

# THE COMEDY GAZELLE



**ALI DRAPOS**

# ABOUT THE GAZELLE

When I first moved to Chicago, I was immediately struck by the level of talent in the scene. "Fuck, she's good," I thought as I watched Kristen Toomey supercharge herself with a firm slap of the puss.

## Why haven't I heard of her before?

It's a question I come back to often, and a major problem here. The city's bursting with household-name-level talent, but unless you're in the midst of it, it's easy to miss.

That's why I'm starting The Comedy Gazelle — to bring outsiders into the heart of Chicago comedy, and to showcase this city's unrivaled talent. To keep everyone up-to-date on the scene, and to do it in a fun way. And not just in a one-off article, but all the time.

Each issue will include an exclusive interview, as well as whatever else I can pull together.

Hope you enjoy.

— Jerry

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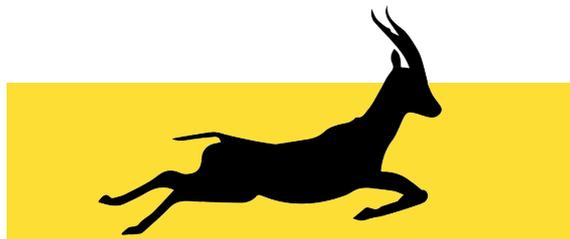
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# INTERVIEW: ALI DRAPOS

*Ali Drapos (@alidrapos) is flat out fun to watch. Her confessional style and unwavering act outs have made her one of the fastest rising stars on Korean YouTube. We chatted about her start in Chicago, off-stage prep, hitting 1B views on TikTok, and more.*

## **You moved here from New York, right?**

So I went to school in Long Island, New York for theatre. Then after I graduated, I lived in New York for about a year and a half just trying to do straight acting. I was like, "I hate it here." Then I came here to do a Second City summer immersion program and was like, "I wanna move here!" So then I just moved.

## **I saw on your bio that you used to tour with Second City.**

Yeah, so that's what I thought I wanted to do when I first moved here. I thought what would be good for me was to be on one of the Second City stages. So I did their Conservatory, I was doing improv and sketch. I worked on a cruise ship for them, then right after that I got hired to be on their touring company. And then I got fired.

## **Why'd you get fired?**

I was very outspoken about what I thought wasn't working and they didn't like that. But that was the best thing that happened to me because it pushed me to do what I always wanted to do, which was stand up.

## **And how did you know you wanted to do stand up?**

I knew I wanted to perform forever. In high school there was this thing you had to do as a senior called Senior Project. You had to pick a topic and study it all year, you had to have a mentor, and that was your big final thing. So when I was 18, I coupled up with a Boston comic who was my mentor and I went to shows in Boston and kind of studied different styles.

## **How did you study? What did that look like?**

Well, in order to bullshit a paper and make it seem academic, I was studying censorship in comedy and how we shouldn't have any. So I would kind of just watch, then have to make it seem like it was academic. Watching it was just so exhilarating. More than anything, I was just so excited to try it. So when I was 18, I did a five minute set at a club, the Comedy Connection, in Providence, Rhode Island. It was the most nervous I've ever been in my entire life. And the happiest moment



Photo by @anfchicago

was doing it. I felt so cool and just liberated. I was like, "I'm famous now!" So ever since then I knew I wanted to do it again, but I got kind of distracted.

## **How'd the set go?**

I feel like that's the best I've ever done, still. I think it's because it was the first time and I couldn't believe I was getting laughs. I was just so worried that I was gonna be silent. The fact that I was getting laughs, I was like, "This is like drugs."

## **How do you think your style's evolved since then?**

I remember doing an act out where I was prank calling these sex hotlines. And it was kind of a big act out. And I'm still doing sex act outs.

## **You seem really comfortable with your act outs. What advice would you give to someone trying to bring more of that out on stage?**

I think if the act out would help drive the point home, or set the scene better, or make the punchline better, then go for it. The best advice that I would give is to commit. Don't ever half do it. Because you're never gonna know if it works unless you really commit to it. I know everybody says that, but it's true. I think what helps is if you genuinely find it funny, you're gonna find it easier to commit to. And if you don't hear

laughter, go home and laugh about it later. Cause it's funny that you just did a whole tap dance on stage and nobody laughed. It honestly is funny.

**That's a really good perspective. I feel like I'm very quick to give up on an act out that doesn't work.**

I've been there when I'm like, "I'm not gonna do that again." Then a couple days later I'm like, "I gotta try it again!" So it's knowing that it might not hit the first time. And also making sure the premise is clear enough before you go into the act out. Cause sometimes it's not that the act out isn't funny, it's that people don't understand what it is you're doing. So if the premise is super clear, you're gonna feel safer to go for your physical stuff.

