

**The 10 Best Posts of 2011**

# The Urban Erma

A Weekly Humor Blog

by

Stand-Up Comedian

Leighann Lord

A workaholic, control freak, perfectionist  
who sweats the small stuff.

Thank you for reading *The Urban Erma*.  
The blog is my passion.  
This E-Book is a shameless ploy for money.

- Leighann Lord

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Leighann Lord is a professional stand-up comedian who wrote for the pilot of *The Chris Rock Show*. She wrote and produced her one-woman show, *The Full Swanky* which was nominated for Best Play and earned her a Best Actress Award in the Riant Theater Women's Play Festival.

Leighann has appeared on numerous television shows including VH1's "40 Most Shocking Celebrity Hair Moments," Comedy Central's "Premium Blend," "Tough Crowd with Colin Quinn," "The World Stands Up," and "Comics Unleashed with Byron Allen," and she was the winner of The Hilarious Housewives Contest on "The View." She's performed at colleges and clubs around the country as well as for U.S. troops stationed in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Europe.

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## ABOUT THE URBAN ERMA

The Urban Erma is a long-running weekly humor blog created by stand-up comedian Leighann Lord. A self-appointed, culture commentator Leighann casts her comedic eye on topics both major (politics) and mundane (the trauma of getting her eye brows waxed). Her blog is the repository of everyday experiences that demand a life outside of the stand-up comedy stage.

The name of her blog is a nod to the nationally syndicated humor columnist Erma Bombeck (d. 1996). Her stories about motherhood and domestic life in the suburbs kept Leighann laughing all through her childhood. A native New Yorker, Leighann has grown up to be an urban version of Ms. Bombeck, ergo: *The Urban Erma*.

Since 2007 *The Urban Erma* has gained a dedicated international readership. In 2011, Leighann added her signature blogcast available free on iTunes transforming it from writing to storytelling. What is a blogcast? Think of it as story time for grownups. Leighann reads each week's blog and listeners get to experience the story the way she meant it to be heard in all its funny, sweet, sarcastic glory!

[www.TheUrbanErma.com](http://www.TheUrbanErma.com)

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## BEYOND SCARED STRAIGHT

Before I was married, I used to love falling asleep with the TV on. Just set the timer for 30 minutes and drift off. However, when my husband goes to bed he needs complete silence and utter darkness. He is not remotely comforted by the glow of the flat screen or the lilt of late night commercials. He can't even drift off to TV shows he likes. That actually makes it worse. If he likes the show he gets caught up and then has to see it through to the end. So when I travel it's a treat for me to turn on the TV and wait for Morpheus. That's how I happened upon A&E's *"Beyond Scared Straight."* It's the 2.0 version for a new generation of wayward teenagers brought to a prison to see their future if they don't get it together in the present. Not exactly a new concept but this particular episode featuring teenage girls had me riveted.

They looked like ordinary girls. They could have been anybody's daughter, niece, sister, cousin. But these young ladies were stealing, fighting, drinking, doing drugs or as they put it: *"Just smoking a little weed. What's wrong with that?"* Apparently nowadays, girls will be girls.

Well, these Young Ladies had run afoul of the law so many times they'd earned themselves invitations to "Beyond Scared Straight" and an opportunity to parade their pain in prime time. It could be worse. They could be hoarders, ice truckers, 16 and pregnant, or little people in a big world. But these were street smart chics. A trip to the local penitentiary would be like a day at the mall, right?

When the Young Ladies arrived on site, I was confused. "Wait a minute," I thought, *"Why are they taking them to a men's prison? Oh, wait. Those aren't men."* Severe fades and tattoos aside, these were the hardest women I've ever seen. They may have played it up a bit for the camera, but it wasn't that much of a stretch.

At this point, if it had been me, it would have been a very short show. I'd of stayed in the car, seat belt securely fastened. *"No, thanks, I'm good, deeply sorry for any trouble I've caused. I'd like to go home now, read a book, get a job and pretend this never happened. You had me at 'Beyond.'"*

But the Young Ladies, full of bravado, still thought they could tough it out. I guess they had to. Signed releases notwithstanding, just because your mouth writes a check that your ass can't cash doesn't stop people from trying to collect on it. As someone said on the show, *"It's one thing to act like a stone cold killer. It's another to meet one."*

I felt bad for one Young Lady whose face seemed plagued by a perpetual faint smile. Clearly an involuntary nervous reaction, the Inmates thought she wasn't taking the program seriously. *"Oh you think this is funny?"* said a woman pulling an 18-to-life stretch for first degree murder. *"I will fold you like a piece of paper."* I get

chills just typing the words. See, this wouldn't have happened if Smiley had stayed with me in the car.

Another Little Toughie who was giving her father and step mother a hard time thought life would be so much better if she could go live with her mother. Turns out, her Mom was back in prison and just in time for her daughter's "*Scared Straight*" visit. This is TV gold. I bet the producers of the show practically peed themselves silly when they learned their luck. Emmys all around.

As the Young Ladies stood silently on the yard — at a distance not nearly big enough for my liking — The Inmates mercilessly teased and taunted them. In the cacophony, Little Toughie's Mom cried out to her daughter: "*This is not what I wanted for you! This place is hell! You don't know what goes on in here! Don't be like me.*"

Seriously, can we just get back in the car? At this point I dropped all pretence and turned off the TV timer. I was officially caught up.

