



# Downward Facing Broad

## Acknowledgements

Tracy Rideout, CBC Radio for broadcasting this as a comedy special on Laugh Out Loud. Allison Dore, Howl and Roar Records, Richard Side, Laurel Brady, Dale Boyer, Christian Smith, Brendan Brady, Libby Osler. Stephen Shehori.

**“At 60 I joined a women’s choir, booked a bus trip to a Broadway show, and began to dress in a tribal-looking eco-friendly coat. A coat made of bamboo. When I sweat, I smell like a Burmese forest.”**



## SENIOR'S DISCOUNT:

When I turned 60, things began to change. I never even bought a scarf to wrap around my neck until I turned 60. On my birthday, for no apparent reason, I began to adorn myself in pashmina. It's not age that makes men leave us, it's scarves. They don't want a woman they have to unwrap.

And although I can't carry a tune in a bucket — I sing in the key of "off" — I joined a women's choir, booked a bus trip to a Broadway show, and began to dress in a tribal-looking eco-friendly coat. A coat made of bamboo. When I sweat, I smell like a Burmese forest. Hand-stitched in Central America.

I was attempting to look like an original, but when I went out into the theatre lobby, every woman there was dressed the same way. We all looked like we'd just arrived from Zimbabwe. We had the same scarf, the same hairdo! The bob with the blonde streaks. Some women go grey because they say they want to go natural. I've had laser surgery and heart stents. If I went natural, I'd be dead.

You might think I'm being misleading, and that the carpet doesn't match the drapes. Well, maybe the carpet is a shag rug from the '80s. Maybe the carpet is old and has dust mites. And maybe the drapes should mind their own damn business.

The whole game began to change in my fifties.

I remember the exact day it happened. I was standing at the cash register in my local pharmacy, when I looked down at my sales receipt and saw the clerk had given me 10% off.

I said, "What's this?"

In a high-pitched upspeak voice, that voice that makes a statement sounds like a question, she said, "*Oh actually*, that's the senior's discount."

At the time I was only 54, so I quickly corrected her.

"*Oh actually*, I'm not a senior. I'm ONLY 54!"

Then her voice went up another half octave. "*Actually*, at this store we give it to you earlier."

I countered her timbre by speaking in an alto voice, like I did in the choir. "*Actually*, that's ridiculous. What if you did that with the drinking age? 19 in one place, 18 in another?"

And then she did something that would continue to happen every time I said anything after the age of sixty. She rolled her eyes at me. She gave me the same eyeroll all of society would begin giving me once I took that discount.

She was trying to cull me from the herd.

I'd experienced this before. Like when I was at Target and a rather officious worker came up and asked me to go to the PLUS section.

"I'm sorry ma'am. Could you come with me? The size of your ass is scaring the petites."

Then security escorted me down the escalator to the basement, to the land of stretchable waistbands.

I couldn't let this happen, so I said to the pharmacy clerk, in no uncertain terms, "Take it back. Take the discount back."

Have you ever tried to give back a senior discount?

This was the scene that unfolded.

Cashier: "*Actually*, I need my calculator."

*Me*: "*Actually*, it's ten percent. All you have to do is move a decimal point."

And then she started crying, "*Actually*, I have an urban planning degree and I'm only the manager on Fridays!"

What a mess. By the time I got to my car, I felt so ashamed. I was an older woman who was supposed to be supporting the sisterhood, and she was a nice gal just trying to get by in the service industry. Working minimum wage. *What was wrong with me?*

I went back inside, and there she was, still standing behind the counter, still crying, and talking to herself. "I'm almost 30. I ride a bicycle to work, I'm still living with my parents..."

I walked up to her and said, "Look I'm sorry. I was rude. It's just that I feel more and more invisible each day."

And when I finished, she looked stunned, almost like she hadn't heard a word I said.

And then she walked off, like I didn't exist.



## **GHOSTING**

Ghosting is when you text your kids and they act like they didn't get it. I know about ghosting; I've been a comic for forty years. I was in comedy in the days before "women were funny." In a business with ten men to one woman, we were apparitions. If they hired us at all, they couldn't see us as more than a foil or the butt of their jokes. Guys were constantly mansplaining my own joke to me, all the while they were dry humping me. Ah, the good old days. No one is dry humping me now, are they?

By the way, there's no need to go on Tinder if you want to date an old man. Go to a Krispy Kreme donut shop and all you see are old men. The only thing they're swiping left-to-right is icing sugar off their top lips.

What happens to some old guys is they get that angry face, like they don't know what the hell everyone is up to. So often I've wanted to turn to one of those men and say, "Come on buddy, put a smile on. We're all trying here."