**Do you have anything you do to clarify the premise?**

I think point of view really helps. If you're telling a story from your point of view, describe how you're feeling and what happened in that moment leading up to what you're about to act out. Take the time to set the scene of how you felt in that moment and really describe that before the act out. So I think really making sure your point of view is clear and I think the present tense vocabulary helps — does that make any sense or do I sound like an asshole?

**No, I totally know what you're talking about.**

Make sure you write that I said, "Do I sound like an asshole?"

**You said you've been there before when an act out isn't working. How do you power through stuff like that?**

I think it's having the perspective that you are not the most important person in the world in this moment. And if it's not going well, just take a second to step outside of yourself and see yourself and know that what you're doing right now is actually really cool and a lot of people would love to have the balls to do what you're doing. You're going for it, and honestly, not a lot of people can say they can go for it — in life and in a lot of ways. So just take a second to step outside yourself, watch yourself, and be like, "This is fun." Cause that's what it is. It's just fun. Even if it's not going well, guess what? You're not gonna wake up tomorrow and everybody's gonna be talking about it. Nobody cares as much as you do, so you might as well have fun.

**Do you feel like you have fun every time you're on stage?**

Yes, honestly. I know that sounds like bullshit, but I felt like I ate shit last night — something didn't go the way I

wanted — and I was still having fun. I'm in love with this and I think starting later than I initially would've liked has given me that clarity. Because I'm just very sure I'm finally doing the thing I've always wanted to do. So I can't really help but have fun. Because I really committed to it. I'm broke as hell. I have to have fun if I'm gonna be this broke.

**You've had a lot of success in the past couple years. What do you attribute that to?**

I think I was very lucky in a sense that a couple weeks into committing to do stand up here, Daryl Schmitz asked me to help produce Verified Laughs. That gave me a big leg up because I got to meet all these comedians, I got to watch all of them and learn from them, and I got to host and do five minutes every couple of weeks. And then also I think people wanted to get on the show so they were like, "Alright, I'll ask this girl to do my show." I think that helped me a lot, and I'm so grateful to Daryl. He saw me do a show that like two people were at and he thought I was funny, and I'm really grateful he asked me to do that. I fell in love with the Laugh Factory immediately and I think that show specifically helped me learn so much so fast. I also think having my own personal point of view be developed when I was doing sketch and improv. That helped me develop a sense of who I am and what I want to say as a comic. So I already worked on that for years and that helped me transition into stand up.

**You built the perspective in sketch and improv, then carried it over into what you actually wanted to do.**

Right. And I still get self conscious: "Oh, is my stand up just a sketch written in a stand up joke?" Cause when I first started, I was basically taking characters I had done just solo on stage and was trying to make them fit into stand up. But then I was like, "Alright,

just scrap everything that you've done before with sketch. Just start new."

### **You just scrapped everything? Why did you do that?**

I wanted a fresh start and I felt like I had new things to say. But I was probably a little insecure starting out, not having done stand up consistently the way I always wanted to. I tried to take my old material that I knew worked from shows at The Annoyance and make it a stand up joke. And it did well, but I think the more I kept going with stand up, I was like, "I feel like a new person." The amount of times in Summer 2018 that I listened to Brand New Person by Tame Impala – I was like, "I'm a new person! I got fired from Second City, I'm a new woman!" I think that was honestly one of the most romantic times of my life: finding standup, committing to it, and finally saying what I wanted to say. I wasn't being edited by producers, I got to talk right to the audience and I just fell in love with it.

### **You clearly love stand up.**

I love it so much. I just feel so lucky that I get to do it, which is the reason I love Chicago so much. Cause I can go up twice a night if I want to. And there's so many shows at all times. I always tell people this is the best place to do stand up, especially when you're starting.

### **What would you say to someone new to the Chicago scene?**

I'd say you came to the right place. Just the community itself. Every community has its problems, but I think there's a lot of integrity within this community. And pride. I think people are truly, genuinely proud of the scene here and they're excited. People who have been doing it a while get excited when they see someone new who has potential. I don't think you're gonna find that excitement as much in New York or LA. I feel like people are cheerleaders for each other here, and that's what makes it so special. I get so excited when I see someone I've never seen before and I'm like, "Oohh, they're gonna be good!"

### **Is there anyone right now that comes to mind?**

Yes. Joy Gamby. Back in May, she came up to me after my first Verified show post-quarantine and was very polite. She was like, "Hi ma'am I heard you book the show." I was like, "First of all, don't ever call me that. Second of all, I'd love to help you." I had her do the Comedy Bar mic I was running, and I saw that she was so comfortable on stage. I could tell she was new, but I was like, "She's gonna be so good." And from May to now – she just won Verified Laughs. And I was so excited.



*Photo by @selfoto*

Cause she just works her ass off and she's going to be dynamite. She's already doing it. You can tell she's out there trying new jokes, doing all this stuff, and that just made me so happy. I feel like that's what Chicago does for people.