Part of the process was determining whether or not The Young Ladies had learned anything from their visit. If they could demonstrate they had, they'd get to go home at the end of the day. If not they'd get an orange jump suit of their very own and stay at the prison for another 72 hours. One by one, they each appeared before an American Idol-style prison panel of judges.

The oldest of the visiting group, Miss Mouth, was a 17-year wilful wild child with an alcohol problem who'd been verbally and physically abusive to her mother. The Inmates questioned her about this. Not surprisingly, she didn't have a lot to say by way of a credible defence, which earned her an orange jumpsuit. Her new cell mate promised to "be both Mother and Father," and to deliver the ass whupping her parents had clearly neglected to give her. When brought back before The Panel, a shaken and teary eyed Miss Mouth mumbled, "*I want my Mom.*" So did I.

As with all TV shows like this you wonder if the right people are really watching. After all, this show wasn't for me. Or was it? Sometimes I wonder how much I've missed out on by being Ms. Goody Two Shoes. Not all roads lead to the orange jumpsuit. But if it's possible, I was scared even straighter. With such an effective format, they should consider developing a version for potential white collar criminals.

The Inmates participating in "*Beyond Scared Straight*" weren't all rough neck lesbians, most looked like ordinary women. They could have been anybody's mother, aunt, sister, daughter. I don't know what they received by way of compensation for being part of the program, but it wasn't freedom. Their message was loud and clear: Learn from my mistakes or be prepared to put on the orange jumpsuit.

I didn't fall asleep until long after this show was over. I was wide awake thinking of all the people who had been a positive influence in my life. They took the time to put me on the right path, and hoped I had the good sense to follow it. But there are no guarantees. We each make our own choices. Next time, I might choose to read before I go to bed.

## CHILDHOOD IN A BAG

A close friend recently hosted a Game Night and all of us who attended were charged with bringing our favorites. Rising to the challenge, I brought a goodie bag full of old school: dominoes, cloth and wire jump ropes for Double Dutch, and a sack full of classic metal jacks. You heard me. Jacks! Yeah, I took it there. You can't get metal jacks anymore. You see, now we care about children choking on small metal objects, in my generation not so much. I'm not saying parents ate their young back then, but they didn't see the need to over protect us from toys made with lead, asbestos, mercury or depleted uranium.

When I sprinkled my bio-hazard jacks out of my black suede pouch my comrades *"Oooed"* and *"Ahhhed"* like I had just whipped out a handful of non-conflict diamonds. When the original hard, high bounce balls tumbled out too, the consensus was I could probably get a bundle for them from the guys on "Pawn Stars." (We later checked and learned that except for the memories, my jacks are worthless.)

One day when I was about 11 years old my Mom's friends saw me playing jacks and asked to join in. I said, "Yes," because I was happy adults wanted to play with me, but I was also thinking, "What do these 'old' ladies know about playing jacks?" Well, these superannuated sistahs got down on their haunches and with breathtaking hand-eye coordination proceeded to wipe the floor with me. It was like the familiar scene in a pool hustler movie where The Mark let's The Ringer shoot first and then spends the rest of the game watching them literally call every shot. If we had been playing for money, I'd still be paying them off.

The Ladies – who were ancient only in the eyes of an adolescent – had to change positions more frequently than I did to accommodate older hips and knee joints, but any aches and pains they might have felt were eclipsed by the fun they were having. They laughed and trash talked like the girls, rumor had it, they used to be:

*"C'mon! You know you touched that jack!"*

*"No, I didn't!"*

There were no husbands, kids, or jobs. They were all skill and concentration handily making it up to their tensies and back.

When I was a kid, I spent hours on my Parent's kitchen floor playing jacks. But now that me and my friends are grown with homes of our own, I knew we were not hardly thinking about putting scratches on our freshly laid linoleum floors. So, in my bag of old school I also had a deck of Uno cards, Dominoes, Monopoly, and

Trivial Pursuit. That's right, son. I'm an OG Gamer. In addition to my original, friends had brought the 80s and pop culture versions of Trivial Pursuit as well.

The night was young, the wine was good, and we were feeling fine. *"Trivial Pursuit it is!"* we agreed. But we soon realized why this game has declined in popularity. It tells you things about yourself that you may not want to know. Since graduation, I've been laboring under the delusion that I am a smart woman. No. Apparently, I'm a dumb ass.

After playing Trivial Pursuit for 45 minutes I wanted to remove my college degree from the wall, return it to the Bursar's office and get my money back. After playing for two hours, I was afraid my alma mater was gonna come and take it back. As the evening progressed I became convinced that I'd go home and find an empty spot on the wall where my degree used to be, a sticky note in its place saying:

*"And you call yourself a college graduate. You disgust us."*

I don't know how we got here. The game had started out with such promise:

*"In which war did the most Americans die?"*

*"The Civil War."*

Yeah, baby! I knew the answer to that. You know why, because that wasn't my question. One of my questions was:

*"Who was the first African American to coach a major league sports team?"*

I'll give you a hint. It's not Ernie Hudson. No, I didn't really think the Black guy from *"Ghost Busters"* was also a major league coach, but I was grasping at straws since the answer also wasn't Denzel Washington in *"Remember the Titans."* For the record the answer is Bill Russell. (Mr. Russell, if you're reading this, I'm very sorry. I should have known that.)

