

Sidebar to LA Times Article
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Finding A Person's Comedic Character in 10 Minutes

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Entertainment: A Tarzana coach helps his clients with their stand-up routines or their acting skills.

For years, Steve North lived on top of a mountain in Colorado, selling the leather from animal hides. "I dropped out of the world," North said. Now North, 46, lives in Tarzana and tries to save hides. He's a comedy coach, aiding aspiring stand-up comics and actors searching for that extra edge to scale their own heights.

North promises to find each person's comedic character. Sometimes, he meets a lot of resistance.

"I can find that character in 10 minutes," North said. "But convincing the person is the trick. A lot of people can't get their ego out of the way. And if they can't do that, I can't help them."

Christel Montgomery, who has appeared in a number of off-Broadway productions, including "Counselor at Law," said she answered North's advertisement in Drama Logue because she was looking for someone to unveil her comedic core.

"He has had such an impact on me," Montgomery said. "It was like magic. I want to concentrate on comedy more, and he just ignited something in me."

Sylver Gregory, who was hired to play what she describes as an "intelligent ditz" on the new CBS-TV sitcom "Royal Family," went to North for help in refining her comedic skills.

"I had never done comedy before," said Gregory, 19. "He brought that out in me. I didn't even know that I was funny. He brought that role to life for me."

North believes that everyone can be funny.

"I really don't worry about anyone bombing," North said, "because if you keep your character, you can't bomb."

North coaches from experience. For years, he and his wife, Barb, have performed stand-up comedy together. In the mid-1970s, they started an improvisation group in Colorado. The pay was pizza. They also toured college towns in the Midwest, opening for folk singer Arlo Guthrie.

The CBS-TV affiliate in Denver then hired the Norths to tape a comedy special. The work lasted three months. The pay was \$250.

"We realized we were in the wrong town," Steve North said. In the late 1970s, they moved to Los Angeles. At first, they got small acting parts in commercials and did some stand-up at local clubs. All the while, they kept writing comedy and, in 1988, were hired as head writers for the new "Gong Show." They were also hosts of a weekly cable TV comedy show, "Alive in the Valley." Two years ago, they created, a new game show, "Switcheroo," which airs in Europe.

The rest of their time is devoted to teaching comedy.

Their animal hide days are over.