

Essays and other diversions celebrating the lifestyle of the IMMORTALS!

The IMMORAL Chronicles

Now online at <http://immortals.wgcomics.com>

Fall 2003
Issue 4

"Middle age is when you're faced with two temptations and you choose the one that will get you home by 9 o'clock."

—Ronald Reagan

THIS ISSUE: The Immortals confront **MIDDLE AGE!**

INSIDE: Articles!
Poetry! Comics! And much much more!

IMMORTALS REUNION



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ABOVE: A look into the future: the Immortals prepare to take a group photo for the issue devoted to "Old Age"!

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We welcome letters of comment, contributions, etc., from members and non-members alike. All articles and letters subject to ruthless editing, regardless of personal feelings, the relationship of the contributor to members of the Immortals, or what the author may have actually intended to say.

Selected work from the Immortal Chronicles is online at <http://immortals.wgccomics.com>

Here's to the Middle Ages!

"We owe to the Middle Ages the two worst inventions of humanity—romantic love and gunpowder."

—André Maurois



This issue, the Immortals take on *the Middle Ages!*

The Middle Ages gave the world pestilence, the Plague (which is like pestilence, but with more ash), Feudalism, Papal supremacy, the Crusades, the Children's Crusades, the Really Annoying Old Peoples' Crusade, and the Inquisition. They also gave us *Beowulf*, the first flowerings of such celebrated college requirements as philosophy, science and mathematics, and, of course, *Braveheart*.

Let's face it, the Middle Ages sucked — if we may be so profane — big weenie.

Nevertheless, they've played an important role in the lives of the Immortals. We've never read *La Morte d'Arthur*, but we did see *Excalibur*; the Mr. Magoo version of *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* and *A Knight's Tale*. (Betcha didn't know they had heavy metal line dancing back then, did ya?)

In addition, most members of the Immortals were avid Dungeons and Dragons players. And what better way to learn about the Code of Chivalry, the military brilliance of Godfrey de Beof Bouillon, Duke of Lower Entropy, and the best way to battle Berserker Hobbits or the fearsome Gelatinous Cubes of olde than through all-night sessions of D&D?

Yes, perhaps if we had had played more D&D, one of your humble eds. could have answered that essay question in the sixth grade to "Describe the rise of the guilds in the Middle Ages and how they gave rise to the nation state (15 points)" — the editor, after all, was a paying member of the Thieves Guild of Lower Gondor at the time, with an option to join the Assassin's Guild and the Lurking Trolls Association, not to mention the League of Ill-Tempered Gelatinous Cubes.

Ah, yes, the Middle Ages. A time when men were men, women were women, and monthly bathing was optional. A time when there was no such as being middle-aged, there were simply young people and old people. Old people...like us.

Oh, who are we kidding? This rumination about the Middle Ages is, despite appearances, not another attempt to hijack this issue's theme of our beloved *Immortal Chronicles*. (Careful readers of issue 2 will recall the unfortunate confusion in which "Misanthropy" somehow became "lycanthropy." We're happy to report that the splinter group responsible is now under lock and key and under heavy sedation at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Our thanks to Tom Ridge and the Office of Homeland Security for their cooperation.)

No, instead, we are practicing what middle aged manhood is all about — denial.

"Middle age went by while I was mourning for my lost youth."

—Mason Cooley

Regrettably, journalistic integrity requires us to report that the Immortals are not handling middle age at all well. (For as many of you already know, rarely have the words "dignified" and "Immortals" been uttered in the same breath.*)

We have seen belts go outward, as well as south (or north, depending on the member's moods and body shapes). Back pain and the latest Viagra alternatives have suddenly become a fashionable subject of conversation at club meetings. And glancing at Britney Spears on the cover of *Rolling Stone* suddenly evokes a startling emotional cocktail of fatherly dismay and unbridled horniness. Some have taken to starting sentences with "In the good old days..." and "These kids and their danged techno music...."

Just as alarmingly, a few reportedly have been spotted around town driving red convert-

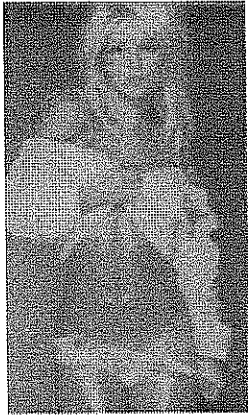
* Many of you no doubt were also surprised to see the words "journalistic" and "integrity" appear in these pages as well.

ibles, and word has it that a member or two actually uses hair-pieces. (For the record, Randy Reynaldo denies that he patronizes Henri of Culver City, said to have “done” Roy Orbison and Bob Clampett.)

Others, of course, have taken the elective surgery route (simply look at any photo of Dave Gordy post-2001). And, ever seeking out new employment opportunities, and yet more male friends, the currently quasi-bald Bob Westal has recently joined a certain “club” for “men.” His new ambition, we are told, is to be able to say, “I’m not just a member, I’m also the mail boy and *feng shui* consultant!”

So as much as we wanted to avoid the subject altogether, in this issue you’ll see that your fellow Immortals, for the most part, have courageously confronted the subject head on. The collective conclusion? Sadly, being an Immortal doesn’t make you immortal.

But who cares? Put on those comfy slippers, sit back in that adjustable lounge, slip on those high-powered reading glasses, take off that uncomfortable truss, take your heart pills, clap really loud to turn on the reading light, and enjoy. You’ll be asleep inside of five minutes anyway, the History Channel’s “Hitler’s Chiropodist: Trimming the Corns of Evil” blaring in the background. Until then, it’ll be quite a ride! ♦



Did your mother see you before you went out dressed like this, young lady?

The Dark Ages

by Raymond Marcus

It begins with a passport photo. Spring 1995. Washington, D.C. A day that will live in infamy. Ketayoun and I were set to fly to England and France in a month’s time, and my old passport had expired. I showed it to Ketayoun, with the photo of me taken eleven years before.

“I wonder if they’ll let me use this photo again,” I said, gazing at it fondly. “I always liked this photo.” Ketayoun looked at it, too, over my shoulder.

“That’s you?”

“Yes,” I said.

“How old were you?”

“Twenty-two.”

“That doesn’t look like you at all.”

I paused. “What are you talking about?” I said. “Of course that’s me! I look just like this!”

“Ray, that looks NOTHING like you,” my supportive spouse said. “I’m surprised they let you into the country the last time you used it.”

“Honey, I look like this. This is me.”

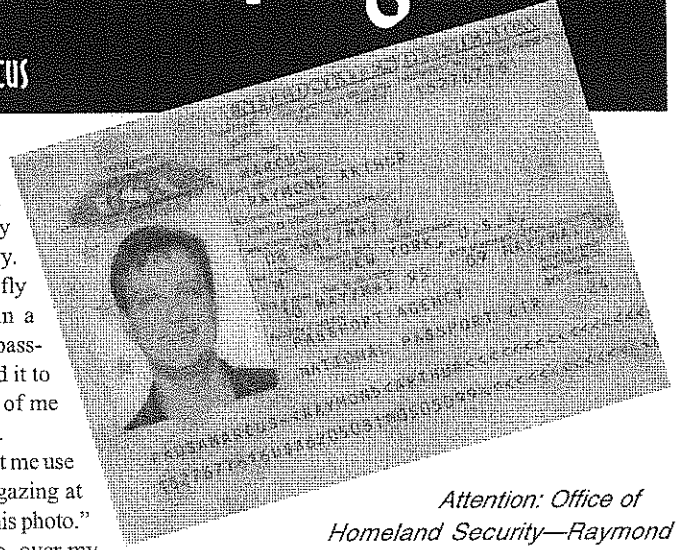
“Whatever. But it’s a good thing you’re getting a new photo.”

I shook my head, and put it down to marital idiosyncrasies. Dutifully, I went down the next day and got a new passport photo taken. When I looked at the new photo, and compared it to my old, I was taken aback. In the one from ’84, a good-looking, thin young man with a sly, devil-may-care look in his eye offered me his smile, full of confidence and joy. When I looked at the new one, Fred Flinstone stared back at me. That’s what I thought, I swear to God: I have become Fred Flinstone.

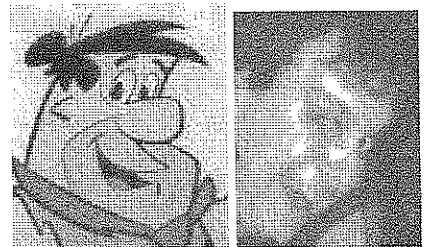
Willlllllma!!

That was eight years ago. I don’t mind it now. I’m used to my slightly older mug, fond of it, even though I’m not that crazy about the middle-aged paunch. To make matters worse, my hair is thinning. I can remember the exact moment when I first noticed my hair was thinning: January 1993, in the downstairs bathroom mirror at my parents’-in-law row house in Maryland. I could not believe it. For the next nine years or so it seemed pretty stable, but last year the top began to definitely thin some more. I can’t have a paunch, look like Fred Flinstone, AND start losing my hair! That’s absurd! In fact, it’s downright obscene! It seems to me the final injustice, though I suppose that will be impotence. I don’t even want to think about that for now. Once I lose the use of my tool, I might as well leave the shed.

