

Excerpts from the book

# SPIILLED GRAVY

*Advice on love and life from a man uniquely unqualified to give it.*

Written by  
Ed Driscoll

**From Chapter Two, "A Major In Comedy, Plus A Minor In Partying,  
Equals A BS In Relationships."**

As I dropped my old hot water tank at the curb, a white car with a smiling man behind the wheel pulled into my driveway. I thought, hey, it's probably one of the neighbors I haven't met, just wanting to say "Hi." Well, I was half right. He was one of my neighbors, only he was at my house in his official capacity as a City Inspector. "Do you have a permit for that water heater?" he asked. "No, but I'm throwing it out anyway," I offered. "I assume you got a new one," he continued, "so should I assume you got a permit for the new one?" As it sank in that he was serious, the best I could blurt out was, "I didn't even know you had to have a permit," with a sick, Pee Wee Herman-like giggle. He eyed me with disdain. "Well, you do. You'll need to go to town hall today to get one." My head was whirling. I've never heard of anyone in this town getting a permit for their water heater, but then I figured out why that is. Because the only way to get caught replacing a water tank without a permit is to have the Inspector drive by the very six seconds you're dragging the old one to the curb. What are the odds? Pretty damn good if you're me.

The Inspector introduced himself as Mark, and told me he lived down the street. "I'll have to bring the wife by to meet you." Great, I thought, she's probably with the IRS. She can sift through my tax records and he can write me a plumbing citation while I barbecue for them. "I want to see that permit when I stop by later today," he said with an odd smile. For a brief moment, I entertained the thought of killing him and burying him in my back yard, but I realized I'd probably need a permit for that, as well.

I shook my head in exasperation. It was amazing that no matter how black my mood already was, something always came along to make it even darker. If the black hole that was now my brain got any bigger, it might start absorbing asteroids and space station debris.

I tried to focus on the task that was directly in front of me, half-heartedly giving myself a pep talk. Oh well, I thought, just go get the damn permit. Hey, how horrible could City Hall be on a Saturday morning?

Four hours in the packed, sweltering lobby later, after reading the same copy of "Penny-Pincher Shopper's Guide" for the fifteenth time, (I would have done the crossword puzzle, but every line had been filled in

with the word “shit,” in ink), my number (two million four) was called to the “permits” window of City Hall.

“I’d like a permit for my new hot water tank,” I told the stern-looking woman in charge.

“You don’t need a permit for a water tank, sir.”

“That’s not what my neighbor told me.”

“Well, is your neighbor a City Inspector?”

“As a matter of fact, he is.”

“Are you sure?”

“I didn’t see a badge or anything, but yeah, he seemed like one.”

Eventually, she had to make up a form by hand because apparently nobody had actually purchased a water tank permit in Los Angeles before, because the only way you could get caught is...well, you know. She wasn’t even sure what to charge me, but twenty bucks seemed unreasonable enough, and I was out of there.

As I drove home, my resentment toward Mark the inspector began to fade as I realized that in fact, it probably would behoove me to have him on my side. After all, with the amount of work I wanted to have done on my house, it might actually be a beneficial thing if I could curry some favor with an inspector. As long as I was on his good side, he might be

able to help me out, perhaps cut through paperwork, or give me hints on how to circumvent some of the more arcane City laws. Maybe he wasn't really such a stickler for the rules once someone got to know him. If he was even able to get me out of a parking ticket one time, it would be worth it.

I was surprised when I arrived home to find Inspector Mark waiting for me in front of my house. This time, though, I was ready for him. I bounded out of my car and waved my permit at him triumphantly. He was extremely pleased. "Hey, that's great, you got right on that. That shows me you respect the city, and that makes me respect you."

I felt like a little kid being praised for eating his vegetables.

"You know, I'm really on the homeowner's side," he continued. "People think I'm there to hassle them."

"I never thought that," I fibbed.

"In fact, I protect people from unscrupulous contractors," he offered.

"That must be a great feeling," I said, losing all respect for myself, yet determined to have a "friend" at City Hall. "I'll bet you know all the important people in city government, huh? You probably get favors from powerful folks, like yourself, all the time."

