

## At Winters Tavern... People who make you laugh

By LYNN RUTH MILLER  
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

"What do you mean, funny?  
Funny- peculiar or funny ha-  
ha?" — Ian Hay

Comics are gifts to us all. They cover the gray of reality with splashes of bright laughter. Instead of grieving and complaining about the obstacles they have overcome, they let you in on their secret of survival: laughter. June 19th at Winters Bar, five very funny men stood up and discussed problems that would horrify most of us and those dilemmas made us see our own life's challenges in a better light.

That is what comedy is all about.

Malcolm Grissom is the guy that people root for because they know he is rooting for them. "Like all Hawaiians, I sing show tunes to deaf children," he said. "Don't worry. I use a bullhorn. I'm not stupid."

When you listen to this gentle, happy man, you realize he has bridged a huge culture gap, survived a problematical childhood and made a success of himself not just in comedy but also in his job at the employment bureau. Our imagination can fill in the uphill battle Grissom fought to move to this country and learn all its unspoken rules for acceptance alone. But that isn't what we hear in his routines. We hear imitations of pigeons (pigeon English) and impersonations so amusing that if we didn't know better, we would think this man didn't know how to shed a tear.

Comics! They are the most sensi-

tive, caring people around! Take Danny Dechi. He was born in Argentina and his father died when he was very young. He has lived all over the United States and now he lives with his mother in San Francisco. He makes a joke of the whole experience and has even written a book about his journey across the country: I DIDN'T WANT TOPAYFORARENT-A-CAR. "Did you hear they found life on Mars?" he asked. "The Mars rover drove up behind a hill and discovered a Starbucks!"

Bob Johnston earned every penny of his college education and it took him 13 years to finish his degree. He has done everything from UPS delivery to firefighting and turns the experience into comedy routines that keep us laughing long after he has left the stage. He is a professed bachelor who does redneck comedy in a high tech world. "Did you ever date someone your parents like more than they like you?" he asks. "My girlfriend dumped me and my parents said they'd appreciate it if I didn't come around anymore."

He insists he is having a weight problem and instead of keeping it an agonizing secret, he announces his new avoirdupois to the world. "I am getting so fat, I was on BART the other day and a pregnant lady offered me her seat."

SpiritWalker is an Apache Indian from Roswell, New Mexico. He has gathered crowds in all 50 states and abroad doing street comedy. He currently writes for Channel 28 in Napa as a co-host and entertainment coordinator. When you listen to his pol-

ished routines, you never guess the blocks he met as he climbed the entertainment ladder to become one of the foremost comics around. He takes the stereotypes people hurl at Native Americans and boomerangs them into wry jabs at our idiosyncratic world. "I just played a casino on the Mescalero Reservation in New Mexico," he said. "They put me up in the Inn of the Mountain Gods. It's a big beautiful hotel. The only drawback is, it's haunted. It's the only haunted building on an Indian Reservation. We think it might have been built on an old White Man's burial ground."

See what I mean?

At Winters, he told us that Gwyneth Paltrow and her husband Chris Martin just had a baby girl they named Apple. "Have we sunk so low in society that we're now cruising the produce aisles at Raley's looking for baby names?" he asked.

Jeff Applebaum ran his own comedy room in Palo Alto, The Rose and Crown. His efforts made it so successful, the place is filled every Monday night until midnight with the finest comics in the Bay Area. He accomplished this while he was helping people make money on the web through e-commerce and dabbling in real estate investments. He has two degrees in electrical engineering from M.I.T. and worked as an engineer for a while as well. He mixes off-the-wall observations with gut-popping punch lines that never mention the immense challenge of living in an all-black neighborhood in New York City in a family that did not speak English. "I was the only white kid in the school

and at graduation one of the mothers asked my mom, 'Which kid is yours?'"

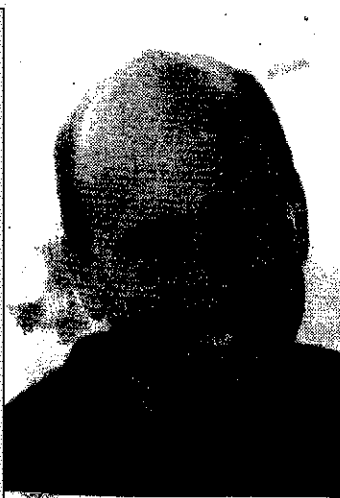
There it is: a joke that reflects that beautiful color blindness we all achieve when many cultures share their space and learn how much alike we really are.

"Rapper 50 Cent did a show in town recently — or as he's known in Canada: 15 Cent" said Applebaum.

When he took the mike at Winters, he dissolved a highly resistant audience into gales of laughter, and not one crack was R rated. His comedy is clean, yet ridiculous and the tales he tells of growing up bridging two cultures reflect none of the confusion, or the tears and misunderstandings that we know he faced while he was becoming assimilated. You hear nothing of his struggle to achieve two graduate degrees and combine all his



Jeff Applebaum



Bob Johnston

talents to earn a living and still find time to amuse us all.

the immense gift these people give us, we are awed by their enormous effort to transform the world into a happier place. "Give these people a lot of love," says Tony Sparks and at Winters we do just that.

It takes immense courage to stand in front of a bunch of strangers and try to tickle their fancies. Yet, we see polished comedians who do just that as they turn tragedy into delight before our eyes almost every week at Don Holloway's Winters Tavern.

"This isn't television," says Tony Sparks. "These are real people putting themselves on the line for you. It takes guts to do a thing like that."

This Friday, July 2, Jay Huston who fell into comedy through the Improv porthole will entertain us. He did Improv for 10 years and then turned



SpiritWalker