

# Lenny Bruce

## Roots of the Underground: Fourth in a series

anon.

1972

Lenny Bruce was one of the greatest comedians of his time. On stage, he tried to make his audiences realize that sex is just one of many everyday functions in life and should be brought out into the open and spoken of as freely as one would speak of eating.

His own first experiences with sex may have been what began his outrage with our society's sexual attitudes on sexual behavior:

"One eventful day, I discovered self-gratification. An older kid conducted a school, and five of us graduated about the same time.

"A few days later I was propped up in bed, taking care of business. I was so involved, I didn't hear the door open. 'Leonard, what are you doing?' It was my father! My heart stopped. I froze. He repeated: 'I said, what are you doing?'

"To say it was a traumatic moment would be euphemistic. I had to restrain myself from asking: 'Would you wait outside just for a minute?' He snarled, 'It's not only disgusting, what you're doing- but, goddammit in my bed!'

"He sat down and proceeded to tell me a story, that story we have all heard, with embellishments. Its grim conclusion left three of our relatives in state asylums, poor souls who had never been instructed in the wisdom of sleeping with their hands above the covers. The story line implied that this sort of thing was a nighttime practice and was associated with werewolves and vampires. Their punishment was that their hands withered away into wings, and they couldn't pull it anymore, just fan it a little.

"I had all sorts of horrendous visions of my future: my spine would collapse: my toes would fall off. Even though I resolved never to do it again, I felt I had done some irreparable damage.

"Oh, what a cursed thing! I could see myself on a streetcorner giving testimony for the C.B.W.A., Crooked Back Whackers Anonymous."

When he turned 17, he volunteered for duty in the Navy. Soon discovering that it wasn't his idea of a good time, he began searching for a way out. He had a friend sew a WAVE uniform for him in exchange for a good supply of beer.

One night he put the uniform on and took a promenade on the ship deck. The idea was to convince the Navy that even as a transvestite, he was loyal and patriotic to the uniform. He yelled "Masher" as four sailors including the chief master-at-arms jumped him.

"Four naval psychiatrists worked over me at Newport Naval Hospital.

"FIRST OFFICER: 'Lenny, have you ever actively engaged in any homosexual practice?'

"LENNY: 'No, sir.'

"(An 'active' homosexual is one who does the doing, and the 'passive' is one who just lies back. In other words, if you were a kid and you were hitchhiking and some faggot came on with you and you let him do whatever his 'do' was, he was an 'active' homosexual because he performed a sexual act with someone of the same sex, and you are a 'passive' homosexual if you allowed any of this to happen. You'll never see this in an AAA driving manual, but that's the way it is.)

“SECOND OFFICER: ‘Do you enjoy the company of women?’

“LENNY: ‘Yes, sir.’

“THIRD OFFICER: ‘Do you enjoy having intercourse with women?’

“LENNY ‘Yes, sir.’

“FOURTH OFFICER: ‘Do you enjoy wearing women’s clothing?’

“LENNY: ‘Sometimes.’

“ALL FOUR: ‘When is that?’

“LENNY: ‘When they fit.’”

After being discharged, he tried various hustles to make a living including masquerading as a Catholic priest to solicit money for a leper colony. Finally he landed some jobs at clubs as an MC and doing comedy routines. He soon became notorious for his discussions of his favorite topics: police, religion (neither of which he overly admired) and the concept of dirty words. The police would come to hear his shows and wait for him to say an “obscene” word and then bust him for it.

He was also constantly harassed and busted for the prescribed drugs he had to take for medical ailments.

Defending himself against obscenity and narcotic charges cost Bruce his money and youth. Finally, on August 3, 1966 at the age of 40, he was found dead in a hotel bathroom with a needle in his arm.

“John Graham. I don’t know if you remember this guy. He blew up a plane with forty people and his mother. And for this the state sent him to the gas chamber: proving, actually that the American people are losing their sense of humor. Because, when you think about it just for a minute, anybody who blows up a plane with forty people and their mother can’t be all bad. The guy’s got like a little thing going there.

