

The Society Page By Gene Mahoney

Sorry if this issue's column seems out of date (or even more out of date than it usually is) but it was all set to appear in December, before the Bay Area had its - what was it - 43rd lockdown or whatever number it was.

As I write this, our fearless leader Gavin Newsom has rescinded the lockdown and curfew (I don't know if he's given us back our television privileges yet, we'll see). And he did it just as the Recall Governor Newsom movement was picking up steam. (Probably just a coincidence.)

RecallGavin2020.com.

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

SummersANDFall, a full service salon at 1014 Larkin that opened in mid-March (nice timing) is back in business. (At least it was as of December.)

Just a reminder: This tragic increase in unemployment, depression, suicide, poverty, alcoholism, drug addiction, divorce, domestic violence, and mental illness isn't due to the pandemic. It's due to the lockdown.

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James Redford, son of Robert, recently passed away at the age of 58. James (or Jamie) was a husband, father, and filmmaker who lived in Fairfax, a lovely town in Marin County.

Former SF Herald columnist Kimberlye Gold and I met him in 2003 at the Mill Valley Film Festival, where he presented *Spin*, a movie he directed and co-wrote. It was (refreshingly) devoid of any forced controversy or quiriness that many independent filmmakers feel is mandatory for their work. It was similar to his father's directorial efforts.

And from the brief contact we had with him, he seemed like a really nice, down-to-earth guy. Around the same time Kimberlye interviewed Jamie for the Herald, her cousin died after being hit by a car. Jamie left a sincere, heartfelt condolence message on her voicemail.

Sadly, fame and fortune are not in the cards for the vast majority of people

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“Serving Nob Hill and Beyond”

trying to make it in show biz. More sadly - a happy, meaningful, well-adjusted life are not in the cards for the vast majority of children of Hollywood royalty.

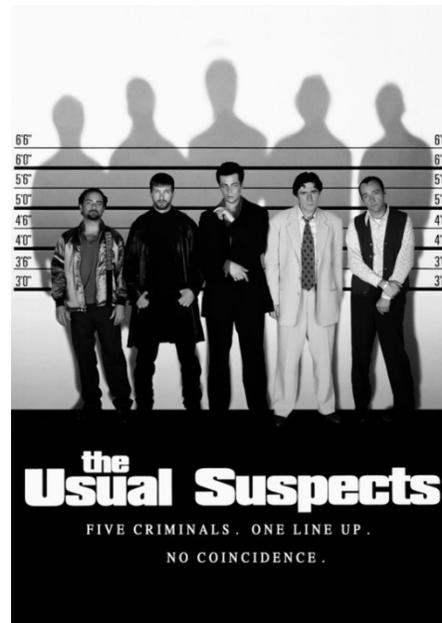
Jamie Redford played his hand well.

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2020 was the 20 year anniversary of *Almost Famous*, a critically acclaimed movie that told the semi-autobiographical story of Cameron Crowe, a teenage journalist for Rolling Stone magazine in 1973.

Former SF Herald writer Kimberlye Gold named her column after the movie, and a frequent mention in her column, former Rolling Stone writer Ben Fong-Torres, was portrayed by an actor in it.

It really captured the rock music lifestyle of that era. Released in 2000, the film's poor box office performance couldn't be blamed on post 9/11 distaste for portrayals of pre-9/11 hedonism.



2020 was the silver anniversary of *The Usual Suspects* first appearing on the silver screen. Written by Christopher McQuarrie and directed by Bryan Singer, it evoked memories of Quentin Tarantino's 1992 debut, *Reservoir Dogs*, with similar dialogue, less gruesomeness, and more plot.

A lot more plot. As entertaining as I found *The Usual Suspects*, it was almost incoherent. Though it all becomes clear at the end. Sort of. You may not have pieced together everything preceding it, but you got the main idea.