That's the problem, isn't it? I look at them and think "YUK," and they look at me and think "YUK," and that's why everyone my age is lonely.



***Is that what I actually look like?***

There's an image in my head that doesn't match up with what I see in the mirror. Or when I pass by a store window and think, "Who the hell is that old broad?" only to discover it's myself.

And the problem is, I've been hanging-out with people my own age. People who say, "You look great, Deb." And I reply with, "Well, you look like you did in high school." *That's if we went to Dried Apple Doll High!* I'm lying to them and they're lying to me. Don't you love it when people say, "You look great... for your age!"

I used to think of myself as a handsome woman, but now it's like my whole body yawned and it's never returned to its first position.

I have a shelf on my chest. I can set my coffee cup on it. Sometimes I have to Swiffer under my boobs. I'm always leaning back, like at any moment I'm going to yell out, "Get off my lawn!"

### Is 60 the New 40?

At 40 you can get pregnant.  
At 60 you *look* pregnant.  
At 40, you're talking about  
your new food plan. At 60,  
you're thinking, "Eat it!  
Don't eat it. Shut up about  
it."



When I turned 60, my aunt sent me a birthday card that said, "Now that you're 60, the weeks will fly by but the days will drag. Happy birthday!"

There wasn't even any money in the card. Apparently, at this age, not only is time flying by and dragging, there's no cash!

Some people will say 60 is the new 40. Not one 40-year-old on the planet thinks this. Not one forty-year-old I've ever met has said "I want to look like that sixty-year-old over there."

And frankly, men thinking 60 is the new 40 is why there are motorcycle accidents. At 40 you can get pregnant. At 60 you *look* pregnant.

At 40, you're talking about your new food plan. At 60, you're thinking, "Eat it! Don't eat it. Shut up about it."

You know there isn't some other body going around the suitcase carousel at the airport, waiting for you to claim it. But at 40, you don't know that. You're still buying self-help books. At 60, you're having a yard sale for those same books. By this age, you've done everything to improve. You've envisioned prosperity. You've got your colors done.

You've been disrupted, downsized, amalgamated, outsourced, thought outside the box, drank wine from a box, and you know with complete certainty you have absolutely no more potential.

At 60, are you still wondering if you're going to make it? No, because you know, in no uncertain terms, that this is as good as it's going to get. That's OK. *60 is the new 40?* Imagine, saying that if you got pulled over for speeding.

*"But officer, 60 is the new 40!"*

**BUSY IS  
THE NEW  
FINE**



Yes, life is going faster. Not just for me, but for everybody. You used to ask people how they were doing and they'd say "Fine." Now they say, "I'm busy."

Busy. Busy. Busy. Busy is the new badge of honor. Frankly, a lot of times I say I'm busy but I'm doing nothing. I want to be busy. but not *too* busy.

Mostly I make plans I want to cancel. I wake up in the morning with two equal and opposing thoughts. One part of me wants to go out for dinner with my friends, and the other part can't wait to get home and take off her bra.

It's hard to get anywhere anymore.

Construction everywhere. Getting out of traffic is like getting out of an escape room.

Trying to work as a team to exit the downtown core, yelling, "We read the clue wrong; we were supposed to avoid Adelaide."

Tell me why cities still close all the major roadways for the Run for the Heart race. You'd think heart people would not want to block a main artery.

The other day I tailgated two cops on horses in the middle of downtown traffic. Two cops just ambling along so slowly, at first I thought it was some sort of historical re-enactment. I'm not sure if I'm even allowed to pass a cop on a horse, so I was stuck behind them, not sure what they were going to do. There are no turn signals, just the tail swishing back and forth, which I believe is actually tailgating. Then one of the horses let go of a big plop. And did the cops climb down to poop n' scoop?

The only thing worse is cops on bicycles. Do these guys in shorts actually scare anybody? Are they trying to intimidate us with the size of their calves? The cops that have to ride bikes are likely the violent cops. The precinct wants them biking 40 kilometers a day to get rid of their rage before they interact with a visible minority.

What do cops on bikes do if they actually get a call? Do they have to unlock their bikes and put their helmets on the moment they hear "We got a 10-4-12 in progress" on their walkie-talkies? They can't exactly burn rubber or put a cherry on their helmet to get pedestrians out of the way. At best, they can maybe do a wheelie out of the parking lot.

Plus, drug dealers have no respect for these cops, because drug dealers are in cars.

They can see the cops in their rear-view mirror, biking against the wind like they're mimes. With their hands placed on the steering wheel in completely the wrong position: they should be at ten and two, and they're at six and twelve. These guys are just taunting the cops, and the cops are like The Wicked Witch of the West from *The Wizard of Oz*, "I'll get you, my little petty thieves!"

