

SUM OF HIS PARTS

AN ACTOR'S MEMOIR



JIM WILLIAMSON

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By 2025 I had already moved back home to live with my widowed father in Winnipeg. Four nights a week I would climb into my old bedroom closet, where I'd hunch before a microphone recording voiceover auditions, or, the latest installment of my audio podcast series *Williamson's Way*. This work made a nice break from the day – which was spent looking for work. But doing voices this way made me almost believe it was 1976 again. I could feel it more than see it. Hmm.

Actually, it seems appropriate that, for all of my work in the medium of the audio-recorded-spoken-word, hundreds of home and studio demos, live theatre and nightclub appearances as professional actor and impressionist-comedian, radio interviews, commercials, and sketches, I still can't "picture" a whole lot of what went on without a tape for reference!

But I do remember how it all began.

Like any kid who had access to a SONY audiocassette recorder circa 1970, a great way to amuse ourselves would be to gather siblings and friends around the microphone and spoof the local FM radio station.



Hearing your voice back in those days was such a novelty, so completely unusual and rare, we would literally hold our sides laughing at the playback; no matter how stupid it was!

Like many of my generation, I was a fan of the dazzling and prolific Monty Python comedy team and by the year 1976 got their classic *Live at Drury Lane* record album for my 12th birthday.

Later that year (probably Christmas) I recorded myself in the basement/furnace room of our house on 53 Cormorant Bay in Winnipeg, reading my older sister Linda's script for the musical *South Pacific** aloud, using the voices of Louise Lasser(!) and the Monty Python team with silly ad-libs throughout, while pounding Dad's basement filing cabinet and hurling baby sister Laura's (unbreakable) toy tea set to the floor repeatedly for funny sound effects. A career (sort of) was born. Semi-improvising parodies with celebrity voices into a tape recorder (a kind of Peter Cook/MAD Magazine/Rich Little approach to creativity) would become a favourite way of working in my eventual career as an impressionist; it helped me develop material. (*Linda had the lead role in a high school production, the previous year)

My first such outing, the resulting noisy mess, the barely-grammatical *The Silly Adventures of South Pacific,* was really just a Python pastiche; John Cleese playing Bloody Mary, albeit with Terry Jones' crazy laugh (taken from their "Oscar Wilde" sketch on the *Matching Tie and Handkerchief* album, if you must know) and it all broke down in chaos, with Cleese/Mary threatening all and sundry with "exploding cows"(?!).

Still...listened to today, the voices, Cleese, Jones, Eric Idle, Graham Chapman, Michael Palin and Sesame Street's The Count (!) are surprisingly distinct and accurate, even in my pre-pubescent state, and the then-hot Louise "Mary Hartman" Lasser's flat, who-cares Brooklynese monotone is an amusing contrast to the boys' plummy British dialects. I always liked Mary/Louise and I'd do her again, if people remembered. [See Entry under Audio Archive]

There was *something* here, despite being such a noisy, childish (of course!) erratically-recorded mess!! Even so, I wasn't inspired again in this way for well over a decade. Stuff happens. In my case, my *real* ambition was to be an artist-and-writer. Even so...

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I'm glad my mom and dad always encouraged me to perform. I sang in the Rosedale United Church junior choir as well as in a semi-professional children's group, the Mininationals, and of course I always took part in the school plays at Van Belleghem School and later J. H. Bruns Collegiate. It got me out of the house! But it wasn't till I was about 19 years old - and having made little progress in my efforts to be a professional artist-and-writer - that I took a real shot at professional acting. Years later I had a huge trunkful of video and audio tapes to show for it.

What follows are stories about what was on those tapes. It's not literally everything I did, just what I consider some of the more notable projects from my work in theatre, nightclubs, radio, television, and film; all that I've managed to preserve! I hope the links to various audio and visual clips online help give you a nice multi-media idea of what it was like to be an actor in those days (beginning about 1984, proper).

All I know is, I sure had fun! Varied, too! It helps to remind ourselves that no one else in the world has ALL the exact same experiences we do, and so we should try to find meaning and comfort and purpose in our own uniqueness. I really do believe life is what we make it.

What's The Problem, Josef? (1984) – Screenwriter Susie Moloney was, once upon a time, struggling actress Suzi Schledwitz. Together with her friend Jim Williamson and Myrna Tycholaz (fellow students in the Introductory Acting Course at the Prairie Theatre Exchange school in Winnipeg, Manitoba) Susie tried out for, and got, a role in a provincial government training film, the kind that depicted workplace problems, and were typically shown to bosses in companies as a way of recognizing and dealing with discontent "in the ranks". In this case, it was an "old-school" lab technician named Josef (Peter Spencer), who refused to adapt to the changing technology, to the growing frustration of his colleagues. This was not Shakespeare, God knows, but the case it represented was, and in 2026 still is, a

legitimate issue in the business world, rendered in a believable way with a skilfully written script (by Coral Bannister) and convincing performances.

I recall being encouraged to be "more nasty" in my role as Tech #1, but that's about it. The remaining technician, Mark Pomerenke, was brought in I think by the director, Pam Best. Mark was a genial professional clown and juggler, always smiling and agreeably humorous (In conversation he very frequently said "That's right!" in mid-guffaw; rather nice as quirks go). Mark would cross paths with me many more times. We shot the movie in the labs of the University of Manitoba on the Victoria Day weekend, May 20, 1984, to be exact, a lovely way to spend my 20th birthday! Look at young skinny four-eyes in his lab coat, makin' his film debut – little does he know the surprises that await him!





"Technology triumphs again!" Tech #1 (me) likes the "auto-analyzer." Josef (Peter Spencer, right) doesn't.





Tech # 3 (Mark Pomerenke) has his doubts about Josef. The Boss, Irene (Susie Moloney) tries to be fair but firm about Josef's need to adapt.



One look, and a career is born.

Sutherland Centres (1985) - This one – a simple 30-second TV commercial, casts probably *the longest shadow* over my entire acting career. That's because it starred the man I performed with longest (Bob Cloutier of the Another Fine Mess theatre company), it featured the man who produced my last stage show (Jack Slessor, *That 70s Variety Show*) and it was directed by the man who made most of my TV commercials and films (Barry Lank). The year before, I'd met Jack and, later, Bob, in the cast of an amateur stage production of *Arsenic and Old Lace*. One night in the dressing room I remarked to Bob that, due to our 1930s clothes, we looked like Laurel & Hardy. "Fuck off," said Bob, only faintly amused, since he took this to mean he was fat. But Jack Slessor remembered the exchange and vowed to do something about it, particularly since he was already getting some paying gigs as a Charlie Chaplin impersonator.

The weirdest thing I can remember from this time is *not liking* either man! That was because on closing night Jack and Bob had at first volunteered to help the rest of us (that is, only three willing volunteers) tear down the set, then changed their minds at the last minute. "Well, I'm certainly not working with *them* again!" I thought.

Sure enough, the following winter Jack literally stopped me in the hall at the University of Winnipeg (he was a year ahead of me in the Theatre program) and told me that Bob was about to make a new instalment of the TV commercials he was already famous for, the "Harry" commercials by Sutherland Centres, who were a building-supply place. The script called for a couple of dimwitted supply clerks, and Jack suggested we try out and "Maybe we could work out a little shtick* together." So, we went down, tried out for and got the parts, director Barry Lank particularly enjoying telling puzzled-face me that I was "perfect for the blank look."

We filmed all day Sunday, March 8, 1985, in one of the Sutherland outlets. It was what I later understood to be a signature Barry Lank production: odd-looking people doing strange things in a fisheye-lens. The glasses, by the way, were my spare pair, a godawful number I was forced into buying when my regular ones broke just before the Simon & Garfunkel reunion concert in Minneapolis in '83. What happened here was, Barry's producer Ann Poten was cleaning my regular specs…and she broke them. I must have known this could've happened or why would I have brought the "ugly" ones as a back-up?? Anyway, it seemed to all happen for a reason. My blank look would play TV screens all hours of the day and night for the next five years. *Showbiz slang for comedy routine.



Left: Bob Cloutier, unimpressed Star of TV spot. Right: Jack Slessor, unperturbed roller-skating clerk.



1987, two years later. Here members of the "Sutherland Centres" TV commercial cast, Bob Cloutier, Jim Williamson, and Jack Slessor join forces to do live, improvisational comedy as Oliver Hardy, Stan Laurel, and Charlie Chaplin. This is a typical party gig; being "wandering characters" at my sister Linda Williamson's house! That's Linda on my lap (and me on Bob's).

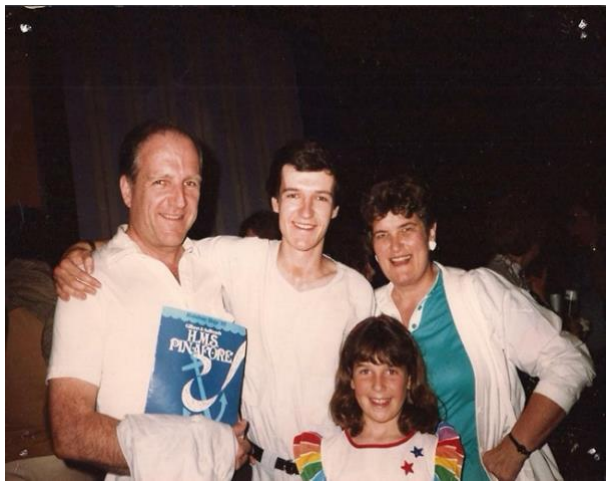
HMS Pinafore *(1985)* - So, by spring of 1985 I'd finished studying first-year Acting at the University of Winnipeg and was now in a professional theatrical show! How was it? Well....in the video of my one and only Rainbow Stage production, towards the end of Act One I can be seen at the very top of the stairs on the right hand side before coming down and doing a double-take (Buster Keaton-style) at the other sailors forming a human pyramid before I wave them off, staggering (Curly Howard-Three Stooges style). That's as prominent as I got!!

For a young Manitoban actor, getting a part in the chorus at Rainbow is supposed to be a feather in your cap, but frankly I found it more anvil-ish than feather-like. Unlike almost everybody else, I was not a music student, didn't tell dirty jokes, and wasn't gay. More importantly, I COULDN'T DANCE. This last bit especially earned me the immediate and

enduring dislike of director Bob Ainslie, a compact Aussie and offscreen-Charlie Chaplin lookalike. "Jim – you're out to lunch," spake he. Somehow I carried on and snuck in the things I was good at, sight gags and pratfalls, all of which Ainslie approved, though he scorned my scratching my head to indicate puzzlement. This from a guy who filled his show with double-takes and stuffed cats. Hoo boy. No, I didn't like *Pinafore*, feeling more like a spectator on an old MGM movie super-production soundstage than a participant. Although, certain individuals were nice, such as David Dunbar (who gave me the classic actor advice: "Just fake it, Jim"), Norman Roberts, and fellow chorus member, the quick-witted, Groucho Marx-like Jim Bell. I concluded that it was okay to have the experience but this was really more colleague and U of W classmate Patty Jamieson's world than mine. Although I did try out for Bob Ainslie the following year. "Your hair's longer, Jim," spake he. "Yes?" I replied, not seeing what a current spring hairstyle had to do with a summer show. Ainslie red-stamped my resume and that was the end of Rainbow for me. So, instead of that, I had the whole summer free for my first serious girlfriend, Nancy Aasland…

I keep meaning to send Ainslie a case of champagne!! ☺





Left, from the video of the show, I'm the Chorus Boy at the very top of the stairs. Right, Dad, Mom, and sister Laura with me backstage after opening night. Laura is especially well-attired!



Davis Automotive Supply (1985) - My line: "Is this it?" Yes. THIS was more my kinda thing; a quick afternoon Barry Lank TV commercial shoot in the middle of the run of *Pinafore* which reunited all the Sutherland players (Jack, on skates again, was in back of me), this time for a parts store based in Calgary, Alberta. Note my new, improved John Lennon glasses (and a Lennonesque glare!). I'd recently purchased contact lenses too (the better to see the audience with).

Bob's scene was shot separately, so we weren't officially together, a state of affairs which would soon enough reverse itself with uncanny persistency. (Either that, or the Winnipeg acting community just wasn't all that big in those days!) Seems a fascinating bit of foreshadowing there, though…Our Hero looking lost amidst auto parts!! (See MPI section)

Green Green Grass (1987) - One more time with the Sutherland boys (sans Bob) and many others! Barry Lank's "overstating" sense of humour (a literally picture-perfect lawn) netted him a Best-Western-Canada-TV-commercial award. Here I shed the geek look for a wiseguy caddy pose. Plus long hair, which was to be my basic "look" (to my mother's consternation) for the next twenty years.

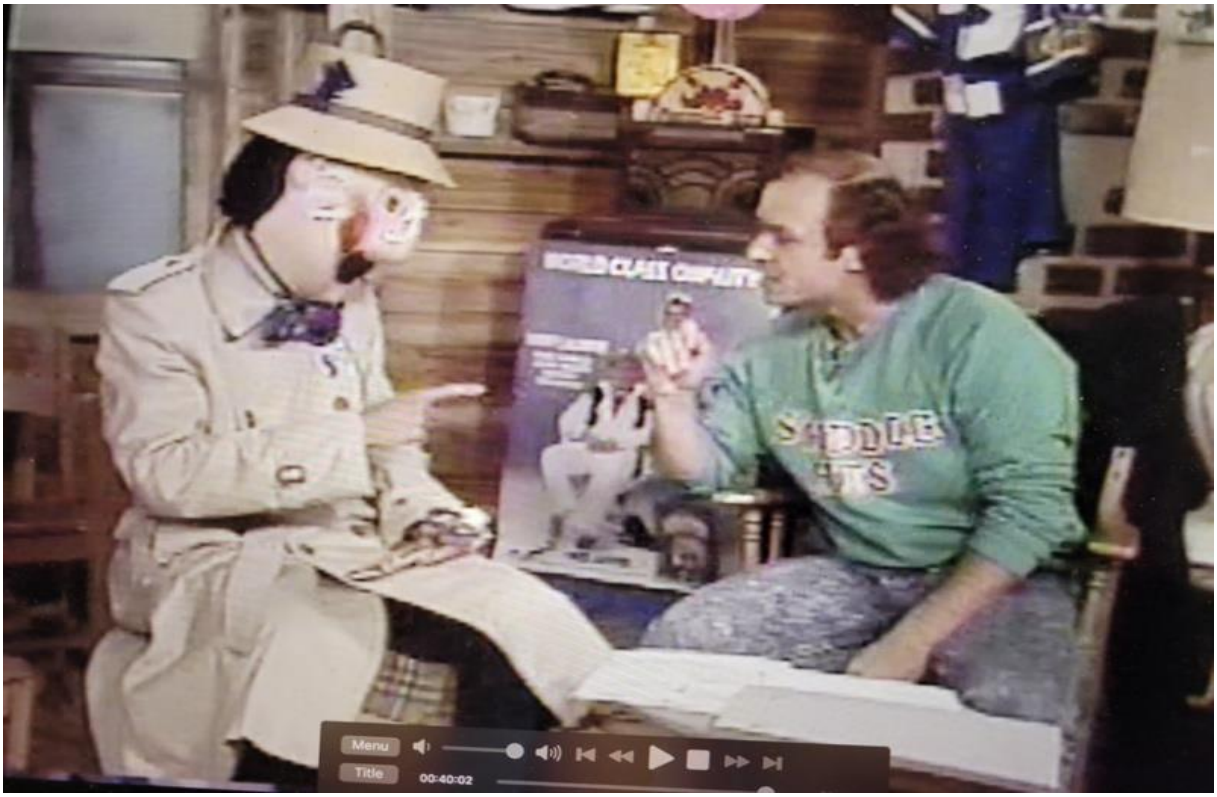
Another Fine Mess at Lions Club Telethon (1988) – True to his word, Jack Slessor "did something" about Bob Cloutier's and my resemblance to Laurel & Hardy: he got us paying gigs. We formed our tribute act, Another Fine Mess (which I refer to here as AFM), just after Christmas in 1986, and, under the auspices of Jack's company, Idea Productions, we were soon booked at hotels, nightclubs, theatres and countless public and private parties, doing essentially a live, walk-through improvisational comedy act. Now, I enjoyed improv about as much as dancing, but "Stanley" was such a natural fit to me (I'd been a fan since 1976) I did fine alongside Bob for the next 15 years. This Telethon is typical of those early appearances. I liked Caroline Jay and Greg Scott's professional obliviousness to the two stupid apes in back of them!



