

'The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel's Lenny Bruce: The Real vs. The Fictional

Outlet: [Collider](#)

Lenny Bruce's role in 'Maisel' is special because we see him before the sad ending, unlike other dramatized depictions of his life.

Unlike many characters in *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*, like talk show host Gordon Ford (a Johnny Carson stand-in) or comic Sophie Lennon (Phyllis Diller/Totie Fields blend), Lenny Bruce was not fictional nor a composite character — he was real. Known as the Godfather of modern stand-up (along with Mort Sahl), Lenny paved the way for legendary comics such as George Carlin, Joan Rivers, and Richard Pryor, but not without a cost. He talked about politics, religion, race, sex, and drugs when it was unseemly to do so on stage, even for a man.

Rachel Brosnahan, who plays Midge Maisel, has described Lenny in Midge's fictional universe as her "fairy godmother." He flirts and floats out of Midge's life, helping her along the way, only to disappear in a pervertible puff of smoke. After all, this is Midge's story, and this fictional Lenny Bruce (played by Luke Kirby) is at the whim of the *Maisel* narrative. Many have argued that turning Bruce into this kind of romantic figure, in every sense of the word, goes against his true nature — except that Bruce has already been branded a mythical figure in the comedy world for years.

The ballad of Lenny Bruce is one of a "subversive" or "sick comic," a drug addict who pushed established social mores, the First Amendment, and obscenity laws until he spent more time in a jail cell than on a club stage. Bruce paved the way for modern comics and storytellers like monologists/playwrights Eric Bogosian (*Uncut Gems*; *Law & Order*), who hero-worshipped him. Bogosian even added the moniker of "Saint" to Bruce's spiritual monogram. But those who knew Lenny, like friend and comic contemporary Shelly Berman, said Lenny would consider the idea that he was "heroic" as "hypocrisy," according to George Nachman's book *Seriously Funny: The Rebel Comedians of the 1950s and 1960s*. And the fictional Lenny, according to *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*, would agree. In the Season 4 finale, Lenny literally scoffs at Midge regarding the "pedestal" he feels she has placed him on and has no interest in being a "stand-up Messiah." All Lenny Bruce wanted, both in his real and fictional incarnations, was to do was his job, to be funny. And getting arrested was not a means to that goal, but a deterrent.

In *Maisel*, Midge and fictional Lenny strikes up a friendship that leads to romance through esteem for each other's talent. So much so that just as they are about to make the leap from friends to lovers, Midge makes Lenny promise her that "... you will never, ever forget that I am very, very funny." It isn't about ego; it's about respect. Midge doesn't want to lose the respect Lenny gives her as a comic. As a woman in 1960, let alone a female comic in 1960, respect was hard to find in the world at large. A time when women weren't seen as comics or writers but as "girl writers" and "female comics." And although Belle Barth was getting arrested in Florida as early as 1953 for her bawdy routines, it wasn't until 1960 that she recorded her first comedy album. 1960 was a critical year for funny women making their comic marks into a new decade,

but it was also the start of the fiery decline of the former Leonard Schneider, a Jewish kid from Bellmore, Long Island, known as Lenny Bruce.

The midnight show at Carnegie Hall in February of 1961 was the pinnacle of Lenny's success (changed to 1960 in the series). The fact that audiences would travel through a blizzard to see Lenny do stand-up confirmed his popularity. Yet, in the fall of that same year, he was arrested in San Francisco for saying "c**ksucker" on stage at the Jazz Workshop. His arrest led to an obscenity trial. He was acquitted, but the arrests didn't stop. In 1962, he was arrested again in California for shows at The Troubadour and The Unicorn. (one of his "offensive" words: schmuck). Both trials ended in a hung jury. In Chicago, he wasn't so lucky, and after his arrest on stage at the Gates of Horn, he was convicted and sentenced to a year in jail. While on bail awaiting his appeal, Lenny flew to London to perform, only to be banned from the country indefinitely. By 1964 he was arrested in Greenwich Village, NYC, his spiritual and literal home. The New York artistic community came out in droves to speak on his behalf, from Bob Dylan to James Baldwin. Unfortunately, their words weren't enough, and in 1964 Lenny was convicted and sentenced to four months in a workhouse.

Once again, he was out on bail while on appeal. In fear of booking him, U.S. clubs began to blacklist him. And although he wasn't banned from Australia, things didn't go well Down Under either. His drug use got worse and affected his health. In 1964, he fell forty feet outside a hotel window pretending to fly (his imitation of "Superjew") and broke his arm and hurt his back. By 1966 he was blacklisted by almost all the U.S. clubs, and the king of comedy, Lenny Bruce, could no longer do what he loved — perform stand-up. His worst fear was realized. By the summer of 1966, he was dead of a drug overdose. Many say his death was a slow suicide and that what really killed Lenny Bruce was comedy. Or lack thereof. Bruce's manager Jack Rollins felt that Bruce had "sinned against his talent." The first one through the door always gets hurt, they say, and his change from "degenerate" to holy man seemed to happen overnight, according to Joan Rivers, in Nachman's book.

"...so what does he get for this? He gets arrested for talking dirty and dies a broken man. Now people are calling him the Rabelais of his time. The day after he died, The Time's obituary included comparisons to Swift and Twain. And I said, "this poor slob couldn't get a cabaret card" -- which you needed in those days."

Rivers (whose real life heavily influenced Maisel) had a friendship with Bruce similar to Midge and Lenny's in the series. However, near the end of her life, Joan would waffle on whether their relationship had also turned romantic or not. Still, she wasn't shy about expressing her attraction to him.

"... sexy as hell — oh, ho ho, you have no idea! The women were mad about him.... And the men loved him because he was a man's man and told the truth."

According to Rivers, Lenny was the biggest influence on her life — he "changed it all" for her. Joan loved to tell a story about how after bombing at a club one night, she exited the stage to find a note from Bruce: "They're wrong, your right." It meant so much to Joan that she kept the note in her bra. Years later, she told the story to George Carlin, who confessed that Bruce had given him the same note, and not just him, but to all the comics he believed had talent. In Maisel,

Lenny shows this side of him through his encouragement and support of Midge's act and career. Lenny Bruce's role in *Maisel* is special because we see him before the sad ending, unlike other dramatized depictions of his life.

