Voiceover: She Shed Comedy with Linda Schwartz: Empowering Your Comedy Career

Linda Schwartz: Hey everybody, welcome to She Shed Comedy Podcast. This is your host, Linda Schwartz. I am super excited to bring you this pre-launch episode. I sit down on location at the Mad House Comedy Club in San Diego with Vicki Barbolak, who is a semi-finalist in the America's Got Talent competition. They're going to be going live in a couple of days and so we hope that you vote for her. Please tune in to America's Got Talent and send all of your votes and your love to Vicki.

Linda Schwartz: The podcast is produced every week for your enjoyment starting on September 1st and the show notes are at sheshedcomedy.com. Come back often and feel free to add the podcast to your RSS feed or iTunes and you can also follow me on Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and YouTube. All links are in the show notes. Now let's get into the show.

Linda Schwartz: Hi everybody, welcome to She Shed Comedy Podcast. I'm your host, Linda Schwartz, and today I am so excited to be here with you. I'm sitting here on location at the Mad House Comedy Club in San Diego with America's Got Talent, Vicki Barbolak. She is a, is it a semi-finalist?

Vicki Barbolak: She did it! She got Barbolak out! Linda Schwartz, give it up for her. It was not easy.

Linda Schwartz: My former last name was [Parathacoon 00:01:30]. It was 13 letters long.

Vicki Barbolak: Para ...

Linda Schwartz: It sounds like party raccoon.

Vicki Barbolak: It was Paratharacoon?

Linda Schwartz: Parathacoon.

Vicki Barbolak: Parathacoon?

Linda Schwartz: Yeah.

Vicki Barbolak: Parathacoon. And you gave that up?

Linda Schwartz: Oh, yeah.

Vicki Barbolak: Parathacoon. I don't know if I could part with Parathacoon. In fact, I might be looking to marry your old husband next, because I want to be Vicki Parathacoon.

Vicki Barbolak: You wouldn't mind?

Linda Schwartz: No, not at all.

Vicki Barbolak: It's a good name.

Linda Schwartz: Not at all.

Vicki Barbolak: You know, Schwartz is good, too.

Linda Schwartz: Yeah, I look like a Schwartz, don't I?

Vicki Barbolak: You do. I said, "I bet you, her last name is Schwartz."

Linda Schwartz: Yeah.

Vicki Barbolak: I love the name Schwartz, as well.

Linda Schwartz: So do I. Thanks, honey.

Vicki Barbolak: You really rock on the names.

Linda Schwartz: Oh. I do. Vicki, I am just so honored you said yes and that you're here.

Vicki Barbolak: Oh sure! It's a great podcast. Of course. I'm very honored that you asked me.

Linda Schwartz: Thank you so much.

Linda Schwartz: I learned a little about you today. You are an ordained minister and you have a mobile wedding business. Tell us about that.

Vicki Barbolak: Through the power of the internet and the state of California, I am allowed to marry people.

Linda Schwartz: Yes.

Vicki Barbolak: And in fact, I married a couple today, a couple of lovely women from LA that saw me on the show and this really happened. They got married at Trailer Park Lake, which is a really beautiful place for a wedding and it's free and it's always available. And it was a beautiful, cool, summer day. It couldn't have been more beautiful. But the best part was in the middle of their ceremony, Clark, my 92 year old neighbor, who drives around on a scooter which is basically a chair with a giant American flag, a full size, he photobombed the wedding.

Linda Schwartz: Oh, no!

Vicki Barbolak: He came through the wedding and yelled, "There's alligators in the lake. There's alligators in the lake." It was so hilarious. I'm like, this is a blessing, because you know, for Clark, I mean he's like the coolest guy in the whole ever on the planet and then he just came through and it was a beautiful moment and the girls really liked it. I loved it. It was just so cool.

Linda Schwartz: It sounds like it turned out to be fantastic.

Vicki Barbolak: That means their life is gonna be perfect.

Linda Schwartz: Oh, it's the perfect way to start their life together.

Vicki Barbolak: It's never happened before. There's hardly any Clark sightings anywhere. It was fantastic.

Linda Schwartz: I love it.

Linda Schwartz: Well, blessings to them.

Vicki Barbolak: Yes.

Linda Schwartz: I'm so excited that you're here, Vicki. I'm actually a little bit nervous, because I'm a little starstruck right now.

