Acting Edition

The Good Life

by Mike Birbiglia

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SAMUEL FRENCH

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THE GOOD LIFE was first performed at the Beacon Theatre in New York City on March 22, 2025. It was written and performed by Mike Birbiglia. The executive producers were Joseph Birbiglia and John Skidmore; the consulting producer was J. Hope Stein; co-producers were Mabel Lewis, Peter Salomone, and Gary Simons. The performance was directed by Seth Barrish, with production design by Beowulf Boritt, lighting design by Aaron Copp, and a backdrop painted by Irina Portnyagina. Ira Glass served as story consultant.

Special thanks to Pope Francis (1936–2025)

CHARACTER

MIKE

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I've written six solo plays over the last twenty years. *Sleepwalk With Me*, *My Girlfriend's Boyfriend*, *Thank God For Jokes*, *The New One*, *The Old Man and the Pool*, and *The Good Life*. These shows were all directed by Seth Barrish and staged in New York City – on and off-Broadway – and all over the world. The aesthetic that Seth and I developed through the years is deliberate, and at its best, invisible. In other words, the direction isn't often seen but ideally is felt. At different points in the process, we considered incorporating larger set elements, but in the end, we always tried to stage the shows simply. This was done with the help of our brilliant designers Beowulf Boritt, Aaron Copp, and others. However, the way we staged the show is just one approach. Seth and I would love to see a production like that or a production that is very different from that. We would love to see productions starring any number of actors and any type of actor (regardless of race, gender, etc.). The goal for these solo shows is to attempt to have a connection in the room with the audience. However you can make that happen, we are excited to see it.

NOTE ON TEXT

Text in [square brackets] is from the original production of *The Good Life* and is customized to the specifics of the Broadway venue and city where it was performed. Take liberties in customizing these moments to your specific theater and city.

For my daughter Oona and my dad Vince

*(**MIKE** enters from offstage.)*

MIKE. *(Off audience clapping.)* Thank you guys so much. Thanks for being here. How are ya? Thanks so much.

About a year ago, I'm walking my daughter home from school. She's nine. And my wife and daughter and I live in Brooklyn and they have these smoke shops in my neighborhood with these cutesy names like "Blazy Susan" and "Yes We Can-nabis."

My daughter Oona looks up at the name of one of the shops and goes, "Dad, what's The Good Life?"

I was like, *I don't even know. It's not what I'm doing.*

But I'm thinking I should try to explain what drugs are, so I'm like, "Some people use drugs and they sort of make your brain happy but it's sort of a fake happy and you don't want to get too happy because then you gotta use more drugs to get it as happy as you were the first time and then the ninth or tenth time it's even harder and that's when you're in real trouble. Anyway, Mom and I use them sometimes. Not often. Mostly when we were younger. Not your age. Like…three years older than you are now."

And of course I have to explain drugs to my daughter but no one ever explained them to me. My parents never explained them. The closest was how in sixth grade we had the D.A.R.E. program…which is an acronym that stood for "drug, abuse, resistance, education." Which sorta feels like it was written by someone *on drugs*.

Like, *(Impersonating the D.A.R.E. inventor.) "It's gotta be four words! And we know what the D is. We're printing the shirts on Monday!"*

It was a very shirt-driven campaign. Those shirts are worn to this day ironically by people actively on drugs.

By the way, before the D.A.R.E. program I had never considered using drugs. But after they laid it out I thought I should try these drugs and make an educated decision. Because they made them sound pretty exciting.

They were like, "Kids are gonna come up to you."

I was like, "Keep talking." Kids had never come up to me. This was the most exciting social development of my childhood.

"Kids are gonna come up to you and offer you crank and boomers and angel dust."

I was like, "Angel dust?" I was a sixth grade altar boy. I was like, "I shall try this angel dust and soar to the heavens aside my lord Jesus Christ!"

To this day, I have not been offered crank or boomers or angel dust.

I've never been offered cocaine. I've never even seen cocaine. Sometimes people don't believe me when I say that. I've worked in nightclubs for twenty-three years which are basically cocaine factories and not once has someone thought, *"You know what? We should show it to Mike."*

That's how people see me. I was in Washington Square Park the other day, and a stranger was walking in front of me and someone said to that stranger, "You've got an undercover cop walking behind you."