### **You mentioned hosting at the Comedy Bar and I've seen you host a ton. How does your approach change when you're hosting versus doing a normal set?**

I like to ask more questions to the audience that I have jokes prepared for. Whereas in a set, I'm just addressing you. I've got 10 minutes, I'm gonna go into this joke right away. Whereas with hosting, you just have a genuine conversation with somebody. If you've got a joke about where you're from, you ask where they're from, then you kinda work in your joke. It makes them feel like you're coming up with it in the moment, which is very impressive to them – they don't know – and it makes them feel like they're in your house and they're welcome there. I know that's corny, but I try to be a little bit more upbeat, definitely get people to clap a lot more than I would during my set. Can you imagine? During my set: "Come on guys, clap it up! That one was good! That joke was good!" There's more of a party girl energy that I bring to hosting

and I like to ask a lot of questions because that way it feels personal. My job isn't to do the best set that night, it's to do the jokes that are gonna get them amped for the next person. You're there to set the other comics up for success. It's not about you.

**Can you talk about that initial learning phase when you're watching a lot of comics and taking a lot of stuff in. Was there anything you saw or learned that still sticks with you?**

I remember being blown away by so many people. To anybody who's just starting, I'd say pay attention to what makes you horny. And I don't mean sexually. Pay attention to what makes you go, "Woah!" or think, "I want to do that!" I remember watching Kellye Howard do this long act about running after her husband. Physically, it was like the Olympics of the extended act out and it was killing. This was like my first month of stand up and I was like, "I want to do something like that someday." Just the energy. It was electric. It was like watching an extremely short play. She had everybody's attention and they were laughing in all the right spots. And I could tell this is something she had worked on, every little movement, and I watched her do it again and again and again and I'd see how things would change. I'd think, "One day I want to have a bit like that." That bit was always in the back of my head, how incredible that was.

**Your comedy's very personal. Do you ever make stuff up for the sake of a joke, or do you stick to actual true things that happened?**

A lot of the stories I do have, especially about growing up, are true. But I will say I do dramatize things sometimes or put them in a different context. Like I had been in a relationship for six years, but I'll say I was going out with this guy yesterday because it's faster and I'm getting to the actual point of the joke. But the emotion is always very true to me. Which can be vulnerable in a good way, where I feel good that I'm talking about it, but sometimes I go home and I'm like, "Oh man, I really told them some shit!" For example I just had a Halloween joke –

**I love that joke.**

Thanks! Like I didn't go to my ex-boyfriends house and pop out of a bush and ruin his night with his wife. But do I sometimes act like an insane person? Yes, I can act spooky. What's a context where I can put it that makes it relatable?

**When you're writing out a joke are you also thinking of the movements? Or does that come later?**

I'm very meticulous about it to the point that I'll literally write down the actions. Like I have a long joke about this instance where a guy is complimenting me and feeling my body. In my notebook it's literally like, "Look up. Put hand up. Feel this way. Pause." I'm very meticulous about it. And if it doesn't work that way or I added something in the moment that night, I'll go back, I'll watch it, and I'll write it down again. So it's honestly sometimes like choreography that I keep doing in my bedroom until I can do it fast. It's like memorizing words for me.

**How much practice do you do in your bedroom or in the mirror? Do you do a lot of off stage prep?**

When a joke is new and it's physical, yes. I won't look in the mirror cause I'll get distracted and be like, "I look like shit." But I'll open my laptop and have Photo Booth open and I'll run it, go back, watch it. Be like, "I think that's good. Oohh, it would be better if I added something here." I know it's cooler to say I just wing it, but I don't. I do a lot of preparation. I'll just keep running it until I'm insane. Once I've learned it, I'll do it in the bathroom and I'll take a shower and I'm not allowed to leave the shower until I can do the bit really fast. That way I know that I've memorized it enough where I can be comfortable enough on stage. Because doing new bits is scary.

**I was talking to a few comics about this yesterday. You always want to showcase your best material at shows, but then you kind of get stuck doing the same set. Did you ever feel like that was the case for you?**

I feel like that's my problem now, to be honest with you. I think that'll come in waves. If you're really dedicated to it and you keep doing stand up, I think that feeling will come and go. Right now, I feel like some of the stuff I wrote at the beginning of 2020 is starting to feel stale to me now. I'm trying to funnel in that new stuff, but all the years have to be working. I can't really funnel in all the new stuff unless I'm hitting the mics just as hard as the shows I'm doing. I think it's normal to feel that way and I think going to mics and doing more intimate rooms will help you with that. But at the end of the day, it's really about taking a risk. I'd love to have a new set right now, but what I do know about myself is that 3-4 nights a week I'm a baby and say I can't do that new joke here and I won't do it. I feel like people always know what they need to do, you just have to push yourself to do it.

**Aside from developing new material, what have you been pushing yourself to do?**

I think there's a mental health aspect to what we do that's important. Coming back after 2020, I was so excited to do this again, and I still am. I made the decision to stop drinking. I started journaling more and going to therapy. I'm listening to how I really feel about things and what I'm actually going through more than at the start of the summer when I was like, "Woohh! So excited to be back!" Now I feel like I have



more to say that is new. Sometimes you just have to take time to actually listen to yourself and pay attention to your reaction to the world. Just slow down. Grind, yes, hustle, yeah. But also, you have to check in with yourself if you want to write genuine comedy.

