



I met up with Janet Barber at her apartment in Manhattan to talk about what it's like to be the head writer for one of the hottest daytime talk shows:

Tell me about your upbringing. You're from Connecticut.

It was an ex-farm. It was in the family it was like growing up in the middle of nowhere. I had an odd childhood because I didn't meet anyone my own age until I was 6 years old because my father was divorced and we had no neighbors and no relatives, no tv and no pets. There was that one incident in Sunday school when I was three but it didn't really work out well so I didn't have to go back. So really those first six years were as really as isolated as you can get. There's a good side and a down side of it. I think it's part of what got me where I am today because my point of view is never normal. And that's what made it work for me as a comic. It's always skewed. I'll see things in a different way because I came from such a very odd background. I was a very over-weight kid so that's another whole set of oddness and ostracism. And I do think that is a tremendous Boone if you're gonna be in the arts.

A warped childhood leads to great things?

You can do two things with a bad childhood. You can either, go 'Ooh, oh my God, poor me, poor me, poor me,' or you can go, 'lucky me'. Cause if I hadn't had this wretched childhood I'd probably be a bank teller today.

How did the ostracism or the fact that you didn't have many friends and were over-weight, lead to traits to help you get to where you are today?

Well, ah, there's two sides in that, the performance and the writing. I'm 45 years old and I am just beginning to get this because I never knew why I was funny. I've been funny my whole life

but I didn't find out exactly why, and I still don't know exactly why. But there's stuff in my speech patterns that are somewhat antiquated. If you listen to me a lot or know me for a long time, or possibly by the end of the interview, there's an odd rhythm to my speech. It's not the same as everybody else, and I'll use phrases, a larger vocabulary and phrases, "I look like the wreck of the Hesperus.", stuff that you wouldn't hear all the time. Because I had a great Aunt Marty at that time, she was ninety-three when I was in sixth grade. And then she died. And I was around that, my father, and this house where we didn't have relatives but we did have ancestors. The past was very real when I grew up. So part of me is in the past, so I had this different sound to me. And also all I ever wanted to do was read. My sister was older than me so she got to go to school, first, which miffed me because I wanted to go to school to learn to read. I knew about reading but I didn't get read to very much. My great Aunt Marty read a little bit. So I was desperate to read. But when I did go to school in first grade I did not go there to play. And I told them this. I didn't like children. I wasn't around kids before. They scared me, I was fat, they were mean. I didn't like the whole thing. They made us have recess twice a day. And you don't expect this of a six year old but I was incensed. This was time taken away from reading. That's what I was there for. And then they tried to teach me math. I would explain to them that I was not there to learn math. And I've succeed to this day to never learning it. I'm a moron. (Laughing). But I went there to learn to read. And when kids would talk in school I was very angry because I was trying to learn the alphabet and that first grade teacher I'll never forgive because since I was an odd ball when I was a kid and I was painfully shy of other kids and I would not speak or play she used me as a door stop every time there were two kids that would talk I would be put in the middle. So I got weirder and weirder the older I got but I wanted to read. And once I learned how to read that was the point. And that's what I would do. I read obsessively all my life really until I got this job and now I have no time. And that's why I know how to write. I read, and read, and read.

What did you start reading and what have you progressed to reading?

It was the other way around when I was a real little kid, it's not like I was deprived or abused, but my father didn't have a parent. His mother died when he was young so he really didn't know what to do. And he didn't understand the reading thing so I got some books like Nancy Drew and some Golden Books, but mostly I had to read what was in the house because I didn't get any books. So I was reading Shakespeare when I was very young because my father's sister went to college. And so we had that. Stories of the great operas, Ace of Stables and other mythology stuff so I read stuff that was really much advanced that was because all we had. All of these old books. But now I'll read a murder mystery and hope my concentration will hold all the way through. But before this I never got into modern literature, Dickens, Trollop, you know all of that stuff; I would read, read, read. I don't know how you can be a writer if you don't read. I also think a different childhood also makes you look at yourself, look at yourself, look at yourself. So all that inward looking is where you find a creative voice.