“Well, I don’t like to brag, Ed, but yeah, actually, I do.”

“So,” I asked, “Did you come to see me for this permit? Or were you just making a social call? Do you want to come in for some coffee?”

“Actually, I just stopped over to say goodbye.”

I gave him a puzzled look. “What do you mean?”

“I’m moving. Changing jobs. I’m going to San Diego to work in my brother’s antique business.”

I dropped my friendly visage. “So, checking this permit is basically your last official act?”

“Well, second to last. I’m afraid my very last official act is to give you this citation for improperly installed gutter spouts. Sorry.” He tore off a \$25 ticket and handed it to me. “But I’ll take that coffee.”

**From Chapter Three, “Up My Career.”**

Now that I was doing comedy professionally, I was under pressure to create new material constantly. A common question asked of myself and other comedians is, “Where do you get your ideas?” In reality, I guess I shouldn’t expect people to know that my “ideas” come from everywhere, everybody, and everything.

For whatever reason, my mind has always worked this way, viewing just about everything that happens in life as a possible joke, or a possible sketch, or a possible scene for a movie.

Unless I'm with close friends, I won't write anything down in front of people. I don't want folks to suddenly feel like they're at a function at Bob Woodward's house.

I keep a notebook and pencil in my car, and pens and legal pads are scattered about my house, for those times when inspiration hits. Yet somehow, whenever I need a pen to write down an important phone number, none can be found.

I sometimes will dictate thoughts into a little tape recorder, but I discovered that one has to be careful with that method. On one occasion, while talking with people at a party, I said something I thought could be useful for my routine. I excused myself from the living room, and went into the bathroom to record my thoughts. I had to pee as well, so I multi-tasked and did both simultaneously. Unfortunately, I hadn't locked the door, and another guest barged right into the john. Though I was stunned, the intruder was even more so to see me standing there, whizzing while talking into a tape recorder. It was quite embarrassing for both of us. The best I could do was turn to him and say, "Uh, I like to keep a journal

of what my urine looks like each time I go. That's why they call this machine a "dick-taphone." A moment that scarred us both for life, I'm sure.

#### **From Chapter Four, "Bombed In Boston."**

I kept my promise to Sally of not drinking, but it was sheer hell. Both nights after my shows, I paced my hotel room, unable to sleep. My heart was pounding. I felt the walls closing in on me. I was starting to get a glimpse of just how much jeopardy I was really in. My mind was racing with thoughts, "How did I get like this? Why is it so hard to not drink for just one night? Why do I have to live like this?"

Somehow, I made it through the evening without imbibing, and drove back to Boston the following morning. I couldn't wait to look Sally in the eye and tell her I'd kept my promise.

On the way to her place, I suddenly decided to celebrate my weekend of sobriety by stopping off to have a few cocktails. Time sort of got away from me, and when I called Sally from a bar to tell her how I hadn't drank all weekend, it somehow didn't impress her as much as I had hoped.

Sally ended things between us right then and there, over the phone, and I couldn't really blame her. I wished her well, and went back to my seat at the bar. Oh well, there went another one. I rationalized that it was probably for the best, she would only get in the way of my career. And I certainly didn't want ANYTHING getting in the way of my career, I mused, as I downed yet another Scotch.

Several days later, I sat in my apartment attempting to smooth out my standup routine. For some reason, I didn't seem to be doing as well onstage as I used to, and I hadn't been coming up with as much new material lately, either. As I sat looking at my blank computer screen, I got very frustrated, so I figured I'd relax with a couple beers. After all, I wasn't scheduled to work that evening, so what did it matter? I kicked back with a beer or two or five or ten. I was typing things into my computer, but oddly, they didn't read as funny on the screen as they sounded in my head.

Several hours later, my phone rang, and I let the machine pick it up. I was just sober enough to realize how drunk I was, and there was no way I was in any condition to talk to anyone.

I turned up the volume and listened as my apartment was filled with the voice of a local talent agent. He was calling because some very influential network television executives were in town for the evening, and wanted to scout several performers. They'd requested to see me, and the agent wanted to know if I could perform that night at a club downtown.

