

The Society Page

By Gene Mahoney

Russian Hill Upholstery and Decor is still located in Nob Hill, not Russian Hill.

If you read it in the Herald you probably know it already: 4 Guys Electronics opened June 1st at 1120 Polk... The Hardware Store left 25th and Irving and is now at 1314 Grant, so go there if you're looking for t-shirts, hats, etc.... Hi-Way (burgers, fries, and shakes) opened 6 months ago at 411 Columbus.

At the Warfield: LCD Soundsystem, 8/21-24. The Driver Era with Summer Salt, Almost Monday, 8/25. The Kid Laroi, 9/7. Placebo, 9/9. An Evening with Peter Hook & the Light – Joy Division: A Celebration, 9/10. Sunmi (Good Girl Gone Bad Tour), 9/13.

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Thirty years ago I worked for a publication called the San Francisco Tourist Guide. But the publisher insisted I call it the San Francisco Tourist Guide Newspaper, because unlike the other local tourist guide publications which were full color on glossy paper, we printed in black and white on cheap newsprint. (How's that for a selling point?)

The guy ran the thing out of his apartment near Dolores Park, and I remember a laundromat near there called Star Wash. The reason I remembered it was because the wallpaper inside featured pictures of old movie stars from the 1920s and 1930s.

I walked by it recently and thought I'd have a look ... and yes, the decor is still the same. Then I thought I'd give it a plug in this column, using words like "delightful" and "enchanted" which would have you questioning my heterosexuality. Heck, I might have even thrown in "divine."

Instead, this old Asian woman who worked there started barking at me in broken English. I made out that she demanded I wear a Covid mask, so I went to get one from my bag but apparently it wasn't fast enough for her, so she told me to get out, and then it sounded like she kept repeating "YOU NOT FUN!"

I left and was getting ready to cross the street when she came to the front door and started yapping something unintelligible at me again.

So I can't describe this place as "delightful" or "enchanted" or even "divine." According to reviews of it on Yelp the woman's name is Olga, and most reviewers seem to have PTSD after encountering her. (Be careful, Olga -- Chesa Boudin isn't the D.A. anymore.)

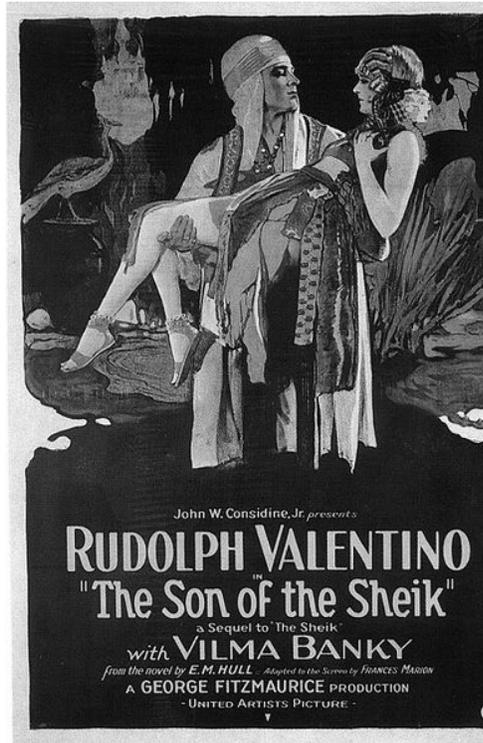
By the way, any store owners that are still requiring masks upon entry — there's no shame in seeking psychiatric help.###



SAN FRANCISCO HERALD

August 2022

SanFranciscoHerald.Net



Rudolph Valentino, one of the stars whose pictures adorn the walls at Star Wash. (I think I saw one of him – I didn't last long in the place.) Hey, who needs Grauman's Chinese Theatre in Hollywood when we have Star Wash?

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Years ago I asked (apparently former) San Francisco Herald writer Zora Burden to interview cult actress Mary Woronov. Mary has appeared in movies like *Rock 'n Roll High School* with the Ramones, Andy Warhol's *Chelsea Girls*, and *Death Race 2000* and *Eating Raoul* with her late onscreen partner, Paul Bartel. Something happened, I forget, and the then online version of the Herald didn't get updated for a while and Zora and Mary were wondering what happened. Sorry, gals! Anyway, a quick search online can find you Zora's interview with Mary. Hope you enjoy it.

The Polka Dot Man

By Ace Backwards

For whatever reason, Berkeley has always attracted its fair share of weird characters. I often wonder why there are so many nutty people in Berkeley. Is it that, for some reason, the nutty people are drawn to Berkeley?? Or is it that something about Berkeley *drives* people nutty?? Who knows. I'm too nuts myself to figure that one out.