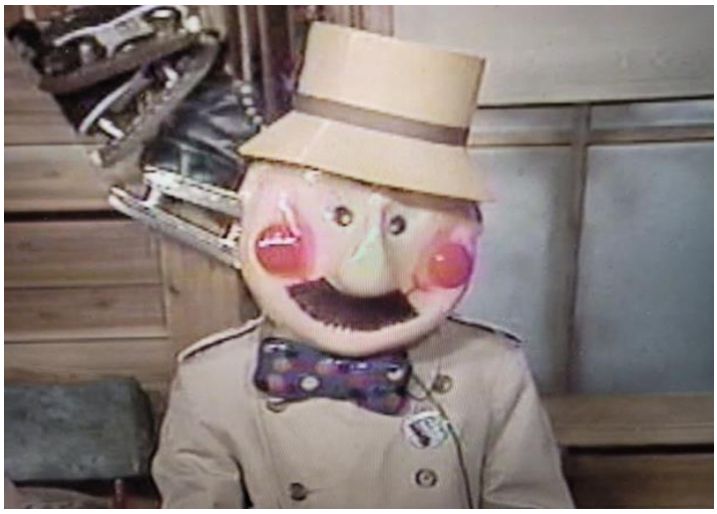
Another Fine Mess's first (silent) gig on live TV, flanked by Caroline Jay and Greg Scott.

S'Kiddlebits (1988) - No offence to entertainer Joey Gregorash but I really dislike this one and include it only to illustrate what it meant – sometimes – to be a Winnipeg actor in the 1980s. It was my former acting professor at the U of W, Blake Taylor, who recommended me for the role of Inspector Smartie, which we assumed was a nice, Inspector Clouseau-type role on this, a local kids's TV show on CKY. Well and good. But, nobody told me I'd

have to wear a HUGE PAPER MACHE HEAD WITH NO EYE-HOLES. Despite this challenge, and the fact that my voice sounded like it was coming from deep within a toilet, Joey and I improvised gamely through this and two other appearances, and that, mercifully, was that. …And no, I STILL don't know who stole the blue Smarties!



Making a point to Joey Gregorash.



Actor with typical swelled head.



"Come along (Woof! Woof!) with me!" **The hits keep right on coming, but Barbie Boult and Dan Chase would seem to disagree, at the Hollow Mug.**

Can-Can (1989) - Now THIS was a show: lights, sets, costumes, make-up, dressing rooms, and music: a crack three-piece live band, oompah, oompah, oompah, oompah, *rat*-ta-tat-tat-*tat!* Sure, the Hollow Mug Theatre Restaurant may have been *chintz* compared to Rainbow Stage, but who cared! Here you only had six actors, the aforementioned band, and, plenty of room and time to trot out your own specialties, be they singing, gymnastics or comedy.

The Mug did what they called "capsule" versions of Broadway and Hollywood musicals, mostly the songs with just a little bit of dialogue in between. The shows were only about 45 minutes long (sometimes half an hour) and there tended to be two a night, 8:45 and 10:45.

It was perfect for short attention spans (like mine); exactly my favourite type of theatre. The only problem was I COULDN'T DANCE, which meant that director and choreographer Nenad Lhotka took an instant and enduring dislike to me ("Jim is slow…like poke. Right?" spake he). Cast member Lorraine West was even more mortified, and seemed to do her best to intimidate me, probably hoping I'd quit or, better yet, be fired by Nenad, who was

noted for his absolute control over every move the actors were to make (No improv, in other words).

But other cast members Dan Chase and, particularly, Barb Boult (a friendly, energetic schoolteacher who drove me home a lot) were much more kind and encouraging, so I persevered and did my best and stayed in the show, though I never did stop looking at my feet. I remember disliking the "Anatole" song as I felt it hampered me in being too far from the audience (and never great at singing especially loud), but "Come Along With Me" I enjoyed, especially Barbie's face as I chased her; such a hilariously prune-faced look of disgusted horror she gave me, I was forever in danger of cracking up; giggling at her. In the video I can clearly see myself want to laugh, but I managed to reign it in and try to look sexy, heaven help me.

Still, it was an optimistic time in my life. I imagined I could maybe be a Shemp Howard* type of actor, the old-fashioned comic relief, but equally adept in the lead if given the chance. Though the show as interpreted by Nenad didn't have a lot to it story-wise (The Judge first disapproves of, but then, inexplicably, decides he is in love with, Pistasche), as the song goes: "So what, so what, so what, *so what?"* It was well-staged and it moved and at the Mug that's what mattered most.

The night our musical director Ron Krug filmed it (the second show that night), Lorraine West told some horrifically filthy joke just before we went on, which was the *real* reason for everybody's smiles! You do what you can. And I LOVED doing this. Baby, *I* can Can-Can too! So *there,* West! Oompah, oompah, oompah, oompah, *rat*-ta-tat-tat-*tat!* (*Shemp Howard was one of the Three Stooges, but had a prolific solo career as well)

Another Fine Mess at Variety Club Telethon (1989) – This was another early instance of Another Fine Mess doing its thing; here improvising with local TV personality Stan Kubicek. Bob and I were getting more comfortable with each other. Also appearing in the show were the Dallas Cowboy Cheerleaders. You can just see one between us in the background.





Wardrobe shot, JW as WA!

New York Dough Boys (1989) – I don't remember this AT ALL except that it was a quickly-produced Global TV commercial for a local pizza place; one where I, as Woody Allen, do a rather laboured joke about big breasts ("I don't understand it – all I said was that the waitresses all had very big…egos…") before finding myself in the Twilight Zone, er, the *Winnipeg* Zone of New York Doughboys Pizzeria. It'd be another twenty years before I became a rabid *Twilight Zone* fan, so I'm delighted to have been in this spoof at all, even if I didn't (and don't) understand the point of it.

Another Fine Mess Presents Laurel & Hardy's Vaudeville Theatre (1989) - What happened was, people we met while doing our improv act began asking us to do a stage routine, so it only made sense for Bob and myself to start writing down actual comedy sketches.

The Winnipeg Fringe Theatre Festival seemed the ideal showcase for this new phase of ours, and it was my idea to make it a show-within-a-show and have special guests, to take some of the pressure off!

Bob agreed, and demonstrated what a good producer-director he was by rounding up all our supporting cast and crew and pianist and choreographer and props, all by himself.

I took care of the poster, ticket, and program design as well as typing all the draft scripts.

We tended to write our material separately, although the "Acoustics Routine" I recall was handwritten by both of us, line by line, eyeball to eyeball, as the Beatles's John Lennon once said of collaborating with Paul McCartney.

Two items, "Suitcase Sketch" and "Shine On, Harvest Moon" were reworkings of REAL Laurel & Hardy routines (the films *Berth Marks, Bonnie Scotland, The Music Box* and *The Flying Deuces* come to mind) but the rest were 100% original.

My old "lab partner" (see *What's The Problem, Josef?*) Mark Pomerenke agreed to appear and added more of a New Vaudevillian (that is, self-consciously cornball) approach to the show, which, in retrospect, clashed with ours, although when I watch the video now he's so

relaxed and focused this stylistic deviance doesn't diminish what he's doing at all. I admired his confidence up there and still do.

I came up with his moniker, "Ducky Dempster". It comes from, of all places, an episode of TV's *The Jeffersons*, where, for a party, everyone dresses up like familiar old movie stars, except for silly-ass Englishman neighbour Bentley (Paul Benedict) whose idol "Ducky" is of course unfamiliar to everyone, leading to hilarious consequences.

Mark liked the name very much; especially its silly lineage!

Yvette Berger was the best accompanist we ever had (effectively covering a few dead silences!).

Carol Zacharias (whom Bob was dating at the time) offered a nice change of pace with her singer character Lilly Harley, a name I suggested, as it was Charlie Chaplin's mother's stage name.

The show holds up reasonably well today, the bit at the end that's lost on the video was just Ducky dancing Lilly away before Ollie has a chance with her.

Then we read our itinerary to the folks, which we accidentally set on fire, and that's the "another fine mess" I'd gotten him into.

So that was it.

Looking back at it now, the pacing is a bit off but it was a good lesson in putting a proper stage show together all by ourselves.

We were fortunate in getting the Chinese Cultural Centre for our venue, guaranteeing us a professional stage and first-rate dressing rooms.

Stylistically, Bob was always wanting to be loud and fast, like in the vaudeville tradition, which I found odd because Laurel & Hardy were *never* loud *nor* fast.

With this type of show, you have to do what "they" would do, or don't call it a tribute!

Speaking of that, the ballad "Till We Meet Again" was in fact uncharacteristic and much too sentimental for Laurel & Hardy's mildly sardonic brand of humour.

But…it's a nice song and fits the vaudeville tradition, so we left it in and it in fact became our regular closing theme.

It's nice to have this filmed at all (It was shot in colour; the black and white footage was a dubbing accident that I decided to retain).

Thanks Mom, for shouldering that particular burden, and camera!

Hard to believe that at (almost) the same time as this I had another, self-penned sketch comedy show playing across the street, *Pun: A Play On Words*, starring a regrettably bickering, miserable little group corralled by my friend Dale Krawchuk and called A Senseless Waste of Human Life, fashioned after Monty Python. Or so we thought. That show tanked, and I'm happy to say there is NO video of it ANYWHERE in the world!

I remember feeling depressed at the time, that is, at the idea that the world would "only" accept me as an impressionist and not a humourist with an original point of view (although I was always quick to tell people that we in AFM wrote and performed ORIGINAL Laurel & Hardy material). No matter. It was the summer, I was performing, all was well!



"Till We Meet Again": Mark Pomerenke, Bob Cloutier, me, Carol Zacharias.



"Coo! Wot a soight! It's me number one all-time favourite show!" **Jerry Maslowksky (partially obscured), David Gibson, and me.**

Disney Fantasy (1990) - THIS is the one. My all-time favourite of all the shows I did with a company of actors, this had so much going for it. First, there was the music, those easy, fun Walt Disney songs, many of which I sang as a kid in the group the Mininationals (named after the Hollow Mug's Internationals, a loose affiliation, changing members with every show). Next, you have the Broadway-quality vocals of Jerry Maslowsky and Nicole Milne, plus the fact that I COULD DANCE the shuffling steps taught to us by choreographer Pearl McConnell, and most importantly, director Neil Harris, a Charles M. Schulz lookalike, was the artistic and emotional opposite of Nenad Lhotka; he encouraged improvisation, and, with spoofing TV's *The Mickey Mouse Club* as our basic template, all six of us went on to do whatever silly thing came into our heads, once we'd memorized all our songs and dance steps of course.

It was one of those lucky accidents, when you just happen to assemble six people on the same giddy wavelength. And, as was the ideal situation at the Mug, everybody's individual

talents were well showcased, too. Jerry's harmonies were assured and strong, David Gibson and Jim Bell played the Ugly Stepsisters with Monty Python aplomb, Terry Reutcky's Snow White warbling was on-target and Nicole's "Feed The Birds" was so beautiful I'd have bought it if I hadn't already "owned" it on our souvenir video of the show. My "Chim Chim Cheree" song was a good excuse for my eccentric, Buster Keaton-ish dancing, and indeed elsewhere in the show I ended up improvising slapstick sight gags all over the place, banging my nose in the scenery, wrenching the nose of a teddy bear "accidentally", and trying to avoid the medicine in "Spoonful of Sugar"; consciously channelling everybody from the Three Stooges to Pete Townshend(!) in my dancing and vocalizing. The point is we all gave 1000% to this – especially during "Supercalifragilisticexpealidocious" - one of the most invigorating songs in the world! - and I find it truly is as much fun to watch on video today as it was to do. I think the video caught our last performance (I could hear myself ad-lib "Smile for the camera, girls" at the end of "Chim"), which in part explains the exuberance, just *why* we're giving our all. When it's your last chance, you just wanna blow the doors off the joint, and I'd say we did, aided as always by the equally silly Danny Carroll ("We can't do the tap number," he once cried, backstage, "the pipes have burst!" A joke) and his band.

I wish we could have taken this on tour – everybody got along so well (although Gibson, it seems, always had to complain about something, but that was his nature. Like the rest of us, though, he just got on with it and had fun). We LOVED this one but even so, I do remember a palpable sense of "Thank God that's over", only because we all were working our asses off, as is plainly obvious in the video. The Ipswich-England-born Terry and I became friends. She drove me home a lot. Thanks Terry. I loved how in "Chim" she made a wide-eyed, grossed-out silly face as she removed my broom bristles from the back of her neck, just before leaning against me with a look of complete insanity. God! What a panic she was! (Decent scene-stealer, too!) I look back on the Mug with nothing but fondness. It is now both gone *and* forgotten (except for people's private video collections, and latterly, a Facebook group). But nothing mars my memory of this; the most fun I EVER had in a show, without a doubt. Even my old "nemesis" Lorraine West saw this and said "Jim's dancing leaves me speechless." Thanks Neil. Oompah, oompah, oompah, oompah, *rat*-ta-tat-tat-*tat!* https://www.facebook.com/reel/3872559806151272



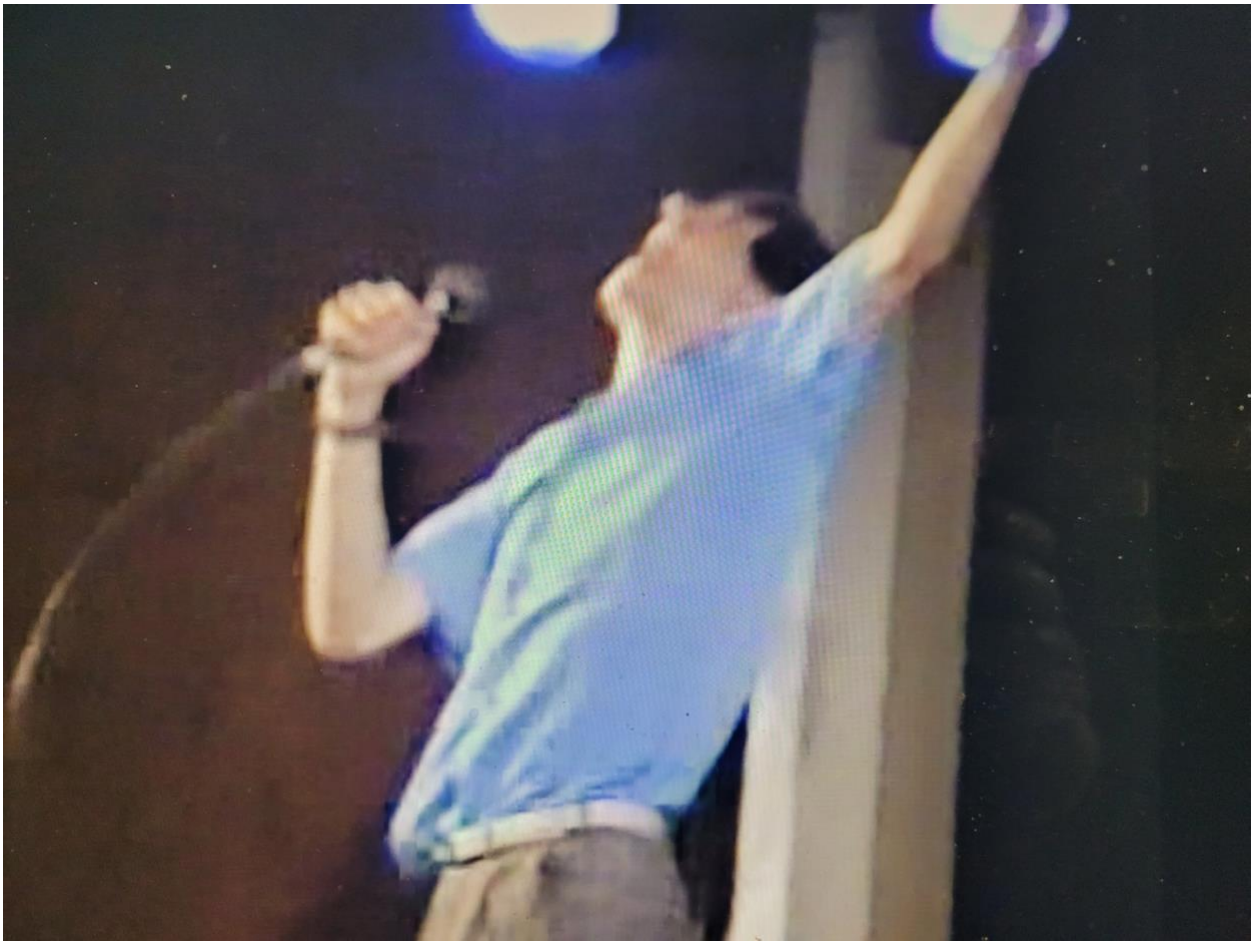
The best it ever was: **Jerry, Nicole, Jim W, David, Terry, and Jim B in the Hollow Mug's *Disney Fantasy* (1990).**

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When I wasn't performing, I was still writing, but pictured myself more as a sketch comedy writer, than, say, a traditional playwright. Oh, I *tried* to write plays and even took playwriting classes in university, but the resultant shows were just so bloody *awful;* I never seemed to get good, *long-form* ideas. While I did complete a couple play scripts I've long since thrown them out. But back around this time I made a couple of audiotapes called *Ladies and Gentlemen,* which was a proposed sketch comedy radio series for a proposed sketch comedy team (University of Winnipeg friend Dale Krawchuk, amongst others). The sketches were all very Goon Show, Bob & Ray, Peter Cook & Dudley Moore, and Monty Python-inspired, written over 1985-1988. Dale passed on these and we did that older theatre revue I'd written - my very first play, in fact - called *Pun: A Play On Words* instead.

