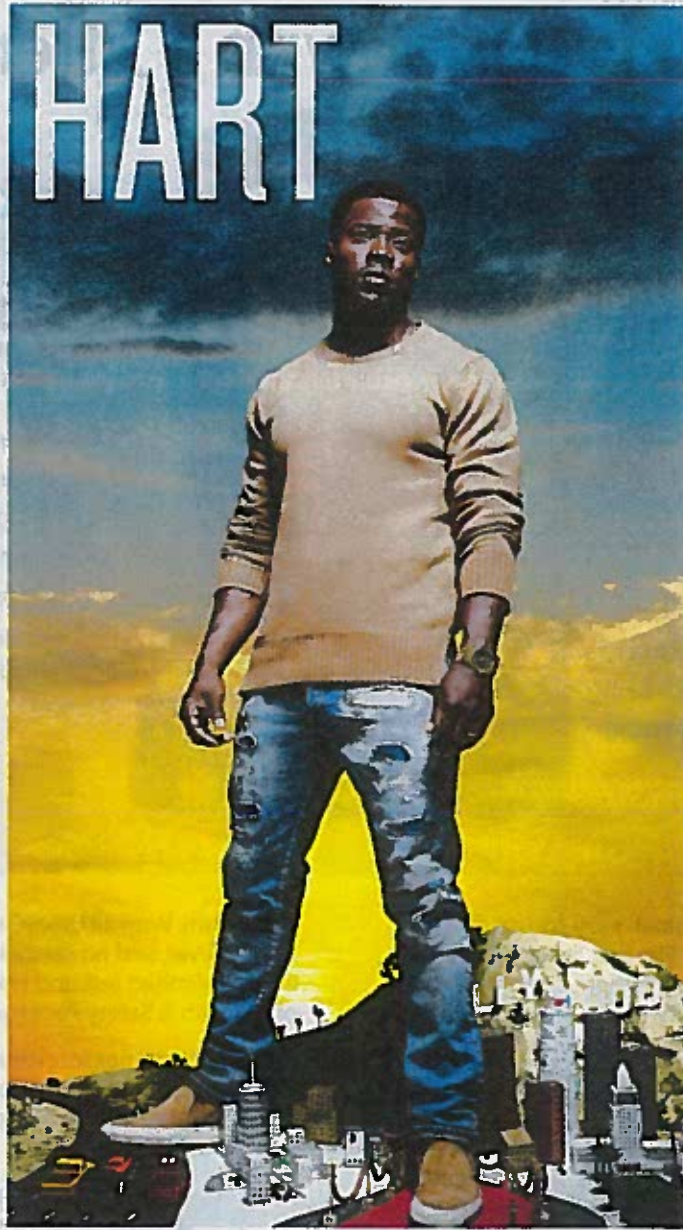


# KEVIN GOES BIG

HE'S A MULTIPLEX  
MEGASTAR WITH A  
STRING OF HIT  
COMEDIES—AND A  
NEW MEMOIR THAT  
SHEDS LIGHT ON  
THE JOURNEY  
THAT'S BROUGHT  
HIM TO THE TOP.

REBECCA CARROLL

COVER AND OPENING  
JEFF LIPSKY/  
STOCKLAND MARTEL



**Y**ou wouldn't know it from his adrenaline-spiked stand-up specials and his action-packed blockbuster movie comedies, but Kevin Hart is totally unassuming in real life.

As we meet at his office in Los Angeles, all 5 feet 4

inches of him saunters out of an elevator alone, encouragement-free, wearing a tracksuit and texting on his phone. He looks less like a movie megastar and more like a teenager showing up for a driver's ed class, no big deal.

Appropriately enough, he claims to have been born with

something he calls "the shoulder shrug." But instead of a flip, dismissive posture, he describes it as an ability to accept things he can't change, to move on with ease, without hanging on to negative feelings.

He writes about the shrug in his new memoir, *I Can't Make This Up: Life Lessons* (co-written with Neil Strauss), available June 6. The attitude has served him well; Hart, 37, has shrugged off more than a few negatives in his life.

But he's certainly got a lot of positives now: At the apex of his career, he's a top-tier box-office draw whose movies have made more than \$1.4 billion. He's starred in a trio of big-screen comedy specials (*Kevin Hart: Let Me Explain*, *Kevin Hart: What Now?* and *Kevin Hart: Laugh at My Pain*), voiced Snowball the bunny in last year's animated smash *The Secret Life of Pets* and made audiences howl with laughter in *The Wedding Ringer*, *Get Hard*, *Central Intelligence* and *Ride Along*. He currently provides one of the lead voices in the new animated movie *Captain Underpants: The First Epic Movie*, the film adaptation of the best-selling kids' book series, which opened in theaters this weekend.

He has a myriad of ad-

ditional projects on his plate: *Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle*, with his *Central Intelligence* co-star Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson, out in December; *Untouchable*, with Bryan Cranston and Nicole Kidman, set for release next year; and *Night School*, a comedy that Hart will co-script and co-produce.

And now he hopes his new book will introduce readers to a Kevin Hart they've never known before.

## NOT FAKE

"I think right now people see the guy on the big screen, the stand-up comic and the personality, which is not fake in any way, shape or form," he says. "But there are so many different levels underneath all that stuff that have made me into the individual that I am, and that was the reason I wanted to do the book. I want to tell the story about how I got here, but to start from way back there."

Way back there is a childhood in North Philadelphia with an occasional father who became an active drug addict, a stern, protective mother and an older brother, Kenneth. While there is a well-crafted comedic stoicism woven throughout the book in the parts about his father, some of it is hard to read without wondering how Hart managed to process some of the memories as an adult, and now as a parent to his own two children with ex-wife Torrei Hart—9-year-old son Hendrix and 12-year-old

daughter Heaven.

