



# Sick in the Head: Conversations About Life and Comedy

*Judd Apatow*

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## **Sick in the Head: Conversations About Life and Comedy** Judd Apatow

From the writer and director of *Knocked Up* and the producer of *Freaks and Geeks* comes a collection of intimate, hilarious conversations with the biggest names in comedy from the past thirty years—including Mel Brooks, Jerry Seinfeld, Jon Stewart, Roseanne, Harold Ramis, Louis CK, Chris Rock, and Lena Dunham.

## **Sick in the Head: Conversations About Life and Comedy Details**

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## From Reader Review Sick in the Head: Conversations About Life and Comedy for online ebook

### Snotchocheez says

#### 4 stars

Literary purists might have a tough time with the interview format of **Sick in the Head**, which is stuffed to the gills with transcriptions of conversations with many of the greatest minds of the comedy, television and film-making worlds.

It occasionally feels *overstuffed* as Judd Apatow's been interviewing folks in the comedy world since he was a bempiled high school student, long before embarking upon his stellar career in the comedy biz. The book itself is not precisely a rip-roaring trove of laffs, but it quite fascinating to see how Apatow's path has intersected with many of these incredibly talented people. Close to 40 different folks are interviewed; the best ones by far are those that Apatow's had a working relationship with (the obvious: Seth Rogen, Adam Sandler and Ben Stiller) but it becomes increasingly clear as the book progresses just how full Apatow's life has been. He's been associated with or has admired damn near everyone. Some great surprises for me in here: interviews with authot/filmmaker Miranda July and. sk8r boi-turned-film-auteur Spike Jonze. My fave of the the bunch: "Curb Your Enthusiasm"'s Jeff Garlin (reminiscing their early stand-up comedy days together). Biggest surprises: I had no clue Apatow was a joke writer for Roseanne Barr's series, or the producer of Lena Dunham's HBO series "Girls".

No there's not much writing on display here, but I didn't care. If you're at all interested in the comedy world (past or present) or Judd Apatow's career arc, chances are you'll be enchanted by this book, too.

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### Amanda says

This is a book about comedy, but it is not a comedic book. Comprised entirely of interviews between Judd Apatow and various other comedians that he conducted between the 1980s and today, the focus is more on what led these people to comedy than the humor itself. It isn't really a memoir, though Apatow does reveal some things about his own past and process during these interviews as well. I wasn't a fan of the writing style as the interviews are presented as a straight back and forth, with no embellishment or outside description beyond an introductory paragraph at the beginning of each one. I think it would lend itself better to a recording than print. He talks to a lot of big names, so I recommend it to people interested in celebrity interviews, or any young artist, not just comedians, looking for validation of the struggles they have to go through to "make it" from people who have been there.

\*I certify according to FTC regulations that I received this book through the Goodreads First-Reads program.\*

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### Kristen says

I DID IT, I DID IT, I DID IT! I'm FINALLY done with this book!!!!!! It only took multiple borrows from the library (massive props to the LAPL--you da #1 champ here!) and a couple of hours on several planes to

finally finish it, BUT I DID IT.

This book SHOULD NOT have been as much of a labor as it was. I tend to like Judd Apatow movies (whether directed or produced) and he's written for a lot of comics that are generally pretty funny. Not only that, but he interviewed a ton of comedians that are well-respected and that I personally love, like Jim Carrey, Steve Martin, and a bunch of others.

BUT OH. MY. GOD. NO ONE IS HAS EVER BEEN SO UPSET ABOUT THEIR PARENTS GETTING DIVORCED AS JUDD APATOW HAS! Sweet CHRIST man, you were 48 when this book was published, and the interviews happened throughout the course of a lifetime, you'd THINK at some point, you'd move on.com or change.org or fucking anything and ACCEPT what happened, BUT NOPE. It's especially infuriating to hear about how depressed he was about his parents' divorce when you compare it to actual tragedies some of these comics had, like Jim Carrey and being homeless with his family at 16, or Stephen Colbert's father and brother dying on a plane crash when he was 10. SHADDUP ABOUT YOUR DUMB PARENTS, YOU'RE FINE, MAN. Or, IDK, if you're not, GO TALK TO A THERAPIST.

Part of reading a good interview means that the interviewer has to be willing to 1) ask interesting questions, 2) be able to be vulnerable enough to get the interviewee to open up and be revealing, and 3) be a good listener. While Apatow does frequently enough ask decent, and sometimes, great questions, he is only really able to be "vulnerable" about his parents divorce, being upset about *Freaks and Geeks* getting cancelled too soon, not getting enough recognition for *Funny People*, or feeling generally anxious. So boring, and especially in comparison to the people he's interviewing. Not only that, but he's not a good listener. Reading the transcripts, you can see he interrupts his subjects frequently and then does a little rant about his own neuroses.