"Sorry for the late notice, but they just contacted me a minute ago. You're my first call. These people are only here for the day, Ed, so please call me the second you get this message, okay?" There was a loud click, and the electronic voice of my machine announced, "Tuesday, 3 PM."

My heart sank. Why couldn't he have called me earlier? Why did it have to be tonight? He could at least have the decency to warn me! This was a day off, didn't he know I'd be "relaxing"? I knew there was no way I could sober up enough to perform that night.

I played the message over and over, torturing myself.

*"Tuesday, 3 PM, Tuesday, 3 PM..."*

They seemed like the most mocking, cruel words possible. I felt my world caving in on me. Here I'd worked so hard, almost obsessively, to

have just this kind of opportunity. And now that it had finally arrived, I was too impaired to seize the moment.

*“Tuesday, 3 PM, Tuesday, 3 PM...”*

I couldn't even call the agent back, and I suspected he'd figure out why I hadn't. After all, my drinking was hardly a secret. All my peers knew, and many considered me an underachiever, largely due to this very problem. I considered myself an underachiever as well, feeling that for my talent, I should be doing a lot more in the industry. But I attributed it to bad luck, a lack of the lucky breaks that I so richly deserved.

Alcoholism, which is a progressive illness, certainly threw gasoline on the fire of career frustration. Disappointment and self-pity were my daily companions. Why wasn't I receiving bigger offers? Why wasn't I famous by now? After all, hadn't I proven myself time and time again on stages, in print, on television? Why couldn't I move forward, and attain the ultimate success I felt was my destiny? Why did these scouts have to show up when I was hammered? Damn my luck!

Though I didn't realize it at the time, booze, besides being a chief obstacle to happiness, fueled one of the other most insidious obstacles to peace of mind: the sense of entitlement. I felt because I had a gift for humor, that I somehow DESERVED to have things go exactly as I wanted them to. I naively expected fame and fortune, feeling it was my inalienable birthright. I realize now that this is a ridiculous premise. Entitlement suggests that life is fair, which of course it's not. I DESERVE to be successful? Well, certainly, people who are blind DESERVE to see, and people who are deaf DESERVE to hear, and people who are starving DESERVE to eat. When put in this perspective, my insistence on having what I think I DESERVE looks quite petty indeed. But it's a perspective I certainly didn't have at the time.

*"Tuesday, 3 PM, Tuesday, 3 PM..."*

As the cruel voice of the machine taunted me, I began sobbing uncontrollably. I had bottomed out. I was sick and tired of alcohol crippling my ability to work on my craft. I was sick and tired of embarrassing myself in front of friends and co-workers. I was sick and tired of it wreaking havoc in all areas of my life. Ultimately, I was just sick

and tired of feeling sick and tired. I felt utterly defeated, physically, mentally, and spiritually. For so long I had thought that booze was my best friend, and instead it had turned out to be my worst enemy. The cumulative effect of all the drunken incidents, both big and small, had taken too big a toll. My entire life was becoming unmanageable. Terrified, I finally had to face the fact that either things would have to change, or I would eventually die from this addiction.

**From Chapter Four, "Bombed In Boston."**

One of the side benefits of a broken engagement, other than the general embarrassment and emotional scarring for life, is dealing with the engagement ring. You guys thought it was a hassle buying it? Try returning it after a breakup. I imagine it would be easier to return a kidney transplant, and as I came to find out, far less painful.

When I first began shopping for Judy's ring, I was, of course, horrified to find out the cost of diamonds, or rather, what they CHARGE for diamonds. I thought the markup on pizza was high. At least with pizza the pleasure lasts for awhile. I love all the diamond ads in magazines asking, "Isn't she worth two months' salary?" What they neglect to mention is that they want you to pay two months of Bill Gates' salary.

And if they really are talking about two months of MY salary, well, I work freelance, so the question becomes, which two months? How about the two I was on unemployment?

