

Whatever Happened to Bob Shaw?

Or

Finding the Real George Costanza

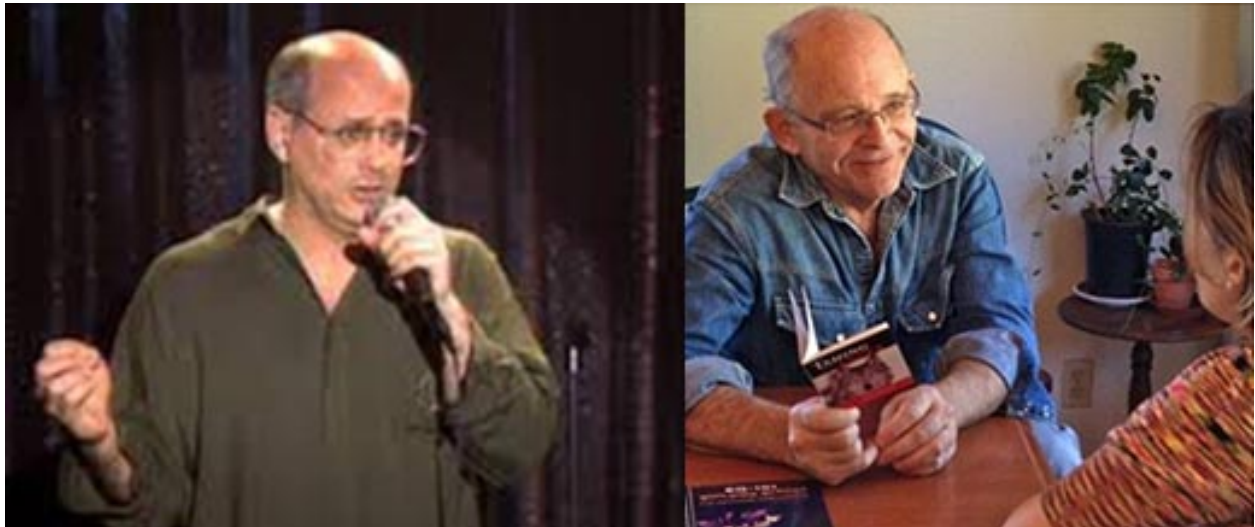
MARC J. SEIFER

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This was a great time for stand-up, with comics like Jerry Seinfeld, Jay Leno and Andy Kaufman working clubs. Who was the greatest comic you saw who never made it big?

Bob Shaw. He was hilarious. He would slaughter. He did one bit about working in a Baskin-Robbins ordering ice cream. It was amazing.

Larry David interviewed by Jason Zinomen, *New York Times*, February 15, 2015



Bob Shaw – Comedian

Steve Wolf -- Psychologist

That's a heck of an endorsement. Larry David, co-creator of *Seinfeld* and creator and star of *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, is both an Emmy Award-winning comedy writer and now a star on Broadway. So, who's Bob Shaw? You go on the Internet and there's very little on him. Here's the Baskin-Robbins bit:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RRffZ-Wal4M>

Don't ask me what he's doing now, because I haven't been in touch with Bob in a quarter of a century. My God! Could so much time have really gone by?

I met Bob almost 50 years ago. We were both freshmen at the University of Rhode Island. Bob was starring in a play called *The Visit* and I had a minor part, actually three

minor parts. It was a serious play, but we couldn't help but kid around, particularly when there were lines such as the following:

"Don't worry about the washing machine, worry about your immortal soul!"

During rehearsals, I'd stand in the wings and mouth such lines on one knee with my hands reaching up in prayer, anything I could do to try and crack him up.



Bob Shaffer, Ken Gozdowski, Lee (Smalley) Smolovitch & Bob Shaw, Usquepaug, RI circa 1970.

Bob made no bones about it. He wanted to become a stand-up comic. Born and raised in Cranston, Rhode Island, Bob's father had a short stint in the 1940's or 50's playing in a band in the Borscht Belt, and this background must have been a big influence on his outlook, although Bob was very resentful of Dad because he was totally opposed to the idea of his son becoming a comic. Lenny Bruce was one of Bob's heroes. Moonlighting as a janitor, Bob paid his way through school, married Sue Berger, a theater major, and moved into an apartment above the Kingston Hill Store.

It was there that we began to craft his first comedy routine.

"Get the handi-dandy electric fan. Blows air where you want it, circulates conversation."

One of my favorite Bob Shaw stories stemmed from a walk he had through the halls of the English building. He ran into a gal named Jan, who was also associated with theater. Jan took one look at Bob and burst into laughter.

"What?" Bob asked sincerely.

"Stop it, Bob," Jan said, continuing to laugh uncontrollably.

"What?" Bob asked again.

"Stop! Stop!" she continued. "I know you're not being funny on purpose."

You'd be standing in line in the Union waiting to get a sandwich, and just as you were about to order, Bob would sneak up behind and goose you. It was really funny. We hung together and took the same acting class. This was during the late 1960's, during the height of the Vietnam War. During graduation year of 1970, the school went on strike but we continued to hone our act with me as the co-writer and Bob as the performer.

