

[00:00:00]

PERSON: Welcome to the Talks at Google podcast, where great minds meet. I'm Emmy, bringing you this week's episode of the podcast. Talks at Google brings the world's most influential thinkers, creators, makers, and doers all to one place. Every episode of this podcast is taken from a video that can be seen at youtube.com/talksatgoogle. Comedian and former "Saturday Night Live" cast member Colin Quinn, the satirical sage from Brooklyn, joined Googler David Windmueller back in February 2019 to discuss his off-Broadway show, "Colin Quinn: Red State Blue State," where he laid bare the absurdities, hypocrisies, and calamities on both sides of the political divide. Regardless of which side you may find yourself on, Colin came to "own the libs, own the conservatives, and all of you in between." Here's Colin Quinn: Red State Blue State.

[00:01:00]

COLIN QUINN: Thanks, David. Thank you.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Thank you so much for coming.

COLIN QUINN: Sure.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: So, what do we do about this free speech thing?

COLIN QUINN: Well, it's too late. The--too late to stop it now. People want to speak. Unfortunately. Yeah, I mean, look, you know, it's like anything else. Every starts out as a great idea and then just dwindles down to , you know--destroyed by us.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Okay. well, congratulations on your show.

COLIN QUINN: Thanks.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Great reviews all the way around. It's been extended through March. And it even had great reviews in both the New York Times and the National Review.

COLIN QUINN: Yes, I know. I was-I was--

DAVID WINDMUELLER: How--I mean, mission accomplished. How--what did you--what--were you surprised by this feedback?

COLIN QUINN: Yeah. I mean, I've gotten a lot of weird reviews anyway in my career. So it's like, you know, at a certain point, you just become to any abuse of it.

[00:01:58]

So I was surprised, and happily surprised I was getting good reviews. But I mean, yeah, obviously, you know, I mean, getting reviews--it's supposed--I mean, that's how I am anyway. I'm not really left or right.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Right. And Every single one of the reviewers got something out. it was like a "Rashomon" thing.

COLIN QUINN: Right.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: You know, where they were each hearing, "Yeah, Colin's telling it like it is." And each side heard their own thing.

COLIN QUINN: Right. That's the weird thing is, like, after this show, the whole show is about how everybody's just--this is just ridiculous, and how we're all not that bright yet, you know, as far as human nature. And then every--people come up to me after the show going, "Yeah." Like, they start--they start yelling about the same things that I'm complaining about. My show is me complaining that people have the right to complain on social media, basically. I mean, if you really look at it past the opening level, it's just me being a hypocrite and saying, "Nobody should be allowed to say all these things, except for me." But I'm trying to hide it. but they're just--but it's like, everybody just goes right back into--everybody's into this--so locked in right now.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Yeah.

COLIN QUINN: It's like--it's like mass brainwashing, mass hysteria, you know.

[00:03:01]

DAVID WINDMUELLER: You did a lot of research for both, like, this show, for your Constitutional show. Was there--did you find anything surprising, like, in the founding of the country or the discourse?

COLIN QUINN: Well, yeah, just that it never really--that it never really took off the way--you know, it was never--it's just been a fight the whole way. Like, in the Constitution show, I always way, like, it was fine when nobody knew what anybody else was doing. But since social media, everybody knows exactly how everybody else is. So you can just be like, "Oh, I never see them anyway." You see everybody--each other's face all day. you know.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Well, that's interesting, 'cause are we, like, now, breeding these internet savvy personas to excel, as opposed to, like, the policy wonks that we created, like, in high school elections, you know, that we hated them before? Like, is this what we are creating now?

COLIN QUINN: I wonder. Because, like, I'll just take comedians, for example. Like, a lot of comedians suddenly became very serious people. And so I always say, everybody's trying to be funny on social media, except comedians.

[00:04:00]

And--but it's like, suddenly, people--this other side is almost like--remember Beyonce had, like, that side personality? I forget the name. And I said--if I knew the name, you'd all be creeped out. Sasha Fierce. Thank you. And--I shouldn't have even been that quick to know what you were talking about. But I did. But I'm just saying, I feel like, online, people do have this side personality now, where people I know--and I'm like--they just--online, they're a different person than they are in real life. That's the other weird thing.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: You had a side personality before.

COLIN QUINN: Oh, online. Yeah.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: No, no, no, not online. In your book, you talk about Colum.

COLIN QUINN: That's quite a jump, but all right, yeah. Back when I--when I used drink, in my early 20s. But I used to pretend to be--I was trying to pick up girls, and I would pretend--I had an Irish accent, like--I mean, I would just put on this Northern Irish accent. It's not as lame as it sounds. It was a specific Belfast. It wasn't like a Lucky Charms guy.

[00:05:00]

This was, like, a serious--I was doing serious character work. And I was just sitting at the bar, by myself, 'cause nobody wanted to hang out with me anyway, 'cause I was like, the real, you know, typical idiot drunk. And I'd just be like, "Hey, how you doing?" And I'd be talking to, like, all these people. And I'd say my name was Colum. And I would hit around that I was from Belfast, and I had to leave under murky circumstances, because if IRA thing, you know. So. It ended--it ended--a lot of times it ended in a lot of violence, where I caught a lot of beatings. I'll be honest. But--you know, but that was my plan. And it seems like--it worked for--it worked for a while. Like, it would work for, like, a half-hour, and then something would happen where I'd be exposed, or the girl would just be like, "You just said--now you said you're from Brooklyn" or something, and I'd be like, "Oh, you know." And it was just--it never really panned out the way I had it planned in my head. Look, I'm not proud of it. I'm just saying it was--it was an idea, you know?

