

The Society Page

By Gene Mahoney

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

At the Warfield: Dark Star Orchestra, 2/2. Neck Deep, 2/3. Babytron, 2/7... New: Fairuz Eatery (mostly vegetarian food) at 519 Columbus... New Pizzalicious at 1977 Union Street... Nicole is moving her SummersANDFall beauty salon from 1014 Larkin to around the ballpark in mid-January... Trivia Nights at Campus, 2241 Chestnut Street, Wednesdays 7-9pm... Max Fleischer characters like Betty Boop and Koko the Clown on a great mural at Coit Liquors in North Beach by Mark Bode (son of Vaughn). Looks like he did the one at the Stork Club in Oakland, too. Looks like it.

I was on the 45 bus cruising down Union Street. A bunch of clean-cut young people got on – and they ALL paid their fare. One of them asked me if I wanted to go to church on Christmas Eve. I said sure. He gave me a card for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints at 1900 Pacific Avenue. I didn't go, but maybe I should have. If they all paid their fare they must be all right people. They, another guy, and I were the only ones on the bus who did. So anyway, I thought I'd give them a shout-out. Which reminds me, if you're a fare evader on Muni or BART, stop reading this newsletter. If you have a Come-to-God moment and start paying, you can start reading it again. If you ever see a guy on the bus asking fare evaders if the bus is free today or complaining that he's the only one on the bus paying, it's probably me. When Willie Brown ran for mayor in 1995 he floated an idea about having gang members patrol Muni. It was widely mocked, but maybe fat lips and busted ribs would encourage fare evaders to pony up.###

Jesus Versus Satan in the Grudge Match of the Century

By Ace Backwards

In 1974 I turned 18. My parents shipped me off to college for a year – this little liberal arts college outside Cleveland, Ohio. I went from an English major, to an Art major, to a Religion major, to *inevitably* a Drop-out, all in one year.

My college roommate that freshman year was this really cool guy named Larry. Larry was a total rock 'n roll freak like me. Larry had a huge collection of rock albums, thousands of records. Larry also had piles of rock magazines, *Creem* and *Crawdaddy* and *Circus*. Larry not only looked like a rock star, he played rhythm guitar in a rock band, this Kiss cover band.

Then one night, on a whim, Larry went off with some friends to one of those born-again



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Christian revival meetings. Later that night, Larry burst back into our dorm room with an excited smile. "You won't believe it, Ace!" shouted Larry, happily. "I finally found the answer! I've been born again in the blood of Jesus Christ!"

Larry immediately cut off his long, blond rock 'n roll hair, and threw out his purple bellbottoms, and completely renounced his satanic rock 'n roll lifestyle. Larry started wearing a clean-cut white shirt and tie, and carrying a big black Bible around with him everywhere he went.

One night I was lying by myself on my dorm bed, thinking profound spiritual thoughts, or more likely getting ready to masturbate, when Larry burst into the room with two of his new born-again pals, Bill and Joe. "Just look at this room," said Bill. "Can't you just sense the presence of Satan?"

The three of them immediately began to systematically demolish Larry's entire record collection, one by one. I had lain there on my dorm bed throughout the whole ordeal, maintaining a façade of smirking indifference. But in truth I had found the whole thing to be deeply disturbing.

So me and Larry were at an impasse. Larry thought I was Satan. And I thought Larry was an asshole. I adopted the pose of smug, know-it-all assurance. But in truth I was crumbling inside. At the time I was beginning to dimly grasp these Hindu and Buddhist concepts. And then all of a sudden I was getting attacked and bombarded from every angle. It was bad enough to be confused, but to have to defend my confusion was even worse.

And all these Born Again Christians seemed so sure of themselves. And there were a lot of them and only one of me. The worst was when they all ganged up on me. And what did I know? How did I really know what would happen to me when I died? I wasn't even sure what was happening to me while I was alive.

But then finally, after much deep thought, I hit on the fatal flaw at the heart of Larry's lunk-headed version of Christianity.

"God created Satan, right, Larry?" I said. "And God created man and gave him the free will to choose between Him or Satan, right? And God is omniscient, right? He knows everything, right? He knows the past and the future and everything else, right? So you're saying that when God created this whole set-up, He knew in advance that billions of people would use that free will to choose against Him and end up suffering eternally in Hell. He set up the whole thing knowing in advance that He was dooming billions of people to eternal Hell."