Vicki Barbolak: Oh, stop it. It is fun, you know. I've been doing this for like 20 years and I think you're ready for things to come when they come.

Linda Schwartz: Yeah.

Vicki Barbolak: 'Cause I don't think I would have been ready before for like people who've seen me in the grocery store and see me and now I'm like, I love it when people see. The other women, I was at Albertson's last night and this woman came up to me and I'm like, "You want to go ahead? Sure, go ahead." I thought she just wanted to go ahead of me. I had 10 things, 20, like please go ahead. She goes, "No, no." And I go, "Oh, oh," you know? "You saw me on the show." That's really been fun, but I think I would have had a hard time with that before, but now it's fun.

Linda Schwartz: So what's the journey been like for you? Can you share a little bit about when you started stand up comedy and why you got into it and what the journey's been like in the last 22 years to get you on America's Got Talent?

Vicki Barbolak: Yes.

Vicki Barbolak: So I was like 38, 39, when I started. Just like took a class, Sandi Shore's comedy class, Pauly's sister. She was really interesting. She had been to another planet and made an alien dictionary so in case you ran across an alien, she had completely written the dictionary from experience of being abducted for quite some time on another planet. It was like a perfect class for me, as you can imagine. She was the perfect teacher.

Vicki Barbolak: It was great, because I walked in there and when I walked in there, I had no sense of who I was. I mean, I've said this before, but literally I literally walked in with three large books that I had not read. I mean, just because I had no, I was

just floating around. So I walked in there and there was these awesome guys there that are still all my friends, two of them have passed away, but they're all just incredibly important in my life, so that was really amazing that they were there and then I just started going to open mics and we used to, back then, we used to just set up in bars. We would just bring a microphone to a bar and ...

Linda Schwartz: No kidding.

Vicki Barbolak: We just bombed bars. People had a great time, and we used to ruin their night.

Linda Schwartz: Open mic bomb.

Vicki Barbolak: It was really bad comedy. Yeah.

Vicki Barbolak: I did that for a long time and then Mitzi saw me, and they never really put me up at open mic at the Comedy Store because I was so bad, but Fred, the manager, who was like my great hero, he didn't know that I was working really hard in bars and that I'd actually gotten pretty good, because I'd been just so hard-working, but Mitzi Shore walked in one night to bring the San Diego people up and Bobby Lee was there and he was already a regular, but she asked Bobby, "Who is that?," and he said, "She's Vicki. She's a comic." And Mitzi goes, "Put her up."

Vicki Barbolak: And they put me up on stage and Fred's like, "Oh my god, what are they doing?," and then I went up and I had a really good set. And then I was passing by her and she goes, in her booth and she goes, "Sit down." I sat down. She goes, "I saw you were very funny." I said, "Well, thank you." I didn't really know who she was. I kind of knew. And she goes, "Okay, you can go." And then I went back to the bar and somebody walked up to me and said, "You're a paid regular now."

Linda Schwartz: Wow.

Vicki Barbolak: I didn't know what a paid regular was.

Linda Schwartz: Wow.

Vicki Barbolak: And Bobby goes, "Well that means ... And I go, "What's that mean, Bobby," and he goes, "Well, that means you can call in LA spots." And I'm like, "Oh."

Linda Schwartz: That's incredible.

Vicki Barbolak: It was incredible.

Vicki Barbolak: That first night I was a paid regular, I remember I always used to go to the Comedy Store and watch, but I'd park like two or three miles away, 'cause parking's like 20 bucks, so this night I paid 20 dollars at the Hyatt. 20 bucks.

Then I get inside and it was again, Bobby Lee was there, and I go, "I paid for parking." And he goes, "What? We have our own parking lot. Paid regular parking lot." I'm like, "Oh."

Vicki Barbolak: Mitzi was really, really good to me for a long, long time. Then she got really sick and then Tommy took over and he was like oh, he thought I was too old and I was done and he just threw me out.

Linda Schwartz: Wow.

Vicki Barbolak: That was really hard and then I was a little bit lost for awhile, because I don't know. And my parents were sick and I took care of them, so I was a little bit lost and then I met this guy named Keoki, he was a photographer and he helped drag a guy with no legs across the Antarctic basically. He wrote a book about it and I met him up in Tahoe at a wedding and he told me about that and he told me about how it made him just dig down deep for everything he could do to get across the Antarctic and I thought to myself and I went down to the river and I was just about to stop stand-up and I'm like, "Why would I do this right now?". I've never been so sad about it. Why wouldn't I just dig my feet in like he did and give it all I got? And then I just had that like rebirth and that was about three years ago.

