

San Francisco Herald

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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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I finally got around to reading *The Late Shift*, a book by Bill Carter which detailed what happened when Johnny Carson announced he was leaving *The Tonight Show*.

The Tonight Show began in 1954 on NBC as a late night, weeknight talk show with comedy and music, hosted by Steve Allen. It was such a success that two years later Allen was plucked off the show and given his own program in prime time.

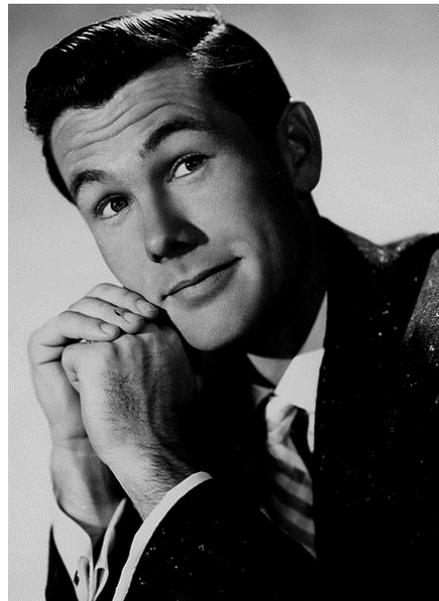
Allen was replaced on *Tonight* by Jack Paar, who had a more combative style – promoting various political causes, battling censors, arguing with guests, quitting the show then coming back – until he left for good in 1962.

Johnny Carson, a quick-witted game show host who had filled in for Paar a few times, was chosen as the new *Tonight* host.

Unlike Paar, Carson shied away from controversy, and he went on to become the most successful host in the show’s history.

In 1982, comedian David Letterman, who had filled in for Carson a few times, was given a show immediately following *Tonight* on NBC titled *Late Night*.

NBC ruled late night television. ABC had some limited success competing against *Tonight* with *Nightline*, a news show. CBS, however, never could offer more than low-rated reruns of cop shows.



Johnny Carson in 1957

In 1989, CBS began a talk show with another quick-witted game show host, Pat Sajak, star of *Wheel of Fortune*. They never expected the show to beat Carson. The plan was to appeal to a younger audience than Johnny’s aging one. Then when Johnny retired, Pat’s show would become the new leader in late night. However, it never caught on and was eventually canceled.

CBS concluded there was only one person who could compete with Carson – Carson’s permanent guest host on *Tonight*, Jay Leno. (Leno got that prized gig by appearing regularly on Letterman’s show.)

CBS offered Leno his own program that would go head to head with *Tonight*. When NBC got wind of this they secretly signed him as Carson’s replacement, apparently to not enrage Letterman (or Carson).

You could make a valid case that David Letterman’s act resembled Steve Allen’s more than Johnny Carson’s, but Carson was Letterman’s idol. His boyhood dream had been to replace Johnny as host of *The Tonight Show*. Though whenever asked about it in interviews, he would always say Carson was a much better comedian than him and he never thought of taking over *Tonight*, so as not to give the impression he was trying to push Carson out the door.

In 1991, Carson announced he was retiring in a year. When Leno was introduced as the new host of *The Tonight Show*, Letterman fumed. Negotiations and legal wrangling ensued. Basically, the NBC Los Angeles executives wanted Leno and the NBC New York executives wanted Letterman.

Letterman had always been difficult – insulting NBC executives on his show, disinviting them from a Christmas party, berating staff members – so the pro-Leno executives eventually won out.

CBS offered Letterman his own show that would go up against *Tonight* with Leno, for more money than he would have gotten at NBC. But he cared more about being the host of *Tonight* than he did about making more money.

However, his agent and staff were more concerned with making more money than fulfilling Letterman’s lifelong dream, so they urged him to defect. Finally, Letterman called his hero, Johnny Carson, who said that if he had

been treated the way Letterman had, he would leave.

Enough said. Letterman decided to move to CBS. His replacement on *Late Night* was an unknown writer for *Saturday Night Live* and *The Simpsons* named Conan O'Brien.

David Letterman's *Late Show* debuted on CBS in 1993, and went on to defeat Jay Leno's *Tonight Show* in the ratings night after night, week after week, month after month.

And that's where *The Late Shift*, published in 1994, ends.

