



John has accomplished more than he ever thought possible from a child that was the product of very sloppy oral sex. He worked several years as a stand-up comic before realizing that he wasn't losing his hearing, just the audience. In fact, the only thing he could hear was his self esteem drop. In order to afford therapy, where he was told that being a man was just a phase he was going through, he started writing for stand-up comics such as Rodney Dangerfield, Johnny Carson, Joan Rivers, David Letterman, Gabe Kaplan, Elaine Boozler, Billy Crystal, Joe Piscopo, and Jenny Jones, before joining the writing staffs of "Saturday Night Live," "The Tonight Show," "Politically Incorrect," and sitcoms so bad, to this day, he's been too embarrassed to cash the checks. John has recently written and directed *The Last Request*, a feature film starring Danny Aiello and T.R. Knight due in the theaters, he hopes, sometime before one of his suicide attempts work, or at least a note can be successfully run through spell check. John insists that for a comedy writer he is very sexy — he wears no underwear under his underwear.

“MEMOIRS OF A GAGSTER”

Stand-up Guys: A Made Comic

So how and when did I become a stand-up? It was 1976. I was in my early 20s, my bald spot not yet a reflection in someone's eye. Up until then, I had done all the things comics do to prepare themselves for the “life.” I had a childhood filled with pain and disappointment.

I had just returned home from school in Boston when a friend, whose name I don't remember (either because my memory is faltering, he was more of an acquaintance, or I'm making up this part of the story), had set me up with a blind date.

She was actually very attractive, if you're the type who used X-rays as pin-ups. To make a long story seem like it's being shortened, she suggested that we go to the Improvisation, since she only lived a few blocks away... in Hell's Kitchen.

Back then those streets weren't just dangerous, but tricky to walk on. There was so much dog doo that during rush hour it looked like a hopscotch convention. And the second it turned dark the hookers would be on every corner of Ninth Avenue, networking — handing out their business

cards — little square packets that looked like foil covered raviolis.

Now if you're reading this and you're an out-of-towner who frequented Hell's Kitchen to indulge in a little oral commerce, I hope you're either mature enough, have a shrink's number handy, or are now wearing make-up yourself. You see, the full breasted girls in hot pants and short skirts were, well, not girls (by at least six inches). They were transvestites. They carried the only concealed weapon that neo-conservatives would like us heathens in New York to require a license for — a penis.

After squirming through the thin entrance, its walls covered with black and white photos of comedy and show business greats performing on the Improv's stage, we were in the showroom, a dark cavernous place, so filled with smoke that roaches died of lung cancer. In fact, because of the thick smoke every seat was considered a structurally impaired view.

The club squeezed in about three hundred people without breaking too many ribs or leaving too many of the “bridge and tunnel”

girl's fake eyelashes stuck to the walls. No two chairs were alike, and every corner of every table was at a different height built up from match books piled under their wobbly legs to steady them. The tables were so close, if you were very short or a child, and a huge laugh shook the room, you could get your head chopped off.

The only wall free of layers of black oily paint, gum, and torn sections of wall-paper, was the now famous exposed red brick wall behind the stage, where the Improvisation sign rose above most of the comics' heads (we're a short breed; the average height of a comic is considered kneeling). That wall magically stayed free of smoke discoloration, alcohol splatter, and even comics' lost hair follicles.

The stage wasn't much bigger than an airplane's flotation device, and looked and often smelled like it was made from a pirate ship's wreckage covered with a hundred years of bluefish chum. It rested in the left corner of the room, near the emergency exit, which comics opened to avoid walking through hostile crowds, Budd Friedman's glare, and lung cancer. Not dog crap which they often stepped on, and then instinctively ran back on stage to use the smelly prop to get a “clever” laugh (I'm sure there's a comic out there saying, “That was my bit”).

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ONLY LIVED A FEW BLOCKS AWAY... IN HELL'S KITCHEN...**

**MY AUDITION NUMBER WAS HANDED TO ME BY AN ITALIAN
HANNIBAL LECTER, WHOSE CHAINS WERE THICK AND MADE OF
GOLD BRIGHT ENOUGH TO GIVE YOU SUNBURN...**

Leaning against the outside wall was a piano, that was so old 10 of Django Reinhardt's fingerprints were still on it, and was so out of tune it sounded like it was strung with Bob Dylan's vocal chords.

