

Final Transcription: Janet Weintraub interview 11/25

KK: Hello, I'm Kathleen Kaan

VC: And I'm Vanessa Corwin

KK: We have Janet Weintraub

Janet: So, what are we going to talk about?

VC: So let's talk about you, Janet. Janet is a stand up comedian and at any time that's not an easy career path, much less during the time of Covid. But let's start from the very beginning. What made you say to yourself, I want to do standup?

Janet: Okay well Janet's husband took an unexpected sudden hike after 42 years and I used to make him laugh so I guess I needed to still make people laugh. I went to this open house at the Gotham about a standup comedy course and I signed up and I took a course. I think it was a six week course and we worked on material, and I learned it had to be about me. Basically, I was dating online and that gave me a lot of material and that night, the last week we go in front of a live studio audience and it was a large studio audience. Mostly friends and family I think, but they were not unforgiving and I remember knowing I was going up soon so I went to the bathroom and got stoned. And then I came up and to my surprise they liked me. They really loved me. I sound like Sally Field! They loved me and I got two ovations, just ask Vanessa. Even the MC was talking about me and I guess I took them by surprise.

VC: Yes, I was there and she killed.

KK: I saw some of your stand up on YouTube. I know what just happened-- you said your husband left you after 40 years-- but you must have had this desire deep down in you. You just don't wake up and say "I'm a comic."

Janet: Well, I was doing acting. I love comedy but I really never thought of standup until one summer Gary and I were in Florida and I went to this open mic, but again, I had been drinking and I was stoned, and I forgot what I was going to say next or if I repeated anything. It wasn't my finest performance. But Gary was there and he kept telling me, so Gary was really the star of that show. I don't know, I don't know. It just seemed like the thing to do, I don't know why.

KK: It sounds to me like you do more ad libbing, or do you write some of the sketches and know kind of a foundation of what you're going to do before you go on?

Janet: Well, the last time I went on they called me on a Sunday night I wasn't even dressed. They needed somebody to fill in. I went up and I knew how I was going to start and I figured I would wing it from there. And I wish I knew I was going to be that funny I would have had somebody tape it. But I just started. I said "Hi, I am, and in fact, since

my husband left me, stoned. I'm stoned all the time, I'm really a pothead. I'm stoned so much that I don't even know when I'm stoned anymore. But you know how you know when you're stoned? I knew I was stoned one day when I called my Chinese restaurant for lunch and I ordered lasagna."

VC: So getting back to the Covid issue. How has the time of Covid affected your activities in standup? Obviously you can't go to the clubs.

Janet: There was a club I went to first a while ago, it was on Seventh Avenue and Second. And they had it in the basement, a large room where we all were social distancing and we were wearing masks until we performed. And I performed there twice. Other than that I can go on, the Comic Strip has a zoom show every Wednesday night and I've been to that about three times. And I hate to say it, except for one comedian once, I don't laugh, they're not good. I want them to be good, I want to learn from them, I don't want to be better than them, but I was bored and I couldn't watch the whole thing.

VC Is it not the same without an audience other than your fellow comics? Does that make a difference for you?

Janet: Well you know, it's not a real audience, it's an open mic, it's everybody, and I'll be honest with you. It's a bunch of old farts and I guess I'm in that category too but I don't look it. It's a bunch of old farts saying the same jokes every week so there's not much of an audience. One time I got up there and I didn't have a set prepared and I just said I've been away for awhile and I went back to my roots acting because the business of standup is too hard. And at a good club like the Gotham, to be seen by an agent or a casting director you have to bring eight people to spend \$50.00, they're called "bringers." And I don't have that kind of "bringers." I could go to the Comic Strip basically anytime I want. So I went away from standup because it was too hard and I went back to my roots. I picked a monologue on suicide which I could really relate to and I ended up in a national monologue contest... but that's a long story. I did it first in the class before an agent and a casting director and I did it very organically. It's a monologue by John Patrick Shanley. It starts, but I changed it a little bit, it starts "She ties a bunch of rocks to her feet and jumps into the East River but the water is only 2 feet deep. She stands there for hours thinking the pollution might kill her." So I did it the dark way, the organic way and my teacher loved it. But I saw it on tape and my girlfriend in LA, who is an actress, saw it, and we both decided it was too real. It had to be more thrown away. So I did it that way, the manger and the casting agent both laughed out loud but nobody rushed to sign me. And then I entered this contest and I did it and I didn't even place. But there was a second chance to do it again, so I figured I'll go back to the organic dark way and maybe that will work. So here I am getting myself into suicide mode using all my acting tools and I'm already crying on the train. I get there to find out it's someplace else and I can't get there in time. So now I'm really in suicide mode. I got home. It takes a pint of Haagen-Dazs and a round of vodka to get me back to good shape. And so I say to myself okay, I say to myself, so what did I learn from this experience. And I still haven't figured it out.