Linda Schwartz: Wow.

Vicki Barbolak: So the last three years have been like the beginning again. And then when I got a call to audition for America's Got Talent, I'm like, "Nah. No. They're not gonna take me," and I went and auditioned and it worked out and it's been so much fun.

Linda Schwartz: I bet. The first time I actually saw you was at Tony Calabrese's birthday part, show, back in July. I think his son's podcast was happening in the back and I missed the opportunity to say back then, but I just thought you were so funny. The only complaint that I had about that show was that your set was way too short.

Vicki Barbolak: You know, I was just doing the three minute set, I think, for AGT. I kind of asked him for that, because I find that if you prep, I mean I really think if you ask for three minutes, even though people might want you to do a little more, you have to get out there and make it happen in three. So instead of being like, if you get like seven or eight, I mean you can let go a little bit and not be disciplined, so I try to take as many threes as I can.

Linda Schwartz: Yeah. That's such great advice. I think.

Vicki Barbolak: When you're prepping for three, if you can, try to do the three as much as possible.

Linda Schwartz: Yeah.

Linda Schwartz: Also, what comes forward for me is 'cause I am a new comic also, I'm studying to be a comic, as well, stand-up and so what that is really telling me is like if you want a tight set, three minutes really forces you into really tightening up your material and getting to the funny.

Vicki Barbolak: How long have you been doing it?

Linda Schwartz: I start my class tomorrow.

Vicki Barbolak: So you're just starting?

Vicki Barbolak: You've been watching a lot of comedy.

Linda Schwartz: I've been watching a lot, but I have a history with comedy. I've done improv in the past and I've done a show, one stand-up comedy show in the past, but it was nothing.

Vicki Barbolak: Like a one-woman show?

Linda Schwartz: No, no, no, no. I actually performed here at the Mad House six years ago for my 30th birthday and a friend of mine just put me on stage and it was my 30th birthday and also his birthday, so there was about 300 people here on a Tuesday night and he gave me about three weeks to prepare, so I really didn't have any training. I was just kind of shoved into the moment and I've been wanting to do it ever since, but I've kind of let life dictate my journey a little bit.

Linda Schwartz: And so here I am and so I start my class tomorrow with Tony and I'm really excited.

Linda Schwartz: He's amazing.

Vicki Barbolak: Tony's a good guy, 'cause he'll bring out the best in you, but he won't try to mold you. He'll just set you free and yeah, 'cause I think you can't teach comedy, but the great thing about a comedy class is it makes you work every week, you gotta show up with something and then Tony's feedback will be really good, but it will also be like encouraging you to just keep doing it and doing it and doing it, because my husband, Lou's a piano player at the Comedy Store in his 25 years this month and he's watched comedy for a long time, like he plays chess and he watches comedy. What he says is, it's not like how many years you do it, it's just how many hours you've done it. It's just about getting up there and doing it and in the beginning, and there's a reason you need to go for three to five minutes.

Linda Schwartz: Yeah.

Vicki Barbolak: Right?

Vicki Barbolak: And after a long time, you want to be able to do an hour and you want to be able to be free and you don't want to be able to be constricted, like Bill Hicks said, "Material is what you fall back on when you don't have anything real to say." You want to get away from material eventually if you can. That's everybody's hope, but that's not always possible so you gotta also have material.

Vicki Barbolak: But when I got back and did AGT, then I was like, "Really? Two minutes? Are you kidding me?". I was really resenting it. I'm like, "This is not good." And then I really learned to love the zen of writing the two minutes that every word counts. You have to get yourself up and born and die, beginning, middle and end in two minutes. It's really fun. It's like as fun as writing your first set.

Linda Schwartz: Yeah. I'm really excited. I've actually been working with Tony privately, but so I'm really excited to be in his class and all of that and I have a short set that I've been working with, but I feel really insecure about it.

Linda Schwartz: Can you talk to that a little bit and how to move through that? I mean, since this is a show about empowering stand-up or comics.

Vicki Barbolak: Honestly, there's only one way through it and that's just to go through it.

Linda Schwartz: Yeah.

