

= David Mirkin =

David Mirkin (born September 18 , 1955) is an American feature film and television director , writer and producer . Mirkin grew up in Philadelphia and intended to become an electrical engineer , but abandoned this career path in favor of studying film at Loyola Marymount University . After graduating , he became a stand @-@ up comedian , and then moved into television writing . He wrote for the sitcoms Three 's Company , It 's Garry Shandling 's Show and The Larry Sanders Show and served as showrunner on the series Newhart . After an unsuccessful attempt to remake the British series The Young Ones , Mirkin created Get a Life in 1990 . The series starred comedian Chris Elliott and ran for two seasons , despite a lack of support from many Fox network executives , who disliked the show 's dark and surreal humor . He moved on to create the sketch show The Edge starring his then @-@ partner , actress Julie Brown .

Mirkin left The Edge during its run and became the executive producer and showrunner of The Simpsons for its fifth and sixth seasons . Mirkin has been cited as introducing a more surreal element to the show 's humor , as shown by his first writing credit for the show , " Deep Space Homer " , which sees Homer Simpson go to space as part of a NASA program to restore interest in space exploration . He won four Primetime Emmy Awards and a Peabody Award for his work on The Simpsons . Mirkin stood down as showrunner after season six , but produced several subsequent episodes , co @-@ wrote The Simpsons Movie (2007) and in 2013 remains on the show as a consultant . Mirkin has also moved into feature film direction : he directed the films Romy and Michele 's High School Reunion (1997) and Heartbreakers (2001) .

= = Early life = =

Mirkin was born and raised in Philadelphia and graduated from Northeast High School in 1973 . His father was a computer engineer until his death in 1960 . Mirkin 's older brother Gary worked as a television engineer for the Philadelphia NBC affiliate , KYW @-@ TV , now a CBS owned @-@ and @-@ operated station . Throughout his childhood , Mirkin had an interest in film , and explored both writing and filming . Mirkin has described himself as a " nerd " and was often in trouble as a child because he was " in another world " . At high school , he felt the teaching was " too slow " and was allowed by his teachers to " skip class two to three days a week . "

Mirkin intended to pursue a career in electrical engineering , which he saw as a more stable employment opportunity than writing or film making . He took a course at Philadelphia 's Drexel University which offered six months of teaching followed by a six @-@ month internship at the National Aeronautics Federal Experimental Center . Mirkin found the experience to be monotonous and unenjoyable and chose to abandon this career path . He decided that " making no money doing something I loved was going to be better than making a good living doing something I didn 't " , so took " an enormous chance on show business " and moved to Los Angeles . He attended film school at Loyola Marymount University , and graduated in 1978 .

Mirkin lists Woody Allen and James L. Brooks as his writing inspirations and Stanley Kubrick and the work of the comedy group Monty Python as developing his " dark sense of humor . " He considers Mike Nichols 's film The Graduate to be what inspired him to enter directing .

= = Career = =

= = = Early career on Three 's Company and Newhart = = =

Mirkin started out as a stand @-@ up comedian in 1982 and performed across the United States , including at The Comedy Store , where he became a regular , and at The Improv . The first joke he used in his routine was , " Is it just me or has everybody been coughing up blood lately ? " Mirkin considers the joke to be " an insight into the way [he writes] . " Stand @-@ up comedy was the most profitable and easily accessible route Mirkin found into the comedy industry , but " it wasn 't a

lifestyle that [he] particularly coveted , " especially due to the traveling required .

He got his first job writing for television on the sitcom Three 's Company in 1983 . Through his cousin , Mirkin met writer George Tricker who became his mentor . Tricker wrote for the Three 's Company spin @-@ off The Ropers so Mirkin wrote a spec script for an episode of The Ropers . Although rejected by the producers of The Ropers , Three 's Company creator Bernie West was impressed by the script and Mirkin began pitching ideas for that series instead . Mirkin pitched to the series ' story editors for several years without success because they had very limited script buying power . He was eventually able to pitch to the show 's producers , who bought a script from him , and then hired him as a staff writer . Mirkin was apprehensive about the job because he was aiming to work on Cheers , a show more focused on character @-@ driven humor which Mirkin preferred writing , but felt he could not turn the opportunity down . Mirkin considered Three 's Company to have " a classic French farce structure , " as " the characters were so stupid they could never say anything clever . " This meant Mirkin had to adapt his preference for character @-@ driven comedy to fit the show ; it " forced you to put all the cleverness into the plot , a much more difficult thing to do . The plot had to get all the laughs . " Mirkin felt the experience " taught [him] a lot about structure " which greatly aided his later work on character @-@ focused shows .

