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“Serving Nob Hill and Beyond.”

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The Society Page

By Gene Mahoney

Russian Hill Upholstery & Décor is still located in Nob Hill, not Russian Hill.

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On April 7, 1970, at the 42nd Academy Awards, Gig Young won Best Supporting Actor for his performance in “They Shoot Horses, Don’t They?”.

When his name was announced at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion in Los Angeles, the older audience members – *old Hollywood* – enthusiastically applauded. Their nominee had won. The nominee representing the younger *new Hollywood* – Jack Nicholson for his performance in “Easy Rider” – hadn’t.

Now at this point I had planned on comparing the two movies, demonstrating that the now almost forgotten “They Shoot Horses, Don’t They?” was the real new Hollywood movie of the late sixties/early seventies, not the classic “Easy Rider.”

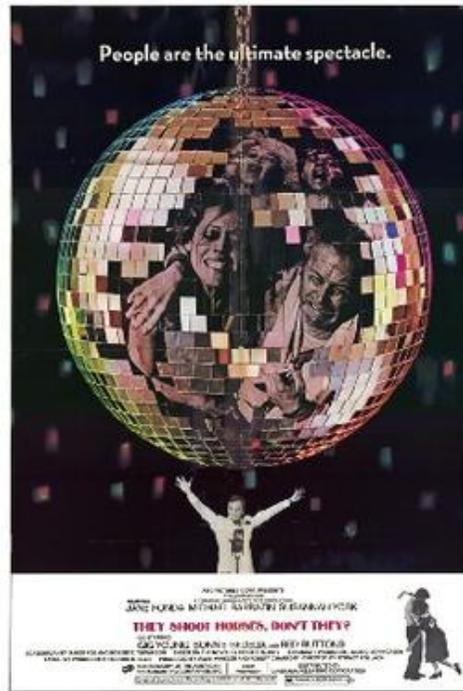
Then I realized that if I was going to write a comparison of the two movies, I would have to watch “Easy Rider” again. I can’t remember the last time I saw it, but I do recall being disappointed watching it. It was like reading “On the Road” by Jack Kerouac. Something that was groundbreaking, but not that great.

Then I realized I wasn’t knowledgeable enough to do it (hey, who am I – Mick LaSalle?).

Then I realized that “Midnight Cowboy” won Best Picture that year, so “Easy Rider” wasn’t the only new Hollywood movie being recognized.

Then I realized that the old Hollywood audience members were probably applauding the middle-aged celluloid veteran Gig Young as representing them, as opposed to the movie he was in.

Then I realized there was probably no reason to write this column. But here it is anyway.



My friend mentioned that he had seen “Easy Rider” on television recently and wasn’t impressed by it, and didn’t want to view it again. But we did go to the library and check out the other movie. We both hadn’t seen it since the seventies, but were still very impressed with it.

So instead of an intelligent, comprehensive comparison of the two movies – a dull, half-assed comparison of the two movies. Actually, not even that.

“Easy Rider” was directed by Dennis Hopper and was written by Hopper, Peter Fonda, and Terry Southern. It starred Dennis Hopper as a hippie biker in late 1960s America. Substance abuse and strange behavior later caused Hopper to be blackballed by Hollywood. His comeback came in 1986 as the sociopathic villain in David Lynch’s “Blue Velvet.” Before his death in 2010 he became an outspoken conservative in Hollywood, which is a lot more radical than anything he did in “Easy Rider.”

Peter Fonda played Hopper’s sidekick. This was about as good as it got for him.

Jack Nicholson played a guy they befriend along the way. After wallowing around in Roger Corman’s B-movies for a decade, this is the film that put him on the map. He went on to star in a slew of critically acclaimed performances.

“They Shoot Horses, Don’t They?”, directed by Sidney Pollack, takes place at the dawn of the Great Depression, at a dance hall in Los Angeles.

The hall is hosting a dance marathon, which have since been outlawed. They were contests where people would dance for weeks with only occasional ten minute breaks, with a cash prize for the couple that could withstand the torture to the end.

