

WORSE OFF

Written by

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FADE IN:

INT. TV STUDIO - NIGHT

The antsy AUDIENCE in their seats. Each person holds a signaling device. Bright lights cover the stage. CAMERAS everywhere. An air of anticipation fills the studio.

Onto the stage comes a middle-aged EMCEE, big smile and carefully styled hair. The crowd breaks into APPLAUSE, and the Emcee takes a bow.

EMCEE

Thank you, thank you. Welcome to a special episode of Worse Off, the show that allows you, the audience, to vote for misery.

APPLAUSE.

EMCEE

Tonight's subject? The self-inflicted. That's right, the self-inflicted. Isn't that exciting?

APPLAUSE

EMCEE

You know how the show works. The studio audience has signaling devices, and you people at home can participate by calling the numbers on the screen. Remember, your vote counts. So, don't be shy. Now, are you ready for round one?

APPLAUSE

EMCEE

Me too. Let's meet Worse Off contestant number one. From Greenville, Oklahoma, welcome Steve.

Onto the stage comes STEVE, 30, middle of the middle, in jeans and plaid shirt. What's obvious is a missing left hand, cut off at the elbow. He waves and smiles as the audience APPLAUDS.

The Emcee takes Steve's right hand in his, and Steve awkwardly lays his stub on top.

EMCEE

(breaking the shake)
Steve, Steve, the audience loves
you already. So, what is your
story?

STEVE

Thank you for having me. And a
shout out to my wife Jaydell and
our son Stevie.

EMCEE

I'm sure they're watching and
voting.

STEVE

Roger that. Yeah, well, I guess it
began when I was nine.

EMCEE

What began?

STEVE

The problems with my left hand.

EMCEE

Go on.

STEVE

You see, I knew right then that my
left hand didn't really belong to
me, if you know what I mean. It
was foreign, and it didn't do what
I wanted it to do. I fought with
it for years because that's what
you're supposed to do, right?
Until I couldn't stand it any more.
I told my wife, Jaydell. I said,
Jaydell, it's coming off.

EMCEE

And what did you do?

STEVE

What I had to do. I grabbed my
hatchet, laid my arm on the
chopping block, and swung as hard
as I could.

EMCEE

Oh my, that must have really hurt.

STEVE

Well, I had pretty much tied off the upper arm, so there wasn't a whole lot of blood. But despite the pain, I felt relief. Like a giant boulder had been lifted off my shoulders.

EMCEE

And then what, Steve?

STEVE

I guess you might call it shoe lace reality. All of a sudden I couldn't tie my shoes or my son's shoes. I had to sell my Harley cause I didn't have a left hand. Jaydell went cold cause she likes two hands if you know what I mean. My life went to hell.

EMCEE

I'm sure it did, which is why you're here tonight. OK, Steve, we get the message. Thank you.

He holds up his stub, and the crowd goes crazy.

EMCEE

There you have it. Our first contestant, Steve.

With a wave, Steve walks off the stage.

EMCEE

And now for contestant number two. From Ridgetown, Maine, a big hand for Beatrice.

As the crowd claps, BEATRICE, 40, thickish, ordinary, uses crutches to get across the stage. She's missing her right leg. She reaches the Emcee and raises a crutch to the crowd, which causes her to lose her balance and fall into the Emcee's arms.

EMCEE

Oops. Let me help.

BEATRICE

Sorry.

He gets her balanced and steps away nonplused.

EMCEE

Welcome to Worse Off, Beatrice.
How are you tonight?

BEATRICE

I'm doing fine. And I want to say
hey to my sister Ruth and my dog
Panther.

EMCEE

Quite a name for a dog. So, are
you ready to tell your story?

BEATRICE

Yes sir.

The Emcee motions for her to begin.

BEATRICE

I suppose it must sound weird. I
mean, I cut off my own leg for no
good reason, and that's weird by
anyone's lights. But you see, it
wasn't weird. I was meant to be
one-legged. My earliest memories
and dreams were always about
wanting to be one-legged. The
whole idea of having only one leg
seemed beautiful to me. So, one
day, I grabbed my father's hack
saw, drove the van to the hospital
parking lot, and opened up the
back. I spread out plastic and
started sawing. When I was done, I
called 911. Took only a minute to
get me into surgery.

EMCEE

And what then, Beatrice?

BEATRICE

I suppose I hadn't thought it
through cause right away things
changed. I couldn't walk without
crutches. I couldn't drive my
stick-shift car. My fiance dumped
me after we tried to walk the beach
together. And there is no fashion
for one-legged people. No pants or
dresses or even shoes.

