Andrew Clark: OK, welcome, everybody, to another guest-lecture Primetime here today. We have a wonderful, wonderful guest who's here doing a master class with the second years and doing a Q&A with you guys today. A hilariously funny standup, a writer for shows such as *Seinfeld, The Larry Sanders Show,* and recently… uh, *Saturday Night Live, MADtv* over the summer, and the author of this book, *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Crying,* which some of you have brought with you today, and it's available to be purchased today as well, right after the talk. Right here we'll have a table set up, you can purchase the book, get it signed, take it home. It's a fabulous book, it's a great book, and it's a great book for anyone who's aspiring to do anything in comedy, and we're lucky enough to have the author here today. So please welcome, Carol Leifer. *(applause)* Check out our high-tech microphones.

Carol Leifer: You like how I did that?

AC: Yeah. So I guess the very first question, although it's looked into in your book, is how you got started in comedy. You were around the age of a lot of these students.

CL: Yes! I was 21 years old. Can you believe it? That I was, at one time…

AC: Sure, absolutely. *(laughter)*

CL: I can't. It's a little more difficult when…I just turned *60*! (*applause*) How crazy is that? Well, my story is pretty wild, because while I'm sure, like a lot of you, I was funny

in school plays and at camp and that kind of thing, I was shy. I had a quiet, shy side, still have that. But no one is really surprised that I went into comedy. Anyway, I went to university—I'm using your vernacular, did you notice, didn't say college—at the State University of New York at Binghamton, upstate New York, and I was in a theater group at my dorm called Hinman Little Theater. In my theater group was a guy named Paul Reiser, who became my boyfriend, and he was funny, and he told me, "Oh, it's so cool, during the summers I go down to Manhattan and I go on these open mic nights at these comedy clubs." This is 1976. The comedy club was like a new invention, you know? It's like, "Wow, he goes to these nightclubs." So I followed Paul down to the city to watch him, and as I'm sure you wouldn't be surprised to hear, Paul Reiser was very funny, as an amateur going up and doing five minutes, and I thought, "Oh, I wanna do this." So I put together five minutes, much like you guys do, you just put together what you think is funny, and I was doing jokes like…at the time they were doing that Trident gum commercial, like, "Four out of five dentists surveyed recommended sugarless gum for their patients who chew gum." And my joke was, "Who's this fifth guy? What's he recommending, rock candy and jujubes?" Stuff like that. And I put it together, and I went on an open mic. When I went to the open mic, this is what's wild, the MC, at a club called Catch a Rising Star, was Larry David, who put me through the audition, and the MC at The Comic Strip was a guy named Jerry Seinfeld. So I literally go back to my first day in show business with those guys. So that's really the wild, wild story of just the coincidence of us all meeting that way. And that's how I started. But I had a year left of school to do, and I knew my parents would kill me if I didn't finish school, so I

transferred to Queen's College, which is right near the city, and I went to school by day and became a comedian at night.

AC: And how long did it take you before you were sort of earning a bit of a living as a comedian?

CL: It took me two years, about. I had regular jobs, like I'm sure a lot of you do. I was a waitress at The Comic Strip, which was the dumbest idea ever, because when you're working as a comic, I would go up onstage and I'd be trying to tell my jokes, and I'd be like, "Table five! I didn't give you your check yet," and I'd be watching people leave, and stuff like that. It's like that old (saying), "Don't shit where you work"? Well, don't do standup where you work. So I did that. Then I was the secretary for a private eye, which sounds a lot more exciting than it actually was. I operated what was called a "Dictaphone." My private eye gave lie-detector tests to people who worked at diverse jobs such as Burger King employees, he would screen them, and hookers for escort services. So it was a pretty interesting waiting room to look out at. And I would just type up these transcripts. I tell this story in my book about day jobs because also, you guys, you have to get crafty with your work, because you're going to school, you're working, and how do you do it all? And when I got the job with the private eye, he offered me this job and he said it was nine to five, and at the time I was going to these comedy clubs at three in the morning, so how could I do a regular job? So I said to him, "Would you consider, if you hire me, me working 11 to 6, without a lunch?" And he said, "Yeah, that's fine, as long as you get your work done." And I took the job because he was nice

enough to let me do that. It helped me because I didn't have to get up at the crack of dawn to do the job. Also, being creative and thinking about how you can structure your life helps a lot.

AC: And asking? A "why not ask" kind of thing?

CL: Yeah. I have a big rule that I like to tell people. It's also part of being Jewish, I think: You don't ask, you don't get. OK? You don't ask, you don't get. My theory has always been, you ask people, you ask them nicely for things, and the worst thing they can say is no. I think of this a lot, because I'm dying to watch the debate tonight with that lunatic Donald Trump. I was on *Celebrity Apprentice*, and I'm sure nobody remembers it, because I was the first person thrown off in my season. Holly Robinson Peete was on, and Cyndi Lauper, and all that. When I did *Apprentice*, it's pretty wild, because the lights and cameras are on, and it happens live, in the moment, and I remember saying to the guy who hired me from NBC, "The only thing is, I don't want to be the first person fired. I don't want to be that loser." It's like, "Oh, Carol, you're too smart, you're gonna make it a long way." And I could feel the pigpile starting of the women, they were throwing me under the bus, and I was thinking in my head, "Oh my God, it's teeing up, I'm gonna get fired, I'm gonna get fired." And the thing they don't tell you about *Celebrity Apprentice* is, he doesn't decide right there, he says, "Well, let me think about it," and he goes backstage and he talks to the producers about who they should fire and why.

AC: Really?

CL: Oh yeah, it's not *right* there. But I sat there, and I knew, they threw me under the bus, I'm totally gonna get fired. And then he came back out and he said, "Carol, you're fired." My head was spinning, thinking, "I'm not leaving here with nothing, that is horrible." And I remember that he liked my charity, which was the North Shore Animal League, which is an animal rescue place, and so I just said, when he fired me, I said, "OK, now I know that you said you were a fan of the North Shore Animal League. Would you consider making a donation?" "Would you consider it," that's a nice way to ask somebody something, "Would you consider it?" He said, "Yeah, I'll give you ten thousand dollars." So I left *Apprentice,* but I gave the North Shore Animal League ten thousand dollars, which to this day I'm very happy about.

AC: So he made good on that.

CL: Not only that, Andrew, but I checked, that's another Jewish quality, I called the North Shore Animal League, and he did, with a check out of his own account, not his foundation's. So in that regard, he's aces in my book. In every other regard, he's not.

AC: Now I know there's gonna be a lot of questions, we're taking questions from students, so I'll stop now in case anyone has one, otherwise we can keep going until we get ready.

CL: Can I take a picture of everybody?

AC: Sure, let's do that!

CL: Just while they're all set up. I have to do that. Please, pretty up a little bit!

AC: They're a motley crew. Now I can also take a picture of you with them.

CL: I like this. OK, one, two… great. Oh, you know what? Everybody wave. Do one where you all wave. Oh, that's better, that's good. Cheese! Thank you!

AC: All right. Photo break! So we were talking about standup, and getting into standup. Last night you did a surprise guest set at Yuk-Yuk's, and one of the things that I noticed that was really interesting was, we were casually walking over and talking about stuff, and a lot of the stuff that you had just started talking about, you did as material.

CL: I did.

AC: So is that something you normally do? You're always working new material and mining your own experience for stuff like that?

