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How I Spent My Summer Vacation

I don't want to sound cynical, but Glenn Beck advocates buying gold as the only safe investment for the impending financial disaster that is destined to engulf the world, yet his show is sponsored by a company selling gold coins. I am no financial genius, but in uncertain times I put what little funds I have in cats—because when Armageddon comes, you can't eat gold.

I will get a call from our daughter, Maggie, when she reads this because she won't hear of me being mean to a cat.

I ran cross country in college, and we'd often pass a dead cat on the road, and someone would invariably say, "Here kitty, kitty, kitty." When our kids were young, we drove past a dead cat and I tried that on them. Maggie cried the rest of the way to Grandma's.

We have six cats and even the cats are saying, "Kent, no more." All but Snickers, who

speaks nothing but Spanish. (She hates Lou Dobbs.)

I would not be able to eat the cats because I love them all. In fact, Ellen ate the ribbon off the Christmas presents once and needed emergency surgery. Now she tells everyone I love her \$1,336 worth. If I'd eaten ribbon as a kid and the doctor told my parents it would cost \$1,336 to save my life, my brother would have grown up as an only child.

Veterinarians know pets are part of our family. We take our cats to Dr. Daniel, who looks like he's 14. My grandma loves Dr. Daniel because she says he's easy on the eyes.

"Ewww."

But she's not the only one who thinks Daniel is cute: every time we take Snickers to him, she says, "Medico Daniel esta caliente" while she fans herself with her little paw. It is adorable.

The cats got to spend a week at Dr. Daniel's this summer while, in an effort to continue improving my performing and writing skills, I took a class

at Chicago's world famous Second City. Walking in the first morning, I wondered if the people in the pictures on the wall (John Belushi, Alan Arkin, Tina Fey, and my hero, Gilda Radner), did they experience the same butterflies on their first day?

Though improvisation is a completely different type of performing than stand-up, there are valuable lessons that not only apply to my performing, but to all of our work.

The first is to love your scene partner and always take care of them. Wouldn't all of our jobs be better if we knew our co-workers were not only taking care of us, but we were reciprocating because the success of our company depends on both of us doing our best?

Eric Stonestreet of *Modern Family* says the most important lesson he learned from his Second City days is to commit fully. He says, "The audience has got to believe you are who you say you are in a role." How many companies would be better served not only if

their employees committed themselves to the work, but the company, in turn, was fully committed to the employees?

But the best lesson for me was *Dare To Fail* (or, as our instructor, Rachael Mason, put it, "Dare to suck"). Yes, failure hurts. There is nothing in the world like bombing in front of an audience. Tim Allen says doing comedy in front of people that don't laugh is like being in front of a bad firing squad: they don't quite kill you, they just leave you standing there. But out of these failures, you find your comedic voice and are ultimately more funny.

Alan Arkin says, "The thing that separated my experience at Second City from every other endeavor I've ever been connected with was that we were in an arena where we were allowed to experiment. And not only that, we were allowed to fail. *Allowed to fail!*"

"We are living in a civilization where *failure* is a dirty word.

It's become a moral issue. If you fail at something you are a bad person. Failure doesn't look good on ledger sheets. You have to explain it to stockholders, and sadly this kind of thinking has permeated every nook and cranny of our civilization. We don't have the time anymore to learn from trial and error. We have to do everything right the first time, and continue to do it right ever after. But how in the world are we to grow if we don't fail? And if we don't grow, we decay. It's that simple. Nothing in the universe is static. At Second City we weren't allowed to decay. My gratitude for permission to fail."

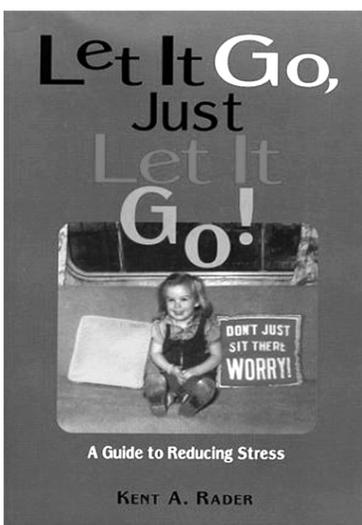
Rachael says, "Fortune favors the bold"—pointing out that, when we are unafraid to fail, we often find comedy gems that are, in my opinion, more important than all of Glenn Beck's gold.

