

The Society Page

By Gene Mahoney

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

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A national minimum wage of \$15 per hour in the U.S. was being pushed by Vermont senator Bernie Sanders, which is ironic, because he never had a steady job until he became mayor of Burlington at age 39.

Many media reports have had a feel-good vibe about them, where workers make more money and the story ends there. No mention is made of employers firing workers because they can't afford to pay all their employees \$15 per hour.

While in office, President Barack Obama called for an increase in the minimum wage, claiming it wasn't possible to live on. But only 1% of American workers currently earn the minimum wage. About half those who earn it are young people working their first jobs.

Getting back to irony, Barack Obama, our first black president, endorsed the minimum wage, which has its roots in racism. (*Actual racism.*)

At the end of the 19th Century, blacks were heavily employed by the railroad industry. The Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen couldn't stop railroad companies from hiring blacks, so in 1909 they compromised on a minimum wage for all races. This led to less hiring, and with the racism of the times, whites being hired over blacks. By the 1960s, many black Americans had become farmers, as agriculture was free of federal minimum wage laws. In 1967 President Lyndon Johnson's "War on Poverty" changed that, and black farm workers lost their livelihoods.

The minimum wage is a product of the eugenics movement, a program designed to decrease the population of targeted demographics deemed by the powers that be to be inferior.

The minimum wage was first promoted in Great Britain by the Fabian Socialists, a "democratic socialist" organization. Along with sterilization, the minimum wage would make the "feeble minded" among others less likely to get jobs, and hence raise families and reproduce. Royal Meeker, future labor commissioner for U.S. president Woodrow Wilson, made similar arguments in 1910.

A new federal minimum wage will force many employers to fire workers and replace them with machines. Too bad we can't do that with politicians trying to "help" us.

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"Serving Nob Hill & Beyond"

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Nob Hill Masonic Auditorium: Dead Can Dance & Agnes Obel, 5/5. The Go-Go's, 6/18. Alicia Keys, 9/3 & 4. The Warfield: Achievement Hunter Live, 3/28. Kaleo, 4/15. Ministry, 5/1. Chicano Batman, 5/14.

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Lenny Bruce

It was the spring of 1986, I was 20 going on 21, had been living in the Bay Area for almost a year, and was going through the obligatory Lenny Bruce phase (a requirement for every wannabe hipster back then). Bruce, as you probably know, was a controversial comedian in the beatnik era, infamous for his political satire and dirty jokes. I never bought any of his comedy albums, though I did buy a book, *The Unpublished Lenny Bruce*, at a bookstore on Polk Street that isn't around anymore. Then I bought a postcard at Fisherman's Wharf that had his picture on it. Then I rented *Lenny*, the 1974 movie starring Dustin Hoffman as Bruce. Then I saw a film of his stand-up routine that KQED aired. I watched it with my new roommate/future best friend who, ironically, was a dead ringer for the "sick comic." Then that was it.

In 1961 Bruce performed some risqué jokes at a nightclub in San Francisco's North Beach and was arrested on obscenity charges. He was later acquitted. However, his arrests in Chicago and New York on similar charges resulted in convictions. San Francisco became the only city he could perform in, and his legal bills caused bankruptcy. According to Paul Krassner, publisher of esteemed alternative periodical *The Realist*, Bruce went to the F.B.I. office in San Francisco and asked them to look into a conspiracy by various police departments to investigate him. Krassner claims a New York cop admitted this to be true. Lenny Bruce died of a heroin overdose in 1966 at age 40.

A decade before the Lenny Bruce phase, in 1976 and 1977, when I was 11 and 12, I would obediently go to bed at 9 p.m. That's because laying in bed listening to Jean Shepherd on the radio was more enjoyable than anything on TV.

Lenny Bruce was from Long Island, where I grew up. Jean Shepherd was from America's heartland, Indiana, and moved to America's bohemian capital, Greenwich Village in New York City, where he got his start writing for the then-newborn *Village Voice*. Shepherd wasn't a shock comedian like Bruce. He was a storyteller, holding his audience's rapt attention with tales of childhood trauma, experiences in college and the army, as well as general observations about society and life in general. *A Christmas Story* has pretty much replaced *It's a Wonderful Life* as the country's preeminent movie during the holiday season. It's based on Shepherd's radio stories about him wanting a BB gun for Christmas. That's his voice narrating it.

Jean Shepherd meant a lot more to me than Lenny Bruce did. So it was bittersweet to read his biography by Eugene Bergmann and discover he was a much better storyteller than he was a man.

