

THE COMEDY GAZELLE



**EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW:
KRISTEN TOOMEY**

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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INTERVIEW: KRISTEN TOOMEY

Kristen Toomey (@kristentoomey) is one of the realest, funniest, and most fascinating comedians you will ever meet. Grabbing a table at the historic Stella's Diner, we talked about her time off from comedy, her mother's vitamins, self-love and more.

So how's the return been?

It's been good. It's been up and down, but I've got some new ideas and new stuff to work on, and I've had a lot of fun riffing and talking to the crowd.

You seem to really enjoy the performing aspect of comedy.

Yeah, I do. That's always what it's been, enjoying being up there and performing in front of people, connecting with them. Watching them laugh. Saying shocking things, where when I'm driving home I laugh, like, "Oh my gosh, I can't believe I said that." On the way home I laugh a lot. If I get that out of it at least, then I'm like, "Okay, it was worth it. It made me laugh."

Sounds like you give yourself a lot of freedom. I'm very much, "Oh, I have to say this, then this," and then I'm not even enjoying what's happening in front of me.

Oh no, that's horrible. Even the idea of putting any restriction on what I'm doing at all takes the fun out of it and I hate it. If I can't even say fuck or shit or any one word, you've already ruined it. Look, I don't get paid anything for this. I don't make enough money. I don't have a big following, you know what I mean? All I get out of it is the freedom to say whatever I want. And that spontaneity and the pleasure of making people laugh and watching them laugh. That's it. That's the only pay off. You take that away, then fuck it. There's no point at all. There really isn't.

Do you even think about what you're gonna say, or do you just figure it out as you go?

When I started back up [after the pandemic], the first time back up I bombed pretty bad. So that was probably the best thing that could've happened, because then I was motivated to work on it. Because when I was doing it before, I was sort of in a manic episode for like three years I think. I was going insane. Literally insane. I'm less insane now —

Waitress: How're we doing?



Photo by Sarah Elizabeth Larson (@selfoto)

Toomey: Good, we're good. Less insane. Much worse three years ago. I was just telling him. This is a terrible date. I'm good with just coffee. Thank you so much.

"This is a terrible date!"

Like, "I'm fucked up!" But I was in a really bad place for like three years and I was performing and touring. And I wasn't writing, I was just getting up there and saying what was coming out. I had a lot of anger. And a lot of intense emotion, which I'm not even sure where it was supposed to be directed. It was sort of this thing I was tapping into, this rage. I feel like that's kind of gone, or contained. I got up and I bombed the first time back, after a year off. Because I didn't have that same energy, I didn't have that fueling. I'm sober now, and there wasn't that thing propelling me, whatever that was. So I had to start writing things down and really try in a different kind of way.

How was your material going when you had that intense emotion?

Honestly, I don't know. It's almost like a performance blackout when I was up there. A lot of the time I was high, I was drunk. Not blacked out, like that messed up, but like a performance

blackout. From the clips I've seen, I was talking about some of the same things I'm picking back up, like the generations stuff. But I don't know what I was saying for like the past three years. I really don't.

When I met you, were you going through that? That was like Fall 2019.

Yeah, yeah. Maybe the end of 2016 it started. And then it got really bad around 2017. And then 2019 I started drinking again and relapsed. And that was not good either. Yeah. I was just sort of... a lot going on.

What started that for you?

Well, my divorce, but I had some mental and emotional things happening before that. Everything was leveled. I was leveled. My marriage was in trouble, and was in trouble for a long time, and I got to a point where I couldn't do it anymore. It was really hard for me to say that to him. And then I think it was like, if I don't do this now... I have to.

Was stand up a big driving force —

I kept trying to quit stand up. I keep trying to quit. I do. I quit like all the time. I tell people, and I'm like, "Don't talk to me" and I delete people, and I burn bridges and I keep sabotaging myself. Because... I don't know why.

Maybe you're not meant to quit.

I don't think I am. I'm kind of a clown. But I was struggling between — one of these things has to go. And I was so angry at myself that [stand up] was the choice. I think that might be what it was. I was very angry at something. At myself. I beat the shit out of myself for like three years. Well, longer than that actually, but alone intensely for three years.

