



**Andy Richter – actor, writer, comedian and sidekick of Conan O’Brien**

Andy Richter is an actor, writer and comedian. He’s best known for working with Conan O’Brien on three different talk shows over the years. He often plays dumb guys on t-v shows, but he’s super smart. He was born in Indiana but grew up mostly in Illinois. His first inkling of depression came at a very young age and it involved a record player.

“My parents divorced when I was four. I remember being a child and listening to Simon and Garfunkel’s *Bridge over Troubled Water*. I didn’t fully understand it, but I would play it over and over. My Dad stayed in Bloomington and my Mom took us to her parents in Illinois. I would play a slide show in my head of Bloomington and of our house and make myself so sad. So I learned this kind of luxuriating in sadness and depression. I must have been deriving some kind of comfort.”

Most kids that age don’t act like that. But Andy had an affinity for depression. Along with finding a connection to misery, he found a connection to comedy. It was the Carol Burnett show.

“Honestly, it was imitating the Carol Burnett show and making my Grandmother and my brother and my family laugh. And also being an incorrigible smart-ass. As my mother said ‘I get paid for doing what I used to get sent out into the hall for in grade school.’”

Andy said as a kid, his depression went from mental state to physical symptom.

“I started to get heartburn and I didn’t know what it was. It was stress. I started to see a family therapist. I started a version of therapy when I was maybe nine or ten years old.”

“One of my basic roots was growing up in an unhappy household with a couple of broken divorces, a lot of depression. I’m in the middle. My Mom’s second marriage fell apart when I was in junior high/high school. So a lot of stuff was laid in my lap. And probably too much.”

Andy kept it together and got elected prom king when he was a senior. But depression doesn’t go away if you just ignore it. It’s like hearing a weird sound coming from your car’s engine. You can turn up the radio, but that doesn’t fix the car. Andy graduated, he left home and the wheels started to fall off.

“I got to college – University of Illinois. I kind of came apart. I started back into counseling. I ended up with a really good therapist who worked with a technique to separate the voices in your head. They said ‘Tell me about that feeling’. It was the beginning of being able to organize

my feelings and my thoughts and getting a handle on them rather than feeling like I was being attacked by a horde.”

You hear about people in show business getting their big break. For Andy, this was getting his big break with mental health.

He started getting in to shows in comedy theater in Chicago. The Chicago comedy scene has provided a lot of top names such as John Belushi, Stephen Colbert, Tina Fey, Steve Carrell, Amy Sedaris, Amy Poehler, Chris Farley, Vince Vaughn and Jane Lynch. It turned Andy Richter into who he was. He was young and talented and collaborating with people. It looked great, but it wasn't great. It makes no difference to depression if you are on top of the world. Andy did the right thing: he sought help.

“Depression was always a constant. It was there in varying degrees. I saw an ad in the paper and got in to a medical study through the University of Illinois –Chicago. They gave you an anxiety drug. They were trying to see how higher doses would affect depression. So it was minimal therapy with this medication that was great. It wasn't a high. It was my first experience with a pharmaceutical relief from this weight that was on me all the time. That ended and I was out of medication. I went to see a doctor with a sliding scale who told ‘It is irresponsible for that medical trial to even accept you. You shouldn't have been on something that *might* work for depression, you should be on something that *works* for depression because you are an obviously depressed person.’”

“It wasn't until I got to the Conan show and got some medical insurance that I started in to real therapy that continues to this day. I still see the same therapist. And I've been on anti-depressants for years and years and years. I do not foresee ever being off of them.”

“It's like a bad a back that I've learned to cope with. Exercises, medication, therapies. I've gotten it to a workable level. It's not to say that it doesn't affect my quality of life, because I think it probably absolutely does. But so does a bad back.”

Andy's advice to himself is: therapist he likes, meds that work, be honest with himself, do something he likes for living. His advice for other people?

“Get to a therapist. If you don't like one, find another. Persistence and know that the talking cure is a real cure. Not a cure in the sense that you will be free. But you will get a relative amount of freedom. Don't think of any form of mental health medical procedure as an admission of weakness. If your leg is broken, you put a splint on it. Denying help is a kind of weakness. When you get yourself to as healthy as you can be, that's when real strength comes in to play.”