That night behind a microphone (recently refitted to accept the power of electricity), worked a young fiery Elaine Boozler, the perpetually insane Andy Kaufman, an insecure nervous Larry David in his green army coat, and some brilliant comics you may not have heard of like Ed Bluestone, whose huge eyes widened with every image-filled one liner; Larry Ragland, a black comic who did such a good Sammy Davis impression that one of his eyes actually looked like glass; and Bob Shaw, whose piece about a guy accidentally taking pills and distorting the way he spoke, was the funniest five minutes I've ever heard to this day (even funnier than the first five times I had sex — which in reality lasted six and a half minutes — if you include foreplay and apologies).

After "over" paying for several "over" priced drinks my date got so drunk she thought the waitress was her personal trainer and asked for yoga instructions. I felt inspired and was as funny as I'd ever been, so funny that the waitress told me the date of the next audition for the Improv and wasn't lying! It was at that moment, I realized that I could incorporate my future plans of avoiding responsibility and be what I was destined to be — a stand-up comic!

My audition number was handed to me by an Italian Hannibal Lecter, whose chains were thick and made of gold bright enough to give you sunburn (maybe that's how he got his perpetual tan) and strung around his vein popping neck. His presence was so intimidating I had forgotten that I'd been sitting six hours on a filthy sidewalk where rats could be seen wiping their feet off before entering a building.

Now I only had three or four hours left to eat, to get more nervous, and to memorize my act which consisted of jokes I had written the day before, and painstakingly honed to perfection while waiting in line. I used a small portion of that time getting to know my fellow auditioners — a very insecure bunch. I think what kept them from committing suicide was the fear of being seen naked in front of a mortician, either that or someone reading their suicide note and not laughing — or laughing and stealing the joke.

Now, the only thing more annoying than an always on comic is a young comic. They are like giant Jehovah's Witnesses' mosquitoes. When I was a young comic, believe it or not, I started therapy. After a year, I got in touch with my inner child and all I heard was, "Do you think this is funny?" Comics are essentially children without adult supervision. Even a long-time professional comic is still as childish as the day he or she started. A pro-life advocate would not consider the stand-up comic's inner child mature enough to be considered a fetus.

I don't remember who the comic was before me, or seeing him get *the dreaded light* from the M.C. that signaled his time was up, or even seeing him leave the stage alive. I just remember this coal black room, with flashes of color from peoples' clothes, an unusual amount of coughing, then hearing my name being called (which I'm still waiting to hear during sex by anyone — even an unexpected unknowing phone caller, even if they only left it on my answer machine) and then being drawn to this bright white light surrounding the stage, like I died and was going through this tunnel to stardom. Little did I know that the "star" in stardom meant starvation.

Blinded by a spotlight (that I'm sure was bought used from a defunct prison, where no one ever escaped), I looked into blackness barely picking out tables filled with the enemy's daring faces. I had crossed the threshold into comic's hell — the first time on stage before a paying audience, at the famous Improvisation, and at the mercy of my jokes — jokes whose staying power hadn't even made the transition from napkin to real paper.

I remember that my first line got a laugh and then receiving a couple others before walking off to the customary applause and feeling of nausea. This is one of those times in life when the action doesn't merit the response (like putting on a condom after you lose your erection). The nausea quickly disappeared and I felt great, like I had just had sex with a woman, one whose face wasn't the original design for the gas mask.

I had a taste of the "life" and there was no turning back. Not only had I been bitten by the stand-up bug, I was infected, my body was ravaged by future setups, punch lines, toppers, savers, and, of course, excuses. I am a stand-up comic — hear me say, "I killed!" even when I didn't.

I didn't pass the auditions that night, but that didn't deter me (or prevent me from writing the first draft of a suicide note just in case I never passed, or passed and was never able to write another joke again). I had heard that the club owners wanted to see you a few times before making you a regular because it usually took several auditions to lower the young comic's self-esteem far enough so he'd be completely subservient to the sadistic whims of the all powerful M.C. Which brings us to the night I became a "made" comic and deemed a regular at Catch A Rising Star.

At the time, the best and most famous M.C. in New York was Richard Belzer, who thrived on verbally assaulting the audience, and putting fear into the comic's blinking eyes, making us feel inferior to even mimes. I was on my way to the bar, when "The Belz" himself, who was not emceeding that night, but still dressed completely in black (always ready to attend the funeral of a young comic, I imagined), turned to me and said, "Hey, kid you want to buy a joke." I didn't have a joke to sell, nor did I want to chance making an unfunny response to "The Belz," so I gave him what all comics want, a "laugh," then quickly turned to the bartender.

