



**THE DRINK TANK ISSUE 112**

## **HAPPINESS IS OLD COMEDY!**

The world of comedy is a strange thing. Sometimes the latest thing in funny gets old faster than that which is new. Hell, I can remember when Phil Hartman was on SNL and I'd rewatch the shows and fast forward over a number of his skits because they were feeling tired. Now, rewatching them, they're so much better than anything that's on now and I can watch them again and again.

Maybe that's why I love YouTube so much. NBC has realised that despite their best efforts, they can't keep all of their material from being loaded by others, so they basically took the stance that they'll let old stuff that's not available elsewhere be posted and post some of their own stuff on YouTube as well. There's a ton of old musical performances up there, from Elvis Costello's Radio, Radio performance that got him banned for more than a decade to Sinead O'Connor's famous Pope-tearing incident to Vanilla Ice to Nirvana. I've been watching a lot of those, but mostly, I've been into the old comedy bits.

The first things I looked up were the old commercials. There was Bassomatic 76, perhaps the best of their comedy commercials, with Dan Akroyd putting a whole bass into a blender and hitting frappe. That one was the start, but there were so many up there

## **Gerald Ford dies at 93- SNL tribute.**



that I just had to keep going. I found The Adobe, the car made out of clay, the classic one where there was a car designed for crazy people with the best tag line: There's a Radio in my Fingernail, Car! It was really Will Ferrell's best work. After that, I went looking for some of the other things I remembered and came across the Gerald Ford bit.

In 1996, Dana Carvey came back and guest hosted and while he was always known for playing Bush the Elder, he always did a great Tom Brokaw. They did a skit where they had Brokaw pre-taping an obituary for Gerald Ford in case he died while he was on vacation. They went through all sorts of scenarios (including if Zombie

Richard Nixon came from the grave and murdered him) and it was just generally a great bit.

There's more! There are great bits from folks like Kevin Nealon and Phil Hartman, lots of 1970s stuff from Belushi, Newman and Garrett Morris. I've watched all the skits I'd heard about but was too young to have seen.

After that, I saw one of the truly great skits of all time. Richard Pryor and Chevy Chase doing a word association that goes awry. Pryor was so much on the edge of comedy that this bit, with a hack like Chevy Chase, turned out to be the best thing of those early seasons.

Phil Hartman was easily the best of his generation and there's a lot of his stuff up on YouTube. There's the Anal Retentive Chef who triple-bags his garbage. There's The Sinatra group with the classic line "I've got pieces of guys like you in my stool!" and so many more. It made me realise just how good those guys were at what they did.

True, there are funny things done even today on SNL, and a lot of them end up on YouTube as well. There's the classic Lazy Sunday that made the new style SNL Digital Shorts all the rage. They'd done one before Lazy Sunday, but the LS turned the Internet on and started folks posting to YouTube. SNL cracked down at first, then after people were doing versions

of it using the sound-track and lipsynching, they realised they had something and posted it themselves. That led the charge and so many more videos

started hitting the Tube.

The next one was called Lettuce. It was two guys sitting on a stoop eating heads of Iceberg lettuce. That's all it was and it was brilliant. They followed that with a few more than weren't as memorable and then it turned on to the second classic - Natalie Portman.

Natalie did a bleep-soaked short that also started turning up everywhere. NBC didn't like it getting out, but they only asked that the raw footage ones, of which there were a few with the swearing intact, be removed. That led to the masterstroke: Dick in a Box.

When Justin Timberlake's skit Dick in a Box appeared, it was bleeped everytime he said Dick. SNL then posted it to YouTube a couple of days later completely unbleeped, which turned it into a huge deal. It's now the third most viewed thing on the site and the



one legal SNL video that outdraws the others by a wide margin.

While I've watched the various recent ones a few times, I constantly go back to the old stuff. I don't remember much of the stuff from the period when Dick Ebersol took over from Lorne Michaels, though a lot of it was pretty much crap. The time Charlie Rocket said 'Fuck' during Weekend Update isn't on there, which is sad as it's one of the earliest moments I remember. There are a few from the times that Rich Little and Billy Crystal were in the cast, and even a few from the shitty seasons when they had lost all of the Hartman-era stars and not yet discovered Ferrell, Shannon, Hammond and the rest. The only one that was any good from that team was Tim Meadows.

So yeah, I've been watching a lot of old SNL and just plain loving it!



## JUGGLING PLATES

### ARTICLE AND PHOTOS BY HOWEIRD

You don't need a map to find Parkfield, California. Just drive to the San Miguel exit on Highway 101 (exit 241A) and follow the signs. After several turns onto increasingly rural and uphill roads, you'll arrive at a nondescript white bridge over what looks like a low, wide stream bed, with a sign which says "San Andreas Fault – Now Entering North American Plate". When you drive across the bridge and look back, a twin of that sign says



"Now Entering Pacific Plate".