CL: I like to always try new material, but what I did last night, and what I recommend to all you standups who go onstage, is that the audience always wants to know, and I've learned this over 40 years, they want to know that you're there, right there, then. And

when a standup goes up and it's very packaged, like "Hey, how you doin' guys, ever noticed the difference between cats and dogs," and they kind of go off into their own thing, you can feel people drifting away, and it's only because they're thinking, "Oh, they're not really here." They want to know you're here. So I started with new material last night because I'm visiting from the U.S., I haven't been onstage at Yuk-Yuk's since 1980, which is pretty something, and I thought it would be interesting to share that with the audience, because we talked on the way over, like "Oh, I haven't been here since 1980, are there Booth drugstores every three seconds," and you were like, "That store hasn't been here for like a million years." So that was interesting to me. I didn't get to talk about Tim Horton's. Do you have to have it every three feet here? I guess it's like our Dunkin' Donuts. People also want to know, "Oh, you're not from here." (I like it) when I see somebody who comes to America from Canada and starts to talk extemporaneously about where they're at. I think it's just always important to trust your instinct of being where you are right then. You know how sometimes, if a glass breaks or a tray spills at a comedy club, you have to comment on it, because everybody's hearing it, and it's weird if you don't. So just to be in the now is important.

AC: Are there any things you've learned doing standup that you wish you'd known back when you were starting out? Like about the craft of standup, writing standup, how to deliver jokes or putting an act together?

CL: Yeah. I think standup, and I talked about this in the workshop earlier, I'm so excited that you guys are so passionate about this stuff. It's really fun for me to see that the drive

for this never ends, the ambition for it, it's still alive and well. It just takes so much time and commitment, standup. And so much of it is just the doing. You know, comedy writing you can do by yourself, you can do with a group, but standup comedy, you just gotta get out and do it and do it, and then do it some more, and there's no substitute for that. What I think is sad is that, when I started there were no comedy programs or classes. How great to have it at a college. But I know people now who take comedy courses, and then they get out, and their parents call me and go, "Stacey took a comedy course, and she graduated, and now can you get her a job?" I think it's the amount of time that you need, and also the bad shows you encounter where everybody bombs are the only way to get good. You have to suck to get good, and I talk about that a lot in the book. You don't realize it, but you learn from the bad. The bad isn't just bad, like, "Oh that's horrible and I never want to have a show like that again." You learn from the bad. When I was coming up in standup, I did David Letterman's NBC show like 25 times. He was really a mentor to me. He saw me at The Comic Strip one time and said, "Anytime you have a set ready, Carol, you come on. You don't even have to show it to anybody, just tell us you're ready and you come on." And it was amazing. I think it was my third time, and my agent got a call from one of The Beach Boys. He said, "Carl Wilson—" this is how long ago this is, Carl Wilson is dead—"Carl Wilson saw you, and he wants you to open for The Beach Boys in Lake Tahoe at Harrah's Casino." And I was like, "Holy shit, this is great." But I also knew I wasn't really ready, because a casino gig is very though. You have to have laser focus, because the audience is not focused. It's people who lost their house, who they gave free tickets to the show, up front. They're not a comedy-club crowd. It's just a tough situation. And I opened for The Beach Boys that Christmas week, and it was so

hard. People not listening, people heckling, to the point where, you know every comic has the worst show they ever had? My worst show was there. It was New Year's Eve, I was onstage. There were frat guys right in the front who, I'm performing, and they started pulling on my mic. I'm like a fisherman up there. Literally, they're pulling my cord. Nobody's policing from the casino. A nightmare. And I left that gig and I was like, "Oh my god, this is the worst thing, I'm so sorry I took that gig." Well, like a week later, I'm back performing in New York, and it's like, "I'm better now. I'm better because I ate it so big." You get stronger. It's like armor. So welcome the bad sets, because you'll get a good residual from that. You will.

AC: How long was it before you started writing for TV? Was it pretty soon after you started working?

CL: I was doing standup for about seven years, and then *SNL* came to The Comic Strip to look for talent. I auditioned to be a performer. I remember Al Franken came, and a guy named Jim Downey, who was the head writer for a long time. I didn't get the performer job, but they asked, "Do you want to write for the show," and I leapt at the opportunity, and that's another piece of advice I love to give to people. I could've passed on that and said, "Well, I really want to be a performer, so thanks but no thanks." Grab any opportunity like that you have, even if it's not in your wheelhouse, because it always leads to great things. And my dad at the time was like, "Carol, you gotta diversify in a good career, so if you have an opportunity to do something like that, take it." So I did,

and I'm glad that I did, because now I get to do both. There's the TV writing and the standup. I'm really lucky that I get to do both. So that's how the TV writing started.

AC: You wrote for the show for a year, and in the book, you talk about a lesson that you learned writing for *Saturday Night Live*.

CL: I forgot what it was.

AC: Well, Lorne Michaels vs. the head writer and Al Franken, and figuring out the business.

CL: Oh, right. That's an important one. You always gotta please number one. Andrew told me that a lot of you, most of you, work jobs outside of here, which I really applaud you for, because I know how hard it is to do school and work at the same time. But I'm sure you all know, from having a job, you gotta please your boss. So at *SNL*, I was writing a lot with Al Franken and Jim Downey, and I was doing well, but I never felt like Lorne took to me. I always felt like I wasn't really one of his pets, so that made me kind of fly under his radar, which is different than the person I am now. If I have a writing job, and this happens to me now even at new jobs, if I feel like the boss isn't responding to me, I try harder to make them like me. But then, at that time, I was a little afraid and intimidated of Lorne, so I kind of flew under his radar. But I was like, "I'm still scoring with Al and Jim Downey, so I'm fine." And at the end of the season, I got fired. So it taught me a big lesson: when you work somewhere, at your regular job or at a creative

job in show business, always please number one, because they're the person making the decision. Pleasing number two and three maybe doesn't ultimately get you anywhere.

AC: Was that a hard setback, losing that job? Did it feel like, "Oh my, this is it," or did you think, "Well, it wasn't quite a fit?"

CL: Yeah, I felt bad about it, but at the time I was really wanting to get back to standup so much that it was fine. It's so funny, I wrote that story in my book, and then I go to dinner, and of course my wife was like, "Look to your left." "Sorry?" "Look to your left." Right at the next table is Lorne Michaels. Right when my book came out. So I said, "Oh, I should go over," and I said hello, and I said, "You know, I wrote a chapter about *SNL* and mentioned you, of course, and I'm gonna send it to you," and he said, "Oh, OK, great." And I saw him at the 40th anniversary party and stuff, so we've kept a nice relationship over the years, and he said, "You've done OK since *SNL*, Carol." I think of him, in our lifetimes, to me he's like Cecil B. Demille. I've never seen someone with such an eye for talent. If you think of all the cast members over the years he's picked out, I mean, how incredible is it? It's amazing.

AC: Now, can you talk a little about *Seinfeld*, and starting to write for that show and how it would work? And then we'll get some questions, so you guys get ready.