Still hoping to work on Cheers , Mirkin sent a spec script of an episode of Taxi to Cheers writers Ken Levine and David Isaacs . The two approved and offered Mirkin a freelance job writing one of the final nine episodes of the show 's first season , pending their commissioning by NBC . The episodes were commissioned , but Mirkin 's agent rejected the Cheers job without telling his client , failing to see why Mirkin would want to work on what was then the lowest @-@ rated comedy on television . Mirkin sacked the agent and signed on with Robb Rothman . Rothman knew Dan Wilcox , the executive producer of Newhart , which like Cheers was more character @-@ focused . Rothman persuaded Wilcox to hire Mirkin . Mirkin wrote a freelance script and in 1984 beat seven other writers to a staff position on the series . He served as a writer and supervising story editor , before being promoted to executive producer and showrunner after one and a half years . Mirkin " felt [Newhart] was where I belonged . I 'd finally come to a place in my life where everything I 'd ever wanted had come together . " In 1987 , he received a Primetime Emmy Award nomination for Outstanding Writing for a Comedy Series for Newhart . It was the first nomination the show had received in that category and for the first episode Mirkin wrote as the series ' showrunner . Mirkin directed several of the Newhart episodes he wrote because he saw directing as " a means of protecting the writing . " A philosophy he carried into his later work , Mirkin felt that " being the head writer ... was not enough ; you had to see the material through its execution ? especially the weirder stuff . You had to be right there to make sure every sick idea didn 't lose any disturbing nuance . " Mirkin left Newhart in 1988 , desiring to work on a single @-@ camera sitcom .

After leaving Newhart , Mirkin wrote freelance scripts for It 's Garry Shandling 's Show and The Tracey Ullman Show . Garry Shandling asked Mirkin to co @-@ create The Larry Sanders Show with him . Mirkin did not have time , but worked as writer and consultant on the show 's first season , and later returned to direct the 1998 final season episode " The Beginning of the End " .

= = = Get a Life and The Edge = = =

Mirkin wanted to produce a surreal , Monty Python @-@ esque , single @-@ camera comedy series . He had a development deal with Newhart 's producers MTM Enterprises and persuaded them to buy the rights to produce a pilot for an American adaptation of the British sitcom The Young Ones . The pilot was entitled Oh No , Not Them ! , and featured Nigel Planer from the original series , as well as Jackie Earle Haley and Robert Bundy . Mirkin had wanted to cast comedian Chris Elliott in the pilot , but was prevented by Fox , which wanted Elliott for another show . Oh No , Not Them ! , in Mirkin 's words , " tested through the floor " because it was too " surreal " and " sarcastic " and was not picked up . Mirkin and Elliott decided to develop a show together , along with Adam Resnick . In 1990 , they created the sitcom Get a Life , which was conceived as a dark , surreal , psychotic version of the cartoon Dennis the Menace . The show stars Elliott as Chris Peterson , a 30 @-@ year @-@ old newspaper delivery boy who still lives with his parents , and who is increasingly losing

his grip on reality . Fox was lukewarm about the idea , but Mirkin convinced them to order a pilot by understating how dark the show would be . The network executives disliked the pilot after seeing an initial run @-@ through , but Mirkin felt that this was because they " didn 't get " the show and opted not to change it . The executives enjoyed the finished pilot and it was aired . However , throughout the show 's run , the network 's initially negative attitude prevailed . According to Mirkin , many of the executives struggled to understand it and objected to the darkness and surrealism of the show 's humor , which included the frequent death of Elliott 's character , and regularly threatened to shut down production . After its first season , on the insistence of the network , Chris moves out of his parents ' garage , attempts to get additional jobs to his paper route , and attempts to get a girlfriend . However , Mirkin and Elliott refused to " [compromise on] the essential goofiness of the show . "