(Looking back twice.)

And then he looked back at me, and I looked behind me. And there was no one there.

And I said to the stranger, I go, "No..." Which is exactly what an undercover cop would say.

So I've never really used recreational drugs. Even in college when my friends would smoke pot, I was the least fun person to smoke pot with. I was the guy who's like, *"Do you guys hate me? Why does my heart hurt? Is that rickets? Who's at the door? Who's at the door?"* I wasn't a good hang. So I veered away from all that.

I use prescription drugs. I don't want to, but I have to. I have a serious sleepwalking disorder. About twenty years ago I sleepwalked through a second story window of a La Quinta Inn in Walla Walla, Washington, and once you do that once – they *always* bring it up when you go to the doctor. So twenty years ago I was diagnosed with REM Sleep Behavior Disorder, and I've talked about it so much that if you go to med school and you study sleep disorders in the DSM – which is the directory of psychiatric disorders – the example of REM Behavior Disorder…is me.

My dad is a doctor and he wanted me to go to med school. I didn't, but I'm in there. I basically teach.

Two years ago I went to my sleep doctor, I mentioned this to him and he said, "That's not good."

And I go, "What do you mean? We did it!"

He goes, "Well the problem is, I'm not entirely sure that's what you have."

I said, "We're gonna have to write a mass email because there are a lot of people walking around the earth thinking they have Mike Birbiglia disease and Mike Birbiglia might not have it."

Can you imagine if Lou Gehrig was like, "Actually I'm feeling pretty good. I might play baseball again!" People would have been furious. That's right, I just compared myself to Lou Gehrig.

The reason I bring up the sleepwalking disorder is that twenty years ago I get diagnosed with REM Behavior Disorder and they put me on Klonopin. And recently

I went to a new doctor and she's looking at my chart and she goes, "You've been on Klonopin for twenty years?"

And I go, "Yeah."

And she goes, *(Wincing.)* "Alright."

That is not what you wanna hear when you go to the doctor.

She goes, "Are you familiar with the side effects?"

I go, "I don't know."

She goes "Depression, loss of memory, poor motor skills."

I said, "I just thought that was my personality."

It's a strange moment in your life if you realize your personality is *side effects*. So then I'm just self-conscious about my daily activities and it just so happens that my dosage of Klonopin is one and a half milligrams so every night before I go to bed I have to cut a pill precisely in half. You know who shouldn't have a precision task like that? *Someone with poor motor skills.*

Inevitably I break it in half and there's a pile of Klonopin dust on my bathroom sink and I'm so depressed that I'm crying onto the dust and the tears gel with the dust to form a Klonopin sorbet and then *(Explicitly miming licking the surface of a counter.)* I'm licking up what I perceive to be a half of a milligram but definitely isn't half a milligram.

So how do I explain that to my daughter? *"That's the good life! That's what they sell."*

There are so many things I can't explain to my daughter. She's nine years old and it's just getting harder and harder. When they're younger it doesn't matter. They're sort of just an animated bag of rice and you just gotta make sure they stay animated.

And even when they're toddlers the questions are layups.

"What's that?"

"That's an egg!"

I'm a genius!

My wife doesn't know that much either. She's a poet. I'm a comedian. Together we're a sculptor. We don't know a lot. We've read hundreds of books about leaves. We can't explain leaves that well.

This became abundantly clear about a year ago because I get a call from my mom and she said, "Dad has been sick all week and I tried to get him to go to his doctor but he wouldn't go. And then yesterday he fell down in the tub and I called the EMT and they took him to the emergency room and it turned out he had a stroke."

I get off the phone. I'm in my bedroom alone. I go into my closet and I'm just sort of organizing things and I start crying alone.

Then my daughter Oona comes in and she says, "Dad what's wrong?"

I said, "Grandpa Vin had a stroke."

She said, "Dad, what's a stroke?"

That's when I realized…

(Walking downstage, confiding in audience.)

I can't fully explain what a stroke is.

I took a swing. I understand the bullet points. It's a brain injury. There's bleeding in your brain.

