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NEWS LOCAL

After stroke, Albertan comedian bounces back

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By Tyler Zdan

"I've been a jerk my entire life, and I just started getting paid for it in the last ten years."

This is how Camilla Jones describes her foray into professional comedy.

Jones is a professional comedian, stroke survivor and a self-described "disappointed parent."

She originally stumbled into comedy on a dare.

Jones was living in Calgary when she was cajoled into entering Canada's Funniest New Comic - an open comedy contest - by a group of friends who had become very familiar with Jones' brand of sharp humor. She had no prior stand-up comedy experience, but was able to arrange a brief set that impressed both the audience and judges. Jones breezed through the preliminary rounds of the contest and eventually placed third out of 53 total competitors, catching the attention of a local talent agent who would help her find her first professional gig.

Shortly after her successful showing in Canada's Funniest New Comic, Jones was contacted by a representative of Alberta Family and Community Support Services, who asked her to perform at a womens' conference in Calgary.

The conference would prove to be her first professional performance. If she possessed any delusions of grandeur about becoming a professional comic, however, they would be short-lived.

"That was my very first one, and I don't think I even got paid - they gave me a frickin' plant," Jones laughs. "I can't stand plants."

From those inauspicious beginnings, Jones' comedy career soon began to gain momentum. She quickly found herself being booked to perform at a variety of venues - from conference centres to clubs.

She was truly beginning to enjoy the freedom that her newfound comedy career had to offer when, unexpectedly, her comedy career would be put in jeopardy by an unexpected illness.

"I had a stroke," she says. "My entire left side was paralyzed."

She was taken to the Foothills Hospital in Calgary to begin the painful process of recovery. Interestingly, the recovery process turned out to be much shorter than Jones' doctors had originally expected.

"They just couldn't believe how I recovered," she says. "I told them it was the positive attitude."

Jones insists that it was the healing power of laughter that allowed her to recover from her stroke with such relative rapidity. She was able to stifle the fear and uncertainty that came from finding herself hospitalized by searching for the humor in her surroundings.

"It was scary at first, but I laughed the whole time I was in [the hospital]," she remembers.

Jones recalls tormenting the doctors - to her own delight.

"I think the doctors were drawing straws to see who had to deal with me because I was such an ass," she laughs.

The stroke didn't keep Jones off the comedy circuit for long. Shortly after her release from the hospital she was back on the stage with new material.

She debuted with a new piece entitled Different Strokes for Different Folks - based on the experiences gained through her stroke and subsequent hospitalization.

It wasn't long before Jones' comedy career picked up right where it had left off at the time of the stroke. She began travelling across North America, performing primarily at conferences.

Jones' comedy delves into everyday life experiences and the hardships that can arise from daily living.

"I just observe everyday things and make fun of it," Jones says. "I make fun of growing up in a dysfunctional family, raising children, divorce, the dating game at our age - which is ridiculous in itself - and near-death experience."

Jones aims to use her comedy to help her audiences feel better about themselves and their lives, much as it has helped her feel better about herself.

"I hope to achieve my goal of having everyone leaving the room feeling good, knowing that their life couldn't be as screwed up as my own," she chuckles. "Nowadays with this busy world we need to learn to lighten up a little bit and take life a little less seriously."

Jones will perform Different Strokes for Different Folks at the Red Brick Arts Centre on Oct. 4 at 7 p.m. Tickets can be purchased for \$20 and can be booked through the NABIS Brain Injury Society at (780) 712-7560 or (780) 723-2390.