Mirkin served as executive producer for the series , directed most of the episodes , wrote several of them , and oversaw the filming and production of them all , to ensure that they had the correct " tone " . The show 's production process was lengthy ; Mirkin would rise at 5 am to film the show , write further episodes from 7 pm until 1 am , and then repeat that the following day . Unlike most single @-@ camera shows , which have around six days to film , Mirkin had to film each episode in two days . He enjoyed doing it , but described it as " not a healthy way to live " . Due to the logistics of filming the show , especially its many sets and effects , Mirkin convinced Fox to not film it in front of a studio audience and use a laugh track instead . The show achieved steady ratings in its first season , finishing 92nd out of the 129 shows listed in the Nielsen ratings . However , for its second season , it was moved from 8 : 30 pm on Sunday to 9 : 30 pm on Saturday and lost the bulk of its audience ; it was canceled after that second season finished in 1992 . In a 1999 piece about the show 's DVD release , Tom Shales praised the show , concluding , " At its best , Get a Life achieved dizzying heights of surrealist farce . At its worst , it was at least amusingly idiotic existential slapstick . Get a Life is a television classic unlike any other . For one thing , most of the others are better . We 're not talking Playhouse 90 here , after all . But we are talking riotous nonsense , and that 's not to be sneezed at . It 's to be laughed at . Hard . " A strong cult following subsequently developed , and Mirkin noted that although the show was canceled " ultimately we got the audience I was hoping for and they are super dedicated and passionate to this day . "

In 1991 , Mirkin wrote a pilot with Julie Brown entitled The Julie Show , starring Brown , but NBC did not produce it . Several people at the network enjoyed it and commissioned The Edge , a sketch comedy show also written by Mirkin and Brown , with Mirkin directing . NBC opted against production , but Fox ran it from 1992 to 1993 . Mirkin had long wished to produce a sketch show , and designed The Edge to be " fast @-@ paced " and " some skits overlap , end abruptly or are broken into segments , " in order to maintain attention . The Edge was a ratings success and was supported by the network . Mirkin considered it " the first time I experienced the feeling of having a hit that I created . It just kept building and growing . " The show 's material often inflamed its targets , particularly producer Aaron Spelling . Spelling objected to a sketch mocking his series Beverly Hills , 90210 , another Fox show , and its lead actress Tori Spelling , who is his daughter . He demanded a public apology and that no further episodes contain the parody , threatening to sue . The show 's production company TriStar Television refused , while Mirkin responded : " The thing about these parodies is they don 't hurt a show . It 's only cross @-@ promotion . The viewers who like the show always come back the next week . What 's upsetting to me is it shows absolutely that Mr. Spelling has no sense of humor . " Mirkin left his role as executive producer of The Edge during its run . The Pittsburgh Post @-@ Gazette reported that Mirkin had been " forced off the show , " due to the negative reaction of Spelling and others , though in 2012 , Mirkin stated that he left the series after refusing to accept a substantially reduced budget . The show 's producers Sony failed to persuade him to stay but he returned to the series to produce its final " Best Of " compilation .

= = = The Simpsons = = =

Mirkin was the executive producer and showrunner for the animated sitcom The Simpsons , during its fifth and sixth seasons (1993 ? 1995) . Following the end of the show 's fourth season , most of the original staff members left the show ; only Bill Oakley , Josh Weinstein , Conan O 'Brien and Dan

McGrath remained , and O'Brien soon left to replace David Letterman as host of Late Night . Executive producers James L. Brooks and Richard Sakai hired Mirkin following his exit from The Edge . He had been asked to join the show 's writing team when it started in 1989 , but decided instead to work on Get a Life . He was a fan of The Simpsons before being hired for the show , and started work in November 1992 . Due to the show 's long production cycle , season five did not air until the following September . Mirkin was the program 's first solo showrunner . Due to the high staff departure at the end of season four , Mirkin " pretty much had to build [the] show from the ground up again , " and noted that this " was exciting but also a big challenge . " He hired several new writers , including Richard Appel , David X. Cohen , Jennifer Crittenden , Greg Daniels , Bob Kushell , Jace Richdale and Mike Scully .

