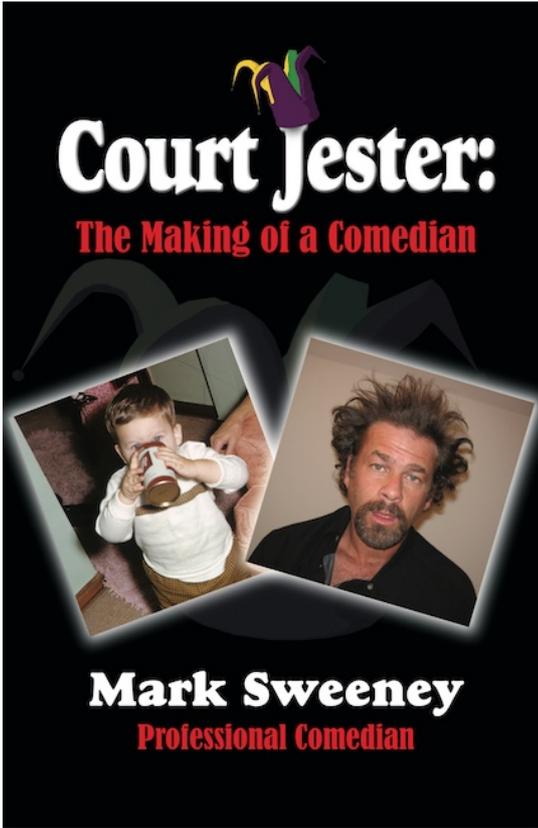


*Comedy, humor*



# **Court Jester: The Making of a Comedian**

by Mark Sweeney

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# Court Jester:

**The Making of a Comedian**



**Mark Sweeney**

**Professional Comedian**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 - BEGINNINGS .....	9
CHAPTER 2 - THE OLDEST CHILD.....	12
CHAPTER 3 - KINDERGARTEN.....	16
CHAPTER 4 - FIRST GRADE .....	19
CHAPTER 5 - I POOPED MY PANTS.....	21
CHAPTER 6 - CATHOLIC SCHOOL .....	23
CHAPTER 7 - FIRESTARTER .....	29
CHAPTER 8 - A THIRD GRADE ESSAY.....	31
CHAPTER 9 - FOURTH GRADE.....	32
CHAPTER 10 - A CHRISTMAS ESSAY .....	39
CHAPTER 11 - SUMMER OF '70.....	40
CHAPTER 12 - BAD EATER .....	46
CHAPTER 13 - ROCK FIGHTS .....	51
CHAPTER 14 - THE BIRDS AND THE BEES .....	57
CHAPTER 15 - MY MOM'S LEAST FAVORITE STORY.....	63
CHAPTER 16 - KID SPORTS .....	64
CHAPTER 17 - STICKY FINGERS.....	68
CHAPTER 18 - HIGH SCHOOL.....	71
CHAPTER 19 - HIGH SCHOOL IS OVER .....	81
CHAPTER 20 - I JOIN THE MARINES .....	84
CHAPTER 21 - BOOT CAMP .....	95
CHAPTER 22 - SUPER BOWL 1978.....	119
CHAPTER 23 - BARS AND BROTHELS .....	125
CHAPTER 24 - STRIP CLUBS AND SUCH.....	135
CHAPTER 25 - COLLEGE.....	143

CHAPTER 26 - JOBS .....	151
CHAPTER 27 - I GO SKIING.....	169
CHAPTER 28 - DOGS.....	177
CHAPTER 29 - SOME PARTY STORIES.....	181
CHAPTER 30 - I'M A COMEDIAN .....	196
CHAPTER 31 - SOME ROAD STORIES.....	220
CHAPTER 32 - GONE FISHIN' .....	241
CHAPTER 33 - I GO SKYDIVING .....	259
CHAPTER 34 - ROAD TRIPPING - THEN AND NOW.....	268
CHAPTER 35 - DRUGS .....	275
CHAPTER 36 - IRAQ .....	294
CHAPTER 37 - I GO TO AFGHANISTAN.....	308
CHAPTER 38 - BACK IN IRAQ.....	325
CHAPTER 39 - I GOT DIVORCED .....	337

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **I POOPED MY PANTS**

I crapped in my pants once in second grade. I don't know why I'm even telling you. It's not something I'm proud of. I'm not sure there's ever been an instance when filling your shorts with poo is something to be proud of, unless there's some kind of bet involved. I'm not even really sure what happened. One minute I was sitting at my desk, the next minute I'm sitting at my desk in britches full of poo. I think I tried to fart and ended up crapping my pants. Either that or I just didn't want to raise my hand and ask for permission to use the bathroom. Was I ashamed that I had to poop? I don't know. Was I so embarrassed that I had to poop that I would rather poop in my own pants than ask permission to go? I don't know. What I do know is that I just pooped in my pants. I didn't panic even though I distinctly heard someone mention something about the smell of poo, as in, "did someone just crap their pants?"