Speaking of obscenity: you want to know what I think is obscene? In just fourteen years we’ll be able to get the Senior Discount at I-Hop. That’s right, boys, age 55. I checked it out. That’s what I think is obscene. Can you imagine us—“the guys,” as we’ve always called ourselves, not “the



Attention: Office of Homeland Security—Raymond Marcus: The Enemy Combatant of Love, Remains At Large!



ABOVE: No, we can't tell the difference either.

Spot the FORGERY!

Because an Immortal failed his charge to submit a column for this issue, one of our staff hack writers at the *Immortal Chronicles* has been assigned to write a piece in the offending member's name.

Can you guess whose column this issue is a complete fabrication?

(Ordinarily, we'd say this was a "gimme," but given that the quality of writing by the Immortals is already generally indistinguishable from hack work anyway, maybe it won't be so obvious.)

Winners will be randomly selected from among the correct answers and flown to the Bob's Big Boy of their choice for breakfast.

And for the person who was the target: fool free to send a rebuttal next issue!

OLD guys" – going to I-Hop and saying, "Yes, deah, we'd like (*cough! cough!*) five senior discounts, please, and not too close to the window. Theah's always a draft there, deah, when you put us by the window."

"Terry, whaddaya, already asking for the senior discount, before she's even sat us at a booth?"

"What, she might forget, I just wanna make sure she knows, that's all. Whaddaya hassling me for?"

And can you imagine what our conversations will be like by then?

"So, I thought you said Homer would be joining us."

"He was, only now he's being trained on the new computer system at that place he works at, theah. That studio, what's it called, the one with the big wizard hat across from Forest Lawn."

"Warner Brothers."

"Universal."

"Fox-TV."

"Whatever. Anyway, apparently he's still got the old system in his head, and can't wrap his mind around the new keyboard – you know, the one that doesn't have any keys, but where you simply THINK your way through the system, all by that, whaddayacallit, telepathy and such."

"Thinking"? What will they think of next?!"

"I dunno. Say, whaddabout Bob?"

"Bob?"

"Yeah, where's Bob? Bob never misses an I-Hop."

"You remember, he's in Stockholm, for that big award, theah."

"New Zealand?"

"Sweden?"

"Australia?"

"Whatever. Under his leadership Greenpeace succeeded in saving the world's last

two whales that the House Republicans were trying to kill. He's getting the Nobel Peace Prize, theah. You remember, it was in the papeh."

"Our Bobby? Good for him!"

"And whatabout Scott? Why isn't he heah? Is Mr. Hollywood too big for us now?"

"He's doing another Book on CD."

"My God! They're still using CDs?"

"Yeah, he couldn't adjust to the new technology, the whaddayacallit, those little thingamajigs the size of a whaddayacallit. He found an old recording studio down in Uruquay that still uses the old audio system, so they telepathized him down theah, and that's where he is."

"I hear he's still doing Shakespeare. What parts is he reading for?"

"Well, good and bad news. He's finally doing King Lear, but he no longer needs make-up."

"Whaddaya talking about? He's a young buck, our Scottie! He must be 50 if he's a day! I bet he doesn't even take Viagra!"

"He doesn't, but he doesn't need to. He hasn't had a date since the George Bush Jr., Jr. administration. How about you guys, you taking that Viagra?"

"I want to, but Donna's paying me not to. We decided to stop after our tenth kid. That damn Women's Lib."

"How about you, Randy?"

"Yeah, I'm taking it, I'm popping pills like there's no tomorrow. I can never remember when my birthday arrives, so I like to be ready, just in case."

"How about you, Dave?"

"Viagra? Yeah, I'm taking it, too, but only when Lois says I can. What about you, Ray?"

"No, I'm not taking anything. I've given all that up. Boyos, I'm dating a little thing now in her late 40s. Boy, is she a hottie! But our relationship has transcended the physical. Indeed, I

don't think about women sexually at all, nowadays. Each afternoon when I go to the park to feed the pigeons I see all the pretty girls jogging and walking around, wearing their skimpy outfits and such, and I mentally imagine them reading. If I go the other way it's too much for the old tickah."

"What happened to that one nice lady you were seeing? That lady, whaddayacallher. We all thought that one had promise. You guys were together for at least a week."

"Two weeks."

"Two."

"That didn't work out. I caught her reading the book that the *Royal Tannenbaums* was based on. Can you believe that? I can't date someone like that!"

Fourteen years, guys. Age 55. You remember this piece. ♦

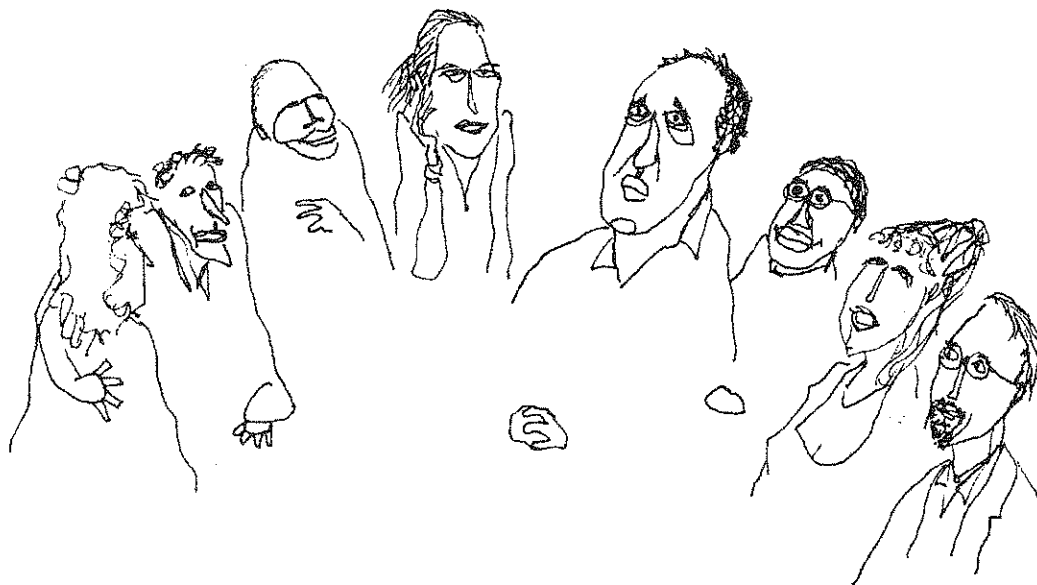
BE IMMORTALIZED — SEND A LETTER TO THE EDITOR!

If you have a burning desire to have your words immortalized here, the *Immortal Chronicles* welcomes your contribution. As you've no doubt noticed, we'll print anything, especially if it's about our favorite subject—us.

Send your letter via e-mail to:

Immortals @wgc comics.com

or via snail mail to: The Immortal Chronicles, c/o WGC Comics, 10736 Jefferson Blvd., Suite 403 (PMB), Culver City, CA 90230.

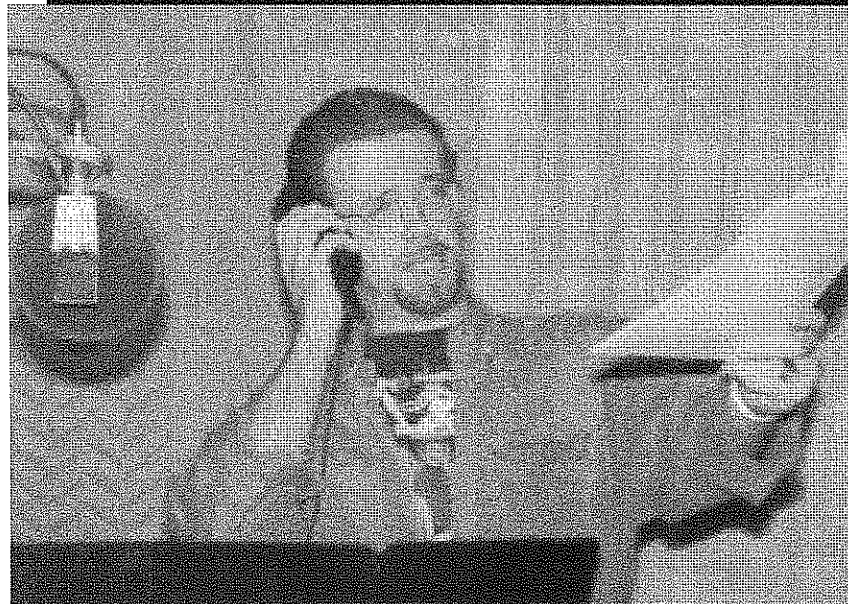


LEFT: Thanks to his witty pen, an eye for irony, myopia, and plain lack of talent, Raymond Marcus's drawings of the *Immortals* have been an opportunity to see the ravages of middle age visited upon them early.

Pictured here, from l. to r.: Lois and David Gordy, Homer Tom, unknown woman (no doubt a girlfriend of Ray's whose name has been lost to the ages), Bob Westal, Randy and Sadina Reynaldo, and Scott Brick.

A Day in the Life of Scott Brick... Actor...Creator...IMMORTAL!

by Scott Brick—actor...creator...IMMORTAL!



Friends — for all of you who read this are my friends — when it came time to approach this issue's theme, mid-life, the autumn of one's years, as it were, I surmised that the best way to broach this most significant and signifying of all issues was to simply share with you all how I, on a daily basis, deal with the creative mid-life that I am so fortunate to enjoy.

The following is my schedule from one randomly selected day—Monday, October the 13th, as it were. (No triskadephobic I!) Enjoy. Experience. Learn.

