful", for crying out loud! Those are things you'd say about a puppy! I'd rather open the refrigerator door and count the seconds until the little light goes out than talk to her, let alone be like her, the little twerp.

_Who, me? Oh no, Dr. Rieger, of course it wasn't me who threw that!_
Why on earth would I launch a big, sloppy, sticky wad of old Bazooka into dear little Suzie Perkings' hair?

I swear, I could scream! Now they're going through her 'poor, dear, misunderstood Suzie' routine! Maybe I should start wearing that much hairspray. I mean, sure, I'd feel guilty about the hole in the ozone for a day or two, but maybe it would affect my brain and then I wouldn't have to worry about knowing the answers but not getting called on because of a teacher who pays about as much attention to me as people do to those little tags on pillows that say 'Do Not Remove Under Penalty of Law'. So help me, that man...

Are you asking me, sir? Oh no, Dr. Rieger, I'm not daydreaming. Well, no, I'm afraid I didn't hear the question. The part of Africa that receives the most rainfall each year? Let's see, Egypt has a large river, might that be it? Oh no, Dr. Rieger, of course I'm not trying to be smart. Why ever would I want to be smart? Oh no, sir, that's not what I meant at all. Of course I want to learn--if you would just give me a chance to... Oh no, Dr. Rieger, of course I'm not criticizing your teaching! I just meant that--Oh no, Dr. Rieger, I didn't... I couldn't... I...
Laughter is an integral part of my life. I love to watch stand-up comedy and listen to old Bill Cosby albums. I once did a creative writing exercise designed to foster an understanding of the mechanics of the comedic monologue. The idea was to make a list of traits and a list of unrelated nouns, pick a word from each, and then justify the combination. I came up with this: "I've come to the conclusion that raisins are actually the products of unsuccessful attempts at time travel." My parents were sooo proud. Actually, I think my dad’s exact comment was "For this we sent you to college?" It’s one of his favorite responses.

Anyway, when my first wedding anniversary rolled around, I thought that such a momentous occasion deserved a tribute. I sat down at the computer with dozens of romantic images floating around in my head, but as usual, things didn’t go the way I’d planned. Every time I typed something that I love about my husband, I’d think of something else he’d done that drove me crazy— and not in the context usually thought of for newlyweds. Luckily, for me my husband is used to my somewhat eccentric writing tendencies, and we’re still married.
On Being Married A Year:

I always knew we could make it
--never doubted it for a minute
(it's a wonder we're both still alive!)
We worked together, sharing everything
(I swear, if you don't start helping with the dishes, I'll knife you while you sleep.
--and give that blanket back!)
We spent countless romantic days, time cherished alone together
(So help me, one more minute alone with you and your #@!* stereo...)
We've had our good days
(long mornings where we never left the bedroom)
and our bad
(the night you broke my favorite lamp)
But I always knew we'd make it.
(OK--you survived one year. Any more remains to be seen. By the way,
did you take out the trash yet?)
I collect everything. I have book reports from third grade. But the one thing I have more of than anything else is shoes. They’re everywhere. I can’t seem to throw them away. I’m not sure, but I think I threw away a few pairs once, and they grew back. One day, in my usual twisted frame of mind, I got to wondering what life must be like for all the shoes in back of my closet.

Ode to a Reebok

Ah, forgotten friend
lying quietly in your corner.

Your laces frayed from puppy teeth,
holes pushed through by cruel toes
in their quest for fresh air.

Left in the rain,
tossed in the dryer
and always the friction of the road.

A chapter in the Journey;
faithful servant
left behind
--replaced by L.A. Gear.
Clerical Aspirations

There was nothing that Arlene Scatterfield wanted as badly as she wanted to be a secretary. The steady rhythm of a typewriter stirred her soul and made her feel proud to be an American. One very large obstacle stood in her way; Arlene could not type.

Arlene would often visit the business supply stores just to be near her beloved machines. People just didn’t understand her, but the typewriters always accepted her. She would stand gazing at them, occasionally reaching out to caress the smooth keys. She longed to be able to sit down and make words appear magically on a page as she had so often seen others do, but whenever she mustered up the courage to press a key, the loud click made her jump. (Arlene did not approve of loud noises.) Whenever that happened, she would look around her, fully expecting someone to approach her and remind her that the typewriters were only for people who knew how to use them. The steady clicking of the machines was soothing when someone else was typing, but to Arlene the noise was like a siren, announcing to the world that she had no business anywhere near a pencil, much less a typewriter. Arlene knew her life would never be complete unless she mastered her fear and learned the skill that was so vital to fulfilling her dream.

One bright Tuesday morning, after she was satisfied that her apartment was spotless and everything was in its place, Arlene decided to visit the business machine section at Johnson’s department store. Before leaving, she checked her image in the mirror one last time. Few people ever spoke to Arlene Scatterfield, much less looked at her, but she liked to think
perhaps someday, someone might.