I had escaped with my comic life, which "The Belz," with his razor sharp wit could destroy in less time than it takes the M.C. to give you the *dreaded light* (*you're time is up, get the fuck off!*). How many stand-up comics does it take to screw in a light bulb? One, but he'll only change it if it's the light to get the comic before him offstage.

About an hour later, I went on stage, stumbled through my graded on a severe curve "A" material, and got a few good laughs from the bloodthirsty audience. The Monday night audition crowd was a hostile bunch mostly from Jersey and

the other Boroughs. The men dressed to match the hair on their chest, and were loud, rude, and so drunk they lacked the coordination to clap — and a few were not yet used to the freedom of having their handcuffs removed. The women’s clothes shined like they were plugged in, and their perfume was invasive if not toxic, and they didn’t applaud much because they had to use their hands to hold up their heads which were weighted down from so much make-up. If members of this group were in ancient Rome, they would have starved the lions so the beasts would find the skinny Christians appetizing.

That night, my biggest laugh came on this joke: I asked my father if I did certain sexual things by myself would I go blind? And he said, “Yes, because if I catch you I’ll poke your eyes out.” It wasn’t exactly Shakespeare, but who cares, he’s dead and I’m alive (at least at this writing).

As I was walked offstage and into the bar, Bob Shaw, the M.C., the comic with the funniest five minute piece ever, caught up to me and said these words, “John, you should be doing this for a living” (not the exact words my ex-wife has repeated many times). I didn’t know what to say, but this wasn’t the time to do the stand-up standby and laugh. Slowly, words forced themselves out of my dry mouth. “Did I pass?” Bob smiled and said, “Yes, come in tomorrow night.” Before I could get out the first of a thousand “thank yous,” the next act left the stage. Bob quickly turned and ran into the showroom, his ponytail smacking me in the face, an unintentional symbolic gesture, preparing me for the first year of stand-up comedy.

The next night was a rainy comparatively quiet Tuesday at Catch, only a few comics were threatened by the mob. Mobster’s believe that when you cry the whole world cries with you, and when you laugh the whole world laughs with you, unless it’s a joke that they don’t think is funny, then if you laugh the whole world is going to cry for you. At around 10:30, that’s when the weekday shows started back then, I sheepishly walked into the club, the newest regular.

Unlike the Improvisation that was designed like a rundown Bronx shooting

gallery, the bar at Catch was bright, and brothel gaudy. On one side there was a long green wall covered with headshots of comedians and singers (most of the headshots were women singers who would rather cut off their heads than date me). A long black bar ran along the other side like an evil barrier reef waiting to cut the skinny stage legs off of a new comic who’d dare to ask for cab-fare.

For some reason, which could have been trauma, I don’t remember if I had gone on stage my first night as a regular at Catch A Rising Star. I just remember comics, Elaine Boozler, who was the M.C. that night, Larry David, David Cey, Glenn Super, and a few whose names and faces I can’t remember, all being very friendly. I was to find out later that it usually took a while for new comics to be welcomed into the comedy crevice (where only the most immature minds slip through).

I hardly spoke that night, but I hadn’t laughed so hard since I heard about my Uncle Pauley pretending he was deaf and having his Miranda rights read to him in sign language, or seeing the video tape of my cousin Anthony singing “The Girl From Ipanema” in the gas chamber. There’s a good chance those two incidents were just family folklore. But I did have an uncle who lost his research grant for developing a breed of Kangaroos with back pockets, which wasn’t very successful because they kept sitting on their young.

Okay, there’s a good chance I’m kidding about that one, but I felt the need for a laugh here. Money can’t buy you love, but a good laugh can buy you a few moments when you actually feel loved!

Elaine Boozler, who had heard through the comic 4 a.m. grapevine (which grew geometrically with the advent of call waiting) that I had passed auditions, introduced me to the other comics.

Although I was to become close friends (which he will probably even deny on his headstone) with Larry David, my first impression of him was that he was different in a way I couldn’t put my finger on, but if I could, Larry would make sure I wiped my hand clean first. He spoke in a strange rhythm — sort of a cross between Jackie

Mason and Mr. Ed — and he asked questions that were offbeat not so much by their subject matter, but by his unique phrasing and almost childlike directness, which at first hid his remarkable intelligence well.

