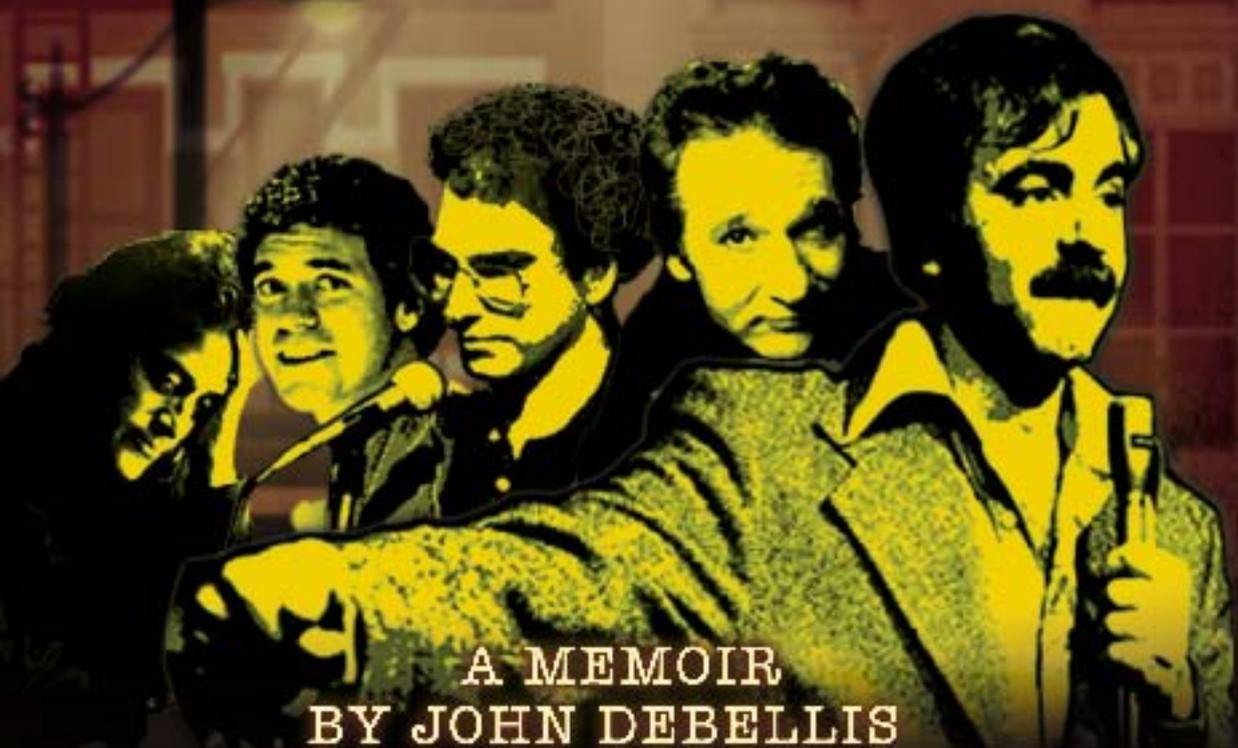


STANDUP GUYS

A Generation of Laughs



A MEMOIR
BY JOHN DEBELLIS

John DeBellis' **STAND-UP GUYS: A Generation of Laughs** is a comic's memoir that puts the reader on and off stage with a unique group of young comedians: Larry David, Richard Lewis, Richard Belzer, Bill Maher, Gilbert Gottfried, Elayne Boosler, Rita Rudner, Larry Miller, Joe Piscopo, Robert Wuhl, Paul Reiser, Jerry Seinfeld and several of the most neurotic, lovable characters who survived and thrived due to talent, passion, and, most importantly, camaraderie. It's a memoir rich in humor, pathos, and insight.

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STANDUP GUYS

A Generation of Laughs

by

John DeBellis

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"I really liked it. Don't know how you remembered all that stuff. The writing was pretty sharp, which leads me to believe you must have had some outside help. Some big words and even some traces of humanity! Couldn't have been you. In any event, please pass on my congratulations to the author and tell him, her or perhaps your Dad before he passed. It's a wonderful book." —Larry David

"This amazing read reminds me of how it might have been for artists hanging out in cafes in the early 20th Century; drinking and laughing, trying to discover our authentic selves in the world of standup. In this crazed existence, DeBellis reveals dead-on how getting laughs practically, if not completely, validated our reason to exist. On a personal note, I'd like to thank the author for so brilliantly reminding me of my tortured, insatiable need to be judged by strangers going on now for over forty two years. Someone had to take the hit. This book perfectly describes my favorite obsession." —Richard Lewis

