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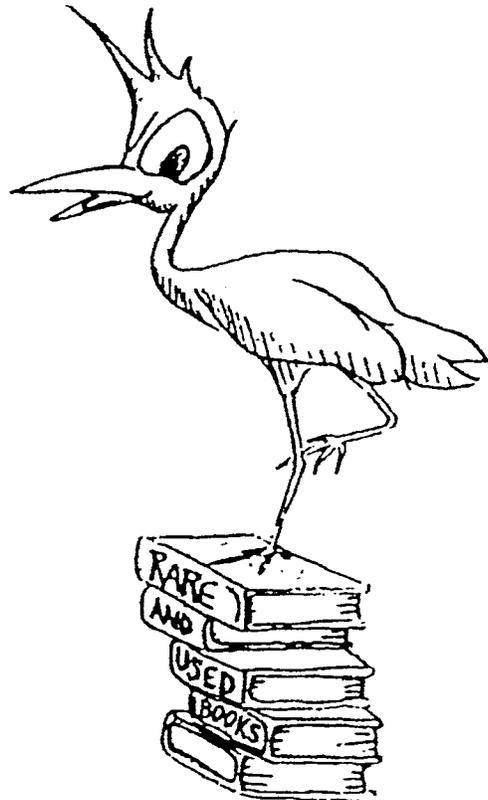
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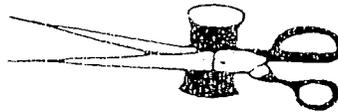
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The Society Page

By Gene Mahoney

I was walking down Polk Street recently and noticed that Russian Hill Upholstery and Decor is still around. I remember putting up posters around there to promote a client years ago - and a woman who worked there came out of the store and asked me if I was embarrassed to be putting up posters for a living. And that's when it hit me: How does a mere mortal achieve such greatness to actually work in an upholstery store? Hey, who knows - maybe she actually managed it. Or owned it! I don't know, my meager intellect is just musing out loud, so to speak.

In this society we practically deify doctors, lawyers, scientists, and others in extremely cerebral professions. But we often forget about upholstery salespeople. So right now, think of this woman I wrote about, and be justifiably humbled.

Oh, by the way, Russian Hill Upholstery and Decor is located in Nob Hill, not Russian Hill. If that woman I wrote about is reading this, you might want to fix that.

xxxxxxxxxx

I was at Sandy's Cleaners in West Portal and a customer there noticed my faded, though still detectable New York accent. Her name is Lucille Cuttler, who, like moi, hails from Long Island. She's 91 years young, and moved out here 11 years ago to be with her daughter. She loves the City of St. Francis, and *still* has her own practice of helping people with dyslexia! Lucille has touted a recent documentary by filmmaker (*and nice guy - I've met him*) James

Redford (son of Robert) called *The Big Picture: Rethinking Dyslexia*, which features some well-known people who have the reading disability, like California Lieutenant Governor Gavin Newsom.

As you know, James' dad recently had a gripping movie out about something that happened over a decade ago that, well, no one cares about. It's called "Truth" and is about journalists Dan Rather and Mary Mapes reporting on CBS News that George W. Bush went AWOL during his military service. Of course, the documents they claimed proved this turned out to be fakes, but why should the facts matter when the actors portraying them can deliver melodramatic, self-righteous monologues hailing themselves as victims of some **Corporate Conspiracy?** (An evil Corporation, not like the good Corporation that made this movie.) Rather and Mapes are then subjected to a humiliating *internal* investigation for - *get this* - inaccurate and shoddy reporting! "Orwell strikes again," as the East Bay Express indignantly proclaimed in their review. But our heroes know better. This is all about pressure from the Bush administration. (Amazingly, when Mary Mapes broke the Abu Ghraib scandal before this story, which made the Bush administration look bad, there was no pressure from the Bush administration to silence her - I guess Redford can't make "Truth - The Prequel".)

Bob, I think you blew it with this flick (though at least you've gone up a notch from being the Leni Riefenstahl of Cuba's Castro regime with "The Motorcycle Diaries"). You should have done an old-fashioned screwball comedy about journalists along the lines of "His Girl Friday". The scene where Rather and Mapes discover the documents were manufactured on a modern day personal computer, whose kerning and fonts didn't exist when Bush

was in the Guard, would have been priceless. Two arrogant yellow journalists try to take down a not-very-bright president and end up looking dumber than he does. Now that would have made for a funny movie. And it would have been the "Truth".