CL: Sure. I'm gonna repeat some things I said in the earlier workshop. The other thing that I think is great too, I would've loved to have had a comedy program when I was

coming up, but the best thing about it, I think, is the camaraderie of it, of hanging out with each other and collaborating with each other. I hope you guys watch each other when you do standup and give each other ideas and pointers, because over the years I've gotten so many great jokes and ideas from people who've just watched me and said, "Hey, I think you might want to try this" or "Hey, you might want to try this with hecklers" or whatever. Performers know other performers. Artistic people know other artistic people very well. With *Seinfeld*, basically what happened was, and I tell people, "Sharpen your people skills," Larry David and Jerry Seinfeld hired their friends. It's really as simple as that. They hired their friends who they thought were funny. They didn't want people who'd written for *Roseanne* and *Murphy Brown* and big shows at the time. They passed on them, because they were like, "We want fresh people." So they hired a lot of standups, and I got a call one day from both of them asking, "Would you want to write for the show," and I was like, "Absolutely." And I feel really honored, because I really learned how to write sitcoms from Jerry Seinfeld and Larry David. It's like learning at the feet of the masters. The thing I learned from them that I also talk about in my book that I think is important is, Larry and Jerry both knew that, for an idea for *Seinfeld* that was gonna fly, it has to be two sentences, something very short, something very funny that you get right away. The process was, you would go into Jerry and Larry's office, and they would ask, "OK, what you got?" And I would start pitching, and I would see Larry glazing over, and he would move his shoulder when he was bored, like, "Yeah, what else you got? Keep going." And then, if you said something like, "Elaine thinks that the Korean manicurists are talking about her behind her back in Korean," he would leap out of his seat and go, "Yes! That's a show! We're doing that!

Yes! Yes! That's a show!" And you could tell, his enthusiasm was overwhelming. So I learned really early to make your pitches really concise, and short, and sweet, and to get to the point of what is the funny.

AC: And you also managed to use your own experience to get some show ideas.

CL: I did. And I encourage you guys, in your comedy writing, what you each have that no one else has is your own life. You each have your own interesting, unique life. Use pieces from that, because that will set you apart from other writers. That used to happen to me at the manicurist's. I thought the Korean manicurists were talking about me behind my back in Korean. So I pitched that. I used to get picked up by car service guys at five in the morning to do my gigs, and I could not stand when I was in the backseat, still asleep, and these guys would chew my ear off with conversation. So I pitched that Elaine pretends she's deaf so that the car service guy won't speak to her. I got ideas from other people. A friend from high school said to me, "Oh, I had a dinner party the other night, and a couple brought a bread to serve, and I forgot to serve it, and I noticed when they went home that they took the bread home." Which became the premise for "The Marble Rye." I always carry a pad and a pen. I hope you guys do too. When you think of something that's like, "This seems funny to me, this seems like a unique idea," use it, because I also know that when we used to pitch at *Seinfeld*, when you would say things like, "You know, this really happened to me, Larry," he was a little more invested in it, and he took it a little more seriously.

AC: We'll see if we have a question yet. *(to audience)* Yes, Sophie.

Audience member: How did Jerry and Larry get their own show? Were they spec writers before?

CL: No, they weren't, actually. Here's the funny story. So Larry and Jerry were both standups. Jerry was very popular right away. He was the MC, I said, when I went on the first time. I always tell people this: don't discard hard work. Even when I started, and I was 21, you know what you do all day when you're 21: nothing. You hang out. Jerry Seinfeld would always be like, "Oh, I gotta get home and write today." He always wrote, every day, disciplined, at least for an hour. His work ethic was amazing. So he was a bit of a star when I started out. Larry David was the comic's comic. He was funny, but the audience didn't really get him. And if the audience didn't laugh, he could be really combative, and he'd say to somebody in the front row, "Why aren't you laughing? You got a problem?" *(laughter)* And he'd literally walk off. If Larry had a ten o'clock spot, and you had a 10:15 spot, you knew to be there at 10, because anything could throw him off, and he'd walk off. He didn't give a shit. He'd be like, "Fine, goodbye." So anyway, I've always been really good friends with Jerry, and Larry David at the time was courting my then-manager, a woman named Laurie David—Laurie Leonard, who became his wife. Anyway, Laurie threw a surprise birthday party for me that summer, and it was at a Mexican restaurant, and it was really fun, and I got hammered, OK? Now Larry David was so poor at the time that my present that he brought to the party was, he wrote a monologue of jokes. *(laughter)* I was so out of it that I was like, "Here, Jerry, you read

it." Jerry got up at the party, and he started to read the material, and he was getting the biggest laughs I've ever seen. So Laurie David and I always say that party at Jackelope's was definitely one of the a-ha moments for the two of them that that synergy worked. I compare them a lot to John Lennon and Paul McCartney, Larry David kind of being the John Lennon, a surlier, more negative personality, with Jerry's kind of sunny, pop sensibility like Paul McCartney, and that combination together, I think, made them great. That's really how it happened. That was their first TV show.

Audience member: So how did they get a network to give them a show?

CL: Well, Jerry was so popular as a standup…

Audience member: In New York?

CL: Well, at the time the Holy Grail was to do *The Tonight Show*, which was out in California, and Jerry had done a few standup sets that got a lot of acclaim, and then they were looking for him to do a show. I don't think this could happen now. "I'm going to bring a complete novice, someone who's never done this before, to create my show for me." But the show really flew under the radar for a long time. But that's how it happened. So that's another reason I always tell you guys, collaborate. Work with each other. A lot of times, better things come from one idea, and putting it together, it makes it really amazing. We did a little workshop today, which was so much fun, where the first-year guys pitched me *Seinfeld* ideas, which were really fun to hear. Not only did I hear some

really terrific ideas, but somebody would say something, and then somebody else would think of a suggestion, and it was like a true writer's room, where it's supposed to happen like that. This great synergy happens. So work with each other, (*in breathy voice)* love one another *(laughter),* because it makes it all better.

AC: *(to audience)* Did you have a question?

Audience member: I was gonna ask: when you write your standup material, do you do it in a group? Is it collaborative?

CL: I start it off by myself, but then I ask friends if they have ideas, and pitches off a premise. I think that really helps too, because I was talking today to the first-years about…I have a friend who made a suggestion that made a joke that was OK really pop. I have a joke about how I'm Jewish, and I don't know if you know this or not, but Jews have the lowest (number of) incidents of suicide among all the religions. Now, I don't know why that is statistically. My only hunch is that in our deepest, darkest hour, there's always some small voice that's like, "Oh my God, I hate my life, I can't believe it, I don't wanna go on…oh look, pastrami!" (*laughter)* Now that joked worked OK, but I had a friend who said, "You know what? What if you just said, 'Oh look, cake'?" And the joke has become so much bigger and better just by changing the word. So there's so much crafting like that to joke writing that I think makes it endlessly fascinating, and it's just because a buddy saw me one night and pitched that to me, you know?

AC: *(to audience)* Yes, Spencer.

Audience member: If you do a set and it doesn't go well, do you deconstruct it after to find out why? How do you edit it, how do you get it to that moment of being stronger and being better? You were saying that the worst sets are what get you better and stronger, so how technically do you get to that point?

CL: Well, when I said the worst sets make you better, I meant it a little more like your mettle, of your courage and strength. When you do a job that's too hard for you, you'll get better, because you'll go back down to your regular level, but you'll be stronger and better. But in terms of jokes that work or don't work, I always tape myself, I know you guys probably do that too, and if you don't you should, and you just hear how you said something, and a lot of the times how you phrase something, it'll work a certain time versus not working another time. But listen back to it, listen to what happened in the room. People are very uniform in their reaction. A good joke that works here will work really anywhere. So if you try a joke, and it's not working, I give it like three shots and then I throw it out. You can't put a square peg in a round hole. If people don't like a joke, they're not gonna learn to like it. It's pretty immediate. So there you go.

AC: *(to audience)* Another question? Uh, yeah.

