



Podcast Episode 234
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“The Wild Story of My Career: Humble Beginnings (Pt. 1 of 3)”

David: Hi and welcome to In The Loop with Andy Andrews. I'm your host, David Loy. Andy, thanks for joining us again this week.

Andy: I am excited to be with you, David.

David: As always. This is an exciting, fun, hopefully funny episode because we got--

Andy: Oh, good, Charlie Cooper will love it. You know who Charlie Cooper is?

David: I think—

Andy: He's a dentist from Atlanta. I hear a lot about In The Loop. People say stuff to me and they say how's David? How's Matt? But Charlie Cooper, I hear from him after every episode. I hope this is going to be good to Charlie.

David: Well Charlie, we're not that good. I hate to tell you. Well maybe we are. I don't know. To him, we might be good.

Andy: Yeah, we are to Charlie.

David: There you go. Well Charlie, this one hopefully you will enjoy. But Andy, the question that we received is actually really funny and I'm excited to hear your answer.

Andy: I am too.

David: And I have a couple of follow up questions that I'm going to take some liberty with. But Paul from Alabama writes in and he says Andy, I saw you as a comedian 30 years ago. I recently was given one of your books and apparently you are also speaking in addition to being an author.

Andy: He has no clue. He's like oh, you're doing what now?

David: So he asked what else have you done in the past 30 years? So this is interesting. Somebody who sees you on stage a long time ago and then now recently gets handed a book randomly and is trying to connect the dots between the person that he saw 30 years ago.

Andy: It happens. It happens. Occasionally, People say I saw you 30 years ago so what are you doing now? I want to say oh nothing.

David: Not much. Not much is going on but I thought it'd be funny to break down maybe just briefly kind of what you have done in the last 30 years.

Andy: Oh different things.

David: A lot of people might not know all the different paths that you've taken along the way.

Andy: And my answer again I mentioned Charlie Cooper. My answer will not be as interesting as one you would've gotten from a friend of mine that lives down there. He's name is Max Reed and Max is a brilliant ad guy, just a brilliant person and does advertising and marketing for people and he is brilliant. But if you ask him, Max what have you done for a living? He will list you very quickly like 20 or 30 things and that is the most bizarre list you've ever and it includes dressing up and walking through a mall as Mr. Peanut. I mean he has this just great list.

David: That's fantastic. I think yours might be interesting maybe not as eclectic as Max's but yours will be good. Well first of all let me back up. Paul said he saw you as a comedian. What was your first show? What was your first ever attempt at comedy?

Andy: My first ever attempt was my parents. I would be like 5 or 6 years old. My parents I guess were so exasperated. Friends would come over. Their friends would come over and my parent would go okay if you would just sit on the couch. We've agreed to give Andy 5 minutes and if you'll just watch him for 5 minutes and he'll go away. And I would come in. Hello, ladies and gentleman or whatever was I did. I didn't know what I did. But are you saying my first paid thing?

David: You're first paid thing and now you got me wondering what was your first public performance of comedy?

Andy: My first public performance and kind of paid is really the same thing. Because when I was a senior in high school, one night, one Sunday night after church in the Pizza Hut in Columbus, Mississippi my friends dared me to stand up on a chair next to the salad bar. The place was full and they dared me to stand up on a chair next to the salad bar and talk. And so I did about 10 minutes.

David: I've never wanted to turn down a dare.

Andy: Right. Never wanted to turn down a dare. I'm just glad they allowed me to do it with clothes. But I remember when I stood up there and started talking and the restaurant kind of quickly quieted down like what's going on? Well the manager, I saw the manager headed for me. But I managed to get a laugh before he got all the way to me and so when

the restaurant laughed, the guy kind of stopped and then he-- They laughed again at something else I said and he kind of backed out slowly and so I did about 10 minutes and when I got through, he came to our table and said I didn't know what was going on there he said but you earned your meal tonight so he gave us our pizza's for free.

David: Fantastic.

Andy: So I say that was my first paid.

David: You got paid in food.

Andy: Yeah.