So you must be very good at Jeopardy?

Oe, no, I'm not a game person at all. I don't read to remember. This was one of my therapy things. I said, if I read everything, how come I can't remember anything. And he said you don't read to remember. So I know words, and it just automatically comes to you how to put the sentence together cause I read a million of them (sentences), I don't remember them.

Interesting. So I guess back in high school you weren't the class clown, I guess the class reader?

I was the class reader. I started doing theater stuff and I did get the class actress. Which was really quite a big thing because those things were always the popular people and I was believe me, I was not. And that was fine because I decided I wanted to go an actress very young, but I didn't know how to do it.

Did you attend many high school plays?

Yes. I was in all high school plays. And then when I went to college.

Any noted high school parts?

Well, I did one. There was a play we did, Every Man. And I was wealth or greed or something like that, and I do remember I was quite stand out in that but I don't even remember why. But then I'd always get annoying things like fat old men parts. I was a fat kid so you never get the nice parts. But it didn't really matter it was so long ago.

What about college?

I went to Elmira College in Elmira New York. I had lied and pretended I sent out my college applications so it got very late and I said, I sent it to them, I don't know why...., so my guidance counselor called and got me in over the phone which should have been a sign. But I really just wanted to go to that college because there was no math requirement. So that drew a line to my life right there. And it was small college up state New York it had been an all girl's school but it went coed three years before I went there. I went and decided I would major in something reasonable like sociology, which was silly because I don't really like people. (Laughing) Maybe more so now but certainly not at the time I had no interest in the well being of the world but somehow I came up with that. I don't think that like I saw my life as having a future, I thought I would die after high school, that's why I never thought of sending out applications.

So I though I'd major in that. Because I knew I shouldn't major in acting, and then of course I immediately signed up for acting classes and I didn't go to the sociology class and sort of went on from there. I only took one sociology class and I didn't go to any of the classes. It was pass/fail, you didn't get graded. You passed or you failed and I passed. I went to five classes over the course of a year and I still passed. It was so easy a monkey could have done it. And then I just took an acting class and did everything there.

So you graduated from there

No. I went there for two years and then quit school, went to Europe for a few months, came back, just hung around and then I went to Temple University in Philadelphia. I majored in radio-television and film concentrating in television directing.

So you had the full background as far as education in the arts. Did anything stand out from your college days, artistic or performance?

Temple is the time of me trying to make myself do what I should do. Performance is the only thing I've ever actually wanted to do until I finally decided to conceive the desire to write, which came late because I wanted to be an actress. Television directing really didn't interest me at all. I wasn't at all technically minded. I was good conceptually as far as putting projects together and framing them up. As far as pushing the buttons, I never mastered it, but I could master setting up a shot and doing a script and I was really good at that; but nothing really of note.

So what happened after college

It surprised me again that I got out. I didn't look for a job, I got out in mid-year; right after Christmas vacation. Again I had expected that I would simply die (Laughter). It wasn't that I saw myself dying. I didn't see that I would ever need a job, so I never bothered to look for one. And all of the sudden it was two weeks before college ended and I didn't want to get out, I couldn't imagine being out there and having to work. I still kind of feel like that (Laughter). And I liked school, so I was surprised by it ending and there was some little job in this career which was selling sea shells on south 17th street in a seashell shop and that's what I did for eighty dollars a week. Cause I really didn't plan to get out of school and have any kind of a life. I went to the John Robert Powell School of Modeling. And I took there little class and I taught there for a year. It was almost like a finishing school, it wasn't professional modeling. You take these kids that have no idea how do to put on make up or how to walk down the street without looking totally dorky.

Did you have them balance books on their heads too?