"I don't think any of us would have become the comedians or entertainers that we've become without passing through that crucible. And also I wouldn't trade anything for the fun we had. God we had fun. We were too stupid to know how hard it was. I miss seeing everybody all the time. Standup Guys authentically mirrors that time period." —Bill Maher

"John DeBellis is one of the many comedians I met in New York City and didn't sleep with. If the 1940s produced the greatest generation, the 1970s and 80s arguably produced the funniest generation. John documents this wonderfully in his book; add "phenomenal memory" to his list of talents, which includes 'terrific joke craftsman'. I was transported right back to the bar at Catch A Rising Star, sitting on a stool with my various notebooks and playing "Is this funny?" I can't believe that was thirty years ago and I was only six." —Rita Rudner

"Standup Guys was so real that I was waiting to get heckled by the book. The writing is witty and smart and it authentically captures what it was like to be a comic during that magical time, when standup was our life, and not yet our livelihood, and the friendships we formed were destined to last a lifetime." —Richard Belzer

"I can honestly say the paper this book is printed on is of pretty high quality and the cover is relatively durable." —Gilbert Gottfried

"John's book brings back that special era vividly and makes me feel like asking for cab fare again. For eight bucks a night we lived like court jesters that had taken over the kingdom. If you want to know what it was like being a standup comic back in the 70's and early 80's then this is the ultimate read." —Robert Wuhl

"As a standup comic, I was so able to identify with John's vivid description of the comedy world in the 70's and 80's and this daring and bold wave of risk-takers. This was a generation of fresh, young comedians that spawned comedy clubs throughout the country and enticed people to go out to see them and laugh. I'm proud to be part of this club and very grateful that I'm not as neurotic and dysfunctional as some of them here in this book." —Kevin Nealon

"John's book relives all those great, early, explosive years of New York comedy: the brotherhood, the backstage fun, the beer, and even the broken bones. It was a blast." —Joe Piscopo.

"John's hysterically funny, historically significant document makes me nostalgic for those crazy days of failure and nights of hope. Being 'one of the guys' was a perk, because these guys were all true originals. I learned, I laughed, I loved the freedom we had to work out who the hell we were in public because we couldn't be alone with it. The voices that evolved on those teensy stages have impacted TV and comedy for decades, so I guess we were doing something right." —Melanie Chartoff

"The most amazing thing about this book is that it is so wonderfully descriptive and detailed, and so perfectly captures the essence of our early days in standup comedy, that I wonder how John DeBellis was able to take enough time away from watching Yankee games on the Yes Network to actually write it."—Bobby Kelton

"The book was great. It brought back a lot of memories, all of them good. When the Strip opened in 1976 if wasn't for the Standup Guys I don't know if we would have lasted. Thanks to everybody, John, Glenn Hirsch, Piscopo, Bobby Kelton, and Larry David who came from Catch and the Improv, which gave us the time to develop acts like Jerry Seinfeld, Ray Romano, Paul Reiser, Larry Miller, Dennis Wolgberg, George Wallace etc. Thanks Guys." —Richie Tienken (owner of the Comic Strip)

"I am too busy with all the free Internet porn to read the book, but I am sure I would have liked it. Okay, not really. I loved the book and enjoyed being part of the comedy scene you describe so well."—Wil Shriner

"Wow, what a fun ride! Every time I picked up this book it was like stepping into a time machine." —Steve Mittleman.

"The clubs were like being in a Marx Brothers film. If the Marx Brothers were still alive they would turn John's book into a movie. It is simply that funny." —Mark Schiff

"I loved this book! It was like reliving the beginning of my own comedic life through John's memories of the times. I could not put the book down...well, I couldn't put it down because I spilled jelly on the cover and it stuck to my hands." —Glenn Hirsch

"The book depicts an era of the development of the comedy boom and the camaraderie that existed in a kind of brotherhood society. It was a time when we'd share ideas and help one another. The book

brings you into those moments of creativity and some of the crazy and hilarious events we all experienced in that wonderful place in our lives. It allows the reader to be that envied 'fly on the wall'. I am proud and privileged to have been part of it. A great read. Bravo, John." —Buddy Mantia (member of the Untouchables comedy team)

Dedicated to my daughters, Alina, Kendal,
Page, and Lane and to the memory of
Ronnie Shakes, Glen Super, Andy Kaufman,
Marjorie Gross, Dennis Wolfberg, Rodney Dangerfield
Rich Jeni and to all the standup comics who have passed on.

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Author's Preface

There were so many people, comics, staff and even very funny anecdotes that were not included in the book in order to keep it at a reasonable length. The anecdotes are as accurate as my memory would permit and the dialogue close enough to capture the essence of the moment. Time has a way of altering our perceptions and perhaps affecting the precise order of when things actually occurred. That said, in certain instances, I purposely took things out of sequence to highlight a particular moment or message.