(Bob, you were a hero in my youth. What's happened to you in your old age? Get help.)

xxxxxxxxxx

Congratulations to the San Jose Spiders for their victory in the American Ultimate Disc League Championship (their second in two years). Ultimate is that sport with the Frisbee. Visit theaudl.com for more info... Fillmore Jazz Festival fave Kim Nalley has a new CD out called *Blues People*. Visit KimNalley.com for info... Flamenco classes in San Francisco, Oakland, and Marin are being taught by the lovely and talented dancers Clara Rodriguez and Andrea La Canela. Visit aguaclearaflamenco.com and andrealacanela.com for info.

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Well, it's been about 31 years since it came out, and I didn't hear any 30th anniversary buzz about it. That probably suits the mastermind of it just fine, as he voluntarily left the limelight because he thought he was getting too famous.

What am I going on about? The album *Brothers in Arms* by the former rock group known as Dire Straits. This thing just kind of crept up and took everyone by surprise in the summer of 1985 and proceeded to become one of the best selling albums in history. Dire Straits had been putting out quality music since their inception nearly a decade earlier, but were they anybody's favorite band? And just two years earlier they had released their weakest effort, a four track EP with a stupid song called

“Twisting by the Pool” as its highlight.

Though it didn't sell more than Michael Jackson's *Thriller* (nothing has), it did beat *Synchronicity* by the Police, *Purple Rain* by Prince, and other heavyweights of the era. It's the best selling album of the 1980s in the UK.

But does it sound like it was recorded in the 1980s? It wasn't post-punk or dance music. Actually, what was it? The band's Wikipedia page likens them to pub rock (Dr. Feelgood, Joe Strummer and the 101ers, etc.), the mid-1970s warm-up act for punk rock. So since it came out a decade later, does that make it post-pub? No, that would be punk. Post-punk? No, that would be New Wave. Post-New Wave? Hmm... there's a thought. Mark Knopfler's mesmerizing yet understated guitar work alternated between finger-picking blues and folk strumming, and he sang like Bob Dylan with a British accent. So it's up to you if you want to call it blues rock or folk rock. Or maybe post-New Wave would be more accurate after all. As a then-20 year old who was burned out from the hip New Wave music of my teens, it was refreshing to listen to a quality rock album that wasn't hip, by a band that didn't care if they were hip.

I had just moved to California in the summer of 1985, and the *Brothers in Arms* cassette was a great soundtrack for driving around the Bay Area in a gas-guzzling '77 Camaro. A friend of mine from Long Island visited, and as we drove down Highway One, the sun was setting, and the album's title track began to play on the car stereo. I could tell that was the moment my friend decided he wanted to move to the Golden State. Years later he did.

The most famous song off the album is “Money for Nothing”. Knopfler was inspired to write it while frequenting an appliance shop, and the song's lyrics are the mutterings of an employee at the store, bitter that he's working there while rock stars are living lives of luxury. Here's an excerpt:

*The little faggot with the earring
and the makeup/ Yeah buddy that's
his own hair/ That little faggot got
his own jet airplane/ That little
faggot, he's a millionaire*

It took a while to find those lyrics online, as some sites have deleted that verse while others have put ***** where the new f-word is.

“Money for Nothing” couldn't have been recorded in 1955 because its lyrics would have been considered profane. And it couldn't have been recorded in 2015 because its lyrics would have been considered politically incorrect.

Let's end this column with something I wrote in 2006:

I also remember how much my Uncle Mike loved Dire Straits. He used to have a few drinks and listen to *Alchemy*, their great live album that had the Ralph Steadman-ish cover art. Maybe Ralph Steadman did draw the cover art, I forget. What I won't forget is how two years ago Uncle Mike laid in bed dying, we were all waiting for the inevitable, but he was hanging on longer than expected. He was tough as nails, having grown up in New York City, the son of Irish immigrants, and an ex-Marine to boot. We were still surprised at how long he was hanging on, though. Then my dad answered the phone, and it went something like this:

“Oh, hi! How are ya? Na, he's still hanging in there. I tell ya, this guy's a pain in the ass. Heh heh. Huh? Oh yeah! I forgot about that! Hey, thanks. Bye.”

Then Dad pulled out the Dire Straits *Alchemy* CD and played it. Uncle Mike passed away before the third track, “Espresso Love”, came on.

He was a great uncle. I'm pretty sure he loved me. But I know he loved Dire Straits.