I just sat there with undies full of poo and tried to play it cool. "Yeah, it stinks in here, who just shit?" I was forced to join the other children in chiding the offending party in order to cover my shame. There's nothing worse than having to sit at your desk in a pile of your own feces. I stayed that way the rest of the day too. Just sitting there with poo in my pants, and it was only morning so I had to sit there all day. I did eventually get to the bathroom and did some perfunctory cleaning, but it had to be done quickly and with a great deal of subterfuge. You don't want to raise any suspicions. During recess, I feigned illness so I could just lie in the grass and watch the other children play. "Are you going to play kick ball Mark?"

"No, I'm just going to sit here in my poo filled pants and try to get the smell to dissipate."

I guess I could've gone to the nurse's office and say I was sick, but the smell of poop was around me like a shadow. There was no mistaking it. At the end of the day I waited until everyone had left before I got up, you know, just in case the seat of my pants was stained by poo. I thought it had to be. After all, I just spent six hours sitting in my own waste. I walked home, I couldn't take the bus with the poo stench wrapped around me like a blanket. Somewhere on the way I stopped behind some bushes, took my underwear off and threw them down the sewer. What a relief. My poo pants were gone.

*Mark Sweeney*

I was still a mess, but the poo pants were gone. I've never forgotten that moment of throwing my poop filled undies into that tunnel. To this day I can still see them lying in the bottom of that storm sewer. That wasn't such good times. I never did poop in my pants again. From that day forward, if I had to go, I raised my freakin' hand.

## CHAPTER 12

### BAD EATER

I've always been what you would call a picky eater. It's not a great word, but it's better than finicky. That's a lame word, isn't it? Finicky? "Oh he's a finicky eater, that one is." Shut up, lady. Picky wasn't really much better. Picky sounds like a guy that constantly has his finger up his nose or digging his undies out of his butt crack.

"Where's Picky?"

"I'm not sure, I haven't seen him, but I hope he's washing his hands."

I preferred the word "selective." I was a selective eater. I don't eat just anything; I'm "selective." I was, and still am, frequently asked why I don't like something, and the answer is simple. "Because it tastes like shit, that's why."

I was very much aware of the taste and texture of what was going in my pie hole. That was a big thing for me: texture. If it had a bad texture I wasn't going to eat it. For me, food had to have a nice solid body to it. I want something I can chew, damn it. I didn't like gushy things, no soft stuff; I don't like my food soft. I also had a problem with anything that exploded its innards all over the inside of your mouth when you bit into it, that was too gross for me to eat. I don't want any explosions of grossness bombarding my taste buds with slimy, slippery particles of so-called "flavor." I never had an affinity for veggies for that reason, not so much the taste, but for that freakin' texture. Veggies are too soft. A gag-inducer my entire life. That's how I knew I didn't like something; if it made me gag, I didn't like it. Seemed like a pretty simple gauge. Gag inducement wasn't the only criteria though. I also went by smell and sight and if it made it that far, taste. I could usually tell if I liked something right away just by looking at it. "Nope, not that, I'm not eating that."

People sometimes didn't understand how I could not like something when I hadn't even tried it. I could tell by looking at it most of the time; one look was all it took. One quick glance and I would know that it's not for me. I could go down a buffet line, "nope, nope, ok, ok, nope, nope," without any tasting going on. It was very existential, and very rarely would I be wrong. I never remember a time when I liked the look of something and it tasted bad. It was a skill I picked up early and it still works.