And you've just crossed one of the most seismically active points in the world.

Which is how I spent Christmas Day of 2006. With the day off work, and nothing else to do, I took advantage of there being almost no traffic through usually bumper-to-bumper San Jose, and drove south 157 miles to San Miguel, and then on another 30 miles and 1500 feet or so to Parkfield, population 18, elevation 1530, the most continuously monitored earthquake area in the country. I wanted to see what was shaking.



The answer was: not much. I arrived at about 1 pm. Parkfield consists of a school, a USGS campus of several small puke-green buildings plus a trailer, an inn and a café. All were closed for the holiday. While I was there, nothing shook. I hung around the little park behind the inn, eating an apple and reading a cleverly designed plaque which demonstrates how far the earth has moved up there since the

1930's. Imagine a rectangular granite stone with a brass plaque mounted on it. Now take a jigsaw and cut a jagged line down the center. Place one half of the monument 12 feet in back of where it had been.

What got me started to thinking about making this pilgrimage was a book by Simon Winchester, *A Crack in the Edge of the World: America and the Great California Earthquake of 1906*. It's a combination geology and history textbook, the author describes the edge of the North American tectonic plate as he follows it from Iceland, across America, and finally focusing on the San Andreas Fault, and the Great San Francisco Quake and Fire of 1906. He spends a significant chunk of time talking about Parkfield.

The weather was sunny and warm (72° by 1 pm), and it's a pleasant drive from the highway through the hills, some of them showing the striated rock patterns which are a hallmark of shifting tectonic plates.



After about an hour and no temblors, I decided to drive out to Coalinga, a town which was flattened in 2004 by a quake which was centered in Parkfield.



The entry road into town is labeled “Parkfield-Coalinga Road” so I followed my intuition (and the maps I had with me) for a few miles. The “end of paved road” sign was my first warning that this might not be a good idea. The signs 100 yards later which said the road was impassable in wet weather was the show-stopper. Rain was predicted for that evening, the only traffic I saw in the past hour was a



pair of Yuppie Harley riders who came into Parkfield from 101 then went back the way they had come, and I wasn't interested in having a Kim Family Adventure.

I'm glad I turned back – it gave me a great view of a stretch of flat land on my (Pacific Plate) side of the fault as it bumped up against the North American side of the fault. There was a ridge about 50 feet high, the difference between one plate and the next. It totally dwarfed a camper trailer parked out in the field - very impressive.

It's a trip which most cars can do on a full tank of gas, but since I was still hoping to cut across to Coalinga



and I-5, I stopped off in King City for gas. A word to the wise – King City has three exits. The one in the middle has gas at prices similar to most of the Bay Area. The stations by the two exits on the fringes were charging 40 cents a gallon more. As it turns out, I had missed the cut-off to Coalinga, it was a few miles back, so that will have to be another trip.

I'll have to try the whole route again some time when things are open. There are several wineries along the way which looked like they would be fun to visit.

As it turns out, I didn't miss being shaken up by much. According to the USGS earthquake map for Parkfield:

**A microearthquake occurred at 10:56:54 AM (PST) on Monday, December 25, 2006.**

**The magnitude 1.9 event occurred 1 km (1 miles) SW of Parkfield, CA. The hypocentral depth is 11 km ( 7 miles).**

And had I gone on New Year's Day:

**A minor earthquake occurred at 5:48:16 PM (PST) on Monday, January 1, 2007.**

**The magnitude 3.1 event occurred 7 km (4 miles) NW of Parkfield, CA. The hypocentral depth is 10 km ( 6 miles).**





## ***MY LEADING MAN, JON CHAPMAN***

I used to watch a lot of E! True Hollywood Stories. Everytime they featured an actor or director who overdosed, they'd always have someone saying it was 'such a waste of talent' about whoever it was that died. I always thought that was a load of crap, that the girl who played Mr. Drummond's daughter on *Diff'rent Strokes* was supposed to be some sort of young Olivier or some such. I just figured they had to say it because they were dead in a tragic way. If they ever make one about our crew of friends who comprise Redfoot Productions or *The Short Timers*, I'll have to say just that about my friend Jon Chapman.

Jon passed away New Year's Eve after ODing at some party. He was living down South after leaving the BArea and setting himself up down there. He was an actor and a musician and LA was the natural place for him. While LA is where the jobs are, there are siren songs on every corner and it's far easier to fall into things there than anywhere

else on Earth. It's a sad fact, but I've seen it with so many people I've known over the years.