In the few occasions when I mentioned club owners in a derogatory manner, the comments were not aimed at the owners of the Improv, Catch or The Comic Strip, but rather at the owners of the fly by night comedy clubs. Other than that, I've chosen not to air out any dirty laundry. It was never my purpose—to do that would have changed the tenor of the memoir.

I did my best to be as inclusive as possible. It's one of the reasons I decided on self-publication. Publishers would have insisted that I center the story only on those who are famous. That would have ripped the soul out of the book. This memoir isn't about being famous, it's about artistic integrity, innocence, the struggle to improve, the love of the art form and most of all the camaraderie. I thank you all, even those who aren't mentioned in the memoir, for without every single one of you, that time may not have been so magical.

Un-Sex Symbols

“The difference in a musician’s groupie and a comedian’s groupie...after a show, a Rock groupie will say to the musician, ‘I think you’re so talented , I want to screw your brains out.’ The comedian’s groupie will say to the comedian, ‘I think you’re so talented... this is my husband, Al.’”

-GLENN HIRSCH



John DeBellis Gilbert Gottfried and Joe Piscopo

Comics for the most part didn’t have groupies—we had singers’ rejects. We didn’t score, we won by forfeit. If a comic were Adam in the Garden of Eden, even after he gave his rib to make Eve, he’d spend the night alone because he’d assume she had a boyfriend. I spent much of my after set time hanging out with Larry David, imagining new reasons and ways for girls to reject us.

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It starts even deeper than just a horrific self-image. It evolves from our comic souls. Unlike the artistic soul, which is something to be nourished, the comic soul is something that we're stuck with—a deep feeling of not being one with the universe but being one *against* the universe. I'm not saying we didn't occasionally get lucky, but if looked upon from the proper prospective, it would really be a matter of how damn *unlucky* the woman was. It would beg the question: What atrocity did she commit in a previous life? Singers, musicians, actors—even jugglers—were the sex symbols, not comics. We were created to show them that there are a lot more horrible things to be than talentless, tasteless and unemployed. It was our job to make the girls laugh—it was our job to make them happy. Well, at least that's the way most of us felt about ourselves—at least the positive thinkers like me.

“Women would look at the comedian as the no-frills carnival that comes to town. It's not the circus, but it's all you've got.”

-JEFF CESARIO

Dating was not natural to comics, because for most of us it required human contact and in extreme cases, affection. We'd also, at some point, have to carry on a conversation that doesn't start with, “Is this funny?” or end with “Can I use that?”

Comics like to be around other comics, not only for the laughs. We knew that whatever we felt about each other didn't have to be expressed in any form of physical contact other than an occasional pat on the back. Alan Lefkowitz, in an attempt for Glenn Hirsch and I to get over our aversion of physical affection between beings of a similar species and especially gender, suggested that whenever we left or greeted each other we should hug.

Both people pleasers and not wanting to disappoint the ultimate authority figure, Glenn and I grudgingly did as we were asked. At first the hugs were robotic and stiff, like two coat trees falling into each other, lasting as long as a blink. We'd exit a cab, pat each other before one of us dove back into the taxi and in our deepest voices spout manly phrases like, “Hurry, one of my girlfriends is waiting for me, lying

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naked on my coffee table that I personally constructed from giant empty steel cable spindles. I need to screw her before the ballgame starts.”

After months of practice, our hugs became long enough to obsess over how long to hold it and who should break the hug first. We came to the conclusion that it was the responsibility of the person who initiated the hug to break it off before the other person felt uncomfortable. At first, these calculations made for false starts and stuttering break-offs, but after a few more months of trial and error, the parting time became instinctive, which in comic talk means self-conscious behavior without visible hesitation. The next phase was to transfer that skill to hugging other people, a phase that seems to be getting easier after twenty-five years. I figure that I’ll be able to hug the priest who reads me my last rights.

Of course, as previously stated there was a small minority of comics who were very good with women, like Richard Lewis, Barry Diamond, David Sayh, Kelly Rogers, Richard Belzer and then there were the pheromone drenched Keenan Wayans, Brant Von Hoffman and Buddy Mantia (all three so handsome that women would make love to them shining a flashlight on their faces).

When I met David Sayh the first time, I realized almost immediately that he was one of the few comics who had a way with the ladies. When David spoke to a pretty girl, he would actually look in her eyes instead of completely avoiding her or her airspace by blinking and glancing around the room in spurts, as if following a wounded bee out for revenge. David would even hold her gaze and talk in complete sentences—not in long, disconnected phrases that collided and competed with each other.