I'm sure Gilda Radner failed many times before developing her character Roseanne Roseannadanna. How many

times in my life have I laughed at Roseanne? I thank God for Gilda's fearlessness and stepping out on a limb. I am not talking about foolish risks, but when you take a risk, your business can find its true product line. Without someone overcoming their fear of failure and experimenting, we would never have gotten personal computers, Post-It notes, rock and roll, fire or even the wheel.

Next time you feel the fear of failure or looking stupid in front of others creeping into your mind, remember Rachael's words: "Fortune favors the bold." Experiment, learn from your failures, and success will be yours.

I wish you continued success this year and always remember the immortal words of Roseanne Roseannadanna, "It just goes to show you, it's always something, if it ain't one thing, it's another."



*Known as the world's cleanest comedian and speaker, Kent Rader helps people learn and experience how laughter matters in reducing stress. A reformed accountant, Kent has written the stress reduction book titled *Let It Go, Just Let It Go* available at Amazon.com and featured in the Country Inns and Suites Read It And Return Program in 200 hotels. Kent is the winner of the 2007 Branson Comedy Festival and is co-star of *The Baby Boomer Comedy Show*, *Clean Comedy for People Born Before Seatbelts*, *Safety Helmets*, and *Facebook*. One conference participant said, "You are a wonderful reminder that our human nature provides unlimited opportunities to laugh, share, and defuse the stresses of our lives in a way that is neither offensive nor exclusionary" For information or a free DVD, please contact Kent at 405-209-3273 or email kent@kentraderspeaks.com.*



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Being You

I walked into a department store one day and was attacked by the Make-Up Lady. She asked me what kind of make-up remover I used. I said, "The pillow."

People laugh at that joke, but I actually said that—my college friend Mary told me after my show once that she remembered the day it happened. I wasn't trying to be a smart aleck with the make-up lady; what I was doing was being me! I really don't wear a lot of make-up, and I have been known to fall asleep with it on (millions of planes in hundreds of different time zones. . . well, sometimes sleep just happens).

Every time I answer the question "What do you do?" at a cocktail party, family event or funeral, the person blurts out one of three reactions: One, "A comedian? Are you funny?" Or two, "I should have been a comedian myself," and finally three, "How do you come up with that funny stuff?" Okay,

in Los Angeles, I also get the standard joke: "Oh, you're a comedian? Really? Which restaurant?" (Apparently most entertainers living in Los Angeles don't actually make a *living* at it, but they waitress while waiting for their big break!)

My answers to the previous lines are: "Yes, I've been making a full-time living at it for 16+ years."; "Really? Then why don't you try it?"; and "I'm funny because I'm ME." Oh, I also toss in that I've never waitressed—it looks way too hard.

The third question is the one that I really like to talk about, because people think humor is some mystery, when it's actually very simple. The best humor really does develop through you being YOU. Kids come up with funny stuff all the time because they are just being themselves. My sister got a speeding ticket with her five-year-old in the car, who is not the person you want with you when the cops pull you over. After the officer left, her daughter said, "Well Mommy, how do you know how fast to drive?" My sister replied, "There are signs all along

the highway." Her daughter blurted out, "Well, can't you read?!"