(Laughing)It was like that but you didn't use the books. The notable thing that I did there attached to how I got here was that out of the seventeen week class three of them was a voice and personality class. You teach them personality which was ridiculous. And the way it was taught was they had this dumb book and they would teach you what knives to use, you know and go through like Ms. Manners kind of things. So when I started teaching I initially just started teaching that in everybody's class. So I changed it all and taught it like it was more like theater games and they had never done that before. I would go around the room and make them say something positive about themselves and then everybody say something nice to them. Which seems so simple but people would cry by the end of it. It was like this break through experience for them. Nobody ever missed my classes. And in the other voices classes like 2 people would come out of 15. I found a way to make the people look at themselves. My rendition of that was to bring out themselves. So I spend all this time teaching them that whatever you wanted to do, you could do. And I would make them stand up and do stupid things, but people who are afraid of speak in front of people, and it's not for a performance but for life in general, if you wanna succeed in anything you have to be able to speak, so it was to bring that out and more than anything it was self-esteem and confidence. I would drum into them over and over whatever you wanna do you can't not do something because you're afraid. You can't not do something because you don't think you're not good enough. Whatever it is you have to do it. And I had

ways I taught that I can't remember. Oh, one thing I did do and this is why they loved me, they would come into the class and I would close the door and tell them this is my introduction to them. That there would be no eating and drinking and I would take food and coffee out of my bag. I would tell them there's no smoking and I'd take out a cigarette and light one. I don't smoke anymore but I did then. And that we'd all act like ladies and then I'd throw my legs over the side of the chair. (Laughing). They loved me. And I'd smoke like a fend in those days. And then they would try to do anything I did. After a year of telling them that they can't not do things because they're afraid of it I finally heard my own lesson, because the truth is I didn't want to be in Philly as a secretary by day, and a personality teacher by night because I wanted to come to New York and be an actress. It finally sunk in and I quit the job and moved to New York.

So what was your next step?

I came to New York and I took some acting classes and I was always frustrated. I didn't know why I couldn't get anywhere. I do know why now; I had no package. I didn't know anything. I was coming out of the dark. So I had a bunch of office jobs and I never lasted long because I really wouldn't work. I'd be bad until they'd fire me. A couple of off, off, off, off Broadway shows that nobody ever saw, thank god, cause they were bad. One was really badly written that I thought I was kind of good in was sort of a one women thing of a person in a padded cell. That was kind of cool. Still going really nowhere, not to brag, but faster than most (laughing). I was just turning thirty and everybody used to always tell me to do stand up because I was funny. And I would say you can't be a stand up just because your funny. One of the reasons I thought I couldn't be a stand is because I thought I couldn't write. One of my last secretarial jobs I started taking a class at The New School in fiction writing. I loved it. I loved silly, little, flat, two- dimensional funny (writing) which is still the style I prefer. I love it. And it's what I like to read. The teacher so hated that style that he called me at home and told me if I persisted to write that style I would never go anywhere because I had to dig into the pain and not do all this silly little funny stuff. So I stopped going to the class but I ended up feeling like I really could write. I liked the stuff I had written.

So he didn't think comedy comes from pain?

Right. He didn't think comedy was valid. But I ended up coming out of it feeling really great about it. So I was an office manager at the time because I lied and made up a resume and got a friend to make up a fake company with his answering machine. So I could get the job. I always did stuff like that. (Laughing). You know you have to pay the bills even though you don't want any of these damn jobs. So I was on the phone with this travel agency and his friend booked stand up comedy. So I lied and I was like, "I used to do that a long time ago in Philly." So he booked me for three weeks from then, and I had never done it. So I picked a place where the comics were horrible so I couldn't stand out. If they sucked, I'll suck, and I won't even feel bad. So I went down there, and sucked (laughing). It ended up that stand-up was a very good place for me. Within a year and half I started to work full-time at it and not do any other work. And one time a friend asked me how much money I made a week. And I said, forty to fifty dollars a week but sometimes I'd have a bad week. (Laughing)

So you were able to work full-time as a comic?