"There will be a debate on the War between Vice President Spiro Agnew and anti-war activist, Dr. Benjamin Spock. To make the debate fair, Dr. Spock will be gagged and tied."

Bob's first gig was at the Student Union.

"In an amazing battle, 500 US soldiers beat off 20,000 Viet Cong."

The place was jammed, but not with students who wanted to hear a comedy routine. It was a horrible bomb, but not our fault. I graduated URI, moved back to New York and got a low-level job in the film industry as I took post grad courses in filmmaking and also graphology, and Bob and I would converse through the mail.

2/8/1971

Dear Marc,

I have been meaning to write for quite some time – but it got put off so that I could further develop my already flourishing skills in procrastination and apathy, skills that are fast becoming an art.

This is my last semester – an easy one too... giving me a great deal of time to read up on the lines of the great and near great janitors of our time. Believe it or not, Manuel Rodriguez Swartz, a semi-Jewish semi-Spanish immigrant, with only a dirty toilet bowl brush and half-full container of San O Flush made the Menlow Training School for Boys what it is today – URI.

I've been reading a lot – and if you haven't read Mark Twain's book **Letters To The Earth**, I would suggest it highly. Also, Sue and I saw a very interesting, in fact, almost great film called **Women in Love** by D.H. Lawrence. I've got a feeling you would dig it – as a matter of fact, I thought of you throughout part of the film and would be interested to hear what you thought of it.

It looks as though the service has rejected me, no questions asked [because of a back condition].... Sue was disappointed, but I told her there would be other wars and not to worry.

There really is a lot I'd like to talk to you about. I do miss you very much. Too lazy perhaps to write it all down in a letter.

Have you given any thought as to what you will be doing over the summer?... I know you get to RI once in a while and time is probably short, but so are my toes. If you have a chance to stop up or call or write or send a telegram, a box of candy, flowers, a card, nothing too elaborate. Listen F---head, I miss you. Let me hear from yourself.

My regards to your pony tail.

Love,
Bob

Bob and Sue moved first to Boston where he met and essentially started out in comedy with Jay Leno. In recent conversations I had with Leno in March of 2018 and February of 2020, he said that he and Bob never really bonded even though they occasionally spent time together at each other's apartment. Where Bob liked to alter his consciousness, Jay said that he had never smoked a joint in his life and never had a drink!

He recalled that it was his birthday and as a gag, Bob mushed the birthday cake into Jay's face. Jay wasn't so sure that was funny.

I asked Jay, since he had his Tonight Show for so many years, why it was that Bob had never been invited to the show. Leno said that Bob never reached out to him, and that, to his knowledge, by the early 1990s, as far as he knew, Bob had given up stand-up comedy. Leno could not have been friendlier and like me, wondered about Bob's fate.

My favorite memory of that period was when Lois and I went to see Bob at a club in Boston and the opening act was a new group called the East Street Band. Out came a small crew with their charismatic leader. Bruce Springsteen, who at the time was just another unknown struggling rocker. With a happy disposition, he wore a colorful toque and sat at an upright piano and played a few incredibly catchy numbers. I remember thinking at that moment that this young singer was somewhat remindful of a hipper Van Morrison. About a month after this gig, Bruce made the cover of both TIME and also Newsweek and of course with that publicity, he literally became an overnight sensation.

After living in Boston, this was the mid-1970's, Bob moved with Sue to Brooklyn along with college buddy, Steve Kotler who Bob had gone to a private high school with. But before he left, Bob sat down with me and asked me to go with him to New York so that our comedy team could continue.

I had fallen in love with Lois and we were set in Rhode Island. I moved back up, so declined the offer. Religiously, night after night, Bob began going to the clubs and Steve became a bouncer for The Improv. Since I was from New York, I would often return and see Bob in action. Every once and awhile, I'd send him some material, but he was really totally on his own. After a couple of years, Steve would return to Rhode Island to open up the very popular Round Again Records store on Wickenden Street in Providence which he's owned for well over 30 years.

During Bob's gigs I remember meeting David Brenner. A haughty fellow, I thought his material was great, but his personality was a real downer. I remember seeing Robert Kline and also Andy Kaufman at Catch a Rising Star. Andy's gig was unbelievable. He'd come out in high-top sneakers and bounced to some music. That's all he did, bounce ten minutes and just when you thought he was completely nuts, he'd do one frigging amazing Elvis interpretation.

The most memorable night for me was at The Improv. Sometime around midnight, the door from the street opened and in came Rodney Dangerfield, and he just killed. It was a rush.

By this time I had a Masters Degree from the University of Chicago and was teaching courses in the controversial topic of Parapsychology at both University of Rhode Island Extension (non-credit) and Providence College Night School (3-credit courses). This was a big deal as by this time I was envisioning university departments opening up in the field. I had two textbooks, *Psychic Explorations* edited by John White and Edgar Mitchell who happened to be the 6th man to walk on the moon, and I also used Israeli spoonbender, Uri Geller's autobiography, *My Story*.