My father never cared that much for my “selectiveness.” He would tell me, “Oh, you’re going to eat that; your mother spent all day making that food.” Really, Dad? How does one go about making peas? Seems to me I saw her take them out of a can. I think it took about 30 seconds. My father never cared much for my answers either. He always felt they were a little smart-alecky. When I gave an answer he didn’t like, I had to hold my hand out. My father really liked the knife handle on the knuckles bit; seems his dad was a fan of it too, but I personally never cared much for it. I liked the game though: hold your hand out so he could whack it with a knife handle, never the blade, just the handle. I always pulled back, and we went on like that until my mom said to knock it off, and let’s eat.

My dad’s punishments were always what his dad did to him. I’m sorry, pa, but this ain’t the forties anymore. He used to make me sit at the dinner table until bedtime or until I finished all my peas, or carrots or broccoli or asparagus or whatever the hell it was I didn’t want to eat that particular evening. I would just sit there and sit there and sit there, every single time, and never once did I give in. Not once did I choke down a helping of something I didn’t want. Not once. All those thousands of hours I sat there alone at the kitchen table, in the dark, forgotten by the rest of the family with a pile of cold, rotting, festering, decaying, disgusting peas in front of me. I guess I can thank my father for my resolve, my stubbornness. I think I learned a lot of patience from it as well. My mom would let me off early sometimes because she felt sorry for me. I didn’t get dessert, but I never ate those fucking peas. Still don’t. I always found peas to be the most disgusting of the garden vegetables, the most unattractive of the, “in-your-mouth” exploding vegetables. It makes me gag just thinking about it.

I remember once in grade school, I was in third grade (remember the smell of the cafeteria? Every single cafeteria in any school you went to, had the same smell), and someone had dropped some peas on the floor in the lunch line and everyone had just walked all over them until they were smashed and smeared all over the place. It was absolutely horrific. There were dozens and dozens of peas, flattened and smeared like green guts on the highway. It was a slaughterhouse. You could hear the screams of the dying peas pleading to be put out of their misery while they lie there with their broken limbs all askew. It seemed that mayhem had run amok and laid waste to entire ladle full of peas. It was ghastly and disturbing.

What I found even more terrifying was that some of these kids who trampled through the peas, had pea guts on the bottom of their shoes, and the guts were working their way into the crevices of the tread, hiding deep in the cracks so they can ferment and mutate into even larger peas with twice as many guts to be smashed and smeared along the vinyl floor tiles. Gaaacckk! At the time, it may have been the most disgusting thing I'd ever seen. You could almost smell the decomposing entrails of those massacred peas lying on that cafeteria floor with all those unknowing children grinding them into oblivion. That image has always haunted me. Haunted me, I tell you. I'm feeling queasy just thinking about it...hold on, I need to hurl.

I had a lot of tricks to ditch my food too because sometimes a boy wants to play after dinner in the summer, and you couldn't go out and play until you finished your food. There was very little negotiation at our house. My parents would tell us how it was going to be, and that was it. There were no ifs, ands or buts; the parents ruled the roost and that was the deal Camille. It's kind of amusing now when you think about it. Parents used to never really care what the kids wanted; we didn't get to pick where we would eat or what we would eat. The parents made the decisions, not the four-year-old. Nowadays you often see people negotiating with their children.

"How about if we do this, then you can do that."

Are you kidding me? He's six, don't let him make decisions. When he pays for the meal he can have a say in where we dine, until then, "Knock it off and get in the car. If you keep it up, you can sit in the parking lot while we go in and eat and we'll get seats near the window so you can see us enjoying a delightful meal."

You had to be creative in hiding food; you couldn't just do it the same way every time. I would've shoved them up my ass if I could've gotten away with it, but that wouldn't pass the old man's strip searches. I would throw food on the floor underneath my brothers and then accuse them of dropping food because with six children eating, it's hard to get through a meal without a pound of food ending up on the floor.

It was great when there was a baby around because they've always got food around them. You had to be careful though; it's hard to explain why the one-year-old has a pile of corn underneath her when she didn't have corn to begin with. Hmmm. I used to put little pieces of food in my mouth, and then when I had a mouthful, I would spit it into my milk and just not finish the whole glass. I would

just leave a small pile of food in the bottom. It worked a lot. I've stashed food in my pockets, rolled it up in napkins, stashed in my socks, even held it in my hands as they slid under the plate to take to the sink. Oh, I was a crafty devil.

