Chris Palmer’s New Career

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By James Hyder, *LF Examiner* Publisher and Editor

Parents of children interested in acting or other non-traditional jobs often urge their kids to learn more practical skills, so they’ll “have something to fall back on.” LF filmmaker Chris Palmer seems to be taking the opposite tack. His new avocation (and perhaps future vocation) for the past several months has been stand-up comedy.

Palmer is the founder and director of the *Center for Environmental Filmmaking* at American University, in Washington, DC, and for ten years was president of *National Wildlife Productions*, where he produced several LF films, including *Bears* and *Wolves*. He was recently named president of the MacGillivray Freeman Films Educational Foundation.

Despite his impressive credentials, which include three university degrees and service with the British Royal Navy and the U.S. government, Palmer is known in giant-screen circles as a personable and witty raconteur, with a tendency to pepper his frequent speeches at industry conferences with one-liners. But few of his colleagues would have suspected he nurtured a passion to become a stand-up comedian.

Since this spring Palmer has performed four times at comedy clubs and bars in the DC area. After seeing him perform at one of them, *LFX’s* James Hyder probed Palmer about his new interest.

*James Hyder: Why and when did you decide to try doing stand-up?*

Chris Palmer: All my life I have loved making people laugh. Laughter has always seemed magical to me and very important. When two people laugh at the same thing, a wonderful bonding occurs, and this can pave the way for better understanding and cooperation. Humor is also a way of being truthful — and making observations about things that are too sensitive to be made without humor. I decided to do stand-up about three years ago and added it to my list of life goals, but only recently (three or four months ago) screwed up enough courage to actually start training for it.

*JH: Tell me more about the standup class you took: where, when, how long it lasted, who taught it.*

CP: I took a class in stand-up comedy at the Theater Lab in DC (www.theaterlab.org). My coach was comic Eddie Sarfaty. I took six classes — one a week for six weeks, and each class was three hours long. Each week we would write and practice stand-up comedy, and Eddie would critique us and give us feedback to help us improve.

*JH: What was your first public performance like?*

CP: A little nerve racking. But once I got on stage, I felt very comfortable and relaxed.

*JH: Where do you hope or expect to go with it?*

CP: I hope to get better and better with more stage time and to perform regularly at increasingly prestigious venues. It won’t interfere in any way with my work as a professor at American University or my work with MacGillivray Freeman Films, both of which I love.

*JH: What have you gotten out of the experience?*

CP: The satisfaction that when I die, I won’t lie on my deathbed wondering why I never had the courage to try stand-up comedy.

*JH: Do you recommend it to others?*

CP: Sure, if you don’t mind wetting your pants in public.