Uri Geller on the Barbara Walters Show

Uri Geller with moonwalker Edgar Mitchell

Bob was working on some gags for his routine and, by chance, he had the Barbara Walters show *Not For Women Only* on, and Uri Geller was on the show. So Bob audio-taped the show for me and because of that I was able to publish an exact account of Uri Geller bending a key for Barbara Walters, live as it was happening! The transcript was published in *MetaScience: A New Age Journal on Consciousness* that I was editing back in 1980, and presently appears in my book *Where Does Mind End?* Introduction by Uri Geller. <http://www.marcseifer.com/table-of-contents.html>

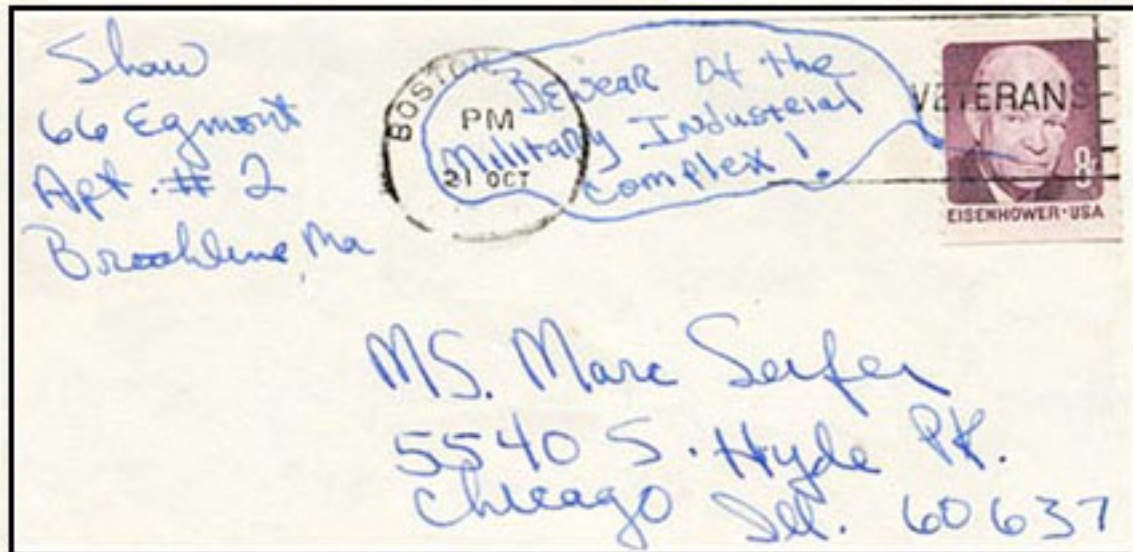
And, on that tape are also lines Bob was practicing, such as the following:

"All of these men are bald! [pause] By that woman over there! What do we have for her Fred?"

Throughout the 1970's, Bob did the clubs in New York. When I was working on my Masters thesis at the University of Chicago, we often communicated through the mail, and sometimes I wrote bits for him. I'm happy with a few of them, but I doubt he ever used any of them.

One bit I wrote involved the use of acupuncture to cure all ills. There's a big build up as to all it can do, including how to get a fat lady who's so heavy that she can't get up, out of her chair. I thought it was pretty funny and wrote another concerning the new pooper-scooper law that had just come into the City. You younger people don't know about this, but before about 1975, the City was simply disgusting, so the set up was that people with big dogs were complaining about the new law, but owners with smaller dogs were less likely to complain.

Veterinarians have recently been swamped with constipated dogs. The most common cure seems to be a swift kick. The other day I was in the city on Park Avenue and I saw a foreign looking woman walking her French Poodle. After she picked up after him, she reached down and wiped his behind! [...laugh....] I think it was Cottonelle [...laugh...] Then she started talking to the dog. He seemed to nod approval but then said "Oui, oui." "Oh," she said, "please don't. I'm out of toilet paper."



"Beware [sic] of the Military Industrial Complex," Shaw to Seifer, 10/21/1972.

I also wrote a bit about all the old Soviet Union leaders who were dying in droves in those days. They kept replacing one old Commie with another.

Have you been following the Russian Politburo? The youngest guy in the group is 87 years old. What is this, Geriatric Communism?

Now a days there are three criteria for getting into the Politburo:

1. You have to be born before the turn of the century.
2. You have to have met personally Karl Marx or Fredrich Engels.
3. You have to had been laid before the Russian Revolution.

Alternatives:

1. You have to have three letters of recommendation from Lenin, Trotsky or Stalin, and if possible, Karl Marx or Vasili Molotov.
2. You had to have been one of the nine men who stabbed Rasputin during the Russian Revolution and dumped him in the river.
3. You had to have been one of the architects of the scorched earth policy when Napoleon invaded Moscow; or
4. You had to have had prostate trouble before the fall of Kaiser Wilhelm.

Take Krushchev. You think he's dead? He's not dead. He dyed his hair and lost a little weight. He's Romanov. He'll be 91 in March.

