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## Columnist Lisa Ferguson: Queen mom Blizzard reigns on comedy stages

*Lisa Ferguson's Laugh Lines column appears Fridays. Her Sun Lite Column appears Mondays. Reach her at [lmsferguson@yahoo.com](mailto:lmsferguson@yahoo.com).*

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Dena Blizzard is the first to concede that most days, she hardly resembles a beauty queen.

Covered in baby drool and chasing after her three young children, the stay-at-home mom says the year she spent reigning as Miss New Jersey 1995 seems as though it happened a lifetime -- not a decade -- ago.

"It's hard for me to remember a lot of it," she sighs. Luckily, she was able to recall enough pageant anecdotes from which to fashion a stand-up comedy act that she began performing two years ago.

Blizzard, whose shtick has evolved to also include the topics of marriage and motherhood, makes her Las Vegas debut Monday through Feb. 5 at The Comedy Stop at The Trop.

A comedy career was not something Blizzard (then Dena Querubin) imagined for herself in the early '90s, when she was a college student earning a biology degree. Then again, neither was becoming a pageant contestant: In need of cash to attend graduate school, however, the trained pianist entered the lucrative circuit.

"My idea, at the time, of getting dressed up was putting my hair in a barrette and (wearing) some lip liner," she says. After competing in six local pageants, she won the Miss New Jersey crown.

"It's like instant celebrity," Blizzard explained recently from her abode in suburban Runnemede, N.J. "I got home and all the little kids in the neighborhood wanted my autograph."

She spent much of '95 making a "few hundred" personal appearances and speaking engagements. "People always used to tell me, 'You just don't seem like a beauty queen; you just seem too normal,' or, 'You're really funny.' "

Then it was off to Atlantic City to represent her state in the Miss America Pageant where, Blizzard jokes, she "finished in the top 50" contestants -- "Some people just don't get it. They're like, 'Oh, wow, that's great.' " (For those keeping score, Miss Oklahoma took the crown that year.)

If nothing else, Blizzard collected plenty of fodder for future use while competing for the Miss America title.

Although the bulk of her fellow contestants were "very driven and very accomplished," she says, "there was that 5 percent that was exactly like you thought it would be, so the rest of us just had a really good time

watching them and kind of making fun of them."

"There was always somebody that was naked a little too much," she recalls. "The dressing room is really small and ... I guess the girls didn't want to mess up their dresses so they would just be naked, and we're like, 'Could you throw on a robe or something? We don't need to see your stuff all the time.' "

Then there was Miss Texas, whose hair was "just perfect all the time" -- that is, until the Lone Star state's rep fell into some water during a photo shoot. When she showed up to a rehearsal with a messy 'do, Blizzard approached her on behalf of the other contestants and joked: " 'Your hair is not curled under and, frankly, we're all really upset about it, so if you could go fix that, everything would be right with the world again.' "

Within five years of ending her reign as Miss New Jersey, Blizzard's personal and professional lives had changed dramatically. "I had gotten married, bought a house, had a kid ... It went from one extreme to the total opposite," she explains.

She remembered how, while making public appearances during her reign, "People would laugh when I was up there talking."

As the years passed, she watched subsequent Miss New Jerseys "go up and try to make jokes, and I was like, 'Man, they suck.' "

Blizzard says she toyed with the idea of performing stand-up, though it took six years before she worked up the courage to give it a go.

"I was always so afraid ... that I would be thoroughly embarrassed." That embarrassment vanished, she says, as she experienced the trials and tribulations that accompany motherhood. "I thought, 'Gosh, this can't be any worse than doing stand-up.' "

As a birthday present two years ago, Blizzard's husband enrolled her in a six-week comedy course taught at a Philadelphia club. After viewing Blizzard's set the club's owner "offered me some guest spots," and the rest is history. These days, she performs most weekends at venues around Philly and New York City.

In the early days, "The only things (other) comics would say to me ... was 'Gosh, you look so comfortable onstage,' " she says. "I realize that all came from the Miss New Jersey stuff -- from constantly talking to people and being onstage."

Coming up with consistently funny material was another matter. Though she started out relying on pageant jokes, Blizzard -- who bestowed upon herself the professional nickname "One Funny Mother" -- soon realized the antics of her husband and kids were a comedy gold mine.

"Every time something difficult would happen, I would so look forward to going out and performing because I'm home all the time; there's nobody else to talk to," she says. "I was just so happy that people were actually paying to listen to me. I was like, 'You're gonna sit there and I don't have to put anybody in time out? That's fabulous.' "

Included in her act are a couple of wacky lullabies she's sung to her daughter ("You're a nutball at 2 in the morning, you'll sing anything"); rants about her Air Force reservist hubby; and her take on yoga poses that are anything but relaxing.

"It's kind of where I am," she explains. "It's marriage and kids and kind of going from being the beauty queen to the stay-at-home mom, which is not pretty."

Last summer Blizzard, who declines to reveal her age, was among the winners of the Ladies of Laughter competition at The Improv in New York. "I've been really lucky that I've been able to get this far so quickly."

For nearly six years Blizzard has worked part time for television-shopping channel QVC (Cox cable channel 11), where she "represents" a line of bath accessories sold under the Solitude brand name. "I know more about towels than anybody on the planet," she jokes.

"The more I see what my past experience has been, I'm becoming more convinced that television, for me, is a really good direction to go into," she says, citing her pageant-queen hook.

"I never thought it was that interesting, but it's amazing to me how many people are interested in that Miss New Jersey aspect," she explains. "People do have certain expectations of what I'll be like, and then they find out that I'm slightly different and that I'm really funny, and it's nice to kind of break those molds."

## **Out for laughs**

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When news of Johnny Carson's death broke this week, Laugh Lines phoned legendary comedian Tom Dreesen (profiled in this column last October). Dreesen, the longtime opening act for Frank Sinatra, has made 61 appearances on "The Tonight Show" -- more than 50 of them under Carson's watch.

Reached on Sunday in Palm Springs, Calif., where he served as master of ceremonies at the Bob Hope Chrysler Classic golf tournament, Dreesen said he was "saddened" by Carson's passing. He credited the king of late night for launching his career, as well as those of countless other stand-up comedians.

When Dreesen started out, "People would say, 'What do you do for a living?' If you said, 'I'm a stand-up comedian,' the next question out of their mouth was, 'Oh, yeah? You ever been on Johnny Carson?' If you hadn't been on Johnny Carson, in the eyes of America you might wanna be a comedian, you might gonna be one, but you're not one now," he recalls.

Dreesen says he was bumped five times prior to making his first "Tonight Show" appearance in December 1976. He remembers how Carson "did something for new stand-up comedians the very first time you appeared on his show." Following a commercial break, "Johnny would say: 'We're back now, and I'm glad you're in such a good mood tonight, because my next guest is making his first appearance on "The Tonight Show" ' ... That was always a very poignant moment."

Also, "When you were out there (onstage) doing your stand-up, if you could hear Johnny laughing behind you, it was like music to your ears," Dreesen says. "Knowing that you made Johnny Carson laugh meant everything to us as stand-up comedians."

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