VC: When you do you'll have to let us know.

Janet: So what was funny, I was in this divorce group and one night the facilitator said to me "Janet is there anything that makes you happy these days?" I said, well to tell you the truth, when I come home at night, get undressed, take my bra off and scratch, I'm happy, I'm happy.

VC: I think we all are.

Janet: Yeah, even guys can relate to scratching their balls, I guess.

KK: I bet you're hilarious in that divorce group. You must make them laugh.

Janet: Yeah, but I'm not supposed to. I don't know.

VC: So I know at the Gotham, you had an interesting story. There was a famous comic that night that showed up.

Janet: Jerry Seinfeld showed up right after me. Like he couldn't be there before to see my set, not that he would have done anything. He worked for 40 minutes off a notebook. We were his guinea pigs. I stopped liking him when he got married, he wasn't funny anymore, but he became funny and he was very funny that night. But I have to tell you my personality. Vanessa, you know I killed that night.

VC: You did. Absolutely. I was there.

Janet: But instead of walking away feeling good and feeling proud, I forgot my best joke. I left it out and I beat myself all night for forgetting my best joke rather than letting myself see how good I was. You want to hear the joke I forgot?

VC/KK: Yes! Tell us. Sure.

Janet: I'm dating online and it's not easy it's about sex and I've been there, done that. When I was in my twenties I was a real slut. I slept with anybody and everybody but I walked around feeling like shit for it. And I was in therapy. And one time I slept with this gross disgusting guy I went to a session and told my shrink who only wanted to know why I would have sex with someone I was so repulsed by. And I said, well he said I was pretty. And my shrink said Janet you are pretty. So I had sex with her too. That's the joke I forgot and it didn't really happen.

VC: You'll have to put that in the next time you go up somewhere. So let me ask you this. Being a woman comic do male comics accept you?

Janet: Yeah.

VC: As an equal?

Janet: I think they think I'm very funny. I think they think I'm funnier than I think I am. Because right now, I don't really have any new material. And, they're all talking about the Corona virus as part of their set and I don't think it's funny. So I don't have any new material, so I haven't joined them.

VC: So do you have any favorite comedians male or female that you admire?

Janet: I thought George Carlin was wonderful and he died before his time. The way he talked about stuff I just really liked him. I liked Seinfeld early on and I like him again now.

KK: How have they influenced you Janet. Somebody like George Carlin and Seinfeld?

Janet: They haven't. Because it's funny, people tell me I'm funniest when I'm not even trying. Like that night when I had nothing prepared except I just talked about me and they said I was the funniest one there. I don't know what I do, I just talk.

KK: That's because you're unique. Nobody has your style.

Janet: And they like my voice, they like my voice a lot.

VC: What do you think is the hardest obstacle to overcome to be a standup comic?

Janet: Fear of not making them laugh, and that happened to me once. I told a joke and there was dead silence and I left the stage. And later on a bunch of comics came over to me and said, "don't you ever do that. You have five minutes up there and if one joke doesn't work you go on to the next." So I learned that. You just don't let one thing that goes wrong stop you. I guess life is the same.

VC: Indeed it is. Especially during these times you have to just keep moving on, moving on moving ahead.

Janet: Right.

VC: Do you have any kind of advice to people who want to get into stand up?

Janet: Don't! Just get up and have fun. Have fun and try to do things that people can relate to. Be vulnerable, it's a learning experience. You get better the more you do it but you know, it's always nerve-racking and if you don't have nerves before you get up, something is wrong. Your adrenaline adds to the performance. And don't try too hard. I see a lot of people do that and it's annoying.

KK: These are really good tips.

VC: Absolutely.

KK: Are you looking forward to getting back on stage, God help us, when this is over?

Janet: Yes, and hopefully my clothes will fit by then.

VC: Lots of trips to the refrigerator.

Janet: Pandemic poundage is no fun.

VC: If people want to see your work I know you have something on line. Where can they go to see you?

Janet: They can go to YouTube, however, I'd rather have them come to see me in person. Okay, do you want my YouTube.

VC: Just tell them where they can go.

Janet: You would Google my name, which is Janet Weintraub standup, and it will come right up.

VC: Perfect.

Janet: And I like to make people laugh so that will be good.

VC: Janet Weintraub, thank you so much for joining us.

Janet: Well thank you. I hope I lived up to your expectations.

KK: You lived more than up to our expectations. You are terrific and we really appreciate it.

VC: Absolutely.

Janet: Good luck, guys. I think you have a great platform, a great place for people to just be themselves and open up. And I just found out that this is National Guacamole Day, so I will leave you with that information.

VC: Thank you we will have to commemorate this.

KK: Vanessa and I will definitely...

VC: For sure.

Janet: You guys enjoy.