[00:05:59]

In your early 20s, you know, you want to meet women or men, and you have ideas. That was my idea. I committed to it. And I would just lock in after--it's the mind--like, after a couple of beers, I was like, "I'm Colum now." And I'd walk in. I had a--like, a green corduroy jacket with patches and, like, an Irish sweater. If you saw me at that time--I know, now it looks like it wouldn't--at that time, it could have worked on you. You'd be surprised. Smoking. You know, the bar. Tortured.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: So-so, like, getting back to your show--

COLIN QUINN: Yes.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Right.

COLIN QUINN: But I had--but I forgot to say, I had read this one big book called "Trinity," about the Irish, so I stole the name. I stole every aspect of the guy's personality, except that was set in the 1800s and mine was interest he 1970s.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Right.

COLIN QUINN: So everything else was just right from that book.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: By Leon Uris.

COLIN QUINN: So anybody who read the book--yeah, Leon Uris.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Yeah.

COLIN QUINN: And it was a popular book, so I probably got caught out a few times on that one too.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Well, you--you are a reader. Like--

COLIN QUINN: I love to read. Young.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: And so, like Joyce?

[00:07:00]

COLIN QUINN: Yes.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Other Irish?

COLIN QUINN: Yeah.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Anything else that has, like, really impressed you greatly?

COLIN QUINN: I mean, not lately, but, you know, my favorite book of all time is called "Confederacy of Dunces," which is, like, to me, the funniest book ever written. And I still read it all the time. You know, I'm obsessed it my whole life. But I mean, yeah, I love--you know, I love to read.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: You said it was a test for dating.

COLIN QUINN: Yeah. I actually used it--I used to buy it for whatever girlfriend I was dating. I'm not coming across good in this. I get it. You're like, "This guy's a monster. Fraudulent accents. Testing people with books." Hey, I never said it was a great guy. I'm a comedian. Nice is not funny. And yeah, so I would just--I would give the book to whatever girl I was dating and just say, "Hey, you know, that's a great book." And, you know, if she liked it, then I felt like we connected. And if she didn't like it, I was like, "Oh man, this is gonna"--you know. But girls gave me books to test too, you know.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Any you remember?

COLIN QUINN: "Frankenstein." Which I never read before, and I was like, "Wow." It was really--it's deep. It's so much deeper.

[00:08:00]

And speaking of today, there's something about Frankenstein. I've been thinking about Frankenstein lately--which is, like, the thing on social media is people--we do love--I love it too--to go after somebody that you don't like. Like, the instinct of vigilante. Just get 'em. Get 'em. It's such a human nature thing. It's just crazy.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: And we made it a lot more efficient now.

COLIN QUINN: And we made it a lot more efficient. Yeah.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: It's very easy.

COLIN QUINN: Yeah.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Yeah. Yeah.

COLIN QUINN: 'Cause Frankenstein was a good guy. When you read the book, you're like, oh, Frankenstein was a good--the monster was a good and the doctor was a good guy. Just was--you know, he had, like, a bad spin. Like, they just caught--you know what I mean?

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Bad PR.

COLIN QUINN: It's almost--yeah. It almost was like a-like an early social media commentary.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Next project.

COLIN QUINN: Yes.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: So, like-like, speaking of the social--like, Hobbes talked about social contract. So, we're now in this new phase of social media contract.

COLIN QUINN: Right.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: What does that look up? What are we giving away, and what do we get in return now?

[00:09:00]

COLIN QUINN: Well, I mean, like I say, it's--I mean, it is--in some ways, you expose so much stuff, right? But at the same time, nothing can really get done, because everybody's got a little--everybody's got a little bit of something. You know, how much times you have people pointing something out, and then people go, "Let's go over your tweets in the past." Everybody's like, "Whoa." It's just, everybody's a little bit guilty. So in a way, I guess--I'm not sure where it goes from here. But it's--you know. Like, nobody's--nobody's pure, you know.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Have you changed your behavior, like, or social--like, you started do something right when the internet came out, and then all of a sudden you go, "Oh, that's-that's a big mistake. I'm never gonna do that again"?

COLIN QUINN: Well, no. But my whole social media thing was ironic from the beginning. So it's kind of like this--you know, like, I'm just literally, like, a troll. Even when I'm trying to be on social media, I'm always like--like, even--you know, I'm just, like, talking about the weather. Like, you know, just, my whole thing is, like, about--it's just, like, kind of ironically--it was funny at the beginning. I was telling you backstage, when I first started Twitter, like 2009 or whatever, and I was like--

[00:10:01]

Will Ferrell, he had won this Mark Twain Award, and I was like, "Well, you know, people see him as a nice guy, but we I worked at SNL, you know, it was quite the opposite. He was--you know, he stole "Anchorman." That was my script. It was on my desk. And then I came by later and he was putting it in the copy machine. And then I said--I said, "But, you know, I don't blame him. It's--heroin does that to people." But then it became, like, a real thing, where suddenly, you know, the HuffPost and everybody's, like, saying, "Colin Quinn says Will Ferrell is a heroin addict and a heroin dealer." I called him a dealer. And then people are calling me, and finally it became--like, I had to make a retraction, because, you know. But so, I've always been, like, you know, just obviously joking on--I've never said a sincere thing on Twitter in my life.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: That leads me, like--in your show, you talk about that we're breaking up the country.

COLIN QUINN: Yeah.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Needs to be. Or it will be.

COLIN QUINN: Yeah.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Doesn't matter.

COLIN QUINN: Yeah.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: So-so, a Tweet like yours maybe will be the Ft. Sumter of tweets. You may start something that gets, you know, [inaudible].

[00:11:01]

COLIN QUINN: You mean, joking, and then it becomes a real thing?

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Right. Right, right.