As I got to know Larry, it was that quiriness, that offbeat perspective of the mundane, that openness about his neuroses and the things that made him uncomfortable (which includes everything in nature or man-made), and Larry’s remarkable ability and unique methods to avoid those uncomfortable things, that allowed us to become good friends, and for him to become such a great success in Hollywood (a place where it’s said, “If at first you don’t succeed, then lower your standards,” which LD never did! I always say if you’re going to sell your soul, don’t go to LA, it’s a buyer’s market. Please don’t get me started on LA. Okay one more. If the Garden of Eden had been in LA, Eve would have taken a second rib from Adam and had it made into implants).

In situations when most men would not only have sold their soul, they would have included the first right of refusal in their next life, Larry’s artistic integrity, his comic soul, would go untouched by the sun-glassed serpents of Hollywood. At this time, I’m proud to say, he could buy all their shrunken souls out of pocket, but I think he’d rather smile all the way to the golf course.

Neither Larry David nor myself ever put our headshot up at Catch or the Improv. Me, I always felt my face was my worst feature. Larry had own his neurotic reasons I’m sure. So we decided to do something different. There’s a famous photo of Mickey Mantle (who was both our idol) and Roger Maris in their batting stances on opposite sides of home plate. Larry and I decided to get our heads superimposed on each of their shoulders. Well, it didn’t work out as we intended. Larry and I got in a huge argument over whose head was going to be on Mickey Mantle’s shoulders. As immature as that sounds, I think we’d still have the same argument today.

Me, Larry, and a very funny comedian, Bobby Kelton (who I was to meet a month or so later), were pretty much inseparable (trying to spell inseparable reminds me of why Larry and Bobby would never let me play Scrabble with them). Bobby always had these small bags forming under his

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SLOWLY, WORDS FORCED THEMSELVES OUT OF MY DRY MOUTH.

“DID I PASS?” BOB SMILED AND SAID, “YES, COME IN TOMORROW NIGHT,”

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eyes, not quite big enough to be considered carry-ons — but today could fit a cell phone. At some point he had the bags removed by a plastic surgeon cousin, and then came into the Improvisation carrying his new de-bagged headshot. So, he proudly put up the new eight by ten glossy. Later when he was doing a set, using all the skills I learned in art school, I took down his headshot and drew the bags under his eyes and put it up again. He could never get a headshot up without me eventually drawing in those bags.

The show at Catch A Rising Star was just about over (on my very first night as a living breathing compulsive obsessive comedy club regular), so Elaine had joined me and my new comic pals at the bar just as Richard Lewis walked in. She introduced me to Richard, who I was shocked to find out, had heard about me from Bob Shaw. Back then if a comic saw an act he or she thought was funny, they spread the good word, instead of today's breed who search for fault in the comic's material, delivery, persona, earth sign, temporal lobes, or the effect their deviated-septums have on global warming. Richard asked me if I wanted to go to the Improvisation to meet the manager slash part owner, Chris Albrecht.

Richard Lewis and I were on our way to Improvisation, which like Catch A Rising Star and eventually The Comic Strip, was about to become an integral part of the best five or six years of my life. I don't know what we talked about, but I realized that I could drive from the fetal position. It was on the first trip across town that it hit me, I was actually going to be a comedian. At that moment I felt like a brand new depressed person.

In the next several months I spent many nights driving Richard from Catch to the Improv and home. Richard was an odd mix. He was compassionate, understanding, and quick to help a young comic, yet his elusiveness gave you the feeling that he was temping for himself. Even as Richard arrived at a place, that very second he gave you the feeling that he was leaving, worse yet, that he had to get out of there before

it exploded. He was almost as naturally funny as he was neurotic, or vice versa.

Unlike most of us skittish comics, Richard had no problem meeting women. He had good looks that at one time would be illegal on comics. He was very funny, had a full head of shiny black hair that obeyed his comb rather than committing suicide like my follicles, and despite his overpowering billboard size neurosis and constant state of panic, he was actually confident around females.

The girls he came into the club with, who definitely didn't see Richard as just a friend, were so beautiful that us comics could never imagine ever being with anything so gorgeous unless we were able to unfold their picture. Freud would roll over on his couch trying to figure out Richard Lewis or fantasizing about his girlfriends.