7:00-7:15 a.m.: I arise and perform my daily ablutions. Whilst abluting, I consult *Variety* for the weekend box-office grosses. (Crass, but one must keep up.) That tacky *Kill Bill, Vol. 1* has “slaughtered” the competition and taken in an impressive \$22 million in filthy lucre. Ah, but the price to the soul and the heart of Mr. Tarantino. The price, indeed.

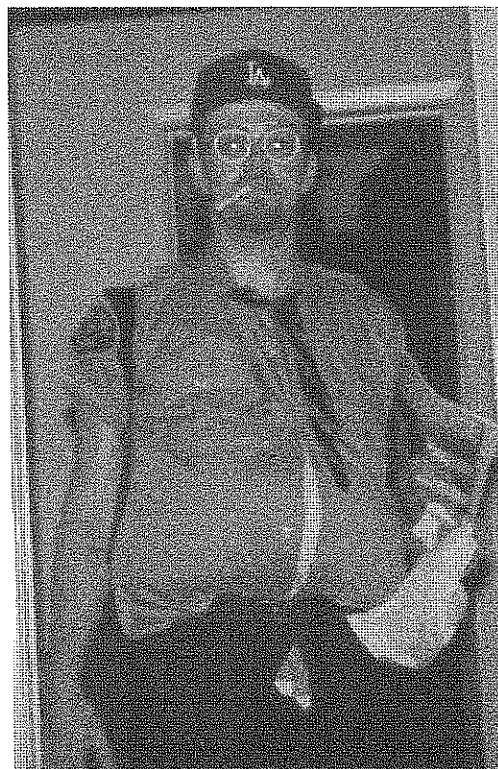
7:15-7:20 a.m.: I sip a single cup of green tea and a delicious, nutritious elixir of Slim-Fast.

7:20-8:00 a.m.: I begin with my daily Tai Chi and Shaolin style fencing exercises. I am making good progress as I hold my newly purchased *très authentique* antique kendo sword, purchased from a antiquarians dealer I happened upon in Reseda. (The “Pier 1 Imports” sticker is obviously in error. I tear it off, contemptuous.)

I consider approaching legendary “wire-fu” martial arts choreographer Yuen Woo Ping. Now that the great *si-fu* is freed from the obligation to work with the odious Mr. Tarantino, perhaps he is finally able to employ the greatest swordsman in all Los Angeles. And with my daily practice, soon I shall be able to levitate in the manner of swordsmen of olde—without wires! Try that, Uma!

8:00-8:30 a.m.: I take a vigorous morning run in the company of my three newly acquired Shitzu puppies, “Stella,” “Uta” and “Shelley Winters.” We run and frolic in the morning air of Sherman Oaks. What fun!

9:30-10:30 a.m.: Having completed my daily exercises and morning facial, it is time to set about the real job of any actor: Speaking to one's agent. As the proclaimed King of Audiobooks, I have several prospects before me, including a planned series of something called “furry erotica,” a new



Despite the self-confident image of a bon vivant man-about-town that Mr. Brick attempts to project in this issue's column, sources tell the Immortal Chronicles that all is not roses with the reclusive master thespian. In the photo at right, a member of the legions of paparazzi devoted to the Immortals captures the Brickman as he leaves his abode for graveyard shift as a security guard at the Encino Denny's. Oh, Obesity, thy name is Krispy Kreme!

series of science-fantasy spin-offs from the "Chicken Soup for the Soul" franchise, and several books "presented" by Tom Clancy. I am hot, hot, hot!

10:30-11:30 a.m.: It is time for my daily exercise of preparing for the inevitable — an interview with the unfairly maligned, James Lipton of Bravo's excellent "Behind the Actor's Studio City." Today, I practice my responses to Bernard de Veove's essential questionnaire:

What is my favorite word: "Hosannas."

What is my least favorite word: "Betrayal!"

What is the word or sound I love: "Applause, applause, applause!"

What is the word or sound I hate: "Apple sauce, apple sauce, apple sauce!" (Oh, I'm so brilliantly clever with the word play!)

What is my favorite curse word: "Damn your eyes!"

What turns me on: "Baked goods!"

What turns me off: "Baked goods that use margarine or hydrogenation!"

What profession, other than your own would I like to try? "Lord of all."

What profession, other than my own would I never like to try? "Lackey!"

What do I hope God will we say when I arrive

in heaven? "You simply did not get the response you deserved for Men in Tights."

11:30 a.m.-1:00 p.m.: Lunch with my extensive retinue, including Tina, my manicurist, Nestor, my gardener, Kazuo, my banzai specialist, Xaviera, my paid concubine and Feng Shui consultant, and Irv, my accountant. We dine on grilled tempe, arugula and plain brown rice. Afterwards, we play cribbage and meditate. After winning, I ponder mid-life in preparation for this article. I realize that, with all my dreams of glory in youth, I have accomplished each and every one!

1:00-4:00 p.m.: It is the time in my day when I commit words to paper. Oh, the pain of confronting a blank computer screen. But, never fear, after a moment, the words come and come and come. Oh, creativity, thy name is "me."

4:00-5:00 p.m.: I take a brief afternoon nap. Afterwards, I arise and attend the gym for my pilates appointment. I think how "pilates" rhymes with "cheap lattes". Oh, amusement, thy name is "me."

5:00-8:00 p.m.: It is time for my daily screening of a great work of cinema. Today, it is *The Fantasticks* starring myself. Afterwards, my retinue and I reflect on how long it will be before my brief yet blazing appearance in it finally gets the recognition it deserves.

8:00-10:00 p.m.: All work and no play makes Scott a dull, multi-talented hyphenate. And now it is time to hit the hot spots accompanied by my new best friends, Joey Fatone and Beyoncé. We start with a light dinner at a certain newly opened eatery. I'd name it — however, one is required to

Top Ten Impending Signs of Immortal Middle Age:

10. Can only muster up the energy for a seven-clap.
9. Baseball mitt? I own a baseball mitt?
8. Homer can't even make it to the top of *Magic Mountain*.
7. *Rob Hanes* comics now considered "Golden Age."
6. Ray's dissertation? Nearly finished.
5. Li'l Immortals Day Care Center.
4. Scott's beard finally grown in.
3. *Feh*, these kids today and their music.
2. Still think Amy Irving is hot.
1. Takes three years to complete one issue of the *Chronicles*.

sign a non-disclosure agreement upon entry. Suffice it to say, the grilled ahi with seared ginger and risotto is a celestial experience. Apologies that I cannot tell you more.

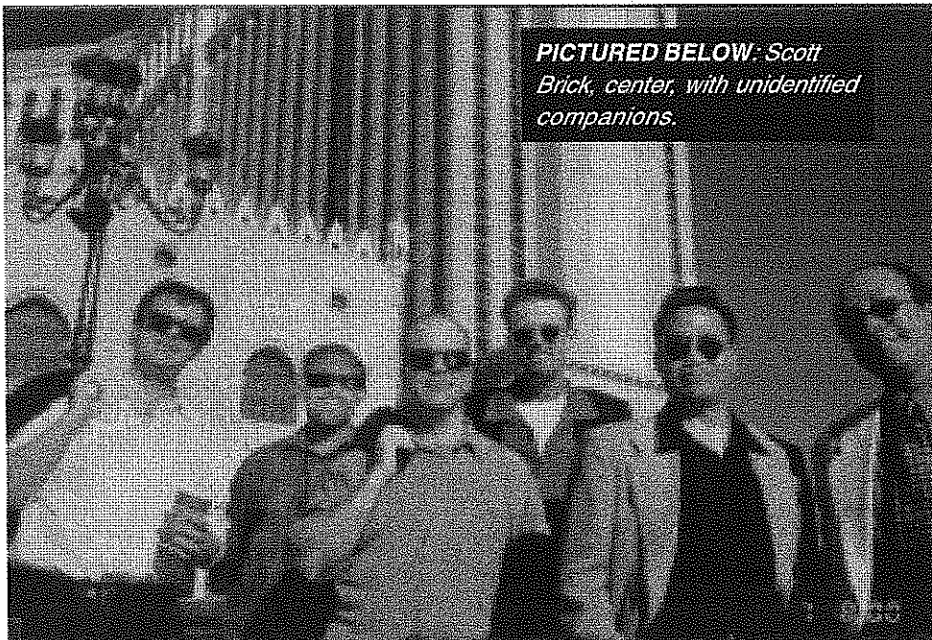
Joey almost orders a New York steak with pasta, but I remind the slightly fleshy actor/N-Syncer that he doesn't want to become known as "Joey Fat One." He shamefacedly decides to go with the Celery Soup with grilled soy. My cleverness has once again saved the day!

10:00 p.m.: On the way out, I encounter my fellow Immortal, Bob Westal. After giving Joey and "B" time to escape Bob's greedy star-struck gaze, I greet him warmly. It is best not to forget from whence one sprung, however lowly. We have a very intense and involved conversation.

10:03 p.m.-2:00 a.m.: I catch up with Joey and the lovely B. Thank heavens, the night is still young!

We repair to one of our city's most exclusive night clubs. I could tell you which members of the upper echelons we hobnobbed, what starlet(s) I, er, encountered and more. However, common decency and signed pre-coitus confidentiality agreements prevent me! Well, perhaps such things are best left to one's fevered imagination.