Arlene set out resolutely, but lost her courage as soon as she passed through the front doors of Johnson's; she didn't want to appear conspicuous, (Mother had always said there was never an excuse for making a spectacle of oneself) so she detoured through the automotive supplies to collect her thoughts. She stood there, between the new tires and the fuzzy dice collection, arguing with herself for quite a while. She knew that she had to go through with her plan-- she had to get comfortable around typewriters. Besides, she wouldn't think of wasting a trip to the store, and there was nothing she needed to buy.

Arlene was so engrossed in thought that she didn't notice young Bobby Willum approaching her. Before she knew it, he was standing in front of her, asking if she needed help with anything. She knew that Bobby was only mocking her; she knew that everyone made fun of her because she couldn't type. Flustered, Arlene managed to come up with a story about needing a gift for her sister's boy who was about to turn sixteen. Frankly, Arlene couldn't stand her nephew-- he was always so smug about all the things he could do with his home computer-- but she had to say something. Bobby suggested the fuzzy dice with the built-in stereo speakers and moved on to help someone else. After a long pause, several deep breaths, and a large dose of Valium, Arlene tiptoed over to the typewriter display.

Cautiously, trying to control the shaking of her hands which even the Valium hadn't stopped, Arlene reached out to the gleaming machine. Unfortunately, someone had been testing the typewriter just moments before and had left it at the end of a line. As soon
as Arlene's slightly bony fingers touched the keys, the margin bell sounded. Arlene was sure that she would be in handcuffs within minutes. Wouldn't that be wonderful? Then mother would come down to jail to get her and Arlene would have to spend the afternoon listening to more lectures about knowing one's place in society. No, that would never do. She decided that she must escape. Once she had determined that no one in the immediate vicinity was an undercover typewriter policeman, Arlene left the store as nonchalantly as she could. Of course she couldn't make a spectacle of herself, but she thought that perhaps it wouldn't hurt to run just this once.

Thoroughly rattled, Arlene knew that she couldn't take another Valium for several hours yet, so she decided to stop by Holsen's drugstore for a soda before going home. After all, what was there to go home to? A surprise visit from Mother? No, a soda was definitely the answer. Arlene took a seat in the corner booth with her vanilla soda and settled back to enjoy her second-favorite pastime—snooping. She noted with a practiced eye that Mr. Radley was dining alone; no doubt he was avoiding his shrewish wife for as long as possible. It was already common knowledge that he had lost a very important business deal that morning, although through no fault of his own. Arlene concluded that it would be several hours before Bob would build up the courage to face his darling Sheila. It was certainly nice to see that someone was having a worse day than she was. Dismissing Bob Radley with one last superior-feeling glance, Arlene turned her attention to more interesting tables.

Nearby, two young girls from the secretarial pool at the
Anders Company were gossiping away the last of their lunch break over sodas. They were just the sort that Arlene loved to spy on; she did not know them, but it was easy for her to despise them, with their perfect figures and their obvious secretarial status.

"Of course, you realize we’re going to have to exercise for simply days to work these off," moaned one to the other.

Arlene leaned closer; this was not a conversation she wanted to miss. Here was her big chance to learn about the lives of the perfect girls who had all the office jobs.

"Well, at least our wrists will always be slender. Old Sourpuss Anders has had us typing non-stop all morning. I don’t know how much more I can take. Just when we get something finished, he changes it and hands it back to be re-done."

"I know. It’s the same for all of us... except Linda. Have you noticed that the most strenuous thing she’s done all day is make a new pot of coffee?"

"I noticed alright. How could I not? She broke a nail changing the filter and had to whine about it to everyone within earshot. Just how did she get her job, anyway? I heard from Roxie that JoAnn said Louise saw her file and she can’t even type."

"You mean you don’t know?" The girl leaned closer to her friend, obviously enjoying what she had to say. "Haven’t you noticed that she’s got the worst IQ and the best measurements of anyone in the office? Think about it—there’s only one way a girl like that could have gotten into the company. It’s obvious that she slept her way in."

Arlene nearly fell out of her chair, but at that point the two girls got up and started back to work, depriving her of any
more of their conversation. She hardly noticed anything that went on around her for several minutes. Finally, she got up, paid for her soda, and left for home. If anyone had looked at her, they might have noticed a small, strange smile tugging at the corners of her mouth.

Later that day, Arlene was seated alone on a bench outside the Anders building looking only slightly uncomfortable in her closest-fitting sweater and shortest skirt. The makeup was new; Mother had always said that only sirens wore makeup, but Arlene was willing to take her chances. Perhaps, just this once, mother was wrong. Arlene hoped that passersby wouldn't recognize her, but she needn't have worried-- the few people who walked by only saw an attractive woman in her late twenties sitting on bench with a very determined look on her face.