When Richard and I arrived at the Improv we were immediately greeted by a few rats or possible large dogs scattering across the sidewalk, a hooker recognizing we were comics and deciding not to display her *off-the-rack* rack, and owner and manager of the club, Chris Albrecht (CEO for *HBO*). I almost had to look down at Chris, who was shorter than I imagined, but like me, he towers over midgets, dwarfs, *midget-dwarfs*, Muslims bowing to Mecca, six-footers in wheel chairs and almost anyone lying down. He was younger than me, by a hair that could have fallen off either of our thinning manes, and had a devilish full-teethed smile that broke into an infectious laugh.

An infectious laugh to a comic is the kind of laugh that (even if it's not your jokes that get the laughs) you laugh as if every joke is yours, and your friends laugh as if every joke is theirs so that the laughter spins like a whirlpool, yet no comic realizes that he is not the center of attention. That happened most with my friend and fellow comic Glenn Hirsch, who we called Gleeb, because he worked a gig and the M.C. mistakenly introduced him as Gleeb Hush.

Glenn worked the door at the Improv after he had lost his job at Barney's, because he went into a dressing booth, sat down on a bench, pulled his pants down,

and read a newspaper, so people would pass by thinking he was answering nature's second call.

One night Chris foolishly left myself, Glenn, and Joe Piscopo in charge of the Improv which is the equivalent of leaving *Fox News* to tell us the news. We proceeded to split couples up and sit them on different sides of the room, put people at tables without chairs, and best of all, we put a table on stage and sat a couple behind Piscopo while he was performing. Typical New Yorkers, the couple watched the show and only got upset because sitting on stage made the service slower.

What we did when we ran the show was nothing compared to the business that Andy Kaufman lost manning the Improv's phones. People would call up for reservations and Andy, using different accents, would transfer them from one of his characters to another until the people hung up in frustration. He reminded me of an old friend who had such a split personality that he used to call himself up on the 900 sex lines.

Without a doubt Andy Kaufman had the most unusual and the funniest act I've ever seen. I visited his grave this year, and much like himself, his tombstone was modest. But his brilliance was immortal, tugging at my gut from beyond. With moist eyes I smiled and then I laughed remembering the first time I'd seen him perform when I was a paying customer (which meant I still had friends I could borrow from. Which is a big deal. I went to a séance once and the only people who showed up were people I owed money to). I didn't know what to make of Andy's act until suddenly without reason he made me laugh until tears dropped from my eyes onto my check, smearing the bill I couldn't afford. Now he was doing it to me again, this time the tears fell onto his grave, and I was glad I didn't run out on that check that night, in fact I would have easily paid double (which might have prevented my date from running out on her check).

At first glance, Chris made me feel immediately at home, and fortunately not my home, so I felt like he accepted me for the disappointment I was. He took Richard and I to the bar for a free drink (I don't think any comic ever paid for a drink at the clubs or left a tip). Chris, on Richard's word, immediately made me an Improv regular and told me to come in every night. To me it was that night that

**ONE NIGHT CHRIS FOOLISHLY LEFT MYSELF, GLENN, AND JOE PISCOPO
IN CHARGE OF THE IMPROV WHICH IS THE EQUIVALENT OF LEAVING
FOX NEWS TO TELL US THE NEWS...**

marked the official beginning of my career as a real life stand-up comic, and my father's high blood pressure!

The next night I decided to go to the Improv first. I met many of the same comedians and several new ones whose names I mixed up countless times over that first year at the clubs. To begin with, I don't have the greatest memory. In fact, my very first memory was of me forgetting something. And I'm even worse with faces. When I look in the mirror my first thought always is, "Where have I seen that guy before?"

Most of the comics sat in torn imitation vinyl booths that ran along side windows which didn't need shades to block out the light, but like the booths needed tape to keep from falling apart.

If you go to a night club and you want to find the comic when he isn't performing, look for the darkest area of the bar or back stage, and if he's not there, then look for the "free" food. And if the "free" food is in the darkest area, then you know the club owner was probably a former comic, or a roach, or the food's odor hasn't caught up to its looks yet.

Comics, like vampires, are by nature nocturnal, wear lots of black, and avoid mirrors, and see a coffin in their near future, but unlike vampires, spend much of their waking hours in diners. You see, if a comic can't eat for free, then they will eat at the place where the food should be free, or close to it.

