

LESSON SIX

Don't Wait for Opportunities; Create Them!

— *In which our heroine bares all (briefly), meets the partner every actress dreams about, becomes a mannequin (again), rocks a gold bikini, crashes a black-tie power party, gets advice from God, and proves that you don't need to sing to deliver one hell of a singing telegram.* —

By the early 1980s, you would have had a hard time cruising through the weeknight network lineup without seeing my face. I did *Dukes of Hazzard*, *Happy Days*, *Married with Children*, *Three's Company*, *Full House*, *Dallas*, *CHiPs*, *Hart to Hart*, *The A-Team*, *Cheers*, *The Young and the Restless*, *The Fall Guy*, *Misadventures*, *Sheriff Lobo*... you name it, I was in it. I was on fire back then.

In 1984 I made my first moderately successful feature film, *Basic Training*. It was directed by Andrew Sogerman (who would go on to garner an Oscar nomination as a producer) and produced by Emmy winner Gilbert Adler and starred people like Anne Dusenberry, Angela Aames, Walter Gotell, Morty Brill, and Will Nye. That film launched many careers. We even had a red carpet premiere. The only hard part for me was the nudity. There was a

sex scene, and the only way for me to get the role was to show my boobs. Remember, I was still very much the Southern good girl who lived according to my mother's moral code.

But I was also realizing that I had been blessed with a bad girl's body that could open doors in my career. So I agreed to the nude scene, but my agent put very specific language into my contract: the director could only shoot my boobs in profile and for only one shot. So there's a three-second shot of me in the throes of lovemaking where you can see one breast.

Those three seconds became an eternity when the movie came out in 1984, and my father got to see it before he passed away. We had a premiere in New Orleans, and it was really cool that my father got to attend, even though I was horrified at the idea of him seeing his little girl's hooters up on the screen. He died later that year, so he didn't get to see a lot of the other things that I accomplished, but I was really delighted that he got to see that movie and things like *Happy Days* and all the other TV appearances that I was starting to get one after another.

FOURTH WALL BREAK!

I was so nervous about what my parents would think, but it was a starring role and I had their best wishes. Even though I was comfy in tiny bikinis, there's a big difference in removing that top. It felt dirty, and I was modest. In the scene, my female costar walked in on me and this wonderful actor, Mark Withers, making love. Mark and I practiced the scene and blocked it with the director with our clothes on. The next day, I kidded with the director and producers that they had to be in their underwear to shoot. Then it was time to film and they cleared the set of grips, technicians, and extra people. Mark came to the set and gave his

wife and me each a rose, which was such a classy gesture.

Then it was time to film, but the scene only took a couple of takes. It was hot but choreographed. We were in bed and I had underwear or a bikini bottom on, and I had the sheets up high so there was no butt showing. You could only see the side of my breast. But what was a very fast shot on camera seemed like forever when I watched it. I actually did another topless scene on a USA Network show, but because it was cable they couldn't actually show anything, so they put moleskin on my nipples! But it's actually hotter because it was after my boob job.

The Marvelous Kenny Ellis

Unquestionably, one of the reasons my career was going so well, apart from my own stubborn work ethic and pageant-bred chutzpah, was the endless, amazing, unconditional love and support of the brilliant Kenny Ellis. Kenny was (and still is) a warm, funny, absolutely golden-voiced comic and actor who's now a cantor, and he's been one of my greatest friends and supporters for nearly (good Lord!) forty years. I can honestly say I would not be where I am today without Kenny.

Life is a cutthroat business, and I don't just mean Hollywood. I mean any part of life. It's tough, and people and circumstances will conspire to take you down. I think everyone needs a sidekick, someone who'll be with you through thick and thin, no questions asked. Someone with no hidden agendas, whose crazy complements your crazy, and who's loyal to the end. We all need someone like that, someone we can count on, who brings out the best in us...who gets us. For me, that was Kenny. I hope you're lucky

enough to find somebody like that on your journey.