*"What two numbers are evenly divisible into 17?"*

*"Ernie Hudson?"*

*"No? Oh my god, who's writing these questions? Stephen Hawking?"*

But in Trivial Pursuit you're not allowed to answer a question with a question. You're also not allowed to use a life line, phone a friend or surreptitiously use your BlackBerry to lookup the answers on Wikipedia. Ridiculous, right? Your

resident former English major was regretting not taking her math classes more seriously.

I'm a very infrequent drinker so I'd like to say that my intellectual faculties were impaired by the wine. But it was probably the lead from my vintage metal jacks still lingering in my system. Apparently, my childhood had a half life. I bet if I ever get cocky enough to play Trivial Pursuit again, my question will be: "*Who's the Black guy from Ghost Busters?*" And I'll say, "*Bill Russell?*"

Next game night, floor damage be damned, I'm playing jacks.

## CARAMEL MACCHIATO, NOW WITH EXTRA TMI

I walked into my local Starbucks and there was a man who had transformed an entire section into his own personal corner office. He had several tables and chairs arrayed around him topped with books and papers. Every available outlet in his vicinity had been commandeered to power a seemingly endless number of gadgets: laptop, cell phone, iPod, portable printer. I'm not sure, but I think I saw a humidifier. If there was an electrical fire, he would have been the first to go.

Corner Office Guy looked so relaxed and comfortable I felt as though I was invading "his" space. I was reluctant to sit down but then I remember I had overpaid to be there too. I don't complain about the price of coffee at Starbucks because that's not all I'm there for. When I just want coffee, I go to Dunkin Donuts. When I want ambiance, I go to Starbucks. It has comfy chairs, good service, nice music, and an air of safety and serenity. It's not just a coffee shop. It's a cool meeting place, and apparently, an impromptu office space.

With his face illuminated by the glow of his super-sized laptop, and a blue tooth ear piece plugged into the side of his head, Corner Office Guy looked like he was all about taking care of business, but looks can be deceiving. I soon realized why the seat closest to him was open and available. He was talking on his cell phone using his outdoor voice. Cell phones have obliterated the line between convenience and courtesy. We should seriously consider bringing phone booths back. Just because you can have a conversation anywhere, doesn't mean you should.

I don't think I would have minded if he were on the phone wheeling and dealing. If he had been negotiating a low interest rate on a business loan or tracking down a missed delivery from Fed Ex, I would have respected that. But the intimate details he revealed in what should have been a private conversation transformed him from Corner Office Guy to Too Much Information (TMI) Guy.

He regaled us all in Starbucks with a story about a recent sexual affair he'd had with a married woman in the Hamptons. They "saw" each other no less than four times a week. Things were fine until her husband got suspicious and decided to test her fidelity by insisting that she – his wife - sleep with him. She did. And this was too much for TMI Guy. As he explained to his friend on the phone (and to all of us in Starbucks) he had to break up with her. He simply couldn't stand the idea of his girlfriend, sleeping with her husband. Classy.

Why do I know this? I shouldn't know this. Don't Ask, Don't Tell has its place. I think it's Starbucks. If we bring back phone booths we should also seriously

consider bringing with it other things so severely lacking in our culture like boundaries, discretion, shame.

I expect this kind of shenanigans at Dunkin Donuts. But Starbucks has standards, an unspoken code of conduct. I don't expect us all to sip our latte's in silence. But if we're going to spend a few hours together we should at least agree to use our indoor voices, share the electrical outlets and not inflict ourselves on each other. Starbucks might start charging for coffee and the show.

Oddly enough I went to Starbucks to write this week's blog. I don't remember what it going to be about, because TMI Guy's story took its place.

## **“IS THAT YOUR REAL HAIR?” “ARE THOSE YOUR REAL MANNERS?”**

*“Is that your real hair?”*

*“Are those your real manners?”*

This is one of my favorite jokes in my act because in real life people ask very rude questions, and we all wish we had a snappy retort ready to go. The joke gets two reactions:

1. Knowing head nods and murmurs of approval from people who’ve been asked this crass question.
2. Dead silence from the people who are guilty of doing the asking. They feel called out and judged, and I’m glad. Sometimes comedy has the power to entertain and teach.

I’ve had dreadlocks - Sisterlocks to be specific - for almost 10 years. Even with a little trim here and there, my locks have grown quite long. At least once a year some troglodyte asks, “Is that your real hair?” And it never fails to irritate me. This question speaks volumes. If an African American woman has long hair it must be fake? Go fornicate yourself.

[Deep breath.] Okay. I’m back now.

I know this should be a teachable moment. But I don’t know which lesson to start with first: culture literacy, common sense, or courtesy.