EMCEE

There you have it, folks. Beatrice
and the misery of one leg.

Emcee waves Beatrice off the stage.

EMCEE
You have Steve who lost his left
hand.

Steve's face appears on the screen.

EMCEE
And Beatrice who lost her right
leg.

Beatrice's face appears next to Steve.

EMCEE
Is everyone READY?

AUDIENCE
READY!

EMCEE
Fifteen seconds to vote. To choose
who is WORSE OFF. Starting right
now!

A timer appears on the screen above Steve and Beatrice.
Below, appear the number of votes for each. As the timer
counts down, the votes trend for Beatrice.

EMCEE
It looks like...I think...yes, it's
Beatrice! Beatrice will be moving
on to round 2. Come on, give it up
for Beatrice.

The faces and numbers disappear as the audience APPLAUDS.

EMCEE
Well, well, well, I can see you
appreciate the problems of having
only one leg. So, let's get into
round two where Beatrice will face
off with RACHEL!

Onto the stage comes RACHEL, blind, tapping the way with her
cane. The Emcee crosses to her, and she smacks him in she
shin with her cane.

EMCEE
Ow, hold on there.

RACHEL
Sorry.

EMCEE
Just take my arm.

RACHEL
Thank you.

He places her on her spot and turns her to the camera.

EMCEE
Rachel is from Teluka, Florida.
Tell us something about your life,
Rachel.

RACHEL
Well, I live with mother, Polly,
and my brother, Ralph, and my pet
pig, Oliver.

EMCEE
You think they're watching tonight?

RACHEL
Oh yes, they never miss a show.

EMCEE
Neither do we.

Audience chuckles.

EMCEE
OK, Rachel, when you're ready.
Your story.

RACHEL
My story begins when I was fifteen
and started to watch the news every
day. You know, CNN and Fox and
Drudge and, well, I was watching
and reading news twenty-four seven.
And all I saw was misery.
Shootings, rapes, bombings, blood
and more blood. It got so I
couldn't stand it. I wanted to
stop, but I couldn't. I was a
junkie. I tried to stop lots of
times, but I always went back.
The only way to stop was to go
blind. So, with the help of my
brother Ralph, I doused my eyes
with acid.

EMCEE

Ouch! Truly a telling story,
Rachel, truly. What do you think
now?

RACHEL

Being blind is awful. No TV, no
internet, I can't even tell night
from day. Walking down the street
is a obstacle course with joggers
and bikers and skate boards. Even
a little dog can trip me up. And
you wouldn't believe how sore my
fingers get from reading braille.

EMCEE

That sounds like pain, real pain.

He helps Rachel off the stage.

EMCEE

You heard her, people. What do you
think?

The audience APPLAUDS and HOOTS.

EMCEE

My sentiments exactly. And now
it's time for round 2 of Worse Off.
On one hand we have Beatrice.

Beatrice's face appears on screen.

EMCEE

And on the other we have Rachel.

Rachel's face appears on the screen.

EMCEE

Before we go any further, I have to
remind the voters that tonight's
winner will receive fifty thousand
dollars, a new car, and two weeks
in sunny Cancun, Mexico.

The Audience APPLAUDS.

EMCEE

That's right, so vote wisely. OK,
time to choose the next winner.
Who will it be? Beatrice?

(APPLAUSE)

Or Rachel?

(APPLAUSE)

(MORE)

EMCEE (CONT'D)

Your fifteen seconds start right now!

The timer appears on the screen, along with vote counts for Beatrice and Rachel.

EMCEE

Tonight's special edition of Worse Off is sponsored by Kure-All medical devices. Kure-All for everything you're missing in life.

The timer winks out. Rachel is the winner.

EMCEE

My, my, the results speak for themselves. Rachel has won round two and will go on to round three.

APPLAUSE

EMCEE

Before we introduce our next story, I want to take a moment to thank each and every person who logged into our web site and filled out an application. Your voices were heard. And if you weren't chosen for tonight's show, don't give up. Log on, update your file, and tell us just how bad things are. You might be just the misery we're looking for.

APPLAUSE

EMCEE

When I read about our next contestant, I knew, just knew he was made for Worse Off. From San Rafael California, let's hear it for Zander.

Onto the stage comes ZANDER, strapped into a wheelchair. A quadriplegic, he moves the wheelchair by blowing into a tube.

The Emcee leads the APPLAUSE as Zander does a fancy spin in the middle of the stage and tips over the wheelchair, leaving him lying on the floor.

The crowd goes CRAZY!

FADE OUT.

