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## The Branding, Creation, and Promotion of a Solo Comedienne

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THE BRANDING, CREATION, AND PROMOTION  
OF A SOLO COMEDIENNE

by

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B.A. Minnesota State University Moorhead, 2007

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts  
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## ABSTRACT

Comedy exists as a stronghold in American culture as a coping mechanism throughout history, but is often limited to the male headliner. From Charlie Chaplin to Jackie Gleason and Bill Cosby to Will Ferrell, men have kept us laughing from stages to screen throughout the last century. Thus, I inquire: who are the prominent women who rose to the top of this male-dominated industry and how did they create a brand for themselves that was distinguishable and celebrated? What is it about being a woman in the last century that made making a name in comedic entertainment more cumbersome, and has this feat of female branding changed at all with the evolution of entertainment and social trends?

With this graduate thesis, I wish to explore the comparative timeline between socio-economic history, feminism, and the growth of entertainment trends. Considering this history, I will examine five major comediennes: Carol Burnett, Lily Tomlin, Whoopi Goldberg, Chelsea Handler, and Colleen Ballinger and their journeys to create prominent female entertainment brands. From this contributing research I will create and perform a one-woman show entitled *An Evening with Aunt Nona*. Through the exploration of personal branding and marketing of my solo voice, I seek to provide an inspirational framework for the creation and branding of future solo comediennes.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Creating a solo show, although the product appears to be of a single artist, is not completed in a vacuum. This project and research would not have occurred without a grand team of support over the last 20 months. It is with humility and my deepest thanks that I acknowledge those who contributed to this work.

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## **CHAPTER 1: A WOMAN'S VOICE**

The subjugation of the female voice is a tradition deeply rooted in our political, social and artistic cultural heritage. However, on August 18th, 1920, American women were given the first significant opportunity for their voices to be heard with the ratification of the 19th Amendment granting women the right to vote. This First wave of feminism, which began with women's suffrage, created the first opportunity for an enlightened woman's voice to join the greater societal conversation. It would take many more years before "She" would truly make headway in socio-political arenas and, by extension, the arts.

As silent film was the major entertainment of the 1920's, even women who were making their mark weren't doing so because of their voice or point of view, they were working because they were beautiful. While Charlie Chaplin had become perhaps the most famous actor in the world whilst wielding a cane, twitching his mustache, and dropping his bowler hat to garner laughs, Gloria Swanson bathed in a golden bathtub because of a "smokey eye" and suggestive body language. The line had been drawn. Men were able to entertain; women were expected to please the eye. This stereotype is still a point of contention almost 100 years later.

Through the economically painful years of the Great Depression following the stock market crash of 1929, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt had a woman of true substance by his side, his wife, Eleanor. The First Lady was known to be an influential speaker as a member of The League of Women Voters and she also wrote for national magazines. She encouraged her husband to create programs that included groups previously barred from socio-political activities including women, youth, and black Americans. She held 'female only' press conferences and traveled the country encouraging people throughout the Great Depression while reporting



success of new programs back to the President. She would, many years later, hold a position with the United Nations and continue to pursue groundbreaking Human Rights work. During her tenure as the First Lady, however, she had to stay resigned to her societal role within her marriage, including hiding the adultery of her husband, and supporting his professional endeavors. Her role as wife may have been broadcast on a larger scale and even granted a few more progressive liberties as far as her duties outside the home based on her role as First Lady, but the subservience to her husband was in line with most women of that era. Their place was in the home, rearing children, taking in a movie once a week, and catering to the needs of their respective husbands.

With the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the start of WWII, women were asked to join society in a new way. The aircraft industry had only seen female employees as 1% of their pre-war work force but this percentage jumped to a staggering 65% to support the war efforts cause as men were overseas (“American Women in World War II”). It was, perhaps, the first time that women were given credit for the potential they had to contribute to society as more than homemakers and pretty faces. Rosie the Riveter would be the ‘new’ face of the modern woman. (The same woman who would then be asked to put down the riveter when her man returned home.) This strong female image was not reflected, however in the booming Golden Age of Musicals, at least in the leading ladies. In 1943, Rogers and Hammerstein debuted the hit musical *Oklahoma*. Although they wrote the character of Laurey to seem independent and not needing the handsome Curly to be complete, the show inevitably ends with them riding off into the sunset on their honeymoon. All the while, Ado Annie can do nothing but proclaim her love

to more than one man at once in the catchy tune, “I Cain’t Say No” (R&H Corp). Once again the male/female stereotypes were alive and well in their on-stage portrayal.

While films continued to be popular in the late 40’s, the end of WWII and its ensuing technological advances continued to move into the family home. By 1948, approximately 1 million U.S. homes owned a television (Alchin). This brought a whole new platform for the branding of subservient women. Advertisements for irons, vacuums, soap detergent and even ketchup found a way to dehumanize the female gender. A ketchup advertisement promoting the new screw on cap with the tagline “You mean a woman can open it?” didn’t cause the blink of an eye or second thought for many Americans. Women had been stripped of Rosie the Riveter’s empowerment, and they simply had to swallow that reality. There were some exceptions to the domestic resurgence encouraged in the 1950’s. Many women became secretaries or phone switchboard operators, but as far as advancement was concerned, there was none to be expected. Even popular television shows like *I Love Lucy* promoted this stereotype. People laughed at Lucy’s daftness and private insubordination to her boss, but nonetheless, she was the secretary, the boss was the boss, and Ricky was the husband.

On September 18, 1950, Harvard Law School admitted women for the first time in its history. Thirteen female students were admitted and began class with their male classmates. (Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art: Feminist Timeline) This was not the only school related victory. On May 17, 1954, the Supreme Court ruled that schools throughout the U.S. would no longer be segregated through the case: *Brown v. Board of Education*. The notion of ‘separate but equal’ would no longer be accepted as status quo, although it would take almost twenty years for every U.S. school to put this ruling into action. Getting rid of ‘separate but

equal' became a mainstay of discussion throughout the Civil Rights movement and as Second Wave feminism started to gain momentum. On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks put this new viewpoint into action by refusing to give up her bus seat to a white person. This was not only a statement made by a woman, but by a black woman. She was holding her own for the good of both parties and the enrichment of the whole community. Events such as this seemed to be making the 1950's an era of progress in relation to women starting to stand up for their own agenda beyond the set traditional roles. This resistance of the status quo began more ardently just in time for Mattel to release the first Barbie Doll on March 9, 1959 (Mattel). Barbie would spark a fire in discussion for years to come about the standards society places on the female body as her silhouette is one that, were she were real, would not have a space in her curvaceous body for all the necessary internal organs (Taylor). Nonetheless, this was a toy that would be bought for millions of little girls as a silent role model for future generations.

Second Wave Feminism, where issues beyond the vote but still primarily "female-centric", truly found its feet in the 1960's which brought a time of great potential change and progress with a more liberal president, John F. Kennedy. In 1963 he released *American Women: Report of the President's Commission on the Status of Women* that for the first time started to address some of the concerns that women had as far as their roles in society and the hope that the government would support them. In that same year, Kennedy presented the Civil Rights Bill in a speech that was broadcast live on national television and radio. The President unveiled plans to pursue a comprehensive civil rights bill in Congress, stating, "this nation, for all its hopes and all its boasts, will not be fully free until all its citizens are free" ("President Kennedy's Radio-TV Address" 970). This bill would be passed a year later by President Lyndon B. Johnson after

President Kennedy's assassination on November 22, 1963. Title 7 of the Civil Rights Act enforced that unequal treatment of any person could not occur because of race, religion, or gender. (Season One, Part One: The Awakening 14:37). On June 10, 1963, the Equal Pay Act was also passed which prohibits sex discrimination in determining wages. Both the Civil Rights Act and the Equal Pay Act would serve as important legislation allowing the newly formed National Organization for Women (NOW) to start bringing cases of discrimination on behalf of women in these arenas to the courts. One such example of successful litigation was the case of Lorena Wicks vs. Southern Bell Phone Company. In 1969, after a two-year court battle, Ms. Wicks, with representation by Sylvia Roberts, won her lawsuit for lack of advancement due to the claim that a woman would not be able to complete the respective necessary duties of a higher position as well as a man. "For the first time in history, women felt like they had the law on their side" (Season One, Part One: The Awakening 23:50).

Alongside the political reform of the 1960's, a sexual revolution had also begun. A revolutionary book The Feminine Mystique was published in 1963 by Betty Friedan, which gave a voice to housewives and their plight of feeling unfulfilled in their isolated roles as wives, mothers, and housekeepers. The book challenged the idea that being a housewife, while always an option, was not the only option that should be available for women to feel as if their lives were complete. This book also arrived fresh on the heels of the 1960 decision by the FDA to approve the birth control pill as a contraceptive. Slowly, women's decisions and rights to choose what was happening to their bodies and lives became personal choices and no longer their husbands'.

The latter half of the 1960's also brought a period of 'new journalism' with the birth of many "underground" publications. Radical women's groups known as 'consciousness raising groups', formed on college campuses all over the U.S. and also distributed a wealth of pamphlets to spread their initiatives (Season One, Part One: The Awakening 30:35). Thanks to the expansion of network news from 15 to 30 minutes segments, highly televised presentations of Women's Liberation included: a protest at the 1968 Miss America Pageant, The Whistle on Wall Street where women cat-called businessmen outside of their offices, and a 11 hour sit-in at the Ladies Home Journal (Season One, Part One: The Awakening 36:05). With the expansion and ability to broadcast around the world, the matriculation of materials, ideas and controversy was reaching a broader market of listeners than ever before. The end of the 1970's brought political revolution for women with the Pregnancy Discrimination Act which states that employers cannot terminate women from their jobs on the basis of pregnancy, childbirth, or childbirth related medical conditions. This was a major victory for women who wanted to continue to work outside the home but create families as well. It gave women a choice to do both.

When talking about women who procured solid platforms and voices for themselves during the height of the Women's Movement, there are two who heartily stand out: Barbara Walters and Gloria Steinem. On April 22, 1976, Barbara Walters broke through the glass barrier and signed a five-year, \$5 million deal with ABC. She would be the first female newscaster on U.S. network television. With Walter's network debut, women had a public face who was not simply there to provide domestic tips or fashion advice. Gloria Steinem was a journalist writing for *New York Magazine*, who, like Walters, found herself in a male dominated industry but was able to use her position to cover relevant 'women's issues'. Eventually Steinem co-founded *Ms.*

*Magazine*, much to the chagrin and skepticism of others in the industry. With the creation of *Ms.* a platform now existed for women to write about women. Domestic violence was discussed openly for perhaps the first time in modern history. Women who were suffering silently in abusive relationships felt that they had a network of women to whom they could relate; they weren't alone (Season One, Part One: The Awakening 52:00). Gloria Steinem's leadership role was, perhaps, easier to achieve since she had physical beauty as an advantage. If the 1920's ideal that the public loved a beautiful silent star was still at work in the 1970s, the public seemed more able to stomach the very vocal perspective from Steinem because "she gave the women's movement a face...and it wasn't an angry face" (Season One, Part One: The Awakening 49:00).

The Women's Movement of the 1970's was supported with several positive female role models in the developing entertainment field of television which proved to be a welcome change from the 1950's. Actresses Marlow Thomas and Mary Tyler Moore both found themselves finally playing characters in sitcoms that weren't simply 'someone's wife or secretary'. They were given the opportunity to play educated, successful, and single women making their way in the world on their respective shows. Even professional female athletes were starting to enjoy the implementation of professional women's sports, although the 1968 Wimbledon Tennis Championship would prove, that male/female equality had not been established. Women were taking home less than half the prize money of their respective male champion counterparts (Season One, Part Two: Changing the World 4:20). The officials, and some male athletes, claimed that a woman could never out-play a man, thus the superior athlete should win the larger prize. In 1973, Bobby Riggs played a match against Billie Jean King after previously defeating his first match vs. Margaret Court. In a nationally televised special, King defeated Riggs and

staked a claim that once and for all, women could play tennis as well as men and the winnings should reflect as much (Season One, Part Two: Changing the World 5:30).

One of the snags that often occurred in the Women's movement of the 60's and 70's was that many women from minority groups felt that the movement only spoke on behalf of the white, middle-class woman. When the first National Lesbian and Gay Rights March happened in Washington D.C. on October 14, 1979, many women found themselves also contributing to the cause and continuing to encourage the fact that if one minority is oppressed, others will continue to be as well. Women were stating "The Personal is Political" within identity politics. Women had to help demonstrate that any type of oppression in regards to race, class, or gender are related (Season One, Part One: The Awakening 32:41).

The 1980's brought out an interesting and potentially unexpected conflict between women themselves. On June 30, 1982 the Equal Rights Act was defeated after not being able to garner at least 38 state's approval votes needed for it to pass. After what seemed like such an easy victory to accomplish after it had passed through the legislature, liberal women in the U.S. had been defeated by their conservative counterparts. There was too much fear and uncertainty about the full implications of the Equal Rights Act. Would this mean that women would also be drafted? Would this mean that women could no longer stay in the home if they so desired? Would this mean that women would be forced into jobs that they did not feel qualified to perform? NOW was doing everything it could to keep abortion and birth control legal with another national march in 1986 after its 1973 legalization, while conservative groups were slowly trying to chip at the legislation to restrict it.

Television in the 80's was quite a different story when it came to conservative choices. By this time 98% of all American homes now owned at least one TV (Alchin) and strong female characters were hard to avoid. Shows like *Murphy Brown*, *Designing Women*, and *The Cosby Show* all promoted confident, successful, professional women that were part of the American prime time schedule. Oprah Winfrey also made her first mark, albeit at a significantly lower salary to her male counterparts. Oprah made the statement, "I decided not to go after and sue the network. I figured I'd just show them later" (Season One, Part Three: Charting a New Course 18:10). She surely did, as she has been cited as "the most powerful woman in the world" in a multitude of publications. Thanks to MTV's newfound popularity and the accessibility of stars to their fans, women like Madonna found a way to continue to push the feminist envelope. Videos with Madonna wearing pointy bras, bold makeup, and teased hair while writhing on men with whips and chains gave Madonna a control over her sexuality in a way that was both empowering to some and terrifying to others. Madonna was exercising her sexual freedom with such explicitness, and at the same time taking full advantage of this trending music video medium, that she gained popularity by upsetting some just as much as she pleased others. Madonna simply responded to naysayers that she was "owning her sexual identity" (Season One, Part Three: Charting a New Course 33:30). She could portray a submissive or dominant woman, but she was the one calling the shots.

Compact discs had been around since 1983 and the accessibility to music in a portable way was becoming easier and easier. As much as Madonna was a mainstream female voice, there were plenty of other groups that were producing their own work in their particular styles. *Bikini Kill* is an all-female, punk rock band formed in Olympia, WA in 1990. They created



albums like *Pussy Whipped* and *Reject All America* with songs like “Suck My Left One” and “I Like Fucking”. “Bikini Kill is credited with instigating the Riot Grrrl movement in the early 90’s via their political lyrics, zones and confrontational live show” (bikinikill). The band also released a feminist manifesto in 1991 that supports women creating work for women, encourages women to be in control of themselves, and fights the frustration that they belong in a society where “Girl = Dumb. Girl = Bad. Girl = Weak” (Hanna). Groups like Bikini Kill were representative of many young women who were helping to shape the Third Wave of feminism by living by and promoting principals that supported women.

An important piece of legislation was passed in 1994 called the Violence Against Women Act. This “enhances states’ ability to support and respond to domestic violence, stalking, and sexual assault” (Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art: Feminist Timeline: United States). After domestic violence first came to the forefront in 1972 with articles in *Ms. Magazine*, legislation to actually protect women from violence in their homes was a welcome change, albeit almost 20 years later. Other artists, like playwright/performer/activist Eve Ensler, were also making their mark. Ensler’s play *The Vagina Monologues* had its premiere in 1996, and continues to be produced annually on a global scale, royalty free on Valentine’s Day to raise awareness of violence against women and women’s rights (Home | V-Day: A Global Movement to End Violence Against Women and Girls Worldwide).

On April 26, 2000, the state of Vermont was the first to grant equal rights to same sex couples. This was groundbreaking legislation that not only was a victory for the GLBT Equal Rights campaign, but a reminder that minorities and people who are oppressed must stand in

solidarity with one another. It also gave hope that a bill like the ERA which was defeated decades earlier, might gain victory at some point.

A survey conducted in the year 2000 showed that 41.5% of Americans had internet accessible computers in their homes (File 2). The rapidly changing ‘life online’ was becoming faster and more efficient every day. In 2001, Apple introduced the first digital software for music followed quickly by the iPod and iTunes. By 2007, 62% of Americans had computers and internet in their homes (File 2) and Apple had released the first iPhone, iPod Touch, and a year later iTunes Movie Rentals (Apple). The company Netflix had also capitalized on the speed upgrade in internet service and was now instant streaming movies to homes for a simple monthly subscription. Film, music, and television were being distributed faster than ever before, and independent artists were also gaining ground in producing and distributing their own work with more freedom under their own record labels and production companies. Halle Berry became the first African American woman to win an Academy Award for Best Leading Actress, all the while women were also gaining ground in political arenas. In 2006, Nancy Pelosi was elected as the first female Speaker of the House. In January of 2007, 16 female senators were welcomed into the senate. The 2008 presidential election also brought women to the forefront with Hillary Clinton running as a Democratic Presidential candidate and Republican Sarah Palin running as Vice Presidential nominee with Senator John McCain’s campaign.

Today, technology continues to become more mobile with smartphones, tablets, and portable computers. By 2013, it was estimated that over half of Americans’ own and use smartphones on a daily basis (Stern). Because technology connects humanity with such immediacy, feminists of today have a wealth of instant information simply at their fingertips.

This instant gratification of messages, emails, and photo sharing has also come with its own consequences. A recent scandal involving the leak of nude photos that actress Jennifer Lawrence had privately sent to a boyfriend became national news. Lawrence called the incident a ‘sex crime’, not simply an invasion of privacy (Messer). Although the photos may have never been meant for public distribution, they nevertheless found their way all over the internet. Lawrence has been subject to varying opinions from: “she has every right to have taken and sent them” to “if you didn’t want others to see them, you shouldn’t have taken them in the first place”. This Third and possibly Fourth wave of feminism has come with its own set of rules and challenges regarding the protection and rights of women. Challenges of balancing life between family and career continues to be a point of contention for many women and their families. Legislation on the outlawing of abortion has also reared its head once again in conservative states like North Dakota in recent 2014 elections.

As much headway as women have made in their battle for equal rights, the fight continues for equal pay in the workplace, education opportunities in the sciences, reproductive rights, and the celebration of story lines for independent women in entertainment. As society continues to embrace the technological changes in communication with one another, the dialogue does indeed have reason to continue. Thankfully, the evolution in entertainment mediums are encouraging female artists to create work that contributes to the larger conversation with more immediacy and opportunity.

## CHAPTER 2: THE COMEDIENNE'S BRAND

In the same way that female pioneers have fought for a voice politically and socially, there are also women who have paved the way through male dominated comedy. This is not to say that men in American comedy haven't been welcome and important contributors to entertainment throughout history, but it has taken substantially more time for women to be welcome among these same ranks. Comedy has grown from silent films to musical comedy, to variety shows, TV specials, stand-up, improv troupes, Broadway shows, sitcoms, mini-series and even video blogs. Mirroring the work that women were doing outside of entertainment, a few strong female pillars of comedy have also carved their place in the progression of riotously funny men. These trail blazing farcical females include Carol Burnett, Lily Tomlin, Whoopi Goldberg, Chelsea Handler and Colleen Ballinger.