David: That's terrific. So what's the actual-- What about your real first paid gig?

Andy: That's a little sadder story.

David: Uh-oh.

Andy: I was actually in college not really study or anything.

David: Just showed up every now and then.

Andy: Yeah. I was there to-- I was just consumed with the thoughts of saying something and being on stage and maybe being a comedian. I really wanted to be a speaker, I just didn't have anything to say. Of course, nobody would

listen to what I had to say. The way that I figured out to be on stage was to be a comedian. I love comedians and so I was going to be a comedian and I had done some stuff you know with Pizza Hut and I had done some other stuff here and there.

David: You played Pizza Hut.

Andy: Yeah, I played the Pizza Hut tour and so in any case, I was actually hired by this manager. It was in Auburn, Alabama and I was hired by the manager of this hotel who in their night club they had the hottest band in the area. It was this group called Muse, M-U-S-E, and it was three guys and they really were great. They were great. They really drew a lot of people and all this. So he hired me, the manager hired me to go between their sets. When they would take a break, I would get up and do my deal. And he said I won't be here this weekend. You're Friday and Saturday night he said and so your next night or he said I won't be here Friday night. He said but come in Saturday and we'll see how it went and decide to go on from there I was getting like \$25 which was a big deal. And so he said but come in Saturday and the band will tell me how you did and only then so then we'll go from there. I said great. So I show up that Friday night and when I show up and I tell the band who I am, they're like what? You're doing what?

And I never will forget. I was out the parking lot and watching those guys. Some other guy showed up and he is pulling his guitar out of the trunk of his car and the band they'd go over to him and they talked to me for a minute and they point to me. I realized this is their friend who would normally play during the breaks so nobody told him. And so I'm like now I'm getting his \$25 evidently. I did my thing. I'm not going to sit here and tell you. I was incredible. I was the second coming of Johnny Carson. It was okay. I didn't bum and it was okay and honestly it would have warranted a second night. But I show up the next day and the manager says I'm so sorry. And I'm like sorry about what? He said I understand it didn't go very well last night. I was like I thought it went pretty well. He said well it probably did he said but the band, their friend is the guy who usually does that. So I would imagine they kind of want him back and they're really popular group and I really need to keep them so I'm so sorry and so here's your 25 bucks and basically get lost.

Now I was working and I was like I have been fired from my very first gig. It was the first thing I've ever done and I'm fired. And I was also I was working at the Zippy Mart at that time. I was the night manager. I never knew. I would say who am I managing? I'm the only one here. But that's what they call me. Alright you, Corn Flakes, back on that shelf. I was the only one there. But I remember like a couple of weeks later, I remember seeing news pull up outside.

Their car, they pull up in the car and all three of them get out of the car and they're starting to come in and they look up before they ever get in to the place, they look up and they see me in there.

They have a brief conversation. They're at the door. Two of them, I don't remember those two guys' names and one of them was the real pretty curly headed guy but the other one his name was Jim. Well evidently Jim drew the short straw and he was the one elected to have to come on in and get whatever it was they needed and the other two guys went back to the car. And so Jim comes on in and he gets whatever it is that he needs and he comes to the thing and I said hey how are you doing? He said good and he said sorry about the thing. Don't worry about it. He said we have a friend and here I am I'm kind of pushing it. I said why the other guys go back to the car? I can't believe I said. But he said they're just kind of embarrassed or whatever and so at that point I immediately felt bad for even asking because I knew why they went back in the car.

David: Of course.

Andy: I'm just being a butt. And he said they're kind of embarrassed. I said man, don't worry about that. That's no big deal. But I still for a long time I carried with me. I wasn't horrified or anything I guess but I carried with me, I got fired from my first job. Now there is a post scrip to this. Years later, I was doing colleges and I had had a fair

amount of success. All the colleges in the nation 2 years in a row voted me comedian on the year and one of those years I was entertainer of the year. You look at that, trophy and everything. It was one year the police if you remember them and next year and next year Andy Andrews. I was like kind of a deal on college campuses.