3:30 a.m.: Finally back in my bachelor lair, I think upon my good fortune and how well I have aged. I'm not getting older, I'm getting increasingly wise and magnificent. As I drift off to sleep, I contemplate the luck I had to be more born an Immortal named Scott Brick! ♦



PICTURED BELOW: Scott Brick, center, with unidentified companions.

PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST

by Randy Reynaldo

IN THIS ISSUE, WE IMMORTALS HAVE BEEN ASKED TO RUMINATE ON MIDDLE AGE!

THE FIRST TIME MY MORTALITY WAS CRUELLY BROUGHT TO MY ATTENTION OCCURRED DURING A VISIT TO THE UCLA CAMPUS WITH RAY SEVERAL YEARS AGO...

WE WERE VISITING ONE OF OUR OLD HALINTS, ST. EDWARDS (OTHERWISE KNOWN AS KERCKHOFF COFFEEHOUSE), WHEN OUT OF NOWHERE RAY BLURTED OUT TO THE CUTE STUDENT WORKER AT THE COUNTER--



Y'KNOW, WE WERE STUDENTS HERE 20 YEARS AGO...

EWWW, CREEPY!

I HAVE TO ADMIT, I WAS APPALLED TO HEAR RAY SAY THIS ALOUD. WAS IT SUPPOSED TO IMPRESS THE GIRL?

THERE HAVE BEEN OTHER TELLTALE SIGNS AS WELL. FOR EXAMPLE, WHEN I TURNED 36, I DISCOVERED I'M NO LONGER WITHIN THE MOST DESIRABLE AGE GROUP FOR ADVERTISERS...

AND, OF COURSE, THERE WAS THE DISCOVERY OF GRAY HAIR AND, MORE RECENTLY, A LITTLE BIT MORE OF ME AROUND THE MIDDLE...

AND I REALIZE THAT I'M NOW MORE THAN TWICE THE AGE OF MOST OF THE STUDENT ASSISTANTS IN MY OFFICE...

RANDY, I CAN'T BE-LIEVE YOU'RE 40!
THAT'S MY DAD'S AGE!

RAY, WHY'D YOU HAVE TO GO AND SAY THAT?!

BESIDES, WE GRADUATED IN 1985! THAT WAS LESS THAN 20 YEARS AGO!

WHAT'S WRONG? WHAT DID I SAY?

≡GULP≡

Please indicate your age group:
[] 18-20
[] 20-25
[] 26-30
[] 31-35
[] Over 35

150 lbs and counting!

AND THEN THERE WAS THE INFAMOUS "GUYS NIGHT OUT" OF SEVERAL YEARS AGO...

AND SURE, THERE ARE THE UNREALIZED AMBITIONS...

CHOLESTOROL MEDICINE...

NECK PROBLEMS...

YOUR NECK? MY BACK!

GOTTA GET HOME OR THE WIFE WILL--

MONOXODIL...

MY GOD, WHAT'S BECOME OF US?

GEE, MR REYNALDO, I'M A BIG FAN...

I LOVED ISSUE 23 OF ROB HANES ADVENTURES!

Meet the artist of Rob Hanes ADVENTURES

YEAH, WHAT-EVER, NEXT!



BUT THERE'S A LOT TO BE SAID FOR THE TRAPPINGS OF MIDDLE AGE AS WELL...

OF COURSE, I HAVE A FAMILY NOW-- SADINA AND PERI RACHEL ARE THE APPLES OF MY EYES AND THEY'VE BROUGHT JOY AND FULFILLMENT TO MY LIFE...



IT'S NICE TO BE OUT OF THE DATING RAT RACE AND I'M FAIRLY COMFORTABLE IN MY OWN SKIN...



AREN'T YOU EVEN GOING TO GET DRESSED?

WHAT FOR? WHO DO I NEED TO IMPRESS?

Typical weekend at the Reynaldo residence

I'VE GOT A CAREER AND A JOB I ENJOY AND WHERE I'M APPRECIATED. I'M ACTUALLY MANAGEMENT!

AND, OF COURSE, MANY OF MY DREAMS HAVE BEEN REALIZED!



THE PRESIDENT WANTS TO SEE YOU...

CAN YOU SIGN THIS?

CAN YOU TAKE THE COMPLAINT ON LINE 1?

OH, THAT I HAVE LIVED TO SEE THIS DAY!

RANDY, ARE YOU CRYING?

The Lord of the Rings

OH, YEAH, AND I'VE HAD SOME COMICS PUBLISHED TOO.....

ALL THAT REMAINS IS TO BE A GOOD HUSBAND AND FATHER...

ALL I ASK IS--

JUST DON'T LET ME LOSE MY HAIR!

THE BOTTOM LINE, OF COURSE, IS THAT I'M HAPPY WHERE I AM RIGHT NOW...

I HAVE A SUPPORTIVE AND LOVING WIFE...

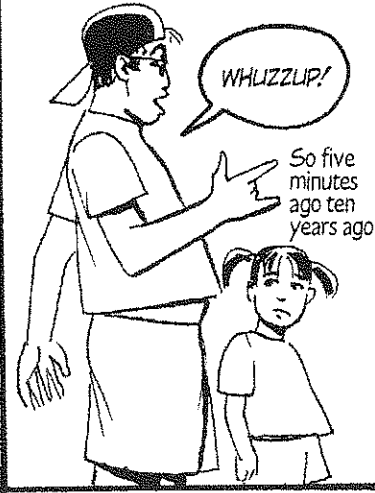
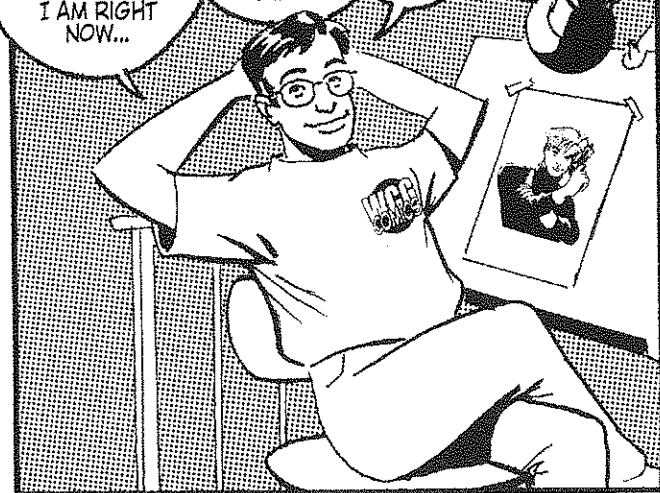
A BEAUTIFUL CHILD...

AND MY HEALTH IS OKAY!

TO BE SURE TO ACT MY AGE...

WHLIZZUP!

So five minutes ago ten years ago



SEE YOU IN THE ISSUE ON OLD AGE!

From City Boy to Adventure Traveler

Photograph courtesy of Homer Tom

by Homer Tom

As I sat in the Rose Bowl watching UCLA play Illinois, I had plenty of time to let my mind wander. Not that I wanted to daydream, but the soporific play on the field and coma-inducing yell leaders on the sidelines left me with little else to stimulate me, save the co-eds parading by with their bare midriffs and hip-hugging shorts. Geez, I'm old enough to be their father!

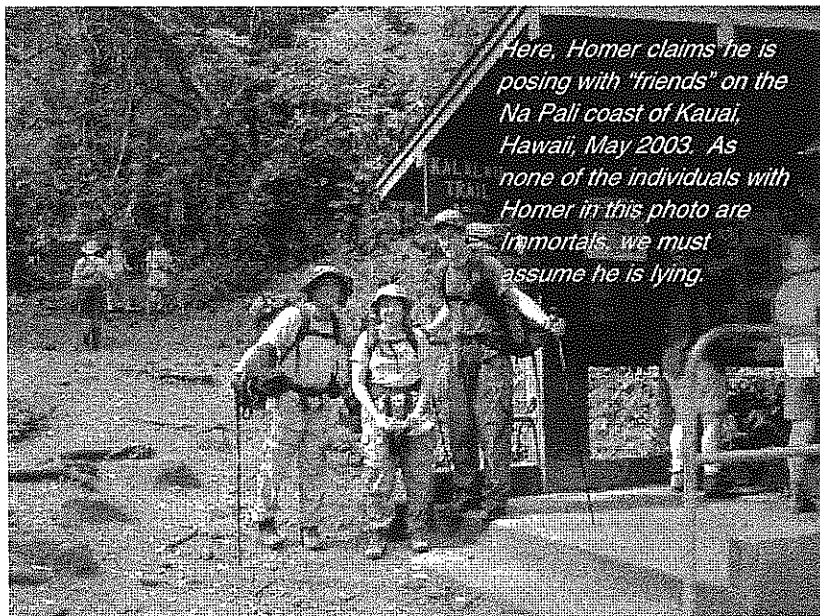
Some things never change, from underachieving football teams to cute UCLA girls, while other things do. My hairline for one, but we've all known that for a while. Another is my perspective. Now that I am uncomfortably into my fifth decade I'm at a point where my past and my future are roughly equal in length. This Journey is half over and, while the Bruin punter trots onto the field for what seems to be the twentieth time, I take stock.

Growing up in Los Angeles, the city was all I knew. I never went to the mountains, never camped, never fished. Aside from two family vacations, I never experienced the outdoors until I was in college. My first taste came with snow skiing. I survived the humiliating faceplants and follies on chairlifts and finally experienced the joy of being in the mountains. Every aspect of the mountains offered a fantastic return: the vistas, the clean air, the sheer exertion, the camaraderie among skiers.

