

Phila PA Chronicles

Sharing memories of people, places and events that left their mark on the Philadelphia region in the 20th century

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Playing smart for laughs: Tina Fey

My 13-year-old daughter has been doing her own “talent review” of successful funny people since she started taking drama classes last fall. Intrigued by Tina Fey’s wry wit, she was proud to know that we can claim Tina as a Philly homegirl since she hails from Upper Darby.

My own review of my daughter’s current comedic role model revealed much about what shaped Tina’s comedic blend and how Lady Fey snuck to the top of the heap.



Tina Fey (Image courtesy of David Shankbone)

[Elizabeth Stamatina Fey](#) was born May 18, 1970 in Upper Darby to Jeanne and Donald Fey. Tina’s interest in comedy developed during middle school, and by the time the self-proclaimed “geeky” honors student reached Upper Darby High School, she was anonymously authoring the school newspaper’s humor column.

Her experiences at Upper Darby High helped Fey pen the screenplay for the comedy film [Mean Girls](#) in which she co-starred in 2004. Surprisingly, teenaged Tina wasn't the picked-upon, but rather the mean girl. Fey has admitted, "I ate weaker girls for breakfast. I really was a snarky girl."

As a drama student at the University of Virginia, Tina was often on the outskirts looking in since she disapproved of heavy drinking, drug-taking and sexual promiscuity. Tina has said, "I want to be on record saying this, so my daughter can see it one day in the future. I have never done any drugs! I am extremely square and obedient in nature!"

Tina's college years also featured a less-than-satisfying romantic life, "What 19-year-old Virginia boy doesn't want a wide-hipped, sarcastic Greek girl with short hair that's permed on top?" Fey, who discovered that there's not much of a market for that recalls, "I spent four years attempting to charm the uninterested."



Tina anchoring SNL's "Weekend Update" with Jimmy Fallon

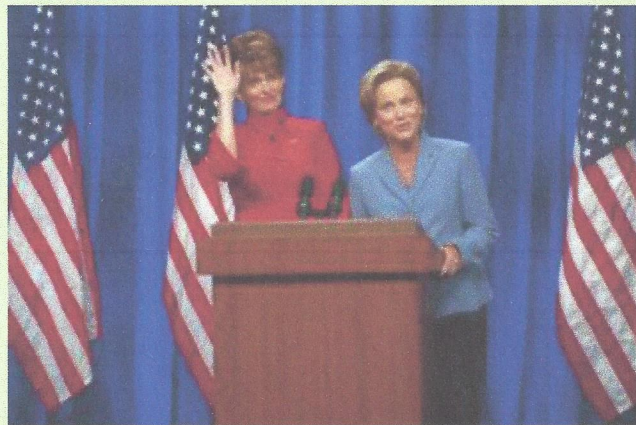
After graduating from college in 1992, Fey started training in improv at famed [Second City](#) in Chicago. Tina credits Second City with teaching her that her focus should be entirely on her partner when acting: "Suddenly it all made sense." In 1997, her talents attracted the attention of *Saturday Night Live* producer Lorne Michaels, and she was hired as a writer. By 2000, she began performing in sketches on the show and began co-anchoring SNL's "Weekend Update" segment. Fey would spend nine seasons at [Saturday Night Live](#), most of those as the show's first female head writer.

In 2006, Fey landed her own comedy show on NBC, [30 Rock](#), in which she imitated life as the head writer of a fictional live sketch comedy series, dealing with the show's crazy stars and her arrogant boss. Some feminists argued that Fey's Liz Lemon character showcased single-woman stereotypes more than her professional abilities. But Tina went for funny, executed well, and though the program never achieved spectacular ratings success during its seven seasons, the show and Fey both walked off with a number of Emmys. (Fey thanked their "dozens and dozens of viewers" in one acceptance speech. Tina earned another pop culture badge of honor with the introduction of [Ben & Jerry's Liz Lemon Greek frozen yogurt flavor](#).)



Tina Fey as Liz Lemon on 30 Rock

Fey gained national attention in 2008 when she guest-starred in a series of [SNL sketches hilariously channeling vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin](#). “Doing Sarah Palin was one of the strangest things that’s ever happened to me. You can grow up thinking, ‘I want to be on *Saturday Night Live* one day’ or ‘I want to be in a movie some day,’ but you never think, ‘I hope there’s a politician who looks just like me.’ To have that fall in my lap was just crazy.”



Tina Fey impersonates Sarah Palin, while Amy Poehler appears as Hillary Clinton on SNL

Rather than reveling in the image of a “woman who has it all,” Tina has chosen to more honestly express the angst of working moms. Returning to *Saturday Night Live* only six weeks after giving birth to Alice in 2005, she quipped, “NBC has me under contract. The baby and I only have a verbal agreement.” But yet Fey remained true enough to herself to not let being the head of a top TV show prevent her from expanding her family in 2011. When announcing her pregnancy with Penelope, she

said, "My husband and I really decided that we felt rather than risk having *30 Rock* end in several years and feeling like part of our family is missing that we were going to prioritize our family."

With a flair for one-liners, and leaving a trail of self-deprecating zingers in her wake, Fey has managed to climb her way in heels to the top of the male-dominated world of comedy. Proving that smart girls can win big, Tina regularly appears on magazine covers, was named to Time's "100 Most Influential People" list in 2007 and 2009, and was the youngest recipient of the prestigious Mark Twain prize for American Humor in 2010. At present, she sits at #79 on the Forbes' ["World's 100 Most Powerful Celebrities" list](#).

All in all, sounds like a role model for my teen that I can live with. Enjoy more of the wit and wisdom of Tina Fey in her memoir "[Bossypants](#)."

Phila PA Chronicles, published by Joanne C. McHugh, is a walk down memory lane to revisit the people, landmarks and happenings in the Delaware Valley during the 20th century. Its name was inspired by the pieces of hand-addressed mail that Philadelphia residents would receive from senders who didn't want to be bothered with writing out the city's lengthy name.