Audience member: You've been in comedy a long time, and you've obviously seen a lot of comedy. What's the best joke you've ever heard? *(laughter)*

CL: Oh god, the best joke I've ever heard? That's so hard. There are so many comedians that I like and respond to. Do you have a best joke…

Audience member: No. *(laughter)* I've heard other comedians say, "Wow, I really wish I wrote that. Any jokes in particular, maybe not one overall, but any in particular that have stayed with you?

CL: Well, with any good comedian, you think of them when you're doing your regular things in life. There are two jokes that I think of a lot. This guy must've done this like 35 years ago, but you know when the elevator is open, and you see someone coming, and you just purposely don't hold it for them, you just watch it close in front of their face? That happens to me all the time, so I always just think of that joke. Elaine Boosler used to do a great joke about the washroom attendant in bathrooms. And then her joke was like, ten percent of *what*? So I think of those. But I was saying to Andrew, you know, it's another (reason) why I want to encourage you, but also why you have to be tenacious and really want it so badly, because the talented-people factory never shuts down. It's operating 24/7. There's always somebody new coming out, somebody great, all the time. And you know that they're getting there because they're working really hard. I was just on Netflix the other night, and I turned on this comedian I'd never heard of before, Sebastian Maniscalco? He's fantastic. He is absolutely fantastic. And I saw this hour where I was transported, and I was like, "Where'd he come from? Holy crap, he's good." So there are always new, great people.

AC: You mentioned Elaine Boosler. In your book, you talk about the comedy business and the fact that it's been, and I guess really remains, kind of male-centered, or male-centric—I don't know if that's the right word. It's not an equitable division.

CL: Well, there are always more men in comedy than women, so shout-out to my female peeps out there. But here's the thing: it was so kind of backward when I started that they wouldn't put two women on right after each other. It was literally like, "OK, we're gonna have this singer, the monkey act, then the woman…" It was literally like that. Like I couldn't follow Rita Rudner, like that was gonna throw off the balance of the axis of the earth. We're here to help each other, like I was saying about you all collaborating and working together. I had a problem with men heckling me. If it was young men out together, they'd always heckle me. I had no comebacks, and they'd just eat me alive, and I was like, "I don't know what I'm gonna do." And a male comic came over to me and he said, "I think I can help you." And I was like, "Fantastic." And he said, "When it's guys alone who hassle you, just say to them, from the stage, "Great, and where are the girls tonight, guys? Where are the dates? Oh, still parking the car? OK, great." And to this day I still use it, because it shuts them down. As a guy, he knew what I didn't know, which is how to shut another guy down. So it helps. We're all helping each other.

AC: On *Seinfeld,* you brought a lot of female perspective, like the skinny mirrors.

CL: Skinny mirrors, right. Elaine thinks that there are skinny mirrors at Barney's. Now I know that a guy would not have pitched that idea, because when I pitched it, other than the other women on the staff, the guys didn't know what I was talking about, whereas I'm sure every woman in this room knows what a skinny mirror is. You know, you look in it, and you look ten pounds thinner. So that's why I always encourage women to get into the business, because we're half the population, we have our own filter and way we see things in life, and there's always stuff for people to be able to look at, and that's what so much standup and so much of *Seinfeld* was about, "Oh, that's me, I've experienced that, that happens to me." And you just want to tap into those things. That's what makes the best writers and, I think, the best standups.

AC: Great. *(to audience)* Another…

CL: Who else? Come on!

AC: So the lessons from *Seinfeld*, just for everybody here, were…the way the show was run was kind of unique, in that Larry David and Jerry Seinfeld were running the show, but they would allow the individual writers to go and basically write the episode, as opposed to hashing the whole thing out. Can you talk a little bit about that process?

CL: Yeah. On a show like that, you'd pitch your idea. If they liked it, like the thing that would make Larry leap to his feet, you'd go off and start writing your draft. It was so funny, I wrote longhand, and then a writer's assistant had to put it on "the computer."

And then you'd keep sending your drafts back to them, they'd give you notes, you'd go back. It was a lot more of an independent-study kind of a show. But then when I wrote on *The Larry Sanders Show*, I really got an idea of the comedy-writers' room, and that's really now my preferred way to write on a show, because you're all sitting in a room, and you go through the script, it's up on a screen, and it's like, "Oh, we need something better here." And I find you get better stuff from the contribution of the room, because sometimes something will lead to something, someone will tag it with something else, and you have the best joke.

AC: *(to audience)* Uh, yeah, question.

Audience member: By the time you finished writing an episode, how long was the script?

CL: Until it got on the air, or got made?

Audience member: Yeah.

CL: It was pretty quick. You'd always see…I have a picture of it in my book, Larry and Jerry had a big board of the episodes, and if you saw your episode up on the board, you knew it was gonna be done. They didn't officially announce it to you, "I have decreed that your script will be shot." It was probably two weeks later, you'd see it on the air, and it's amazing, a show like *Seinfeld*, this will probably never happen again. The

watercooler show, you know, they used to talk about it, the next day? When I wrote "The Marble Rye," that weekend I went to our local deli in Northridge, California, and I walked in, and there was a big sign right at the front of the store that said, "We Have the Famous Marble Rye from *Seinfeld*." That would happen at that time, because there were so many millions of people watching. I wrote an episode, I think it's in "The Marble Rye," where Kramer goes to Costco, we used to call it Price Club, and I had him say something about, "I got a thing of olives, Jerry—Lindsay olives! They're the best, top of the line olives!" I got sent to the show, I can't even begin to tell you how many cases of Lindsay olives. I think I finished them last year. *(laughter)* But that only happened on a lightning-in-a-bottle show like *Seinfeld*. (*to audience*) Yep.

Audience member: Were there any pitches that you made that didn't get picked up that you wanted them to do?

CL: That's another good question. Were there pitches that I pitched that I really wanted them to do that they never did? Well, talk about using your own life, go back to 1995, when fanny packs were popular, and I noticed that when I was wearing my fanny pack and I had a T-shirt over it, wherever I went people would go, "After you, ma'am," and "Please, right this way," and then I got home and I thought, "Oh, they think I'm pregnant." *(laughter)* From the fanny pack. And of course, taking it to the *Seinfeld* stage, Elaine wears a fanny pack so people will think she's pregnant to get things done. She wants to get to the front line of the ticket thing, or get a seat on the bus, or whatever. So I always wanted them to use that, and we never did. Sometimes, too, things wore on them,

and you kind of wear them down. It's so funny too, the zeitgeist of the time you're living in. Twenty years ago I had a friend, a gay guy, who worked in banking, and he was closeted because you had to be, twenty years ago, to work in banking. So he was like, "Carol, will you come with me to the Hollywood Bowl and pretend you're my date, because I'm going with my boss and his wife?" And we went, and I pitched for a long time to Jerry and Larry, "Elaine is a beard for a gay guy," and they never took it, and every few months I'd go, "How about the gay guy being a beard," and then finally, "Yeah yeah yeah, let's do that." So you never knew when they would alight on (an idea).

Audience member: You mentioned Kramer, who might be one of my favorite television characters of all time. Did you do a lot of writing with Michael Richards about when to put his character in?

CL: Well, the beauty of a character like Kramer is that you could really plug him into anything and Michael would make it funny. My episode "The Lip Reader," George brings a deaf woman with him to a party to lip-read his ex-girlfriend's lips to find out why she broke up with him. Elaine pretends she's deaf so the car-service guy won't talk to her. And it took place at the U.S. Open tennis tournament, and we were like, "Kramer's a ball boy. It's simple as that. He's a ball boy, and he'll make that funny." And he did. I tell people, when Michael Richards would walk into the door like that, he worked on that for hours. That wasn't just something he came up with on the set. He'd practice it like a dancer or something with a routine. I had Kramer as a hansom-cab driver in "The Marble Rye." You could really plug him in anywhere to things like that.

