

Roger Smith

FEATURE WRITING

5/3/88

*good lead!*

"Where I can buy a rubber nose?" a member of the audience asked.

"In New York City, you're asking me?" answered a 42-year-old medical doctor from Virginia with a ponytail and a handlebar moustache who was sitting on a stage behind a table festooned with balloons.

✓ The doctor, Hunter ("Patch) Adams, was participating in a recent panel discussion at a conference entitled "From Laughter to Health" at the YMCA on Lexington Avenue at 59th Street. The panelists also included a marketing representative of a consulting firm that helps employees to combat stress on the job with the aid of humor, a former comedienne who now works as a "humor therapist" and the actress Imogene Coca.

There was lots of laughter at the conference, which was attended by about 60 people interested in using humor in their professional or personal lives. But some of the laughs elicited from the audience seemed to be of the variety heard on the soundtracks of situation comedies. The conference participants

seemed often to be laughing more because they expected to be amused than because of genuine hilarity.

There also seemed to be a lot of confusion about exactly what the point of the conference was. There were hardly any doctors or nurses in the audience, despite the stated theme of humor and its relation to health.

*more description*

Adams, who had what appeared to be a perpetual smile on his face, seemed to be a cross between a survivor from the '60s counterculture and a clown. He was wearing oversized running shoes, one bright green and the other yellow, brightly colored socks that didn't match and a multi-colored skirt. "I dress to be laughed at," he said.

A plastic nose, attached to his head with an elastic band, was incongruously sticking out of Adams's ear. "I keep my nose in my hat for an emergency," he said.

A graduate of the Medical College of Virginia, Adams has no malpractice insurance and subsists entirely on donations from his patients, whom he lives with communally. Humor is an integral part of his therapy.

"We were like a Monty Python hospital," said Adams, who until 1983 ran a health community in Virginia called, with typical irreverence, the Gesundheit Institute. (He is now trying to raise money to establish an expanded "health community" in West Virginia.) For example, Adams said, he tailored his approach to terminally ill patients according to their attitude towards death. Some patients, he explained, prefer "a moany, groany death



without anybody around," while others would prefer "a death that's fun."

"It's not beneath me to dress like an angel with wings and to say, 'coming attractions,'" Adams said.

Adams said that a hearty laugh can produce 45 minutes of muscle relaxation. But he cautioned the audience not to expect any jokes from him. "Jokes aren't going to create a silly atmosphere," he said. "Being silly and creating a silly environment will."

Despite Adams' admonition, he and the other panelists could not resist trying out a few one-liners on the audience.

Adams, who once walked across the Soviet border in a clown suit, recommended that participants purchase a rubber nose rather than a gorilla costume, one of his customary outfits, for starters. "You've just had a physician recommend it," he said. "So say it's been recommended by a physician."

Coca was one of the few panelists or workshop leaders who tried to address the issue of humor and health in a mostly analytical fashion. ~~while drawing on her own experiences.~~ Aside from one humorous story about her family, she resisted the temptation to try to amuse the audience.

"I lost my husband last June," she said. "I visited him in the hospital a lot. We laughed a lot. It was an up thing for him. I didn't go in saying, 'Are we going to laugh today?' But when we laughed and we found something mutually amusing, he seemed to be able to drop what was happening to him at the moment."

"I think it would be terrible to be ill in the hospital and to have people come in and tell you jokes that you hate," Coca said. "That would set you back. I think you have to know the person you are dealing with and have an idea of what you find funny. Comedy is such a personal thing."

While performing in a play in Florida in 1973, Coca said, she was involved in a serious auto accident. She woke up in a hospital in New York City and was told by a surgeon that she had lost her vision in one eye.

Her husband, she said, helped her to cope with what could have otherwise been a terrifying realization by alluding jokingly to the example of actors such as Sammy Davis Jr. "My husband was wonderful," Coca said. "He said, 'Do you realize that you have joined an elite group?'"

The other panelists and many audience members were so spellbound by the appearance by Coca, whom they remembered from watching television as children, that they temporarily forgot the purpose of the conference. "What did it feel like to take the clothes off Sid Caesar on live television?" one audience member asked.

"I got an M.B.A. God knows what I'm doing in the humor field," the representative of the consulting firm, Mark Pearson, quipped. "Put your note pads down," Pearson instructed the audience. "I want you to stand, take a deep breath and smile." Pearson said that humor can help workers to communicate better and to take more risks, enhancing their creativity.



The humor educator, Melinda Rose, a former stand-up comic, drew a laugh when she stood up and revealed that she was wearing enormous rubber feet with big toes. A specialist in making funny faces, she instructed audience members to turn and make a face to their partners.

Rose told a story about how she went to visit her 95-year-old grandmother, who is gravely ill. "I just propped my [rubber] feet up on the bed," she said. "I thought she was going to go right there because she was laughing so hard."

In the afternoon, the group broke up into workshops. One workshop leader, a chiropractor from Huntington, Long Island, was wearing a striped shirt similar to a referee's jersey, an outlandishly wide tie with huge polka dots, a red clown's nose and rubber shoes shaped like chicken feet.

The chiropractor, Richard Statler, was directing workshop participants, most of whom were women of middle age or older, in the game "giant amoeba," which required that the group move in unison with its eyes closed.

Despite the workshop's title, there wasn't much discussion of the relationship between laughter and medicine, although Statler did make a passing reference to Norman Cousins's book, "Anatomy of an Illness," which has the status of a "bible" for the pro-humor movement.