I got to learn all about the diamond “C’s”: color, clarity, carat, can’t afford it. I haven’t seen that many expensive “C’s” since George W. Bush’s Yale transcript. Blinded by horrifically bad judgement disguising itself as “love,” I ended up purchasing the ring of her dreams, (and my nightmares) for a “discount” of \$20,000. The whole time I was thinking, hell, for \$20,000, it should be Joe Montana’s Super Bowl ring.

She enjoyed showing the ring off to her friends, and I was happy to see her do so, though in my mind the perspective was a bit different. When I looked at the ring, I didn’t see a diamond. I saw the home entertainment system for my den that I didn’t have.

At least it wasn’t hard to get the ring back from Judy. (And I had no idea she could throw that hard.) I decided that I needed to get rid of it as fast as possible. I had enough hurtful reminders around. I didn’t need one that could cut glass.

I called Ahmos Hassan, a good friend who also happens to be my manager, or “baby-sitter” as he likes to joke. (I THINK he’s joking.) I told him I was returning the ring to the Beverly Hills store where I’d bought it,

and that if he'd go with me, I'd use some of the money I received to take us out for a nice, expensive meal. He readily agreed, but warned me that I probably wouldn't get back what I'd paid for the ring. I told him I realized that, and that I'd be happy with \$15,000 or so. Fortunately, I didn't really need the dough, but I wanted to get it and spend it on cool stuff for myself to try to feel better about the whole disaster. Maybe I'd give some of the funds to charity, too. Perhaps I'd even start one, "Ring Purchase Survivors," or something like that.

I finally met up with Ahmos, and we entered "Quality Carats," the Beverly Hills establishment that was the scene of the crime, and asked to speak with the folks in charge. The management was all smiles, until I said I wanted to return my jewelry. Their practiced grins disappeared faster than pastry in Oprah Winfrey's dressing room. I explained my situation, and told them I didn't want it anymore. I admitted that I knew they couldn't refund my money, but I just wanted some dough back. They could sell it to the next sap, er, man in love.

The store manager, a fellow named Ron, actually asked me, "Well, what happened with you two?" As if he was some concerned relative.

I was tempted to blurt out something equally inappropriate, like “Well, Ron, I just couldn’t get an erection with her anymore, you know?” but I managed to maintain a small amount of dignity. Ron commented that they don’t normally buy jewelry. I said, “Neither do I.” Ron told me he understood, and asked if perhaps I’d like to trade the ring in for some other merchandise. I said, “Yes, where are your big screen televisions?” He looked at me for a moment, then excused himself to take the ring into the back room to “determine its worth.”

“According to my ex, it’s worth nothing,” I joked bitterly as he turned his back and scurried off.

As Ahmos and I wandered uneasily about the store, I saw the sales clerk I had dealt with all those months ago. I gave her an awkward wave. At first she smiled, then it hit her. She remembered who I was, and when she realized that I was attempting to make a return, she suddenly turned her head away as if she’d just spotted an old gym teacher who’d made unwanted advances in the sixth grade locker room.

After what seemed an eternity, Ron came back and said, “It’s a beautiful ring. How much did you pay for it?” “Twenty grand,” I replied. “Impossible,” he shot back. “But I bought it from YOU guys, I have the receipt!” I pulled out the dog-eared piece of paper I’d been carrying

around in my pocket for self-flagellation purposes. “Hey, ask her! She sold it to me!” I pointed to the sales lady, who at that juncture literally somersaulted into the back room. Ron looked at the receipt and said, “Well, yes, I see it’s insured for \$20,000, but, you know, there’s a bit of a markup and all.” He was becoming visibly nervous at this point. “Fine,” I said, “Then what can you offer me?” I had been naive enough to assume that a diamond was always worth what it was worth, but I was about to learn the truth, the hard way. He giggled uncomfortably and said, “Probably about \$5,000”.

After the smelling salts kicked in, I got up from the floor and asked him why he could only give me one fourth what I’d paid. Somehow the ring devalued \$15, 000 while it was on Judy’s finger. Ron basically admitted that they’d ripped me off, but tried to assuage me by saying the diamond industry rips EVERYBODY off. He also admitted that they could re-sell my ring for \$20,000 to someone else, but that HE could never pay that much for it. “Yeah, you wouldn’t want to be so stupid,” I muttered. He suggested that we visit two other stores right there in Beverly Hills that “specialized” in purchasing “pre-owned” gems. He told us he was sure we could do much better at one of those places, and

wrote down the addresses of both establishments on the back of my receipt. "Tell them Ron sent you," he advised.