Then, in 1995, something strange happened.

British thespian Hugh Grant was arrested in Los Angeles for procuring the services of a prostitute. While the story was still in the news, he appeared on *Tonight* as a guest. Not surprisingly, that episode garnered huge ratings, defeating Letterman's program for the night. Surprisingly, however, Leno's *Tonight Show* kept defeating Letterman's *Late Show* in the ratings night after night, week after week, month after month.

In 2009, Leno stepped down from *Tonight* and was replaced by Conan O'Brien. Leno was given his own show in prime time. Both Leno's new show and *Tonight* with O'Brien were ratings disasters. Eight months later, NBC fired O'Brien and rehired Leno for *Tonight*.

(Bill Carter wrote a book about this, too.)

In 2014, Jimmy Fallon, a former *Saturday Night Live* cast member, replaced Leno as host of *Tonight*. Apparently he's still there. Leno isn't hosting the show again. Yet.

Though presently Fallon and ABC talk show host Jimmy Kimmel are losing the ratings war to Letterman's successor on *Late Show*, Stephen Colbert.

Stephen Colbert got his start hosting a show on Comedy Central, where he played an arrogant, conservative

blowhard talk show host, who comes across as a mean spirited partisan hack.

On *Late Show* he's just the real Stephen Colbert. And the real Stephen Colbert is an arrogant, liberal blowhard talk show host, who comes across as a mean spirited partisan hack.

I haven't watched television in years, but from what I hear Colbert pretty much spends each show bashing President Donald Trump. Which is ironic, because before Trump got elected, Colbert regularly finished behind Jimmy Fallon and Jimmy Kimmel in the ratings. He owes his success to the man he lambasts nightly.

Apparently Leno regularly appears on *Tonight* as a guest. Letterman grew a long beard after he retired, claimed he stayed on *Late Show* ten years longer than he should have, and now hosts his own show on Netflix. Conan O'Brien, bitter about being fired from *Tonight* (and having to accept a \$45 million buyout – *poor baby*) got his own talk show on TBS, a cable channel. He banned Jay Leno from ever appearing as a guest on it.

Today's late night talk shows have much smaller audiences than Leno and Letterman had – and a lot, lot less than Carson had. Maybe it's all the competition nowadays. Maybe it's the internet. Maybe it's the political grandstanding instead of being funny. Maybe it's all of that, or something else.

Or maybe some things just aren't worth staying up for.

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Recommended: "The Homeless Industrial Complex" by Edward Ring in California Globe (online). Published in May, it begins with a doctor's prediction of a major infectious disease epidemic in Los Angeles this summer.

L.A., along with other cities in California, already has outbreaks of tuberculosis, typhus, hepatitis, and other diseases. And the primary reasons for this are the unsanitary conditions caused

by the homeless. Though there are an estimated 55,000 homeless in Los Angeles County and over 130,000 in California, Ring claims the homeless problem could be completely solved within a few months.

Ring suggests the national guard, along with law enforcement, could sort the homeless into groups: criminals, substance abusers, the mentally ill, illegal aliens, and others. Each group could have separate facilities built on vacant or government land away from downtowns and residential areas. The facilities could be tents, porta-potties, and mobile modules distributing food and medical aid.

Ring points out that every major city in California is spending at least tens of millions of dollars on homeless programs, but most of the money is being wasted due to what he calls the homeless industrial complex.

Ring explains how the homeless industrial complex works: Developers accept public money to build housing for the homeless. Cities and counties collect building fees and hire bureaucrats to oversee it. Nonprofit organizations are chosen to run it.

However, the developers build way overpriced, overbuilt housing projects. Cities and counties collect very expensive building fees while creating a massive bureaucracy. The nonprofits become large bureaucracies with expensive overhead and salaries that do nothing to help the homeless.

Ring cites a homeless shelter being built on Venice Beach, where over 1,000 homeless people have taken over every public venue, including the beach. Their tents are protected by law as private space – so in addition to housing, the tents have become drug dens and brothels. A 154 bed shelter is being built as a "wet" shelter, meaning drug addicts and alcoholics will be able to check in and check out as they please. The estimated cost of this shelter (so far) is \$8 million, which works out to over \$50,000 per bed. All that money for

tents, bathroom plumbing, and a kitchen? To have freeloading party animals live alongside the truly needy?