One time we were at my grandparents' house for dinner and we were having ham. I didn't like ham as a kid, nor did I like brisket or pot roast. I liked beef, just not in those formats. I never liked the smell of brisket or pot roast, I think it reminded me of Sunday, which means the next day is Monday and it's back to school. I like ham now; I just didn't like it as a kid. We were at my grandparents' house, and we were using cloth napkins, which is cool, you can hide a lot of food in a cloth napkin, and it doesn't break down due to carrot juice.

I'm sitting there with ham, carrots and mashed potatoes on my plate. Perfect, I don't like any of this. I like rolls, so perhaps I'll fill up on rolls today. I've got all this nasty food on my plate and I start hiding. I'm using the "leave it in the glass" bit, I dropped some on the floor, I stuffed a roll with bits of ham, and I even lined up some ham on the chair next to the phone book my brother was sitting on right next to me. Mostly I stashed it in my napkin. The mashed potatoes were hard to stash because they don't hold their form. You can't pocket them because anywhere you put mashed taters is going to get messy. What I would do is just spread them out flat on my plate and lay my silverware just so; that way it looked like my pile of taters had diminished. In retrospect, I don't know who I was kidding. My folks knew I didn't like this stuff, so how come my plate's clean? They know I didn't eat it. I've never eaten it before, why now? Why, all of sudden, had Mark eaten ham and carrots? Something's fishy.

I asked to be excused and my father reaches over, picks up my napkin, shakes it over my plate, and half of a pound of ham drops back on my plate, along with all my carrots, and now my plate is as full as it was when I sat down, except now there's mashed potatoes stuck to it. I remember my grandfather looking at me in amazement. I'm not sure he immediately grasped the concept of what was happening. How the hell did that boy get an entire dinner wrapped up in a napkin? My dad wanted me to sit there until I finished it, but my grandmother would have none of it. She said it was her house and if I didn't want to eat anything I didn't have to. She even gave me dessert. That's why people have grandmothers.

My whole life I've avoided having dinner at people's homes because I knew they would make something I didn't like. Every time a girlfriend would invite me over to her parents' house for dinner, I was doomed.

"You don't like corn on the cob? Who doesn't like corn on the cob?"

"I don't, that's who; it's gross, juicy, slimy and tastes like corn." So, everyone would be sitting at the table with plates piled high with food, and I'd sit there with nothing on my plate but meat and a roll. This went on my entire life, trying to tell new people how I didn't like corn or carrots or peas or cauliflower or broccoli or green beans or tomatoes or baked potatoes or cucumbers or celery or olives or eggs or onions or beets or spinach or squash or asparagus or brussel sprouts or dark meat on a chicken or any dark meat, for that matter, or fish or headcheese or goat balls or monkey brains. I just don't like them Sam I freakin' am, that's all. Now leave me alone. I'm going to make some hot dogs and mac and cheese. You just can't go wrong with ground up animal parts. Now, that's livin'.

## **CHAPTER 33**

### **I GO SKYDIVING**

I fell out of a plane once. It was on my 45<sup>th</sup> birthday. I was working in Vegas and decided to celebrate by going skydiving. I've always wanted to do it, but for one reason or another it never transpired. I was scheduled to go twice when I was in Okinawa, Japan, but due to the whole "restricted to barracks" thing, my opportunities passed me by.

A few words about Vegas. First of all, I was there in July. As we all know, the summer is warm. The week I was there it got over 110 every day. 110 degrees, that's toasty. "It's a dry heat though," yes, well so is a kiln but you still don't want to be running around in it. The week after, I was in Laughlin, NV. Laughlin, wow. A thousand people living in the middle of the Mojave. It was over 120 degrees every day I was there. Can you really imagine 120 degrees? When the water in the pool is too hot to get in to, it's too hot outside. At night it got down to 92, on Tuesday, I think. You could still see heat waves coming off the sidewalk at 3 a.m. What the hell? You spend the whole day going from air conditioning to air conditioning, all the while trying to stay in the shade. A difficult task indeed. It's an amazing sight, watching thousands of people walking around Vegas in weather that is fit for gila monsters and other types of leathery lizards.