One of the many strange characters is a guy who was known for many years as the Polka Dot Man. The Polka Dot Man has been bizarrely displaying himself on the Berkeley campus since the early 1980s. He would sometimes go years without talking, like a deaf mute. Often he'd sit unmoving for hours at a stretch in weird postures. In a newspaper interview, he said he originally slipped into this catatonic state while tripping on LSD in a Texas jail. He became fixated with the drain-hole of the urinal, staring at it for hours. And that was how he got locked into the "polka dot" concept. For years he wore a bizarre, clown-like costume covered with polka dots.

The Polka Dot Man existed in this weird mute-deaf-dumb catatonic state for many years. Then one day he was sitting on the sidewalk in front of a building that happened to catch on fire. This fireman started screaming at him: "GET UP!! GET UP!!!" For some reason, the fireman yelling at him, ordering him to get up, pulled him out of his catatonic state. He began talking normally to people again, and was relatively normal for several years after that.

The human mind is a peculiar thing.###

Herald Archives: 2003

White Rabbit

By Lee Vilensky

At what point, or by what process, does one become a San Franciscan? How long do you have to reside in S.F. County before you can call it home? How many jobs, or bars does one have to frequent?

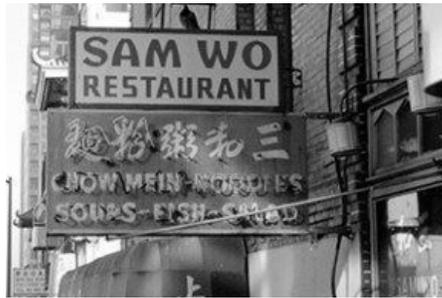
Hell, I resided in Cherry Hill, New Jersey for 8 years and never felt even remotely comfortable there. I lived and worked in Silicon Valley for 2 years and felt like I was amongst a race of sneaky aliens cleverly disguised as humans. Only through thin cracks in their façade of normalcy, was I able to view the dim light that showed through their faces into their souls, baring the horrible truth: I was surrounded by Republican, surfer, druggies from a distant planet similar

in topography and climate (social and otherwise) to "Dust Bowl Era" Oklahoma. I had a tough time in San Jose.

I've now lived in S.F. for 22 years and it is indeed home. I may not be a native, but it's my town, and I like it here. However, 22 years does not make one a homie.

The true rite of passage is acceptance at Sam Wo's Chop Suey joint on Washington Street just west of Grant, where rude service has been a tradition for many decades. I can now go in there and be treated like an honored guest. For example, I don't have silverware thrown at me 15 minutes after sitting at a greasy table and asking for tea doesn't evoke anger from the wait staff. This, of course, was not always the case.

My first visit to Sam Wo's was around 1980. I'd come up to the city from San Jose with 3 other people, and after wandering around C'town, we walked into the kitchen of Sam Wo's, up two flights of stairs, and settled into a table.



A waiter, possibly the original owner, Edsel Ford Fong, spewed some Cantonese at us, and threw silverware on our table. We looked at each other, then looked at our waiter (and wine steward), who was pointing at us and laughing, urging another member of his staff to join in the ridicule. He had insulted us. We did not feel like honored guests. It must be noted that we'd misunderstood the nature of the insult. (Gruff behavior and deliberate service was de rigueur in most Chinese restaurants in C'town. Of course with today's economy, most of the eateries in C'town offer friendlier service, with the cuisine being the insult.)

Our waiter's slight was not in the tossing of the spoons and forks, but the fact that he served us spoons and forks at all. Only Yankee dogs, with newly evolved, opposable thumbs need forks, while the rest of the world manages quite well with chopsticks. We were not worthy of chopsticks and when we asked for some, he cackled like an insane waiter/rooster. Not too far into our meal, we were relieved to witness similar treatment to other diners. I've always felt that you only get one chance to make a first impression, and our waiterwell he didn't make a good impression on me.

I moved to the city in '81, and began to frequent Sam Wo's. The prices have always been rock bottom and they serve till 3AM every night but Sunday. I was abused, or at least slighted, every time I went in there, but I began to see some entertainment value in the effrontery of the staff. It was all a put-on and actually attracted tourists who wanted to witness the incredibly bad service firsthand. A friend of mine once made the mistake of asking for brown rice. The waiter brought him white rice. He asked again for brown rice and the waiter ignored him. My friend, not be deterred, asked a third time for brown rice, to which the thoroughly exasperated waiter replied, "You want brown rice? Put soy sauce on white rice, then you get brown rice."