Ring points out that not only is the shelter incapable of housing the over 1,000 homeless already in Venice, it will attract more homeless people to the beach town.

Ring offers several ways to rein in the homeless industrial complex, but they won't be easy. At community hearings across the state, "homeless advocates" are often bused in from other places to shout down local opposition and demand new projects. PR firms sell feel-good stories to an incurious media about people who have turned their lives around, never mentioning all the people still on the street due to sparse, massively overpriced housing for the homeless. (When Los Angeles voters passed Measure HHH in 2016 to build more housing for the homeless, they were told "permanent supportive housing" would cost about \$140,000 per unit. They are now more than triple that.)

Wow. Can you believe all that corruption disguised as compassion is going on in Los Angeles? Gee, it's a good thing nothing like that happens here in San Francisco.

Right?

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Herald Archives: 2012

Phil Spector: Coolest Man Alive

By Ace Backwards

I have this weird fascination with Phil Spector. I'm not sure why. I'll regularly Google "Phil Spector" to see how he's holding up amidst prison life, see if he's gotten any more teeth knocked out lately and etc. I guess everybody likes a rags-to-riches-to-rags story. And if anyone ever went from the penthouse to the outhouse it's old Phil. He went from living in a gated castle with the world at his fingertips, to a 5-foot-by-9 foot cell that he's confined to 23 hours of the day.

Part of the fascination I guess is that a lot of this life is about winning and losing. That's why sports are so popular, for we see these symbolic dramas acted out for our vicarious amusement. Certainly everybody experiences their ups-and-downs in this yin/yang universe of ours. Most of us experience combinations of winning and losing. But face it, some people are just flat out winners or losers. Phil Spector was a loser who spent his life masquerading as a winner. Always strutting around like the cock of the roost, making a big show of leaving hundred dollar tips, flashing expensive jewelry and flaunting trophy girlfriends. Probably as a way to try and convince HIMSELF that he was a winner for he probably always suspected deep down he was a total loser.

On the other hand, my old friend Vincent Johnson was a winner masquerading as a loser. Half black and half white, he never knew his father, and his mother treated him like shit all his life. He was raised in a ghetto in southern California during the early '60s and remembers walking to grade school with tear gas in the air from the Watts riots. The blacks all hated him because they considered him white and the whites all hated him because they considered him black. Frail and epileptic with a bad stutter and somewhat homely by conventional standards, Vincent was one of those guys who seemed to have everything stacked against him. A bad statistic waiting to happen. And yet Vince had a quiet dignity about him. One of the most peaceful and tranquil people I've ever known. Always walked with his head held high, a prince among men. Just a very soulful dude. He moved to Berkeley in the '70s to become a hippy. Spent much of his life homeless, living in a battered '56 Chevy that rarely ran, painted in bright psychedelic colors with the Grateful Dead "STEAL YOUR FACE" logo on the front hood. Who can explain the twists and turns of our lives, and why some of us are winners and others losers.

For some reason this reminds me of a guy I used to play basketball with at Ohlone Park. Let's call him Charlie — as in Charlie Brown — because the poor

guy was just a born loser. For some reason, no matter what he did, no matter how hard he tried, he always ended up losing. Like his life was preordained like a Wile E. Coyote cartoon. I'll give you an example. One night we were playing 21. Many of you are probably familiar with that game. Two points for field goals, one point for foul shots, first player to 21 wins, but if you miss the foul shot at 20 you have to go back to 12. Anyways, this one night Charlie was playing an uncharacteristically great game, scoring fantastic shots left and right. But the rub was, every time he got to 20 he missed the crucial last foul shot and had to go back to 12. He had lapped the rest of us at least 4 or 5 times but he just couldn't make that crucial last shot. So Charlie decided to play it smart. The next time he got to 19 he decided to purposely miss the foul shot so he could win the game later with a harmless field goal. So he takes the basketball and just blindly flings it at the basket with all his might. Of course it went right in the basket. "I CAN'T BELIEVE IT!" he screamed in stunned disbelief. So now Charlie was back at 20 and of course he missed the foul shot when he was TRYING to hit it and went back to 12 yet again. "I CAN'T BELIEVE IT!!" he screamed. While the rest of us were rolling around on our backs laughing until we cried. In truth it was one of the funniest things I'd ever witnessed.