As I mentioned in passing during the last Laurel & Hardy entry, that show regrettably tanked. Though disappointed in Dale's troupe after our lacklustre show at the Fringe I was

still fond of the material I'd offered him. So I finally recorded the complete *Ladies and Gentlemen* radio series myself in my bedroom at Ramsgate Bay in 1990-1991 on my beloved dual-deck SONY tape recorder with the stand-up desk mike and a pair of headphones, the full "radio" deal.* These *Ladies and Gentlemen* shows contained some pretty bizarre ideas, more weird than funny, perhaps, but greatly amusing to me personally and an attempt, however flawed, to do something other than impressions. Parts of it were not bad. I have since reworked some of the better sketches in my present-day projects (as of 2026). *My voice teacher Gail Loadman had said that my onstage voice was not strong and that my *real* performing future was in "microphone media". I was OK with this assessment.



100 Celebrities In 45 Minutes (1990) - That short hallway from the dressing room to the stage suddenly seemed like the longest mile. It was opening night of my first one-man show; I was actually going to entertain a theatre full of strangers, all by myself, for the first time ever. It could well have never happened.

What was *supposed* to happen was, Bob and I were supposed to write a sequel to our AFM vaudeville show at the Fringe, although what Bob had in mind was a drama called *Forty Faces*, in which he played the extrovert father to "Jimmy" (me), a lonely boy who sat in his room all the time watching movies and talking in different voices. I remember being frankly suspicious of Bob's intentions with this. It seemed to come from a decidedly jealous and/or condescending side of him that disliked my being able to do so many voices and so *he* decided it was a "disability" rather than a "skill" and best dealt with as *pathos!* "Pity Jimmy, the poor little freak!" Or was I just being paranoid?

Whatever it meant, I felt a certain private relief when Bob phoned me in early 1990 to tell me that he couldn't do the show after all, for personal reasons. OK, I said, but suppose I do a one-man show, a la Rich Little, would you be willing to direct me? Bob at first thought this was self-indulgent. It *was*, but so what? There are worse ways to indulge yourself. When I told Bob I already had a script ready he was intrigued and agreed to do it; was grateful, in fact.

I'd been toying with the idea of a one-man show since about 1987; having seen how my acting teacher Alan Williams had made a career of it. At first, I'd strongly disapproved of the genre, finding it as narcissistic as Bob apparently did, but, the closer I was getting to becoming a Real Actor, the more I saw the economic sense of it!

At first, I couldn't decide whether to just do a stand-up comedy version of my own, shy-but-girl-crazy self or (I can't believe this) play a mentalist character called Oracle Noyes, a charlatan who "conjures" the voices of dead celebrities! I wrote both such shows between 1987 to 1990 and then just let 'em sit till I could figure out what to do. Meanwhile, my manager at that time, Peggy Sarge, asked me to make a voice tape, which in those days meant an audiocassette of all the different voices I could do. So I wrote and recorded this tape, which was really just my voices arranged A-Z, saying hello and introducing the next voice with a joke or two. It just grew and grew and grew as these things do.

So, when it really came time to do my own thing, what seemed to be the easiest solution (while arguably the hardest challenge) turned out to be just putting the tape on stage, so to speak. The title comes from a contemporary comedy book-on-tape, John "Motor Mouth" Moschitta's *10 Classics in 10 Minutes*. Bob's main contribution was suggesting the ending, where the Voices gang up on me. Years later I found the same plot in a *Twilight Zone* comic book from 1967, called, sure enough, The Impressionist. Bob, being a sci-fi fan and the right age in the 60s probably did indeed lift it from there. Interesting. Or it was just a coincidence?

The thing to understand about Bob Cloutier – in this particular professional context – is that he'd frequently reject my original material for AFM in favour of something *he'd* written, that is, "jotted down" from Peter Sellers, the Marx Brothers, Jack Benny, Red Skelton, Foster Brookes, or the Smothers Brothers. To Bob, comedy was comedy, and anything could be made to fit Stan and Ollie. Or, was it indeed unconscious? Every time? We'll never know. Come to think of it, Jack Slessor had that a little bit too. Jack once claimed to have created two gangster characters, Bugsy and Shifty, and Bugsy reportedly always told Shifty to shut up by saying "Nix! Nix!" I actually saw Jack ask himself, "Where do I come up with this stuff?" Well, sorry, Jack, but that's NOT your original idea, it happens to be the words to the song "Jailhouse Rock"! Osmosis? Maybe? I suppose we're all capable of this...

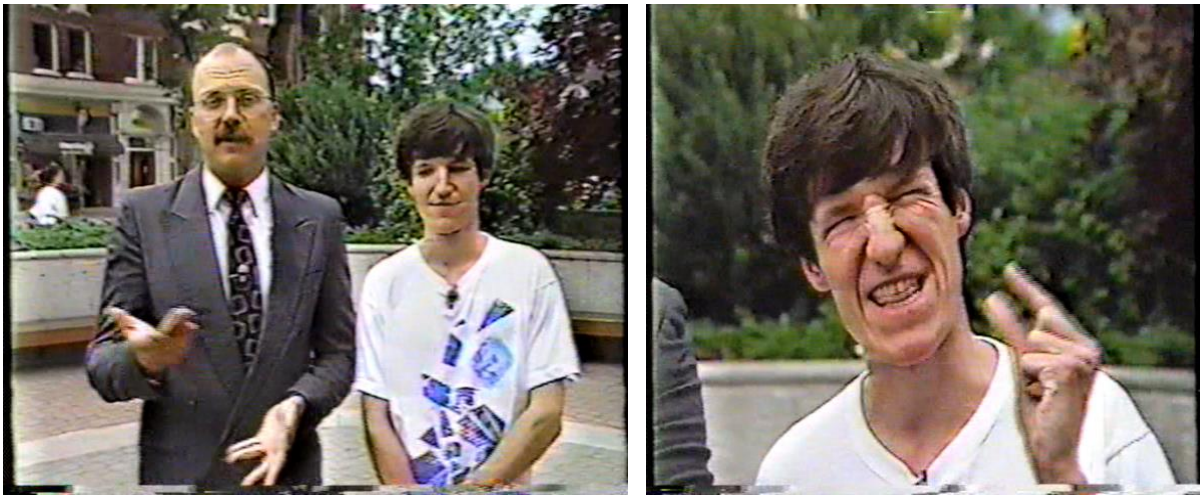
But I digress (OH how I digress) ... The show opened before an exceptionally warm and interested Winnipeg crowd and was an honest-to-God hit. The Planetarium Auditorium was the absolute best venue I could have wished for. A great sound system, despite the minor glitch of the Everly Bros. "Use Two Tapes" song! For every voice that didn't work, such as Roseanne Barr and Paul Shaffer, there was a Shelly Long or a Dick Cavett that did. Adding the Count at the finale made for a strong ending (Bob was right), but I suspect the *real* reason the audience was so happy was that they were sitting there thinking, "My God, he's doing it, he's *really* gonna go all the way up to 100!" It was most unusual standing there all alone realizing I was the only one making all these people laugh. The speed of the show was inspired in part by my reading the collected Monty Python TV scripts earlier that year and just doing those kinds of random segues ("We take you now to...") just for the hell of it. My John Cleese bit was prescient in that in 20 years' time Cleese would indeed have a stage show where he quoted himself. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3TTO1zM4MIk Even a quick Charlie Chaplin bit went surprisingly well. Like the Cleese bit, you can catch a glimpse at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6mP3YQ34Km4.

I recall David Gibson, Nicole Milne, and Jim Bell from the Hollow Mug all came to see the show and were surprised and delighted for me. I think people were just surprised in general at my assurance up there. To me it was no surprise. It was just because *I was doing exactly what I wanted*. Self-indulgence can be a good thing indeed! Joie de vivre, I call it.

Winnipeg Plus: The Best Of The Fringe (1990) - This was a brief report from a Global TV show on the local entertainment scene. The genial host Marke Driesschen asked me a few personal questions and then I launched into a few voices. I had a palpable serenity then; my stage show was a hit and was now held over at the Gas Station Theatre! Bob was stage managing, and the theatre manager, Jo Anne Cormier, my old boss from the St. Regis Hotel (where from 1981-1984 and 1988-1989 I used to work as kitchen helper, dishwasher, later busboy, then bellhop), insisted on charging what seemed then an exorbitant $8.00 a ticket

(The average at the Fringe was 5). I enjoyed being there but we didn't draw nearly the crowds. Bob ordered (yes, *ordered*) me to walk up and down Osborne Village between back-to-back shows handing out flyers to drum up more business. When I complained of being tired he said, "Jim, I'm 44 years old." I countered with "But *you* haven't just done 100 Celebrities in 45 Minutes!"

Regrettably, this proved to be one of many more arguments to come.



Global TV's Marke Driesschen explains how I am one of the best of the Fringe. Judging from this he clearly meant I am one of the best *shows*, not best-looking! (During the interview I attempted to rattle off so-many celebrities in *one* minute, including my Don Adams-Maxwell Smart impression. Apparently, I "missed it, by...THAT much!")

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There was another audio cassette tape I started compiling around this time, one that I eventually called *Club Sandwich,* which was the real deal; a "live album", me doing my impressions comedy act live on stage, circa 1990-93, giving way to my earlier, Rich Little ambitions. Because my one-man show *100 Celebrities In 45 Minutes* had just played the Winnipeg Fringe Theatre Festival to very good notices, I was told, more than once, "You're ready for the comedy clubs" (!).

My first set, at the Comedy Oasis (either at or near the St. Vital Hotel) was a near-total bomb; only the Johnny Carson gags making any sort of impact. Thinking about it still gives me a cold sweat, many years later. Terrifying! At least I had the good grace to not blame the audience.

Did revisions the following night at my debut at Yuk-Yuk's Komedy Kabaret, to a far happier audience. "Yours was the best first time ever," said the manager, which was better

than a kick in the pants. I don't remember the host, Paul Something; I do remember he was kind and encouraging.

But, future sets found me injecting an ill-advised Dick-Cavett-voiced shy, girl-crazy "Real Me" persona (Sample line: "It's for the squeamish, not for the bold". Hunh?) which grates on my nerves today, although I was also using the Be-Someone-Else line*, which did work and seemed well-placed. The act at this point was cute but not strong. But what the hell; it was amateur night, right?

By the third Yuk-Yuk's appearance I relaxed more, but I found once I did the Steve Martin and the Muppets routine I was in danger of going too fast (again) I think more out of dissatisfaction with the shape of the act than its reception. But, I was learning to edit and, the audience was sufficiently friendly, so fine.

(I'd share more live-on-stage tracks but the sound is tinny and awful due to being dubs of small SONY hand-held recorder cassette tapes. Ugh. More for my reference than sharing!)

*For the record, the joke goes, "I started doing this to meet women. Well? Women LIKE impressionists. They DO! Whenever I go on a date, the woman *always* says, 'Be someone else.'"

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Another Fine Mess Presents Laurel & Hardy's Goodtime Revue (1990) - With lessons in pacing learned – somewhat – from the Fringe, Bob and I wrote a brand-new stage show together, retaining only three crowd favorites, the "Acoustics Routine", the "Trombony Sketch", and the "Itinerary Routine".



The title *Goodtime Revue* came from our sometime-booker Brian Twerdun, head of Idea Productions, who thought calling it the *Vaudeville Theatre* wasn't

commercial enough. Bob frequently complained to Brian that he didn't employ us enough. Brian countered with "You guys don't work hard enough on stage." He was referring to our improv shows, where, yes, we did gradually develop a bad habit of coasting. So this, in part, was to show Brian how seriously we took our work. Once again, Bob shored up our supporting cast, but with decidedly mixed results on video this time. Ozzie Aasland's piano playing took too many distracting detours to really be called support. Keith MacPherson (as Billy O'Donnell) did fine with "Casey At The Bat", but Dash Lalonde as the goofily old-fashioned stand-up comic "Winston Wheeler" was cute but lacked Mark Pomerenke's cool and sense of irony. Kendra-Dee Williams's Mae West may have been sexy and controlled but vocally she was off, while young "Lilly and Ann Harley" (whose real names I forget) looked bored. Still, with the pacing improved (despite Bob's milking our improvised, wandering-in-the-audience stuff, forgetting that the audience frequently didn't "get" those parts and thought we were stalling/goofing off!) it was an appreciative, noisy crowd in Lions Manor, and, despite having one of my frequent colds, I gave it my all. Even a backward somersault with the trombone!

Nightline: Ottawa and Manotick, Ontario (1991) - How exciting; *100 Celebs* is on a nationwide Fringe Theatre Festival tour! Manotick was such a magical, happy place. And to be interviewed on TV! I hadn't yet mastered the art of weaving comedy material into an interview, but it's not bad. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0_-moHJu0xk&t=3s



100 Celebrities In 45 Minutes On The Road (1991) – I have in my archives the one and only audio recording of *100 Celebrities In 45 Minutes* on the road! September 1991 in VICTORIA, BC! Live, from an abandoned bank, to be precise!

Having performed the show almost every night since June, my confidence is extremely high. Hearing it now I am vigorous, fast, but *clear*. The joyous *doing* of the show is clear. And what a great audience – hearing this one always gives my confidence a good boost and makes me very happy.

I like how it had changed since Winnipeg; still preposterous ("Brando, get over here!"), but some funny new material, such as "Beatles Reunion", where we see the Fab Four willingly altering their songs for commercials. Having Clouseau and Cato introduce the "Shakespeare Sketch" is just stupid, but I do like having Martin Short's Ed Grimley in there.

"Tony Danza as Macbeth" and, especially, "Bob Dylan Singing Cinderella" and the Everly Brothers' "Use A Tape" bit, go over well, and Steve Martin and the Muppets keep it going.

Sadly, the tape cuts out before the finish, but it still gives a very good idea of what the Fringe was like: *having all this time and space onstage* was infinitely more preferable to the git-on-git-off-chop-chop nature of comedy clubs, which is why things developed the way they did.

I'd come a little bit of a distance from the Williamson family furnace room on 53 Cormorant Bay! [See Entry under Audio Archive]

Cane Care (1991) - Between Fringes I was summoned to film a TV spot for the Canadian Physiotherapists Association as Groucho Marx alongside Jack Slessor's Charlie Chaplin when their original Groucho, Bob Wall, became ill. The director, whose name I've long forgotten, inexplicably HATED my Groucho, but, I persevered and did as I was told. It seems I was not believable as Groucho(!). The plot, such as it was, consisted of Groucho spotting Charlie in a park with a too-long cane, and karate-chopping the end to make it shorter and more comfortable! Frankly, I had serious, unspoken doubts that this guy had ever actually seen the *real* Groucho in his life (It's more of a Harpo Marx gag, to be honest), because why in God's name would anyone put Groucho Marx in a *silent film??* WITHOUT HIS CIGAR? ("We can't show smoking," he explained) Jack and I, huddling under the same coat between takes in the autumnal chill, just did our best and, in Charlie fashion, shrugged it off, as yet another eccentric Winnipeg commercial. This spot was also notable for containing my very first voiceover, recorded later in said director's car, as Groucho.



Charlie Chaplin (Jack Slessor) and Groucho Marx (me) share a laugh in this TV ad.

