

GRANT'S IS PROUD TO PRESENT THIS SERIES ABOUT PEOPLE WHO ARE MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN THE COMMUNITY

Russell Peters was in town for just two days to promote the Canadian leg of his upcoming tour and his tie-up with The Condo Store.

His schedule was tight. After a few days of back-and-forth with his publicist, we had nailed down a day and a time, but Peters was running late.

He's stuck in traffic, his publicist called to say, he'll call in five. And then again, "in just a bit".

I was beginning to think I was being stood-up by a stand-up when he finally called. We'd do the phone interview while he packed, Peters suggested. He was leaving earlier than planned as his flight had been rescheduled.

It also happened to be the day Tiff Macklem, the Governor of Bank of Canada, announced a sharp increase in interest rates and set the stage for the cooling of the country's red hot real estate market.

The perfect day to announce his partnership with The Condo Store. Talk about comic timing.

Peters, however, knows investing in property is serious business. He is lending his name and heft to The Condo Store, he said, because he's worked with them earlier.

He has been a long-time client and they have now partnered to share his unique experience in the world of real estate investing. Together, the partnership will highlight important conversations about investing wisely, lessons learned, all while showcasing the vibrant energy of the Canadian real estate market.

"These are not condo developers," says Peters. "They make it easier for the average Joe to own property,

PATIENTLY CRAFTED, DRINK RESPONSIBLY.
Represented by PMA Canada Ltd. | pmacanada.com

16 Desi News July 2022



Laugh, and the world laughs with you

so it's all good. I've never lent my name to anything before, so that should tell you something."

Asked if he viewed the world differently, if he saw the humour in situations which might have others pulling their hair out, he says, "It doesn't matter what happens, I see the funny side. Death, disaster, my brain automatically goes to 'what's fun about this?' I guess you could call it a sort of coping mechanism."

This coping mechanism has made Peters phenomenally successful. The stand-up comedian, actor and producer was the first comedian to sell out Toronto's Air Canada Centre, selling more than 16,000 tickets in two days for the single show. He is a Gemini winner. He also won the Peabody Award and the International Emmy Award for Best Arts Programming for producing Hip-

Hop Evolution. He was number three on Forbes' list of the world's highest-paid comedians, and became the first comedian to get a Netflix stand-up special.

Grant's Desi Achiever

RUSSELL PETERS
STAND-UP COMEDIAN,
ACTOR, PRODUCER

He is synonymous with funny. Think back to segments on his early shows in which he said his father gave out raw rice at Halloween. "It becomes lots more when cooked!" Or his irreverent take on Aishwarya Rai. Or his Netflix show, *The Indian Detective*.

The next wave of South Asian stand-up comics including Sugar Sammy cite him as their role model.

But what if a joke doesn't go down too well? Has he ever had a Chris Rock-ish moment?

"You mean have someone try to slug me? No, not really, but not every joke is going to get the same reaction. You've got to be prepared for that, that's the nature of the business. You could have 2000 people falling out of their seats laughing, but someone could take offence. That's not my problem, it's theirs."

And if the problem walked up to him?

"It would be a horrible night for the person—a horrible, horrible night. I've been a boxer for nine years!"

Peters learned boxing back in school to deal with other tough situations.

Born in Toronto in 1970 to immigrant Indian parents who had moved to Canada in 1965, he went to school in Brampton when his family moved there. Bullied because of his ethnicity, he learned boxing as a way to stand up to the bullies.

He was a pioneer in that he was the first South Asian to do stand-up at the time. Which must have made it difficult for his parents, too—there was no familiar path ahead that they could visualize for their son.

In a 2004 interview, his mother Maureen Peters had told *Desi News* that while his father Eric was a bit skeptical of his son's choice, she told Russell that so long as he was living with them, it was fine, but when he moved out, he would have to earn enough to pay his own bills.

"He said, 'I'm going to make it, mom,' and I told him he had my blessings."

That's exactly how it was, he reiterates. They never tried to persuade/push him towards a Plan B, to be a doctor or an engineer.

