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American: The Bill Hicks Story

By Unknown

Everyone comfy?
Get comfy!
Get comfy!
Cos the show's about to start!
Who do you ever pay to talk?
Maybe a preacher.
Maybe a lecturer. Possibly a politician.
But even those rarely.
Comedians are the only ones
that you pay to hear 'em talk.
Talk to me, make me listen.
News is supposed to be objective.
Isn't it supposed to be?
The news!
But every drug story is negative.
Oh, well, hold it!
I've had some killer fucking times on drugs.
Let's hear the whole story.
What Bill said will never change,
because it is the basic truths
and they are never wrong.
Plenty of people say
he is the best American comedian
the country has ever produced
and he was only 32 when he died.
- His influence lives on.
- Bill Hicks!
Get out. You're everything that America
should be flushed down the toilet.
You turd. Get out!
"Hey, buddy, we're
Christians. We don't like what you said."
I said, "Then forgive me."
The sergeant sent me
and my men on a search
He wanted us to go out
and get the lay of the land
We were to find
Any people who might be
The enemies of man...
Free yourself, folks. You're right.
You're right. Not those fuckers
who want to tell you how to think.
You're fucking right!

Sorry, wrong meeting. Again.
I keep getting my days mixed up.
From the moment I met Bill,
throughout our life, it was about laughs.
Cos I think our parents were just happy
being comfortable. "Can we just be quiet?
"And can we just go to church and be
distracted by our religion? It's orderly here. "
Growing up in that environment
you start to get a little antsy,
because clearly
there has to be something more.
Lyndon Johnson talked
about the great society back in the '60s
and I think he was keying into something
and that was
that America's so wealthy and powerful
that we have to do
something responsible with it.
We're gonna defeat poverty,
we're gonna do the Peace Corps
or we're gonna make the world a better place.
And then I think that Vietnam stalled that.
So the generation that Bill and I came out of
was, we were looking around going,
"Well, there's got to be something else
we can do with all this. "
Bill was, uh...
I don't know, I just... He was interesting.
All of my children were special.
I had a girl. I had only a girl.
Then I had a boy.
And then I had a baby.
There was definitely something there that was
different from Steve and Lynn growing up.
But Bill... You should have known him,
is all I can say.
They were so much older.
Five and seven years' difference
is a lot of difference.
You couldn't do anything with him.
He was too little at that point.
Bill was seven
when we got to Houston.

Then we stayed there 12, 13 years.

Yeah.

He was just another kid
playing sports, you know.

It wasn't evident yet
where his life was gonna go.

And, of course,

by then he had met Dwight.

What I noticed about him is

he was fast. He had a real strong constitution.

He could do things better and longer
than everyone else.

An unbelievable scrambler.

I was fast but I wasn't a very good scrambler

but I watched him and I just picked him apart
about what he was doing,

then I was scrambling all the way

to the end zone, no one would touch me.

After we'd played a few times,

I just remember everyone leaving

and us being alone

and me thinking to myself,

"I think this is gonna be a friend of mine."

The first time I ever met his parents,

Bill did not want to introduce me.

He just wanted me to go straight up the stairs.

He would look at me and just go, "Look,

don't talk to them. Just follow me upstairs. "

But of course, you know, an adult says,

"Hello there! Who are you?"

You stop and you say, "I'm Dwight."

Bill's like, "Come on!"

You're stuck on the landing

between Bill at the top of the stairs

and you're at the bottom of the stairs.

And, "Well, just hold on. Where are you from?"

I go, "I live in Nottingham Forest too."

"What does your father do?"

"Works for Shell Oil." "Uh-huh?"

'Just leave him alone!' Bill's screaming at you

to come upstairs. "Come on!"

"Bill, would you just hold on?"

I'd like to know who your friends are. "

"Aaah! What does it matter?"

What does it matter?"

"Well, we're just curious.

Is there a problem we're being curious?"

When you reached his room, the door would be closed and locked and you were safe.

I had told him that I wanted to be an actor and he goes, "I'll show you these jokes that I wrote. "

Because we were joking around so much, he started saying we should be a comedy team.

It was completely alien to me.

I had no idea what a comic really was.

He told me that he'd seen Woody Allen on Casino Royale.

This guy made his living being a comic, and it really, really fired him up,

the importance of stand-up, that society cherished its funny people.

And for Bill, he knew it. He knew that he was gonna be the comic that shook people up.

His mom figured out how to pick the lock.

The door would open

and she'd be standing there with a butter knife.

"What are you doing?"

"I know you don't like me picking your lock

"but I am leaving

and you have not responded to me. "

"Well, don't ever unlock my door again!" Ppkkl

I'd never met anyone

who talked to his parents like that.

The Hicks family

is a very smart, intellectual family

yet there was this suspension of reason

when it came to certain issues.

We were raised Southern Baptist

and had to go to church every single Sunday.

It was just a strict household.

"You do this. You do that."

The one thing

I always wanted to get straight,

cos a lot of times it talks about, "The Hickses were raised fundamentalist Christian.

"No, we were raised Southern Baptist

and that's much worse. "

And he's right, really.
That's just the way we lived then.
But hopefully what you're taught there
teaches you the spiritual,
and I don't mean religion.
I mean the basics of how to live a life.
So when I was 17, he was 10.
I was like, "Get me out of this house.
I want out. "
And off I went to college.
I rebelled. Steve, in his fashion, rebelled.
And Bill rebelled too.
Stand-up comedy was not on
the map in the '70s, for kids to want to be.
But we were very determined
and so we started to do
this very much guerilla-theatre type
of comedy amongst our friends.
This group of people's just standing around,
and you appear,
and you do an outrageous sketch
and then you disappear.
What the hell was that?
And, of course, once they got wind of it,
they wouldn't let us alone.
"Are you guys gonna do your thing?"
After school we would go over to his house
and we would plan them and write them
and they were like gigs to us.
And it wasn't lost upon us, the fact
that we already knew what we wanted in life.
This was what we were going to do.
You had to sacrifice your family,
your relationship with girls,
your popularity at school.
We were sacrificing everything for this.
And there was nowhere to do our craft.
There was no open mics.
There was nothing in 1970s Houston, Texas.
As a backdrop to all this
is how we met Kevin Booth.
Bill and I just thought
that Kevin was hilarious,
just cos he was this technical genius

who could build things and blow things up.
I was known
as the instigator and a facilitator.
You know, if you had an idea for something,
I would go out and figure out how to build it.
You know, the fact that he was able
to get his parents' RV and hook up a generator
and then set up speakers and play rock'n'roll
to the Spartanaires
as they were practising their routines.
That just was like classic Kevin.
Because of this ranch,
I was able to get what's called
a hardship driver's licence when I was 14
without even like taking any lessons.
I just thought the two of them were hilarious.
It was like a new breed of person.
They did all this weird stuff,
and I guess we just started talking
about music all the time.
We wanted to be rock stars,
thinking like this was gonna be our way
to break out of suburbia.
Bill was like, "Let's go look
at these guitars downtown. "
I'd never driven downtown before,
I was like, "OK, I guess I'm game for this,
if you guys are gonna navigate the way. "
He goes,
"Did you see the paper today?"
He goes, "A comedy workshop has opened up
and they have open mic. "
"Open mic stand-up?" "Yes."
Oh, my God. Finally.
So we drove to downtown.
On our way back we passed this place
called the Comedy Workshop in Montrose.
Bill and Dwight were like,
"That's that place we've been reading about."
We couldn't believe it,
that something like this
had happened in our own backyard.
And we realised that now we had
a real chance. We could actually be comics.

Most entertainers have to deal with the fact,
"I've got to get to LA or Hollywood,
"I got to take acting lessons,
I got to get head shots. "
What's our problem?
We can't go out on school nights.
I remember my father sitting me down
and going, "Look, you're not going down
to a nightclub in Houston, Texas. "
Man.
We were strict.
We wanted to know where they were.
And we wanted to know
when they were going to get home.
And if they didn't give us the answer
we wanted, we told them what we wanted.
Bill and I talked about it
and he said, "We have to do it",
and I was like, "Absolutely."
The question was, "How are you gonna
get down there on a school night?"
When you're in Bill's bedroom looking out,
if you hop that fence, you are
in the parking lot of the Catholic church.
You could open the window,
but there also was a storm window,
and he became just very efficient at getting
that thing open and getting out that window.
You had to be quiet cos the roof
was right above where their kitchen was.
The evil Catholic boy
with his 14-year-old driver's licence
was sitting there
in the Catholic getaway wagon
ready to take the Baptist boy
down to the Comedy Store.
We'd never been in a nightclub,
but when we walked in it was like, "Whoa!
The whole thing is set up for comedy. "
And there was chairs
and they were all pointed at the stage
and this was what it was all about.
We did the first few jokes
and it started working.

