

THE NEXT ACT | LIFE STORIES

THE COMEDIENNE

Lynn Ruth Miller, 83

# The last laugh

THE AMERICAN DISCOVERED STAND-UP IN HER 70S, AND WANTS AUDIENCES TO LEAVE HER SHOWS BELIEVING THAT IT IS NEVER TOO LATE TO ACHIEVE THEIR DREAMS



**A**s far as I know, I'm the oldest stand-up comedienne still standing: anyone older would be sitting down.

I always say that I didn't start doing stand-up until I was 71 because I didn't want to peak too early, but the fact is I don't believe in peaking. Life is a long journey and you never truly peak until the second before you die.

Lots of people assume that I set out to shock because I'm an octogenarian who does burlesque and tells filthy jokes, but I'm not doing anything in order to defy convention. I'm actually deeply conventional, at least in my own head.

I was born in 1933 in Ohio and I've always danced to the beat of my own drum. That made things difficult growing up. Looking back, I realise that my mother was abysmally ashamed of me. It was a time when children – especially girls – were supposed to be seen and not heard. Well, I always felt the need to make myself heard. I'm much more comfortable in today's liberal society. I think I was born in the wrong time.

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MY PERSONAL MISSION IS TO DILUTE THE FEAR OF AGEING

I see people as freer now than I was and I applaud it: the freedom of sexuality, the freedom of expression. I only wish they'd go further. I live in London and love its diversity. I enjoy sitting on the tube (I always get a seat – another benefit of age) and seeing every creed and age, every shape and shade.

When I go on tour and see places that are much more monocultural I think, no, no, no. Don't hold on to this, you're missing the trick.

Comedy was my first real experience of success. That sounds quite sad because I only discovered it in my 70s, but it's the truth. I did a community class when I was living in San Francisco and we had to deliver a stand-up routine as our final project. Everyone else was in their 20s and had absolutely nothing to say. I had a lot of material to work with and I brought the house down.

In a funny way, it wasn't until I was a pensioner and was expected to quietly disappear that I really got into the swing of things. There's so much pressure on women as they get older to look and act a certain way. I see younger friends taking their life savings and spending it on Botox and I just want to scream: "Stop! It's a total waste of your time! Take that money and spend it on a PhD!"

My personal mission is to dilute the fear of ageing. We tend to think that it's all downhill from 65 but actually,

you have a choice in the matter. I've chosen to age in a way that I feel uses the time I have left to its fullest.

I hope that I'm unlocking some doors for my younger audiences too. You can spend your life pushing and pushing against a door and then one day suddenly realise that it was open the whole time.

You're the only person that can stand in the way of achieving your dreams. I want people to leave my shows feeling like they can go out and live their own dreams and not to worry about what other people think of them.

It took me over 70 years to learn that trick so that hopefully you don't have to.

**This is the latest in a series of profiles of individuals who are redefining later life that will appear in FT Weekend Magazine and at [www.nextact.ft.com](http://www.nextact.ft.com).**

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