Yes, Arlene was determined. . . Determined that she would get her job, and that she would not have to learn to type.

There was nothing that Arlene Scatterfield wanted as badly as she wanted to be a secretary.
I spend my summers doing office work for various temporary agencies. It's not exactly what I want to do for the rest of my life, but it helps pay the rent. Last summer, as I began to feel the first twinges of Carpal-Tunnel Syndrome creep into my wrists, I experienced a dawning realization. (Isn’t that a great term? Dawning Realization. I love it.) I get bored very easily with typing all day long, but it occurred to me that there must be some weirdo out there somewhere whose lifelong dream it was to have my job. Thus, Arlene Scatterfield was born. Thankfully, she doesn’t live anywhere around here.

After a summer of such rigorous mental workouts, I just wasn’t quite ready when school started for the barrage of acronyms that administrators just love to toss out at bewildered students.
Abbreviated Lives

Rush to the DR.
and get your MMR
and don't catch the 'FLU.
Take your IQ and your MAT
and graduate to the JR high school.
ACT, SAT
took the MMPI, I see
but register for the ASVAB, won't you?
Choose a MAJ
and a MIN
and don't forget the NTE and the GRE
for when you leave ol' STATE U.
Find a MR., become a MRS.,
learn to see XOXO as hugs and kisses.
"Hey mom, pick up some MAYO at the A&P, could you?"
Got the BS, go for the MA
only so many HRS. in the day.
Maybe the CORP. will have a place for you.
the Stress will get you an EKG
and maybe an X-RAY or two,
and when you end up DOA
an RN can write an OBIT. for you.
Well, that’s what a peek into my mind is like. I hope I didn’t scare you too much. And for heaven’s sake, don’t worry about me—I’m having fun! After all, it’s what I do. I’ll leave you with a healthy dose of paranoia—food for thought.

The Garden of Eden

You won’t understand me. You couldn’t possibly. You’re one of them. They are everywhere. They watch me. I get, at best, a few hours of nighttime to myself. But then, just when I’ve begun to be calm, they come back, peering at me from all sides. They stick their pointy, hairy noses right up in front of me; their hot, garlicky breath nearly chokes me. Their nearsighted eyes blink at me from behind glasses that distort both viewpoints. Every day they come; morning and night they return to paw at me. They take hold of my round cheeks and turn me this way and that, discussing my health between them.

At first, they came only to look, their footsteps shaking our very bodies, their rumbling voices filling our ears. Then, day by day, they began taking some of us away with them. Each time they leave us now, one of my hapless comrades is taken with them. I am young and green; perhaps I am of no use to them. Perchance I alone am to be spared.

But wait! I feel the trembling earth signal their approach. Their cruel fingers grasp and bruise me again, turning me about. One of them remarks to his companion that my color is improving. I begin to think that my turn has
come at last, but suddenly they let me drop, exclaiming over the perfection of one who lives quite near to me. Sadly, I watch my friend carried away with the other victims of the day. Even as I grieve for my fallen neighbors, I allow myself a sigh of relief that I have been given another day to stretch and grow in the sun.

Each day the pattern is the same: they approach, inspect us individually, and return to their lair with several of us clutch in their arms. Finally one day, as I am heavy and drowsy from the sun, I feel their hands on me again. They tug at me, pulling more roughly than before. Suddenly, I feel my lifeline give way and I am left supported only by their hands. I am carried away through a world I have never seen, nor even dreamed of. I am taken to their home, thrust into cold water, scrubbed brutally, and dropped onto a hard, flat surface nothing like my former home. Plucked from my peaceful existence, I lie there quietly. Feeling the bruises form beneath my tender skin, I try not to wonder what my future holds.

Here comes one of them. What’s that grasped in his mammoth hand? It’s...it’s...Oh, Sweet Mother Earth, it’s a knife! He grabs me with one hand, while the other plunges the knife straight through my skin and cuts out my very heart. He leaves jagged edges around my wound and places me on a bed of cool, gentle lettuce. I am left to search my mind for what could have induced such cruelty.

Some time later, a cool, strange-smelling paste is scooped into the
opening in my body. Am I to be healed? Will there be any sort of explanation? As I lie there gasping, an instrument with four sharp tines is plunged into my side, and I see the knife descending toward me. A large portion of my flesh is cut off and carried away. This happens again and again. (Apparently, my death is to be slow and painful.) Each time, the creature moves his hand toward his mouth and I watch a part of myself disappear inside it. The last thing I hear as giant teeth begin to crush me is one of the creatures telling the other how delicious the tuna-stuffed tomato is today.