I think everybody
was very receptive to it
because they were like these little kids
trying to be a part of this adult world.
When Bill first started,
you could see Woody Allen.
He actually had the Woody Allen mannerisms
a bit. But that's not a bad thing.
If you keep doing it and
you don't grow out of it, that's a bad thing,
but you can tell when a comic first starts
who his influence may be.
Bill and I got off stage
and we were flying. We had done well.
It was beyond...
You know, the exhilaration was just...
It was just, here we go, we're real comics.
And then the shit hit the fan.
Cos Mrs Hicks calls Scott's mom,
says, "Is Bill over there?"
"No, they went
down to the comedy workshop. " "Oh. "
So when Bill gets home, he gets nailed.
Mrs Hicks calls my parents, and I get nailed.
It went from being thrilled
with the fact that, "Hey, we're doing this"
to, "Now what do we do?"
We're comics, we have to work on this career.
We can do it.
And just as I thought that,
my father came home and said, "I've bought
a business in Klamath Falls, Oregon,
"and we're moving in July."
I was devastated, and I go,
"I gotta tell you something."
"In July I'm gonna be moving
to Klamath Falls, Oregon. "
And there was just this silence.
Bill didn't exhibit any emotion about it.
It was just one more fucking thing
we were gonna have to deal with
and in typical fashion
we just began joking about it.
"When you get up there to Calamity Falls..."

"It's Klamath Falls. " "Whatever.
"You're gonna meet a little girlfriend, you're
gonna be happy, you're gonna enjoy yourself. "
"Yeah, but I'm missing my friend."
"Oh, you'll make new friends."
You know, so we joked a lot about it
but there was this idea that it was all over.
What were we gonna do?
What could we possibly do?
He never focused on doing solo stand-up.
All our stuff was about characters.
It was about creating these worlds.
So I think when I left,
he just threw himself into music and the band.
I couldn't imagine
Bill performing without Dwight
or Dwight performing without Bill,
and I thought the three of us
were gonna be doing music forever.
Dwight took off. And poof, he was gone.
And at the time, too, I had actually seen
Dwight perform comedy without Bill
but I hadn't seen
Bill perform comedy without Dwight.
And so I wasn't sure how it was gonna go.
A big hand for the very funny Mr Bill Hicks.
Yeah!
Whoa!
Thank you.
You guys remember.
I gotta see if this is universal or not.
- Remember this thing called flinching?
- Yeah.
You know what this is, you guys? Some guy
would come up to you and they'd go, "Hey."
You'd go, "God! Watch out, man!"
And he'd go, "Flinch. I owe you a poke."
The guy would go, "Oh, shit, I flinched.
You're poking me."
You remember that? First time it happened
to me, this guy comes up, says, "Hey, Hicks."
I went, "God! Get away from me."
And he goes, "Ah, flinched. I owe you a poke."
I said, "Get away from me, you jerk."

Principal's walking by.
The principal goes, "What's going on here?"
And that guy goes, "He flinched.
He won't let me poke him."
And I said, "This guy's trying to hit me."
And the principal went, "Did you flinch?"
I remember Kevin telling me
early on that he's gonna be a comedian
and he writes comedy,
and I thought that was really strange, because
we were only 16 years old or something
and finally I just said, "Kevin,
I want to go over and meet this Bill guy. "
Bill and I had the same sense of humour
from the very beginning
and we just got each other instantly.
It was, "Really? You got a camera?
Oh, these pictures are good.
"Well, yeah, you're my photographer.
Take some pictures of me.
"I need pictures for a newspaper."
Just immediately, without question, I was the
photographer and he put complete faith in me.
I just saw it as that I found a kindred spirit.
He was the guy that was out in front,
breaking barriers.
Cos it was a very adult world
and he was like the high schooler
that was telling them what fools they were
for drinking and smoking
and giving them this clear mirror,
and you could tell
they all really respected him.
The good sign for a comic
is not just when audiences
come in and ask for you.
It's when other comics stop what they're doing
and come in the room and watch you.
There has never been anybody funnier
at his age as a stand-up.
Maybe the only other guy that touched him
at that age was Buster Keaton.
The stuff about his family and his parents
and growing up was entertaining to anybody.

Bill should have been famous right away.
Open house night, open house night,
your parents go out, talk to your teachers,
find out you've been lying through your teeth.
"His name is Bill?"
"I thought it was Moltvic."
Come home the next night and my father's
sitting there and he goes, "Hold it, Moltvic."
"Went out to the school last night and I talked
to your teachers and I talked to Miss Jones
"and she said you called her a frothing slut."
"What is that all about?"
"Well, Dad, she's a loser."
"Everyone's a loser, everyone's a jerk?
Tell me, Mr Blister, who's the real loser?"
"Promise you won't get mad, Dad."
Where it really hit me was
one weekend I was home from college
and he said, "Come down to this comedy club
and here was Bill performing
and the place was sold out,
and I remember going and telling all my
friends, "Man, you gotta come, this is unreal."
And it hit me pretty powerfully. It really did.
What Bill's comedy was,
was his view of our life.
He had been able to turn that
into this thing that could entertain strangers.
"Oh, that's what you been doing
the last few years. "
Both of my parents are college graduates.
My older sister's a college graduate.
I'm a college graduate.
Here came Bill and he said,
"I'm going to LA to be a comedian."
What does that mean, you know?
We had no idea.
When Bill basically said, "I'm moving
to LA and I'm not gonna play music any more",
I was really taken back,
it was definitely depressing.
LA was something that had to be
done. It was the next step. You had to go.
I cried, of course, and I said, "Bill..."

"nobody will say
a thing if you don't go. "
And he said, "Mom, this is hard for me
so I'm going, so please stop crying.
"If I don't make it, I'll come back.
But I've got to try. "
That's how he lived the rest of his life.
I mean, he had girlfriends and relationships.
But certainly life on the road as a comedian,
there's a lot of time by yourself.
I was working at the Comedy
Store and Bill came up one afternoon.
Pale, bad haircut, had a suitcase with him.
He said, "I'm here to be a comic",
and I explained to him about amateur nights.
I got lucky, and was passed
on my first audition. Bill did too.
The difficult part was stage time
once you became a regular.
Bill was in a hurry too.
He had an impatience about him.
But you went there to be on stage,
to hone your performing abilities,
and, you know, to showcase for producers.
I remember
we went out to visit him.
Being on Sunset Boulevard in Los Angeles
at the world-famous Comedy Store
where people like Robin Williams and Richard
Pryor and Billy Crystal also performed
and then Bill Hicks.
That was the Mecca for comedy
and Bill got his name up there.
OK, there's one for the books
right there, you know.
He was where he wanted to be,
and that was pretty clear.
You know, he would call me up
in these fits of inspiration
and go, "You have to get down here, we got
to do this script. It's our key out of this. "
I'd already decided
that that's what I was gonna do,
so I left the University of Oregon

and drove south to Los Angeles.
I remember knocking at the door
and it was an intense moment.
I had the map out
and I was going, "Dnde sta..."
And, "Sir, you can't come in here."
"Where... dnde sta the olives? They
chopp the olives?" "Sir, you can't. Please. "
And he goes, "Come on in,"
and of course it was just tiny,
and we would wind up
living there for two years.
I'd driven 11 hours because Steve wanted to go
down to the Comedy Store. I said, "Sure."
We got in his car, and drove down to
Hollywood and I walk into the Comedy Store.
This is it, you know,
the ground zero of stand-up comedy.
He always went up really early in the show
like second or third.
He never swore. He was the clean-cut comic.
It was a nice way to restart
a new chapter of our friendship.
I think we both knew that we weren't
gonna be working together as stand-ups
cos he had already
gone on to be successful.
The whole focus was
all this was leading to a script.
If we could sell a script, well, then,
that's when you get can excited.
We started to come up with an idea
of, how do we evolve these characters?
The father character and the mother character.
It would make a good movie.
We were writing constantly,
pages and pages of scenes
and we knew these characters,
the voices were in our head.
He flew back from LA
to be the best man at my wedding.
He was always gonna be my best man
and we were gonna be there for each other
whenever those times were.

But he had to perform that night,
and so after the wedding
a bunch of people went down there
and, "Yeah, let's go see him. What the hell!
Let's go down there, you know?"
I didn't know I had a funny brother.
That was the first I was aware
that that was what he wanted to do
as a serious profession.
He was hilarious.
The guy at William Morris said,
"We all want to meet with you."
He was a big frickin' agent in Hollywood.
He looked at us and he goes,
"You guys are 19?" And we go, "Yeah."
He goes, "How did you get in my office?"
So we kind of told him
the story of being stand-ups
and that we're just out of high school
and we're writing a script
about being from high school
and that really intrigued him.
He goes, "I want you to rewrite it.
It doesn't have much of an ending.
"And I really want to see
another script from you guys."
"After that, I want to talk
about representing you."
"You guys are gonna be good screenwriters."
And I was very excited too.
This was my first break.
Bill was just disappointed
because we'd put so much
into that script, obviously,
and he would have liked to hear
that it got bought.
And in the months that followed that,
he just lost interest in writing,
and I could not fire him up about,
"We have a ton of ideas about scripts."
"Let's just write another one. Let's get him
what he wants and see if we can do this. "
He just wasn't into it. He didn't want to.
He was through being a screenwriter.