I’m sad to say most comics don’t see women as sexual objects, we see them as objects that get in the way of sex! When I was a very young comic, one woman actually said that she enjoyed having sex with me. She said I was so nervous that I was better than her vibrator. Okay, that’s a line from my act. But it’s probably not far from the truth. If we could, we’d slip a joke into a chemical formula. If Einstein were also a comic his Theory of Relativity would be called Einstein’s Theory

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of My Cousin Is So Fat I Blame Her for the Expanding Universe and Relativity.

Glenn Hirsch was an abnormal breed for a comic. He was good looking, not handsome in the classic sense. He was also self-deprecating, displayed inappropriate behavior at comic appropriate times, and he had the standup's natural dread of affection, but he also could have had all the women *we* wanted. They chased after him, but he didn't want, nor need any. He was living with Sue Giosa, the beautiful woman he's still married to. If Glenn weren't so damn naturally funny, I'd doubt his comic credentials and think he was really a musician that had funny material written for him.

Imagine being with the same woman for over thirty years! Most comics couldn't look at the same Playboy centerfold for more than a month unless the other side had at least three pictures in different poses. Despite his ability to maintain a healthy long-term relationship, Glenn is still one of my comic idols. Glenn did two things that earned him that merit, that special place of honor amongst comics. Number one: Glenn was late for his own wedding because it was the first game Phil Simms started as the Giant's quarterback. Number two: he perpetrated what could possibly be the bravest, most manly act a comic ever committed, which spits in the frown of one of our biggest fears, the germ terrors. Glenn dropped his hairbrush in the toilet and started to comb his thick red locks with it. When Sue shouted at him for doing something so disgusting, Glenn told her that water from the toilet was clean because of the constant flushing, and then proceeded to scoop up a palm full of that good old toilet water and drink it. Need I say more?

"Throughout my entire showcase experience, I managed to keep my virginity."

-MARJORIE GROSS

There were male comics who had steady girlfriends and some even had wives they would bring to the clubs. I don't remember a female comic bringing a non-comic boyfriend to any of the clubs. In fact I

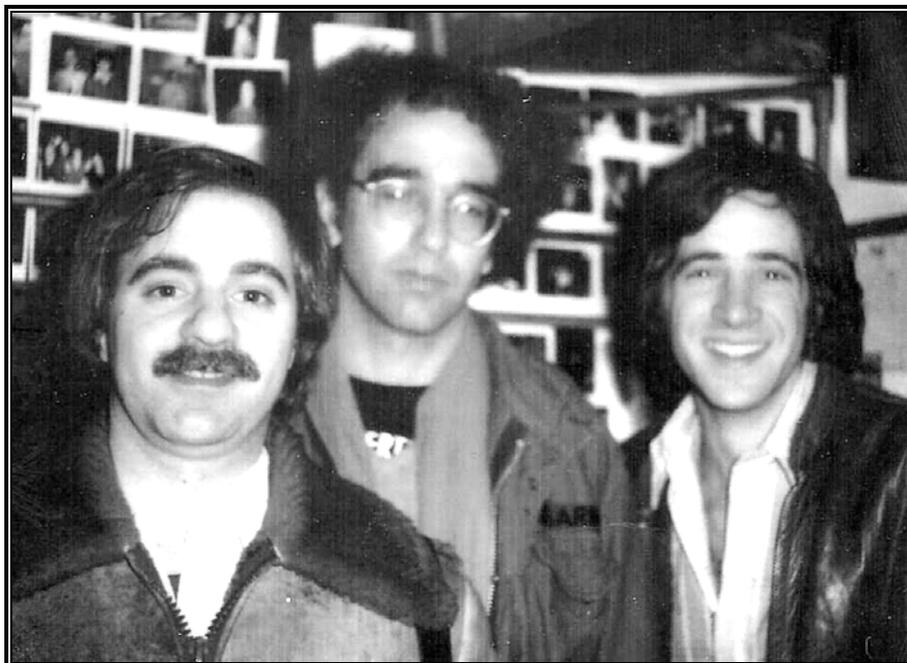
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don't remember any of the female comics having non-comic boyfriends.

I would be headlining a comedy club, and after the show I couldn't even get a girl to talk to me. The opening act, a local guy, who maybe had been doing standup for six months and didn't get any laughs, got laid every night."

-GILBERT GOTTFRIED

One night Bobby Kelton actually brought a date along with Larry and I which, to say the least, was unusual. During the first year of standup the three of us were as conjoined as the Presidents on Mount Rushmore.



John DeBellis, Larry David and Bobby Kelton

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I had found a parking space about a hundred yards from the diner. We exited my car and it took us almost a block before we realized we'd forgotten the girl. By the time we turned around she had fought her way through the mulching fast food and wrappers in my back seat to find the car door and figured out how to open it without a crow bar. I'm pretty sure she eventually caught up to us and I'm almost positive she paid for herself (probably because we forgot).

