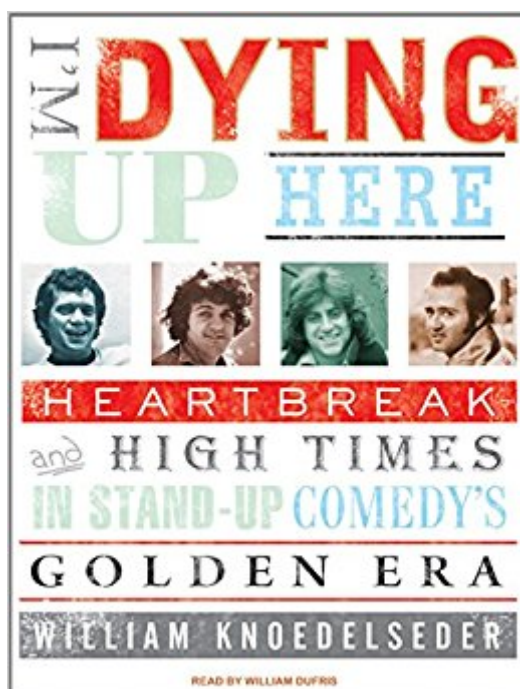


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# I'm Dying Up Here: Heartbreak And High Times In Standup Comedy's Golden Era



## Synopsis

I'm Dying Up Here chronicles the collective coming of age of the standup comedians who defined American humor during the past three decades. Born early in the Baby Boom, they grew up watching The Tonight Show, went to school during Vietnam and Watergate, migrated en masse to Los Angeles in the mid-1970s, and created an artistic community unlike any before or since. They were arguably the funniest people of their generation, living in a late-night world of sex, drugs, dreams, and laughter. For one brief shining moment, standup comics were as revered as rock stars. It was Comedy Camelot but, of course, it couldn't last. In the late 1970s, William Knoedelseder was a cub reporter assigned to cover the burgeoning local comedy scene for the Los Angeles Times. He wrote the first major newspaper profiles of Jay Leno, David Letterman, Andy Kaufman, and others. He got to know many of them well. And so he covered the scene too when the comedians—who were not paid for performing at the career-making-or-breaking venue called the Comedy Store—tried to change an exploitative system and incidentally tore apart their own close-knit community. Now Knoedelseder has gone back to interview the major participants to tell the whole story of that golden age and of the strike that ended it. Full of revealing portraits of many of the best-known comedic talents of our age, I'm Dying Up Here is also a poignant tale of the price of success and the terrible cost of failure—professional and moral.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Knoedelseder offers a fascinating account of the Comedy Camelot days of the 1970s when Los Angeles abounded with future comedy superstars. Everyone from Jay Leno and David Letterman to

Andy Kaufman and Robin Williams struggled through late-night sets in clubs that refused to pay them for their efforts, until a strike tore the comedy community apart and paved the way for future generations. William Dufres delivers a strong reading that is slightly more straightforward than many listeners might be searching for. However, it gets the job done and entertains along the way. Dufres has a journalistic tone to his voice, imbuing his narration with gravity and sincerity. A PublicAffairs hardcover (Reviews, June 1). (Aug.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

"Knoedelseder skillfully layers powerful dramatic details." ---Publishers Weekly Starred Review

Laughing to Keep from Crying One of the best narratives of comedy in the seventies. It walks the perfect line when everyone one was living for the day and the next hour yet pursuing a truly dangerous career (names are simply not necessary in this case): A novel brought to life; the golden Svengali promising fabulous wealth and fame, endless verbose brilliance delivered by the downtrodden,, oppressed, depressed, and distressed. The complete freedom to fail on stage and by that very act able to carve out a name for yourself. The story line in this work is very well connected and filled with little vignettes of all the successful comics from Williams to Leno. The off stage Letterman surprised me more than anything, He was so dare I say it kind and it illustrates the bankrupt nature of having your persona on TV being the only real knowledge anyone has of you. A very strong five stars.... I wished it had gone on farther but really this was the story...

I purchased this book after hearing Richard Lewis mention it on his interview at The Nerdist. A great story and extremely well told. I'm a comedy fan, yet besides knowing something about how Pauly Shore's mother owned a comedy club, I had no idea about this amazing story. You get to learn about the origin of Leno and Letterman and also much about Richard Pryor, Richard Lewis, and Andy Kauffman. Even more interesting are the 2nd tier comics, people I've had to check out on youtube since reading the book. You definitely get immersed in the world of standup comedy and all the struggle that comes for those who never quite make it. I haven't said this about many books in my life, but this is one that I could not put down. I think I read it in four sittings. I can't stress enough what an accomplishment this book is. He introduces about 20 characters, develops them all, and you get to learn a lot of history of the entertainment world (even a bunch about Johnny Carson) in the 1970s.

A true account of those golden times when the best comedians had some homes where they could hone their craft. The results can be seen today in the likes of Leno, Letterman and Lewis. It also shows how such a laboratory could not sustain. Lighting in a bottle.

The hit Showtime series is based on this history of the standup comedy scene in the 1970s, but the book goes so much deeper.

Like many who are probably reading this book now, I read it in anticipation of the Showtime series that is based on the book which airs this summer. Unfortunately, it looks like the cast of characters on the series are all fictional (but will probably be "loosely" based on the real comedians) except Johnny Carson. The book follows the 1970's when The Tonight Show moved to California and with it, a lot of comedians followed in search of stardom. Most of the book follows individual comics as they get their big break on stage at The Comedy Store: Jay Leno, David Letterman, Richard Pryor, Andy Kaufman, Elayne Boosler, Robin Williams, Jimmie Walker, and Freddie Prince to name just a few. If you enjoyed the comedians on The Tonight Show during Johnny's reign, you'll love all the name dropping in this book! Eventually the book follows the formation of the CFC (Comedians for Compensation) which fought against the owner of The Comedy Store (Mitzi Shore) to get her to start paying comedians for their stage time. Mitzi always thought of the club as a college where comedians honed their act thanks to her generosity while she pocketed all the money the club made from drinks and cover charges. Mitzi was also quick to take credit for all the agents and bookies in the crowd who sought out talent for movies, TV shows, and The Tonight Show. Eventually the CFC won and earned paid stage time along with half the door but not without consequences including arson, picketing, cut spots, and suicide. All true! While reading the book I enjoyed hitting up YouTube between chapters to check out Jay Leno and Dave Letterman's first time on The Tonight Show, or I looked up comedians who I had never heard of or had not watched in years. I love a book that makes me want to research more about the topic! And like I said, if you enjoy comedy you'll enjoy all the name dropping. The book is a fast read that I couldn't put down and is written in the style of like sitting around the dinner table and hearing your grandpa tell you stories about back in the day. I look forward to seeing how Showtime does with the series.

Very well reported. A detailed history of the comedians' strike. But there was not a lot of fleshing out of the comedians as individuals. I also would have loved to see the comedians' strike and the idea of working for free at a showcase compared to current ideas about interning and working for free for

exposure.

I can't say who would enjoy this book, because it's neither exceptionally funny or poignant, but simply a tell-all style narrative that gives you a glance behind the metaphorical 'curtain' of the comedy scene in the 60's and 70's. All I can say is that regardless of your age, ethnicity, sex, or occupation, if you have any interest in Stand Up comedy this is a must-read. You'll not only receive a list of some of the most famous comedians in the past 50 years and their early exploits, but see how they pioneered the current comedy scene. I highly recommend this book. Very interesting read.

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