

TICKLED PINK

Local comedian Beth Pinkerton tells Eugene how it is BY ALEX V. CIPOLLE

Beth Pinkerton's first time performing standup comedy was in March. As of June 28, she was opening for a national act — comedian Jen Kirkman — at Cozmic, where Pinkerton brought down the house with her outsider views of Eugene. It takes some serious chutzpah to tell a Chaco-wearing, CSA-subscribing crowd of the hippie noblesse that you buy your produce at Walmart, you eat at Taco Bell and that you, Eugene, can go fuck yourself already.

Sure, there was a boo or two, a few gasps and clasped hemp necklaces, but, overwhelmingly, the New York transplant was greeted with laughs, applause and what felt like a collective cathartic release.

Pinkerton's shtick is the stick poking at our self-righteous, bougie bubble of liberal values, an antidote for politically correct lives lived too seriously.

But she also pokes at herself in her act, regaling in self-deprecating stories of trying to come out as a lesbian to her cigarette-dragging mother at 15 (it didn't take at first), her Catholic upbringing and what it's like to follow in the footsteps of her brother, the "golden boy," a navy pilot, who's now one of her biggest advocates.

And for all her jokes, Pinkerton — who works for a local nonprofit specializing in therapeutic foster care — loves Eugene and its generally accepting nature. *EW* caught up with Pinkerton to discuss comedy, marriage equality — she married in December — gaydar and more. Catch her next at the Bleepin' Funny comedy night Aug. 29 at Sam Bond's Garage, but for now, here are some Pinkerton musings.

ON FINDING STANDUP

I've actually wanted to be a standup comedian my whole life, but it was one of those pipe-dream things — like, "That's never going to happen." I'm also super self-conscious about stuff, so I was super nervous about it.

Then I was like, "Fuck it." There's a class through LCC, a comedy-writing class. It's taught by Leigh Ann Jasheway and it was a fantastic experience, and I learned how to write standup. The whole final for the class was, if you chose to participate, doing standup at "Bleepin' Funny" at Sam Bond's. So that was my first show. I think my opening joke was my mom had an STD in the 1980s, and it was called an unwanted pregnancy.

ON EUGENE ELITISM

I think what you eat, where you buy things, where you shop, who you associate with, where you stand on certain social, political issues — it's all very judge-y. I kind of said it in my standup: I do; I eat Taco Bell and I do fucking consider it Mexican. I've been shamed for that here. The first time I told a joke about shopping at Walmart — that's where I buy my produce — people booed in the audience. I was like, "Yeah. Suck it. You can boo if you want." I'm sure they were half being funny but it's true, you look down on that.

But I work for a nonprofit. I'm the primary breadwinner in my family. I just bought a house. I don't have a ton of money and I do shop at Walmart and that's just the way it is.

ON EVERYONE LOOKING LIKE LESBIANS IN EUGENE AND REFINING HER "GAYDAR"

When I first moved here, my gaydar was shot because when I look for a lesbian, I look for a dyke haircut, short

finger nails and a general angry disposition. Do you know what happens when you put tin foil on a cat's feet? They can't feel the ground so they can't walk. That's how I felt when I got here around navigating the queer community and figuring out who was gay because I had no idea.

Where I work right now, when I first started there, everyone called their partners their *partners*. I was like, "Everyone's gay! This is the coolest thing ever." Then I was like, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa. You're just PC or some shit." I'm not used to that. Where I'm from [Rochester, New York], you say partner you mean *gay*.

ON MARRIAGE EQUALITY

As a young lesbian, you think you'll never see it. I always hoped that I would see marriage equality, but once it finally hits you — when it hit here [in Oregon], I remember walking out of work and calling Jules, my wife, and just crying.

And now with the Supreme Court, it's just fantastic. My boss texted me at 7:15 in the morning — it was the best thing to wake up to. We live in an amazing time. The fact that I can now technically go to Arkansas where the Duggars [of *19 Kids and Counting*] live and get married and throw that in their face — I'll tell you what Jim Bob!

ON GAY BARS

So I was shocked when I came here and there wasn't a gay bar. And all the straight people's response — they were like, "Yeah, but you guys don't need gay bars. Everybody's welcome."

And I was like, "No. I totally get it, but that doesn't mean I don't want a space." It's weird. It sounds so backwards to say a benefit of oppression, so stay with me on this, but a benefit to it, back home, was this whole group of people was forced to find a community. I had a handful of gay bars just in Rochester alone — lesbian bars, gay bars, bear bars, leather bars, all kinds of stuff with each little niche of the queer community because you needed a place to go, because nobody was accepting. What that allowed for was for you to know other lesbians in the city. What happened here [in Eugene], it's bittersweet. It's more accepting here, but I lost that sense of community.

ON FAMILY AND COMING OUT

My parents were super liberal. They left the Catholic Church due in part because I came out. At this point, they're completely done. My mom started wearing PFLAG [family and ally org advocating for LGBTQ community] pins and my dad has a rainbow sticker on his car, like a straight rainbow. I was like, "You're going to be confused as a gay man." And he's like, "I don't care. I support my daughter."

Every single letter or card my dad signs, every single one for years now, has been signed, "In love and pride, Dad." I have amazing parents. ■

Edited for length and clarity. To read extended version, visit eugeneweekly.com



BETH PINKERTON SAYS HER PARENTS LINKED ARMS AND SANG 'THE SUN WILL COME OUT TOMORROW' WHEN SHE CAME OUT TO HER DAD AT AGE 18

PHOTO BY TRASK BEDORTHA