If Miss LA Press Club and the Bob Hope special were two early turning points for my career, meeting Kenny was the third. I met Kenny in 1978 in Harvey Lembeck's Comedy Improv Class. Everyone studied with Harvey. He had coached people like Robin Williams, John Ritter, and even Bryan Cranston of *Breaking Bad* fame. You may remember him as Rocco Barbella from the *Phil Silvers Show* or as Eric Von Zipper in the beach party movies. I loved his class, and I knew right away that I wanted to work with Kenny because he was so obviously talented (I've always been turned on by talent). Kenny was a Jerry Lewis type of comedian: very physical, rubber-faced, and wonderfully improvisational with a gorgeous singing voice. He performed at my sixtieth birthday gala and had me crying like a baby in under a minute.

"Rhonda was auditing this class and sitting in the back, being very quiet and un-attention-getting," Kenny said in an interview. "She was wearing a hat to hide her hair, jeans, and a t-shirt, and nobody was going to look twice at her. She didn't want to be the center of attention. Rhonda's always known what to do and when. Anyway, she came up to me during one of the breaks and said, 'I think you're the funniest person in the class.' We talked and she told me that she'd won an audition at NBC from being Miss Los Angeles Press Club and needed a scene partner, and she thought I would be the perfect person to do it with.

"People come up to you in Hollywood all the time and tell you things," Kenny continues. "So I said, 'Sure, whatever.' But then she handed me a business card that said 'Rhonda Shear' with her phone number, which was very businesslike, and asked me to call her and we would set up a time to rehearse. I'd never gotten a business card from a girl before, so this was interesting. We got together and

she'd asked me to bring any comedy scenes that I had. Well, I had tons of comedy scenes that I'd purchased at theatrical bookstores, but as we started reading through them, we realized that they weren't very funny. Right on the spot we started improvising and writing our own scenes, and that was how we started doing an act."

Shear Honesty: *Packaging matters in any line of work. Today, they call it your "personal brand." Back then, I don't think we had a name for it. But I knew from watching my father run his business that for people to take you seriously, you have to present yourself as a professional. I knew there were a hundred thousand would-be actresses out there, all trying to be taken seriously. Business cards and a no-nonsense attitude were a way to stand out—to let someone like Kenny know that I was about working hard and making a living. Today, you'd do the same with a great website. The tools don't matter, but the intent does: be polished, smart, and professional. A great first impression can be what convinces someone to give you a chance.*

For the NBC audition, Kenny and I did a scene from a Neil Simon play. It didn't lead to anything, but now I had footage that I'd actually performed on the original *Tonight Show* set. More importantly, Kenny and I quickly became bosom buddies and partners in crime, both of us trying everything to get seen, get noticed, and get that big break that we were sure was waiting out there. We were absolutely inseparable, a match made in comedy. Like Lucy Ricardo and Ethel Mertz from *I Love Lucy*, we would do anything to get in front of anyone with the power to "put us in the show," and in the process we met some of the biggest names in Hollywood. Kenny would even make calls for me, posing as my manager, if we couldn't get in the door ourselves.

The late 1970s and early 1980s may have been a sexist era, but it was also a magical time in Hollywood. You could still see glimpses of Old Hollywood and the studio system, though both were fading fast. It was an era when you could still beat the pavement, dropping off pictures and résumés to producer's and casting director's offices. We should have gotten an award for pure moxie and wacko creativity.

In the endless fight to get seen, known, cast, and paid, Kenny was the best friend a young actress could have hoped for: phenomenally talented, inventive, and always pushing me to try things I might never have tried on my own. For the next seven years, we did the craziest things you can imagine, things nobody else would even try, to get the attention of the bigwigs. We spent hundreds of hours writing comedy sketches and bits, because we were natural foils. Most of the time, I was the straight man, like Gracie Allen to his George Burns. Kenny has brilliant comedy timing, so I would play it straight (which is sometimes harder to do) and Kenny would be Kenny. It worked perfectly, because nobody expected the pretty girl to also be funny. We wrote hundreds and hundreds of comedy routines and performed them for years, all over Hollywood, Las Vegas—anywhere we could work.