**What have you noticed about yourself through journaling and therapy?**

I definitely feel like I'm noticing more things in social situations. Not necessarily in comedy, just about myself and the world that I don't think I would've noticed as much. I feel like I have new observations that I wasn't paying attention to before. And just recognizing behavior patterns that you have as your own person. Kind of recognizing your own insecurities and things you do to cover up who you really are. It is funny. It is funny the lengths we go to to appear normal. Paying attention to yourself more and trying to better yourself makes you notice those things and you have new observations. Tyler Horvath has a great bit about his anxiety and being in therapy. His therapist was like, "The way you're talking to yourself is chaotic," so he came up with this whole premise where he talks to himself like...

**An NBA player in a press conference.**

Yes. That's a great bit. But he's doing work on himself and that's how he thought of that. And that is so relatable. Who doesn't beat themselves up? That's why the bit is so successful I think. I think there's this perception that broken people are funniest. Yeah, you can still be funny when you're screwed up and not taking care of yourself, but if you're funny you'll always be funny. But that doesn't mean you can't be funnier if you're trying to be healthier and a better person. No, you can be funny if you're okay. I think it opens you up to a whole new pot of observations. Also, anyone who wants to do this for a living — this needs to be sustainable. You can't drink every night, get screwed up, not pay attention to yourself and be broke forever.

**Do you want to do this for a living? Is your goal to be a touring stand up?**

I would love to tour and do stand up. That is like a dream of mine. But I would also love for it to open the door where I'm creating content, whether it be a series or films. I'd love to get my foot in that door as well, because I just love storytelling. I've always wanted to do both stand up and that. All comedy though, I'm not interested in doing any dramatic shit. I'm dramatic enough in my own life. I probably should define my goals a little better. I just love performing.

**You do a lot of sketches and videos. On TikTok you have over a billion views.**

I just saw that the other day. I was like, "Is that a B?" That's crazy. Cause in my head I was like, "I only have 29,000 followers, that's nothing. My hot 19 year old cousin has millions." But I saw B, billion. I don't even understand that number.

**I heard you have a big Korean following. Can you talk about that?**

This is crazy. So I get a DM from somebody and they say, "Do you know you have over a million views on Korean Youtube?" And I was like, "Huh?" And I see there's a clip of me and it's the incest porn joke with a freeze frame of me with the mic, just looking insane, and Korean text over it. I translated it and the title was like, "Madman Ali Drapos Talks About Her Problem with Porn." And I was like, "This is the coolest thing that's ever happened to me." My college friend actually lives in South Korea and she was like, "Hey, when I Google stand up comedy, you're the third video." I was like, "What?!?" In what world if it weren't for me meeting Daryl, doing Verified Laughs, doing Laugh Factory — would people in Korea ever hear me do this joke? That's why when people are like, "Chicago's not LA," I'm like, "Okay, but there are opportunities here." New York or LA? Go to Korea! Especially right now, I'm like, "I need to get on this and learn Korean because I want to be on Squid Game 2."

**Do you think you'd ever perform in Korea?**

If I knew the language I'd probably be on a plane right now. Cause that's so cool and I love traveling. Maybe there's a way. It's something I'd really have to look into.

**I wanted to ask you about a sketch of yours. The movie bully that runs out of insults. Did you just write a million insults for that? How did that come to life?**

I was living in Virginia with my boyfriend and his dad for most of the quarantine. I was taking one of my long depressive walks, and at this point doing videos just really made me happy. I was thinking of something I can take from pop culture and put my own spin on it. That's a lot of TikTok: if The Bachelor was like this, or if X was like Y. So I was thinking of Mean Girls and movies and what I would say — and all my insults would be so stupid. I was like, "What if it was a classic movie bully, but all her insults are bad, but she's delivering them with the confidence that she's really dissing these people?" So I was walking in the hills of Virginia making myself laugh writing all these stupid things. Then I asked my boyfriend — who's an incredibly talented videographer and sketch writer — I was like, "Can we film this right now? I have this idea." I didn't know if it was gonna be funny, I just knew it was making me laugh and he was laughing. And here's the thing, on TikTok I had no stakes. I'd love to say I don't care what people think about me. I do. And on Instagram, all the comics I look up to are there. So when I started doing stuff on TikTok, I was like, "Nobody knows me and I'm too old to be doing this anyway. What do I have to lose? If I bomb on TikTok, okay, you're supposed to. Who cares?" That's something I'd love to do with my actual jokes on stage. Just the energy of, "Who cares, it makes me laugh." But I didn't know if it'd be funny.