Here’s the new Hollywood aspect of the movie:

Released in 1969, it pretty much qualifies to be included with the recession-plagued 1970s fascination with the depression-plagued 1930s, as

demonstrated in new Hollywood films like “The Day of the Locust” and “Chinatown.”

It stars Jane Fonda, who was a controversial political radical – more so than her brother Peter, and Michael Sarrazin, who lost the lead role to Jon Voight in “Midnight Cowboy.”

As for old Hollywood:

“They Shoot Horses, Don’t They?” was Gig Young’s comeback film, and he had the Oscar to prove it. Years later he relocated from California to New York, living across from Carnegie Hall in Manhattan.

On September 27, 1978 he married his fifth wife, Kim Schmidt. Three weeks later their bodies were found in their residence. Apparently Gig had shot his wife to death and then turned the gun on himself.

As far as new Hollywood goes, it’s hard to imagine anyone giving as powerful a performance as Jack Nicholson in Tim Burton’s 1989 “Batman.”

But watching Gig Young as the amoral dance contest promoter yelling, “Yowza! Yowza! Yowza!”, you have to wonder if he wouldn’t have made such a bad Joker himself.

“They Shoot Horses, Don’t They?” won nine Academy Awards, the most for a movie not nominated for Best Picture.

It should have won Best Picture.

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It’s the fiftieth anniversary of Mario Puzo’s novel “The Godfather,” which was later made into a movie of the same name, which some critics have called the greatest film of all time.

In honor of the anniversary, you’ve probably heard interviews with people connected to “The Godfather,” and now it’s time for me to tell you my remembrance of it.

As I recall, it was the spring of 1984. I was 18 years old going on 19, and still

living on Long Island. Eugene Puzo, Mario’s son, had moved into the house across the street from mine. One day he was mowing his lawn and briefly looked up at me. I waved to him and he ignored me.

Actually, I guess that wasn’t a very interesting story.

You know who has an interesting “Godfather” story? Gianni Russo, a real-life mobster who walked onto the movie’s set in New York and got cast in it.

The film’s star, Marlon Brando, told its director, Francis Ford Coppola, that he didn’t want Russo in it. Russo got in Brando’s face and the actor changed his mind, applauding Russo’s over-the-top performance. (Russo says he wasn’t acting like Brando thought – he was really threatening him. They stayed friends after the movie finished filming.)

In the movie, Russo played Carlo Rizzi, the brother-in-law of Sonny Corleone, played by James Caan. After Carlo beats up his wife (Sonny’s sister), Sonny avenges his family’s honor by savagely beating Carlo in public.

Russo claims that Caan hated him, and much of the film’s fight scene veered off the script (Caan throws a billy club at Russo’s head, throws him over a railing, bites his hands, and kicks him in the stomach as he’s getting up on all fours, literally elevating him off the ground).

“Hollywood Godfather: My Life in the Movies and the Mob,” a memoir by Gianni Russo is out now.

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There’s a much more genteel memoir I finally got around to reading. It’s called “Which Reminds Me,” by Tony Randall, published in 1989.

Actually, it’s not much of a memoir, as Randall acknowledges that he’s never been one to discuss his private life, and the only thing people know about him is that he doesn’t smoke. Which is understandable, but chances are his

untold stories would be more interesting than almost all the ones featured about fellow performers in movies, television, radio, and stage.

Luckily, the anecdotes in the book each run about two paragraphs and flow into one another, so it’s entertaining enough. Though the book would probably be twice as entertaining if it was half as long.

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A place you’ve probably never heard of: A while back I was looking at the web site for the Association of Alternative Newspapers, which covers those rapidly disappearing Village Voice wannabees. One of them wasn’t published in the US or Canada, like the others. Its publisher was an American journalist, but the paper was distributed in Svalbard, an archipelago of Norway located between that nation and the North Pole. They’ve got a “doomsday vault” there full of plant seeds from almost every country in the world in case of a global food shortage or some similar catastrophe.

