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THE BEST-SELLING LESBIAN MAGAZINE



America's Funniest Lesbians

**Suzanne Westenhoefer
Comes Out On Top**

**Funny girls (from left): Dana Goldberg,
Westenhoefer & Bridget McManus**

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The Funniest Lesbians in America

We all love funny women,

but when we asked you, our readers, who you thought was the funniest lesbian in America we had no idea how fervently you'd cast your digital ballots—thousands of votes for nearly 100 different women! Even after the voting ended we got suggestions and complaints, ranging from simple (“I just saw Karen Ripley! Love her!”) to accusatory (“How the hell did you forget Lauren Flans?”) to baffling (“That’s pretty rich, calling *her* a lesbian comedian!”). Message boards were ablaze and many of you (like those on the Ellen fansites) began mass emailing your friends about the contest. Some very funny lesbians were a bit worried. (“I don’t have mailing lists and PR machines that can compete with some of these other women,” one well-known comic told us.) Talk about a can of worms.

We kicked out comic *actors* (like *Exes and Ohs*’ Michelle Paradise), sticking to stand-up and sketch comics. And as for the “lesbian” question, well, we left that up to you. We had tons of ties, plenty of votes and a whole lot of debate. In the end, the queen of daytime TV won—she edged out comic Suzanne Westenhoefer by 1 percent! See pg. 41 for the rest of the surprising results. — *Editors*

Photography by Tony Donaldson

Photo Assistant: Josephe | Stylist: Edgar Revilla | Hair & Makeup: Andrea Kerns



Styling Credits (for opener and cover): Dana Goldberg (left) is wearing black shirt by Kenneth Cole; silver buckle and leather belt by Ari Soffer (saleather.com); and Monterey Justin Boot Jeans by Pierce Jeans from Fred Segal Fun (piercejeans.com)

Suzanne Westenhoefer (middle) sports the white “Mercy Me” tee by Cohesive (Nordstrom and cohesiveapparel.com) and jewelry by Ari Soffer

Bridget McManus (right) is dressed in a black sheer top with satin trim by Single (singledress.com) and jewelry by Ari Soffer

She's Our Number One

She nearly edged out Ellen DeGeneres as America's Funniest Lesbian—without a daytime talk show or an Emmy.

In the beginning, there was Suzanne. And she was good. And gay. And out. As one of the first openly gay comics on the mainstream stage, Suzanne Westenhoefer paved the way for queer comedians around the country. For nearly 18 years, she's been performing for packed audiences at clubs and on cruises. She's even opened for Ani DiFranco and the Indigo Girls. In between making wedding plans (she and her partner got hitched in September) and preparing for a family vacation, she talked with **curve** about her fear of lakes, her love of "lezzie" and her groundbreaking experience on *The Late Show With David Letterman*.

What's new, Suzanne?

I have to ask you this, because my sister and I are very close and we were talking about this yesterday and I said I'd ask everybody I talked to. Did you ever swim in a lake?

Oh heck, yeah. I grew up in Pennsylvania, like you.

So you know, swimming in lakes, it's like there's an eerie feeling that there's bodies in the bottom. Because if someone drowns in a lake, it's like there's nowhere for them to go. If you think about the ocean, people drown and they go to Europe or something.

Maybe you grew up a little too close to New Jersey.

Yeah, that's funny. You know, we'll be in a lake by next week because we're going up to Lake Superior. I think that's how all of this started, because we're going up to "vacation" with my girlfriend's family.

You headlined Dinah Shore last year. What was that like?

I've done it a lot. It's perfect. It's like a thousand lezzies in a room. And I usually do my show on Thursday, when everybody's fresh and vibrant and ready—they just got there and they're stoked. And it's always a really awesome show. You feel like you could say anything and they're into it and it's fun. I love it!

"Lezzie" is one of my favorite words, by the way.

"Lezzie" is one of my fav-o-rite words. It's actually the cutest word. You know what else is a cute word? You're going to hear it and laugh because the root word is so difficult. But if you say "cunty," it's so cute. Isn't "cunty" oddly cute?

It's sort of endearing.

Yeah, I like "lezzie." I like "fag." I like all those words. And I know some people still get offended. But I never grew up having that yelled at me. I look like a cheerleader. I look like a big girly-girl. That's what I am. If someone took offense to me using the word, I would hug them. I'm a big hugger.

Do you think straight people relate to your work?

Definitely. That's my piece of history—I was the first openly gay comic on the main stage. I used to do this old joke about how queers can't get married so we don't get bridal showers. And I would say, "It's ridiculous [that] I've been with my partner 11 years and we don't have two matching lamps." It's not a joke anymore because things have changed, and isn't that great, but to do that in front of straight people, it wasn't like it was their life, but it was more like they hadn't thought of it, and it was funny for that reason.

