

My Buddy Bill @ Unitarian Universalist Society 3/30



My Buddy Bill, a monologue produced by Emmy award-winning playwright, screenwriter and monologist Rick Cleveland, will be performed one night only on Friday, March 30 at 7 p.m. **[ED. The first show is sold out. They've added a second show at 10PM]** at the Unitarian Universalist Society of Cleveland, 2728 Lancashire Road, just off Coventry Road in Cleveland Heights. It is advertised to be “a witty and knowing tale” about Mr. Cleveland’s unlikely friendship with former U.S.

President Bill Clinton. Tickets are \$20 each or two for \$30 and can be purchased at Mac’s Backs Bookstore, 1820 Coventry Road (next door to Tommy’s Restaurant) or by calling 321-BOOK.

Writer Cleveland, the whose father was “an alcoholic bus driver” and mother “a drill press operator for a screw factory,” says he flunked 11th grade at Parma High School for smoking too much pot and skipping school to hang around Coventry Village. This was where Cleveland started reading Harvey Pekar’s American Splendor comic books. Astonished to discover that working class people could be authors Cleveland went off and became a successful screenwriter and recently served as executive producer for the HBO cable TV original series, *Six Feet Under*. He is a graduate of the Playwrights Workshop at the University of Iowa, and also a founding member of Chicago’s American Theater Company.

He’s returning to the neighborhood, now a Hollywood veteran, to meet Mr. Pekar and kick off the Unitarian Universalist Society of Cleveland’s yearlong benefit “Celebration of Coventry.”

My Buddy Bill has its genesis in a chance meeting between Cleveland, then a writer for the NBC TV hit *The West Wing*, and the 42nd President of the United States. The show chronicles an unusual and idiosyncratic relationship including a trip to Amsterdam and a spontaneous jam session in Arkansas plus new material about U.S. Senator and candidate for Democratic party presidential nominee, Hillary Clinton.

The audience is invited to a post-performance Meet 'n Greet with the artist and complimentary coffee.

In the spirit of Spalding Gray to whom the work is partially dedicated, *My Buddy Bill* is a comic shaggy-dog tale about a star-crossed friendship between the writer, a leader of the free world and their two dogs. *Variety* calls it, “Relentlessly funny... delightful” and *Hollywood Reporter* says it is “amusing enough to tickle even the most demanding funny bone.” Mr. Cleveland won the Jury Award for Best Performance in a One Person Show for *My Buddy Bill* at the US Comedy Arts Festival in Aspen, Colorado in March, 2006. *My Buddy Bill* had its world premiere at the Geffen Playhouse in Los Angeles.

In 2000, he won an Emmy Award and a Writer’s Guild Award for his writing on *The West Wing*. His play Jerry and Tom was adapted as a screenplay and was an official selection at both the



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Sundance and Toronto Film Festivals in 1998. He was nominated for an Edgar Award, presented by the Mystery Writers of America, for his screen adaptation of John Grisham's *Runaway Jury*. As a playwright he attended the National Playwright's Conference at the Eugene O'Neill Theatre Center in 1991 and 1993, Midwest PlayLabs in 1994, and has received playwriting grants and fellowships from the Kennedy Center's Fund for New American Plays, the National Endowment for the Arts and the Rockefeller Foundation. As a freelance journalist he has written for the Destinations column of *Outside Magazine* and for the Sunday Magazine of the *Chicago Tribune* and is also a commentator for NPR's *All Things Considered*.

On Saturday, March 31st, from 2-5PM, Cleveland will host a Writers Workshop for aspiring writers to hone their skills for stage, screen and TV. The seminar will be held at the Unitarian Universalist Society of Cleveland and has a nominal fee.

Celebration of Coventry will continue with a series of stories told by long time Coventry movers and shakers. These include Harvey Pekar, Tommy Fello (the owner of Tommy's Restaurant), artist George Fitzpatrick, (who was manager of the old Heights Art Theatre, where the *Rocky Horror Picture Show* had over a decade run), and others. There will also be "I Remember Irv's," an evening with stories from lesser-known lights of the Village.

"This is the only neighborhood I've ever had," said Joyce Brabner, Celebration organizer. She lived several places on the eastern seaboard before marrying Pekar almost 25 years ago. The series is being held to raise funds for various activities at the UUSC. "We are looking for people who have stories about Coventry," said Ms. Brabner. The Irv's session will be more informal than a monologue by a local punk turned Hollywood screenwriter. If you have stories to tell about Coventry Village and environs, contact Brabner at celebrate_coventryATsbglobal.net or leave your name and number at Mac's Backs.

Listen to the audio interview by Lee Batdorff with Rick Cleveland here:

<http://www.coolcleveland.com/files/audio/RickCleveland.mp3>

From *Cool Cleveland* contributor Lee Batdorff batATadva.com