

that could eventually blossom into a funny routine. After several weeks of reworking our material, we were ready at the end of the 8-week session to perform live at the Comedy Connection in front of invited family and friends. It was graduation by fire.

*I still get very scared when I step in front of a live audience.—Adam Sandler*

I was surprised at how nervous I was.

I've had skilled Superior Court judges ridicule my arguments, how bad can some heckler in the audience be?

Just as I would in a trial, I tried to project confidence ... even as my heart was thumping so loudly in my chest that I was afraid to hold the microphone too close for fear that the audience would hear it. But after my opening joke got a chuckle, and my second one a real laugh, I settled down and enjoyed myself. Oh sure, I forgot a few words here and there and skipped one of my jokes entirely, but I was probably the only one that noticed. When the audience cheered at the end of my set, a part of me understood the joy and compulsion comics feel by making people laugh.

*Comedy, like sodomy, is an unnatural act. After all, it's not normal to parade yourself in front of other people and invite them to laugh at you.—Marty Feldman*

After the show was over, Tim explained that lawyers are often ideal candidates for his comedy workshop. "Lawyers are mature and open to direction," Tim said, "and they're often type A personalities by nature of their occupation." He went on: "Most attorneys are presenters at heart and doing stand-up is just like making an argument. Your jury is the audience and they have to buy your act and you have to sell it."

*I told the cop to go forth and multiply, though not exactly in those words.—Woody Allen*

There's a world of difference between arguing a legal case in front of a receptive family member as opposed to a disgruntled judge who has three other cases to hear before lunch. (I hasten to point out that here in Maine, we of course have no impatient or grouchy judges.) Like many of Tim's graduates, I wondered what it would be like to do my routine before strangers. So, I gave Tim a call and politely asked him to book

me at the Comedy Connection. About two months later, I was delivering my best jokes to a room full of paying customers.

Ouch. It was rough. Unlike the family and friends who were at the class graduation, the regular audience was much less forgiving. Laughs were harder to come by and I quickly learned the difference between a professional comedian and someone like me—a rank amateur: Hi, I'm not a real stand-up comedian; I'm just playing one on this stage.

*You ever read a book that changed your life? Me neither.—Jim Gaffigan*

But I didn't give up. I kept writing jokes and appearing on stage. I accepted the fact that live comedy audiences could be ruthless. In stand-up, you're only as good as your last joke—not your last performance—your last joke.

The great attraction of stand-up is that you know instantly if the audience likes you—they laugh. But it's a double-edged sword. When the crowd doesn't laugh, it's brutal. It's like that feeling you get at trial when the other side has introduced some piece of evidence you were unaware of that just bowls you over and completely destroys your case. It feels like someone has driven a stake through your heart. Your only option is to move on to your next joke ... quickly.

At trial you can attempt to mitigate harmful evidence by explaining its meaning to the judge or jury. (Politicians call this spin.) On stage, if a joke bombs you need to sell your next joke and pray the audience likes it. You've got about thirty seconds of sympathy before the crowd expects to laugh again—and you'd better deliver.

*Parents are not interested in justice; they're interested in peace and quiet.—Bill Cosby*

After awhile, my routines got a tiny bit easier. Then came an unexpected opportunity. Bob Marley, Maine's King of Comedy ([www.bmarley.com](http://www.bmarley.com)) and a personal friend, asked me if I'd like to perform with him at the Portland Comedy Connection.

Would I like to appear with Bob Marley? Duh.

So on a sweltering hot Friday night last July, I appeared during three of Bob's performances as one of his opening acts. The next night, we did four shows (notice how quickly I inserted that "we"—like Bob Marley and I were a team or something).