For some reason it reminded me of the comedian Pat Paulsen, another total loser. He decided to get a cool tattoo, but the tattoo artist misspelled it and it came out "Born too loose." The poor guy couldn't even lose right.###

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BY GENE MAHONEY

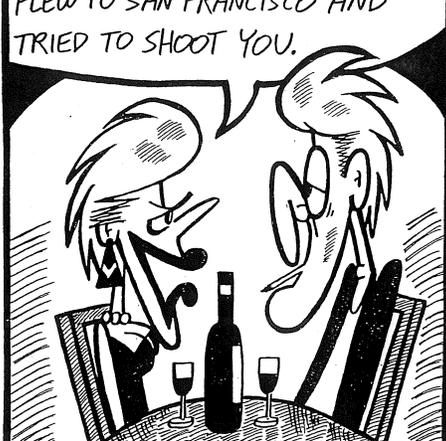
"WHATEVER HAPPENED TO
BABY JANE
JANE X?"



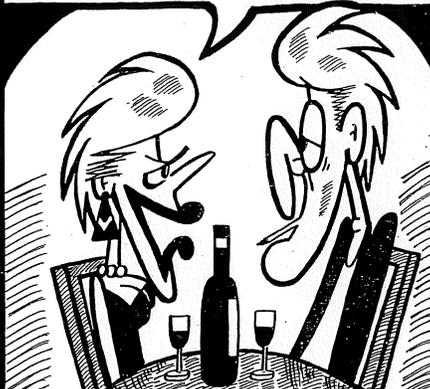
O.K.... SO THIS WOMAN
YOU KNEW, JANE TRIPP,
FROM LONG ISLAND...



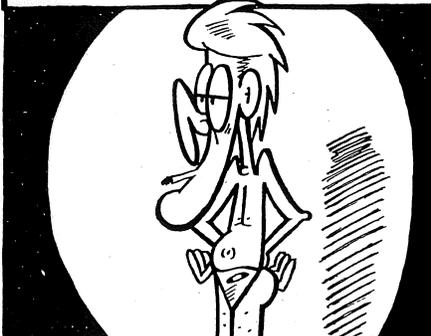
SHE DIVORCED YOUR OLD FRIEND,
CHARLIE TRIPP, JOINED A
LESBIAN TERRORIST ORGANIZATION,
FLEW TO SAN FRANCISCO AND
TRIED TO SHOOT YOU.



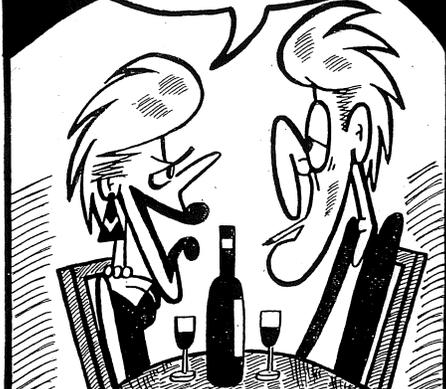
IN A WOMEN'S PRISON, SHE
SHAVES HER HEAD, RE-NAMES
HERSELF "JANE X" AND
MARRIES HER CELLMATE.



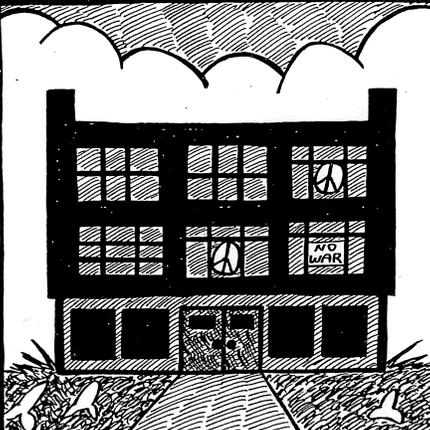
WHEN YOU'RE 37 YEARS OLD THEY
ADOPT YOU AS THEIR SON AND
FORCE YOU TO WEAR A DIAPER
AS PART OF YOUR "REBIRTHING
PROCESS" - TO RID YOU OF
ANY MASCULINITY YOU HAVE.



SHE GETS INVOLVED IN
LEFTIST POLITICS HERE.
WHATEVER HAPPENED
TO HER?