For several years I went skiing as often as I could. In fact, as the years went by I found this to be my only relief from the pressure of work. Since this was only a winter sport, I turned to hiking the rest of the year. I hiked primarily within L.A., not to explore the outdoors, but to stay fit. Now I see that both the skiing and hiking prepared me for more adventures.



*The editorial staff of the **Chronicles** asked top forgery experts to confirm the authenticity of the photos that Homer Tom has been sending to the newsletter in support of his accounts about his hair-raising globetrotting adventurous lifestyle. As suspected, the photos have been heavily retouched. Tom (a computer expert by profession) cleverly has inserted himself into common picture postcards. **ABOVE**, Homer claims this photo was taken during his ascent of Half Dome in Yosemite in July 2003.*



Here, Homer claims he is posing with "friends" on the Na Pali coast of Kauai, Hawaii, May 2003. As none of the individuals with Homer in this photo are Immortals, we must assume he is lying.

Throughout the '90's I was fortunate to be involved in the celebrity fundraising circuit. With two or three events each year, I traveled to places like Jamaica, Banff, Colorado, Hawaii, and Alaska. These trips always featured sporting events like golf, tennis and skiing but often included activities unique or memorable to a given location. During these trips I experienced the thrill of mushing a team of sled dogs, catching a marlin, snowmobiling in the back country of Alaska, skiing down a glacier, snorkeling turquoise waters, and racing a Hummer off-road. I don't go to these events much any more but seeing these places and doing these things have left me wanting more adventure travel.

And so I set off on my own events. Kayak trips to Alaska and Baja have put me face to face with icebergs and whales. The hiking has evolved into backpacking trips on Kauai, numerous summit attempts in the Sierra Nevada (see *Immortal Chronicles* #3 for my Mt. Whitney climb) and an annual trip to the Grand Canyon each November. Not that I have become strictly an outdoors person—I still attend the Hawaiian Tropic pageants where I stay in touch with the Vegas lifestyle (see *Immortal Chronicles* #1)!

I have also joined the Sierra Club where I have met many people with similar outdoor interests and whose own adventures tower over mine. A lot of them are driven by goals like reaching the 100 highest summits in California (also known as "peak bagging") or running a 100-mile marathon. These are some of the more extreme achievements but I have realized that many other feats are within my reach, not only at age 41, but well into my later years. Look for my recap in *Immortal Chronicles* #20.

And so I have come up with a list. By no means comprehensive, it is more like a rough map of some of things I want to experience in this Journey. By committing this to writing I am hopefully committing myself to fulfilling as many of these as I can.

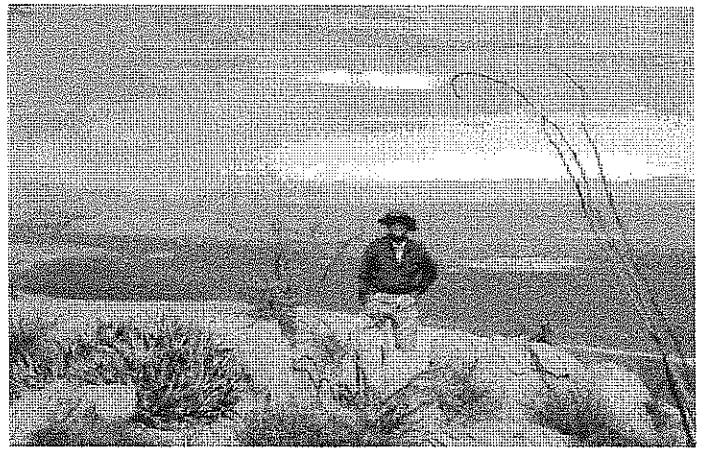
I want to kayak with orcas, backpack in the Canadian Rockies and see the Northern Lights. I'd like to raft down the Colorado River and jump out of a plane. I want to see the mountains of New Zealand (thanks to Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings*) and base camp at Mount Everest. Traveling to Europe, I would visit the Louvre and the Coliseum. The desire to get married and have a family grows stronger each year, but I have to believe I can still pursue my other dreams too.

With my eyes opened to the world, there seem to be limitless things to see and experience. How much can be crammed into one lifetime?

Sometimes it seems I am experiencing the world with the sense of awe and wonder as a newborn, but I also now realize that Time is not to be dallied with and each year must be appreciated and each experience must be sought out. Middle age should have nothing to do with this philosophy but, then again, it is a reminder that the clock is ticking.

Speaking of clocks...the exhortations of Jeff the alumni cheerleader and the roar of crowd bring me back to the Rose Bowl. The Illini have the ball with under a minute and down by three.

UCLA has gone into a prevent defense, allowing the opponents to march down the field. The game comes down to a field-goal attempt by an Illinois kicker who has been perfect all season. The kick misses left by a foot. The crowd goes wild as the Bruins win, momentarily forgetting all the dropped passes, shanked punts, and uninspired play-calling from a team and coach that should know better. Some things never change. ♦



ABOVE, Homer claims he was hiking above Bahia de los Angeles, Baja California, February, 2002. Really, has he no shame? We know for a fact he was comfortably sitting in front of his computer screen in his apartment in Burbank when he created this photo. Oh, the pitfalls of Photoshop.

NEXT ISSUE:
The Immortals
take on "POLITICS"!

IMMORTAL PROFILES

**FUN FACTS AND TRIVIA ABOUT YOUR FAVORITE IMMORTALS!
THIS ISSUE--RAYMOND MARCUS!**



THE CURRENT WORKING TITLE OF RAY'S DISSERTATION IS "A HISTORY OF RAY'S DISSERTATION: VOL 1: THE REAGAN YEARS!"

IN 1999, RAY WAS IN A RELATIONSHIP FOR FIVE WEEKS! GUINNESS OFFICIALS, HOWEVER, CAUTION THAT THIS FIGURE HAS NEVER BEEN PROPERLY VERIFIED.

RAY CLAIMS THE U.S. PATENT FOR SERIAL MONOGAMY.

RAY IS ON THE SHORT LIST TO RECEIVE THE NOBEL PRIZE FOR HIGH VOLUME JOURNAL-KEEPING SOMETIME THIS DECADE.

RAY IS THE PRESIDENT--AND ONLY MEMBER--OF THE HOUSTON CHAPTER OF "THE DAWSON'S CREEK AND FINE COGNAC APPRECIATION SOCIETY"!

AFTER HAVING REDISCOVERED HIS HEBRAIC ANCESTRY AND THEREAFTER EXHAUSTED THE RESOURCES OF JEWISH DATING SERVICES, RAY RECENTLY DISCOVERED HE IS ONE-EIGHTH ANGLO-HINDI ON HIS MOTHER'S SIDE. LOOK FOR RAY'S UPCOMING ENTRY ON HINDLI-DATE.COM: "SWM, INTO FOREIGN FILMS, GOOD BOOKS, LONG WALKS AT SUNSET AND SHIVA, THE DESTROYER OF WORLDS."

Bathing in the Cooling Waters of Denial



I live in a dream world. Perhaps you do, too. It's not the worst place to live, actually, though the vanilla scented air, courtesy of Las Vegas's Mandalay Bay, can be cloying.

In fact, I live in such a dream world that I actually wrote an entire version of this column that didn't mention middle age—the stated theme of this issue of the *Immortal Chronicles*. Yes, I am in such deep denial that I wrote a column about denial which included absolutely nothing about the subject that I was denying. Now, however, my denial is now less denial-full. I'm back on topic and there's no denying that!

Nevertheless, in a way I think I was right the first time. The way I figure it, the best way to deal with aging is to deny its existence in every way possible, short of injecting botulin toxin into your face or making sure you say "sweet!" fifteen times a day.

In his middle years, my father used to jog around the bathroom while massaging his scalp, occasionally singing "Stormy Weather." He claimed the practice would provide healthful exercise while also *completely* preventing baldness. My dad is, of course, still alive and in reasonably good health at 85. However he is also mostly bald and a little bit nuts, but that's nothing new. On the other hand, he knows how to program his VCR, which makes him a superstar in the over-80 set.

And while living every moment only to fight off death and aging may not be the kind of life that leads to Nobel Prizes or happiness, it seems to have worked for my dad in its own perverse way. He honestly never expects to die, despite living in a retirement community where funerals come with the same frequency as birthday parties.

On the other hand, he still concocts paranoid scenarios — the latest being about how the Supreme Court is in league with the Catholic Church (something about sodomy laws and pedophile priests) — and dining with him is an experience, since he claims to be allergic to just about everything and believes he possesses ultimate knowledge of the health giving or denying properties of all foods. No one, including me, bothers to argue any more.

Now for my part, I spend hours in the gym each week and squirt a generic version of extra strength Rogaine (Minoxidil) on my head twice daily, which costs me a mere \$39.99 every three months. And there's the five to seven bucks a month that I spend on products that "blend away the gray" on that hair which remains. (My sprigs of gray are sort of inconsistent and don't look "distinguished," assuming you don't think Larry Fine of the Three Stooges had an elegant air about him.)