### 2.1 Carol Burnett

Carol Burnett was born in 1933 and grew up very poor with her grandmother and alcoholic mother in Hollywood, CA. Her father was also an alcoholic and visited infrequently. Although money was tight, she and her grandmother still made regular trips to the movie house where a movie ticket was \$0.35 per person for a double feature. She would see up to eight films a week (Kaminsky 1:42). Burnett would view films like *Casablanca*, *The Philadelphia Story*, *It's a Wonderful Life*, and Disney's *Pinocchio* with lovable stars like "Fred and Ginger and Mickey and Judy" (Kaminsky 1:42:22). What drew Burnett to these works was "that they were optimistic. They were filled with laughter and happy endings" (Kaminsky 1:43:10). This idea of

optimism is what would carry Burnett through her career. She created easy, relatable humor that provided catharsis for the audience during a period of great socio-political unrest.

In the early 1950's, Ms. Burnett attended UCLA to study journalism and acting, but much to her chagrin, the theatre department wasn't the creative home that she had envisioned. The music department did, however, recognize her unique talent and ability to create original comedic moments in their sketch/variety music shows. She would transform standard songs with an unexpected spin and make them her own memorable work. She loved the joy of making people laugh and knew that's what she wanted to continue doing. "I thought whoa! This feels good," Burnett said. "I wanted those laughs to keep on coming forever" (Zongker).

Burnett did not finish her degree, but did go on to pursue her performance career in New York City with her soon-to-be first husband, and fellow actor, Don Saroyan. She did not meet with immediate success in this new competitive environment. After an unsuccessful agent audition, she asked the agent what he thought she should do, to which he replied: "Well, why don't you put on your own show?" (Burnett, "One More Time" 258). This sparked her desire to take charge and create her own work and to continue doing so throughout her career. The first show she created in NYC with her roommates drew enough attention that she was picked up for representation by the prominent William Morris Agency (Burnett, "One More Time" 271) and she subsequently started to book paying work. At her homespun debut, she performed "Monotonous" from *New Faces* but instead of paying homage to its original incarnation, Burnett performed this sexy number as a frumpy, awkward, rollers-in-her-hair old lady who got tangled up in folding chairs as she attempted to seduce the audience (Burnett, "One More Time" 270). She garnered people's attention because she was bold enough to make a choice to stand out. Her

performances, throughout her career, allowed her to her play with gender stereotypes without demeaning herself as a woman. Her primary comedic tool was the creation of memorable characters through antithetical choices.

Ms. Burnett went on to appear as a frequent guest on *The Ed Sullivan Show* and later, *The Gary Moore Show* from 1959-1962 (Burnett, “This Time Together” 335), and at the same time in 1959, made her Broadway debut as Princess Winnefred the Woebegone in *Once Upon a Mattress*. Ms. Burnett’s comedic strengths were fully realized when the CBS network green lighted her very own variety show. She was the first woman to have her own show which ran for 11 seasons from 1967-1978. One of the most memorable sketches, if not, the most memorable, was her spinoff of *Gone with the Wind* entitled: “Went with the Wind”. In this sketch, she performed a pastiche of the Scarlett O’Hara/Rhett seduction scene. Instead of coming down the stairs simply wearing a dress made of the old curtains of the mansion Tara, Carol’s “Starlett” wore the curtains, rod and all.

“That Friday taping will go down in history. When Starlett appeared at the top of the stairs in that getup, the audience went crazy. It has been called one of the funniest moments of the history of television comedy” (Burnett, “This Time Together” 114).

In a stroke of pure comedic genius, this delightful sight gag allowed Burnett to simply walk down the stairs and let the audience enjoy. Ms. Burnett was shrewd to pursue her patent antithetical character choices through the frequent use of sight gags. Very popular at the outset of silent films: “Sight gags involve a play of interpretations. But with sight gags, the play of interpretation is often visually available to the audience simultaneously throughout the gag; the audience need not await something akin to the punchline in a verbal joke to put the interpretive play in motion” (Carroll 147).

Ms. Burnett often capitalized on the costume designs that Bob Mackie created to allow sight gags to establish physical character traits.

“There were times I didn’t have clue about how I was going to play a character until I put on the outfit Bob had cooked up for me. The character of Mrs. Wiggins had originally been written as a somewhat doddering old lady. Bob changed all that. I looked at the drawing...and there was this buxom blonde with a flowered blouse, tight black skirt, stiletto heels and long red fingernails. Instead of seeing her as ancient, he suggested I play her as a bimbo - someone the ‘IQ fairy never visited’. The skinny black skirt was very tight around my knees, but baggy in the behind. Bob suggested, ‘Why don’t you stick out your butt to make it fit?’ And that’s how the ‘Wiggins Walk’ was born. I had found my character” (Burnett, “This Time Together” 113-114).

Ms. Burnett used this collaborative inspiration to spur on her creative power. She knew that she wasn’t alone in the making of good entertainment, and that sometimes the consult and collaboration of a colleague would create a richer entertainment experience for the viewer. While male comedians could create a sketch entirely around coming on stage in a dress, women in pants didn’t create quite the same effect. What Burnett and her team did realize is that a woman in pants was funny if those pants were actually fuzzy cowboy chaps and if those chaps were 4 times larger than normal.

Burnett was a pioneer of comedic branding. Her antithetical interpretations of situations led her to create optimistic fully formed characters that abounded in physical expressiveness and visual humor. But her career longevity was truly a result of her transparency as a human being in front of her audiences. During the lengthy run of *The Carol Burnett Show*, Ms. Burnett would open the show with a question and answer session with the audience. It was that simple. By making herself available to the audience, albeit with a few great punch lines, she made them feel welcome and part of the evening. Adding the personal touch of a left ear pull at the end of every

show was her nod and greeting to her grandmother who lived across the country and could only see her on air.

Ms. Burnett also recognized the benefit of career flexibility. She has a wealth of credits from film, TV, animated film voiceover, TV specials filmed at Carnegie Hall, and stage including multiple Broadway appearances. In 1998, her daughter Carrie suggested that they co-write a play, based on the first half of Ms. Burnett's autobiography Carol Burnett, One More Time, published in 1986. After her daughter's death in January of 2002, the play *Hollywood Arms*, saw its premiere in Chicago that April. (Burnett, *This Time Together* 259). In October, it moved to Broadway, but closed after only 76 performances, as it did not find the same acclaim that Burnett garnered from her more well-known comedic platforms ("At This Theatre: Court Theatre").

Even 50 years later, today's DVD viewer can experience Carol's radiant presence throughout the run of her self-titled variety show. When Ms. Burnett was awarded the Mark Twin Prize for Comedy, Lucy Inez, daughter of Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz, proclaimed that "Truly funny people are believable and Carol is believable" (Kaminsky 10:39). Burnett lets an audience know she's a human, just like everyone in her audience. One wants not only to be entertained by her, but to be a part of the entertainment. Her inviting spirit allows this balance to exist. Further, she paved the way for young comediennees to join the ranks of sketch comedy, telling their own stories via their own unique brands.



## 2.2 Lily Tomlin

A slightly younger contemporary of Carol Burnett's was the Detroit native, Lily Tomlin. Both women built their early careers in New York City, but unlike Carol, Lily found her comedic foothold performing stand-up 'character' comedy in New York City clubs in 1956, after abandoning her degree in medicine. This 'character' branding would become a mainstay of Tomlin's career thanks to her unique skill of mimicry coupled with keen observation of subject matter. Growing up in such a racially and economically diverse neighborhood provided ample fodder for the young player. The realization of the fact that her parents were at one point children, was a game changer for her. In the 1950's she was enthralled with the idea of the women in the 'good' magazines who cooked and cleaned and the women in the 'bad' magazines who talked with words like 'throbbing, sordid, and steamy' (Tomlin & Wagner). She found herself captivated by her neighbors like Mrs. Rupert, a botanist who wore fox furs, even to take out the garbage, who would later influence characters like the 'Tasteful Lady' (Tomlin & Wagner).

Tomlin is best known for the career long characters she cultivated, primarily, Ernestine, Edith Ann, and Trudy the Bag Lady. Tomlin said in a 1994 interview, "I wanted to build a body of material so when I did get famous, I would have an act" (Jane Pauley with Lily Tomlin 5:20). Ernestine and Edith Ann had their debut on the sketch comedy show, *Laugh-In*, where Tomlin was a household name from 1969-1973. *Laugh-In* was a sketch comedy show hosted by Dan Rowan and Dick Martin. The show was much more politically driven and relied on sketches and gags, many of which included sexual innuendo. In comparison to *The Carol Burnett Show*, *Laugh-In* played to a more adult audience. Tomlin's character, Ernestine was a sassy telephone

operator: a direct illustration of a 1950's female position acceptable outside the home. Edith Ann, however, was a five-and-a-half-year-old who sat in a giant rocking chair and told stories about getting in trouble, drawing on her little brother, and the little boys who take their 'pee-pees' out at school (Friendly and Schlatter).

With a reputation for the comedic characters made popular by her television career, Tomlin made her Broadway debut in 1977 with a one woman show entitled, *Appearing Nitely*, co-conceived and written by longtime partner and collaborator, Jane Wagner. In 1985, Tomlin would again appear on Broadway in Wagner's *Search for Intelligent Signs of Life in the Universe* for which she would receive a Tony Award. *Search....Universe* is a fractured biopic of society in the 1980's. The show presents characters like Agnes Angst, a teen punk rocker juxtaposed next to Trudy the bag lady, and Chrissy an aerobics instructor versus Kate a New York housewife with a bad haircut, and the unforgettable granola hippy, Edie. The feminist themes are hard to miss since topics such as young, independent women creating art, life after divorce, single motherhood, societal standards of beauty, and prostitutes' perspectives on men are featured prominently throughout the show, "...All tied together with a crazy bag lady talking to aliens about soup and art" (Spears). Tomlin's gift of mimicry creates such nuanced characters that *Search* even endured the transition to a fully filmed version and Broadway revival in 2000.

Tomlin's character Edith Ann had a successful run as a cartoon in TV specials: "Edith Ann - A Few Pieces of the Puzzle" and "Homeless go Home" (King). Outside of her longtime characters, Tomlin has enjoyed many a role on both big and small screens, but the Lily Tomlin that people remember most of all is the Lily Tomlin embodied in the characters she debuted over 50 years ago. Her characters are her brand. The specificity and intricate life that she and

Wagner have given to each one create such authenticity that one can't help but laugh at their 'real faults' or 'genuine perspectives'. To many, Edith Ann, Ernestine, and Trudy are as real as the woman who inhabits them.

### 2.3 Whoopi Goldberg

With two distinct entertainment paths blazed by Burnett & Tomlin, young female comediennes now had clear options available. However, fellow comedic pioneer, Whoopi Goldberg created her own path by shining in the Blake Street Hawkeyes improv troupe in 1974. Upon moving across the country as a divorced single mother from NYC to LA, Goldberg found her first platform as an improviser and quickly began creating her own work. During the height of the woman's movement, Whoopi quickly became branded as "not simply a stand-up comedian but a satirist with a cutting edge and an actress with a wry attitude toward life and public performance" (Coleman). Like Burnett and Tomlin, Whoopi created a one-woman show with memorable characters, but with a more far-reaching agenda.

When *The Spook Show* made its Broadway debut in 1984, a character like Tomlin's "Edith Ann" was nowhere to be found. In her place was a junkie trying to pan-handle the audience and cursing, a 13 year old surfer chick who aborted her own baby with a hanger, and a little black girl who was trying to create lovely blonde hair because her hair "don't do nuffin', don't blow in the wind" (Coleman). Whoopi's work tackled current issues with a vengeance. Her brand of comedy was indeed still comedy, but with a stronger point of view than her predecessors, especially Burnett's. A year after *Spook Show* had its Broadway run, Whoopi was cast in a revolutionary film, *The Color Purple*. While this movie wasn't a comedy, it gave

Whoopi the opportunity to show her range as an actress and a platform to confront topics like abuse and the tumultuous past of racial inequality. Whoopi's career continued to quickly gain momentum. She co-hosted *Comic Relief* with Robin Williams, a benefit to raise money for the homeless, which was a raging social issue in the late 80's/early 90's. In 1990, Whoopi set a new standard for African American women by being the first to accept the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress for the film *Ghost*. Her career continued on stage and in the movies, but she particularly expanded her television career with a short stint as host of her own talk show, becoming a recurring character on *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, and, most recently, joining daytime talk show *The View* as a moderator in 2007. She has hosted numerous award shows, voiced animated characters, produced films and theatre, and even written children's books. Amidst all her work, a thread of humanitarianism is prominent. She works on behalf of children, the homeless, human rights, education, substance abuse and the battle against AIDS (Kennedy Center). Whoopi's comedic brand paved the way to branch out into more accessible arenas that could support a broader message of care and equality. There was and is a purpose in the joyful glint of her eye.

## 2.4 Chelsea Handler

Almost 15 years after Whoopi moved to LA to start her career, another strong female voice, with a fresh perspective would join the ranks. Chelsea Handler, born in 1975 as the youngest of six children, found out very quickly that to be heard, she had to have something to say that stood out from those around her. As a struggling young comic, Chelsea was known to take risks with both her material and its delivery, changing her work on a nightly basis. She

wasn't afraid of being confrontational or controversial as a minority in her industry. Her act really started to blossom at the crest of the third wave of feminism; therefore her brand of comedy was unapologetic in its approach to female-centric topics. Taking her feminine "assets" to the next level, it is not uncommon to see nude photos of Chelsea taken while she is performing her stand-up routines, or nude, censored video on the E! Network as a part of comic interviews. Chelsea owns her sexual freedom, joy of drinking, and brash observations of herself and others without a second thought. Instead of apologizing for her choices, she stands out with celebration. This outspoken example of female liberation wasn't even possible 30 years prior to her birth. Handler has had critical acclaim as a stand-up comedian as well as host of her late night talk show on the E! network for seven years from 2007-2014 where the topic of sexual conquest seems to appear in every episode. Handler also found that her brand readily and successfully transfers to a written medium. Handler is a best seller with her books like: Chelsea, Chelsea, Bang, Bang and Are You There Vodka? It's Me, Chelsea... Handler has said that she writes how she speaks so it's not that tough of a transition ("Chelsea Joy Handler"). Her national tours play to sold out crowds and she recently signed an exclusive contract with Netflix to produce specials for the company that can be live-streamed to an even broader audience. Handler is the captain of her production ship and continues to explore opportunities as a producer as well as performer. Her honest branding could be summed up in the statement, "I am woman, hear me roar!" Chelsea Handler stands up for women by being unapologetic about her idiosyncrasies and providing a relational space for people to celebrate their own. She provides another stepping stone for young comedienues to take control of their destinies.

## 2.5 Colleen Ballinger

As the technological world has progressed, an interesting new trend of young people have also emerged; they are called 'YouTubers'. The creation of YouTube in 2005 in tandem with personal devices with decent filming capacity, quickly gave way to an opportunity for anyone to film themselves and post their work online. For Colleen Ballinger, the creator of Miranda Sings, what first started as a joke for her friends has since become a substantial career for the young comedienne. Ballinger started Miranda as a retort to young performers who filmed themselves singing in their bedrooms and posted their performances online, when in fact they were quite poor performers. She created Miranda as an alter ego who is "a five-threat who sings, dances, acts, is a model and magician" (MY DAY. MY LIFE. 6:05). In reality, she sings out of tune while living under the impression that she will indeed be famous. Falling in line with comediennes before her, Ballinger's Miranda is an intricate character with an in-depth family history, over-drawn lipstick, and eyebrow movements that seem to function with their own personalities entirely. Ballinger confesses that Miranda is wildly similar to her and that much of her material comes from Ballinger's real life (MY DAY. MY LIFE. 0:50). Her YouTube channel has almost 3 million subscribers with millions and millions of hits compiling on her two channels. Miranda is such a well-developed character that many people thought she was a genuine person ridiculously self-promoting when she couldn't actually sing. Ballinger continued to flesh out this character with segments completely comprised of tweets and feedback from her 'Haters'. With online sketches ranging from Miranda giving ludicrous makeup tutorials, to instructing others in voice lessons, to performing celebrity impressions, there's a little something

for everyone. Miranda has universal appeal because the lens with which she examines the world is truly unique and quirky. She is surprising.

Ballinger has since translated Miranda to full on-stage acts and toured internationally doing so. Ballinger continues to sustain a 'straight' performance career and speaks to how much her exposure with Miranda has brought other opportunities her way, but it truly is with Miranda that she has found success. Jerry Seinfeld recently hosted her on his own comedy web series which then led to an appearance on the *Late Night with Jimmy Fallon Show*. Ballinger confesses that she "never envisioned that she would make a career as a comedienne, but that she couldn't imagine her life without making people laugh" (MY DAY. MY LIFE. 5:45). This young comedienne has climbed her way into the ranks of the comedic greats from very humble beginnings in less than five years because of the immediate technological accessibility of her material. Although she has made a career from videos she films in her bedroom, she continues to be passionate about relating to her fans in person as well and hopes to continue to branch out into film and TV as a role model for young kids (MY DAY. MY LIFE. 6:52).

Looking at the progression from Carol Burnett to Colleen Ballinger, it is encouraging as a female comedienne to see how each one has made her stamp on the entertainment world. Based on their position in feminist history, they all have succeeded in providing entertainment for the greater public through times less than humorous, but they have also found strength in their own voice to speak on behalf of their greater personal agendas. All five of the aforementioned women are not only entertainers but entrepreneurs in their own right. They have held their own within a male dominated industry, but have also created sustainability within their careers by

simultaneously branding themselves as artists and businesses through the emerging media of their respective times.



### CHAPTER 3: ANNA CAROL AND AUNT NONA

I am an observer of the world and that ability is one of the most important tools to possess as a performer. In my quest to build my career, I have looked to other women whom I admire. I found myself drawn to Carol Burnett, Whoopi Goldberg, Lily Tomlin, Chelsea Handler, and Colleen Ballinger; each a comedic pioneer in her own right, with a successful career crafted in a unique way. What they all have in common is that they became the primary visionary of their careers. Each of them capitalized on their unique perspective with solo work in different entertainment mediums which opened the gateway to broader opportunities. In an interview, Ballinger said that she was encouraged “not to ride the wave that she had created, but take control of the direction in which it was going” (Colleen Ballinger (AKA "Miranda Sings") 3:14). This idea resonated with me and is what fueled the creation of Aunt Nona and her first foray into the public eye in *An Evening with Aunt Nona*.

As a character actress crossing the threshold into her 30's, it has become very clear to me that I spend many of my days auditioning for others and waiting for them to give me a job. It is a wonderful thing to work as a professional performer, and I have been fortunate to sustain the career that I have had thus far, but the fact of the matter is that I am often not in control of my livelihood. As the second oldest child of five, my parents have always been wildly supportive of my career, but they also made it very clear to me that I needed to figure out how to support myself. My gypsy life as a performer didn't mean that I could avoid being a functioning member of society. I had responsibilities and bills and wants and needs and trying to sustain a career where jobs literally come and go every six to eight weeks can be a very tough life to lead, especially when contracts don't align concurrently. I've become quite skilled at working

‘survival’ jobs to pay the bills, but there is great joy in the thought that I could be more in control of my artistic livelihood if I was indeed steering my own ship with my own work.