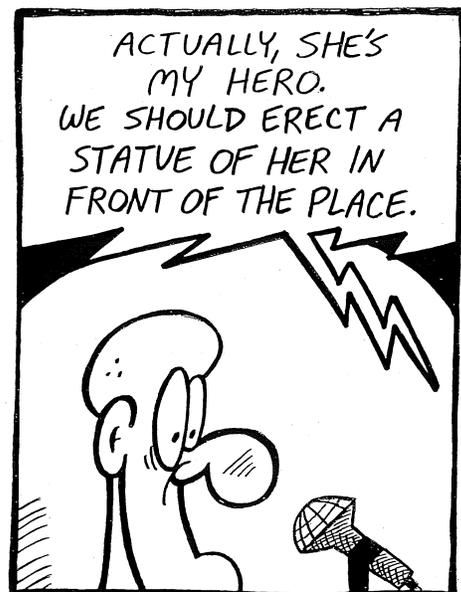
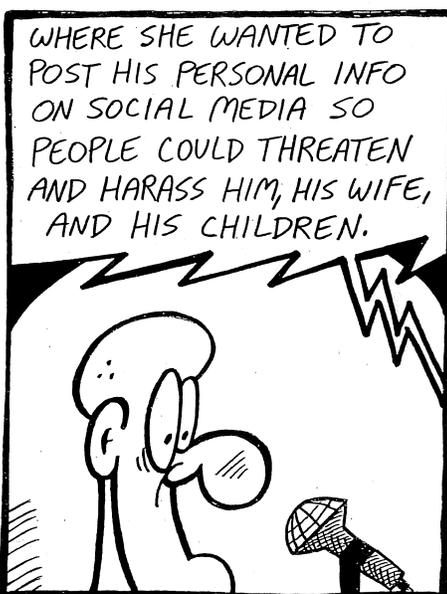
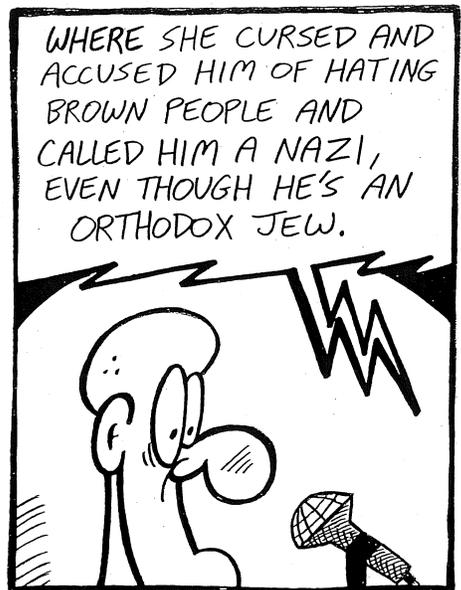
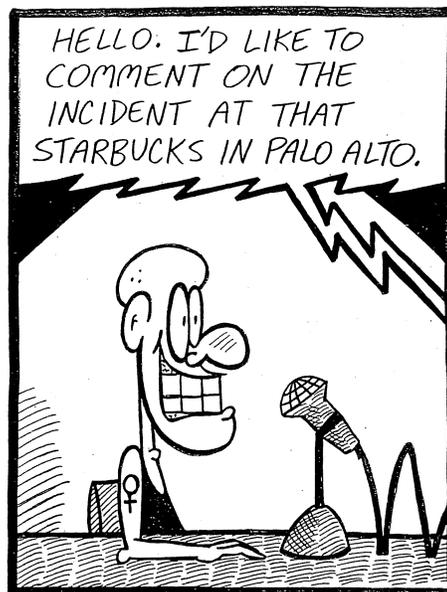
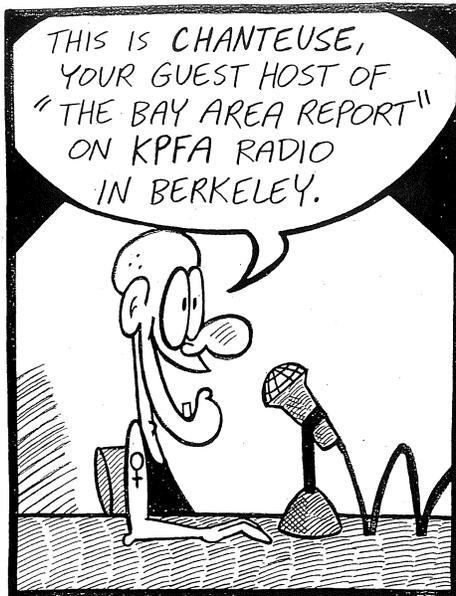
Another place you’ve probably never heard of: A while back I was at a Chinese restaurant on Taraval and saw a poster for a place called Macau. I pointed at the poster and asked the owner where Macau was, but he didn’t understand English very well I guess – he kept smiling, nodding, and saying, “Yes! Yes! Yes!”