When you hear the word "tourist," the people walking around Vegas is what you picture. Strolling though the desert heat with huge rings of perspiration around their necks and bellies, which are also carrying the infamous "fanny pack." For the love of God, put the fanny packs away. Granted, they are convenient, but come on, how many guys need to carry that much crap with them? At one point, you may as well start carrying a purse. A man just doesn't need that many supplies for an afternoon stroll down the strip. Then there's the water, everyone has their water. We can't leave without our water. In Vegas in July it's mandatory, but it's still adorable to watch everyone you see carrying their bottles of water around like it's their juicy-juice. Just strolling and sweating and gawking and drinking out of their sippy cups. Ooh aah. Look at the big Lion. (Which by the way, is the largest bronze statue in North America.) Snapping pictures of everything, oh, look, a strip club, what are the chances?

A few years ago, Vegas started this new ad campaign, toting itself as a “family vacation” spot. Oh, for the love of Mike. A family vacation spot? OK, let’s see, it was started by gangsters to launder money made from drugs, loan sharking, mayhem and murder. It grew because of gambling, drinking and whoring. People go there to experience debauchery, to do the things they wouldn’t do at home. “Let’s go play blackjack for a while, hang in the bar, get hammered, and then go find some hookers.” Too bad the kids aren’t here.

Just because you put in a roller coaster and a GameWorks doesn’t make it Six Flags. Look around, nimrods, this place isn’t for kids. There are guys on every corner passing out fliers advertising strip clubs and escort services. Every bus has an ad with a half naked girl on the side, and she’s selling something to do with sex. Sweet. And if your kids somehow miss the fliers and the buses, they can look down and see titties and g-strings on the fliers on the ground. “What’s this, daddy? Can we go here?” Sure Daddy would like to go, but he’s got the wife and kids with him and they’re on “vacation” in Vegas. Titties, drinking, gambling, depravity; keep the kids at home man. There has to be a place that’s just for adults. There has to be. After a couple of years they’ve gone back to “what happens here, stays here.” That’s better. That’s how it should be. I like that, having a place to go where you can use your location as an excuse to be an idiot.

“What the hell did you do that for?”

“Well... “It’s Vegas.”

Like that explains everything. Drink too much, gamble too much and certainly, eat too much.

“Hey how was your day?”

“My day? My day was fine, I ate six buffets.” Nothing makes people bigger pigs than an unlimited food supply. Let’s see, I’ll have a little ham, maybe some beef, I think I’ll take a hot dog, ooh maybe a brat too, hmm, I think I want some macaroni and cheese (because you can’t just get a delicacy like that at home), maybe some fried taters, oh, a roll, grab a couple of those rolls, what else do we need? Let’s see, how about a chicken fried steak? Oh yeah, now we’re talking, lots of gravy, I need some cheese, “has anyone seen the cheese?” Wait, there’s noodles over there, maybe I’ll make up a little stroganoff, I’ll have to find beef chunks, you know what? I think I want a taco too, no, put some more of that cheese sauce on it, oh yeah, that’s looking good, Billy Ray, let’s see, is that everything?

Nope, I forgot bacon, I need to head back to the front. Not all the way to the front, just far enough back to get what you need, and that usually requires cutting in front of someone, but since you've already been through, it seems OK.

"Hey, no cuts, man."

"Oh, it's OK, I've been through the line already and just forgot some things. I'll just be a minute while I pile my plate so high I can barely hold it with one hand." Why do people do that? Put so much food on our plates that you can barely transport the food to the table? It's a buffet for crying out loud, you can go back and get more. You don't have to pile your food so high it's in danger of toppling over. Then comes the desert; even if you're full, there's still room for desert. I have to have some pie, maybe a little, just a little piece of cake, that cheesecake is looking pretty good; of course you can't have pie without ice cream, and the cake may need a little splash as well. Oooh, you know what would go good with this,? Reece's pieces, or some colored sprinkles or Oreo crumbles, and last but not least, a nice layer of jelly beans. Bon appetit. After a meal like that, there's only one way to finish it off, a nap. It's Vegas, baby.

There's also some type of optical illusion in Vegas. It looks like a walking town. When you can see something, it looks like you can walk to it. You can't. You can try, but by the time you've gone a mile and the place you were heading to isn't getting any closer, you realize, it's time for a bus or the tram or a cab because it's too far to walk. How come we're not getting any closer? I can see New York, New York from my hotel room, why can't I walk there in an hour? Are the sidewalks secret treadmills? I know my feet are moving me in the right direction; I've gone through twelve intersections, why is my destination not getting any closer?