The Usual Suspects was critically acclaimed upon its release in 1995. A notable exception was the most famous movie critic, Roger Ebert, who panned the film, claiming the plot was too confusing to follow.

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My favorite San Francisco political figure, former Independent state senator Quentin Kopp, writes for two west side papers, the Richmond Review and the Sunset Beacon. Recently he penned a column proving he's not the president of the Kamala Harris Fan Club.

He recounts how San Francisco's District Attorney, Terence Hallinan, hired her as a Deputy D.A. in 1998. She repaid Hallinan back by running against him in 2003. For her campaign she signed under penalty of perjury a form (which when signed couldn't be withdrawn) agreeing to a campaign expenditure limit. She exceeded the limit by \$91,446.

Instead of removing her from the ballot and fining her \$275,000 (the legal penalties for that) the Ethics Commission abolished the spending limit for all three candidates and fined her \$34,000. Harris ended up spending more than \$1,150,000 compared to Hallinan's \$362,000 and had the gall to accuse him of "unethical" and "unprofessional" conduct.

As Kopp points out: "This is our new vice president."

I tell ya, I just don't know why his column isn't in the Chronicle.

Actually, I do.###

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That attack on the US Capitol on January 6th sure was terrible, though it taught us a lesson in semantics:

When protesters go into a city, beat up innocent bystanders and set buildings, cars, and police stations on fire, politicians call it a “mostly peaceful protest.” If protesters attack where politicians are, politicians call it a “riot.”

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Back in 1984 I left New York and spent a year in Oklahoma before moving to California. My friends knew this band that I never thought would amount to anything. They were called the Flaming Lips. They went on to become big apparently. I never followed them. What’s ironic is I’ve known a lot of would-be rock stars in glamorous New York who never made it big. And I’ve known a lot of would-be rock stars in glamorous California who never made it big. The only ones I knew who made it big were from not so glamorous Oklahoma. The Flaming Lips perform at the Warfield on August 19th.

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In January the San Francisco Board of Education voted to rename 44 schools presently named after historical figures who were a threat to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” (They quoted Thomas Jefferson with respect and then announced he wasn’t fit to have something named after him.) George Washington was on the hit list, too, even though the school board wouldn’t be able to express their idiotic opinions if it wasn’t for him. Abraham Lincoln, the man responsible for ending slavery, was also deemed to be a miscreant. Here are a few historical figures who may not be sufficiently “woke” to have their names on institutes of learning:

Malcolm X: In 1961 Malcolm met with members of the Ku Klux Klan to work against the civil rights movement. While black churches were being bombed, Nation of Islam mosques were left alone. Malcolm also delivered a pro-racial separatist speech with George Lincoln Rockwell, leader of the American Nazi Party. (Malcolm later rejected all this. But that doesn’t matter if we follow the school board’s litmus test.)

Cesar Chavez: The head of the United Farm Workers labor union, and icon of Hispanic leftists, didn’t refer to illegal aliens as “undocumented workers.” He called them “wetbacks.” In 1969 he marched to the Mexican border to protest farmers using illegal aliens as strikebreakers. In a memo Chavez claimed, “If we can get the illegals out of California, we will win the strike overnight.” Chavez also sent his ex-con cousin and his crew to the border to beat up illegals attempting to cross it.

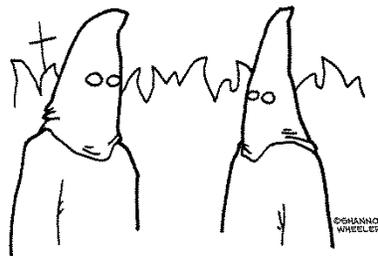
Barack Obama: While campaigning for president in 2008, he said: “I believe marriage is between a man and a woman. I am not in favor of gay marriage.”