Audience member: Do you think it's possible in this day and age to have a character with that much comedic impact?

CL: I think so…

Audience member: The guy that everyone looks forward to (seeing) walking into the room?

CL: Right, right. You never know. It's really that synergy of Larry basing it on a real guy named Kenny Kramer, who lived in his apartment building in New York, and you have to get an actor who's as gifted as a Michael Richards, who has that thing, that X factor that you can never really buy or educate, it just is. (*pause, to Andrew)* Yeah, you should be the boss. You call on people. (*laughter)*

Audience member: So a lot of the pitches you're talking about seemed to be initially aimed at Elaine. Were you specifically tasked with coming up with ideas for Elaine, or did you just naturally…

CL: No, I naturally came up with a lot of Elaine ideas, being female. But a lot of them…when we did it today, with the first-year students, it was Elaine and guys—Elaine likes a guy, a guy likes Elaine. I'd encourage you to see female characters as not also just dating guys, and guys dating them—like big-picture ideas that are specific to women. So

I didn't think of just…and we wouldn't just be character-specific, like "You just think of a George story, and you just think of this thing." You just kind of came up with ideas that seemed right for the character's personality.

AC: *(to audience)* Kyle.

Audience member: Was there anything you pitched for a premise that didn't fly on *Seinfeld* that you tried translating to another medium like standup, or another show?

CL: That's a good question. It's funny, there really is a difference between standup bits, jokes, and situational sitcom ideas. If I went up onstage and said, "I brought a deaf woman with me to a party to find out why my ex-boyfriend broke up with me," people would be like, "Yeah, there's no joke." I had my own show for a while after *Seinfeld* called *Alright Already*, and I used an idea that I never got on *Seinfeld*, which was, you know how you go to Costco and you buy—I'm so obsessed with Costco—you know when you buy that toilet paper where it's like 24 rolls, and it's like a shoulder bag, you know, where you carry it out on your shoulder? I always thought it'd be funny if you had a crush on a guy, and you're leaving Costco with the 24-pack, and you run into him. That visual is like, blegh. So we used that on my show at the time. But a funny idea…the characters were so quirky on *Seinfeld* that it really lent itself to quirky ideas. But a funny idea is a funny idea. The real classics, like *Everybody Loves Raymond* and *The Office* and shows like that, the characters become so identifiable that you know an idea that would work for them or not.

AC: *(to audience)* Sylvia.

Audience member: I'm just wondering: when you are looking for talent in this day and age, are you looking for funny people, let's say in the trenches of comedy clubs, or is it more through an agent or through their writing specs?

CL: Am I looking for people?

Audience member: No, I'm saying… *(laughter)* When, for shows, if they're looking for talent, where are they searching? Are they searching more like through agents, or are they just going to comedy (clubs), or…

CL: I think it's a lot of, I just worked on *MADtv,* which we revamped back in the States over the summer, and I know that when they went out looking for talent, they went to comedy clubs, they went to sketch places. So being seen is just really important. I know that when I'm out and about, and I see somebody who is special and talented, I really try to encourage them, because I also know that funny people can see funny people better than executives and agents do. I remember one night I went on at The Improv, I had a really crappy set, and I felt terrible, and I was at the bar, and Robert Klein, who was a big influence on me and my generation of comedians, came over to me and said, "I think you're really good. You've really got something. Keep going. Keep doing it." And it kept me going for I think at least another year, to hear that from somebody that big. I

remember Jay Leno came over to me one night, we all have mentors, he came over to me one night at the bar after a set, and he said, "You're really good." And I said, "Thank you," and he said, "But you're cursing too much. You're relying on 'fuck' here and 'shit' here, and you're better than that. You should take the profanity out of your act." And he was right, and it was something I took to heart, and now I do a lot of corporate events because of that, because I work clean, and that was an amazing piece of advice he gave me.

AC: *(to audience)* Yep.

Audience member: So when *Seinfeld* came out, it was revolutionary, and people really liked it. Even now, there's like a Twitter feed called "Modern Day *Seinfeld*," I think, and it's really good, which I think shows that people still do like that style. But apart from something like *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, which is basically like an adult version of *Seinfeld*, do you think that kind of humor could happen just because it's so well-known?

CL: You know, what's funny is funny. I think what was great today about the first-year students doing *Seinfeld* pitches is, there are always funny ideas. We plugged them into Jerry and Elaine and Kramer, but they were just, regardless of the characters, funny ideas. So just always keep searching for what you think makes a really unique, funny idea. Larry David (quit) *Saturday Night Live*. He got really mad at Dick Ebersol, who was running the show at the time, and cursed him out and said, "Screw you, I'm outta here, I quit." And then over the weekend, he went back to his crappy apartment, and Kenny

Kramer, his friend in real life, said, “Well, Larry, what the hell are you doing? You’re making how many thousands of dollars a week working on *SNL*, what are you doing? Are you crazy?” And he went back Monday morning and just pretended that nothing happened, (*laughter)* and it worked. And he used that on *Seinfeld*. So when you’re in the middle of the worst thing that could possibly ever happen to you, take out your notebook and say, “This is gonna be funny somewhere, sometime, to somebody.” It’s not funny right now, but it’s a great story later, right?

AC: *(to audience)* Yep.

Audience member: So sitcom episodes have to be 22 minutes long, right? So did you always find it difficult to work under that time constraint, or did you get used to it?

CL: No, I mean, twenty-two minutes… I worked on a show called *Devious Maids*, which was a hybrid of a comedy and a drama, and I hated working on an hour show. I was like, “How do you fill *this* time?” No, a half-hour script is very easy to write for, I found. It’s not like *War and Peace*, you know. It’s in-and-out, funny…

Audience member: Are they usually a minute per page?

CL: No, I think that’s more for screenplays. Do you guys write screenplays here?

AC: They do, in second year, start working on screenplay structure and stuff, but we don't have time to do a full feature or anything like that.

CL: Yeah, I've always felt that a half-hour is a good space to be in, for sure.

AC: *(to audience)* Yep.

Audience member: The time-constraint issue being brought up, was there ever a time when you pitched a joke in an episode, like a one-minute joke or piece of dialogue that you thought would carry an episode and be way more significant than it was?

CL: Well, that's an interesting question. When I worked on *Seinfeld*, they never really used to like topical…I say "they," but Larry never liked topical pop-culture references because he felt, like we're watching it now, twenty, twenty-five years later, people wouldn't get it, which I was really happy about. In "The Hamptons," that's one I cowrote with Peter Mehlman, it was Peter's idea that Jerry sees George's girlfriend topless before George does, bcause she's sunbathing. But you see, it's one line, that idea, one sentence. It's short. Elaine walks out in this really ugly, dowdy sundress, and I had written in the script that Jerry goes, "And then there's Maude," which is a reference to the show *Maude*. I thought that Larry would totally get rid of it, but he kept it in. So it's still there, so sometimes I still have to explain it to people, *(laughter)* especially Californians who are like, "Did you watch *Maude* when you were growing up?" And I'm like, "*Maude*?

I'm from New York. You mean *Mohd*?" *(laughter)* Not *Maude*. So yeah, at least I have that in my legacy.