Due to Kirby's transcendent performance as Bruce (he won an Emmy for the role) and Kirby and Brosnahan's electric chemistry, Lenny's role went from pilot cameo to a continuous role over several seasons. Still, even with Lenny's beefed-up role in the series, he and Midge feel like two ships in the night, which ultimately feels by design. After four seasons of sexual tension, the final coupling of these two "will they or won't they" characters doesn't feel random but purposeful and specific. Based on Bruce's history and where the series appears to be headed, Lenny and Midge seem to come together at the exact point where their lives diverge in opposite directions. It is, in cosmic terms, called a "stellar collision." Two shooting stars with opposite trajectories, almost switching places as they collide in space and time. Midge on her way up and Lenny on his way down. What makes this moment unique and not just another "fan service" hook up of a highly anticipated coupling is that it does what many series before it have failed to achieve — it drives the story forward.

Later that night, after Lenny's Carnegie Hall performance, when he leaves Midge center stage with the parting line, "If you blow this, it will break my f***ing heart," it has the pathos of two characters who genuinely care for each other. It would have felt empty had it happened before this moment, like a god-like avatar or a *deus ex machina* who comes down from the heavens to push Midge toward success. But instead, Lenny's importance to Midge's path in the show gives him a purpose in the narrative that feels earned and important. He isn't romantic or mythical; he feels real. And Lenny's words are just what Midge needs to stop hiding and fight for her place with the legends of comedy and into *Maisel*'s filth and final season.

The assassination of John Kennedy in 1963 is considered an "end of innocence" seminal moment in history. It pushed many Americans out of their cloistered existence of the 1950s into reality. The finale of *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* appears to take place between Halloween and the 1960 election — and Kennedy's win. But, like Bruce's future, we know Kennedy's tragic end is also coming. In the final moments of the season, Midge passes a car of celebrating Kennedy volunteers, excited for what lies ahead with a new president, all while Midge pushes herself against forceful snow gusts representing the hard-fought road she has ahead in her journey toward success. Then, as Midge reaches the subway, she sees a billboard for *The Gordon Ford Show*, complete with the 1960s NBC "brought to you in living color" peacock logo. Finally, Midge sees the words "Go Forward," like a snow mirage that disappears into the billboard of Ford's face. When the *Maisel* pilot first dropped, the slug line for the series stated that it would "...lead her to a spot on Johnny Carson's couch". For stand-ups, Johnny Carson was a kingmaker, launching thousands of careers. In many terms, his *Tonight Show* represents legitimation and stardom. Carson didn't take over for Jack Parr until 1962, but the NBC logo alone gives away who Ford represents in the *Maisel* world. In this final moment of the episode, we as an audience know that Midge will be taking Lenny's words to heart.

Maisel's costume designer Donna Zakowski has referred to Midge's signature pink as the rose-colored glasses through which Midge sees the world. Midge's pinks have gone from baby pink to darker fuchsias/burgundies as each season, Midge's world is opened wider and wider

from her tight-knit life on the Upper West Side. So, if the death of President Kennedy threw off America's "rose-colored glasses," perhaps the death of Lenny Bruce will represent this same moment for Midge. Midge and Lenny aren't just a tragic romance; they represent the tragic romance between themselves and comedy — the good and the bad.

Adapting 'Ghosts': The Characters of the U.K. Series and Their U.S. Counterparts

Outlet: [Collider](#)

Both versions of 'Ghosts' stand out in the television landscape through their use of themes, characters, and experiences through time.

The concept of U.K. to U.S. television adapting isn't anything new to the genre, from their popularity in the 1970s with Three's Company (U.K.'s Man About the House) and Norman Lear's All In The Family (U.K.'s Till Death Us Do Part) to the 21st century with The Office, House Of Cards and Shameless, just to name a few. Not that there haven't been a few duds along the way (see 2003's U.S. version of Coupling). Still today, Trans-Atlantic conversion seems to be at its height for two countries that Oscar Wilde once famously wrote "have everything in common (with)... except, of course, language."

Since the popularity of The Office in 2005, literal adaptations and adherence to the source material, plot lines, characters, and themes have become the norm where previous reboots had mainly used the source material as a jumping-off point — often making the recent era of reboots feel like cookie-cutter imitations, depending on which series you watched first. This makes the recent CBS adaptation of the U.K. series Ghosts a refreshing change of pace.

Ghosts is a series about... well, a group of ghosts, spanning generations haunting one house after dying on the property. Their life, or afterlife, is forever changed when a married couple inherits the house with plans to turn it into a Bed and Breakfast. Chaos ensues when Allison (Charlotte Ritchie in the U.K. version) and/or Samantha (Rose McIver in the U.S. version), after hitting their heads, develop the ability to hear and see the ghosts, much to the chagrin of their husbands. (U.K.'s Kiell Smith-Bynoe and U.S.'s Utkarsh Ambudkar)

Baked into the original U.K. series is the history of the country in which it takes place. The ghosts in the house range from a World War II Captain to a headless Elizabethan to a Regency Jane Austen-style poet. The exciting aspect of the U.S. Ghosts is that while adapting many storylines from the original, the series has the leeway to be creative with characters due to differences between the two countries' land histories. Thoroughly American changes include a Viking, a Revolutionary officer, a 1960s hippy, a Native American, and a 1920s Jazz Singer. Both versions of Ghosts also stand out in the television landscape through their use of LBGTQ+ themes, characters, and experiences through time. Here are just a few of the characters from the U.S. series that come directly from the head of their U.K. counterparts.

Lady Stephanie "Fanny" Button (U.K.) / Hetty Woodstone (U.S.)

Played by series writer/co-creator Martha Howe-Douglas, the great Lady Button, much like her U.S. Victorian counterpart Hetty Woodstone (the superb Rebecca Wisocky), is set in her ways

based on the patriarchal indoctrination of her time, ideas such as that bike riding sexually arouse women (U.S.) or how overthinking is bad for a women's health and safety (U.K.). While both women had husbands who cheated on them, the biggest change is that Lady Fanny's husband killed her (causing her to reenact her death every night by screaming and flinging herself out of her bedroom window). In contrast, Hetty's husband (Veep's Matt Walsh), in comparison (a robber baron, i.e., see *The Gilded Age*), is not canonically LGBTQ+ as Fanny's husband is, which we find out when Fanny divulges that after finding her husband having sex with the male staff, he killed her. We later discover that Fanny and her husband, Lord George Button, were forced into marriage based on the societal pressures of the 1900s. (Fanny due to family money issues and being unable to enter business; George due to the archaic mores of the time.) An overall theme in the series that Fanny expresses the best:

"After all, if George had been free to love as he chose... well, I wouldn't have been murdered, and I could have had a husband instead who wanted to know me."