"Right," said Larry.

"Well, what kind of barbaric God would create a crazy set-up like that?"

"You shouldn't question God," said Larry.

"I'm not questioning God. I'm questioning your dim-witted opinion about God."

Touché.

Larry wearied of the battle and threw in the towel. He decided to pack up all his stuff and move back into his parents' house in the suburbs of Cleveland for the rest of the school year. That way he wouldn't have to be further contaminated by my noxious, satanic presence.

So I had won! I now had the whole dorm room to myself. But it was a hollow victory. For I had lost my one true friend on campus. One night alone in my dorm room, in my loneliness and despair I got down on my hands and knees and begged Jesus to come into my life and save me. "Save me, Jesus! SAVE ME!!!" I cried, with tears streaming down my face. I stayed down there with my head on the floor for about ten minutes, praying like mad for Jesus to come into my soul and heal my wicked and depraved shit. Waiting. And waiting...

But nothing happened. Finally I pulled myself off the floor, feeling like a fool, feeling like life had played one more dirty, rotten trick on my stupid-ass soul.###

The Old Fool of Moanalua Valley – Part II By James Dylan

(The names have been changed to protect the idiots.)

There were a few other roommates in the house in Hawaii. There was Gary, a 30-something, single, white construction worker who had been renting a room there for 9 years, and didn't seem to have a lot going for him. In the other room were a young Filipino couple in their early 20s with a small child, maybe 6 years old.

Gary was quiet and kept to himself. He worked construction during the day, and

when he came home he might sit outside a bit and drink beer, but mainly he stayed in his room. Eventually I realized he was a serious alcoholic, but he was a reclusive drunk, and never bothered us.

The Filipino couple were something else, however. Again, they were both very young, almost too young to have a six-year-old. They had both grown up in the Philippines, but the girl came over first, then brought the boy over, and both worked in the hotel industry. Pretty much as soon as we moved in, COVID reared its head and lockdowns were occurring. Hawaii's economy is almost all tourism, so these two were among the first to lose their jobs. The wife seemed to be an okay mother; she would cook for the little boy and sit at the table with him while they ate. My wife is Filipina and she talked with her sometimes, and got along, but something was off with the guy.

He rarely acknowledged me, maybe just a brief nod, but whatever. Oh, I should mention, he ALWAYS had a phone in his hands, always playing video games. Always.

We lived about a block from a large neighborhood park, with a playground and a basketball court, and the boy would literally beg the parents to go to the park. Neither of them was working at this point, but they rarely took the kid out; they mostly stayed in their room. When they did walk out, the guy was always looking at the screen, it was insane. My wife told me that the girl complained to her that even if they did go to the park, the father ignored the little boy, wouldn't play with him or anything, and only stared at his phone playing games. I felt so sorry for the wife and kid, but what could I do. Not. My. Business.

Life in the house was mostly uneventful; Gary would just sit outside and drink beer and keep to himself. The Filipinos mostly stayed in their room. My wife worked as an RN so she was busy, as you could imagine. I was a military contractor and worked on a nearby military base, so both our jobs were secure. The only odd thing I witnessed during this first month was Gary becoming blackout drunk and staying in his room, and Mr. Fong, the landlord, cooking for him! He said he was cooking for Gary as "he was sick." I knew Gary was drunk, but kept my mouth shut.

About twice a week I would fire up the small propane grill, and the wife and I would eat on the back terrace, which was a lot more private than the front; almost no one went back there except Mr. Fong. Well, every time I started grilling something, here came Mr. Fong. "James, what you cooking! Smell good!" and then he would hang around and watch me. Since his English was so limited, he wasn't up for small talk, but I figured he was just so lonely...

Well, sooner or later the wife would come out and set the table, and the meat was ready

and we would sit down to eat, and... Mr. Fong would just stand there, smiling at us. I would say something like "Well, time to eat!" and start cutting my food, trying to give him a hint, but no, he would just stand there, not speaking, just smiling and watching us, as if he was trying to bring back memories of happier times in his life.

About 30 days into our move, the Filipino couple said that since they have no jobs or savings, they were moving out of their room and in with her parents. I was a bit shocked when the girl pulled me aside and asked if I could speak to Mr. Fong about getting their deposit back. Huh? "Talk to him yourself, I have nothing to do with that," I told her.