That's hustle. That's making your own work, folks. That, right there, is the difference between success and failure, not luck or destiny or other such nonsense. I knew actors who sat around waiting for their agents to call, bemoaning the fact that there "wasn't any work." Bullshit. There was work; they just weren't willing to hustle and either find it or make it. Most of those actors (some very talented) never did make it; they left LA and went on to something else. That's one reason I don't believe in doing things halfway. Don't dip your toe; jump in. You're only going to be

motivated to stick your neck out if it's a matter of survival.

This was survival for me, and with Kenny's encouragement I was able to do things I never thought I could do. That "leap, then look" mentality is with me even today.

Shear Honesty: *This whole era with Kenny taught me that there is so much to be gained from being bold, audacious, and outrageous. So many women lose out on wonderful things because they're afraid of looking silly or offending someone; they don't chase their dreams, or they're too shy. Who cares? Your dignity will recover—go for it! Nobody's going to hand you anything—you have to go out and grab what you want! You make your own opportunities by speaking up, tricking your way in the door, breaking the rules and a few eggs along the way.*

A Real Live Girl

Kenny and I were a fantastic team not only because we pushed and helped each other but because we had a nose for opportunity. "At the time, there was a TV show called *The Shields and Yarnell Show*, and they had done this robot kind of mime," Kenny says. "Rhonda told me, 'I can do that,' and I thought 'Wow, this could turn into something.' We wrote a sketch based on Barbie and Ken, called 'Rhondie and Ken,' and that was the first time we ever did the mechanical doll thing."

The mechanical doll act is what Kenny and I are still best known for. Kenny played the nutty professor who had invented this life-size doll—me. I would dress up in a leotard and a nice top and put a big bow in my hair, and we would do our vaudevillian shtick. I might have Tic Tacs in my mouth and while Kenny did my

hair onstage, the Tic Tacs would fall out...one...at...a...time. Kenny would sing songs to me like "If You Were a Real Live Girl," a parody of "I Enjoy Being a Girl" from the musical *Flower Drum Song*. I had a knack for that sort of slapstick, physical comedy.

Then we had an epiphany: why not put me in a nude body stocking so I'd look like a mannequin? After all, I'd already been sculpted as a real mannequin, so this was the logical next step. Kenny had studied with the great Marcel Marceau and was a wonderful mime, so he helped me perfect my robot movements. That act became our greatest hit.

In a typical performance, Kenny would carry a real mannequin onto a department store set, and then he'd carry me on stage, usually wearing a nude skullcap that made me look like I had no hair. He'd position my arms and torso just so and then turn away to style the wig he was going to put on my head. While he wasn't looking, I would change positions, and when he looked back he'd do a classic comedy double take. From there, I might elbow him in the stomach while he brushed my wig, fall into the splits and make the poor guy lift me back up, and generally mess with him. It was classic vaudeville clowning, and audiences loved it.

In fact, the act was so popular that we had a harebrained, Lucy-and-Ethel idea. "We came up with this idea as a publicity stunt and a way to get into offices," Kenny says. "I would deliver Rhonda as a mannequin. I would pick her up, knock on the door, and walk in with her slung over my shoulder. The reactions were so amazing that I wish we'd had a cameraman with us to capture them. I delivered her first to Dick Clark, because I had some connections at Dick Clark Productions. They said, 'Let's do it, bring her over. We'll deliver her for Dick's birthday.'"

"So we went over, went in, and did our shtick," Kenny continues.

“Dick was on the phone at the time and his jaw practically fell off. He didn’t know what to say. Then at the end, he said, ‘Thank you very much,’ and I carried her out. Rhonda got a Dick Clark special as a result of that. That’s also how we met Larry Klein, which led to her getting USA: *Up All Night*.”

