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## Suffern Life

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# Roast This

Suffern funnyman Phil Selman talks about his road to comedy, the business of corporate roasting and making it big.

by Kevin Haslam

A 9-year-old boy sits in a Broadway performance, captivated by the song, dance and acting of some of the finest entertainers in the business. Gazing upon the stage, he knew he wanted to be up there ... Or at least he thought.

Suffern resident, professional comedian and corporate roaster Phil Selman didn't fall upon comedy in the most conventional of ways. As a matter of fact, there were a number of years where he didn't know what he would end up doing.

His first time doing standup comedy was at age 15. A few years later, he went off to college and took up a theater major; however, it wasn't meant to be for Selman. Once he found out he had to take ballet classes and build scenery, he was out, eventually graduating with a sociology degree.

"[After college] I was working in retail and got mono[nucleosis]," Selman said. "I thought I was going to die. So, I had a conversation with God and realized [comedy] was what I wanted to do."

Selman also noted that being a Scorpio and an only child contributes to his desire to be a comedian.

## The Road to the Microphone

After his revelation, Selman went off to Manhattan to do an open mic night at Dangerfield's. He recalled he got there relatively early and sat there for about four hours before being put up on stage last.

"The guy introduced me with the wrong name," he said. "They turned up the house lights and no one was there, but I still performed."

Selman took comedy classes with Dick Ward, learning the craft of putting an act together.

"I realized if I put shows together by booking them on my own, I would get stage time," he explained. "So, I started booking everything I could at local bars and restaurants. In the mid-80s, it was the boom of comedy. I was the king of the one-nighters."

Selman said he gave some famous comedians their starts, including Adam Sandler, Chris Rock and Ray Romano. Unfortunately, none of them speak to him anymore, he said.

"Adam Sandler actually named a character after me in one



Is it a striking resemblance or all in our heads? Is that David Duchovny? No, but comedian Phil Selman filmed a commercial for the Showtime series *Californication*.

Photo courtesy of Phil Selman



Selman moved to Suffern for its convenience and location. From here, he can do shows in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York and Connecticut.

Photo courtesy of Phil Selman

of his movies: *Eight Crazy Nights*," he said. "I tried to get a hold of him, but he wasn't interested. They don't want to know the people they knew when they weren't successful, you know?"

"Last time he did a show for me was in January 1987. He told the two other guys in the group that this was the last crappy gig he would do. He went on to *Remote Control*, the *Cosby Show* and then *Saturday Night Live*."

Selman didn't let the lost contact get him down. He has been in *Saturday Night Fever* with John Travolta, as well as a horror movie called *Blood Night*. He has also appeared on Comedy





Is your business celebrating a big milestone? Is the boss retiring? Did you just break ground on a new office location? Whatever the occasion, The Corporate Roaster has you covered. Selman's favorite niche is corporate roasting and you can book him easily on the web.

Photo courtesy of Phil Selman

***"[After college] I was working in retail and got mono[nucleosis]. I thought I was going to die. So, I had a conversation with God and realized [comedy] was what I wanted to do."***

– Phil Selman, comedian

Central and MTV, as well as in a promotional commercial for the Showtime series *Californication*.

"They thought I looked like David Duchovny," he said. "They cut me out of it before it ever aired. I guess Duchovny was intimidated by my good looks and charm, or something."

### Finding Suffern

Selman was born in New York City and lived in Queens until he was 9 years old. He and his family moved to Ramsey, N.J., which is essentially two towns over from Suffern.

"If you walk two blocks [from where I live now], you're in New Jersey," he explained. "It's good because I'm close to

*Continued on next page*

## 6 Ways to Find Phil ON THE WEB

- **philselman.com** – See Phil's credentials as a comedian and businessman, learn his history and contact him via email.
- **corporateroaster.com** – A new site. Read more about Phil's story, see customer testimonials and get information on how to book him for your next big event.
- **facebook.com/phil.selman** – Friend Phil and see what he's been up to and what he'll be doing soon.
- **@corporateroast on Twitter** – What's on Phil's mind? Follow him on Twitter to find out.
- **Youtube and Vimeo** – Search for Phil on these popular video sharing sites to see some examples of his work.
- **gigmasters.com/comedian/Phil-Selman** – More details on Phil, including pay range, travel radius and customer reviews.



*Continued from previous page*

all the roads. I'm not far from Manhattan and am close to all the major highways. I've done a show off of every exit to New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Connecticut and New York.

"I just wanted to be conveniently located. I used to go out to California a lot when I was younger. I used to audition for stuff out there. You get over 30 and they don't want to know you out there. Unless I'm rich or famous, I'll never go back there."

## The Corporate Roaster

When asked about his favorite bit to do, Selman did not hesitate. For him, it's got to be the main business he's in: corporate roasting.

"I like to refer to myself as a nice insult comic," he said. "I'm not malicious. I've had instances, but I've become kinder and gentler than I was in my earlier years. A refuted mobster kicked me in the rear end at a show once, because I didn't know who he was. But I've become kinder and gentler over the course of time.

"People have to like you. The audience decides if they like you in the first five minutes you're on stage. The longest I've done is an hour and a half. That can be brutal if they decide they don't like you [in the early going]."

Looking back, Selman remembers what it was like in the 1980s when comedy was a much bigger deal.

