

## The Society Page

By Gene Mahoney

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

**At the Warfield:** Jay Wheeler 9/1. Flogging Molly, 9/2. Bruno Major, 9/11.

**New:** Waystone, 1609 Powell. Beer, wine, art.

If you often wake up in the middle of the night like moi (or if you're a speed-freak on a binge) you should switch your radio dial to 860AM at 2AM. For an hour you can hear old radio shows from the 1940s and '50s:

*Abbott and Costello, The Life of Riley, Burns and Allen, Amos 'n' Andy*, as well as noir-like mysteries. Surprisingly, many of these shows still hold up. Especially good is a show called *Lights Out*, which was like an early version of TV's *The Twilight Zone*.

## American Graffiti at 50...

I thought the first movie I ever saw in a movie theatre was *Willie Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* in 1971, but my mother told me it was *Ring of Bright Water*, about a sea otter, which I don't remember. What? Yes, it was rated G.

The first R rated movie I saw was *Apocalypse Now* in 1980 with a couple of friends. We were 15, which is under 17, and we weren't accompanied by a parent or guardian, though we still got in. Things were looser then. I was blown away by it – now I think it was overblown.

The first X-rated movie I ever saw was the all-time classic – the *Gone with the Wind* of porno movies – *Deep Throat*. My best friend in high school got a video copy of it and him, me, and a couple of other guys watched it at his house (while his parents were away). I was initially excited about viewing an X-rated movie, but walked out in the middle as I found it boring.

Did I leave something out? Oh yeah, the first PG-rated movie I ever saw was *American Graffiti* – George Lucas' second film. His first one was a critical and commercial flop, a science fiction flick called *THX1138*.

*American Graffiti* was completely different: a comedy/drama focusing on some recent high school graduates in a small California town in 1962, obviously based on Lucas' upbringing in Modesto. It was filmed in Petaluma, except the Mel's Drive-in scenes which were filmed in San Francisco on Van



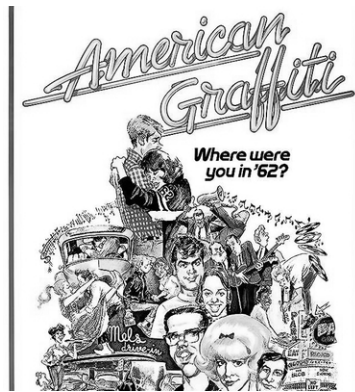
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Ness Avenue (that Mel's location was torn down just as the movie premiered).

Lucas' *THX1138* may have bombed, but *American Graffiti* was a critical and commercial smash, earning \$140 million on a budget of \$777,000. (His third film, *Star Wars*, a mash-up of the first two – a science fiction comedy/drama – went on to become critically acclaimed and the biggest money-making movie of all time when it came out.)



The movie poster designed by Mad Magazine's Mort Drucker.

As a promo for its television premiere put it: "The movie about the '60s that launched the stars of the '70s." That was a reference to the cast which included Harrison Ford, Richard Dreyfuss, Ron Howard, Cindy Williams, Mackenzie Phillips, and Suzanne Somers.

It also launched the career of two almost stars: Paul Le Mat, who played a greaser named John, who lives for cruising the strip in his hot rod, and Candy Clark, who portrayed the ditzy blonde whom actually goes out with Terry the town nerd because his friend loaned him a cool car.

The movie begins with Steve (Ron Howard) berating his friend Curt (Richard Dreyfuss) because Curt is having second thoughts about leaving town to go back east to college. In

between that scene and Curt finally deciding to go back east are the interactions of the characters as they cruise the strip. At the end of the movie, words across the screen reveal the fates of the main characters. Steve has become an insurance agent in Modesto, which implies that he skipped college to stay in town and have a family with his girlfriend (Cindy Williams). That's either positive or negative depending on your outlook on life. Though the remaining three fates are undoubtedly negative: John was killed by a drunk driver. Terry was reported missing in action in Vietnam. And most tragic of all, Curt became a writer.

*More American Graffiti*, a sequel not directed by Lucas, premiered a few years later. It was about what happened to the cast of the original a few years later -- the late 1960s, which really defined that decade. (The original film was set in 1962, which more resembled the 1950s.) Though it had some merits, the sequel was a critical and commercial flop – probably best if it had never happened.