When they start gaining on the car, the drug dealers just open their doors and nail them.



When I was growing up, women never swore. But now they sound like geese on a pond.”

Things get crazy on social media pretty fast. A few months ago, a comic on Facebook posted a picture of her potato from her fall harvest. And as a joke, I wrote, "Hey, isn't that last year's potato?" Then she private messaged me and said, "Why did you criticize my crops?"

I wrote back to her, "LOL," because I'm a comic, and I thought it was a joke. And she replied, "You're always so negative about my vegetables. Unfriend me." The first thing I wanted to say is, "I've never met you." And secondly, are your hands broken? You can unfriend me.

So, I quickly private messaged Comic #2, and she agreed that Comic #1 indeed tries to pull off the same potato picture every year. "I'll talk to her for you."

No, I didn't need her to fight my battles for me, but Comic #2 talked to Comic #1. And ten minutes later, Comic #1, private messaged me and said, "Oh I didn't realize you were a comic. I didn't realize you were being funny."

So I blocked her.

That's the way it is now: we're getting into fights online with people we've never met. And that's why we're all swearing so much. When I was growing up, women never swore. But now they sound like geese on a pond. "FFFFF."

We've got to get ourselves under control, because if we don't we're going to get kicked out of the nursing home. Imagine your family visiting you there, and your little grandchild presents you with a gift. "Grandma, I made you a Mother's Day card out of macaroni." And we'll all be swearing like, "I hate that FFFFing macaroni!"

## **A SWEET TREAT CALLED RUBY**

Mother Earth was having a hot flash.

It had been stinking hot. My air conditioner was dripping sarcasm, and my body parts were sticking to each other like Post-it Notes.

I was hot and cranky. And although there had been a lot of domestic nudity, I had the decency to throw on a caftan before going on an ice cream run.

The moment I walked into that ice cream shop, an itty-bitty sweetheart of a girl ran up to me and asked, “Can I have that dress when you grow out of it?”

I’d bought my caftan in Mexico; it looked like what Mrs. Roper would wear if she’d moved to Cancun. This pup tent wasn’t going to be form-fitting, even if I ate three scoops of maple walnut ice cream.

“Pardon me?” I asked.

“I love your dress, beautiful lady. It has jewels. Can I have it when you grow out of it?”

*Beautiful lady?* I love children’s perceptions of things.

“How old are you?” I asked.

“Three.”

Her grandmother yelled from behind the counter. “She’s four.”

The little doll confided, “I loved three. It was a much better age.”

I started looking at the various tubs of ice cream, window shopping with my mouth. I wanted something — either sweet or crunchy or salty, or maybe a trifecta of abuse — but it was hard to concentrate with Sweetie Pie following me. She was breaking out her dance moves and rolling around the floor on her head, jabbering away the whole time.

“What are you looking for? Do you want to see me dance? If you buy an ice cream cone, you won’t be able to balance it and drive your truck at the same time.”

“Oh yes I will,” I thought.

As the little girl’s innocence washed over me, the need to obliterate my discomfort began to melt away. The three scoops of ice cream I’d had my heart set on became two, and eventually just a single scoop. ( cont’d)

What a child she was — innocent like we all once were before we became filled with doubt and cynicism. She still had that openness to say what was in her heart.

As I left, she called out, “What’s your name?”

“Deborah,” I said.

“Mine is Ruby.”

“Nice to meet you, Ruby.”

“You too, beautiful lady.”

I almost cried. I realized I was feeling sorry for myself. I wasn’t the only one on the planet who was hot. It hit 65C in Iran that day. No wonder they want nuclear power; it’ll cool things down.

I finished my one scoop — as I drove, thank you very much — and it made me feel a little less cranky. I had to admit that three scoops would have been overdoing it.

We don’t have to eat more than we really need, just to escape what’s troubling us.

Sometimes our inner child encourages us to accept ourselves, caftan and all.

And sometimes life just wants us to see the gifts before us, and delight in a sweet treat like Ruby.

## A SUMMER DRIVE

Fall drives are nice, going up north to watch the leaves turn. But if your timing is off by a week, all you'll see are dead leaves.

The spring drive means nothing is open yet. And the winter drive? Well, I've never once in my life gotten up and said, "Hey, it's February, let's go for a spin."

But when the temperature hits over 20 degrees, I get a hankering to get in the car and go somewhere. I lather the SPF 60 sunscreen on my driving arm, which is perched on the partly rolled-down window. Beyoncé's *Single Ladies* is blaring as I merge onto the highway. I'm met with the sweet smell of tar and the dulcet sound of jackhammers.

Nothing says summer like a highway pared down to one lane. Within minutes, I've cranked the air up to the same temperature as a meat locker. I know the heat is out there waiting for me.