FOURTH WALL BREAK!

Getting into Dick Clark’s office was nerve-wracking, but because I had Kenny there, I wasn’t completely terrified. I guess when I donned that leotard and ball cap I became like Supergirl and just did it. The act got us an entrée into many places, and I’m glad we did it. The worst that would’ve happened was extreme embarrassment, and I’d already had that. I think that’s why I can go on live TV and sell stuff, because once you’ve gone in front of someone in a ball cap and a nude body stocking, you really can’t be embarrassed.

Kenny and I pulled that stunt all over Hollywood as a way of getting into the offices of shows we wanted to be on or important figures we hoped would hire us. We crashed our way into the offices of Johnny Carson, John Davidson, and the Smothers Brothers, who were the only ones to kick us out. Everybody else was wonderful. One especially lovely instance stands out: during a writer’s strike, NBC had asked the great Steve Allen to produce a variety show. Kenny knew Steve a little and knew where the show was rehearsing, so he picked me up, put me on his shoulder, and carried me right into the rehearsal that Steve was doing with Louis Nye and Don Knotts!

They could have kicked us out for interrupting them (and most big stars would have), but this is how wonderful Steve Allen

was. As I started into my live doll routine, Steve started making ratchet sounds with his mouth as I was moving. He laughed the entire time, and then said, “They would be great on show number seven.” Well, it turned out that NBC only produced six episodes of that variety show, so we missed out. That was a bummer, but the memory remains precious.

Starving actors that we were, Kenny and I would work anywhere that would pay us. The live doll thing was just one part of our larger act. We won first prize at a talent show at the Palomino Club in North Hollywood, and even though it was a country and western club, they would put us on anytime we wanted to go back. “We did a lot of stuff with the Press Club and the Masquers Club, an old Hollywood actor’s club,” Kenny says. “We did a show there and got to meet people like Janet Blair and Ginger Rogers. They would bring us back as part of their variety show. We performed in New Orleans, in the French Quarter, at a place called Clyde’s Comedy Corner. It was me, Rhonda, and some girl named Ellen DeGeneres.”

It was a great time in my career. People started comparing Kenny and me to Lucy and Ricky or to George Stiller and Anne Meara. We kept hustling and being creative. We really had no choice; it was either do that or get a night job!

The Emmy Awards and Honey Bunny

Just like Lucy and Ethel, Kenny and I would do anything to meet influential people or generate press coverage, always hoping to be cast in something big. And when I say anything, I mean *anything*. We used to bluff our way onto studio lots from Paramount to Universal to Warner Brothers. You can’t do that today because of tight security, but back then security was pretty lax. We couldn’t

drive onto the lot, but I could usually talk my way on by saying that I had an appointment with so-and-so. We'd get a walking pass, Kenny would be in a suit and carrying a briefcase full of our pictures and résumés, and we would go from office to office, dropping them off. Then we would go to the studio commissary and have lunch with the stars.

We also used to crash big parties. The craziest one was in 1988 when we crashed an Emmy Awards dinner at the Century Plaza Hotel in Century City. "We knew all the ins and outs of those places. So we walk in the door, Rhonda goes to the ladies' room, I go to the men's room, and we meet up at the escalator," Kenny recalls. "We went up the escalator and nobody stopped us. Rhonda was wearing a gown and I was wearing a tuxedo. We were mingling with all these stars and it was very nice, and then she looks at me and says, 'What are we going to do when we have to sit down?' I said, 'I'll think of something.' We see a table that has two chairs with nobody sitting, so we sit down and start talking to the people next to us. Then two people came and said they were supposed to be at this table, and I said, 'Oh, I'm sorry, we must have the wrong table.'"

Kenny continues: "Then we see another deuce that's empty up near the dais, so we go up and I say, 'Is anybody sitting here?' A guy said no and we sat down. Again, small talk with the people next to us and so on. Then the guy next to me says, 'I'm Daryl Hickman. I'm the president of CBS.' I said, 'Nice to meet you, Mr. Hickman,' and almost choked right there.