Believe it or not I love talking about natural hair, the locking process, the different types of locks, and can do so ad nauseam. In fact I used to do an entire blog about my locks. Because Sisterlocks are much smaller than traditional locks, I sometimes get quizzical looks from interested observers. Total strangers ask me what kind of locks I have and I’m more than happy to tell them. This most recent encounter, however, did not make me happy at all.

I had actually taken the time to curl my hair. I don’t do it that often anymore because I hate rollers, but having Sisterlocks gives me a great deal of styling flexibility. If I say so myself I was looking cute.

A gentleman, who I know but hadn’t seen in a while said, “*Wow, nice!*” Then he proceeded to reach out and touch my hair — ooh that’s a no, no! Rest assured, we’re not that close. He touched my hair and said, “*Is that real?*”

“Yes,” I said with all the ice and venom I could muster. Mission accomplished because that’s when the stuttering and back pedaling started.

“Ah, well,” he said, “*Women sometimes wear wigs.*”

“Yes, *they do.*” I said, the temperature in the room still dropping. “*I don’t.*” The conversation ended shortly after that. But really, what else is there to say after you’ve revealed yourself to be an oaf?

Let’s say for sake of argument it wasn’t my hair. Maybe I was wearing a wig, a weave, extensions, whatever. The last thing I would want is anyone drawing attention to that. What purpose does it serve to ask such a thing out loud and in front of other people? Was it to chagrin, humiliate, detract? “*Yes, you look nice but...*” Oh no, not on my watch. There was a time when I might have tried to laugh it off. Those days are over. I’ll not allow it. Unwarranted. Unacceptable. Unforgiven.

Very young children do this all time. They ask socially awkward questions. They blurt out whatever is on their little minds, until their parents can teach them otherwise. So you would think an adult — pushing a hard 60 — would already know better, but alas no. The social graces are on the decline but I would never think to say, “*I see you have a cold sore. Is that a herpes flare up?*”

I guess that’s why I love my joke so much:

“*Is that your real hair?*”

“*Are those your real manners?*”

It’s empowering. It turns the situation around. It says, I won’t let your insensitive comments diminish me. I prefer to make your ignorance embarrass you. Class dismissed.

## WHAT'S A DOGGIE BAG BETWEEN STRANGERS?

So I'm having a lovely Sunday dinner out with friends. My meal was okay, but not worth taking home when the waiter asked if I wanted a to-go box. I said, no thanks, but then the man next to me piped up and said, *"Oh, I'll take one."* He didn't mean he wanted a to-go box for "his" food. He wanted the box for mine. And no, I hadn't offered.

Before I go further, I should clear up a few things. Yes, I was out to dinner with friends, but in our little group of nine there were two people whom I did not know. To Go Box Man was one of them. Having only just met him that afternoon, he was essentially a stranger to me. And while our general table conversation was riveting — obscure but sexy vocabulary words, Physics, Ayn Randian philosophy — it remains to be seen if this is enough to form the foundation of a future friendship. I'm gonna need more information.

As the realization sunk in that — no joke — this man meant to box up and take home my left overs, the naked shock of it must have clearly manifested on my face. My friends — the people at the table I actually did know — sensed they were watching a blog post or at the very least a comedy routine in the making.

To Go Box Man then said, *"Uh, it's okay, isn't it?"*

*"Actually, no,"* I said. *"I'm a little uncomfortable."*

Now usually, I'm a big proponent of "icky doesn't necessarily mean bad." But this felt really icky and it certainly wasn't good. I'm not making a moral judgment on To Go Box Man's actions, but I do deem them to be well outside my comfort zone. At the very least he assumed a familiarity with me that he did not have.

Things got even stranger when the waiter brought the white Styrofoam box to the table and To Go Box Man was presented with the awkward task of actually taking my half-eaten food off my plate. Our little drama was now the focal point of the entire table. My face doesn't always let me know what its doing but I imagine my initial look of shock was transforming into one of incredulous disgust, prompting To Go Box Man to ask, *"Well, you don't have any diseases, do you?"*

I said, *"Well, now is a helluva time to ask me!"*

The waiter, surely adding this story to the repertoire of tales he tells his friends, took the to-go box and my plate back to the kitchen to do the deed himself.

In his defense, To Go Box Man said he really hated to see food go to waste. I do too, but it has never occurred to me to rescue food remnants from the plate of a

stranger. I wouldn't even do that to a friend or family member. Perhaps this speaks to my lack of commitment to food salvage.

I do have the good grace to realize that my outlook comes from a place of privilege not privation. I have never been hungry in the truest and neediest sense of the word. I've never wanted for food. I've wanted for good food — steak instead of hamburger — but not abject hunger. So it's possible I was wrong to assume that To Go Box Man was being both boorish and unsanitary. Maybe he was just hungry. But I doubt it.

Judging purely on appearance, To Go Box Man didn't look like he missed too many meals. Apparently his own or anyone else's. Perhaps there's something to be said for living off the left overs of others. But since To Go Box Man was essentially eating half my meal, shouldn't he have offered to pay for it? He's lucky. If I was a different kind of woman, I might have insisted that he put out, but I don't like left overs.

## THE GREAT SPANX EXPERIMENT

Spanx. Spanx are this generation's girdle, the poor woman's liposuction, another tool in the arsenal to avoid diet and exercise.