I first met Jon Chapman the day we started shooting *The Chick Magnet*. I'm writing an issue of *Claims Department* all about it right now and the story of making the film is one that I never realised is everything that Hollywood is about. Jon was our last-minute replacement. Steve Sprinkles, the director, had met him and said he'd be good. As soon as I saw him, I knew he'd be perfect. He had an everyman charm about him that played brilliantly on camera. I had spent much of the time in pre-production thinking specifically about someone else, but when Jon showed up, he was perfect.



He actually managed to get me to re-think my entire take on the script just by showing up. That's how good the guy was.

We had a rough few days of shooting. Jon was great, but some of our actors weren't quite as good and we had issues with scheduling and timing in general. We had to add two days extra shooting. Jon was two hours late one day, which was the hardest part. When your lead actor is great and he's that late, you start to think about other options. Luckily, once he showed up, we managed to get the good stuff and he made the actors around him so much better.

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"John was outgoing and caring. I didn't work with him long, but the time we spent on set together was always a joy. He made me feel comfortable and welcome, that's just the kind of man he was. The world won't be the same without his smile and laughter...I'll never forget the impact he had on my life.

Rissy Smith (Dawn)"

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After we had done the Chick Magnet, we set off on another course and did The Last Woman on Earth with Kate Kelton. After that we took a few months break and then ended up doing the 48 Hour Film Festival. Jon agreed to work with us again, and after some rocky moments of casting, we settled on him playing the driver of the van that was full of Street Medics who worked on the various homeless folks of the city.

The film was a mess on the production end with arguments and in-fighting. We didn't go into it with the right state of mind and everything could have easily fallen apart. Luckily, we had good, and at times great, actors who helped pull everything into frame and make it happen. Jon was the glue of the comedy. He had a deadpan delivery of his goofiness that was so refreshing and played so well off of the others. His comedy in Saving Pockets was very complex, even though on the surface he's basically playing Joe Garelli from NewsRadio. He acted the rock 'n roll dufus while snacking on various sweets the whole way through, but the second he starts to desire something salty, he changes the pace and sends us into the finale. He hit every note we asked him to and often with a brilliance I wouldn't have expected. He tackled a guy into a fence, the action highlight of the film, and made it look like he was enjoying that



part of the job. It was a strange role, but he nailed it. Steve said that no matter what role we had given Jon, he would have kicked ass at it. I couldn't agree more.

In many ways, Jon was Saving Pockets for me. His character, named Jon of all things, was the comedic heart of the film and he got more laughs from me than anyone else. When he choked out an under-aged hooker, I laughed. It takes great comedic timing to get laughs out of that situation, but Jon pulled it off.

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Chapman was obviously talented, there's no question about that. His work in both Saving Pockets and The Chick Magnet were both what saved them from being unwatchable.

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As a producer, you learn that there are people you want to work with everytime. For Steve Sprinkles, it's Frank Ramirez, his buddy who appears in all but one of the films of Steve Sprinkles. For me, it was Jon Chapman, and the times I got to have Jon on-set were the ones that I felt most

comfortable. I guess that's why I wrote the lead in *Traffic on the Hour* with him in mind.

*Traffic on the Hour* was one of the more twisted ideas I've ever had. A film about a guy who is stuck in traffic getting more and more angry until he put a tape in of a girl getting hacked up with a chainsaw. That's the gag. I instantly thought of Jon and his commitment and delivery and especially his ability to get across things without talking since there was no dialogue in the movie. That was the key and I knew that Jon could pull it off.

Sadly, we've never completed the film. It's likely we'll at least try to get it done now.

If you're interested, there are a lot of Jon's films on-line. You can see *Saving Pockets* at <http://www.theshorttimers.com/2005/index.html>, *The Chick Magnet* at <http://youtube.com/watch?v=RCvMrxdKztg> and his brief cameo as a package of bologna at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cJBcbOj0dUM>. I've rewatched them all recently and they're all evidence of the gold standard that Jon set for the stuff we did with him.

Jon Chapman was my Olivier. He was scary talented, knew exactly what to do. He could take direction and then turn a little something and make it so much better. He was a star who never shined as bright as he could

have. He was a comedian who knew that comedy was as much give as it is take. He was an actor, a helluva actor, and a good guy. I wish I'd had a chance to work with him more, to get to see more of that huge talent, but even more than that, I wish I could have spent more time with him, around him, just soaking it in. Jon was a wonderful human being, a funny guy, a nice guy, a real guy. I wish I'd gotten a chance to know him better.

So, now it's my turn to make myself another spoke in a terrible, depressing cliché. Jon's death was a huge waste of talent. He was an amazing personality taken from us too soon.





