Written by Jeff Ignatius
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Emmy-winning comedian Louis C.K. understands that some of the words he uses are offensive to many people, and that many people don't want to hear the things he talks about. His goal, he said, is to get beyond the offensive, and to find some truth. He wants people to laugh at things that might ordinarily make them wince.

"When people know you're being honest, they're just interested in hearing what you have to say," he said in a recent phone interview. "Because it's really just talk. It's harmless."

The performer won an Emmy writing for HBO's *The Chris Rock Show*, wrote for Conan O'Brien for the first years of his late-night talk show, had his own HBO sitcom for a season, performed specials on HBO and Comedy Central, and scripted the movies
Pootie Tang
and
I Think I Love My Wife
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He said he doesn't consider himself a shock comic. Much of his material is drawn from his family life, increasingly about fatherhood but also his marriage.

"I don't insult people, or say taboo things, but I do talk about cleaning shit out of my daughter's vagina after taking off her diaper," said C.K., who will be performing at Penguins Comedy Club (in its new location in Davenport's Freight House) on December 14 and 15.

"That's not something people usually want to hear, but I take 'em to a place where they want to hear it," he continued. "To me that's the goal: to take people to a place that they didn't expect to enjoy, and have them enjoy it - have them discover humor in a new place. And in order to do that, often you have to go to places that they don't think you should be talking about."

Not that the disgust factor didn't appeal to him initially. "The first time I did it in front of my friend Chris Rock, he said, ‘Even me, and you know me, I couldn't take it. I just don't think you can do that,'" said C.K., whose real family name is Szekely. "When he said that ... he just basically bit a coin and called it gold. I gotta do this. And what do I got to lose? Some people groaning at me? What, do I die from that?"

The key to comedy, he said, is to refine the material, to work it so that people listen instead of rebel against it. "The thing that's not right is to stick with it the way it is," he said. "The thing to do is to really, really work on it, and try with every new audience to say [implicitly] ... ‘This is an important subject. ... I'm not trying to just gross you out here.'

"It's a big part of being a father," he said of diaper hygiene. "On stage I say it's bigger than Christmas. It happens every day, and if you don't do it right, they get sick. ...

"And the bit is now easy. Now every crowd I do it for laughs. There was a time when they all groaned and booed, and even Chris Rock couldn't take it. It has now been forged into a really sweet bit that destroys."

C.K. got his comedy start at age 17, and his first forays into stand-up were disastrous. "The first time I did it, I did two minutes, and I bombed," he said. "And then I tried it once more and it went

just the same."

C.K.'s career has had plenty of highs, but he admitted that he's made his share of stupid choices. He agreed to write for David Letterman's show on the condition that he could perform there as a stand-up. "I was the last of my generation of comedians to get to be on Letterman," he explained. "I was a clear omission, and I resented it." So he took a job he didn't want in order to do stand-up on the show.

He described his time writing for Letterman and *The Dana Carvey Show* as miserable, and has talked extensively about that misery in interviews, but he also recognizes that most people would kill for those opportunities.

For the 40-year-old comedian, the turning point in his comic career was starting a family; he began to make a transition from the clever to the real.

"Before you have kids, you just have your personal choices ... and who really cares about that?" he said. "But once you have kids and you're married, you've got consequences, and you've got circumstances that you just have to deal with. The stakes are higher. It just makes you grow up."

The critical thing, he said, is not the subject matter but the skill with which it's presented, and C.K. said he's spent more than 20 years figuring out how to make the offensive funny. "It's not just me up there draining the worst part of my soul to people with no form," he said.

Louis C.K. will perform two shows each on Friday, December 14, and Saturday, December 15, at the Penguins Comedy Club in downtown Davenport. Tickets are $22.50. For more information, visit (http://www.penguinscomedyclub.com).