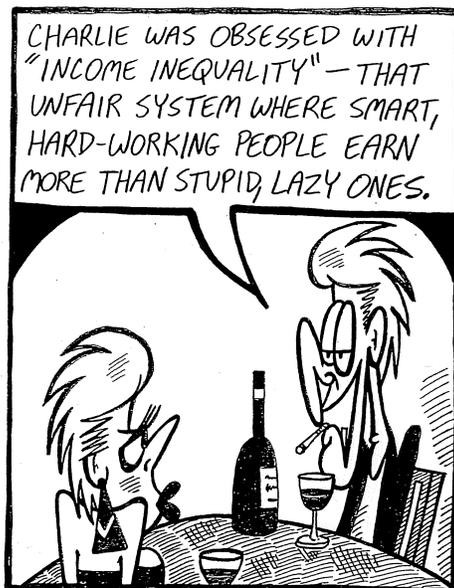
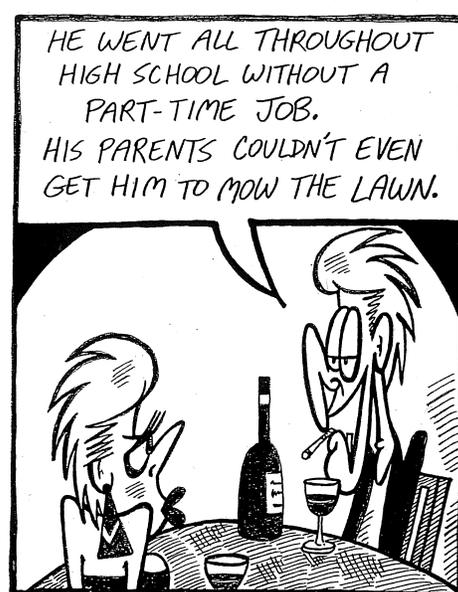
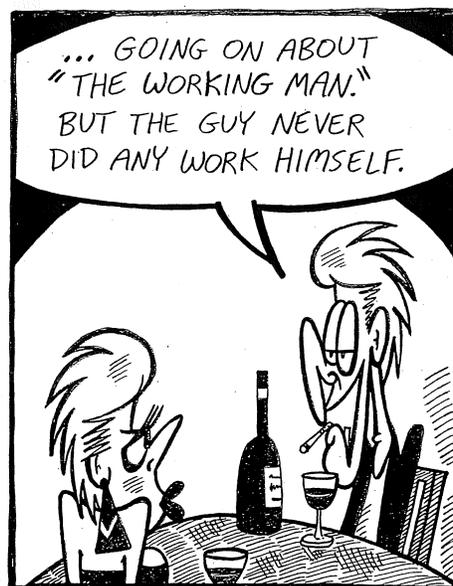
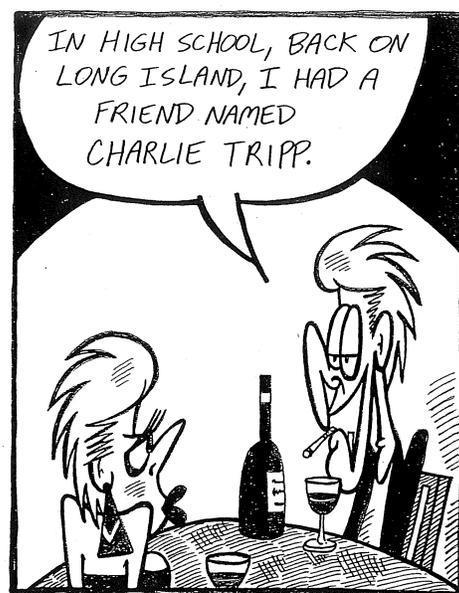
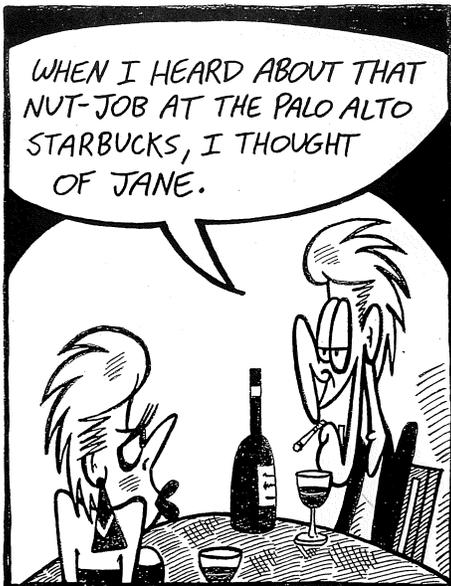
According to its Wikipedia page, Macau is a former Portuguese colony that’s located in China. It’s the most densely populated region in the world, has the fourth highest life expectancy in the world, and has a gaming industry seven times that of Las Vegas.