Starting seventh grade in 1977 sucked enough, but Jean Shepherd being taken off the air around the same time added insult to injury. Luckily, the local Public Television station began airing reruns of Ernie Kovacs' 1950s comedy sketch show. Ernie Kovacs was doing *Saturday Night Live* before *Saturday Night Live* existed. The show's dark humor and visual experimentation made it a hit with the critics, not so much with the general public. It was ahead of its time. Kovacs' most popular character was probably Percy Dovetonsils, an extremely flamboyant poet.

Kovacs' wife, the lovely Edie Adams, was a regular on his program. Kovacs had gained custody of his two daughters from his first wife, a mentally disturbed dancer. (It was

the first time in U.S. history that a court sided with the father, not the mother, in a custody battle.) Kovacs continued his comedy show throughout this. He even continued it after his first wife kidnapped the daughters and he spent two years trying to locate them.

They were found in Florida, and Ernie, Edie, and the girls lived happily until a few days before Kovacs' 43rd birthday, when he died in a car crash.

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There's something nice happening in Russian Hill. Bright colored post-it notes with "Love yourself" and "You are beautiful inside and out" written on them are being taped to buildings... And if you want to contact Kurth, the guy who stands on the corner of Bush and Jones making giant bubbles with those two big sticks held together with elastic at the tops, bubble stuff, and the wind, he's at bubblesbykurth@gmail.com. You can also catch him at Huntington Park and Lafayette Park... This Recall Governor Gavin Newsom movement really took off since he prohibited Californians from dining indoors at restaurants, then he was caught dining indoors at the most expensive restaurant in the world (The French Laundry in Napa), then claimed he was really at a Jack in the Box drive thru, or whatever his story was. You know what's odd? Now the Democrat party establishment is suddenly concerned about the validity of the signatures on the recall petition. In the past, any attempts to stop voter fraud were called "voter suppression" and even "white supremacy." So let illegal aliens vote, let violent criminals with extensive rap sheets vote, let terrorists vote, let Iranian Mullahs vote, etc. Why the sudden change of heart, racists?

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Herald Archives: The most (in)famous article ever published in the Herald, it appeared in print in 2002. In 2012 an updated version appeared online. Here's a mash-up of the two, serialized. Forgive me, James.

The Roommate from Hell

A True Story

By James Dylan

(Part One)

Awww, your roommate ate your Twinkies without asking and you are mad... poor baby. Now shut the hell up and read this.

This is a common story, especially for a guy who lived in San Francisco, and I beg you to take a few minutes to read it, so that you may not make the same mistakes that I did. As I wrote this in 2000, I was no longer a man, but a weak, nervous, emotional wreck. Let the story start here. **(The name of the person this story is about has been changed).**

This tale takes place back in the late 1990s, when I was a poor student living in San Francisco, contributing to the San Francisco Herald. I liked to go to coffee shops to sit and read, have an espresso, etc. One day in November, I walked into a cafe in North Beach, and sat at a small table in a corner. A man came up to my table and asked me something about the book I was reading, so I chatted with him for a while. He seemed like a nice guy, about 60 years old. He was dressed in a rather expensive looking black suit, with a black trench coat. He was wearing thick black glasses, the kind you see nerds wear, but they looked cool on him. He introduced himself as Joe. We talked for a while, cracking jokes about this and that. He seemed like a very well mannered, well-spoken intellectual. After a few minutes, he went back to his book and I left, headed for class.

Over a period of several weeks, I returned to the cafe to find Joe sitting in the same place, working on his laptop. He always recognized me, and I always sat near him. I asked what he was working on, and he said he was a writer. I made a joke about how you can't find enough "writers" in North Beach, and he laughed, and then I noticed the book on his table, with his name on it. It turns out he was a published author and the screenplay to his book was recently approved for a small film. I was humbled, and talked to him about the newspaper I worked for, and if he would be interested in writing an article or posting part of his book on its web site. I asked the publisher, Gene Mahoney, to show up and meet me at the cafe the next day, and we all chatted. They got along great, and Joe said he would happily give us a chapter or column to post on the site.

So here I am thinking, Great! I'm networking, making contacts with authors and screenwriters! And I'm also sitting in the same area where Francis Ford Coppola wrote the screenplay to *The Godfather*!

Oh man, if I had only known.

Anyway, after a few more meetings with Joe at the cafe, we found ourselves talking about the housing situation in San Francisco, and he mentioned he had to find a new place as he was getting evicted. It turns out the man who owned his building had sold it and the new owner was moving in or something like that. I asked him what he was looking for, as I had a room for rent in the apartment below us that my girlfriend managed. *(We had our own apartment upstairs, and the owner wanted her to take the lease on the apartment below us so we could rent out the rooms for her. The only advantage was getting to pick who could move in, and it kept us on good terms with the owner).*

Holly, my girlfriend at the time, had asked me to look around for someone to take the room. I told Joe that it was only a small room in a 4-bedroom apartment with 3 other people, but he could have it if he wanted. I mean, I knew him for about a month now, I had never seen him do anything but work at his computer, and go outside to smoke every now and then. I had never seen him drunk or display any signs of being a freak or psychotic, so I felt comfortable in offering him the room. Hell, he was wearing a \$1,000 suit! He had been interviewed by Terry Gross on NPR! He had taken a call from a Hollywood producer about a movie to be based on his book! After I told him about the room, he looked at me like he was surprised, and said, "Really?"