What was it like to be the only out gay comic in the mainstream?

It's weird now because it was different when I started, almost 18 years ago.



There were comics who were gay, but they weren't out and they were like, "Don't do it. Don't do it." Because they were truly frightened for me. There were very few people who were like, "Go for it, this is going to be great." Most people were like, "Oh no, this is going to hurt your career. This is going to end up badly." No one did it to be mean; everyone did it with goodness in their heart.

Did you ever have any scary experiences as a result of putting yourself out there like that?

Not really. Well, I mean, I did Texas in 1992 at the Improv, and I was pretty new and there were definitely people who got up and left when I was on stage. But there were just as many people who got up and left because the comedian after me was a black woman. I walked out and said, "I'm a gay comic." I did it on purpose. That was my activism. You could wait, and warm up the audience, which is what most people do. It's probably smarter, but it's not my style. I'm the kind of person, if I'm talking to you at the bank and I never met you before, in like, 10 seconds I'm going to ask you how much you get paid a year. I don't think, "Oh, that's inappropriate." It just comes out of me.

Having no filter—does that get you into trouble?

Oh my God! Uh, weekly! But I'm not unwilling to apologize if I've truly hurt someone's feelings. I've never been like that. I'm not like, "Hey, that's my art, you just have to fucking deal with it."

You were the first gay comedian on *The Late Show With David Letterman*. What was that like?

The Top 5

By Kristin A. Smith
Photography By Tony Donaldson

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It was a phenomenal experience, but Letterman was sick. And he's never sick. So there was a guest host. It was such a big milestone, but the gay community didn't leap on it. They were like, "Oh, good for you." They had no idea how hard it was—how no one had done it before. So it was a sort of anticlimactic experience, because I thought it was a huge thing. I thought it would be a breakthrough and 10 other gay comics would get on. It kind of happened and it was great and I got all this great response from all these straight people. But the gay community, I don't know, maybe they don't actually watch *Letterman*.

Where do you get the inspiration for your material?

Well, let's look at it. You called and because my sister and I are talking about dead people in a lake, that's what I'm talking about. So, I guarantee you, or there's a 90 percent chance, that when I get up on stage in a couple of nights, I'm going to talk about dead people in a lake, because it's on my mind. I might not talk about it again. It might be very funny or it might just fly right over. Or it could be something where I'm doing it for a year. That's how the show evolves. I don't write. I don't know how to. I don't sit and write jokes. I've not sat and written a joke for myself ever. I don't know how I would even do that.

What's coming up for you in the near future?

For some reason, everybody I'm involved with, like my agent and my girlfriend and another friend of mine, are all bugging me to write a book. I'm like, "Oh my God, they all have the same freaking idea." I swear, they went behind my back. ■

- 1 Ellen DeGeneres
- 2 Suzanne Westenhoefer
- 3 Bridget McManus
- 4 Kate Clinton
- 5 Dana Goldberg

The rest of the Top 10 included several ties:

- 6 Chantal Carrere
- 7 Shann Carr • Sabrina Matthews • Tamale
- 8 Kristen Becker • Faith Choyce • Jennie McNulty • Lily Tomlin
- 9 Michele Balan • Carlease Burke • Julie Goldman
- 10 Elvira Kurt • Vickie Shaw • Sandra Valls

The Best of the Rest (in alphabetical order)

- | | |
|------------------|-------------------|
| Dana Austin | Lisa Kaplan |
| Suzy Berger | Jessica Kirson |
| Sandra Bernhard | Courtney Knowles |
| Matina Bevis | Jen Kober |
| Gloria Bigelow | Lisa Koch |
| Amy Boyd | Poppi Kramer |
| Judy Carter | Sapna Kumar |
| Maggie Casella | Jennifer Lanier |
| Poppy Champlin | Anne Lippert |
| Tara DeFrancisco | Janis Lipton |
| Lea DeLaria | Mary Matthews |
| Alana Devich | Ellen Moschetto |
| Kelli Dunham | Tig Notaro |
| Maggie Faris | Rosie O'Donnell |
| Erin Foley | Christine O'Leary |
| Lisa Geduldig | Monica Palacios |
| Janice Gennevois | Julie Potter |
| Heather Gold | Georgia Ragsdale |
| Judy Gold | Karen Ripley |
| Marga Gomez | Jen Slusser |
| Mimi Gonzalez | Faith Soloway |
| Robin Greenspan | Regina Stoops |
| Gail Hand | Julia Stretch |
| Mina Hartong | Amy Tee |
| Renee Hicks | Cheril Vendetti |
| Page Hurwitz | Vicki Wagner |
| Julia Jackson | Dawn Whitwell |
| Susan Jeremy | Karen Williams |