"Oh, I will," I said. "Clearly, you're the man with clout." Ron looked relieved as he watched us exit.

We entered the first store he'd suggested, and were immediately set upon by the classic snooty saleswoman. Though Ahmos and I were both dressed nicely, she eyed us as if we were two indigents who'd just stopped by to steal some toilet paper. I explained, "Ron sent us. He said you might want to buy this ring."

"We don't buy, we only sell!!" she snapped. Gee, thanks for the lead, Ron. We left and headed for "recommended" store number two.

### **From Chapter Five, "A Blind Date With Emmy."**

The next woman I went out with, Melinda, lived quite a distance away from me (which would eventually turn out to be a blessing for both of us.) She offered to pick me up for our date, which I thought was a nice gesture on her part. She pulled up to my house right on time, and as we weaved our way through Hollywood, she certainly had a lot to say.

Unfortunately, none of it was directed to me. Melinda's cell phone had

rang right as she'd picked me up, and she'd instantly become deeply involved in a conversation with her friend Suzie. It's not like she ignored me completely, though. Every few minutes she'd assure me that she'd be "finished in a second. You don't mind, do you?"

Hey, why would I mind? She hadn't talked to Suzie even once in the hour since they'd last seen each other. Far be it from me to come between two long lost friends.

About halfway to the movie theater, we nearly plowed into a street vendor after running a light that was as red as my face, with the oblivious Melinda chatting happily away on her phone. I decided I'd had enough of driving with Popeye Doyle, and after several unsuccessful attempts to get her attention, I finally pulled out my cell phone and called her. Melinda clicked over with her call waiting, and I said, "Hi, it's your date. I'm calling from the passenger seat, and I'd like to not have to call you from the emergency room, so can you hang up with Suzie now?"

We arrived at the theater early, because when you're driving that fast, you tend to make good time. After a quick check to make sure there were no pedestrians impaled on the grill of her car, we went in to see the movie.

Of course, as is the norm now, they showed seventy-five previews before the main attraction began. It's reached the point where by the time they start showing the movie I actually came to see, I'm sick of watching movies. At last, the "featured attraction" flickered across the screen, but right at that moment Melinda suddenly turned to me and began talking in the same loud voice she'd used on her phone. Wow, this woman was certainly touching all the bases. It was as though she was working off some sort of "Ed's pet peeves" checklist.

**From Chapter Five, "A Blind Date With Emmy."**

I checked out a video dating service called "Great Expectations." It seemed ridiculously expensive. Maybe I could find a cheaper one called "Very Little Hope." I also checked out a service that provided for informal first meetings called "It's Just Lunch." Again, too expensive. I figured I'd wait until they open up "It's Just Pathetic." Finally, I realized that there was really only one sure way to meet "the right one," as God intended: The Internet.

It was nice to discover that I could place a personal ad at no cost, other than my own self-respect and dignity. The site instructs people to "title" their ad, so I called mine "Facing Grim Reality." I figured I would be

as up-front as possible. After all, there's nothing the ladies dig more than a deeply hurt individual whose outlook on dating has been soured by his previous relationship. I wrote out my ad, which read:

Hello, I'm a 39 year old man with a successful career in the entertainment industry. I'm funny, honest, nice looking, and have a pretty amazing life. Yet here I am, perusing the Internet, looking for strangers. I love music, watching sports, and chess. (Now you're thinking, "Oh, that's why this guy is alone.) I know, I know, I probably have a better chance of winning the California lottery without a ticket than meeting the right person this way, but...I'll give it a shot. Interested?

About a month later, after receiving no replies except from my writer friend, (who by now was filling my mailbox with "men seeking men" postings on a daily basis,) I finally got a hit. It came from "Feverish One", which immediately made me think she probably has herpes. The text of it follows, with my jaded reactions in italics.

