



# COMEDY COURAGE

**Canada's Largest Comedy Benefit Concert in Support of Mental Health**

*"Helping Our Mental Health Community*

*Help Themselves Through Laughter, Comedy and Courage"*

2010

CAST OF COURAGEOUS COMICS  
AND THEIR  
FABULOUS TESTIMONIALS  
WITH THEIR BIO'S



## Brian Wiens Bio



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I have had a varied education, some university, Bible College, life skills and careers training.

I have lived here in New Westminster for a decade and a half.

Having health and mental disabilities has been a constant struggle for me.

Staying on my meds helps me keep in check and out of the hospital but still I felt invisible and alone.

I really love to play pranks and games to have some fun.

When I discovered Comedy Courage last year and enjoyed it so much I joined the class again this year. What a great outlet it has been. The comics I have shared with and worked with are so awesome and supportive.

I am so thankful to be a part of something so uplifting and life changing program!

I hope you will enjoy Us as much as I do.



## Jari's Wilkman Bio



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Born n Vancouver, lived here my whole life.

I overcame my hilarious combination of crippling mental illness to pursue a career in comedy.

This is this first of many programs and venues I plan to conquer with my razor wit and whatever else I have going for me.

Besides, girls really like a funny man.

Comedy Courage has given me an opportunity to explore all this and so much more.

I am so glad I chose to take the course and I have felt a lot of camaraderie with all the other students.

Our Comedy Courage teacher Shay Novak has led us all to victory!



## Matt Frame Bio



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Matt was born and raised in Richmond, B.C, a disability unto itself.

Lousy at school but successful at being a delinquent, Matt spent more time in the Principles office than your average deviant. Still he managed to squeak by, in most part thanks to his parent's connections in the school district.

At 17 he was kicked out of Grade 11 and it was undoubtedly the happiest day of his life.

Matt has done some interesting things in his life and lived in some interesting places. 4 years in the Canadian arctic (Yellowknife), 3 1/2 in Tropical South East Asia (Cambodia), 8 months in Mexico and 6 in Egypt.

He has owned 22 vehicles in his life (the vast majority of which were bought for \$400 or less) and still has a soft spot for early 70's model VW's, of which he has owned 4 (three VW Beetles and one VW Van.)

## Matt Frame Bio Continued

Matt has 'officially' struggled with mental health issues for 20 years and if you want to know more about that you'll have to buy him some sushi.

Comedy Courage has helped me feel more secure in my own skin and brought out the comic in myself and allowed me to laugh along with my mental illness.

Enjoy the show!



## Monique Diotte Bio



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I was raised in an alcoholic home with a rageaholic father and a depressed/screaming mother. My father was extremely violent towards my mother. I witnessed some horrific scenes growing up. Our home was a ring for big brawls when alcohol was involved between families and friends.

I was also a victim of sexual abuse by two of my uncles and a friend of my father. I felt like an ugly duckling searching for a warm and welcoming spot to curl into. Alcohol was it.

I swallowed a bottle of Librium after my boyfriend slapped me in front of my siblings. I knew my dad would kill him if he was to find out.

I left home at 14 years old, after my father tried to strangle me in bed. My father always preferred my younger sister to me. My boyfriend; a drug dealer who lived across our house

## Monique Diotte Bio Continued

rescued me from it all.

This was the beginning of a nightmarish few years for me to muddle through. I still wonder sometimes how I made it through. I flirted with death more than once.

## Monique Diotte Bio Continued

After I cleaned up from alcohol and drug abuse I had to face my demons head on, but it was much too overwhelming for me to cope with it all. I suffered from migraine headaches, sleep disorder, reoccurring nightmares, panic attacks, and social phobias to name a few. I went through a series of abusive relationships. I was a total basket case; finally, I was diagnosed with bi-polar.

When I found Comedy Courage I thought it would be great for my daughter who also suffers from mental illness. I thought I would do it with her so she would go; otherwise I knew she would not have gone by herself. Well to my surprise I related to the people there. I did not feel so alienated. I actually felt great support even though I did not find myself funny. I started to laugh again at myself and with others like me. I kept wanting to back out and just support my daughter, but I am really happy I stayed. I feel like I was part of something special.