Oh, occasionally us "have-nots" would get lucky, which, in my case, often took other comics to recognize the opportunity for me. One night I was at the bar at Catch after having a few drinks with a girl from the audience. I didn't realize she was coming on to me, even though her legs were wrapped around me twice, we both were wearing her shirt and sharing a tongue. Buddy Mantia, got my cab fare from the bartender and thrust the eight bucks in my face and said, "John, take her home, now!"

One Sunday night at the Improv I had a great set and was standing at the bar, when a waitress brought a note to me that said, "Do you want to meet a sexy California girl?" Back then, when it came to meeting a girl, the only thing that really mattered was gender. I would have been willing to meet a girl from a land mass made from nuclear waste. Being a California girl brought up images from Beach Boy songs, which quickly faded when I saw my reflection in the mirror behind the bar and all I could think of was Alice Cooper. Of course, I handed the waitress back the note, on which I had nervously written, "Yes." It didn't occur to me to have the waitress point her out before I'd given her my reply.

I waited at the bar, trying out postures and expressions that would make me look like I wasn't counting the seconds until I'd be rejected, or overcome with fear that she might look like a girl every male in California rejected.

Before I had a chance to sweat out all the toxins in my body, she tapped me on the shoulder and said, "I'm the California girl." Much to my delight and near stroke, she was an Olivia Newton-John look-alike, but better because she wasn't Australian and was already feeling the two-drink minimum.

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I don't remember much of our conversation, probably because most of what I said was either unintelligible or well worth forgetting. What I do recall is that she wanted to go out for real drinks and that she had a girlfriend. Yes, the dreaded girlfriend. And, of course, asked if I had a comic friend for her pal. Now, I figured since she hadn't introduced her friend as a California, Arizona, New Mexico, Rhode Island, District of Columbia, or even an Area 51 girl, that she probably wasn't a looker. But I was really in luck that night. Sitting a few feet away in a booth was Peter Bales-- the same Peter Bales to whom Glenn Hirsch at a gig in the Jersey boondocks said his famous words, "Where are you going to take her to, your coat?" Back then Peter never met a woman or reasonable facsimile that he didn't lust after. Well, at least up until then.

Even guys like Peter knew the formula. It's simple math: the better looking the girl, the uglier the girlfriend. While my beach blanket beauty walked into the showroom, I pleaded, lied and offered to write an hour of new material for Peter if he stayed. Before I could offer to pay off his college loans, the California girl returned with a six-foot, knockout brunette. Peter was so happy I thought he might actually hug me.

We ended up at some bar on the Upper East Side, spending several months of cab fare on Tequila. The idea was for me to get drunk fast enough to not care about eventually getting the boot or to get her drunk enough that she couldn't find the boot. By the time we left the bar we were all drunk and before I could figure out where to go next, we found ourselves in an upscale NYC apartment. Me and the California girl, and Peter with his gorgeous Amazon woman.

It could have been a night that would be bragged about by comics at the Improv, Catch and the Comic Strip for centuries—one that I personally would brag about well into several of my next lives. But brag I would not. Embarrassed I would be. You see, shortly after our arrival, I started to throw up! Not, once, not twice, no, it marched out of me like an unending legend of Roman soldiers. I was the fat guy in Monty Python's vomit sketch, only sloppier. Since the apartment was a friend's sublet and it took us a while to find the bathroom, the place looked and smelled like an apartment that a bulimic Oscar Madison

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dwelled in for decades. Peter would have hated me for life if he hadn't been seen by several other comics leaving the club with Wonder Woman.

The next night, which was Monday and audition night at Catch, my stomach felt like it was being tortured for trying to escape, making me still sick enough to pass up the sixty bucks for emceeing. Unfortunately, I had to show up in case my sub didn't. I was leaning against the bar with my back to the showroom entrance, nursing an orange juice and feeling relieved that my sub was on stage. I heard some comics stop talking and wondered what had put the brakes on their babble. I turned my head and not more than ten feet from me, as gorgeous as ever, was the California girl and her Paula Bunyan friend walking toward the showroom. I didn't know whether to say hello, wave, smile, frown, crack a vomit joke or throw the juice in my face and try to hide behind the pulp. It wouldn't have mattered if I had smiled thousand dollar bills, they glared at me like I had not only thrown up all over their friend's apartment but I suffocated their dog with my puke. Then they turned away, and any memory of me, current or future, disappeared forever—unless they're still telling stories about Vomit Guy.

I had one experience where a woman (a female comic) rejected me and while it turned out to be an embarrassing moment for her, became a humiliating one for me. I had asked out an attractive female comic, who turned me down politely by telling me she was gay. That kind of rejection is always easier on the ego unless you think that she turned gay the minute you asked her out, which I didn't. I had a good set that night, so there was no reason to feel that inadequate.