Martin Luther King Jr.: In 1958 MLK wrote an advice column for Ebony magazine. An anonymous letter writer wrote to King with: “I am a boy. But I feel about boys the way I ought to feel about girls. I don’t want my parents to know about me. What can I do?” King wrote back advice which included: “You are already on the right road toward a solution, since you honestly recognize the problem and have a desire to solve it.” Add that to MLK’s numerous extramarital affairs and, according to the school board’s standards, he isn’t fit to have a school named after him.

Here’s an idea: How about we name a mental institution after the San Francisco Board of Education?

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“I’m no racist but...”

Herald Archives: 2001

Counterculture Casualties

By Ace Backwords

Another new development over the last thirty years is the emergence of the counterculture casualty. There are lineages on the street scene that have been around since bums immemorial: the Skid Row Wino lineage, the Hobo/Tramp lineage, the Gypsy lineage, etc.

But since the ‘60s, a relatively new and virulent strain has emerged: the Counterculture-Casualty lineage.

Much of today’s modern street scene spawned out of the ‘60s hippie counterculture, and continued on with the ‘80s punk counterculture. So it might be worth it to take a quick look at some of the values and assumptions that came out of this. As well as some of the pitfalls you might want to avoid stepping into. Because one thing you will definitely have to survive on the street scene is The ‘60s, man!

Kerouac was the forerunner, Kesey and the Merry Pranksters created the prototype, and then the Haight-Ashbury was the explosion. And kids have been dropping out ever since in search of that elusive countercultural dream. Every year I’ll see a new crop of dazed street kids looking for it. The hippie kids looking for Rainbow Hippy Village. Or the punk kids looking for Punk Scene USA. Where is that cool scene they’ve read about in all the cool books and magazines anyway?

Now it’s certainly a reflection of something seriously lacking in the mainstream culture, that so many people seem to be seeking an alternative in the first place. And I certainly don’t have space here to do justice to the whole Counterculture vs. Mainstream Culture debate.

All I’m trying to point out here is what you’ll most likely find, on the street level, when you come looking for the counterculture:

Very, very little.

Let’s face it. This world just doesn’t need any more hemp-jewelry makers, or hardcore punk-rock bass guitarists. So cut your hair and become a yuppie, okay?

(And what exactly is wrong with being a yuppie, anyway? Can anyone explain the

universal scorn I keep hearing being heaped on “yuppies” these days? It just means you’re young, you live in the city, and you’ve got a fucking job. That makes more sense to me than this phony “counterculture rebel” pose I see so many kids trying to live out.)

All I’m saying is: If you decide to drop out of straight society, BE PREPARED TO PAY THE CONSEQUENCES. “Living in the moment” might sound nice if you’re nineteen and picking up Zen for the first time, but many of you may be unprepared for the truly tenuous nature of day-to-day existence on the street scene.

Take me for a tragic example. You want to talk drop-out?

I haven’t driven a car in 25 years. I haven’t been to a doctor or a dentist in twenty years. I haven’t had a bank account in fifteen years. I haven’t watched a TV show in ten years. I haven’t lived in anything that would remotely be considered a “home” in six years. (Which reminds me of the old street person joke: “What does the street person do when he gets sick? He dies.” Ha. Ha.)

Now if you want to try and exist without the security of the corporate tit, that’s fine (and it may be an illusion that such a thing as “security” even exists in this ever-changing world of ours). I’m just trying to warn you here about the reality that’s waiting for you, as opposed to the highly romanticized counterculture myth that you’ve been fed by the media.

Now it could be I’m overreacting here with the scorn of a lover betrayed. Because, at one point, I shared most of the values of the counterculture. I was certainly one of those kids who tried to live out the whole countercultural dream. For several years in the early ‘90s my work appeared every month in both *High Times* (the bible of the hippies) and *Maximum Rock ’N’ Roll* (the bible of the punks). An accomplishment I’m still not sure if I should be proud of, or embarrassed by.