I said "Sure, why not? You and I and Gene are all working on the web site, and we all hang out together anyway. It'll be fun!"

Well, he said he would come over later in the week to check it out, which he did, and he wrote me a check for the first month's rent and security deposit. I introduced him to my girlfriend, who was the leaseholder, she was cordial and they talked for a bit, then he left.

Later that night, she told me she didn't like Joe, she didn't trust him, and that she didn't want him to move in. I asked her why, and she said because there was "just something about him." We got in a small fight, me arguing that you couldn't refuse a person a room because of something that vague, and that I had known the guy for a month by then, and that he was cool. She argued that everybody else in the place was in his or her early 20s and that they wouldn't get along, and that she had "woman's instinct" which told her that something was wrong with the guy. I laughed it off and argued my point, and in the end she caved in and we let Joe move in on the 1st of the next month. Man, if only I had listened to her, it would have saved us more grief and sleepless nights I wouldn't wish on my worst enemies. Of course, it never really occurred to me why an older, successful writer would want to live in a small room, in a shared apartment with 3 other people, mostly kids barely in their 20s.

Joe moved in, and he had few belongings. He bought a futon from the previous tenant; he had a small desk, a night table, a printer and scanner, and his laptop. All his clothes easily fit in the small closet that was in the corner of the room. The floors were hardwood, but unfinished and worn due to neglect by the previous owner, so he bought a large carpet that was cut to fit the room. He also brought in a small plant. The other roommates in the place were a little pissed that I didn't allow them to meet with Joe before I gave him the place, and I should have, but I really didn't think about it at the time. I was so excited about having a "published author" and screenwriter living in the apartment. I liked the fact that he was older, to maybe keep the others a little quieter, and maybe lose the "dorm" atmosphere in the place.

At first everything was fine, and although Joe got along well with all the other roommates, he became good friends with one of them, a

French exchange student. They set up a chores list, and he did his share. He liked the large kitchen, and often made large meals, enough for everyone. My girlfriend slowly lost her sense of unease, and we kind of just forgot about Joe. We never heard any complaints from the other roommates, so we assumed everything was fine. Let me say that despite holding the lease to the apartment downstairs, we had very little to do with it. She collected the various rent checks, and sent them all to the owner. If they had any problems like clogged-up drains, we just called the property manager of the entire house.

The month passed uneventfully. Joe paid the rent on the 1st, and everything was good. Around the 12th, our doorbell rang at 11 PM. I was already in bed, but went downstairs, and there was one of Joe's roommates. She was standing there, looking nervous, and wringing her hands. I asked her what was wrong, and she said that she had come home an hour earlier and found Joe at the bottom of the outside stairs, passed out on the sidewalk. She said he smelled of alcohol, and obviously fell down the stairs. She helped him up and walked him to his room, then wanted to call an ambulance, but he didn't want her to. She wanted me to take a look at him. I went to his room, and he was sitting on his bed, his left shoulder bent up at an angle. It appeared his collarbone was snapped. He also had a large 2-inch square section of his scalp missing; hair and all. While falling down, he scraped his head against the sharp, old-fashioned steel handrail.

I decided we should probably call an ambulance. He was really out of it; he couldn't answer any of the paramedic's questions, and couldn't walk. I was a little worried when he was taken to the hospital, but assumed it all just an isolated incident. I mean, many people have too much to drink and fall down.

He came back the next day with his arm in a cast. He was still a little drunk. I chalked the whole episode up to him being eccentric, you know, the writer who likes to drink and rip up the town, etc. As I said, I had never seen him drink in the months I had known him, so I thought it was a one-time thing.

A couple of days later, my girlfriend got a letter from the bank with Joe's check in it, saying it had a stop payment on it, and that she was hereby charged \$25 for it. She threw it at me, pissed, and started in with the "I-Told-You-So!" speech. I sighed and collected my blankets - I would be sleeping on my sofa that night.

The next day, I took the check and went downstairs but Joe wasn't there. I rode my motorcycle to the cafe, but he wasn't there either. I asked the barista if he had seen Joe. "Joe? Yeah, he was here, and I threw him out! He came in here all drunk, making a scene. If you see him, tell him he ain't welcome here no more! If you're looking for him, check the gutter." A bunch of the old regulars there laughed.