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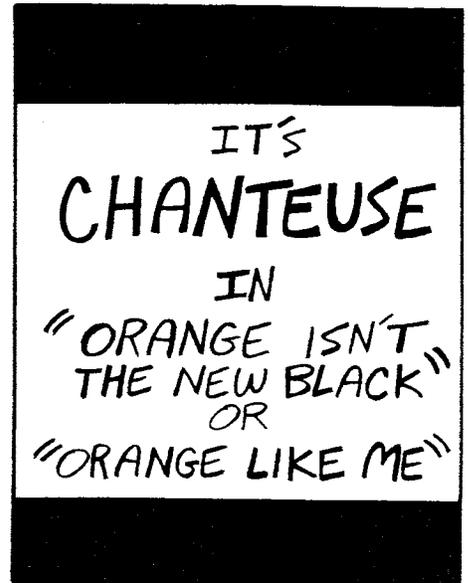
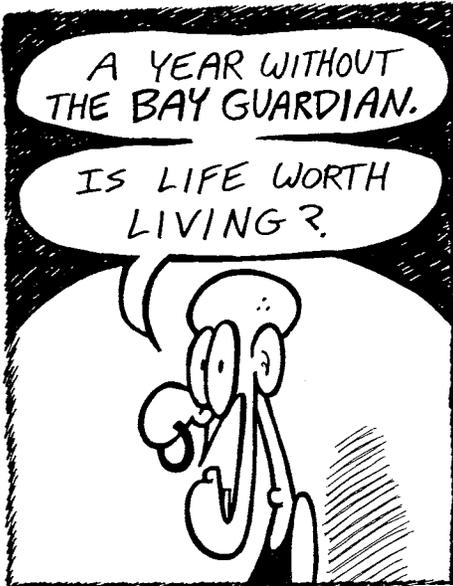
Good News: Last year I wrote about how the Samuels Clock Tower on Market Street had been vandalized, and a justifiably outraged person had written a semi-literate letter scolding the creep (or creeps) responsible, and placed it in the clock's shattered glass.

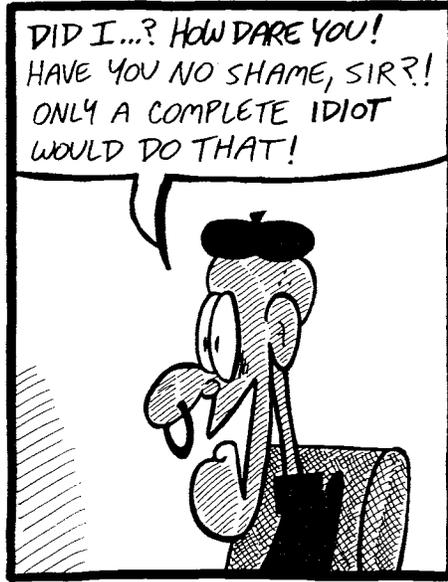
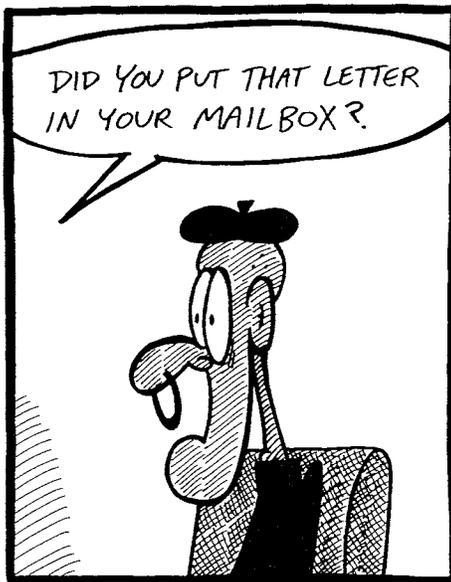
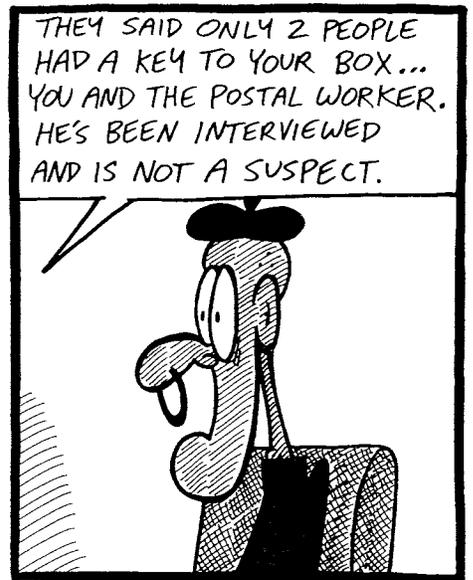
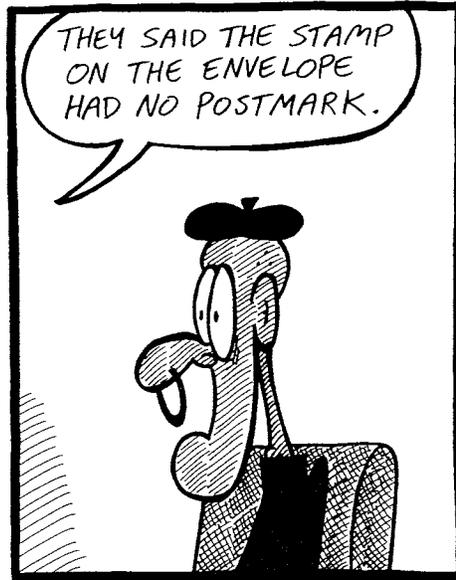
Well, last summer I passed by the clock and noticed it had been fixed. It was a hot summer day and there was a bum lying on the sidewalk with his head resting against it, so I don't know if it's broken again. Heck, I'm sure they got smart and used Plexiglas this time.

