



## Sweating the small stuff 'American Squatter' Barry Smith returns to the MAT with a love story that was decades in the making

by [Edie Adelstein](#)

Barry Smith traces his close relationship with ephemera to his childhood, in particular one "housecleaning mishap" involving his mother and some of his treasured drawings.

"She didn't just throw them away, she burned them," Smith says. He goes on to explain, "We lived in the Deep South, and that's what people did with their trash. So it wasn't so much a punishment or a weird ritual, it was just the housecleaning. But I wasn't notified, obviously ..."

Since then, even as he's grown into a 44-year-old performer and writer, Smith's collected stuff for comfort.

"Through my life I've had kind of traumatic moments, like that one, that have made me turn to photos and objects and keepsakes and things like that to try to hold on to my past and define myself," he says from his home in Aspen. "Or even find myself or hang on to some semblance of stability."

It hasn't always worked, which you already know if you've seen Smith's autobiographical shows at the Manitou Art Theatre. Using only a microphone and a PowerPoint presentation, he's narrated stories about his years as a squatter overseas (*American Squatter*) and in a religious cult (*Jesus in Montana*). Hard as it may be to imagine a light-hearted look at life in a doomsday cult, the untrained actor's earned awards including 2005's New York International Fringe Festival Outstanding Solo Show Award with an intimate and friendly approach.

Smith's newest show, *Me, My Stuff and I*, which comes to the MAT this weekend, focuses on photos, schoolwork, his baby book and other things he's kept through the years. *Stuff*, according to Smith, was created in part by a common observation from past audiences.

"My first two shows were about very specific things that happened to me," Smith says. "Well, I was in a religious cult, here's the story of that.' I ended up living in squalor in London, here's the story of that.' And while doing those shows people would very often comment afterwards, point to my screen and say, 'Wow, I can't believe you have all that stuff.'"

Without a cult or teenage rebellion to frame his show, *Stuff* goes straight to the heart of Smith's personality. But with any autobiographical material, Smith says, "You have to constantly ask yourself, is this interesting to anyone but me? ... Here's a picture of my grandfather with funny pants — is that interesting beyond the fact that it's an old man with funny pants?"

Smith's pitch is that everyone has a "take" on stuff, and his pursuit of common ground with audiences takes a less circuitous route with this show. Plus, it should make them laugh.

"I'm not doing therapy onstage — I came to grips with [my stuff]. But it was like an archeological dig into myself, and again something ... kind of universal. Probably more so than living in Jesus' basement or in a squat."

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