

LAST THE STITCH

PLASTIC SURGEON GETS THAT FUNNY FEELING WHEN HE TAKES THE STAGE AS A STAND-UP COMEDIAN

There's an old saying that says, "Dying is easy . . . comedy is hard," but Gustavo Colon, MD, Jefferson, La., might say the opposite is true. The plastic surgeon and part-time stand-up comedian says his outgoing nature and penchant for finding the humor in mundane situations makes comedy relatively easy for him.

But there have been times when he's found himself all too close to comedy gone devastatingly wrong. Dr. Colon, who performed his first stand-up routine "around 15 years ago," once had to follow onstage a nightclub comedian who had dangerously misjudged his audience. "I was doing the House of Blues in New Orleans, and the guy right before me took on a heckler," Dr. Colon recalls. "The heckler actually jumped onstage and they needed security to haul him out. I came on after that and calmed everyone down. I seem to be the guy they throw out there to bring the audience back."

Dr. Colon became involved in stand-up after his late wife gave him a birthday gift certificate for stand-up comedy classes. "It was a lot of fun," he says. "The instructors taught you how to develop stories from your own experiences that are funny – not to tell jokes in the traditional sense. They also taught you how to use a microphone, how to move onstage, how to think on your feet and to always be thinking two steps ahead. I learned that stand-up is scripted from A to Z; you know what you're going to say and how you're going to say it.

"You have seven seconds to get people to pay attention to you," he adds. "You will probably be in a room full of people who've been drinking and there likely will be hecklers. But the good comedians have what I can only describe as a 'sixth sense' about working a room that directs you to where you should take your routine. That's something you can't teach."

Dr. Colon says his best experience as a stand-up comedian came when he won first place in a competition held in New Orleans "without using any foul language. You might get a laugh with it, but it soon becomes nauseating," he says. "His worst experience: 'I signed on to perform at a place that was a biker bar, but I didn't know it,' he says. "It was 11 p.m. when I went in, and all I saw in the audience were big guys with tattoos and beards. I said, 'I'm gonna die,' which I meant figuratively and literally. But they were very receptive. It turned out very well."

Dr. Colon says he's always been confident and oriented toward humor – he uses it regularly to put his plastic surgery patients at ease – but stand-up comedy helped him reach another level. "The ability to make people laugh at things that come solely from your mind and experiences gives you an incredible amount of self-assurance," he says "It's tremendously rewarding." **PSN**



Gustavo Colon, MD, says he always dresses to the nines when he performs his stand-up comedy routines, usually in clubs throughout New Orleans. Unfortunately, Hurricane Katrina damaged many of those clubs, he says.

PSN'S SURGEON SPOTLIGHT

Editor's note: The bulk of PSN's pages are devoted to specific elements of our mission statement – to keep members informed of the social, political and economic trends and educational opportunities that affect the specialty of plastic surgery.

PSN is pleased to take liberties with the "social" aspect of its mission statement by presenting a good-natured look at the lives of notable members who we believe are making significant contributions to the specialty.



Robert Peterson, MD

IN THIS ISSUE, we present to you **Robert Peterson, MD**, Honolulu. After studying astronomy and physics, and earning a master's degree in electrical engineering, Dr. Peterson discovered he was more interested in physiology than physics. Switching career paths, he went on to graduate from Harvard Medical School. He completed his general surgery residency at University of Hawaii in Honolulu and plastic surgery residency at the Baylor College of Medicine in Houston. Following a microsurgical hand fellowship in China and pediatric reconstructive surgery fellowship in Japan, Dr. Peterson returned to the Aloha State to enter private practice in 1991, and he currently serves as president of the Hawaii Plastic Surgery Society. Away from the O.R., Dr. Peterson spends his free time swimming, traveling, tinkering with computer software development – and answering the following questions for *PSN*:

If I had to start my career over again, I would...

Be more appreciative and thankful to my teachers for their time and effort – and listen to them more!

My single biggest contribution to plastic surgery has been...

Acting as program chairman for the 2006 World Congress of Cosmetic Surgery here in Honolulu from Sept. 21-24 (www.wccs2006.com). It will be a great meeting – "West meets East" – giving U.S. surgeons a chance to see what's going on in Asian plastic surgery.

The single biggest influence on my decision to become a plastic surgeon was... My first internship rotation. It was with a wonderful plastic surgeon, Don Parsa, MD, who seemed genuinely delighted with each new case – as if it were a game that he had been asked to join. He's a skilled surgeon and enthusiastic teacher, and he has a genuine rapport with patients. I thought, "I want to be like that." I followed in his footsteps to train with Mel Spira, MD, at Baylor.



Original artwork from a grateful young hand-surgery patient hangs in Dr. Peterson's office.

I couldn't operate without...

Xylocaine with fresh epinephrine and small, blunt infiltration cannulae.

The best part of next weekend will be... The "Space Night" campout at my kids' school.

The best thing I ever purchased for my office was...

Better O.R. lighting. My new O.R. light is ceiling-mounted, which makes it much easier to direct light to the area I'm working on – now that I need reading glasses, every bit of extra light helps!



Dr. Peterson with his wife, Laraine (top). The Peterson family (above, clockwise): Dr. Peterson, Laraine, Kirsten (age 11) and Kimberly (age 9).

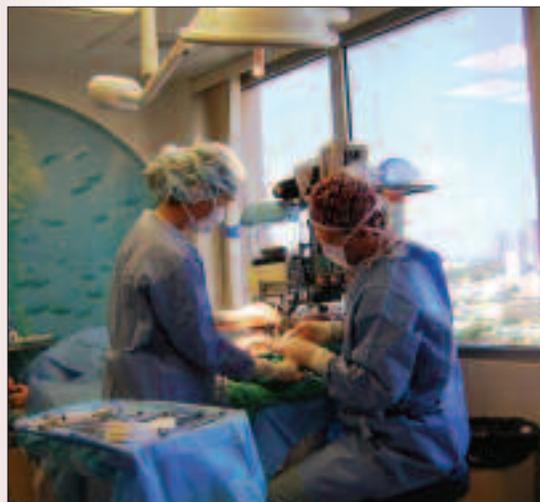


The best thing about being a plastic surgeon is... The artistry, variety and precision of the surgeries that we perform.

My all-time favorite movie is... Woody Allen's *Radio Days*. It really conveys the feeling of a quieter, slower-paced America prior to television, with wonderful period music intertwined in the plot.

The best vacation I ever took was... My honeymoon trip to Singapore, Hong Kong, Thailand and Bali. It was the last trip my wife and I took without the kids!

The best thing a grateful patient ever gave me was... A picture that he drew of his injury (he was 6) that said, "tac you for fexen my fegr." It still hangs on my wall. **PSN**



A Massachusetts native, Dr. Peterson says he fell in love with Hawaii during his general surgery residency and returned to the state permanently in 1991.

10 YEARS AGO IN PSN...

The following excerpt addresses the digital revolution as it relates to the genesis of electronic medical records, then called computer-based patient records (CPRs):

"Physicians are aware that we're dealing with a tremendous information overload. They're very much aware of the shortcomings and pitfalls of the current state of information technology. . .

Information is power. I think many physicians view putting patient information into a computer as giving up information or giving up control. What they don't understand is that it's the doctors who set up the rules. They will maintain control over their own patients' data."



– Margret Amatayakul, MBA,
executive director of the Computer-based Patient Record Institute
April 1996 issue of PSN. **PSN**