

TIM HAWKINS

It's not every day that your local waiter at Olive Garden moonlights as a comedian. But for Tim Hawkins, at one time, it was reality. While he was serving up pasta and never-ending salad and breadsticks to customers, some of his fellow co-workers encouraged the natural entertainer to sign up for an open mic night at St. Peters, Missouri's Funny Bone Comedy Club. His "day job" might have paid the bills, but once he found himself on stage tickling the audience's funny bone, Hawkins realized he might have just discovered his destiny.

"I think I knew comedy was my calling, if you will, because I would fail at it, but I would not even think about quitting. Really, I tell people I do comedy out of desperation. I've tried every other job. I mean, I've rented cars. I was a substitute teacher. I worked customer support jobs," he shares. "There was no manual for it. There was no school of Hogwarts for comedy. So you just try to find an audience and start doing your thing."

Growing up in Missouri, like most of his peers, Hawkins was more interested in sports than anything else. However, hints of his God-given humor were present even during childhood. "My goal as a kid on road trips was to make my dad laugh so hard he would pull the car over. That was like the gold medal for funny," he remembers. "That was the way I broke the ice. I was pretty shy, so that was one way I could break through and develop relationships."

Hawkins went on to play baseball at the University of Missouri, assuming he'd pursue athletics professionally. However, he soon found an audience off the field—one that thought he was really funny.

Following his initial stage debut at that first open mic night, the Midwest native started telling his jokes and performing his material anywhere people were willing to listen. His original bits took him to church youth groups, steakhouses, and even prisons. He also took a job at a local radio station, tasked with making heavy news feel lighter during morning drive-times. Every open mic night and every voice-over proved to be a steppingstone.

Over the past three decades, Hawkins has gone from opening bits at regional comedy clubs to headlining 90-minute sets nationwide and performing in front of audiences numbering in the thousands at 100 shows per year. A committed family man, Hawkins built his career poking fun at the things in his world that he finds funny, intentionally keeping his comedy clean, without sacrificing the quality of his work. He's released eight full-length DVDs, as well as five albums, amassing fans thanks to countless song parodies like "Chick-fil-A," where he proclaims his unadulterated love for the popular fast-food chain; "Cletus, Take The Reel," his ode to fishing loosely based on Carrie Underwood's classic hit; and his most-streamed song, "Pretty Pink Tractor," his original spin on a signature Jason Aldean track. His parodies have made him a YouTube sensation. Hawkins has been sharing his original songs live alongside his stories and stand-up bits, averaging in excess of 100 shows annually for more than ten years. In addition, he's recorded over a hundred episodes of his popular "Poddy Break" podcast and currently hosts "The Tim Hawkins" podcast, which also features his wife Heather, daughter Olivia and son-in-law Luke.

Regardless, long before he had a captive audience that would eagerly purchase his products, in the early-2000s, Hawkins was earning one follower at a time on a then unknown platform called YouTube with his bits based on his aforementioned love for chicken nuggets and fishing, as well as anecdotes about homeschooling, marriage and real-life mishaps.

“YouTube came along, and then it became the engine of building the business,” Hawkins admits. “With YouTube, you can create your own path; you can set up your own gigs, and you can do the material you want to do. You’re building your own fanbase.”

Hawkins continues to leverage social media today, even joining Gen Z on TikTok. “You can’t even fathom how many people you can reach on there,” he remarks. “That’s the power of putting yourself out there, creating content, and not over-judging it. Because people will find it and they’ll like it. Not everybody’s going to like it, but you’ll find enough people that you can make a living at it.”

Hawkins has done just that, making a living off of...well, living. While he grew up laughing at the clever antics of comics like Brian Regan, George Carlin, Jerry Lewis, Jerry Seinfeld and Flip Wilson, among others, Hawkins developed his own comedic voice by leaning on real life experience. “As you go along, you don’t really draw on those guys as much. You respect what they do, but you kind of develop your own take,” he explains. “It’s like training wheels on a bike. Then you start talking about your authentic views and your expression. That’s when it gets fun—when you’re doing a show and you’re like, *I’m not lying here. This is really how I feel. This is a concentrated version of myself.*”

Although he might express his opinion under the guise of humor, the clean comedian is far from controversial. While he has his own thoughts on certain topics, he’s not trying to convert anyone to his side; he’s simply trying to make people belly laugh.

“Comedy, for me, comes from passion; it doesn’t come from funny. You don’t try to write funny; you write what you’re passionate about. The truth is the funniest,” he attests. “And the more detailed, the better. I learned quickly to just live my life and take notes.”

These field-notes often come from the life he shares with Heather, his wife of nearly 30 years, his four kids, and his first grandchild. In addition, Hawkins also finds a certain muse in setting his brand of funny to music, something he’s loved since he was a kid. “Music is more inspirational to me than comedy is. I’m a rock ‘n’ roll guy, I love classic rock. I love Led Zeppelin,” he confesses. “I want my shows to have that feel, that energy. So I try to mix it up and give it a dynamic of highs and lows. It’s not all just cranking.”

Like a veteran rock act, Hawkins leads his audience on a journey, telling stories one minute, then reaching for his guitar and strumming out a parody the next. Before you know it, he’s back to storytelling behind a piano, giving the audience the same push and pull fans experience at a concert. And just like a skilled lead singer relies on the give and take of a live audience, Hawkins allows his fans to determine the direction he takes each evening when he finds himself on stage.

“Your audience is your best friend. Your audience tells you if it’s funny or not, if it’s confusing or not,” he says. “You’ll tell one joke one night, and it’ll get a totally different response the next night, so you’ve just got to say humble and keep driving.”

At the end of the day, Hawkins just wants to “make people laugh as hard as humanly possible.” However, he claims everyone has the ability to instigate humorous moments. After all, he’s living proof that even a waiter at a chain restaurant can be a riot.

"I believe everybody really is funny. I just write stuff down. That's the only difference," he insists.
"I'm not witty; it's just that people relate to what I'm talking about."

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