

Shazia's week

Columnist of the Year



"I designed the winners' brochure," he shouted drunkenly. "Look, you're in it. You won!"

Recently I sat at home, pondering my struggle to acquire acclaim for what I do. And how, consequently, I must be totally rubbish and should stop encumbering myself and give up. My greatest feat so far was to be awarded a certificate at school by the headmistress for not missing a day off school in five years.

Of course, it came as a momentous shock to hear that I had been shortlisted for this year's PPA Awards Columnist of the Year. Over the past few years I have learned to be grateful for any crumb of success. I've had the feeling that people didn't really think I'd amount to much. In a newspaper's recent preview of an up-and-coming show I was doing, the journalist had written: "And on the bill is Shazia Mirza – who as a comedian seems to have stayed the course." Why wouldn't I have stayed the course? Did he think being a comedian was like a gap year between doing a respectable job and getting a husband? Well, neither has happened, so I've had to stay the course.

On the night of the awards, which were held in London, I was performing in an inflatable purple upside-down cow called "the Udderbelly" in Brighton. When the show finished I ran to the train station. All trains to London were delayed. I took this as a sign from God that I had not won and that, to help me avoid embarrassment, He had delayed all the trains. I was already resigned to definitely not

having won, because all the other people on the shortlist were great. I never really thought I had a chance. When a train finally arrived, it was a slow one and my phone didn't ring once, so I knew I hadn't won.

At Victoria, I got a cab to the Grosvenor House Hotel and arrived at 11.30pm to find hordes of drunken journalists smoking on the steps, which looked like they'd been made from butt ends.

One journalist was being chased by two young women shouting:

Did he think being a comedian was like a gap year between a job and getting married?

"But I'm married!"

"Who to?" one screamed back.

"It doesn't matter! I'm just married," he shouted.

I thought, "This is interesting," and stood on the steps eavesdropping, thinking at least I'd get some material. I concluded she wanted to sleep with him and he wanted to sleep with her but fancied a bit of a chase. Finally, I decided to go in, but the doorman at the Great Hall stopped me, saying: "This is a private function." "I know," I said, "I'm invited." He looked doubtful. "No, really. I've been nominated for an award."

He looked even more doubtful, looked me up and down and said: "Well, you don't look the part, this

is black tie." I said: "I've just done a gig and didn't have time to change. Please let me in."

I walked in, feeling his suspicious eyes on the back of my head. Everyone was drunk, dancing, having a ball. Older men trying to keep up with younger women. Suddenly I was grabbed by a very drunk man, shouting: "Why weren't you here to collect your award?"

"My award?" I screamed.

"Yes, you won," he shouted.

"I won!" I screamed.

"I designed the winners' brochure. Look, you're in it!" he shouted and opened it up to show me. So I stood and screamed with this stranger I didn't know, telling him how I had never won anything in my life – and that I was really happy.

When I'd shared my happiness with this drunken stranger, I rushed to find anyone from the *New Statesman*. I was grabbed by another man who shouted: "You won! We won, too! We're from *Property Week*. You'll be hearing more from us now! We sell..." and reeled off the number of copies their publication sold.

"I'm looking for Sue from the *Statesman*," I said, and they pointed me towards the kitchens.

I woke up the next morning and Sue sent me a text message to say I had won. Someone, somewhere, thinks I'm good at something, I thought. What a relief. ●

Shazia Mirza (who wishes to appear for the present in a tiara)

PAYNE'S GREY BY CHRIS PRIESTLEY