Was it hard for you to be funny when you're in that state of mind? I can't even imagine. I think that speaks to your love for it, even if you are trying to constantly quit.

I do love it. And I feel, especially during the pandemic, I had a newfound respect and appreciation for it. I was working in a nursing home on a COVID unit during an outbreak. I was enjoying that. That was scary, but I was enjoying it. But some of the darkest days in isolation

during the pandemic, the thing that cheered me up was watching Katt Williams clips on YouTube. I was like, "This is a real thing. It does actually help people." Because I was in a place where I didn't wanna get out of bed. I felt low. Like, really, really low. And I watched a couple of his clips and I was gonna pee my pants laughing in the kitchen by myself. Just knee slapping, gonna pee my pants. If it's done well, it works and it's worth it. And it's an honor if you can do that, it's a huge honor. Then I started to have more respect for it like I did in the beginning. And now I'm sort of looking at it like, if that's what you're claiming to do, if this is what you're professing you're doing — you're a comedian — then you need to have a respect for it and take it seriously. You have a responsibility. If you're gonna call yourself that, you should take it seriously. And I wasn't for a while.

What are you doing now that you hadn't been doing in the past?

Well, I'm thinking about it all the time. I'm more aware of the things that I do that make me a comedian. When I got a real job and was like, "I'm done with it," I was driving in a car to work and I started doing crowd work with the cars next to me. And I'm like, "Oh my god, you're a fucking lunatic."

You're a comedian.

Right, that's the thing. But if you take that out of it, I'm batshit fucking crazy. It makes the things that I normally do really, really scary. But if you add the, "Oh, you're a comedian," it kind of makes it make a little more sense. It's weird, but it's not as weird.

"IF THIS IS WHAT YOU'RE PROFESSING YOU'RE DOING — YOU'RE A COMEDIAN — THEN YOU NEED TO HAVE A RESPECT FOR IT AND TAKE IT SERIOUSLY. YOU HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY. IF YOU'RE GONNA CALL YOURSELF THAT, YOU SHOULD TAKE IT SERIOUSLY."

Has anything else changed for you coming out of the pandemic, mindset wise?

I'm sober, so I feel like I'm a little more clear-headed and less paranoid. I was smoking a lot of pot. As far as comedy goes, it's just something I wanna be great at. I'm not good at marketing myself. I shoot myself in the foot all the time. I'm kind of a mess. All I know how to do is be myself up there and be funny. All the rest of it I'm not good at. I should get better at it. When I leave here I'm gonna work on it, and I think this is a good intervention you're doing.

What were you like a year or two into comedy?

Probably worse than where you are. I didn't have a zine. I was being an idiot. Still. I do remember it took me a very long time to hit that 15 minute mark. I remember Matt Drufke, who I started with, at one point we would do shows all the time and he would stand on the side because I would always bail. I would be booked for 15 minutes and I would always get off at like 13, 12, 14. I could never make it to 15. And then one day he was standing there with his arms folded on the side of the stage like, "You're not fucking leaving until you do 15 minutes." Most people would do the opposite when they first start, they never get off. And I would bail all the time. Like, "Oh shit, I'm outta here."

How long was that to get to 15?

Probably like three or four years, it was ridiculous. I mean, not really, because nobody has a good 15 for like 10 years probably. But it was a long time. Something about that minute mark was like, "Ooh I've been up here too long."

So in Blake's interview he said you called him out for being a pussy because he wanted to run a joke by you.

Yeah, like right before the show. I was like, "Not now, dude. Go and do it up there." Because he would get so nervous about CYSK, and at that point he was producing the show. I was like, "You've gotta just believe in yourself to go up there and do it." Also, maybe it's better if you don't run a bit right before you go up and do it. For example, I've got this new baseball bit that I'm working on and I ran it at a writer's thing that I went to, and when I was pitching it to the group, no pun intended, I really sold it well. I sold it like I should've been telling it to the crowd. Then I go up and try it in front of a crowd, and I didn't do it right. Cause I just did it. And so it wasn't the same sell as that first time. For me, most of the time,



the first time I do something it comes out the best. Then it sucks for a while, and then it's good again. Hopefully. You're excited about it, you're trying to sell it, and it's fresh. That's kinda what I was saying to him. Don't be a pussy, but also get up there and do it. Don't waste that energy on me. Go give it to them.

