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EDITED BY  
Josh Ozersky  
AND  
Daniel Maurer

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E-MAIL

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NewsFeed

1:00 pm

## How the Wienermobile Can Save Your Life



Robin Gelfenbien still loves Oscar Mayer.  
Photo courtesy Robin Gelfenbien

For us, the highlight of next month's Fringe Festival is (of course) Robin Gelfenbien's multimedia show, *My Salvation Has a First Name: A Wienermobile Journey*. Gelfenbien, 36, spent twelve months during 1993–1994 behind the wheel of the iconic, hot-dog-shaped vehicle, which has been promoting Oscar Mayer goodness for over 70 years. Now living on the Upper West Side, Gelfenbien told us all about her adventure and her play.

### How did you come to drive the Wienermobile?

I went to school at Syracuse. The Wienermobile came, and I fell in love with it. It was a low point in my life, and I knew I wanted to drive it. I did everything I could, including making up songs and tap dancing at the Oscar Mayer headquarters. I got the job.

### What was your title?

I was a goodwill ambassador for Oscar Mayer.

### Is it hard to drive the Wienermobile? It looks

### hard.

It's hard at first. We went through a rigorous program called Hot-Dog High. It's especially tricky because you have to be careful not to scratch the sides, where the buns are.

### What was the best thing about driving the Wienermobile?

It offered the things I didn't get to do in college. Reclaim who I was. It's such a kitschy thing that I love about myself. It allowed me to do something really great and find redemption. Who would have thought I would have found my salvation in the world's most famous hot-dog-shaped vehicle?

### What's your favorite hot dog in New York?

[Gray's Papaya](#). I especially like the really burned ones that sit on the back of the grill.

### Will there be hot dogs at the show?

We can't sell hot dogs at the show. It's against the law.

[My Salvation Has a First Name: A Wienermobile Journey](#) [Official site]



# Fringe Festival

## My Salvation has a First Name: A Wienermobile Journey ★

### Jazz Gallery

290 Hudson St (between Dominick and Spring Sts)

Soho | [Map](#)

212-242-1063

Subway: C, E to Spring St; 1 to Houston St | [Directions](#)

<http://www.wienermobileshow.com>

### Prices

Tickets: \$15

### Description

\*\*\*\* (four stars) Everyone loves a good swine adventure. This one is the true story of how the most unpopular girl in school became one of the most notorious Oscar Meyer Wienermobile drivers of all time. More of a one-woman roast than an autobiography, Robin Gelfenbien invites the audience into the driver's seat of her painfully honest and hilariously self-deprecating tale of getting one's first real job after college. Unabashedly kitschy, her unusual coming-of-age journey is replete with embarrassing drunken snapshots and VHS-captured local-news clips. Visiting more than 20 U.S. states in the "Big Link," with a chauvinist pig of a sidekick, Gelfenbien finally learns how to let loose, be herself and beat the crap out of bullies. It takes her a while to reach the comedic meat of this jalopy tale, but once she gets cooking, be warned: No bun pun or wiener wisecrack goes unuttered in her nonstop romp through the back roads of 1990s America.—Julia Keefe-Chamberlain, Senior Account Manager

The logo for nytheatre.com features the text "nytheatre.com" in a bold, yellow, sans-serif font with a black outline. The text is set against a blue background that has a jagged, torn-paper-like edge on the right side.

**MY SALVATION HAS A  
FIRST NAME: A  
Wiernmobile Journey**  
reviewed by **Zachary Fithian**  
Aug 12, 2008

Robin Gelfenbien had the enormously hard task, for a year, of getting people to take the **Wiernmobile** seriously. The anatomical implications of this particular American icon are hard to ignore, especially when it is parked on the side of the highway near the exit for the lovely town of Intercourse, Pennsylvania. For most of us, the Wiernmobile is, at best, a passing fancy. At worst, it is a giant, well, you know. For Gelfenbien, it is most certainly no joke.

In *My Salvation Has a First Name*, Gelfenbien tells her all-too-true story, a sad tale of teasing and ridicule at Syracuse University. She was Jewish, a tad awkward, and she bore a striking resemblance, at least to the boys from Syracuse, to an actor from *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*. (And, no, I'm not talking about Phoebe Cates.) She had, too, an almost unhealthy obsession with the Oscar Mayer Wiernmobile. Her fantastical notions of becoming a Hot Dogger (Wiernmobile driver to the layman) were not, well, normal. But, unlike all of us normal folks, she would eventually get to realize her fantasy.

With her one-woman show, Gelfenbien takes her place among such monologuers as **Eve Ensler, Vanessa Redgrave, and Billy Crystal**. Though her life may not possess the same scope as Crystal's or Joan Didion's, **Gelfenbien is beyond endearing**, and she makes the most of a story that, like the Wiernmobile and all the hot dogs it stands for, has very little actual meat. **Gelfenbien shows such passion that you can't help but root for her.** **She's fearless**, really, willing to compose songs and dance sparkly dances to get the job of her dreams.

As a storyteller, Gelfenbien has very wisely accepted the notion that, when it comes to ridiculous and funny, you can't beat real life. "I couldn't make this stuff up," she says, as she stands looking at actual pictures of herself at graduation—in a cap and gown complete with Wiernmobile tassel. This self-deprecation and the Wiernmobile tassel. **This self-deprecation and the wealth of hilarious anecdotes that necessarily arise from driving a 27-foot hot dog are the bread and butter (or relish?) that Gelfenbien uses to craft such an entertaining night of theatre.** You'll surely enjoy yourself, and you'll get a hot dog whistle!!!