When considering one’s performance career, one must define and accept one’s “type”. An actors’ “type” defines a performer into a certain category of character with which they are appropriate to play based on look and personal characteristics. Differences of sex, height, weight, and vocal type make a difference when directors and casting agents look for a Cinderella in a Disney musical versus Queen Anne in Shakespeare’s *Richard III*. Within my personal type there are certain physical realities I must acknowledge. I am 5’5” tall, have blue eyes and long blonde hair and an hourglass figure. I am Caucasian (of Scandinavian heritage), have a legit soprano and belter voice type, and fit somewhere between the ages of 25 and 45. Beyond my physical type, directors have branded my type as: honest, able to make bold brave choices, possessing comedic timing and a sensitive vulnerability. All of these characteristics both physical and perceptual have a distinct effect on my castability. This is a career where if I’m too tall, I don’t have to be hired; If someone doesn’t like the timbre of my voice, I don’t have to be hired; If I’m not willing to cut my hair, I don’t have to be hired. This profession is one where I encounter judgment on a daily basis and often about things that are inherently and uniquely me, but cannot be changed. I am on a constant quest to fit into someone else’s mold and vision of a character, and so the question has become: How can I, instead of judging everything about myself and trying to fit into someone else’s character, create a character and performance that is designed to capitalize on who I am and what I have to offer in performance?

The women whose careers I have explored and admired all created work for themselves, initially, through solo performance. They took the very characteristics of their individual types

and capitalized on their unique differences. Instead of trying to fit in another's mold, they built their own with their own personal material. With this inspiration, I ventured forth with creating a show for Aunt Nona. The concept of creating unique material was terrifying when I began the process of Aunt Nona's creation. What if my perspective wasn't particularly interesting? What could I write about that would keep anyone's attention? Could I entertain them to the point of generating laughter, especially for an hour? I again turned back to the mentorship of female comedic performers that came before me. Carol Burnett wanted to create an optimistic outlet in which people could escape. Lily Tomlin made it ok for female characters to be funny without being self-deprecating. Whoopi Goldberg spoke with a strong socio-political agenda. Chelsea Handler claimed her feminism and femininity with boldness. Colleen Ballinger reaches millions of viewers with joy and foolishness about the entertainment industry itself. How could these pioneers' paths help me find my unique voice? The answer came in the exploration of what has been most important to me in my life and the struggles and successes therein. Much like my comedic mentors had done, I found that holding up a mirror to myself, and thereby the truth, couldn't help but produce a fountain of material.

I grew up in the suburbs of Minneapolis, MN with my large family. I spent my undergraduate career in northern Minnesota on the border of Fargo, North Dakota. In my studies there, I had created an overly exaggerated northern accent that my friends and family deemed as funny to listen to when I would use it. This vocal pattern was the foundation of Aunt Nona, although she was unnamed at the time. Her name came out of the fact that I had played two characters in my graduate career that happened to be Aunts to other characters in the play. The

name Nona was born during a silly brainstorming session for names that had a pronounced “O” in them since it is the most noticeably modified vowel in the North Dakotan accent.

When I graduated in 2007 from undergrad, the economy was in a downward spiral and the U.S. entered a significant economic recession. I remember how hard my friends and I struggled to find jobs that seemed to have been promised to us as college students. They had simply disappeared by the time we had graduated. Somehow I had managed to scrape together a performance career relatively quickly, even in a broken economy while I watched friends who had graduated from more prestigious universities than I, struggle to find even part time jobs that had nothing in common with the education to which they had committed. Actors were not the only ones trying to find work. It was and is an issue for many people. Given my own experiences in the work force and the relatability of the search for work, and thereby meaning, I discovered that the greatest thematic thread for Nona’s show would be to explore her desire to find her life’s purpose. What was Aunt Nona supposed to do with her life when nothing seemed to really be suited to her unique perspective and abilities?

The bulk of Aunt Nona’s show moves through her stories of jumping from one job to another, seemingly failing at each one, but making light of her foibles and laughing at the outcomes. She talks about the importance of her family, being a middle child, her love of baking and the Food Network. She speaks to how much she hates cats and is terrified to travel. She giggles through the plight of falling in love with gay men, struggling with weight, and the joy and acceptance she has for her gay, drag queen nephew. She is proud to educate non-northerners about the bliss that can be found in ‘coffee and bars’ and a neighborhood meat raffle.

At first glance, I wasn't convinced that I was saying anything wildly 'important' in this piece. What I have discovered is that I speak to things that have been important in my life and they are indeed worth talking about. The fact that 85% of my friends happen to be gay and that equality for all continues to be a hot topic in society made the moments that Nona speaks about the love and acceptance of her nephew important and relevant. She also speaks to the continued and ever evolving conversation about where a woman's role should be: inside or outside the home. Her stance is that they're both necessary. In our community where the Millennial Generation is constantly scolded for being lazy and arrogant and unwilling to find solace in dead end jobs, Nona offers encouragement and the idea of new possibilities to her nieces and nephews.

Aunt Nona's voice and brand is not condescending or self-deprecating. She doesn't swear and she loves Jesus. She's as equally naïve as she is progressive and clear-headed. Her humor lives in malapropisms and stories that seem to trail off and yet, miraculously, return to completion several minutes later. Nona is also highly interactive with her audience. In the same way that Whoopi's shows mildly morph depending on audience reaction, or entire moments created in the moment like Handler's standup or Ballinger's channel, Nona is flexible and depends on her audience to contribute to her stories. There is no fourth wall. She even goes as far to invite audience members on stage with her. The Twitter feed to promote Nona's show has been: Part standup, part improv, part theatre all wrapped up in 55 minutes with your favorite North Dakotan Aunt.

Those who have seen my show have asked how much of it is 'true'. What was exciting about the creation of this piece is that 80% of Nona's show is autobiographical but has been

creatively fictionalized. Aunt Nona is an amalgamation of my sisters, my aunts, my mother, my grandmothers, my friends, and most certainly me. I think that is what makes her easy for me to play is that she isn't a 'real' person, but she absolutely comes from real people. I have met people just like her in my life. She's a character, but not a caricature. In most of the brainstorming and creation of her character, I would spend hours around tables, in cars, and in living rooms simply talking to my friends as Aunt Nona. She's not meant to be goofy for the sake of being goofy. She's a real person who cares about those around her and wishes to share her own perspective on the world. She exists in the same way that Tomlin's Edith Anne exists, or Ballinger's Miranda. My goal in the creation of Nona was to build a character to whom people can relate and with whom they can feel comfortable sharing laughs and tears. She is the understanding "universal" Aunt for whom we all pine.

As an actor, I am often thousands of miles from my family. I have missed many major family events during extended acting contracts. I think that creating this show is, in many ways, an homage to my family and their support of my career even though it is frequently long distance. Aunt Nona creates a vehicle for me to commune with them from afar. In much the same way that Carol Burnett would tug her ear to greet her grandmother from the screen, there are special nuggets that reference my family throughout the text. If an audience listens carefully and knows anything about my family, they might be able to pick some of them out, but widely, the names, dates, and comments that I fleetingly reference are for me. They are my version of an ear pull.

What excites me about Aunt Nona is that she is a character with the capacity to develop as I do and that she could indeed have a future beyond this inaugural show. While I am unsure

as to the exact format of a second incarnation of Aunt Nona, I've always been excited about doing a cabaret, and am curious if I could host and perform one as Nona. Adding a musical component to her performance could be another interesting outlet for this character to tackle. Who knows what insights she could share musically? As I reflect on the ways that female comediennes have built and performed on their individual platforms with purpose, I feel compelled to do the same. I don't have to yell obscenities, take my clothes off, create multiple characters, or even keep my platform on stage, but I do have a duty to use my voice. For the last 100 years, women have sacrificed for me more than I ever realized, and it would be a disservice to not share my voice with a laugh and heart.

## CHAPTER 4: THE CREATION OF AUNT NONA – A JOURNAL

I knew at the start of my graduate career that I wanted to do a one-woman show and incorporate it into my thesis. For years I had toyed with the idea, but had never actually executed the plan. I knew that grad school would be a place where I would have to set timelines for myself and make it happen. It's amazing what I can accomplish on a timeline! In my first year of school I created a clown named Paper and created a 30 minute solo piece where she connected directly with her audience in a tangible way, but didn't use spoken text. The piece revolved thematically around how we raise our children: The aspirations we have for them, how we teach them right and wrong, how we wish to guide them in spiritual ways, but then how in the end, there are factors beyond our control that will always affect our kids. The piece turned out to be rather comedic in nature but also quite tragic at the end with the death of Paper in the illustration of a probable school shooting. I was pleased with the piece at its completion, but decided after the final performance that this wasn't a piece that I wanted to expand to a larger format. That said, it was a wonderful jumping off point and re-enforcement that I had the potential to create something unique.

February 2013:

During Spring semester, I had also worked on some of Lily Tomlin and Jane Wagner's *Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe*. At that point, I was strongly considering learning that whole show and producing it for my thesis project. I was excited by the idea, but knew that something didn't feel quite right. If I ever wanted to perform it outside of a one-night, academic performance at UCF, I was going to have to pay rights on the material. Now, I



completely support paying the original artist for use of their works, but I knew I wanted something that was mine. I didn't want to worry about using something someone else owned. I wanted my own package.

April 2013:

At the very end of the semester, we had a solo-performer and UCF alumnus, Kelly Kinsella, spend a class period with our voice class. She took us through a few exercises, and one in particular where we had to get up and tell a 2 minute story with 30 seconds to prep. It wasn't about how great of a story we could tell, it was about identifying what kind of storyteller we are. Some classmates were very poetic, some observational about the world, mine was close to home. My family was part of my immediate response. Kelly spoke to that immediately after I got done with my story. That I wasn't afraid to be personal, and that there was an openness with how my family was clearly important to me. The final exercise she took us through that day was to tell a 3 minute story about a moment that brought us the most happiness, and then at the height of the story, we had to break into a song. I told the story about how when I was leaving my high school job to come to grad school, my students had made a video for me where each student gifted me three words that described me or my relationship with them. One student, a 17 year old boy that I had worked with for three years held up three words: Changed My Life. At this point in the story, I was crying, as were members of my class, and then I broke into the song My Girl. It was a pretty moving experience for me, but I did not know then how much those two exercises would impact the creation of my own piece.

June 2013:

I spent the summer between my first and second year of grad school with eight terrific weeks of travel. I trained with the Great Lakes Michael Chekhov Consortium and started my certification in Chekhov technique. I had a week of really terrific physical and imaginative play and met wonderful artists and teachers from all over the world. I then spent a week in New York City. I took in the city; Absorbing the feeling of different neighborhoods. I gave myself a week to people-watch and acknowledge how people nap on the subway after a long day at work. I saw young students using the subway with freedom like I had with a car in high school. They used public transportation with much more tenacity than I think I could have at their age. I witnessed music, and breakdancing, and other buskers throughout the city on a moment to moment basis. I tried to simply absorb the art around me.

July 2013:

I then went to Europe for 4 weeks. I spent a week in France and then 3 weeks back and forth between Austria and Germany in the Bavarian Alps. I was there for a musical theatre intensive, and to experience Europe for the first time in my life. I found myself surrounded by new languages, customs, people, personalities, great beer, dancing, music, and the opportunity to perform for people who knew nothing about me. I befriended a great American guy named Derek. He and I were the elders in the musical theatre track. We shared many a night where we sat over glasses of wine and discussed what we felt like we really had to offer to the world and to the arts that we so ferociously desired to be a part of on a professional level. Derek has a voice

like a dream but sometimes doesn't know how to interpret with integrity. I'm a solid actor, but sometimes have to beg forgiveness for audacious notes. We balanced and had lots to learn from each other as we grew through the three weeks abroad. Upon arriving back to the USA, I felt like I could conquer the world. I felt like I really had something special to offer as an entertainer and artist, and I was impatient with the idea of going back to school for the second year. I wrote my parents halfway through my time in Germany and told them I might be moving directly to NYC when I got home.

Early Fall 2013:

I felt like I was in crisis. I wanted to be working, not in school. I had countless conversations with people I love and admire, and tried to figure out: Where am I supposed to be going? Where am I supposed to be right now? When will I know that where I am right now is the right place to be? At one particular dinner with Dr. Steve, one of the UCF faculty, we talked about holding tight to those who I can feel supported from this year, and that it's really only one year to get through and then I'll be on to my residency. I also talked about wanting to do a cabaret or solo show with music after the terrific, musical theatre filled month of July I had just had. I explained that I also had a character that I had created with a North Dakotan accent, but that I didn't know how to work her into the show. I felt like she had a place there, but wasn't sure how to make it work. Dr. Steve is actually the one who came up with the title: *An Evening with Aunt Nona*. He also coined the line: "My mom told me there is a Broadway in every city in the United States. Some are meant for New York and some are meant for Kansas City." Perhaps it was her cabaret, but on Broadway in Fargo, ND. Perhaps she didn't sing that well. Perhaps she

could tell funny stories and tie them to the songs in some way. I didn't know exactly what her show was at that point, but I knew I had a leading lady and a title. I also knew that I had some questions:

- Can midwestern humor translate to a broader audience?
- What is Nona questioning? Is this a satire? Or real questions?
- Is there a star in every city?
- Gender and Humor - feminist?
- Religious standpoint? - church stories?
- Why is the music important in telling her story?
- Why are her stories important?
- Is her Broadway a win or a settle?
- When do we celebrate or empathize?
- Does she know she's funny?
- Can Midwestern Ideals exist in the big city? What challenges her?
- I wasn't quite ready. When will I be ready?

Mid October-Early November 2013:

It was at that point that I enlisted a director for the project. I called my friend Josh Gold who is a UCF alum and now a NYC based director. I asked if he would be willing to be on board to work on this project, even though I didn't know exactly what it was at that time. He

was excited about the potential of it, and agreed to do it, knowing that he was going to help keep me organized and have someone to whom I could be held accountable.

Then came the writing process, which was so painful. Throughout October and November, I would say something funny and write it into a running notepad on my phone. “Oh, Aunt Nona could say that. Save that for later.” That’s when I started to understand what her humor was. Nona has the ability to see the world so clearly at some moments, and others are quite skewed. She has opinions about safety and Jesus and speeding and motorcycles. One of the first jokes I wrote, that never made it into the show, was, “If you can't go that fast on your own 2 feet, you shouldn't be doing it on a motorcycle.” It doesn’t make any real sense, but somehow there’s reason behind it. I went on adding silly anecdotes to my notes, but nothing was really coming together. I was also meeting with Dr. Steve on a weekly basis trying to find potential music I could sing in my show, but nothing really seemed to be sticking there for me either. I felt stuck.

November 11, 2013:

I called Josh and tried to work through some of my blockage. How could this show actually work? He then told me about a solo show that he had seen, that still lives very vividly with him, about a performer getting ready to do a drag show. The audience watched a man in his bathroom go through the transformation from normal guy to fancy lady and that transformation almost snuck up on the audience throughout the piece. There was something about the idea of getting ready that stuck out to me. A week later, I called Josh back and said, “what if we never actually see Aunt Nona’s show? What if we see her getting ready for it, and the getting ready is

the vehicle in which she tells her stories? What if this isn't a cabaret at all? What if she's simply a person talking to an audience?" Josh said he loved the idea and that it would also provide good parameters for the piece. If I set up the convention that she only has an hour to get ready before 'her show,' then I have a real 60 minute boundary in which to create. It provides a structure of action and an immediacy to keep the piece moving. At that point, I did want to still sing a number at the end of the show. Perhaps we got to see the opening number of Aunt Nona's cabaret. I wasn't sure what that number would be.

December 2013:

At the beginning of December, I also started reading, researching and watching female comedic performers. I started with Carol Burnett's biographies and huge wealth of work from stage to small screen to big screen. She is one smart performer. She's brilliant at sight gags, physical comedy, and specific characters. She's a show-woman of highest caliber in my opinion. I also revisited *Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe* and some of Lily Tomlin's other work. Ms. Tomlin has tremendous strength in creating compelling and usually quite comedic characters. They are what drive her work and have sustained most of her career. I didn't stop there. I looked at Joan Rivers, and Chelsea Handler, and Melissa McCarthy, Amy Poehler, Tina Fey, Lucille Ball, Bette Midler, Ellen Degeneres, Vicky Lawrence, and Whoopi Goldberg. What I began to really figure out is that every one of these women have a very specific brand of comedy out of which they have made their careers. Reading Ellen's book in comparison to Chelsea's, it's like night and day. Chelsea is so crass and blunt. Her first chapter is about masturbating as an eleven year old. Ellen's book is full of quick wit and gentle humor.

Never poking fun at anyone else, but always having a bit of a spin in response. I'm never quite sure what to expect will happen in her standup, TV programming, or written work. All of this exploration brought me back to what the visiting artist had said to me last spring: that I had a gravity toward my family and the world in which I was rooted. Further, I had an open heart and was willing to share my private space with complete strangers. I've also known for some time that I have good physical and comedic timing. I'm not afraid to take a big risk and embarrass myself for the sake of a good joke. So how was all of this going to fit into this show?

January 10, 2014:

Josh and I spoke today and he asked how everything was going...reminding me I had a performance date scheduled for the end of March. I had sent him a very rough couple pages of text. I wouldn't even call it a script at that point, but really a few stories that I had fleshed out. After perusing the text, Josh said to me, "I don't think the style in which Nona communicates is the problem. The actual storytelling isn't the issue. Why do you want to do this piece? What is the purpose of this whole project? What makes this solo show important? What does it contribute?" Well, those questions were some of the hardest to address. I didn't know...or I thought I didn't. I talked about failure. I talked about how I graduated from undergrad in the middle of a recession and how I have friends that still haven't found jobs even though they have great degrees from expensive schools. I felt fortunate because I felt like I actually had direction in my life and the fact that I had been as successful as I have been in the last seven years in my chosen career. So what is this piece about? I think it's about trying to find your way. Everyone struggles to find the answer and the path on which their life is about to travel. At that moment, I

knew, that's what Nona's obstacle would be. She's trying to find her way, any and every way she can. She disguises her struggle with humor and innocence, but really, she's just as "busted" as everyone else. I had decided at that point that one of Nona's failed jobs was that of a baker. Josh asked, "what if the tragedy of the show is that her bars simply aren't any good? That she thinks that they are, and lives in this bliss, but then finally has the realization that she has failed at that too?" There was something deeply tragic to me about this idea. What if the bars really aren't any good? At the base idea that cookies, cake, or sweets provide comfort or celebrate special occasions, and the fact that Nona can't even get that right...could this work?

After that conversation, I started to dig into the biblical idea that some people have one gift and some people have many, but it is our responsibility to use any and all gifts to their fullest potential...and what if Aunt Nona realizes that she only has one...and still doesn't know what it is?

January 15, 2014:

I wrote a song that Nona will sing at the end of the show. I came up with the lyrics and melody and sent them to my friend Ben in New Mexico to put to music. I feel good about what the song says:

Just one?  
Is it only, just one? One? Just? Simply? Just. One.  
Is that all I get...and if so, I haven't found it yet.

Just give me one...I'm not asking for a thousand.  
Just one. One thing uniquely mine.  
That just for a moment, one might simply stand aside.



When I'm up front, with arms out wide,  
Just me, myself, and I  
Just one!

The wise ones say, "It's simple. Dig down deep, and the water will come.  
Say your prayers and be grateful for your days.  
That you're here. You're alive.  
That not everyone can be the cream that will rise."

So I've waited and watched  
and I listened and ran  
and I crawled and I won  
and I failed...not just once.  
But I did and I drive  
and I scream and I climb  
and I fall and I love  
and I hate and I bark  
and I cry and I save  
and I spend and I wait  
and I want...just...one....simply?...just one.

One purpose to guide where my next turn will be.  
One gift that I know I can give.  
One moment to stand proud and speak from my heart  
To know how it is I can live!

Just give me one! I'm not asking for a thousand!  
Just one! One thing uniquely mine!  
That just for a moment, one might simply stand aside.  
That I'm up front, with arms out wide,  
Just me, myself, now and I  
Just one! Even simply!  
Just one! That I know where my river should run.  
Just one! Simply. Simply. Just. One.

So great. I have a song. Now about the rest of the script....