“But they sent him away. They tried to get a lawyer couldn’t get Otto Kruger, Sidney Blackmer was working on the Scotsborough case.

“Now back to that day at the airport. Was he guilty?

“PUBLIC ADDRESS SYSTEM: United Airlines paging passenger Sylvia Green. Will a Sylvia Green report to the United Airlines information desk or ticket counter. Grand concourse now loading gate thirty-one for Hawaii and the Philippines.

“GRAHAM: Hurry up, Ma, we’ll miss the plane! C’mon Ma! Hurry up. Hurry up now! C’mon, you can walk—I don’t want those lies again. C’mon, c’mon!

“MOTHER: (cracked old voice): I dunno why you want me to fly all of a sudden. I dunno I dunno! I’m gonna get claustrophobia closed in up there. I know it!

“GRAHAM: Don’t worry, Ma, you’re gonna get alotta air—hahahaha! O.K. Hurry up! Hurry up! Throw that cane away, it’s in your mind!

“MOTHER: Alright!

“GRAHAM: Listen, I gotta game for you to play before you get on the plane.

“MOTHER: Games! I love games.

“GRAHAM: Shut up! Not so loud, you freak. C’mere.

“You’ll love this. It’s wild. C’mere. It’s called “Fill Out the Policy.” Just write there. O.K. O.K., good.

“Now, listen, Ma, I got a present for you, and I don’t want you to open this up till you get halfway across that shiny sea (and that’s all you’re gonna get!) Alright.

“Now, I’ll put it in your pocketbook.

“MOTHER: I love presents!

“GRAHAM: Shut up with that parakeet voice of yours!

“Alright, now, you’ll love this.

“MOTHER: It’s a music box.

“GRAHAM: Yeah, you’ll get a good sound out of it.

“Uh huh. Plays “Rumania, Rumania” and “Hot Nuts.”

“O.K. Ma. Listen, have a good trip, and, ah, don’t talk to anybody on that plane.

“And now, the take-off: WALLAWANGDANG. WA WALLAWALLAZONGBONGBONGFLINGDINGDING-FLONGFONGBONGBONG GONGFLINGDINGDING-DINDINGWOMBOMBINGBINGBINGFLINGALINGAF

“COPILOT: Where are we?

“PILOT: I dunno, man I’m so juiced! Whew! That airport bar...That guy can make a martini-I’m outta my nut,man. I’m really juiced, baby.

“COPILOT: Look, man, you promised you’d cool it. Like, you can’t make this scene outta your skull alla time.

“PILOT: I know, it’s depressing. man. I don’t dig height.

“COPILOT: Hey!

“PILOT: What?

“COPILOT: Look, We gotta know where we are.

“PILOT: Boy, you’re really a bug, man. Just enjoy the high, baby, that’s all. They’re lucky they get anywhere for seventy-nine dollars. Anyway, what does it matter where we are?

“COPILOT: Ah, don’t start with any of that existentialism stuff again man, I’m fed up with that philosophizing.

“PILOT: What was that?

“COPILOT: The back end of the plane just blew off!

“Hey, man! Seventeen people just fell out!

“PILOT: Cool it.

“COPILOT: Is this weird? There go twenty more! Are we gonna get yelled at!

“PILOT: Will you shut up with that! What the hell are we gonna do now?...Look.

“COPILOT: What

“PILOT: You don’t say anything, I don’t say anything.

“It’s our word against theirs.

“COPILOT: Whatsa matter with you, you nut, you!

“There’s twenty people left!

“PILOT: Let’s dump ‘em.

“COPILOT: You’re really insane! You can’t do a thing like that, you monster! They’re awake.

“PILOT: I dunno what the hell...

“COPILOT: Hey, I got an idea!

“PILOT: What?

“COPILOT: You remember that guy in the second seat over the wing? The guy who was coming on like he knew alot about planes? He was dropping alotta big words, like ‘wing’ and ‘propellor’?

“PILOT: Yeah?

“COPILOT: Why don’t ya ask him?