Some of you may have heard of Macau, but Svalbard... forget it.###

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From LA to San Francisco, to Mexico: Jack Hooper (1928-2014) Women, Figures, and Frida Kahlo, Art Ventures Gallery, Menlo Park, 4/16 – 5/15.





SHE WAS A COLLEGE DROPOUT WAITRESS WHO WORKED AT SOME GREASY SPOON. SHE FORMED ALL HER POLITICAL OPINIONS FROM PROTEST SONGS.



SHE LEFT CHARLIE, JOINED A LESBIAN TERRORIST ORGANIZATION, FLEW TO SAN FRANCISCO, AND TRIED TO SHOOT ME.



IN PRISON JANE TRIPP SHAVED HER HEAD AND RE-NAMED HERSELF "JANE X."



SHE MARRIED HER CELLMATE, THEN THANKED ME BECAUSE THEY NEVER WOULD HAVE MET IF SHE HADN'T TRIED TO MURDER ME.



THEY ADOPTED ME. I WAS IN MY LATE THIRTIES; MY LIFE WAS ALREADY OVER. BETTER ME THAN SOME KID WHO STILL HAS A CHANCE.



THEY MADE ME WEAR A GIANT DIAPER AS PART OF MY "REBIRTHING PROCESS."



THEY TRIED TO EXTRACT EVERY OUNCE OF MASCULINITY FROM ME, FORCING ME TO ATTEND NEW COLLEGE IN THE MISSION AND MARGARET CHO PERFORMANCES.



IT ALMOST WORKED... BUT MY OVERWHELMING MASCULINITY WON OUT IN THE END.



⇒ SIGH ⇒ THOSE WERE THE DAYS. I TELL YA, I'M NOT GETTING ANY YOUNGER.



Bullies

By Ace Backwords

This probably surprises a lot of people that know me. But I was actually a happy, well-adjusted kid all the way through 6th grade. I grew up in a laid-back cow town in the middle of New Jersey, and I was the undisputed leader of my gang of friends. We roved all over town, at all hours of day and night, like a pack of wild animals.