**What's your favorite insult from that sketch?**

"Where did you get your clothes? The Worm Planet?" That doesn't make any sense. I was just filming it with my boyfriend, who's my best friend, and we were making each other laugh. It was just so fun. Also, collaborating with people you genuinely like and make you laugh makes you better. I wouldn't have thought of half that stuff if we weren't just riffing and being weird together.

**Do you do any of that with stand up at all? Do you have people you write with?**

My boyfriend, Case Blackwell. He's a great comedy writer and if something's not working he understands the idea of what I'm trying to get across and really helps me put it in a context that elevates the whole joke. I also started writing with Deanna Ortiz, Mallory Bradford and Eunji Kim. They're amazing. We just throw out ideas and give each other suggestions. Writing with people you like is really important. I think some people think that's like cheating. It's not. We're all trying to do the same thing. I think it helps you get other people's perspectives on your joke.

**Do you have any tips for having a successful group writing session?**

Personally, I think the less pressure you put on it the better. I think you like these people and you're gonna shoot the shit before you even talk about jokes. I think that's important, to just feel comfortable. Especially with people who will tell you the truth. Like "Ooh, I don't know about that, but what about this?" People who will be honest with you and people you genuinely like. I think that's the most important thing.

**Maybe we'll see more writing groups in the scene.**

I'd love that!

**If you could change anything about the Chicago scene, what would it be?**

We need more shows on the North Side that are a line up of mostly black comics with one or two white comics, instead of the reverse. And I think just getting out of our zone of the four places that we kind of bob between is important. Where are some voices we're not hearing from? Even if they're new. Who's killing it right now?

**I feel like we're in a North Side bubble and Chicago is way bigger than people realize.**

It is. There's so many places I don't even know. And that's something I'm trying to work on, so I need to practice what I preach. And in a similar vein, you don't need to have an all women showcase and call it an all women showcase. If there's eight people on the lineup and five of them are women and there's three guys, that's the show. It's not the women's showcase with a couple guys. That's the show. Funny is funny. You don't just throw on a couple women at the end. Come on. And that's not everywhere, I do think we're good about that, but I do see it sometimes. And I get it. I ran a show at Comedy Bar, I know it's hard to book. People drop last minute then I'm like, "Oh shit, it's a sausage fest!" I've been there like, "Fuck, how did I do this?" But just being more aware of it. \*Fart noise\*



Photo by @selfoto



# BONUS: Ali Drapos' Top 10 Chicago Comics

**1. KRISTEN TOOMEY**

**2. CORREY BELL**

**3. MARILEE**

**4. MY DIAMOND GIRLS**

(ELISE FERNANDEZ, ALEX KUMIN, CARLY KANE)

**5. CHASTITY WASHINGTON**

**6. CARLY BALLERINI**

**7. FAB MONROE**

**8. KELLYE HOWARD**

**9. VICTORIA VINCENT**

**10. CASEY LARWOOD**

(DEANNA ORTIZ, BRITT FERGUSON, JACKIE COOPER, JAMIE SHRINER,  
GENA GEPHART, LUCIA WHALEN - I CAN DO THIS ALL DAY)

# I'M NOT LIKE OTHER GIRL, I'M SANTA

by Jessica Misra (@jessicarmisra)

Santa sat down with his new friends at the local mall food court. He felt unimaginably cool surrounded by these teenage boys. Santa was dying to tell them about a new belt buckle he had just bought when three mall Santas walked by. They were laughing quietly until they caught a glimpse of the boys staring at them. They burst into a fit of giggles. Their bellies bounced up and down, not unlike a bowl full of jelly. Dylan, the cutest and funniest of the boys, looked at them and said, "Damn, that Santa on the left has a big ol' bag of presents behind him." Santa felt awkward. He knew his silence on the matter would be noted. These weren't even real Santas, they were mall Santas. He was the real deal. Why didn't they see them for the fake ho ho ho's they were? Deep down he knew that a small part of him wanted Dylan to notice HIS bag of presents. He knew he wasn't gifted, pun intended, with the biggest bag, but no one worked harder or took more unregulated supplements than he did. His bag might be smaller than the other Santa's bag, sure, but it didn't matter. He knew what he and Dylan had was special.

Dylan had showed Santa his Christmas list. He had sent it in the mail but got drunk one night and played it for him on the acoustic guitar. It was the best night of Santa's life. Granted it wasn't so much a list as a bunch of bullet points about how his parents divorce had been affecting him, sung in E minor. Santa didn't care. Afterwards he took off the guitar, went downstairs, and they never spoke of it again. That didn't mean Santa didn't get DMs every other weekend night. Santa wasn't surprised. He knew when people were sleeping and when they were awake and Dylan was always awake at 3 am on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays. Now Santa felt used. That wasn't a DM, that was emotional labor Dylan had been sending him through Instagram, TikTok, and the US Postal Service. But Santa couldn't stay mad at him for too long. Dylan had 2010 Justin Bieber hair and never spoke to his mom in public. He was hard not to love. Santa was pleased to be the only Santa that Dylan and his friends had ever invited for an Orange Julius. It was 15% off because Dylan, Brian, Tyler, Jake, Andy, and Trevor worked there on weekends.

