

Lovelorn Literati Unburden Themselves

By Joseph Manuel

Originally Published for Portland Monthly Magazine



Admit it: If given the chance to hop in a DeLorean and travel back to the yesteryears of our teenage angst, many of us would relish the opportunity and deliver a strong right hook to our own 15-year-old faces. There is nothing more self-deprecating than returning to mom's house and unearthing love letters, diary entries, poetry, and other what-have-you's from a time when the world revolved around secret crushes and growing armpit hair.

Alas, the time machine is thus far fictional. One option is to simply suppress the woes of puberty and deny that we were ever that lame, once upon a time. Or the healthy alternative would be trying out and eventually baring all for the ever-expanding troupe that presents Mortified Live, the collective humiliation project founded by Dave Nadelberg.

Mortified is a rehearsed open-mic night in which selected adults share artifacts (mainly journal entries) describing lost loves, fights with mom, hating the world, and other cringingly ridiculous memoirs of sheer embarrassment.

So as last Friday's edition of Mortified PDX began, the emcee gave a sarcastic nod to the Portland Trail Blazers, who happened to be playing the most important game of the season at the same time that full-grown Stumptowners were humiliating themselves at the Mission Theater. It did bring about an interesting scenario to ponder: What would an adolescent Joel Przybilla share if given the opportunity?

Regardless, the night was studded with highlight-worthy quotes as the first five performers were women sharing from their diaries and venting about loves lost and ludicrous. There was Lola, a local actress who dreamed of being an "FBI Agent" described her passion for the X-Files and touched upon her former footwear habits: "Black combat boots are a good conversation starter. They are also a good conversation stopper."

The friendly crowd constantly roared during the appropriate intervals, as presenters rocked the mic with perfectly timed pregnant pauses to maximize the gut-busting guffawing. Audience participation was limited, although one performer had the subject of her teenage crush present on the upper landing, and constantly looked to him during her soliloquies à la the Romeo and Juliet balcony scene (but reversed).

Eventually, hearing endless variations on the "he loves me, he loves me not" spiel got a bit tiresome. However Greg Gasperin, a Mortified vet on his second showcase, rounded out the night with excerpts from a trip to Italy with his grandmother. The sarcastic traveler's interactions with grammy reminded me of George Costanza's relationship with his griping mother: Priceless stories of ridiculous bickering and awkward international scenarios provided some sweet relief.

Mortified concluded with slideshows of embarrassing photos of the performers and production crew, and the emcee gave a friendly farewell to the pasty crowd. The show returns to Portland for July 15-16, which should be ample time for Oregonians to scrape their closets for some material.