The group, which included a sizeable percentage of therapists, as well as people interested in spirituality and personal growth, seemed to have an implicit faith in what Statler

referred to as "clown consciousness." They cheerfully donned Mickey Mouse and Viking hats, wigs, fake noses and other items provided by Statler.

"Okay, let's have another game," said Statler, shuffling around in his chicken feet. "As you can see, this is a participatory workshop." The group formed semicircles and was soon tossing beanbags back and forth.

"We're not here to analyze humor to death," Statler said. "We have to go back to childhood, because that's where humor starts."

- end -

*A solid job!*



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Roger Smith

5/17/88

TRUMP: The Art of the Deal. By Donald J. Trump with Tony Schwartz. Random House. 246 pages. \$19.95.

Donald Trump takes pride in his ability to deliver on his promises and to get mammoth construction projects completed on time. One can imagine him approaching the writing of this book (in much the same way) with his collaborator Tony Schwartz (as he did) the construction of Trump Tower, the Wollman skating rink and the Trump Castle casino in Atlantic City. The book is not an autobiography but is rather an edifice constructed by piling on layer after layer of materials forming a catalog of the author's accomplishments that are meant to impress the reader with their cumulative weight.

On the "ground floor" of the book, the reader is given a glimpse, much like someone strolling around the atrium of Trump Tower, into the everyday life of an entrepreneur for whom multimillion-dollar business deals are an everyday routine. The chronology of a normal day in Trump's working

life is broken up into 15-minute segments because (that's the longest that most of his business meetings usually last.) Written in a staccato style, the opening chapter has the effect of leaving the reader breathless just trying to keep up with the author as he meets and deals with businessmen and celebrities ranging from Ivan Boesky and Cardinal O'Connor to David Letterman and Judith Krantz.

*show some of this*

But the real foundation of the book is Trump's catalog of the various deals he made, and the implicit message that good old-fashioned entrepreneurship is superior to management by committee when it comes to producing results. Much of Trump's success, he keeps saying in one way or another over and over again, is (due to the fact that) he is in charge of a relatively small ((in terms of the number of) employees) private company and that he doesn't have to worry about what ~~his~~ stockholders think.

The reader learns in a single autobiographical chapter that Trump inherited his drive and his hardheadedness from his father, a successful real estate developer of Swedish ancestry who began buying up and renovating apartment buildings in the outer boroughs of New York City during the Depression. He says he got "a sense of showmanship" from his mother, who was more of a dreamer than his down-to-earth father, a hard taskmaster who taught him to keep an eye on the bottom line.

The Donald Trump who emerges in this pages is, despite



all his wheeling and dealing, a surprisingly bland person. One gets the sense that there are few people that he strongly dislikes other than Mayor Koch, whose administration he labels "both pervasively corrupt and totally incompetent." He does make a few mildly critical comments about businessmen whom he finds to be less than decisive in critical situations, such as hotel owner Conrad Hilton and John Bassett, the owner of a United States Football League franchise, but he usually tempers his criticisms with some exculpatory comments -- Conrad Hilton got "screwed" by his famous father and Trump felt sorry for him when he was forced to sell a casino in Atlantic City to Trump after failing to get a gaming license, for example -- that are designed to show that he's not really all that hard hearted.

*jud*  
In other matters, this book, which is written in a simple, declarative style that at times becomes monotonous, is relentlessly prosaic. In its judgment of people and art for example: "You've got to give it to her [Judith Krantz]: how many authors have written three best-selling books in a row? She also happens to be a very nice woman."; "Some people criticize [Sylvester] Stallone, but you've got to give him credit. . . . Here's a man who is just forty-one years old, and he's already created two all-time-great characters, Rocky and Rambo."

Occasionally, this book reads a pastiche of newspaper clippings and press releases detailing Trump's greatest

successes: buying and restoring the Grand Hyatt hotel on 42nd Street during the 1970s when the real estate market was in a period of decline, the byzantine negotiations to buy the Tiffany store and the site it was located on in order to erect Trump Tower, getting a foothold in Atlantic City when the casino gambling business appeared to be turning out to be less profitable than expected, the short-lived attempt to get the United States Football League off the ground by hiring stars such as Herschel Walker and Doug Flutie, the renovation of Wollman Rink and the ongoing story of Trump's proposed Television City project on the site of the former Penn Central railroad yards on the West Side of Manhattan.

What keeps this book <sup>from</sup> ~~at~~ being a pure exercise in self-congratulation is Trump's ability to poke fun at himself and (while attempting to portray himself in the best light, for example, in his struggle with a tenants group in a building he bought on Central Park South) to admit his faults to a certain extent. "I don't kid myself about why I'm asked to speak at or chair so many events," he says. "It's not because I'm such a nice guy."

Donald Trump is not a particularly introspective person, hardly a quality ~~that~~ would be expected in a businessman. He tells you hardly anything about his family life or his children. The book is unlikely to be useful as a business primer to anyone but the most successful and wealthy. But it delivers what it promises, a behind the scenes look at the



lavish life of a wealthy entrepreneur who relishes in recounting how he pulled off some of his biggest deals.

A - writing is flabby in spots as marked, but this covers all the bases -

Roger:

it's been a pleasure having you in class: you're a smart, careful editor and ~~to~~ have some good insight into writing - good luck in the future -