She said he was very dismissive about it, and wanted me to talk to him. My wife kicked me under the table. *Sigh*, here we go.

I brought up the topic of the Filipino couple's deposit to Mr. Fong and he said, "Oh, as soon as I get a deposit from whoever rents the room, I'll give it to them."

I took some time to point out to him that he isn't supposed to spend the deposit, but hold onto it, as it wasn't technically his money, but he dismissed me, saying of course it was his money, and besides, he needed it for something. Oh boy.

So, the couple moved out and after a while Mr. Fong came to my room and asked if I could post the room for rent on Craigslist for him, and I could even weed out the "undesirable" people who showed up. See, this is my life. I just wanted to live in my room and mind my own business, but like Michael Corleone, *Just When I Thought I Was Out, They Pulled Me Back In*.

Like a moron, instead of slamming the door in his face and curling into the fetal position under the bed, I said "sure." At least I would have a little control of the situation, like posting the ad and getting to pick someone decent. Well, it turns out, it was kind of hard to rent a room at the beginning of a pandemic. It also turns out that most other people who responded to the ad had higher standards than me, as they saw the condition of the house and declined. One guy even asked me "The owner is in his 90s.... what happens if he dies? Will someone kick us all out? Will I lose my deposit?" All valid questions, actually.

Finally, a big local woman named Stacy, who was built like a linebacker for the 49ers, showed up, with a 7-year-old daughter in tow. Stacy was fighting with the girl's father and left their apartment, and they needed a place to stay. The woman said she was half Hawaiian, and the ex was full Hawaiian, or something like that. Of course, my white guilt kicked in, and also the fact she was a single mother.... and again, we didn't plan to stay at the place long anyway. I referred her

to Mr. Fong, who didn't seem to mind who rented the room, as long as she had money for a deposit and a steady income.

At first, I got along with Stacy, because she liked that I kept things neat and clean, and was picky about roommates; she liked that I wasn't just "letting anyone in." She seemed to think of me as the manager, the guy running the place, which wasn't the case, but Mr. Fong kept telling her to talk to me! She thought it was nice that I was helping out an old man, etc. But after a few days, Stacy started to get a little bossy, with Gary being her first target. She didn't like the fact that he smoked and drank out on the front covered garage area, which was kind of the communal hangout for everyone. Mr. Fong even had a table and chairs there, and it was Gary's "designated smoking area."

She started complaining that she was a single mother, and trying to raise a child, and she didn't think he was a good influence, sitting there smoking and drunk. Poor Gary, all he wanted to do was come home after a day's work and relax. I tried to play middle-man, and told her that it WAS the designated smoking area, but she was all bitchy and bossy about it. So then, Gary, who just wanted peace and quiet, moved to the back of the house to sit and chill, but then Stacy started complaining that the smoke from his cigarettes is coming in through her room's window!

Finally, Gary got fed up and ripped into her -- said he'd been there for almost 10 years, no one complained about him, she just showed up like a week ago, and if she didn't like it, she could leave, as he wasn't breaking any rules. He said her ex was lucky that he and she weren't living together anymore.

I was really regretting letting Stacy move in, but it was too late now. Mr. Fong rarely came out of his room (turns out he had a little kitchenette and bathroom of his own back in his area), and he didn't want to get involved. Stacy really killed the chill vibe of the place though, for sure. We all used to sit outside after work and chat, but then Stacy would come out and take over the conversations, talk loudly on her cell phone, and yell out her daughter's name loudly, shrilly, and constantly. "Shakira, don't do that!" "Shakira, be careful!" "Shakira, slow down!"

Slowly, everyone would leave that area and go to their rooms, to get away from Stacy and her overbearing presence. Also, I could see what Stacy was doing; she was slowly taking over my position as "manager" of the house, and letting everyone know it. She saw Mr. Fong as a weak, feeble old man who could be easily pushed around, and I could see her already making plans.

Meanwhile, in my world, it began to look like Covid was here to stay, and we realized that we wouldn't be going anywhere anytime soon. All our tickets and plans had been

cancelled, entire countries were on lockdown.... so I withdrew my resignation from my job (they were happy about that, as they never found anyone to take my place), and (*sigh*) we decided to get an apartment again. Again, *just when I thought I was getting out, they pulled me back in.*

However, a lot of people that HAD apartments were taking them off the market for fear of “showing” them to people (Covid) and a lot of tech-bros from the Bay Area were relocating to Hawaii where they could “work from home” -- taking up the other available apartments. I spent a few days looking, and there wasn’t that much, but I found a nice three bedroom for only \$2100 a month, including utilities. Huh? That didn’t make sense; a 3-bedroom in Hawaii in 2020 would be at least \$3000 a month, not including utilities. (Red Flag! Red Flag!)