Yes, for a year and half I didn't do anything else for money. I was headlining by 2 years, and by three years I was headlining all the time. And that was not easy for a women in those days because there were very few women and they wouldn't headline you, easily. But if you could just get to where you could headline, then it would help you because they couldn't get any women headlines. So if you could just lie your way into it and convince enough people that you can do it, and then of course once you go you then have to do it, but I was able to do it. Every once in a while I'd have a place where'd I'd bomb and then I couldn't go back. But most places worked out and I got cool jobs. Miller Beer got me to do these Europe and Asia tours and I was the first female comic to ever perform for US Troops in Europe. That was in eighty-eight. And then I met Rosie in a club called Bonkers in Orlando which is how I got here.

So when was that?

March of eight-six or eighty-seven. Exactly one month before she came to New York to become a VJ for VH1. When I worked with her she was headlining and I was middling. And I heard the name but I never really kept up that much. I was so busy trying to get to a point where I was good that I wasn't paying a lot of attention to the business which could have back-fired on me but luckily it didn't. I knew she was a Long Island act and I knew she one star search. I didn't realize she was already a star I just thought, 'oh goody, she's a women,' because you never got to work with women. We just clicked immediately; we really, really, got a long well. Cause I didn't have a mother and her mother died. And mine was gone, she just left. It was enough of a parallel because you meet tons of people who don't have fathers, but you never meet anybody who don't have a mother so that was (known) within the first ten minutes. Because men will talk about sports, but women will get right down immediately to whatever emotional things you got going on. It was a four day week and then she went to New York right after it. And although she was from Long Island, she's never done comedy in the city; she didn't know people in the city. She never lived in the city-she had lived in CA for years and years. She didn't have many friends at that point in New York. So while she worked for a VJ for VH1 for one year, we became friends. Then she stopped doing it after a year and went back to LA . We always stayed friends. She does not forget her friends. I'm a terrible phone caller, I'm terrible with keeping up with anybody, but she's not.

So then what?

Well she (Rosie) did Stand-up Spot light at VH1 and she hired me for that several times as well as doing the warm-up. She hired me for a League Of Their Own. I went to do stand-up comic as a warm up in Evansville Indiana. All the people were unpaid extras so they found that if they didn't entertain them, they weren't gonna come.

So I guess you didn't use jobs about mid west people huh?

Oh, no. These were families. So I had to be squeaky clean. Which now if I could find the time to do stand up I'll never work dirty again. Everybody who told me not to was right, it does not help you.

Now comes the Rosie O'Donnell Show?

Yes. We started the show in April of nineteen-ninety-six. November of nineteen-ninety-five I got a call from her (Rosie O'Donnell) saying she just got a show and I wanna hire you to write. I almost died. I was ready to stop doing stand-up. The clubs were closing and the face of stand up had changed. The only thing I was sad about, and everybody makes fun of me, was that I had to stop doing cruise ships. But I was ready for this. I started as staff writer, one of six plus we had a head writer. Topical joke writing was not my forte. When Randy came and the writers at the time, three of us were stand-ups. Randy came in and said Rosie asked him to put the monologue together. But he thought one of us should do it because we're stand ups. And I said, "You know what I already spoke to Rosie about not writing jokes. So I should be the one to put the monologue together." I wanted to put the monologue together but I knew it was an important part of the show and I knew I wouldn't be a big part of it as a topical joke writer cause I wasn't that good at it. So I asked for it. And I started doing it. Which is how I got this job.

So you knew you weren't good at topical joke writing.

I'm not a good topical joke writer. So everybody else wrote the monologue jokes and I put it all together. I would re-write it, I would re-tweak the jokes, if the joke was essentially right for her but maybe the wording, the timing or the phrasing wasn't gonna be I would tweak that a little bit. And she didn't read all the jokes.

So within five months, you went from staff writer to comedy producer (head writer).

Because I managed to snag the monologue rather aggressively. So then Rosie worked with me. So Randy, the head writer's contact was up. So she called me in and said she was gonna give it (head writers' job) to me. I was shocked. Honestly, in those five months, I said to my friends in a couple of years, I'm gonna be head writer on the show. Cause I knew I would be able to do it then, I had never worked in TV. Near the end when he was about to leave, I thought fuck. It would be better for me if he stayed a couple of years. Then I'd be able to take the job. But now they're gonna hire another (head writer) and they may not want to leave. I knew Randy was not gonna stay forever. So I was completely stunned when she gave me the job. It was tough in the beginning learning it.