And then there are the Trader Joe's multi-vitamins I swallow two at a time once daily with a meal: rich in death-and-aging defying antioxidants and designed especially for men. Not only do they do eschew the possibly male-killing iron, they also include other key elements like ginkgo, which prevents...something, I can't remember what, and lutein, a substance found in cooked tomato products that's thought to prevent enlarged prostates and

prostate cancer.

That last part is important. I once worked on a proposal for a book tentatively titled the *Prostate Cancer Cookbook*. Yummy. But, guys, let me tell you, forget cancer. The symptoms of an enlarged prostate were horrific enough that I had my legs crossed for the better part of a week. A big prostate is not small potatoes.*

Of course, then there's the matter of trying to keep the mind young. The studies say that reading and playing difficult games seems to stave off dementia and forgetfulness, but not writing. This makes sense because, as we all know, reading is less mental exercise than writing. Especially if you write like I do.

So, I could go on and on about life phases, about the fact that we only have so much time on this planet, how life is precious and there is no time for procrastination. You know the drill. But I've just realized I'm going to make it to 100 at least, so I won't be middle-aged until I'm fifty! Plenty of time to goof off and no reason to worry. None at all. No reason to worry. Nope. Not at all.

But wait, did you hear that noise? Is that the clock ticking, the sound of life slowly draining away, the sound which makes a mockery of all mankind's ultimately doomed efforts to defeat time?

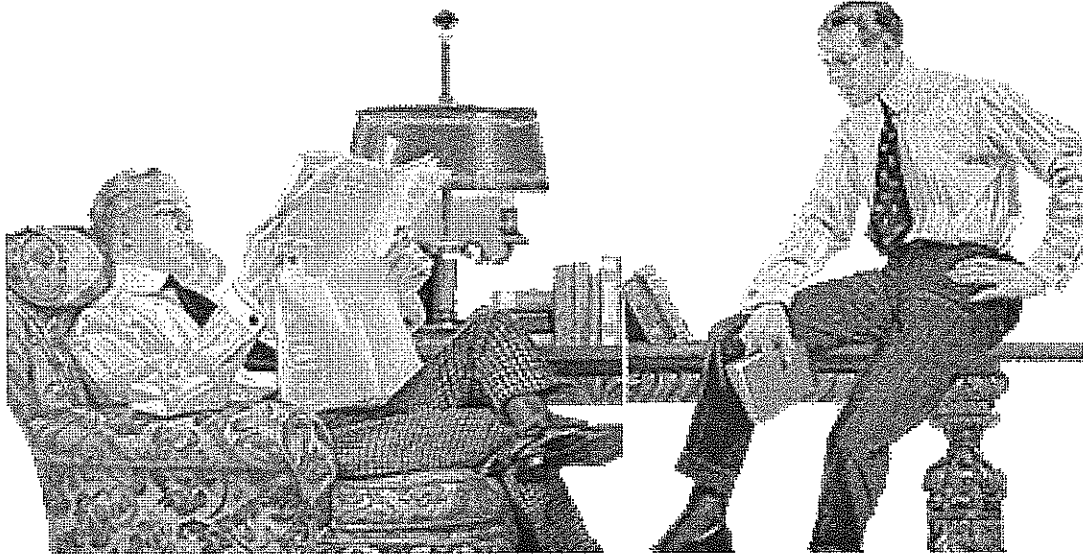
False alarm. Just my VCR turning on. ♦

* No memory of whether or not any of the recipes actually included small potatoes.



Where Immortals Gather...

Heard and Seen about Your Favorite Immortals, as surreptitiously recorded and observed by Lola Monique Sanchez



J.C. Leyendecker

Well, it's been a long hiatus, but it's good to be back on the beat in the land of the Immortals. And, as I see that this issue's theme is middle age, my initial response is that advancing age combined with a distinct lack of maturity is the theme of every Immortal's chronicles.

But enough editorializing, it's time for another fair and balanced™ look into the social and partying lives of these geeks about town....

First off, **Bob Westal** seems to be wearing his long term un/underemployment fairly well. Sort of like an old smelly shoe, buried under his bed in his old, smelly Hollywood apartment. In the meantime, neighbors are taking bets on when Bob will be found, dead from a fatal combination of caffeine and cocktail olive brine, clutching a stolen "Buffy" DVD and 5500 losing lottery tickets, and with the audio commentary to Fritz Lang's "Dr. Mabuse" blaring out of his headphones. Personally, I think Bob's obsessive good health habits should prevent such a fate — but a word to the wise, *n'est ce pas?*



ABOVE: Bob's job interview suit suit has been getting quite the workout lately!

The peripatetic **Scott Brick**, on the other hand, is anything but under-employed, having won several awards for his work in the ever glamorous world of audio book recording. Of course, our source say that Scott isn't exactly basking in these apparent successes. No, apparently the insecurity innate in actors has overtaken him. It seems that *el hombre de Brick* has become convinced that, since his success is in an auditory medium, it follows that he must be unspeakably ugly. So convinced of this has Brick become that sources close to the San Fernando valley

thesp tell us he refuses to leave his home without wrapping his head in bandages à la Claude Reins in the Invisible Man.

This habit, the sources say, arose out of an bizarre incident in an Encino Ralphs check out line. It seems that Brick misinterpreted the blank stare of a female courtesy clerk as a look of pure horror. Brick ran out of the Ralphs, yelling, "I am not an animal!, I am an award winning voice actor!" That might have been the end of things, but unfortunately Brick was still clutching \$150 in filet mignon and two live lobsters as he ran from the supermarket. The Brickster has reportedly lawyered up, seeking counsel from Robert Shapiro, but no word yet on how long before the lithium kicks in.

And speaking of the thespian mummy-man, ever since "Dog Boy" began using the words "award winning" before his



ABOVE: In the aftermath of his failed bid for Governor of California, is Gary Coleman behind efforts to recall Scott Brick from the mighty roll call of the Immortals and replace him?

Lola Monique Sanchez was the gossip columnist for Fangoria from 1991 to 1993. Her most recent memoir, *Have Asper-sion, Will Travel* is coming this Christmas from Harper-Collins. A native Californian and an only child, she enjoys secretly the fact that she has been asked out by at least two Immortals and told them both she was unavailable due to a prior engagement with her sister from Nebraska.

name, El Brickman has been conspicuously absent at recent Immortal gatherings. While some insiders blame the master thespian's ego, others have suggested that all of his spare time is required for a new project in conjunction with that other frequent Immortal truant, writer-historian-police officer-hypnotherapist-bonzai gardening consultant **John Thomas**. The two writer-hyphenates are hard at work, sources say, on a massive three part adaptation of Terry Brooks' *Sword of Shannara* series which, studio sources tell us, will be "nothing at all like the *Lord of the Rings*, though we are thinking of retitling the series *The Sword, with the Things*."

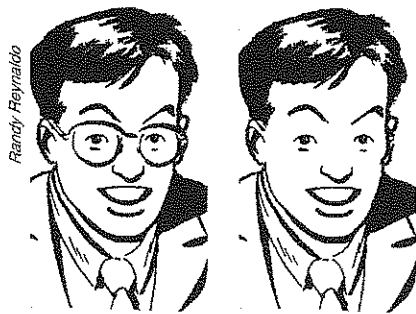
Regardless, the existence of an obscure amendment in the Immortals' charter that requires members to meet the minimum requirement of trivial and self-indulgent behavior may force a Brickman recall. Of course, in such an event, the Brickman will have to be replaced. Look for much contention in the future as the Bobster lobbies for his gambling and porn hero Larry Flynt, while the Deleageane-headed "virtue" wing of the Immortals lobbies for lefty-but-lovably-priggish Green Investment Advisor Peter Camejo. At this point, Arriana Huffington has already withdrawn her interest but, Monique thinks it's still anybody's ball game, except for the new California Governor Arnold Gropeinator. It seems an obscure amendment of the California State Constitution prohibits sitting governors from joining organizations deemed "silly and pointless" by the California State Commission of Silly and Pointless Organizations. Gary Coleman, your moment of victory is at hand!

And, every gossip queen's favorite Immortal, **Ray(mond) Marcus** has been up to his old tricks. Not only has Ray exhausted the dating possibilities of all available Jewish dating websites in both California and the giant state of Texas, he's been blocked preemptively from *friendster.com*. Sources inside that hotter-than-hot website told us, "friendster does not wish to make enemiesters, nor to incur legalcoststers from harrassment lawsuitsters."

Never one to take "no, not ever again, not even if you were the last reproductively viable entity in the universe" for an answer, Ray has taken his new cues from legendary L.A. non-actor Dennis Woodruff, and has turned his Nissan into a sort of moving bust of himself, with the words "Please, date me" on one side and "two weeks of heaven...guaranteed!" inscribed in English, Hebrew and Farsi on both sides of the auto.

All seems to be domestic bliss at the home of **Randy, Sadina and little Peri Reynaldo**. Sadly, "seems" is the operative word. Our operatives report that the deceptively adorable two-year old Peri has taken to heinous "fussing" and extreme "running around." While we at the *Immor-*

LEFT: "Before" and "after" shots of Randy's transition to contact lenses. YOU DECIDE!



tal Chronicles take our journalistic obligations very seriously and therefore do not want to issue such a charge without corroboration, the Reynaldo camp is tight lipped so we must therefore report these unsubstantiated allegations as the facts they so obviously are.