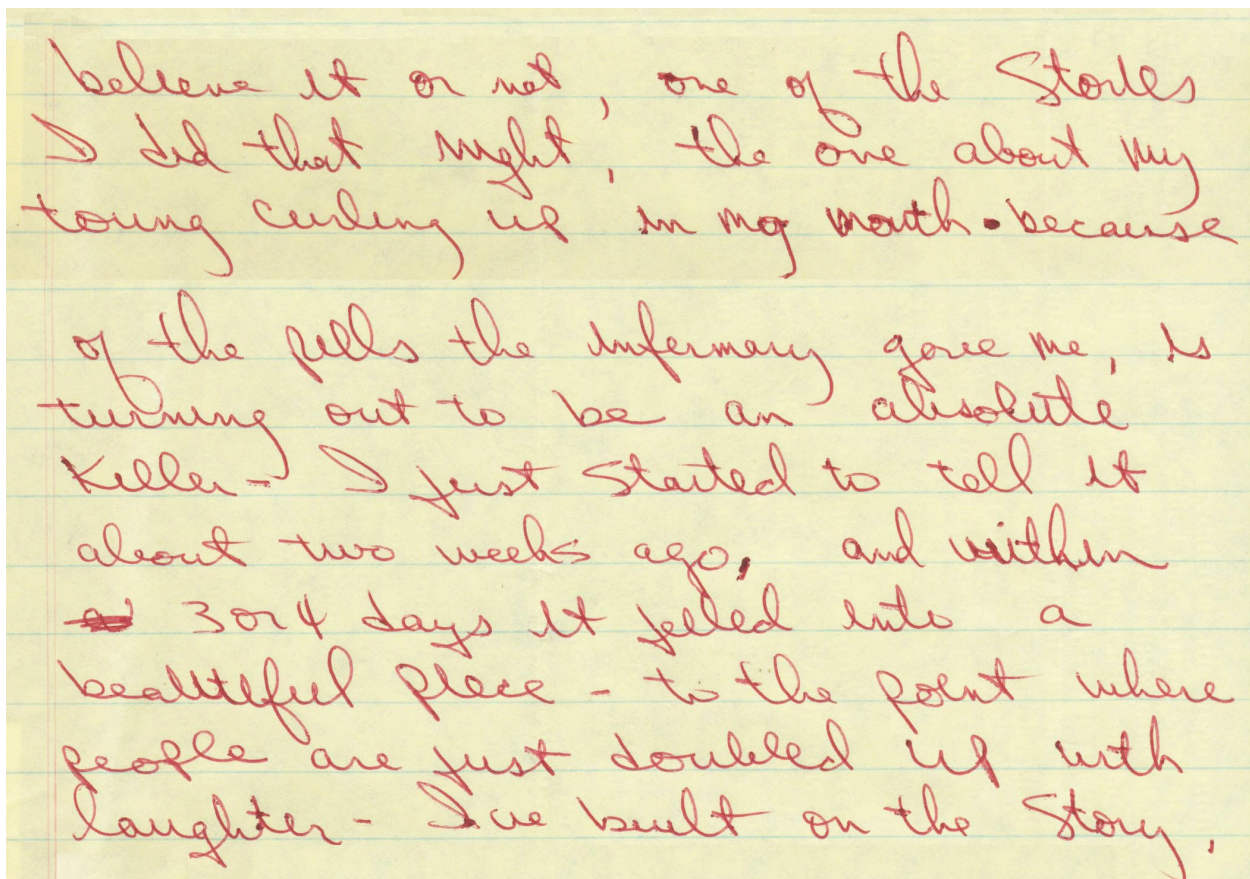
Brezhnev? Dead? No way. They shaved his eyebrows, removed his double chin. He's Gromeko.

Some time around 1979, Bob moved to LA and the following year, I flew out to meet him en route to San Francisco where I had begun a doctoral program in Psychology at Saybrook University. My mentor would be Dr. Stanley Krippner, world leader in the study of **Dream Telepathy** who co-wrote a watershed book by that title. By this time Bob was at the top of his game. In particular, I certainly remember the "Baskin-Robbins ordering ice cream" bit along with many others. For instance, Bob did a bit that went along the lines that there is no way to look cool in a shower cap. And once he put it on, you would just roar.

Bob's signature piece was based on a real event that took place around 1971 while he was still living above the Kingston Hill Store in Kingston, Rhode Island. He and Sue were divorced by now, but this bit came from the time that they were truly in love. Sue was hungry, and so she sent Bob out at midnight to pick up a pizza. As I remember, he didn't really bother to get dressed, and was pretty much in a bathrobe and slippers, but out he went. He was on medication for some ailment for his back and he had a reaction which caused his tongue to swell up and that occurred on the return ride to their place.

It was late at night, and maybe he was speeding, or maybe one of his tail-lights were out. In any event, a cop pulled him over and when he approached the car, all Bob could do was mumble. The cop thought he was high on some drug, but in fact it was simply that his tongue was swollen and every word sounded ridiculous. As he told the story, he is forced out of the car in his bathrobe and slippers and struggles hard to say something but instead mumbles as he tries to talk reason to the cop -- your side ached from the laughter as tears would roll down your cheeks. It was a show-stopper.

Larry David said Bob would "slaughter" and he did. This piece was pure genius. Comics would come back stage not only to congratulate him but also, in the case of Richard Pryor, to say he was jealous of Bob! That's how funny he was.



believe it or not, one of the stories
I did that night, the one about my
tongue curling up in my mouth. because
of the pills the infirmary gave me, is
turning out to be an absolute
killer - I just started to tell it
about two weeks ago, and within
~~3~~ 3 or 4 days it jelled into a
beautiful piece - to the point where
people are just doubled up with
laughter - I've built on the story.