And then it was a lot of free association after that. I was like, "Your brain is bleeding. I don't know where the blood is. Or was. I think maybe in the vessels. I don't know where they are but now the blood is everywhere. I think. Your body is just filled with blood. Gallons and

gallons all over. In a way we're all just sort of bleeding all the time. Maybe ask your mom about that. Or Grandpa. But not this week."

Oona goes, "Is Grandpa Vin gonna be okay?"

I go, "I don't know, I'm gonna go home tonight."

So that night I drive to Providence, Rhode Island, to see my dad at the hospital.

He's in the stroke unit on the seventh floor of Brown University Hospital and when I see him in the gurney he's just this hollowed out version of himself. He can't move half of his body. He can't speak.

The neurologist comes in and she goes, *(Speaking loudly and clearly.)* "Vince – we're gonna do a spinal tap."

My dad just so happens to be a retired neurologist. And from the condition he was in he suggested a specific type of spinal tap.

He said, *(Leaning back so as to impersonate a patient in bed.)* "Guided spinal tap."

Which was impressive. But also, a good example of how controlling my dad is.

I'm watching a half-dead neurologist tell a fully alive neurologist how to do her job. That is next level mansplaining. That's dead-mansplaining. If you don't know the term "mansplaining"... *(To a female audience member in front row.)* It's when a man explains something to a woman that she understands better than he does. I'm not explaining this to you. I'm conveying it. I'm "man-veying."

It was devastating to see my dad like that. Since I was a kid I viewed my dad as larger than life. He was almost like a mythological creature. In a way, I always wanted to be my dad because he knew so much stuff.

My dad was a doctor and in his free time he got his law degree. *(Off audience.)* Yeah. That's how much he didn't want to be a dad. He was like, *"What can I do in these slots of time where I *would* be parenting?"* In fairness we weren't great kids. We always wanted a dad…and he wanted another secondary degree. *(Gesturing in the air to indicate two paths diverging.)* So our goals were at odds.

I never understood my dad's job. I rarely saw that side of him. Sometimes when I was a kid a stranger would come up to me and be like, *(Exaggerated Boston accent.) "Yowah dad is a great daw-ctah!"* I'm from *Woostah*, Massachusetts.

I'd be like, "Alright. He's not my doctor."

I didn't know. I mean, who really understands what their parents do for a living?

The other day I was walking Oona home from school and a stranger came up to me and said, "I really like your comedy."

I said, "Aw, thanks."

He says to my daughter, "Your dad is a great comedian."

And she goes, "Alright."

I thought, *"I know what you mean."*

We walked a few blocks and I go, "Oona, what do you think when people say stuff like that?"

She said, "It's a waste of my time."

I thought, *"That's the meanest thing anyone's ever said to me and I know Bill Burr."*

But when I was a kid, I didn't see my dad being a doctor. I mean, every now and then… like I remember one time I was in a soccer game and I was the goalie and I dove headfirst for the ball and I got to it and

then a kid on the other team kicked my head with the intensity he had intended for the ball. I don't know the rest of the story. But I have been told…that I hopped up and said, "I'm good!" And they took my word for it and they kept me in the game. About fifteen minutes later, I wander off the field…

> (**MIKE** *walks off stage right, returning from a different, upstage part of stage right.)*

Onto another field…

My teammates go, "Mike, are you okay?"

I said and I quote: "What are we even *doing here*?"

What I remember about that day is that my dad ran onto the field and picked me up and drove me home and he asked me all the questions a neurologist asks when you get a concussion: What's your middle name? What are the classes you take at school? And he was so calm and so focused and I thought, *"My dad is a great doctah."*

The second time I saw that side of my dad was when I was in fifth grade at St. Mary's School where they had a thing called "Science Club" every Friday night. It was kind of like a mafia front for Catholic school. Like, *"We believe Jesus turned water into wine and also…there were dinosaurs."*

Every Friday night a different parent would come to one of the classrooms at St. Mary's and talk about how their job related to science. One week it was gonna be my dad. I was so nervous. I was like, "What's he gonna say? He doesn't know about science."

My dad showed up with his medical tools and he took them out one by one. He took out a three-dimensional model of the brain and explained the hemispheres of the brain. All these kids came up to me afterwards. They were like, *"Yowah dad is wicked smaht. Yowah dad is the smahtest dad."*

I was like, "Yeah. I do have the *smahtest* dad." But how come he didn't explain any of that stuff to me sooner?