While it is best that the American version stayed clear of this storyline, with its history of tragic queer characters, thematically missing from the U.S. *Ghosts* (within more than one character), is that the group is better off when everyone can be their true selves. However, the U.S. version has explored a similar storyline in a deeper way than the U.K. version has yet to achieve. (More on that later.) Both Hetty and Fanny explore how to break from their literal corsets in different ways, and based on the trajectory of the U.S. version Hetty will be catching up to Fanny very soon.

The Captain (U.K.) / Captain Isaac Higgintoot (U.S.)

The Captain (played by writer/co-creator Ben Willbond) in the U.K. version hails from World War II, representing Britain's Churchill years, an archetypally English symbol. Therefore, it makes sense that his American counterpart reboot, Captain Isaac Higgintoot (Brandon Scott Jones), would be a Revolutionary War veteran. The Captain is a charming, sweet man with the famous Brit "stiff upper lip." Early on in the series, it is obvious that the Captain died in the 1940s, unable to express that he was queer and in love with a fellow soldier. Completely chaste, the Captain's longings are implied in scenes, never acted on or spoken.

In contrast, in the U.S. version, even though making Hetty's husband straight and changing the same-sex wedding in the house to a heterosexual one, Captain Higgintoot gets a love interest and a coming-out story. Isaac reunites with the ghost of a British officer throughout the first season, with whom he had a crush-worthy mutual flirtation in life. In a lovely touching scene (in the U.S.'s most recent episode), Isaac confesses to Hetty something he is excited but nervous to say out loud — that he is in love with British Officer Nigel Chessum, something he could never have imagined saying in his own time. Another addition to the U.S. version is that Captain Isaac, unlike the U.K.'s Captain, is played by an out actor. Jones told *Out Magazine* on playing the role and relating to his own time of feeling closeted in his past:

"The thing that has interested me from the get-go is, I remember that feeling. I remember that time in my life when I was somebody that just kind of wished I was somebody else or was struggling with my own identity... Then to sort of play this character who has held onto that

moment for much longer than any human could ever hold onto it for almost two and a half centuries, was so kind of sad, but also really, really exciting to me to play as an actor... Then to sort of play this character who has held onto that moment for much longer than any human could ever hold onto it for almost two and a half centuries, was so kind of sad, but also really, really exciting to me to play as an actor."

As the U.K. series has just finished filming their fourth season, one can only hope The Captain has a coming-out moment in this future when he's ready.

Pat Butcher (U.K.) / Pete Martino (U.S.)

Pat (U.K.) and Pete (U.S.), played by U.K. series writer/co-creator Jim Howick (*Sex Education*) and Richie Moriarty (*The Tick*), are the only characters with no noticeable gaps between their respective versions. Pat/Pete, dressed literally as a Boy Scout (killed with an arrow through his neck) is the sweet, cheerful goody-two-shoes from the 80s who loves Newhart, sports (well, maybe not archery anymore!), and his wife. They both have similar backstories, but it is the actors that bring their substance and likability to the role as the resident optimistic among the dead. From Howick's excitement and giant smile to Moriarty's bright naive spirit, they each bring their individual take to a memorable character.

Julian Fawcett MP (U.K.) / Trevor Lefkowitz (U.S.)

Both series depict the 1990s as a time of excess and greed, so what's more perfect than a character who died with their pants down to actually turn out to be a politician and/or a stock market bro? Although it feels deeply American to age down a character in a Brit-to-American transfer, the young Wall Street pre-9/11 type fits into the U.S. ensemble perfectly. The U.K.'s Jillian Fawcett MP (writer/creator Simon Farnaby), a career Member of Parliament, is the perfect satire of the end of Thatcherism, a hilarious buffoon who delivers some of the best lines (and improves — watch the outtakes). However, the U.S.'s Trevor Lefkowitz (Asher Grodman) fits the same mold but with moments of vulnerability, letting other characters on the show have the larger comic moments otherwise reserved for his predecessor. Still, at the surface, Julian and Trevor are both pompous sex maniacs who have never seen a modern H.R. department, but they also are doing what the series does best — shining a light on how far we've come and turning that into laughs.

Robin the Caveman (U.K.) / Thorfinn (U.S.)

Robin and Thorfinn are both the oldest characters in their respective series: a caveman and a Viking who have moments of brutalism and genius, alongside vulnerability. The concept behind Robin in the original series was that the oldest ghost was the smartest, having seen it all — only it is their way of speaking and presenting themselves that makes everyone assume otherwise. Often Robin is the one with the words of reason and a big heart. Thorfinn's juxtaposition from his appearance and his literal armor is also his soft heart from his past, singing baby Hetty to sleep, to his feelings of torture about killing his best friend: a squirrel. While Robin has all the answers, Thorfinn looks for them in therapy, making them both treasured characters.

Thomas Thorne (U.K.) / Sasappis (U.S.)

Of all the characters on the series, the U.K.'s Regency poet Thomas Thorne (writer/co-creator Mathew Baynton) and the U.S.'s Lenape Native American Sasappis (Román Zaragoza) couldn't feel more rooted in the history of the land where they died. And while Sasappis does share DNA, so to speak, with Robin in the realm of the "oldest characters being the wisest" mantra, his genuine connection appears to be with Thomas Thorne, as they are each the storytellers of their group. While Thomas is a writer who could never tell his stories in his lifetime or get the girl (dead or alive), and he is neither as brave as Sasappis nor as wise — yet you can't help but fall in love with both of them. While Thomas Thorne, much like The Captain, is a symbol of a romantic version of the British Isles, Sasappis represents North America's true origins. And similar to Thomas, he was unable to fulfill his storytelling dreams while he lived. Speaking in a modern vernacular, Sasappis is quick and funny; he makes jokes about the living characters' experiences and prejudices and has moments of true honesty, making him the American reboot's stand-out character. One could say he is the truest character adaptation from British-to-American in the entire U.S. show.

Gracie Allen: Truth in Comedy

A Tribute to the great comedienne Gracie Allen

Outlet: Travalanche

They say the great ones never truly know how great they are -that the great ones do it without effort, without the knowledge of doing it any other way – doing what comes naturally. Gracie Allen was that kind of woman, that kind of comedian. But of course she wasn't as black and white as the medium in which she played. Gracie Allen never gave the same performance twice; she had no conception of it. If she had to eat on camera she ate on camera; if she had to darn a sock she'd darn a sock. Being truthful in her work was a given to Gracie long before the phrase "Method Acting" became part of our lexicon. She unknowingly went against convention in her Vaudeville days, wearing whatever she liked on stage (always a nice dress) at a time when performers wore the same outfit each night – costume was as much a part of the act as the lines or moves themselves. When asked by her husband and comedy partner, George Burns, one night why she brought her purse on stage when the previous night she had not, she replied simply, "A lady always carries a purse." When asked by a director of a Burns & Allen feature film if she could "cheat" towards the camera while eating, she answered, "But this is how I eat breakfast." Everything Gracie Allen the character said on stage, Gracie Allen the woman believed, and so in turn did the audience.