In this letter written circa 1974, Bob describes the development of the tongue-swelling bit.

Bob was on his way up. About this time he sent me a letter telling me that an agent approached him who represented Woody Allen and Dick Cavett. In the *Newsday* piece below, he's listed with the likes of George Gobel, Phyllis Diller, Jan Murray and David Letterman. In 1979, came the movie *Time After Time* starring Malcolm McDowell and Mary Steenburgen, and Bob appeared as the Bank Teller. If you IMDB the film, you will note that they actually list the great actor Robert Shaw for the part instead!

The fact that Bob has never corrected this error is telling. Bob was also dealing with demons. He found out that Bill Cosby had stolen his *tongue swollen joke*. What was he to do? This was 1980, and Cosby was at his height, a huge TV star, spokesperson for companies like Ford, Coke and AT&T and the most beloved stand-up comic on the planet. Cosby charmed Bob, claimed it was a coincidence, but that event took the wind out of his sails, because now it seemed like Bob had stolen the joke from Cosby! (Coincidentally, the joke has reappeared in Rosie O'Donnell's new HBO special "A Heartfelt Stand Up.")

Nevertheless, Bob was really advancing, appearing on the Michael Douglas Show and also on Merv Griffin. He got a running gig on a Steve Allen program too, but in general, I felt that Bob took a cautious route. He wrote his own material. He had a good hour, maybe an hour and a half of solid material, but with Cosby trimming his sails and the danger of over-exposure, the freshness of his appearances might suffer. That was the bane of TV.



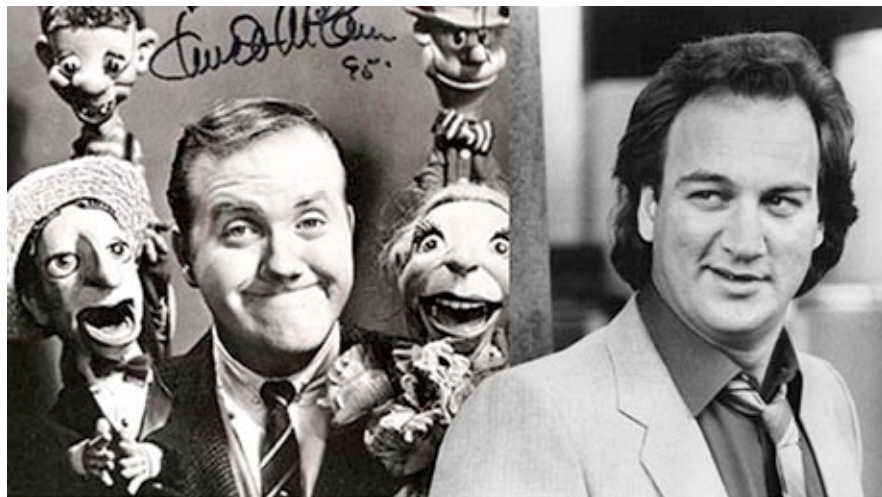
Bob appearing with George Jessel, Phyllis Diller, Jimmy Walker, Soupy Sales, George Gobel, Pat Carroll and Jack Carter in a *Newsday* ad in 1979.

So, the year was 1980. I decided to enroll in a course on Screenwriting at Sherman Oaks out in the LA area en route to Saybrook University in San Francisco. I called up Bob and stayed at his place. He was living in a sparse apartment. He kept his full record collection which was substantial. He was an ear-minded guy, had a big filing cabinet of material, but the place looked more like an office than an apartment. Not a thing on the walls. He was totally zoned in on his comedy career.

We went out that evening to a nightclub and there before us was a very old comic. I couldn't possibly tell you his name. He was somewhere around 70 years old and washed up and Bob quipped that that would be him in a few years. I looked over in a corner and much to my amazement, there was Chuck McCann, one of my childhood comedy idols! And he was all alone. Bob was talking to one of his friends, so I walked over and introduced myself. When I was a youngster, which would be the early 1960's, Chuck had his own kid's show on WPIX, one of the local New York TV stations. He would do impressions of various cartoon characters like Dondi (he would come out on his knees) and Little Orphan Annie (pronounced An-NEE), **Leaping Lizards!** (pronounced heavy on the ZARDS!). And he was a riot. He also did both Laurel and Hardy.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uti3TBWtIVg>

Chuck asked what I was doing and I told him that I was teaching Parapsychology. That hit a chord with him, and he proceeded to tell me one amazing story about a psychic experience that he had. Jerry Lewis had contacted Chuck and asked him to drop by the house.



Chuck McCann

Jim Balushi

Jerry Lewis! That was unbelievable and Chuck was nervous as could be driving up to the great comic's place, a gate opened up for him and he walked to the front door incredibly anxious. He's sweating and shaking a bit, the door opens and Jerry couldn't be nicer. I don't remember all the story, we're going back 35 years, but the gist of it was that Jerry wanted Chuck to appear perhaps on the **Tonight Show** when Jerry was subbing. A flood of adrenaline ran through Chuck and this caused a table in the room to psychokinetically crack down the middle! It was some form of spontaneous poltergeist activity.