February 10, 2014:

Tonight Josh and I had another Facetime date. Technology is awesome. I told him I still feel super stuck with the writing process. I didn't know where to start or end. He suggested that we think of some other professions at which Nona has failed. Here are notes from the evening:

- Church singles meet and greet
- Makeup artist - drag video tutorial
- Speech therapist
- Baker
- Dog walker
- Gynecologist office assistant - tried to help with a procedure? Delivered test results. You got genital herpes
- Florist - white is not an appropriate color for a flower. Roses should only be red.
- Travel agent aka secret agent - superhero. Didn't get a cape and mask.
- Cat sitter - feed and spend time with them. That is the important part. Spending time. Never really spent time with them and actually really hates them. Why would anyone want that? Didn't know you had to scoop poop. Couldn't figure out why cat smelled so bad. Bad hygiene. Social anxiety disorder because cats didn't want to spend time with her.
- Bridal consultant - too honest of a consultant. Firm belief that no one looks good in white. Tried my best, but no one looks good in white.
- Tried to wait tables. Didn't actually bring out the correct food but on purpose.

- Wedding photographer: hate weddings. Jobs that are related stems back to relationship that did or did not happen.

Other thoughts:

- I didn't know that Jewish people existed anymore....
- Journey and pattern. Things that come back and come back. Call backs of jokes.
- In sections of three, 9 major sections which coincide with getting ready
- Generational tension

March 1, 2014:

I have to perform this show in 27 days, and I'm terrified. I still don't have it written. I keep promising Josh pages, but I don't have anything to give him! I sent him the character analysis that I had started on her, to better understand who she is, but I just can't get it together. I'm super busy with *Nicholas Nickleby* still going on, but I can't use that as an excuse. This show has to happen!

March 3, 2014:

I spoke with my friend Madde Gibba tonight. She is a brilliant comedienne who I met in Minneapolis but who now lives in New York City. I told her of my frustration with trying to write and she basically told me that I have to trust myself and just make myself do it! Make it my job. I also explained that I'm terrified about the fact that I'm marketing a funny show. What if people don't think it's funny? We talked a lot about the fact that real people are funny. If I feel like I have something to say and know that there is a creative spin with how to say it...I'll

know when it feels good. Audiences laugh when there is relationship. When they feel like they can relate to the tragedy that they are witnessing, but can feel glad that it's not them. She also assured me that if I earn the funny in an honest way, I will also earn the moments of tenderness. Write a person...not a caricature and blown up figure of a person.

She also talked about the fact that writing comes from a different muscle group...and clearly not one that I exercise all the time. "First lesson. You're not a writer if you don't f\*\*\*ing write." And she was right...no pun intended. I hadn't even been giving myself the opportunity to fail because I hadn't taken the time to even set the pen to the paper. I have to write if I want/need to write. The character is already inherently within me... I have to trust her stories...my stories. Write what I know and what feels right.

March 15, 2014:

I wrote the play. I sat down for 7 hours, locked in a coffee shop, and wrote the play. I think everything is there. Josh gets here in five days and we get to work. We're going to function on an Equity schedule. Scheduled eight hours of rehearsal per day. I predict it will be an exhausting seven days, but seems absolutely manageable for an hour long piece...hopefully.

March 21, 2014: Rehearsal

Tonight was my first rehearsal with Director, Josh Gold and I couldn't be more thrilled. The first hour of rehearsal was a sit down chat with Tara, my thesis Chair, and we carefully combed through my abstract and made sure that the academic value and contribution of my work

to future artists is relevant and pointed. The biggest decision made is the fact that I am breaking down female comedic performers by category of performance:

Character based and Clowning

Kind

Domineering Angry Feminist and Potty talk

Self Deprecation

I will be able to explore 7 comediennes: Carol Burnett, Lily Tomlin, Whoopi Goldberg, Joan Rivers, Melissa McCarthy, Tina Fey, and Ellen Degeneres and looked at their careers based on category. It will also be important to look at their careers and the manipulation of them in comparison to what was happening in history throughout their lives, where career changes may or may not fall in regards to waves of the feminist movement and in regards to how the entertainment industry may have been changing throughout history as well. All 7 of these women have had longstanding careers and careers that jumped from medium to medium. How could the relationship between style, socio-economics, feminism, and entertainment provide clues to future comedic women to navigate their careers? Not that we can predict the future, but the possibility that being aware of the world around us can provide clues as to where a comedic career may go is exciting to contemplate.

We then talked about the necessity of me working with Josh as my director for this piece. In the same way that I have a Thesis Chair mentoring this creation and writing process, it is imperative to have another set of eyes in the execution of this one-woman show. I was feeling a

little trapped and lonely by this point in the process. Josh and I have been in conversation about this show since November, and he has been great about asking questions. Why do this project? Knowing that this piece will be able to be broken apart regarding comedic style will be important to identify and purposefully craft into the work.

Tara and Josh were both present for the first read of “An Evening with Aunt Nona”. It was the first time that I had read it out loud for another person. So much of my writing process was moments of improvisation with friends, so having to organize my thoughts and put them out all at once was both frightening and exciting. I knew that I had a script and stories and ideas that worked in their own right, but it was a little tough to hear it all together. (Especially after leaving it alone for a little while.) After Tara left, Josh and I talked about how the flow of the second half had a better flow and heartbeat of who Nona really is vs. the first half of the piece. The charm in this character is the naiveté that she holds but also a quick wit. How could we make her type of humor apparent from the start? We also broke down how many stories I was using in each section of the show. The show functions under major action changes:

- The Entrance
- Unpacking
- Wigs
- Hot rollers
- Cold Cream
- Dressing Robe
- Hot Rollers take out
- Put on makeup

- Change clothes
- Shoes
- Wig brushing
- Showtime

We then started at the beginning. I was surprised that I really didn't re-write very much, but more-so re-crafted the puzzle. Most of the changes we made were simply taking one story and moving it to a different order and finessing transitions. There was too much bulk in story at the front end of the show in the first 4 sets of actions or so. I also experienced the writer's pain of cutting a joke or 5 that I really liked, but just didn't serve the play. If it stands in the way, no matter how funny it may be, it won't make it better. But there's always room to put something back in if we find a new place for it. After 4.5 hours, we had worked through half the script and reading it through, I felt much more comfortable with the work. I felt like it was really starting to tell the story that had a flow. We kept pieces highlighted where we knew that jokes need to be added or more finessing is needed, but the first half of the show is starting to feel like the same person telling the story as the second half. We also found a couple other, what we're calling "anchor points" where the real human fear or intimacy or vulnerability has a chance to come out, the real moments that we can relate to Nona. The heartbeat of why we are telling the story in the first place.

What also was exciting was the fact that as we were doing the 'final read' of the evening, there were still extra add-ins and moments of improvisation. I have a feeling this will continue throughout the next week as we progress and flesh out Aunt Nona. The improvisation and living

character that develops as I work is part of the fun and further supports how I work and create as a performer. Allowing spur of the moment impulse to support my work and then finding when to edit it is exciting!

The plan for tomorrow is to continue table work and re-drafting and hopefully be on my feet by Sunday if not before. I am thrilled with the progress we made tonight. My brain and creative juice is exhausted. I think that means I'm working. I'm so glad to have Josh and Tara's support with this show. It wouldn't happen on Friday if not for both of them.

March 22, 2014 Rehearsal:

We picked up right where we left off yesterday. Did a quick read through of the pages we "maneuvered" yesterday and continued forward. I am grateful in this process for the fact that I have another set of eyes, and Josh is coming at this process with such freshness. Every moment that I feel overwhelmed or can't tell if we're making a positive change or simply a change, he reminds me that we're working on a play. It's supposed to be fun. It's art. It's play. It's not going to cure cancer, but it should/could bring light to it for a moment. No one is going to die making this play. So let it be simply that, play.

We knew that there was less manipulation of the script in the second half of the play. That it already had an inherent flow that worked better than the first few pages. What I found super surprising was that a section that I originally had towards the end of the play, we moved way towards the front. Even more surprisingly, the very first piece I had placed in the play we had cut the day before and moved it to the very end. And it fits there. It makes sense.



Throughout this whole re-working process, I really removed very little and didn't have to rewrite new things on the spot. Almost all the content was there, it was just a matter of what order it fits and how to transition from one to another. I suspect that this ease of manipulation will continue in the next couple of days as we put everything up on its feet. There were a few more casualties of small jokes that we've cut from the piece, but it's really clear when they don't serve the play...and if it doesn't serve the purpose and flow of the play, then it's "self-indulgent" to keep it.

The biggest surprise of today is that, as of right now, I've cut the final song. This is an element that I always thought would be there. From conception of this piece over a year ago, I always thought there would be music and much more than even now. What I have discovered is that it doesn't serve this play. Because it is that, it's a play. This show is not a cabaret. It's an evening with Aunt Nona. It is a glimpse of this wonderful, "busted", human who has a vehicle to talk about her life in preparation of the show, but the point of this show, is not Nona's show. It's a night to experience her. How she tackles life with humor, but then also where we get to see those little cracks of humanity. Where is there real pain? Where is there real joy? Where is there real fear? I want Nona's show to work because there is a point of view, not because it's a perfect package. It's important to me that the audience does get to leave with a question. We're left wondering if she makes it. I hope that it celebrates the human struggle and life that we all are trying to navigate. That comedy can and does come from very vulnerable places in life.

I worried that since I didn't have a super dramatic or traumatic childhood, I wouldn't be able to tap into a painful place to then create comedy, but the fact is - I have real fear in my life. I have real fear of this project! I have real doubts some days of what I do and where I'm going.

Isn't that just as valid a fear as being kidnapped or having a parent die at a young age? I think it may be.

We continue to seek out and finesse the first hook in the play. After seeing *Pluto* at Orlando Shakes tonight, it was another example, of, needing the first hook to land. The piece that connects the audience to the character and makes them want to continue on the ride is essential. The first 5 pages or so of *Pluto* didn't land right away. The language seemed cumbersome and like the actors were fighting it. So, how could that have been finessed? How could we have been more easily invited in the first page? Jim even talked about that when doing *Nicholas Nickleby*. How important it was for the first joke to land and to allow the laugh to happen. If we alienate our audience vs. inviting them to come for the ride, they don't feel permission to laugh, to cry, to participate. I think the hook for Nona will come in some of the first physical bits that we'll be able to start getting on their feet tomorrow.

We've accomplished so much in the last two days. It's hard for me to be objective about the script anymore since I've been so absorbed in it for the last 4 months, and longer really, but Josh assures me that it is working. He did send me home with about 8 sections to provide some finessing and rewrites tonight, but the flow is working. The story I'm trying to tell makes sense; which is great news and as a partner and collaborator, this is where I have to trust him. I have to go in ready to make choices and play and trust that he will continue to help shape what I can't always see. I'm so grateful he's here. I feel much more in control, at ease and that the idea that I have to perform this in front of people in 6 days, doesn't feel so scary. I can do it. We will do it together.

March 23, 2014 Rehearsal:

Today we started with creating the space. Part of the joy of the show should be that it can be performed essentially anywhere. I need a keyboard, a table, a couple chairs, and something to change clothes behind, but other than that, the space should look like a closet. Odds and ends. It's not Nona's space. She has to make it her own.

We also continued to track where "actions" meets "story". I have 3 major playing spaces: table, piano, and center. One of our goals in crafting will be to make the use of space dynamic. Our goal for the first day was to get blocked through the first 4 sections of action. Slowly, we moved through the script, (trying to memorize all the while) - which was more than frustrating. I expected that the words would come quicker to me since I had written them. Or that it wouldn't be such a big deal if I ad-libbed through portions, but I was wrong. The script exists for a reason, and especially in the building process, I have to lean on the text. Play can come later, but this whole process today is about connecting the action to the word. Where are the triggers to move to the piano vs. plugging hot rollers in? If I miss a section, I'm totally lost. It jumps the action. The transitions between action are the most important parts of the show. If a transition isn't lining up with the action or serving the action - the writing has to be adjusted, but it is not a part of the script that can be dynamic during performance. The transitions are what keeps the train running.

It took 3.5 hours to get through 3.5 pages today - and I was done. It is so exhausting being the only person on stage and trying to track everything. The first 2 pages are the most stressful to try to get through because that's where I unpack everything. It's so easy to get lost right now. I feel like my brain is trying to go in twelve directions: action, memorization, acting?

What's acting? Acting is hard right now. Josh isn't pushing too hard, but it's terrifying. It's also so tricky because I know that a little more finessing has to go into the script, but I'm not in a place where I can play with the text right now, I have to set the foundation based upon what I have first.

I feel exhausted. I only got through barely 4 hours of rehearsal and don't have anything left physically or mentally. Rest is also going to be an integral part of the process this week.

March 24, 2014:

Today we moved into the performance space after spending part of the afternoon in the rehearsal room. I'm rested today. :) We started today with reviewing the first 3 pages on my feet since they really are the most difficult as far as action. I felt a little bit like a failure as we were working, but had to remember that's what we're doing right now. We're working. It's about process right now and taking the time to really break things down so we know that there is an actual flow.

I am impressed with how well the piece really seems to fit in the space and move pretty fluidly around the set. I never spend too much time in one location - for even how small the space is. It's also exciting to find the moments of pause with movement that help punctuate what's happening in the script. It makes sense to sit for a moment and recuperate after a very lively section like the meat jingle. I guess it's not surprising, but in the rearrangement of some of the stories, Josh and I created a flow that really seems to work from the start as far as momentum.

Then came setting up the lights. Andrew Carnero, a sophomore Stage Management student offered to help with the light and sound tech set up. And of course they didn't come without their bumps. An entire bank of lights in the performance space wouldn't turn off which means the theatrical lighting wasn't quite as effective because there was so much general bleed. Nonetheless, light set only took about an hour. Part of the need of the theatrical lighting was to continue to confine and create boundaries for the space. Since this is a one person show, I wanted to make sure that the space didn't feel overwhelmingly large hence the audience feels like they were a part of an intimate space vs. a large studio.

Audio setup was super easy. I plugged my iPhone into a stereo jack and pushed play. Thankfully that was far less stressful than trying to get ceiling lights to turn off.

As we conquered the tech elements, we also continued to work through the first half of the show. We successfully reached page six at the end of the evening. 4 pages left to do tomorrow.

I will say that I am really having to keep my attitude in check this week. I'm not usually a glass half-empty kind of gal, but there is something about this process that is truly challenging to me in a new way. It takes a lot for me to want to keep pushing forward. I'm tired and in a way I haven't really felt before. When working on *Nickleby*, I had super long days and my body hurt from bad shoes, but never stress tired...which is what I'm pretty sure I'm experiencing. There is a greater responsibility and stakes for me with this project. Is this show going to work? Are people going to think it's funny or worthwhile watching? I have to keep pushing those little voices away and choose to keep moving forward. It's not Josh's job to pull me through. I have to walk through of my own free will.

March 25, 2014:

We made a lot of good progress today! We left the first 6 pages alone today and only worked forward with the end of the play. We got through it! There is just as much action that takes place in the second half, but somehow it feels much more controlled. Although, we have yet to confront the strip tease. That is still a bit daunting. I also am aware of the fact that we get to see a little more of the vulnerable part of Aunt Nona in these last few pages. We hear about her nephew, her joy in being an aunt, her fear of not knowing what her purpose is in life. It's still surrounded with humor, but I am excited to also play with the broken parts of her. Nona is so biographical but also so fictional. The moments that are truly real and come from Anna are quite exciting to play. It's still within a character, but Anna really exists in those moments too. I think there is something joyful about that. In every character I've played, I obviously make a contribution, but some are much farther from my immediate heart than others.

I am excited for the parts of this piece where I work very directly with the audience. Tonight we pulled in another student for about 10 minutes to practice a couple 'therapy' sessions. The key to this point of the show is cutting it off at a high point - like all good improv training has ever taught me. It's quite a thrill to play as Nona and let her answer how she would. At the base of it, it's good acting. Receive and give back. It's not complicated, it's simply listening. There isn't a requirement that this section of the show be funny, but I have a feeling that it probably will be - if nothing else, for the sheer embarrassment/joy of seeing someone talk one-on-one with Nona.

Lines are still slowly coming. Again, the second half seems to be gelling a little more quickly than the first. I'm trying not to judge myself. I am a little impressed with the fact that I wrote just enough time to plug in hot rollers, have them heat up, put them in my hair, let them set, and take them out while I continue the evening. Instinctual time management.

But the whole show has been blocked and worked! Minus the striptease, everything has had 2 go-throughs.

March 26, 2014:

Today we started with the striptease. It's the last piece of the puzzle that we haven't worked out. The idea of it is that it starts out from the inspiration of the drag queens and a lip-sync routine and then into a full striptease because of the number. Josh and I decided on "Let me Entertain You" from Gypsy. He found a great recording where Mama Rose is badgering Gypsy so we're playing with the character in that situation as well as Nona playing and making light of her silliness. We cut the number down to just about 2 minutes. Again, it was a moment where we assessed how this functioned in the show and what purpose did it serve. Is it propelling the show forward? I didn't want this to feel like some weird stopping point that took the show on a major right turn. It needed to serve its comedic purpose and the practical purpose of changing my clothes. I'm not convinced it couldn't be made even shorter.

It may be the most terrifying 2 minutes of this whole show. We can't let Nona disappear behind the screen for too long. That's not exciting for an audience. So how can I push her to the very end of actually getting the last dress on? There's something mildly scary about the fact that

I'm literally down to my "underoos" on stage. The mat that I'm behind could fall over. It could happen.

We also added a funny sight gag in homage of Carol Burnett. At the end of the strip tease, I come out in the new dress, but with a hanger still in the dress as well. It's a small nod to Carol's Gone with the Wind sketch, but an important nod, nonetheless.

Tonight it felt so crazy to actually see/feel the show from beginning to end. It's bumpy and we are quickly identifying where the transitions are that are still clunky or where my brain stops working as far as lines, but it exists! Today I feel like the show actually could work vs. how I felt embarrassed about even reading it aloud at the very first rehearsal. It was also nice to have Tara pop in for part of rehearsal tonight. I ran the Meat Jingle portion with two people vs. just Josh and was able to play with someone who had no idea what was coming next as far as choreography —which tells me how quickly I can or cannot teach it.

The FIRST PAGE is still where I'm getting tripped up the most as far as order, unpacking, and cue lines, but it will come.

Tonight we also solidified specific titles of places that still had potential question marks. We were trying to figure out a funnier church name, but at the end of the day, it just didn't seem like it was a joke that had to be told. Cut the fat, move forward. We also cut down the drag section a little more too. I'm still not convinced that I'm telling the most clear story when it comes to the lips section, but at this point I feel like I need to go with what I have. I think minor changes can still happen, but I have to have faith in something with only 2 days to show.

March 27, 2014:



Today I did a full run in the rehearsal space before we could move into the performance space. I think I did it in half the time that it should take. Only kind of kidding. I was in such a panic to get all the words out and at the right time that I didn't give myself any time to actually let moments land. Even with an imaginary audience I need to give myself liberty to play. I was not playing this afternoon. I was a Mack Truck trying to plow everything over in its way. Josh asked me when I got done what I thought, and I told him I felt like I was out of control...which he totally agreed. I found the rhythm a little more when I hit the second half, but reminded me that I have to breathe and take my time at the start. The show's not going anywhere. I can't leave myself behind. Josh also pointed out that Nona has a great, grounded physicality when I let myself breathe and take my time. We need her to be solid so the audience knows that they're in safe hands.

We then moved into the space and briefed Christa on all of the tech. She is another BFA stage manager who agreed to run the show. With only 6 total cues, she assured me that she was fine and we could go for it with a dress run.

