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Winesburg, Indiana: Grudge Wright

Abstract
And this is where my naive mistakes began. I had money and time, which turns out to be a dangerous combination for a fledgling comedian with zero anecdotes in his repertoire. I had time, money, two free motel ink pens, and an endless supply of Mankiller's Motor Court memo pads. What did I know?

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BOOTH

A JOURNAL

Winesburg, Indiana: Grudge Wright

by George Singleton

And this is where my naïve mistakes began. I had money and time, which turns out to be a dangerous combination for a fledgling comedian with zero anecdotes in his repertoire. I had time, money, two free motel ink pens, and an endless supply of Mankiller's Motor Court memo pads. What did I know?

I sat in the motel room, or down at the Henry David Thoreau County Park where all the stray dogs have disappeared, and tried my best not to think like this:

Jumper cable walks into a bar. The bartender says, "Man, you look horrible." The jumper cable says, "Don't get me started."

A sixteen-penny nail walks into a bar and the bartender says, "Can't serve you. You're already hammered."

A right-wing radio personality walks into a bar. The bartender says, "Can I get you anything?" and the guy says, "No thanks, I'm already really fucked up."

A hairbrush walks into a bar. The bartender says, "Hold on, buddy. Don't bristle up on me."

You've heard them all, I'm sure. People always wonder, where do jokes come from? Answer: Me. When I got heckled—nightly—some genius in the audience

would always yell out, "Hey, Bazooka Joe, vaudeville's calling and it wants its act back." I didn't care. It was my shtick, as they say. Even people in Whinesburg can have a shtick. Some comedians had woeful childhood stories, some stuck to tales of a horrific marriage, some did prop comedy. One guy wore a bag over his head and went by the Unknown Comic, from what I've gathered. Me, I had my Blank Goes into a Bar:

A tongue depressor walks into a bar and the bartender says, "Get out of here. You make me gag."

A blow up rubber sex doll walks into a bar. The bartender says, "What'll you have?" and the sex doll pauses before saying, "It was just on the tip of my tongue. Well fuck me."

A pair of pliers walks into a bar, but the bartender says, "We don't serve tools."

A screwdriver walks into a bar and orders a vodka and orange juice. The bartender says, "What are you, a cannibal or something?"

Some confetti walks into a bar and the bartender says, "I can't serve you seeing as you're already torn up."

A rectal thermometer walks into a gay bar and gets a hero's welcome.

Nine million, nine hundred ninety-nine thousand, nine hundred ninety-nine lottery tickets walk into a bar. The bartender says, "Sorry, we don't serve such losers."

A rasp walks into a bar and asks the bartender, "Can I drink here if I promise not to grate on your nerves?"

An air horn walks into a bar and the bartender says, "If you're intent on blowing, follow the rectal thermometer next door to the gay bar."

A bi-polar woman walks into a bar, but the bartender says, "Last time you were here you split without paying."

An atom walks into the bar and the bartender says, "Last time you were here you split without paying, and all hell broke loose soon thereafter."

A candelabra walks into the bar and the bartender says, "Can't serve anyone already lit."

I bought loaves of white bread, some lunch meat, peanut butter, and wrote my jokes. I drowned out the senior citizen bikers congregated nightly at the fire pit.

I chewed beef jerky, seeing as that seemed a proper thing to do. My motel television didn't have but two clear channels, but I intentionally kept it on channel 2 ½, all snow, to keep me focused on what would be my nightly routine:

A linebacker walks into a bar. "Hey, don't rush me," says the bartender.

A bowling ball walks into a bar. He says, "I'd like a pint of Mad Dog 20/20." The bartender says, "You can drink better wine than that. You're not in the gutter anymore."

A bowling pin walks into a bar. He says to the bartender, "I'm thirsty, and I don't have any money." The bartender says, "Spare me."

A spigot walks into a bar and asks, "What do you have on tap?"

A spigot walks into a bar. The bartender says, "Sorry, but we don't serve drips."

A ceiling fan walks into a bar. The bartender says, "Draft?"

A blood drive nurse walks into a bar. The bartender says, "You want another pint this soon?"

A rabies victim walks into a bar. The bartender says, "I guess you're ready for another shot in your stomach."

A revolving door walks into a bar. The bartender shakes his head and says, "Turn around."

A bottle of white-out comes into a bar. "I can't serve your type," says the bartender. "Disappear, buddy."

A chunk of fresco walks into a bar. The bartender says, "Can't serve you. You're plastered."

An ATM machine walks into a bar and orders drinks for everyone. The bartender says, "What are you, like, made of money?"

A length of bubble wrap walks into a bar. The bartender says, "I'm going to keep a close watch on you. Don't pop off."

A champagne cork walks into a bar. The bartender says, "I'm going to keep a close watch on you. Don't pop off."

Carbon paper walks into a bar. The bartender says, "I guess you'll be wanting an

old-fashioned."

A typewriter walks into a bar. The bartender says, "I guess you'll be wanting an old-fashioned."

Dr. Kevorkian walks into a bar with a little Chinese boy. The bartender says, "We don't serve youth in Asia."

I got six hundred of them. I cannot stop, I know. Where would I go to talk to someone about getting it to stop? Maybe Bloomington. Maybe Indianapolis. I hear there are people in Indianapolis who want to officially change the name of the city to Nativeamericanapolis. I'm betting those people don't have much sense of humor.

People say that you have to live in a sad area in order to come up with funny two-liners. I don't know about that. I've never read an official study. I'm not sure that there are any official studies, here in Winesburg.

George Singleton has published four collections of stories and two novels. His fiction has appeared in a number of magazines and anthologies, including the *Atlantic Monthly, Harper's, Oxford American, Playboy, the Georgia Review, Southern Review, Zoetrope*, and *New Stories from the South*. A 2009 Guggenheim Fellow, he lives in South Carolina.

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