Blake was saying a lot of good advice he's gotten has to do with fearlessness. Do you have any fear when you're on stage?

No, I'll fight a dog! I'm not afraid! Here's the thing, I really want people to like me. I do. I really want them to like me. I'm a people pleaser at heart, but I also have this "If you don't like me, I kinda like that too." So it's like another gear. I want you to like me, but if you don't and you're like, "Fuck you." I'm like, "Okay," and I can enjoy that too. So that's helpful.

Did you develop that, or where does that come from?

Well, when I was like two years old I was trying to talk to my dad because I wanted him to read me a book and he said "Not now" and put his finger up. And so I climbed onto the couch and opened the book upside down and said "I don't care about that, I don't care about that," and turned every page in the book. So I think it developed then.

I wanted to ask you about your mom. How is it living next to her?

Oh, gosh. It's been good for me, she's probably miserable. She's like, "This is a nightmare." It's good, the rent is free. She's got a boyfriend, she goes there Thursday through Monday, so it's just me and my dog most of the time. And I don't have a TV at my house, but my dog likes to watch TV, so I'll take her over to my mom's to watch TV. It's nice. I use her vitamins. She's got good vitamins. So I let myself in, I take some vitamins, let my dog watch her TV, and then I kind of Kramer her all week when she's home. I come in and she's like, "Ugh, Jesus." Because I always come in with these deep thoughts, or heavy thoughts. She finally told me, "It's been three years of this. I can't keep doing this. You can't keep coming in here, saying this shit to me. I'm almost 70. I wanna enjoy my fucking life, will you stop with this shit?" Cause I wanna talk about what's wrong with the culture and she's like, "I don't give a shit. I wanna fuck my boyfriend, make fun tea and plant things. Will you shut up?" But it's good for me.

Do you have any short or long term goals? What are you trying to do coming out of the pandemic?

Yeah, that's something that I struggle with is making goals. I know that's something you need to have to be successful. My goal is to get better and be great at this. As far as what I would like to do, I guess I would like to be able to tour and make enough money to live where I'm not stressing about money, and just be able to perform without having to constantly create this content all the time. Maybe release another album that actually makes money, so I could have money.

Before the pandemic didn't you schedule an album recording date when you had nothing?

Yeah, I did. It was supposed to be in July.

How much time in advance did you give yourself? That sounds like a good goal.

Six months, maybe? I probably had about 15 or 20 that wasn't on the last album, but I was just floundering. I wasn't tethered to anything, so it was just to give me some sort of beacon. I think having a beacon like that at all times is good. Even me saying, "I wanna be great at this," that's not enough. And I know it's not enough. I guess it would be touring and having a new hour album that is sellable.

You said you wanna be great at it. What do you think you still have to improve upon? Anything stand up wise?

Always. I'm still learning how to do this too. If anyone thinks that they've mastered it, very few people have, if anyone. I would say there's probably four or five people that have mastered it. Ever. I don't even know what that looks like, but what I imagine it to look like is you say anything to them and they speak out a brilliant bit like *that*. There's very few people that can do that. And they can tape an hour every year and it's brilliant. Very few people can do that. I'm not that, so I would like to try until I'm that, I guess.

We touched on this earlier, but when you're approaching a personal topic like your divorce, how do you make it funny if it's still affecting you?

When I'm talking about that right now, it still is painful. Not enough time has passed to really get into certain things that I might talk about. There's only a certain deepness you're ready to go to, you know? So right now, when I'm talking about it, I'm putting it all on me being a fuck up. Which is something that I'm used to being, and I know that, so it's painful to me. I don't think that's funny in real life. I'm not sitting here like, "Haha look, I fucked up my life." But I know there are people who feel that they fucked up their life, and if I can get up there and make light of it, it helps heal them from that and helps heal me from it. It's some way of processing shame, it really is. And so, there's only a certain deepness that I can get to right now with that. I'm just at the surface right now and it's been three years, and I'm trying to slowly get into it.

So you do wanna tap into that?

I don't know. Because also I want to respect — he's moved on and he's got a new life happening. So it's like, I don't wanna be up there talking about him. That's fucking weird. At some point he's been through enough. So I guess it's sort of addressing that that's part of my past, and maybe touching on my side of it — why I sabotage myself all the time and getting into that. I'm not trying to talk about him anymore, you know what I'm saying?