Santa was enraged that they would ogle over these mall Santas. "Yeah I heard that Santa will give presents to anyone," said Santa in what he hoped was a casual way. Tyler had just returned to the table with some orange chicken and caught what Santa had said. "I'd let that Santa go down my chimney if ya know what I mean." Santa had no idea what he meant. Santa's mom told him he didn't need to do that until he was ready, until then just use the backdoor. Honestly the idea of going down someone's chimney frightened him. What if he got stuck or went down the wrong way or got pregnant?! Santa had to put his fear aside, though. He needed to shut this down. Tyler was his backup in case things didn't work out with Dylan. "It's all coal in there, Jack B Frost-y told me. So whatever, Tyler, if you want to spend Christmas surrounded by a barbeque pit, go ahead. I'll drop off some lighter fluid." Everyone laughed. "DAMN, Santa, you vicious," Dylan laughed.

However, Santa felt bad about what he had said about the other Santas. He had hung out with those Santas before, and they were very nice. A little too merry at times, but had lent Santa a red hat when his mom had accidentally brought a pink one to school for picture day. Dylan looked at Santa and said, "You know, you're not like other Santas. Like you're a Santa, don't get me wrong, but you're not too festive or whatever. It's cool." Santa didn't give one fuck about those other Santas any longer. He had made it.

It was only after that the comments weighed on him like an old holiday wreath. The kind your dad leaves up all year because it's a lot of work to put up and take down every season. He went home to the North Pole. His father, Time, was in the living room watching a TED Talk about vulnerability. "What's wrong, Santa? You look down." Santa was down, but couldn't exactly tell his Santa's Rights activist father what he had done. In the kitchen, his mother, Nature, was cooking dinner. Milk and cookies, his favorite. She was on the phone with a friend and he could hear her soft, sweet voice fill the kitchen. "She brought store-made Candy Canes to the bake sale. No, I'm not joking. Take it from me, some of the flavors in them are not found in nature. I would know." Maybe he could tell his mom. She would understand because she had made some comments about other Santas when his father wasn't around. He remembered that one time she had called a Santa "too skinny to be jolly." Oh god, he was becoming his mother. What next, picking fights with teenagers at the supermarket? Santa made a mental note to always eat right before bed to help put on fat and not say anything to anyone. That night he ate an extra five helpings of sugar cookies with holiday icing and went straight to bed. Santa lay awake in bed that night, replaying the scene in his mind. It would be years before he himself would become a Santa's Rights activist; before he would go on to champion anti-discrimination and the Equal Pay For Santas Act; way before he could ever hope to make up for the damage he had caused that day. But that was, of course, years away. Tonight, he would put Dylan's SoundCloud album on loop, so it could play all night long. He was sure Dylan would appreciate the views in the morning.

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# WHY WE ALL NEED TO BE EATING A LOT MORE MULCH

by Hank T. Porter

*Published posthumously (Hank T. Porter passed away from mulch eating complications on December 16th, 2021. The family requests that in lieu of flowers a donation can be made to The Wounded Warrior Project)*

Mulch: nature's forbidden fruit. We've all walked by a recently mulched flower bed with an aroma so delightful that drool spouts out of our mouths like a broken fire hydrant. So why must we all suppress this natural urge? What is stopping us from breaking the societal shackles we are inexplicably confined to?

I, for one, blame the media. Think back to the last time you were watching a CNN or the MSNBC: how was mulch eating depicted? Unfortunately, mulch eating has been painted in a terrible light by traditional media outlets. Although non-traditional media (QR codes, etc.) has a slightly more open-minded perspective, mulch eaters are still often presented as simpletons or dimwits. I'm on a mission to change that.

In my 54 years on this little rock in the sky we call "America", I've been eating mulch in some capacity for 17 of those years. And, starting tomorrow, I'll begin a mulch-only diet. I know that this won't be easy; I'll have to contend with wry looks from my neighbors, professional repercussions from my employer, and nutritional propaganda from my primary care provider. But I also know this: it will be the most glorious time of my life.

I embark on this journey not only as a tribute to my upcoming endeavors in self exploration, but also as a beacon to attract like-minded individuals. I've already recruited a few other mulchheads at the office who promised to take their coffee extra black, if you know what I mean (mulch in the coffee). I am certain that a significant percentage of this publication's readership will be keen to join me as well in this movement. But let me be clear: even if not a single person joins me, I will still be munching on mulch.

For those of you who are still nervous to give into their innate, carnal desire for mulch, I'd like to dispel some common myths and misconceptions that might be clouding your thinking.