Mirkin 's tenure on The Simpsons has been cited as a period where the series evolved to focus more on abstract and surreal stories and humor . A. O. Scott notes that " several veterans recall the ' crazy David Mirkin years ' as a time of wild inventiveness . " In The Simpsons : An Uncensored , Unauthorized History (2009) , John Ortved describes Mirkin 's era as moving the show away from more " realistic " emotional and character @-@ based stories to " pure comedy " and " surreal " humor . In a 2004 interview with Animation Magazine , Mirkin stated that he felt that he " brought [the show] back to a more story @-@ oriented " approach and increased the focus on characters and their emotions , although " at the same time still keeping it surreal and weird " . Mirkin moved the show 's focus toward Homer Simpson , and also developed some of its secondary characters , including Apu Nahasapeemahpetilon . He also strongly opposed censorship and network interference , telling post @-@ production supervisor Colin A.B.V. Lewis to ignore the list of changes sent by the Fox censors . He aimed to put " as much blood and guts " as possible into the episode " Treehouse of Horror V " as an attack on the censors .

Ortved ? using interviews with writers Bob Kushell and Brent Forrester and Mirkin 's assistant Charleen Easton ? describes Mirkin as an " outsider " on the show , with the writing staff , at least initially , divided with respect to Mirkin 's comedy and leadership style . Forrester described the latter as " a little bit dictatorial " . Mirkin conducted the show 's writing sessions in one room , rather than splitting the writers into two groups , as later showrunners would do , and often worked late into the night . Some praised Mirkin 's leadership , including Appel , who felt that " the shows were great under him . " Others criticised him , including Kushell , who clashed with Mirkin over the episode " A Star is Burns " , a crossover with the The Critic . In 2004 , Mirkin stated that he " really wasn 't at all intimidat [ed] to join [the show 's writing] crew , " because he " had worked with and written with " many of his fellow writers previously and concluded that , " [I took] this show in a direction that is more personal to me . I did that , had a great time doing that , and everyone was very receptive to that . " Mirkin 's era and style of humor are popular amongst the show 's fans .

The season five episode " Deep Space Homer " , in which the characters Homer and Barney are recruited by NASA , is Mirkin 's first writing credit on The Simpsons , the second being " The Man Who Came to Be Dinner " , which was co @-@ written with Al Jean . Mirkin worked on the concept for a long time , basing the story on NASA 's Teacher in Space Project scheme to send ordinary civilians into space in order to spark interest amongst the general public . The idea proved controversial to some of the show 's writing staff , who felt that having Homer go into space was too " large " an idea . Series creator Matt Groening felt that the idea gave the writers " nowhere to go . " Based on these attitudes , several jokes were toned down to make the episode feel more realistic , including the impression that everyone at NASA was as stupid as Homer . During re @-@ writes , Mirkin and the other writers placed greater emphasis on the relationship between Homer and his family and on Homer 's attempts to be a hero , but most of Mirkin 's original script was retained . The episode is considered one of the show 's best . Colin Kennedy of Empire magazine named it a " contender for greatest ever episode " , and in Chris Turner 's book , Planet Simpson , he says the episode is " second to none " . Regarding the long sequence that begins with Homer eating potato chips in the space shuttle and ends with Kent Brockman 's dramatic speech , Turner claimed that it was " simply among the finest comedic moments in the history of television " . A copy of the episode was later sent to the International Space Station for astronauts to view . Mirkin considers the episode to be " very very special . " Ortved says the episode , in its plot and surreal humor ,

epitomizes Mirkin 's era .

Mirkin pitched the plots for the episodes " The Last Temptation of Homer " , " Bart 's Girlfriend " and " Homer the Great " . He also produced the show 's sole two @-@ part episode " Who Shot Mr. Burns ? " , which aired as the finale of season six and the premiere of season seven . The writers decided to write the episode in two parts with a mystery that could be used as a contest . Mirkin suggested Maggie Simpson as the culprit because he felt it was funnier and wanted the culprit to be a family member .