Which reminds me of something else. A lot of people seem to think there was a big difference between the hippies and the punks. But what’s the difference between Sid Vicious and Jerry Garcia? That one of the dead junkies was “positive”? Speaking of media myths: It cracks me up when I hear these so-called “’60s-icons” congratulating themselves for the greatness of the ‘60s (and the greatness of themselves for bringing us the ‘60s). This would be all well and good, aside from one

niggling detail: Virtually every aspect of American life has gotten worse since the ‘60s. Much worse.

In a radio interview, cartoonist R. Crumb talked about coming to the Haight-Ashbury in ‘67 right before the so-called Summer of Love. He mentioned what a beautiful city San Francisco was then: the streets were clean and safe, the people were friendly, housing was cheap and plentiful, living was easy, etc. And he mentioned an idea that was very much in vogue then amongst the countercultural set: How much more wonderful the city (and the world) would be when the Age of Aquarius set in and all the old farts died off and all the groovy hippies took over.

Well, I’m here to tell you, all the old farts did in fact die off, and all the hippies (including me) did in fact come tramping through the city. And it was hardly improved by our presence. But here’s the funny part. These “’60s icons” seem to think it’s still 1967 and that they should be judged on all the groovy, idealistic things they intended to do, as opposed to the actual effect they’ve had. I think it’s getting a little late in the game for that.

In the ‘50s, Oakland was averaging about twelve murders a year. After the ‘60s it started averaging about 150 murders a year. What would we have done without all the “love” the hippies invented in the ‘60s?

I think we all could benefit from an honest appraisal of what actually went down in the ‘60s. Lord knows we still haven’t sorted it out. Lord knows this society is schizo in its attempts to assimilate the counterculture into the mainstream.

I think of the day Jerry Garcia died. The mayor of San Francisco gave a heartfelt eulogy and lowered the flags at City Hall to half-mast in honor of this Great Man. And then, after shedding a few tears, went back to his Matrix program of busting and throwing into jail any of the street freaks dumb enough to try and emulate the example of this Great Man.

Which reminds me of George Carlin’s great joke about Jerry’s death: “It’s a sign of the great progress we’ve made since the ‘60s that rock stars are no longer O.D.ing in hotel rooms, but they’re now O.D.ing on the way to detox centers.”

My opinion? LSD is garbage, Jerry Garcia was an idiot, and the ‘60s was bullshit. The ‘60s was basically a dead-end we went staggering down. The ‘60s impacted on the

modern street scene in several devastating ways:

1. Drugs (need I say more?)
2. The sloppy sexual unions that came out of the so-called “sexual liberation” movements - and the shattered family structures and the generation of orphans (especially in the black community) that resulted from that.
3. The romanticized notion of being against the mainstream society. Number three is probably the most devastating, because usually the street person starts out feeling alienated enough from society to begin with. Then the counterculture ethos feeds him this romanticized notion of the Hip Rebel Outsider, which locks him permanently into this state of alienation. Why try and integrate yourself into society when your alienation is your badge of honor, the very source of your identity.

Criticizing certain aspects of this world is one thing. Hating the world is another. It’s one of the most damaging things for the human psyche to endure. And all too often, the counterculture encourages and justifies this sense of alienation from society. Over and over I’ll hear these Counterculture Casualties give me a big speech about how they’re “against the multinational corporations, man.” That’s fine, except for one thing: the corporations own virtually everything. What world are you planning to live in? Well, the sidewalks, I guess.

What does it actually mean when you say you’ve “dropped out of the corporate system?” Most of the food you eat, the clothes you’re wearing, the beer you’re drinking, 95% of the media you’re consuming, all the electricity you’re using, all the money in your pocket... all these things were produced by big, big corporations. All you’re saying is: you’ll consume, but you won’t produce. Does that somehow make you more noble?

The ‘60s was a noble experiment, perhaps. All I’m saying is, the time has come to clearly assess the results of that experiment. I’m not looking to go back to the ‘50s. Maybe what I’m looking for is a counter-counterculture. In the meantime, beware of the pitfalls of the generation that preceded you.###

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