But, because there just wasn’t a lot out there, I contacted the guy, checked out the apartment, and put a deposit down. Bad thing was, we couldn’t move in until May 1st, which was still a month away, so we had to endure Stacy. (*Sigh.*)

Anyway, this is a whole different story.###

All Aboard By Mr. Fabulous

I’m not sure when it was, or for what movie, but my agent sent me to New York for an audition. I flew into New York and took a cab into midtown Manhattan. I found myself hurrying down the main escalator of Grand Central Station, in a rush to catch a train to my audition. I had probably a minute-and-a-half to make a train on the lower level. I was sort of pushing my way down the escalator, ducking past people, muttering, “Excuse me, excuse me.” Near the bottom of the escalator, I half-stumbled into a short, dark-haired woman.

“Pardon me,” I said.

The woman poked me in the shoulder. “Why don’t you watch where you going? You knock me over, why not?”

I continued down the escalator. I half-turned to the woman. “Sorry, baby—I gotta make a train.” I continued jostling down the escalator. “Excuse me, excuse me...”

Behind me, the dark-haired woman shouted, ““BABY”—you don’t call me ‘Baby.’”

I ignored her and jumped down the last few steps of the escalator. I landed on the tan marble floor of Grand Central’s main hall. I began hurrying toward the north stairwell. I had less than a minute to get to the lower level and catch my train.

I hadn’t gone more than 10 steps when someone crashed into me. I fell forward,

landing flat on my hands and knees. My Bitterman trench coat—which I’d been carrying over my right arm—draped itself across the floor.

A woman’s voice shouted behind me, “That’s for calling me ‘Baby.’”

I stood up and turned around. It was the dark-haired woman from the escalator. She was wearing large wraparound sunglasses and a black leather jacket. Her face looked familiar. She touched her bun of hair to steady it. I suddenly realized that I was looking at Yoko Ono.

I hurriedly picked up my trench coat. “My God, Yoko, honey—I had no idea it was you.”

Yoko glared at me. “You a very bad person.”

I folded my trench coat. “Oh, baby—don’t say that. You gotta forgive me. See, I just gotta make this train.” I turned and pointed at the stairwell to the lower level. “See, I gotta go. All right, honey?... Everything’s cool, right? Okay, bye...”

Yoko stomped her foot. “No, no. You say sorry, right now.”

I was frantic to make my train. “No, Yoko—I love you, baby, you know that—”

“Say sorry.”

I had to think quickly. “My God,” I shouted. “What’s that?” I pointed to something behind Yoko. She turned to look, putting up a hand to steady her hair. Instantly I sprinted off to the stairwell.

I jumped down the first part of the stairs. Behind me Yoko shouted, “HEY...”

I jumped the final steps to the lower level. I could hear the clip-clop of Yoko’s feet echoing behind me in the stairwell. She was chasing after me. I ran down the hall to my train’s gate. I ducked through the gate and sprinted down the ramp leading to the platform.

Yoko saw me run through the gate. She began shriek.

I reached into my pocket to pull out my round-trip voucher. I glanced back at Yoko. She had pulled a hairpin out of her hair. She was charging toward me, holding the hairpin like a knife. All her hair had flopped down crazily around her face. She saw me glance at her and began to shout, “AIGHHH...”

I dug out my voucher and held it up for the conductor. “Please, hurry. She’s gonna kill me...”

The conductor glanced at my ticket. Then he reached up and pushed the door release

button. A bell rang and the door slid open. I fell inside, panting and wheezing.

“Oh, thank Christ,” I gasped. “Thank you, Lord.”

The conductor released the button and the door slid shut. Just at that moment, Yoko leaped for the door. I looked up in time to see her face bounce off the window. She fell back onto the platform.

The Metro-North conductor didn’t seem to notice Yoko caroming off the door. He reached down and helped me to my feet. “Let me have your ticket.”

I handed him my round-trip voucher. The train began to rumble down the track.###

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