I was at Georgia Tech and sitting in the programming office with the head of the who brought in the concerts and all like that and I'm just-- Everybody is trying to get booked on college campuses at the time and so I'm looking at all the brochures people send in and all the fliers for the bands and the comedians and the jugglers and the hypnotist and the lecturers all this kind of stuff and I was just kind of flipping through it and it see this flyer and it's Muse. It's like 10 years later. It says Muse. I'm like Muse? I grab it and I look and I said to the programmer I said have you had them? He said, no, I'm not sure who they are but we get a lot of this stuff. I was like wow. So I look at this a nice brochure and there's one part of it where you lose your credit and everything. It says has performed with and it lists or has performed with Andy Andrews.

David: No way.

Andy: I was like really? I said to that lady the programmer. I said you see this? These guys got me fired. Yeah, they performed with me one night instead of two because they got me fired. Now they're using me for credit. Isn't that amazing?

David: That is fantastic.

Andy: That's a cool story, isn't it?

David: That is a cool story. I've never heard that.

Andy: I guess that's a cool story in retrospect. I didn't really enjoy going through it.

David: But you started to mention a couple of other things that I was going to ask you about. So you started off in your living room.

Andy: We're already out of time. Anyway go ahead.

David: Started off in your living room, moved to the Pizza Hut and on and on and on. What were the other stops in your career in terms of comedy? You said colleges, was there anything before that?

Andy: Before that really the first major thing and I did some stuff here and you got to understand David I started doing that before all these comedy clubs existed. There weren't any comedy clubs outside of New York and LA. In New York there was Catch a Rising Star and Caroline's. In LA, there was a The Comedy Store and Improv and that was it. There wasn't any comedy places anywhere else and so I was literally-- It turned out in my favor. It was much harder. I was going and begging places to-- Can I go between the sets

of your band or between the sets of your singer or can I talk to your whatever, rotatory club.

David: Anything.

Andy: And the reason I say it turned out better is because there is something comedians today which are speakers I suppose. If you grow up in a comedy club if you start your career in a comedy club and then you get thrown into the real world and the real world would be like a convention. You get thrown into the real world. Well in the comedy club, they made those people sit in certain places and it was set up for you and it was set and they were told that no talking. If anybody got out of hand, they got them out of there so this was set up for you and these people came to the comedy club to laugh. Because well you grow up in that, it's an artificial atmosphere. Now you get thrown into a convention and a lot people in a convention number 1 not only didn't they come to see you, they didn't know you're even there and a lot of them don't like comedians.

David: They don't want to be there in the first place.

Andy: Right. I saw a lot of comedians just absolutely croak in those situations. But see I-- Obviously I'm from the south and so most of what I did at the first during that time was in the south and so I was literally performing for people who had never seen a comedian live in their entire life. The only comedians they had seen where on The Tonight Show.

And so now look at the comparison. You got this bozo kid who thinks he's funny because he's seen other comedians on TV. They've seen the best in the world and now they're watching me. But you talk about forged by fire and so then later as I worked my way to the point where I got to go do a convention, that was nothing. I already--

David: You've done the worst possible thing.

Andy: I've done the worst thing you could ever do and now at least these people cannot count on vacation. And so I did that. But then the really first big, huge thing that I got was started working cruise ships. I started working cruise ships really it happen when I was not too long out from under the pier. I didn't know anything. I didn't even have anything rented the first time I ever went on a cruise ship and so I'm thinking wow. This is great. I'm getting fed. I'm getting a place to stay. In fact, David, I think my first...I think, I think this right, you have to ask Robert but the first booking I ever got on the cruise ship, Robert was probably still living in a garage in Birmingham that older lady's garage that he was like trading yard work to stay in this garage that had a bathroom and we put a a phone line in it. But I did those cruise ships for a long, long time and I learned, I learned how to make that work because when I got on this cruise ship you want to do a five episode art of In The Loop that has some crazy stories. Sometimes we ought to do it about cruise ship.

David: The crazy cruise ship. We should do that in the future.