The conversation was quite intense and I was a little taken aback when Bob chastised me for spending so much time with Chuck McCann. We then went to some famous deli and I ordered a Knockwurst hotdog and beans dinner. These franks were HUGE, so I only

thought I could eat one, but the waiter would not let me order just one. They came two to a plate.

Jim Balushi walked in. John's film *The Blues Brothers* had just been released. Jim was still unknown, but there were rumors that he had as much talent as his older brother. He couldn't have been nicer and we split the dish. He took one dog and I took the other.

The next day we went out to Studio City to the home of Chris Albrecht, one of the co-owners of The Improv in LA. Chris, still in his late 20's, was also producer and an agent for comics, and I tried to interest him in a novel I wrote, a parapsychological thriller which is presently titled *Rasputin's Nephew*. We both went for a swim, but Bob swam a mile, which meant about 80 laps of the pool, so I had a lot of time to talk to Chris while Bob went back and forth. He wasn't too happy that I pitched Chris. My notes of the event read, "I predict much success for him in TV." Founder of IGM Global Media, 20 years later, Chris would go on to become chairman of HBO.

That night, Bob took me to a sushi bar and then back stage to a comedy club where Elayne Boosler performed, and I believe that I face-to-face, squunched past Billy Joel in a doorway. But Bob was not performing that night because he was roasting a guy who literally was getting a gold watch for 20 years service at some business and was retiring.

For reasons difficult for me to understand, Bob skewered the guy. He was like Don Rickles on Steroids. I thought it was horrible how he tore the man apart, but the crowd seemed satisfied. Bob was unhappy that he only got a couple of hundred bucks for the gig, he seemed resentful, and this revealed a side of himself that I had never seen before. Keep in mind, we were extremely close friends for easily 15 years by this time. It was a paying gig, so I didn't feel he had a right to complain, but I didn't say anything.

I was still taking my screenwriting course at Sherman Oaks. And I remember I saw the movie *Tex* starring a very young Matt Dillon and we may have met with the director. Back at Bob's place, I met Richard Belzer and took a couple of photos and we went out to the Top Hat Café where Lana Turner had been discovered.

Belzer, who had already appeared on *Saturday Night Live* and in the movies *Fame* and *Groove Tube* was joking about Frank Sinatra, how he changed the lines to the Beatles song, *Something In the Way She Moved*. Often billed as the definitive version, we all laughed because the Chairman of the Board had added the word "Jack" to the end of that line. "Something in the way she moved, Jack." It was a riot.



Top left clockwise: Bob Shaw, Steve Wolf, Michael Richards, foreground and Richard Belzer.

The first three photos (above) I took in June of 1980. The bottom right one came off the Internet. Bob Shaw's up on the left looking directly at me in the eye. I could write a book based on that expression. Richard Belzer is below him giving me the thumb's up sign. A fellow I would soon meet, Steve Wolf, who was on the same roll of film, is top right. While we were sitting there a frizzy-haired fellow who resembled Larry from the *Three Stooges* joined us and he was introduced as Larry Fine. He's in the background of the bottom right photo. I recognized him from the show *Fridays*, which was an ensemble rip-off of *Saturday Night Live*. But the star of the show was, without doubt, Michael Richards, who nine years later, would come to play Kramer on the *Jerry Seinfeld Show*. The guy with the white Afro I thought of as a downer even though he was on a semi-successful TV show and I didn't photograph him. He struck me as a low-key sad-sack, and I wished that Michael Richards had shown up instead.

The next morning I said good-bye to Bob and flew off to Frisco to attend an orientation period at Saybrook University. My roommate was Steve Wolf. He looked so much like Bob Shaw that I couldn't separate them in my mind. We became good friends and

stayed friends for a good number of years, seeing each other every year when we each went to Frisco to attend the on-site meetings with our professors, and later, when I had a book signing for *Wizard: The Life & Times of Nikola Tesla: Biography of a Genius*, which I had at the Midnight Special Bookstore in Santa Monica, circa 2000.

<http://www.nytimes.com/1997/02/23/nyregion/shedding-light-on-a-neglected-genius.html>

Here are two Youtubes, one with Bob Shaw and the other with Steve Wolf who came down from Topanga to my book signing. Note how similar they really are. It was somewhat disconcerting to befriend Steve, because in some deep sense, my brain couldn't separate the two people even though I obviously knew they were completely different individuals. Were they doppelgängers? You tell me.

<http://www.cc.com/video-clips/ql69gf/stand-up-bob-shaw--middle-age>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6aOYdAiX3zM>

You can play them both at the same time with the sound off. It's pretty freaky!

Steve had co-written *Romancing the Shadow*, a psychology book, with the well-known author Connie Zweig, and their advance was so large that Steve bought himself a house at the top of a mountain in Topanga with his share! It was a huge coup and it was simply great to see Steve having played his cards so well, and then Lois and I had the pleasure of driving up to visit him at his fantastic place overlooking the valley.