Then, in the summer of 1968, age 11, my family suddenly packed up and moved to this suburb. This strange and uptight suburb about an hour from New York City. Most of the parents worked at high-pressure, desperate-for-success jobs in New York, and I think that's why so many of the kids were weird, because they were under a lot of pressure, too.

When school started in September (7th grade) I was in for a shock. The kids were all mean and cold-hearted. Everybody is always mocking everybody, I thought. And that was the word that always described it to me: "Mocking." It's like everyone was desperate to fit in, deathly afraid that they didn't fit in, and ready to viciously attack anyone perceived as not fitting in.

This manifested itself in many odd ways. For example, if you dared to wear white socks that was considered an affront on all that was normal and decent. God knows what it was about white socks. It just was. And if you ever wore white socks to class once, you wouldn't do it again. Believe me. You would be viciously mocked by everyone. Taunting jeers of "WHITE SOCKS! WHITE SOCKS! GET HIM!" And after school you'd almost certainly be jumped by a pack of kids, stripped of your socks and shoes, and probably have dirt and grass rubbed into your face for good measure. It

was a weird form of peer-pressure and group-think, I guess.

I was the new kid in town that year, and one of the smallest and youngest in the class. So I knew I was a likely target for abuse. But somehow, I got through junior high school relatively unscathed. I think because I consciously developed an obsequious charm, and an ability to blend in and not be noticed (I didn't wear white socks, that's for sure!). And I might have also had this little glint in my eyes that said: "If-I-were-you-I-wouldn't-fuck-with-me."

Anyways, there was this one girl in our class who, for whatever reason, took the brunt of most of the abuse. Sarah Gorge. I'm not sure what it was about Sarah Gorge that made her such a target. But she was the designated reject. The scapegoat. The punching-bag. The clown. The court jester. For the entire class. For that entire 7th grade year. I have never before or since seen one person subjected to so much abuse and mockery. I'm not sure what it was about Sarah Gorge that inspired such universal contempt. Because she was quiet and kindly and never caused trouble. I guess it was because she was a little odd looking. She was sort of mousey-looking, with these big ears. And she had big front teeth that gave her a horse-faced look. And she dressed sort of like a 12-year-old little old lady, with her frumpy, Goodwill-style clothes. Or maybe she had cooties. Who knows?

Virtually everyone in the class picked on Sarah Gorge. People would call her nasty names and throw objects at her, etc.

Sarah was subjected to the worst abuse in between classes. We all walked in the hallway to our next class in these double-file lines. Boys on one line and girls on the other. And whatever guy was lined up alongside Sarah Gorge, he would make a big point of walking several feet ahead of

her, or several feet behind her. As if she had a terrible smell and we would be contaminated if we got too close to her noxious presence. Even the girls went along with it. The girls in line, in front of her and behind her, would make a point of keeping an extra large space between them and her. In this way (and many others), Sarah Gorge was publicly humiliated and isolated from the rest of the class on a constant and daily basis.

Sarah only had one person in the whole class that would associate with her, Debra Simmons. Debra was sort of a prim-and-proper young girl, wore glasses, and was Sarah's only friend. The two of them would eat lunch together in the cafeteria every day. And Debra was the only one that would sit with her and walk with her and publicly acknowledge that she was a human being and not a cooty-infested humanoid.

Sometimes I wondered how Sarah Gorge withstood all that abuse. What it did to her psyche. But Sarah never publicly reacted to any of this, aside from occasional flashes of pain in her eyes. Mostly she tried to maintain this goony, brainless smile. As if she hoped that by being "nice" and inoffensive she might be left alone. But I think that only inflamed the sadist in the 12-year-old beasts. That she was so passive and submissive and never fought back.

The worst of Sarah's tormentors was Johnny Goll. Johnny Goll was the undisputed king of the class. The leader of the pack of cool kids that ruled the roost. Johnny was tall and thin, one of the tallest in the class. And he had an innocent baby-face that usually fooled the adults. But he was feared by all the kids. He was mean, and you could see the coldness in his eyes. And his lips were always pinched like he was about to make a cutting remark. Which he usually was. That was his specialty. Making these stinging, mocking comments. With the

power of the derision of the entire class backing him up.