Gracie Allen's onstage persona was that of a scatterbrained woman with her own sense of logic – her mind was an open book. In real life, Gracie Allen almost never gave an interview as herself; to find an interview, usually very early in her career, where she speaks as herself, is rare. Gracie Allen was a very private and humble woman. She believed her own personality was not at all interesting and that the public cared only for her on stage persona, so why do interviews as herself. This kept Gracie Allen's real life shrouded in mystery and -whether she knew it or not – gave her a final vestige of privacy.

And who would have blamed Gracie's audience for being fooled into thinking she was her fictional persona? After all, Gracie Allen, wife of George Burns, mother and Vaudeville/Radio/TV/movie star, was playing a woman named Gracie Allen, wife of George Burns, mother and Vaudeville/Radio/TV/movie star; even in almost all of Gracie's movies her

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character had the first name Gracie and/or last name Allen. Not to mention Burns and Allen used many of the real-life names of Gracie's family members in the Burns and Allen comedy act. Even her real age is a mystery, as she never revealed it even to her husband and family. It was only after the 1900 census as well as her high school yearbook were discovered that her true age came to light. What is mostly known about Gracie, beyond her ditzy character, is from second hand sources, such as George Burns himself as well as her friends and family. Therefore, reconstructing the real Gracie Allen is more complicated than her character's sense of logic.

She was kind, giving, fiercely loyal and fought for what she felt was fair and just in the world. Her motto was simply, "To be professional; on time and don't push me around because I'm small." (Burns 1988) The 5'1" slip of a woman had that Irish passion and never let anyone forget it. Once in a Vaudeville act, after George refused to take a joke out of the act she didn't think was funny, Gracie refused to answer George's straight line – each and every time until George took the joke out of the act. Another time, in New Orleans, a local dry cleaner ruined an expensive dress of Gracie's and refused to reimburse her for the damage; Gracie stepped out of the act in different intervals each night in the middle of a joke, to let the audience know of her dissatisfaction, until the dry cleaner paid her back. Once, outside the Brown Derby, Gracie literally kicked George in the ass for not opening a door for her.

She helped her friends (and enemies) out with money when Vaudeville died, adopted two children including a son whom most would have considered sickly at the time, and made sure her sisters had everything they needed when they both were lost in a sea of dementia (Something she feared would happen to herself) She did all this while remaining, as Gracie would refer to herself, "a lady." She was embarrassed by the large burn scars on her left arm from a childhood accident (She always wore long sleeves because of it), and the fact that she had two differently-colored eyes, but according to George she never complained about either flaw. In fact, if she did complain about something one knew it was a big deal – she was a Vaudeville trooper on-and-off-stage. This made her appearance very important to her; something she was proud of. George remarked she never left the house with a hair out of place or her make-up less than perfect.

Gracie had unresolved issues with her father, also a Vaudeville hoofer, who had abandoned her family when Gracie was a child – so much so that when Gracie's father came backstage to see his now-famous daughter, Gracie's only comment on the matter was: he had nothing to say to her when she was growing up and therefore she had nothing to say to him now. She was however very close to the rest of her family, her mother and sisters, and she loved her children fiercely.

She didn't think she was funny, even though American considered her its comedy sweetheart, stating that she knew funny, but wasn't funny. When asked to say something funny her

response was, “Charlie Chaplin.” George Burns says the only real joke he ever heard Gracie tell, after being egged on by friends was, “An Irishman walked out of a bar.” She hated her feet, loved gossip and her only wish was to be able to wear a strapless, sleeveless, evening gown – the one thing her money and fame could not provide her.

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In August 1932 The World Telegraph interviewed George and Gracie in their NY hotel room; it's one of the rare interviews where Gracie speaks as herself. She remarks, in the interview, how she is not looking to play Shakespeare and someday hopes to have enough money to retire and never work again. The reporter even mentions how during the interview Miss Allen kept staring out the window, waiting for her daughter and nanny to come back from a stroll in the park. This would be in direct parallel to her husband George Burns, who felt performing was his life and performed well into his 90's – one might say that after Gracie's passing, show business was what gave him the reason to live so long.

It is a lovely interview and a rare glimpse into Gracie's personality and her dynamic with George. Her excitement about their travels around Europe lifts off the page with the same enthusiasm George had talking about show-business. At one point, George, ever the raconteur, exuberantly tells the interviewer that he can't sit still when he talks: “I have to walk around and act out everything,” to which Gracie mutters, “But perhaps you noticed that,” looking on him lovingly before sharing an admiring smile (The New York World Telegraph 1932).

The love between George and Gracie is well-documented; he adored her and lauded her as the genesis of all his success, which was half-true. They were both responsible for each other's successes and they each referred to the other as the talented one. The difference was George lived longer to tell the tale. But after all, being the literal brains behind their act as the writer, storytelling was George's talent. Their love story sounds like something out of a storybook. He loved her, and pursued her, in Vaudeville while Gracie claimed she loved another. And like a great act one finish, after giving Gracie an ultimatum to marry him and drop her fiancé, or break up the act, Gracie called him early Christmas morning and agreed to marry him.

Together his sense of humor and her rare talent for the stage brought them great success as a team in real life as well as show business. And although their Dumb Dora act – the girl/boy double act with a nitwit woman and smart straight man – wasn't anything new for the time, Burns and Allen brought their originality – themselves -to their work, making it something new and innovative. But that wasn't how it started. When Gracie first met George he was doing an act that was just imitations of other, more established Big Time acts. But his act was breaking up and George needed a new partner. Enter Gracie Allen, stage right, an out-of-work hooper whose short respite from show business in stenography classes was a bust. They both needed new partners and George's act was cheaper so they agreed to do his “new” act. Only just like George's old act his “new” act was neither new nor innovative. The act consisted of jokes straight out of joke books – safe material – material that was sure to keep the fearful Burns employed, as new untested material was far too risky. George would later admit he had spent so much time in Small Time Vaudeville he was fearful of being more; he was happy coasting—he just couldn't admit it. But the more George and Gracie worked together the more confidence he seemed to get and the more new material he wrote – until it was the whole act. George went from a twenty-eight-year-old playing it safe to a confident star that played The Big Time, The Palace. They were each other's loves and muses – each encouraging the other.