"The way comedy has become now is unless you're a name person, people don't go to the comedy clubs to see you," said Selman. "It's really changed. Back in the time of the 80s, when comedy was a big deal, everywhere was doing comedy in every major city. There would be three or four comedy clubs in those places. Now it's the point where it's probably a quarter or fifth of what it was.

"Unless you're a name person putting people in the seats, you're not going to make any real money. Colleges are another mark where you make a lot of money, but you've got to be politically correct and I'm not necessarily politically correct. Once you get to be a certain age, you don't want to see someone that is old enough to be your father telling those types of jokes."

So, corporate roasting is a nice outlet for Selman to exploit his talents and skills. Aside from performing for businesses and corporations, Selman also does weddings, mitzvahs, Sweet Sixteen parties, housewarming parties, bachelor/bachelorette parties, prisons, anniversaries, banquets, birthday parties, christenings, celebrations, Christmas parties, church services, clubs, community events, conventions, dinner dances, festivals, fundraisers, funerals, graduation parties, grand openings, picnics, proms, reunions and many more.

"I found a niche for myself where I can enjoy work and make a good amount of money," he said.

*All over the map*

**40**

*Selman has performed in 40 states across the country. He's also done international gigs.*



Comedian Phil Selman has been in the business for more than 30 years. He's worked with Adam Sandler, Chris Rock, Ray Romano, Dave Chapelle and Jerry Seinfeld.

Photo courtesy of Phil Selman

## Other Bodies of Work

Movies, television, standup, roasting ... is there room for anything else? Selman's biggest audience was about 5,000 people when he opened for Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons.

He's also opened for Metallica, but did not enjoy that experience very much.

"The ideal situation is playing a theater," he said. "I opened for Metallica once and that was a bad situation. There are certain shows where a comedian really isn't suitable. Opening for Metallica is on the top of the list."

The Internet has also been a refreshing outlet for Selman to show his work. Some of his acts are on Vimeo, but he's also hopped on YouTube to speak his mind.

"I'm also known for my ranting," he said. "I had one about taking pain medication because of this foot. I had the bones fused in my foot. Don't ever get that done. I don't recommend that to anyone. I'm in a good deal of pain. That was the rant with the most hits. For some reason it was big in Asia.

Selman said he rants about anything that comes to mind. If he's not roasting someone or insulting anyone, he likes ranting.

"My agent said I'm like a blue collar Louis Black, who went on to big fame and fortune under my agent," Selman said. "He didn't make it until he was relatively old. So there's still hope for me to hit big. Rodney Dangerfield was in his 50s when he made it. He bought some jokes from me. He did one of my





***“People have to like you. The audience decides if they like you in the first five minutes you’re on stage. The longest I’ve done is an hour and a half. That can be brutal if they decide they don’t like you [in the early going].”***

jokes on *The Tonight Show* once.”

And that, Selman said is one of his biggest accomplishments—not selling a joke to Dangerfield, but being in the business for this long.

“I’d say perseverance,” he said. “The fact that I’m still doing it. It’s hard. It’s a very difficult business. Nobody helps anybody. People come up to you and tell you they’re interested in doing comedy or acting, and I tell them ‘You’ve got to love it and really want to do it.’ Nobody’s going to hand you anything in this business.”

Selman has performed in 40 states in America, as well as Canada, Europe, Mexico, the Caribbean and the Middle East. He’s been heard on more than 100 radio shows across the country, as well. For more information on Selman and booking him for your next big event, go to [philselman.com](http://philselman.com) or [corporateroaster.com](http://corporateroaster.com)

# Q&A with Phil Selman

A round robin of questions and answers with comedian and corporate roaster Phil Selman, who lives in Suffern.

## Who are your comedy idols?

Don Rickles, George Carlin, Richard Pryor.

## Where do you see your career in 5-10 years?

I’d like to have my own TV show or would like to be in movies. I’ve been doing it a long time and just want to keep making a living at it. We always aspire to bigger dreams. The older I get, I believe the funnier I become.

## Favorite U.S. city to perform in?

It’s funny. They always ask me that and my answer is the place they like me the best and pay me. Honestly, I like New York and LA. I would say the cities where people are more sophisticated and intelligent. When I get down south, I have to speak slower.

## Favorite place internationally to perform in?

I like Amsterdam and London. The farthest place I’ve got was Kuwait for the military. That was an experience. I did a show for a few thousand people stationed at Camp Doha. I also flew around in a helicopter telling jokes to soldiers. I have medals of honor for going there. I’ve played 40 states, Canada, Europe, Mexico, the Caribbean ... but Kuwait was the farthest.

## Biggest difference performing outside the country?

The culture. I performed in Sweden; people were very respectful, but they didn’t laugh. I basically worked with the Jerry Seinfeld of Sweden out there. I have no idea what he was saying, because I don’t speak Swedish.

They just didn’t like me there. Amsterdam and London and the resort areas, they all speak English. The cultural thing is a big deal, and maybe they just don’t like my sense of humor, or my attitude or style of comedy.

## Favorite comedian to work with?

Somebody I was very close with that died a few years back was Bob Woods. He was very influential in my career. He started with Eddie Murphy in Long Island. He was one of my favorites.

## What’s the most rewarding part about comedy?

The response from the people. People laughing at you and having a good time. The attention.