

Comedy Mom

Continued from page 32

there's not a lot of time or energy to commit to being afraid: "There are a few moments of shaky hands, and then you're introduced, and you're just on. The hardest moment is those last two moments before you go up."

Despite the tension and high-risk nature of comedy, Angley embraces the benefits and rewards of performing for the public: "I love the interaction with the audience; having people nod or laugh — making a connection. Good comedy is pure honesty. Even if the joke bombs — and it does happen — you think, 'Wow, you guys did not laugh at that.' You call it out and usually they reconnect. If I find a connection I feel like I've done well."

Despite her continuing development of stand-up comedy, the dichotomy between Angley's day and night lives remains. "I use public speaking every day — throughout the year I work with and speak to groups that vary in size from 20 to 200, and being in a sales position I find that humor helps in almost every situation — so there's some overlap," says Angley. "But I don't tell many jokes at work. I love what I do, and it's important to balance both sides."

Like any other art form, Angley accentuates the necessity of practice and hard work as a means to success. "It takes four to five years to really develop your voice and identity as a comic, find out what you're comfortable with and how to best explore that. Once you've done that, you reach the next step of finding an agent, and a manager, and getting bigger bookings." With all that in mind, however, she acknowledges that, for those who choose to pursue comedy full-time, it can be a grueling lifestyle.

"If you want to make six figures doing stand-up comedy, you'd have to travel 300 days a year. I'd love to keep this a hobby that makes some money. It's a fine line I'm trying to ride." She does get paid for some gigs,

including Gotham in New York and Foxwoods Casino in Connecticut. But she also performs for free. For example, she will perform with certain comics she enjoys working with just for the love of it, or at a venue that will give her new exposure. She says local venues like Catch a Rising Star at the Hyatt present both paid and unpaid comics. In fact, she and her agent are looking into the opportunity to book her there. Other ways comics can make money are at corporate events and on cruises, she says.

Angley spends time every day refining and expanding on her act. "The whole point of comedy is to write, and rewrite, and look at it." She spends an equal amount of time on promotion and developing relationships, through social media, her website (www.HeleneAngley.com), and with the help of an agent, who she was introduced to at a friend's birthday party.

"A lot of the comedy world is such that if you have a solid 15 minutes you can do an exchange with comics. For example, a lot of comics have their own shows [such as An-

'You want to have the persona where everyone can accept you, and everyone will listen to what you're saying, and not get sidetracked.'

gley's at Grovers Mill Coffee Shop], so I'll have someone do a set in my show, then I'll do a set in their show. You kind of move around and get exposure by working with other comics in that way."

Angley's monthly show at Grover's Mill Coffee showcases different comics from the New York area, in addition to Angley. "It's a great opportunity to see New York comics in town," she says. "My comics love the place — they think it's fantastic. I get big names to

Trust Your Gut: Angley appears monthly at Grovers Mill Coffee House, and often invites New York comics to join her.

come down because they just think it's a great, funky place."

In teaching comedy, Angley emphasizes a strong sense of accessibility. "I believe that everyone is funny and can do this if they want to. But it does take years to really find your voice. People think that you just get up there and you go, but it does take years."

Angley's class at WWAC is formatted to give insight into the industry, teach students ways to work on their material, and get comfortable performing. Every student in the class performs a five-minute set every class, and is critiqued and given weekly feedback. Angley loves the diversity of her class. "It's people from all walks of life — professionals by day, funny by night. The Arts Council's been great to offer this class. We're thinking of expanding to an intermediate level in the fall, and seeing what kind of response we get."

Are there gender politics in comedy — what can men and women get away with on-stage — or not? "There's never a glass ceiling, just a thick layer of men," Angley says. "The industry is 70 percent male, which means female comics tend to look out for each other. You have to play the gender role of making sure people are paying attention to the words. You want to have the persona where everyone can accept you, and everyone will listen to what you're saying, and not get sidetracked."

Angley's comedy idols include fellow comic Jessica Kirson and legend Bill Cosby, with a special affection for the work of Lewis Black. "He's outrageous, he makes me laugh. I love the anger of the everyday frustration and how he expresses it."

In "coming out" as a comic, Angley — and her family — faced a period of adjustment. "At first my family didn't know what to do with it," Angley says. "Now they offer



their feedback and their own punchlines. Everyone's a comic in my house now. My son's seen the exposure coming out of the local show. My husband's very active in working with me. They're all wonderfully supportive."

At the end of the day, Angley's comedy is driven by her love for it. "You do it because you love it. You're only as good as your last set. It's so helpful to have a community of other comics to lend support, and remind you that you can keep doing this."

Comedy Night, Grover's Mill Coffee House, 335 Princeton Hightstown Road, West Windsor. Friday, March 25, 8 p.m. Helene Angley of West Windsor hosts. **609-716-8771 or www.groversmillcoffee.com.**

For information about future comedy classes at the West Windsor Arts Council call 609-716-1931.