And although Gracie Allen spoke of retirement as early as 1932, and not too long after she had the money to do so, Gracie didn't retire until her heart became too weak to continue in 1958. Gracie Allen's heart perhaps had loved too much to go on. She loved her husband George so much that she stayed in show business longer than she would have wanted to for his sake. She

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knew that show business was the breath of life to her husband – “He needs it for his metabolism,” She told Carol Channing on teaching Carol her old Burns and Allen act, when Carol appeared with George in Gracie's place. (Burns 1988) And once George ventured out on his own she reminded him of the lessons she had taught him when they first met- truthfulness. If he didn't believe what he was saying, how could the audience? “All you need in acting is honesty, and if you can fake that you've got it made, “George would always joke later in his life. But George believed as early as the 1940's that, according to his biography on Gracie, “a joke just isn't funny unless it has some truth in it;” he just needed to learn how to incorporate that into his delivery. (Burns 1988) George said he learned a lot from Gracie, but the most important was, “She taught me that you've got to make it sound like you've never said it before ...A lot of Gracie rubbed off on me.” (People October 31, 1988 Vol. 30 No. 18)

*George Burns won the academy award for Best Supporting Actor in 1976.

Just Carrie: A Tribute to Carrie Fisher **Outlet:Travalanche**

“I don't want my life to imitate art. I want my life to be art.” — Carrie Fisher

The day after Carrie Fisher passed away in December, and for subsequent days afterward, letters still flooded the U.K. newspaper The Guardian where Fisher had an advice column. Not because these people had no idea the actor/writer had just died, but because they thought maybe in some way Fisher could still reach out to them, just as her character Princess Leia had reached out when she was in need: “Obi-Wan Kenobi, you are my only hope.”

After its premiere in 1977, Star Wars became a surprise hit that not only changed the way films were made and how we consume them, but went on to become a global phenomenon. Its creator George Lucas has even referred to it as a “religion,” and for many it holds a cult-like quality over their lives. And what may just be a film for some, has for millions become a beacon of joy passed down from generation to generation. For most, Carrie Fisher's likeness as Princess Leia has been in their lives since childhood or early adulthood. Whether the film was the glue that brought their family together or solace for them in bad times, Carrie Fisher's status as a pop culture icon is one draped in the nostalgia of youth, a line of demarcation between childhood and adult responsibility. I have to digress for a moment and admit that I began writing this essay the day after Carrie Fisher died; but when her mother, Debbie Reynolds, passed away that same night, I just put it away. This is in fact my third, as they say in show business, “pass” writing about Carrie Fisher since her passing. For many, 2016 was a hard year personally and creatively, one which included the loss of so many great artists who had touched our lives. Carrie Fisher was no different but her connection to our childhood as a symbol of, well, hope, gave the end of 2016 even more of a sting. I ended 2016 with a scratched cornea, meaning the year had both figuratively and literally broken me. But I see now that my writer's

block was in fact caused by how hard it was to write about Carrie Fisher in the past tense – so much of her life was lived in the vibrant, take-no-prisoners, present. Because Carrie Fisher to me, and to millions, was more than a pop culture princess. She was a wit, a mental health and addiction advocate, a script doctor, an advice giver, a raconteur ... a bullshit barometer. (Not to mention Dog Lover and Coca-Cola connoisseur) Carrie was once asked who she would be without Princess Leia: “Just Carrie” she responded plainly. It doesn’t feel right to celebrate forty years of Star Wars without Carrie Fisher. But maybe the best way to celebrate this day is to

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remind people of her real impact beyond the stars. So in celebration today here is my new (and a little of the old) essay, I hope you enjoy it.

“You know the bad thing about being a survivor... You keep having to get into difficult situations in order to show off your gift.”

I was lucky enough to have met Carrie Fisher a few times and crossed paths (more on that later) with her on a few occasions over the last fifteen years (as a fan). For me, Carrie Fisher was an inspiration at a very formative time in my life, and is even more so now, after her passing. Now, I’m not talking about Star Wars. And listen, I’m not saying there is anything wrong with remembering Carrie Fisher for Star Wars – as our Princess Leia, and later, General Organa. Carrie herself knew (and repeated in interviews) that she knew that would always be the first– and probably the last – line in her obituary. As she said in public and in private to those who knew and worked with her (including actress Maria Thayer who recalled the same story on my podcast *The Fordcast*), Carrie Fisher’s impact as a strong female character set the mold – or at least the on-ramp – toward women in (what Carrie called) “all-boy fantasies.” Women who stood up for themselves and were able to take the blasters right out of the boy’s hands and save themselves. First impressions for children are important, as is equal representation, inspiring across the boards and sexes. In 2004, on the radio show *Fresh Air*, Carrie recounted how she had gone to her first fan convention and was shocked when a woman told her that Leia had inspired her to become a lawyer. What Leia was, and Carrie Fisher became, was a role model – embodying a visual example for men and women, girls and boys – of what a woman’s place in the world could be: working alongside the menfolk, not two steps behind. In the end, Carrie Fisher the person became an icon, as herself: a kickass woman who, like Leia, spoke up for her beliefs and demanded to be heard. For it was in real life that Carrie inspired people, especially women, not only for being outspoken, but also the notion of survival with a sense of humor. Yes, I spent many a day as a tiny tot watching Star Wars religiously, while simultaneously chewing on the tiny nose of her Empire Strikes Back action figure; but it was her words as a writer that I mentally chewed on, way past my teething stage. Look – the internet is lousy with far more qualified people than myself to talk about Star Wars, especially today of all days. I would just be another voice in the crowd, and I don’t need or like to do what has already been done. Carrie taught me that. After her death, I was warmed by how many journalists and social media users took the time to remember Carrie Fisher the writer, the wit and – if I can be so bold – the humorist. Not to mention acknowledging her as a voice for mental health and addiction who has inspired millions fighting their own personal battles, Star Wars was just the vehicle that brought her to us. The same way Leia fought her war of resistance against the Empire, Carrie was fighting her own wars with mental health and addiction, and in time helped others fight this same battle by example.

“Do not let what you think they think of you make you stop and question everything you are.”

George Burns, a humorist in his own right, once said, “Someone who makes you laugh is a comedian. Someone who makes you think and then laugh is a humorist. If you’re familiar enough with the work, comedy, and banter of Carrie Fisher, you know she possessed very little self-censorship when it came to letting an opportunity for a joke or pun pass her by – so much so that it was as if she had been a vaudeville comedian in a previous life. When asked where she got her personality, she replied, “Sears.” In fact, Carrie Fisher would be the first one to

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make a joke at the expense of her own death. In fact, she would want us all to laugh and make jokes. Yes, I think I would be paying Carrie Fisher the best possible tribute when I say she never left a hole – I mean, that she never left a void – go un- ... okay, well maybe that isn’t appropriate for this medium ... but Carrie would have loved the effort. Because what Carrie Fisher did was take ownership of her own narrative by making fun of it.