"Everything is going smoothly—until the waiters come around to ask us for our dinner ticket. And I say, 'My gosh, I think I left my ticket at the other table.' We had to think fast. So I get up and run to the other table and ask if anyone has found my dinner ticket.

I don't like lying and I don't like doing things that are shifty, but this was fun. Finally, I go to back to the other table and Hickman leans over to me and says, 'I know what you're doing. I'm not going to have you thrown out, but don't try this again.' I almost passed out. He shook my hand, and the second dinner was over, we left because the jig was up."

FOURTH WALL BREAK!

Thank goodness for youth; you can get away with so much! I'm sure everyone at the awards knew immediately that we were crashing, but you could see right away that we were good kids from good families, not grifters or fame whores. I'm also sure that some of those bigwigs had pulled similar stunts at one time. Yes, I was embarrassed, but not as embarrassed as I would have been today. That's what youth is about: getting away with things you wouldn't even try when you're older.

With Kenny and me, it was one screwball idea after another. Another time, we started our own singing telegram company, Hot Lines. This was the height of the singing telegram era, and it seemed like another great promotional stunt. Trouble was, while Kenny is blessed with a gorgeous voice, I couldn't carry a tune if it came with handles attached. No matter. I went out as the Honey Bunny. We wrote a song called, "I'm a Honey Bunny," and I would go into offices, hop around, smile, and charm everybody so they wouldn't notice how bad my singing was.

Shear Honesty: *You won't always be the perfect fit for the opportunity. When that happens, instead of trying to bullshit people into thinking you have a skill you don't have, rock what*

you DO have. I can't sing. So of course, a singing telegram job made perfect sense! Actually, it did, because I could smile, dance, move, make just about anybody laugh, and charm the socks off a room (thank you, pageant experience!). Bring your best to the table no matter what you're doing. You still won't always be the right fit, but you might impress people enough that you get a chance you didn't know was there.

It worked so well that a couple of years later, when I wanted to do a portfolio photo shoot with the famous photographer Harry Langdon, I went back into singing telegrams to raise Harry's \$5,000 fee. That time, I worked for a company called Live Wires. They had all these young actors with amazing voices, but they loved my look, so the Honey Bunny was hopping again! One time, I got a call from Live Wires that said, "We're sending you to Paramount." I was thrilled. Paramount Studios! Then they gave me the address, and it turned out that I was delivered a singing telegram to a guy alone in his house in the city of Paramount, a blue-collar suburb of LA.

It was my very own Lucille Ball moment, and looking back, you have to laugh. Young actors have those kinds of moments, and I certainly had my share of them. But during that one summer, I was able to make my \$5,000 and book my Harry Langdon photo shoot. Live Wires loved me and wanted me to stay on, but I had bigger things in mind. Honey Bunny went into permanent retirement.

Another highlight of that wonderful period was when we got advice from the great George Burns. Kenny and I had met him at a Press Club event, and he invited us to the studio where he had his office. We met with him, and he lectured us on what we should do as a male and female team. He was very sweet and he said, "You know, I was in a male-female comedy team, too," referring of course to himself and his beloved wife, Gracie Allen. If you're too

young to remember George and Gracie, look them up on YouTube. That's how to be smart, funny, and sweet at the same time. They're still hilarious.

George said, "If I were you, I would recommend that you never do dirty," as he chewed on his famous cigar. "Put it in the minds of the audience. Let them think it, but don't you say it." I based my act around innuendo, using his advice. Maybe it was old school, but it suited me. When the time came for us to go, we walked toward the door we'd come in. But he pointed us toward a different door. We opened the door and behind it was a brick wall. We turned around and George said with a twinkle, "Gets 'em every time." He was one of a kind.