**Hello,**  
**Okay, your "ad" attracted my attention and since you're likely to get plenty of responses I'll tell you a bit about me.** *A weird, sort of hostile beginning. From saying "Okay, you attracted my attention" which is oddly begrudging, to the placing of the word "ad" in quotes, suggesting it may not really qualify as an ad, I'm on the defensive already. This could be the future Mrs. Driscoll!*

**I am attractive, I love to laugh, and I'm emotionally stable.** *That's fine, but people who are emotionally stable don't have to go around pointing it out. I pictured her typing her email using the severed fingers of past boyfriends.* **I'm not into corresponding with weirdos.** *You certainly won't find any on the Internet.* **Would you like to follow this path a bit and see where it takes us?** *No thanks. The last time I followed a path that looked like this, I ended up with poison oak.*

Okay, maybe I'm a little overly-guarded. I guess I should have mentioned that fact in my "ad." But maybe "Feverish" was right, I really was likely to get plenty of responses, because the next one arrived in my online mailbox later that same day. It was from "Lucky," and I thought, well, opposites DO attract, so...

**Hi, I am an independent, sometimes too soft-hearted person.** *Hmm, this seems better. Someone I can emotionally blackmail. Finally, a level playing surface. I enjoy thought provoking discussions, conversations, and arguments. I don't know about the first two, but I can guarantee the third one. I am attractive, motivated, and certainly have a mind of her own. (sic) Hopefully, that's just bad grammar, and doesn't mean she has someone else's mind for her own. I'm picturing a brain floating in a Mason jar. What am I looking in a man? (sic) I don't know, proof-reading ability? I'm looking for someone with wisdom and maturity. And I'm realizing I've just been eliminated.*

What's this next one say?

**Hi!!!!** *Already more enthusiastic than the others. Probably a crack addict. I bet you'd like me, after all, everybody does. I meet every problem with a smile. Wow, I'll bet THAT'S not irritating. My biggest passion in life is the opera. And my biggest passion in life is AVOIDING the opera.*

Hmm, here's one of the more interesting ones:

**I am a transsexual woman who has had my operation, so I'm 100% female. You'd never know the difference.** *I'm betting I would. I'm actually quite old-fashioned. Yeah, a real Norman Rockwell type of transsexual. I'm a combination of sexpot, and the girl next door. And the boy next door, too.*  
**I'm completely non-materialistic.** *I guess so, you didn't mind parting with that penis.*

This one came from "Special 4 You."

**Hello, your ad caught my eye. What can I tell you about me? I like Fridays more than Mondays. Wow, you ARE special. I'm 31, but look 21. I get carded at the liquor store all the time! You're at the liquor store all the time? Now there's a selling point. Dancing is my biggest hobby, along with tennis and becoming a doctor. Now that's what you want in a doctor, someone who considers medical care to be a "hobby." I'm a creature of habit with a rebellious nature. I'm unpredictable, but that's part of my immense charm. Can you see where this is going? Yes, I can. It's called a "wastebasket."**

I got this one from "Heart Smart," which I believe is a butter substitute:

**I am a normal girl, and live in LA. Well, which is it? I love French gardens, colorful perennials, fragrant soaps, sailboats on the ocean, floating candles, and rainbow-colored beach umbrellas. When the acid trip's over, look me up.**

I got this response from "Confident One."

**Yes. Interested. I'm a 5' 5 1/2" dyslexic funny woman. Then she won't mind if I "off her blow." I'm a serious person, prone to sudden outbursts of laughter. I believe they call that "Tourettes." I am 46, but don't resemble my age. I like to dress wild. I'm a part-time cosmologist. I'm very curvy, with maybe a few extra pounds. I have four children, but they are all grown. Sorry I don't have a picture for you. That's okay, I think I've got one in my head. I enjoy walks around the block. What is she, a beagle?. I guess I'm a bit conceited, but what can I say? I am a very rare find. Well, so's a case of polio.**

I got this one from "Cal-Gal."

**Hello, I found your ad interesting. I'm a 40 year old, divorced woman in her third year of sobriety, with no baggage. Except for that huge carry-on marked "Utter Denial."**