We had such a place, it was called Poachers, and it served breakfast until closing at 6 p.m. For ninety-nine cents, and the ability to suspend your sense of taste, we got two eggs, toast, bacon, and orange juice made from unconcentrate. You could tell it was orange juice from the color not the flavor. Oh and of course they served a bottomless cup of coffee made from quicksand (and when you swallowed the thick java it tried to take you down with it).

Believe it or not, what I'm about to say is absolutely true. The only kind of eggs they didn't make at Poachers was poached eggs! At ninety-nine cents you don't ask questions.

There is however another story, that might be folklore, about a comic sending back his ninety-nine cent eggs and then being physically thrown out of the eatery, or I should say, undigestery. Poacher's was a place that the board of health was terrified to enter, but we certainly weren't afraid. We got our ninety-nine cents worth,

IT WAS HEAVYWEIGHTS LIKE ELAINE BOOZLER, RICHARD LEWIS, RICHARD BELZER, AND BOB SHAW, PLUS STARS LIKE ROBERT KLEIN, DAVID BRENNER, AND RODNEY DANGERFIELD, WHO TOLD US TO HANG OUT EVERY NIGHT AND TO GO ON NO MATTER HOW LATE, OR HOW BAD THE CROWD WAS...

refilling our coffee cups, and talking over one another until the java destroyed the walls of our ulcers.

When I stepped into the Improv that first night as a regular, I instinctively searched for a dark corner, which in the Improv's case was all the corners, but before I could find a place to hide, I was greeted by a few fellow comics who held down some springs, slid over, and asked me to join them in a booth.

The very same booth I sat in about four months later with Kitty Bruce, Lenny Bruce's daughter, who at the time was having problems with her boyfriend and star of "Chico and the Man," Freddie Prinze. A few minutes into our conversation (which I don't think was as dull as usual, because Kitty was able to keep one eye open the whole time, even when she was snoring), she somehow saw that Freddie was about to enter the club. It was the dead of winter and a pile of the comedians' ratty coats which wouldn't have kept anyone warm if they were on fire, sat next to Kitty. She didn't want to speak to Freddie, so she quickly buried herself under the heavy odor-proud garments.

Now, I'm a new comic, a species that the amoeba evolved from, and I've never met Freddie, but for some reason, he decided to sit across from me and start a conversation.

Here I am with one of the biggest stars in comedy, and instead of enjoying every minute and trying to desperately extend the conversation to include myself, so by its end I will be the new executive producer of "Chico and the Man," I'm trying to cut the conversation short, like a disinterested blind date, so Kitty doesn't suffocate. I'm also worrying that if this mega star finds out I'm hiding his girlfriend, my career is over — no more performing to drunks at 3 a.m.

The coats did move a little, but Freddie must have assumed it was just the Improv roaches, who were large enough to be used as doorstops. So Freddie, being a nice guy kept talking, trying even harder to put me at ease and to be entertaining, while Kitty

struggled to keep still, and to keep her lungs from filling with stale air, lint, and asbestos, either from the coats lining or the booth's stuffing. Finally, Elaine Boozler who was the M.C. that night, called Freddie over to ask if he wanted to do a set. When Freddie got up and walked into the room to see what kind of crowd it was, Kitty tried to dig herself out of the mountain of coats before they disintegrated. While I followed Freddy into the showroom, hanging onto him like a shrinking man's shadow, Elaine helped Kitty escape, thus saving my career which after seeing how it turned out, I'm sure she has some regrets.

Elaine was the first comic I ever sold a joke to, which was a big ego boost because she was a very funny writer herself and she didn't have to correct my writing for spelling mistakes. I remember the joke. "You know you're getting fat, when you step on your dog's tail and he dies." I know Elaine wouldn't mind me telling you that, she was always fast to praise and give credit.

It was heavyweights like Elaine Boozler, Richard Lewis, Richard Belzer, and Bob Shaw, plus stars like Robert Klein, David Brenner, and Rodney Dangerfield, who told us to hang out every night and to go on no matter how late, or how bad the crowd was, or even if there were only two people in the audience and one person was performing the Heimlich maneuver on the other. But most importantly they showed us that there was enough room for all of us, and that helping each other didn't make us less selfish (which is every comic's birthright), it made us better comics, would make the journey ahead more fun, would improve the art form, and give us a real reason to stay up late. They built the groundwork for the amazing camaraderie that was to follow in the next several years.

***John DeBellis continues his
"Memoirs of a Gagster"
in the next issue of PERFECT 10.***