I'm so frustrated because I really love to listen to comedians talk about comedy and get into the art of what makes something funny and get into the machinery of jokes and comedy. Some interviews were great, just because the person who is talking is always wonderful, like Albert Brooks (whose birth name is Albert Einstein--how about that?!), Steve Martin, Stephen Colbert, Maria Bamford, Harold Ramis, and a few others. I think he didn't do justice to some comedians, like Amy Schumer, or Sarah Silverman, or Sarah Berhard. Jeff Garlin, Louis CK, David Sedaris, and Keye & Peele are also great, but can you mess up those interviews? Also, how dare you whine about your parents being divorced when you're talking to someone who was abandoned by their dad? Shut up, at least your dad was still there for you.

I skipped the Marc Maron interview because FUCK THAT 100%. Definitely don't need to read two idiot man-boys circle-jerking about their anxieties when nothing really terrible has actually happened to either of them. NOPE.

Although I read this book in eBook format on my Nook, because I borrowed it from the library, and I'm not savvier, I can't find out how many times the word "divorce" or its derivatives come up, but if I had to estimate, I'd put it at roughly 829 times. If only I could get a dollar for each time it came up, what a time to be alive.

No dogs barked in the distance, but that's because it's transcripts of interviews. A dog probably did actually bark in real life somewhere in the distance. Who knows? ^\\_(?)\_/

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## Jenny says

This was very repetitive. Judd was a better interviewer when he was in high school. As an adult he talks too

much about himself and his parent's divorce for the comedians to share much of anything. Plus, he constantly name drops and keeps digging for compliments about his movie Funny People.

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## Jeremy says

This isn't a funny book, this is a book about funny.

Apatow has put together a veritable treasure trove of comedic interviews! Jerry Seinfeld, Albert Brooks, Steve Martin, Chris Rock, Amy Schumer, Mel Brooks, Sarah Silverman, Jon Stewart, Stephen Colbert, Roseanne, Louis CK, Jay Leno--Judd interviews 'em all over a span of 30 years!

Since Apatow he has been immersed in the comedy world for so long (whether as a lonely child transcribing SNL skits, a teenager conning his way into interviewing Jerry Seinfeld, a stand-up comedian, a TV writer, or as a creator of some of the greatest comedic movies of all-time), he is able to connect with each comedian personally, and contextualize their work in a way a regular journalist couldn't.

If you're someone who loves WTF with Marc Maron, you will really enjoy these interviews--in the sense that the interviews aren't necessarily funny, it's more about how to be funny and what life is like for funny people. But Apatow is pretty emotionally detached, so these interviews aren't nearly as raw as Marc Maron's can be (though Apatow does have some heartfelt moments). There's something about comedians that even if they don't like each other, they share a weird bond.

I'm not a stand-up or anything, but I'm a bit of a comedy nerd who grew up idolizing Chris Rock, Adam Sandler and Louis CK. These are the kinds of people who make sense to me, but they're kind of damaged, and that often shines through in the interviews (the Roseanne one was very rough).

Don't read this book if you want to laugh, read this book if you are fascinated by comedy.

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## Taylor says

I started to get really annoyed half way into this book for one reason: Judd Apatow isn't likeable. He markets this book as a collection of "interviews" he has had with comedians and yet, they aren't interviews at all. It's mainly Judd Apatow forcefully interjecting his own complaints and experiences as a means of validating his own credibility to these celebrities. It comes off as whiney and self deprecating. I would've enjoyed the book more if it had been purely focused on those he was interviewing rather than reading the SAME anecdotes about his life in every chapter. I feel like Apatow considers himself to be the ring leader of the comedians of his generation, but with multiple failures and few successes under his belt, it's hard for him to justify this notion. Oh and just for the record, Funny People is awful.

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## Fabian says

A gem for a few comedians & most comedian enthusiasts. I don't know where I fit in that demographic, but this is indispensable to certain members of the artistic community, that's for damn sure. As much as I tried to ignore the self-aggrandizing, it's undeniably present in this collection of interviews that range from snoozefest to almost-bitchfest! The better ones include Seinfeld, Roseanne & Steven Colbert; the lamest ones

are from his "heroes", i.e. the elder comics such as Mel & Al Brooks (mostly they recount accolades too much). No, his angle is that of Father: he loves to ask modern comedians mostly how they deal with their families and their success. Never about how they got there, but how they enjoy the spoils & not feel too guilty about it afterward. We totally KNOW Mr. Apatow is an outstanding member of this current comedy circle, but hot-damn! his tentacles are EVEREewhere!