I saw a package of Spanx on sale at an accessory store, and the cartoon ladies on the package looked svelte and sexy. Who doesn't want to look svelte and sexy? Now, I know what you're thinking. "*Leighann, you don't need Spanx*" and my Ego would totally agree with you. But my Vanity said, "How could anything that ups your sexy be bad a thing?" Well, I found out.

I got my spanking brand new pair of Spanx past my ankles and knees without a hitch, but my thighs were another matter entirely. Most people don't notice them because I'm tall, but big thighs run in my family. No one would ever call me thunder thighs (at least not to my face) but proportionally, they're larger than you think they'd be on a woman my size.

My upper thighs are where the huffing, puffing, yanking, tugging and finessing began in earnest. At this rate, it wasn't looking good for my ass at all. I checked the package to make sure I'd purchased the right size and wondered if this was one of those things you are supposed to buy one size up.

I finally got the Spanx on and immediately felt svelte and sexy. As promised, it "whittled my middle" and "tamed my tummy." What I didn't expect was the immediate improvement in my posture. The fit was so tight, I was afraid if I slouched I'd crush a lung.

I also learned that when one is wearing Spanx, there is no "holding it." The minute you have the remotest of inklings that you think you might possibly have to go to the bathroom, don't be a hero. Go. Your kidneys may not be that patient with the decompression process especially if they've been under wraps for a while. Honestly though, I'm not sure if the external force holds stuff in or squeezes it out.

The trek to the ladies room made me feel like Svelte Girl Walking. I was torn. On one hand it would be nice to be Spanx-less if only for a few minutes, but I wasn't relishing the task of pulling them back up into position. I was very self conscious about huffing and puffing in public. It can be a bit disturbing to hear a woman grunting in the stall next to you. I didn't want to have that conversation:

*"Ma'am, are you okay?"*

*"Yup, just putting on my Spanx."*

For a moment I regretted not wearing a pair of Depends as well, but the combined pressure might have induced an explosion or internal bleeding.

It's probably not a good idea to wear Spanx and baby powder. On a hot summer day you might be tempted to douse on a bit of baby powder to keep yourself cool. But by the time you peel off your clothes at the end of the day, a not so freshly baked cake might pop out of your privates.

Now that I've been liberated from my Spanx, and blood flow has returned to my brain, there are things I realize now that should have been obvious before. My first clue should have been the cartoon women on the packaging. The Spanx people could never use real live women to model this product. They'd never survive the photo shoot. Human women have to actually move and breathe. Since the Geneva Convention is silent on the use of Spanx, they could easily become a useful tool of interrogation. *"Come on, Hassan. You either tell me what your cell is planning or you're putting on the Spanx."*

I'll take a little of the blame here and say that maybe Summer wasn't the best time to run the Spanx experiment. Perhaps they are best worn as a sexy pair of long johns.

In the main though, this is all Vanity's fault. Vanity says things to me that I'd slap a stranger for. It says things about the little pooch under my belly button that it turns out is totally normal if you're a real human being and not an air brushed photo in a magazine. But I should know better. I should know that Vanity doesn't always have my best interests at heart. Did I learn nothing from the Great Glitter Catastrophe of 2004? Apparently not.

Here's what I won't forget: after a day wearing Spanx, it might actually just be easier to do some sit ups, watch what I eat, and tell the government everything my cell is planning.

## A BAD BREAKUP; E-MAIL: A LOVE STORY

I'm going through a very messy breakup and some of my friends are taking sides. For reasons both shallow and practical I switched from AOL to Gmail. Yes, there was some peer pressure involved. It seemed like everybody who was anybody had a Gmail email address. It said, "I'm young, I'm hip and I'm hot." AOL wheezed, "I'm old, I'm tired and I'm not." AOL is the dividing line between people who may have once [gasp] paid for email and those who never have.

I'd tell people my AOL address and they'd look at me with a mingled look of surprise and pity as if to say, "*You? You're still with AOL?*" I could tell they now thoughtless of me. If I told someone my AOL email address over the phone I'd hear that uncomfortable, palpable and yet increasingly familiar moment of judgmental silence that said, "*Seriously?*" I mind as well be talking to them on my 1989 Motorola flip phone, a pager on my left hip, a Sony Walkman on my right listening to mixed tapes I made on my JVC Boom Box.

It got to the point where I was apologizing before I gave out my email. I'd beat them to the punch and insult myself saying: "*My email address is [LeighannLord@aol.com](mailto:LeighannLord@aol.com) and I churn my own butter.*"

But AOL and I were having problems long before this. Back in the day, having AOL installed on your computer led to problems that would make even the best computer tech geek cry. Somewhere, there's a guy named Charlie. He's curled up in the corner of a white-padded room clutching an old Dell Latitude laptop. He's rocking back and forth saying, "*AOL 9. AOL 9. Don't install AOL 9.*"

The web-based version wasn't much better. It would freeze without warning and suddenly be unavailable, always it seemed when I needed it most. God forbid I ever had to send an email with an attachment. Watching the frozen cursor was an exercise in Zen meditation.

