

It's all for the LOLz for Brooke Janicek



By Brock Weir

Everyone who is ? or who has ever been ? a teen knows how it feels to sometimes fade into the background until you find that one special thing that makes you stand out from the crowd.

For 15-year-old Brooke Janicek, it is ?getting injured constantly.?

Well, maybe not quite ? but her accident-prone nature gives her plenty of material to make her friends laugh and it is actually her comedy inspired by her everyday life which has made gag-makers sit up and take notice.

Brooke, a Grade 10 student at ESC Renaissance, is putting the finishing touches on her well-honed stand-up comedy routine this month as she prepares to take the stage in the southern and central Ontario finals for Concours LOL!.

Concours LOL! is an annual competition hosted in conjunction with the Just for Laughs festival to give opportunities to budding Francophone comedians between the ages of 14 and 18. As a student in the Conseil scolaire de district catholique Centre-Sud, Brooke will be squaring off in Brampton against her peers from as far south as Niagara to as far north as Georgian Bay.

Recently, Brooke and some of her fellow finalists appeared on TFO's ?Flip,? showing off some of their improv skills. Now it is time to perfect the routine before the big day on April 28.

?Rewriting is your best friend,? says Brooke. ?You can't fall in love with everything you write because you have to constantly change it. I am on my sixth version right now and it is a lot of work because you put your heart into it but can't become attached to it.?

Brooke says she first became interested in comedy and improv when she was just nine years old. Winning a public speaking competition within her school system that year, she realised it was a passion and one she has continued to foster throughout high school.

And her life has provided no shortage of material, she said. Aside from the odd bump and sprain, she mines material wherever she can find it, including her family.

?Stand-up is really playing yourself,? she says. ?It just comes so naturally when you're on stage that you're not nervous; you just talk to your peers. It is very natural and soothing for me to be talking on a stage in front of a big audience, which surprises many people, but you're performing yourself.?

In Brooke's case, however, there is the added challenge of performing in French.

Fully bilingual, she switches back and forth with ease, sure in the knowledge that some jokes which might fly in Anglophone Canada might not hit the same mark in the Francophone sphere ? and vice versa. Certain words and certain accents, she said, are integral to Francophone comedy which might fly over the heads of the uninitiated, but that is all part of the fun.

?We started this process in October and it is very long and rigorous because you have a meeting to look at making different types of jokes [and defining] what your stand-up is going to be around, the main idea, and categorizing it with other topics,? she explains.

?You think of an idea but then you have to keep a pen and paper with you at all times because you will just think of a joke and have to write it down immediately or you'll forget it.?

Along the way, Brooke has been receiving some expert encouragement from her elder brother, Jared, who participated in the contest

last year. He always encourages her to go farther and greater than him in everything they do, and it is something she is striving to achieve. She is also passing along that encouragement to other students who might want to give a contest like this a try ? and for audiences to give aspiring comedians a chance.

?If you give off positive energy, the audience will give it back and that is what comedians feed on,? says Brooke, who hopes to one day take on funny bones from a different angle, as a physiotherapist. ?They feed on the energy of the crowd to keep going. I encourage young comedians like me to be comfortable and stay true to yourself and don't be afraid to push limits. As teenagers, sometimes we think we have this reputation to uphold and we're nervous for people to see who we truly are. I just want everyone to be encouraging to everyone and every teenager because you never know what their life is like, they could really need it, and it could really make their day.?

For more on Concours LOL! visit www.concours-lol.ca.