Andy: Yeah. But man, obviously you're getting hired into a thing and you think you're going in for one thing. Well you know none of these ships are registered in America and certainly at the time there was no internet. There was no oversight over anything.

David: Of what was actually taking place.

Andy: Of what was actually taking place and so I get there and you think oh yeah you're hired to go be a comedian. I get there and I was getting \$300 a week. That was I was going to get. I get there and not only are you going to do a show here and here and here and here, you're going to emcee this show and that show and that show and that show and at 8 o'clock in the morning, you're going to pass out games to kids and then at 10 o'clock you're going to go and be at the library and check out library books for everybody and then at noon you get to go host the luncheon on the back deck and then at 2 clock you get to get on a microphone and emcee the pillow fight over the back pool deck and at 3 o'clock you get to call Bingo and that's just the first day. And so it was--

David: I hear you saying you get to do all of these things.

Andy: That's right.

David: I don't see you being too excited about it all.

Andy: It was crazy but I also knew and some of the other people - I realized that most of the people that were on the ship at that time they were either brand new starting in careers like me or they were burned out and had been around for years and years and years. So people get kind of trapped in any job, in any profession and so people were certainly trapped there. But most of them, most of the younger ones like me, most of them felt like they had other options. I don't have to do this. I don't have to do that. I'm a singer. I'm above calling Bingo or I'm a real comic and I da da da da da.

Nobody knew it but I'm like man, if I don't make it here I'm going to sleeping under the pier again. Because I would keep \$30 and I would send the rest of the 300 back to Robert so that he could pay a phone bill and try to get something else going. We had our eye, we're thinking maybe we could do colleges because I knew I couldn't stay on the ships for the rest of my life. I had already seen some of these old entertainers.

David: And you knew you did not want to become that.

Andy: I knew I did not want to do that.

David: Right.

Andy: And so everything, at every point even at the beginning and I'll tell you that in a minute but at every point, it was a constant attention to the changing world or a constant attention to pivot. You may not have to reverse course, you may not have to go take a right turn or left turn but I don't care what you're doing for a living if you don't get ready to pivot and moving a little bit different direction or learn something or be prepared for then you are in danger financially in every other way. They didn't know that at that time but at that time I thought if I don't make it here man. And so I had to figure out how to make it.

I'll tell you this I don't know that I've ever told anybody this, what I'm about to say. But you and I have talked through the years about how in sales or in entrepreneurial effort, people compete in the same way. They compete with price and with product. They pay a little attention to customer service but you are really the secret weapon. What you become, who you are, the value you have for other people is your secret weapon and who you are--

I've told you in the past, I've never been-- I was not even under any illusion when I was winning the awards or touring with stars. I was not under any illusion that my material was the best and the funniest. I just knew that I had paid attention to becoming a person that people liked to be around. I wanted to be a friend. I wanted to be-- You

know what I'm saying? And so it really had its basis there on that cruise ship that very first time because these entertainers, these young and old entertainers basically we were worth nothing in the entertainment market. And yet we were something to the cruise line because we could kind of sing and we could kind of make people laugh. We could call Bingo with the best of them.

David: You're a utility player.

Andy: Yeah. And so we had a value there. But I found out very quickly that the cruise ships lived and died on comment cards. Lived and died. I saw people very quickly. I saw entertainers that on Wednesday in St. Thomas knock on the cabin door, you're out. They lay off the ship.

David: Midweek.

Andy: Yeah, midweek. You ain't got anything planned, you ain't got an airline ticket home but you're off. They don't need you anymore. And no American laws or registration to protect you or whatever. But a lot of times people got knocks on the door on Sunday morning when were in port we'd go into Miami Sunday morning, out of Miami on Sunday afternoon and get that knock on the door and you're out and bring somebody else on. On those weekends, it was generally because some passengers said something. We didn't like him or we didn't think was good and stuff.