Where did the other writers come from? How did they break into TV?

Initially a few of us knew Rosie. And then some writers from Letterman were brought in and that's how we got Randy (head writer). Randy took some submissions and hired some writers from Politically Incorrect. My theory as to why the initial group didn't work out was that nobody knew what our show was gonna be about. They didn't know what types of writers to hire because they didn't know what the voice of the show was gonna be.

So do you have junior writers?

We have writer's assistants but nobody has moved from writers' assistant on up to writer. But one of our assistants did go up to writer on another show. So getting a writers assistant does lead

you to writing. It will probably not lead you to a writer's job at the place where you are unless you're unbelievable incredible.

How many writers do you have on staff?

Six. Sometimes the number has gone down but never up. Writing for Rosie for this particular show comedy is very difficult because they're has to be no edge. That's where people usually find comedy in pushing the envelope. All the talk shows that use comedy especially late night, their humor is mean. There's nothing wrong with it. I love it. But we can't do any of that. Ours has to be very whole some. Never mean. You can never use a celebrity as the butt of anything. Rosie says she will never insult somebody that may later be a guest on her show.

Do you use outside writers?

We did in the first year. We used to do a lot more topical jokes. And then we had faxers. One of them became a staff writer.

How is the work distributed?

All the requests come to me. We'll pitch to Rosie. We'll have pitch meetings. So whoever thought of it, works on it. A lot of stuff is assigned. Rosie will have an idea that she wants written, or produced.

Give me an example of a typical day for you?

We have a production meeting at eight-thirty. I produce, write and I do everything. We go over the shows for that day; all of the elements. Then the writers come to me with whatever they want to pitch to Rosie. So I'll weed out whatever it is most likely she's gonna go for. If I say no to an idea, they can pitch it anyway if they feel strongly. We do; intros, celebrity idea, bigger ideas for sweeps, taped pieces but a lot of what we taped doesn't make it on the air. Which is frustrating. Sometimes we have as little as twenty minutes before air time and then suddenly she'll (Rosie) have an idea. Sometimes during a commercial a writer will have an idea if something comes up they'll run down and talk to her between segments. After the show we'll meet as a group, we'll be brain storming.

How long is your day?

Eighty-thirty to six. Our hours are shorter than anybody else's hours.

Who gets credits? Residuals?

It's somewhere around three-hundred and fifty dollars for its first run. If it's a compilation show or a clip show then there's a different fee.

So you get paid per show, per week?

Per week.

So how often do you go on hiatus?

In summer, a week in Thanksgiving, a week in Christmas, a week after February sweeps.

What kind of contacts are the writers under?

Standard writer's guild. I think most writers have a three year contact with a 13 week option cycle.

What are some of the draw back, say, a writer vs. writing/performing?

I'm used to being in the spotlight. Granted, mine was a little, tiny, tiny spotlight next to Rosie's, but it was mine (laughing). When I was at the club I was a headliner and now I'm not. You know, I find that disappointing and I miss it. On the other hand I never worked at this level before. On one hand there's things that are disappointing about it because you like to be there (doing stand-up). On the other hand, there's things that are very relaxing about it. In all of my thirteen years of stand-up never really escaped stage fright. I was always a very nervous performer. I don't have that clutch in my stomach every day. And I did get on camera a fair amount on the show. That doesn't scare me. It's the live audience the stand-up thing that did. It's kind of nice to not to have that fear. It's kind of sad to not be performing, but it's also very interesting to discover that I can do things that I never knew I could. Since my act was all completely dark. My opening line was something like, getting born was a nightmare, cause I was a breeched birth which meant that I came out feet first, which meant that I was wearing my mother as a hat.(Laughter). See what I mean. That's not family comedy.

Rosie is geared towards children as well, is it hard to write jokes geared for adults and kids?