Apparently a lot of people who lived through the '60s thought it was probably best if that decade had never happened, if you consider the widespread '50s craze of the 1970s: *Grease, Happy Days, Laverne and Shirley, The Last Picture Show, American Hot Wax, The Wanderers, The Lords of Flatbush*, etc.

The tagline for *American Graffiti*, released in 1973, was "Where were you in '62?" If a new version of it was made in 2023 with the tagline "Where were you in '12?" -- it could follow a group of teenagers texting each other about the latest things they're offended at or depressed by, while being driven around in Uber cars, on their way to getting gender reassignment surgeries.

Let's leave well enough alone.

**Gene Mahoney – SF Herald  
editor/publisher/delivery boy**

I'm not a big movie guy, but I remember watching *American Graffiti* sometime after it was released in 1973. So my memories of the movie are foggy. But I remember being impressed by how accurately the movie captured the mood, and the characters, of that period.

I was born in 1956, and was 6 in the year 1962 when the movie was set, but I vividly remember that period. I lived in a little town in New Jersey and went to a big brick schoolhouse that had all the classes -- from kindergarten all the way to seniors in high

school. So I was familiar with all the characters -- all the high school types -- portrayed in the movie, rubbed shoulders with them, and watched them hanging out around town, and riding their "batmobile" cars (with the big back fins) up and down the main drag. It was very much a "Fifties" world back then, even though it was 1962. And it would be like that, at least for me as a boy, for most of the 1960s. What people think of as "The Sixties" -- the hippies and all that -- really didn't start for most of us until the decade was nearly over. Anyways, *American Graffiti* captured all that. I especially remember the scene where the kid drops in on the deejay Wolfman Jack at the radio station. Most of all (at least to me) that era was "Before The Beatles" (everything started changing after that). And the movie captures that period distinctly. That fuzzy little cocoon of innocence (so-called) after the turbulence of the World War and before the turbulence of the social upheaval of The Sixties. . . It's funny looking back now, but World War II had only been over for just 17 years at that point in 1962 (even though it seemed like ancient history to me at the time as a little kid). And that was the backdrop of the whole thing, in a way. America had just won the war, and now the conquering heroes had produced this next generation, with big dreams and great futures ahead of them. Bigger cars, better dishwashers, "new and improved!!" everything, "going to the moon," saving the world, all that. And all the characters in this classic "coming-of-age" movie were on the cusp of all that.

#### *Ace Backwards – esteemed writer*

I was a bit shocked when I heard that *American Graffiti* was 50 years old this year, but, as I grow older, I am used to being shocked by things. The price of food, the lack of civility in politics, etc.

When asked to write a few words about this film, however, I became excited, as it will always hold a spot in my heart and memories. I don't remember how old I was when I first saw it, but I know it was on TV in the late '70s when I was around 12. I had a little black and white TV I had bought from cutting lawns and doing jobs for neighbors (we had to work for our money in the '70s, we didn't have GoFundMe to digitally beg like today), and I remember hearing about the film before I saw it.

I know my older siblings liked it and that it spawned *Happy Days* and *Laverne and Shirley*, and they had a double LP of the soundtrack, which I listened to all the time.

Even without seeing the film, the soundtrack was my first introduction to American music. . . or just music in general. I didn't listen to music before my siblings introduced me to that soundtrack, and now, 40 years later, I can still recall the songs and know all the lyrics! There's hardly a bad song in the bunch! "16 Candles" by The Crests, "Runaway" by Del Shannon, "The Stroll" by The Diamonds. . . . these songs opened a whole new world for me, and it marked my passage from a dorky kid playing on his banana seat bike in the suburbs to a teenager. Even now I will pull the soundtrack up on YouTube and all the memories will come flooding back. It also introduced me to The Beach Boys, which led me down a whole different path and may be why I now live in Hawaii. Yeah, by 1980 these songs were considered corny and outdated, but it was a great introduction to Americana! It led to a lifelong appreciation of music, which I still pursue today.

