

ARTS

Hey, Arnold

Was Benedict just misunderstood? I12

Out in the country

Terri Clark returns to her roots. 14



MAKE ME A STAR • PART 1

Get up, stand up

Why did the Citizen writer cross the road? To learn how to be a standup comic. Bruce Deachman writes home from funny school.

sodomy," Feldman Marty once remarked, "is an unnatural act."

I will not challenge the late Mr. Feldman on that statement, on the assumption that his experience in both fields ran deeper than

But if comedy - or standup comedy at least - is not an unnatural act, it can certainly be a lonely, agonizing way to die, a public execution by an audience whose only quarrel with you is that you're not funny. They are the kings, in a world in which court jesters are a dime a dozen.

Compared to more popular forms of death, like, say, lung cancer or working in the civil service, a stand-up comic's demise may seem brutally swift. Yet a fiveminute comedy routine that is floundering like a fish on a riverbank has a tendency to stretch time.

The spotlight sears like a prison's searchlight, the microphone turns your practised, funny jokes into yesterday's breakfast, and the audience morphs into ectobloodthirsty plasmic,

And the worst part is that it never quite kills you, but leaves you, like some cruel Eastern form of the afterlife, barely standing, so you can experience it again and again and again.

I long ago walked through stand-up comedy hell when, in high school, I did comedy "bits" at assemblies, ostensibly as filler while the stage crew changed sets.

On one occasion, a car accident I'd been involved in earlier in the day left me a bit rattled, and that night, in front of 500 fellow students and parents, my mind went blank.

The only sound I could discern above the Buddy

Take a chance on us

The Citizen sent two of our courageous (crazy?) writers to take their shots at the big time in show business. Alas, neither has since quit their day jobs, but we're proud parents nonetheless.

Today: Bruce Deachman goes to a weekend workshop on being a stand-up comic. Tomorrow: Paula McCooey auditions for a role in the smash ABBA musical, Mamma Mia!

Rich-beating of my heart, as my brain's synapses randomly fired in a desperate but vain attempt to recover this lost data, was the awkward, asphyxiating white noise of an auditorium's worth of people not laughing. Dazed, confused, I turned and left the stage, stumbling, I imagine, much like Floyd Patterson before he hit the canvas just over two minutes into his 1962 fight against Sonny Liston.

I swore I'd never do it again, a promise I managed to keep for exactly 25 years.

Contrary to everything I believed when I was eight, there's nothing remotely funny about Saturday mornings at nine o'clock. Certainly not when you're sitting on a stacking chair in a downtown hotel conference room, drinking unremarkable coffee from a cup with an all-too-small handle. Yet there I was, along with 19 other people, looking worse for the room's fluorescent lighting, peeling the paper wrappings from bran muffins and sipping sad joe in a miserable attempt to jump-start the creative and humorous juices.

See BRUCE on page 12



Bruce Deachman takes his turn in the spotlight at Yuk Yuk's in downtown Ottawa. He signed up for a weekend workshop on how to be a standup comic, and discovered there's nothing remotely funny about pure terror.