He wanted to move on into being a comic.
Hello, this is Bill.
I just needed to talk with somebody and
this tape recorder is all I've got right now.
I haven't been funny in a long time.
I haven't come up with new material
in a long time,
and, I tell you what, there's nothing scarier,
especially for me out here, forsaking college
and an easier life, coming out here.
What happens if I am just not funny?
I have nothing. I am a bum.
I could be five years in the Store
and no one gives a shit there.
Fuck doing this stuff.
LA wanted six minutes of clean
to do on the Tonight Show,
and, uh... that wasn't enough for Bill,
Bill wasn't growing enough.
The only way you could grow
was to get more stage time.
Bill had... you know, was a veteran.
For Christ's sake, he was 21 years old in 1982.
And he had been a comic for seven years.
Coming to LA was such a romantic
and meaningful and emotional experience
and then leaving was like a thief in the night
with every possession he has
streaming out of the back of his car,
Bill in his leather jacket with his guitar
and me going away with a knapsack to Oregon
just glad to be the hell out of there.
And knowing that we both had all the tools
we needed for the rest of our lives.
For Bill, that period in Los Angeles was when
he solidified his identity as a stand-up comic.
You know, it taught him how to be on his own,
to take his comedy seriously,
that this was what he was
gonna do for the rest of his life.
It strengthened him and wised him up.
But even when
he went to LA the first time,
I don't think Bill had really found his voice.

You could be liked and you could be doing well, but that day you find your voice... The difference is night and day. Bill called me and I thought he was still in LA. He's like, "Guess what" and I was like, "What?" He goes, "I'm here." I was like, "What?" and he goes, "Yeah, I'm here in Houston and guess what else. "Me and you are gonna take psychedelic mushrooms tonight. " I was like, "Yeah, that's funny, Bill." He's like, "No, Kevin, it's not what you think it is. " And if there was the only person that could talk me into doing it, it was Bill. And we took some mushrooms in this vegetarian restaurant, and we just laughed our asses off. Only Bill would try hallucinogenics before he tried alcohol. He just had a whole new appetite, you know. "I want to try everything." When he came back to Texas realising that the difference between where he was and say where Richard Pryor was, was a way big thing, way bigger than he'd thought, he knew that he was gonna have to break moulds and that it wasn't just enough that he was the baby-faced kid. And I don't think he knew exactly where it was that he had to get to, but he just knew that he wasn't there yet. I think we left as kids and came back as real seasoned comics. Some sort of forces were moving people from Houston together. There were so many kindred spirits and other comics that made Houston different from other parts of the country. How many guys in here

just broke up with my girlfriend?
There were six of us at the time,
and it was founded by Steve Epstein.
I was more of the court jester
in a sense in that I was kind of goofy.
I... I say, Steve Epstein
was driving a 78 rabbit!
Ooh-orr!
He'd just flap around
like an unattended fire hose
but he got everything going.
Andy Huggins we met in LA.
I had a feeling Andy was more like
a Houston comic than an LA comic.
And after Armageddon, there'll be
a small reception at the Ramada Inn.
Jimmy talked me
into coming back to Houston.
He said, "You want to do stand-up?
We got more stage time for you here. "
That's all I needed to hear.
John Farneti was a very successful lawyer,
but just a terrific performer.
I was born in Wyoming. I lived there
until I learned how to read a road map.
I'd wanted to do it since I was six
but there was nowhere on earth to do it.
Then suddenly
there's this place where you just walk in
and people are lined up in the rain
to get in and see it.
And I wanted, like everybody,
to hang around with Bill Hicks.
Everyone knew he was
just head, shoulders, waist,
kneecaps and ankles above everybody else.
My problem with going to U of H,
I went there in the summer session.
All I had in all my classes were jocks
trying to make up credit, you know?
You know that feeling?
They weren't there to learn at all.
I remember the first day
of my eastern philosophy course.

The instructor walks out and goes,
"God is consciousness."
"And we are all God
trying to realise our full potential."
Wow.
This guy in the back row goes,
"Yeah, we gonna need to know that?
"Is that gonna be on the quiz?"
Hey-hey, hey-hey, it's just a sunny day...
From the time he started taking
mushrooms and smoking cigarettes
to that night he first got drunk,
I think it was only a matter of months.
When the Comedy Annex started hopping for
the first time, it was an exciting place to be,
and it was the place to go every night
where there was drugs, alcohol and women.
We were there every night.
Pineapple
and Huggins were hysterical drunks,
so I think he was ready
to learn from us in other ways.
I remember he came up
to David Johndrow and I
and he was like, "I want to try a drink.
"What's a drink people drink?"
I said, "You want to try drinking
for the first time, order a margarita. "
Then he went up to the bar and goes,
"I'll have seven margaritas."
And he downed seven margaritas
and went up on stage.
He never drunk before,
and the bitterness came out for the first time,
it just came pouring out.
He was literally crawling around the stage
with a full house of 200 people watching him.
But he was still funny.
People were still laughing the whole time.
The drinking was a way
that he was able to have this breakthrough
of really going out on the edge and
not being concerned with people's reactions.
Then all of a sudden he could really be bold

and really say what he wanted
and not be concerned.

- How's your ex-girlfriend?
- Oh, my girlfriend! Thanks, pal!
Throw salt on the fucking wound! Thanks a lot!
Why don't you just come up here
and throw salt on? Here's my heart. Throw salt.
Come on. Dig it in.
Yeah, my girlfriend left me. Five years.
I loved her more than anything
in the fucking world and she just split on me.
Remember your first love?
Didn't that hurt? Isn't it hard to get over?
But I think it helped my career
when she left me.
Cos I'm a driven man now.
I was driven by a fantasy,
that one day, this girl who I loved more than
anyone in the world and I gave my heart to,
and she spat upon it and spun out the door,
one day this girl's gonna be living
in a trailer park somewhere in Oklahoma.
Swampy trailer ground
and clouds of Aids mosquitoes
swarming around her
and blocking out the light from the sun.
She has like nine
naked little kids with rickets.
They got birds in their hair
and jam on their face
and rats laying babies in their ears at night.
And they bring home dead animals
beside the road to eat.
And she lives with this ex-welder
who doesn't have a job.
He's got fur all over his back.
He's fat like 600 pounds
and he makes love to her
with a broom handle at night.
And one night he's gonna be romancing her
with that stick and his heart is gonna explode
and she's trapped under 600 pounds
of flaccid, sweaty, fish belly cellulite
that's moving like the tides of the ocean

and blood and phlegm and bile
pours out of his mouth
and nose into her face, into her face,
and just before she drowns in that vomit
she turns to the TV and I'm gonna be on it.
Ha-ha-ha.

Once Bill decided
that he would just be in his home base
and he would just do his own comedy
the way he wanted
and that the world would come to him,
well, it did.

He was just too good
not for fame to find him,
no matter how many corners
it had to go around.

Jay Leno showed up at the Annex
and they all adored Jay Leno at the time,
cos he was the professional stand-up comic.
He was just the best.

Jay did help. Jay liked Bill's act.

He gave Bill advice.

He made a few phone calls.

When Leno said this guy was good, I
would imagine Letterman knew totally he was.
Hello. Good evening.

Good evening. My name is Bill Hicks.

Thank you.

Full name is William Melvin Hicks.

Thanks, Dad. It's a name
with certain connotations, huh?

Hi, my name is Melvin Hicks.

This is my wife and my sister.

Ha-ha. OK, man.

All right.

He called us
every time he was gonna be on
and I used to always tell him,
"Bill, it's just not you,"
but, you know, that first time, the impact
and nirvana of being on national TV,
I mean, we felt that too, watching him,
and I was like, "Man, that was great."
Christmas rolled around,

my friends got go-carts.
I'm 12 years old, I got a college dictionary.
Mom goes, "Bill, it's the thought that counts!"
Oh, Mom,
but what were you thinking? Seriously.
Yeah, well...
Laughter has become big business in Houston.
Now you've been on television,
it's like a stamp of approval.
So if you were on the David Letterman Show,
it was like, "Yeah."
He did not want
Jim and me to see him.
I guess he thought we wouldn't understand.
But we did sneak into that one in Austin.
Steve thought we were in shock
when we saw Bill perform.
I know you were in shock...
Uh-uh.
... cos he did not know they were
in the audience so it was the entire show.
I was not shocked, I was in awe,
to tell you the truth, I could not believe...
How the years have changed your memory.
I couldn't believe that he was up there
and he had such poise.
I think Bill was the one in shock.
But all he said was, "Well, that's what I do."
And I said, "Well, that was very good."
And then the odd thing about it is
he didn't really temper his material for them.
Not like I would have.
And I think they kind of treated it like,
"Well, that's his world."
"We don't understand it,
but that's what he does. "
He was open for anything, really.
Yeah, I have had a good job.
I've had a good job.
I'm not complaining
about every fucking job I had.
I used to work at a lady's shoe store. I liked
that. I got to see this all day long, man.
It was great. Women came in,

