

comedy is tough. Not many people are damaged enough to
 very public failure by agreeing to take up a microphone in front
 Strip, West Edmonton Mall's resident comedy club, made time
 give three Gateway writers the chance to get up on stage and
 a slow demise under the spotlight.

and his habit of eating inappropriate objects into a media empire;
 of his Vietnam War squad sketch-comedy troupe; and Andrew
 m of animal sounds has already gone triple platinum.

PHOTOS BY MIKE OTTO

wait much longer, I might be too drunk to perform.

As if sensing my concern, the host told me that I'd be first.

"Thanks," I said.

"Plft," my sphincter said, as it released the contents of my bowels into my pants.

The host did a routine to warm the audience up. I'd asked him to make it a terrible one. He

had told me not to worry, but turned out to be pretty good (although I didn't think the joke about how the room was

haunted by all the comics who had died on that stage was very funny).

My time on stage is a blur. As I went through my rape routine, I made eye contact with a lady in the front row who definitely didn't find it funny, but it drew some laughs from elsewhere in the room. Several of my other jokes,

Steve, of course, had the audience laughing with his simple, offensive cures for all of societies ills. The applause that he was getting were for jokes about genitalia and performing indecent acts for money; this made my act about living in Saskatchewan seem charmingly idiotic. More beer was required to drown out my fears.

At least I had a good buzz going by the time the emcee introduced me as being an old friend of his from the Vietnam War. I had my mind

focused on trying to remember how I wanted to open my first joke, and my hands were busy trying to work the microphone off of the

stand. So there was no one on guard to stop my mouth from speaking into the microphone without my expressed consent.

"Just to get it out of the way before anyone asks, my nickname in Vietnam was 'Big Tits.'"

There was a pause as I stared out, wide-eyed,

my dick and get an erection in five minutes. We were also told when the red light above the stage came on to get the hell off and that was about all we got for an introduction to the world of comedy.

Waiting on the left of the stage with the other comedians was the most nerve-racking part. Steve was the first performer and he set the bar high by making the audience crack a few times. Scott

opened with a home run about his Vietnam nickname then recalled some humorous tales of growing up in Saskatchewan.

I was the eighth performer of the night but it went by quick. When it came to my turn, I forgot what I was going to say for a moment, but I ran over my routine while the host introduced me. Okay, ready to go. When the host said my name, a rush of adrenaline flowed over me. Once I

including the Clamato one, seemed to fall a little flat. Before I knew it, my five minutes were up and I was shaking the host's hand on the way off the stage to scattered applause.

Going first at least allowed me to enjoy the rest of the evening in a non-panic-stricken state. Some of the amateurs—including both of my fellow Gateways—were pretty good, and some of them were terrible ("So did any of your fathers beat you when you were kids? Mine did. Ha ha!"). After years of being told that self-deprecation wasn't inherently funny, I began to believe it.

The host had a loud and distinctive laugh that he graciously directed at anything that appeared intended as a joke but wasn't getting a good reception. I was grateful that I hadn't recognized this pity laugh for what it was when it had popped up during my set. A few people approached me to tell me they'd enjoyed my routine. (I wondered where they had been during the Clamato joke, when I really could have used their support.)

"Thanks," I said. "Incidentally, do you think the concept of incest repellent is funny?"

into the audience, trying to register what had just happened. Luckily, the audience seemed to enjoy it, so I was able to cover it up as if I was just simply pausing for laughter. My mind was racing, wondering where I was going to go with this next.

Luckily, my mind didn't have to factor much into it. My lips kept moving, retelling the stories that I had told at parties and over RATT burgers hundreds of times. My hands busied themselves with wrapping around the mic cord, a habit that my friend later told me made it seem as if I was going to rip the cord out of the wall. My eyes mercifully focused right on the stage lights, blinding myself to the fact that there were people watching me.

I didn't regain my sight until I was off the stage and sitting back down at the table. That's also the point that I started breathing again. But, I hadn't choked, and I got a few laughs. A few of the comedians came over to tell me that I had done well, including Dino Di Filippo, manager of The Comic Strip. Steve and I later told him that it was easier to do than we thought it would be.

"It isn't hard work," he laughed. "It's a joke."

grabbed the mic, the lights were so bright that I couldn't really make out the audience's faces so I found it easy to start my routine off with a bang: a rant about Anna Nicole Smith's constant media attention.

I carried on the loud obnoxious routine throughout and it went fairly well, I think—after all comedians like Sam Kinison and Denis Leary made their careers being loud and obnoxious. Partway through my murder capital of Canada joke I forgot the punch line, but that was only for a second. Any longer and I would have peed myself up there, but I managed to finish off with jokes about life in an office without incident.

As I left the stage the host said, "The Gateway needs to start doing background checks," which made me smile more than anything else that night.

Being on stage was a rush that's hard to describe: an odd mix of nervousness and adrenaline. I'd definitely do it again, hopefully next time minus the queasiness beforehand. And maybe I'll go easy on the yelling.