Thankfully, I had a few undergrad friends who I knew wouldn't be able to see the show this weekend come to the dress rehearsal. And boy, am I grateful. Even having 5 new people who knew nothing about what they were going to see made a completely different environment to rehearse. All of a sudden I had a scene partner. All of a sudden there was real laughter. All of a sudden I had people who were invested and interested in Aunt Nona. She was pleased to be there with them as much as they were with her.

I really did feel the weight in her feet tonight that Josh was talking about. I felt connected to the floor vs. sprinting on top of it. I also felt for the first time that I had someone to

support me as I moved through the play. It's hard in a rehearsal process in a one-person show capacity to truly understand how necessary the audience will be until they are there. I knew that I had written jokes, but timing is so dependent on how an audience responds. How long do I draw it out? If one joke didn't land, I kept moving forward. Let the scoffs and smiles feed me just as much as the big belly laughs!

I had to call line 3 times tonight, which was really better than I had thought it would be. Christa had the prompt ready for me. And really, if worse came to worse tomorrow, I could probably finagle some way to get a line from her during the show as well since Nona is being so direct with everyone anyway.

I think it's curious that this is the second solo show in 2 years that I have created that uses the audience as a direct and interactive scene partner. There's something about that dynamic to which I'm very drawn. I think part of it is that I'm not afraid of the improv portions. My show about Paper the Clown was 85% improv set within a framework. Nona is much more orchestrated than that, but I love the possibility of what COULD happen with a different audience. I think it keeps me fresh and on my toes.

The few students who saw the dress run assured me that Nona is indeed funny, charismatic, loveable, and relatable...all the things I originally set in my character description of her. They also said that amidst the big laugh out loud moments they found that the gentle moments to be just as engaging. The show doesn't even feel like an hour because it just keeps moving and they were interested in what she had to say. They also pointed out that Nona's stories are from a unique perspective, but one that is still universal as well; another goal that I had for this project. Turns out, she's working.

I really wanted to do one more full run tonight, for posterity's sake, but I literally couldn't get past the first paragraph. My brain and body couldn't produce any more. Instead, I sat with Josh and did a speed line through - double checking the moments that still seemed a little cumbersome or where I wasn't making sense of a transition. One of his notes was "stay on the bars! You're not done with them yet." It's so funny how moments like that stay with me during performance.

I don't want to do a full run tomorrow, so that I may be fresh and ready for the show, but I've got to admit that I'm pretty nervous.

March 28, 2014:

I got a good night's sleep and didn't deal with the show at all today until I did a line through in my car on the way to the theatre. The couple spots that Josh and I pinpointed last night and gave reinforcing images to remember them actually stuck. The lines seem intact.

Arriving at the space, I had a killer group of undergrads who were already setting up bleacher seating for me. We set the room for about 75 people. I made sure the room was set, we checked all the cues. Unfortunately the third bank of lights that wouldn't turn off this week still wouldn't turn off, so we made do. The audience is a huge part of the show, so I guess it doesn't hurt to have them a little bit visible.

I was so nervous waiting for the show to start. I haven't ever done a self-crafted show like this, for this large of an audience. I think the scariest part is that it's truly mine. If people hate it, I can't blame it on bad writing, because the writing is mine. One of my favorite directors, Peter Rothstein once said to me that to him, "being the director of a play is like have a baby,

holding it up for the whole world to see, and praying people don't think it's ugly." I felt the exact same way. I've had lots of discussions about ownership of art in my last two years at UCF, and today, more than ever, I can say that I own this piece. What the audience and I create together will be a fleeting moment that happens with spontaneity, but this piece is mine. I've worked on it for over a year, and it's finally here to have its first try. I have finally come to the deadline and put up a piece I've wanted to do for years, but never had the gumption to actually do it.

My biggest concern about this show was: would people think it was funny? It turns out, people think it is QUITE funny - whew. What a stress off my shoulders. I knew that I needed a hook at the very beginning of the show that pulled in the audience. I expected it to be when I first address them and ask them if they're there for the same show as me. Unexpectedly, it happened much sooner. As I was making my first entrance, there was an extension cord in my path and upon approaching it, I simply said "oh that's a hazard" in the North Dakota accent of course. It came out very organically. I didn't plan on saying it, but I had an instinct and ran with it and it became my first hook. Before the audience knew anything else about Aunt Nona, they knew she was going to identify obstacles in her own special way - which she does throughout the evening. And really, every joke, physical gag, accent manipulation, one liner, or sight gag really seemed to land. I don't think it hurt that I had a very home team audience full of students who know me, but still, people wouldn't have laughed if they didn't think it was funny. I was also so pleased with the fact that I could see the audience as well as I could for the fact that when the play boils down and we see the broken parts of Nona, I could see they were with me. We laughed together. We cried together. They were my partners throughout the evening.

The moments of ‘scripted’ improvisation with the audience also went really well. I’m so grateful improv was such a big part of my undergrad experience because that training and trust in myself and my instinct is what made those moments work. It’s not about how funny I could be in that instant. It was about knowing intimately who Aunt Nona is and why she ticks the way she does; how her brain works. Being immersed in her, all I had to do was honestly answer. I simply listened and responded, and didn’t censor my gut reaction. Whatever came out first was right....and thankfully I do have some quick wit at times so humor came out too. But I think the other big selling point about Nona is that she’s not stupid. She’s not completely naïve. She is honest and she is curious, and she is a little sheltered. But more than anything, it’s her willingness to be honest with an audience that makes her work.

One of my classmates told me after the show that he enjoyed her so much because the audience is given the opportunity to experience and discover who she is throughout the evening instead of being ‘told’ how this character is going to function. She trails off on stories, but has a way of connecting them back together. I was pretty deliberate in the writing that I wanted pieces to connect from the beginning of the story all the way to the end. I was even surprised how easily I could call back little nuggets from earlier in the piece at well placed places later. Sometimes I would write one section and then 4 pages later see where it reconnected. I didn’t plan all of them; some we even discovered in rehearsal - mentioning that Joshua perhaps was the one that choreographed the meat jingle - which then makes sense later when we find out he’s a gay drag queen, for all the double entendres that happen in the choreography.

I also got feedback from audience members that they felt like I really earned the sensitive moments and then quickly pushed on to the next without belaboring the emotional or making it

too melodramatic. People cared about her. She's universal in her own silly way. I've discovered that I really like playing her and playing with her.

March 29, 2014:

Tonight's audience was so very different. I broke a lightbulb on stage within the first 30 seconds of my entrance which threw me a little bit, but the audience's energy was a bigger factor with which to contend. They still hooked in on the 'hazard' moment, but I knew very quickly that this wasn't an audience that was going to jump in on their own as far as being playful with me. I was going to have to coax them into the water. It was going to be a gentler experience of an evening. It truly was. The audience was a little smaller, around 40 people, but they were still very engaged with Nona. There were still moments of big laughter, but also plenty of moments where the smiles on their faces told me that they were all still with me, just not necessarily with a guffaw every moment. Josh and I had talked about the fact that this kind of audience energy would and could exist. It's not better or worse, it's just different.

I felt like the show was still very complete, but there was something about my performance that didn't seem quite as tight. Perhaps I didn't have quite the same buzz from opening night. Perhaps a few of the jokes didn't land the way I was expecting, but I simply didn't feel like I delivered as clean of a show. I felt myself getting tripped up a little more, ad-libbing where I hadn't needed to the night before. Nona's accent also wasn't quite as crisp. I'm going to have to cut recordings together from last night and tonight, and the accent I'm sure will sound a little different when the cut happens. It wasn't a bad show, but I think with only 2 days

of performance and such a short rehearsal period with a director, she hasn't solidified all the way yet.

It makes sense to me after creating a new piece that there is generally a lot of time spent with previews. Having people as part of the experience does dictate change for a show. I think this piece could benefit from more rehearsal, and even more tightening of the script, but for its workshop debut I'm very proud of it.

I had one of my acting students come to the show tonight and he happened to have brought his mom. This student also happens to be gay, and it was so compelling to see how moved his mom was when Nona started talking about her gay nephew and how she would love him anyway. This mom literally spoke back to Nona at a couple points of the show when she really agreed with her - and I guess that's the point. I've tried to create a piece that reaches people. It lets people agree or disagree. It lets people conquer demons or heal a wound - if even a little bit, or maybe it provides a simple moment to have a good belly laugh. Any of these goals offer such validation, and I'm pretty proud to say that I think at one point or another, I reached all of them.

April 27, 2014: Reflection

This process has been eye opening to me as far as what I am capable of as an independent artist. One of the hardest parts about being an actor is that I have to wait for someone else to give me a job. So, what if I didn't have to be dependent on that? What if I could indeed create something that is uniquely mine, but speaks to some universal truth and is marketable to a broader audience? This experience has absolutely built my confidence in the fact that I can write

something of value and worth putting in front of an audience. I have a unique voice and point of view that comes out in Aunt Nona. I would venture to say that I probably have other unique voices and characters inside of me as well.

In the performance of this piece, it was so powerful to not only experience true laughter and true tears as an actor, but also that I was joined so willingly in these moments by my audience. The convention I created with having them as a direct scene partner, is a style that I am very comfortable in, and it pays off for me to exploit it. I'm also quite proud of the fact that I wrote from my life. The show is about 80% autobiographical. Yes, it is also fictionalized, but some of the stories come directly from my life with a few name changes. A Minnesotan point of view in a quirky middle-aged woman was compelling to an audience...because I told stories of my life. It's really quite unreal to me!

I also know that this piece could not have been successful without the collaboration of my director. Josh was the one with the discerning eye when I could no longer read what was on the page. He trusted the project and asked the right questions to keep it moving. He also was the greatest cheerleader to have by my side in a very intense rehearsal process. The show wouldn't have made any sense had he not been there to help rearrange it. He also added input for some pretty funny bits and jokes that I hadn't yet considered. There's a little bit of Aunt Nona in Josh too, I think.

I also look at this piece and am excited to see how I could use it as a teaching tool. I could break down the different elements of comedy. I could elaborate on characterization. I could speak about comedic point of view. I could encourage the art of good storytelling. There are a lot of intricate pieces that feed into this show to make it what it is. There could be a



week's worth of master classes associated with this performance. I absolutely want to take this to other venues and continue to finesse it. (I know there are parts that are still a little bumpy.) What is exciting to me though, is that it could be marketed not only as a performance, but as a teaching tool. There could be the possibility of a completely new market that I hadn't considered for this show.

Throughout this process, I also feel like I have found real solace in who I am as a performer and the unique gifts I have to offer. Nine months ago, I wanted to quit school and get to work...envious of my friends who were working on cruise ships or Disney or other opportunities for song and dance. What has been solidified for me is that it does me no good to covet those careers...and I absolutely needed to finish school. The two years I spent in the classroom asked me to challenge who I am as an artist: vocally, physically, intellectually and imaginatively. Every moment spent stretching on the floor, or learning a side roll, or the exploration of sound or the poetry of learning how to speak in verse pushed me in a new way. Graduate school has been a place for me to really identify what I have to offer and to truly find solace in that identity. I am a character actress. And a good one. I have a sense of humor and good comedic timing. I understand that humor doesn't have to come from a sarcastic and condescending place, but that it can also come from vulnerability and kindness. I feel secure in my body. I am an improv performer. I can navigate my way through material that is wildly outrageous to other moments that pull at heart strings. I can sing and dance, but that's not the extent of my abilities. I am not an actor that has two gifts; I am an actor that has a multitude. It is a disservice to myself and my career to try to box myself in to someone else's career that looks appealing. I will find my own way, and it should be my own way...using all my gifts to their

full potential. I think going through the process of creating this piece has pushed me more than I expected it to as a human, and truly cast more light on where my life will navigate from this point forward. I have the ability to be at the helm of my career and make opportunities for myself. In the same way Aunt Nona picks herself up with a laugh and moves forward to the next show, so will I in my own special way.

## CHAPTER 5: BRANDING A CONTEMPORARY ARTIST

Ego plays an important role in the life of a theatre professional. Carol Burnett knew it; Lily Tomlin knew it; Chelsea Handler knew it; I have learned to understand it. However, ego is a term that is often met with much trepidation as it tends to carry a negative connotation. The Merriam- Webster Dictionary defines *ego* as: The opinion you have about yourself and as a close synonym to self-esteem. The word ego can be threatening to some due to its close relation to/confusion with *egotism*: the practice of speaking about oneself too much and an exaggerated sense of self-importance. While egotism can be troublesome, ego is a necessary component to an artist because the artist has to be their own greatest advocate. Without a high opinion of one's work, and the ability to advocate for it, an artist's product is easily overlooked. The creation of a piece of theatre, music, art or other artistic expression is only half the battle. Having a healthy ego is necessary to carry a new work to completion. In the case of Aunt Nona, her show is not complete without her scene partner - the audience, so as the advocate for my own work, I have to get the audience to the theatre.

The creation of Aunt Nona's show has been very much like starting a brand new business, and there are many business and marketing strategies that can be implemented to sell Aunt Nona's brand to an audience that I not only wish to gain but retain. The marketing world defines this as Return on Investment (ROI). ROI uses business goals to develop a dedicated strategy, and using designated strategies to promote Aunt Nona should be used the same way. The authors of Digital Minds have created a strategic breakdown to accomplish ROI including the wide use of social media. This plan breaks down as follows:

- “1. Well written, high quality content to promote product
2. Something new to say and ensure your content is well researched
3. Understand target market and provide information people are looking for
4. Give Target Audience something they haven’t seen before
5. Create personal content. Customers need to trust and like you.
6. Be interesting and engaging using a variety of mediums
7. Allow comments and interactions
8. Organize publishing plan” (WSI 31)

Using the Digital Minds promotional model, the first step to properly branding Aunt Nona is identifying who she is (her product) and who her consumer base is (i.e. her target audience). When these two things work in tandem, Brand Awareness is formed. One of the best examples to explain Brand Awareness is by using Kleenex. “Kleenex is a brand of facial tissue, but many people simply refer to the noun, facial tissue, as Kleenex. *That’s* brand awareness” (WSI 13).

Looking at women in the entertainment world, recognizable names (i.e. brands) like Cher, Madonna, Beyoncé or Lady Gaga have similar international brand awareness. They are a focused product where the consumer has a bold initial response to the product being sold. In creating my personal brand, focusing Nona’s image is key. I spent a lot of time brainstorming adjectives regarding who she is: lovable, progressive, simple, confident, “tongue-in-cheek”, relatable, optimistic, quick-witted, polite, and excitable are a few that made the list. Aunt Nona does not live within the same brand as one of my comedic mentors Chelsea Handler who I might describe as: domineering, sexual, blunt, crass, or wildly un-embarrassable. In Handler’s book, Chelsea, Chelsea, Bang, Bang, the entire first chapter is about how she learned to masturbate as a young child complete with explicit detail to explain this life event. This is not how Aunt Nona would approach the same material. Aunt Nona might elude to sexual innuendo or unknowingly

make a joke with a double entendre, but Handler's bluntness does not embody Aunt Nona's brand or target market. What is wonderful is that Chelsea Handler's brashness, Colleen Ballinger's awkward Miranda and my goofy, lovable Aunt Nona can all exist in the same modern marketplace with targeted branding.

In the inaugural workshop of *An Evening with Aunt Nona*, approximately 90 people saw the show between two evenings of performance. The audience was primarily comprised of undergraduate and graduate theatre students, theatre professors, working actors in Orlando, and a couple friends and family members of respective students. I knew that some of the content included in the show regarding musical theatre and supporting a gay nephew would most likely play to this particular crowd. That said, I had also built a majority of the show around the explanation of Minnesotan and North Dakotan sentiments. I need Aunt Nona to offer comedy or content to explore so her voice sounds different among other comediennes, however I was fearful that her 'midwesternisms' wouldn't necessarily work with a Florida audience. Would a meat raffle joke work or a bit about coffee and bars resonate? Thankfully, both sides of the coin were relatively well received, for which I was grateful. In future incarnations, I am aware I may have to expand her material to meet the demands of a wider market audience. Part of my goal with Aunt Nona is that she would be 'everyone's Aunt'. I want her show to have a little bit for everyone. Her show is not meant to be shocking. She might push the envelope with some of her opinions, but if those opinions evoke a moment of thought in my audience, I have also achieved a goal. I was so surprised on the second night of the workshop when a fellow student brought his mom to the show and how she seemed so genuinely moved by her evening in the theatre. In the moments Nona talked about the acceptance of her gay nephew, this mom spoke up in agreement

with Nona during the performance. In its initial performance, I calculated that my target audience would be a college or young professional, progressive audience, but after that interaction with a mother, I was encouraged that my net may indeed be able to be cast a little wider.

The promotion of Aunt Nona's brand is now the next hurdle to tackle in order to gain and retain an audience, my ROI. If I wish to reach out to an audience of young professionals and their parents who have jumped on the bandwagon, I have to take into consideration the level of technological literacy that exists. Social media has completely changed the way that the public becomes aware of current events and a small business cannot ignore the magnitude of its presence. Part of the joy of social media is the immediate relationship that can exist between a patron and product, and it is most important to set up as many digital spaces as possible (WSI 9). Having a stagnant website that speaks to your target market is not enough to promote a brand, however a primary landing site is important. Colleen Ballinger has mastered Miranda's presence in a variety of social media options. If one doesn't want to google her primary website, she can be found instead on her Facebook page. If one is more inclined to use Twitter or Instagram, there are very active accounts with consistent witty banter and links to her videos and upcoming touring schedules. "Content Marketing has given small businesses the opportunity to become publishers of news and content and has leveled the playing field of larger businesses (WSI 19). Artists can be everywhere, while working from one location or many. With over 4 billion smartphone users globally, and over 6,000 Tweets per second, the social network is attached, alive, and thriving. It is a disservice to a young company not to be involved in the social media world and thusly, an independent artist must do the same. Knowing this, Aunt Nona has been

incorporated into social media platforms. She appears on a devoted landing page:

[AnnaCarol.net/Aunt-Nona](http://AnnaCarol.net/Aunt-Nona) through my personal actor branded site. She also consumes a Facebook page devoted solely to the upcoming events that concern her. She has thusly appeared on my actor handle @annamccarol #AuntNona via Twitter.

One of the principles of a well maintained brand is the quality of content and the frequency with which it is distributed. When consistency is established with the target audience, a relationship is formed. Forming even a virtual relationship with an audience base takes consistency and work. “Producing content and distributing it online is like being a keynote speaker at a conference full of potential clients - every single day” (WSI 21). Ballinger leads by example and releases new videos twice a week on her Youtube channel as well as daily Tweets, instagram photos, and Facebook updates. The consistency that Ballinger has with the output of her work also keeps the control of her brand intact across all media platforms. Her presence began with videos that portrayed a specific style and syntax and Ballinger has been savvy to continue writing status updates the same way that Miranda speaks. She writes phonetically, with abbreviations, and ‘miranda grammar’. I suspect that this would be the hardest bridge for Aunt Nona to cross due to the fact that a good deal of her humor exists within the pronunciation of words. Her accent is part of her trademarking.

Understanding the format of the medium in which a brand is being promoted is as equally important as being present in the medium. “The key to unlocking the value of social media is embracing it and finding a way to make it work for your business” (WSI 5). Modern society today has a distinct obsession with instant gratification. People don’t want their time to be wasted and if they feel that it is, they move on. The foundational principles of comedy coincide

very closely with the foundations of a good brand; both should be quick, clear, and concise. In the same way that a well-played improv scene should end at the height of the laugh, the same technique can be used on a Youtube channel. There is a method to leaving your audience wanting more. If Vlogs (video blogs) become too lengthy, an audience stops watching. The medium is longer than a Twitter Tweet of only 140 characters, but nonetheless is most successful in smaller increments. Ballinger's videos range between 90 seconds and seven minutes depending on the content, but most fall around the two minute mark. Using the language of the medium is also important to understand. Youtubers, ask viewers to Subscribe to their Channel at the end of any video and it is an essential piece of their marketing.