A few nights later, I entered my large, two bedroom apartment, which I shared with one of the "haves"—Brant Von Hoffman. Brant had left the door open to his room, not expecting me to come back between shows. Moaning loudly, with such pleasure it blocked out the self-mocking laughter in my head, was the female comic who turned me down by saying she was gay! Obviously, she was lying and didn't know Brant and I were roommates, or maybe she didn't care, or Brant was such a manly-man he turned her straight... Or worse yet, my asking her out (despite my great set in which I really killed) had indeed

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turned her gay and Brant in one evening had quickly turned her straight again.

One other experience I remember distinctly was a double date along with a comic buddy whose name I can't remember distinctly (most likely he was a singer who was mildly funny). We were bringing the girls back to my apartment for a special fish dinner, complete with a lobster. I have no idea how we had gotten the lobster. I'm sure whatever exchange took place, it wasn't a monetary one. Being a bachelor and according to the male rules, pots, pans and extra silverware were luxuries that had to be washed every once in a while. Larry David only had one spoon, one fork, one cup, one plate, one bowl, etc. Eating at his place was done in shifts. So, in order to make this feast we needed bachelor-unfriendly utensils.

Without money, there was only one place to get what we needed and that was the Improv. Chris Albrecht told us to take whatever we needed, just do it without the homicidal chef seeing. So late one night, after the chef had left, we took silverware and several large pots, not to mention a few round loaves of black bread. Amongst comedy clubs, the Improv had the best bread. It had a very thick outside crust and a soft solid inside that seemed to stay fresh for years. If you scooped it out, you could use it as a bank or a rat could use it as a bomb shelter.

The next night, the girls came over. My date, of course, was the shy one—the one that entered slowly, looking for an escape route. My friend's date, on the other hand, was looking for floor space. At first, we all sat in the living room, drinking beer. Wine was a decade away from being included in the comic's pallet—except for Ed Bluestone who waited to go on stage holding a goblet of Chardonnay. My pal took his date into my kitchenette, which was the size of a batter's box, to prepare the food, while I sat in the living room trying to think about what I could say to keep my date from running out.

I started to smell the food, which meant that there was a chance that I'd be able to use all four borrowed plates. And we had even gotten to the point where my date started to fill in the other half (okay, tenth) of the conversation. My pal and his girl were in still in the kitchenette, but by the sound of my creaking tiles and the kicking of cabinets his date had found almost enough floor space. Bothered by the noise in the

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kitchen, my date started talking more, faster and louder. Just as I was about to offer her a cleaner glass for her beer, the lights went out in the building. I couldn't see her, she couldn't see me and before she could scream, we heard loud banging of pots, pans and utensils, fish crashing, and shouts of either the greatest orgasm registered within ear shot of a comic, or two people and a lobster in pain. At that moment, the lights came on.

My date and I had circumvented my furniture and hopped our way to the kitchenette. On the floor with pots, pans, bouillabaisse and a dying lobster on top of them, were my friend and his date. Unconcerned about etiquette or the mixing of courses, they were determined to finish their own course. It was exactly like the beach scene in *From Here to Eternity*, only without the ocean, sand, the sun or swim suits; and here, the lovers weren't bathed in a romantic wave, they were littered with a smörgåsbord of fish, round bread and dented pots. With the lights on and only a few feet from the door, my date didn't wait to say, "Goodbye," "Thanks for the beer," or "Let's cover our friends with a blanket and still cook the lobster." She ran out the door and down the stairs, preferring not to wait for the elevator, its doors already opening. I left my friends, went into my room, closed and locked my door and ate a stale slice of pizza that I'd left on my night stand the day before, because as was my custom, I'd written a joke on the bottom of it.

My tragic love life has had its funny moments, but there were none funnier than Larry David's. The mishaps on *Curb Your Enthusiasm* and the neurosis rich *Seinfeld* are, for the most part, brilliant exaggerations of Larry David's life, or the thoughts that go on inside his cataclysmic mind. If Larry David had a date, it would become a major event of neurotic proportions, much like George Costanza on *Seinfeld*. He'd worry about how long ago he shaved, what t-shirt to wear, how wrinkled it was in case he had to take his shirt off, whether to tuck it in or leave it out, and all that, after deciding which jeans looked like date jeans. But his biggest concern was, and I'll use his exact words: "John, I didn't make yet. What happens if I have to make when I'm with her?"

In one of his *Seinfeld* episodes, George talks about being in bed with a girl and having to go to the bathroom—number 2. According to

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LD it actually happened to him, and the real problem was that it was a studio apartment and the bathroom was right next to the bed. Of course, LD didn't want the woman to hear anything, so he made up some excuse that he had to get something or other out of his pants and ran out of her apartment and never returned.