I grew up near the Thousand Islands, which meant if someone said to go jump in the lake, you could. In the summer, you'd never think of getting in the car without your bathing suit underneath your clothes. If you wore a swimsuit on a winter drive, it meant you'd run out of underwear.

The best times were the trips with my dad.

My parents' idea of a holiday was stuffing six kids in a paneled station wagon and driving 500 or 600 kilometers a day. My dad was the kind of guy who, if GPS had been invented back then, would've thought it was lying. He also believed rest stops were for the weak. I think we'd be in Quebec before we'd get our first bathroom break. One time he slowed down in New Brunswick and said, "Hey kids, there's Magnetic Hill. We don't need to stop, because if we go backward like that we'll lose time."

We didn't care. Perhaps we had Stockholm syndrome, and had started identifying with our captor. Or perhaps we were having a ball in the back seat.

These were the days before seatbelts. Every time dad turned a corner, we'd slam into each other. It was like being on a ride at the amusement park – without the height requirement.

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We played “I Spy” and spotted love bugs – punching each other until our upper arms were black and blue.

My mother gave us 50 cents each, and I convinced my brother to pool his resources with mine to get some itching powder.

“Come on, it’ll be fun!”

We shook it down my sister’s back when she was sleeping. She immediately broke out in hives and tried to crawl out of her skin. The mayhem ended with my exasperated mother marching down the road trying to leave, with my dad driving behind her, arms hung defeatedly over the steering wheel, muttering, “I don’t know what she’s thinking. At this rate, we’ll never make it to the ocean by nightfall.”

Being forcibly confined breaks some people. It’s broken me. Being trapped in a small space impairs my ability to make reasonable buying decisions. Summer drives often lead to odd purchases of fudge or folk art. Once on a 12-hour drive to Timmins, I picked up a Billy Bass fish singing *Take Me to The River*.

That’s because reality is heightened during a summer expedition. Swims always feel more refreshing. Hot dogs taste like steak. The connection to friends is never sweeter. A lot of summer drives end with great late-night conversations echoing across the lake.

I still like to go on road trips in the summer. Maybe it’s the heat. Maybe I’m trying to chase a feeling I had in my youth. Or maybe my dad was right: the destination is far better than the journey.

# MY 60-YEAR-OLD HIPS THAT MADE THE NORWEGIANS LAUGH!

A while back, I was in Isla Mujeres, Mexico for International Women's Day, attending a conference called *We Move Forward*. Eighty amazing women from all over the globe, gathered for three days of inspiration. Other than to be with fabulous women, I had no goals for this conference. I didn't want to be Helen Reddy: I was a woman, but there would be no roaring. I didn't want to change my vision or be motivated. I'd improved enough. I wanted to enjoy the beauty of Mexican beaches and my delightful hotel.

But when you start to relax, you find one thing is true: your mind has a mind of its own. As soon as I committed to enjoying myself, I began to hear a radio show playing in my head: *CK-R-U Kidding Me?*

*CK-R-U Kidding Me?* is like a talk show with callers chiming in from my childhood, all blabbing about how I shouldn't be this size, this age, this pasty. I should be someone else. Who? I don't know. It's a female trait to put all our anxiety on the body. We could have a day where we popped out a kid in a field, put out fires, rescued cats and spayed them. But at the end of the day, we'd always bemoan the fact we're fat. Or think we were. I think it's because if we had to own how powerful we really were, we'd be afraid we'd start blowing up buildings with our excess energy.

As the conference went on, and one woman after another inspired the group with stories of courage and determination, I thought, "I'm so sick of this *CK-R-U Kidding Me?* playing in my head." It was like relentless elevator music.

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I really didn't care why *CK-R-U Kidding Me?* was on my satellite dish – I realized I didn't want to subscribe anymore. So for the next several days, every time I started to hear some negative mind fart, I purposely nipped it in the butt. I mean bud. I walked, danced, moved my booty, ate, laughed, and cried until it hurt. I even attempted snorkeling. And although I ingested a fair bit of salt water, I started to feel good. Me! Someone with psoriasis and age spots and cellulite — in other words, human — finally felt like they fit in their body. This body was OK. I was OK. Naturally, the universe would want to make sure I'd learned this lesson... One delightful afternoon, I came back to the hotel, where a Norwegian couple I'd befriended was splashing around in the pool. They yelled, "Hey, Deborah, come on in. You look hot!"

I did? Wow! This affirmation crap was working!