This Morning: Kingston, Ontario (1991) - Later that tour, I was feeling confident enough to do a brand-new sketch featuring Steve Martin and the Muppets, here presented on local TV.

I loved the cutaway to Fringe Executive Director Mark Cassidy after I fell to the ground. Mark was such a supporter but here he seems to be going WTF? In fact, Mark's bit was taped entirely before mine and edited before and after it later on, so he's not in fact reacting to me, honest. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2aZb7VWOq2I&t=18s Kingston gave me the best review of my entire career; I was on cloud nine, but this Fringe was cruelly underattended and didn't last. A video was made of one of my shows here but sadly it didn't survive either. No matter. This was one of the happiest times of my life.

a spectacle of impersonation

100 Celebrities in 45 Minutes
Written and Performed by Jim Williamson
Presented by Another Fine Mess Productions
The Kingston Fringe Festival
272 Bagot St.
BY HOLLY MCCURDY
The Queen's Journal

Picture the embodiment of schizophrenia. Proving that it is, in fact, possible to be 100 people at once, Another Fine Mess Productions is presenting *100 Celebrities in 45 Minutes* at this years Fringe Festival.

Written and energetically performed by Jim Williamson, this show is a true spectacle of impersonation. During the span of 45 minutes, Williamson was transformed into a series of well-known characters, ranging from Laurel and Hardy to Kermit to Maxwell Smart. Using minimal props and a bit of audience imagination, he managed to bring such life to these characters that you would swear they were standing right in front of you, arguing and bantering amongst each other via Williamson's body. He literally leaped from one character to another, changing roles within split seconds with a continuity that did not allow the audience to return to the reality of the fact that they were watching one man in the middle of an empty stage. By the time the 45 minutes were up, Williamson had "become" all 100 of his diverse characters, all of whom battle to take over his body, until he finally collapsed in exhaustion at the end of the play, jolting the audience back into reality.

Particularly brilliant moments in Williamson's performance have to be his transformation into John Cleese reciting famous lines from *Monty Python* sketches, as well as his conversation between the Beatles, in which he becomes each of the four singers. Finally, Williamson performs a song by the Everly Brothers, in which he harmonizes with a tape of himself.

All in all, *100 Celebrities in 45 Minutes* is a show not to be missed. Jim Williamson is right up there with Rich Little and Lily Tomlin, giving a side-splitting, action-packed performance in all his familiar roles.

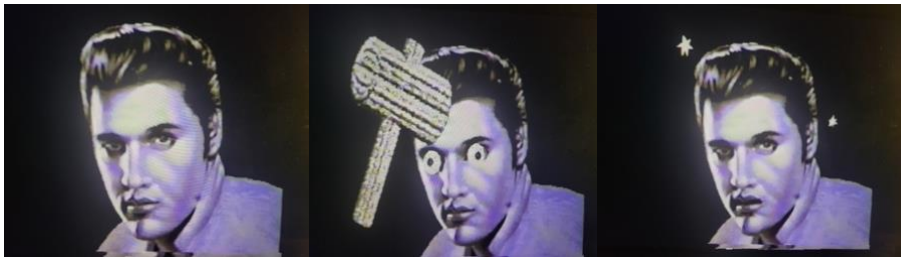
100 Celebrities in 45 Minutes will be playing at VENUE 2 (272 Bagot St.) tonight at 9:45, Thursday at 7:00 and Saturday at 7:00.





- **The Queen's Journal, October 22, 1991**

Movie Village (1991) - This was a projected, but unused, animated commercial featuring me as Elvis Presley, for the store where I worked as a clerk for seven years (1988-1995) between gigs. The animator, John Galaugher, was one of my bosses at the store. He would agree to be the sound engineer for my next two plays.



"Listen to the hits..." **"See the stars...."**

Another Fine Mess Presents The Onion and Jam Pie Sketch (1991) - This was basically a bonus sketch written especially for the Winnipeg Beach performance of *Laurel & Hardy's Goodtime Revue*. The premise is for Stan to suddenly appear in the audience, "makin' a buck", as he puts it, but hawking various disgusting-sounding pies. "Turnip Pie! Duckbill Platypus Pie!! Onion and Jam Pie!!"



OLLIE: Onion and Jam Pie?

STAN: You told me you liked onion and jam!

OLLIE: But not together, Stanley!

Ollie beckons for Stan to stop this nonsense and join him back onstage. Stan reluctantly agrees. Still holding a pile of pies, he makes his way to the stage, trips, and....you finish it. For a slapstick duo it seems odd that

we'd only ever have *one* pie fight in our careers, but that was it. Bob wondered later why I never got a pie in the face, then he remembered that *I* wrote this one. Pianist Cathy Nosaty was in this one; she was so nice and professional I hired her to provide pre-recorded music for my next two one-man shows. The bit was filmed, but the tape quality is quite bad, so it was never streamed. This screenshot will have to suffice! *The wandering owes a bit to Monty Python, but not overtly!

Advance (1992) - Back doing the nerd for a Barry Lank TV commercial. Actually a little upset at what feels like regression, but…this time I'm the star, so what the hell! ☺





Pager Pro (1992) - A film for Manitoba Telephone System, this time as "Biff", a *1950s* nerd, carrying "my new invention – a mini-pager". I remember nothing about it except being concerned about typecasting again but I let it pass. It's typical, whimsically overstated Barry Lank. Stan Lesk played the fight trainer.

I Gotta Be Them (1992) – This was my first attempt at a continuous narrative with my Voices. The loud 1980s duds were shed for the standard garb of the 1990s comedian: black blazer, black t-shirt, blue jeans, white runners, and slightly longer hair.

The idea of an impressionist trying out for a variety show only to be rejected by the people he imitates is a nice conceit (in a way it's the logical outcome of the fight at the end of *100 Celebs*).

But I overdid it with the self-pity, and it dragged the show into a pit from which it never quite recovered.

On the positive side, John Cleese made an ideal director, the Beatles harmonized well (thanks to some double-tracked audio tapes I made as John Lennon and Paul McCartney, using the superb acoustics in my parents' garage!). Jimmy Stewart was a perfect prompter, and there were some good bits with Jack Nicholson, Steve Martin, Peter Sellers/Inspector Clouseau, and the then-hot *Wayne's World* dudes, but those were few and far between.

I remember the Victoria show, the audience weren't sure when to laugh and didn't applaud the songs.

This show in retrospect seems thematically confused; it would have benefited from one more rewrite as watching the video today I think it drags quite a bit.

Originally it was darker than this; with a long sketch at the beginning of me as the Frankenstein monster.

My mom and dad hated that one, thinking it somehow narcissistic *and* self-loathing at the same time, and basically too heavy for what was supposed to be a comedy show.

While I defend narcissism and self-loathing as acceptable, even classic, topics for comedy, in the end it's like anything else: it works or it doesn't.

I did a hasty rewrite before the tour, making it all more cute and emphasizing the intended satirical link to the Broadway musical *A Chorus Line* more.

Even so, it seemed like all I was really doing in the show was whining about the lack of progress in my life by 1992!

Some sort of change felt necessary about now, but what?

I didn't know if it meant a completely new direction, or the same stuff in a new setting? Thankfully, the ensuing months provided a bit of both.

My Charlie Chaplin In Puerto Rico (1992) – This particular improv comes from a costume party on a Carnival Cruise ship vacation all the Williamsons took, courtesy of Mom and Dad. I remember the host seeming vaguely annoyed at my attempts to entertain; perhaps he spotted a ringer?? https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9IqnGCXQdVM



Promo pic of Chaplin improv act, 1992.



Live pic of stand-up comedy act, 1992.

Jim Williamson In The Bahamas (1992) – One night the ship had a talent show, so I gamely did a 10-minute distillation of my comedy act. Although I played many nightclubs I always found them tougher, less indulgent crowds than theatre folk. Still, it was lovely to hear the roars of 1,000 people like this and I did in fact get more nightclub and theatre work because of this tape. It was New Year's Eve 1992, and life was about to go on a wonderfully *sustained* upswing. **https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EyLr10ecCEA**

Brad Garrett Alive! (1993) - This was a sketch from a TV comedy special the popular stand-up comedian Brad Garrett filmed at Winnipeg's Walker Theatre early in 1993, years before he landed a plum part playing Ray Romano's brother on the famous sitcom *Everybody Loves Raymond*. Bob Cloutier (who tried out for a part and failed, possibly because he needlessly memorized his part and then forgot all the words at the audition*) felt sure this was my Big Break, that Garrett would be knocked out by my impressions (he was an

impressionist himself) and insist I go on the road with him. Nope. Garrett was jovial enough, but, he felt I was all wrong for Igor, too young (he kept calling me "Skippy"), not ugly enough, and that my Charles Laughton-Gilda Radner(?!) voice for Igor kept slipping. And in any event, impressionists do not typically travel in pairs; it ain't done. Even so, I soldiered through it. I thought the sketch looked great even if the jokes were a bit heavy-handed. Dr. G (Sorry, but I can't think of his name; VERY quiet he was. Laurie Something??) looked especially right, that is, creepy. Whatever, the show is conspicuously absent from Garrett's profile on the Internet Movie Database!

*I think one reason I got the part in the Brad Garrett show was I grabbed the sleeve of the other actor, forcing him to really react to me. It was a nice acting trick I'd read about. It worked!



"Here's your Big Break…Robert Barone!" Me with a pre-*Everybody Loves Raymond* Brad Garrett.

The Divisible Man (1993) – THIS was more like it; good title and a more thoughtful, carefully prepared and organized script than the manic *I Gotta Be Them*, with the personal stuff lightened up and alternated more skilfully with the impressions.

In tribute to, oddly enough, Lily Tomlin (and her similarly stark play, *The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe*), I grew out my hair even more and switched to Tomlinesque, all-black clothes. I filmed a rehearsal with Mom's trusty video camera in the Williamsons' basement on 27 Ramsgate Bay. I had a gold curtain background, a deliberate addition of Mom's to create a theatre/rehearsal space for me! (This curtain is still there in 2026!) Nice.

The sketch “New Traveling Wilburys” made its first appearance here, as did the Simon & Garfunkel spoof “Muscle Bound”. The “Faster Than a Speeding Bullet” bit I realize now is a variant of an old Harvey Kurtzman gag in his “Superduperman” story from MAD comics. Two or three routines or gag lines from *I Gotta Be Them* were re-worked here, notably the Jack Nicholson on Halloween bit and “Superman’s Song”, my Crash Test Dummies impression.

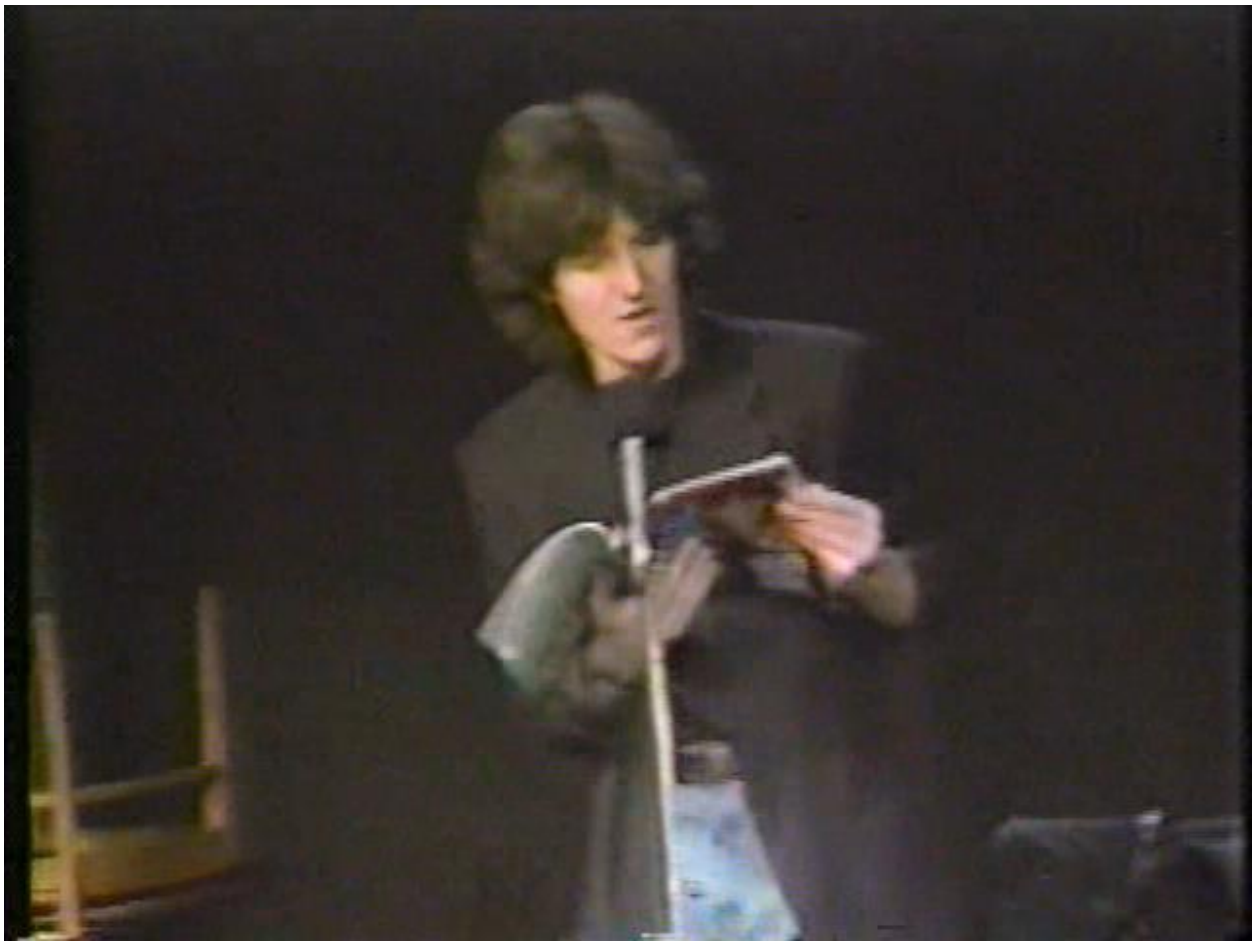
Watching the rehearsal video today I find with the greater care I took this time the presentation is clearer and more confident as a result. I finally worked in some costume changes via an audio sketch, “Celebrity Bedtime Stories” and a bit of borrowed music, Paul Simon and Stephane Grapelli’s “Hobo Blues”. This was all meant to lead into the “Silent Treatment” sketch, where I’m Charlie Chaplin being picked up by a drunken young woman, which was an interesting idea but fell completely flat in execution.

It’s a true story, happened in Toronto on the previous tour, and I remember later on during that same tour, walking around Vancouver at great length, missing my new friend Morgan and wishing she could be with me. So, this was an attempt to get Morgan involved. I’d written the monologue specifically for her, then encouraged her to improvise when we recorded her tracks in her apartment back in Winnipeg. So…it turned out to be an interesting but dissatisfying moment and went on a touch too long. The subsequent talking I did about AIDS testing in the show seemed like another misstep and the jolly finish with Groucho Marx, while an OK performance, seemed a little forced! (Especially since I’ve just gone from talking about needle-using dope addicts to needle-using tattoo artists!!)

Despite the odd glitches, I think it was a good show overall and turned out to be a popular one. I had sell-out shows, four-star reviews (top marks then), and, for the second time, I made Best-of-the-Fringe and was held over.

Around this time, Morgan left town. I don’t think she ever “saw herself” in the show. Cathy Nosaty provided the music again, and Movie Village boss John Galaugher did an excellent job mixing the music and sound effects (One of which is the Williamsons’ much-loved golden retriever dog Shandy, playing the part of “Muffin”!)

Despite the better reviews and the more upscale gigs I still wasn’t earning a living wage as an actor-comedian, so I went back to school (Red River College, when Dad was Dean of Business) in the fall of ’93 to study advertising, ostensibly to make my own commercials! (As did one of my heroes, the Man Of 1000 Voices: Mel Blanc, voice of Bugs Bunny…and 999 others).



“What do women want? For men to stop asking that.”

MTN News (1993) – When Blake Taylor launched Noon Hour Theatre in the fall of ‘93 he invited me to participate with a revival of *Divisible Man,* which I gladly did, confident that it was a good show and keen to tinker with it again. We got lots of good publicity for it, of which a typical example was this report from Jennifer Rattray.