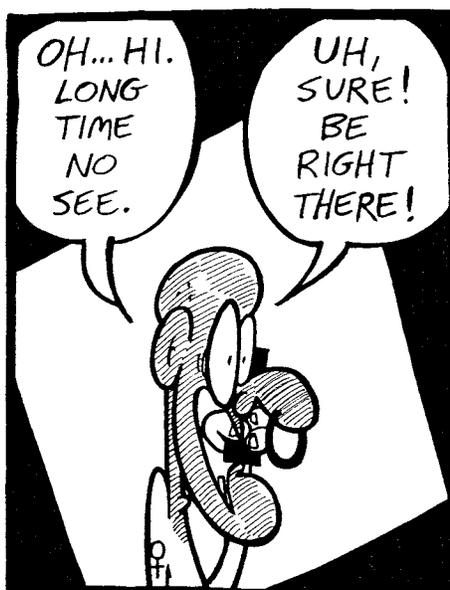
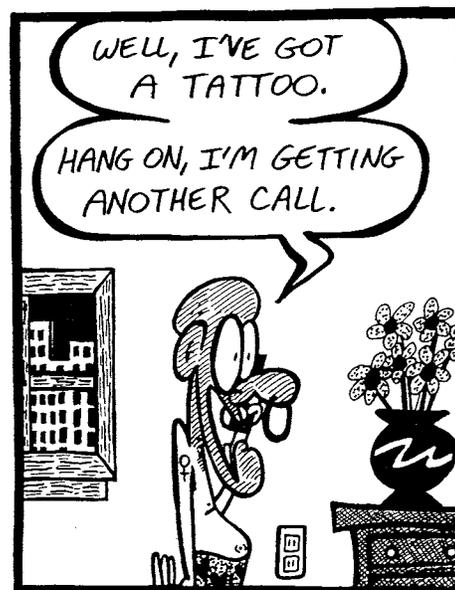
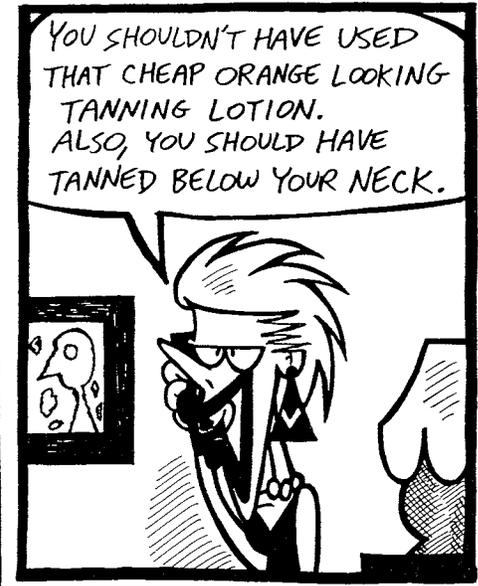
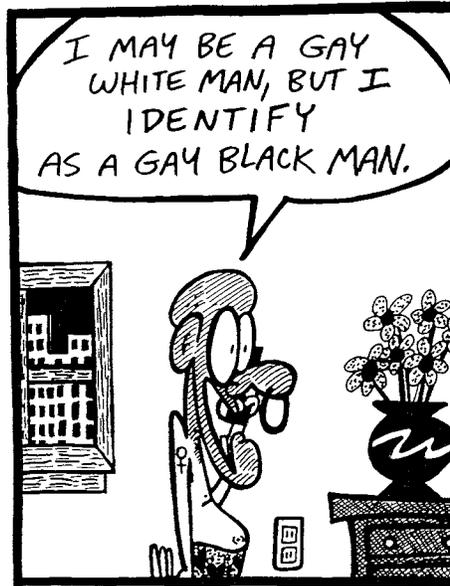
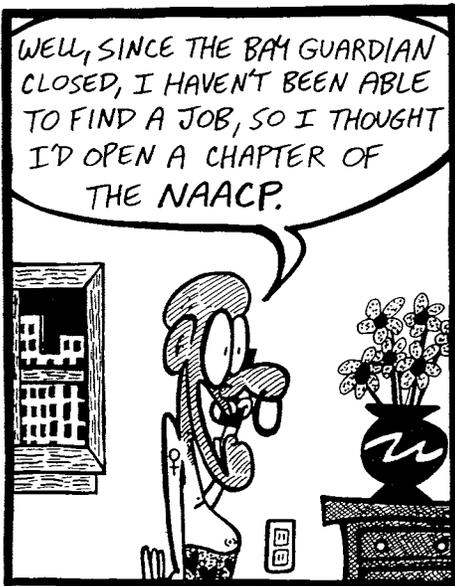
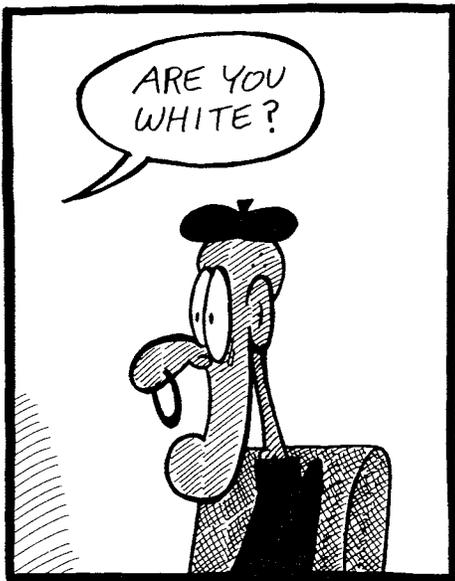
Various news stories I've read claimed that Samuels is the last clock tower in San Francisco, but isn't there one on Van Ness and O'Farrell, too?