Since I hadn't seen the movie until later, I listened to the lyrics and made my own movie out of them; the multiple stories in the songs. A boy worrying about his ex falling for "The Great Imposter", a young Chuck Berry singing about how he's "Almost Grown", and the coolest thing I'd heard up to that point - "The Stroll" by The Diamonds, a slow, jazzy song with a sexy saxophone. To a young boy hitting puberty and suddenly getting interested in girls, a lot of these songs started making sense. Cue The Flamingos "I Only Have Eyes For You".

Anyway, I remember one of the TV networks (we only had 3) promoting the movie - "The World TV Premiere", and we were all excited (it's hard to imagine, but this was before VCRs, so if you didn't see it in the theater, you were screwed).

I remember making popcorn, going to my room, shutting the door and turning on the TV at 10 minutes before the "world premiere" as I didn't want to miss it, and even though it was in black and white, it blew my mind and changed my life. The film was about a group of high school grads' last days of innocence, which was ironic, as it marked mine as well.

I could relate to seeing Terry (the nerd) trying to impress Debbie and getting beat up. I immediately developed a crush on 12-year old Carol (Mackenzie Phillips), as we were around the same age and were trying to get accepted by the "cool" kids. I had little clue about sex, I only knew I was attracted to girls, and the movie helped me understand what I wanted them for. George Lucas had already

released *Star Wars* by this point, and it never impressed me as a kid. I mean, it was a good "popcorn movie" but I was confused by the cult following - all my nerd friends freaking out over it. The story wasn't original. . . I was way more into *American Graffiti*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, and of course, *Blade Runner*.

Even though *American Graffiti* took place in 1962, only 20 years previously, it amazed me that teenagers had cars like those in the film, that they were allowed to cruise up and down main streets, and that even towns portrayed in the film even existed! I had friends who had cars, but they were shitty things like Ford Pintos or Chevy Chevettes, nothing as cool as the hot rods in the film. Forget about drag racing; my friends' cars were lucky if they made it down the street. I would sometimes go out with them on weekends, but it was mostly just boringly driving around, listening to music in the car. I grew up in a Midwestern town of 25,000, but the downtown was deserted by 7PM and everything was closed. We might hit up the roller rink, but mostly it was hanging out at friends' houses - totally different than the lives of the teens in the film, and it depressed me. Even my friends had few plans after high school; most of them just got boring jobs around town at chicken processing plants or factories. This may be one of the reasons I joined the Army in 1985, to get away from my sleepy Midwestern town. Like my own life, the film depicts multiple characters going through decisions to attend college, join the military, or stay in a small town, just like mine. After the Army, I eventually made it to California in 1997, and visited Petaluma, only because that's where the movie was filmed; almost a full-circle kind of thing.

I still laugh when I remember that the film was shot in 1972, as it was supposed to portray life only 10 years before it, in 1962. I can't imagine two vastly different times than 1962 and 1972, when you think about cars, clothing styles, and especially music. If you made a film now set even 20 years ago, in 2003, you wouldn't see many differences, not to the extent they did in the film. The movie and its music were a big part of my life as a teen, and I still think of it fondly. Whenever I see a classic car from the '50s, I always think of Curt heading to the racetrack. Whenever I see a gathering of hot rods at a street fair or carnival, my wife always knows she can find me staring at them, dreaming of being a teen in the early '60s and humming along to "All Summer Long" by The Beach Boys.

#### *James Dylan – another esteemed writer*

And now, more of

## The Society Page

By Gene Mahoney

Sorry, I thought I could bang out a two page comic this issue (couldn't even bang out one), so I've got an extra page to fill, and this is it.

I'm not going to see the wildly successful *Barbie* movie, as I'm overflowing with testosterone. (There used to be a Barbie museum in Palo Alto, by the way.) The way sensibilities are today, I'm surprised the Gay Bob doll hasn't made a comeback, and even had a movie made about it.

Gay Bob *came out* in 1977, the year Harvey Milk became San Francisco's openly gay supervisor. As Johnny Carson quipped: "Wind him up and he steals Ken away from Barbie."

It had to be ordered by mail, as aside from a few boutiques in San Francisco and New York, no store would sell it. Nowadays it would be the first thing you'd see if you walked into a Target.



