

REPORT ON

rick
MERCERstory *Laurie Wallace-Lynch*

That handsome, dark-haired guy you see bungee jumping or skydiving on the *Rick Mercer Report*: "I'm not that guy," says Rick Mercer. It's not that he has a stunt double. It actually is Rick doing those daredevil stunts, but Rick insists it's not his personality. He's doing it for the show.

"I will never, ever, jump out of an airplane again unless it's for the show," says Rick. "I just go, okay, what am I doing? Oh really? Doing anything physical is a challenge. If I was sitting on a dock and someone came by and said, 'Hey look, we've got this speedboat and this crazy raft and once you lie on it, we'll drag you around and it's a lot of fun', I'd be, like, no thanks. I'm good right here."

Rick says he gets letters from 10 year olds who think he's a stuntman. He also gets fan mail from teachers saying they watch his show before giving a Canadian geography lesson.

"No one puts a gun to my head to do the stunts," laughs Rick. "Although I think most people in show business will tell you that it is amazing what you will do when the television camera is turned on! It's just not my natural inclination to jump out of an airplane. I'm not an adrenaline junkie. But maybe when this show ends, I might find out that I've become an adrenaline junkie and I'm addicted to it and I'll have to go out and do things, but somehow I doubt it."

Doing death-defying stunts such as climbing into a bear cave in Algonquin Park and extracting

a baby cub from the warmth of its mother, who happens to be awake, this is just a small part of the highly successful *Rick Mercer Report* which runs every Tuesday night on CBC TV.

Asked to describe the *Rick Mercer Report* to someone who has never seen it (it's one of the highest rated shows on the network), Rick answers, "It's a bit of a tricky thing to explain. While the format of the show is rock solid and stays the same week in and week out, the types of shows I do, vary. I could have a politician on one week. I could have a rock star on another, but then another week it could just be folks who live in a small town in British Columbia who are having a winter carnival. Sometimes there's a real element of adventure to the show and sometimes it's just strolling down the street with the Mayor of Calgary. It varies. Obviously there's an element of political satire and sketch comedy that remains somewhat the same, and it's a very current show. Whatever you see on TV, 90 percent of the time I did the taping the previous week. The country is reflected in the show even down to the weather conditions."

Rick keeps two suitcases packed at all times, depending on where he's travelling that week. "I start out on Monday and I'm usually somewhere else in the country," says Rick. "I have to be back by Wednesday evening. Thursday we do our sketches and Friday we shoot the live show in front of a packed audience at the CBC ➤





◀ studios. And usually Saturday morning I get up and fly somewhere again."

Asked how many air miles he's amassed since he started producing the *Rick Mercer Report* a dozen years ago, Rick exclaims, "I have a million miles and no air mile points! I collect more points than anyone should inside of Canada, but I have very few. That's because my mother likes to travel and she knows my password!"

Growing up in St. John's, Newfoundland the now 46-year old comedian admits he was the funny kid in class and at home. "There's a lot of emphasis put on being funny in Newfoundland. It's just the nature of the beast," says Rick. "I think I had many funny teachers and it's just something that's not uncommon. I was just the one who decided I wanted to go into the theatre and work in comedy and work in television."

And join the circus, so to speak. After grade 10, Rick decided to drop out of school and hit the road, touring with a clown. "Yes, that's partially true, but I didn't hit the road. I hit the boat, because we toured the coast of Labrador. If you can make it there, you can make it anywhere!"

Rick can joke about that pivotal moment in his life which may have started him on his quest to be an entertainer, but he gets downright serious when talking about dropping out of high school. "It was the stupidest thing I've ever done in my life!" he admits. "In fact, maybe when I was 20-years old and I was on television, I might have been a bit cocky about that, but it's not generally something I talk about now unless I have the time to put it in context that it's a terrible thing to do. I would never suggest that anyone do that. It's a huge mistake."

After a long and successful run on CBC's *This Hour Has 22 Minutes* (as well as shows like *Made in Canada* and *Talking to Americans*), Rick was ready to wear the producer's hat. "The Rick Mercer Report came about as a result of me wanting to produce television as well as be on television," explains Rick. "Television is very much a producer's medium and producing television was something I became more and more interested in as my career progressed. Television is straight forward. They buy shows for six or seven episodes and if it works they'll keep you on and if it doesn't, it goes away. It's been a long partnership and I'm really happy at that."

The *Rick Mercer Report* is co-produced by Rick and his business and life partner, executive producer Gerald Lunz. "It wasn't planned that way, but we've worked together for a very long time, well over 20 years," says Rick. "It's really tough when you are working on a deadline and it's 10 o'clock at night and you just want to stop, and the person who you trust gives it back to you and there's a big red line through the first two pages. It can be frustrating, but again, I

appreciate that. It's important for anyone to have that person in their life if they are going to be a writer."

Rick can be described as a comedian, entertainer, author (three books), storyteller, political satirist, Order of Canada recipient, multiple Gemini Award winner, and big time political junkie.

"It's no different than someone who's a baseball fan and their brain is filled with tons and tons of useless baseball stats that are only interesting to another baseball fan," says Rick. "Politics has always been my sport. In this business there are people who exist because they are funny and when the TV season is over they might put down their newspaper and never read another one until the season picks up again. I don't work with people like that just because it generally doesn't work. In order to really satirize something you kind of have to love your subject matter."

Rick had a chance to meet his real life hero Rick Hansen when the two Ricks went bungee jumping off a bridge on an episode of the *Rick Mercer Report*. "He has always been a hero of mine," says Rick. "Having him on the show was tremendous. I say that because in

show business, sometimes you don't want to meet people that you admire because it can be disappointing, but he was much more generous and impressive than I ever could have imagined. And I got to throw him off a bridge so it was a good day at the office. He doesn't jump. He can do a lot of things, but he doesn't jump. He needs to be pushed."

Rick Mercer fans are well aware of his "rants" on the show and this spring, Rick performs live at Brampton's Rose Theatre in a sold out show he calls *A Nation Worth Ranting About*. "It's the show that reflects my 12 years on the road,"

explains Rick. "I go to British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and all over Atlantic Canada 25 times a year. I'm just constantly moving all over the country and that gives me an interesting perspective. I talk about different things I've done on the show; my adventure with Rick Hansen for example. On television, that's a six minute segment, but there's a lot more to it. So it's very much a behind-the-scenes presentation. I play some of my favourite clips and tell some stories and the audience really enjoys it and I love it because it gives me an opportunity to be on stage which I love to do." **GL**

RICK'S FAVOURITES

Favourite TV show other than the Rick Mercer Report:

"I'm currently binge watching *Ray Donovan*, which I love and *House of Cards* including the original British version.

Favourite Movie:

"*The Godfather I and II*"

Favourite Book:

"*Escape from Camp 14*"

Favourite Vacation Spot:

"*Newfoundland*"

Favourite Stunt:

"*Zero Gravity*. It's something that I wanted to do when I was a little kid and I was desperate to do, but then I found out you had to be an astronaut to do it. So I filed it away in my head as something that's really cool, but I'll never be able to do. I got to do it and it's pretty awesome."

Favourite hobby or way to spend a Saturday afternoon:

"*Doing absolutely nothing! Sitting on the couch. I travel a lot with my work, but I like to travel outside of work. I like to noodle around the garden.*"



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