Greenbaum has been a bunch of random, crazy jobs,” he says, “and you hope you can build a parachute while you're falling.” Partly it was the stripped-down purity: “That's what makes it almost a blood sport. You remove so much, until it's just you and a microphone. It's very raw and visceral—you feel everything.” But even more exciting was the freedom. He was used to performing magic in a blazer and khakis. In stand-up, the dress code, and the expectations, were wide open.

He spent his college summers in New York City, working an internship at MAD—“comedy boot camp”—and barking comedy-club customers in off the street in exchange for a little stage time. Back on campus, he helped found the Harvard College Stand Up Comedy Society (HCSUCS; “To Harvard's credit,” he says, “once they figured out the acronym, they never made us change it”) and wrote a prize-winning senior thesis on the effect of racial humor on prejudice. After graduation, his parents implored him to take the LSAT, but instead he leapt into performing full time. He moved to New York and gave himself two years to make it work.

Eleven years later, “work” is the operative term. Greenbaum performs more than 600 shows a year, locally and internationally, earning more than two decades. Chuckie helped Hoffa bulldoze to the president of the Teamsters official, for stealing a marble statue said to be the offspring of dragons. “My career has been a bunch of random, crazy jobs,” he says. “I like to say yes as much as I can.”

Last August, he debuted What's Your Prob-

One evening in early December 2003, I found myself alone in a brightly lit cavernous office on the fifth floor of the United States Department of Justice, reading a stack of Supreme Court decisions about the Fourth Amendment’s prohibition on unreasonable searches and seizures. At the time I was serving as the assistant attorney general in charge of the Office of Legal Counsel, a position that made me a senior legal adviser to the attorney general and the president. A few weeks earlier, I had concluded that President George W. Bush’s secret two-year-old warrantless surveillance program…was shot through with legal problems…

My thoughts that stressful December evening began with a crisis about national security and presidential power but soon veered to a different turbulent period of my life. One of the cases in my “to-read” pile was a 1967 Supreme Court decision… that restricted the government’s use of electronic bugs to capture private conversations by stealth. As my tired eyes reached the end of the opinion, two citations leapt off the page like ghosts: “O'Brien v. United States, 386 U.S. 345 (1967); Hoffa v. United States, 387 U.S. 231 (1967).”

…The Hoffa case involved the pension fraud conviction of James Riddle Hoffa, the autocratic leader of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, who would later vanish, on July 30, 1975, in what remains one of the greatest unsolved crimes in American history. The O'Brien decision concerned the conviction of Charles “Chuckie” O'Brien, also a Teamsters official, for stealing a marble statue of St. Theresa from a U.S. Customs warehouse in Detroit Harbor Terminal. The Supreme Court vacated both convictions so that lower courts could determine if the government had eavesdropped on Hoffa and O'Brien in possible violation of a new governmental policy and developing Supreme Court jurisprudence.

After reading the decisions, I immediately saw their connection to each other, and to me. In the 1950s and 1960s, Jimmy Hoffa was the nation’s best-known and most feared labor leader….Chuckie O'Brien met Hoffa at age nine and later served as his most intimate aide for more than two decades. Chuckie helped Hoffa bulldoze to the president of the Teamsters. He was Hoffa’s trusted messenger to organized crime figures around the country, and was by his side during his seven-year battle with Bobby Kennedy that ultimately sent Hoffa to prison.

But in 1974, he and Hoffa had a falling out…Soon after Hoffa vanished, Chuckie became a leading suspect.…Based on a slew of circumstantial evidence, the FBI quickly concluded that Chuckie picked up Hoffa and drove him to his death.

I knew this history well because Chuckie O'Brien is my stepfather.