

Jeff Foxworthy

Jeff Foxworthy's life is a great example of the efforts you can achieve through hard work, family support and dedication to your purpose. Born in 1958 in Decatur, Georgia, a suburb of Atlanta, Jeff was the oldest of three children. His father worked for IBM. His parents divorced when he was 10 and his mother moved the family to Hapeville, just South of Atlanta. In school he was very popular, partially because he loved to entertain friends so much. In the early '70's, he even drew attention by "streaking" (running naked with a mask over his face) at a high school event (he was caught).

Jeff attended Georgia Tech, in Atlanta for three years with the intention of following in his father's footsteps at IBM. He dropped out of Ga. Tech after three years and, as planned, got a job at IBM. Jeff met a young lady and they married quickly, but the marriage didn't last very long. In 1984, Jeff found himself divorced (like his parents) and working for IBM in Atlanta. One night while attending a comedy show at the "Punch Line" Comedy Club, he took the stage on Amateur Night on a dare from his brother. Jeff was such a hit with his homespun jokes, that he was asked to come back the next week. HE was asked back the next week by the Punch Line. That night was also significant because a young lady in the audience saw him and was attracted to him. Her name was Gregg. They dated and became an item within a week.

Foxworthy began balancing weekly comedy appearances at the club and his work at IBM. Several weeks later, Jeff was approached at the club by deadpan comedian Steven Wright, who told him, "You should be doing this full time." Jeff talked it over with Gregg and quit his job at IBM. His success lasted one month; then the Punch Line let him go because they had a fully booked schedule. He found himself out of work and with no prospects for months. Determined to succeed, Jeff went throughout the Southern United States from town to town looking for comedy clubs that would book his act. Jeff jokes that he was practically on a first-name basis with every Holiday Inn manager in the country. As traveled, though, he picked up new material. Gregg had a full-time job which sustained the couple through the late '80's. Most clubs turned him down but many would let him perform and his following began to grow.

Jeff faced tough times as a struggling young comedian, but he refused to give up on his passion for entertaining people through humor. In 1990, at Gregg's insistence they moved to Los Angeles, California, to pursue his comedy in that market. He became a great success, getting bookings around the nation. During these years he had sent videos repeatedly to HBO, Showtime, the *Tonight Show* and *Late Night with David Letterman*. He was continually rejected. Then he caught a break. He met Jay Leno who took over Johnny Carson's hosting position at the *Tonight Show*. Shortly after the two met they became friends and Jeff was asked to perform in front of a nationwide audience on Jay's show. It was a big turning point in his career. Jeff was resounding success! He won "Best Comedian" at the American Comedy Awards

Jeff began producing material for an album. Most of it came from an idea he had when he was referred to as a "Georgia Redneck." On his way home one night he thought of a

routine he could do to help people determine if they were a redneck. A new idea was born that catapulted Jeff to stardom. His first album, was of course titled, *You Might Be a Redneck If*. In the early 1990s, when stand-up comedians' albums weren't selling, Foxworthy's people packaged him as a sort of spoken-word country artist instead. Warner Bros. bought his contract in 1994. Country music fans began asking for Jeff's album in stores.

At first Foxworthy's album sales lagged, but his marketing team moved the albums to the "Country" section instead of "Comedy" and his sales took off. Warner Bros. urged stores to file the album under country, not comedy. With their added promotional muscle, *You Might Be a Redneck If...* climbed to No. 3 on the country album charts in 1995, and eventually sold more than four million copies, making it the biggest-selling comedy album of all time. His follow-up album, *Games Rednecks Play*, appeared later in 1995, reached No. 2 on the country charts and crossed over to the pop Top 10, selling more than two million copies.

With all this attention ABC approached Jeff about building a sitcom around him. The Jeff Foxworthy show debuted in 1995, with less than favorable ratings. Jeff had the dubious distinction of being named "Favorite Male performer of the Year" by the People's Choice Awards and "Worst Actor on Television" by the New York Post. After a dismal year, NBC bought the show and revamped it but it never caught on, partially because the network executives maintained control of the writing and wouldn't allow Jeff to use his experience in front of thousands of people to guide the content of the show. In fact, when he received the call in May, 1997 that the show was cancelled it was welcome news to him.

Jeff returned home to Atlanta to settle back into the stand-up comedy routine and produce more albums and books. His first four books explore the phenomenon of the redneck: *You Might Be A Redneck If...* (now in its 30th printing), *Red Ain't Dead*, *Hick Is Chick...A Guide To Etiquette For The (Grossly) Unsophisticated* and *Check Your Neck*. Jeff's fifth book, *You're Not A Kid Anymore...*, is a more poignant look at growing up. Jeff also got involved with a charity near to his heart: the Duke University Children's Hospital in Durham, North Carolina, which specializes in treating children with cancer. Jeff is the Honorary Chairman of the Duke Children's Classic Golf Tournament. He has raised over \$4 million in his efforts.

Jeff Foxworthy got two specials on Showtime and one on HBO, winning Cable Ace nominations. He also won TNN's "Comedian of the Year" three years in a row. In 2000, he teamed up with Bill Engvall (his cousin), Ron White, and Larry the Cable Guy for the hugely popular Blue Collar Comedy Tour, which spawned an album of highlights and, in 2003, a concert film. When Comedy Central aired the *Blue Collar Comedy Tour* it garnered highest ratings ever for the network. Jeff and his three companions followed it with a second tour and DVD, *Blue Collar Comedy Tour Rides Again*, which broke Comedy Central's ratings records a second time. In addition, when Comedy Central aired Jeff's *Celebrity* it, too was one of their highest rated shows, surpassing Jeff's previous

records. He released *Have Your Loved Ones Spayed or Neutered* in 2004 on Warner Bros., and parlayed his film success into a TV series, *Blue Collar Comedy*, on the WB network, in which he writes, produces and stars.

Jeff stays close to his Southern roots, spending time at home with Gregg and his two daughters in Atlanta, when not on tour. Jeff feels that family and faith are most important in his life. His act has always been clean and tailored for anyone from 7 to 70 years old. His wit has been compared to that of Mark Twain, and he is the best-selling comedy recording artist of all time. He was not an overnight success. He stays away from drugs and women on the road. He has become a fine example of what happens when you are dedicated to what you love best and work hard to achieve your goals.

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