Each social media medium has its own idiosyncrasies. In the "twitterverse" understanding how to appropriately use Hashtags and Handles in a Tweet can make all the difference between connecting with other Twitter users and gaining followers for your brand. If an artist can get their particular Hashtag to "trend" (become one of the most used hashtags on Twitter in that moment), the exposure of that artist is capitalized because it becomes a bookmark for Twitter as a whole versus only the user. Gaining Likes on a Facebook page is also important. The instant call and response an artist can build with her followers via posts on Facebook is invaluable. The creators of Digital Minds state "if your brand isn't accessible or willing to interact with customers, you're at risk of losing potential customers and retaining less of your current clientele" (WSI 13). Creating content that is interactive allows the customer to be a part of your brand versus strictly an observer. Also, because all of these social media mediums work in tandem with one another, a plethora of exposure can be had when all cylinders are firing at once.



The most challenging part of being present in social media is that it continues to rapidly evolve. Although Facebook doesn't seem to be going anywhere in the near future as the mother of social media, other apps are gaining prowess. One in particular is Snapchat which is a service where short videos or photos can be shared with friends or publicly as a Snapstory. Once the photo or video is received and viewed, it goes away. Community SnapStories are also created by Snapchat with users who contribute their photos and videos to a specific community location they may be attending. A chronological, community documentary is established in mere moments. SnapChat is a more recently developed app for smartphone users, but there is not a question that it will continue to mature, progress, and finally be surpassed by the newest network device or application.

With all the possible online outlets to tap into to promote an artistic brand, there is no question that an exceptional amount of work must be planned and successfully navigated. This is where a Content Calendar becomes very helpful. "Create a content calendar to make sure your potential customers are receiving relevant material at regular intervals. It allows you to schedule and organize material for blogs and social networks well in advance" (WSI 31). It is no surprise that many artists reach a point where they need extra help with managers, assistants and employees as their brand expands. As a solo artist and small business at present, the organization of my content and marketing is in my hands to negotiate. What is most important is that the integrity of the initial vision remain intact stemming from a strong initial perspective and clear vision of the work with the continual release of high quality content.

Having a product and promotional plan is the first step of selling a personal brand, and the next step is putting it into action. In December of 2014, I submitted Aunt Nona to the

Orlando Fringe Festival and The United Solo Artist Festival in NYC. The show was wait-listed for the Fringe Festival due to the lottery, but Nona was accepted to debut at the United Solo Artist Festival on September 18, 2015 in New York City. To my delight, one of the major components to applying to the Festival included proof of her presence in social media. Because she had been established on Twitter, Facebook, and my personal website, these application boxes were easily checked. The next major hurdle was creating a Youtube trailer to promote her show and brand. With shot list in hand, my colleague Michael Hunsaker and I filmed 20 minutes of material in a two hour shoot which Michael then edited down to 7 minute, 3 minute, and 90 second segments. Having these videos allowed the Festival to see what type of comedy lives in Aunt Nona's show and how she might bring variety to the Festival. The videos have also been invaluable tools to link via the social media platforms and create buzz about Nona's show. This is especially helpful to promote her beyond the Orlando area for people who may not have had the opportunity to see the first workshop in 2013.

As I prepare to take Aunt Nona to NYC in September 2015, the creation of her promotional calendar is becoming as important that the rehearsal calendar that I will establish in August with Director, Joshua Chase Gold. We are also designing more content to release via web and also in hard copy for flyers, and postcards thanks to additional promotional photos taken by photographer, Landon St. Gordon. Keeping the high quality of Nona's content is the first priority as it is disseminated to the masses. With correct and timely distribution, I cannot help but be encouraged about garnering an audience for Nona's NYC debut and the possible exposure this could create for my continued work as an independent and collaborative female artist.

What I find most empowering about the creation of Aunt Nona is that it has allowed me to examine the larger picture of who I am as an artist and what I wish to contribute to the bigger picture of society. I have wept over interviews that I have watched and read in regards to women who have stood on their platforms and shared their voices. From proud activists like Eleanor Roosevelt and Gloria Steinem, to well renowned artists like Carol Burnett and Whoopi Goldberg, to unknown comediennes and playwrights like my colleagues Madde Gibba and Whitney Rhodes, I find that I have an important voice just like all of these women. I have every right to brand my specific outlook, and I feel fortunate that I have been allowed the luxury and opportunity to write, perform, direct, and experiment. I have more freedom to do so, because other women fought on my behalf. I know that as a small business, it takes work on a daily basis to maintain the integrity of my product. I also know that the growth of my career depends on careful navigation of current trends and capitalizing on them when I can. I am thrilled to have created Aunt Nona and that she is a part of my personal brand. Perhaps the most exciting thing is the mystery of what I have yet to create and contribute to our ever evolving society.

## **APPENDIX A. ADDITIONAL NONA FODDER**

September, 2013 - March, 2014

Aunt Nona's quotes:

- If you can't go that fast on your own 2 feet, you shouldn't be doing it on a motorcycle
- No iPads in the room
- Steamed vegetables more fun to eat than raw vegetables. But no one likes the hot lettuce.
- Bumper stickers. Don't worry I'm driving fast cause I need to poop.
- Lady gaga performance
- Dads lay z boy and the rocking chair
- Ability for dad and boyfriends to make better eggs than me
- Lady chin hair
- Red river flooding
- Gym girl sitting in lotus position in the sauna.
- Junk food Christmas
- Needing anxiety medication to get on the light rail in mpls
- Grandma double fisting
- Fascinated with drag queens
- Gay boyfriends
- Inspiration Ladies:
  - Carol Burnett
  - Vicky Lawrence
  - Bette Midler

- Kristin Wiig
  - Melissa McCarthy
  - Gilda Radner - Bunny Bunny
  - Lily Tomlin
  - Phyllis Diller
  - Ellen DeGeneres
  - Toty Fields
- "Here I am"
  - One woman show with music...
  - Grandmas fisting. Possible lesson: grandma could fist me as much as she wished, but by god, she did not enjoy being fisted back. Grandpa's POV as well.
  - The French Song –
  - Cousin who would read the tags on furniture. Rocko from buffalo. Have you ever been there? Oh no, I'm afraid of buffalo.
  - Speech Therapist - talk to people and they tell me their problems. My "clients" She has to know someone who does it.
  - I always wanted to be a drag queen
  - Gay nephew jimmy. (Josh) I knew you were gay since the moment I offered you Chapstick and you reached for the flaming red lipstick instead.
  - Tears and groceries. Sometimes we just need to be taken care of.
  - An hour before curtain. Everyone is in her dressing room. End with opening number. Full glam.

- Chanel Bernadette peters and Barbara Streisand.
- There's a broadway in every town.
- A Christmas hymn. O holy night.
- When you fall out of love...late husband? Old boyfriend?
- Really bald? Curling iron accident?
- There's no business like show business.
- Luna bars not for boys. Voice will go up. Grow uterus?
- Like I always say, if you put smog in a city you're only hung to draw in bad air.
- glue eyelashes together. in attempt at beauty/drag.
- I got so embarrassed, like walking into an occupied toilet stall! Pure fear! - walking into the dressing room filled with people.
- Drinking Asparagus Water that tastes like sweet corn
- Character Performer
- Less common female comedienne
- Creation of original character
- Storytelling is humor

Blind bowling club car wash. I just wonder how good they would clean my car

## **APPENDIX B. NONA'S CHARACTER ANALYSIS**



1. Place and surroundings -location. Be specific and descriptive country/state etc.
  - a. Fargo, ND
2. building/structure
  - a. Middle class family. Parents now retired. Dad is engineer for the river system. Mom ran a daycare while growing up. 9 siblings. I'm the middle. 6 brothers, 3 sisters. Siblings: Lu, Peter, James, Ryan, Kyle, Me, Mary, Matt, Kristin, Joe.
3. room and furnishings
  - a. shared a room with 2 sisters growing up.
4. Moment Before :What just happened to me before this scene starts?
  - a. I've been fired from my latest job at the Hans bakery. I was in charge of all of the 7 layer bars in the bakery and Ruth, the owner wasn't pleased with how they turned out. I had altered the bakery recipe to make them a little spicier. I had recently watched the Food network and saw a Chopped episode, and I always feel so bad for people who get chopped. You have been chopped. Anywhoo, there was a chef on there who had made a cookie recipe with spice in it, so I thought I would alter the Bar recipe and put some spice in it. And it wasn't chili. Oh what did I put in it? It wasn't the chipotle kind. Oh I just love that restaurant don't you? oh. So good. I carry a burrito baby around for a full day after the chipotle. And the lime chips are like crack. Not that I've done the crack, but if I had, that is what I would imagine them being. AHH, they were habenero peppers. I cut them up a bit and put them into the seventh layer of the bar to spice it up! Well, it turns out a young boy had a bar with his mom, and burnt a little bit of his mouth. Oh don't worry, he's fine. Mouths are resilient, and we had some ice-cream to wash it down with, but nonetheless, Ruth the manager of the bakery said that I was a hazard to the bakery and we could not just go around burning costumers. The really good thing is tho...I got to take all eight pans that I made today! I'll be eatin 7 layer bars for weeks!
5. Why did I decide to come here? Why at this time?
  - a. The Fargo theatre which is normally a movie house opened up cabaret acts to kick off the movies. My good friend Susan at church had recommended that I come in and do a show since she always enjoyed my singing at Church. Now, I've never done a real show before on my own. Just lots of solos at church. First Presbyterian. But I've been intrigued about the idea and decided to give it a shot. Picking the material was going to be the tough part.
6. Have I been here before?
  - a. I used to come to the Fargo Theatre with my high school beau for the midnight movies. Popcorn is always so expensive at the movie theatre. Have you noticed that? The cost of

popcorn is more than most of the movie tickets! In any case, Cody and I used to sneak a quart of ice cream in my purse up to the balcony of the theatre and eat with two spoons. Cake batter ice cream.

7. What have I just heard?

- a. I came in the back of the theatre and was told there was a room I could get ready in, but no mirror, no water. I guess they modified a broom closet/storage room.

8. What have I just seen (tasted, smelled, touched)? 10. What am I thinking about as I make my entrance?

- a. It smells a little funny in here. I have an hour to get ready. But it's warm. close to the boiler room. Perhaps to the point of perspiration.

9. Now turn your attention to all of the information you are gathering as you walk into the room. Who was I expecting to see? Who do I see?

- a. I thought this was going to be a little more glamorous. There's stuff everywhere. No great place to get ready, but makeshift areas. But I'm flexible and easy going. I'll make it work. I reminds me of being a little kid and building a fort out of couch cushions. How can I make this my own? If even for simply the hour.

10. Is this place okay? Do I feel comfortable here?

- a. There's a comfortable smell of mildew. Like that old sweet smell of grandpa's cigars. But not bad enough to register as bad...perhaps some cleaning supplies. Most definitely dust bunnies. The room is dirty. But there's an antique wonder about this space. Like a treasure chest almost.

11. What do I need to do?

- a. I have a lot to get ready. I need to unwrap from my winter gear. Unpack my bags. I'm still not sure what to wear. Do my hair. Do my makeup. Change clothes. Warm up. Center. Pick my song.

12. Are there any Obstacles?

- a. I have a finite amount of time to get ready. 60 minutes. That's it.

## **APPENDIX C. NONA DRAFT 12/21/1**

*An Evening with Aunt Nona - draft 12/21/13*

The setting: A shabby dressing room. (Perhaps a modified janitor closet?) a couple layered carpets on the floor, a piano, a dressing table with a pedestal mirror. Perhaps Christmas lights? A microphone on a stand - off to the side. A door, upstage center.

*Aunt Nona enters the room with arms full: a hat box, roller suitcase, big purse, etc. She has wild curly hair, pink huge-rimmed eye-glasses, a fuzzy winter coat, big scarf. It is a physical struggle to get everything into the room. She gets all the way into the door and notices the audience.*

Nona: Oh I'm so sorry! I must be in the wrong room!

*Nona kerplunks her way back out of the door and exits stage L. She make her way back on, realizing she did have the correct door in the first place, as it is the only dressing room.*

### **Wrong Door:**

Nona: I am so sorry. I didn't know I was sharing dressing space with anyone else tonight. I felt for a moment the true fear that occurs when you walk in on someone taking care of their business on the john. There is nothing more terrifying is it? Oh, it's no trouble, I have no problem sharing! When I was growing up, my grandparents had an outhouse at the lake home due to no indoor plumbing. Now an outhouse wouldn't seem so out of the ordinary at a cabin in Northern Minnesota, but the tricky thing about this particular outhouse was that my grandpa build it with 2 seats. For communal potty time. I wondered when I was little whether or not it was a buddy system for the little kids, just to make sure that we didn't fall in. Then there became a silly

family tradition where new lovebirds had to take a photo together in the outhouse. As if together “potty time” sealed the deal of true love. I’ve often thought it a bit sad that I don’t have one of those photos, but on the flip side, it is a little silly, don’t you think?

Oh! I’m so sorry, I haven’t introduced myself properly! My name is Natalie Bruno Steverson. But you’re welcome to call me Aunt Nona. I now have 15 nieces and nephews under the age of 20: Robert, Alexander, Christine, Joshua, Lily, Eric, Sophie, Tillie, Maggie, John, Ruby, Freddy, Samuel, Markus, and Maddie. This is what happens when you are the youngest child out of a family of 10 children and everyone is a breeder.

- Broke for birthdays...

- 35 is pretty old...

Well, This is an unexpected treat. I’m pretty nervous to be making my Broadway debut on the great white way! Did you know why they call it the great white way? The wind blows so hard here and we get so much snow in the Winter time, that whiteouts happen more often than we would like, but nonetheless, we push through. Literally. Somewhere between 5th and Roberts, I’ve always found my way to the Fargo Theatre on Broadway. And now! My debut! Oh, I do hope you’ll stay to watch it. It’s taken 15 years for me to actually gather the courage to do it. I’ve always wanted to do my own cabaret show. Me, on a stage, channeling Bernadette - (insert some Bernadette impression here?) (or barbara?) (Or Bette?) (Or all?) I thought for a while that I would never get to Broadway. It’s not where I really felt like I belonged, but then my mother

pointed out: “Nona, there’s a Broadway avenue or street in every city in the United States! Some people are meant for NY, NY - some St. Louis, Missouri, some backwoods Montana. In any case, it’s a Broadway debut.” She was a wise one. So, here I am.

Do you come here often? To the Fargo Theatre? I remember coming here as a young woman. The summer after my senior year in high school, my beau Cody and I would sneak in a quart of ice cream - cake batter ice cream, with sprinkles - into the midnight movie and eat the whole thing in the 4th row balcony. Oh how sprinkled and delicious those evenings were.

I’ve been working for quite a bit on the song selection for my show. I’ve considered hundreds of titles: There’s no-ah business like show-ah business; I’m just a girl who can’t say no-ah; No-ah, No-ah No-ahnette, Somewhere O-ahver the rainbow; Oooooo-ahklahoma; Someone to watch O-ahver me; O-ahver there; Mama a Rainbow-ah. Ho-ahme;

I haven’t quite decided, but I’ll put a good one in there.

### **Unload the Luggage:**

### **Dressing Gown:**

Do you like it? I embellished it. I enjoy an embellishment from time to time. See, I’m not actually talented enough to make a dressing gown, but I sure can make it sparkly. I like to think of this as my Sisterhood of the traveling pants - Dressing robe. You know, where magical things

happen and you add a patch every time it does? Well, of course it doesn't have any patches yet, it's my debut! But here's the one I made for tonight - and I am going to superglue this business so hard once tonight is done!

Know what I like most about a dressing gown? It makes me look like a woman! Not that I'm not a woman, but a real, woman, woman. Cause you can cinch it here, and call it a day! Don't get me wrong, I've been doing a little bend and stretch lately. Oh yes, I got a membership at the YWCA. The support the ladies Y. And know what I love most about that membership? The sauna. Nothing makes me smile more than getting sweaty on a treadmill and having the reward of a good sauna afterwards. And, please don't mistake me, I am no prude, but may I comment for a moment about sauna etiquette and locker room etiquette in particular? Ladies, I don't mind if you feel free enough with yourself to sit in the sauna in the nude, however may I please request that you do sit ON a towel? I mean, there's a lot of sweat from a workout and presumably liquid in general, and a towel would be appreciated. Really, some days I feel like a throat doctor when I'm at the gym. Oh, yes, the other day I was stepping in for my sauna time and I walked in and there was a woman who was sitting in the corner of the sauna, right where the two benches meet, and naked (which as I said, she has the right to do) however, she was seated in the lotus position. I literally thought I could see her throat. Or another young lady who happened to be blow drying her long lovely hair, in front a of a mirror, again - allowedly naked, but upside down. Now ladies. I simply request that you consider what kind of reflection you are casting to the room. I should not be able to test you for strep throat.

I've never been an ENT, but I have had quite a few professions in my life. Oh-a yes. Currently I am a speech therapist. It's my own non-profit that I started. Would someone like a speech therapy session?

*Interactive session here where Aunt Nona barely lets her client speak and instead simply shares her own opinions.*

My grandmother used to double fist us when we were young? And I guess as adults for that matter. In fact, my grandfather used to get it worst of all. Oh, grandpa would say something silly that would aggravate Grandma and out came that double fist. It didn't have a name for quite a while, but we endearingly called it the double fist. It's one of the least aggressive, aggressive hand gestures I've ever scene. And it gets performed with such vengeance, but we always just end up laughing at her. Oh grandma.

### **Pete and Therapy:**

### **Makeup and Dragqueens:**

I have got to tell you, the best makeup tips come from Dragqueens. I am absolutely fascinated by them. You may indeed be surprised that a woman from Pelican Rapids knows has connection to The Drag culture, but indeed I do. I was first introduced to them by my nephew Joshua. I was surfing the Facebook one day. Is that what you do? Surf the Facebook. We used to first surf the



Net after the internet became simply the Net, but now I hear it changed it's association again to Interwebs. So do we climb the Interwebs? In any case, I was surfing the Facebook and was looking at my Nephew Joshua's page. He's not friends with his parents, but he is friends with me. I think it's because I understand him. When he came out at age 18, he was so worried that I would judge him, well that we all would judge him, but I just turned to him and said, "Sweetie, I knew you were gay when you asked me for my lipstick at age 3. I tried to hand you chapstick, and you made it very clear that was not what you had requested." We have a special bond. How did we get here...? Oh yes, dragqueens. So, I was looking at Joshua's Facebook, and there was the lovely woman popping up every once in a while. I told Joshua, I says, I want to meet her, she's lovely. He laughed and laughed and laughed. He said to me, Nonny, that's me! He was doing drag when his parents weren't looking. His name was Escort Crosstown. I guess the rule was take the name of your favorite pet and combine it with the name of the street you came up on so - Escort Crosstown it was. He had a delightful little puppy growing up that followed at your heels, so he had named her Escort. In any case, I saw Escort, the drag queen, not the dog, live one day and she could put her foot over her head, jump in the air and fall in a split, tuck in ways I didn't understand, and move her mouth speak wider than any human I've ever seen.

- possible lip syncing bit?

### **The changing of the Dresses - Burlesque:**

## **APPENDIX D. NONA PERFORMANCE DRAFT 3/28/14**

*An Evening with Aunt Nona*

Performance copy

The setting: A shabby dressing room. (Perhaps a modified janitor closet?) a couple layered carpets on the floor, a piano, a dressing table with a pedestal mirror. Perhaps Christmas lights? A microphone on a stand - off to the side. A door, upstage center.

