

My Day With Joan Rivers

A 914INC. contributor reminisces about her stressful “lunch date” with the queen of comedy.

BY LISA
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Joan Rivers (right) and daughter Melissa Rivers

Moments after the announcement came that Joan Rivers had [passed away](#), the newsfeed on my Facebook page was flooded with an outpouring of sadness and reminiscences about the comic genius. One friend perfectly echoed the sentiments of so many of us when she posted: “I honestly thought Joan Rivers would live forever.”

A lot has been written about what a genuinely nice person Joan Molinsky from Larchmont was — and my own encounter with her fourteen years ago can attest to that. I was the newly named

Entertainment Editor at the venerable women's magazine, *McCall's*. If you don't remember *McCall's*, your grandmother certainly does.

Joan and her daughter Melissa co-authored a monthly advice column and once a year they would be the guests of honor at a luncheon the magazine threw for VIP advertisers. The year I joined the event would take place at Le Cirque, and my job that day — my only job — was to make sure that Joan and Melissa arrived on time to allow for plenty of schmoozing with the advertisers.

I was nervous about everything that day... even though I went and bought something new to wear, I was nervous it was all wrong, I was nervous about meeting Joan Rivers and saying the wrong thing, or worse: doing the wrong thing. (I mean, seriously, how was I supposed to tell a superstar to speed it up because we had to get going?) But mostly, I was nervous about losing my job because I messed up what should have been a relatively easy assignment.

I arrived with plenty of time to spare and was buzzed in to her palatial triplex on East 62nd Street. While waiting for Joan and Melissa to appear, I was stunned by the size of the apartment that appeared to be bigger than any house I had ever been in. Joan once described the design of her home as "Louis XIV meets Fred and Ginger" and as I hung out with her dogs in the living room, I stared in amazement at the fresco of blue skies and clouds that covered the entire length of the vaulted ceiling.

It didn't take long before I switched my gaze to my watch. "My boss suggested we arrive by two," I shyly announced to the assistant who asked if I'd like something to drink. She just smiled.

When Joan finally walked into the living room to greet me, she was dressed in a camel-colored cashmere dress with a matching cape trimmed in fox. That cape left almost as much of an impression on me as she did. It certainly cost 10 times more than my rent at the time. It was stunning and Joan looked beyond chic.

"Okay, let's go!" she said with a smile. On the elevator with Joan and Melissa, we encountered a doorman and Joan inquired about what seemed like every member of his family.

Le Cirque was only a few blocks south in its old location at the New York Palace Hotel. I hopped in next to the driver while Melissa and Joan took the back seat. I was so nervous about saying the wrong thing that I said nothing: The jumpy mute in the front seat. Joan and Melissa, who had flown in from the West Coast, took the opportunity to catch up and talk about what was happening in their lives. Joan bragged about losing three pounds. "From where?" I wondered to myself.

When the driver approached our stop Joan said, "Please, I'm just not ready to go in yet, please drive around for awhile." We were already late and, while I might have been freaking out on the inside, I kept up the Marcel Marceau imitation and stayed mum.

When Joan finally decided it was time to go in, the luncheon was just about to start. There would be no pre-schmooze fest with clients. Sally, my boss, greeted the mother/daughter duo warmly and looked happy. Then again, my parents looked happy when I misbehaved in public — and then I got an earful after I got home. Who knew if she would be angry tomorrow.

After lunch Joan took to the podium, and within minutes had the room doubled over in laughter with her stories about the red carpet and which stars did and didn't wear underwear.

She was so fast and so funny, it was amazing to behold. She stayed long after she had to. It was then that she chatted with the dozens of people who wanted to shake her hand. And after the

crowd started to dissipate, she came over, told me she liked my hair, and thanked me for picking her up that day. But then she took me by the hand, led me over to Sally and said: “I want you to know that I was the reason we were late today. This girl was great.”