AC: *(pause)* Sorry, I thought I saw a hand there. You talked about Jerry Seinfeld and Jay Leno. A quick question I wanna ask is, do you think there's something about some comedians and cars, because they're both, not just people who like cars, they're two of the most fanatical car enthusiasts on the planet. Or is that just two one-offs?

CL: I don't know.

AC: I have to ask. *(laughter)*

CL: I can't even begin to fathom what it is about guys, those guys, and cars. I just know they both have a lot of money (*laughter),* and they found very good ways to play with it.

AC: Now *The Larry Sanders Show*, it's one of the more pivotal sitcoms that's been done. You could trace a lot of what's happened since then back to what they did on that show. The story of you getting on the show is one of being rejected for…

CL: Oh, this is a good story. I forgot. This is a really, really important story that I hope to impart to you. I'd finished working on *Seinfeld*, and I just thought, "There's only one other show I'd want to work on: *The Larry Sanders Show*." I had an interview, and I figured, when I had my interview, I was gonna do what a lot of writers don't do: I was

gonna go and bring a list of pitches. Sometimes people don't do it because it's being a little aggressive, but I felt like, who doesn't like to hear pitches? So I brought these pitches, and I have a good meeting, and then I go, "You wanna hear some ideas? Hey, you brought some? Great, let's hear them!" And I started pitching *Larry Sanders* ideas, and Garry really responded to them, and the showrunner, and I called my agent literally while leaving that meeting going, "You're getting a phone call in ten minutes and they're hiring me. It's in the bag." I wait a week, don't hear anything. Two weeks, nothing. My agent, I keep asking, "What's going on?" She says, "Oh, they're still thinking about it." "Great." Literally six weeks later, I heard, "Oh, they hired this other woman." And I was so disappointed. I thought I had it in the bag, they loved me ideas. Now, where this story normally goes is, "And so I hated that Garry Shandling. I thought that really sucked, and I pitched, and he didn't…" And I knew him from standup. But I learned a really important lesson, because I ran into Garry because I was writing for the Emmys. And he was nominated, and I saw him there, and instead of being like, *(sarcastically)* "Hey, how are you, how's your *writer*," I was nice, I was pleasant, we had a good conversation. And at the end of the Emmys, he came over and said, "Carol, if something happened with the show, if an opportunity came up to write, would you be interested?" I said, "Absolutely, I'd love it. Always happy to be considered, and thanks for thinking of me." Well, a month later, they called, and they offered me a writing job. So I always tell people, it's important to be funny, it's important to work on your craft, it's important to do your work and show up, but always have good people skills, because that to me was the perfect example of, if I had been surly or angry about it, I wouldn't have gotten this amazing opportunity that popped up again, you know? So don't take things personally. You get

jobs, you don't get jobs, shit happens. I still go out for jobs, I get some, I don't get some. It happens all the time. Just keep it all light and fun, and sometimes a great job like that will come back around.

AC: In the book, you talk about agents that you've had, management, and I think people get confused. It's almost like there's two kinds of people with an agent: one who calls their agent every day, and one who's afraid to even send them a text. I guess what I'm asking you is, what do you think someone should expect from a good agent or manager? And they're different in the States. In Canada, an agent and manager can often be the same person. Do you think there's anything, just in case…because sometimes people will leave Humber and they'll get representation, and then they find out nothing comes of it. Do you have an opinion on what they should expect?

CL: Yeah, I'm sure these guys have heard that there are good agents out there. You talk amongst yourselves, and you hear who's a big agent, who's not a big agent. I would be careful of signing anything with anybody without having an attorney look at it, because that's always trouble. And I think you should be able to call your agent any time and ask them about anything. Something else I talk about in the book is, you really gotta be the squeaky wheel. To get anywhere, to get ahead, you really gotta be the squeaky wheel. But the squeaky wheel can also turn into the pain in the ass. Being able to navigate those things, of being aggressive and being out there, but also not being someone where it's like, "If this person calls me one more time, I'm gonna kill myself." But I think you should always be able to call and have a good relationship with your agent.

AC: Well, you had the one agent who told you he was gonna get you (a gig as) the opening act for a big, big star, Sinatra, and how many months were you with him before that finally happened? In the book, you talk about how it's a lot of bad gigs…

CL: Yeah, I had an agent who promised me the world, and then literally he's got me booked at, there was a place called Ground Round Restaurant, on the turnpike, where people would eat peanuts in the shell, and the thing was you would throw the shells on the floor. So I'm doing my act to peanut shells crunching. *(laughter)* It was pathetic, and I was like, "When are you gonna get me, you promised me the world," and he was like, "I'm workin' on Frank." I'm like, "Frank Stallone? What are you talking about?" He said, "Frank Sinatra." I said, "You gotta be kidding me." And I kept my head down, I focused, I kept trying to work, and sure enough, he got me to open for Frank Sinatra, which is still the highlight of my almost 40-year career. So you never know.

AC: In the book, you talk about some lessons you learned from Mr. Sinatra. What were they again?

CL: Well, he was very gracious. He brought me out every night for a bow before he performed. He certainly didn't have to do that. That was nice. He put my name up on the marquee, which a lot of stars at the time did not do. My friend Bill Maher opened for somebody big at the time, I won't say who, but her act is "supreme," *(laughter)* and she

wouldn't put his name on the marquee. And he also credited each songwriter with every song that he sang, because he also valued writers.

AC: Right. *(to audience)* Yep.

Audience member: How old were you/where were you in terms of your career when you got your first agent?

CL: When I got my first agent, I was…I started in '77, and then I went out to L.A. to do *An Evening at the Improv* in 1982. So it was five years. But a little side note, because I was telling the first-year guys that you gotta be your own biggest fan, because if you're not, who is? And I don't mean that in an ego way, like "I'm the greatest, look at me." I mean you gotta really stick up for yourself. I look back on doing *An Evening at the Improv,* and I was already doing standup for five years. Vincent Price was the host, and introduced me. And he said, "Please welcome Carol LIEfer." I didn't even have the balls, five years in, to say to the guys running the show, "Can he do it again? He got my name wrong, it's LEIfer, not LIEfer." So I watch on my *Improv* tape, "Please welcome, Carol LIEfer." So you've always gotta, like, speak up. But I have a lot of sympathy, because I look back and I was five years into it, doing a big show, and I didn't have the balls to say, "Can he do it again, because he said my name wrong?"

AC: Is part of that thinking you're on thin ice when you're new? You're easily replaceable, you don't wanna make waves?

CL: Right, don't rock the boat. Well, if someone mispronounces your name, you can rock the boat. It's OK. It's like the same thing I said earlier: you can say anything or ask anyone for anything. You don't ask, you don't get. Just do it nicely. When I asked Donald Trump, I didn't say, "Will you make a donation?" I said, "Will you consider donating?" I use the word "consider" a lot with people. When I wrote my *Modern Family* episode, I ran into Steve Levitan, who's the showrunner of *Modern Family*. We bullshitted for a little bit, and I said, "Let me ask you, Steve: would you consider my coming in and pitching some *Modern Family* ideas?" "Fantastic, Carol, great." That worked out great. Also, I could've said, "Steve, would you consider me coming in and pitching some ideas?" And he could've said, "You know what, we're good, we have a staff and we're not taking any outside pitches." "OK, great." I always like to encourage people to ask for what you want. Be your own advocate. Just be light and fun about it.

AC: Don't take it too hard, or personal.