Anyway - welcome back, Sammy!###

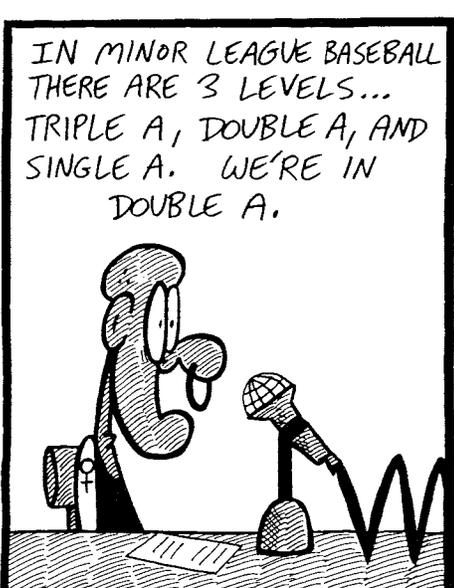
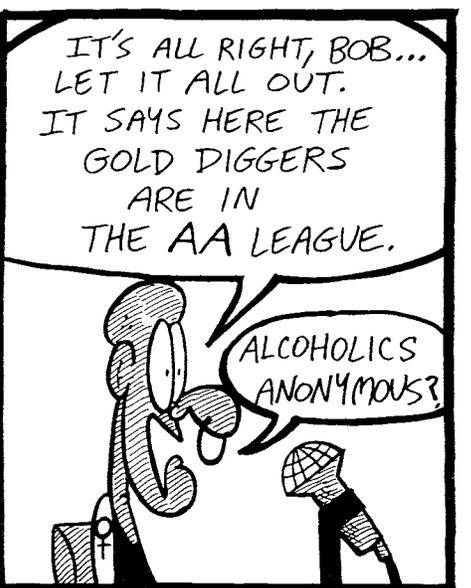
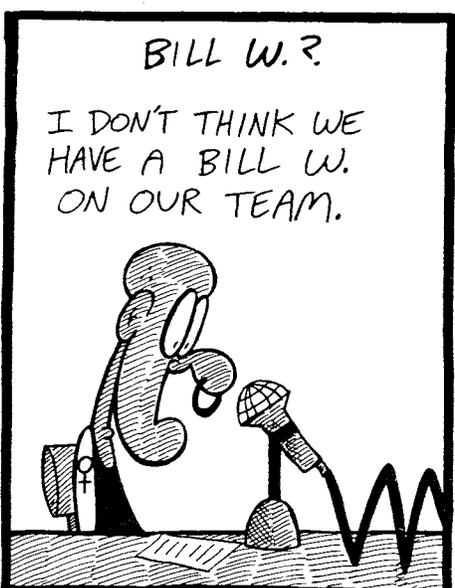
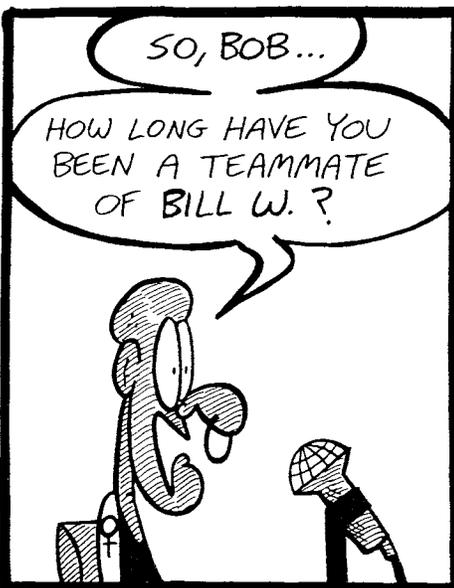
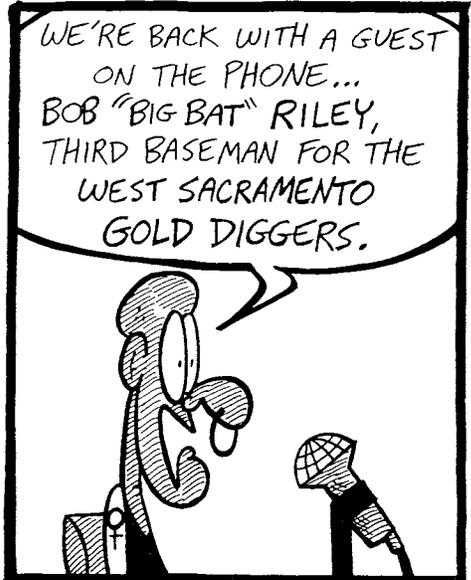