At one point, Larry was dating a girl for six months or so and was going to actually take her out to dinner, not at the club, but at a grown-up restaurant with pull out chairs, for her birthday. When he got to the restaurant, he feigned going to the men's room, took the waiter aside and gave him a two-for-one coupon and told the guy not to mention it when he brought the check. Well, the dinner went fine, other than the usual LD changing his mind on what to order several times, debating whether it was healthy or not, finally ordering and feeling guilty about it like he had broken an oath to a sacred dietician on his death bed. When his meal arrived he then became envious of what she was eating and complained that he should have ordered what she did the whole time he was eating everything on his plate. The meal, plus some additional self-consciousness about his eating form in a restaurant at night, must have stretched out longer than expected. LD signaled for the bill and a few minutes later a different waiter (because of shift change) presented Larry with the bill, and wanting to get a tip for the full price, not only specifically mentioned—but pointed out the two-for-one coupon. She was furious, left the restaurant and, of course, broke up with Larry.

It was a warm summer day and the girl Larry had a date with must have been very special, because LD put on his best pants, most likely his newest, or at least his cleanest jeans. He even wore shoes. Yes, shoes, not his treasured but worn-out black Chuck Taylor Converse All-Stars. The plan was for Larry to meet the girl in Central Park. LD, not wanting to give the woman any additional excuses to find him unacceptable arrived at their meeting spot very early. As he was sitting down on the park bench, he noticed something was different. What was it? His clothes looked fine, almost wrinkle-free. His hair was a loose afro and there wasn't even a breeze so there couldn't have been much wind damage done to it. And then it hit him. It was undeniable and way too familiar—the sweet fragrant smell of dog shit. He looked at his

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shoes—there was nothing on their soles. He sniffed some more as his nostrils closed in on the odor. It was all around him, but not in view. Yet there was nothing on the ground. And then it hit him harder than a Larry Holmes straight jab to the jaw. He was sitting in dog shit! Some dog didn't let nature take its normal course. Instead the beast jumped up onto the bench in that defining moment. Could it possibly have known Larry was coming? Maybe it was part of some citywide canine plot against him. There was no time to debate the neurotic possibilities, because LD had to either change his pants or somehow get them cleaned. He was too far from home to change and since no one had cell phones back then, it was too late to call her.

LD did the noble if not slightly insane thing. He ran to the closest place where there was running water, which happened to be Tavern on the Green. Now this was the seventies, the peak of the Tavern's popularity. He moved quickly, as not to arouse too many nostrils and made it to the men's room, which, luckily at the time, seemed empty. He took off his pants and standing in his underwear, started to wash them in the sink—a sink that sat in the men's room of the exclusive and swank Tavern on the Green! While he scrubbed the dog shit (not even thinking about how he was going to dry them), security guards who'd called the police exploded through the door. Before his date had even started, he was about to be arrested for indecent exposure. Somehow LD, who could out excuse just about anyone, talked his way out of being booked or even taken down to the precinct—but he did manage to stand up his date. Had he been standing up while waiting for his date, his whole future might have been different. Well, at least that night he wouldn't have been standing at the Improv bar telling me the story.

Years later, when I was living in L.A., and actually married at the time, Larry was single and living in Laurel Canyon. I think we were in our mid to late thirties. He called and asked me to come over to his house because he had something incredible to tell me. Well, when I got there, Larry's anxiety was not his normal everyday get-up-in-the-morning-and-hate-everything-about-myself panic. No, this was definitely heightened. His face had a washed-out pallor like a vampire

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who drank someone coming out of Starbucks and couldn't sleep from the caffeine. I figured either Larry had just read something about a new fatal disease and imagined he had contracted it and was about to die or it was a woman, which of course it was.

The night before, LD had gone to the movies and while at the refreshment stand fell head-over-sneakers for the popcorn girl. He kept saying, "John, I think I'm in love with the popcorn girl. And I think she might like me. I made her laugh and she gave me more popcorn. What should I do? I think she's in her twenties, is that too young?"

We decided that being a comic automatically took a few years off your appearance and a decade or more off your rate of maturity. So the fact that she was old enough to legally hold a job meant she was old enough to date a thirty-something comedian.

In our emotional life, there are people years and there are comic years. Psychologically, we're half-life regressive. For every decade a regular person matures, we mature five, until at some point we're physically old enough to either actually experience a partial life or just blame it on dementia.

Since LD did not ask the popcorn girl what her name was, or where she lived, and I knew Larry would never be able to just walk up to a strange woman, he'd have to approach her armed with his best weapon - one that didn't require his standing before her stammering. It was far mightier than a sword or even a cocktail in his hand—the weapon was the written word. As previously mentioned, comics, especially Larry and I, were scared adolescents around a woman we fancied. If either of us were a Governor and a very pretty girl were in the electric chair and we could save her life, we'd be too insecure to pardon her, thinking she'd rather get toasted than talk to us.