SHE WAS A GUEST SPEAKER
AT THE OPENING OF THE
M.A. PICKER SOCIETY...



... A "PROGRESSIVE" ORGAN-
IZATION DEDICATED TO
MARY ANN PICKER, THE
FORMER MYRON A. PICKER.



JANE STEPPED TO THE PODIUM...

WE ARE HONORED TO
BE HERE TODAY.



IN 1969, M.A. PICKER FLEW TO VIETNAM—IN THE HOPE OF HAVING A DIALOGUE WITH THE PEACE LOVING VIET CONG ABOUT TRANSGENDER RIGHTS.



HE WAS IMPALED ON PUNJI STICKS.
TODAY, WE CONTINUE HIS PROGRESSIVE AGENDA.



I CAN SEE YOU'RE ALL HAVING A GOOD TIME.



WELL, KNOCK IT OFF!
WE'RE PROGRESSIVES!
WE'RE SUPPOSED TO BE OUTRAGED AND MISERABLE!



SO TO GET YOU IN THE MOOD,
I'M GOING TO READ SOME QUOTES FROM THE REVEREND JERRY FALWELL,
WHO DIED LAST WEEK.



I MAY BE AN ATHEIST,
BUT THANK GOD HE'S DEAD!



COMRADES, LET'S URINATE ON HIS GRAVE!
LET'S BOO AND HISS AT HIS FASCIST STUPIDITY!
HERE GOES...

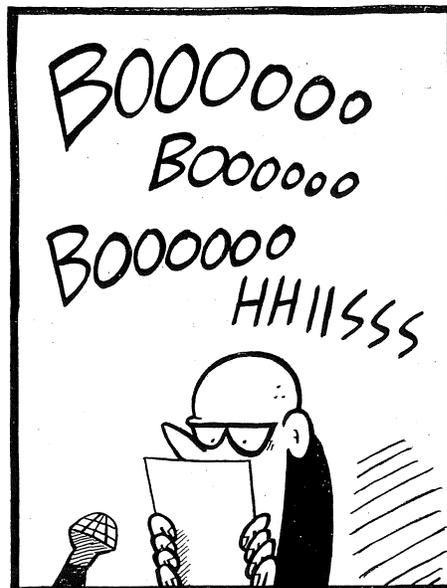
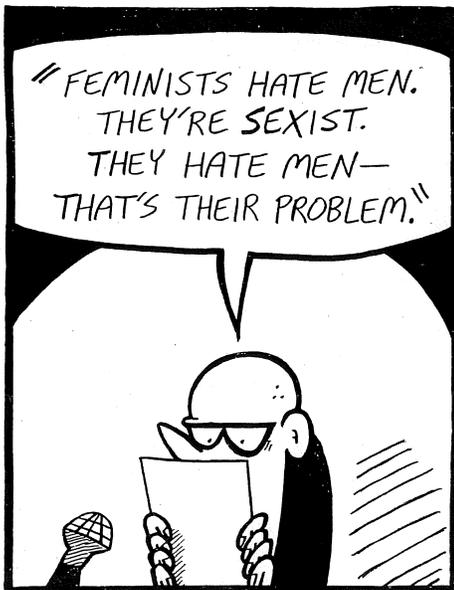
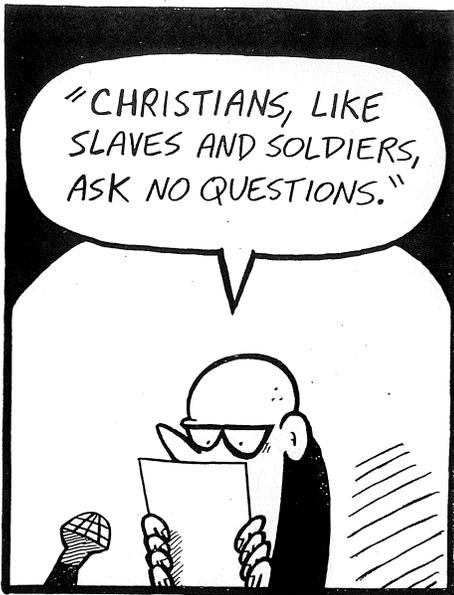