Yeah, that self-sabotaging theme.

That would be the more interesting thing anyway. Because everybody has a divorce. Not everybody has a divorce, but everyone has something they failed at or fucked up. And I think it's more interesting to talk about the root of that. It's me trying to get to that and being at a point where I can have some levity about it, where I'm not crying. You certainly don't want to have that on stage, although I have had moments like that, where I'm just like, "Ooh, shouldn't have gone there."

Yeah, I had that yesterday.

Did you? Where you just go a little too deep on yourself?

I was like, "Oh god, this isn't funny."

I know, it's just sad? Ooo yeah. It is a fine line. You don't want to make them feel sad. Yeah. That's when you have to come to a place of acceptance on the issue. Because comedy is tragedy plus time. You have to have enough time. If you're getting up there and talking about something that happened yesterday that was super messed up, which I've done, and it's not funny, it is weird and it is uncomfortable. And that's okay, too, to have sets like that. It's not okay for the audience, but it's okay to do it for you. I've had super uncomfortable moments. I've had moments where I've been too sad, too angry, too high, too drunk, too mean, too nice. It's gonna happen whether you like it or not. You can't avoid it. So you just gotta go, "Okay, that was the time that happened. That was the time I cried. In a bar. In front of ten people."

You said you felt like you fucked up your life. Do you really think that?

Yeah. Do you think I haven't?

I mean, do you regret your divorce or anything?

No. It was kind of messed up in an unfixable way.

If you don't have any regrets, then do you really think you've fucked up your life?

That's a good question. I mean, I regret this hat right now.

Can I take a picture of your hat?

Yeah, you can take a picture of me — not while I'm smoking! Have some dignity. Do I have regrets? Sure. I dropped out of school, things like that. Well no, that wouldn't have worked out. That didn't work out for anybody. I think I regret spending so much time on the internet. That I do regret. That's probably the biggest regret. That'll be all of ours, I'm not alone in that. I've done terrible things, bad things that I regret, sure. But I'm trying to be more compassionate towards myself. I started to do this, and I think I heard Amy Poehler say something similar, and it resonated with me. If a friend came up to me and said, "Hey, I just did this." I wouldn't love them any less. So you should apply that to yourself. You should love yourself. I've always been really mean to myself, and people are going to be mean to you, so why help them?

Last few questions. What would you change about the Chicago scene if you could?

We'd get paid more, that's all. That's like the worst thing I could say.

No, that's fair. And if someone was deciding where to go for comedy, why do you think they should choose Chicago?

It's the best place to get good at this, as far as not worrying about anyone watching. Nobody's watching, but there are a lot of places to do it. And enough people are watching where it's not like you're in the middle of nowhere. I mean, this is an answer from five years ago. I don't know what's happening right now, because Austin is all of a sudden the place to be. But Chicago has an incredible comedy history, and so many people come out of here because you can get up a lot and you're free to do whatever you want. You're not trying to get on TV. You're not trying to do a tight five, really. You can try your shit, you can bomb, and it's like nobody's really paying attention. And the people in Chicago are a great audience. You get a mix of people. You get out of towners, you get people from Middle America. But they're not unsophisticated, either. It's a good mix. It's middle. Which is good for me, cause that's me.

And finally, if you could put something out into the universe, what would you ask for?

I sort of feel bad asking for things, in a way. But I think I would ask for an increase of faith. I asked for that earlier today. Faith in a divine plan. So like an increase of trust in God's plan and being content there. My hope is not in this, what you see here, in institutions and corporations, and human beings. Because none of that is worth putting your hope and your faith and your trust into. It's not. You shouldn't. But you have to have that, it has to go somewhere, so you have to go higher than that. So an increase in the ability to do that.