COLIN QUINN: Yeah.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Like "The Mouse That Roared."

COLIN QUINN: You're right, though. But you're right. A tweet probably will start our next war. It will be a tweet, right?

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Yes.

COLIN QUINN: Yeah.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: So, I don't know if you anticipated something like that.

COLIN QUINN: Oh my God.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: So, like, one thing is on my mind a lot is that it's relentless. Like, the churn that we get. So much information--so much.

COLIN QUINN: Yeah.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Like, I remember a time where I could go two weeks without knowing what the president was doing.

COLIN QUINN: Right.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Right?

COLIN QUINN: Yeah.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: So, do you disconnect? Do you--I know it's part of your work, but, like, do you find ways that you can actually really disconnect from that whole thing?

COLIN QUINN: I mean, I haven't yet. But I mean--you know, 'cause you just--it's just this thing you just are--you have to go to your phone. Like, I never even--I'm just like, "Nah." And then when you have to disconnect for an hour or two, you feel great. But when you're like, oh, you catch up and you feel--like, for the first minute I'm catching up, I'm like, I'm so happy.

[00:12:01]

And then I just get that sick thing where, like, I've seen this 100 times, everybody's saying the same thing, I'm saying the same, everybody's just--you know? But at first, I'm just like, yeah, it feels happy to come back and say hello. It's like-it's like meeting your friends--you know, when you meet a friend for dinner that you used to be good friends with, and then you're like, "Oh, I haven't seen them in a long time." And you remember the good times. And then after a minute, you're like, "Ah, Jesus Chris." You know what I mean? It's the same old feeling, you know?

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Yeah.

COLIN QUINN: No offense to all my friends, but, you know.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: So, like, one concept in your show, you talk about people not listening. That we just talk.

COLIN QUINN: Right.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: And, like, Twitter is a-is a cacophony of shouting. Right?

COLIN QUINN: Yeah.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: And so, like, how do we fix that? Have you seen that ever in history where it's just, like, people stop listening and then they started, or there was some event, you know, that brought us together more so?

COLIN QUINN: I mean--right. I mean, obviously, like, after 9/11, in New York--the month after 9/11 was the weirdest New York.

[00:13:02]

No horns honking. Nobody yelling at each other. It was the strangest time, where people were just--and you're like, "Oh, people can act nice if they want," okay?

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Yeah.

COLIN QUINN: Everybody was nice to each other. It was a weird, weird time, you know? And then one day, people started honking--you just started hear honks--horns honk. You hadn't heard them for a month. It was crazy. And then it was back to normal. But I mean, my ideas would be--like, if I could be in charge of society, what I would do is I would make--once a year, have a Constitutional Convention and just have everybody--whoever you would choose to speak, but everybody in the country also would have to agree--whatever gets said here, you can't attack it. You can't--you have to let it be spoken. Like, this is the safe space, where everybody says what they want. You can't have articles the next day that--it's not, like, a popularity thing. Just kind of everybody speaks. Like, you get what's considered the best minds, or whatever, and just have everybody speak honestly.

[00:14:01]

But you can't attack them. I don't know how you'd pull that off. But--you know what I mean? Like, because part of it is us. That we're like, "That person's the problem." You know what I mean? Like, it's so easy to pick one symbolic thing, you know what I mean? Like, Trump. After Trump leaves, our problems--the divide doesn't go away. He's just a symbol of it. But, you know what I mean? So people are like, "We got to get rid of Trump" Yeah, but once he leaves, that still doesn't change the inherent problems that

divides or whatever. So that's just one problem. So just saying, instead of it being just attacking a person and thinking you could crush that symbol by crushing that person, it's like, I would like it to be more--a more intelligent conversation about what's really--where people could be honest and say what they really feel, and just try to figure this out, you know?

DAVID WINDMUELLER: And you've said before, like, Trump is just one part of the--like, one--a symptom of that disconnect that we have.

COLIN QUINN: Right. Right. He's just the symptom. Yeah.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Yeah. But here in New York, we've had plenty of people--like, different people--

[00:14:59]

And you talk about it in your book and in your show, about, like, how we've gotten over it. Like, we've--a new group will come in, and after a rough time, it will get integrated, you know, to then hate the next group that comes, you know.

COLIN QUINN: Right. Oh, you mean--yeah, when I was growing up and stuff. Yeah.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Right. Like, so-so, like, is living in New York that experience that people need to actually--to be able to listen, or just to, you know, be able to coexist?

COLIN QUINN: No. I mean, I feel like New York is--you know, New York--even when I was growing up. Like, I look back on it now. I grew up, it was very mixed--black, white, Puerto Rican. And we got along better. I would say everybody understood each other better than they said, say, in places where they wouldn't be around each other all the time. But people seem to separate. By the time I was, like, 17, people were going more away from each other towards their own group. And it was just--we changed a lot ourselves. Everybody did.

[00:16:00]

So, I don't know. I don't know what that--I don't know--you know, you could have a--you could have a racial Constitutional convention and a red state/blue state Constitutional convention. Just a country of conventions, where people are talking all the time. But I mean, yeah. I mean, I would--I would say that every time I watch any show on TV, it just deteriorates into people just locking in and just--it's just strange that we're still doing the same thing, even though the results are not going the way that we would want them to go, you know?

DAVID WINDMUELLER: So, you have been raised in, like, so many parts of Brooklyn.

COLIN QUINN: Right.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Like, Bensonhurst, Flatbush, Park Slope. Like, how is it, like--do you go back and visit and, like, these [inaudible]?

COLIN QUINN: Oh, no. I'm one of those people--I'm one of those cliché New York people that just sits there and kicks myself, because we used to work on the houses. Like, we would work on the houses in Park Slope when people would buy them. Me and my friend would be--they'd bring in, you know, these kids, like 15-year-olds. We're 15. We're doing the floors. Doing the--you know, just all the prep work and all.