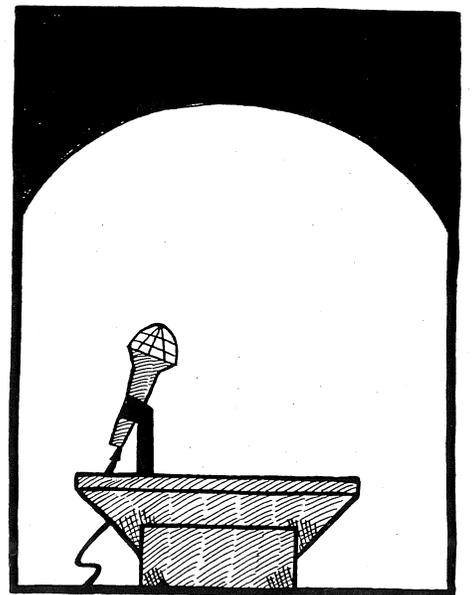
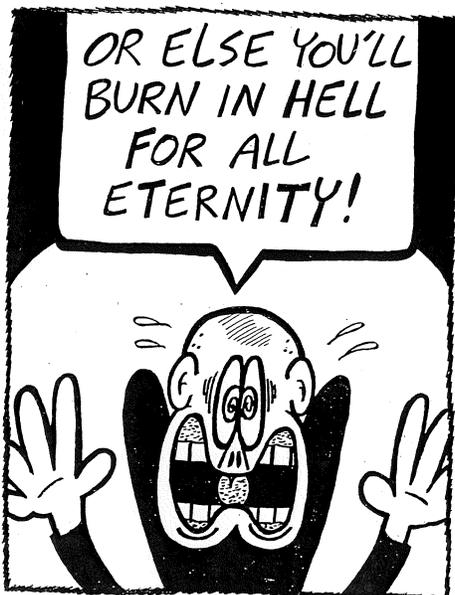
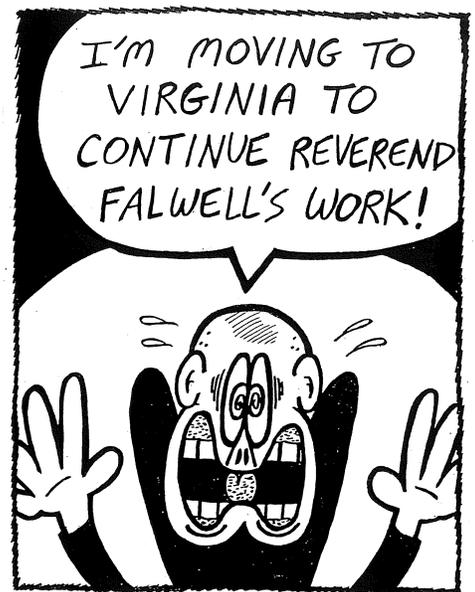
"IF YOU'RE NOT A BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIAN,
YOU'RE A FAILURE AS A HUMAN BEING."



BOOOOOO
BOOOOOO
BOOOOOO
HHIISSSS







Herald Archives: 2014
(edited for length from original article).

Almost Famous

By Kimberlye Gold

We lost a lot of people this year and recently who meant a great deal to me, both personally and professionally. But none hit so hard as beloved comedian actor Robin Williams, who I met and wrote about several times over the years. Depression is a REAL illness and unfortunately, it takes tragedies of this magnitude to wake people up and get us to acknowledge just how real it is.

From my very first "Almost Famous" column in 2001: *In '79, I got cast in a rock 'n roll musical comedy called BREAKFAST IN MARIN as "Sunny From Ohio," an innocent ingénue (which I was) who gets indoctrinated into the wild world of sex, drugs, rock 'n roll, health food and new age this, that and the other thing (which I did). It was a work in progress and so was I. The line between the stage and my life blurred. The show was written by two San Francisco State graduates, Brenda Warren and Barbara Friedkin (the niece of William Friedkin, the director of THE EXORCIST). One of the actresses was Robin Williams' sweetheart at College of Marin and he had just broken up with her before she was cast - and he became MORK! Fun fact: A year after BREAKFAST closed, I met Robin Williams when this guy I was dating, the male half of the SF comedy duo Rick 'n Ruby, landed a guest spot on MORK & MINDY and he flew me down for the taping. I had a short,*

precisely styled hair-do (ala Sheena Easton), and when Robin was introduced to me, he immediately went into this gay, French hairdresser character and started cooing and fussing over my hair while he "styled" it. I played right along, acting like a spoiled diva and everybody laughed. For a minute, me 'n Robin had 'em rolling in the aisles, baby!