The ad for Gay Bob went like this: **Come out of the closet with Gay Bob – the world's first gay doll for everyone. He sits... He stands... He gets into any position ...and since he is anatomically correct, he can even play with himself without going blind. Gay Bob is a big 13 inches tall (WOW!) and made of plastic (or plastique, if you're very elegant)... He comes dressed in mucho macho plaid shirt, blue jeans that open with a smart snap to reveal his private parts, boots and (naturally) one earring. He lives in a closet and has his own storybook/fashion catalogue. Barbie and Ken... move over.**

Though Gay Bob wasn't the first male anatomically correct doll. A year earlier the controversial Joey doll was introduced, based on the son of Gloria and Meathead on the controversial sitcom *All in the Family*.

**At the Regency Ballroom:** Poppy & Pvriss, 8/22. Extreme (with special guest Living Colour), 8/26. Black Country, New Road, 8/29. Kamelot, 9/1.

**New:** Copra, Indian restaurant, 1700 Fillmore.

*Herald Archives: 2003*

## Barb Wire

By Howard Hallis

Name that movie: War is declared and tensions are high. In the center of the chaos is one small city which has deemed itself "neutral" to both sides of the conflict. Within this city is a nightclub where most of the movie's action takes place. The owner of the nightclub is a strong-willed no-nonsense type who on the outside doesn't take a stand one way or the other politically, but who secretly has ties to the resistance. One night, the owner's ex-lover appears at the club with a new romantic interest. This new romantic interest happens to be a crucial leader of the resistance and is almost instantly threatened by the enemy.

The desperate couple turn to the club owner to help them get out of the city alive. What follows is a conflict between the emotional attachments and sacrifice for the greater good as the club owner has to decide between helping the two lovers to get out of town safely and turning the tables for personal advantage. Sound familiar? If you answered "Casablanca", you'd only be half right. There is another movie with the exact same plot that you might have heard of. The movie is called "Barb Wire" and starred Pamela Anderson Lee. Don't believe me? It's true. The "Baywatch" star's almost universally panned screen debut as a super hero clad in leather with tattoos and a motorcycle is actually an honest to God remake of the Bogie/Bergman classic.

Never mind the boobie shots that greet viewers almost instantly during the opening credits. Forget about the goofy catch phrases like "Don't call me babe". "Barb Wire" is an action movie bastardization of one of the greatest films of all time. If you see it, you'll learn that in the year 2017 the USA is involved in a second civil war (probably with one side fighting for silicon breast enlargements while the other favoring saline. It's never really explained what started the

war, but who cares? Pam Anderson is NAKED!!!) The evil Congressional Army has taken over most of the country except for the small city of Steel Harbor, where Barb Wire has her biker-goth bar named The Hammerhead. It may seem like a far cry from Nazis, Morocco, and Rick's place, but you can see the parallels.



When Barb Wire's old boyfriend Axel shows up with his new wife Cora D, a resistance leader who is crucial to defeating the Congressionalists, it's up to the augmented one to get the couple out of town to the safety of peaceful Canada. She does this by using lots of explosions and nudity in favor of secret dealings and innuendo, but the times have changed since 1942, and so have the movies. One can imagine film teachers in college screening "Barb Wire" and "Casablanca" for their students and asking them to write comparative essays on both movies. Perhaps this isn't such a bad thing after all, as the Baywatch/V.I.P. star may even get some of the legions of her drooling fans to discover cinema by default.###

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Sorry, no *Good Clean Fun* "The Elvis of Comic Strips" this issue. But hey, go to [SanFranciscoHerald.Net](http://SanFranciscoHerald.Net), click on "Archives 1998 – 2005" at the top, then click on "The California Herald Comics." You can check out all the old ones from the early days.

Here's a clip from the American Gigolo series, where the dot com collapse of 2001 has caused ad revenue for the Herald to dry up, so Chauncy, Wembley, and Sven go to Palm Springs to become male prostitutes to keep the paper going. (The Herald used to be a bona fide newspaper, not this piddly little newsletter you're reading.) Hi-jinks ensue.



This month's issue of the Herald may not have a new cartoon, but it identifies with having a new cartoon. And it may suck, but it identifies as a great work of art. See ya next time.