## 1. Eating mulch is unhealthy and dangerous

This is totally incorrect: studies have shown that mulch is an excellent source of many vital nutrients<sup>1</sup>. Although it is true that there have been no large-scale investigations of eating mulch on human health, most leading scientists in the field agree that mulch eating has minimal risk. I myself have been eating mulch in small quantities for 17 years, and have observed no ill effects, except for occasional bad breath, minor episodes of severe kidney failure, persistent migraines/bile in saliva,

green feet, and mega hemorrhoids (which I'm told is normal for a man of my age/someone who eats a lot of mulch).

## 2. Mulch eating is illegal

This is an easy one to clear up - mulch eating is completely legal! Back in 1789, the founders cleverly added a clause to the 12th amendment guaranteeing the legality of mulch eating for the next 250 years. To be clear, there are no direct references to mulch eating in the amendment, but if you do a little bit of reading in-between the lines, you'll arrive at this legal conclusion. Of course, come 2039 we may have a difficult legal battle on our hands (Big Pharma wants a slice of the mulch pie, of course) but that's a mountain we'll cross in due time.

## 3. Mulch doesn't taste good at all

It is an acquired taste! It took me 4+ years before I stopped gagging at the taste of mulch, and even now I will vomit profusely while eating mulch if I don't have a clothespin on my nose. But I can assure you - there really is nothing better than a few nibbles of mulch in the morning with a cheese and jam omelette while doing the New York Times mini crossword.

I look forward to updating this publication on my mulch eating progress. I've been told by the editor that I will have a dedicated column each issue to discuss the trials and tribulations of this grand experiment. Please write to me at [hankporterbooking@hotmail.com](mailto:hankporterbooking@hotmail.com) to send in pics and comments on your own mulch eating adventures. Also, I'd be remiss if I didn't plug my upcoming stand-up comedy shows (yeah, I do stand-up comedy! It's a comedy magazine after all, isn't it??):

- Who Let the Dogs Out: Schaumburg's Wiliest Jokers Barking All Night Long (December 26th, The Red Robin on Route 12 in Schaumburg)
- CANCELLED (December 29th, Peoria Ale House in Peoria)
- Comedians You Should Know (January 5th, Timmy O'Tooles Chicago)

Until next time,

Hank T. Porter

1 Iqbal, R., Raza, M.A.S., Valipour, M. et al. Potential agricultural and environmental benefits of mulches—a review. *Bull Natl Res Cent* 44, 75 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s42269-020-00290-3>

*Written by Jeff Braun (@jeffbraun69)*

# TONY THE TIGER ON KELLOGG'S STRIKE: "THEY'RRREEEE LAZY!"

By Jonathon Dunne (@gitrdunne) and Luke Ipsum (lukeipsum)

Dear Kellogg's stockholders and sugar deprived public,

My name is Anthony Tigerino. Some of you may know me by my stage name Tony the Tiger. I am on the board of the Kellogg's company, and as king of the cereal jungle, I've called you here because we have a problem. For the last few months, 1,400 Kellogg's workers have gone on strike with outrageous demands. Let me tell you this, do not believe what you have heard. They'rrreeee lazy!

Every single one of these workers are trying to take advantage of a family business that has brought the world nothing but happiness and delectable type 2 diabetes. Without cereal, what are our children going to eat? Fruit? You want our children to eat fruit? You want the children of America to be fit? You want little American kids with chiseled abs and impressive jaw lines? I'm going to throw up a hairball. You disgust me.

The union is making wild accusations about the Kellogg's company that are absolutely not true. For instance, the union says that we are threatening to outsource their jobs to Mexico. This is false. The truth is we would love to, but we don't know how to speak Spanish. Trust us, we are trying.

Next, the union claims that we are posting ads to encourage workers to cross the picket lines. Again, this is absolutely not true. The truth is the Kellogg's company is trying to hire anyone who isn't a human. For instance, elves, oompa loompas, ghosts, dogs, and the writer of *Last Man Standing* starring Tim Allen.

Now, although the union's demands are unreasonable, we as a board of directors at Kellogg's are prepared to address some of your complaints.

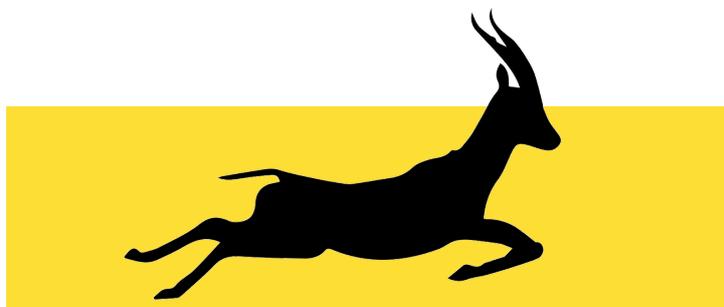
1. You say that long shifts behind the double axis differential cornflake mega hopper can be strenuous on your pathetic fingers and body. We will address this problem by adding a small 4x6 postcard of Disney's Epcot in Orlando Florida onto the modular circular groove screws of this machine. We have determined that this postcard will simulate vacation time for our workers. We will of course limit the amount of time any one worker can look at the postcard.
2. Kellogg's will now offer daycare for employees with young children from Snap, Crackle, and Pop, or as we like to call them, *The Three Little Twinks*. (Why are they called *The Three Little Twinks*? Ask your husband.)
3. We understand that you're worried about your pension and that's why we are prepared to replace your pension with a table tennis table and (1) complimentary domestic beer on select Fridays. Remember you took on these risks when you decided to work at a startup like Kellogg's.