Listen, the Love Boat was playing then. People were coming out of the woodwork trying to be entertainers on cruise ships and so they had no shortage of anybody who would come and work for \$300 especially when they didn't tell them until you got there that you're also calling Bingo and doing the beer drinking contest on the back deck. So I quickly found out that being liked by the passengers had a lot more to do with you getting to stay than being funny or singing good. And so while I started to do—Obviously, I'm working on what I do in my act but I would see other people they're calling Bingo-- they're mad about it. It was like I'm above this. They're doing the captain's party and they're standing there like a gnat on a log because they don't want to be there and they can't believe they have to be there and they can't believe that an entertainer of my caliber would have to hand out games to little kids.

David: An artist to kids.

Andy: Yeah. I said my number 1 thing just by myself I was reading Og Mandino *The Greatest Secret in the World*. I was reading it three times a day every single day and going through the whole book in 10 months or whatever it is and I'm reading that every single day and I decided my job here it may appear to my friends back home that I'm living in luxury. I'm on the Love Boat. I'm an entertainer on the Love Boat and I'm hanging out with Julien Isaac and Gopher and Captain Stewving and that's what they think. And the people that are paying my check they think that

I'm a body who can ably fill the stage and also called Bingo and do horse racing and all like that. but between me and god I figured out my real position here is to serve these people and make these people feel good and make sure they have most of the people have saved their entire lives to get a week on this ship.

David: Only for that 1 week.

Andy: And I'm going to make sure they have a greatest time. I'm going to be silly with them. I'm going to have fun. By midweek, they all knew who I was because I would play with them. I'd come out of the room even if wasn't supposed to be doing anything. I would call Bingo and I would be silly with it. So by midweek, they knew who I was. I would walk into the dining room with 7 or 800 people in the dining room and I would look over to the side where the water at the side and I'd say very loud I say ladies and gentleman and I'm looking over. If you've never seen a school of killer whales if you'll look-- And man, people were getting up they're grabbing, they're running toward where I'm looking. If you've never seen a school of killer whales if you'll look right over here this is where they usually are. There don't seem to be any there this week but that's where they usually are. And of course these people are stuck halfway across the dining room with their cameras, their napkins in their shirts and they just stop but then they start laughing and they just loved it. They just loved it.

David: So from an early stage you realize the importance of perspective. You were choosing to be happy. I'm just speaking out so many of the things that would come out later in your life. We might have to turn this into a couple of episodes because there's so much more to your story, the different steps that you took in your career

Andy: We can stop right here and say next week ladies and gentleman on In The Loop. Find out what really happened.

David: We might have to. I think we are just about out of time. It's 30 minutes already.

Andy: Let's do. I mean Charlie Cooper would be calling me and saying I can't believe that one was so long.

David: There you go. And this is what do they call it? A cliffhanger or a teaser.

Andy: It's a cliffhanger.

David: So we'll be back next week to recap what we talked about today, the Pizza Hut, the cruise ships, the colleges.

Andy: And wait until you hear the stories of touring with the stars because we still got until how the college thing happen. Touring with the starts, this might be a three-part episode. It's a three-part episode. It's a trilogy. We'll have our first trilogy, David.

David: Andy Andrews, this is your life.

Andy: This is your life and we still got to talk about how the college thing happened, the touring with the stars. I want to tell you a story about Joan Rivers that will blow your mind and about Cher. I'll tell you one about Cher that will blow your mind. Then we've got to talk about-- We haven't even got into where the writing the books came from.

David: Right.

Andy: And then the speaking.

David: Or the speaking. We haven't touched on any of that. Alright we will be back next week to pick up where we left off to learn more about what Andy's been doing for the past-- What did Paul say? For the past 30 years. So we'll be picking that up next week.

Andy, thanks for your time. Join us again next week. Share In The Loop with your friends. Obviously, this is a free resource that Andy loves to provide for everybody. So make sure that you are passing this along to those in your life that might find it fun, entertaining and hopefully valuable as well.

Alright, Andy, we'll talk to you next week.

Andy: Thank you, buddy.

Announcer: Join in the conversation with Andy on Facebook and Twitter. Also be sure to check out AndyAndrews.com for more information.

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Would you like to run something by Andy? Contact us and your question might be featured on the show!

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