

com)—Maine’s Funniest Mom—and spoke with her about her experience as a comic. I thought that if these lawyers could do it, so could I.

*What do I think of Western Civilization? I think it would be a very good idea.—Mahatma Gandhi*

The skills necessary to perform stand-up are similar to those used in trial work:

- Preparation and memorization
- Poise under pressure
- Self-confidence in uncomfortable settings
- Thinking on your feet and reading your listeners
- Selling yourself, and
- Timing

I’ve done my share of jury trials and arguments before judges (as well as a few Law Court appeals), and I’m always alert for ways to improve my legal skills. If stand-up comedy could help me become a better trial lawyer, I had to give it a try.

*It’s not enough to have every intelligent person in the country voting for me. I need a majority.—Adlai Stevenson*

Last spring I took an eight-week comedy class with Tim Ferrell, the talent coordinator/talent development director for the Portland Comedy Connection. Tim is a fantastic teacher who has been in the comedy business for thirty-five years. He’s an award-winning writer and director for shows like Comedy Central, The Daily Show, and a bunch of others. Tim knows all the big names in comedy and is extremely personable and very professional. Folks who took the class came from all walks of life—but we all had one thing in common: we believed we were funny and wanted to show our talents.

The first week, Tim did all the talking. He explained how the class would work, spoke about presentation techniques, had each of us take the microphone and introduce ourselves on stage (the class was held right at the Comedy Connection), and told us to prepare a three-to-five-minute sketch for the following class.

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Piece of cake, I thought.

*I went to a bookstore and asked the saleswoman where the Self Help section was. She said if she told me it would defeat the purpose.—Dennis Miller*

As I began preparing my routine, it struck me that I’d told plenty of jokes in my life, but what I mostly did was repeat jokes that I’d heard. I quickly understood that the difference between repeating a joke and writing a joke is enormous. As recently as fifty years ago, it was considered acceptable for professional comedians to lift jokes and even entire routines from other comics. Today, that practice is frowned upon and there is immense pressure to regularly come up with fresh material.

*Go to Heaven for the climate, Hell for the company.—Mark Twain*

I wracked my brain and finally came up with my material. I practiced it several times and thought I was ready. Several classmates went onstage and tried their routines before it was my turn. That is when I learned my first lesson.

Done well, stand-up comedy looks easy. What I was watching, however, didn’t look easy at all. To put it bluntly, most of the bits done by my classmates were pretty awful—and to my chagrin, so was mine. We all stunk!

*A study in the Washington Post says that women have better verbal skills than men. I just want to say to the authors of that survey: Duh!—Conan O’Brien*

Tim explained that even the best comics are never sure that their material is funny until they actually perform it before an audience. He graciously said our presentations were “a good start.” He emphasized which jokes seemed to work and which ones needed to be jettisoned. Tim congratulated each of us on our initial attempt and told us that we’d try again the following week. He promised we’d get better each time we were on stage. I had my doubts.

*If the police arrest a mime, do they tell him he has the right to remain silent?—George Carlin*

I have to give Tim credit—he somehow managed to find the kernel in each person’s struggling bit (including mine)