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STAND UP GUY

GEORGE LOPEZ

OF TBS' LOPEZ TONIGHT



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George the Conqueror

by Greg Archer

WILD AND WITTY, GEORGE LOPEZ USES HUMOR TO SLAY
HIS FEARS AND BECOME A LATE-NIGHT TRIUMPH



"MOST PEOPLE ARE RULED BY FEAR," George Lopez admits with a calm, knowingness you might not expect from one of the world's more rambunctious talk show titans. "They are afraid to succeed or fail. But the biggest fear is to never know."

No, this isn't "Therapy 101 with George Lopez." It's just a typical conversation with the host of TBS's passionate late-night chat party, *Lopez Tonight*. And, since Lopez is now in the business of having conversations, sometimes they can run pretty deep.

"Early in life, I thought I was born with an innate sense to be funny or self-deprecating," he goes on. "But I realized through therapy that it was built as a defense to keep things from hurting. You take the

pain; you joke about yourself: 'Why didn't I have a father; why do I live with my grandparents; why aren't my grades as good as my friends?' You joke about it and make your friends laugh, but from years of doing that, I built up a protective wall that allows you to do work that most people would be afraid of."

"But you just have to fight through," he adds. "It's like working out. You have to get the muscles you didn't know you had, and that's what makes somebody consistent, prepared for everything."

"Prepared" is a superb way to describe Lopez. Let's face it, you can't rise to meteoric heights (he's one of the top five highest grossing comedians in the world) and remain grounded without having a strong sense of where you came from or the emotional undercurrents that helped shape the human being you've become. >>>



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PERSONAL PROCLAMATIONS

d!: What makes you laugh most?

GL: Making fun of yourself; things that happen in real life.

d!: How do you feel about helping lure Conan to TBS?

GL: I've known Conan for a few years. I thought if we combined forces, we could be hipper, draw in a younger audience. We are just entirely different, but we're friends, which is not the case in most late-night situations.

d!: What makes you stand up and take action?

GL: When I feel like somebody is bullying someone just because they think they are stronger than the other person. I don't like people who are bullies or who are mean to people. There's no purpose to raising your voice or being unkind to somebody.

d!: What's the most interesting thing you've learned about yourself lately?

GL: That I'm probably much calmer than I thought. I've spent hundreds of dollars on candles and thousands of dollars on incense, and it does really kind of center me. I'm very peaceful in a manic business. And there's no value on that.

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Of his youth, Lopez notes that he was "painfully shy and only comfortable around my friends."

But then he enrolled in a high school class taught by Dick Crowell, a tennis/music/justice teacher who, over the years, saw something in Lopez he didn't realize he had—self-reliance.

"Unbeknownst to me, this guy was helping me come out of my shell," Lopez recalls. "He started asking me to run errands and such. I mean, the first time I did stand up, I was in high school and I think if it wasn't for him guiding me along the way, I would have never considered standing up in front of people and talking. I've never said that to anybody. Without his guidance, without him seeing that, it might have been different. I might have gone through a harder time."

"...I THINK IF IT WASN'T FOR HIM GUIDING ME ALONG THE WAY, I WOULD HAVE NEVER CONSIDERED STANDING UP IN FRONT OF PEOPLE AND TALKING."

Truth is, times were already hard for Lopez. Deserted by his mother and father at birth, he was raised by his maternal grandmother and step-grandfather in southern California. "I grew up in a house that was unkind and I was surrounded by a family that was unkind," he offers, but it's without any hint of resentment.

Lopez seems to know what past events to use as leverage rather than angst. Eventually, that ability, coupled with the support he received from Crowell, helped prepare the '90s stand-up comic to become a bona fide TV star. *George Lopez*, the award-winning ABC sitcom, was a ratings supernova—it's now a hit on *Nick at Nite*. And few would have predicted his late-night TBS gamble would follow similar suit. Not only has it helped galvanize the Hispanic community, *Lopez Tonight* has evolved into a fascinating *cirque du ethnique*, if you will, a theatrical cultural bridge that has just as much celeb glam as it does spirit and heart.

"A guy came to the show crying because his brother in Mexico was dying—he needed a kidney transplant," Lopez muses. "And we got the guy surgery. Oprah gives away cars, I'm giv-



Janet Jackson visits with George on the set of *Lopez Tonight*.

ing kidneys. I don't have enough kidneys for the whole audience, but one guy benefitted." (Lopez himself had a kidney transplant back in 2005.)

Lopez credits the show's "kind of easy flow" to being a curious host. "Curiosity doesn't have a temperament. It's always the one same emotion—curious. And when you're curious, you listen and listening is probably the most important thing if you're going to host a talk show."

Well, that, and confidence.

"Oh yeah, I am gutsy ... and respectfully bold in my own approach," beams the former shy kid. "I don't ask for advice from anybody about what I should do. In this business, it's rare that an actual artist runs their career and not their publicist, who decides for them what's right and what's wrong.

"I've never been like that," he adds. "I make my own decisions. I trust my gut instinct. No Ouija board, no magic black ball you turn over. None of that. I trust my inherent first instinct. It's saved me from pretty wild stuff." **d!**