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## Diane says

This book about comedy has gotten me through some difficult times. My mother has cancer, and this book kept me company at doctor's offices, in hospital waiting rooms, and at the end of long days, even if I only had enough energy to read a few pages before falling asleep.

Judd Apatow loves comedy, and so do I. But Judd Apatow loved it enough to go interview his favorite comedians and performers, asking them about their career, their process and their lives. It's an interesting and delightful read, and the pieces are organized alphabetically, so it's easy to jump around and read about your favorite people first.

The first interview I read — and the reason I ended up buying my own copy of the book — was with Jerry Seinfeld. I started reading the piece while browsing in a bookstore, and it was so thoughtful that I couldn't wait to tell my friends how awesome it was. There are so many great quotes in it that I had trouble picking a passage to post here, but this is a favorite:

Judd: For me, I wanted to be a comedian and I wanted to work from a very early age because I was afraid of being broke. What was your core motivation?

Jerry: To never have to do anything else. I learned very young in this business that you bust your ass or you get thrown out of the kingdom. My motivation was not wanting to leave the kingdom. Plus, I just love the life of it. I love my independence and the joy of hearing laughs and making jokes. It's as simple as that.

Judd: Does the TV show seem like this weird little dream that happened in the middle of your stand-up career?

Jerry: That's a very good description of it.

Judd: Like this odd distraction for eight or nine years and then back to real life?

Jerry: Obviously, after the show, I saw there were many other avenues available for me. I missed the solitude. I missed the grimness and the simplicity of the life. I remember working it out with a friend of mine, James Spader. I said, "What do I do with my life now?" And he said, "Well, what has been the best experience that you've had so far?" And I said, "For me, it has been performing for live audiences." You kind of get to do that on TV, but TV is so much work and the pipeline is just too long. In stand-up, you get addicted to that intensity: You have an idea for something, and then you're onstage that night and people are reacting to it. That's very intense."

There are also great interviews with Albert Brooks, Amy Schumer, Chris Rock, Garry Shandling, Jay Leno,

Jimmy Fallon, Jon Stewart, Key & Peele, Louis C.K., Marc Maron, Mel Brooks, Sarah Silverman, Stephen Colbert, and Steve Martin, and that doesn't even cover everyone. If you're interested in comedians and comedy, this is a marvelous and enjoyable book. I highly recommend it.

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### **Stephanie Laurenza says**

This collection is amazing. I have so much that I could, that I want to say about it but don't want to ramble. What I will say is this: this was the book I talked about while reading it...to my husband, to my co-workers, to my friends. "I'm reading Judd Apatow's book - it's SO good - he says Jimmy Fallon is EXACTLY who you think he is!" This book is a dream come true for a pop culture loving person.

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### **Lee Anne says**

First, let's get this out of the way: even if you didn't write your own dust jacket blurb, you have to approve it, and it takes a lot of balls to allow yourself to be called "one of the greatest comedic minds of [your] generation." Even if it's financially and commercially true.

OK, now the actual review: when Apatow was out promoting this (I heard him on Howard Stern, and Gilbert Gottfried's podcast), he talked about his teen years, when he became obsessed with comedians, and, using his gig at his high school radio station as an in, would interview all the famous comedians of the day, and how he still to this day had the tape recordings. So I was safe to assume, I thought, that this book would be all those interviews. That is not the case. A handful of them are here, but most of these interviews are reprinted magazine interviews, transcripts of panel discussions or film festival appearances, and, in one case, the DVD commentary from "The Cable Guy." So while some of the material is entertaining, funny, philosophical, etc. (I really liked Spike Jonze, and Apatow's clear love of Garry Shandling moved me), it kind of feels like a ripoff, and if you're a big Apatow fan, or consumer of pop culture, you may have read or seen the bulk of this already. Apatow himself comes across as neurotically bitter, and one of those people who has those stock stories about himself that he probably feels define them, so he goes back to them again and again. This, combined with my sister seeing "Trainwreck" right when I started this book, and railing against its "be normal and you'll get the love you deserve" ending (one of her pet peeves), made me like him less than I did when I started the book. Too bad.

And the Eddie Vedder interview doesn't belong in here, no matter how Apatow tries to justify it in the forward to that piece. You can tell he just wants to show off that he knows him, and I hate those worshippers who have made Vedder into the Gen-X Bruce Springsteen/Bob Dylan poet of the people.