No matter how many times I logged in and checked the "Remember Me" box, AOL never did. It always made me log in again. This was particularly frustrating if I'd just accidentally closed the web page. "*Seriously, AOL? I was just here!*" Was this a security measure? Maybe, but treating me like a stranger every time led to our inevitable estrangement. To complicate things, I was coordinating both AOL and Outlook on my BlackBerry. I know. I was just asking for trouble. But when it worked it was wonderful, it was Big Love. But when it failed it did so in spectacular fashion. It was the ultimate technical Ménage à trois where I'd end up getting screwed, but not in a good way.

The last straw was when I logged into my AOL account and there was nothing there. All my email was gone. It eventually came back, but I was done. And Gmail was there, waiting for me. It said — in a voice that sounded suspiciously like

Vin Diesel's — *"Come to Papa."* And Gmail made the transition easy. It effortlessly imported all my old AOL emails and contacts. I guess it's as close to carefree as Windows users will ever come.

But the real work, however, was in all the stuff that wasn't automated. A lot of personal and professional correspondence came to my AOL address, not to mention numerous mailing list subscriptions. As the now forwarded emails rolled in, I braced myself and patiently set to the task of updating my profile with each.

I had decided not to do a giant mass e-mail announcement letting everyone know that AOL and I had parted ways. Instead I did it quietly with a soft roll out. As people emailed me, I replied with the good news, or so I thought. The responses varied. There were those, usually fellow members of Gmail Nation, who greeted and welcomed me with open arms. There was definitely a "you're one of us now" kinda vibe. *"No judgment. We all make mistakes. We're just glad you're here now. Try the Kool Aid. It's delicious."*

Others, the majority of people, made no comment at all. A brief thank you to them: They updated their address books and kept it moving. But there have been some loyalist hold outs. There are folks who seem to be taking my defection from AOL as a personal affront.

*"How could you? AOL was there for you from the beginning, and you left it for the first sweet-talking, web-based email provider offering less spam, a superior search, conversation views and built in chat? Jezebelian Harlot!"*

No one has actually said this, of course. I infer it from the behavior of the people who still continue to email me at AOL despite my numerous return messages reminding them that I am now with Gmail. Oh for sure, some of them have made excuses: *"I keep forgetting. I don't know how to update my address book. My computer won't let me do that."* Uh huh. Sure.

There's always fallout after a breakup, the messy aftermath of disentangling long-time commingled lives. And I guess my email relationship is no different. Some people were bound to choose AOL over me. But I'm in a better place now. Gmail accepts me and my baggage ... I mean attachments. I wish AOL all the best, but I'm [LeighannLord@gmail.com](mailto:LeighannLord@gmail.com) now.

P.S. Note to BlackBerry: Get your app game together, Son. Android's got game and knows how to woo a woman who knows how to make a change.

## GIVE ME ONE REASON TO STAY HERE

For the first time in my entire career as a professional performer, I walked out on a gig. I picked up my purse, bid farewell to the Promoter/Booker/Deejay and took my Black Ass home. There have been many gigs over the years that I wished I had walked out on. Or just had the flat out good sense to say no to them in the first place.

There have been:

Country club gigs where the people are too uptight to laugh.

Bar gigs where patrons would rather watch the sporting event du jour on TV than the comedy show.

Corporate gigs where the people are afraid to laugh, perhaps subconsciously believing that laughers are the first to be fired.

Outdoor gigs which are not always bad, but are always a challenge. The good news is they offer an easy means of egress when things go as badly as the odds and your experience tells you it will.

But I've always stuck it out in the name of professionalism, pride, and an awareness that no gig is perfect. Much like a game of spades, you play the hand you're dealt. To that end, I've never bailed on a gig until now.

I remember doing a show years ago in New Jersey that was supposed to be great. It was a sold out event for a prominent women's group. What could go wrong? For starters the sound system was not working properly. It was also completely inadequate for the room of 500 chatty women who were, quite frankly, just excited to be out and away from their families. Their temporary freedom, lubricated by the open bar, was really all the entertainment they needed. The comedy show was superfluous.

As the venue tried to fix the sound system on the fly, the show stopped and re-started multiple times. This went unnoticed by the audience. They were busy scarfing down the remnants of a prime rib dinner.

There were three comics on the show that night, but that dwindled down to two when one of them turned to me and said, "I'm not doing this. I'm out of here." And then he left. Just like that. I was stunned. This was not a newbie comic who was afraid to tackle a tough room. He was a seasoned veteran who knew that stand-up comedy loses its power and allure when a comedian has to shout all of his set-

ups and punch lines. Comedians don't need much, but good sound in a large room, with a big audience is definitely on the short list.

I was deeply in awe of his courage. He chose the integrity and quality of the performance he could deliver over money. But it's not just about the Benjamins. It's also about your word. If you say you'll show up and perform, people expect you to do just that. Reneging seems like a mark that goes onto your permanent record. But as I watched the other comic leave, everything inside me screamed, "*Wait! Don't leave me here! Take me with you!*"

But I stayed and did the show; and there was no joy in it. The audience, enmass, was never entertained. There seemed in fact to be a schism. A goodly number of folks had finally caught onto the idea that there was a comedy show going on, and they were trying to enjoy it. But it's hard to enjoy what you cannot hear. The ocean-wide dance floor between me and the crowd didn't help either. The other audience members seemed deeply resentful that they were being forced to endure an annoying background buzzing sound while inhaling their strawberry cheesecake.