Very hard. You gotta be soft. Most comedy isn't soft. The way you generally write comedy is you find the edge and skate along it. That's where the humor is right along the edge. But we're got to stop way far from the edge and still find some humor. We're not looking for the edge. You can have a grandmother, a six year old and a mother and father in the room and nobody is gonna be embarrassed. So yes, it is hard. Doing something that's more difficult is incredible rewarding. Personally I've discovered things in myself that I never knew I could do because I had to do it for this (show).

Do you have an agent?

Yes, but my agent I didn't have it when I got the show.

Had you been trying to get an agent?

Not for this because I was still a comic. But I do think that's something as a writer or as any kind of professional in anything that comes into the entertainment industry, if you don't have a

skill to be able to network you need to develop it or you might as well stop. If somebody doesn't help you, you're not going anywhere. When I wrote the book, Breaking The Rules, Last Ditch Tactics for Landing the Man of your Dreams, we wanted to see if we could sell the rights to that. So we went on a verbal agreement with them (an agent). So my agents are from my non-Rosie work. And then from that book I was doing a show with my partner that was being developed by media American who is a radio company. But I withdrew from that project after a few months. It became nightmarish. Creative difference. But because of that we needed an agent so we got one. So I'm signed with him for broadcasting only. So the only thing I'm really signed in is a broadcast agent. I don't have a writing agent. Right now I see no reason to get it. I am in an enviable and unique position at the show. My contact has changed and I trust Rosie one-hundred percent. If this is what is it, that's the best I'm gonna get. An agent is not gonna get better for me.

What happens after Rosie?

I'd like to do on-air radio. I wanna do talk radio. And still writing. I find working in TV shows you know how much you can do. I had no idea I could accomplish this much.

So I've never heard of many people wanting to go from TV to radio?

I am working in production. It may be the very best job you can get which I think it is but I do wanna perform. And I like the idea or radio better than TV. There's not as much money in it but honestly by the time I'm done (with this show) I'm in a good position (financially).

What's the best way a writer can get an interview for a position on the show?

I think it's very hard to go from never writing to writing in a show of this level. It's very hard. I don't mean you have to have written for TV, because none of our writers have. But they have experience. For me, I look for something that might be different. I look for comedy experience and I look for soft sensibility. Honestly, I do not want them really, really young. It's very hard to get past me. I think that's my personal bias. But every time you're looking for a job, the first thing you're gonna have to deal with is the personal bias of however does the hiring. And this one's mine. I think that life experience, especially when you're looking at the kind of topics that we're looking at, our staples, we're using 70's TV as a thru line, children and parenting are a big part of what we do. So if you're young and just out of school and have no experience in those areas, your sense of comedy is unlikely to fit us. Your sense of comedy is much more like a Letterman or a Conan.

What are some of the things a writer should say or shouldn't say in an interview?

Don't send me cutesy baby pictures. I prefer a business approach. I hate all these queer, weird things on it (a resume). Give me a way I could read it quickly and easily. Everybody in my position gets tons and tons of stuff. I don't wanna weed through what you think is cute and funny. That should be in the submission, don't give it to me in a letter. Above all, professional and no mistakes. If you're trying a job with me, rewrite your resume to show me what I wanna

see. I'm not looking at you for performer so I don't need a list this long of every play you've been in. You'd be amazed at how much stuff you get. I'm gonna hire someone if they're right.

Any other advice to writers?

To build a career, you always have to have this in mind, what else can I do? What more can I do? Advice for a young writer, go as far as you can and then go a little bit further. To me to have a job like this working on the Rosie O'Donnell Show, I think it's utterly fool-hearty to then, not capitalize by doing outside work. Even though it's very hard to split yourself like that, but how dumb can you not too. You get opportunities because of where I am that I wouldn't get with the same amount of talent. Another advice and this is what I've seen from the writers that did not succeed the ability to listen and learn. The writers who came in believing they were the best, and they knew exactly how to do it, and that their way was the best, didn't last. Even if they had lasted, that doesn't give room for growth. And I feel after three years that everyday I'm learning and I learn so much from the writers. That's another reason I'm a much better writer now that I was three years ago, partly because I have the opportunity to read reams of excellent stuff, written by the six people we have.