Written/created by: Robin Gelfenbien  
Directed by Jeremy Gold Kronenberg  
Presented by Hot Dog Productions

**Buy tickets for this show:**

**Sun August 10 9:15 pm**

**Tue August 12 9:15 pm**

**Thu August 14 10:00 pm**

**Sun August 17 2:30 pm**

**Thu August 21 3:30 pm**



Posted on Tue, Nov. 9, 2010

### First Person Festival, a singular sensation

In nine years, it has become a weeklong extravaganza of the autobiographical arts.

By Wendy Rosenfield  
For The Inquirer

During the nine years of its existence, this week's First Person Festival of Memoir and Documentary Art - with its lectures, film screenings, gallery exhibitions, and now even a First Person Museum of treasured objects - has seen the form take on a life of its own. From the personal philosophies of Jersey juiceheads to your friends' Facebook status updates, it's all me, all the time, everywhere you look.

So why pay for the privilege of hearing even more about someone else in person? Robin Gelfenbien of *My Salvation Has a First Name: A Wienermobile Journey* - a "multimedia extravaganza" about her year driving Oscar Mayer's ubiquitous mobile hot dog - makes a good case. "It's a lot easier to share (and overshare) a story online than face to face." However, she continues, "We're surrounded by so much pointless entertainment that when someone stands on stage and is honest about his or her life, people find it refreshing and genuinely connect to it."

New Yorker Gelfenbien is one of two theater artists highlighting the festival (which began Monday and ends Sunday with a celebration of poet Sonia Sanchez) as part of First Person Raw, a new series featuring emerging artists. She performs Friday and Saturday at the festival's headquarters, Painted Bride Art Center, as does the other, Philadelphian Justin Jain.

Jain is a Philly Fringe favorite whose *shiFt/transFer* also breaks from the festival's typical podium-and-monologue setup, using an experimental, nonlinear format and four well-known area actors (James Ijames, Leah Walton, Scott McPheeters and Genevieve Perrier) to ask, "What does it mean to be an American?" A first-generation Filipino American, he stages the piece in the round, asking the audience "to constantly shift perspective, adjust to new rules, and assimilate to the moment at hand," challenges, he says, that are "staples" of life in the United States.

Jain and Gelfenbien represent this year's move toward more theater-based performance for the festival, a change Vicki Solot, First Person Arts' executive director, says she's always hoped for. "It's costly," she explains. "We're not in a position at all to mount a *Laramie Project*" - Moises Kaufman's documentary drama about the murder of gay student Matthew Shepard - "so that puts us in presentation of solo theater, and frankly, a lot of it isn't that good."



## Looking for 'The Real Americans'

PHILADELPHIA

11 November 2010 10:28

One morning, Dan Hoyle had simply had enough of San Diego's trendy jelly.

"I was sitting around with my friends having brunch at some hipster cafe: 'Hey, Dan — do you want some fruit compote that was made from locally grown reclaimed maple syrup?'" remembers Hoyle in a spot-on mocking tone. "Just say it's f—ing delicious. I thought, what the f— has happened to my life, to my city? My friends were driving me crazy."

Crazy enough that Hoyle packed up his van and headed out on a cross-country trip in search of "real, American, tough country wisdom." It's debatable if he found just that, but there were certainly no yuppy preserves. "I was in Alabama, and this guy was drinking moonshine and showing me his automatic weapons," says Hoyle. "And he's like, 'Ever notice terrorists don't mess with Alabama?'"

As much as an enthusiastic reporter, Hoyle is a talented actor. His one-man show based on the trip, "The Real Americans," is playing in Philly this weekend as part of the First Person Festival. Although by no means a lecture, it does raise questions about the two radically different cultures that exist in our country. "There's a lot of pretty extreme views that are getting a lot of play out there. And it's not just a handful of crazy people — they're electing senators and congressmen," says Hoyle (who, it should be noted, happily returned to San Diego). "And increasingly, our two Americas have less to say to each other. But there are nuances and exceptions — you can find anything you want in this country."



LYRA HARRIS

"I got a totally mind-boggling, but kind of fascinating, lecture on evolutionary science," admits Hoyle of one stop. "Real Americans" runs through Saturday at the Painted Bride.

## Also playing at First Person

### 'My Salvation Has a First Name: A Wiernmobile Journey'

Piloting the Oscar Mayer Wiernmobile after graduation would be a nightmare for most college seniors. But Robin Gelfenbien wanted that job — and she wanted it bad.

"I did absolutely everything I could to get their attention. They have thousands of people applying, and they were only choosing 10 my year. I made a cassette which I entitled 'Rockin' Robin's Hot Dog Holiday Favorites.' I tap danced on the carpet. I sang," she says. "By the way, I was the only one who did this."

Not only did she get the job, but she lived to write a one-woman play about it.

MONICA WEYMOUTH

## ***My Salvation Has A First Name: A Wienermobile Journey***

**Fri., Nov. 12, 10 p.m.; Sat., Nov. 13, 8:30 p.m.; \$15, Painted Bride Art Center, 230 Vine St., 267-402-2055, [firstpersonarts.org](http://firstpersonarts.org).**

**by Josh Middleton**

Published: November 10, 2010

### **[ STORYTELLING ]**

For most gals, too much wiener-riding won't afford you much but an awkward gait and a bad reputation, but writer and comedian Robin Gelfenbien went doggie-style through America's Heartland and came back feeling like a brand-new woman. In *My Salvation Has a First Name: A Wienermobile Journey*, the former speechwriter for Rosie O'Donnell and Hillary Clinton uses photos, videos and tunes to tell the hilarious story of her road trip across the country driving the Oscar Mayer Wienermobile. With a media circus in pursuit and a horny co-pilot in the passenger seat, she learned the importance of standing up for herself and that, like a hot dog, life is much better when it's relished.

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