Stopping Traffic

The year 1984 rolled around and Kenny started managing me, turning his focus toward building my career. He really cared about helping me, even more than he cared about his own career. As a result, my career continued to grow, although we never really made it as a comedy duo. Our material was very old-school; comedy was becoming edgier, more topical, more political, and more profane. We were doing sketch work better suited for something like *Saturday Night Live*. Speaking of that, Kenny reminded me that we actually got an audition for SNL but I backed out at the last minute because I didn't want to live in New York. I still kick myself for that one.

Anyway, Kenny was relentless in making calls, and that resulted in some interesting opportunities. The Olympics had come to LA, and this was also the time when posters were huge in American culture. Remember when half the boys in America had Farrah

Fawcett in her red swimsuit hanging in their bedrooms? Well, the always-resourceful Kenny decided that I needed a poster for the Olympics. He contacted the StarMaker Poster Company in New York and put together a poster deal for me, just like that.

Shear Honesty: *If you're ever in a position where you can hire someone to represent you as an agent or manager, do it. It's worth every cent of the commission. There's a reason that actors and writers are always dying to find representation: it opens doors. An agent has access that you don't have, can work tirelessly to find opportunities for you, and can be the bad guy in negotiations so you don't have to. I put in years and years of hard work, but without great representation I would not have had the career I enjoyed.*

In my poster, I wore a gold leather bikini with water dripping down my body; the type read, "Go for the gold! Love, Rhonda Shear!" The poster was shot by famed Hollywood photographer Dick Zimmerman, whom I would later coax out of retirement to shoot the first catalog for my clothing brand. To our delight, my poster started selling well. But Kenny took it a step further.

"Rhonda is into publicity, and she really likes to make a splash," he remembers. "So as a publicity stunt we had a billboard made from the poster and we actually hoisted Rhonda up on one of those cherry pickers to promote its unveiling. We put out a press release, and it was in the newspapers." The billboard stood at a sharp bend in Sunset Boulevard and Roxbury on the world-famous Sunset Strip, right by the old Carlos & Charlie's restaurant; it cost us \$900 a month, which was a small fortune back then. But it stayed up for six months, turned a lot of heads, and probably caused a few accidents.

This was another time that I used Hollywood's obsession with the hot female body to my advantage. Call my billboard "cheesecake feminism" if you want, but it was empowering because even though I was posing in a swimsuit, I decided how I would look and where my image would go. This was me flexing the power not only of my sexuality but my marketing savvy. The billboard was me not only playing the game but winning it. If Hollywood was going to use me for my body, then I was going to benefit.

After the billboard became a thing, I got a lot of modeling gigs wearing swimsuits or modeling for the covers of fitness magazines. Bodybuilding legend Joe Weider actually approached me about becoming the next Rachel McLish, the first famous lady bodybuilder in the 1970s. Joe said that I had a better natural body for bodybuilding than Rachel and that he would personally make it happen, but I said no thank you. I liked my curvy, feminine body and I didn't want big muscles. Also, I didn't want to work that hard. Of course, if I'd known how hard I'd have to work now just to keep from collecting extra cup sizes, maybe I'd have taken him up on it all those years ago.

Unfortunately, though everybody knew me because of the poster and billboards, nobody knew that I was an actress. Was I on a show? Where could they find me? I didn't have a body of work that someone could really create a strong PR campaign around, so while my name was getting out, nothing was really happening. I had always thought that if you got out there, people would call you and cast you. But that was magical thinking, and it just wasn't true in a city where beautiful girls were a dime a dozen.

Also, I was becoming confused with a local legend named Angelyne. Oh my God, where to start with her? Before Paris Hilton and Kim Kardashian made "famous for being famous"

into a million-dollar enterprise, there was Angelyne. She was a bit part actress who in 1984 started putting billboards up all over Los Angeles and became a local icon for her pouty lips, enormous platinum coif, gigantic boobs, and bubblehead persona. Sighting her driving her pink Corvette down Sunset was considered a good luck charm, but being confused with her was irritating and even sort of insulting. I was an experienced actress and comedian with hundreds of credits; she was somebody who'd appeared in a few movies and performed with a punk band and was desperate to be famous.