BONUS: Kristen Toomey's 10 Favorite Chicago Comics

10. ALI DRAPOS

9. MO GOOD

8. MADDIE WIENER

7. JUST NESH

6. MARILEE

5. ALEX KUMIN

4. CORREY BELL

3. ERICA CLARK

2. KELLYE HOWARD

1. DANNY KALLAS

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COMEDY FAN LOOSE IN CHICAGO

ONE NIGHT'S JOURNEY INTO LAUGHTER

By Ryan Buynak

The first thing I think of when I schedule any type of travel is food and live music or comedy. With the restrictions surrounding the pandemic lightening, my trip to Chicago meant the chance to see actual live stand-up comedy, and the town did not let me down.

A Comedy Town

From sketch to stand-up, alt to improv, comedy is abundant in Chicago, and its reputation as a comedy town is well-deserved. It was here that Nichols met May and Poehler met Fey. The best comedy clubs in the Windy City continue to build on that rich history, ensuring it will always be a place where comedic thrives. From the Second City to Zanies, there are plenty of laughs to be had, and I got to experience a nice, thick slice of that silly sub-culture.

The Set Up

So I hit up Brooks Wheelan on Instagram, with whom I have worked in New York (at Good For You in Brooklyn) and have patiently pestered over the years, asking where I should go or who I should talk to, and he told me there is only one man in Chicago for this job: Matty Ryan.

Of course! Why didn't I think of that? Brooks was right and Matty could not have been nicer. He got me on the guestlist at The Comedy Bar for a Wednesday night, downplaying the spectacle, not knowing I didn't care, that I just needed a good laugh. And I was not disappointed.

The Comedy Bar

Come that Wednesday, I walked the five blocks from my hotel to The Comedy Bar and sure enough my name was on the guestlist. I immediately knew I was part of something cool. It felt so good to be back in this world, especially with the year+ we all just had.

This is a downtown room where local headliners rule. Apparently, the club had recently moved to this location on the third floor above Gino's East in River North, and I could tell that it was mostly populated by

tourists, but the comics still shined. I had forgotten what it was like to be in the audience of a real stand-up show with a lineup of pros and heavy-hitters.

That evening's host was Chris Higgins, and this dude was a natural-born leader, shucking and jiving up there between performers with post-hipster ease. There were many great comics on that show, including Dan Pyatetsky, a drop in from my NYC (via Atlanta) brethren Mike Rowland, who murdered, and of course my new pal Matty Ryan (there were a lot of other funny folks but I can't remember).

The Punch

After the show, I said hey and thanks to Matty Ryan. We talked about Brooks, LA comedy, NYC comedy, cocaine, etc. He mentioned he was heading to Cole's Bar in Logan Square for the open mic and asked if I wanted to cruise along. Even as a 38-year-old father, I still geek out at certain things, and this was one of them. Getting to tag along with someone you look up to as an artist never gets old, kids.

The Cole's Bar Chronicle

Jerry, the maestro of this digital magazine you are (hopefully) reading right now, jumped in the backseat of Matty Ryan's car, which is how we met, and how you are (hopefully) reading this right now. Once again, and I can't stress this enough, it was personal magic for me. The windows were rolled down, the smell of a chocolate factory wafting into our nostrils, the illustrious talk of comedy, both local and far flung...I truly couldn't ask for more, but then we got to our destination.

Apparently, Matty Ryan's girlfriend, the fantastically funny and super nice Alex Kumin ran the show at Cole's, which had been going for over a decade having been started by the likes of Cameron

Esposito. The Wednesday night comedy showcase is touted by locals as one of the most inclusive and accessible spaces in the city, allowing for first-timers, big dreamers and famous drop-ins.

The place was packed, and I would come to learn that this was the first show in a long time because of COVID, so the crowd was buzzing. I recognized funny faces from Instagram, like Evelyn Troutman and Adam Burke. It was wild, and Matty Ryan introduced me to everyone, all of whom assumed I was a comedian and graciously asked if I was going up. Alex asked if I wanted to go up, but I happily informed her and all that I was a spectator in this sport, honored to watch them play behind the mic.

If you're hanging out in a barber shop for so long, you are bound to get a haircut. This metaphor was apt for Matty Ryan, who swore he was just hanging out, but low and behold he got the itch and took the stage. Amongst that crowd, he carried the vibe of Consigliere, like he knows his shit and is not afraid to try new material at a mic one night, while turning around to headline the next.

