

DARSHI.BLOG

The Time I did Stand-Up for One Year



When I was twelve years old my favourite TV show was *Seinfeld*. We had just gotten cable TV and for some reason, it was all I wanted to watch. I never laughed out loud, but the bits stayed with me. It wasn't long before I walked around with a little notepad, jotting down ideas for my own comedy routines. They weren't very funny though.

Soon enough, my palate broadened. I'd watch specials on Comedy Central and HBO. I'd re-work some of these jokes in my notebook, trying to make them my own.

Me at an open mic in Second City, Toronto. December 2023.

My second ever open mic.

I also noticed my favourite sitcom stars were originally stand-up comedians. There was Ray Romano, Kevin James, Martin Lawrence, and Tim Allen, to name a few.

“I’m 10 years old; TV’s my life!”

-Kevin McCalister in *Home Alone 2* (1992)

Steve Martin, Adam Sandler, and Robin Williams had started out in stand-up before making movies. Every actor I liked seemed to have this one thing in common. They didn’t run around auditioning hoping for a role, they wrote material and created something on their own before they were discovered.

Years later, when my brother went off to university, he came back with Eddie Murphy’s *Delirious* and Russell Peter’s *Outsourced*. I realized that there was more to stand-up than crowd work or insult comedy. Stand-up was storytelling. It was a way of communicating deeper ideas. Did I have any deeper ideas to communicate?

I was thirty-two when I finally worked up the courage to try it for myself.

My Ph.D. was almost complete but my supervisors were taking forever to respond to my dissertation drafts. With my life was in limbo, I was stressed and unhappy. To self-medicate, I returned to my favourite stand-up specials.

Having already penned most of a dissertation, I had developed a regular writing habit. Punchlines worked their way into my writing. I was still too scared to go to an open-mic though.

To bridge the gap between where I was and where I wanted to be, I enrolled in a workshop at the Second City, Toronto. Many of my heroes had done improv comedy there (more on that later). I could use the classroom setting as an entry point.



For about six months, I went to *The Comedy Lab* in Toronto each week. I tried a new 4 minutes of material each time.



I made a few friends at the workshops. There was David, who held a Ph.D. in computer science. He was originally from Venezuela and came to Canada as a refugee. He had brought with him his best friend Bon, another computer scientist and amateur photographer. Leslie, who went by “Liz Hunter” was another compadre.

It was David who first scouted out The Comedy Lab, a small club near the University of Toronto. It was familiar territory. The club was actually situated under my favourite cafe, Future Bistro. I had gone there for half a decade and not realized.

Soon enough, it was just “Liz” and I attending the open mics. The rest were done their dabbling. Her and I would sign up at 9.30pm and wait three to four hours to get our 4 minutes in front of the small room.

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I loved it right up until I hated it.

I wasn't there to network or make friends with other amateur comedians. I just wanted to do my four minutes. The problem was, if you're advocating for yourself, you end up at the bottom of the list.

I'd go up second to last many weeks, “performing” for two to three people after 1am.

It was fun the first five times, but it was too much effort to sit among the rest for hours before getting a chance to talk to myself on a mic.

When my dissertation defence finally came around, there was less room for stand-up. By the time I had submitted my final draft, I was all tapped out. There wasn't much creative energy left for working on material. Nevertheless, I had grown from the experience.

Talking in front of strangers is nerve-wracking as it is. The uncertainty of not knowing whether it would be two people or ten makes it all the more scary. Walking home at two in the morning, on the lonely streets of Toronto after bombing, terribly, is a unique meditative experience. One finds the depth of one's soul.

I enjoyed the experience in many different ways, even—perhaps especially—the difficult moments. Reflecting on this initial foray, I feel the desire to return to it, to write new bits, try new things and re-experiment with this strange art form—but I'd sure like to do it in front of more than two people.



My last open mic. Performed in December 2024.