[00:17:01]

And I'd be going, "Look at these idiots, buying houses in Park Slope. Sterling Place. Sixth Avenue. Fifth Avenue." I was like, "These people are psychotic." Like, I wanted to live in Valley Stream. That was my dream. I said, Valley Stream, Long Island. that's where I wanted to live. 'Cause my cousins lived there, and it was nice. And I just had no idea. And now I look, and I'm like--I would have been--I would have been a billionaire. I would have big bigger than Howard Schultz right now. I'd be sitting there her husband, "Hey, listen. I came from Brooklyn, and now I'm a billionaire, and I'm gonna be President of the United States." But I mean, it's crazy. And Williamsburg. I still wouldn't have--I would never have--I was like, Williamsburg was, like, gangs when I was a kid. It was just, like, a wild neighborhood. You know, Bushwick. I mean, it was crazy. So it's like, I wouldn't have--you know. So, I look back at my life, and I realize it was--basically what I'm saying is an mitigated failure. Instead of being a comedian, sitting at a bar, doing an Irish accent, I should have been a real estate mogul.

[00:18:00]

DAVID WINDMUELLER: How did-how did you get into comedy. Like-like--

COLIN QUINN: I was bartending, and I was a bartender and a waiter, you know, at all these different restaurants. And I was like, you know, I wanted to be an actor in the back of my head, but I was like, I didn't know how to go about being an actor. It was like--you know, I was just, like, a haphazard person. And then luckily--this is the early '80s--I started doing comedy, and comedy was just starting to boom. But I didn't realize that at the time. So I started, and I had to wait on line, and every week, on my--on the line--every week, almost--most weeks, it was me, Chris Rock, Adam Sandler, waiting on these lines to get into, like, open mic and do five minutes. And we all got to know each other. And so it was like 1984, probably. And then we started to pass at these clubs, and everybody started--and it was just this little group of comedians. But it was so much smaller than today. In some ways, it was easier. I mean, there was a lot of comedians around that didn't make it. But it was just such a--it was such a small world, compared to today, you know.

[00:19:00]

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Did your-did your parents, like--were they big fans of this? Did they, you know, support you through that?

COLIN QUINN: Well, I mean, I was already, like, in early 20s by then. I was-I wasn't even living at home, you know. So it was like--you know, and they weren't living with each other anyway. So it was like--yeah. They weren't--they were glad I was doing something. They were just like, "Yeah, that's great," you know. Nobody-nobody thought about comedy. Everybody's just like, "Comedy?" it was, like, a crazy thing.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Right.

COLIN QUINN: Like, in those days. Like, "Hey, this guy's a comedian." People would just--it was so much easier to be a comedian in those days, 'cause you would just go on a stage, and people would start getting excited. Like, "There's somebody gonna be a comedian on stage." Like, nobody ever saw a comedian before. Now, people are like, "Oh, my cousin does that for seven years, and I tried it for two years." You know, it's not a big deal anymore. But back then, everybody was like, "Whoo, comedian."

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Okay. So, you-you lived in Park Slope for--

COLIN QUINN: For most of my childhood. I grew up in Flatbush, then Park Slope, then Bensonhurst. I lived with my girlfriend.

[00:19:59]

Then Astoria, Queens, then I lived in Staten Island for a brief period of time. I don't talk about that. And then I lived in--I lived in Manhattan. I lived in, like-like, Yorkville. Like, East 78th, between First and York. Then I lived on 45th, between Ninth and Tenth. But in those days--this was in the '80s--those apartments were so cheap. I won't even say it, 'cause, you know, everybody will kill me. But it was like, really--I lived on East Tenth, between A and B.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Uh-huh.

COLIN QUINN: Like, 400 a month. It was almost, like, a whole floor. It was crazy. You know? 'Cause they were considered bad neighborhoods back then.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Right. I read your book. It's, like--it's funny, and it's also a lot of autobiographical. I don't think I've ever read a book where the person gets punched so much.

COLIN QUINN: Yeah.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Like, like, all over, every chapter.

COLIN QUINN: Yeah.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: You get beat up.

COLIN QUINN: Yeah. Well, like I said, I was a very--what they call beer muscles. I was a very tough guy in here.

[00:21:00]

So, I would just--I would go to bars, and I always wanted to be 6'8", like 240. Like, my whole life, even when I was little kid, I resented the fact that--like, I'd see--Connie Hawkins was my childhood idol. He was a basketball player. I was like, "How come he's 6'8" and I'm not 6'8"?" So my whole life, I was--so, when I get drunk, I'd be like, "Look at that bouncer. How come he gets to be 6'5" and I'm, you know, five"--so I just flicked my cigarettes at them. And then they'd beat--they'd beat me out--literally--I'd just get punched a lot. I'd get punched out into the street, like the old school beatings, where you'd go flying out of the club. 'Cause I'd go after hours, 'cause there's a lot of after hours clubs in New York. So, I was the bartender all night, so I'd go drinking after hours. So I'd be like 6:00 in the morning, 7:00 in the morning, I'm walking out, my shirt's all ripped, all bloody, walking home, you know.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Wow.

COLIN QUINN: Yeah.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Well, and actually it ends up being, like, part of your, like, philosophy. You talk about--I think a friend of yours, Harry, mentioned there's a Never Punched in the Face Club.

COLIN QUINN: Oh, right. Right.

[00:22:00]

There's two types of people: those who have been punched in the face, and those who haven't.

COLIN QUINN: Right. Right.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: And those that--

COLIN QUINN: My friend came up with that one.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Yeah. That--that people that have, have a certain amount of respect for each other.

