

IMPACT OF AN INDIVIDUAL

I. BEST FRIENDS

1 We met six years ago, the first day of school. We started seventh grade in a new school with
2 teachers and new friends. "Everyone stand in front of the room until I seat you in your permanent
3 seats," the teacher said. One by one, she called everyone's name, and row by row the seats were
4 filled. "Miss Patrizio--next seat. Next to her, Miss Pedalino." We both sat down shyly, clutching
5 our books and staying close to our own corners of the desk; she the left and I the right.

6 The days passed.

7 Day after day we both became accustomed to each other's company and became much more
8 comfortable. From occasional glances and smiles, we went to asking if she could borrow a pen, if
9 I did last night's assignment, or if I heard what the teacher had just said. Before we knew it, we were
10 friends. We began passing notes and learning more and more about each other as each day went by.
11 Her name was Laura--Laura Patrizio (Lally, as she liked to be called).

12 We met in the morning at her corner and would walk to school together. (She lived three blocks
13 away from me.) We would meet again after school, and go over each other's houses to do
14 homework, or just talk for a while. We could never watch a movie together, because we would
15 always end up talking instead of paying attention to what we were watching.

16 The months passed.

17 We both were allowed to start wearing make-up. We would experiment on each other's faces,
18 trying to find the best style and colors for us. We never did.

19 She knew me better than anyone else in this world. All we had to do was look at each other, and
20 we would know what the other was saying in her mind. She knew and knows my deepest secrets.
21 "To the grave," we'd promise while crossing our hearts, kissing our fingers, and locking pinkies.

22 We were so much alike. We wore the same clothing, did our hair the same way, got the same
23 grades, and had the same interests. When we were together, we were often referred to as "Laverne
24 and Shirley" or even sisters. She was more than a sister to me though! Because we were constantly
25 at each other's houses, her home became mine and mine hers. We did everything together. We even
26 went on our first dates together and double dated together constantly. I had nothing to hide from her,
27 and even if I did, I couldn't. She knew me too well.

28 The years passed.

29 She always knew how to make me laugh and to look at the bright side of any situation. We
30 bought each other a best friend charm, which was a heart that splits in two. She would wear one side
31 and I the other. We wore it always, because we were without a doubt BEST FRIENDS! She was
32 literally the best friend I could ever ask for, and I've never found a friend like her since.

33 Once, I remember, she came with me to the dentist. I had to have a cavity filled and was deathly
34 terrified of going. "I'll hold your hand. I promise he won't hurt you," Laura said. The nurse called
35 my name to go to the office. Laura and I both got up and began walking into the office. "Sorry, only
36 the patient is allowed in," the nurse said. "You'll have to wait outside for her." But she can't, I
37 thought to myself. Laura was my strength. I'll never make it without her. I turned to Laura with a
38 tear flooding my eye. She looked at me with her reassuring but gentle smile and said, "Hold on to
39 your other hand tightly and I'll be holding my hands together too. We'll be holding hands in our
40 minds." She was right. I felt her in the room with me, helping me get through my pain.

41 When she got her braces, she wouldn't open her mouth to talk to anyone but me. She was so
42 embarrassed by them that she wouldn't even smile. She said that now I would have to do all the
43 smiling for her. She made me promise I would, and I did.

44 And then our time together ended.

45 Laura. The person who taught me so many things. How to care for someone, how to love
46 someone, how to give and also how to receive in a relationship, and how to deal with the loss of
47 someone so dear.

1 Our moments together are merely memories now. All my secret thoughts and hers will be ours
2 forever, just as we promised. Even though she's gone, I can feel her with me, just like that time in
3 the dentist's office. How could I forget her? How could I forget her smile? Even the last time I saw
4 her, in her last breath of life, she was smiling. A smile so real--so alive. She'll always be my best
5 friend and I'll smile for her--

always...

II. BRANCH RICKEY—A MAN WITH AN IMAGINATION

1 There are many man whose decisions and actions affect the world of sports. These men include
2 commissioners, general managers, managers, coaches and players. Very few of these men's actions
3 have any impact outside of the world of sports, however. One man whose decision had an impact
4 outside the sport world, as well as in the sports world, was Branche Rickey.

5 Branch Rickey was the business manager of the St. Louis Cardinals from 1925 to 1940 and the
6 general manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers from 1943 to 1950. His teams participated in the World
7 Series in 1926, 1928, 1930, 1931, 1934, 1942, 1947 and 1949. His teams emerged victorious in the
8 World Series in 1926, 1931, 1934 and 1942. Rickey was also responsible for many innovations in
9 baseball such as the batting cage, sliding pit and the farm system. Those accomplishments, as great
10 as they are, are not what he is most famous for; he is the man who is responsible for the breaking of
11 the color line in major league baseball. That action not only had a great impact on baseball, but other
12 sports as well, and to a lesser extent the nation.