“I thought I would inaugurate a Bipolar Pride Day. You know, with floats and parades and stuff! On the floats we would get the depressives, and they wouldn’t even have to leave their beds – we’d just roll their beds out of their houses, and they could continue staring off miserably into space. And then, for the manics, we’d have the manic marching band, with manics laughing and talking and shopping and f**%#ing and making bad judgment calls.”

If Nora Ephron’s mantra was “everything is copy,” then Carrie Fisher’s might have been that “nothing is sacred” – or in her own words, “If my life wasn’t funny, it would just be true, and that is just unacceptable.” Carrie weathered two marriages (she was actually married only once, but often called the father of her daughter her “second husband”), drug addiction issues, bipolar disorder, drug relapse, being committed, electroshock treatment, being left by her “second husband” for a man, her mother’s failed marriages (take a breath now and:), and her mother’s two husbands, who took all her mother’s money and left her bankrupt (and breathe again). However, Carrie found a way to comment and poke fun at every melodramatic moment of her life (“I am a spy in the house of me”); and, as absurd as it sounds, I am now half-expecting Carrie Fisher to comment on her own death, throwing out one of her one-liners on a talk show or in an emoji-riddled tweet (Most of her tweets, if you are unaware, were in need of a cartographer and a U.N. Translator). I wouldn’t be surprised to discover some letter in her will from Beyond. The. Grave. I mean, you can already trace Carrie Fisher’s life by her fiction (or roman a clefs) alone: *Postcards From The Edge* (rehab), *Surrender To The Pink* (first marriage), *Delusions of Grandma* (motherhood), and *The Best Awful* (institutionalization and release). There are her more recent memoirs detailing the in-between, as well, including the book and Broadway show *Wishful Drinking*, many of which echo lines and moments from her aforementioned novels. You might say Carrie Fisher’s life was an open book (yes, I said it...); and, you know what, Carrie Fisher was fine with that. She said it helped her cope; and, just as importantly, it helped other people cope through her honesty. Since her death, stories of fans who spoke to Carrie at signings and conventions – and even in private twitter messages of advice about their shared troubles, have come out of the woodwork. She counseled, advised, and commiserate with people, not just by example as most celebrities do, but with the personal, imperfect precision of her candor. I say imperfect because what Carrie Fisher taught us was that “perfect” was overrated.

That even though she was born into Hollywood royalty as the daughter of a movie star and a pop star, and starred in a global franchise as a Princess, that didn't mean she was free of problems – far from it. “Say your weak things in a strong voice,” she would say, “I'm very powerful about my weaknesses.” She inspired many to take ownership and control of what might otherwise tear them down, and not just in brief fan encounters. Carrie Fisher was known to bring strangers and friends to stay in her guest house: those who needed a place to stay, addicts in recovery, even one woman she had just met at an AA meeting who was living in her car. Carrie once expressed that it gave her a sense of community, being open and honest about herself with people, even strangers. She felt that commenting on her own life in humorous ways

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helped her feel somehow outside of it all, looking down. This way of living life, of not feeling ashamed of one's own weaknesses – of making sure life was funny – became a battle cry for many people, including myself. And although I personally don't struggle with mental illness or addiction, she opened my mind up to a world I would have never been privy to. She had this effect not only on her fans, but on many people. The outpouring of remembrance on Twitter from people who had never met Carrie, or who only met her briefly, spoke of how she touched so many with an openness we normally don't grant to strangers. Even Mark Hamill, her Star Wars co-star (Luke Skywalker) said the same about Carrie when he recalled their first meeting. Stories still pour into Twitter and Facebook about people who sat next to her at a charity event, or on an airplane. And the overall theme (except for maybe the guy who got drunk with her in first class) was that Carrie's connection to people seemed to come from a genuine place. Sharon Horgan, the star and creator of *Catastrophe* (Carrie Fisher's last filmed performance), said “Carrie Fisher was so real it was dangerous.”

“So it's not what you're given, it's how you take it.”

My story with Carrie Fisher may be the least interesting. The first time I met Carrie Fisher was after I had just moved to New York and there were far more Barnes & Noble around than there are today. I attended a free signing for Carrie's book, *The Best Awful*. It was a moment I had been waiting for since my mother took me as a young teen to the used book store in our hometown and I bought a beat up copy of *Surrender The Pink*. Carrie, first of all, was funny, and that meant something to me at that age. I don't remember when I first knew that, knew that she was funny – that she could spin words in the air the way my youthful mind dreamed up, in comic couplets and wry, irreverent phrases. All I know is that Carrie Fisher being funny was what led me to buy that first book, and later pay more attention far past a childhood fancy. And I knew long before I read her fiction, the above-mentioned quote, “If my life wasn't funny, it would just be true...” resonated with a little dyslexic girl who was struggling. I had clung to that phrase as my own mantra. When I would come home from school, crying my eyes out from being bullied, there was that line telling me: “Have a sense of humor. Life is hard. You can get through this.” I would try to craft my own one-liners (e.g. “Majoring in acting in college is a high-priced degree in waitressing,” and “I'm Jewish, the other white meat!”) and practice my “talk show” banter. I wrote her quotations, among others, on my notebooks and brown paper-covered school books. I borrowed her other books from the library and never missed a talk show appearance. Any memories of Star Wars I had slowly faded away, replaced by Carrie Fisher *The Writer*. At this signing, not only had I brought her current book, but the aforementioned beat-up copy of *Surrender The Pink*. I was young and nervous, and sat in the back.

On every seat in the small room across from Lincoln Center, were papers with the rules of Barnes and Noble: no pictures (pictures in line that don't stop the line are fine), and no signed memorabilia...books only! I saw two people holding Return Of The Jedi 8x10s (a young man and woman) sit down next to me, read the paper, and then leave. I was appalled. "How dare they!" At least stay and hear her read her amazing words. Carrie arrived and posed for pictures in a comedic way that suggested she found the whole idea absurd. After all, that was her persona: the child of a celebrity who saw it for what it was, in all its, well, absurdity. After Carrie read from her book, I made my way through the line until I was finally face-to-face with my hero. "You make me want to be a writer," I blurted to her and then she smiled and said only one sentence to me. It confused me, so I gave her an odd look back, and just walked away. What

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had she said to me? Later, while recounting the story to a friend, I tried to remember. She had said something about...trying. I think...

My friend interrupted, "Did she say, 'Do. There is no try?'"