There were more than fifty open-mikers on the list, so it was tough to catch all of them, but it was sublime to be in this world, especially since I had just come from South Florida which is not exactly a comedy haven. Maybe it's the Midwestern manners, but everyone was so nice and every conversation was like witnessing a mild, millennial version of Tough Crowd with Colin Quinn. I can't reveal most of what I was honored to overhear, but I can say that there is nothing better than sitting at a table with a bunch of comics.

Standing O

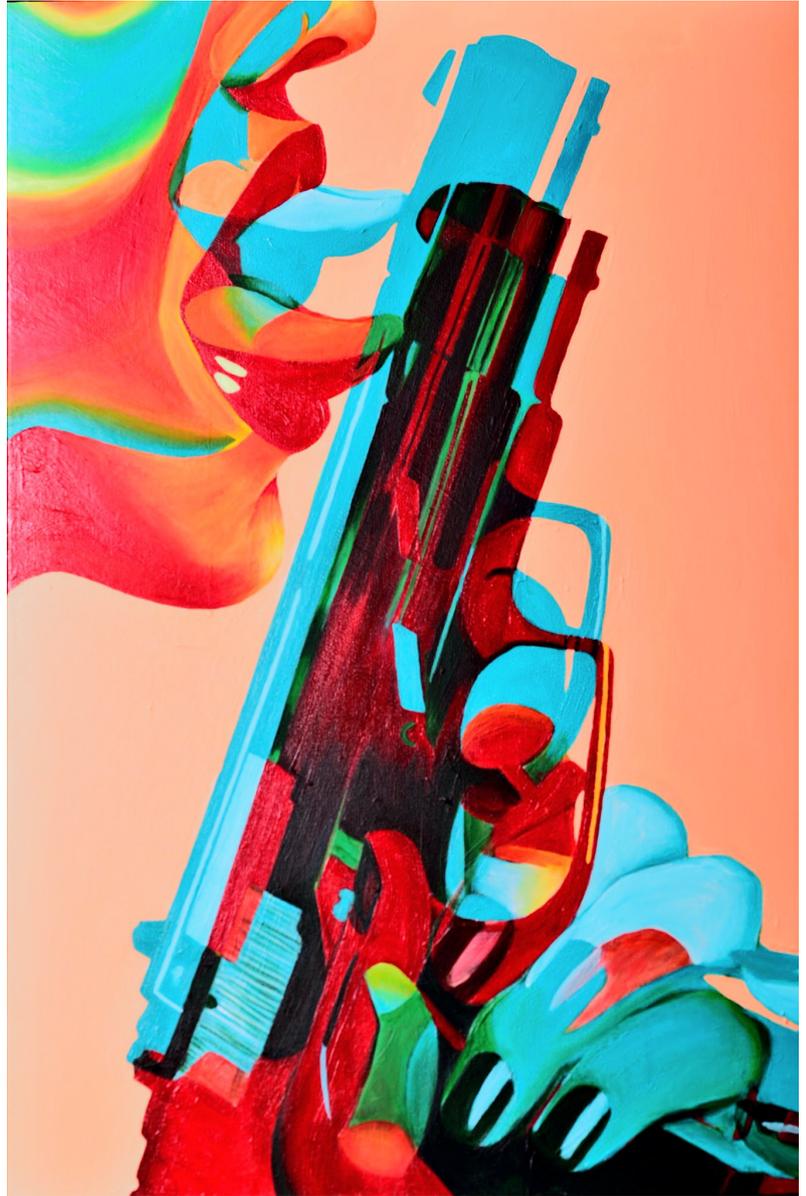
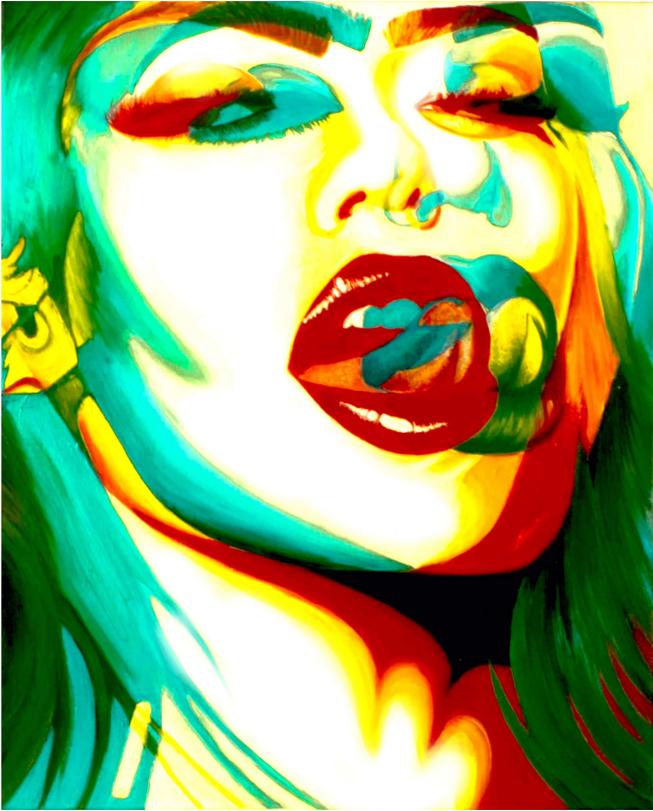
Now, let me say, aside from ghostwriting a few jokes here and there, or hosting open mics, I am not a comic. I am however a proud comedy sponge, soaking up as much as I can get. I took an Uber back to my hotel that evening, and on the ride I called a few of my buddies, fellow comedy nerds, because I just had to tell them about the amazing night of being immersed in Chicago comedy.