A few months later, perhaps at the end of 1980, Bob called to tell me he was going to appear on the *Tonight Show* with Johnny Carson. And lo and behold, he did! He had captured the brass ring!! Wow! Bob Hope was also on the show. I recently did a search of all the people that appeared on the Carson show, and Shaw's name does not show up, but he was there. He appeared towards the end and he may have even sat down on the couch next to Hope. I'm not sure about that.

A few years went by. It was 1985. I was again in the Bay area finishing up my doctoral program. Coincidentally, Shaw was appearing a few miles away in Palo Alto. I went to see him with my good friend Howard Smukler, a lawyer from Berkeley who happens to also have an incredible sense of humor. It's so long ago, and Jay Leno wasn't famous yet, but I think, while he still had rather long hair, he was the opening act. Shaw started to get up, but got sick, had to walk off the stage, and came out to our car where he puked.

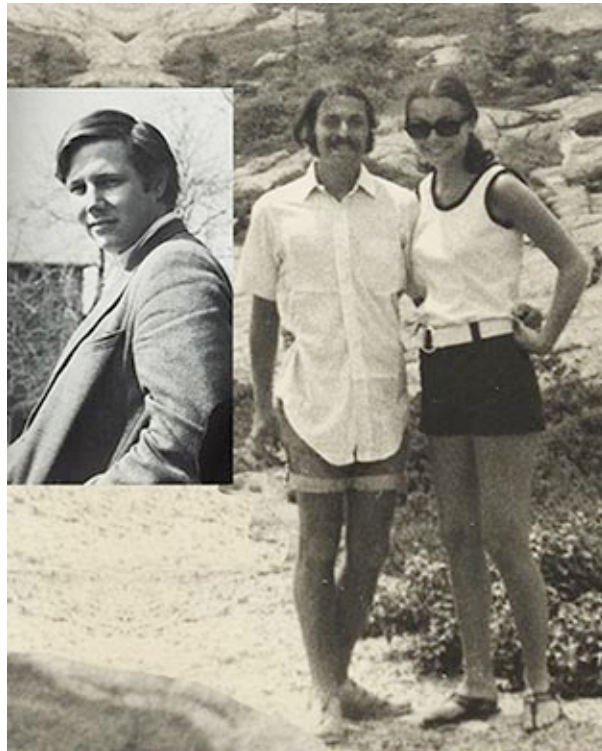
In retrospect, I think he was in the midst of ending his friendship with me and that led to some of his distress, but I could be wrong. He was on his way up, and I was living a rather obscure life still in Rhode Island. I would call now and then, and occasionally he would answer. In one phone conversation he told me he was involved in writing a TV pilot about two guys living in apartments across from each other. I'd ask about his parents and Bob would answer, "Unfortunately, they're still alive." Wolowitz's mother from *The Big Bang Theory* or George Costanza's mother for that matter, come to mind. During another call he said that he was doing gigs in Alaska.

It's not easy to be famous or close to such fame, and that factor played heavy on hurting our relationship. Phone calls were strained and it was a painful time for me because we had been such close friends. One final call from Bob made it as clear as could be. "You mean we are breaking up?" I said. Who knew he'd come to steal that line!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8re7JvLfE2E>

At the same time, another friend from the University of Rhode Island, the actor JT Walsh, (who we knew as Jim) was also making a name for himself. A year after Shaw began writing for the *Jerry Seinfeld Show*, JT would star in the Rob Reiner movie *A Few Good Men* with Jack Nicholson and Tom Cruise. Walsh, who would appear in over 60 movies, was on his way to mega-stardom, but unlike Bob, JT made more of an effort to maintain the friendship. JT Walsh's story from my perspective can be seen at:

<http://www.marcseifer.com/jt-walsh.html>



JT Walsh, Marc Seifer & Lois Paziienza, college years, circa 1970.

Since they both were in LA, I tried to get them together. They had known each other from college, in particular because Bob's former wife Sue Shaw had been in a number of plays with JT. But Walsh said that he did not get along with comedians and I understood why. You are always in competition. Robin Williams' demise comes to mind. It's not easy to always be "on."

At this time, the early 1990's, I was teaching regular Psychology courses, my 15-year Parapsychology gig had ended (1975-1990). And my students kept telling me to watch

Seinfeld. For years, I never did. I knew that **Seinfeld** was about a Jewish kid living in New York, been there, done that, I couldn't see the point.

I didn't start watching the show until many years later, probably late 1990's and then watched most of the re-runs, so I didn't know through much of the early 1990's that Bob had been a writer, and that he also appeared occasionally on the show.

Our friendship had ended, but I kept my antennae up and found out that he also had a co-writer with partner Don McEnergy for at least fifteen years (1991-2005) penning several Disney/Pixar cartoons, **Hercules; Boo, Zino & the Snurks** and their most successful film **A Bug's Life**. Here's my favorite scene: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zcoFo8fQ54E>

Not a bug's life? Well, it's still my favorite scene. Bob met Don back in 1990 when together with Larry David, they wrote a number of the first **Seinfeld** shows with master comic, David Steinberg directing the pilot. Bob's listed as a writer for two episodes, but he is also listed as a consultant for 23 episodes. Unfortunately, he only appears in three, the best with Bette Midler. He plays a cabbie with an Indian accent and he is very funny in the brief time he is on camera.

