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TALK OF THE TOWN

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EVERYONE loves a good story. Unfortunately, you're stuck with friends and co-workers who can go 15 minutes - easy - on the time they built a shed, dropped \$60 in Vegas or said hey to Lou Reed outside a club on Delancey.

You're a good listener. You deserve better.

On Tuesday night at Comix comedy club on West 14th Street, the Moth storytelling series presents its biannual GrandSLAM, a competition showcasing 10 of the city's most spellbinding storytellers. Each story is between five and six minutes, and the "true life" topics can be anything within the theme of "Hot Water/Thin Ice."

At a Moth storytelling event, expect grass-roots recollections from a lineup that might include astronauts, baseball umpires, voodoo priestesses or reformed pickpockets.

"This isn't stand-up comedy," says GrandSLAM producer Jennifer Hixson. "There is a lot of humor in the stories, of course, but there is also a lot of drama, suspense and poignancy."

The Moth storytelling series was started in 1997 by poet George Dawes Green, who hoped to bring the South's spoken-tales tradition to the downtown New York spoken-word scene.

In the decade since, the Moth - named metaphorically for an audience being drawn to a good story like moths to a flame - has attracted a number of celeb performers like Moby, Ethan Hawke and Suzanne Vega plus New York literati like Malcolm Gladwell and Frank McCourt.

Built almost entirely through word of mouth, not advertisement, the Moth recently expanded to L.A. and is currently staging a traveling tour in cities including Boston, Chicago and Austin, Texas.

The GrandSLAM competition Tuesday will pit 10 winners of previously held StorySLAM events, and will include all-new material. The stories are, by rules of the competition, true and personal - although a dose of embellishment is to be expected.

The Post spoke with some of Tuesday night's yarn-spinners who offered up a preview of the evening's anecdotes. Get ready for a potpourri of pathos.

Ophira Eisenberg, a stand-up comic in her early 30s, lives in Manhattan although she's originally from Calgary, Canada.

"I decided to take a break from taking care of my mother. I'd been making sure she was taking all of her heart medicine at the right times and making sure she was comfortable and that the pacemaker in her body wasn't causing her too much pain. One day I borrowed her car to go to the gym. I backed out of the garage thinking about what a good daughter I was, how I - the youngest daughter - was proving I could be an adult, that I could make her life a little easier. As I backed out of the garage, I was thinking of all this, and I wasn't really looking. I swiped the edge of the garage door and took out the mirror on the driver's side. I completely cracked it off."

Jean Michelle Gregory is 29 and lives in Carroll Gardens, Brooklyn. She's a director who specializes in autobiography.

"I was just a regular little straight kid, weepy over the absence of my boyfriend who'd gone off to college, when I fell in love - or was it lust? - with this 21-year-old woman who wore a leather jacket, had just returned from backpacking around Europe, had a wicked tattoo crawling up her wrist that she'd designed herself and who took to calling me 'Jailbait' every chance she got. So what did I do? I invited her to my senior prom, of course. And when it became clear we weren't welcome there, she sweet-talked a bouncer into letting me into my first bar - which also happened to be a gay bar - and we ended up dancing the night away. The evening was ultimately as wholesome as it was sexy."

Saurabh Tak, in his early 20s, emigrated from India and now lives in Manhattan where he sells jewelry and does performance art.

"I talked to this man's wife on the phone. Such a silky and soft voice, and such a contrast to her husband - whose voice was like listening to a hammer banging on a marble floor ... She had been to the same town in India where I had grown up, but it was years before I was even born. On the phone she invited me to come and visit them at their home. When I arrived, there in the doorway was this majestic, elegant, beautiful woman. She showed me around the house, so tastefully decorated. There was so much we had in common. We talked about arts and theater. Then she led me into a cavernous dining area, and there was her husband, Raj. He was sitting at the table, loudly slurping his afternoon tea, hunched over a

newspaper. I thought, this is so unjust. This guy does not belong here. I belong in this family."

Adam Wade, 31, is a freelance writer living in Hoboken, N.J. - and a defending GrandSLAM champion.

"It was August 1999. I had left my home in New Hampshire, where I had spent my first 22 years, for New York City 14 months prior, and had been waiting tables at Virgil's BBQ in Times Square to makes ends meet. All the while, I was trying to convince my family back home that I was going to get into the TV business. When I finally got my big break, luring in pedestrians to the 'Sally Jessy Raphael Show,' I remember my father's exact words. 'Adam,' he said, 'You were sixth in your high-school class and had a 3.8 GPA in college, and now ... you're a street barker. Congratulations, I guess.' Immediately, my heart sank."

The GrandSLAM Championship: "Hot Water/Thin Ice"

7:30 p.m. Tuesday at Comix comedy club, 353 W. 14th St.

\$15 tickets available by calling (212) 524-2500; themoth.org

Storytellers: Jonathan Brady, Andy Christie, Dave Dickerson, Martin Dockery, Ophira Eisenberg, Marvin Gelfand, Jean Michelle Gregory, Saurabh Tak, Boris Timanovsky and Adam Wade

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