they'd wear dresses to try on these shoes.
I'm the guy
that helped them on with their shoes.
I don't know if you ladies do that on purpose,
but keep it up, will you?
They're sitting there going, "Oh..."
"How does it look?"
Oh, God.
It looks great.
Yeah, it's you. It's definitely you.
"Mm."
"It's kind of tight."
Oh, no.
"I can stretch it out for you."
So after I got fired from that job...
No one said it'd be pretty!
Bill was always an all-or-nothing guy.
There was no halfway for Bill.
And wanting to experiment with mushrooms
was to him a way of trying to, like,
further his evolution as a person.
Just hearing about something
was not good enough.
Bill always wanted revelation to be first-hand.
Our family got this ranch,
and it ended up being a place where
we could come and get away from everybody.
A lot of our friends were like,
"You guys are just trying to get fucked up,"
so Bill was like, "No, we really are
trying to get somewhere else with this. "
So we would go out
and fast a little bit and prepare
and then have this experience
and see what happened.
Well, some really amazing things happened.
The world is one magical motherfucker,
and if you take a certain amount
of mushrooms, you're in a magical world.
A lot of people have this thought
when they take these,
"Does anybody know about this?"
Because it's like a secret.
It's like this fundamental thing

about the human brain,
but no one knows about it
and no one talks about it.
There was one time in particular,
the harmonic convergence.
It was basically this time
when all the planets were to align
in some alignment that only happens
once every 10,000 years.
I remember walking down this tunnel of light
and feeling like Bill and I
were walking into a spaceship.
Bill was just asking,
"Who are you and why are you here?"
And basically being told
that the boundaries
of space and time were all in our minds
and that we all are one, and everything is one.
We all are one, everything is one.
We all are one, everything is one.
I remember Bill just looking at me like, "Oh,
my God. Can you believe that just happened?"
And at first I was like going, you know,
"That was just something I thought of",
and then Bill explained
everything that I had just seen
and then the day went even further than that
where it was like tapping
into these other minds,
like, thousands of them all at once.
And I'm really sceptical.
I was ready to say, "OK, we're on drugs."
But something about what happened
on this day was different.
It was significant and very tangible.
We all are one, everything is one.
You know,
this was accepted by human beings
that you take substances
to change your consciousness,
from the beginning of human history.
After that day,
I think he really was like 100% sure
that something did exist on the other side

and it helped him go out there
and become a lot more fearless,
and a part of his art was being able to
broadcast cutting edge ideas to the public.
We came here for the truth, right?
That's all I want out of life, is the truth.
Is that too much to ask for?
You ever see a positive story
about drugs on the news?
Ever? Me either.
Isn't that weird?
The news is supposed to be objective.
Same LSD story every time. We've all heard it.
Young man takes acid, thinks he can fly,
jumps out of a building. What a tragedy.
What a dick, really, when you think about it.
If he thought he could fly, why didn't he take
off from the ground and check it out first?
Why give acid a bad name
cos you're a moron, you know?
I'd like to see a positive LSD story.
Would that be newsworthy, just once?
Today a young man on acid realised
that all matter is merely energy
condensed to a slower vibration,
that we are all one consciousness
going through itself, subjectively,
there's no such thing as death,
life is only a dream,
and you're the imagination of yourselves.
Here's Tom with the weather.
Wow.
All the drinking and drugging too,
some of the club owners were concerned
about how erratic the shows would be.
Alcohol with Bill was definitely
like throwing gasoline onto a fire.
You know, it was kind of a tightrope, cos
you never knew what was gonna happen,
and usually, if there was
a lot of drinks being pounded down,
it was gonna go bad.
I mean he was always like an angry kid
but when he drank the alcohol

he was letting everybody have it.
And so we were like,
"Ooh, this is a new kind of comedy."
Shout...
Bill was what we used to call
a short ball. He got drunk real quick.
What happened?
The main thing that I always
remember was him getting on stage
and people in the audience
sending him up drinks.
Fuck it, I'll drink red wine if no one's
gonna offer me anything real. Fuck you.
And people said I couldn't improvise.
He could drink a lot because
he had all the adrenaline of the show
and he said, "I'm a bull,
I can't be brought down. "
Conflict.
Coke dealers
would be giving Bill free coke.
Can I get a shock of Jack up here?
How much can we get Bill
to take on stage? Let's all watch.
It was just like a red flag for club owners.
He was like suddenly
not on Letterman any more.
He started losing bookings.
Just be careful going home tonight,
cos I'm driving right along with you fuckers.
I got there in the middle of the set
and nobody was laughing, really.
But he was laying down on his back
- screaming into the microphone.
- It was awful.
It was terrible. It wasn't a show any
more. It was a drunk on stage is what it was.
I'd taken a friend from work. "You're gonna
love him. He's my brother. He's hilarious. "
You know, to have a room clear,
I felt bad for him.
He called me the next day
and said, "Well, they fired me too.
"Seems to be the thing. Everybody fires me."

I'd go, "Yeah, it wasn't funny."
Bill didn't bring these problems
into the family.
Just the fact that now he drank
and now he smoked, well, so did I,
so how big of a deal was that?
You know, I don't know
what I would have said, had I said anything.
Maybe I should have, but I didn't.
But I knew there was something in there
during that time.
You can see it in his eyes.
That was after he got in that fight
and he broke his leg
and he was performing
and leaning on crutches.
I'd like this man to leave the room. If I could
have that, please. Thank you very much, sir.
Yeah, why don't you pull out the fact that
you're a mobile biped right in front of me?
Why don't you do a fucking cartwheel
into your stall, sir?
Thank you, I'd like to do
my impression of Ironside now.
Next week we have Helen Keller...
No. I'm delirious. I'm delirious.
It's the heroin.
Seriously.
Aah!
Good evening.
Don't worry, there is no pain.
I just didn't want to spill my beer.
There are priorities even in the world of pain.
I wish that we had been
more worried about him, maybe.
But there was kind of a code that we had,
Kevin and Bill and I,
which was, "You were gonna do
what you were gonna do
"and I'm there for you
but I'm not gonna stop you. "
But it was kind of cool
because it was like we had faith in each other.
We tended to trust

that he knew what he was doing.
I got beaten up by a guy in a kilt!
Are you happy? You wanna see blood?
It suffered.
There were club owners that were willing to
forgive and forget, cos he was that good,
and there were other club owners
that... you know, it wasn't worth it.
It wasn't worth it.
When I saw him at my wedding,
he was clearly enmeshed in substance abuse.
You know, and he'd obviously been up
all night and he looked beaten.
My wife-to-be, and she'd never met Bill,
she didn't know anything about him,
thought he was wild, funny but wild,
could not be contained.
There were half a dozen of us
that were in a bad shape that way,
and we were drinking suicidally,
basically, that's where it was headed.
We were sitting up,
me and Bill, and he just started crying,
and he broke down and he said, "Man,
I've got a problem. My life is out of control. "
My big answer was,
"Well, just stop, then, Bill. Stop doing that."
And he straightened back up real quick
but it was the one thing
I always thought I let Bill down about.
And it was just from ignorance. I didn't know
how to handle it, didn't know what to do.
And when a Bill Hicks show became
more about, "How drunk can we get Bill"
instead of, "Let's see how far
Bill can take us with his ideas, "
that's when the party was over.
You know, realising,
"What the fuck am I doing?
"These people are not my friends, you know?
These people are trying to kill me. "
Led him down the path of knowing, "If I don't
make a drastic change, I'm gonna die. "
That was a moment of clarity for Bill.

That could have been
the wake-up call. I guess he just woke up.
He realised what he was working for
and this was in the way of it.
Bill quit drinking in February of '88,
I quit in April,
and we started going to meetings together
in downtown Houston.
Being the stupid alcoholic I am,
I'm going, "Good, good for him,
"he should go in there not thinking
about what a fuck-up I was.
"You need to get sober and get clean.
Good job. "
Bill knew there was no way he was
gonna be able to sustain any kind of sobriety
surrounded by all these Houston comics.
He told me,
you have to get rid of the people,
that you can't be around the same
environment and expect to survive.
Bill realised that he had to jump ship
and as crazy as it sounds, moving to a big
city by yourself is the way to get sober,
and, um... Bill just disappeared to New York.
When you're dealing with drugs
and alcohol, willpower, it's the opposite,
it's when you admit that you don't have,
you're powerless.
I don't think there was ever
a question that he was not gonna continue
even though the struggles
must have been mighty.
He was tapped on the shoulder
and this was what he was going to do
and it doesn't mean
it's gonna be handed to you
and I'm sure that it had to have
been unbelievably challenging.
He told me that it was six months
before he could start being funny again.
That's when he went from being
just an above-average comedian
to being something spectacular.

- Let me hear you say yo!
- Yo!
- Say it! Yo!
- Yo!
- Well, all right.
- All right.

That's it, end of your part. Thank you.

Hope you don't mind if I smoke.

I know it's getting harder

to find a place to smoke these days.

I feel like I'm in high school

with the bathroom window cracked again.

I don't do drugs. I don't think

they tell us the truth about drugs, though.

They tell you marijuana smoking

makes you unmotivated. That's bullshit.

When I was high, I could do everything

I normally could do just as well.

I just realised it wasn't worth

the fucking effort, man, that was it.

Why get out of bed? I'm just gonna get stuck

in traffic and go to a job I hate. Fuck it.

Stay in bed and watch cartoons.

By the time he came back

in late '88 for a show,

he almost didn't talk to me or Jimmy,

who was with him on the bill that night.

He was staying away from me, "You guys

drink, you get loaded. I can't be near that, "

which we didn't understand or appreciate.

Here he is, Bill Hicks!

Cut!

How about a hand

for Jimmy the odious Pineapple,

and John...

...John, his whimsical show, Farneti.

Yes!

