



GAIL HAND IS LAUGHING THROUGH LIFE'S UPS AND DOWNS

BY JODI HELMER

PHOTOS BY MARTY DAVIS

Gail Hand sees humor as a calling. Throughout her life, she has used humor to bond with others, sell products and get through difficult times, and for more than a decade, she has been making a living by making other people laugh.

"I have always looked at life in a very sardonic manner," says Hand. "Originally comedy was a way to process the things that had happened in my life, but when I realized I could be getting paid for it, it was a no-brainer."

Hand had her first audiences while working a host of jobs in customer service. "I was always entertaining my customers, and I realized that I sold more because I was funny," she recalls. "Being funny helped me be successful."

On a dare, Hand performed during an open mike night at a San Francisco bar in 1989.

"I wrote 10 jokes, and the audience laughed at seven of them," she says.

Hooked on the high of being on stage, Hand began performing at clubs around the country while maintaining a day job in sales. At the start of her career, she says standup was like therapy.

"I made fun of dating and sex because I knew we all had ridiculous things happen to us, and it was fun to share that humiliation," she says. "I would go on stage and talk about relationships and process my breakups, and the audience would laugh."

Despite the fact that Hand was beginning to earn a living making people laugh, many of the things that had happened in her life were far from funny.

"I was 11 months old when my mom died,

and my grandmother and grandfather died shortly thereafter," Hand says.

Hand also faced the challenge of growing up with a brother who is bipolar and borderline schizophrenic. "Having someone you love so much be diagnosed with a mental illness can make you crazy," she says of Richard, who is four years older. "My family had to deal with his erratic behavior, which was not always easy."

Hand says her entire family dealt with the mental illness through humor. "We would joke about the funny things he did. We had to, because otherwise it would have made us crazy, too."

Her brother also used humor to connect with the family. "One of [Richard's] gifts is humor. He knows that he is sick, but he has a

good mind," Hand says. "He says a lot of funny things. Even today, he'll call and leave funny messages on my answering machine."


Humor also helped Hand come out to her family.

"I tried to come out as a teen-ager, but it was too difficult," she says. "I think one of the reasons I got on stage in the first place was because I had a lot to say that I felt I couldn't say anywhere else."

At 21, Hand finally decided it was time to tell her father and stepmother that she was gay. "I told my mom, and then she got drunk and told my dad, 'Your daughter is a lesbian.' My dad sat me down and said he didn't want it to jeopardize my work or my life, and that was it."

Today, Hand says her parents fall in love with her girlfriends as deeply as she does and


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