Anything else you'd like to add?

Nothing is gonna be handed to you as a writer. And here's a key thing. If you wanna be a writer you really need to write. Cause so many people do so much more talking than they do writing. And they don't wanna write anything till after they're hired. If you're a writer it means that you're writing. If you're not writing than you're not a writer.

Do you do work outside of the show?

Darian was on Q104 FM here in New York. And what I did I was the relationship expert. Their very bad relationship expert. Because my book, Breaking The Rules, Last Ditch Tactic for Landing the Man of your Dreams. It was a parody of the book, The Rules. The advice in the Rules, they would say, never live with a man until you marry him, but we would say (in our parody book) was that it's a fabulous idea to secure free housing. Jan of nineteen-ninety-seven it was a best seller.

So you worked with Joan Rivers on Can We Shop?

That I wrote and I was the gadget expert. They would give me a product and I had eight minutes to up with selling points of the product, and I had to be funny as well. So I wrote it and performed it.

Let's talk about your rewards.

It's like anything else. By the time your really get it, you're so beaten down that. I worked and I'm exhausted and I don't care whether I get it. The first time we were nominated was in 96-97. She won that year (for best host) but we didn't (for best show). I wanted to win and I thought we were gonna win cause we had such a great show. I remember we went out to dinner

before, and I said, “ now Emmy’s maybe we can win Emmys”. And we didn’t win. You know when everybody says it’s an honor to be nominated, I’m sure it is, but it feels horrible to loose. When they call out Oprah, you do not feel well, at least I got close. I felt like that though when I came home. Then a year later, we’re back at the Emmy’s. I’m like this is a completely fucking waste of time, this is so annoying. By now I’m positive we’re gonna loose. And then we won. And it was so weird. I was the last person on stage because I was so shocked, I got up and I was wondering around on the floor. I had no feeling, I could not get happy about that award for a few months. I was so numb, because I’m not a good looser.

O.K., well here’s an interesting transition. Who would you imagine Rosie fighting in Celebrity Death Match?

God. If she was to fight I would imagine her fighting some sort of villain. Like an O.J. Simpson or Woody Allan (because he had a relationship with his stepdaughter). Somebody who would have offended her sensibility in the area of children or kindness. That’s the only thing that would make her feel like that (fighting).

Let’s talk about your injury. So what happened?

I was walking on a treadmill in nineteen-ninety-two and I got a horrible ankle pain. I didn’t know what it was and it took a few months to go away. And it happened, again, again, and again. Then in August of nineteen-ninety-five I was jogging around the reservoir (in central Park) and it started to hurt so I stopped. And always it would get better. They didn’t get better. They hurt for a really long time. I could walk but I couldn’t exercise or walk any kind of distance. It was bad but it wasn’t impossible. Then I went to Paris before the show and I had to wrap them in so many ace badges, they would really throb till I stayed off of them. From August of nineteen-ninety-five till this year they got just progressively worse. Even by the first summer of the show, I could only walk a couple of blocks at a time and I couldn’t stand for a great deal of time. Then we went to LA for the show and they had to give me one of those little wheel chair electric things because it was too painful for me to walk. Back at work it would hurt and so for a few years I would have to wrap them in ace badges. This year one week into vacation, in the summer, I was standing and then they got painful beyond anything. So I had to go to the bathroom desperate so I sat in that chair (chair is close to bathroom) the whole summer. Except for physical therapy I didn’t leave the house. I’d have to be desperate to go to the bathroom to walk that far.

So when did you reach the point where it got so painful?

This year. It was always diagnosed as tendinitis. And they said I had to do this, that or the other thing. Anti-inflammatory and physical therapy. And it didn’t help. I went to so many doctors and after a while they’re said, ‘does it still hurt’, and I’d say, ‘yes’, and they’d go, ‘huh?’ That’s when it was always time to go to another doctor. I tried acupuncture; I tried magnets, acupressure, etc.