"Yes," I exclaimed, "How did you know that?"

"That's Yoda, Lauren. She spoke Yoda to you."

The last time I had seen Empire Strikes Back was in high school and it wasn't like I hadn't had all the Han Solo and Princess Leia scenes memorized; but, I guess it hadn't occurred to me she would speak Star Wars to me. I wasn't there for Star Wars. And my friend and I both just laughed our faces off.

"There's no room for demons when you're self-possessed."

I've often said being dyslexic is like having a buffet not of your choosing and everyone's plate is different. Carrie Fisher grew up with a love of books and words, and so did I – only that part of my life was a tragic romance. And today, her frankness still resonates with me – especially after, three years ago, I was diagnosed with an autoimmune disease ... "Say your weak things in a loud voice." This is the first time I have admitted publicly to what has been a four year struggle with my health. And even now, saying this in print is scary. Here's the thing about Carrie Fisher: she was still sensitive and vulnerable and filled with self-doubt like all of us are – and this isn't a guess, this is based on her own words and her Twitter feed. Up to her death she was still fighting against Hollywood's and society's age and beauty restrictions on women: "Please stop debating about whether or not I aged well. Unfortunately it hurts all three of my feelings." Or in a lighter mode, at Montreal's Just for Laughs Festival 2016, "Can everybody see me okay? I have to double check because I'm from Hollywood, and ya know, women my age tend to be invisible there."

Her last book, *The Princess Diarist*, published only a month before her death, contained Fisher's personal diaries from when she was nineteen and filming Star Wars in 1978. It was raw, unedited and unflinching, and showed – at least to me – a young woman I recognized as once having been in my life, and one I think many women could relate to. It also showed how far Carrie Fisher had grown emotionally. What many creators of current heroic female characters in

pop culture seem to forget is that strength in a woman (or any human) isn't about how strong she is physically, or how little emotion she expresses; it's that vulnerability is its own form of strength. "Be afraid. But do it anyway," was how Carrie Fisher said it. That's bravery.

"I have problems; my problems don't have me."

What I think may be the most important thing about the last years of Carrie Fisher's life is that, unlike her Fresh Air interview in 2004, she now understood not only what Star Wars meant to people, but also what she had meant to people. There is a moment in HBO's Bright Lights, the documentary about her and her mother (most likely filmed in 2014), in which Carrie tells the camera that she believes her fans look up to Leia and not her. Yet with all the stories of people's interactions with Carrie, sharing their stories with her, of how she had helped them with their

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depression, anxiety, and so on, I can't imagine that, by the end of those two years, she didn't see how they loved her, just Carrie. She looked people in the eyes, made sure they got a picture (even when they weren't allowed to), held hands, and often hugged people as soon as they started crying. She showered them with actual glitter, because everyone deserves a little glitter in their life. Some might say she faked this for the money. Carrie herself even comically called them "lap dances" but at least from the outside it looked like the resurgence of Star Wars had helped her understand her own appeal. Through the release of *The Force Awakens* I found myself being reminded of my love of Star Wars and my first introduction to Carrie. I had forgotten what it had meant to me. I started co-hosting a Harrison Ford podcast and now, if someone quotes Yoda to me, I know it. Because of that podcast, I was lucky enough to attend the Catastrophe TV panel at the Tribeca Film Festival and the premiere of *Bright Lights* at the NY Film Festival with Carrie (Debbie actually called and sang to us over the phone). It even seemed odd to me at the time, but in 2016 I crossed paths with Carrie Fisher about four times. The last time I saw Fisher was a signing for *The Princess Diarist*, in NYC. If you've seen *Bright Lights* or read her Twitter feed, you'll understand why I gave Carrie a package of Coca-Cola Lip Smackers, because it made me laugh and I thought it would make her laugh, too. It did. I also had the feeling I should give her a little note to tell her how she had helped me. The signing was November 22nd in New York City, and she collapsed on Dec 23rd, preparing to land in Los Angeles.

"I feel I'm very sane about how crazy I am."

Meryl Streep's posthumous quotation from Carrie at the Golden Globes this year, "Take your broken heart, make it into art," seemed like the fitting epitaph to her life. And then about a month after Carrie's passing, a Women's March was held around the world. A feminist icon herself, Carrie was there, to my own surprise and delight. In posters and signs, shirts and slogans, the rabble-rouser Princess from the rebel base shone big and bright. Mixed in with the rebel princess signs were a few "Carrie Fisher sent me," because send us she had. After Carrie Fisher passed away, her ashes were kept in a giant, vintage Prozac pill-shaped impromptu urn (a favorite item of hers). Not her idea, per se, but her spirit. So...we should all be so lucky to live life big enough to end up in a big, giant, porcelain Prozac pill. Carrie Fisher's life, like the books she loved, now has a clear beginning, middle, and end. Carrie went from the Princess to the Jedi Master. She became Obi Wan Kenobi the teacher ... or perhaps one of the letters sent to The Guardian sums it up best:

“Hi Carrie....I know you’re dead. But that shouldn’t stop you from continuing to respond to those who are sick and suffering, because come on, you were super-human in life – and in death you’ve become even more powerful.”

“Back then I was always looking ahead to who I wanted to be versus who I didn’t realize I already was, and the wished-for me was most likely based on who other people seemed to be and the desire to have the same effect on others that they had on me.”

Carrie Fisher — 1956-2016

Milberger on “The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel”

Outlet: Travalanche

The Marvelous Mrs Maisel: A Woman in Redux

Many people would consider the modern Golden Age of Comedy to be the 1950s and 60s, when what we know today as stand-up became all the rage and television was in its infancy. When the comedy from vaudeville finally had its eyes back again (after years of being in the dark with radio) and was able to take its experience to mint legends for the ages. Television turned nightclub raconteurs into instant celebrities, thanks to the likes of Jack Paar, Ed Sullivan and soon – the king of them all – Johnny Carson. But except for Lucille Ball, how many women from this era have seen their strengths and struggles dramatized, their stories told? For all the plays, films and TV based on Neil Simon, Mel Brooks or Carl Reiner’s fond memories of the 1950’s classic sketch show *Your Show of Shows* (and later *Caesar’s Hour*), sporting a writing staff that included most of the comedy legends for the latter part of 20th century (Woody Allen, Larry Gelbart, Mel Tolkin, etc.), where are the stories solely about Lucille Kallen or Selma Diamond? Where are the lavish odes to Madelyn Pugh, who wrote most of *I Love Lucy*’s classic episodes and who was given the moniker of “Girl Writer” because of the oddity of such a thing at the time? Because for every Lenny Bruce, George Carlin, Alan King, Bob Newhart and Richard Pryor, there was a Joan Rivers, a Moms Mabley and an Elaine May. Today, Tina Fey and Amy Poehler are household names, but the female narrative of comedy they came from seems mostly forgotten or glossed over. That was until *Gilmore Girls* creator Amy Sherman-Palladino gave us the new Amazon pilot *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*.