After season six , Mirkin suggested Oakley and Weinstein take over as showrunners , but remained on the show in an advisory capacity , helping them with technical aspects of the show such as editing and sound mixing , and attending table readings of the scripts . He was the executive producer for three other episodes from season seven : " Lisa the Vegetarian " , " Radioactive Man " and " Team Homer " . " Lisa the Vegetarian " was approved by Mirkin after the story was pitched by Cohen ; Mirkin had just become a vegetarian himself , and so many of Lisa 's experiences in the episode were based on his own . Mirkin flew to London to record the episode 's guest stars Paul and Linda McCartney at Paul 's recording studio , where the McCartneys spent an hour recording their parts . Mirkin later said that recording with the McCartneys was one of the most " amazing " experiences of his life and considers the episode to be one of his favorites . Mirkin returned to the role of showrunner to produce the episodes " The Joy of Sect " and " All Singing , All Dancing " for season nine . He pitched the plot for " The Joy of Sect " , because he was attracted to the notion of parodies of cults , calling them " comical , interesting and twisted . "

As of 2012 Mirkin still works part @-@ time on the show as a consultant , helping with the re @-@ write process . The show 's nine @-@ month production cycle allows him to contribute to each episode in some form , whilst engaging in other projects as well . Mirkin also co @-@ wrote The Simpsons Movie in 2007 , and the 3D animated short The Longest Daycare in 2012 , which was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Animated Short Film . Mirkin won four Primetime Emmy Awards and a Peabody Award for his work on The Simpsons .

= = = Subsequent work = = =

Mirkin directed the feature film Romy and Michele 's High School Reunion in 1997 . The film stars Mira Sorvino and Lisa Kudrow as two friends determined to show their former high school tormentors at their 10 @-@ year reunion that they have led successful lives . Mirkin said of the film : " These are women characters we haven 't seen before . There are so few female buddy movies , written funny for women . Women don 't get to do odd , strange , self @-@ involved roles like these . " He knew Kudrow previously and felt she was " perfect " for the role , but did not expect Sorvino would take the part given her recent Academy Award win for Mighty Aphrodite , but it " turn [ed] out that she 'd had a horrible time in high school , so the story appealed to her . " The film received critical praise , as did Mirkin 's direction . James Berardinelli wrote that Mirkin " brings a lot of energy to the production , always keeping things moving , " while Jack Matthews of The Los Angeles Times says Mirkin " knew exactly what he had here and composed it like frames in a comic strip , ordering cheerful snow @-@ cone colors for everything from the girls ' childlike outfits to the decor of a Laundromat . "

In 1999 , several of the Fox executives who had disliked Get a Life came to Mirkin and apologized for the way they had treated the show , stating that they now found it funny . They commissioned Mirkin to write , produce and direct a similarly @-@ themed show of his choice . Mirkin produced a pilot for Jeff of the Universe , a " sarcastic " parody of the science fiction genre . The executives who had disapproved of Get a Life had since moved from the Fox Network to Fox Studios , and they liked this new show . However , the new executives at Fox did not , and chose not to air the show . Mirkin often plays clips from the show at the talks he does at colleges ; they receive a positive response .

Heartbreakers , Mirkin 's second film as a feature director , was released in 2001 . Mirkin rejected the project three times because he disliked the script . While he liked the idea of a mother and daughter con @-@ woman team , he found the writing " really broad , " and " it had no emotion in it . " Eventually , Mirkin was allowed to rewrite the script himself , which he did in a year 's time . He

filmed the project in Florida and Los Angeles and had a cameo appearance in the film as Jack 's lawyer . Reactions to both the film and Mirkin 's direction of it were more varied compared to Romy and Michele 's High School Reunion . Roger Ebert said the film was not " as sly and has no ambition to be [as] charming " as Romy and Michele 's High School Reunion , " but in a season of dreary failed comedies it does what a comedy must : It makes us laugh . " Chris Hewitt of Empire wrote that " Mirkin 's direction is a little flat , but he 's clearly having tremendous fun , " but Susan Wloszczyna of USA Today opined that Mirkin " never gets the timing right and allows the story to drag with little internal logic . "

Mirkin was attached to direct Sports Widow in 2004 , a comedy starring Reese Witherspoon as a disregarded housewife who seeks to become an expert in American football in order to regain her husband 's attention ; the project has never been completed . Mirkin is a fan of the musician James Taylor ; Taylor guest starred in " Deep Space Homer " and Mirkin directed the music videos for his songs " Enough to Be on Your Way " and " Sea Cruise " . As of 2012 , Mirkin will write , direct and co @-@ produce a biopic of businessman Richard Branson , based on his memoir Losing My Virginity .

= = Personal life = =

Mirkin is a vegetarian . In the early 1990s , Mirkin was in a relationship with actress Julie Brown , with whom he had worked on The Julie Show and The Edge .

= = Credits = =