What a great bunch.

Thank you Shay for your wicked coaching,

And Thank you Darcy for giving me this amazing opportunity.



## Paul Tom Bio



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I was born in Kenora, Ontario and I am First Nations from the Ojibway Nation. I spent my childhood living in the community of Norgate in North Vancouver. I was first discovered at 8 years of age for a photo poster ad campaign promoting milk.

At 13, I moved with my family to England returning to Canada when I was 20. When I was 17 I had a son, who today is 21 years old. I spent a part of my 20's living in the Downtown Eastside when I was struggling with addiction and self worth issues. I finally broke free of that self destructive lifestyle with the help of family and friends in the later part of the 90's where I did a complete 180 and reclaimed my life in a much healthier way.

In 1999 I appeared in a theatre production of The Three Penny Opera where I was cast in the role of Filch. Returning



## Paul Tom Bio Continued

to full time education, I have worked in Hospitality, retail, warehouse, and construction. Today, I am a certified Construction Safety Officer and First Aid Attendant.

Having been recently diagnosed with Major Depression I have taken a short sabbatical from the workforce while I adapt to a new recovery program and lifestyle.

## Paul Tom Bio Continued

During the 12 week Comedy Courage class I have noticed major changes in not only myself, but in my classmates as well. Where at first I had fears and insecurities about whether my sense of humor was actually funny, these disappeared as the classes progressed as it was an extremely safe and secure environment where we all supported one another.

The Comedy Courage class and performance experience has played a major part in my own recovery and I would recommend it to anyone who wants to express themselves through the medium of stand up comedy.

I would gladly do it again.



**SHAY NOVACK**

Shay Novack Bio:



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I come from an abusive background, beaten as a child I found no laughter in my life.

At 15 I became a ward of the courts and lived in many different group homes.

At 16 I spent 3 months in Juvenile detention, this is where I discovered the art of funny

I became the jokester and made people laugh to protect me. As a young adult I spent a lot of time running from my past and using drugs and drink to self medicate my pain and confusion.

It was in my late 30's that I first attempted suicide. Three more attempts followed. I was committed 3 times to a hospital. I was diagnosed with acute suicidal depression and panic disorder along with post traumatic syndrome.

I found Comedy Courage after my last discharge and came to the class. I was afraid and unsure but deep down I wanted

## Shay Novack Bio Continued

to do it. I kept at it and was accepted to re-join classes for four years.

This is my fifth year and am so proud to have been chosen to be the mentor and teacher of the 2010 program!

Comedy Courage helped me become more sure of myself and gave me purpose in my life.

It literally saved my life after 4 previous suicide attempts and truly changed my life and I am forever grateful and proud to be a part of such a powerful and uplifting experience.

Thank you to Darcy James for encouraging me to continue with the Comedy Courage program and giving me the opportunity to help others by being the mentor and teacher for Comedy Courage 2010

I am very proud of my students and in awe of their accomplishments!



Vanessa Diotte Bio



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I was raised by my mother. She took me from Montreal to Vancouver in 1990 when I was almost four years old, so that she could make a change in her lifestyle. She has been recovering from drugs and alcohol since 1992. I had to go to a preschool where all the kids spoke English and all I knew was French. I witnessed a lot of violence in my mom's past relationships, and that really hurt me emotionally. I had my first psychosis when I was fifteen. I found out between the age of 15 and 16 that my father was actually not my biological father. When my grandfather passed away I met my biological father for the first time. I had my next psychosis when I was 16.

I was diagnosed Bipolar Schizo- affective. I was in and out of the hospital 22 times until January this year. I am now 23. I was suicidal trying to slash my wrists. I would steal my mom's credit card and money and attempt to go to Montreal. My obsession was always to return to Montreal. In a manic state, sometimes I would either end up taking the ferry to Victoria's Empress Hotel, the Vancouver Airport, the train station or even the Greyhound bus depot where I actually

## Vanessa Diotte Bio Continued

bought a one way ticket and off I went. I always wanted to go back to Montreal. I missed my family terribly. I was not compliant in taking my meds and sometimes mixing with alcohol made for quite a combo; I was very unstable, until I was given injections.