## The Banshee Screams For Buffalo Meat

By Stephen Sprinkles

I was never supposed to meet Jon Chapman. It was one of those random series of events that leads you on a path the inevitably alters your life.

My partners and I were working on our new film called “The Chick Magnet” and the lead actor (and main character) we had all though the audition and rehearsal process had dropped out... two days before we shoot our first scene. We had another actress coming out from Canada to shoot with us so rescheduling would be hard if not impossible. I called my friend Ana to ask if our mutual friend Larry George might be available to play the roll. She said he wasn't but he recommended a friend of his, Jon Chapman.

I went down and met Jon at Starbucks the night before we were scheduled to shoot. We talked a bit about the film, his character and I gave him a copy of the script. The next morning we started shooting and I was floored. He knew every line cold, had a character ready, knew how he wanted to play the part but took direction perfectly and with every change or note he would always add another dimension on top, always go farther always do it better then I had asked. Who was this guy and where did he come from?

On the third day of shooting I realized that without knowing it the part of a man who is magnetically attracting women was something that was custom written for Jon. We had one scene with about 10-15 extras or as we called them “hotties” they were all supposed

to pretend to be attached to Jon as he does a scene with the female lead. Through the course of the day every single woman asked me if Jon was single and if they could get his number. I briefly concocted a scheme to become a pimp and make back my budget for the film by sending Jon on a series of dates... it didn't happen but I'm sure it could have worked.

By the end of the shoot Jon was our new hero. He was our savior and by the end I was proud to have made a new friend.

Just after the shoot a friend of mine called asking if I knew any actors, it turns out he was in much the same position I had been and was desperate for an actor... I gave him Jon's number. After that Jon became the by word for our group of filmmakers. He was our little secret. He ended up in every film made by everyone I knew for the next two years. You knew that someday he was going to belong to the world but for now he was ours. Our Brando... Our *Olivier*... Our De Niro... the most talented actor I've ever known.

On top of that he was a ray of sunshine on every set, which was half the reason you would want him back, just to have him on set with you... to crack a joke or smile that crooked smile.

I was the second of my group to move to LA and it was a very lonely existence for quite a few months. LA is a strange place, no matter



how many people live here everyone seems to feel so alone and I fell victim to that too. After a few months, Jon called me and told me he was coming to LA and I damn near bounced off the walls. Thank the lord! One of my friends was going to be nearby again, it was the beginning of a very good summer.

I only got to see Jon a few times over the next few months. I would be busy with an ever increasing workload and it made seeing Jon difficult.

The last time I saw him, I went out to Pasadena to see his place, he had always been making the drive to North Hollywood to see me and I wanted to make it easier for him. It was a Monday or Tuesday night so there wasn't much going on in the city, we bar hopped from place to place having a great time but the whole time Jon kept apologizing that it was so dead. In my head I kept thinking. “I'm not here to see

Pasadena; I'm here to see you!"

Around Thanksgiving I sent him a little email just saying that I was sorry we haven't been hanging out, work was to blame and that I would see him soon. I really kept thinking that, I would see him soon, I would see him soon. But I never did.

My two most hated words are 'no' and 'goodbye'. I can't stand having to say either of them. And this time it's even harder.

Jon was the kind of person you want in your life. He was honest and loyal and just a hell of a lot of fun to be with. He made me feel happy to be around him and blessed to count him as my friend.

I will remember him as he lived, and Christ, did he live. Life had to be wrestled out of his grasp with his teeth marks still on it. He left that same mark on everyone that met him. He was, to quote Steve, cooler than Steve McQueen.

Jon Chapman, he was too big for life and the best mistake that ever happened to me.

Via con dios, Johnny-Jon-Jo-Jo-Johnston, my friend, I will never forget you.



Jon's funeral was held at Crossroads Church in San Jose. I'm not much of a church guy, but I went and discovered something: Crossroads used to be a movie theatre: the Cambrian Twin. I went there a couple of times with my Dad. The only films I remember seeing there were The Boy Who Could Fly and The Gods Must Be Crazy.

As soon as Steve and I walked into the place, I went "this is very appropriate. At the beginning of his speech, Jon's LA roommate said "Of course it'll be at a movie theatre, Jon."

The location was actually very comforting. I've always said that movies are my religion and theatres are my churches. I don't think I could imagine a better place to pay tribute to Jon.

This issue of The Drink Tank was written by Howieird, Steve Sprinkles and Christopher J. Garcia. The Cover is by Anahita Pelaneshgli. The Photos with the Parkfield article were by Howieird. The Chapman photos were by Chris Garcia, Sean Becker, Steve Sprinkles and Others.

We'll be back with a regular issue, including LoCs, next week. This week, we just had to say goodbye to a good dude.