Give them some love, guys.

Damn, give them some love.

Can I get a coke before I get one of my...?

I started out in this club ten years ago.

Pretty bold of me to admit that.

I want you to know

I started out when I was 15 years old.

It's kind of weird doing comedy when you're 15
and want to impress strangers.
I don't know these people.
It's scary, you know?
You don't know if you're funny.
You don't know, you know, what you're doing.
All the other comics were helpful. If I had a
bad show they'd buy me a drink or something.
If I had a good show,
we'd celebrate and get a drink.
Pretty soon,
I was trying to get a little better.
People I didn't even know
would buy me a drink after the show.
Women would come up to me, you know,
buy me drinks or offer me coke
and I started doing coke
and drinking every night
and women I don't even know
getting me coke and booze and...
Phew. I just want to tell you
what my life's been like for ten years.
How's y'all's jobs?
I said, "Bill, gosh,
you're not doing your mom any more.
"That's so funny."
He goes, "Yes, but I've done that."
"Yeah, but it's funny." I was still in the
thing where, "This is what he's all about."
But he was in this thing,
"I have other things I want to say."
John Kennedy is murdered. Martin Luther King
is murdered. Jesus Christ is murdered.
Reagan's shot, wounded, cancer eight times.
That fucker still walks, doesn't he?
When Bill first came back
and announced to me that he really
was sober several months later,
I didn't believe him at first,
and I watched him do a set at the Laff Stop
and all of a sudden it was like,
"Oh, my God." Bill was back.
The fundamentalists, they try to get
creationism taught in schools as a science.

Now what exactly would that be?

"We're gonna be preaching this science,
on the sixth day God created the world.

"On the seventh day he rested, and...

Well, shit, class dismissed, you got it!"

It was like he had re-hatched
out of a cocoon or something like that.

He had the same stamina
that he had as the young boy
that could run the 220s on the track team,
and smoke everybody.

You know, and I said, "Now is the time
we have to make a video recording
of a feature-length set,
and that's when we did Sane Men.

I remember coming in
to do the show that day
and I was just so scared that he was gonna
break his sobriety before he went on stage.

And Jimmy Pineapple,
who opened the show, had also gone sober.
Backstage, Jimmy said, "Screw it, I'm gonna
down some whiskeys before I go on stage. "

I hadn't been sober that long.

I go, "I could try it again later."

But for this show, these audiences,
working with Bill,

I wanted to knock it out of the ball park
and I wasn't gonna fuck around
with the jitters about being sober.

I know some of you people are looking up here
and saying, "Hey, man, this guy is it."

Well, you're right.

I am it. I've always been it.

Even when I was a kid, I was it.

When we played tag...

...some kid would hit me

and say, "Hey, you're it",

and I'd say, "You're goddamn right, buddy."

And here I am really praying
that Bill's not gonna do the same thing
and I went back into Bill's green room
and Bill was still just drinking water
and pacing around and smoking.

We were already making films
for Axis Television
and I was backstage and Kevin had said,
"Wait till you see his new stuff."
This was like the sober Bill, and I guess
he'd been on the road working new material.
How about a nice round of applause
for Mr Bill Hicks?
Yeah, it's good to be here.
I haven't been here in two years.
Thanks.
That warmth I've missed in Austin.
"So? We been here.
"It's not our fault you got to travel around.
"Shit. We supposed to follow you around?
You supposed to be back here.
"What are you doing? Where are you?"
Where have I been?
I've been on my flying saucer tour.
Which means like flying saucers,
like two have been appearing
in small southern towns
in front of a handful of hillbillies lately.
No one doubts my existence.
I've noticed a certain anti-intellectualism
going around this country, man.
I was in Nashville, Tennessee, last week,
and after the show I went to a waffle house.
I'm sitting there and I'm eating
and I'm reading a book. I don't know anybody.
I'm eating and I'm reading a book.
And this waitress comes over to me.
"Tut-tut-tut!
"What are you reading for?"
I went, "Wow, I've never been asked that."
Not what am I reading,
but what am I reading for?
Well, God damn it, you stumped me.
I read for a lot of reasons
but the main one is so I don't end up
being a fucking waffle waitress.
Am I stepping out of some intellectual closet
here? I read. There, I said it.
I feel better.

Suddenly he's just commanding
the audience. There's no breaks.
It's just perfectly choreographed.
I don't do drugs.
I want to thank management for offering.
But I said no.
When I say no, it means how much
and can I get some more? No.
It means... seriously,
it means no... is the bar open?
OK, no, it means...
Let's see.
No, I used to do drugs.
I had no luck with drugs, man.
Got pulled over tripping once.
Whoo! There's a dream come true.
I'll match that to any drunk story you got.
Pulled over tripping. Jesus!
The cop was tapping on this window.
We're staring at him in this mirror over here.
"How tall are you?"
Ooh-ooh!
Shit.
Ambush.
Big one and a little one.
Twins?
Oh, shit.
Be cool.
I think he had to work
to get to that point.
He had to go through some dark shows
and break some furniture
but after going through that
I think he knew where his limits were
and, uh... how much the audience could take
and how far he could push 'em.
Our emotions are running wild
and our mind has stopped, man.
The flag-burning thing. Oh, God, did that
bring up some fucking retarded emotions!
The flag! The flag! They can't mean the flag!
They didn't say that,
they said, "If the guy burns the flag,
"he perhaps doesn't need to go to jail

for a fucking year."
Pretty harsh on their part, isn't it?
People are going, "Hey, buddy,
let me tell you something.
"My daddy died for that flag."
"Really? I bought mine.
"You know they sell them at Kmart and shit?
Three bucks."
"He died in the Korean War for that flag."
"What a coincidence.
Mine was made in Korea.
"He didn't die for a fucking flag.
It's a piece of cloth.
"He died for what the flag represents,
which is the freedom to burn the fucking flag."
And as my friend Jimmy Pineapple would say,
case fucking closed.
We filmed two sets that night.
His parents were there for the first set.
And now that he had gone sober,
I think they were just more proud of him
and I don't think Bill
was really censoring himself that much.
He'd kind of gone beyond that.
Bill's demeanour was different.
His eyes were brighter.
My thought was,
"Thank goodness that that's behind us."
I never said anything like that to Bill.
I just accepted him like he was.
- Watch this, Uncle Bill!
- Wow.
We did have this place south of Austin
called Wimberley,
and when he'd come to Austin,
Bill went down there with us.
You know, I think that he just really
got into the rhythm of this place,
which was a total getaway.
The cracker man.
All right. It's a duck frenzy.
Yeah!
Coming from the hecticness
of what he did, what all of us did,

that was a great little place
to spend a week, you know,
before he went back out and hit it again.
I really don't think
the full Bill kicked in until he went sober.
I really don't.
I think a lot of people were still
coming to see the shock jock comedian,
and now Bill was slipping in
some loftier ideas to lead people with.
You know, just because this is a comedy club
doesn't mean that we can't do
something more with this.
My clothes have got to be clean, Dad.
- We're gonna have to do them again.
- Well, that's right.
When I saw him in Chicago in 1989,
we hadn't seen each other for three years.
His life was completely on track
and he was beaming about it.
It's been a very exciting week for me
because I'm working with Dwight, who...
He and I started off doing comedy together
when we were 13 years old in Houston, Texas.
It's good to be in Chicago.
What a great town, man!
Went to Linkin Park Zoo.
How many people have been there?
A couple? Yeah?
Well, if you haven't been there,
I'll save you a little time.
I'll do a quick visual impression for you guys.
First time ever seen.
This is every animal in Linkin Park zoo.
Here we go. Save you some time. Ladies and
gentlemen, every animal in the Linkin Park Zoo.
What a fucking rip-off.
We had
this unique relationship that...
I brought out things in him
that normally would not be brought out,
and he did the same thing.
What do you feel? What's inside you?
What makes you tick?

What fires you up? What pisses you off?
It's nice to have someone
in your life that's like that.
He brought that out of you.
He expected it out of you.
This is called logic. It won't hurt you, it'll
set you free. But we'll get to that later.
I think a lot of comics have confused
being a great comic with being like Bill Hicks.
Well, no, being a great comic has to do with
your inner voice matching your outer voice.
That's what Bill did.
His personality on stage was just
an animated extension of who he was.
Hey, get this, man. I was in Las Vegas, right?
I'm going to get an elevator at the hotel. I'm
smoking. There's a lady next to me coughing.
"Heh-hem! Heh-heh-heh-hem!"
Shut the fuck...
I look out the window of the hotel and I see
the sunset, and it's green and purple,
and it's 3pm,
and then a mushroom cloud
forms in the desert,
and the hotel starts shaking
and every elevator stops working.
I was a little bit curious.
So I turn to this lady who lived in Las Vegas
and I say, "What was that?"
And she goes, "Oh! That's the army.
We don't know what they're doing out there.
"Ha-ha-ha!"
And you're worried about my cigarette smoke?
I would get a fucking priority list happening.
And then I talked to people who lived in Vegas
and they go, "Well, they're 100 miles away."
Yeah, well, my little deodorant aerosol can is
I'll use Cheez Whiz aerosol, anything I want.
Shut up. Quit setting off nuclear bombs, OK,
it being our planet and all, don't you think?
What gives them the right to set off bombs?
Ha-ha! I love y'all.
He knew that he was
just formulated to be a comic