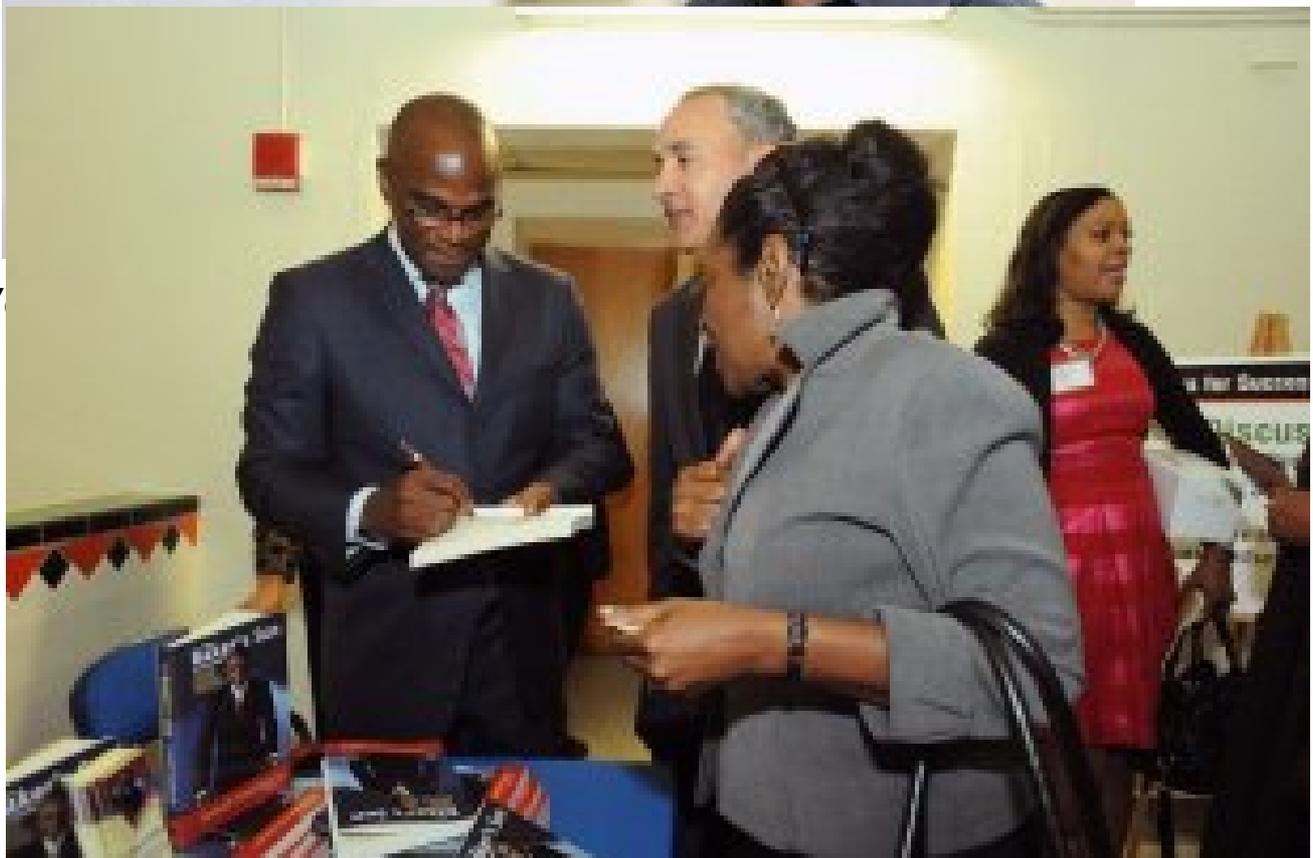
If I was quiet before, I was now officially stunned into silence. She could have just fulfilled her obligation and left, and I have learned since then that most celebrities would have done just that. But that was not her style.

Now I, like fans everywhere, wonder how the world will laugh again without her. But I will also always remember that act of pure generosity and kindness when no one else was looking.

Thank you Joan — you were the best lunch date a girl ever had.

Lisa Arcella is a contributor to [914 Inc.](#), a business publication produced by [Westchester Magazine](#).

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