

## Laugh now, laugh later

Written by Harry Colbert, Jr.

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There are many dates of historical significance.

There's Jan. 1, 1863; the date President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation. On Aug. 28, 1963 the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. led the March on Washington. On July 20, 1969 Apollo 11 landed on the moon. And Sept. 11, 2001 shall forever be a date of infamy.

For Vanessa Graddick, her date of significance is Nov. 1, 2006.

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On Nov. 1, 2006, Graddick, a native of St. Paul, was living and working in Los Angeles when she got a phone call that changed her life.

“That was the date my mom got diagnosed with breast cancer,” said Graddick. “When I found out she was diagnosed, I was so upset that I wasn’t there with her. I called a couple of (comedy) bookers and said, ‘I need to go on stage ... *tonight*.’ After that, it was all she wrote.”

Since then Graddick has not looked back. Neither has her mother, who is now a six-plus year survivor. In many ways Graddick is showing that she too is a survivor; crushing through a male-dominated industry of stand-up comedy.

A 1998 graduate of St. Paul’s Central High School, Graddick is not the “typical” comic. For starters, Graddick not only has a bachelor’s degree from Hampton University, but she also has a master’s in social work from the University of Minnesota and worked as a social worker for Ramsey County and in Los Angeles.



“(Being a social worker) shows you how to deal with people,” said Graddick. “If you can deal with a crackhead, a heckler ain’t nothing.”

With the recent success Graddick is experiencing, she hasn’t had to deal with too many hecklers (nor crackheads). The visually pleasing Graddick was able to quit her job as a social

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worker nearly a year ago and is now a fulltime comedian and actress.

Yes, actress.

Fans of the wildly popular Kevin Hart show, “Real Househusbands of Hollywood,” were recently treated to a Graddick appearance as she played Angry Customer in an episode of the BET series. The St. Paul native said her connection to one of the show’s producers led to her role.

“Chris Spencer was one of the creative producers of the show and I knew him pretty well,” said Graddick, who also added that the role wasn’t just handed to her. “I still had to audition just like everyone else.”

For Graddick, landing the role on “Real Househusbands” is one in a string of coveted bookings. Last year Graddick’s stand-up was featured on Showtime in the all female stand-up series, “Lip Service.” The highly sarcastic comic was featured on Comedy Central’s “Live at Gotham” and on Byron Allen’s “Comics Unleashed.” Currently Graddick’s stage show can be seen on Nuvo TV’s “Stand Up & Deliver.”

“I’m really excited to see this one because it’s the first show I’ve done since I lost all my weight,” said Graddick who dropped 30 pound within the past few months.

Graddick said after viewing her airing of “Lip Service” she decided she needed to do something about her weight. At the time of that taping Graddick weighed 175 pounds. Today, when Graddick steps on the scale it displays 143 pounds. The entertainer, who was recently featured in *Muscle and Body* magazine, attributed her body sculpting to weight training, cardio workouts and a change in diet that cut down on her carbohydrate intake.

For Graddick, image is not the only concern when it comes to her career. Being a woman in a male dominated industry presents other challenges as well.

“I’ve been told flat out that I could get a lot more stage time if I slept with certain people,” said Graddick. “And if people think you’re desperate enough they will try you. There are a lot of us who will say no, but there are others who won’t.”

Proud of her St. Paul roots, Graddick said her upbringing keeps her from “becoming all Hollywood.”

“I’m a Midwest chick, so I’m very down to earth,” said Graddick. “We’re very genuine people from the Midwest. I never read my own headlines.”