

I Will Be a Household Name

[Come from backstage and bow. Keep bowing].

I think you all know Cooley Windsor. A big hand for Cooley. Cooley and Emily Keeler put on this show together. A big hand for Emily. Now a big hand for me. Thank you.

[More bowing].

Cooley's always wanted me to do stand-up. I've never done stand-up before. So he bought me two books: The Comedy Bible and How to be a Working Comic. I have not read either.

Because tonight's going to be okay. No matter how this goes, I'm getting the fuck out of here. What I mean is I leave for Chicago in March. To the Windy City I go. The place Carl Sandburg called "The City of Broad Shoulders" – though they're less broad now, really more fat. In 2006 it was the country's fattest city. The City of Fat Shoulders... but(!) perhaps redeemed by home of 2008's President? (Barack. On Tuesday!)

It's strange to be moving back. I've been in California eight and a half years. Four in Los Angeles and four and a half up here. That's a lot of firsts. My first real girlfriend. My first real apartment. My first real job. My first real smoking addiction. My first time getting so drunk I threw up all over myself, a girl, at a bar and stumbled home in my vomity clothes and took a bath and cried myself to sleep.

So I've learned a lot about myself and life. For instance, a couple days after I moved to San Francisco, a neighbor invited me to his wine and cheese party. The thing you need to know is that at the time I did not know this was a wine and cheese party until I arrived with some High Lifes and Nacho Cheesier Doritos. What you also need to know is that I arrive to every party always with some High Lifes and Nacho Cheesier Doritos. But the party isn't really important. Pretty insignificant except for one key thing: I was standing in a group of strangers, sipping on a High Life, and I burped with my mouth closed. And someone said, "Woah" because I guess it was a big burp. And I stared at this person in amazement because up until that moment I thought if you kept your mouth closed when you burped, no one could hear you. I'm serious. I mean, I can hear it in my head, but I thought it was like when you hear your heart beat. No one else hears that. I've got all these memories of me as a chubby little kid, eating out at restaurants, eating the shit out of some food (because that's what people from Illinois do, they eat the shit out of everything) and burping with my mouth closed. And now to know this whole time my family, people at other tables, and the cute waitresses could hear me, well, maybe not an epiphany for you, but for someone who considers himself a bit above the curve that was a real confidence shaker.

When I tell people out here that I'm moving to Chicago, a lot of them say, "It's cold there. It snows." I don't really know what to say, except, "Yeah." And they say, "Aren't you worried about the snow and

cold?" And I say, "No, not really." And they say, "Don't you think you should be worried about the snow and the cold?" It's just hard to explain to people who haven't experienced it that snow and cold are not a big deal. And it makes me feel that the weather out here is too easy. There's no sense of proportion. A city on the verge of an earthquake everyday, and yet when it's drizzling here everyone starts freaking out. "Rain, it's raining!" And I start freaking out, "You're right! It's raining!" and I'm sprinting down the block to the bus shelter because I don't want to get drizzle on me?

What I've lost is this sense of proportion and it's bigger than weather. It's not just a headache anymore – it's window into the dire state of my emotional life because in California, you don't just take an Advil, you talk it out with someone. Why do you think you have a headache? Are you okay? Are you stressed out? Let's assess. Wait, we're going to get out the emotional thermometer and take your emotional temperature.

I don't remember it being like this. Is California to blame? Yes, no, maybe. I don't know. Because there's an argument to be had that if I went to Northwestern like I had always planned, I could be on a stage there tonight saying, "When I get headaches, no one is asking me how I feel about the headache or why I think I have one. It's because I'm dehydrated and it is hot with all these goddamn winter clothes. Why don't you want to know this?"

I'm scared as hell to move back, though. There's some real questions. How much of it is expectation just waiting to disappoint? Can I deal with my family more than twice a year? How fat will I get? I was home for Christmas, at my Aunt's, and I finished a beer and asked where their recycling was. My aunt said, "I don't believe in recycling." You don't believe in recycling? I don't even know what that means. I have an uncle who believes in Creationism, and dares anyone to kill his 9-year-old daughter because this would somehow prove survival of the fittest. I'm not joking. There's a lot of ignorance there I'm blessed to avoid in California. I mean, some of us were 22 years old when they learned mouth-closed burps make noise, too.

But, yes, [close eyes], when I do this and imagine myself in the future, it is with the backdrop of Chicago. And yet doubt is starting to creep in. What is this move really going to do? You are who you are no matter where you are, and so my life won't be drastically different from how it is now. I know that. I'm just concerned about regressing because essentially, I'll return the same way I left: no money, no job, and living with my mother. But there's comfort in knowing I'm going back to the home I grew up in. Once again, I'll be a household name. But all that's in March. And why March? Why do you think? It's cold there. It snows.