

An interview with Spilt Milk's Betsy Kauffman and Joanie Quinn

By Jack Rubinger
The Southwest Portland Post

Betsy Kauffman and Joanie Quinn are producers, cofounders, and performers in Spilt Milk, the smash hit monthly comedy series at O'Connors Vault in Multnomah Village.

Quinn has magenta hair. She's Catholic. Kauffman wears round glasses. She's Jewish. Both are in their 50s. The two met several years ago when they took comedy classes and tried doing stand-up.

This reporter interviewed the pair over a tall Guinness Stout at O'Connor's. Very quickly, a flow began as it turned out that this reporter and Kauffman knew each other from the B.C. (before children) era.

Who are your influences?

Kauffman: Gary Gulman, Andrew Norelli are two influences! They both get so much humor from everyday things. I love Elizabeth Gilbert's book on creativity; it's opened up a lot of things for me.

Quinn: Growing up it was the TV shows Laugh-In, Saturday Night Live, Gilda Radner, and later Steve Martin and Robin Williams. Today I am influenced by the daily comedy swirling around me with four kids, from three different mothers. My comedy is like Erma Bombeck on medical marijuana.

Where is the humor in the world today?

Kauffman: Pretty much everywhere. I heard Jay Leno quoted as saying that the average person could turn out a five-minute comedy set every day on the things that happen to him/her. For me, my humor is mostly from my family – my kids, my parents, my upbringing, my husband.

Quinn: Buried under a big pile of political correctness, perhaps. But I find humor everywhere – in the palm trees people are planting in Portland. Oh, and in Betsy's hair. Lots of comedy in there, and probably a few other things... Betsy have you seen my keys?

What's the scariest thing about doing stand-up comedy?

Kauffman: It's soooo scary the first time you get on a stage. I thought I was going to get sick. You're all alone and so vulnerable, wondering if anything is going to land. Everyone knows that awful feeling of telling a joke and not having anyone get it.

Quinn: Everything. Will I remember what I was going to say? I was really funny last time, but will the audience find me funny this time?

How do you recover from a night when you have bombed?

Kauffman: What? I never bomb! That's not true. I figured out early on that you don't die from it, so even

though it feels pretty crappy, it's not that big a deal. Still, I usually call Joanie after I have a bad performance so I can whine and get some sympathy.

Quinn: Tons of chocolate. Talk to Betsy. It's a hard feeling, but it does happen.

Can anyone do stand-up comedy?

Kauffman: Interesting question. I don't know. I do know that a lot more people can than realize they can. Much of it is a learned skill that can be taught if you're willing to work at it. Judy Carter, the author of "The Comedy Bible," claims to be able to make anyone funny.

Quinn: Anybody can do it. But it takes someone special to do it right. Wait – that's being a parent. I guess it applies here, too.

What do you like most about Southwest Portland?

Kauffman: It's very homey. I like the parks and the little shopping areas. I love the Hillsdale library. I spent a lot of time there with my kids. Our curving streets are good too. That grid system on the east side is dull.

Quinn: I like the community feel of Southwest Portland. Multnomah Village has original shops owned by local folks, who sent their kids to local schools, and who work at their shops and invest in the community feel of our town.

What do you like least about Southwest Portland?

Kauffman: We could use a few more sidewalks.

Quinn: The hills! Geez, a girl with no muscles would like to ride a bike every once in a while, pleeeese!

Spilt Milk is located at O'Connor's Vault in Multnomah Village, 7850 SW



Betsy Kauffman (left) and Joanie Quinn at O'Connor's in Multnomah Village. (Post photo by Jack Rubinger)

Capitol Hwy. Featuring PG-13 humor, the next show is set for Thursday, May 12. Dinner is available. No minors are allowed, and the doors open at 5:30 p.m. Shows often sell out ahead, so purchasing tickets in advance is recommended. The

line-up for the Thursday, May 12 show includes Nathan Brannon, Joanie Quinn, Debby Dodds, Neeraj Srinivasan, and Wendy Westerville. Tickets are available on www.brownpapertickets.com for \$10 in advance/\$15 at the door.

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