He read the letter to me, and of course it was very funny. One line stood out. Larry had written, "If you go out with me, I'm prepared to give up meat for you."

He finished the letter and we decided to go to the movie theater that night so LD could hand-deliver it. LD had a brown Fiat (he purchased it when he worked on the TV show "Fridays") whose first engine he'd blown up because he'd forgotten to put oil in it since the day he bought it. So we drove there, parked nearby, walked into the theater and Larry

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asked for the popcorn girl. We were taken to a lanky guy, in his early twenties, with acne splattered across his cheeks like crumbs left on a comic's chair, wearing the exaggerated expression of a Broadway star belting out the lyrics, "I'm younger and better looking than both of you."

Larry feigned confidence that unfortunately toppled out of at his mouth and he stammered, "Uh... I'm looking for the popcorn girl."

"What popcorn girl?" the kid said, like the authority in his fiefdom was absolute.

"The one who was working here last night," Larry, trying to cover his disappointment, spoke like he had no authority anywhere on the planet.

"She's off tonight," he quickly cranked out, warning the universe the schedule he made was never ever to be broken.

Before His Honor could dismiss us, LD squeezed in, "Can you give her this?" Not giving the Sheriff of Nottingham the time to say no, Larry handed the guy the envelope.

The multiplex mogul, no longer feeling threatened by us thirty-something, alfalfa males, actually smiled nicely at us and said, "Sure, I'll give it to her when she comes in tomorrow."

LD and I turned and walked back to his car, discussing how long he should wait for a reply before knowing whether he'd been rejected or not.

We circled the block and were about to go home, when I thought I saw the guy open up the letter. I told LD, and Larry, never being one to back down from the opportunity to confront his own embarrassment, decided to go back and find out.

When we approached the ticket booth, the guy was indeed reading the letter, not just to himself, but to three or four other members of the acne brother and sisterhood.

LD walked up to the guy and asked as impolitely and impotently as he could, "Are you reading my note?"

The kid smiled and said, "Yes," after which he and his crew of pimple people began laughing.

"That was personal... That wasn't to you... That was personal."

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“I got permission,” he said, like he was shoving a dirty newspaper in a dog’s face.

“From the popcorn girl?” LD asked more surprised than curious.

The guy shot back. “Yeah, she’s my girlfriend.”

“She’s your girlfriend!” LD repeated like bad Mexican food that hung onto your esophagus, dangling awhile, before it did a nosedive into your gut.

Their laughter was Miracle Grow for pimples, as thousands of pink mounds leaned toward us cackling. LD didn’t have his usual temper tantrum. No, this time he didn’t have a stage to walk off of, or a bum to fight to the death over a tuna sandwich. He just shouted from the top, bottom and middle of his lungs. “You shouldn’t read other people’s letters!” as he steamed toward the car. When we were driving away, I saw the letter being passed around, the ticket booth bursting with knives of laughter, looking at us until LD and his humiliation passed out of sight.

Author's Bio

John originally started his decent into helplessness as a standup comic before turning to writing because he needed another way to express his depression. He wrote jokes for the likes of Rodney Dangerfield, Johnny Carson, David Letterman, Gabe Kaplan, Elayne Boozler, Billy Crystal, and Joe Piscopo before joining the writing staffs of "Saturday Night Live," "The Tonight Show," and "Politically Incorrect." He was the head writer for critically acclaimed D.C. Follies and has written for sitcoms so bad, to this day, he's too embarrassed to cash the checks. He was, however, the supervising producer of the ACE Award winning "Joe Piscopo Special" on *HBO* and also produced what the competing networks, said was the best special ever done about standup comedy, "Comedy Club Super Stars" on *ABC*.

In recent years John wrote and directed, "The Last Request," a feature film starring Danny Aiello and T.R.Knight, due in the theaters sometime before his next reincarnation. John considers himself very sexy for a writer/standup comic; he wears no underwear under his underwear. He currently lives with his dog and cat in New Jersey, but soon plans on moving out of the kennel.

John DeBellis' **STAND-UP GUYS: A Generation of Laughs** is a comic's memoir that puts the reader on and off stage with a unique group of young comedians: Larry David, Richard Lewis, Richard Belzer, Bill Maher, Gilbert Gottfried, Elayne Boosler, Rita Rudner, Larry Miller, Joe Piscopo, Robert Wuhl, Paul Reiser, Jerry Seinfeld and several of the most neurotic, lovable characters who survived and thrived due to talent, passion, and, most importantly, camaraderie. It's a memoir rich in humor, pathos, and insight.

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