I like to play blackjack. But sometimes I don't like the people who play, especially the older ones, or the people who play all the time. They always want to give advice: "you may want to split those son." Or, "I'd double down if I were you."

"Hey, shut up, old man, I'll show you how to play, let's go ahead and hit my 19."

Even the dealer will speak up, "Sir, you have 19."

"And I want 21, give me a card, Chauncey," then throwing a five, I'm busted, but the guy giving me advice is sitting next to me with 15, looking at that five and going, "what are you doing? That's my five."

“Well, apparently not, sir, I paid for it, you enjoy that nine, now leave me alone or I will ruin every hand at this table.”

I’m sorry if I can’t add up five and nine as quickly as Einstein, and don’t even get me started on Aces. “Oh great, now I have to figure out two hands, one for eleven and another for one, it’s too much adding, I’m drinking, I can’t think, I need out, aaaaaaiiiiiieeeeeee.” That’s why I don’t really gamble. I don’t like doing like that with strangers. I can play cards with my friends, but sitting at a table in Vegas with people I don’t know? Terrifying. I never feel like I’m qualified to be doing this. Is that stupid? It’s not rocket science, its cards. I’m just a little leery of gambling because I got burned once in Twenty-nine Palms.

We were playing a game called “in between.” Two cards were laid down and you bet on whether or not the next card would be “in between” the two. I had an ace and a three, so I bet the pot of \$250 and pulled a deuce. I just sat there and looked at that two. I don’t think I’ve hated a number before or since. That deuce killed me. Everyone was screaming and jumping up and down and I was dumbfounded. I even had to borrow about \$40 to cover the debt. There goes my money for the next two weeks. It was an entire paycheck gone in an instant and I’ve never really gambled much since.

I went skydiving in Vegas. Me and my pa. My folks were actually in Vegas that week, so my father joined me. Much to my Mother’s chagrin. We had two options, tandem jump after a 10 minute class, which considering what we were about to do, I personally thought, could have been a little longer, or jump solo after an eight hour class. Well, I’m not spending eight hours in training just to plummet to the ground alone. If I’m going, I’m taking someone with me. Plus, I don’t think I wanted the responsibility that comes along with parachuting, most of the time, I don’t want to count on anyone, but this time I passed the torch. If I’ve got someone strapped to my back, I know he’s going to do everything to save his neck, which means, I’m saved too. Yeah. So we took the 10 minute class and jumped tandem. I’m not going to make any jokes about having a man strapped to my back. I’ve had guys tell me, “I’d do it, but I don’t want another man that close to me.” Well too bad for you, homophobe. I’m going jumping. Plus, once you leave the confines of the plane, having a man strapped to your back is the last thing on your mind. I could’ve had a naked Boy George strapped to me and I

wouldn't have noticed. There are way too many things to occupy your mind. Like dying.

On the ride from the strip to the airport, which wasn't really an airport as much as tin shack with a runway in the yard, we filled out our paperwork. About ten pages worth of paper work and each page had the words "DANGER/DEATH" in the background in red ink. That's nice. "DANGER/DEATH." I guess they wanted to make sure we knew that we could die from this little excursion. It was rather amusing because it was on *every* page, front and back.

They also didn't take responsibility for anything, not the weather, not acts of God, not pilot error, not mechanical error, not instructor error, nothing, nada. They didn't take responsibility for a thing. It was amazing. There was even a clause in there that said if we tried to sue them, we had to pay for their legal expenses. I'm thinking, "what the hell? Are we going to die today?" Those thoughts do go through your mind, what it would be like plummeting to the ground from 15,000 feet. Would it hurt? Would it be scary? Would I poop in my pants? Yes, is the response to all those questions. I don't know if it would really hurt though, the heart attack would probably kill you first. It would be a wild way to die wouldn't it? Splat, man, splat.

We filled out our forms, signed the line and agreed to the fact that we could die today. All-righty then. Let's get to the class. I call it a class only because they did. It wasn't so much a class as a "meeting." The instructor had us watch a video, show him our "arc" and we were ready to jump. Ten minutes and we're ready to jump. Talk about a hurry-up society. My dad and I were the third group to go up. I saw my father getting a little nervous when he sees how high up the plane is. "You can barely see it" he says. "It's just a little dot." I just said that it was a small plane and just seemed smaller in the air. I didn't really know what else to say. These could be our final moments together and I wanted to reassure him, but by God, that plane does look way up there. He's just staring up at the plane and not saying anything. Then the group in front of us starts jumping. They are so small, they are barely visible. You can just faintly see movement and my dad says "oh, boy, is that them?"