“PILOT: No, man, like I don’t like to ask anybody for anything. You know, you get indebted to people, you know?

“COPILOT: Well, ask him, for me, man. I wanna make it home once more.

“PILOT: I dunno, man. Then they’re always on your neck for favors, you know.

“COPILOT: But, like...

“PILOT: Awright! Switch on the intercom.

Click.

“My name is Stewardess Stevenson...’

“PILOT: Will you shut up with that, you nitwit? Everybody knows your name, moron! And stay outta the Icebox. And get that guy up here over the wing seat who knows all about planes. And hurry up!

“STEWARDESS (to passenger): Sir, would you help us out? They’re cranky. Some people fell outta the plane, I dunno what the hell is goin on. I never bother anybody, I can live in an apartment ten years, I dunno my next-door neighbor. I hate to bug ya, but c’mon, help us out, will ya please? I’ll give ya half a cheese sandwich. Come on. Will you?

“PASSENGER (suave, superior voice): I certainly will. I’ll help anyone who’s in peril. (whistling nonchalantly).

“COPILOT: (panicking): Sir, sir, we’re in alotta trouble!

“PASSENGER: Oh, really? Ilaahaha! That’s a little obvious, that you’re in a lot of trouble. I would say you’re in trouble everybody fell out of the plane. lahaha. Yes, that was a beautiful statement. Yes, trouble. Very profound.

“PILOT: Well, whaddawe do?

“PASSENGER (lowers voice): C’mere. First of all, like you gonna duke me in on the insurance bread?

“PILOT: Well, yeah, I’ll swing any way, man.

“PASSENGER: O.K. Gimme ten in front.  
 “PILOT: We haven’t got!  
 “PASSENGER: Well, the watch. Gimme the watch.  
 “O.K. I’ll take that.  
 “PILOT: Alright. Now, what’s the bit?  
 “PASSENGER: Well, it’s obvious that you strip the plane of everything. Now, there’s about thirty people left out there. You’re going to have to ask for volunteers.  
 “PILOT: To what?  
 “PASSENGER: (whistles)  
 “COPILOT: What the hell are you smoking? What the hell’s the matter with you? How you gonna go out and ask people to jump out of a plane? I can’t ask people to do a thing like that!  
 “PASSENGER: Let me ask them. I know how to talk to people.  
 “PILOT: Solid. Be my guest, man.  
 “PASSENGER: Good evening, everyone. I’ve got a surprise—hahaha! Ah, I know that you people have been satiated with many motion pictures where the captain and the copilot and the crews jump out to save the passengers? Well, like, it’s not happening. I don’t wanna bug anybody, but it’s time to split. C’mon, anybody. Anybody! Come on now. Sissies! Whatsa matter—didn’t anyone ever ask you to jump out of a plane before? How bout you—the old railroad man. You! The old railroad man. Yeah, yeah, you!  
 “OLD MAN: Please! No! I just got my watch. No!  
 “PASSENGER: Alright with those Gene Lockhart bits, shut up and sit down.  
 “PASSENGER: Hey... The six year old kid! Yeah, that schlub! He ruined the men’s room with the crayons. Is he sleeping? That’s coller. O.K. (whistling tune that changes to “The Bridge Over the River Kwai”) Sonny! Sonny, wake up! Wake up now. Wake up!  
 “KID (screaming): Where’s my mommy? Where’s Mommy?  
 “PASSENGER: Right out that door, Sonny...  
 “For four days the testimony in the court in San Francisco we heard.  
 “He did a man and a woman who were involved in a perverse act. He accompanied himself on the drum.’  
 “A perverse act. The fifth day I brought a tape in. They didn’t know I was taping the shows at the time. And this is the “perverse act” they heard:  
 “(To be accompanied by cymbals and drums)  
 “Toooooo  
 is a preposition  
 “To is a preposition  
 “Commmmmme is a verb!  
 “To is a preposition,  
 “Come is a verb.  
 “To is a preposition,  
 “Come is a verb the verb intransitive.  
 “To  
 “Come  
 “To come.  
 “I’ve heard these two words my whole adult life and as a kid when I thought I was sleeping.  
 “Tooooo  
 “Commmmmme  
 “Tooooo  
 “Commmmmme.  
 “It’s been like a big drum solo:  
 “(drums rolling and cymbals flaring in a crescendo of excitement)  
 “To come to come, come too come too, to come to come uh uh uh uh uh um um um um uh uh uh uh uh uh uh-TO COME! TO COME! TO COME!

