



## Finding a "Hook"...and Following a Dream

by Steve Solomon



Steve Solomon

### About the author:

For Steve Solomon, the road to a career in comedy began during his childhood in Sheepshead Bay, Brooklyn, where he picked up the many accents he heard on the streets of his multi-ethnic neighborhood. This self-professed "class clown" grew up to become a teacher and school administrator, using humor, dialects and sound effects to inspire students in the manner of *Welcome Back Kotter*. Eventually, however, Solomon felt the irresistible urge to perform full time—and he returned to his roots to write an autobiographical one-man show titled [\*My Mother's Italian, My Father's Jewish & I'm in Therapy\*](#). After several years on the road, Solomon has brought his comic solo show home to the intimate Little Shubert Theatre. He described his winding career path for Broadway.com.



My pop used to say, "Some of us are blessed with the ability to work for as long as we want to." My addendum: "Some of us are blessed with the ability to work *in the field we love* for as long as we want to."

As a child, I lived in Brooklyn and was surrounded by immigrants: Russians, Italians, Irish, Chinese...a medley of accents for me to mimic, and mimic I did. Thirty years later, I was living on Long Island, facing a divorce and feeling fed up with the bureaucracy I dealt with on a daily basis as an administrator in the public schools. Contemplating my future, I once again remembered my father's words: "When you're flat on your back, the only place to look is up." Practical? Maybe.

That evening, I received a call from a local church brotherhood—divine intervention?—asking if I could assist them in preparing a "roast" for one of their members. I was then "guilted" into performing my work at a local comedy club. And I was a hit. (How could you not be a hit with 90 drunken friends in the audience?) Although I had achieved success in education and had begun a side career in telecommunications, I decided to focus on making people laugh.

The gigs came in. I discovered that although I could hold my own with the best of the comedy club comics, I didn't have a "hook." You need a hook. Whether it's an ethnic hook or a physical hook (fat? thin? short?), self-deprecating humor works in clubs.

I moved to Florida, got agents and did more than 200 shows a year. Though my hook now was that I was at least 25 years younger than most of the comics performing around the state, I needed something more to make me stand out. Abby Koffler, an important arts presenter in South Florida, explained that since my name alone wasn't a draw, I needed a show title with universal appeal, one that would attract audiences from all demographics.

This seemingly simple assignment became a monumental task. I wrote down dozens of variations on a theme. Finally, we picked this: *My Mother's Italian, My Father's Jewish & I'm in Therapy*. We now had a title...just a title.

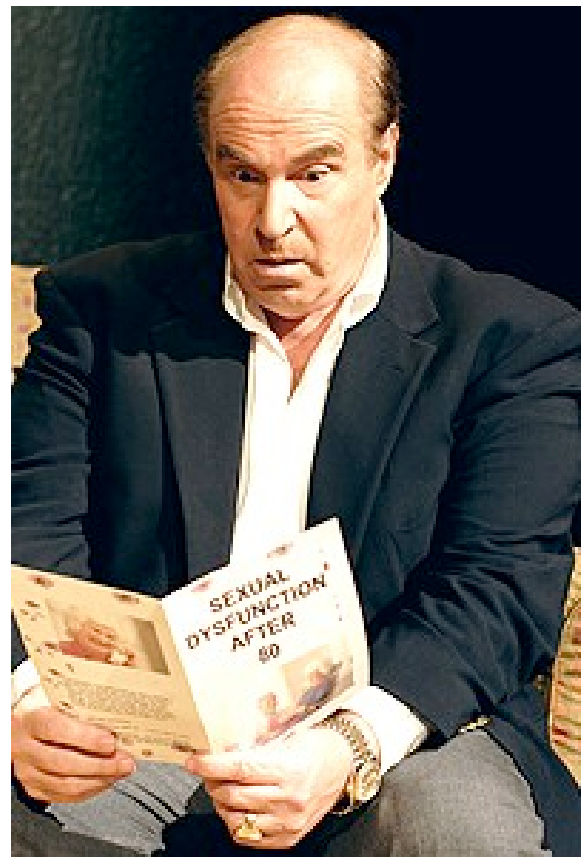
My management team prodded their way into a meeting with William Morris Agency vice president Kenny DiCamillo. "Look, we're not really interested in new comics," he said with a smile. "We're looking for a show." I turned to him and said, rather casually, "I have a show. It's called *My Mother's Italian, My Father's Jewish & I'm in Therapy*." A New York minute later, we had \$100,000 worth of bookings. The problem? I had given him the title of a show that didn't exist.

I had 10 months to write my mythical show, design a set and hone it to perfection. "He'll work on cruise ships and write when he's not performing," Kenny declared. After about seven months, most of the writing was finished. I returned home, hired a director and performed to seven sold-out houses in one week. It was a smash; we were instantly rebooked. In a little over three years, I played for more than 200,000 people in 49 cities throughout the United States and Canada. But—and it's a big but—we all knew that the next step had to be New York City, the Big Apple...home. We had no idea how to proceed.

Whether it was fate, divine providence or just blind luck, we met Rodger Hess, a successful, well-known Broadway producer. He liked my show, and we formed a partnership. Rodger took the helm and put together a team of Broadway professionals, from stagehands to my new director, John Bowab. We began previews at the Little Shubert Theater on 42nd Street in early November.

Now the rest is up to me, the wonderful New York audiences and maybe a bit of that divine providence I mentioned. And here I am, back home, still pinching myself to see if this is all real.

As Pop said, "Follow your heart, work hard, stay focused and your dreams might come true." With me, it went like this: Follow my heart. Meet the right people. Trust them. Find out what their dreams are, and do what we can together to make everyone's dreams come true. Mine certainly have!



Steve Solomon in *My Mother's Italian, My Father's Jewish, and I'm in Therapy!*