who was supposed to shake things up.
It's all about money, not freedom, y'all, OK?
Ha-ha. Nothing to do with fucking freedom.
You think you're free?
Try going somewhere
without any fucking money, OK?
When you laugh at 'em,
it makes you think about things
you hadn't thought about before.
It's about fucking money, not about freedom.
Don't ever think that it is. Thank you. Sorry.
I am a child of God sent here
to bring salvation to the earth,
and you're welcome.
When people walked out of
his shows, they may not have admitted it,
but they just were changed a little bit.
He knew that he'd have problems
because he would be going to places that
his fan base, his audience, may not follow it.
As Bill evolved as a comedian,
the comedy clubs were probably de-evolving.
Please quit yelling, man.
It's not funny, it's stupid, it's repetitive
and why the fuck would you yell?
I'm serious.
OK, what does that mean now?
Now what does it mean?
I understand where it comes from. So do you.
Now what does it all mean?
What is the culmination of yelling that?
- Jimmy Shorts!
- He's not here. He's not gonna be here.
Now what? Now where are we? We're here at
you interrupting me again, you fucking idiot.
Yes, we're here at the same point again
where you, the fucking peon masses,
can once again ruin anyone
who tries to do anything
because you don't know
how to do it on your own!
That's where we're fucking at once again,
the useless waste of fucking flesh
that has ruined everything good

in this goddamn world!
People started to notice Bill
at this point.
You know,
a lot of the places I travelled to
to be able to experience that with him.
We were brothers, we were pretty close,
and that's what we did,
you know, going to Las Vegas for the first time
and being there on opening night
by request by Rodney Dangerfield.
You know, and it was cool being backstage
at the filming of an HBO
One Night Stand special.
From the Vic Theatre in Chicago,
please welcome Bill Hicks!
Good evening, brothers and sisters,
friends and neighbours,
vibrations in the mind of the one true God
whose name is love.
How many smokers do we have here tonight?
That's a lot of energy for you fuckers.
That's good. Usually you get...
Thank you, guys, thank you.
Next time I need you, just hawk up
a chunk of lung for me, all right?
Rear back, launch a phlegm gem
towards the stage.
But listen to this.
How many non-smokers do we have here?
Bunch of whining little maggots.
You obnoxious,
self-righteous...
slugs.
Don't take that wrong.
I'd quit smoking
if I didn't think I'd become one of you.
But you got to understand something.
I don't do anything else. I don't drink.
Now, a lot of you non-smokers are drinking,
OK? I'm a non-drinker and I smoke.
Now, to me, we're trading off vices.
That seems fair to me.
Yeah. Little fuck. "No, it's not. No, it's not.

"Why should our lives be threatened by your nasty habit? Nyeh-nyeh-nyeh-nyeh-nyeh!"

Yeah, but you know what?

I can't kill anyone in a car cos

I'm smoking a fucking cigarette, all right?

And I've tried.

Turn off all the lights and rush 'em,

they always see the glow.

"Man, there's a big firefly heading this way.

"Shit! It's knocking over shrubs!"

It's really weird, he could do

an HBO special one night at a big arena,

and then to go back on the road

and do crappy clubs.

American Airlines flight 577.

I think to him

that was part of the journey,

getting his vision out to more people,

that was what he needed to do.

I'm really tired. I apologise.

I'm really tired of... from travelling,

and tired of doing comedy,

and tired of staring out

at your blank faces looking back at me,

wanting me to fill your empty lives with humour

you couldn't possibly think of yourself.

Good evening.

American audiences, people

are too quick to take offence over here.

He just couldn't get any momentum going.

So I guess there was a frustration

level of you grow past where you're working

and Bill was moving faster

than the audiences at times.

What is pornography, man? No one knows.

The Supreme Court says

pornography is any act that has

no artistic merit and causes sexual thoughts.

That's their definition essentially.

No artistic merit. Causes sexual thoughts.

Hm.

Well, that sounds like every commercial

on television, doesn't it?

You know, when I see those two twins

on that Double Mint commercial,
I'm not thinking of gum.
I am thinking of chewing.
Maybe that's the connection they're trying
to make there in a roundabout way.
You've all seen that Busch Beer commercial.
The girl in the short hot pants opens
the beer bottle on her belt buckle,
leaves it between her legs,
it foams over the bottle and over her hand,
and the voiceover goes,
"Get yourself a Busch."
Hm.
You know, correct me if I'm wrong,
that looks just... No.
No.
That fine liquor company wouldn't try
and plant that idea in my head, would they?
Not that fine upstanding liquor company.
Let me tell you what commercial
they'd like to do if they could,
and I guaran-fucking-tee
if they could, they'd do this right here.
Here's the woman's face. Beautiful.
Camera pulls back. Naked breast.
Camera pulls back. She's totally naked.
Legs apart. Two fingers right here.
And it just says drink Coke.
Now, I don't know the connection here,
but God damn if Coke
isn't on my shopping list this week!
After doing these big long shows,
which always wore him out, being on the road,
it was good to be back in Austin
and to be playing music with his friends.
The start of the Marblehead Johnson thing
was the three of us playing the night
of the first Gulf War breaking out,
and Bill had these new songs
that he had written.
My band Year Zero broke up
and we were looking for something to do
and Bill came to town one day
and sat in with us, and it totally jelled.

You're watching the live feed of the war
and the classic... you know, the shells
going over downtown Baghdad.

It was weird watching that kick off live,
and that's the surreal thing about American
wars now is that they're televised
with some sort of ratings blood lust.

#Just one thing I know for sure
Chicks dig jerks
Yeah...

Bill then got the HBO special
and gained greater and wider notoriety.

Still there wasn't that explosion.

Why didn't the country like Bill
as much as we do?

He went

to the Just For Laughs Festival at Montreal.

Just For Laughs

is like the Cannes Film Festival for comedy.

They come from all over the world
and it's a big deal.

He realised for the first time
in Canada that there was a new boundary
and far more thirst for his perspective about
what was going on with the American dream.

First of all, this needs to be said.

There never was a war.

How can you say that, Bill?

Well, a war is when two armies are fighting.

So you see right there, I think.

We can all agree. Yeah.

Those guys were in hog heaven out there.

You understand, man?

They had a big weapons catalogue opened up.

"What's G12 do, Tommy?"

"Well, it says here it destroys everything
but the fillings in their teeth.

"Helps us pay for the war effort."

"Shit, pull that one up."

"Pull up G12, please."

Shhwshh!

Kkkcckkk!

"Cool. What's G13 doing?"

Everyone got excited about the technology,

and I guess it was pretty incredible
watching a missile fly down an air vent.
Pretty unbelievable.

But couldn't we feasibly use that same
technology to shoot food at hungry people?
You know what I mean? Flying over Ethiopia.
There's a guy that needs a banana.

Shh-kkkrrrrkkk!

Shh-ww-shh!

Here he was not only just playing
in the arena of international comedy,
he was excelling in that arena.

Cos I live in the States,
a very puritanical place, full of superstition,
and ancient, ancient religions that
no longer serve their function on this planet,
because they're based on fear instead of love.

But, uh... they say
rock'n'roll is the devil's music.

Well, let's say that it is. I got news for you.
Let's say that rock'n'roll is the devil's music
and we know it for a fact
to be absolutely unequivocally true.

Boy, at least he fucking jams.

OK, did you hear that correctly?

If it's a choice between
eternal hell and good tunes
or eternal heaven

and New Kids On The fucking Block...

I'm gonna be surfing on the lake of fire,
rockin' out.

Oh, come on, Bill, they're the New Kids.

Don't pick on them.

They're so good, they're so clean-cut and
they're such a good image for the children.
Fuck that. When did mediocrity and banality
become a good image for your children?

I want my children to listen
to people who fucking rocked!

I don't care if they died
in puddles of their own vomit!

I want someone who plays
from his fucking heart!

I want 'em to fucking play with one hand

and put a gun in their other fucking hand!
Now, I hope you enjoyed the show! Bkkk!
Yes! Yes!
Play from your fucking heart!
I am available
for children's parties, by the way.
I don't think Bill knew
that this video they made there was gonna
suddenly be broadcast on British TV,
and then that was gonna be
the beginning of the next step.
From the United States,
please raise the roof for Bill Hicks.
Yeah!
I love being a comedian. It's the greatest
job in the world for one simple reason.
I don't have a boss.
Definite plus in a lifestyle, man.
Every job I've had with a boss,
always harassed.
"Hicks, how come you're not working?"
"There's nothing to do."
"Well, you pretend like you're working."
"Well, why don't you pretend I'm working?"
"You get paid more than me. You fantasise."
In Edinburgh,
he won the Judges' Award.
He realised, "Man, OK,
there is an audience for what I do. "
Here's an American ridiculing America.
He had been so good at making fun
of his parents, especially his father.
Now he was terrific
at making fun of his fatherland.
The American dream
was supposed to be us running from the Brits,
and now Americans are having to tell the Brits
what's become of the American dream.
They did get it.
They got it. They could handle it.
How that manifested itself
was his confidence went through the roof,
and he definitely attributed that
to being in the UK.