That wasn't the version of my dad that I saw. What I would see of my dad is that he would come home from work at about eight o'clock at night and he'd sit in the corner of the living room and read a war novel and scowl. Every now and then he'd fly off the handle about something small.

He'd be like, "WHERE ARE MY GODDAMN KEYS?" I'd be like *(Jogging across the stage.)* "We gotta find those keys!" I spent my whole life looking for those keys. I jumped through a window to get those keys!

My dad would not like that joke.

My mom's solution was to pray. She'd be like "I'm gonna say a prayer to Saint Anthony." Even when I was seven, I was like, "I don't think that's gonna work. We need more concrete tactics to locate the keys."

If you don't know the Christian Saint Anthony, he's the finding stuff guy. Which is sort of a bum deal. Because it's hard to become a saint. You have to perform three miracles. They have to verify the miracles. *(Winking to audience.)* Lotta dark money in that space. Lotta, "Yeah…I saw it."

And then you get canonized if you're lucky. And chances are you find out five minutes before you die. They're like, "Great news! You're gonna be a saint."

You're like, *(Dying.)* "Ahhhhhhh."

They're like "One last thing. You have to find everyone's keys!"

You're like, *(Dying.)* "Noooooooo."

(Frozen dead.) And then you're dead.

So I'm with my dad about a year ago in the hospital and it's devastating. If you know someone who's had a

stroke, it's the worst thing you could possibly imagine. But I will say – if I'm being completely honest – *it has calmed him down.*

Stay with me. Most of these jokes tonight are for you but a few of them are for me. This is a coping mechanism. I hope it is for you too. This year has been so hard but every once in a while, I think, *"Where was this stroke when I was five?"*

When I was a kid he'd be like, "WHERE ARE MY GODDAMN KEYS?" Now he's like, *(Stilted, as if bedridden.)* "Keys!"

I can't say I don't prefer the latter. It is a little more polite.

(Walking downstage.)

Stay with me. It is *my* dad. You can laugh at this. It would be weird if it was your dad, you know what I mean? Like I came out here and am like, "This guy's dad is like…'keys!'"

You'd be like, "Mike has really crossed a line." The most perverse insult comic of all time.

(Doing an announcer's voice.) "The Roast of Mike Birbiglia's Audience Members' Ailing Parents!"

So I'm sitting with my dad at the hospital and he can't even really move his face because of the stroke so the only way I can understand his expressions are in his eyes. And the expression in his eyes is fear.

(Beat.)

So how do I explain that to my daughter? Pretty sure that's not the good life.

A few days later, I drive home and take my daughter to one of her friend's birthday parties. I go to probably two or three hundred children's birthday parties a year.

It's a huge part of my life. My daughter has six friends. Last year I went to 273 children's birthday parties. The birthday party industrial complex has grown wildly out of control. It's my least favorite part of my life. I don't like it.

I just don't like my daughter's friends. Am I allowed to say that? I love my daughter. I don't like her friends. I don't know if you've spent a lot of time with nine-year-olds you're not related to, but this is an insufferable bunch. I mean when I am with her friends, it makes me *really* not understand pedophilia. *Stay with me.*

(Tiptoeing across the stage.)

I'm gonna tiptoe through this minefield of a topic.

You're like, "We weren't with you for the stroke stuff!"

Obviously, I'm evoking the most heinous of crimes, but when I'm with her friends I'm like, "*I don't even get the hook. What's the sell? Who would want to spend any meaningful amount of time with these people? These are our worst and dumbest.*" Stay with me – I have examples.

So we're driving to this birthday party and it's me and my wife Jenny, our daughter Oona, and then one of her friends and his dad. And the dads are losers, can we talk about the dads for a sec? Not me! The other dads. They're nothing like me. They're all just dead in the eyes. They've recently developed a stutter. They're always storming into a room like, *"If anyone asks, tell them I tried to find oat milk!"* They're always desperately seeking an alibi for a misdemeanor I'm not familiar with.

So we're heading to this birthday party and we're with one of the dads. His name is Rob. Jenny and I call him "Broccoli Rob."

(To an audience member.) Thanks for laughing at that.

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