Written and directed by Sherman-Palladino, *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* tells the story of Miriam ‘Midge’ Maisel (Rachel Brosnahan), whom we first meet at her wedding reception, doing stand-up (unbeknownst to herself) and regaling her family and friends with the cleaned up version of her 1950’s teen life at Bryn Mawr College. Four years later, Midge has two kids and the seemingly perfect New York Upper-West Side Jewish life of 1958, and one would assume to find her spending her nights in Greenwich Village trying her hand at stand-up comedy. However, this is 1958 after all, and Midge is just a “housewife” making brisket, worried about keeping her figure and beauty for her husband – all while having time to prepare the perfect Yom Kippur break -fast for the Rabbi and for her family. It’s only when a family crisis (which I won’t give away) sends Midge’s “happy life” into upheaval that she finally discovers that she is the talented stand-up in the family, not her wannabe husband. A talent that, based on the synopsis, will take Midge all the way to Johnny Carson’s couch – the pinnacle and seminal moment for stand-ups of her generations.

Within the short pilot, Sherman-Palladino is able to establish Midge as a smart, confident and

funny female who knows what she wants, even if it took her 26 years to know that she, as a woman, could achieve it. Midge belongs in the company of other Sherman-Palladino heroines: a witty, fast-talking brunette you want to root for. What the pilot also does well is establish the obstacles Midge will be up against in her upward rise to fame. The fact that Midge didn't even expect herself to go into comedy, that it was her husband's job, is a red flag on its own; but what the pilot does best for a layman of this era is to establish this pre-feminist environment Midge will have to push against to succeed. Midge, for example, keeps a journal of all of her measurements, something she has done since she was a child, and even goes so far as to hide

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her night beauty regimen from her husband to make him believe she wakes up with perfect hair and make-up – behavior that appears to have been passed down from her own mother who in the pilot worries her baby granddaughter has too big of a head and bemuses that her daughter is officially done wearing sleeveless dresses. Even Midge's own father blames her for her husband's failings – something that even shocks Midge. Sherman-Palladino's music choices, as with *Gilmore Girls*, do a wonderful job to establish mood, tone, and style of the time period. Paired with the vibrant colors and sets of 1958 New York City, it all makes the audience feel like they've stepped back in time. What you ultimately get with *Mrs. Maisel* is the fast, witty dialogue of *Gilmore Girls* mixed with the epic scope and social commentary of *Mad Men*, and a comedy history lesson to boot.

Along the way Midge meets *Gilmore Girls* alum Alex Borstein who plays a hardened (West) Village bartender Susie at the comedy club "The Gaslight Cafe" – which appears to be a fictitious stand-in for "The Bitter End". Susie sees the rare comic talent in Midge, comparing her to Mort Sahl (an icon in his day). Finally at one point Susie tells an unsure Midge, "I don't mind being alone. I just do not want to be insignificant. Do you? Don't you want to do something no one else can do? Be remembered as something other than a wife... a housewife..." – a universal question women, hell, humans ask themselves. It resonates with Midge as it did me and it pushes Midge to take the first steps to go after her own dreams with as much gusto as she put into making a brisket or we can only imagine she put into getting back in her Rabbi's good graces. It's fitting that what will one day become one of the most important days in Midge's life takes place on Yom Kippur. It is a day of atonement of sins, yes, but is also a day of starting over. Of re-birth. Of having your sins forgiven and wiping the slate. (In fact, she literally ends the day wearing wearing someone else's shoes)

Also making an appearance are The Kingston Trio and, in a more substantial role, Lenny Bruce himself (played wonderfully by Luke Kirby), establishing that there are rules to this world (which includes being arrested for indecency) and that being innovative means sometimes you have to break these rules. Every actor in the pilot is a knockout, led by the adorably charming Rachel

Brosnahan as Midge, and (as Sherman-Palladino always does) casting stalwart actors such as Tony Shalhoub and Marin Hinkle as Midge's parents.

For me, what really struck home this piece in my heart was not just that it was about a woman who will pioneer comedy, but that this is the story of a Jewish woman in comedy. See, a short time ago I had a revelation. And hear me out, here. It may sound crazy... but... as a Jewish woman I feel unrepresented within the comic Jewish narrative. No seriously I do. Think about it... 99.9% of what we know as the traditional comic Jewish persona is male driven. And I don't just mean this in the sense that this narrative is mostly populated by men. What I am talking about is the ideas or tropes that are usually identified as the classic heritage of Jewish comedy, or voice, comes from the point of view of a strictly male narrative. The style, the attributes, what

consolidates a comic Jewish stereotype – from Alan King to Woody Allen to Jerry Seinfeld. And yes, this is a history that stems all the way from the ethnic comedy of vaudeville to the dining rooms of the Catskills “Borscht Belt,” so of course it comes from a male dominated society. But for me it was a persona I had adopted as my own, that I thought I was a part of. It wasn’t until I saw more of myself in the works of Ilana Glazer and Abbi Jacobson (Broad City) and of Rachel Bloom and Aline Brosh-McKenna (Crazy Ex-Girlfriend) writing actual Jewish women that I started to notice it more: I wasn’t represented. Where I had previously thought I saw myself in

the worlds of Allen and Seinfeld, and even Aaron Sorkin to a degree, I only had to take a step back to see that alongside their “Jewish avatars” were mostly goyisha women. And that when any token Jewish women actually appeared, they were nags or annoying stereotypes with funny voices for laughs. And yes, to a non-New Yorker, Midge has a funny voice, but what her voice is in so many ways is authentic. Here is a familiar, confident, Jewish woman I recognize. And this is a good thing not just for seeing myself represented in the narrative, but also for what it does to the public at large. To show that we aren’t just jokes and nagging mothers in a punch-line. Or bad dates their mother sets them up with. We are also part of this heritage of comedy. And I think there is no better person than Amy Sherman-Palladino (whose own father was a comedian during this era) to use her own Jewish voice to tell us all about Mrs. Maisel and how she made it to the top of comedy. So I recommend you watch this pilot and vote for it to be picked up for series (or else it won’t, that’s how Amazon works) And if the male in your life or the ones reading this still aren’t sold on “Mad Men/ PunchLine for chicks” ... just tell ‘em there are also tits in it.

For more of my work please visit www.laurenmilberger.com