

Special: Interview with A. Whitney Brown

(A. Whitney Brown is most noted for his *Saturday Night Live News Update* segment titled, "The Big Picture" and an Emmy he was awarded for comedy writing on that show. He started out on the street as a juggler after dropping out of school in the eighth grade. He later became a comedian, writing his own material, and was discovered by SNL from an appearance on "The Tonight Show." He has published a book on political satire titled, "The Big Picture," (Harper Collins, 1991). To his credit, Brown has written numerous tele-scripts and other televised productions, as well as a off-broadway, one-man show.)

bit of a dry period now. "The Simpsons," that's a great show. I think it's one of the funniest shows I've ever seen. Seinfeld's a great show too. But there can be something really great on t.v. and I might never get around to watching it. It took me two or three years to watch "Beavis and Butthead."



Developed by Sheila Bickel

A. Whitney Brown performed in Reed Lecture Hall on Saturday

On working on Saturday Night Live:

It's a high pressure environment and it's a very hard job. It's a hard job to do a bad show, let alone a good show. It's the same amount of work, good or bad. It's also pretty chaotic emotional environment because people are tired because it's long hours, so everyone is fatigued and doing crazy things. I have a lot of sympathy for the troubles they're going through.

On the quality of comedy on television:

I'm sure there's a pendulum. There's period when it's really great, like in the seventies when there was "Laverne and Shirley," "The Odd Couple," and all the Gary Marshall shows. In the eighties there was "Cheers," "The Cosby Show." It seems like there is a

On being writer and performer:

I've always had an equal balance. The first writing I did was for myself to perform. Then I started writing for others. The only difference is that it's easier to perform something if you didn't write it and it's harder to write something if you're not going to perform it. I

used to have to write my segment for SNL's News Update on Friday night because I'd be busy with other things. I'd have to stay up all night and come in at seven in the morning with it written and at noon I'd do the first read through. Many times the producer would say to me that I was reading that piece like a writer who just wrote it instead of an actor who just got it. There's a big difference because writers are insecure and want to know how good their piece is and they constantly want to change it. Whereas the actor has it set in stone and cannot question the script.

On the difference between New York City and Erie:

Not even a time zone (laughs). No, it's the same world, same culture, same television, same radio, etc. It's one culture we live in. There's just less people in this particular spot.

On starting out:

I went to "The Tonight Show" and showed them a tape and said that I'd like to be on "The Tonight Show." I'm telling you there are people on "The Tonight Show" whose job it is to find someone to fill five minutes. If you know how to do it then it's easy to get a job.

On Behrend:

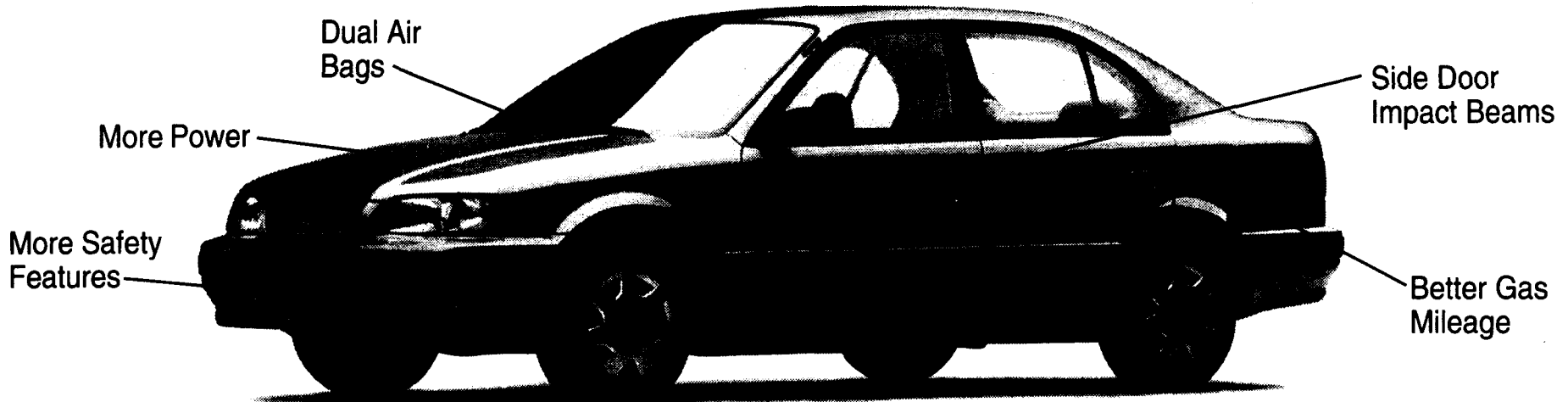
My experience has been that even if I'm in a place for a year I can't really make a distinction about one place as opposed to some other place. I think it's just me.

On the personal future:

I really don't know. A few years ago I could have told you and I would have been totally wrong so I can't tell you. I worry about it alot. I wonder what the future holds. I have alot of regrets about the past and I have discovered that how much I regret the past depends on what I'm doing in my life right now. If I feel like I'm making a contribution or if I'm helping someone, I don't regret the past too much. I figure that's what it took to get here, nor do I fear the future. I just think, well, whatever happens, I'll handle it. But when my life is not going well and I'm not finding my satisfaction or if I'm not feeling useful than I regret the past alot and fear the future. So, I try to concentrate on what I'm doing now and stay here in this moment to make this one work.

Interview Conducted and Transcribed by
R. Carl Campbell III
News Editor

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