

pCLIMBING UP TO CENTER STAGE HIGH SCHOOL NEWSPAPER

By Julia Joseph. Reprinted without permission.

[Note: This is an old article which appeared in a high school newspaper while Bill was a senior]

Los Angeles has "The Comedy Store", New York has "Catch A Rising Star". Now in Houston, up and coming comedians have a place to launch their careers. The Comedy Workshop is now in session.

Since its start a few years ago, the Comedy Workshop has become one of Houston's most popular night spots. Houston comedians, both amateur and professional, go to the Workshop to try out new material, improve on established material, and receive inspiration for future material.

Senior Bill Hicks is one of the Comedy Workshop comedians who has aspirations for a career in comedy and entertainment. He has been doing comedy since [sic] was in the 7th grade. Bill and a former Stratford student, Dwight Slade, who is also interested in a career in entertainment, went to the Workshop two years ago and performed on amateur night. Dwight has since moved to Oregon, but plans to return to Houston. He and Bill are going to form a comedy team. As a team Bill says that he and Dwight have "something special that will make us the two who become famous." "There is a rapport with Dwight that makes me come up with things quickly," said Bill.

"It used to be just amateur night," said Bill of the format in the Annex of the Workshop. "They started having stand-ups about two years ago." Bill has been hired as one of the regular stand-up comics.

The Comedy Workshop is now divided into two parts, the Cabaret and the Annex. The Cabaret houses satirical revues Wednesday [sic] through Sunday, and the Flipped Side of the Comedy Workshop -- the touring company -- Thursday and Sunday. The Annex houses an open stage for stand-up comedians and specialty acts every night, along with regular paid Standups Friday and Saturday.

Bill is the youngest comic at the Workshop and for him to have gotten this job is no mean feat. "Two of the comics were in the National Laff-Off," said Bill. He explained that this is the best comedians in the United States. Several celebrities, both local and national, also perform at the Workshop. For example, Gary Richardson, a Burt Reynolds look-alike, has opened Charo's show in Las Vegas. He is also renowned in Houston for the local T.V. commercials that he does for a weight reduction clinic.

Stand-up comedy requires as much preparation as any stage performance does. "You've got to be your best supporter," said Bill. "Sometimes you feel in control and it's great, but sometimes you just don't feel in control and you really have to struggle to get laughs." He said that he does not have a specific place or situation from which he gets his material, "It just comes to me."

Bill is having increasing success with his career. Besides working at the Comedy Workshop, he has performed with other comedians at the University of Houston. Private groups are able to arrange with the Workshop for a group of the comedians to perform at a special function or gathering.

Since working at the Workshop, Bill has had only one bad experience. "There was a bad audience; half of them were asleep and the other half was insane. One guy hated my guts, I don't know why. We started arguing back and forth," he explained. Bill said that he tried to

continue with his routine but soon gave up as the heckler continued. "I totally fell apart. I wasn't funny at all. He (the heckler) pulled a gun." The episode ended as Bill left the stage and the heckler was subdued and led away by the managers of the Workshop.

There are over 2000 comedians trying to make it and Bill explained that the road to stardom is long and hard. "Think of Rodney Dangerfield; he's what, 50, and it took him about 20 years to make it." The competition at The Comedy Workshop is also keen. "Any comic that's there feels threatened by another comic," said Bill, but added that they remain, for the most part, friends. "Your [sic] wonder if you're going to be that one that makes it, like Steve Martin," mused Bill. Well, it's a one in 2000 chance.