Doug Greggan was second in command of the cool crowd. Doug Greggan was blonde and good-looking and self-assured, the star athlete on the football and basketball team. One league game he actually scored 32 points. And his girlfriend Melissa was waiting for him after the game, adoringly. Doug Greggan had a steady girlfriend who had already developed breasts. So he was like a man among boys. He was living the life; he was the person we all dreamed of being. Doug Greggan could have easily overtaken Johnny Goll as the king of the class, but Doug lacked ambition and was happy to let Johnny run the show and just go along as the admired crown prince.

Doug's best friend was Torry Mikan, who was also good-looking and athletic, and he had this aggressive gleam in his eyes, like what some guys with an overload of testosterone have. All the girls had crushes on Doug and Torry, so they were a formidable duo.

Rounding out the cool-kid clique was Moose Starkel. Moose was big and dumb and blonde and on the football team. And he was like a thug who provided back-up muscle if anybody got out of line.

Years later, I would wonder what exactly was Johnny Goll's problem. Why was he so mean and vicious? Because he took a special, and almost obsessive, interest in constantly mocking and debasing Sarah Gorge. It was like he had a need to lash out and hurt her. Like he got his rocks off on humiliating her. With Doug and Torry it was nothing personal. They went along with it and heaped the abuse on Sarah. But it was just for fun. Something to do. But with Johnny Goll, you could tell he was out for blood.

It all reminded me of the movie "Lord of the Flies." Where this tribe of wild boys ganged up and tormented Piggy as the designated scapegoat of the group. Systematically destroying him. Because they could. The most offensive and grotesque to me were this pack of toadies that circled around the cool crowd. There were about a dozen of these toadies. And they were constantly trying to win favor with the cool crowd by entertaining them with their mocking attacks on Sarah Gorge.

Anyways, this one day near the end of the school year we were all in our math class, when our teacher, Mrs. Fitz, was suddenly called away for some emergency. "I'll be back in 15 minutes," she said. "So everybody open up your textbooks to page 127 and quietly work on the assignment until I get back."

"YES, MRS. FITZ."

Of course, the second Mrs. Fitz left the classroom, the entire room burst out into madness and chaos. Needless to say, Sarah Gorge became the designated target yet again. She was pelted with a barrage of spitballs. It was like a snowstorm of spitballs, deluging Sarah Gorge. They were bouncing off her head and her back and her dress. People were spitting them out of their mouths, and shooting them like voodoo darts out of hollowed-out pens. And one of the toadies actually snuck up behind Sarah Gorge with two chalk erasers from the blackboard and clapped them together, engulfing Sarah in a cloud of chalk dust. Everybody was laughing riotously, of course, and hurling mocking insults at Sarah, as well as chanting the mocking jeer of the day: "SARAH GORGE-Y, HORSE-FACED PIE, KISS THE BOYS AND MAKE THEM DIE!!" And then everyone would make vomiting, retching noises in Sarah's direction.

Just when the abuse seemed to be reaching some kind of frenzied

crescendo of hysteria, Debra Simmons suddenly stood up and shouted:

"STOP IT!! STOP IT!! I MEAN IT!! STOP IT! THIS IS CRAZY! WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS TO HER?! WHAT IS WRONG WITH YOU ALL?! WHAT HAS SHE DONE?! FOR GOD SAKE, LEAVE SARAH ALONE!!"

There was a momentary quiet in the classroom. We were all stunned. What was this? Someone standing up in defense of Sarah Gorge? It was so unexpected and unprecedented. We had difficulty assimilating it into our 7th grade minds. Who was this person, and why was she spoiling our fun?

"Ah, sit down and shut up, Simmons," snarled Johnny Goll. "You stink like cow-pies."

And then everybody went back to abusing Sarah Gorge. But it was like we had been taken down several notches. Like our balloon had been deflated. We still directed an occasional horse-laugh in Sarah's direction, but it was like there was this metallic after-taste to our laughter now. And by the time Mrs. Fitz returned to the class, we were already silent and strangely subdued.