I thought no more about this incident until the other night when I was confronted with my own Jean Luc Picard "Here and no further" moment.

And I can't tell you what my tipping point was in this comedy show turned open mic. It could have been the super-sized deejay booth looming large behind the comics, making it seem like they were performing in front of the Supreme Court. Maybe it was that the Promoter/Booker/Deejay chose to start the show even though his emcee had yet to arrive. Was it the fact that the comics on the show outnumbered the audience? This wasn't hard to do since there was only one guy there to see the show. Was it that the highlight of the opening comic's act was her sitting in the lap of said Lone Audience Member making it an awkward comedy show/lap dance? Or maybe it was just the moment when the Promoter/Booker/Deejay said with a straight face: "*I don't know what happened. It was packed last week.*"

In any event, I was suddenly gripped with the fear that if I didn't leave soon, I may not ever be able to. I was unshakeably sure that I was sitting in the comedy version of "*Hotel California*". ("*Home By The Sea*" for you Genesis fans.) And just outside of my peripheral vision Rod Serling was narrating a very special episode of the "*The Twilight Zone*" just for me.

This wasn't a matter of money (I wasn't getting any) or pride (clearly, taking this gig, I didn't have any). But I now knew that not every show should be done. There was nothing I could accomplish and indeed I might be doing damage that my therapist would not have the skill to undo.

And so I left.

As Gloria Gaynor bid her errant lover do, I walked out the door. A part of me wanted to feel bad about this, but I only felt liberated. I imagine it was how Kunta Kinte might have felt if he had actually managed to get away, foot intact. In the end I know I made the right decision. Even the threat of amputation would not have been a good enough reason to make me stay at this gig. Like Kunta, I would've found a way to run.

## DEAR AMERICAN AIRLINES: YOU SUCK, AGAIN

So, I got to the airport with my two allowable carry-on bags. American Airlines forced me to check one and then promptly lost it. Well to be fair they didn't actually lose it. The Miami ground crew decided not to put it on my plane. They chose instead to send it down on the next flight. No worries, right? They would simply forward it to me wherever I happen to be staying in Nassau. Too bad I wasn't staying.

I was working on a cruise ship that I was scheduled to board at 3pm. The next flight (which was delayed) was due in at 5pm. The ship was leaving the port at 6pm. If that sounds tight, it was; and the 45-minute drive from the airport to the seaport made it viselike.

That's why I pleaded with American Airlines to let me take my bag on board my flight out of New York. I travel a lot and I know that it fits in the overhead, but The Bag Czar would not be deterred. Once they start insisting that you put your bag in the measuring bin — which is quite a bit smaller than the overhead space on a jet plane — resistance is futile.

*“Oh you have plenty of time between flights,” she said. “Your bag will make the flight.”*

*“Time is not the issue,” I said. “It’s weight.”*

I explained that it's a smaller plane from Miami to Nassau. A smaller plane means there's a fuel-to-weight ratio that must be maintained. They can't very well unload passengers, but they'll think nothing of de-planing a bag or two. I asked if there was some kind of note that could be attached to the reservation or onto the bag itself telling the ground crew that this one was not okay to be left behind. Wasn't there some consideration that could be made for frequent flyers or for people who were not staying in Nassau? What exactly was the point of my “elite status” if that sort of arrangement couldn't be made? Besides I wasn't on vacation. I was working.

She flashed me a vapid, Stepford Wife smile and assured me that everything was going to be fine. I knew it was not. I tried not to fret about it: Pip-pip, cheerio, a stiff upper lip and all that, but it was difficult when I saw people get on the plane with bags that were exactly the same size as mine, stuffed to capacity and smoothly slide them into the overhead.

When I stood at baggage claim in Nassau and saw the outside baggage door slam shut and the carousel grind to a halt, I knew the worst case scenario was now

at hand. I pictured myself spending the next few days decked out in the finest the cruise ship gift shop had to offer.

I also started picturing what was in my bag that I might not see for a while, or ever again. All my valuable valuables were of course still with me: Electronics? Check. Jewelry? Check. Teddy Bear? Check. But all of my clothes were in the forcibly checked and now supposedly in-transit bag. They may not be designer duds, but they are nice clothes. I feel like I'm one of the few stand-up comedians who even bothers to dress nicely on stage anymore. Everyone else seems to select an outfit that gives them versatility to choose between doing a comedy show or yard work. But who was I to judge? I was about to do a formal night show in pastel pink capri pants and a T-shirt.

Although the plane with my bag landed on time, getting it back didn't appear promising. A cruise ship might wait for a late-arriving passenger, but not for a crew member and certainly not for a crew member's really cute silver Delsey suitcase.

But heroic efforts were afoot. The Ship's Agent (port to ship coordinator) was in touch with the MSA (Manager of Staff Administration), who was in touch with the woman who was driving my suitcase in a golf cart alongside the ship as it was pulling out of the pier. Like a riveting rescue scene out of a movie, my bag was hoisted aboard the ship as it was sailing out of the harbor and into the sunset. End Scene.