Special thanks to Matty Ryan, Alex Kumin, Mike Rowland, Adam Burke, their buddy Joe, the creepy guy in the Flaming Lips shirt, all the hilarious Chicago comics, and Jerry Hamedi, the man behind this fantastic magazine. It was an absolute honor to live in your world for a brief moment of existence.



RYAN BUYNAC IS THE AUTHOR OF 12 BOOKS OF POETRY, WHICH SIT ON BOOKSHELVES AND BACKS OF TOILETS ALL OVER THE WIDE WORLD. HE IS ALSO THE HOST OF BOTHERING THE BAND, A PODCAST THAT ASKS FAMOUS MUSICIANS SUPER SILLY QUESTIONS. YOU CAN FIND HIM ON INSTAGRAM @COYOTEBLOOD.

ARTWORK: JENN WEISKOPF







JENN WEISKOPF IS A VISUAL ARTIST THAT MOSTLY FOCUSES ON A SURREALISTIC TAKE ON THE WORLD WITH WORK THAT HAS VIBRANT COLORS AND EMOTIONAL IMAGERY. SHE IS A SELF-TAUGHT ARTIST THAT STARTED CREATING AT A YOUNG AGE AFTER BEING INSPIRED BY HER OWN MOTHER'S PAINTINGS. SHE ALSO KEPT ART IN HER LIFE AS A THERAPEUTIC AND CREATIVE RELEASE, FINDING A MUSE IN ARTISTS SUCH AS FRIDA KAHLO AND ALEXANDER GREY. ARTISTS WERE A SIGNIFICANT PART IN HELPING HER KNOW THAT IT IS BEAUTIFUL TO HAVE A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE ON THE WORLD.

HER INFLUENCES RANGE FROM 70S PSYCHEDELIC ROCK, TO THE PIN UP STYLE OF GIL ELVIGREN, TO THE ELECTRIFYING COLOR COMBINATION OF GRAFFITI-BASED ART. NATURE AND NOSTALGIA ALSO PLAY A HEAVY HAND IN THE INSPIRATION FOR THE OVERALL FEELING OF HER ART. A GOAL IN JENN'S MIND WHEN CREATING IS TO GIVE AN EMOTION TO THE PAINTING, LIKE GETTING LOST IN A SONG OR YOUR FAVORITE OLD PHOTO. HER OVERALL BELIEF IN ART IS THAT THERE ARE SUCH RANDOM BEAUTIFUL THINGS TO HELP YOU CREATE AND BE INSPIRED.