And, at nearly 500 pages, this book, like most Apatow movies, is about 1/3 too long.

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### **Ashley says**

This was an overall interesting book full of conversations. It is not comedic itself but ABOUT comedy and the people who create it. So, if you're going into the book expecting to laugh, you're really setting both yourself and the book up for failure. This book isn't for people looking for empty laughs, it's for people looking to read sometimes very personal conversations about comedy behind the scenes, what it takes to do the work, how it effects comedians personally, what kind of person becomes a comic, and their experiences

with success (or lack thereof). It is very inside baseball. If you like that sort of thing, you will like this book.

I happen to love listening to people talk about being good at their jobs, so I knew I would love this. It's also a neat conceit that half the interviews are from 1983/1984 and the other half after 2005 (most of them are from 2014, as he was preparing this book, but there a handful of press appearances, magazine interviews, commentaries and panels included from previous years as well). As a precocious sixteen year old comedy nerd, Apatow was in possession of a high school radio show, and he basically tricked a bunch of up and coming (and in some cases already successful) comics to let him interview them, and most of the time when they realized he was just a kid, it was already too late. It's fun to watch them respond to his earnest questions.

The later interviews are much more personal. Oftentimes, he's interviewing friends or co-creators, so there's a personal bond there that comes through in the conversation. Oftentimes, the conversation becomes just as much about Apatow's life and career as his subjects, which is why this book is subtitled 'conversations about life and comedy' instead of 'interviews about life and comedy'. 'Conversations' implies a back and forth, give and exchange.

I only had a couple of complaints about this as a collection. First, Apatow totally shoehorns in interviews with Eddie Vedder and Spike Jonze, mostly because he just wanted to, even though they really don't fit in with the tone of the rest of the book. They're just as introspective, but it was still jarring when the conversations shifted away from comedy in their chapters (I did end up skipping through the Jonze chapter, in the end, because I had twenty minutes to finish the book before it was due back at the library, and really wanted to read the Stephen Colbert and Steve Martin chapters). And second, some of the stuff Apatow would talk about with his subjects got a bit repetitive after a while, as he would tell variations of the same stories/sentiments to many of them. I see how he does as an interview technique, but it was still a little annoying after a while to get the same story over and over again, even if it was in the service of facilitating conversation.

Definitely recommend this if you are an Apatow fan or interested in comedy even a little bit. Some of the stuff he gets these guys to say is super fascinating. Steve Martin, Stephen Colbert, Amy Schumer, Roseanne Barr, Jon Stewart, Louis C.K., Harold Ramis, Chris Rock, and even Lena Dunham, whose stuff I tend to avoid, were all excellent reads. Even the stuff that wasn't technically interviews, like panels with Larry Gelbart and Mel Brooks, and the *Freaks and Geeks* oral history were super interesting. It was also interesting to me as a person who aims to create things to see all these successful creators/artists, and what they all have in common.

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## Lynne Spreen says

This is a goldmine of conversations between Judd Apatow and successful people in the entertainment industry (mostly comedians). I enjoyed seeing how decent and hard-working the majority were. How much they slaved to get to where they are. How smart they are. Some of it resonated for me as a writer, to see how another creative person works.

What I liked the least: when interviewees recited their job histories.

What I liked the most: when they spoke about the bigger issues about life. Here are a few examples.

Harold Ramis: "...you're famous. Now what? Now it becomes a measure of character, growth, and development. Who do you want to be from that point on?...Growth is hard...When you're almost sixty years old there's got to be something more going on. What are the challenges of being a grown-up in the world?"

(Lynne: I loved this, because I'm all about rethinking things when you're around 50, 60, and older).

Jerry Seinfeld on being a dad: "...my son (insulted me) even worse than that. We were making up words as a game at dinner one night and I said, 'You know, I've made up a lot of words that people actually use as words.' And my son said, 'Uh, really, like what? UNFUNNY?'"

Larry Gelbart: "I don't worry about what (the audience will) get. I write for myself on the assumption that there are a number of people who have similar sensibilities and will appreciate what it is..."

Lena Dunham: "There are always people telling you that your experience doesn't matter, that it's navel gazing or unnecessary. 'We don't need to hear about twentysomething girls who feel like they're ten pounds overweight. We don't need to hear about forty-year-olds getting divorced.' But we do need to hear it, because...it can be the difference between someone feeling like they have a place in the world and someone feeling they don't." (Lynne: I write for people who are 60-something, so thank you for the validation, Lena.)