"Wouldn't have worked!" he laughs. "I had no Plan A. I had no plan. All I knew was that I wanted to do comedy. I liked making people laugh. So doing anything else was not an option, ever, it was never on the books. My dad worked in a meat-packing factory, my mom worked at Kmart, there were no professionals in our family, whom were they going to point to as an example? Besides, I wouldn't have made a good employee—I don't like authority."

But he did have a day job, a few, actually, while he attempted to break into the comedy circuit in 1989.

"I worked at the Aldo store on Yonge and Bloor, I worked at Yorkdale Mall, I was the DJ at weddings and birthday parties. I made myself available for desi cultural events, trying to get the community behind me. But then I'd end up offending all the uncles and aunties because I'd talk about how they really were as against how they presented themselves to others. I'd say, 'Why do you pretend you don't use swear words? Or do some other stuff? I see you, I've been around!'"

By the 1990s, he was a well-connected DJ on the Toronto scene.

He was on Yuk Yuk's roster, and says, while it wasn't a cakewalk, it wasn't hard.

"It's more like, 'I'm a comic, you're a comic'. Everyone is okay with each other, we're all just trying to raise a few laughs."

"Of course, there are those who will try to stop you from getting a gig, but no one is holding you back. You are the only one who can hold yourself back, you can be your worst enemy."

When he made it big, did he hear back from any guidance counsellors at school or teachers, those who might have tried to gently steer him in another direction? Because as his mother had said, though he didn't really fool around too much at home, she has heard from his friends that he did, at school. Enough to upset some teachers.

"I'm sure some of them have been to some shows—I've been doing this for 31 years!"

There was this girl who went to one of his shows with a friend. She'd rejected Peters at high school, but bragged to the friend about knowing him. They came up to him and the friend said, "She went to high school with you."

"Really?" he responded. "I don't remember."

Revenge is sweet, he laughs.

"I was not about to let her have her moment by using me."

To encourage students, he estab-



"Find your own voice. Go be yourself, there's only one you."

lished the Russell Peters North Peel Scholarship, an award worth up to \$21,000 and intended to finance up to three years of college for a student with a strong academic record and the intention of attending college.

If his son or daughter were to come up to him and announce that they wanted to get into the comedy circuit, Peters says they would have his blessings. And then he would tell them to go at it the same way he did.

"I'm not opening any doors for them. There are no short cuts, you have to prove yourself. With a short cut, you end up only shorting yourself. These are life lessons too many parents are failing to pass on. They do so much for their children that kids are not motivated to strike out on their own. Hard work scares them."

"I've made my mistakes, I'm still trying to figure things out."

He encourages those who seek to follow in his footsteps to find their own voice. And then to stick to it.

"Go be yourself, there's only one you. Stand-ups today have it much easier and safer—you're welcomed—than I did. The ones that thank me for opening doors, they have to, because I was the first. I myself thank George Carlin because he showed me the way. I had no one in my community who was doing this to

motivate me."

American comedian George Carlin, one of his biggest influencers, advised him to get on stage whenever and wherever possible. Peters says he took that advice and grabbed every opportunity that came his way to show people what he could do. In 2007, he hosted one of Carlin's last shows before the comedian's death the following year.

Everyone's journey is different,

says Peters. And mentions the meme that says there's a reason a Lamborghini has two seats and a bus has 50.

He owned a Lamborghini at one time, and then he sold it. Along with much of his fleet of luxury cars that included Rolls Royces, Bentleys, expensive watches, properties around the world.