I remember her showing up at the theatre; small, gloomy and tired, kind of a contrast with the hip, Valley Girl-ish persona she presented on TV. I looked presentable but was a little incoherent (Note the women’s mag I hold with the photo of *Kirstie Alley* on the front; another interesting bit of foreshadowing there! See 1998).

The interview started out normally enough, with excerpts from the “Elvis Allen” and “Eight on a Date” sketches, themselves in fact resurrected from my previous show, *I Gotta Be Them,* but then Rattray blindsided me by suddenly leaning forward with hooded eyes, deep voice and the wickedly sardonic question, *“Have you finally figured out what women really want?”*. I laughed, truly surprised, and stammered out something about “seeing

someone nice right now" (my then-girlfriend Kim Coghill) while Rattray killed herself laughing.

WHY she laughed, I'm not sure! But I gamely played along with her as improv comedy had long taught me. Phew! It then cut back to Rattray in the studio who smirkingly said, "Glad he's happy!" Which means…what? Truly glad? Or a sort-of, half-assed apology for putting me on the spot? Who knows? One thing's for sure, the sad-and-lonely persona still featured in my show had already changed in real life. By Christmas season (when this show ran) I'd been going with journalist Kim Coghill for two months. Life had taken a happy turn…for now. Fun fact: I realized, much later, that Kim had, about this time, *purchased a dress, and choker, exactly like Jennifer Rattray's, as seen here, in this clip from my Facebook page*. https://www.facebook.com/reel/2534163186657614

The Divisible Man (Revival, 1993) - When I think of how busy I was (School every day, studying every night, working at Movie Village every weekend, seeing Kim at least three times a week), it's amazing I had the energy for this at all. But, I knew the show so well by now it wasn't that hard work.

What a time: I had friends, I had money, I was getting good marks, I was having all the shows and all the Kim I wanted. It is, therefore, as John Cleese would say, "absolutely lovely, marvellous" to have a LIVE performance of *Divisible Man* preserved on videotape**.** I thought Blake had filmed this, but I can hear my mother nearest the video camera. Great to have Mom's laugh in here, especially during the "Hello John" bit, which she always liked. Bob Cloutier's laugh is evident too. I was always glad of his support, but a bit suspicious. When things went well it would always be, "You need a manager, you need a writer." I was already doing both, thanks.

The after-hours-bar set design was Blake's idea, and I liked how I cut to the voices sooner with the "Hooray for Halloween", "Elvis Allen" and "Crash Test Dummies" sketches following each other at a good clip. "Dummies" was a simple caricature and not a gag as such, but it did have relevance, I guess, and using a local boy like Brad Roberts is always a good way to get the audience on your side. "Muscle Bound" worked well; I always loved mimicking Art Garfunkel's little stonily-serious mannerisms in particular. "Eight on a Date" connected, but the vocal/facial transitions work better if they're faster, as in *I Gotta Be Them*.

"Celebrity Bedtime Stories" regrettably played to silence, but things perked up with a MUCH tighter rendition of "Silent Treatment", aka the Charlie Chaplin sketch. There was a weird bit of unintentional symbolism as I put my tie on, noose like, while talking about AIDS. But the transition from my luckily negative diagnosis to a silly song by Groucho Marx

seemed less jarring here. (Look Mom, I even included the clicking-my-heels which you always liked! *)

Overall, the show, at a brisk 38 minutes, worked a treat. It had a thematic unity and smoothness I wasn't all that aware of at the time. Dad pointed out that I entered and exited with *two* silly walks: John Cleese's and Groucho Marx's. I came across as likable and natural and *not*, for once, self-pitying. The blazer-t-shirt-jeans ensemble was back and the Chaplin and Groucho costume changes went reasonably smooth for a guy not noted for his grace. (The Groucho coat, so perfect, came from my actor friend John Huston). The Groucho sketch may be seen here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ggu9gwTLzms

I remember at the time being only conscious of giving my all to the audience, my *complete* bag of tricks, and on this Christmas season night in a simple little theatre in Winnipeg, I reached them. They were a great house, touchingly warm, loud, and appreciative throughout, which was and is wonderful. Beautiful night.

(*Taught to me by my drama teacher Sharon Hamilton for the J. H. Bruns Collegiate production of Kiss Me Kate, back in 1981!)

CJOB Radio Interview (1993) - This was a phone interview I did for the CJOB Radio nighttime talk show Winnipeg Tonight, hosted by my sister Linda's old Winnipeg Sun colleague Mary Jane MacLennan. It was to promote Noon Hour Theatre's production of my third one-man show, *The Divisible Man*. I liked the playful ad-libbing I did with Mary Jane; exactly the stuff these shows want. Christmas 1993: good times. [See Entry under Audio Archive]

CBC Radio Interview **(1993)** - Another plug for *The Divisible Man*; but just an extract explaining how I develop impressions. Recorded at my old job Movie Village, oddly enough! [See Entry under Audio Archive]

Daytime with Sylvia (1994) – The time was Spring, 1994. I'm not quite 30. This was a promotional spot for the upcoming *The Jim Williamson Show* at the Planetarium, under the auspices of Jim Slobodian's short-lived Underground Improv comedy series (though we never got round to describing it as such. Sorry Jim S.!)

CTV's Sylvia Kuzyk was arguably the best-known and best-liked TV personality in Manitoba at the time, so it was a great honour to be asked to be a guest on her show. I created new material especially for the occasion (such as Laurel & Hardy's "Border" gag) and for once I managed to weave it into the conversation without looking like an ass, although watching it again I detected a brief, ill-advised flash of anger(!) in my eyes when Sylvia called me bizarre! But, a split second later I rolled with it, as any good improviser should ("In *addition* to being very bizarre…").

Sylvia seemed to think at one point that I was dodging her question about impressionists having great insight into people. I wasn't avoiding the question, I'd honestly just never considered it, and what I was *trying* to say, in my shy, roundabout fashion, is that if I do indeed have that so-called "gift" then I suspect it comes more from my dramatic studies than the comedic ones. I never considered myself a natural comedian. Natural *actor*, yes. Comic, no. And *yes,* Sylvia Kuzyk is nice in "real life". Thanks Sylvia. You can watch us at: https://www.facebook.com/reel/5077928175614423

The Jim Williamson Show (1994) - This was basically the best-of *100 Celebs, I Gotta Be Them*, and *Divisible Man*, along with some new material, at my comfortable old stomping ground, the wonderful Planetarium Auditorium. The new sketches included "Pack of The Leaders" and "The Seinfeld Western" plus Groucho had a few more gag lines at the end.

I'd just gotten back from Ottawa where I did a show at the Canadian Real Estate Association conference, in which I'd been asked to provide some political jokes. I wasn't confident I could pull it off, assuming that all political satirists were smarter than I was, but I went for it anyway, as it was really just a matter of politicians doing my silly lines rather than movie stars. No big deal. Some of the gags went, as Jean Chretien said in the show, "ger-blop", but, it was refreshing overall. The "New John" sketch was a nice quasi-topical way to round up the "voices" to do some of the old, sure-fire gags before leading into the inevitable "Handle With Care" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BvGi2Qq1LUU). The new bit about obscure video titles completely tanked, but I got 'em back with the always reliable Jack Nicholson-for-Halloween routine. Woody's new lines in "Elvis Allen" didn't work, so I moved straight on to the reliable "Crash Test Dummies" bit, a simple verse of their hit "Superman's Song" in my best Brad Roberts voice (I tried never to harangue the audience for not laughing – after all, perhaps they're right?) The simultaneous Simon & Garfunkel "Muscle Bound" song (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TP45JYmaNPg) went fine, and "Seinfeld Western" went down exceptionally well, to my obvious delight (Bob Cloutier, once again in the audience, damn near busted a gut at it – a little *too* helpful?? Also, I'm sure he knew the show was being filmed. This too may be seen amongst other videos at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ZuxXcw3qbE).

The new routine about "Adult Video Titles" worked well, "Celebrity Bedtime Stories" worked slightly better here as a live sketch instead of an audio clip but it didn't have the really big laughs a penultimate bit requires ("Seinfeld Western" might have been better here). Groucho's new intro to Lydia was OK but I felt I was in danger of drifting into George Burns (Seems I look down a lot, regardless whom I'm playing; I think it helps me remember!) The music tape for "Lydia" crapped up a bit, jumping to the end, where I just

managed to catch it and ad-lib “Beat ya that time!” (a Marx Brothers line!) to the resident sound technician.

Overall, a confident show with enough big laughs - despite the sparse attendance - to qualify as a success. The superior video quality had to do with this being a camera borrowed from Red River College and the operator being my then-girlfriend, the multi-talented Kim Coghill.



George Harrison cues the band for “Handle With Care”.

Another Fine Mess Presents Laurel & Hardy & Friends (1994) - By 1992, the boys in AFM decided that having a full slate of guest stars and pianist (and pies!) was simply too expensive. We’d also ditched the suits for low-maintenance matching overalls (Bob’s practical idea). The next shows we wrote, *The Laurel & Hardy Show* (1992) and *Laurel & Hardy & Friends* (1994) were strictly two-man affairs, with Bob and I relying more on old vaudeville jokes to fill the stage time rather than bothering to write much new material. Writing comedy with him was often tense and uncomfortable. I’d simply grown tired of

arguing in the name of creativity and originality, so now I just went along with him to keep the peace.

The few new sketches reflected this new looseness. "Laurel & Hardy Meet Snow White" was basically ripped off from the SAK Theatre improv troupe. (This explains the "Friends" in the show's title, here meaning the audience, whom we would invite to improvise with us. Trouble was, Bob's concept of working harder took us, ironically, AWAY from the characters of Stan and Ollie. Can you picture the real Ollie ad-libbing "Do you have to pee-pee?" to the audience?)

Two better, and far more appropriate "lifts" were the two new songs, "At The Ball, That's All" and "Lonesome Pine" which came from the REAL Laurel & Hardy's feature film *Way Out West*. In the film, Stan's silly voices are dubbed by two different singers, Chill Wills and Rosina Lawrence. This being live, it meant I was actually impersonating Laurel *and* Wills *and* Lawrence all together. The one and only time in my life I may have "improved on" Stan Laurel himself! ☺ I do know one thing…that last high note meant a GUARANTEED sore throat and cold. So…I guess I *can't* improve on Stan after all! Well I didn't know… (cries) Ooo hoo hoo!

Actually, it's nice to remember that we were still willing to work *somewhat* hard, this late in the game! ☺ "Till We Meet Again" seemed effortlessly pretty this time out (My ad-lib in the show about my singing, the fact that "I've got quite a range…with a bunch of cows" was a playful, punning volley at Bob for - earlier in the show - putting us through that hoary old "Herd of Cows" routine, which was perfect…for Abbott & Costello, that is!) But…no matter…on a day like that…a summer's day in Stonewall, Manitoba, 1994, "Stan" being the snug character fit he always was…life was as peaceful as I'd ever known. It-cer-tainly was. Mm-mm-MM! See Bob and I literally strut our stuff, live on stage from Stonewall, here: https://www.facebook.com/jim.williamson.14/posts/pfbid02vTcs1UFcBTY8vGQ2wpBXkGgNLQx5vDuMwFtq5Fnp5EYvc4vwJ7UQJ7TpXnVDgjQsl

Ricki's (1994) - By my second year of college my girlfriend, writer/producer/broadcaster Kim Coghill, was anxious for me to FINISH so I could move in with her. To that end, she helped give my career a boost by getting me this gig – the first movie I "made", as co-producer, director, writer, and narrator – alongside her then boss, the filmmaker Doug Davidson.

So there I was, suddenly on the other end of the camera, ten years after *Josef!* I was dubious that I could do anything appropriate for a women's clothing store, but, both Doug and the staff at Ricki's were exceptionally kind and accommodating. In fact, our clients were such natural hams they had most of their scenes and gags worked out in advance - I

was there mainly to direct traffic. It worked, using the then-hot linking device of a David Letterman-type Top 10 List to make the employees feel good about themselves.



Typical gag from the Ricki's corporate video. The fellow in the mustache is not me but staff member Aldo, who was very good at mugging.

Prunes Promo on CTV News (1994) – My old pal Sylvia Kuzyk, flanked by Kim's sometime-colleague Barbara-Lee Edwards (They worked on *The Innovators* TV series together), plugged my new Christmas stage show (more on this in a moment) where I was partnered with modern dancer D-Anne Kuby. Nice clip but my slight discomfort at the weird camera angle caused me to forget one of Groucho's lines! See D-Anne, Sylvia and me right here: https://www.facebook.com/jim.williamson.14/posts/pfbid0mpg1Z4BZBS7jV1PpJVFyPXXnTXN1E513T8z5mc8rRvt6RAaof4TjB4xS2ern2vLdl

Dancer Prancer & Prunes (1994) - When Blake Taylor invited me back to write and perform a brand-new play for Noon Hour Theatre I leapt at the chance, even if the stipulations were a little unusual. I only had to write 20 minutes of material, all to be on the theme of Christmas, but I was to somehow combine it with the routines of modern dancer D-Anne Kuby, in what Blake called "deconstruction".

D-Anne and I soon met each other and got along well enough, but neither one of us was actually keen on attempting to co-write; combine what we thought were two completely disparate styles. "I can't write with you anyway," said D-Anne, "because I'm going to be on tour all summer." I suggested we just go ahead and write our own individual pieces and present them to Blake as such. Then maybe he'd change his mind and present us the way we wanted, as two separate shows. Blake liked what we each came up with, but he was firm in his decision about having us alternate scenes in the show, all to maintain his "deconstruction" idea. The result was a good but to my mind hopelessly patchy show.

I seem to remember the dance stuff turned off comedy fans every bit as much as the comedy stuff turned off dance fans. I respect D-Anne and admire her grace onstage but when I watch the video today I still do not get what she's doing, even all these years later. As for my bits, I think it was my single best script and performance ever. My confidence was extremely high, my characters extremely focused and relaxed, the "casting" (amongst them Groucho Marx and John Cleese as department store managers; Jimmy Stewart, Jack Nicholson, and Johnny Carson as rival clerks) worked especially well for a narrative of this kind, and, nothing went on too long (Mr. Bean, Laurel & Hardy, and even Leslie Nielsen were originally part of the show but dropped; their gags, while funny, being superfluous to the story, which was about the search for a politically-correct Santa Claus!).

My costume, a new suit and tie, plus cleaner-cut hair, all must've pleased my mother but they were really meant to suggest a department store clerk. I thought the satire was sustained quite well, but I maintain, I thought the momentum really suffered at the forced alternating with D-Anne. I remember Blake was pleased, but I think he may have been the only one!

Even so, I still look back on my script and performance here as being The Best It Ever Was. I was thrilled to write completely new stuff on commission like this and had a ball that summer of '94 writing it and putting it together at night (while continuing to work at my day job, clerk at the Movie Village video store, every day). I am, when all is said and done, pleased and proud to have done this; one of the true highlights of my life. The "prunes" in the title were what we handed out to the audience as part of their lunch. That's it. Trivia note: The name of the department store in the show, "Beaton's" had a dual meaning. It's a pun on the late lamented "Eaton's" as well as literally my mother Janice's maiden name.

Years later (2018!) I remade my portion of the show as an audio play, "Happy Humbug!", which you can access here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8POvfmolEeQ




With D-Anne Kuby. She pauses dancing, I start joking...about Xmas shopping!

Halls Commercial (1994) - My very first self-written, produced, and acted radio commercial, done for the Red River College advertising course, recorded at the Channels Audio studio in 1994. One of My Favorite Things, without a doubt! [See Entry under Audio Archive]

Live at Rumor's (1994) - A nice, confident distillation of the *Divisible Man*-era sketches which goes down well with a happy comedy club audience. [See Entry under Audio Archive]

Live at The Norwood Hotel (1994) - Jovial Kent "Exactly Right!" Gulbrantson was my Advertising instructor at Red River College and ALWAYS very kind, enthusiastic and supportive. Like most instructors there he had Connections, and so it was through Kent that I met the well-known broadcast personality and former ad writer Jim Ingebrigtsen.

"Inggie" as Jim was known, wrote this tongue-in-cheek awards ceremony for the Ad Association himself; regrettably our only such collaboration. The Steve Martin, Dudley Moore, and Fozzie Bear impressions seemed to work best (Steve's wild-and-crazy-guy seems especially accurate). [See Entry under Audio Archive]

Sharpening Your Business Writing Skills II (1995) - Here I was merely keeping the acting muscles in shape with this brief, literal "walk-on" (and stumble-down) in a typical corporate video by some later collaborators during my MPI years, Visual Marketing. I think Jack Slessor may have been the star of this one; regrettably I don't have a full copy, so I don't quite know what the connection is with this scene and business writing. Work safety? Maybe? Director Ron Blicq was fine other than a disconcerting tendency to *mock my grin,* or was that to create the nervousness needed in my clumsy character?