COLIN QUINN: Right. Right.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: [inaudible] the others that haven't.

COLIN QUINN: Right. [inaudible]. Well, that's another thing from social media. People talk a lot--you know, they're always digital soldiers. Whatever, computer guy. So people just say a lot of nasty stuff. It's like, this stuff is gonna lead to war. That's why I worry sometimes, 'cause I'm like, you can't just keep talking to people, ridiculing, attacking people. People are gonna react one day. You know what I mean? It's just--you know, it's not human nature to just think people are just gonna take your abuse. That's just the way it goes. It's been proven every society, including ours, many times.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: But maybe that--part of that is that people haven't been either punched in the face. I'm sure we could fix that.

COLIN QUINN: Right.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: But--or that people haven't been punched in the wallet, or, you know, like--

COLIN QUINN: Right.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: [inaudible] inequality is one of the things that people talk about greatly.

COLIN QUINN: Sure.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: [inaudible] like, with--people with--driving up with Lamborghinis.

COLIN QUINN: Oh, right. Like, lecturing, you know, some sheet metal worker from, you know, the red states and stuff.

[00:23:01]

Yeah. Oh, yeah. I mean, it's real stuff. It's like, people just talk, and it's spring--people--like, a lot of people in the media or in showbiz, whatever, just telling people, "Look, this is how you have to"--the problem, to me, is everybody--the whole country's built on the fact that you get to decide for yourself how to think. That's your only that everybody kind of says, "Well, that's one thing we came up with." And now everybody's just trying to force everybody to think the way they think. And it's not working.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Yeah. You--you grew up--your parents were teachers?

COLIN QUINN: Yeah.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: And so, how did that shape you? Like, what type of--what-what type of teachers [inaudible]?

COLIN QUINN: I mean, because they--because they--well, my parents were--my mother was just--I almost said just a housewife. My mother was--only became a teacher after my present got divorced. She went to college. She didn't go to college before that. But--so she did it later in life. And she taught Special Ed. My father taught English. And so she was a Special Ed teacher all over Brooklyn.

[00:23:58]

And-and, so yeah. It just taught me to-to like reading, you know?

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Mm-hmm.

COLIN QUINN: So, I loved to read, from early age. That was my other part of my thing with my jacket and my Irish thing. I always had a book. Usually I had, like, a play. Like I said, I was gonna be an actor, and, you know, so I always had, like, a little play tucked in my pants pocket or my jacket pocket. Then I'd be at--you ever see, like, a pompous asshole at the bar, breaks out a play, and starts reading by himself? That was me. Strindberg. I'd be like, "Yeah."

DAVID WINDMUELLER: So, did you--did you get any plays? Did you do them?

COLIN QUINN: Did I get into any plays?

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Yeah.

COLIN QUINN: I got in two plays, and one was a--was just this weird--I mean, I can't even tell you what they were about to this day. But they were, like, these weird, like, experimental plays, in the East Village in, like, the early '80s, where one was--was just some lady who was pretending to swim the whole time. And then I had to--but I had to carry her around. Like, I always liked to swim. I mean, I was in pretty good shape, when I think about it. Carrying somebody around a whole play, you know. I mean, I was like 23.

[00:24:59]

Even at the end of the play, I was like, "Jesus Christ, this really hard." And then I was in some other play, where it was just, like--I can't even remember what it was about. It was just insane, you know. But I was--I was--I was the worst--I was the worst employee. I was the--when I was drinking, all I would be thinking about is, "Yeah," just sitting there smoking, plotting how to get more drinks. So I didn't even care about anything I was doing, other than that. Even when I bartended, I'd be, like, trying to get back to my drinks. I was really a compulsive personality.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: So, how did you get to "Remote Control," which I remember? I was super fun.

COLIN QUINN: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I was doing standup. You know, I had quit drinking, so that's why I did standup. 'Cause I was like, I have nothing to lose. That was the only thing I really liked, you know? Nothing to lose. It was like they took away my best friend. So I started doing standup, 'cause I was like, "I don't care if I bomb in front of people. That's nothing compared to this." You know. So I was doing standup for like three years. And then they just saw me at a club, and then they hired me, 'cause of my voice.

[00:26:00]

And my voice was even more like this, 'cause I smoke three packs a day, so I talked like this, even though I was like 28. I talked like this. So they thought it was funny. I thought they were hiring me for my brilliant comedy. It was a disconnect. So I thought--oh, they get that I'm a great comic. They were just, like, making fun of the fact that my voice was so stupid. So, the first week we had a big fight, me and the MTV bosses, where I was like, I quit this show." You know what I mean? Like--'cause I was like, you [inaudible]--I'm not doing commercials for you. I just had this whole idea. I'm like, "What, I got to do the advertisements?" So I ended up--I was so resentful that I ended up doing the advertisements, like, really sarcastically, for their products, to where the people that advertised Casio or Mitsubishis--like, they're like, "This guy's disrespectful. Either he starts doing our advertisements sincerely or he's out." And I was like, "I'm not doing shit." But the show was on the air, so all the kids that were watching the show loved it, because, I guess, they were like, "Oh, this guy's insulting the products while he's"--

[00:26:59]

So then they wanted to keep me. So I lucked out that I was so snotty that kids were like, "A-ha-ha." Like, they liked it. and then suddenly, advertisers was like, "Oh yeah, do it his way."

DAVID WINDMUELLER: That's great. And how did that--how did you get on to SNL from there?

COLIN QUINN: Well then, after-after MTV was over, I was right back to--like, I was really--I mean, I had to move back in with my mother. She was living in Bay Ridge at the time. I had to move in with my mother. And people would see her on the block going, "Was your--he was just on TV?" And I was back. I had no money. 'Cause MTV didn't really pay that much. And I just--it was just a combination of things. I don't know. But I ended up...