Vicki Barbolak: In the very beginning, there's probably gonna be another voice in your head the whole time you're on stage saying, "This isn't quite right. No, they're not liking that. This isn't good. I can't believe I did that." So you're having this internal, negative motitoring going on at the same time you're trying to get that out. That's what I've noticed with a lot of comics when they're starting. That certainly was my huge, huge problem.

Vicki Barbolak: One way I feel like ... I could tell your spiritual so that's really helpful. It's just doing it and doing it and doing it and if you can try to quiet any negative little second voice that's inside of you or if you have a second voice inside of you, don't let it bother you too much. Go, "Okay, I hear you." If you have to slow down just to get quiet between jokes, that's the thing.

Vicki Barbolak: If you know your material and you're nervous, there's something Lindsey Vonn said, the skier, that's really been helping me. She said she was like almost stopping because of fear and she's broken everything, she should be afraid. She's a nut. Who would do that, right? So she said that the last few years, every time she gets at the starting gate, instead of feeling fear and anxiety, she feels a joy for this opportunity that she's about to have.

Linda Schwartz: Wow.

Vicki Barbolak: So like when I was live in my first time live TV and in a giant place like Dolby, I was like so freaked out that I just kept saying, "Opportunity. I'm gonna be grateful for this opportunity. Yes, Lindsey Vonn. Yes, I'm grateful." And secondly, I thought Mitzi was with me and thirdly, I had had so many letters from fans, I didn't want to let them down. They were having really bad times. They kept letting me know these rough things and I'm like, "I'm not gonna mess it up just for them."

Vicki Barbolak: So I would say that the idea of right before you get on, if you feel like it's an overwhelming anxiety, that you consider that opportunity.

Linda Schwartz: Just reframing.

Vicki Barbolak: Exactly. To this a huge ... I get to go on stage right now and do stand-up and share my heart and then the other thing is like I like to send a lot of love out into the audience before I perform.

Linda Schwartz: Share that.

Vicki Barbolak: Yeah.

Linda Schwartz: So I would love to know about your spiritual foundation also. Being an ordained minister and just sharing the love, I feel like that is the foundation of spiritual practice.

Vicki Barbolak: Right.

Linda Schwartz: How does that relate to you and in terms of comedy? How do you use that?

Vicki Barbolak: If I was always at my best, then I would be always, first of all, courteous, because I think, one time I lost my faith in God completely. I did not believe in God. I felt so completely bereft of any faith at all, so I had just read this quote from a Kurt Vonnegut book and it was a quote in the beginning of one of his books and it said, this 21-year-old man had written him a letter and said, "From reading your books, I've learned one thing above all there is courtesy," so I know that is so weird, but for like a couple of years, I just held onto courtesy as my faith which was so strange. But it's all I had.

Linda Schwartz: That's beautiful.

Vicki Barbolak: It was like something.

Linda Schwartz: And so simple. It's such a simple practice.

Vicki Barbolak: To be courteous.

Linda Schwartz: Yeah.

Vicki Barbolak: But my real truth is, I was always like raised a Catholic and one thing that always bothered me in any Christian reading was always no one could come to the father unless you come through me and then I just changed that word to love, unless you come through love, because Jesus was love, so like the core of everything for me is come through - Jimmy! That's my dog. Come here. Don't go away.

Vicki Barbolak: That you come through anything, you come through love. You come with love. That's like the whole, my essence is about being about love as much as possible, because that is I think the most important thing if we can be in of love have love to all then that makes us courteous and it makes us kind. Also, it makes you feel the audience because the wall between you is gone. That fear and stuff because you love them.

Linda Schwartz: Yeah.

Vicki Barbolak: They love you.

Linda Schwartz: That's great advice. I love that. I'm just so moved by your wisdom and your heart and your courage to just keep following your dreams and making it happen. I feel like if you weren't here, it would be such a disservice to the world.

Vicki Barbolak: That's so nice. I'm just so happy that I've gotten to do it that like everything just kept working out, you know?

Linda Schwartz: Yeah.

Vicki Barbolak: That I kept going, getting to go forward and I think that if you have a certain trust, if you want to do something, whatever it is, whatever it is, like I really wish I could have been a podiatrist, but I couldn't do math and I don't like medicine, but I mean, whatever it is that you wanna be, you can just trust that absolutely you can make it happen. Everything will keep working out.