Those beautiful young people didn't care I was walking around with 54-year-old hips and a size 14 bathing suit. Petra and Jarold thought I looked hot. Sweaty even! I went to my room and shut the curtains (my room overlooked the pool). And as I slipped into my swimwear, I did my chant: "You're good. You're fine. You're lovely." I sauntered out of the room and hopped into the pool. And to my surprise, the young Norwegians began laughing at everything I said. I was tickling the Norwegians' funny bones BIG TIME!

Then I looked down and saw what they found so hilarious. I had put my bathing suit on inside out! I looked at the Norwegians. They smiled. I looked at the bra cups bobbing on top of the water. I looked back at the Norwegians. They waited for my response.

"This is how we roll in Canada."

Then I dove into the water and flipped them my bum. To hell with it. I wasn't going back to the room to change. That's what I wanted from this vacation: no change! No more turning myself inside out.

As I did my self-love victory laps, I wondered how many mojitos it would take before the Norwegians would pass out and I could finally go back to my room.

# INSOMNIA

I don't sleep anymore. I now wake up most days at four in the morning. No matter how late I go to bed, it's always 4 a.m. I lie there and count the minutes 'til I can get up and drink coffee. I think of the weirdest things at this time:

*Who was the first person to knit socks?*

*Was it a fisherman and his dyslexic sister, Purl?*

*And another thing, why does anybody who's done one yoga class start saying "Namaste"?*

I feel like genuflecting, to tick them off.

You have to agree there's a societal overuse of the prayer hands emoji in our texts. Followed by the pine tree emoji!

What does that pine tree mean?

In the light of day, I could care less about these things. But at 4 a.m. they're what I'm replaying over and over. Damn friggin' pine tree emoji.

I'm never getting an answer. My brain is like Google in reverse.

Waking up at that time means I'm so tired by evening. Some nights I have to nap on the couch so I have enough energy to get up and go to bed.

## VAGINAL ATROPHY!

Apparently, I have vaginal atrophy.

Let me back up for a sec. I was getting my annual physical. And as I was looking up at the cartoons on the ceiling, the doctor said to scooch down. Scooch is never a great word for women.

Dr. Chow is so tiny, it's like having a butterfly examine you. But she has no sense of timing. One time she was south of the border and asked me if I had my tonsils out.

"Hmm, can you tell from that angle?"

But this year, while she was feeling around in my nether regions, she asked, "Are you still sexually active?"

"Well, if you mean, 'Did you try to write off your vibrator as a medical expense?' Then yes..."

Dr. Chow's reply to my quip? "You might have vaginal atrophy."

Then she flitted away like Tinkerbell, while I scooched up enough to get back on my feet.

She left me with two of the most horrible words I've ever heard in my life.

*Vaginal Atrophy*. They won't be putting those words in any public school's next sex ed curriculum. It sounds like something stuck to a roasting pan. "Let that soak overnight, it's got vaginal atrophy!"

I gave that doctor a very bad Yelp review.

My biggest fear with this is that I won't be able to keep doing stand-up. I created these videos for YouTube called *Kimmett on a Couch*. I referred to them as "Sit-down comedy." I put my vaginal atrophy set on YouTube. I was thinking people would see me playing a "character." But people online didn't read the byline that told them I was a comedienne. They just saw an old broad ranting on YouTube about her cooch. They wrote comments like, "Sending love and prayers." Some lady in Oklahoma said, "I'm sorry you have V.A." V.A.? Is this such a rampant condition that it needs a short form? I replied, "It was just a joke." She wrote back and said, "VA is no laughing matter."

So, I blocked her.

An aerial photograph of a crowded beach. The ocean is a vibrant turquoise color, and the sand is a light beige. Numerous people are scattered across the water, some swimming, some floating on inflatable chairs, and some standing near the shore. The overall scene is one of a busy, sunny day at the beach.

# **FITBIT AND AQUAFIT FIGHTS**

To stay healthy, I got one of those step trackers to better manage my stress. Mine is the Fitbit! It never seems to be correct. One time I ate chips, and it said I did 100 steps. I made out with my boyfriend and it said I pole vaulted for three minutes.

I imagine if I have a heart attack, after they've quit paddling me, it'll say, "Congratulations. You've reached your goal."

Recently I started walking with urban poles. I don't think I'm using them correctly because people asked if I had polio as a child.

Oh, don't be offended. When was the last time someone you know had polio?

OK, maybe someone you know might contract it in the future because your mom's an anti-vaxer, but the rest of us have nothing to worry about.

Someone said at my age I should do Aqua-Fit.

Yes, let's get a gaggle of people with leaky bladders in an aquarium of warm water and hope for the best. That's why they make you lift Javex bottles.

You can exercise and disinfect the pool at the same time.

I decided to give it a try, and it didn't go well. There were a bunch of women standing in a line at the back of the class. You know those women who never get their hair wet?