From my Rickie Lee Jones at Bimbo's show review in 2001: *After the house lights came up, I went over to a very low-key, bespectacled Robin Williams, introduced myself, and told him I'd written a piece for the SF Herald about meeting him 20 years ago. He very politely and honestly said, "I don't believe I've ever heard of the San Francisco Herald." "Don't worry," I replied. "No one else has either. But I think you might find it amusing and worth your while. And we just won 'Best Neighborhood Newspaper' in the SF Weekly!!" I gave him the website address and he thanked me and told me he'd be sure to check it out. I'm certain he ran straight to his computer the moment he got home. Why, I bet he's probably still chuckling about "our moment" right now...*

And from my New York City diary right before 9/11 - right after I played my own set at The Bitter End: *So we all went across the street to celebrate with food and drink at an outdoor Mexican restaurant. I had to be on a plane in 7 hours and was floating on a surreal, post-gig cloud, when a guy walked by and somebody called out to him and he stopped to let them take his picture and began to walk away. Someone at the table goes, "Look, that's Robin Williams!" Without missing a beat, I grabbed the last issue of the*

SF Herald (which of course I had a copy of on me) stood up on my chair and jumped over the railing onto the sidewalk and yelled, "Hey Robin!" and ran up to him. He turned around and I said, "Kimberlye Gold, San Francisco Herald, the Rickie Lee Jones show at Bimbo's in June!" He goes, "Oh my God, it's YOU!" in mock (I hope) horror. "I wrote about you, it's right in here!" I exclaimed and handed him the issue. He took it and said, "Great! Thank you for this!!" and walked away, waving back to me, "Thanks again!!" I think he was genuinely amused. (God knows everybody else was!).

Thanks for the memories, Robin...

Hold the presses - this just in...9/4/14 - Joan Rivers left us too...

Like our publisher Gene Mahoney so poignantly stated: "Somebody always dies at deadline"...

But this was not just "somebody." Say what you will about Joan but she sure as hell did it her way and she remained a trailblazer in a field where few women even get acknowledged and did so till her last breath. Truly inspirational, even if she hurt some folks' feelings. As Joan would say, "Oh grow up!" or "Get Over it!"

Joan got over a LOT - including her husband's suicide and being told she would never work again - and she kept going and going and going like the comedic Energizer Bunny. Joan Rivers had an UNBELIEVABLE work ethic that would rival anyone at ANY age - and at 81 years old, she was still going gangbusters and remained completely RELEVANT. What the general public probably isn't aware of is Joan River's

kindness, encouraging nature and humanity. I'd like to end this tribute with a beautiful memory from my fellow cast mate from *Breakfast In Marin*, Nancy Scher, who worked with Joan some years back:

Years ago, I had the pleasure of working on a commercial with Joan Rivers. There were 6 or 7 of us; all dressed the same, all Joan Rivers look-alikes. It was for MCI. (Remember MCI?) Before she arrived, someone from the production company came over to coach us on how to "be" with Ms. Rivers. He asked us not to engage with her "too much." We all looked at one another. What? Was she a Diva? We were all big fans, so this was not good news. Our spirits dampened, and we were noticeably bummed. Someone - someone very brave - asked, "Why? Why couldn't we talk to her?" "Because we won't get any work done. She'll hang out and play with you, and we need to keep her on track." Well, we all felt much better, and ignored his request, and hung out and played with Joan, who turned out to be completely professional, and insisted on taking a lot of breaks for us, because, "These women are just standing here, let 'em sit down already." She was very conscious of time, and when she had some trouble reading the teleprompter, she stopped the shoot to edit the copy so it was more reader friendly. I was so impressed by how fast she did that. No complaining, no joking, just "put a comma here, slow it down a bit, ok, ok, that looks good, let's go again." At the end of the day, we all lined up and she posed for a photo. A few weeks later I got the pic, autographed. I still have it. I have never forgotten how wonderful she was that day.

RIP Joan...