"I do believe it is."

"Oh my, they are way up there."

"Yup, they sure are."

"We should be all right shouldn't we?"

“We should be, yes.”

“This will be fun.”

“Yes, I think it will.”

“Plane’s coming back.”

“Thank you Tattoo.”

“Who?”

“Never mind.”

“Boy they are way up there.”

“They have to be Dad, if you want to free fall, you’ve got to get up high.”

“Freefall...I don’t like the way that sounds.”

“But that’s the best part.”

“We should be OK, right?”

“Sure Dad, we’ll be fine.”

“OK, the plane’s here.”

“Yes, it is, it’s our turn.”

“I guess we’re next.”

“I guess so.”

The plane lands and we headed to the door. A word about the equipment. We were issued a jump suit. Mine was orange, just like at “work camp.” I’m sure originally it was a nice outfit, but now it’s in tatters. When you jump tandem, you land by sliding in on your butt. After many butt landings the seat of the jump suit had completely worn through. The seat of the pants are literally hanging there in threads. It’s either from wearing out or the fact that so many have shit their pants when they jumped, the back had rotted out from so many washings. We were also issued elbow and knee pads along with a vintage WWII flying helmet. I’m not sure why we were issued knee and elbow pads; if anything goes wrong, my elbows and knees will be the least of my concerns. I guess I could try to land on all fours, like a cat. Somehow I doubt I’d have the presence of mind to try and land on my elbows and knees, but it gave me something else to think about. That would be funny though, a guy who’s parachute didn’t open trying to land on his elbows and knees, talk about balance. The helmet was a helmet in description only. It was a leather helmet with the ribs of padding along the top. I say WWII flying cap but an old time football helmet would be a better description. This helmet might have helped if someone was throwing tennis balls at our heads, but outside of that, I didn’t see much benefit in wearing it. I don’t know why anyone would be throwing tennis balls at the heads of

other humans, but if they were, we had the helmets for it. When I asked my jump partner if the stuff would do us any good in case of an emergency, and he just shook his head no. It seems it was just policy.

We were ready, the plane has landed, and we began to load up. My jump guy has a camcorder so we can capture these moments for posterity. He then asked me if I have any last words. "Last words?" Oh I get it, he's a comedian. How about this for last words? "If anything happens, I hope I take a big poop on you," how's that for last words? Smart ass. Once you get in the plane, everyone squeezes together and "your man" straps himself to your back. It took 20 minutes for the plane to reach 15,000 feet. When we first got on the plane, it was noisy and full of excitement, there was a lot of chattering going on, but the higher we got, the quieter it got. By the time we were at altitude, there wasn't a peep out of anyone. Strange. It's almost like everyone realized these may be the last faces we ever see. This could be it. Could be. Would be? Would you be my, could you be my, won't you be ... my neighbor? "It's time," says the pilot. The skooching towards the door begins. My guy and I were the last two out. What amazed me is how quickly people got sucked out once they got close to the door. I kept trying to watch someone go out, but if you blink your eyes, they're gone. Whooooooooosh. Gone, man. My Dad was two groups in front of me. I saw him at the door, he turned to say something to me and in a flash, he was gone. I'm not sure what he was trying to say, but he had been sucked out of the plane before he could get his words out. Happy trails, Dad.

I was making wise cracks to the camera and have this little thing planned where I'm yawning and mugging for the camera on the way down. I'm going to do a little comedy for the camera as I skydive for the first time. Nice plan. It never really came to fruition though. As soon as I put my feet outside of the plane, all I can do is look out in wonderment. I also noticed the noise, going 140 mph is noisy. I'm sticking my head out of the plane and just enjoying the view when I look down, it dawns on me what the hell I'm doing. The ground looks far away, which means we're pretty high up and the next thing I know, we're out. It only took a split second and we were gone.