Another of Bob's lines comes to mind.



Larry David

George Costanza

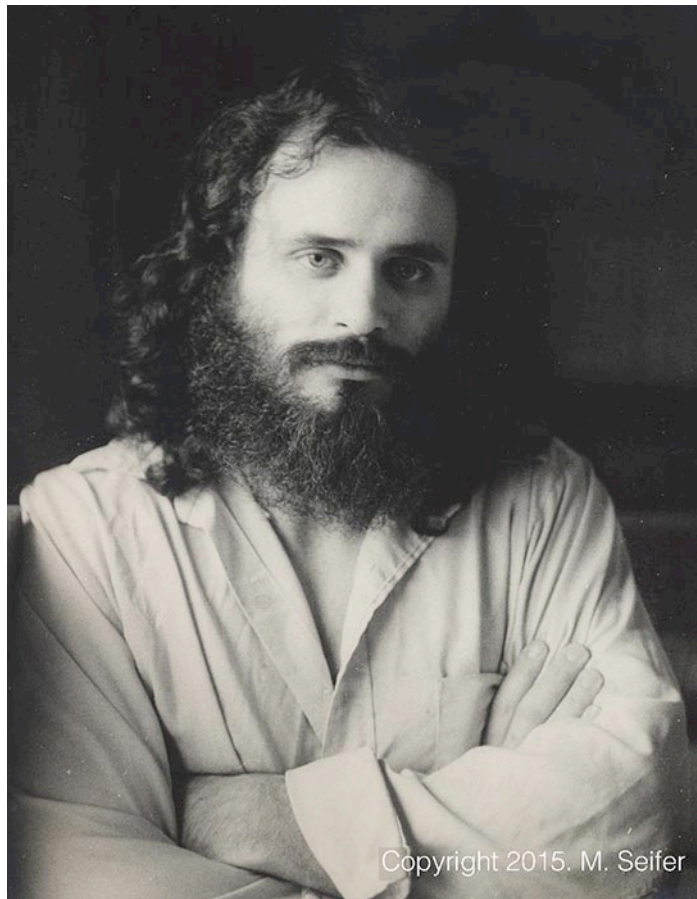
Corbin Bernsen

Déjà vu, where have I heard that term before?

So, I'm watching another **Seinfeld** episode. It's when George Costanza and Jerry go to Hollywood and George gets into a very long-winded discussion with Corbin Bernsen, who at that time was a megastar because of the TV drama **LA Law**. It occurred to me that Bob had written that segment based on the time I got into a very long conversation with Chuck McCann as Bob impatiently waited. In the show, Jerry is miffed because George is talking Corbin's ear off. I could be wrong, but the parallels are hard to ignore. And if I'm right, Larry, you're not the only George in town!

I think about my old friend on occasion. At his height, there was no better comic. Bob had the respect of such greats as Larry David, Freddie Prince and Richard Pryor, and he was a writer for arguably the funniest comedy show in the history of television. If Larry had such respect for Bob, why didn't he give him greater parts in *Seinfeld*? Why didn't he appear in *Curb Your Enthusiasm*? Why would Bob allow IMDB to make such a blatant error in the film *Time After Time* and list the dramatic actor Robert Shaw for Bob's part? Since he had started out with Jay Leno, why wouldn't Bob have moved to get a spot once again The Tonight Show? And why not David Letterman? Considering Bob's talent, this has remained a mystery for me. This essay just fills in a few gaps.

The last great time I had with Bob Shaw was in 1980, well over 30 years ago. Before that, we shared an untold number of highly enjoyable moments together, heavy rap sessions, deep discussions of various movies and also what we each wanted out of life. When he was just starting out, Bob asked me to do some head shots for him, here is one:



Bob Shaw, circa 1970, age 23.

Underneath it all, when I think back a third of a century, I had always wished that when we shared lunch with Richard Belzer and some guy from *Fridays* with the fuzzy hair at Top Hat, that I had hoped that it had been Michael Richards instead, the outstanding comic who would literally go on to impact the world as Kramer in *Seinfeld*. In class, I would

always refer to Kramer and what an amazing actor he was. The door to Jerry's apartment would swing open, and in five seconds, Kramer would steal the scene.

It wasn't until my old college buddy Lee [Smalley] Smolovitch called from Mexico on my birthday, to tell me that Shaw was mentioned by Larry David in a *New York Times* article that I realized that the guy with fuzzy hair at the luncheon was Larry David, one of the most successful comics of all time, not Larry Fine (of The Three Stooges) who he was introduced as! I had been goofed on. Over 30 years ago, the guy who George Costanza is [mostly!] based on, had lunch with me in LA and I never knew! Who wudda thunk? I want Larry to know, I may be slow, but I finally got the joke!

I want to congratulate my old friend Bob Shaw for getting such great praise from Larry David in the February 15, 2015 *New York Times* interview. That's quite an accolade, well deserved! Here's looking at you, kid.

http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/22/theater/larry-david-on-broadway-theater-seinfeld-and-death-etiquette.html?_r=0