

BILL HICKS MINGLED LAUGHTER, SEARING TRUTHS
THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE, MARCH 25 1994

By Allan Johnson

"You can actually go to the sixth floor of the Schoolbook Depository (in Dallas). It's a museum called the Assassination Museum... they have the window set up to look exactly like it did on that day. And it's really accurate, you know? Because Oswald's not in it."

If you all will indulge me for a moment, I'd appreciate it.

But when someone like Bill Hicks goes from this world to the next, you want to properly put down words that would do justice.

Hicks died of pancreatic cancer Feb. 26. He was 32 years old. He started doing standup comedy when he was 13 years old.

In my opinion, he was one of the best standup comics working today.

From the first time I saw Hicks, maybe more than five years ago at the Funny Firm, I have laughed each and every time I watched him work.

"Do you know that if you play New Kids on the Block backward... they sound better?"

Offstage, Hicks was intense, thoughtful, intelligent and just a good person to be around. But it's the onstage Hicks that the public knows, so let's focus on that.

His jokes could be rough. He was graphic about sexual themes, and some of his political views rubbed a lot of people the wrong way. He took no prisoners when it came to religion, politics, smoking, sex, drugs, rock 'n' roll. He thought Dick Clark was the Anti-Christ.

"I hate you non-smokers with all of my little black fucking heart. My biggest fear is that if I stop smoking, I'll become one of you."

Hicks' ability to speak the truth "was one of his many strengths," says T. Sean Shannon, a fellow Houston comic who, like Hicks, calls the Funny Firm home when in Chicago.

"He could talk about things that needed to be said, and that he cared about a great deal, and still make them funny. Which is so difficult to do."

Shannon, a writer for *In Living Color*, was at the memorial service for Hicks this month. He says Hicks' brother read something that Hicks wanted said:

"The gist of it was, 'My life stood for laughter, love and truth. Whenever you find those three things, I'll be there.' "

"There never was a (Persian Gulf) war, OK? A war is when two armies are fighting."

"If you go to a comedy club, all the young comics are basically doing an impersonation of Bill," says Riley Barber, an original member of Houston's ground-breaking Outlaws of Comedy, along with Hicks and Sam Kinison.

"He has a real strong, rebellious attitude. Which I really wouldn't call rebellious. It's very individualistic, which always seems to be rebellious, because you're being who you are."

"I used to do drugs, but I'll tell you something... I had a great time doing drugs. Sorry."

Hicks' credits are long and worthy of his talents. Two HBO specials, one of which was a *One Night Stand* shot here in Chicago. The subject of a 48 Hours segment on comedy.

"Jimi Hendrix died in a pool of his own vomit. Do you know how much you have to puke to fill a pool?"

There's a joke that Hicks did that goes something like: "Why is it that people like John Lennon have to die, and groups like Wham! continue to make records?"

Trust me when I say this: There are a lot of truly bad comics in the world. Bill Hicks wasn't one of them.

But he's gone, and none of those bad comics will ever be able to fill the void he left behind.

And it doesn't seem right to me. What do you think?

"I love pornography... that is one of my big fears in life, that I'm gonna die and my parents are gonna have to clean out my apartment and find that porno wing I've been adding onto for years. There'll be two funerals that day."