They talked so much we couldn't hear the instructor. So I said, "Shh" a few times, until I had to turn to the ringleader. And with the sound of a goose squawking, I said, "Shut...the ffffff up!"

Then this broad started splashing me, which is the most exercise she'd gotten in a long time.

Then there was a melee, with noodles and underarm wings flapping. It sounded like a flock of starlings taking flight. I was swinging and ducking, but I didn't see that arm coming at me. Before I knew it, I got nailed by a skin tag and ended up in the ER.

Can you guess the wait time in Emergency for an Aqua Fit-related injury? A long time!

## GET A HOBBY

I can't retire because I didn't develop any hobbies. I like eating lunch. Don't you hate people who eat lunch and say, "Well I guess I won't be needing any supper." Why are you saying that? We weren't going to check up on you. I always need supper. I have two hobbies: lunch and supper.



## A BUDDHIST TEACHER WITH A PAST

When I was young, I had an acting teacher named Marie Hopps.

She was a Buddhist. It was 1980. I'd never met a Buddhist.

I would visit her every week and sit on her couch, always broken-hearted over some crazy man I was in love with. She'd give me Buddhist advice and say, "There there, darling. You're on the path." I didn't know what that meant. She'd give me tea and digestive cookies and would always make me feel better.

My point is that Marie sat there and offered me her wisdom. Don't you think, in these difficult times, we need to offer wisdom to our youth? You may be scratching your head, wondering if you have any wisdom. If you feel you haven't learned anything wise, you can always go play pickleball.

But the closer I get to Marie's age, the more I want to be like her, and offer the youth what she offered me. Not that they would likely get it. I didn't. You see, each week, I would complain to Marie about how I was dating some crazy musician. And she would keep telling me this story about a wildly attractive guy who kissed her.

She was British and went to boarding school in Germany. At 17 she broke her leg, and was in a hospital bed for weeks, lying in old-school traction. The doctor would regularly flirt with her. And one day he brought in a friend — a friend Marie took a shine to. She hung off his every word as he regaled her with his theories on life. He then kissed her hand and gifted her a book he'd written.

Months later, she was back in London, where the city was being carpet bombed. The horror of that kiss became clear: the book was *Mein Kampf*, and the man was Adolph Hitler. Hitler kissed Marie. *I only kissed the drummer.*

But here's the point: I wrote a play about Marie. It ran at the Tarragon Theatre in Toronto. And I didn't include that story. Why? Because I didn't remember it until I turned 60. If you're a younger person, this means you won't remember the wise things I'm saying in this book until you reach my age.

I did the same thing with my grandmas: the Sassy Grandma Brady and the need-nothing salt-of-the-Earth Grandma Kimmett. I didn't see their history: that they had survived two world wars and the depression, and had 18 kids between them. They were constantly pregnant, with no agency over their bodies. They had no schooling past grade eight, because they got pulled out to work on the farm so they wouldn't starve to death. That's a lot like our kids walking out of school so they can save the planet!

Our elders did all that, and then got reduced to an eye roll and an "Isn't she cute, walking around, enjoying herself without breaking a hip!" We all want to be seen as something beyond the face we have.

## **MY MOM'S HAPPY THERE**

When people talk about nursing homes, someone will invariably say, "Mom is in a beautiful place, and she loves it because there's so much to do."

The issue with any nursing home isn't the lack of activities. The issue is that it's the last house on the block. And you're spending it with people you don't even know. One of the side effects of a long life is that people around you are constantly dying. That's the reason those theatre broads I referenced earlier weren't affected by a guy having a heart attack. Death doesn't impress older women because they're buying sympathy cards in bulk.

The death march starts when you take that damn senior discount. Take that discount and you're agreeing to obscurity. Because that's when people start watching you and talking behind your back. They're like tow truck drivers, sitting on the side of the 401, ready to haul you away.

And will there be any room for me in a nursing home? In six-years there'll be more old people than ever before in the history of this world. Politicians are calling it an epidemic. Aging is like Ebola, except with Ebola, you die. If you hear squawking, it's not a goose on a pond, it's another person qualifying for old age security! That's what we'll all be like: Canada Geese, walking around, shitting and squawking everywhere, with no natural predators.

And I haven't saved any money. I won't be one of those people living in a beautiful villa with a party room. I'll be shipped up north, like we do with all our garbage. Probably in Northern Canada somewhere, warehoused outside of William's Lake in a super-jail nursing home in a single bunk bed, stacked triple-high like in a Dickens novel. Our politicians will be mass-producing congratulatory birthday greetings, flying them in like paper planes.