I began going into Sam Wo's on my breaks from cab driving. Starting in the late '80's, a certain Mr. Lee ruled the second floor, and he was neither friendly nor unfriendly, although I think my cab badge moved me up a notch in social status from untouchable, to common, garden variety cur. (A lot of cabbies eat at Sam Wo's, and tip reasonably well.) I eventually learned to tip not only the wait staff, but also the kitchen staff, which is a tradition, amongst those in the know. Mr. Lee warmed up to me (and my tips) and would hail me like a long lost conquering warrior, returning from a distant war, anytime I came in. Tables of goofy, post preppie, pre-yuppie, Pac 10 grads would eye me with contempt/envy as I pimp rolled onto the second floor (*the third floor is closed after about 10:30PM*), happy to be an honored guest at Chez Sam's. Mr. Lee and I had a time tested dialogue with each other:

"Hello Mr. Lee!"

"Hello!"

Upon departure: "Goodnight Mr. Lee."

"O.K., see you next time."

The guy loved my ass.

Sometime in the late nineties, Mr. Lee disappeared. I believe he's passed on, however getting information from anyone that works at Sam Wo's has been fruitless. "Mr. Lee sick...sick!"

A woman in her early sixties took his place. She didn't know me and I was back to square one. I felt like a 4th grader coming home from school for lunch to a completely different mother. A lifetime of ass kissing down the tubes, and nothing ahead but a horizon smothered with endless rows of unpicked cotton.

I didn't have the time or energy to start over with this lady, so I implemented an aggressive tipping policy soon after our first encounter. She's warmed up pretty well, but

it's been a slow, steady process. I've had to build up years of trust between us and I think I can speak for both of us when I say that the effort has been somewhat cathartic, as well as a learning process, and not without its rewards.

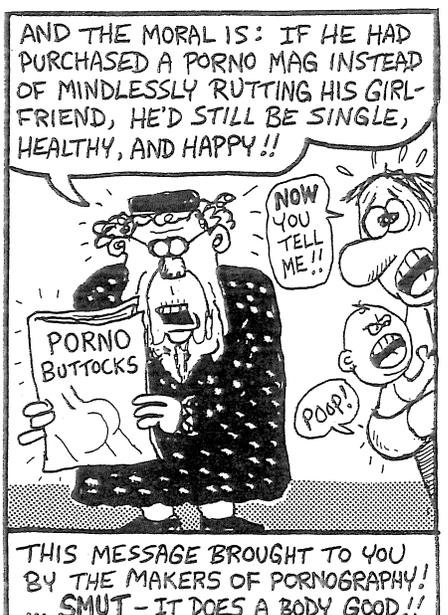
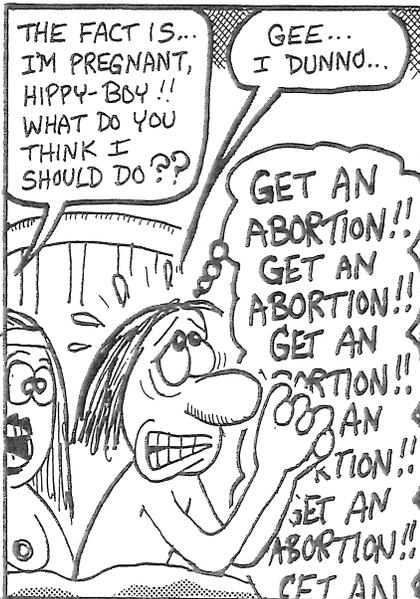
I got her pretty well trained at this point. As soon as I enter the second floor dining area, she coos like a morning dove and announces my regular order: "Pork Chow Mein with Chinese Greens." I don't dare order anything else and disappoint or confuse the dear girl. We have an excellent relationship and I can only wish her a long and happy life. Mostly long.

Last year, my regular waitress, whose name I don't know, began giving me a treat at the end of my meals. A small, chewy, roll of vanilla candy, wrapped in rice paper, called White Rabbit. She recently gave me two White Rabbits at the end of a meal. This is pretty heady stuff from a woman who regularly takes food orders from customers while talking on her cell phone. (Sam Wo's cell phone policy is very liberal, and actually encourages cell phone use by customers and staff.) That second White Rabbit reassures and reaffirms my San Franciscan status, and makes me feel like I'm a part of this great city. And as I drive the cab, my eyes are on the road, and my auto-pilot, public face/mind is pondering answers to the usual questions, "Where are you from?"; "How long have you been driving a cab?"; "How often do you have to change the brakes in this thing?"; "Don't you think Fell would have been quicker?"; "Where were you during the earthquake?"; while my subconscious is counting off the minutes till a lull in the action commands break time and Pork Chow Mein with Chinese Greens, followed by White Rabbit, not to be confused with Welsh Rarebit, or anything else under the sun or moon.###

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Attention SF neighborhood newspaper publishers: Do what I did and skip newspaper printing and switch to this newsletter concept. That way there's a print version and you can stop fretting about lack of advertising in the internet age and boring your readers with that.