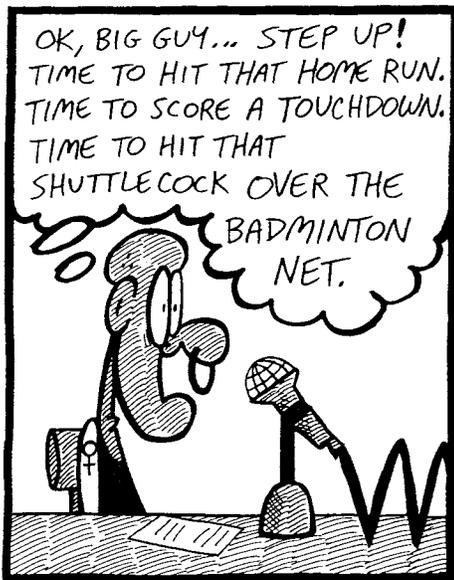
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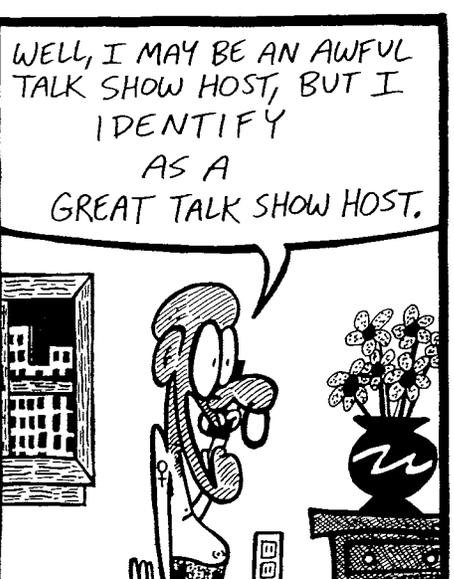
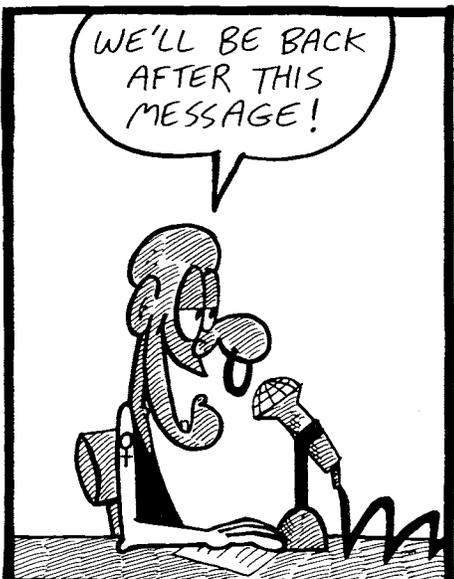
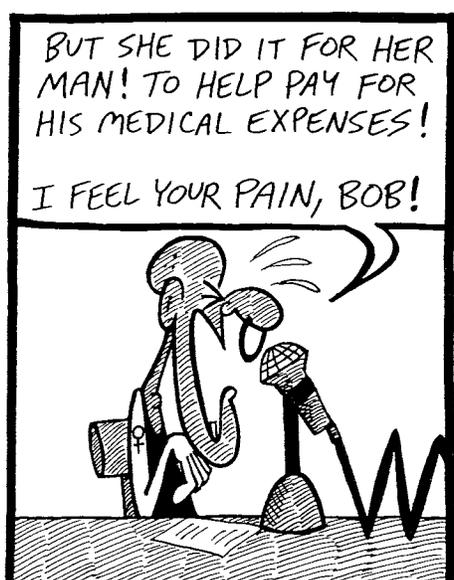
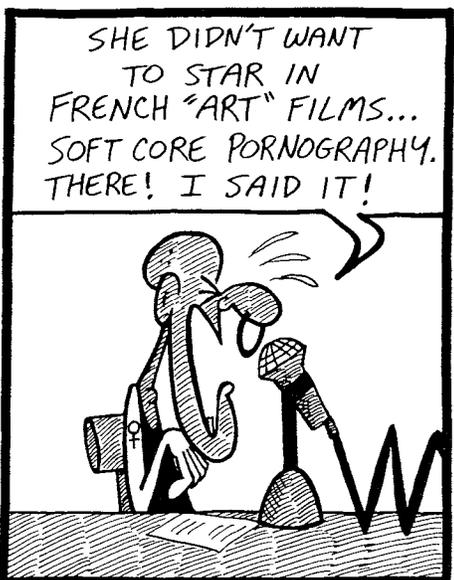