Years later I would think of Debra Simmons' righteous speech. And it was one of the bravest and most courageous things I had ever seen. Like a lone woman standing up to an angry mob that was ready to stone a woman to death.

Sadly, even Debra Simmons would eventually turn on Sarah Gorge by the end of the year. It was like the cumulative pressure of being constantly ostracized by the group finally wore her down. Like she just couldn't stand being a pariah anymore. She made a big show of repudiating Sarah in front of the whole class one day, and symbolically joined in with the rest of us. So Sarah was finally completely alone. Though,

thankfully for her, there were only a few more weeks left until the end of the school year.

Well, eventually, we all graduated and moved on to the regional high school. Half the people in the high school were from another town, who knew nothing about Sarah and her past. So Sarah was able to quietly blend in with the crowd for the rest of her high school career. Her senior year, she actually drove to school in a big pickup truck, and she took to wearing cowboy boots, which gave her the air of a goony cowgirl. Every now and then I would catch a glimpse of her face as we passed in the hallway. And I always wondered what she was thinking. If she still remembered that horrible year, or was scarred by it. She mostly just seemed relieved to be ignored and left to herself.

And Johnny Goll apparently peaked early in 7th grade. By high school he had metamorphosed into a non-entity; just another face-in-the-crowd. One year he even came down with a bad case of acne. Which seemed almost like justice. Like now he was getting a taste of his own medicine. Finding out what it's like to be publicly embarrassed and humiliated.###

Herald Archives: 2004

Little League Jesus

By Lee Vilensky

I was scared of him.

He threw very hard, was three years older than me, and had fuzz on his upper lip.

He was one of the Chosen -- straight and tall and handsome, in an Irish way.

Probably had a nice singing voice.

In my first At Bat, I struck out, happy to get back to the safety of the dugout.

In my second At Bat, he hit me on the wrist, and the umpire called it a foul ball.

I got back in the batter's box, and struck out with the bat on my shoulder, my left hand numb for 2 or 3 innings.

I came up for my third, and final At Bat, and I'd never bought into that "David and Goliath" business, and I couldn't wait to get home, and watch a little TV.

Jimmy O'Neal stared at me.

He looked tired, slightly irritated, and bored with the game that was clearly too easy for him.

He was gonna put me out like an unwanted cigarette, then go home and watch a little TV.

My plan was to stand in the outer reaches of the batter's box, and hope for a walk.

Instead, I closed my eyes, and swung at the first pitch, body in rebellion of brain.

I hit the ball late, into right field, and stood at home plate, following the path of the ball, with eyes like silver dollars, as everyone yelled, "Run, run!"

It was too many things to do all at once.

Just making contact with the ball was plenty, now I had to run as well?

The ball bounced once, and hit the fence.

Quite a distance, maybe 15 feet from going out.

It was really something to see.

Everyone was yelling, "Run, run!"

I looked at Jimmy O'Neal and he was smiling, yelling, "Run, run!"

He was excited for me, this little boy, not even close to 5 feet tall, showing some guts, going the opposite way (the only way to go against Jimmy O'Neal), after getting hit in the previous At Bat, something he knew, something shared between us.

He didn't need this moment.

His victories were many, past, present, future, and he just didn't need this one.

This one was mine and it was much more interesting than another Jimmy O'Neal strikeout.

I finally ran and turned a triple into a sliding double.

Jimmy struck out the next three batters and the game was over.

My mother was waiting by the bleachers, with hug, kiss, cherry Sno-Cone.

She knew what I had done.

We walked across the street to our house.

And I thought about the smiling face of Jimmy O'Neal.

Smiling like some kind of Little League Jesus.

He showed me something on that warm Jersey night.

And maybe I showed myself something, as the summer waned, and I steeled myself for the 5th grade, an inch closer to manhood, as my cherry Sno-Cone dripped all over my baggy white baseball pants.###

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