"I THINK THAT ONE OF THE AMAZING ADVANTAGES AS AN ARTIST IS THE ABILITY TO CREATE BEYOND THE OBVIOUS. WE GET THIS OPPORTUNITY TO CHANGE SOMEONE'S PERSPECTIVE, EVEN IF IT'S JUST FOR A MOMENT, AND THAT IN ITSELF IS SUCH A BEAUTIFUL GIFT, ISN'T IT?" – JENN WEISKOPF

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BOOK REVIEW: I'M FINE... AND OTHER LIES

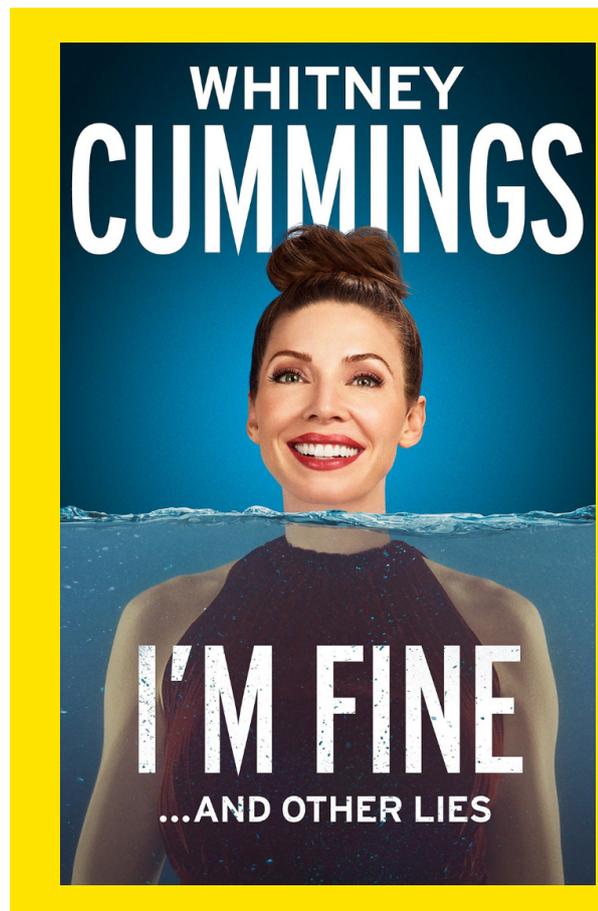
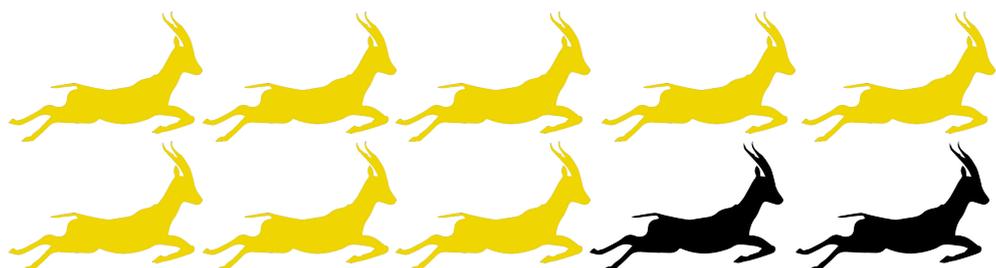
Review by Keay Crandall (@keaycrandall)

Have you ever felt like a hot mess? I guarantee this book will make you feel better about yourself. Cosmo magazine called *I'm Fine... and Other Lies* "Honest, witty." First of all, I don't believe that anyone from Cosmo read this book because it really would have turned their values upside down. Second, what an understatement! Whitney basically crucifies herself in every chapter.

She shares embarrassing and sometimes just really sad accounts of her youth, then assuages the pain with self-deprecating humor, which makes me feel uncomfortable. In this context, it was easier to digest because Whitney lays out some of her deepest insecurities in an attempt to deconstruct her past and do better for herself. Don't worry, it took her decades to get to this point. So your life is probably on track for some clarity in 20 years.

Whitney is a person whose life has been deeply influenced by the harsh expectations set for women in the United States. From surviving eating disorders and body dysmorphia at a young age (topics that were not as relevant in conversation even four years ago) to exposing herself as culturally ignorant and in denial of the societal values perpetuating her circumstances, there is a lot of pain and trauma uncovered. All in all, this was a pretty good read!

Overall Rating: 8/10 Gazelles



**THANK YOU TO EVERYONE WHO
MADE THIS POSSIBLE.**

**HAVE SUGGESTIONS?
WANT TO CONTRIBUTE?**

DM US @COMEDYGAZELLE