"Did you come?

"Did you come good? Did you come good'?"

"Did you come? Good.

"To

"Come To

"Come

"Didyoucomegooddidyoucomemegooddidyou come good?"

"Recitative:

"I come better with you sweetheart than with anyone in the whole goddamn world. I really come so good with you—after being married for twenty-two years—goddamn I sure do love you! I really came so good with you—but I come too quick, don't I? That's cause I love you so much.

"Goddamn it! Do you know that with everybody else I'm always apologizing. If you just wouldn't say anything—just don't say, 'Don't come!' That's what it is.

"Don't come in me

"don't come in me

"don't come in me

"Don't come in me mimme mimme.

"Don't come in me mimme mimme

"Don't come in me mimme mimme

"Mimme.

"Come in me

"Come in me

"Come in me come in me come in me—

"COME in me!

"Don't come in me mimme

"don't come in me—

"unless you want to kill me.

"Recitative:

"My sister bled to death in the back of a taxicab, with a bad curettage. Because she had a baby in her belly. She was a tramp—my father said she was a tramp. That's why she bled to death in the back of that taxicab—cause she couldn't come home with a baby in her belly. A tramp with life in her stomach—so don't come in me, unless you want to kill me.

"I can't come, don't ask me!

"I can't come—

"Cause you don't love me.

"I love you but I just can't come when I'm loaded

"Cause you don't love me—

"That's why you can't come.

"I love you! Will you get off my ass? I'm just loaded.

"I shouldn't juice and ball at the same time.

"Cause you don't love me.

"I love you but I just can't come when I'm loaded!

"Now will you get off it?"

"Cause you don't love me.

"Awright! Awright. You want me to tell you why?"

"I'm gonna tell you the truth: You know why we never had any kids?"

"Cause I can't come, cause it ain't in that Sunday book, because the good people don't come. And I'm gonna rise above the physical, the carnal—don't you think I'm ashamed of coming? It's filthy and rotten. And I'm just sorry they blamed it on you. That's why, we never had any kids; but they blamed it on you and kept you in bed with those dumb temperature charts. So if you want any kids you better get a different old man. But I sure do love you. But

I just can't help it—intellectual awareness does me no good. I know its not dirty but it is dirty. You know what I mean? God damn it! Oh shit! Maybe we oughta adopt some kid from some bum who can come.

“If anyone in this room finds that verb intransitive, to come, obscene vile vulgar—if it's really a hangup to hear it and you think I'm the rankest for saying it—you probably can't come. And then you really are shitty—disposition-wise.

“I bet a lot of censors can't come. They wouldn't be going to the movies so much if they could come. How can you come and go to the movies? Weird.

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“You know, I got to do some reading, and I found out that the Catholic Church had the best, clearest definition for obscenity. It makes the Supreme Court decision vague. Dig:

“For the matter to be obscene the intrinsic bent of the work must be to the prurient interest.’

“Now that's vague. But dig the Catholic Church. It goes further:

“To put it more concretely, the genital apparatus must be in a position to unite sexually.’

“Now you want a clearer definition than that? That's beautiful. How can anyone say that's vague and indefinite? And dig, they really got curte with it:

“And the words “vulgar” and “disgusting” shall not apply, since human liberties are at stake.’

“Alright. Now after that they say, that ‘the test shall not apply if the person is sluggish.’

“I really liked that. Cracked me up.

“If you check the records, there's not one citizen who bought a dirty book. Every case has been initiated by the police department.”

# fifth Estate

anon.

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