I, of course, saw none of this. Already preparing for the worst, I was in the ship's gift shop cobbling together an ensemble that wouldn't make me look like Barbara Bush. The Assistant Cruise Director found me about an hour before show time to tell me the good news. *"We have your bag!"* he said.

*"What? Really? Seriously?"*

I ran to the Crew Office and for one horrible moment I thought, *"What if they brought the wrong bag?"* But no, it was my well-worn, silver Delsey. I was so relieved. Now I could return all the clothes I bought and didn't want, including the extra large, white, Hanes granny panties that could have doubled as a smock.

Although this story has a happy ending, my mild disgust with American Airlines is bubbling up into an active hatred. Why? This is not the first time this little drama has happened to me. It's the second, which is two times too many. I assure you, a third time will not be charming.

It's bad enough passengers get no pillows, blankets, movies, or food on American's domestic flights, not even so much as a bag of peanuts! But, the airline's

arbitrary bag policies are petty and punitive. You're on notice American Airlines! Don't let this happen again or else! Or else what?

Oh hell, I'm at your mercy, aren't I? I'm subject to the whims of your Gate Gremlins who are probably angry that they themselves never get to go anywhere. I am filled to the brim with bile over the fact that I really have absolutely no recourse here. Call your complaint line, for what purpose? To give the person who might answer practice saying, "I'm so sorry to hear that."?

My Blog is really as good as it gets and even here I have to be careful what I vent. In this post-911 era, any threat I make against an airline, it's CEO, or the CEO's mother is probably going to get me on a watch list and suddenly lost luggage will be the least of my problems. So I'm reduced to a brief and sincere, heartfelt appeal:

Dear American Airlines,

Please stop f%@#%\*!g over your passengers.

Love,

The Very Disgruntled Bag Lady

## SCENT OF A BLACK WOMAN

So, I'm standing in line at the dollar store waiting to pay. I'm dutifully looking at all the impulse items that were put there to get my attention and that's when I saw my favorite: the display of cheap perfume body sprays. I was expecting the usual plastic bottle assortment of vanilla, coconut, strawberry. But the bottle that caught and held my eye was a scent I'd never seen before called Black Woman. Really? Was this from the people who brought you White Woman?

Honestly, I didn't know we had a scent, at least not one that could be legally bottled and sold. Those who have been allowed to come within sniffing distance of a Black Woman will probably tell you that we usually smell like aggravation.

I was intrigued to see that this little gem was being sold in a dollar store located in a moderately affluent Caucasian community. How odd. If they really want to know what a black woman smells like, wouldn't they just surreptitiously sniff their child's nanny?

I know that's not politically correct to say or even a truly accurate measure. Everyone knows, of course, that Caribbean black women smell differently from American black women. The former smell like sugar cane and curry. The latter smell like collard greens and sweet potato pie. African women, by the way, being closer to the source smell like Europe.

The picture on the bottle of Black Woman was a bit incongruous. The model the manufacturer chose was fair skinned, with curly blond hair. First of all, I'm not saying that no Black woman has ever had natural blond hair — the manifestations of miscegenation never cease to amaze — but it's certainly not representative of the group at large. Second, blond-haired Black women are so 90s. Yeah, I'm talking about you Tyra, Eve, Mary J.

What was truly curious was that the black woman pictured on the bottle was smiling. Really? I'm not saying black women never smile but we're not exactly known to be a happy go lucky group. You usually only get to see our teeth when we're gritting them, or when we are open-mouthed chewing on the souls of men who have done us wrong, and had the temerity to think they could walk away unscathed. I've often thought a dominatrix is the perfect job for a black woman. You get paid to wear stylish clothes and cuss people out? Sweet honey in the rock, where do I sign?

Curiously, the bottle of Black Woman that I picked up wasn't marked tester and yet it was only half full. Evaporation? I think not. I pictured primarily Caucasian customers liberally spritzing themselves with this liquid gold hoping to vicariously gain all the things we black women are rumored to have in abundance:

strength, wisdom, greasy hair products, limber neck muscles.

Upon closer inspection I saw that the label on the bottle didn't just read Black Woman. It read "Our 'Version' of Black Woman." So it's based on actual perfume? How in the world did this slip by me? Who approved this? Clearly I'd missed a very important meeting.

A quick internet search revealed Black Women's fragrance by Kenneth Cole. The 3.4 oz Eau De Parfum Spray retails at \$42. That makes the two ounce, dollar store knock-off look like a bargain. But really Kenneth, is this homage or mockery? What were you sniffing that made you think this was a good idea? And this is where the internet has its limitations. There are no scratch and sniff web pages and I refuse to make a special trip to the mall just to see what Mr. Cole thinks I smell like.

Not even the famous black women who hawk their own brands of perfume go so far as to say that their product has captured the scent of a sistah. My favorite is one by Queen Latifah called, of course, Queen. It smells like Freddie Mercury.

Since the dollar store version of Black Woman was so affordable I bought it and no, it was not as advertised. It smelled like a Spanish dude. But that's okay, I love chorizo.

Thank you for reading *The Urban Erma*.  
The blog is my passion.  
This E-Book is a shameless ploy for money.

- Leighann Lord