Now let's end all of this whining because, let's face it, this is the United States of America, not Communist Europe. Get back to work because none of us deserve to live in a world where children can tell the difference between their faces and their feet. And well hell, if you don't cooperate, I'll remind you all that we're the only industry in your dumb stupid town. When this is all over we might just close up shop and move to another random state just to spite you.

It's youurrrrr last warning!



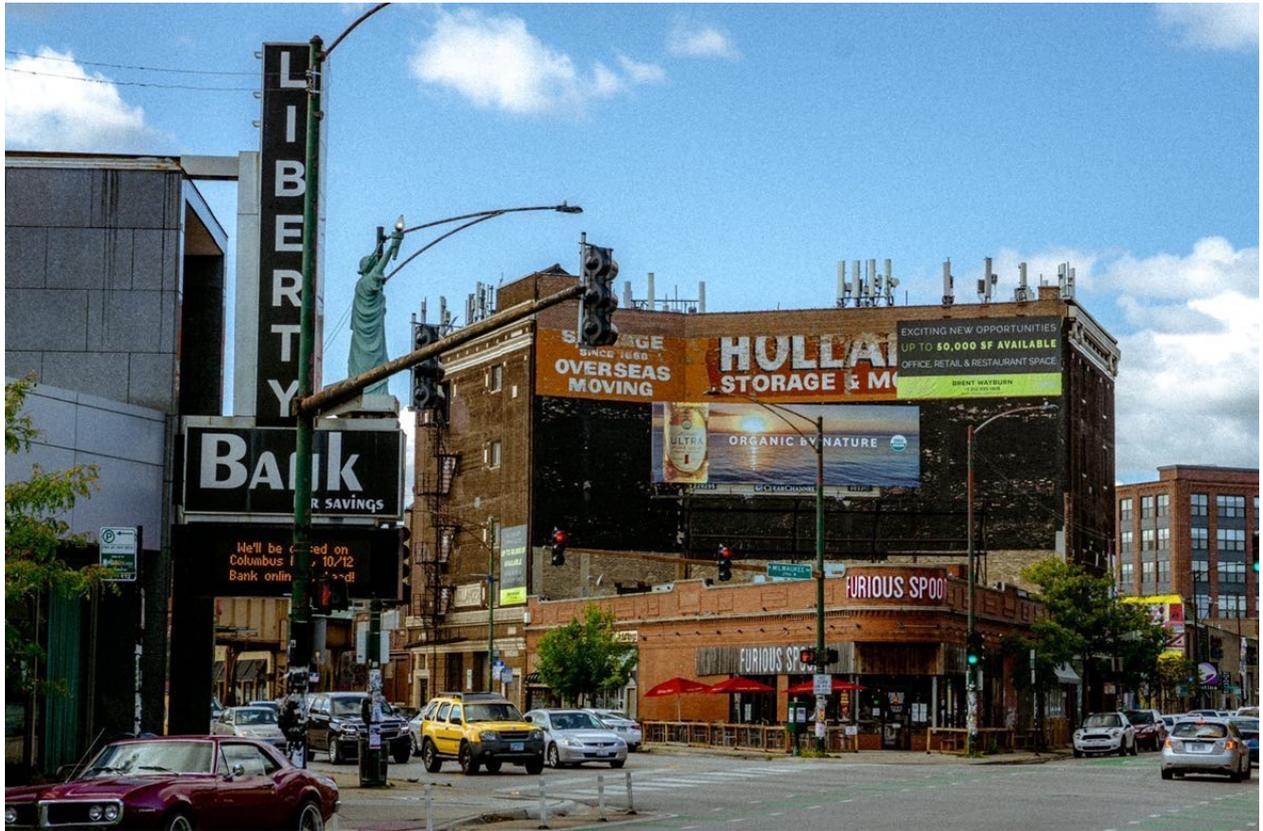
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**ETHAN CONLEY-KECK (@ECONKEC) IS A COMEDIAN, PHOTOGRAPHER, AND OCCASIONAL PAINTER BASED OUT OF CHICAGO, IL. WHEN NOT WRITING OR SHOOTING ETHAN LIKES TO UNWIND BY FISHING FOR COMPLIMENTS. FOLLOW HIM ON TWITTER (@ETHANJCK) OR SEE HIM LIVE @NORTHBAR AND OTHER CHICAGO MICS. FOR PRINTS, MESSAGE HIM ON INSTAGRAM OR TWITTER.**



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