Instead of rescuing a squirrel, how about rescuing a senior? Foster her until she goes to her forever home

## **TRAVEL WARNING**

I like going to the theatre, but I don't want to become one of those gals I went on that bus trip with. They were brutal. At one of the matinees we attended, a guy had a heart attack, and as the EMT wheeled him out, two women next to me said, "Oh great. This performance better not start late. We have 6 p.m. reservations."

That's what happens to people in retirement. They make leisure time sound like work. They start packing for a trip three months before they leave. "Thursday we'll be in London, so I'll need a raincoat, but then if it snows I might need a toque." The U.S. pulled out of Afghanistan with less planning.

Now that I'm old, I'm expected to use my downtime to "do good." How many hours a day will that take up? Three? Four? I volunteered at Meals on Wheels, but I ate the meal. Some of my friends go to Africa to help people. I'm not going to Africa. I've performed in Kenora, and that was bad enough. In Kenora, the organizers put me in their best room, which was a revolving room that kept moving slowly in a half-moon circle. I realized this when I looked out and saw the tree I'd been staring at was no longer in my sight line. I thought I was having a stroke. If I can't handle a revolving room, how could I ever handle African warlords?

## DO-GOODER:



So many of my friends are doing this voluntourism thing. Which sounds good, but you need to know if you're making a contribution or just being a pain in the ass. Like my friend who went to Mumbai. She paid \$5600 to help make bricks for poor people. That sounds lovely, but she isn't a brickmaker. If someone can't even get rid of crumbs in their cupboard, they have no business going to a third-world country to "help."

I get a call from her while I'm on the road. I'm far from home myself, in Hull, Quebec. And I don't speak the language. I speak French, but not Hull French, and I'm having dinner in a St. Hubert's Chicken joint and ordering a Caesar salad with no croutons because I don't want any wheat, and I get a call from her because she's escaped her compound.

"Compound." Is that a special section on Airbnb? Are there Super hosts in compounds?

My friend is very upset. "They're feeding me mush. I'm dehydrated and I'm shitting."

I want to say, "Are you shitting bricks?" But I don't. No, because I'm a good person, and I don't kick a friend when she's down.

But I do say, "Cash out your retirement savings plan and get out of there."

Meanwhile, after the call, I get the shits. Maybe it's in solidarity, or maybe it's because the sous-chef didn't wash her hands. My point is, my shits cost me! \$26.50. Her shits cost her \$5,600. And that night, neither one of us did absolutely any good for anybody.

# KEEPING IT LOCAL

Instead of Africa, I decided to volunteer at a local seniors home. I told the staff I don't want to hand out cookies because I'll eat them. And when I play cards, I'm a sore loser. So instead, they had me come by and read the seniors some stories.

It was a fascinating experience. Every time I walked into the building, it was like getting a visit from the Ghost of Christmas Future. There were always women crying, "Get me out of here!" And those were just the personal support workers. One day, I was reading a story to a group of seniors, and a lady with white hair walked up beside me and started bouncing up and down in one place. Then, a man in the front row called out, "Sheesh Irene, you ruin every friggin' thing we do!" I found out later he and Irene were married.

Without warning, Irene then proceeded to pull her skirt over her head. If you do this as a little kid, your parents pull out their phones and put it on Instagram. But if you're in your second childhood, you're going to get body shamed. "Irene, cover up your cooch!" I've played biker bars that were kinder.

Anyhow, each time I'd finish reading my stories, I'd walk around and give out hugs to people in the audience. One time I met an elderly woman named Keitha, who looked at me and said, "What's your game? Why are you coming in here and hugging me?"

I said, "I guess I'm lonely. I guess I'm suffering from existential loneliness, and we all need a hug." So she reluctantly gave me a hug. The next week she brought a friend, and when I got to the hugging part, the friend looked at Keitha and said, "What the hell is she hugging us for?"

To which Keitha snorted, "She's hugging us because apparently she suffers from existential loneliness."

## **AFTER THOUGHT**

just heard that STD's are very common in nursing homes. Why? As the rumour goes, seniors at these places are having sex all the time, because they feel they're too old to have to worry about the repercussions. I think this is an urban myth, like that story about people finding rats in their Big Macs. If this were true, it's likely there was only ever one rat in one Big Mac – I seriously doubt it was an epidemic. In each nursing home, there's likely only one man having sex with all these women. And he's not a player. They've just got him tied to a chair. He was probably already in the chair in the first place. Old guy's worn out and needs to rest.

## 60 IS NOT THE NEW 40

I'm not 40 anymore. I'm 60!

A lot has changed since my last birthday. I now take the discount. And if some places don't offer it until 65, I lie. What are they going to do, card me? Plus, there are advantages to invisibility. I can go back for seconds at the sample table at Costco, because to them we look alike.

