By day, Chris Palmer of Bethesda does serious things. Palmer, 58, is director of the Center for Environmental Filmmaking at American University and distinguished film producer in residence. His forte is IMAX films like “Coral Reef Adventure” and “Whales, Wolves, Dolphins, Bears, India: Kingdom of the Tiger.” By night, Palmer isn’t so serious. He is an aspiring comedian, whose signature is to end each comedy performance with a handstand.

Humor has always intrigued Palmer, particularly its ability to transform any situation, from tension to miscommunication, into a lighthearted matter. But, he wasn’t planning on sharing jokes with an audience until his 25-year old daughter, Kimberly, brought home a flyer for stand-up comedy classes.

“I thought about it, put it off for awhile and then finally made the decision to do it,” says Palmer, who began his series of six classes in March at the Theater Lab in D.C. and started performing in May. “I see stand-up comedy as far more than cracking jokes. I see it as a funny way of talking about serious things.”

Palmer, who performs once a month at Nanny O’Brien’s in Cleveland Park, says that when he announced his foray into stand-up comedy, friends sent him Internet jokes, most of which weren’t funny. Instead he uses his own experiences, raising three daughters and working with AU students, as inspiration. On average he spends one to two hours each day for a month prepping for his next performance.

“Creating humor is very hard work. Well, at least for me it is,” Palmer says in his British accent. “Each joke is a work of art—every word has specific placement and every superfluous word is cut.”

Palmer says he is getting better with each performance. “I’m not Jay Leno, I’m just a novice,” he says.

At Palmer’s Nov. 1 performance at Nanny O’Brien’s, he shared the secret of his successful marriage. “We’ve learned to compromise,” Palmer said. “I admit I’m wrong; she agrees.”