My mom wanted me to join Comedy Courage to help me open up and increase my confidence and self esteem. So I decided to join and it became a big success! I joined when I had just come out of the hospital; I was very fragile. I didn't think I had what it took to stay, but with the help and support of the instructor and fellow comedians I made it through and I'm so proud of myself. It's helped me come out of my shell and for that I'll be forever grateful.

Thank you very much Shay for your support and Darcy for this wonderful opportunity by creating Comedy Courage for people with mental health diagnoses and issues so we can begin our journey to mental health wellness.



**VERNON WESTPHAL**

## Vernon Westfall Bio



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I am reasonably sure that I have genetic predispositions to introversion, depression, alcohol abuse, arthritis, and sarcasm.

Both my parents worked, so I didn't get as much attention as I wanted. I took refuge in reading a lot.

When I was 10 my father died and I stopped coming out of my room except to go to school, get food, or watch TV.

Depression or dysthymia? You be the judge.

Being intelligent and quiet made me popular with teachers. Being short, fat, four-eyed and sarcastic made me a popular target for bullies. School was a mix of good and bad forms of attention. Then I discovered girls.

After grade 12 I suffered through a bad break-up with my then-girlfriend, and ended up drinking a lot. I also fell into a cycle of alternating between school and full-time work.

During this time I also did some amateur(ish) writing.

Eventually I had a month of in-patient alcoholism treatment, which introduced me to 12 Step groups. This helped me to become somewhat more comfortable in social settings.

I was in graduate school in Psychology when my mother was diagnosed with cancer. I ended up dropping out of school and found that I had arthritis. I spent time moping at home,

## Vernon Westfall Bio Continued

and then started in the outpatient groups at VGH, which eventually helped.

I had heard of Comedy Courage years before I applied to it.

It has been an opportunity to explore the differences between casual humor and stand-up, and between written and performed humor. Most important for me, it has been a chance to work with a friendly, creative group of fellow mental-health-consumers.

Thank you Darcy for creating such a great program that builds on our strengths and not our weaknesses and allowing me to continue on my mental health wellness journey.

I am so grateful to Shay our Teacher and for the program Comedy Courage.



**VICTORIA CLEMENTS**

## Victoria Clements Bio



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Since I was very small child I was always high energy and quite the troublemaker for my parents, or so it seemed.

A dictator type father and a submissive depressive Mother it set the tone and I became the mediator and the glue that held the family together even though I felt I wasn't really loved. I always felt like I was walking on eggs around our house and I developed some serious health complications due to the stress.

In grade 2 I fell into my first serious bout of depression. I can only tell you that at that age it felt like I had a mild flu for a year. I wasn't really interested in anything or anyone and spent a lot of time alone and quiet with my art table. The fog lifted after a year and it wasn't until I was 13 that the black hole came back.

My Moms Mom died in an insane asylum, and my aunt was suicidal depressive too so depression ran in the family.

I left home at 14 and took my Mom with me as I couldn't watch and feel what was happening in my house anymore.



## Victoria Clements Bio

My brother and I were so sick all the time.

My Mom ended up having a nervous breakdown once we moved and was on valium and I took a part time job managing a store and going to school at the same time so I could make ends meet now that we were on our own. My Dad disowned me for 2 years.

After I got my own place at 15 I struggled a bit more but now had to look after myself and pay the bills so I just started working. Been working ever since.

I have always done what I love to do whether it be show producing, fashion, film or anything in the arts and entertainment fields.

I have had amazing opportunities over the years but 2006 saw a crash for me and a black hole of depression I just about didn't make it through. I did some counseling and some NLP and Clinical hypnosis and that helped until in 2009 I found Comedy Courage.

I must say since I did the program and made a routine about laughing at the darker sides I have suffered with I haven't ventured down the rabbit hole again.

I am so honored to be working side by side with Darcy James and George Roshko Founders and creators of Comedy Courage a Canadian National Non-Profit Corporation.

Truly Laughter is the Best Medicine!