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Free snacks [inaudible].

COLIN QUINN: Literally living with my mother and my niece in this apartment. And-and so then, I ended up getting a writing job on "In Living Color." So I moved to L.A. "In Living Color" was in its last couple of years. So they brought me on to write for that show. So that gave me enough to live on. And then SNL hired me as a writer.

[00:28:01]

And then once I was on there, I started doing stuff on there.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Was it weird to take over for Norm Macdonald?

COLIN QUINN: Oh.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Was it awkward?

COLIN QUINN: The weirdest. Yeah, it was really awkward. It was bad. Like, speaking of social media, at that time, social media was almost new. People just barely--I don't know if it was Myspace or whatever, but it had just started. And I was one of the first people that had to deal with the fact that, "This new guy sucks. You're fat. You fat neck. I'm sick and tired of seeing his stupid face." And I was like, "What the--?" I was so mad. But, like, it was, like, the first--I was one of the first people that had to deal with, like, feedback on that--on a digital level, that people didn't like you. So it was--

DAVID WINDMUELLER: From all over the globe.

COLIN QUINN: Yeah. And it was really interesting.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: So, do you watch "Saturday Night Live" now? Do you think it's changed drastically from when you were there?

COLIN QUINN: No. I mean, I watch it once in a while. But, I mean, you know--I mean, I watch--like, I'll watch it like everybody else, where I go online on Tuesday morning or something, you know what I mean? Like, I'm like, "Oh, let's see what this one is."

[00:29:00]

And it's the same. I mean, it's the same as when I was there. like, I see it from the side of, like--I'm like, "Oh, that person." I just imagine how it was trying to get that sketch on. So when I'm watching, I'm like, "Oh, I bet that--and look at that person. I can tell their lines got cut. They're just standing there in the back, like, "Why do they have me in this sketch?" So, you know it from like, whatever--you know, like anything else, you just look at the different angles.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Yeah. I'm gonna change topics to, like, something that--you've have your one-year anniversary coming up.

COLIN QUINN: Oh, my heart attack?

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Yeah.

COLIN QUINN: Yeah.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: That happened on Valentine's Day.

COLIN QUINN: Yeah.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: How has that changed you?

COLIN QUINN: Don't ready, my girlfriend noted it at the time. She goes, "Yeah, Valentine's Day. Interesting"

DAVID WINDMUELLER: People--yeah, that's pretty drastic to get out of Valentine's Day.

COLIN QUINN: You don't have to be Carl Jung to figure out that one. And yeah, the--yeah. I just had a heart attack. I just came out of the gym, and I was like, "Oh, man, I pulled a muscle." And then I was like, "Oh, shoot, I think--you know, I'm having a heart attack." And then next thing I know, I'm in the ambulance. And I was, like, losing air.

[00:29:59]

And I'm actually, I'm actually--I said, "I might die right now." 'Cause I'm losing air, and I couldn't breathe. And I'm like--and it hurts. A heart attack, like, physically hurts. Like, I didn't think it hurt. I thought you went numb. You don't go numb. It's like something pushing--like, somebody elbowing your heart. I was like, "Ah." And then I was like, "I could actually die." It was so weird. 'Cause I always thought I'd get--I thought I'd be like, doctor set me down and go, "Listen, you have two years. Get your affairs in order. Take care of business." I'd put out all my mission statements online, visit all my enemies, you know. Get

forgiveness from all my, you know, past things. and then--but no, it was like, sometimes it just ends. You forget about that--you forget about that partner of dying. Sometimes it's not a big, dramatic, two-year, you know...

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Yeah.

COLIN QUINN: Bad Movie of the Week type thing. It's just--you're just done.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: So, did you change anything in that last year?

COLIN QUINN: Yeah. I mean, I changed--I mean, everyone's like, "Did you change your diet?" But I'm like--you know, look, if--they're giving me medication, like, heavy medication.

[00:31:00]

It's disrespectful to science and the advances they've made if I then take the medication and don't trust that their medication works by having to change my diet.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Right.

COLIN QUINN: That's my theory.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: But have you visited enemies and, like--?

COLIN QUINN: Mm-hmm. The enemies? No, I haven't visited them yet. Because it's--but yeah, I do think, in terms of, like, oh, what would I do if I really only had a finite amount of time to I've, you know what I mean?

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Yeah.

COLIN QUINN: Like-like, I mean, I know I do. I mean, I know I'm gonna die now. Like, before, I kind of knew. But you really--you don't know for sure until you're actually dying. Like, "Oh no, this is gonna happen." But it hasn't--you know, it doesn't--it doesn't have, like, this big effect on you that you want it to, where you'd like, "Hey, man, everything's great." You know what I mean?

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Yeah.

COLIN QUINN: Still annoyed by every little thing. You know, just city, driving around [inaudible] on the train--everything's just, you know, the same.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: So, as a comedian, you've been doing this for decades.

[00:31:59]

Have--has it changed drastically now, with the--what you can do, and has that changed what you do, or your, like--you have a pass?

COLIN QUINN: Yeah. I mean, look--I mean, you can only--you can only do what you think is funny. Of course, everything changes, you know what I mean? Like, everything starts out for the right reasons. I think, like, people--like, even political correctness started out for the right reasons. But eventually, it becomes mod rule, where everybody's like--you know, you feel good telling people--you know what I mean? Like, yeah. People can't say this. so it starts out for a good reason. And then it becomes twisted

by just the general idea of, you know, people--everybody just gets involved, you know? But, I mean, comedy is--it has changed. It has changed in the sense that, like, there's a lot of things that don't get discussed in comedy, just 'cause people are like, that's off-limits. And, you know, that's stupid, because it's comedy.