I sighed and went back home. Why the hell would he stop payment on his check? If he had a problem, he could have talked with us, but to stop payment? Maybe it was a mistake. The next day I knocked on his door, and a roommate answered it. Joe was in his room, laying on his futon, stinking of booze. He hadn't shaved and his hair was a mess. He sat up on the edge of the futon and acted surprised when I told him that the check had been stopped. "I didn't do it, why would I do something like that? The bank must have made a mistake!" he slurred.

I gave him the benefit of the doubt, and said, "Okay, I believe you. Maybe they did make a mistake, but I called them up and they said the only way to stop payment on a check is if the owner of the account calls in and does it. Anyway, we need the money for the rent, and the \$25 penalty they charged us." He said he would go get cash as soon as he was "feeling better", and I left.

I didn't see him for the next couple of days, and I put a note on his door telling him to cough it up or get out. Stupidly, this was my chance to get rid of him, but I didn't know better at the time. I could have filed a 3-day notice to pay or quit, but I wasn't a professional landlord. When I finally did see him, he kept making excuses and putting it off, crying about how his "ma died" recently. Something about how he stopped payment on the check to buy a plane ticket to visit her. Anyway, near the end of the month, he was still drunk every day, the whole apartment smelled, and we still hadn't gotten the money. The other roommates were all complaining about him, the odor, the fact he was eating their food, the fact that he was bringing homeless people into the apartment, leaving the house door open all the time, and that he was smoking in his room. They were threatening to leave if we didn't get rid of him.

Once I went down to his room and found 2 bums digging through his desk, looking for money. I booted them out, and told Joe he had to leave. I dragged his futon and sheets down into the courtyard, as they were soaked in piss. He had been sleeping on them for days. The whole apartment smelled of piss and stale cigarettes. I called his daughter, whom I had met once at the cafe by chance. I explained the situation to her, and she told me that she hardly knew Joe, and wanted nothing to do with him, and that I shouldn't call her anymore. She was crying by the time she hung up.

I visited him a couple of times when I knew he was in the room, and he was totally out of it. All he would do is make excuses, that his "ma died", that his daughter had problems, etc. Trying to reason with him did no good. He'd say he was trying to get better, but it was hard. I posted the room for rent on Craigslist, and started showing it to people. Joe was in there most of the time; I just ignored him. It scared many of the people who came to see the place, but I assured them he would be gone. Mostly he was stone-drunk and sprawled on the bed, which he had dragged back inside.###

-To be continued -

Why the Beatles Broke Up: The Backwards Theory

By Ace Backwords

John Lennon summed it up as neatly as ever: "I started the band, and I disbanded the band." The Beatles were basically John Lennon's band. He was the driving force. "You could see he was the spark behind the whole thing," said boozing buddy Harry Nilsson. Even though McCartney may have come up with the concept and the packaging for albums like *Sgt Pepper* and *Magical Mystery Tour*, it was Lennon that gave the concept its psychedelic power. "We were all in love with John," said Paul. And THAT was the driving force behind The Beatles.

Everyone in Lennon's orbit competed for his friendship, his approval, and his love (so-called). "John rarely tolerated a dissenting opinion and always had to get in the last word," said Lennon gofer Fred Seaman. What broke up The Beatles was that McCartney finally got tired of playing second fiddle to Lennon. By the time of the *White Album*, McCartney realized he was a musical genius and began to notice that he was the one coming up with most of the hit records. So he began veering off on an independent path. Something that Lennon would never tolerate. Lennon demanded complete subservience. He demanded total loyalty. Even as he rarely gave it back. He often pointed out that when he was young he always surrounded himself with a gang of friends - "toadies" - who would do his bidding. That's just the kind of guy he was. McCartney would talk about the incredible "peer pressure" that Lennon and the other Beatles inflicted on him when he initially refused to take LSD like the rest of them.

In retrospect, the weirdest thing about The Beatles to me was how they always looked, dressed, acted, talked, and drugged alike during the different phases of The Beatles career. Lennon would have tolerated nothing less from his "mates." But it's kind of weird when you think about it. Could you imagine walking around everywhere with 3 other guys who dressed and talked just like you?

"John was always the loudest person in every room," said Paul. But as McCartney pushed into his late 20s, I guess he got tired of being a toadie. The final rupture occurred when McCartney - an astute businessman - decided he wanted nothing to do with a rat like Allen Klein, the guy Lennon wanted to hire as The Beatles manager. Subsequent events would prove McCartney right, as even Lennon would later concede. But to Lennon, McCartney's actions were an example of the highest form of treason. Why, he refused to go along with what Lennon wanted. So Lennon, as was his character, spent the rest of his life viciously attacking McCartney.

In truth, the amazing thing is that The Beatles (or any band) stayed together as long as they did. Not that they eventually broke up.###

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COVID
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