Another Fine Mess Infomercial (1995) - Red River College classmate Mike Zueff and I needed another project for TV class. The mercurial Bob Cloutier and I needed a promotional video for our theatre company. That's how this little intriguing, if slightly ragged, piece came about. I attributed Bob's then-ambivalence to writing and performing

new, specific Laurel & Hardy material to boredom. I knew he wanted to be in *my* shows, actually saying to me one time, "I wanna be up there with you, doin' impressions!!"

So, I figured the solution was to re-imagine Another Fine Mess in the style of the British comedy team called the Two Ronnies, meaning that instead of trying to be a permanent Laurel & Hardy tribute team we'd be two separate comic actors with individual careers but one *multi*-character show that we did together. This was already true anyway – sort of; Bob wasted no opportunity working other gigs and would replace me with another Laurel if I wasn't available for AFM stuff. (Oddly enough I never considered trying to replace him with another Hardy if *he* wasn't available - I suppose it's because I always had my own solo show to do) The few improvisational murder mystery plays we did together however (for the company Mysteriously Yours), Bob would curiously avoid any interaction with me. Curiouser still, he sometimes felt betrayed when I did things on my own.

Our new approach, then, would be of two actors who did one show together where we play ourselves AND a host (or do I mean mess?) of other characters. Surely Bob would find that as interesting as I did! So, with Mike Zueff's peerless work behind the camera and in the editing suite, I basically produced, wrote, and directed a TV infomercial for AFM, filming one Thursday night I think it was in January 1995 in the Red River College TV studio.

The central conceit - stars Bob and Jim deliver a mildly cheesy sales pitch straight to camera for their stage show to prospective corporate clients, with the dubious assistance of stagehands Laurel & Hardy, sound engineer Woody Allen, janitor Elvis Presley, director Groucho Marx, floor director Charlie Chaplin, and cameraman W. C. Fields – was a good enough idea, marred slightly by inconsistent sound. But the original intent was as a school project and, despite the defects, Another Fine Mess *did* get paying gigs out of this.

It was great to finally do completely new, original material with Bob again (besides that old standby "Lonesome Pine", in what I'd call its best-ever rendition as seen in the video link); it seems he trusted me completely here and was in good enough spirits to do little or no improvisation that night. We both had fun (When I watch it now I can see myself starting to crack up as Charlie Chaplin); when Bob said near the end, on camera, how he really enjoyed doing this video, it seemed he really meant it. I don't recall there being any problems whatsoever during filming. I do recall one potential problem during editing, though. A "clunk" sound in the music track – this was from me slamming down the turntable lid of the stereo I used to play the original vinyl record. The solution I had was to "cover" that particular moment with a shot of Bob conking me with a baseball bat! Aaaaah, I was BORN to make l'il movies!! ☺

Inspired by the good vibes of this particular l'il movie, we would soon write a new stage show (simply called *Another Fine Mess*) featuring many of the characters in the video PLUS us as Dean Martin & Jerry Lewis, Ralph Kramden & Ed Norton, Gilligan & the Skipper, AND Archie & Edith Bunker. We would tour with it that summer…and it would completely tank. The audiences wanted pure Laurel & Hardy.

Live & Learn. See Bob and I sing "Lonesome Pine" here:

https://www.facebook.com/search/top?q=jim williamson bob cloutier&filters=eyJycF9jcmVhdGlvbl90aW1lOjAiOiJ7XCJuYW1lXCI6XCJjcmVhdGlvbl90aW1lXCIsXCJhcmdzXCI6XCJ7XFxcInN0YXJ0X3llYXJcXFwiOlxcXCIyMDIwXFxcIixcXFwic3RhcnRfbW9udGhcXFwiOlxcXCIyMDIwLTFcXFwiLFxcXCJlbmRfeWVhclxcXCI6XFxcIjIwMjBcXFwiLFxcXCJlbmRfbW9udGhcXFwiOlxcXCIyMDIwLTEyXFxcIixcXFwic3RhcnRfZGF5XFxcIjpcXFwiMjAyMC0xLTFcXFwiLFxcXCJlbmRfZGF5XFxcIjpcXFwiMjAyMC0xMi0zMVxcXCJ9XCJ9In0=

Royal Bank Commercial (1995) - Another self-written/produced Red River College studio project, guest voices regrettably forgotten. Inspired by an incident with Kim, though she reportedly literally screamed with laughter at hearing this. [See Entry under Audio Archive]

Monty's Commercial (1995) - More from college, this is a fun one by classmate Holli Moncrieff, featuring her and myself and Jeff Ryzner. [See Entry under Audio Archive]

Murray-Midway Commercial (1995) - CJOB Radio. What I thought would be a glorious, vastly enjoyable creative hoot somehow became a nerve-racking ordeal. Radio advertising in those days seemed not so much creative as it was facilitative, as in "Get it outa here!" For someone as painstaking as I was it was a real eye (and ear) opener; to survive I had to work as fast, but as accurately, as I possibly could, or be fired! I persevered (as I always do) and came out of it a craftsman, basically, getting a bad case of shingles but retaining my sanity and still doing some good writing. Initially exciting but creatively disappointing. Still…I lived to tell the tale, that's the important thing! [See Entry under Audio Archive]

The Channel (1995) - The closest thing there ever was to a Jim Williamson TV Show, this trio of sketches was meant to do two things; one, parody TV commercials, and two, highlight my skills as writer, producer, director, editor, pitchman, impersonator, and pantomimist/actor. If this can be said to be "really me", then my deepest, *deepest* influences were apparently Ronnie Barker – for the self-important but clumsy spokesman in the "Being Wrong" sketch, Rich Little - who better to convey "All Walks Of Life", and Buster Keaton - for the deadpan in "The Pick-Up Line", to my mind the best of the three.

Red River College classmate Ralph Jadischke, a witty guy himself, helped film "Wrong" and "Life" (which I recall being done very efficiently despite my having my usual terrible cold) but I think I edited those myself. The set was the college TV studio again. "Line" was

in its way a comment on mine and Kim's absurdly "long-distance" relationship (Absurd because we were in the same city but too insanely busy to be together much). The blonde I'm staring at in the college cafeteria remains unknown to this day; she appeared genuinely pissed off there as we (myself and the cameraman, classmate Keith Dixon) were literally invading her privacy, even being so far away with a zoom lens. We really should have asked her permission, on the other hand the cold hauteur she shows there is in fact perfect for the scene! It was Keith's idea to do the circular pan in the college hallway, and I think Zueff helped once again in the editing. I liked using the Carpenters's music and there were some nice unexpectedly synchronized moments in there (music swells, heads look up – it's nearly good enough for YouTube today!) There was to have been one other sketch, "News1", where, because we've lost film, I read the news in different world accents. This was cut for length but later turned up in my stage show *The Return Of The Divisible Man***.** As it stands, *The Channel* was a nice, quirky little show and I am very fond of it.

Years later I noticed a similar mix of approaches – commercial parodies, impressions, and pantomime – rampant in Benny Hill's work. I don't remember consciously imitating Hill back then – I barely knew him – but I do see now how we shared the same pop cult passions! Get a taste here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bLOplf5HLhc. Much more of it can be seen in my later quirky comedy video collage from 2014, "Too Commercial!" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WA8TtbBSbZE&t=45s

CBC Radio's DNTO – Comedy Sketches (1995) - CBC Radio: the big break? Yes and no. Great to have the national exposure as a resident writer/producer/comedian but the Canadian mandate I found restricting. Fellow writer/producer/comedian Al Rae (later to become Lara Rae) was a good mentor as to the deliberately cheesy, self-consciously hip DNTO style, but I wanted more. That was the dilemma of my having a one-man show. It was More, everything else was Less.

Still, there were some decent sketches with Al ("Easter Chicken", "Johnny Neurotic" and "Hollywood Genetic Engineering" were more to my style); and overall it was a good experience if less than satisfying. I enjoyed being an honest-to-God professional comedy writer/performer/producer. I enjoyed the sheer imaginative leaps a radio show permits, but, I did *not* enjoy the confinements of DNTO itself, and never in fact missed it. Nor were Al and I, with our respective, intensely personal styles, ever a good bet for a team. I never really clicked with Al and considered the show itself bloody hard work for too little reward, quite frankly. [See Entry under Audio Archive]

Fayz 4 (1995) – Personally, I'd heard nothing but negative things about CKX-TV in Brandon, but Dad said to go anyway when they offered me a writer-producer job in their creative

department. CKX, like CJOB before it, turned out to be strange, startling *misfit* to my skills and temperament!

My boss and I couldn't agree on things like what is quality and what is sensible procedure. While it was only supposed to be a three-month contract I tried very, very hard to improve amidst shoddy equipment and exhausting working conditions but was still shocked when they let me go.

How awful when the thing I was "meant to do" I ended up being NO GOOD at! The fun times, like a spot for the Fayz hair salon (which I also announced) were very, very few (Santa was played by Rick Somebody, an account executive and who, like the resident cameraman Rob Brown, was one of my two-few allies in this dark, bleak nightmare called Brandon circa October-December 1995).

I remember little of this now except how miserable, lonely, depressed and bitterly disappointed I felt working there. I lived in a cold basement apartment five minutes from the station and I was still ten minutes late every day.

Thank God that whole experience was brief. Back to Winnipeg for me. CKX, incidentally, no longer exists, having been shut down in I think 2009. Ah but CKX would in fact merely pave the way for some of the best times of my life….





"His hair, how it glistens! His beard, it's so neat! Facials, manicures, pedicures, what a treat! …Merry Christmas to all, and a Happy New Hair!"

The Yellow Submarine (1995)/Club Hollywood Commercials (1996) - The first two spots I I acted in aired at Brandon's CKX Radio, the highlights of that otherwise miserable three months there as a TV commercial writer-producer. They were written and produced by a long-forgotten gal from Birtle (who appears briefly as a clerk). The third spot, by an unknown writer-producer, aired back in Winnipeg on Power 97, as a favour to my sister

Wendy, who briefly worked in their promotions department**.** [See Entry under Audio Archive]



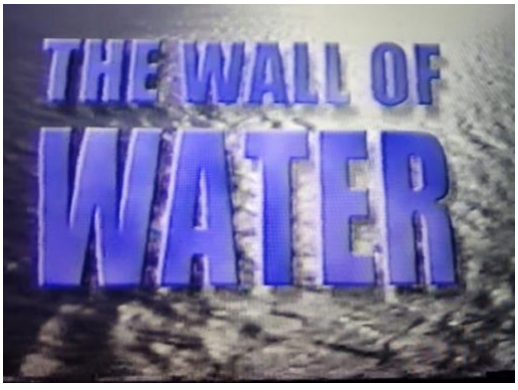
Prime Minister of Canada Jean Chretien faces his future…as a TV game show host.

Beer & Skits '96 (1996) - By spring of 1996 my old college friend Jason Beck had 1) found me an apartment in his block, 2) created a job for me as web page designer/advertising coordinator at his work, WorldStar Holdings, and 3) introduced me to a Canada's longest-running satirical revue, The Winnipeg Press Club's Beer & Skits. It was a free gig, open to any performer with some sort of communications background. I was getting the odd voiceover acting job; radio commercials and whatnot, and the odd nightclub appearance with my comedy act. But with all the changes in my life the gathering of new comedy material was slower than usual (Even Another Fine Mess was in one of its periodic slumps. Bob Cloutier deciding, perhaps rightly, to chuck the other characters and go back to improvising as Stan and Ollie, plus stockpiling old vaudeville jokes).

So, when Jason suggested we try out for the legendary B & S, I agreed. It was performing, it was new people, why not. Well, we passed the auditions and Beck hung on to help write

the show with the others. Their style of writing happened to be gathering each night in the bar for a bull session and plenty of booze. Never comfortable with writing in committee, never mind tanked, I left the scripting to them. A typical sketch was a MAD Magazine type political satire loaded with topical references and some fairly easy laughs regarding breasts and going to the bathroom, all of which to my mind went on far too long. On show night (one night only) I had my usual bad cold but gave it my all, including putting a naughty mix of Jerry Lewis (face) and Mick Jagger (gestures) into an adequate Jean Chretien impression. The B & S folks were nice enough as individuals but collectively they had to my mind this weird, inappropriately solemn if not pompous attitude about B & S Rules: You HAD TO sell enough tickets to the show ($80 a pop!) to enough friends and family members to fill a table or the show WOULD NOT go on. You HAD TO play to the audience, not to each other. Geez! Of course, it had its moments: it was nice getting to perform with Jason and particularly the enigmatic Jim Coghill, veteran radio DJ and father of That Kim! Oh, it was great to be back with an ensemble, BUT… Hollow Mug it weren't!

The Wall Of Water (1997) - By July 1997 my concurrent workplace WorldStar had shut down (bad investment advice). After a mercifully short (3 month) stint of unemployment, I was now an honest-to-God professional multi-media writer-producer at Manitoba Public Insurance, in their Advertising department! Maybe it helped that my bosses, Jim Kingdon and Correy Myco, were similarly nice guys with glasses? Whatever, my first task with them was to quickly help Correy write and produce a corporate video (with the help of old friend Barry Lank, and his trusty editor Chris McIvor) chronicling MPI's role in Manitoba's Flood of the Century, to show MPI's board of directors. Correy's method was to write the script AND gather footage at the same time, which I (privately) didn't agree with – one aspect always gets too far behind the other – but we put together a pretty good and accurate if lumpy and overstuffed movie out of it. Correy graciously allowed me to do the narration, and a "serious new career" was born, rather belying previous disasters with CKX and CJOB! I clearly *could* be a pro writer/producer, not just an actor/comedian!





Opening titles for MPI corporate video, narrated and co-written by yours truly.

Nescafe (1998) - Playin' the nerd again, *one more time*, for Barry Lank. This time it was a *national* TV commercial filmed one cold winter night after hours at the St. Vital IGA store in Winnipeg. Dr. G. from the *Brad Garrett Alive!* show was in the store lineup with me, but the really funny ones were the Guy With The Ponytail, and the always-good Susanna Portnoy as the cashier. Her crooked eyebrow at the end was a panic, but I think Barry possibly overdid it with the FX and fisheye lens stuff here (aided by some young local punks called Frantic Films!), something he often did if he didn't find the script all that exciting. It's OK though; the spot was really all on Susanna's shoulders and she carried it as perfectly as you could wish.





MPI Motorcycle Safety Commercial (1998) - This was recorded at the Channels Audio studio. Other voice talent regrettably forgotten. Was probably co-written with MPI production coordinator (and later "best man" at my wedding!) Brigitte Scholte. Good times. [See Entry under Audio Archive]

Winnipeg This Weekend (1998) - July, 1998, beautiful summertime in Winnipeg's Forks district and for what seemed like the first time in ages I felt a palpable, shining, filled-to-bursting optimism – I had a brand new stage show in the Winnipeg Fringe Theatre Festival, and, I was dating Karen McMahon (a Kirstie-Alley-lookalike – see the magazine reference in *Divisible Man* – and a co-star in the *Beer & Skits* show of '97, unchronicled here, but none the worse for that). It just happened that Karen and I were seeing different people at that time (I was dating, off-and-on, CJOB radio personality Amber Anderson) but we kept bumping into each other downtown, kept meeting for lunch, and there you go. Karen suggested I do Antonio Banderas in the show. Hot voice! Good call.

Winnipeg This Weekend on SHAW TV was the usual interview banter, the jovial Dick Reeves employing the gently sardonic manner ("We get it…You're a sick man.") of Rattray and Kuzyk from interviews past. But by then I was used to that, and, despite my

inexplicably “drying” before my prepared John Cleese bit, I seemed to weave the new gags in and out of the interview reasonably well. I remember being a bit dazed but I looked good and overall it was pretty smooth compared to Manotick. This was a live SHAW TV show and quite enjoyable.



The Return Of The Divisible Man (1998) – I well remember my notorious sweatbox apartment – the little bachelor pad, No. 9 at the Princess Harrow block on 1017 Corydon Avenue in Winnipeg. The microphone and stand were a permanent fixture in the living room. I would write my stuff on the little desk behind, with a Smith Corona electric typewriter(!), then turn around and do audio recordings of it, the mike plugged into a cassette recorder. All very efficient.