A Swift Kick...

By Mr. Fabulous

I had just boarded my flight to New York, and sat down in first class, when a stewardess told me I was in the wrong seat. I had taken the aisle seat, 3B, and the stewardess said that I should be sitting in the window seat.

I stood up and pulled my ticket out of my pocket. I showed it to her. "There, it says '3B,' right?"

The stewardess squinted at my ticket. "Well, that is just the darnedest thing." She turned to a tall blonde girl who was standing behind her. "I'm sorry, miss, but somehow you both got assigned the same seat."

The girl looked at my ticket, then at me, then at the stewardess. Her eyes started to fill with tears.

I smiled at them both. "No problem. I'll just take the window seat."

The stewardess shook her head. "I'm sorry, this is a full flight. That seat is already taken."

The blonde girl blinked at the stewardess. A tear rolled down her cheek.

I turned to the stewardess. "I could take a seat in the back. Maybe you could comp me or something...?"

"I'll check. But I believe this flight is sold out."

A man stepped around the stewardess. "Excuse me. I'm traveling with her." He gestured to the blonde girl. "I can give her my seat."

The stewardess shook her head. "Sir, if you disembark, your seat will get turned over to our waiting list."

He shook his head. "Please. Can't she just take my seat?"

"I'm sorry, sir. If you've checked baggage and you get off now, I have to call the air marshal. And your seat will automatically go to the waiting list."

The blonde girl started to whimper. A silent tear swelled in her right eye, then slid down her shiny cheek. She wiped her hand across her face.

The man tried once again with the stewardess. "Please, you don't understand—" He leaned close to her. "—This is Taylor Swift. We need to get her to New York. She's playing Madison Square Garden tonight."

"I'm sorry, sir. Just give me a minute, please." The stewardess turned and rushed up to the cockpit.

I turned to Taylor and her friend. "Listen guys, I'm so sorry about this. I totally know what it's like. I have to get to New York, too. I'm doing an AT&T audition tomorrow. I usually do movies, but my agent thought—"

"Please—" The man cut me off. "Just give us a moment, okay?"

The man started to pet Taylor's head. Gradually, she leaned her ear against his shoulder. After a moment, the tears stopped. She stared off into the distance.

The stewardess returned and grabbed my arm. "Sir, let me see your ticket."

I handed her my ticket. She put on her reading glasses and held the ticket up in front of her face. "Sir, you're not sitting in first class. You're back there, 3B."

I looked at my ticket. "Oh, I assumed I was in first class. I'm auditioning for an AT&T commercial tomorrow—"

"You'll need to get your stuff and move."

"Oh, okay." I reached up and grabbed my laptop bag from the overhead. I turned to Taylor and her friend. "Sorry about that. Good luck."

I nodded to the stewardess and shouldered my bag. I walked into the economy cabin, and found row 3. I stuffed my laptop into the overhead, then climbed over a passenger and squeezed into my middle seat.###

Day of the Condor

By Gene Mahoney

This is a belated RIP to Carol Doda, the famous ex-"exotic dancer", who passed away in November. She performed at the world famous Condor Club in North Beach, hence the witty title of this piece ("Day of the Condor" starring Robert Redford and Faye Dunaway, get it?)

That was called "Three Days of the Condor"? Oh well.

I first met Carol about 20 years ago while unsuccessfully trying to sell her advertising for her lingerie shop on Union Street. I'd later run into her around town on numerous occasions and she was always polite and talkative, casually mentioning that she had appeared on "Nash Bridges" and other things she was up to. As I recall she even invited me to her home for Thanksgiving once but I couldn't attend. Carol quit dancing at the Condor in 1986, three years after the infamous incident where a bouncer and a dancer were having sex on the piano after the place closed - and the hydraulic lift was accidentally activated, raising the piano to the ceiling and crushing the bouncer to death. In her later years Carol sang at a few North Beach supper clubs.