13 The reason Branch Rickey decided to break the color barrier was not because he felt blacks
14 deserved an equal opportunity, but because it would greatly improve his ball team. Through the early
15 1940's, baseball, like most other sports and society in general, was segregated. Branch Rickey, who
16 was an incredibly shrewd and intelligent general manager, knew that there was a tremendous amount
17 of black talent playing in the negro leagues and in Cuba. He also knew that sooner or later the color
18 line would be broken, and that the first team to get a hold of some of the black talent would have an
19 advantage over the other teams. Realizing this, Rickey signed a negro league player, Jackie
20 Robinson, in 1944. In 1947 Robinson played in his first major league baseball game, thus breaking
21 the color barrier.

22 After Jackie Robinson, there was a great influx of black players into major league baseball. Soon,
23 just about every team had at least one black ball player on its roster and many teams had more than
24 one. The breaking of the color barrier in baseball hastened other sports into breaking their color
25 barriers. Teams in other sports had nothing holding them back now since baseball had broken its
26 color line and soon blacks were in all major sports. The breaking of the color barrier also helped in
27 race relations outside of sports, although to a much lesser degree.

28 Up until that time America was a nation basically divided into two sections, black and white.
29 Blacks and whites very rarely worked together, were segregated almost everywhere and very rarely
30 socialized. Many people felt that blacks and whites could not work together in a productive way.
31 What Rickey's move did was show that blacks and whites could indeed work together in a productive
32 way.

33 Rickey's move also gave some blacks a sense of pride. At the same time it showed them that they
34 were equal to whites and should be given equal rights. It also showed some whites that the
35 stereotype of blacks being lazy and inferior was incorrect and might have changed their feelings
36 about blacks.

37 Although it would be foolish to say that Branch Rickey was responsible for the social upheaval
38 that would occur in the 1950's and 1960's, his breaking the color barrier certainly didn't hurt the
39 blacks' cause. If Rickey had not broken the color line, the changes might not have happened so early.
40 Branch Rickey is a man who had an impact not only on baseball but on society as well, and his
impact will be felt for many years to come.

III. A RADIO PHENOMENON

1 He is the reason I'm able to drag myself out of bed in the darkness of early morning. He is also

1 the reason for my occasional tardiness to the first class of my day. From the second my clock radio
2 goes on at 6:06 A.M. to the delayed instant when the key leaves the ignition of my car at ten minutes
3 before eight, he commands my attention. I can think of no other person who, during the course of
4 the average day, talks to me at such a concentrated rate for as long as he does. His name is Howard
5 Stern and he controls the airwaves every weekend morning over radio station WXRK.

6 It is difficult to articulate exactly what it is Stern does. Although he works for a rock and roll
7 station and occasionally plays a record, he can't be called a disc jockey. It wouldn't really be
8 appropriate to call him a comedian either because he doesn't have a set routine, nor is his humor
9 exactly in the "Two guys walked into a bar..." vein. Perhaps the best job description would be a
10 Babbling Brook of Consciousness. Essentially, Stern talks about anything and everything that's on
11 his mind, pushing his constitutional freedom of speech to the hilt. Because it is a daily show he
12 focuses on current events but certainly has time to delve into pop culture and the ubiquitous topic
13 of sex. He has an opinion or theory on everything and is never reluctant to offer it regardless of how
14 unconventional or off-color it may be. Along the way Stern displays his talent as an equal-
15 opportunity insulter; he unabashedly takes on everybody from his listeners to the Pope.

16 For his efforts, Stern has one of the highest rated radio shows in the city: one of every four males
17 aged 19-25 listens to him. The nagging question is how can a man, who describes himself as having
18 "the mentality of a nine-year old," be so successful? His harshest critics write him off as someone
19 who has capitalized on the public's appetite for shock humor. Form my point of view shock humor
20 operates on the same principle as the law of diminishing returns; after a while, people just don't find
21 it funny. Stern has been successful for over four years in this city. There is obviously something
22 more intrinsic to his appeal.

23 I think part of it is that he is on radio. Talk radio, more so than music radio or even television,
24 demands the most of its audience. It is as close to two-way communication as the medium will
25 allow, simply because the audience has to use its imagination in order to get the full picture. The
26 audience has to reach out and meet the performer half-way, and the performer must do the same.
27 Howard Stern is very good at breaking down the barrier that separates him from his audience, up to
28 a point where I don't feel like I'm alone when I listen to him.

29 Stern's greatest asset (which others may interpret as his greatest liability) is his flat-out honesty.
30 He says exactly what's on his mind. Any regular listener knows everything about his private life, his
31 problems, his concerns, his likes, his dislikes, his loves, and even his dreams. The other side of this
32 honesty is that to a certain reasonable extent, he expresses feelings that many people do not display.
33 Often it is humor that is black and this highlights the connection between comedy and the darker
34 side of all of us. There are times when Stern strikes this very fine nerve and it is rather disarming.

35 Stepping back and taking a wider look at the fascination with this man's show, it is somewhat
36 troublesome to see one person having such control over people's ears on a daily basis. Spooky as
37 it may seem, I have asked myself in recent weeks whether he has toned down the harshness of his
38 material or I am becoming less sensitive. I'm not sure and I can't say that it fills me with pride to say
39 that I listen to him. I can only say that he is funny and if he can brighten the mornings of hundreds
of thousands of people, then he seems amply justified.