[00:33:01]

You know, it's supposed to--you're supposed to discuss certain things, if you can make them funny. That being said--so, like, a lot of people would be, like, "Well, I want to say what I want to say." And a lot of--like, I find myself defending the rights of comedians to say things sometimes. I'm like, I don't even agree with that. I don't even like what you're saying. But I still gotta defend on general principle, just because I'm a comedian. You know what I mean? So, you know, you stick with the idea, even though I'm like, "I gotta defend your dumb joke?" I don't even find it funny. It's shock humor. I don't go for that. You know.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Right.

COLIN QUINN: So, it's a weird--you know, it's been--it's a weird time in every--for everybody, with everything, I feel like, and comedy's just one of those other things.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Yeah. And your show, you do that. Like, you are very blunt about different topics.

COLIN QUINN: Oh, yeah. I've always--you know. Like I said, I just--you know, I feel like, if you make it funny, then people will more likely go, "That's funny."

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Yeah. I mean, like, you do, like, a celebrity roast of the states.

COLIN QUINN: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: So, like, each one--you call out all of them.

[00:33:59]

COLIN QUINN: Yeah.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: And give them--give them something. Is there--was any of those hard to do? You want to share any of those right now?

COLIN QUINN: I'll share them, but I don't think they're hard to do. I mean, I don't think they're hard. Like, the New York story was more like people, like, "You're talking about everybody's ethnicity." But people liked it, because everybody thought, you know, "Obviously, he's not trying to attack." I'm not trying to slip anything by anybody.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Right.

COLIN QUINN: Like, I feel like that's a big problem in comedy. If you're trying to be slick and say something without taking ownership of it, then you're gonna be in trouble. But my state ones is like, you know, I say, in "New York Story," you know, I just talk about how the fall of every state--New York was once the home of drunken writers at the Algonquin Roundtable, and now it's drunken texters at SantaCon. And then Massachusetts, where once, Sam Adams pouring tea into Boston Harbor. Now it's

Fenway fans pouring Sam Adams on to Yankee outfielders' heads. And just, I go over all the--you know, just mocking every state, as you go along.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: That's great. It was funny. Very funny.

COLIN QUINN: Thanks. Yeah.

[00:35:00]

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Before I ask my last question, we have two microphones, so if you want to ask something, feel free.

COLIN QUINN: Wait, what about you--I'm sorry, what about your state, Virginia?

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Virginia?

COLIN QUINN: I go, Virginia, the snobs of the South. Stop trying to be Connecticut, you hayseeds.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: That's good. No, that's funny.

COLIN QUINN: He's like, "That's funny."

DAVID WINDMUELLER: So, again, we're gonna have questions, so feel free to line up, if you have questions for Colin. Last one, you've hosted a comics talk show, "Tough Crowd."

COLIN QUINN: Oh, yeah.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: That was awesome.

COLIN QUINN: Thanks.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Very tough. You helped our troops with your USO tours.

COLIN QUINN: Oh yeah, we did a USO tour.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: So nice. And, you know, you have your--now an online--you've had online shows--"Cop Show."

COLIN QUINN: "Cop Show." That's my baby.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: And so, like, what's next? More directing? Writing? What's going on?

COLIN QUINN: I would like to do more "Cop Show"s, now that you mentioned it. that's really my--you know what I mean?

[00:36:01]

In fact, now that I'm here at Google, I might as well say, the problem with "Cop Show" is that you didn't watch it, and you guys know how to get it--it's got like 100,000 views per show. You need like 8 million.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Mm-hmm.

COLIN QUINN: It's too late anyway. But go watch it. it's funny. I was gonna say, I was gonna pull a strategy move, and I was like, "I'm over my head. I don't know what I'm talking about." So everybody just watch it. it is funny, though.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: It is funny.

COLIN QUINN: It's funny, right? I swear to God, it's funny. If you don't like, you see me in the street, you punch me in the face. Obviously, it's my go-to move, getting punched in the face.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: All right, we'll go to the questions.

COLIN QUINN: Thanks.

PERSON: Hi. Thank you so much for coming. I watched "A New York Story" a few years ago, and I thought it was great.

COLIN QUINN: Thanks.

PERSON: I went to the Minetta Lane Theatre. But my question for you is--you touched on this a little bit, but there's a lot of controversy around what some comedians talk about...

[00:37:00]

Like, certain topics having to be off-limits, you know, like racial jokes or sexuality jokes and things like that. And I struggle with that, personally, because some of the jokes, I do find funny personally. So I have that own struggle myself. I'm like, "Oh, shoot. Like, I don't want to laugh, but it's making me laugh." Like, what is your perspective on that? Like, should some of these jokes be off-limits and, you know that internal struggle that some people may have--like, is it warranted? Is it--should we move past it? because I don't necessarily think that everyone's bigoted, but I understand the rationale for not having these jokes. So it's sort of a struggle for me, personally.

COLIN QUINN: Yeah. Well, that's--yeah, I mean, that's--it's a good question, because everybody--everybody gets offended by something. I always quote this guy Jack Simmons., who was a comedian from the '80s, where I'm from. The place where I came from. And--

[00:37:59]

But he used to always go on stage, and when people would moan, he would go, "Come on, folks, it's comedy. Somebody's got to get hurt." And that's the thing. So, it just--we just shifted what's offensive now. So, it's kind of, like, there's things that offend me. There's things that offend you. And like I say in the show--you know, I say, since they've gotten rid of ethnic humor from mainstream society, 'cause they felt it encourages racism, I go, "That's proven--racism is gone. So it was a great success." You know what I mean? Like, I feel like there's too much focus on standup material. Everything's--standup is not nice, and sometimes people say things that make me mad in standup--all the time. But like you say, if you're laughing, you shouldn't feel like, "Mmm, why am I laughing at this?" You know, like, suddenly it makes you into, you know, something that's--there's just--there's no--what do they call it? suspension of disbelief, which is term that always bugged me, 'cause I think it's supposed to be suspension of belief.