"I understand that there were a lot of negatives that came from my dad," he says. "But the big positive that came out of it surpasses all of that. I am who I am because of the mistakes that he made."

Still, the negatives were pretty negative. Hart writes about his father, Henry, siccing an attack dog on Hart and his brother after losing to them in a game of backyard basketball, and about his father giving him an obscene pep talk before dropping him off for camp—in front of a place that wasn't his camp.

Enter the shoulder shrug. "It's the best weapon I have," says Hart. "What time do I have to judge my dad and to talk about the obvious? My dad's on drugs. OK. It doesn't change the fact that he's still our dad. We just got a dad who's an addict."

## 'I COULDN'T GET DRUGS'

Clearly his late mother, Nancy, to whom *I Can't Make This Up* is dedicated, was instrumental in keeping Hart on the straight and narrow.

"I couldn't get drugs if I wanted. [They were] sold in the neighborhood, but I couldn't personally go out and get [them]," he says. "I didn't know how. I didn't know where to go. My mom kept me away from that." His parents never married, but his father, who Hart says is now clean—and was given his own chapter to write in the book—left when Kevin was 8. Soon after, his brother entered the military.

**'MY KIDS ARE GREAT. I GOT SMART KIDS. MY KIDS TALK TO ME, THEY HAVE QUESTIONS AND SOME OF THE QUESTIONS COME FROM LEFT FIELD; IT'S SCARY WHEN YOU GET HIT WITH THEM BECAUSE YOU DON'T KNOW WHERE THEY GET THE INFORMATION.'**



In the book, Hart describes the strict schedule of activities his mother devised for him after it became just the two of them at home. There were early, late and long bus rides to and from school, after-school basketball and the swim team, which practiced until 8:30 p.m. most weekdays; his mother was determined to fill his every waking moment in order to keep him occupied and out of trouble.

If he stepped out of line, he got hit. Abuse? He laughs. For most black kids of his generation, he says, discipline by way of an old-fashioned whupping was the norm—and it worked.

"My mom never abused me. I got in trouble. I didn't do the stuff that I got hit for again. It worked," he says. "I'm playing with fire in the house? Whatever she did, I didn't play with fire no more."

In an era of hyper-political correctness, where you stand publicly on controversial topics can get tricky. Case in point, fellow comedian Dave Chappelle was roundly criticized for making several transphobic and homophobic jokes in his highly anticipated return to television with two new Netflix specials earlier this year.

"I think Dave is a brilliant talent, a brilliant comedian," Hart says of Chappelle. His own approach to comedy, though, is quite different. "I am very current with an understanding of what lines to cross and what lines to steer clear of. Offending people or

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offending groups of people or races, those are things I stay very clear of.”

### WORKING FOR FOOD

Hart, who spent his early years in comedy taking the bus back and forth from Philadelphia to New York City to play a club or a dive or a bowling alley, sometimes getting paid in food, maintains that he tries to keep his comedy based in personal stories. That said, he also

When the conversation turns to his kids, Hart's expressive face lights up. “My kids are great. I got smart kids,” he says. “My kids talk to me, they have questions and some of the questions come from left field; it's scary when you get hit with them because you don't know where they get the information.” He and his wife, aspiring model Eniko Parrish, 32, his longtime love



In the new *Captain Underpants* movie, Hart and Thomas Middleditch provide voices for two young pranksters who hypnotize their school principal (Ed Helms) into thinking he's a superhero.

claims to welcome accountability if his humor occasionally gets him into trouble.

“I had one gay joke in my career and it was about my son at a birthday party, and it was before things got as P.C. as they are now,” he says, referring to a bit from his 2010 stand-up TV special *Seriously Funny*.

The media blowback was swift. “I get it,” Hart says. “At the end of the day, people are people, attacking is attacking.” Today he feels differently about that “joke” and the language he used to tell it. “[Obviously,] there's nothing wrong with being gay,” he says.

whom he married last year, are getting ready to take the kids for some rest and respite at their house in Cabo San Lucas. “Just go, hang out, just us, family time. Nothing better—kids, kids, kids.” And there are more to come. Hart and Parrish recently announced that they are expecting their first child together.

The vacation will be a much-deserved break from back-to-back filming—among other things. Hart is a very busy man. In addition to the movies and the comedy, he's the CEO of his own entertainment company, Hart-

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Beat Productions, which produces film, television and live and digital content for distribution across all major media platforms. Last year the company partnered with Lionsgate to launch Laugh Out Loud, a 24-hour comedy network streaming service—in the same vein as Netflix—that will showcase original content and feature up-and-coming comedians. "There is no black place for comedy, there is no white place for comedy," says Hart about the network. "I got a multicultural hub and people can come laugh; that's what Kevin Hart represents."

All of this while staying grounded and in touch with where he came from—the "way back there." Hart tells of a recent experience from when he was filming *Untouchable* in a neighborhood just outside of Philadelphia—his hometown—that he knows well, and that knows him well. Hundreds of fans lined up to see him. Hart responded by taking the time to break from filming, say hello and buy everyone sandwiches.

"Simple stuff; it shows gratitude," he says. "You don't go there as if you're above and beyond, you go there as a person and you talk to the people."

Happy to add "author" to his list of credentials, he says the book is finally a reflection of his journey, his work ethic and his true self.

"Everything is about me getting to the next step," he says. "I think ultimately people will say, outside of the hard work and determination that goes with Kevin, the guy's spirit was just as dope as it can get."

Visit [Parade.com/kevin](http://Parade.com/kevin) for 20 of Hart's most hilarious quotes.