This is amazing. Last show I did...
You're not gonna believe this.
Belfast, Ireland, last week.
Never been to Belfast, Ireland.
Played to 900 screaming and adoring fans
in a turn-of-the-century theatre
that Oscar Wilde performed in,
only to come back to America,
the country I toured ceaselessly for 15 years
to play Adolf's Comedy Bunker in Idaho,
in front of 25 apathetic people,
strangers one and all,
who stared at me like a dog
that had just been shown a card trick.
One of life's little ironies.
When Bill talked to me about
breaking out in England and making it there,
I thought, "Oh, shit,"you know?
Over in England? But it was
pretty much for him a fait accompli.
"This is the place that gets me,
"I'm filling theatres, not comedy clubs,
impartial comedy clubs."
It wasn't really until
I saw the Revelations special
that we were all like, "Oh, my God,"you know.
"Bill's like a rock star over there,
that's amazing. You know, finally. "
You're in the right place.
It's Bill.
I'm so sick of arming the world
and then sending troops over to destroy
the fucking arms, you know what I mean?
We keep arming these little countries
then we go and blow the shit out of them.
We're like the bullies of the world, you know?
We're like Jack Palance in the movie Shane
throwing the pistol at the sheep herder's feet.
Pick it up.
"I don't want to pick it up, mister.
You'll shoot me."
Pick up the gun.
"Mister, I don't want no trouble, huh?
"I just came downtown here to get

some hard-rock candy for my kids,
"some gingham for my wife.
"I don't even know what gingham is,
but she goes...
"she goes through
about ten rolls a week of that stuff.
"I ain't looking for no trouble, mister."
Pick up the gun.
Pkk! Pkk! Pkk!
"You all saw him.
"He had a gun."
Bill was a true patriot,
and that is like a true American and a true
patriot does question the Government
and that's what being a patriot means,
is that you question the powers.
I mean, I think he was still
always proud to be an American
but he was embarrassed about the things
that his government was becoming.
By the way, if anyone here
is in advertising or marketing,
kill yourself.
Thank you, thank you. Thanks.
Just a little thought.
I'm just trying to plant seeds.
Maybe... maybe one day they'll take root,
I don't know.
You try. You do what you can.
Kill yourself.
Seriously, though, if you are, do.
Uh... no, really.
There's no rationalisation for what you do
and you are Satan's little helpers.
OK? Kill yourself, seriously.
You're the ruiner of all things good.
Seriously.
This is not a joke.
"There's gonna be a joke coming."
There's no fucking joke coming.
You are Satan's spawn,
filling the world with bile and garbage.
You are fucked and you are fucking us.
Kill yourself. It's the only way

to save your fucking soul. Kill yourself.
Thanks, thanks.
Planting the seeds.
I know all the marketing people are going,
"He's doing a joke." There is no joke here.
Suck a tailpipe. Fucking hang yourself.
Borrow a gun from a Yank friend.
I don't care how you do it.
Rid the world
of your evil fucking machinations.
Machi... Whatever. You know what I mean.
I know what all the marketing people
are thinking now too.
"Oh, you know what Bill's doing?
He's going for that anti-marketing dollar.
"That's a good market. He's very smart."
Oh, man, I am not doing that,
you fucking evil scumbags.
"Oh, you know what Bill's doing now?
"He's going for the righteous indignation
dollar. That's a big dollar.
"A lot of people are feeling that indignation.
We've done research. Huge market.
"He's doing a good thing."
God damn it, I'm not doing that,
you scumbags.
Quit putting a goddamn dollar sign
on every fucking thing on this planet.
It's a universal idea,
but supposedly it's the American creed,
which is free men, who can say
what they want and believe what they want,
and that's a powerful idea
when you see somebody that believes
so much in that kind of freedom.
That's exactly what you work for.
That's what it's all about.
Audiences that get what you're saying.
I got called by NBC,
so I flew down and spent
the whole week with him.
He was really relaxed
and he had some time off
and when we were driving around Los Angeles

we started developing new characters.
Los Angeles, California, stars in the making.
Everyone's got a rsum in their hands
and dreams in their eyes
and he'd given up smoking
and he goes, "I just feel great."
Bill never stopped
wanting to make it in America.
He was now kind of wondering,
"What does the future hold for me?"
You know, when I would go
watch him in Austin four nights in a row,
I would be amazed
that maybe something that was
just a throwaway line the first night
became a five-minute bit by the fourth night.
Put on a helmet, go wait in that foxhole. We'll
tell you when we need you to kill somebody.
You know, I'm so sick...
I've watched these fucking congressional
hearings and all these military guys
and all the pundits seriously...
"Oh, the esprit de corps will be affected
"and we are such a moral..."
Excuse me, aren't you all fucking
hired killers? Shut up! You are thugs.
When we need you to go blow the fuck
out of a nation of little brown people,
we'll let you know.
Until then, what do the fucking military...
"We are the military!"
"Is that a village of children and kids?
Where's the napalm?"
Shh-kkk!
"I don't want any gay people
hanging around me while I'm killing kids."
"I just don't want to see it."
That was, uh... June of '93,
and I have those shows on video,
and I was at work one day
and he called my wife
and he said, "Do you have a doctor,
a family doctor, here in Austin?"
And she said, "Yeah, we do,"

and he goes, "Could you call and make me an appointment? I'm having stomach problems."
Bill called a lot of times while
he was waiting to go on or whatever at a show
and I heard Jim say,
"Are you getting ready to go on?"
And Bill said, "No, I'm in the hospital."
And I remember
my wife answered the phone,
and then she said something like, "Oh, it's
your brother. He's got cancer or something",
like he was making a joke or something,
and I got on the phone and, "What's up?"
And he said, "Well, I got bad news,"
you know, and he said...
And I just... it just devastated me, you know?
I mean it, you know, so...
The foundation of our family
was probably laid early on in our lives
and I don't think that there was ever
any hesitation of decision in Bill's mind
that he just needed to get back home.
When he picked me up at the airport at LA,
he came straight from a chemo treatment.
And I kept saying, "You want me to drive?"
That whole trip, he drove the entire way, ten,
twelve hours a day, every day for four days,
and he wouldn't let me drive.
He came here
and he was sitting out on the deck,
and in years before when he'd go out there
and sit on the deck,
you know, he kind of wanted to be alone.
So I opened the door and I said,
"Bill, do you want to be alone?"
And he said, "Who wants to be alone?"
I said, "I'll be right there."
As serious as it was, it was a good time.
He started telling me
everything he had been doing,
filling me in on things
he thought I needed to know,
and he turned to me and he said, "Why, you're
more broad-minded than I thought you were. "

Also at night, Jim and Bill and I would walk.
Bill was encouraged by
how those tumour markers were going down,
and that's why Bill
didn't want anybody to know.
His desire to continue to work
and perform came before everything else.
Cos he still travelled. This was in August
and he was still travelling and performing.
Receiving an awful cancer diagnosis
and still wanting to work,
I mean, how many people really could do that?
And you know
what he used to say was
when he was on stage it all went away.
He just got in his zone and did his thing
and he never felt it, never thought about it.
He was also in that period
starting to put together Arizona Bay
and then Rant In E-Minor
and he worked with Kevin, his producer.
We had started working
on Arizona Bay a few months earlier.
I'm here. Here's my toothbrush.
Wherever I am. It's my... it's my little home.
The years and years that Bill and I
had worked together brought us to a point
where the idea
of combining music and comedy
just seemed like the next natural progression.
OK, here we go. Ready. Play again.
You all saw him. He had a gun.
Bill, you know,
had so much energy and so much focus
I never in a million years would have
thought something was wrong with him.
You know we're recording this for an
album. I'd like to thank you all for laughing.
When I got to San Francisco,
Bill was smoking again. That was strange.
What can I say? The hook is deep, man.
I went nine months without 'em
and that fucking hook, they dropped it
back in the water, boom, and there I was.

Whooh!

See, folks, here's the deal,
man, in my humble opinion,
is that what the problem with the world is
is very simple.

We're undergoing evolution
and all our institutions
are failing and crumbling around us
because they're no longer relevant.

Ha-ha-ha!

I'd say let 'em go.

That's all. It's just evolution. Evolution does
not end with us growing opposable thumbs.

OK? We're at the point now in history,
the first time ever, we can evolve at will.

And the way we do it is we evolve ideas.

By the way, there are more dick jokes coming.

Please relax.

Let's create a new philosophy.

What do you say?

Let's create a new religion. What do you think?

I mean, it's not necessarily new.

The... the seeds are real in the religions.

Love and acceptance and forgiveness.

That's good stuff. Let's... let's keep that.

Let's just drop all the dogma, OK?

And let's take care of the planet, OK?

OK.

I know I'm starting to lose 'em
a little bit here with this shit.

I'm like digging a fucking hole right now.

And another thing.

I don't think we would have gotten
as much done through those couple of months,
had I known he was dying.

He was looking now at his life like,
"I've only got so many months to live,

"I want to finish the script,
make a new Ninja Bachelor Party,
"record enough material
for several more records. "

So I was in heaven.

I mean that was my idea of a good time.

He actually included tripping on mushrooms

as part of the sobriety.