On a related note, it seems Randy "Don't Call Me Mr. Mago" Reynaldo has been spotted rocketing around town in his fleet of Mazdas...sans his trademark corrective eyewear! Now, before the CHP erects a massive roadblock on Overland Blvd., it appears that the Randster has taken to wearing contact lenses, using a technology spun off directly from the Hubble Space Telescope. It appears the diminutive Hobbit-loving Immortal is living up to this issue's theme and exhibiting the classic symptoms of a mid-life crisis. If I were long-suffering wife Sadina, I would hide the keys to that convertible and regularly check his shirt collars for lipstick!

Meanwhile, all is not Skittles™ and root beer at **Casa Gordy**...mother Lois and giant boychild Matthew seems to be on their better behavior of late, but the same cannot for said for his increasingly grouchy pop. Seems that recent political developments have sent the Gordy *pere* off the deep end. You would think the ardent Democrat would be happy as a clam over recent reports showing W's approval way down, but Gordy — ever the fearful liberal — believes he is being toyed with by the forces of nature and Fox Television. "I'm certain this is all set-up," Gordy said to a trusted personal confidante. "This is all just a vile ruse to set me, and me personally, up for a soul-crushing disappointment."

Fortunately, Gordy, who still takes personal credit for the three Los Angeles Laker championships over the Boston Celtics during the late 1980s, tells the trusted source, he has a plan, gleaned from his years as an ardent observer of the effect of sports fans on the sports outcomes. "I simply have to determine which of my personal habits cause Republican victories and stop doing them."

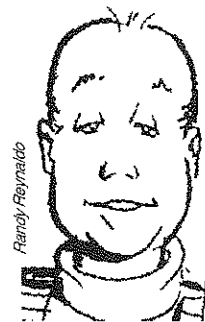
Included on the list of potential Gordy personal habits that cause pro-Republican upswings

in polls are: purchasing the three piece dinner at *El Pollo Loco*, standing on one foot and scratching any part of his anatomy, and shaving his ears. Habits that are deemed to cause Democrat or progressive upsurges include furtive nose picking, brow-furrowing, and watching "Dharma and Greg" reruns in syndication. Look for plenty of the latter and little of the former from Gordy over the coming months.

Finally, we take a look at the home of **Terry "Don't Call Me Triant" Deleageane**, long-suffering wife, **Donna** and long-suffering children **Emily, Susan and Henry**. Terry, who was recently singled out by *Los Angeles Magazine's* as "Southern California's most notorious late adopter" is up to his old tricks. Deleageane's skittishness toward purchasing a CD player, installing cable television, and pronounced fear of the family microwave has led to charges of extreme Luddism from several sources close to the Deleageane camp.

While it would be unfair to compare Terry to such fellow technophobes as, say, Theodore Kaczynski, we have heard rumors from that Terbear has ordered Westside mechanics to remove the computers from the family car. "Why the heck do cars need computers anyway?" Terry asked Mr. Goodwrench. "If I wanted a car that knows how to play the latest games like Tetris or Ms. PacMan, I'd buy one of them newfangled automatics with those crazy new automatic windows and wacky tape players. It's a car, not a freakin' Atari!"

And finally the ever-more adventurous **Homer Tom** is keeping his latest planned exploit under wraps. You won't read this in his article for this edition of the *Immortal Chronicles* but this reporter has it from an inside the Tomster's retinue that he plans to be spend three weeks hoisted in a



box above the corner of Washington and Sepulveda in a pathetic David Blainish cry for attention. While there, he will be visible, clad, we are told, only in designer skivvies ("Homer really admires Blaine," says our source, "but he wants to outdo him in the semi-nudity department. It's a thing.") and visible to the patrons of Tito's Tacos and nearby Johnnie's Pastrami.

Unlike Blaine, we have it on good authority that Home-boy's stunt will, in fact, make it into the *Guinness Book of World Record* as "Longest time spent by any human above a Mexican restaurant with Jewish tasting food." ♦

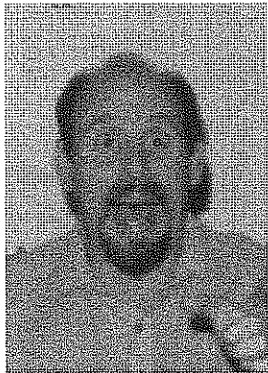
HEY, KIDS! IT'S IMMORTALS' POETRY!

A preponderance of Immortals were English majors (or dabbled in it until the realization set in that one's time might be better spent majoring in something more practical like poststructural philosophy). Being an English major required extensive reflection and critical thinking on such questions as, *Who is the narrator of Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess"?*, *What does the albatross in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" symbolize?*, and *Just how big was Alexander Pope's hump anyway?*

In any case, years of being required to read and analyze the impenetrable poetry of dead white guys should have been enough for most of us to put verse behind us. Indeed, most have no doubt banished their hoary copies of the bane/bible of all English majors, the *Norton Anthology of English Literature* (the two-volume, 5000-page collection that encapsulizes the whole of English literature from the "Dream of the Rood" to *Bridget Jones Diary*) to the bottom of their closet.

So imagine our surprise when we received not one but *two* poetic contributions to this issue's newsletter. No, we haven't read them, but send us a letter telling us what they're about, won't you?

Miscarriage of Poetic Justice



by Immortal
Doct Laureate
Terry Delegeane

Okay. So I've decided to become a poet. Granted I am starting late, and most poets of note have died tragically before they ever even reached my age. They were tortured and misunderstood and the world wasn't ready for their genius. *Pfff!* The romantic poets like Keats and Shelley and Coleridge and Byron were the rock stars of their time. None of them had the guts to actually live past 40, unlike many of our rock stars who have discovered that being a 60-year-old rocker is not such a good thing.

Nevertheless, I proceed. The romantics drowned, died in wars they didn't even belong in, contracted tuberculosis, and ingested large amounts of opium. I'm not asking for a huge tragedy or deformity to befall me, but you live a day in these guys' clubfooted shoes, and I dare you not to write a classic poem.

Here's another surefire poetic success story: have a close male "friend" die and you too could be the next Tennyson taking 17 years to churn out "In Memorium" for his "friend" Arthur Hallam. (He sure went on and on — was that guy paid by the rhyme or what?) Speaking of which, back in college I did promise Ray and Randy an epic poem upon their deaths, but before any of you get the idea of taking one of them out on my behalf, give me a couple years to develop my craft.

Got some #2 Ticonderoga pencils and my main muse, so here are a few ditties I tossed off in an afternoon. That should keep the masses satisfied. Time for dinner. *Ciao!*

On Immortality

Will I be remembered throughout history?
Will I be remembered in song?
Will there be rhyme or reason when someone years from now mentions my name?
Or will I just be remembered as that disembodied voice on the family video,
whose magical hand suddenly appears as it reaches around the camera
and waves into the lens to say "Hello"? 5
The Earth will remember me as it clutches my ashes to its dusty bosom,
and God will remember me and remind me that He knew me throughout time.

In the Morning

I hardly recognize the Quixotian visage in the bathroom mirror.
Haggard and worn,
I see glimpses of the boy I was amid the creases of a forehead etched by time.
The fresh-faced teen has yielded to the discolored skin around still sparkling eyes.
Peppered whiskers give way to a modicum of wisdom, 5
hard earned and hard fought,
a prospect even the most liberal university could not of have prepared me for.

I gaze again at the reflection,
and I see it,
all at once,
and I realize, 10
in an instant.
I need more sleep.

Samurai Sushi

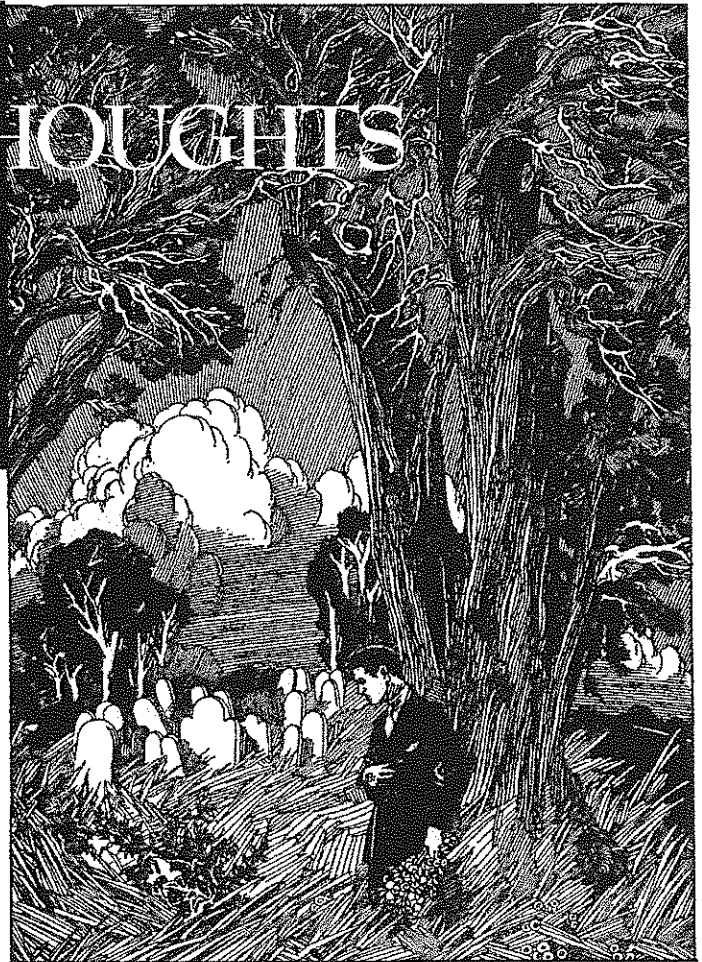
O, we Immortals can get quite loud.
We have driven many from Ray's favorite sushi house,
the sushi house that always smells like fish every time we convene in
Pasadena,
the same fish, 5
I think.