Louis C.K. on not being chosen for gigs: "I'm glad I didn't get it. I'm glad for every single thing I didn't get."

Great interview question: Judd asks, "Who's voice is in your head that's wise?"

Mike Nichols: every scene is either a fight, a seduction, or a negotiation.

Judd: "When your parents behave in ways that make you feel unsafe, you think, 'Oh, I guess I'm in charge of myself.' And when you're fourteen, that's not a great thing. It kind of never goes away. As a producer, I'm always assuming things are going to crash and I'm trying to figure out what could go wrong before it happens. It's helpful for work. But it's a terrible way to live your life." (Lynne: amen, brother.)

I could go on, but you get the idea. I think Judd Apatow poured his considerable heart and soul into this book, and I recommend it.

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## Rob says

There's this notion that as you get older you eventually come to peace with who you are. The hardest part of that process for me was realizing I'm too insecure to do what I really want with my life. I've always loved acting, and for a time I loved writing (until academia beat that passion out of me). Growing up, I just always assumed I'd get involved with TV or movies or theater, doing something for a living that genuinely made me happy. And while I *do* love teaching, the most fulfilling times of my life were when I was doing improv or writing sketches in college or teaching high school kids to do improv or acting and directing in community theater. But when I had the chance to make the leap – I lived near Los Angeles for fifteen years – I couldn't make myself do it. I even wrote a couple screenplays, but the thought of subjecting myself to the grind of judgment and evaluation was just too much. So I gave up on it. And now of course I hate writing and my teaching schedule eliminates even the possibility of doing some local theater in the evening. The closest I get these days to the thing I love is watching as many movies as I can.

All of which is a lengthy, navel-gazing setup to explain why I'm still irresistibly attracted to books *about* the creative process, even though as a frustrated, wannabe artist I'm no longer engaged in that process myself. Viewed from that angle, Judd Apatow's *Sick in the Head* is a delight, a 550-page series of interviews with various comedians, actors, and directors that could've been double the length and I still would've devoured it. As a high school student, Apatow recognized his desire to be a comedian and suckered various managers into letting him interview their up-and-coming comedians, never letting on he was actually a teenager

lugging around a tape recorder for his high school radio station. The book starts with his first interview – a 1984 talk with the still relatively-unknown Jerry Seinfeld – and ends with (in this new, expanded edition of the book) a 2016 interview with author David Sedaris. In between we get conversations about comedy and creativity from such diverse personalities as Steve Martin, Garry Shandling, Jim Carrey, Sarah Silverman, Harold Ramis, Mel Brooks, Jon Stewart, Key and Peele, Louis C.K., Lena Dunham, and more – essentially a murderer's row of the best comedic minds of the last 50 years.

It's a fool's errand to try to condense a book like this into a couple paragraphs, but there's no denying the big takeaway from these interviews (especially in light of how I opened this review): the common thread among all these comedians is an unerring faith in their ability and the ways in which they could add their voice to the larger artistic conversation. That isn't to say they didn't have moments of doubt, but it's fascinating to hear firsthand accounts of how their drive to do what they loved overcame whatever insecurity they felt. Interestingly, this is especially true of Apatow himself, who speaks freely with his guests of how critical he is of his own work (and worth). I'm not sure what lesson I personally should take from this; at 43, whatever creative ship I might have hopped aboard has almost certainly sailed. But as someone who lives vicariously through the lives of those doing what I wish I were doing, it's compelling stuff.

(Tangent: It's particularly fascinating for me to hear from the people who are Apatow's contemporaries. They [and he] are roughly my age, and it's fun to hear how we all prize the same pop culture touchstones – Carlin, Monty Python, *SNL*, Pryor, et. al. – even if they eventually went on to do something with their obsessions.)

A bunch of interview transcripts may not sound like the most entertaining read in the world, but trust me: it is. Especially if you consider yourself a fan of comedy, *Sick in the Head* is essential reading.

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## **Jaga says**

Yes, this book actually inspired me to prepare my own stand-up routine and it begins like this: *So what's the deal with interrupting people while interviewing them... Judd...*

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## **Po Po says**

Very Enjoyable.

Favorite chapters were interviews with (1) Leslie Mann, (2) Amy Schumer, (3) Sarah Silverman, (4) Lena Dunham and (5) Miranda July. Listed in no particular order, except for (1) Leslie Mann. I especially liked her chapter most of all.

The major takeaway from this book is: success (as measured by society --fame and fortune) doesn't necessarily bring you happiness. I could give you the astoundingly long list of featured folks in the book who are surprisingly miserable, but will let you read it for yourself.