[00:39:00]

Suspension of disbelief. But another time. But anyway, the point is, like, when you're at a movie, you say, "Okay, I'm going into this world." And standup--I know it's not the same thing. There is a lot more truth to standup. So isn't all just jokes. I get it. But yeah, it's--I don't feel--I feel like it's--I feel like it's going down a path that I can't imagine how there'll be jokes in five years, because if everything falls

under the standard of, you know what, that group of people, that's a little bit off--I mean, you'll see--you'll see it now, like, in standup. Like, somebody will say, like, say any name of any group, and people are like [gasp]. Like, they just--before they even get to the joke. So it's like, people say celebrate diversity. Just don't point out anybody's different. You know what I mean? So there is, like--there's got to be, at some point--somebody's got to come with a clear point of, like, what it is. You know, it's just people marking down, "Okay, that's an 8.5."

[00:40:00]

We're just gonna have to start doing it based on--out of 10, how offensive is that joke, and how wrong am I for enjoying it? You know what I mean? Where standup gets to be this weird place, where it will be. We might as well be in 1950s at a glee club, where you're just like--everything's positive. I mean, standup, everything's negative. That's what it's about. So, I don't know--I don't know. But I don't--personally, I don't like it. I'll say that. I don't think it's good for standup. And I don't think--I think most standups agree with me, that it's weird. And you don't want it to become the kind of thing where standup is just motivational speaking or people are just lecturing the audience, which happens a lot, sometimes, I feel like, where suddenly it was, "Now, this is what goes on." And you're like, "Okay"--within the parameters. Like, standup punches down sometimes. It doesn't just--people are like, standup shouldn't punch down. Yeah, it should. It punches up. It punches down. It elbows you in the side of the face. It's dirty. Standup is wrong. You know what I mean?

[00:40:59]

So, that's the other part of it that's kind of getting into a weird area. I realize that I've spent the last eight minutes answering this question, and don't think I'm not aware that I've said nothing. But. Such are the times we live in.

PERSON: Thank you.

COLIN QUINN: Thanks.

PERSON: Can you speak in your Northern Irish accent for the next--like, till you're done?

COLIN QUINN: For the next how long?

PERSON: What?

COLIN QUINN: For how long?

PERSON: Just until we're done, I guess. Or until someone tells you "Please don't speak in Irish accent, 'cause I don't understand you."

COLIN QUINN: Yes. I will. I'll do it like that.

PERSON: Awesome. Thank you.

COLIN QUINN: And I'll tell you something else. I hope Irish people don't see it, 'cause they might think it stinks.

PERSON: Okay. I'll give you the out, and answer this however you feel most comfortable.

[00:41:55]

So, when you talk about the evolution of standup comedy, especially political commentary, like, thinking back to Lenny Bruce, Bill Hicks, where we are now, is it easier? Is it harder? It is just the exact same situation? Like, are we--are we in a different place? Or have audiences evolved? Have comedians evolved? Or are we just stuck on a loop?

COLIN QUINN: From those days, you mean? Yeah. I mean, it's gonna be another long-winded one. I'm just warning you ahead of time. I can sense I'm gonna be rambling again. But it's--it's evolved. Here's how you know it's gonna be too long. It's evolved and devolved at the same time. I really am a big mouth. But I mean, it's evolved in that people--like, when I was doing comedy in the '80s, people would just get away with murder. Just cheap things, being like, that's not even funny. It's just they'll--the shock or the--whatever with the audience so now people are listening more, which is good. But it's devolved in the sense that everybody--I feel like there's almost, like, a film--like, a fake film over everything.

[00:43:02]

So when people speak, it's almost like we all agree, like, okay, you're saying this exists, that we know doesn't exist, and then the jokes will come within this fake world we've created. It wasn't as long as the other one, but it was just as hard to figure out. I don't even know what I'm saying. But you know what I mean? I just feel like there's something very fake going on, and it's infected standup too, you know? Where people are, like, "It should be appropriate--standup should be appropriate." It's like, no, the whole point of standup is it's not appropriate. It's kind of--I mean, part of the fun of a standup show is you're like, "Oh my God. Come on, man. That's too much." You know what I mean? And now it's like, sort of, like, that too much is based on something fake. So people are almost forcing themselves, you know? I'm singlehandedly bringing down the standup industry right now. People are gonna go, "I don't want to go to a comedy club if it sucks as bad as he says." But I'm saying there's still a lot of great standup out there. Hey, still a lot of great standup.

[00:43:59]

But-but, I mean, there's something--when it comes to politics or whatever, there's just a general feeling of appropriate, that's just--that's not what standup is to me.

PERSON: Thank you.

COLIN QUINN: Thanks.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Well, thank you, Colin Quinn. "Red State Blue State."

COLIN QUINN: Thanks.

DAVID WINDMUELLER: Is playing till March 16 at the Minetta Lane Theatre. And we thank you very much for coming.

COLIN QUINN: Thank you so much. Thank you guys.

PERSON: Thanks for listening. If you have any feedback about this or any other episode, we'd love to hear from you. You can visit g.co/talksatgoogle/podcastfeedback to leave your comments. To discover

more incredible content, you can always find us online at youtube.com/talksatgoogle, on our website, google.com/talks, or via our Twitter handle, [@googletalks](https://twitter.com/googletalks). Talk soon.