So when were you in a wheel chair?

In the summer I didn't have a wheel chair but I couldn't walk. Just getting out onto the street was agony. I went to visit a friend in LA and then I needed a wheel chair in the airport. While visiting her I went to go see a faith healer. It was worth the try. It was from LA that I was coming back to go back to work and I called the executive producer. It was very upsetting to tell her that without a (wheel) chair I can't come back. I could not walk at all. So we rented a wheelchair for me. From this August until end of October I was in a wheel chair. I would have a wheel chair at work and then I'd take cabs to and from the show. It was just horrible. My boyfriend would even come every day to help get me a cab because that (would hurt). To get from here to Broadway if I had to wait five minutes to get a cab, I would become nearly violent. Every instant made it hurt more and more. This cycle of pain kept getting worse and worse. I would then need the wheel chair all the time. I would ride it back and forth to work. Finally I did what I swore the whole three years I wouldn't do which was pain pills. You get stupid (from taking the pills). So when I came back this September in the wheel chair, she was quite heart broken to see me in this chair. She'd say, 'when are you gonna be out of there?' And I didn't know. So she said we should talk about it on the show. Maybe somebody will call in with a remedy. So I said let me just try this other doctor, and that didn't help. So I went to Caroline's that night to check out comics for the show, which we rarely do. It was a horrible experience because I spent all that time as a comic so you have to go Carolines with all these people I used to know, and I'm in a wheel chair. And I'm fat as pig again. And that night I went home, which took me forty-five minutes, and I must have been a site to behold. I was on my cell phone with my sister, and I was sobbing, "I'll never walk. I don't wanna live. If I'm gonna be crippled for the rest of my life, I'm done." And there are people much worse off than me. But for me it's bad. And when I went in the next day (to work) I must have looked bruised. I literally would cry every night for hours. A. It hurt so much and then B, I was in such depression. So I went in and sat down with Rosie and I'm sure she could see I was that desperate so she said, "let's put you on the show. And the show we were taping aired on my birthday so it was my birthday show." So she just had me come out through the curtain. She says she's known me for a long time and this is what happened. Does anybody know how to fix Janette? The nice side of it is that the desperation left. The hopelessness ended immediately when it aired. The phones lite up. It was a huge reaction. I'm still getting mail. I had stuff to try (now). I got tons of mail. I still haven't opened it all. Somebody suggested Noni juice. And I tried it and it seemed to help somehow. Like the writers were like ten feet away from me and sometimes, I could walk to them instead of riding that fucking chair. But then Tony Schwartz (the writer) called. He wanted to talk to me about Dr. John Sarno. When I heard the name I recognized it because people had written to me to read his book. The book is about back pain. He talked (in the book) about pain tied to the repression of emotion. So I went to the doctor and what he said it was somatesthesia emotion. And he was right. Because last week I jogged. A couple of weeks before that I went Hiking in Vermont. He's right. Tension Myositis Syndrome, which means that it's total stress related. It's all repressed anger and rage. It's not that I'm mad at the executive producer so my feet hurt. A deeper kind of rage from childhood, or just a personality, people who are perfectionist or overly responsible, all things that I am. Over twenty-five years he's treating over ten thousand patients. Like eighty-eight percent recover completely within two to three weeks with nothing more than just information. You have one visit to the doctor and they you go to a lecture. Somehow it actually works. Within a week I stopped using the chair. He said the only cure is awareness. He said the purpose of the pain is to district you so that you don't have to be aware of your emotional distress. It's like a

covert action. If the covert action becomes known, it ends the operation. I'm not saying my ankles never hurt. But now I know if they hurt, I don't wanna know about something. I had a mention on every show this week, or something like that. I had two other segments that I was in. The 20/20 piece, the reporter is John Stosil, and the reason he's doing the piece (on me) is because he had a back problem and he went to Sarno. So he said 20/20 was doing a piece on him and they wanted to follow three patients and they had two and would I be willing to do the third.