CL: Yeah, don't be afraid of "no." I get rejected for stuff all the time. Don't be afraid of "no." I think you probably hear "no" more than "yes" with things. Don't be bummed out. It happens to everybody.

AC: Great. *(to audience)* Uh, Deb.

Audience member: How has comedy helped you in this election?

CL: Um, zero. You know, Deb, I'd really like to say that…I don't do any political material, only because that was another piece of advice Jay Leno gave me, and we also, I don't know if you saw Amy Schumer, the clip that's out there from this past week, she had a flap with the audience in Tampa, where a lot of Trump supporters walked out because she made a big thing about hating Trump. Jay Leno said to me, "You go onstage and you're political, you're gonna alienate fifty percent of the audience. You just are. So why go there?" My friend Bill Maher, that's his shtick. He's a political (guy). But I just don't do any political jokes. It's never worked for me. If that's your thing, then I say go for it. It's just, especially when you pick sides in something, you never wanna alienate your audience in any way.

AC: When did you know what your thing was? When a lot of standups start out, they start out with material that's reminiscent of the standups they love watching. They're, not imitating, but paying an homage, if you will. They try out different things, they do dangerous material for a while. But at what point did you go, "This is where I'm at, this is my spot"?

CL: I think it's always evolving. I'm still trying to figure out who I am onstage, but you kind of know when you're onstage…look at one of your sets, and look at the top three things that hit. What were the jokes that hit the most? And I think that can kind of help you, guide you towards who you are onstage. "If these three jokes worked the best while I'm onstage, maybe that's what people are responding to about me." So maybe play to

that and work to that a little more. It's a really simple exercise, but if you have writer's block, write down twenty things that annoy you. We all have that. Twenty things that just bug you. And a lot of times, it just leads to material, because the thing that bugs you probably bugs the person sitting out there.

AC: Great. *(to audience)* Yep.

Audience member: Have you ever had a special? Is that something you'd want to do?

CL: Yes, I have had a special. I've had five specials. Where are they available? One of them is…I did a special called "Gaudy, Bawdy and Blue." I did a takeoff of those bawdy, ballsy comedians from the sixties, the women who worked in these nightclubs and played the piano. Bud Cort, he's Canadian, right?

AC: I believe he is, yeah.

CL: He's in it. So there's that, and then I did two specials for Showtime, I did one for Comedy Central…

Audience member: These are half-hours?

CL: They're half-hours, yeah. But I'm working on something new now. So it was fun to go on at Yuk-Yuk's last night and start to try the material.

Audience member: How far into the process are you?

CL: Really right at the beginning, but I've kind of got a theme, because I want to talk about…my first book is titled *When You Lie About Your Age, The Terrorists Win*, so I've never been afraid of talking about my age, and I don't think a lot of women do. I embrace it. So I want to talk about what it was like growing up when I was a kid compared to now, because there are so many funny things about that, so I'm starting to write that kind of stuff. But just like you guys, I'm gonna have to get out to the club and go on and try it, because you just don't know until you try it.

AC: *(to audience)* Yep, right back there.

Audience member: You talked a little bit last night about your son and your wife. How often do they come see your shows or try to contribute to your material?

CL: My son and my wife…well, my wife and I just got married last December. *(applause)* Thank you. It's a real shot in the dark. We've been together twenty years, but we just got married last December. *The New York Times* wrote about it in their "Vows" column, you can look that up. *(laughter)* That was very cool. My wife Laurie is… you know, people are always like, "Oh, is she hysterical, is she a laugh a minute?" It's like, "Um, no, I don't need that. I don't need competition in my relationship." She appreciates (comedy), but she works in real estate. I think that's another good thing about advice in

relationships. A lot of times, in relationships, you have a gardener and a flower. You can have two gardeners in a relationship, but you can't have two flowers. So I always give that piece of advice as well. Our son, who we adopted from Guatemala ten years ago, whose name is Bruno, he's funny. I swear to God, it's not genetic, obviously *(laughter),* because we adopted him, but he makes me laugh. He wrote a joke like a month ago that I couldn't believe. One morning we were sitting there, and he says, "Mommy"—to me, because he wanted to know if I thought it was funny—he says, "Mommy, have you seen the movie *Diarrhea*?" And I said, "No." And he said, "Well, you haven't because it hasn't come out yet." *(laughter)* Pretty good, son, pretty good. He definitely has the bug. He just has a funny way about him.

AC: Do you think that's part of comedy, though, where it's like a currency in certain families? It was like that for you growing up, right, a very valued thing?

CL: Yeah, I always say to Laurie, he's got it. He's got that X factor. We sit in a room, like we do in a writers' room, we goof around, A lot of the time Laurie says, "Will you two cut it out?" because we're kidding around all the time. He just knows how to do it, he makes jokes, little things like that. I totally could see him becoming a writer. He's a wiseass, too, which you need to be as a comedian. We went to Disneyland, and when you go to Disneyland, they say everything over the speakers in English, and then they say everything over the speakers in Spanish. So he was taking a dual language program at the time in school, so he was learning Spanish too, and we'd never gotten him to speak Spanish, and the teachers say it's normal, kids want to speak English when they get

home. So we go to Disneyland, and they're saying stuff in English and Spanish, and I thought I'd be crafty, so I go, "What are they saying over the loudspeakers? Mommy doesn't speak Spanish." And he turns to me and goes, "The same thing they're saying in English, Mom." *(laughter)* He got me. But I'm writing a lot about being a parent, because…

AC: Well, last night you did the joke, that came out of your real life, about driving by, was it a van or something that had…

CL: Right, kids ask you a ton of questions, and this happened in real life, I was driving him home from school, and we passed a van on the street advertising "Topless Maids," and of course he asked me, "What are topless maids?" So I gave it my best shot, and I was like, "Well, sometimes, Bruno, people like it when other people don't wear their shirts." And so he goes, "Oh, you mean like the time Grandma walked out of the shower, and I walked in on her?" "No. Nobody likes that." *(laughter)* "Not even Grandpa." But you know, the dialogue we were talking about in the earlier session, when I said that to him, "Some people like it when people don't wear their shirts," Bruno actually said, "Oh, you mean like that homeless guy over there?" And I tried to use that onstage, but the audience would be like, "Heh heh, ehhh," and they got sad a little bit. *(laughter)* You know how we were talking before about jokes you love? Well, the audience is the ultimate decider, and they said, "No thanks." So we go with the grandma thing, where it's not controversial to people. So I always write things like that down that he asks.

AC: And that was also when you were getting other comics giving you stuff to try out?

CL: Right.

AC: Yeah, it's amazing how much work goes into that.

CL: But that's another thing: I have a friend who I gave that bit to, and I said, "If you have anything on this, give it to me." Because I said, with the topless maids, Bruno would ask, what kinds of things do they clean? And then my friend gave me the joke, "Probably the remains of the previous topless maid who cleaned the premises." *(laughter)* Right? I love that joke too. You do it at comedy clubs, and people are like, "Heh heh, ehhhh…" Suddenly, they feel very sad, like they're watching *Dateline* or something. So you never know until you try it.

AC: *(to audience)* So we have time for a few more questions, and then a reminder that when we're done here, we're gonna have an opportunity to get your book signed by Carol, and to buy a book if you haven't got one. Come right up onstage, and we'll have a table set up with everything for you. Uh, Sophie.

Audience member: Do you find that, and I hate to use the word "non-coms," but do you find that people who come into comedy clubs that aren't in the business have a different sense of humor than your friends who are comedians?