So it was surprising when Bill said, "Let's go to the ranch again and trip on mushrooms. "

Suddenly Bill calls out of the blue.

"Hey, I think it's time

we have another ranch blow-out."

I'm like, "Wow, OK. We just had..."

It's not something that you do that often.

It's pretty intense.

The only thing to me that signalled that something was a little bit different is when I suggested something that we were gonna do in the future that he didn't say anything, like he knew

there wasn't gonna be a next time.

Then he wanted to take a photo when we got back to my house.

I think that he wanted one last photo shoot.

I think deep down inside,

Bill was an activist.

It wasn't Bill's style to be a part of any kind of mob or group, or anything like that.

I mean, Bill was gonna do things in his own way.

I was in Australia during the week, and I'm from Texas,

and all the Australians were going... going,

"Bill, that guy is such a weirdo," right?

First of all, I'm thinking, don't hate that guy cos he called himself Jesus, you know,

and my first thought was, "Come on, the guy's real name is Vernon.

"Let him be Jesus for a couple of months, you know? I mean, what's it to you?"

March of '93, the Bureau

of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms

performed a raid on a kind of a cult compound outside of Waco, Texas

that was headed by David Koresh.

This story was so fascinating to Bill

that we gathered all our cameras

and drove up there.

Hi, Bill, we're almost there. Sense anything?

I smell some holed-up people.
Good afternoon. Where are we going to?
Oh, we were gonna get
as close as we could and film it.
The government was careful to
make sure that the press was pushed back
something like two miles
away from the compound.
It's still a matter of debate
like who fired first.
But one thing is for sure, that
they were just firing into a plywood building
that was filled with, you know,
men, women and children.
The whole country just stood by and was just
like, "Well, they're a bunch of fanatics,
"they got what they deserved,"
and I think that's what enraged Bill the most,
to be that one guy going, "Hey, everybody,
did you just see what they did?
"Now, seriously, does everybody
really think that's OK, you know?"
Ladies and gentlemen,
I have some very shocking news for you.
I have seen photos that you probably
have never seen, some of you never have,
that's never aired on network television,
footage of Bradley tanks
shooting fire into the compound.
The Branch Davidians did not start the fire.
They were murdered in cold blood by
the pussies, the liars, the scumbags, the ATF,
and the meaning of it all,
the reason you didn't see it,
the reason they said the Branch Davidians
started the fire... No, they didn't,
cos they know now
that David Koresh was trying to finish
that fucking whatever,
seven-seals horse shit he was doing.
They know that.
They burn these fucking people alive
because the message they want to convey
to you is state power will always win.

We'll paint you as a child molester and we'll
paint you as a methamphetamine manufacturer,
we'll say any lie we want over our
propaganda machine, the mainstream media,
and we'll burn you and your children
in your fucking homes.

So you just be apathetic, America,
you stay docile,
and don't you ever forget
you're free to do what we tell you.

The real implication is why no mainstream
media has picked upon this footage
and thought that it was news.

This tells you something about America
and the state of freedom that you live under.

Just seeing it first-hand,
and seeing him do it on TV.

What if that was you in there?

You may not agree with them,

but what if the day comes

where you're the guy in that church
practising something that they don't like?

Bill really was in the state of mind,
of, you know, for one, I'm not taking
any shit from anybody any more,
or two, I'm gonna just tell everybody
exactly what it is they need to hear,
because time is of the essence here.

That last day we tripped out here,

Bill was preparing

for his last Letterman appearance.

It was only a matter of days.

He was taking this one really seriously.

And of course, Bill was the only one thinking
that this was gonna be the last time
he was gonna perform something to be seen
by the entire American public.

And he called me up, he was like, "David,
I think I finally did it. It went so good. "

And then about an hour or so later, he called
and he was just like, "I can't believe it,
"they cut it."

Bill's reaction, I am pretty sure,

was because he knew what he was facing.

I just remember him saying,
you know, "I'm done with this.
"I'm tired of trying to please these people,"
and then, "I'm trying to be myself
and they want me to be somebody else,
"and so I'm just not gonna do it any more,"
it was kind of final like that.
Then he invites me over to Igby's
and as we were walking, he goes, "This is
gonna be my last night working at Igby's. "
I go, "Why do you say that?"
To me it made no sense at all.
"I mean, it's a nice club. You like the club."
He goes, "Some things you just know."
I thought maybe it's cos
he was gonna move to England.
Folks, I appreciate you coming out.
It's a very sentimental evening for me
and a very exciting one.
But this is my final live performance
I am ever going to do, stand-up comedy-wise.
True. No, no, no, don't get me wrong.
It's not sour grapes.
I've loved every, you know, moment
of the 16 years I've been doing it,
in total anonymity in the country I love,
and, uh... every delayed flight,
every Econo Lodge, I've loved it all,
playing the Comedy Pouch
in Possum Ridge, Arkansas, every three months,
it was my treat.
When I saw the Igby's tape,
it just flat out blew me away.
You listen to any set after he knew he was sick
and they're phenomenal, raging.
You can just feel
the, "I got to get this shit out."
I went in and I said, "I want to do a show
"where we rid the world
of all these fevered egos
"that are taking our collective unconscious,"
and the CBS guy goes, "Will there be titty?"
And I said, "Yeah, all right, sure. Uh... sure."
Boom! A cheque falls in my lap.

I'm a producer. We've had creative meetings.
"What are these titties gonna do?"
"Uh... jiggle?"
"Son, you're a genius.
Where have you been all our lives?
"Oh, at the Comedy Pouch
in Possum Ridge, Arkansas, you fuck.
"I had no idea if I said the word titty,
I'd get my own show,
"but damn it,
damn me for not thinking of that."
What does everyone love?
Titties. Yes.
Kevin called me
and said, "Bill's coming over
"and he wants to talk to us about something."
And so when he came over,
we knew that something was wrong
because he was kind of weepy
and he was hugging us and saying he loved us
and then told us that he had cancer
and had been told that he was gonna die soon.
You know, it was just like that feeling
of just falling into a tunnel
and going, "Oh, God,
everything makes sense all of a sudden."
He called and told me
and then asked me who he should tell,
whether he should tell other people or not.
"Of course you fucking...
"You know, these are your best friends. You
have to tell them."
It was just shock forever, you know.
Still can't believe it.
It always just seemed then,
as it seems now, that Bill is, uh... out of town
and he's mad at me
and he'll call me when he gets over it.
An awful thing, but Bill's gonna beat it
and this has got to be
at least 20 minutes of material
and it's gonna be difficult
but he'll do it, he'll do it.
This fucking sucks. You're just like...

I'd lost my mom four years earlier
to the same thing, pancreatic cancer.
Only Bill, only Bill could that happen to.
I mean the timing of it was so Bill, you know?
He said, "John, you know,
everything that happens is right,
"and that the last thing
that you have is family.
"It's the only thing you truly have is family."
Which, of course, it goes without saying,
it never occurred to me.
Right before we hung up
I said, "I'll see you again,"
and he said, "I know," and hung up.
He said, "I don't want to die.
"It is like the biggest joke on me
in the world.
"You know, here I've been a comedian
all my life, and now the big joke's on me,
"right when it was all coming together."
Is there a point to all this?
Let's find a point.
Is there a point to my act?
I would say there is.
I have to.
The world is like a ride in an amusement park,
and when you choose to go on it, you think it's
real, cos that's how powerful our minds are,
and the ride goes up and down
and round and round, it has thrills and chills,
and it's very brightly coloured
and it's very loud, and it's fun for a while.
Some people have been on the ride
for a long time
and they begin to question,
"Is this real or is this just a ride?"
And other people have remembered
and they come back to us and say, "Hey,
"don't worry, don't be afraid ever
because this is just a ride,"
and we kill those people.
Ha-ha!
"Shut him up. We have a lot
invested in this ride. Shut him up.

"Look at my furrows of worry.
"Look at my big bank account and my family.
This has to be real."
It's just a ride. But we always kill
those good guys who try and tell us that.
You ever notice that?
And let the demons run amok.
But it doesn't matter because...
it's just a ride
and we can change it any time we want.
It's only a choice. No effort. No work. No job.
No savings of money.
A choice right now between fear and love.
The eyes of fear want you to put bigger locks
on your door, buy guns, close yourself off.
The eyes of love, instead,
see all of us as one.
Here's what we can do to change the world
right now to a better ride.
Take all that money we spend
on weapons and defence each year,
and, instead, spend it feeding, clothing
and educating the poor of the world
which it would many times over,
not one human being excluded,
and we can explore space together...
...both inner and outer...
forever in peace.
Thank you very much.
You've been great. I hope you enjoyed it.
Thank you very much.
My mom called me the other day.
She's going, "Bill, honey,
it's your daddy's birthday tomorrow.
"I want you to call him up and wish him
a happy birthday. It'll mean so much to him.
"Please don't you forget to do that.
"It'll mean so much to him,
to wish him a happy birthday.
"Please do it for me, honey. Please."
I said, "OK, Mom, sure."
I called up my dad.
Said, "Dad, happy birthday."
He goes, "Thanks, son. Here's your mother."

I kind of look
at the audience out there too.
Are they going to be able to take
that inspiration that they feel
and move it forward?
It's not enough
just to make jokes about it.
You have to kick over some tables.