*Aunt Nona enters the room with arms full: a hat box, roller suitcase, big purse, etc. She has wild curly hair, pink huge-rimmed eye-glasses, a fuzzy winter coat, big scarf. It is a physical struggle to get everything into the room. She gets all the way into the door and notices the audience.*

Nona: Oh I'm so sorry! I must be in the wrong room!

*Nona kerplunks her way back out of the door and exits stage L. She make her way back on, realizing she did have the correct door in the first place, as it is the only dressing room.*

No, this must be the one. (something about door, joke, something - Jan Itor? Chemicals? Boiler room)

Oh Hi! Are you here for the show? Me too! Oh, but you're an hour early....did you know that? And the auditorium is actually across the hall in the other....oh, but you're welcome to stay! I'm pleased to have some company ....I'm pretty nervous to be making by Broadway debut on the great white way! You know, they call it that because the wind blows the snow around so much

every winter! The feet upon terrible feet of snow. I had to shovel my way here tonight! Wait, why do you look so confused. Oh, no! I'm not talking about NY, I'm talking about our Broadway. Fargo's Broadway: the Broadway between Roberts and Main in Fargo, ND. The ORIGINAL Great White Way. I really think that NY stole the whole "great white way" thing from us. Literally. I'm just saying - coincidence or stolen material?...and my mother always used to say, she said, "Nona, there's a Broadway in every town. Some people are meant for NY, NY - some, Fargo... In any case, it's a Broadway debut." And now! My debut! Oh, I do hope you'll stay to watch it. But I'm sorry, autographs will have to wait until after the show.

Oh! I'm so sorry, I haven't introduced myself properly! And to my fans! My name is Natalie Bruno Steverson. But you're welcome to call me Aunt Nona. I now have 15 nieces and nephews under the age of 20: Robert, Alexander, Christine, Joshua, Lily, Eric, Sophie, Tillie, Maggie, John, Ruby, Freddy, Samuel, Markus, and Maddie. (Wallet bit) This is what happens when you are the fifth child out of a family of 10 children and everyone is a breeder. Is anyone else the middle child in their family - or what I like to call "the forgotten"? The kid who mom calls everyone else's name in the house including the dog - besides your own? Well that's me. I guess I never fought it much though. I've always been the quiet one who's easy going. Like I have siblings who are driven: doctors and principals, own their own businesses...they seemed to know what they could be right off the bat. I was never like that. I've tried all sorts of things and haven't quite landed yet, I guess. But now, I'm on the BROADWAY! Not a bad place to land if you ask me.

The entertainment industry has always interested me. I was a jingle writer for a while. You see, I have sung in church since I was a little kid at First Presbyterian. At age eight, my rearrangement of “Jesus Loves Me” was a hit! In any case, we were having a meat raffle at church for a fundraiser for the new church pew cushions. - I’m not sure why we don’t just buy cushioned chairs. But you know those protestant Swedes, we don’t pray rosaries for connection to Jesus like the Catholics. Part of the pain of the pew is your devotion to the Lord. So, back to the meat raffle, why the confused faces? oh you don’t know what a meat raffle is? Well local butchers donate basically a couple cows, pigs, chickens, venison and the like and people buy raffle tickets for a drawing. kind of like BINGO, and if your ticket gets pulled out of the hat, you get the meat that was on the auction block at that point. Oh, not the whole animal, but a portion of the animal. You can win some real good steaks, roasts and other delights. Well, we were doing the meat raffle and I came up with a tune that I sang for all the winners:

“Come get your meat! We got a nice leg, a hind quarter and a thigh. You’ll just keep gnawing till you hit the sky. Don’t be shy, for sexy snouts or feet, Presbyterians have it all, come get your meat! - Come get your meat!”

I didn’t keep my jingle job very long. The pastor said that perhaps I was too pg-13 for the congregation. I still don’t really know why - OHHH, I forgot! There’s choreography. My nephew Joshua helped me, he’s got artistic instinct. Do you want to learn it? GREAT! (two men)

“Come get your meat” choreography. (Round of applause.)

Here! Have a bar, have a bar! I have all these extras. You see, I was working at the Hans bakery until this morning, when I was, oh how did she say it, **ousted** from employment due to creative differences. You see, there was a conflict of palate. I was in charge of all of the 7 layer bars in the bakery and Ruth, the owner wasn't pleased with how they turned out. I had recently watched the Food network and saw a Chopped episode, and oh I get so worried when the chefs cut their fingers and have to glove up and then end up getting chopped anyway. It's so emotional. It's like a soap opera! Anywhoo, there was a chef on there who had made a cookie recipe with spice in it, so I thought I would alter the Bar recipe and put some spice in it. And it wasn't chili. Oh what did I put in it? AHH, they were habenero peppers. I cut them up a bit and put them into the seventh layer of the bar to spice it up! Well, it turns out a young boy had a bar, and burnt a little bit of his mouth. Oh don't worry, he's fine. Mouths are resilient, and we had some ice-cream to wash it down with, but nonetheless, Ruth said that I was a hazard to the bakery and we could not just go around burning costumers. The really good thing for you though, is I got to take all eight pans that I made today!

You look confused again. Is it the bars? You've never heard of them?! Why they are the chosen dessert of ND, MN, SD, and Wisconsin! They have their own category at the church pot luck! There's the cookie table and the bar table. The English say that every challenge can be solved over a cup of tea, well in my house, every problem can be solved over coffee and bars. When my sister ended up pregnant before she got married, we had bars. When mom told dad that they were pregnant for the 4th, 7th, and 10th time, there were bars. When my brother Richard got a D-I-V-O-R-C-E. Bars. They come in all variety of flavors. Lemon bars, chocolate chip bars,

caramel bars, 7 layer bars, and others. If anyone else wants one, there will be some waiting for you at the end of the show...I'll even autograph them in frosting if you like.

(Curlers: humming Come get your meat)

Oh! There was a point to that story! My friend Susan from church (who has nice jewelry but she lives entirely on credit cards.) She liked my jingle so much that she recorded it and put it online. It got 10,000 hits. And then, low and behold, the telephone rang and the Fargo Theatre asked me to be the comedic open for the midnight movies. I figured well, why not! A little local exposure.

So it's going to be Me, on a stage, channeling The Triple B's. Barbara, Bette and Barry. We start with Barbara:

*"People, People who need people, Are the luckiest people in the world We're children, needing other children*

*And yet letting a grown-up pride Hide all the need inside..."*

And into Bette:

*"Did you ever know that you're my hero,  
and everything I would like to be?*

*I can fly higher than an eagle,*

*'cause you are the wind beneath my wings."*

And of Course, Barry's Copa Cabana, but no ordinary Copa Cabana. My dad's rendition.

"Her name is Nona, she was a showgirl With yellow feathers in her hair and a dress cut down to there She would merengue and do the cha-cha - at the Copa, Copa Cabana...

Can we backtrack just for a moment? Back to my buddy Babs? I guess I've never really understood that song, PEOPLE. The fact is that people do need people don't they? I couldn't be a person if my parents weren't people who needed people who are people. I guess a hermit doesn't need people, No, he does need people, he just chooses not to have people or be around them. And I'm not a child. I'm a grown up. So aren't we all lucky? is this song talking about such a phenomenon? If I could re-write this, it would go like this:

"People,

People who need people,

is everyone that you pass on the street.

We're children, and old ladies,

and the hermit on the mountain

who just wants to have some quiet..."

What else could this lyric be?

I don't know, I think it has potential. And you know, even if the lyrics are a little flawed, the tune will always have a special place in my heart.



The summer after my senior year in high school, the first midnight movie my beau Cody and I saw was *Funny Girl*. And you know, we would sneak in a quart of ice cream - cake batter ice cream, with sprinkles - into the midnight movie and eat the whole thing in the 4th row balcony. Oh how sprinkled and delicious those evenings were. Lots of, oh what do the kids call it these days, hand holding? Yes. Hand holding. You see, he was the first man I ever turned gay. I always thought he was being a gentleman, but it turns out he was really quite terrified of my lady parts. Love the lady, leave the parts. I bet I could write a song about that. Maybe a country tune. "I love her hair, I love her smile, but now I realize after a while...she doesn't have a peter." I think Babs has got some competition. I could take it on tour...but I'm afraid to travel. You see, this one time I went to the big twin cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul with my friend Susan, remember from church? She's a bridal consultant and asked me to go to the bride expo with her at the convention center since I was considering joining her as a partner. So I went and saw all these lovely brides walking around the convention center, some even trying on new dresses. They would stand in front of the big three-way mirrors, and the fact is that none of them looked very good. White is just not a flattering color on anyone...and I've always thought that you should tell people the truth when they ask your opinion. There was one bride who asked me what she thought and I told her that white was probably never a color she should wear...I made her cry and was asked to leave. So the next day I decided that I would take the light rail to the Mall of America while Susan stayed at the Expo. Well, I've never ridden public transportation before and I had such an anxiety attack, I thought I would need a valium. And there were only 3 stops! And that is why I'll never be a country star.

It smells a little funny in here doesn't it? It reminds me of when I was working as a cat sitter. Now I've always liked cats, but had never had one of my own, so I figured this could be a pretty great career. Go hang out in fancy people's houses who wanted playmates for their cats while they were away. Now here's where I got so confused. These folks would hire me to come hang out with their cats, because they needed companionship, to be socialized, but they were always so mean! They wouldn't come out to play with me at all. I would beg and beg and meow at them and try to coax them out, but they ignored me. Like they were too good for me or something. I developed social anxiety disorder from these creatures. My therapist said so! My self image went down the tubes for a while. Was I not pretty enough? Did I not have enough hair for them? Because my eyes didn't have a slit in them, they wouldn't accept me as one of their own? It was awful! Degrading. Debilitating. I just wanted to be their buddy. And cats are gross. They smell. And not the cat themselves, but they make everything smell. One owner got home and told me they had almost passed out from the smell in the house. I explained I had experienced the same thing. Then they asked if I had scooped the cat box? I explained to them that I was not a veterinarian and didn't feel qualified to scoop a cat's box.

But the smell in here is different. Not like rude, antisocial-that-need-to-be-socialized cats. There's almost that wonderful antique smell. Of books in a library or grandpa's cigar at the lake or gasoline at the pump. It's not a smell that you want to be immersed in, but there's a level of mildew that tells you that it's comfortable. Now I don't mean dirty, but a level of acceptable mess - as my mom would call it, or 'lived in' if you will. Our house always looked plenty "lived

in”. Especially with 12 people living there. It’s funny, Where some people judge if your house had laundry hanging about or dishes in the sink, but I think it was a badge of honor for my mom. Mom didn’t have a job while I was growing up other than taking care of all of us. And looking back, what a gift that was.

On my twelfth birthday, my mom woke me up at 12:01am and took me down to the kitchen. She had made an entire pan of my favorite, caramel bars, for me! The forgotten one! and we sat and ate half the pan. And then, for lunch! I opened my lunchbox and she had packed the rest of them. Just for me. No vegetables, just bars. I guess bars can be for celebration too, not just solving problems. She wanted to be a mom, and was the best one around. She was really good at her job.

What I’ve discovered is that it is a badge of honor if you have 10 kids, it’s not a badge of honor if you live by yourself. Then people just think that you’re lazy and disgusting like a cat.

### **Dressing Gown:**

Do you like it? I embellished it. I enjoy an embellishment from time to time. See, I’m not actually talented enough to make a dressing gown, but I sure can make it sparkly. I like to think of this as my Sisterhood of the traveling pants - Dressing robe. You know, where magical things happen and you add a patch every time it does? Well, of course it doesn’t have any patches yet, it’s my debut! Or as the French would say, they De-Butt. But here’s the one I made for tonight - and I am going to superglue this business so hard once tonight is done!

Know what I like most about a dressing gown? It makes me look like a woman! Not that I'm not a woman, but a real, woman, woman. The kind of woman who marries Cody's brother, and has a messy house and makes bars for her daughter's twelfth birthday. Who hires someone else to watch her cat and doesn't have to shovel the sidewalk on the way to her Broadway debut...

**LAUGH MOMENT...figure it out**

TRANSITION FIX LINE: Cause you can cinch it here, and call it a day! Don't get me wrong, I've been doing a little bend and stretch lately. I used to be able to get my aerobics in at work. Oh yes, for a while I was serving at a Sallies Grill and Carwash. I wrote a jingle for them too!

Come get your soup! Come get your soup!  
Get a buff and a rub while you slurp and we mop.  
Chicken noodle is warm while the suds are on top.  
If you're feeling the flu or a snuffle ha-chop  
Sallies Grill and Carwash is here  
Come get your soup.

"The lunch special was a scrub, soak and soup for 7.99 " Between drying the hubcaps and dropping off the soup, I was down a lbs a day. With my newfound health regimen, I figured, let's get everyone in shape. I thought to myself, I could be the Richard Simmons of the serving

industry. You see, if food became too heavy for the tray, I would simply remove half of it. The rule I served by was that if it was too heavy for my arm, it was probably too heavy for your tummy and heart. Unfortunately, not everyone liked my preventative portion control.

So, now that I don't get my exercise in at work, I got a gym membership at the YMCA. And know what I love most about that membership? The sauna. Nothing gets me going more than sweating to the bump of a treadmill and yank on a rowing machine only to be finished off by the t,s: of the sauna.

And, please don't mistake me, I am no prude, but may I comment for a moment about sauna etiquette? Ladies, I don't mind if you feel free enough with yourself to sit in the sauna in the nude. I support your second wave feminism rights... however may I please request that you do sit ON a towel? I mean, there's a lot of sweat from a workout and presumably liquid in general, and a towel would be appreciated. I mean, I wouldn't cut fish on your vegetable cutting board. Think about that.

On a related note: the other day when I was stepping in for my sauna time there was a woman who was sitting in the corner of the sauna, right where the two benches meet, and naked (which as I said, second wave feminism) and on a towel (which I appreciate) however, she was seated in the lotus position. I literally could see....

I've never been an ENT, but I was a speech therapist. I started my own company called "Talk it out". Would someone like to be therapized? It can be quite thrilling. Its kind of like if you would go to an oracle or a psychic. But I can't fly. So, who wants to have a therapy session?

We'll time it. I don't have a chaise lounge here, but we can make due.

*4 minute Interactive session here where Aunt Nona barely lets her client speak and instead simply shares 81her own opinions.*

I actually felt I was doing quite well in this new business endeavor until one day I received a letter in the mail from a lawyer's office explaining that I couldn't market myself as a speech therapist without proper credentials. That's a funny word, isn't it. Credentials? Sounds like a tooth disease. In any case, I had to shut down. Like a double fist from the Man.

Did your grandmother fist you growing up? My grandma used to double fist us when we were young? And I guess as adults for that matter. In fact, my grandfather used to get it worst of all. Oh, grandpa would say something silly that would aggravate Grandma and out came that double fist. It didn't have a name for quite a while, but we endearingly called it the double fist. It's one of the least aggressive, aggressive hand gestures I've ever seen. And it gets performed with such vengeance, but we always just end up laughing at her. Which would make her even more upset and fist harder. Oh grandma.

I have got to tell you, the best makeup tips come from Dragqueens. I am absolutely fascinated by them. You may indeed be surprised that a woman from Fargo has connection to The Drag culture, but indeed I do. I was first introduced to them by my nephew Joshua. I was surfing the Facebook one day. looking at all the tasty recipes that my friends Cindy and Karen was posting.

and was looking at my Nephew Joshua's page. (You know him, he choreographed the meat jingle.) He's not friends with his parents, but he is friends with me. I think it's because I understand him. When he came out of that wardrobe at age 18, he was so worried that I would judge him, well that we all would judge him, but I just turned to him and said, "Sweetie, I knew you were gay when you asked me for my lipstick at age 3. I tried to hand you chapstick, and you made it very clear that was not what you had requested." I knew right then, that was a homosexual 3 year old. Oh, I knew before his mother. When he came out to her, I sat her down with some coffee and bars, let her cry it out and told her we're going to love him anyway. And that's the way it is. We love him, cause that's how you're supposed to treat people. Joshua and I have a special bond. How did we get here...? Oh yes, dragqueens. So, I was looking at Joshua's Facebook, and there was the lovely woman popping up every once in a while. I told Joshua, I says, I want to meet her, she's lovely. He laughed and laughed and laughed. He said to me, Nonny, that's me! He was doing drag when his parents weren't looking. Well, I went and saw her live! at this delightful establishment called the Raunchy Hole - or something She could put her foot over her head, jump in the air and fall in a split! And I kid you not, she was the most beautiful woman I have ever seen. Especially her lips. I loved those lips so much, I asked Joshua to teach me how to put them on myself: I'll show you

There is something about her lips that roped people in. That made her exciting, like magnets. When her lips were painted on, she didn't have to do anything except stand there and people noticed her. I guess some people are electric like that you know? Like they don't even have to try...

*- lip syncing bit that turns into a strip tease in order to change clothes. A la Gypsy Rose Lee....of which she's horrible at. Probably falls down, sounds of tearing fabric etc. But appears in a fabulous dress.*

So, how do I look? (gesturing to dress) It's new. I thought maybe it would be a little racy. But at least it's not white. I bet I could get a beau with this dress. I did try online dating once..... I haven't had one since Cody...and we know how that turned out. I am an avid practitioner of Menogamy. Lots of "me" time. I've been asked if I've ever tried clubbing, and I couldn't understand why hitting the moles on the head that pop up in my yard and wreck my lawn would create a relationship.

But, really, I don't mind it. I feel like I have what I need. I have the people I need at church, and my family. I have to say that one of my greatest joys is the fact that I have time for my family. I don't have kids, but I do have 15 young people who I adore. They are "my people, who need people".

On November 14th, my sister Lu had called my phone around 5:00pm. I had just been fired from the gynocologists' office for performing a minor procedure without a medical license. I was leaving the clinic for the last time and feeling pretty awful and checked my phone and saw that my sister had called. At first I didn't think anything of it. Then it dawned on me. Hello! Lu's super pregnant! I called her back right away and she answered cheerfully. Letting me know that



my nephew had been born. Robert Thomas. Now she and her husband live 2 hours from me in Bemidji, MN, and I've never made the trip in better time. I was the first one to the hospital. I was going to be the favorite Aunt! I GOT THERE FIRST! And I held that little peanut and looked down at his squishy face. I felt so much joy! I said a little prayer and thanked the Lord. And then I whispered to him: told him I loved him, that he was special, and that my hope for him was that he would bless the world with his gifts. That he was capable of anything if he so desired, and that I would be his people - there to support him. So you see, I'm not sad, I'm an aunt.

You know who I do feel sad for? People on HGTV.

You know, sometimes I can't sleep and I watch millionaire island buyers on the HGTV at 1:00am, and I have to tell you. These people make me sad in my heart. I just feel so bad for them. They are trying to buy an island in the Fiji and they are just one million dollars short! That 4 million dollar island isn't good enough, we're going to have to pinch pennies for a bit so we can get the 5 million dollar island. Talk about feeling incomplete. Those are the people I pray for.

During my Menogomny time, I read a lot of books. Mostly non-fiction about pirates and dragons. Wouldn't it be great to be a pirate! Sail the seas, look for mermaids...oooh? like Bette Midler! and know that the only thing you're supposed to do is go where the wind takes you. "cause you are the wind beneath my wings" Because I guess I just still haven't figured out where this wind is supposed to take me. The fact is, I'm not a nurse or a therapist. I can't seem to help

people the way I'd like. I don't love cats or understand how to clean them. I can't serve food, or even strip correctly.