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GOOD CLEAN FUN
 WRITTEN, DRAWN, & ©2022
 BY GENE MAHONEY

**WORKERS
 OF THE
 WORLD
 UNITE!**

PEOPLE WHO SIT ON
 THEIR ASSES LOOKING
 AT THEIR PHONES
 ALL DAY UNITE!

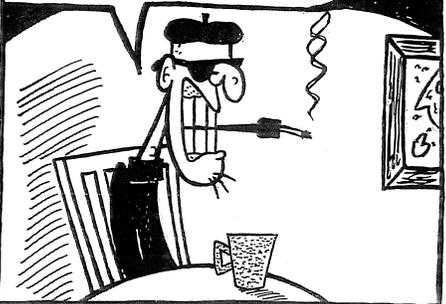
HELLO, MY NAME IS LEE HARVEY WEMBLEY,
 AND WELCOME TO THE SF HERALD YOUTUBE
 SHOW! RECENTLY, TACO BELL OPENED A
 FULLY AUTOMATED EATERY... WITHOUT ANY
 EMPLOYEES. FAST FOOD RESTAURANTS
 HAVE ALWAYS BEEN FIRST JOBS FOR
 HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE STUDENTS.



BUT IT LOOKS LIKE THAT MAY BE
 BECOMING A THING OF THE PAST.
 SO WE ASKED SOME YOUNG PEOPLE
 THAT BURNING, IMMORTAL QUESTION:
 "DO YOU WANT TO WORK AT
 TACO BELL?"



ABSOLUTELY NOT. MY HERO,
 BERNIE SANDERS, NEVER HAD A
 STEADY JOB UNTIL AGE 39 WHEN HE
 BECAME MAYOR OF BURLINGTON, VERMONT...
 AND I HOPE TO FOLLOW IN HIS FOOTSTEPS.
 BESIDES, CAN YOU IMAGINE ME WORKING
 WITH BRAINLESS, COMMON PEASANTS?
 POWER TO THE PEOPLE!



MY COLLEGE PROFESSOR SAID HE WOULD
 GIVE ME AN "A" IF I CALLED
 EVERYONE A WHITE SUPREMACIST
 (EXCEPT HIM).

WOULD I GET PROMOTED AT
 TACO BELL IF I CALLED EVERYONE
 A WHITE SUPREMACIST (EXCEPT FOR
 MY SUPERVISOR)?



NO. I IDENTIFY WITH BEING A
 COW. MORE SPECIFICALLY, A
 QUEER TRANSGENDER COW OF COLOR.
 SO I WOULD NOT ENGAGE IN
 ANY CAPITALIST CANNIBALISM.

I WOULD FEEL "UNSAFE."



MAYBE FOR 20 HOURS A WEEK...
 AND ONLY IF THEY HAD THERAPY
 AVAILABLE IN CASE I EXPERIENCED
 A MICROAGGRESSION... OR WORSE.
 NO, MAKE THAT 10 HOURS A WEEK.
 NO... 5.

I DON'T WANT TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE
 EXPLOITATION OF THE WORKER IN THIS
 RACIST, SEXIST, HOMOPHOBIC, TRANSPHOBIC,
 IMPERIALISTIC, FASCIST SOCIETY.
 ACTUALLY... ZERO HOURS.



YES. I'M A VEGAN SO
 EVERY TIME I SERVE A
 CUSTOMER I CAN TELL THEM,
 "I HOPE YOU CHOKE ON THE
 FLESH OF THIS MURDERED ANIMAL
 AND DIE, THEN GET REINCARNATED
 AS A COW IN A SLAUGHTERHOUSE."



WOW! CAN YOU BELIEVE THIS BIG,
 GREEDY CORPORATION WOULD RATHER
 HAVE MACHINES SERVE THEIR CUSTOMERS
 THAN HAVE THESE SALT-OF-THE-EARTH
 EXAMPLES OF OUR EDUCATION SYSTEM
 DO IT? OH WELL... SEE YOU NEXT
 TIME ON THE SF HERALD YOUTUBE SHOW!



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