What more can you say? RIP, Carol.###

That Apartment Building on Bancroft Street

By Ace Backwords

Every time I walk by this apartment building on Bancroft Street, I look up at the 2nd floor window and think of my friend Mikal.

I first met Mikal around 1980 through my friend Duncan. They were in the same group therapy group. Mikal was an odd duck. A little woman around 60 with a short Napoleon-style hairdo. She looked sort of like a little elf. Duncan said she was inclined to be a lesbian. And she made a half-hearted attempt to connect with a woman when she was younger, but quickly gave up on that. Which was typical of Mikal's life. Which never seemed to amount to anything. You meet a lot of people like that on the social margins of society. They just sort of drift along.

"I've been *waiting* all my life," Mikal would often say, wistfully. But it was never clear exactly *what* she was waiting for. Love? Fulfillment? A point to her existence? Mostly she sat alone on her bed, watching game shows on TV all afternoon. While smoking endless cigarettes and drinking 6-packs of tall-can Budweiser, which she washed down with Nyquil cough syrup for that extra kick.

Mikal had a great apartment – the kind of apartment people in Berkeley would *kill* for today, but was readily available back then, even to people like Mikal on the social fringe. She had a big front picture window that was almost like a solar panel, with a great view of the Berkeley campus, and

lower Sproul Plaza right across the street. On the weekends you could clearly hear the endless Sproul drum circle, with the exotic Afro and Latin rhythms wafting up to her apartment. And it really gave you the feeling that you were in a special place: Berkeley, California.

Mikal had two beautiful Siamese cats, Mish and Mosh. They were never let out of the apartment. So, like Mikal, they had pretty much given up on life, mostly just eating, sleeping and sitting in a lifeless stupor. They were more like pieces of furniture than pets. Everything in Mikal's apartment was kind of like that. Lifeless. She had a bookshelf full of books, mostly dull tomes from the '50s and '60, that were covered with dust like they hadn't been touched in a decade. Her apartment was like a crypt that was slowly entombing her.

I'd sometimes hang out there in the afternoon with Duncan and some of their group therapy friends, smoking cigarettes and drinking coffee. Their primary interest seemed to be their personal problems. That was their main hobby.

Mikal's main problem seemed to be a need to return to an infantile state. She wanted to be babied, basically. And she was very resourceful at finding social services that would help her. She got free maid service. And Meals-on-Wheels delivered free food. Etc. Then she'd sit endlessly on her bed – like an aging elf on a toadstool – trying to figure out what to do with herself. Waiting and waiting for something.

The last 2 or 3 years of her life Mikal began disintegrating. First she'd be admitted to the hospital for some health emergency and be back out for 6 months. Then after the next hospital trip she was only out for 3 months. Then the next time it was only 1 month out.

Then it was just 2 weeks. She was stuck on this relentless downward spiral. That was rapidly accelerating. To its inevitable conclusion.

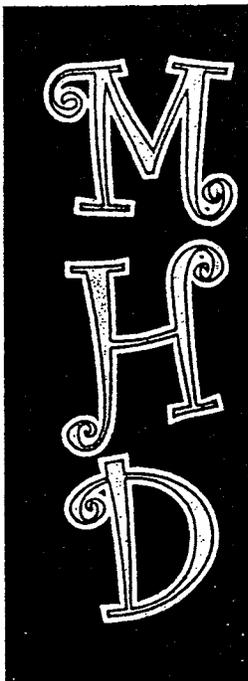
The thing I vividly remember was this one time when the 911 emergency crew came rushing to her apartment to take her to the hospital. They had her strapped to the stretcher and they were about to haul her into the ambulance. But the odd thing was: Mikal had this big, beaming smile on her face. This look of pure bliss. That was her favorite feeling in the world. When she was like a baby surrounded by all these people who were rushing around trying to help her.

The last time she was in the hospital was 1986. She was very frail, with purple splotches all over her face and she needed an oxygen tank to breathe. But she was adamant that she wanted to go home to her apartment. The doctors insisted that if she left the hospital she would surely die. But Mikal insisted. You could tell what she was thinking. She wanted to go home to die.

Later that night I went up to her apartment to check on her. I had a key because I used to do odd jobs for her. Her apartment door was wide open. The room was dark aside from this eerie gray light illuminating from her TV set, which was jammed between channels and hissing out static. Her book shelf had been knocked over and the dusty books were sprawled across the floor. Mikal was curled up on her bed, her eyes closed, and she was kind of vibrating back and forth. I softly called out to her, "Mikal?" But she was already way too far gone, in some kind of subhuman animal state of pure vibrations. I quietly left and shut the door behind me.

At least her wait was finally over.###

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