Linda Schwartz: Yeah.

Linda Schwartz: I love that idea, because I feel like I've been following this impulse for a really long time and it's never left me. I hear it and there are times when I just say, "Okay, I hear you, but not right now," and that impulse though and that voice and longing in the back has always carried me forward and now that I feel like I have such a, earlier you said that you didn't know yourself when you first started stand-up and it sounds like you've really found your core and you're really grounded in who you are.

Vicki Barbolak: That's one great thing about stand-up, I mean, if you're gonna be a real stand-up and not just like a pretend stand-up, not just somebody who goes around going, "Hey, I was at the airport and there was some things going on at the airport you wouldn't believe," I mean if you wanna really be a comic, you have

to find the funny in truth and you cannot do that unless you find yourself. Some of us comics, we don't come from a place of great self love. I'm the last person I ever wanted to get to know. You know? It turns out that I feel like it's sometimes having a bad self image, what it stops you from doing is being equal with everybody else.

Linda Schwartz: Right.

Vicki Barbolak: It's just as bad to have a low self image in terms of how ungettable the world is gonna be for you, ungettable the conversation will be for you, because you feel so bad that you put up this big wall. It's just as bad as thinking so high on yourself that you put up this big wall. So just to feel equal, to feel that all people are equal, that all things are equal, to get to that point, that is what stops the wall between you and your work as a comic, your work with the audience. I think that's just really key and when you're writing jokes and you're learning how to live that creative life that your truth definitely has to come out.

Linda Schwartz: Absolutely. I thoroughly agree with that. Thank you so much.

Linda Schwartz: This show is really about educating and empowering women pursuing a career in comedy and just sitting here with you for these last few minutes, I just feel so empowered and so full right now. My heart is just so full, so thank you for that.

Vicki Barbolak: I'm really glad that you're having a show for women, because the thing about women in comedy, we are like making big strides. It's about math. The reason they said we weren't funny is 'cause there was 20 guys on open mic, two girls. Okay, 18 of those guys were not funny, two might have been funny. If two of the girls weren't funny, that meant zero girls are funny.

Linda Schwartz: Right.

Vicki Barbolak: The math has never been in our favor. That's all it's been, because let's face it, women are funnier than men. Our senses of humor, it takes a little bit more than, I mean I do love a fart joke, I'm not kidding you, I do love a good fart joke, I love fart jokes. But men could just do two, three hours of fart jokes and laugh their brains out. We are more discerning with humor. I think, I mean I just flat out think we're funnier and I'm sorry. It's just true.

Linda Schwartz: Yeah. I agree with that.

Vicki Barbolak: I'm not gonna lie.

Vicki Barbolak: There's a lot of funny guys.

Linda Schwartz: I think we're coming up to the top of our time and I'm just so honored and thrilled that you've been with us.

Linda Schwartz: Oh, before I forget, I brought a gift for you.

Vicki Barbolak: Oh my god.

Linda Schwartz: Yeah.

Vicki Barbolak: A gift. I never get a gift before.

Linda Schwartz: Yes. So since you love animal prints, I have these little clips. They're for your hair and I don't know if you ...

Vicki Barbolak: Oh, they're so cute.

Linda Schwartz: They look like little ears!

Vicki Barbolak: Oh my god, they're darling.

Linda Schwartz: Yeah.

Vicki Barbolak: Oh my god. This is so cute.

Linda Schwartz: I don't know if you want to wear them tonight or whenever, but ...

Vicki Barbolak: Of course, I'm never gonna take them off.

Linda Schwartz: I'm blessing them.

Vicki Barbolak: Thank you.

Linda Schwartz: And putting my love into them and I hope they bring you good luck.

Vicki Barbolak: I love them. Thank you, Linda. Thank you so much.

Linda Schwartz: You're so adorable. Thank you, Vicki.

Linda Schwartz: And with that you guys, thank you so much for listening. I hope you got a lot of value from the show and Vicki's wisdom.

Linda Schwartz: Good luck this week on America's Got Talent. If you guys haven't yet voted for Vicki, go vote for her right now. We're really excited for you and the best of luck with that.

Vicki Barbolak: Thank you so much. Thanks everybody.

Linda Schwartz: Take care. Bye.

Voiceover: She Shed Comedy. Like us, follow us, share us. Tune in next time.