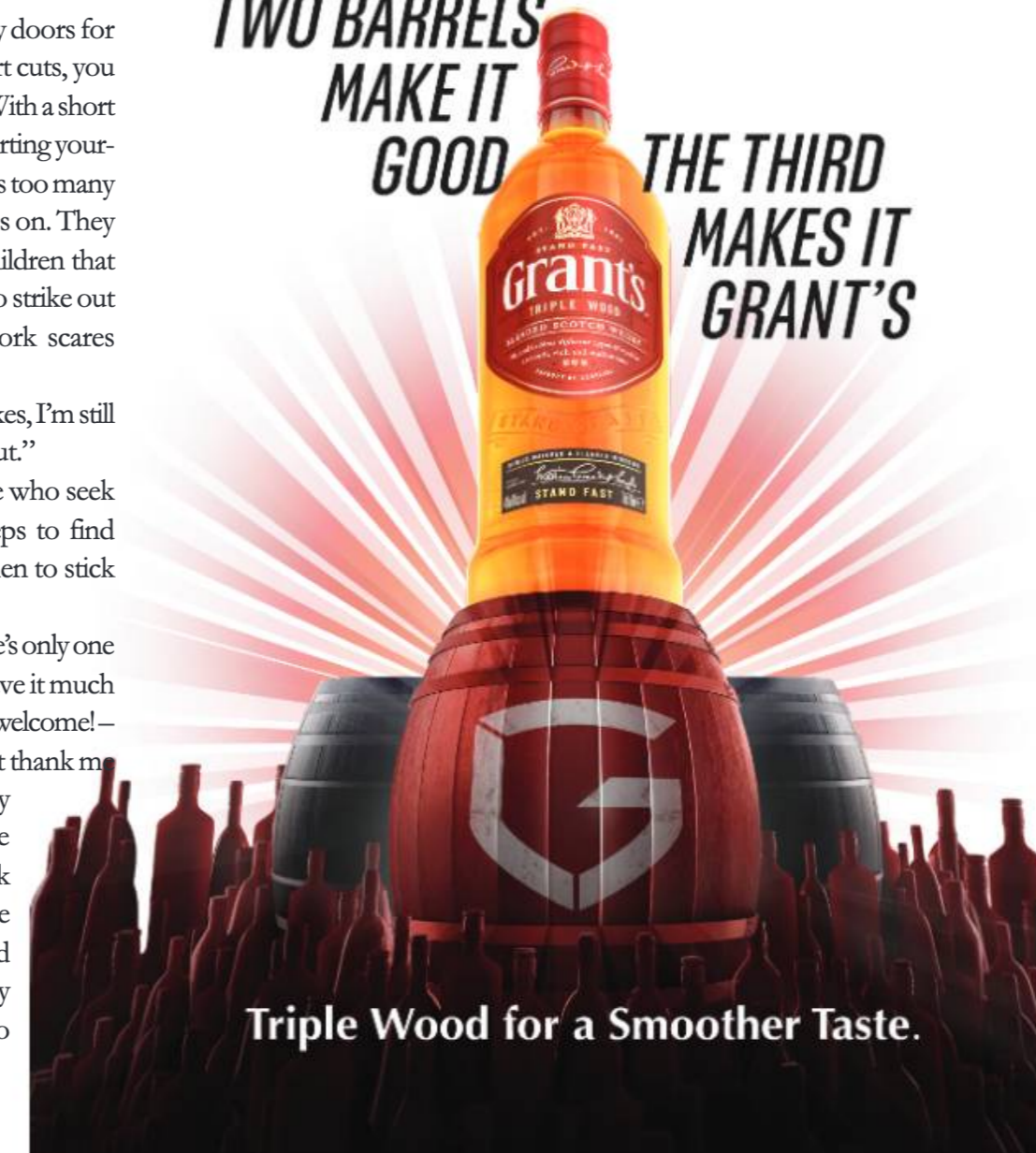
The pandemic triggered it, he says, heightening an awareness of all the things he had that were just sitting there. What's the purpose of collecting all this, he asked, and began the process of purging.

"I love the sound of people laughing. Being able to make people laugh, that's the best part of what I do, what I find the most rewarding."

— SHAGORIKA EASWEAR

After sold-out shows in Chicago, New York, DC, Cairo, Amman, Abu Dhabi and Dubai, Russell Peters will be bringing his new act, *Act Your Age World Tour*, back to Canada with shows from Victoria to St. John's, ending at Toronto's Scotiabank Arena on July 28.

TWO BARRELS MAKE IT GOOD THE THIRD MAKES IT GRANT'S



Triple Wood for a Smoother Taste.