I hate to use the phrase "the first step is a doozy" but this moment is exactly what they're talking about. The second you're out the door, it sucks the breath out of you, your stomach plunges to the

top of your body cavity, everything from the colon on up gets radically shifted up into your chest cavity. Your lungs try to wedge themselves into your throat and your brain is trying to bust its way out of the back of your head. It's a very strange feeling. I was gasping for breath because it was like having the wind knocked out of you, the adrenaline is coursing through me at high speed, the wind is roaring in my ears, I can't hear a thing, and my cheeks are blowing back into my face and flapping around like a St. Bernard's. My heart is about ready to break through my breastbone, and I see the ground rushing towards me and we're falling at somewhere around 150 mph. Although it feels faster, it's hard to gauge the speed because my eyes are tearing up and I can't see.

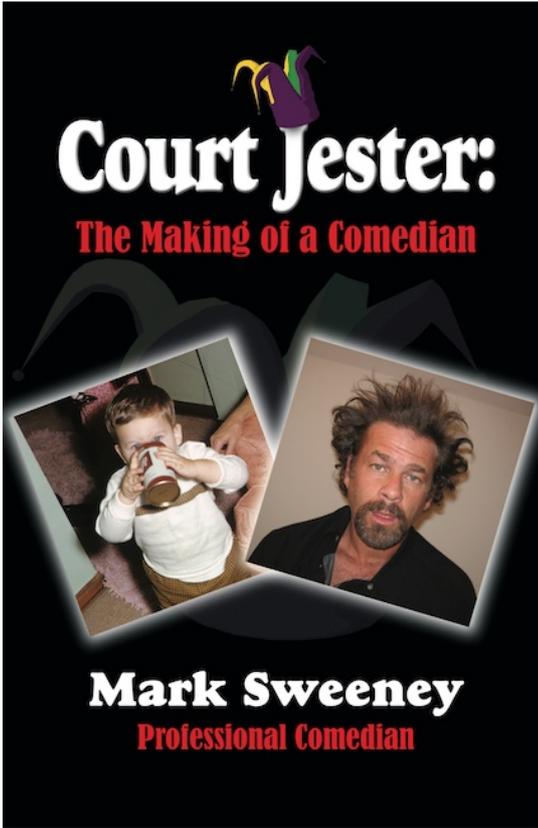
Somehow, in all this, I forget to do my little comedy act. As it turns out, there is no comedy when you're crying. Strangely enough, as your body plummets to the earth, closer and closer to death, being the clown doesn't enter into the equation. No sir. I don't think comedy crossed my mind again for the rest of the day. I think I tried screaming, but couldn't get the air out of my lungs. They advertised this jump as one where you could "see the strip, Mt. Charleston, Hoover Dam!" but all I saw was the ground. I didn't even think about looking around. I don't know many people who would have the presence of mind to sight see while they fall towards earth. All you can do is look down. It's impossible to look at anything but the ground. I mean, for God's sake I was plummeting towards earth. I've never plummeted before.

I liked it. It was liberating, I didn't think we would die but I started wondering when he was going to pull the cord. I liked the free falling, but still, I had to wonder. If this guy has a heart attack, I won't know it until it's too late. I keep waiting for his arms to drape over me in a death wilt, then quickly realize that the force of the wind will push his arms back and I'll never see the death wilt. I'll never know until just before we hit the globe. Godspeed, little one. We free fell for about 40 seconds then the chute gets pulled, and with it, the harness you're wearing. Cool, he didn't die, we're going to be all right. That's nice.

Did I mention the harness? It is a harness in all senses of the word. To begin with, you step *into* it. That is not a good sign, any occasion you have to step in to something with canvas straps, politely decline, no good will come of it. I realize the strapping in is necessary, but damn. When you go from 150 mph down to 20 mph

up, those straps have nowhere to go but up, problem there is: I'm going down. The straps grab me like I've never been grabbed before, but since I've been rappelling before, I knew to put my testes out of the straps way. If you don't pull those puppies up and out of the way, you'll have a stomach ache all day. Testicles are gentle animals; there's no reason for them to go through that type of trauma. I reminded my father of that as well, so he pulled his to the inside and made sure everything was tucked safely away. Once we get settled, it's a gentle float to the ground. The thing I noticed most after the chute opened was the quiet. It was completely silent. It was fantastic. That's all I can say; except for the strap giving me a good why-to and what-for, it was an incredible experience, and the most amazing adrenaline rush I've ever had. But the time I got on the ground, my dad was just sitting there on the ground with nobody around him. I walked over and asked if he was alright and he replied "Yes, I'm fine but I'm not doing that again." It's OK, dad, you don't have to.

*Comedy, humor*



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