When I was growing up, my grandparents had an outhouse at the lake home due to no indoor plumbing. Now an outhouse wouldn't seem so out of the ordinary at a cabin in Northern Minnesota, but the tricky thing about this particular outhouse was that my grandpa build it with 2 seats. For communal potty time. I wondered when I was little whether or not it was a buddy system for the little kids, just to make sure that we didn't fall in. Then there became a silly family tradition where new lovebirds had to take a photo together in the outhouse. As if together "potty time" sealed the deal of true love. I've often thought it a bit sad that I don't have one of those photos. That others have a photo with someone who compliments them.

And I guess that for me it's never been about who compliments me, but the fact that I don't know what compliments me. What am I supposed to be good at? It's not always fun to be the scattered, unemployed, quirky aunt. It's not always fun to not know what tomorrow is going to bring. It's not funny. and it's not fun. and I guess I don't know what to hope for anymore...

This bar (*takes a bite*)...tastes horrible. (*smile*)

Well, showtime. **End of Play**

## **APPENDIX E. COMPARITIVE TIMELINE**

Year	Event in Feminism	Event in Technology	Women in Entertainment
1920	August 18th, 1920 19th Amendment Ratified : allow Women the right to vote	<p>1917 Charlie Chapline becomes first entertainer to earn \$1 million</p> <p>1919 RCA founded</p> <p>1920 First radio stations in U.S. and Canada</p> <p>1922 <i>Reader's Digest</i> magazine founded</p> <p>1923 <i>Time</i> Magazine debut</p> <p>1923 Warner Bros. Pictures incorporated</p> <p>1923 AT&amp;T links two radio stations for the first 'network'</p> <p>1924 Metro-Goldwyn Mayer (MGM) officially formed</p> <p>1924 Disney Studios first formed</p>	<p>1900-1910 Modern Drama: Ibsen, Chekhov Independent Theatre Movement: Moscow Art Theatre, Independent Theatre Concept Based/Image focused: Edward Gordon Craig, Adolphe Appia Drama League of America Birth of Community Theatre</p> <p>1923 American Laboratory Theatre brings 'method' to U.S.</p>
1925	1929 Stock Market Crash	<p>1926 Sound introduced to film with <i>Don Juan</i></p> <p>1926 First 2-color film produced by Technicolor Motion Picture Corporation</p> <p>1927 Philo Farnsworth applies for electronic TV patents</p> <p>1927 Paramount Pictures formed</p> <p>1928 First Academy Awards</p> <p>1928 Television introduced to the United States</p> <p>1929 Stock Market Crash</p>	

		1929 CBS founded	
1930	<p>March 1930 Unemployment has doubled from the previous year from 1.5 million to 3.2 million</p> <p>January 1932 Congress establishes the Reconstruction Finance Corporation and lends \$2 billion to banks and loan agencies</p> <p>November 1932 Franklin Delano Roosevelt elected president</p>	<p>1930-40 Golden Age of Film</p> <p>1932 Disney releases first Technicolor full length cartoon of “The Three Little Pigs”</p> <p>1933 20th Century Fox formed</p> <p>1933 the Roosevelt Rule Eleanor Roosevelt insists on women-only press conference</p> <p>1934 Federal Communications Commission established (FCC)</p>	<p>1930 Group Theatre Established Formed to produce social protest works.</p> <p>1933 Carol Burnett Born</p> <p>1935 Federal Theatre Project Eventually challenged by government for propaganda</p>
1935	<p>1939 Start of World War II Women encouraged to join war efforts including accepting industrial jobs outside of the home</p>	<p>1936 LIFE magazine debut</p> <p>1936 The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) debuts first television programming with 3 hours a day</p> <p>1939 First radio station started in New Jersey</p> <p>1939 TV demonstrated by RCA at the World’s Fair</p> <p>1939 Hewlett-Packard is founded.</p>	<p>September 1, 1939 Lily Tomlin Born</p>
1940	<p>1943 Rosie the Riveter 65% of Aircraft Industry comprised of women compared to 1% prewar</p>	<p>1941 First TV commercial of a Bulova clock</p> <p>1944 Harvard Mark -1 computer completed. Room-sized, relay based calculator.</p>	<p>1943 Rogers and Hammerstein produce Oklahoma. Start of Golden Age of Musicals</p>
1945	<p>1945 End of WWII</p>	<p>1947 Red Scare leads to congressional investigation of Hollywood</p> <p>1948 Cable television is introduced in Pennsylvania</p> <p>1948</p>	<p>1947 Actors’ Studio began by Elia Kazan. Work method of emotional memory</p> <p>1947 Weekly movie attendance of 90million patrons</p>

		One million U.S. homes own a television	1949 150 professional theaters serving the entire U.S.
1950	<p>September 18, 1950 Harvard Law School admits women for the first time. Thirteen female students are admitted and begin classes on this day.</p> <p>May 17, 1954 Brown vs. Board of Education Supreme Court decision to desegregate schools. Major turning point in the discussion of 'separate but equal' in civil rights movement</p>	<p>1950's 'The Golden Age of Television'</p> <p>1951 <i>I Love Lucy</i> debuts; uses film and three cameras</p> <p>1951 Color television introduced in U.S.</p> <p>1952 Eisenhower runs 20-second campaign spot</p>	<p>1950 More experimental, smaller house, Off-Broadway venues producing new work</p> <p>1950's Growth of Children's Theatre</p> <p>1954 Joseph Papp starts the Shakespeare Workshop later transforming to New York Shakespeare Festival</p>
1955	<p>December 1, 1955 Rosa Parks denies bus seat</p> <p>March 9, 1959 Barbie Doll first produced</p>	<p>1958 Videotape introduced</p>	<p>1955 Burnett appears on Paul Winchell Show</p> <p>November 13, 1955 Whoopi Goldberg born</p> <p>1956 Tomlin begins Stand-Up career in Detroit and NYC</p> <p>1957 Weekly movie attendance down to 28 million patrons per week</p> <p>1957 NY Shakespeare Festival moves to Central Park</p> <p>1959 Burnett stars on Broadway in <i>Once Upon a Mattress</i></p> <p>1959 Recurring guest on <i>Gary Moore Show</i></p>
1960	<p>May 11, 1960 Birth Control Approved FDA approves birth control as a contraceptive</p> <p>April 6, 1963 <i>The Feminine Mystique</i> published Voice of housewives and spark of Feminist movement</p> <p>June 10, 1963 Equal Pay Act Prohibit sex discrimination in determining wages</p>	<p>1960 Kennedy-Nixon debate</p> <p>1962 Laboratory Instrumentation Computer (LINC) offers first real time laboratory data processing.</p> <p>1962 AT&amp;T launches the first television satellite to carry broadcasts around the globe</p> <p>1963</p>	<p>1960 Off-Off-Broadway developed with more avant-garde works</p> <p>1961 Radical Theatre finding audience within political issues Bread and Puppet Theatre Sanfrancisco Mime Troupe El Teatro Campesino</p> <p>1962 Burnett and Andrews perform Emmy-winning tv special at</p>

	<p>October 11, 1963 Kennedy's American Women: Report of the President's Commission on the Status of Women Published</p> <p>November 22, 1963 President Kennedy Assassination</p> <p>July 2, 1964 Civil Rights Act Prohibit employment discrimination based on race, sex, religion, or nationality</p>	<p>Network news expands from 15-30 minutes</p> <p>1964 The Beatles tour America for the first time</p> <p>1962-67 J.C.R. Licklider promoted an "Intergalactic Network" of computers — pre internet</p>	<p>Carnegie Hall</p> <p>1962 Delacorte Theatre finishes construction as home for Shakespeare in the Park</p> <p>1963 Tyrone Guthrie builds the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis, MN. Encouragement to build other regional art centers.</p> <p>1964 Start of Black Theatre Movement</p> <p>1964 Burnett film debut in <i>Who's Been Sleeping in my Bed?</i></p>
1965	<p>October 29, 1966 National Organization for Women (NOW) Founded</p> <p>October 31, 1967 Radical Women's Group Formed - Women's Liberation Movement Bolder public confrontations that NOW Ideas formed and spread through 'consciousness raising' small groups on college campuses</p> <p>April 4, 1968 MLK Assassination</p> <p>September 7, 1968 Miss America Protest</p> <p>November 11, 1968 Rosenfeld v. Southern Pacific Company Women cannot be prohibited from jobs that require excessive labor</p> <p>May 4, 1969 First No-Fault Divorce Law California adopts law to grant divorce from either party without cause</p> <p>July 20, 1969 Neil Armstrong walks on the moon</p>	<p>1965-70 Second 'New Journalism' period; literary journalism; underground newspapers</p> <p>1967 Congress passes Public Broadcasting Act; PBS formed</p> <p>1969 Neal Armstrong's first walk on the moon is televised</p> <p>1969 ABC introduced made-for-TV movies</p>	<p>1965 National Endowment for the Arts starts to develop federal public support</p> <p>1965 Roger L. Stevens named LBJ's full time presidential arts advisor</p> <p>1966 Burnett has recurring role on The Lucy Show</p> <p>1966 Burnett discovers Vicki Lawrence at 17 and has her join cast for variety show.</p> <p>1966 Tomlin makes TV debut on <i>The Garry Moore Show</i></p> <p>1967 First grants provide from the NEA of nearly \$8 million</p> <p>1967 The debut of the Carol Burnett Show. Airs for 11 seasons. First woman to have own variety show.</p> <p>1968 Theatre Development Fund (TDF) works to attract less wealthy audience to straight plays at a Broadway level</p> <p>1969-1973 Tomlin becomes household name</p>

			in <i>Laugh-In</i> with characters like “Ernestine”
1970	<p>January 1, 1970 Married Women’s Property Act New York State allows women to own property under their own names</p> <p>January 1, 1970 Esther Hobart Morris appointment Justice of the Peace First female gov. official in Pass, Wyoming</p> <p>August 26, 1970 50th Anniversary of Women’s Suffrage 5th Avenue march</p> <p>December 1, 1970 <i>Our Bodies Ourselves</i> Published encourage women to be knowledgeable about their bodies, sexuality, and reproduction</p> <p>June 23, 1972 Women Make Movies Established Formed to address scarcity of women in the film industry and the portrayal of women in film. Work to promote women’s work</p> <p>July 1, 1972 Ms. Magazine Founded and independently published</p> <p>January 4, 1973 Women in the Arts Founded Protest galleries that don’t exhibit women’s work</p> <p>January 22, 1973 Roe v. Wade Legalization of Abortion and a women’s right to choose.</p> <p>1973-1975 Various Workshops, Studios, and Women’s Art Centers open focused on promoting women’s work</p>	<p>1972 Cigarette advertising banned from TV</p> <p>1972 <i>Life</i> Magazine stopped printing. Came back as a monthly publication from 1978-2000</p> <p>1972 50% of home televisions are in color</p> <p>1974 <i>People</i> magazine introduced</p>	<p>1970 Burnett makes recurring appearances on daytime Soap Opera, <i>All My Children</i></p> <p>1971 Tomlin receives Grammy Award for comedy album, <i>This is a recording</i></p> <p>1974 Goldberg moves to L.A. Starts performing with Blake Street Hawkeyes improv troupe.</p> <p>1975 Tomlin appears in film <i>Nashville</i>. Known to mix both comedic and dramatic qualities.</p>
1975	<p>April 30, 1975 End of Vietnam War</p> <p>June 19- July 12, 1975 U.N.’s International Women’s Year Create a 10-year plan of action to address issues of poverty,</p>	<p>1975 Sony videocassette recorder introduced</p> <p>1976 Matsushita introduces VHS</p> <p>1977</p>	<p>February 25, 1975 Chelsea Handler Born</p> <p>1976 Burnett has live tv broadcast special at the Met</p> <p>1977</p>



	<p>education, health, violence, human rights and mass media in regards to women</p> <p>April 22, 1976 Barbara Walters is first network anchorwoman Signs 5 year, 5 million dollar contract with ABC. First woman newscaster on U.S. network television</p> <p>Oct 31, 1978 Pregnancy Discrimination Act Employers cannot terminate women on the basis of pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions</p> <p>October 14, 1979 National Lesbian and Gay Rights March First march for gay rights in Washington D.C</p>	<p>Personal computers first introduced</p> <p>1978 laser disc player introduced</p> <p>1979 Sony Walkman appears in Japan</p>	<p>Tomlin makes Broadway debut in one-woman show, <i>Appearing Nitely</i>. (Wins Tony Award)</p>
1980	<p>June 5, 1981 First case of AIDS Reported</p> <p>September 25, 1981 Sandra Day O’Conner first woman appointment to Supreme Court</p> <p>June 30, 1982 ERA defeated</p> <p>July 19, 1984 First Women Vice-Presidential Nominee Geraldine Ferraro running mate to Democrat, Walter Mondale</p>	<p>1980 TV Show <i>Dallas</i> is first to end season with cliff-hanger</p> <p>1981 First airing of MTV network. First video is “Video Killed the Radio Star”)</p> <p>1981 IBM introduces PC</p> <p>1982 <i>USA Today</i> begins publication</p> <p>1982 Dolby surround sound introduced for home use</p> <p>1982 <i>Home Shopping Network</i> debuts</p> <p>1982 First laptop computer introduced</p> <p>1983 Sony introduces CD player</p> <p>1984 8.2 percent of Americans had a computer in their home</p> <p>1984 Apple Computer launches</p>	<p>1982 Burnett appears as Miss Hannigan in film, <i>Annie</i></p> <p>1983 Whoopi stars in original one-woman show in LA, <i>The Spook Show</i></p> <p>1984 Whoopi’s <i>The Spook Show</i> moves to Broadway</p>

		Machintosh at \$2,500 per computer	
1985	<p>March 9, 1986 March for Women's Lives NOW organizes national march to keep abortion and birth control legal</p> <p>May 1, 1986 Women Artists in <i>History of Art</i> First Art History book to include female artists</p> <p>April 1, 1989 Guerrilla Girl's Women in Art Study Study revealed only 16% of artists represented in NYC galleries are women</p>	<p>1988 98% of all U.S. homes have at least one television</p> <p>1989 Apple releases first laptop for the company.</p>	<p>1985 Burnett inducted into Television Hall of Fame</p> <p>1985 Tomlin receives Tony Award for one-woman show, <i>Search for Intelligent Signs of Life in the Universe</i>.</p> <p>1985 Whoopi wins Grammy Award for Best comedy album from <i>The Spook Show</i></p> <p>1985 Whoopi makes big screen debut in <i>the Color Purple</i>. Wins Golden Globe for Best Actress</p> <p>November 21, 1986 Colleen Ballinger Born. Later creates Miranda Sings</p> <p>1986 Whoopi co-hosted <i>Comic Relief</i> to raise money for homelessness</p> <p>1989 Handler moves to LA to pursue career in stand-up comedy at age 19</p>
1990	<p>1991 Riot Grrrl releases feminist manifesto contributing to the formation of third wave feminism</p> <p>April 23, 1992 Take our Daughters to Work Day Established</p> <p>November 3, 1992 Carol Moseley Braun elected first African American female senator</p> <p>September 18, 1994 Violence Against Women Act passes Enhance states' ability to support and respond to domestic violence, stalking, and sexual assault</p>	<p>1990 Tim Berners-Lee invented the World Wide Web and internet becomes public access.</p>	<p>1990 Whoopi is first African-American woman in 50 years to win Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress (<i>Ghost</i>)</p> <p>1991 Tomlin revives <i>Search for Intelligent Signs of Life...</i> for film adaptation</p> <p>1992 Whoopi launches TV talk show, <i>The Whoopi Goldberg Show</i></p> <p>1994, 1996, 1999 Whoopi is only woman to host Academy Awards three times</p>
1995	<p>October 3, 1996 Vagina Monologues Premieres</p> <p>January 23, 1997 Madeleine Albright becomes</p>	<p>1997 Netflix introduces online streaming of movie rentals.</p> <p>1999</p>	<p>1995 Burnett earns Tony nomination for role in <i>Moon Over Buffalo</i></p> <p>1998</p>

	<p>Secretary of State - highest female appointment in U.S. government history</p> <p>June 21, 1997 Inaugural season for WNBA</p>	<p>Netflix launches subscription service</p>	<p>Whoopi joins TV cast of <i>Star Trek: The Next Generation</i></p>
2000	<p>April 26, 2000 Vermont the first state to grant equal rights to same sex couples</p> <p>September 28, 2000 FDA approves abortion drug</p> <p>July 11, 2001 First human embryos created within a lab for the purpose of harvesting stem cells for scientific research</p> <p>March 24, 2002 Halle Berry becomes first African American woman to win Best Leading Actress Academy Award</p> <p>March 20, 2003 Iraq War Begins</p> <p>November 5, 2003 Bush Signs Partial-Birth Abortion Ban</p>	<p>2000 41.5% of Americans have computers with internet access in their homes</p> <p>January 2001 Apple introduces digital jukebox software</p> <p>October 2002 Apple introduces first iPod</p> <p>April 2003 Apple launches iTunes Music store</p>	<p>2002 Burnett's play <i>Hollywood Arms</i> makes Broadway debut</p> <p>2002 Handler stars in Oxygen Network's <i>Girls Behaving Badly</i></p> <p>2003 Burnett awarded Kennedy Center Honors</p> <p>2003 Tomlin awarded Kennedy Center's Mark Twain prize for Humor</p>
2005	<p>2006 Nancy Pelosi elected as first female Speaker of the House</p> <p>January 4, 2007 Number of Women senators at all time high of 16</p> <p>2008 Hillary Clinton runs for United States President in 2008 election</p> <p>2008 Sarah Palin runs as Vice Presidential candidate with John McCain</p>	<p>2006 U.S. starts to switch all analogue signals to digital</p> <p>2007 62% of Americans have internet access and personal computers in their homes</p> <p>January 2007 Apple introduces iPhone</p> <p>September 2007 Apple introduces iPod touch</p> <p>January 2008 Apple premieres iTunes movie rentals</p>	<p>2005 Handler published first book, <i>My Horizontal Life: A Collection of One-Night Stands</i></p> <p>2007 Handler becomes host of the E! Channel's <i>Chelsea Lately</i></p> <p>2007 Ballinger performs for Disney World in CA</p> <p>September 4, 2007 Whoopi becomes moderator for <i>The View</i>, daytime talkshow</p> <p>2008 Handler releases book, <i>Are You There, Vodka? It's Me, Chelsea</i></p> <p>2008 Ballinger debuts Miranda Sings on Youtube</p> <p>2009 Tomlin debuts Las Vegas show at</p>

			<p>the MGM Grand Hotel with new show, <i>Not Playing with a Full Deck</i></p> <p>2009 Ballinger starts bring Miranda Sings to live stage comedy shows, touring internationally</p>
2010	<p>2010 Feminists continue to strive to balance between work within and outside of the home</p> <p>2014 Feminists striving to be pro-equality in government forums and reforms, not only pro-woman</p>	<p>January 27, 2010 Apple introduces the iPad</p> <p>2010 Netflix becomes compatible with computers and almost all personal devices, phones, and tablets</p> <p>2011 71% of Americans have personal computers and internet access in their homes</p> <p>2013 Netflix recognized with Emmy nominations as first internet TV network</p> <p>2014 Netflix has over 50 million members globally</p>	<p>2010 Handler releases book, <i>Chelsea Chelsea Bang Bang</i></p> <p>2010 Handler hosts MTV Awards</p> <p>2011 Ballinger debuts Off-Broadway in American Theatre of Actors production of <i>Odyssey</i></p> <p>2011 Handler releases book, <i>Lies That Chelsea Handler Told Me</i></p> <p>2013 Whoopi directs documentary <i>Whoopi Goldberg Presents Moms Mabley</i></p> <p>2013 Ballinger starred in web series <i>The Flipside</i></p> <p>2014 Tomlin receives Kennedy Center Honors</p> <p>2014 Ballinger has over 2.5 million subscribers with over 400million views to Miranda Sings Youtube Channel</p>

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