

# The Bells of St. Perry

News You Can Use from the Lives of the Saints

By KRISTIN PETTIT

Sometimes on a Friday night or Saturday morning I feel like I'm stuck fast in John Bunyan's Slough of Despond. According to Bunyan, a seventeenth century preacher man and writer, all we pilgrims bog down a time or two on our way to the "Celestial City" (read Heaven).

Now what in the world could short-circuit my zest for life? Headlines; agenda-laden, bombastic politicians; downer Dow Jones; Rosie O'Donnell's amazing descent into the hell of celebrity worship and consumer craziness; an incessantly whining jet ski ...? Perhaps a run-through of the Seven Deadly Sins can shed some light on my gloomy, uncharitable state of mind. Well, Pride's a good bet. Covetousness, too. How about Lust? Nope – hardly enough time for that what with all the Anger, Envy, Gluttony and Sloth I've been flirting around with. Damnable mess, with no savior in sight? Don't you believe it because ...

I've got a confession: if you can't recommit to the quest or fling off the crutch of self-pity by yourself, help is at hand – 21st century style – in the form of Janice Perry's exuberant new video *Holy Sh\*t: Stories from Heaven and Hell*.

Anyone whose faith and human kindness are at a low ebb is invited, by Ms. Perry, to put the hucksters and zealots and "true-believers" on pause for awhile and become born again in her hands-on-healing, immersed in boisterous hilarity (hard to come by these days) and wacky wickedness (ditto). Fear not: you won't miss the pseudo-religion guys at all. After all, the overwhelming glop of them are distorting three monotheistic faiths to further their own political or economic aims.

From the moment I punch PLAY I can tell it's going to be a new day.

The tape rolls. City Hall, Burlington, Vermont, 2001.

Janice takes the stage, resplendent in blue satin, gloved to the

biceps, her head framed by a giant gold travel halo. She dispenses with that, and she might as well have licked her lips because she's about to dine on the energy that's apparent in the audience, the palpable connection that builds all the way through until, to me, it feels at the end that the congregation is somehow on stage with her, pulled up and over the stage apron, and they are so THERE that she could, and does, slip away, downstage right. It was as if Billy Sunday himself had worked the crowd, taking them to

**REVIEW:**  
**Holy Sh\*t: Stories from Heaven and Hell**  
**A video by Janice Perry, aka Gal**

a whole other place.

Well, I'd long ago abandoned the couch to sit up close and watch her take her curtain calls. Then the tape goes black. I wonder how long the converts and the old faithfuls yelled for more.

Rats! Janice's breathless, flamboyant romp through Western Civilization – from Aphrodite's birth and the doings in the lives of a few memorable Christian saints – seems to be at an end. Inter-mixed with all that had been a miraculous story of Janice in Germany, performing and, as well, scenes from her convulsive musical about Joan of Arc, entitled "Joan – Exclamation Point!"

Totally cool! She's back. She's saying she wants to do something with modern saints but they're not "fun or sexy."

"The thing is, imagine if Tonto had a sister who was totally hot. And the Lone Ranger fell in love with her. But then, she died and so the Lone Ranger had to ride off into the sunset – with Tonto ... No mask, though; that's the bummer."

And then she did the bit, and I honestly can't think of many funnier scenes – on stage, on film, TV. I really shouldn't tell you what she did and how she did it because you must see it your-

self. Anyway, the magic would get lost in the telling. You really had to see or hear her. But I will tell you there was a loincloth and a set of pasties and a lot of action on the stage floor ...

At first when a friend gave me the tape, I wondered if the video camera eye could possibly render a "true show." So much of the impact was bound to be blunted. Maybe it was. However, I talked to two people who saw the show live in Burlington. Bravos from both of them, but, then, I felt as keenly positive with the video. So even though the camera work was rough (even crude in spots), the show's vibrancy triumphs anyway, and that's hats off to a remarkable performer. (She'd probably knock 'em dead in a rowboat, if it came to that).

Was it all furiously funny but going nowhere? Just a talented entertainer having a good time?

Did it offend, making light of millions who honor their faith, delivering a body-blow to Christianity when it reels before us daily in print and the electric media? No to all the above.

The show hangs together. It is, in fact, structurally unified in the sense that all parts work harmoniously in the serious business of delivering a stake through the heart of all the plagues that have bedeviled monumental religions from their dawning: hypocrisy, greed, oppression, and rigid adherence to outworn structures and creeds.

And the bonus bit about Tonto and the Lone Ranger is tacked on, but it's a wonderful wave good-bye. After all, unity isn't everything.

Lucille Ball had a ball and made living rooms rock in the 1950s with her frantic physicality, and Carol Burnett was awesome and occasionally veered into ideas that sometimes nudged a social construct or two. Mary Tyler Moore fluttered around, and her "America's Sweetheart" packaging enabled her to take a dainty jab or two as things heated up and women began a world-tilt. Whoopi Goldberg – much younger, not now – was mesmerizing, inhabiting the diverse characters she did,

thereby etching the "types of time" almost eerily. And Lily Tomlin – amazing.

But – Janice Perry contains within herself each comedienne you've ever seen or heard, even a female essence of Lenny Bruce. But she, unlike most of them, doesn't hold back. And we need such daring to cut through the unending rant and misinformation that is non-stop, often overwhelming and frequently delivered with motives having nothing to do with our personal well being or our cultural health.

Nothing short of blistering, zany satire will do to distance us, mess with our entrenched points of view and give us some cleaned out spaces and eased emotions, the better to think and feel a new, back to the "better angels" of our nature. (I swiped that from Abraham Lincoln, speaking of urgent messengers in intense times).

After Janice Perry rode off into the sunset I checked out her web site:

[www.janiceperry.com](http://www.janiceperry.com). Lots of neat stuff there about her significant and frequent work abroad over the last 20 or so years and what's she's getting up to in the States. For one thing she's taken

to teaching. Hesitant at first – after all, she's an actress, a dancer, a writer – apparently she's taken to it, and her workshops here, there and everywhere are sparking real growth, for her, she says, as well as for her students.

Well, of course they have, and they will. All memorable teachers put in some stage time, maybe not routinely but, oh, my yes, Janice's a natural. Great to think of her as a teacher. May she flourish.

During her performance, bells or chimes somewhere outside the auditorium rang at two opportune times, enhancing the monologues which were unfolding on stage. She waited with a Johnny Carson-like smirk and then responded, incorporating them artfully into the bit, eyes dancing, giving us an over the top theatrical restraint before she pounced all over the opportunity. They were crystal moments.

Have a crystal moment – or 90 – for yourself. See the video and take a ride with the holy terror herself. ▼

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**Halo of a Time: Janice Perry exposed.**