Remember Susan Boyle? The Scottish singing sensation who rose to fame overnight on *Britain's Got Talent* a couple years ago? It was cool to watch this plain, middle-aged woman walk on stage and blow away the judges, the audience, and the Internet community with her voice. In fact, I'm guessing that the only person who was not thrilled with her performance had to be the guy or gal who followed her. While she was knocking 'em dead onstage, I'm guessing that person was getting nauseous backstage. How the heck do you follow that? My advice to the person waiting in the wings would be to **Run your own race. . . be yourself.** That's why we like Susan; she is the real deal. You can bet she would have performed the same way regardless of the act ahead of her. I once followed a guy for a week at a comedy club who told me that he wanted my headlining job. . .and then he proceeded to get the audience riled up into a frenzy with dirty jokes and high-energy humor; in other words, pretty much everything I am not. At the

end of the week, he came up to me very frustrated and said, "I've thrown everything I have at them and you're still able to follow me. How?" I said, "Why don't you just do your own thing and forget about 'getting' me?"

One thing that helps me be myself is by staying present and not drifting off into a fantasy world. I've been at every kind of event you can imagine and trust me, sometimes it's very hard to stay present. I sat through an awards ceremony once where they handed out (as in *called people to the stage*) 292 award pins for years of service. 292! I got on stage and said "I got my five-year pin just sitting here!"

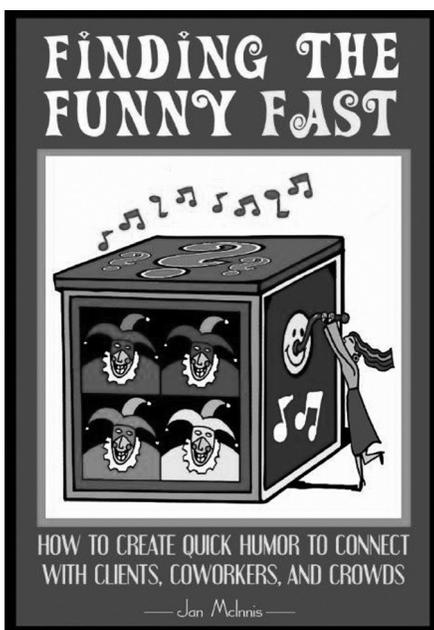
And sometimes the room set-up stinks! I once spoke at an event in which the room had pillars all around making it tough for some people to see me. I had to keep walking

back and forth until I finally screamed, "This is hard! I went to college so that I could get a job that didn't involve dancing around a pole." The humor in these instances came about by being present and saying what I would say, not trying to think about what a comedian would say.

So find something that keeps you present or brings you back to the present when you're stressed; this can be repeating a mantra, meditating, focusing on your breathing or even one person said, "Drinking a beer!" His logic was that beer will clear the clutter in your head. . . maybe, but that can get kinda risky during work. I've heard people who do dangerous things like rock climb or sky dive, do it because it forces them to be present. You can't be thinking about your to-do list when you're hanging on the side of a mountain. Okay, you

can, but you won't be hanging on very long. I don't climb rocks because I don't want to be present when I fall from a huge boulder. The scariest thing I've ever done? I went up 2200 feet in a hot air balloon! Actually, the scariest part was climbing into the basket because they asked for our *weight*. Like I would tell them that! I gave 'em my goal weight. . . this thing may crash, but that secret's dying with me!

So stay present in order to be yourself, and that in turn, will allow you do well. If you're good at what you do, then the audience/clients/bosses/co-workers or whomever will like you and key in to what you're doing. At the Punchline Comedy Club in Atlanta, some comic carved the words "Make them come to you" over the doorway leading to the stage, and that's exactly what you do when you are yourself.



Jan McInnis is a comedian and professional speaker who has shared her customized humor keynotes with thousands of associations and corporations. She is also the author of "Finding the Funny FAST; How To Create Quick Humor To Connect With Clients, Coworkers And Crowds," and she was featured in the Wall Street Journal and the Washington Post for her clean humor. Jan and Kent Rader are performing The Baby Boomer Comedy Show in theaters around the country.

(www.BabyBoomerComedyShow.com) From a health care client: "Jan McInnis was the keynote speaker at our conference in Anaheim. She did a fantastic job! Not only did we laugh heartily, but we gained insight into how to use humor to improve communication, particularly in the workplace. I heartily recommend Jan and would enjoy having her present to our organization again in the future."