Bob Cloutier, on hearing I had a new show, said “Finally!!” in a strangely scolding manner, meaning one that you usually apply to someone who is lazy, forgetting that in the last five years I’d moved four times, had four different jobs, four different girlfriends, and written, produced, and sometimes performed hundreds of scripts for CJOB, CBC, CKX and now MPI. Oh, and gone to college, finishing with an Honours Diploma while working at the video store on the weekends. How is that being lazy??

That explains why this show was compiled so slowly – I started writing in 1995, and by the final draft in the spring of 1998 I was spending the odd Friday or Saturday night at Mom and Dad's house to type it on their computer and walk their golden retriever dog Shandy. The resulting show, while entertaining, seemed, in a disconcerting throwback to *I Gotta Be Them*, thematically confused; my performance in the rehearsal video seems erratic as well. I've got that deer-eyed sad look I always had between girlfriends and as a result my eyes seem unconnected to my strange, sprightly prancing, and my voice seems further disconnected, lapsing now and then into a faux-airy Robin Williams lilt.

It seems what I did here was cram in every funny idea I could think of, even though this is supposed to be an impressions show. ...Or, equally likely, I'm conscious of my very expectant new friend Karen McMahon filming the show, and I'm trying like hell to remember my lines! I'm back to the Tomlinesque clothes but a more flattering Elvisian pompadour. Commendably, I don't once flub any lines, but the show doesn't quite have the focus of the final, polished *Divisible Man*.

What it *is*, I find, is *generous*. "Little Love" was co-written (and the audio track co-produced) with my guitar teacher, the sunny Jerry Semchyshyn from Yamaha. It's a funny song that takes a comparatively mature, albeit razzing, approach to my stupid love life, filtered through my then-current obsession with the Monkees(!). Though if I listen closely the wordplay sounds more like I'm trying to emulate Neil Innes of the Rutles (Beatles parody group) or possibly "Weird Al" Yankovic! It's funny but not quite right. Even the "Dated" sketch that followed seemed to belong in another show (as do some later bits in the show like the commercials "Scroop" and "Someone Else"; the music was mixed a bit too high for these paranoia-fuelled spoofs) but I like the Dylan Moran-ish fever I got into and the seeming spontaneity of the dialogue. "Hooray for Halloween" made a welcome and timely reappearance, and "Wandering Character" captured well that strange, dislocated feeling I got from the AFM improvs with Bob. "Clouseau's Minkey" comes from an improv I did with a monkey puppet, to the amusement of my sister Linda, on board that Carnival Cruise with the Williamsons back in 1992. Waste not, want not. Karen seemed to like it. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IC5llpj_Gu4) I still have "Link" (the minkey).

The "Starter" routine regrettably tanked in performance; it might be that, again, it needed to be in a different show. "Hollywood Closet" was quite a bit better, and "Spoonfeeding", though perhaps too surreal, I think was my most technically accurate John Cleese impression ever, right down to the blank, mad look Cleese would get on his face; something I usually forgot about. "Almost An Evening With Hawkeye Pierce" was an effective pastiche, down to the inclusion of Alan Arbus (Has anyone else in the world ever imitated him??) as Sidney Friedman.

The commercials “Crust” and “Jimbo’s Songbook on a Shower Curtain” were at best forgettable, not having anything to do with impressions, while “Monty Python and The Stanley Cup” was accessible (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y7n8tvrWnO4), whereas “A Hard Day’s Night At The Opera”, while a good idea, risked being too obscure. “News1” dated back from my college days, and, failing to make it on CBC Radio, made its first appearance here. It was all pretty hit-and-miss even with the seemingly-quick inclusion of an abbreviated “Seinfeld Western” sketch.

Things picked back up very effectively with a confident one-two-three punch of the songs “Intern Nights” (a rare bit of topicality from me on the Bill Clinton-Monica Lewinsky scandal) followed by the more typically autobiographical “If I Had 1,000 Voices” (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EoeKefNv0Nk&t=77s) (Even today I sing “I would do-oo Mickey Mouse” to my Walt Disney coffee cup) and the trusty “Handle With Care” before ending with a couple of abrupt, but funny, relationship gags, bringing the show full circle, if a little too subtly!

By this time the thematic confusion of the show didn’t seem to matter; it moved, it was funny, the script was commendably consistent in its new, more disciplined, set-up-and-punchline structure and didn’t wander too much, and I did get sellouts and four-star reviews out of it, once again making Best of the Fringe.

Karen liked to talk about how I was late for the filming of the rehearsal video - in my own home! - and badly prepared, she said… Still, I had a hell of a lot of material (60 minutes worth!) there to remember and I didn’t once goof, so…that’s *something,* right?





Antonio Banderas, Lancelot Link, and Peter Sellers, together again, in my apartment.

***MPI Driver Ed Commercial* (1998)** - Here I was with Karen McMahon, all cozy in the Lank Beach sound booth – to play mother and son! (Yikes.) The young girl doing the tag line was recorded separately. I don’t remember her name but she was a fine young actress who did a great silent scream in our “Speed Kills ‘99” TV Commercial. [See Entry under Audio Archive]

***Jim Williamson Sells It!* (1998)** - Back to the Channels Audio recording studio to a do an update of my voices tape. This did actually get me work and was later adapted into my new stage show as the "Role Call" sketch. [See Entry under Audio Archive]

Speed Can Cost You (1998) – I just had a brief cameo (the jolly mailman) in this typical MPI TV spot written by Correy Myco and directed by Barry Lank. Airing in October 1998 but filmed, I think, the previous February. Not since *Green Green Grass* had Barry seen fit to cast me as something other than a nerd and it was nice. It was also the one and only time I've ever bumped into, or almost bumped into, Keith James as the manic Bob.





Harried commuter Keith James must first contend with a too-late toaster and a too-early mailman?

Autopay Commercials (1999) - These are in fact demo soundtracks for TV commercials, of which only the first made it. I used a Mr. Bean impression.

They were recorded once again at Channels Audio, about which I remember hastily improvising the slapping of pizza dough by putting a mike by my big bare hairy stomach as I smacked it! "I'll get my camera," deadpanned engineer John Schritt.

The other two spots were basically mountaineering and tightrope-walking scenarios that go wrong, only the participants aren't worried, thanks to their car payments being paid! [See Entry under Audio Archive]

Live at Canada-Manitoba Business (1999) at Karen's work (April 1, 1999) was by far my most successful stand-up comedy show ever, judging by the many hearty laughs in evidence.

What a wonderful, happy bunch! The live routines "Meet Women", "Handle With Care" and "If I Had 1,000 Voices" [See Entry under Audio Archive] were tremendous fun.

My script was focused and logical, the cueing of tapes was rather more controlled and I was in good voice all the way. 30 minutes of happiness; not too shabby!

And why? Because ***Confidence*** *will get you through damn near anything; remember that*.

There would be another ten years of projects after this; mainly my writing and producing commercials for MPI, which, while a very happy and professional association, didn't quite possess the rough charm of the previous items mentioned.

But in fact, it was right about this time I stopped acting in commercials and live stage shows altogether. More on the whys in a bit.

Media Scene (2000*)* – The Another Fine Mess theatre company was still staggering along with the by-now-rare improv show and a revamped *Another Fine Mess (1998)* stage show (dropping the audience-participation fairy tales and adding more old verbal vaudeville routines).

We even wrote a new production called *Laurel & Hardy's Christmas Show (1999)*, which I believe included the new sketch "Mixed-Up Xmas Medley" and the songs "A-Soalin'" and "Silent Night"; otherwise, the contents of *Christmas* were identical to *Mess*.

Around spring of 2000 we were asked by our then management to do a TV commercial hawking a coupon book.

Shortly after this, the partners in our management split to form two new companies, and for a long time there was an embarrassing and unnecessary tug of war between the two of them for our services.

The fellow who booked my solo shows wanted to manage AFM as well. His ex-partner told Bob that if he worked for him then he couldn't do the murder mystery plays that he, Bob, had been doing for her.

I felt that we shouldn't be exclusive to *anybody* since that would mean we, as a novelty act, would automatically be working even less than we already were by this time.

Bob, whom I think ought to have agreed with me, chose not to make any decision about anything and so both companies stopped calling us!

The final set of AFM live stage shows were at rest homes and were financed by a friend of Bob's, until she and Bob had a falling out and she stopped giving us work. So, AFM was just about dead.

To return to the TV commercial, you could see (if you could get past my long locks done up in a makeshift ponytail under Stan's unusually tilted derby) the recurring problem with producers of certain local TV commercials when it comes to classic movie characters (e.g. Woody Allen in *New York Doughboys*, and Groucho Marx in *Cane Care)*.

Nobody does their research!

There was the repetitive, misunderstood use of the word "Wow", Ollie's uncharacteristic lusting for food, and Stan's ADMONISHMENT of Ollie ("Get your own!").

Yep. The producers thought we were somebody else: Abbott & Costello.

For what it's worth, this was AFM's last appearance on TV …I do like the smiles at the end, though.





“HEEEEEEEERE’s…JIMMY??” (And not FALLON!)

That 70s Variety Show (2002) – The video for this one is hard to watch, for personal reasons only. On paper it was a perfectly good idea; Jack “Charlie Chaplin” Slessor, now working for the Manitoba Department of Justice, had for some time wanted to organize a benefit stage show on either the theme of the old MASH or Johnny Carson “Tonight” TV shows. It almost happened in 1992, back when Jack was managing Winnipeg’s Gas Station Theatre; Jack envisioned a live “Tonight Show” play with myself as Johnny Carson and Bob Cloutier as Johnny’s sidekick Ed McMahon. But Bob, again displaying the moodiness he was noted for, resented the idea of being cast as my sidekick (even for a one-night benefit) after years of equal partnership in AFM and didn’t want to do it. I felt he was quite missing the point, but it didn’t matter anyway as the Gas Station benefit didn’t happen.

Cut to July 8, 2001. I was working exceptionally hard at MPI as a writer-producer, with probably two dozen commercials, corporate videos and other assorted ad campaigns, big and small, then in various stages of development. I’d been married to Karen for over a year; a year of tremendously happy peaks, desolate valleys and the odd moments of stress and worry. Karen had been hospitalized several times and once almost died from

complications over a bout of pneumonia. With all this plus the general responsibilities of marriage and fatherhood weighing heavily on me there was little or no time for much else. I still acted in the occasional quick radio commercial but my live stage shows (of which the bookings mainly came now from Richard Edwards, who'd split from Tina Lussier's company That's Entertainment to form his own company, Entertainment Solutions Canada) were in fact becoming fewer and were relegated to low-profile corporate shows and private parties, noted for their lack of organization, and their occasional failure to pay!

There was also a new trend starting in these corporate shows, where the company basically wanted you to do a show all about *them*, with voices and jokes *they* wanted, which they failed to appreciate meant writing new, *untested* material rather than use the sure-fire material that made me employable as an impressionist in the first place. A further, and more subtle, complication in these corporate shows would be the corporation's insistence that I would eat with them first, then, "get up an' tell yer jokes".

This wasn't how I preferred to work. Not to be impolite, but I was a *theatre* guy doing a reasonably demanding *theatrical* show that required focus and concentration and even warming-up backstage before I came out and worked. I would invariably tell the people, "Please let me just do a good, proper show for you and I'll sit with you after." This became interpreted as "He doesn't want to eat with us", which I suspect gave me a reputation for being a snob, which was neither fair nor true. In my efforts to do my best for these people they would only focus on what *they* wanted, or thought they wanted (A typical thank-you after my show might be "You didn't do Jean Chretien"). I started to seriously ask myself if it wasn't time to stop.

This was a deliberate, entirely personal decision, rather than anything forced on me. It included my not acting in any more MPI commercials. For one thing, I wanted to avoid the sort of "empire building" (doing everything myself) that tended to get other MPI colleagues in trouble! Confining myself to a George Martin (Beatles producer)-type role actually enabled me to concentrate better on the production as a whole, which I felt meant I did a better job. And it did work. My commercials always turned out well; problems were virtually nil. Although I wasn't in there twiddling the knobs and editing tape/sound files, I did and do consider myself a good producer. The decision not to do any more live shows was a combination of not wanting to let my standards drop, and not wanting to shut my new family out. I was determined to put my family first, even if meant stopping performing.

Indeed, on July 8, 2001 I read through a new script I'd written, *Jim Williamson's Water Cooler Theatre*, and was dismayed at how unfunny it was. I also realized I'd forgotten to meet my wife at the street corner that day. We had a fight, and I realized (perhaps not right away! ☺) that it was my fault; I was simply doing too much and neglecting what really

mattered: my family. I was burnt out. If indeed I *meant* what I was saying in all those pathetic "lonely guy" routines from my shows, then I had best re-organize my life and save my marriage and family.

To that end, I decided I would keep writing, but I would quit performing. My logic being that writing was easier to pick up and put down than rehearsing. I was already a successful ad writer-producer 8 hours a day and not about to chuck that security. But if I continued that *and* I continued to write, perform, produce, *and* direct myself in one-man comedy stage shows at night, this translated into roughly *four times the isolation* from my family. Clearly, this was not going to work with a wife and a young daughter (Sydney, from Karen's previous marriage) and a dog (Chabby).

So, I fulfilled my remaining stand-up/corporate show commitments and decided that Jack's production of *That 70s Variety Show* at the Franco-Manitoban Cultural Centre in March 2002 would be my Farewell Performance, although the only person I told that to was Karen. Any "announcement" to that effect would have been pretentious; I wasn't important enough and neither was the retirement itself. Besides, maybe I could keep doing my Charlie Chaplin routine, since that required no preparation...?

Anyway, Jack Slessor called me in early 2002 to say he was indeed reviving the Johnny Carson idea if myself and Bob Cloutier were interested. Bob and I were in a slump yet again with AFM (a shame since we'd talked about making no less than three AFM promotional movies with my new film equipment: a live video recording of our most recent stage show, a behind-the-scenes documentary about us and a silent-film idea of Bob's called *Eat 'n Run*). But we weren't working then and so far as Bob was concerned the Carson idea wasn't the answer.

Considering himself not just the star of Another Fine Mess but a Star in general, Bob was again fuming over the very *idea* of playing second fiddle – even in a one-off benefit and demanded an apology from me before he'd consent to do it (?!). Jack, wisely deciding not to come between us, privately said it was up to me whether I wanted Bob involved or not.

Already in a stew myself over the prospect of starring in a big benefit stage show with hundreds of strangers with no rehearsal and for one night only, my last ever performance, with a loose cannon who was already pissed at himself not being The Star, I told Bob angrily on the phone (to his voicemail, actually) that under no circumstances would I ever perform with him again.

I meant it. Bob tried on three successive occasions to reach me again, pleading with me to reconsider or at least let him have our AFM props and could we talk about it (which, like our scripts and essential papers were stashed in a closet in the basement of my house).

I left Bob a message again on voicemail stating that he could have the props but I was through with him personally and refused to talk to him about it.

I never saw him again. Jack felt bad for us but accepted my decision.

We proceeded with an outline for the show, a pastiche of classic Carson gags, some original material, and a slew of improvised interviews with a few select Manitoba politicians! Heady "schtuff", as Carson would say.

I still feel I was right to exclude the mercurial, unpredictable Bob Cloutier. To me this was too important, too nerve-racking a thing to fall victim to the machinations of a temperamental actor who specialized in improv when he wasn't wandering off/forgetting the script in general.

I want to emphasize here that I'm criticizing the worker, the actor, not the man, who was a good person. But this is a fact: Bob Cloutier, *professionally,* was a loose cannon. There was one time when Bob, feeling the audience was ignoring us, actually went out and physically hauled several people to their feet to sing along with us; not exactly an "Ollie" thing to do!

We almost weren't paid that night.

"Well, that didn't go *quite as planned,"* glared our client, a big, tall, stony-faced man in white hair, wire-rimmed glasses and a grey three-piece suit. His action of writing out a check for us was the slowest, most reluctant thing I've ever seen. Bob was oblivious as to *why* this might be*,* convinced that the client was in fact apologizing for his colleagues being a poor audience! *Probably not,* I say.

Anyway, to this present show: Jack, in a clever and casual pose as the Stage Manager, complete with clipboard, opened the show with a few throwaway gags and general announcements (I adopted a similar pose in the late AFM shows, which helped an increasingly forgetful Bob remember his lines). There was a weird bit about Ed McMahon being stranded in a shoe store in Moose Jaw, but Jack turned this into a nice audience-participation thing, turning them into a chorus of Ed McMahons! They were warmed up…and off we went …into the most extended Johnny Carson impression I ever did in my life.