I take the CPP! Soon, I'll take old-age security. Which is an oxymoron. There's no security at any age.

While we're at it, every time I got upset during my life wasn't because of PMS. I understand this now that I don't have hormones. It was simply because I was a bitch.

"Here kitty, kitty! Let Grammy tell you about the good old days, OK?"

I've been a comic for 40 years. I remember this one gig I played off-Broadway. It was in Kenora. A place where the billing was "Wienerschnitzel, Strawberry shortcake, and komedy." I sat down at the dinner beforehand, and someone asked me if I was the comic.

Just the way they asked me, I knew enough to lie. "No!"

"Good, because last year that girl comic was too dirty, and we threw buns at her."

"Buns?"

"Yes, because we're good Christians."

I don't know which part of the Bible that's from.

But I do know this: I went on stage, and every time someone reached for a butter knife, I twitched.

I cut n' pasted my set, removing every punchline. Which isn't the best idea when you're hired to be a comic. Punchlines are the basic premise.

But as you age, you start to stand up for yourself. I went to Arizona to perform at a Women's Wellness Symposium. You know, one of those conferences featuring booths with essential oils, dark chocolate facials, and energy bars made from cauliflower.

There was a banner above the check-in desk that read, "Open your chakras and check your piece." And not peace as in "Ohm." P.I.E.C.E. As in guns. The room was full of grey-haired grandmas, and they were all packing. And they threw their handguns in a nicely-decorated box with a purple bow before they got their gift bag.

There's always one man at these women's events. One of those men who comes to check out what the ladies are up to. This one was named Kenny. He had a belly that arrived in the room before he did.

Kenny walked over to me and said, "So you're a comic. What's your punchline? You got to have a punchline."

Yes, Kenny was mansplaining. You know, where a man explains to a woman what *she* does for a living.

“You need a punchline. A surprise ending.” I’m open to constructive criticism for my comedy sets, but Kenny worked at Patton Lumber.

So, I simply smiled. After all those years of men explaining things to me, all I heard from Kenny was, “Wah wah wah wah,” like he was Charlie Brown’s teacher. I imagine it’s not unlike what men hear when women talk about their feelings.

I later found out that Kenny sat on the committee that decided to hire me for this job. And I wasn’t his first pick, courtesy of a joke in my set about a guy getting a four-hour erection after taking a blue pill. Apparently, Kenny told his fellow committee members, “My wife doesn’t want to hear about a four-hour erection.” *What woman does, Kenny!* But since there were ten women to one man, Kenny lost the debate. But as a booby prize, he was asked to introduce me.

After a ten-minute speech on what he knew about women and God, Kenny finally got around to reading my bio. He took one look at it and decided to improvise. Instead of listing off my credits, he went with, “Well, here’s a little lady from Canada who apparently is a comic. I hear they’re funny up there, north of the 29th parallel.”

I took the mic from Kenny and got started on my set. Which included the joke he didn’t approve of. It started like this:

*After my divorce, I started online dating, and went out on my first date in years. I got to the coffee shop, and there was only one man there and he was in bicycle shorts.*

*I thought, Yep, that’s my date. We sat down and I ordered an espresso and he told me that his wife had just died and this was on his first date in forty years and after he stopped crying, he began talking about sump pump in his basement..*

*It wasn’t a euphemism. No it was actually talking about a pump that drained water from his house.*

*Even though I was smiling, I was secretly saying, Did we get married and no one told me?*

*He actually drew a picture of how the sump pump worked on his napkin.*

*I wasn’t much better. I found out I’d lost my ability to flirt.*

*When he called me a few nights later, he asked me what I was wearing, and I said “orthotics.” We ended up going out for a while and he announces he has the blue pill.*

Then I looked over at Kenny, because I was gearing up to tell the part of the joke, he said he hated. And as I did, I noticed him pushing back his jacket. Kenny was *packing*. Bulging out of his pocket was a very tiny little pistol. And if I was still a forty-year-old woman, seeing that gun would have made me cut the joke.

But I wasn't 40, so I continued.

*So, Mr. Bicycle Shorts and I go out on a date, and he tells me he's taken a blue pill and might get a four-hour erection. What am I going to do with that? Get my nails done?*

*Clean the stove?*

*Who wants a four-hour erection? Not your wife, right Kenny? Because she'd never be that lucky, would she?*

*Because you work at Patton Lumber, and she wants hardwood, and you only deal in softwood.*

I turned to Kenny and looked him straight in the eye.

"Is that what you meant by 'punchline,' Kenny?"

As I began to walk off stage, I realized I couldn't leave it this way. After all, I'm a Canadian, and I can't be rude. After obliterating Kenny, I bent down and whispered in his ear, "I love your shirt."

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