CL: That's a very good question: do comedians have a different sense of humor than regular people? As an audience, I don't think so. That's the thing: the joke about the remains of the other topless maids, somebody in comedy would probably laugh at that a little more than a regular person, just because we have a more wicked sense of humor, but the audience is made up of more regular people. I've seen that trap that people get into, like the "too hip for the room" comedian. Like Larry David, he did his thing, and comics liked him, but regular people didn't. He had to find his thing in comedy writing to really score. But I know comedians that are too hip for the room, like "if you don't get that, you're an idiot, because that's a good joke," you can't take that attitude up onstage, it just doesn't fly. And people feel it. Audiences are geniuses. I really do feel that. They know good jokes when they hear them, and when they don't like them, they don't like them. It's up to them. They're kind of the boss. So let them tell you which jokes are working in your act and which aren't, because normally, they know. They do.

Audience member: Have you ever had a joke that you hated that you tried onstage and it just got a huge laugh?

CL: Uh huh. I'm kind of in a quandary with one of the jokes that I have now, because I love it, and it gets a great laugh, but I'm getting a lot of shit about doing it, just from friends. I'm doing a thing about Bruno asking questions, and some questions are easier than others. Bruno asked me around the holidays, "Is Santa Jewish?" That one is very easy to answer, so I said to him, "No, Bruno, Santa is not Jewish, and we know this because Santa gives out the presents for free." *(laughter)* I love that joke, it makes me

laugh, I think it's hysterical, but I have had other comedians come over and say, "I wouldn't do that on TV." I don't know, I'm kind of wrestling with it a little bit, but at the same time it makes me laugh, I'm Jewish, I can't carry a banner for every cause. I don't know, what do you think?

AC: I think it depends on the show, right? There's always someone at home getting outraged, but there's also someone at home thinking the TV's talking to them. *(laughter)* It has something to do with the person telling the joke, and then the venue. So I think for you, you've also got some tags you're working on, right?

CL: Oh, the tags are the best part of it.

AC: Maybe without the tag, it doesn't work. But maybe with the tag, it cushions it a little. I don't think it's offensive at all, but then I love the (joke about) cleaning up the (remains of the) previous maid (*laughter*), so maybe I'm not the right guy to ask.

CL: Yeah, the tag is, "Jewish Santa'll cut you a deal, but nothing's coming off this sleigh gratis."

AC: *(to audience)* At the back, Vance.

Audience member: So for forty years, you've seen comedy evolve. How important is heart to your comedy?

CL: Heart. What do you mean?

Audience member: Like for example, the "Jurassic Park" episode of *Futurama*…

CL: That I didn't see.

Audience member: It's just that feeling of, "Aw, oh my God," but at times you're just laughing hysterically, but you still have that "aw" factor.

CL: Right. I wouldn't go up onstage as a standup and think, "I have to evoke some heart." That's not in your bag of tricks. Don't think about that, just think about writing the funniest, best jokes. In terms of heart, in comedy writing, like in sitcoms, on *Seinfeld* the motto was "no hugging, no learning." That was from Larry David, and we all kind of followed that. But people still loved these characters to such a crazy degree, and still do. I remember when we shot "The Marble Rye," and Jerry grabs the rye from the old lady and runs off, and she's upset, and he says, "Shut up, you old bag," and he runs off, we all turned to each other and said, "This is how beloved this TV character has become. He steals a marble rye from an old lady, and not only that, but he also says, "Shut up, you old bag," and people are like, "We love you, Jerry, you incorrigible little crazy Jerry!" *(laughter)* That's really a testament, and none of it came from thinking, "Let's make him lovable," it was just creating these characters. *Modern Family*, I really give them a lot of credit, because I think the show is as funny as anything, but there's always that element

that hits your heart, or makes you think twice about something. I'm really not a good spokesperson for that, because I'm still stupefied by it.

AC: *(to audience)* Uh, yep, one more.

Audience member: I'll try my best to build off the last question. I've tried talking about more personal subject matter, like a story about anyone's grandmother. Making up a story like that, does that have much less value if you make it funny than making a story about a very boring situation in your life funny? Is there more value in making a bad story good, or in making up a good story?

CL: *(long pause)* I'm not really… *(laughter)*

AC: I think the question is… I think in a way it's the same thing, which is, you can take a terrible experience, like you mentioned with Larry David getting fired and then just going back, like what have you got to lose, and making that become funny. It's a bad thing that becomes funny. As long as it's funny, you're good.

CL: Don't you find that a lot with things that happen that are bad? You have something with a person at a store, and you're upset about it, like a fight with someone in a store, and you leave and your heart is pounding, and you're all upset. Don't you notice, when you tell your friend about it that night, it's funny, and you're finding the funny things in the story? A little bit of time makes it better and funnier.

AC: In terms of writing, when I started writing, my editor said the difference between fiction and non-fiction is, in fiction they accuse you of not making it up, and in non-fiction they accuse you of making it up. So I think ultimately, whether it's coming from a real experience or one that's off the top of your head, as long as you're connecting with an audience, you're probably good. Uh, right at the back.

Audience member: What are your thoughts on the industry these days compared to when you first started?

CL: Well, I think what's better about the (industry) now, and I think you guys can embrace, is I'm amazed at people on Youtube who become popular, and what I like about it is they're like, "Well, I'm just gonna shoot my own stuff, and I'm gonna put it out there, and check this out, I have four million followers who subscribe to me." I think that kind of initiative is pretty amazing, that you can do that. You don't need to find an agent, it's like, "Well, here I am, and I'm doing my thing." To me, when I was coming up, we didn't have that. I think that's amazing. What I think is bad is, with social media, even young kids who are thirteen or fourteen, you've gotta market yourself all the time, and present yourself as a certain thing. To me, that's a lot of pressure, and I think as a young performer, that's a lot of pressure too. I had my hands full going on and doing sets, and now I gotta market myself everyday? But it is what it is.

AC: *(to audience)* One final question. Yep.

Audience member: Do you have any advice for nervous Nellies who…like when you were talking about, “That’s not what my name is.” Any advice for becoming centered and who you are, and not being so affected by, “What if this is wrong”?

CL: I’ll give you two pieces of advice that I think are really good that I wish someone had told me when I was your age. One is really simple, and I’m borrowing from Nike: just do it. Really, just do it. I get nervous before I do shows, I’m not bulletproof. I get nervous before pitch meetings or job interviews. It’s part of the deal. And don’t you notice, and I was saying to Andrew I think it’s great that even the people who just want to be writers have to go up and do standup, because didn’t you notice, and I bet there’s not one person that didn’t have this experience, you were so petrified. You were like, “Oh my God, I’m gonna go up there, I’m gonna throw up.” And you go up, and it turned out it was OK. And not only that, it was so much fun. So not only “just do it,” but here’s a really good piece of advice that I use al the time, and like I said, if someone had told me this forty years ago, I’d be really happy to know this. When I’m in a situation, I always ask myself, “What’s the best thing that can happen out of this, and what’s the worst thing?” And usually, the best thing so eclipses what the worst thing is. Usually, the worst thing is, I was rejected, I didn’t get it, they said no. I did standup and I sucked, and people didn’t like it. It’s not as bad compared to the best thing that can happen, which is usually something fantastic. So ask yourself those two questions when you’re in a situation, and I think you’ll find, when you ask yourself what the worst thing is, it’ll propel you to do it because you’ll see in the end it’s really not that bad.

AC: Great. Well, Carol, this has been one of the best things to happen so far this year.

(*applause)*

CL: Thank you!