I had such nervous exhaustion backstage I almost fell asleep, but once I was on, there was this surge of adrenalin and I was fine. Looking at it again years later it's better than I remember. I was an adequate Johnny Carson, and fortunately I picked some decent jokes for the monologue, but I think starting with the Harvey Smith interview didn't quite work. I was nervous about improvising, let alone with politicians, and Harvey really didn't want to

take his prepared bag-gag beyond Safeway, it seemed, so I let him be, and then we were off to a couple very good sound-alikes of Olivia Newton-John and Neil Young.

Teresa McLennan's reading of "I Don't Know How To Love Him" really benefited from the band's back-up, while Tara and Graham's "American Pie" seemed a bit too dour, which rather worked against it, being such a long song. But the audience seemed to dig it and we kept them happy with a vintage Carson bit called "Anti-Clichés". I really should have done that one from the desk; the pacing up and down is a bit irritating to me now, but I liked being that much closer to the folks, and anyway we finished the first act strong with the H & S Choir's "Born To Be Alive", which got a well-deserved standing ovation.

There was a weird bit in between acts where the cameraman (Jack's cousin?) catches me writing a new gag for the second half of the show – probably the one about "Big Brother and the Holding Company" being Harvey Smith's next book - I laugh now to think that I was actually performing in a show that I hadn't finished writing! - and we're back strong with the crowd-pleasers "Country Roads" and "Me and Bobby McGee".

A technical malfunction caused one of the new bits ("Q & A With Kids") to be lost forever. I don't remember anything about it except for Johnny confusing Britney Spears with Christina Aguilera and briefly grunting/singing "Oops! I Did It Again". Then we're back for two rollicking numbers with a returning Neil Young and Family; "Heart of Gold" and "Love is a Rose", followed by a brand new Johnny Carson sketch I'd written just for the occasion called "Celebrities in the Audience"; a nice time-eating technique dating back to the days of the Italian Commedia del arte theatre; great (of course) to get Karen, Dad, mother-in-law June Hanushchak, and our friend Bonnie Arcand involved. Nice big laughs for the bit and even some ad-libs, then after a nervous pause there was Kristin Desmond with "I Will Survive" and the Jackson 5 with "ABC". And, we're clear.

Jack made sure I got a videotape after the performance and phoned me later, where he kept saying "Isn't it GREAT?" I just said "It's nice to have a souvenir of it" which I think *may* have irritated him?!

For some reason I couldn't bring myself to lie about it and just go "YEAH!!" Probably still getting over the Bob thing. Frankly I *didn't* think it was *great,* it was merely *good*. It was a *good,* well-produced show.

"Great" is what theatre people often say when they really mean "Thank God it worked!!" My criticism is that the tape was too amateurishly shot and at 90 minutes plus intermission it's a LOT to sit through, but the acts were well chosen with good songs, it's just that were too many of them.

The fact is that even a lot of good stuff in a row can become *tiring;* which is why I say it was *good* but not *great*. I'm really talking about pacing, and editing; I just felt there was too damned little of that here. And, as you know by now, I'm just as critical about my own stuff.

But to be clear - and fair - YES, *all kudos to Jack Slessor for putting it all together*, for sure! I remain proud to have honoured my commitment of 1992 and taken part in this GOOD show, which was also to bear the private distinction of being my last performance. With friends and relatives being this entertained in a big theatre, yes, it was a GOOD way to go**.**



Why is this unemployed actor smiling? Me at MPI circa 2004.

Sound Productions (2005) – Since about late 1999, MPI's radio commercials had been assembled solely at a funky young studio called daCapo Productions. It was a combination of the excellence of product, the convenience of the studio (within walking distance) and the warmth and friendliness of the core group of four themselves: Clint Skibitzky, Olaf Pytlik, Nolan Balzer, and Annalee Schellenberg.

daCapo always felt to me like an oasis, a holiday, the sun breaking through cloudy skies. I LOVED going to see them with new radio ads I'd written (and the ads were indeed 99% mine) and I LOVED being a producer; having what I thought were the right instincts for directing voice talent ("You're going *down* on the end of that sentence when you should be going *up*.") They were a tremendous boost to my life. A welcome shot of fresh energy. daCapo were such a contrast to an encroaching sense of treadmill-ish, unfathomable misery.

Although the MPI ad department were nice people, the sense of pioneering adventure had left when Jim Kingdon and Correy Myco left and the result was an efficient but relatively "plain" working environment that lacked that nebulous thing called vision.

The executives there had been obsessed with this thing called the MPI-brand for the last five years without ever explaining clearly (to me, anyway) just what the brand was. ("Y'gotta *live* the brand." Hunh??) All they knew for sure was that the ads should clearly depict people in trouble as a result of making the wrong driving decision. Sounds simple until you try to make a career of it! Despite the odds, I did do just that, but still I longed for the variety-is-the-spice-of-life feel I got from daCapo.

So, when they invited me around Christmastime 2004 to act in their TV sitcom pilot about life in a recording studio I was nothing less than delighted. It felt terrific to be acting again (I'd been invited back on the boards the previous summer, for a one-night revival of my stage show *The Divisible Man* at Victoria Beach). It was a good script and for the part of goofy Barry the Client I basically felt myself channelling Woody Allen, Lou Costello, Mr. Bean, Alan Bennett, Stan Laurel and Dudley Moore, to name a few. (My notorious hair - which I'd been dyeing black since 1997 - is starting to go here, too) Well, whatever works! And it did!

I think I just filmed the one day, although the rest of them did it over a two-day weekend on a budget that cost a little over a couple of extra-large take-out pizzas.

The characters, comically morose Clint, breezy Olaf, quizzical Nolan and crafty Annalee were only slight exaggerations of the real people, but to me the real standout was co-writer/director Darren Wall as the smartass, David-Letterman-esque, er, "Darren".

Also it *looked great*. I loved the simplicity and fun of this friendly, cooperative and *highly efficient,* basic way of making movies. I had a ball the entire time and was especially delighted when the film premiered at the first annual Winnipeg International Film Festival the following June, in 2005.

There I was, a movie actor, actually playing on the honest-to-God big screen in an honest-to-God movie theatre, the Garrick. It's at times like these you feel overflowing with hope and love for life; that anything is possible. Yes. This was one of those happy, happy times. The jellybeans I ate in the film wreaked havoc on my lower teeth, but what the hell – it was worth it**!!**



Enter Barry the Client. Trying to enter behind him is a delivery person (Mike Krywy).

The Good Life (2006*)* – Mom had pancreatic cancer and so Dad was taking an early retirement. Red River College threw this affectionate send-off for the popular Dean of Business and creator of its esteemed Creative Communications course, and, as a bonus, two of the college's teachers, Armin Weibe and Barb Mekelburg, asked me to come out of *my* retirement (again) to play my lookalike Dad in a little play they'd written about Dad's life and times at the college, including how he had helped build their downtown campus. Armin and Barb invited me to contribute to the script, and I did, but my contribution was mainly little verbal Dad-isms and sight gags that we worked out in rehearsal. Calling it a Mekelburg-Weibe-Williamson collaboration, MPI style, might be a little generous, but what the hell! The audience did indeed roar at what they recognized as Dave-isms and the whole thing was nice and warm and not at all the roasting Dad seemed to think he was gonna get! Watching the video of it now I don't even mind being - what, 30 pounds heavier? - since *That 70s Variety Show*. A poignant little bonus in the video is of all the Williamsons posing for a family picture - Mom, Dad, Linda, Jim, Wendy, Laura - the last such complete picture there would ever be. If this is indeed my last stage show – playing Dad – then I'm cool with it.





Ken Webb, me, and other unidentified Red River College staff give Dave Williamson (right) an affectionate send off.



Meanwhile, Dan Chase and Barbie Boult lament the passing of the Hollow Mug (Actually a scene from the Hollow Mug's *Can-Can*).

By 2006 we were in fact bored, restless, and in the case of my wife Karen and our daughter Sydney, unhealthy. We needed a change.

Karen's doctor recommended we pull up stakes and move west to a more temperate climate. Karen already had plenty of family in British Columbia. Her retired parents were living in a seniors complex in Kelowna and she had a sister living in nearby Vernon. It was 2009 before we finally sold our house, and, ready or not, away we went.

Talk about change.

This somewhat impulsive move led to some very hard times: both Karen and I went through many different "survival" jobs (a combination of contracts expiring and our distaste for the jobs in general). Life had an unexpectedly strange, starting-over quality to it, coupled with the concurrent global economic downturn, social media boom, and just the fact that Kelowna was about 1/6th the size of Winnipeg anyway.

The TV and radio stations had no place for me, nor did the ad agencies or the government bodies.

My attempts to go back to school were either refused or fumbled, so the social media and web design skills I sought and acquired were, as needs be, self-taught.

My desk/stage/recording studio/editing suite would be all one and the same. I wrote the occasional ad or newspaper article but these gigs were few and far between.

To keep myself jolly during my survival jobs in hospitality and customer service (when not looking for them) I kept writing scripts, stories, and even returned to drawing comics (which I hadn't done since 1984).

I never gave up.

I always looked and never refused any work that was offered, however humbling. I literally never stopped trying to improve my situation and tracked my progress obsessively.

And yet, *all* of this – plus an attempt to do comedy videos and podcasts online – got me *absolutely nowhere*.

A so-called reprieve as marketing coordinator for the local museum proved to be short-lived. Kelowna in those days had no comedy club nor Fringe Festival, nor professional theatre, so THAT was out.

I took stock finally with a brief solo vacation in Winnipeg in June of 2017, at Dad's request, on *his* dime, *and* with Karen's consent.

Even so, it was on this same trip that my wife and I separated. Karen's health had continued to deteriorate. She phoned to say she'd decided she didn't want me coming home. My chronic unemployment was finally too much to bear.

The vacation proved permanent.

The most succinct way I can put my dilemma at the time is: I was *liked…but not wanted. With no reason given*.

That's a key point. WHY I was not wanted was unclear. As one potential employer put it. "I don't know. My *gut* told me not to hire you."

This is not particularly helpful.

If, let's say, you've indeed got the potential to make people vomit, aren't you better off knowing *why,* so you can fix it?? Or is this just too impractical and/or hopelessly naïve of me to ask?

How are you expected to live as a sort of mysterious walking toxicity?

"Oh. It's *YOU,"* moaned another prospective employer on my making a return visit.

Cue my deadpan to a fantasy audience, a la Jack Benny! (Actually, I remember smiling, deeply amused at the sheer unprofessional gall of the woman. Evidently, I dodged a bullet there!)

I got plenty of advice:

"Just go on stage again."

Yes? And do what? Plus, actors need updated photos, resumes, and audition pieces. All of which costs money, which I didn't have to spare. Nor does my voice project well on stage.

"Just write a new comedy routine."

Yes? About what? My act was impressions, mainly of dead or semi-retired folks. Who wants to see that now?

The ugly truth was that my comedy act wasn't commercial anymore. Also, as master impressionist Rich Little has pointed out, so few of today's stars have distinctive voices. In any case, updating a comedy act and trying it out costs money, research AND time, which again I didn't have to spare on what *wasn't a regular job*.

Even a reunion with the unpredictable Bob Cloutier - had I even wanted one - was out. For, as I wrote on my Facebook in January 2020:

Winnipeg actor **#BobCloutier** has died. A veteran of many stage, television, radio and film productions, Bob also played Ollie to my Stan in "Another Fine Mess", a Laurel & Hardy tribute show where we combined improvisation with original scripted material. We did this from 1986-2002. We were the classic introvert and extrovert, so you can imagine the creative tension over the years. Sometimes, as in other relationships, it's best to let your partner do exactly what they want in life and to stay completely out of their way and not look back. After years of his teaching me improv and me teaching him discipline, we two increasingly confident, increasingly stubborn comic actors were just better apart. The best moments were offstage, doing other characters in his car on the way to a gig. Once we got in the mood like this we could, and sometimes did, perform ad-libbed comedy for as long as four hours. Making people laugh is a wonderful thing and I'm still glad I got to do this alongside Bob. It's hard to think of a man this unapologetically loud and colourful "shuffling off this mortal coil" to paraphrase Shakespeare. I prefer to paraphrase Hardy: "Here's a fine mess (planet Earth) you've gotten yourself OUT of." RIP



“Another Fine Mess” in action on stage and screen during the 1980s and 90s. I try not to be a hypocrite and rewrite history when someone passes to make a relationship out to be closer or deeper than it truly was. I *am* the sentimental type, but I think this is going too far. I’d rather continue to tell the truth. And the truth is, Bob Cloutier and I had, for the most part, a good working relationship, but that was all. I’m positive I was sometimes a pain to him, too, when I wasn’t a joy. It was what it was. This act couldn’t be revived. Who’d want us? As the Stan Laurel character himself might say, “Well, if we were still doin’ it, we wouldn’t be doin’ it!”

Note that slightly veiled commentary there on Karen re a separation. Yes. A team, a marriage, must be mutually beneficial or don’t bother.

Fortunately for me, Winnipeg in 2017 proved easier than Kelowna to land and keep a survival job!

By 2021 I was feeling gradually secure enough to get back into performing – but with an important pivot. As long as my attempts at comedy online were being ignored, why not pivot to being a voice actor online – now that it was possible to do that from home – even

from a closet? The convenience proved irresistible. And, remember by now I was living with my elderly father. While not exactly a caretaker to him I did help him maintain certain routines, so that required some presence! Theatre and comedy usually require you to tread the boards most nights, and this just wasn't very appealing anymore. A palpable sense of "Been there, done that", but *also* that other trusty old cliché, "Never say never"!

Eventually, I got gigs again – including a dream job in 2022, marketing and communications coordinator at Relish Ideas, for whom I wrote a ton of ads and articles, and even did voice acting, as in here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DA9dEttEJ4Y





Circa 2024. Advertising writer by day (the Relish office), voice over actor by night (home).

Regrettably, by January 2025 Relish Ideas experienced a sharp drop in requests for writing and my position was terminated.

Here we go again!

Fortunately, I was far more financially stable by then thanks to savings and some wise investments, and so I could ride out this particular storm.

Good thing I was so prepared. It took me till January 2026 to land a good job as a Copywriter at Direct Focus Marketing & Communications.

Two months later I reunited with a dear old college friend, Karen Wade. (Different Karen. VERY different) We are now, as they say, an item. (The Karen Wade thing is a story in itself, well-documented on my Facebook!)

Suddenly, just like that. Good job. Good woman. But only because I never, never, never, never, EVER gave up, you see!

Today? I am old and fat. Easy to achieve, it turns out.

Harder, it seems, to be an actor and writer. *But I did it!*

Unlike some people, I don't have a bucket list. I've had a good life. I like my life and everything in it. I would not trade it for anyone else's. Why would I, when I like it? It suits me so well! When I go, they'll say, "He was nice, but weird," or, "He was weird, but nice." I'm OK with that.

And, I'm in favour of all this rapid technical change. *Let's have fun with it*.

For me, if I can keep acting in, say, occasional commercials and cartoons, I'll be satisfied. I'd still consider the "right" stage thing too – whatever that might be!

Mel Blanc (that great cartoon voice actor) said the secret of life was to enjoy yourself. Keep going and you will succeed. I agree on both counts! In life and in work I focus on being the Best Jim because really, it's all I can control.

That's not as self-indulgent as it sounds. By being my best I become more pleasant to be around and a better help to everyone else. That's the point, and it seems to be working!

Oh and this past August 2026 I did a completely new stand-up comedy routine at the office as part of a presentation. A mix of accents and, yes, impressions.

My colleagues did laugh. They did applaud. Just sayin'. I also have a new comic strip idea I'd like to try online...

Breaking away from these audio and video clips is what I imagine surfacing from a scuba dive is like. It's disorienting on account of the immersion is so deep, the memories so intense, I forget that the fat-figured but sweet-natured little old lunatic in the mirror is me now!

But what really matters is not how I've aged/decayed since 1984 but asking; Was it what I expected? Was it worth it?

NO it wasn't what I expected. YES it was worth it!

I could not have predicted ANY of this but I'm sure glad I did it. I'm as happy as I can be!

Life was fun.

Life is still fun. And, rest assured, it's still *what I make it*.

Jim Williamson

August 2026

https://www.jimedia.company/



Made it to Direct Focus in January 2026, for whom I write…and amuse with a few voices.

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