Despite this, all the attention did help me get some modeling gigs, but I'm only five-foot-four, which is short for a model. I got some fashion modeling work, and a lot of gigs in swimsuits or shorts, and I continued landing small parts in sitcoms and episodic shows, but I was making more money from my mechanical mime act than anything else. Still, I didn't mind paying my dues. With every gig I got more exposure, made more contacts, and got closer to my big break. I knew that I was a lot luckier than most people.

Shear Honesty: *Not every opportunity will be a good one.*

I could have jumped at the chance to become a bodybuilding star, but would that have served my larger goal? No. It would have typecast me. Don't be so anxious for the right opportunity that you jump at ANY opportunity. There's a fine line between ambitious and desperate. Early in your career, you may have to say yes to just about everything because you need experience and contacts. But as you progress and figure out who you want to become, start curating your time and only say yes to what moves you in the right direction. Remember, being able to turn away work is a sign of success.

End of an Era

From 1978 to 1984, Kenny Ellis and I tried just about every oddball, harebrained, *I Love Lucy* scheme we could think of to get seen and get cast. But by 1985, we had put the live doll gig on the shelf and our run of wonderful, zany stunts mostly came to an end. I was working pretty much all the time as a talk show guest and getting small parts in movies, so the time came when I no longer needed the mime act. Meanwhile, I think Kenny, who always wanted our relationship to be more than a friendship but was too sweet and too much of a gentleman to press (God, he was wonderful), was ready to move on as well.

It wasn't just our relationship that was changing. For better or worse, 1984–1985 marked the beginning of the end of an era in Hollywood. The studio system was dead. Cable television was starting to become serious competition for the networks. Women were getting bigger roles, bigger jobs, and bigger salaries. I was there to see it happen. When I came back from New Orleans in 1985 after recovering from the death of my father, I would be ready for a new phase in my career.

ON THE WAY TO TODAY

What advice did I distill on the journey from starving actress to billboard icon, comedic foil, and Honey Bunny that I still rely on? Let's see...

- Find an ally who's got your back and pushes you to be better.
- Get an agent. Seriously. A great agent is your best friend.
- A little embarrassment isn't going to kill you. Just don't compromise on your values.
- Even the biggest names are still people, and everyone respects somebody with the guts and desire to get their foot in the door.
- You have to create your own opportunities. You can't sit around waiting for the phone to ring.
- Always present yourself as a polished professional, especially when you're not.
- Crash. The worst that'll happen is you'll be escorted out, and you'll have some awesome stories to tell.
- Doing silly, crazy things to get ahead is fun and an adrenaline rush. What's the point in doing anything if it's not fun?
- When you're hanging your ass out over the edge, you're making progress. Not comfortable progress, but progress.

LESSON SEVEN

Barriers Are for Breaking

— In which our heroine becomes a comedy junkie, hits the road, dodges airborne shoes, becomes a headliner, covers Bill Clinton's nomination from her décolletage, and learns that despite what everyone told her for years, pretty, sexy women can indeed be funny as hell. —

Though I didn't know it, that new phase began in 1986 when Chuck Barris (remember Chuckie Baby?) cast me as the sexy bailiff in the pilot for his show *Comedy Courtroom*. Each show would play out a real small-claims court case, but with comedians playing the judge, attorneys, plaintiffs, and defendants. Playing the prosecuting attorney for the pilot was a wonderful standup comedian named Bobby Kelton, and I fell a little in love with him.

Bobby was a topical comedian with a wonderful command of the English language and a stage presence that was smooth as silk. He had appeared on *The Tonight Show* twenty-one times and opened in Las Vegas for the likes of Paul Anka, Tom Jones, and Gladys Knight. He was awkward offstage, with limited social skills, but when we worked together on *Comedy Courtroom*, I thought he was really cute. When the show wrapped I handed him a business card.