We are the Seven Samurai brandishing our swords
and saving the oppressed villagers while the cacophonous rain pours down.
We launch our attacks against the marauding bandits,
and one by one, 10
meet our fate.

And with so much rain, one can't help but think of the flooding water
And the wildlife being driven from their homes or the fish being washed away
or on to the shore where they gasp their last breath,
the same fish, 15
I think.

SOBERING THOUGHTS

BY RAYMOND MARCUS



Lawrence Chaves

Good evening (for it is late in the day).

I wrote the piece you're about to read in late August, two weeks after I submitted my "Dark Ages" column for this issue. It is now October 17, as I revise it, nearly 22 months after Randy's submissions request for this issue.

I know that some of you have only recently submitted as well, nearly two years after Randy's initial request, while others have been seen wandering through local shopping malls and flirting with middle aged women. Those of you who have flirted with younger women have had things thrown at you. Age, it seems, is slowing us down. But, perhaps because our Immortal Chronicles are also historical documents, and not just the comical misadventures by a band of under-achievers, I find myself sitting down again, in hopes of presenting a more serious meditation than my previous submission. Middle Age, after all, is serious business. So let us begin.

Wait a minute. I think I just repeated myself. I wrote this in August. I'm revising it now, in October. October 17. Then I said I was "sitting down again." Was I referring to August or October? Am I sitting down again, now, or is this the first time, not knowing I will sit down later? Who am I, anyway? And do I have to be somewhere?

Back to the story. Let's start, as always, with my love life.

My love life, I think, is a good analogy for the way I live my life as a whole. I mean this quite seriously. (What am I going to eat tonight? Oh, that's right, chicken.) Since the Vietnam War, when I was but a lad, I have been motivated by two primary impulses in the social world: a sense of gregariousness, of wanting to spend time with my friends and family, versus a deep strain of individualism which, quite frankly, shuns the com-

pany of others.

At times I think this is related to the My Lai massacre of 1968, and certainly out of frustration over the Watergate crisis and Nixon's desperate attempts to stay in power. (Do I have chicken in the fridge?

No. I guess I'll need to go to the store.) With the exception of my one-and-a-half year relationship with Paula (1984-85); my one-year relationship with Rachel in New York (1986-87); my eight and a half year relationship and marriage with Ketayoun (1988-97); and my on-and-off again relationship with Alicia (2000-03), the bulk of my romantic relationships with women tend to last only three months each. It's become so predictable that I could plant crops by that calendar, if I wished. "Hello, my dear. My, you look lovely. It's a pleasure to meet you. I sincerely hope we'll both enjoy the next few months together. But come February I'll be planting corn." (Yes, yes, I know, you can't plant corn in February, but you get my meaning. Unless it's metaphysical corn? Is such a thing possible? What exactly *is* in my fridge? Where was I? Oh, yes. Rachel. She broke my heart.)

Actually, the brevity of my relationships does not necessarily bother me, nor is it necessarily a problem. It does not, however, bode well for the future, if a "good future" can only be perceived as enjoying a long-term, committed romantic relationship, instead of a series of short term affairs, punctuated by long periods of solitude.

Since I'm finishing up my ninth grade unit on Ancient China today, I'll compare the arc of my relationships to the cycle of dynastic rule. First there is hope, signs of benevolence, loyalty, affection, and perhaps even a transient sense of "love." Then, after six to eight weeks, a gradual plateau. This is followed invariably by a steady decline, notable for its predictable sense of boredom, loss, chaos, alienation, burnt villages, disillusion, and finally, after the Mongols of desolation have had their fun and returned to their lands beyond the Gobi Desert, a retreat for me (continuing the analogy of comparing me with the ancient Chinese peoples), back into the safety of the self.

There are signs now, however, at age 41, that this process is becoming more solidified, and has even taken a disturbing new turn. Whereas in the past I enjoyed spending the night with women—I was never one of those guys to "cut and run," late at night, in order to return to my bat-cave before dawn—most recently, this summer, I found that I am now having trouble falling asleep with women (or, at least one woman, come to think of it, so maybe it has not yet become a universal rule).

I think once I develop an unremitting pref-

erence for sleeping alone, if such a thing does indeed occur, then all chance of a future happiness in a long-term relationship will have faded. As we all know, with the exception of mid-life crises, which I have yet to experience, people grow more entrenched in their ways the older they get. Thus, it can fairly be assumed that Randy, David, and Terry will continue to take great joy in their children, with perhaps a corresponding decrease in interest in their careers as their families grow; that Scott will continue to be successful in his work, but increasingly substitute both male and female company for comic books; that Bob will continue to be Bob, but only more so; and Homer will eventually be arrested with his computer for performing an unnatural act. As for me, not unlike Bob, Scott and Homer, I shall become increasingly used to being alone, and increasingly expect to remain alone, forever.

Is this a bad thing? Well, it depends on your perspective. Since my early twenties, I have been quite at peace with the prospect of living my life alone, although the likelihood is stronger now, I must say, than when I was twenty.

My one concern has been that, however content I am with the prospect of living alone, that one day when I am in my sixties or seventies, the joy and peacefulness of living a solitary existence will suddenly begin to feel lonely, hollow, fearful, and dull. Studies have been done, in fact, which show that married men tend to live longer than non-married men, while for women it's the absolute reverse (they live longer without us).

And so, the danger: where once there were hours of reading productively in coffeeshops and restaurants, savoring my freedom, eventually might come a sense of social vacuity. Where once there were pleasing walks alone through lanes and woods, might become a self-pitying voyeuristic stroll past family-lit windows—particularly at Christmas, Easter, and Thanksgiving, where the contrast between my Norman Rockwell childhood and my current minimalist existence will become all the more glaring.



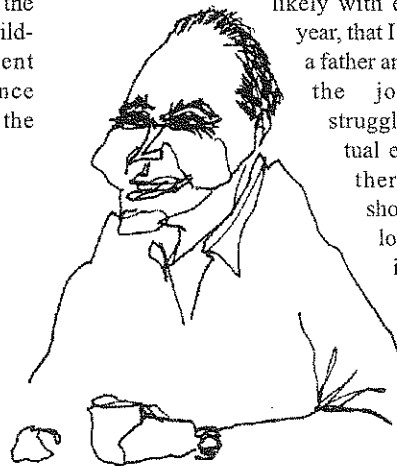
Raymond Merrius

Where once I snapped my fingers to silent show tunes in my head, as I softly sang in the night, might become mere empty hands swinging slowly by my side, missing holding hands with another. And where once there was an open bed that promised a good night's sleep, might become instead a place of tangled bedsheets and frayed linen, with a growing sense of sleeping uneasily, wrapped in my own shroud.

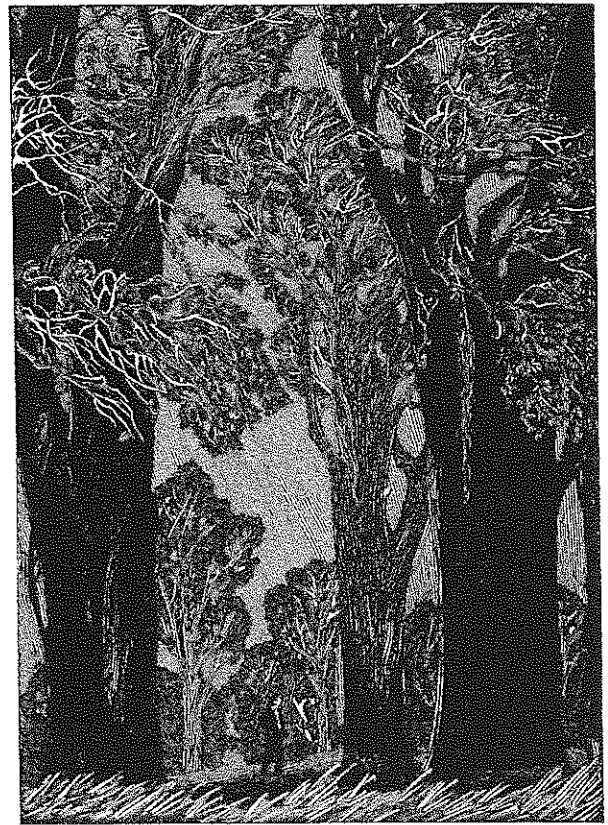
It's all a crap shoot. If I'm not lonely in my declining years, but still enjoying the lengths of my long-distance solitude, then all will be well. But if the loneliness hits hard, then that will be a dark time indeed. The fact that I move every four to five years, routinely abandoning the temporary circles and friends I develop in each new town (New York, Bloomington, Washington, and Houston thus far, with L.A. proving the only touchstone to which I regularly return), will only enhance a life of social isolation.

This whole column has now become, I fear, self-pitying and self-indulgent, but it really isn't self-pitying, or at least not yet. I am simply offering possibilities – they may not come true. Certainly, as countless examples have proven in the past, from Job to Napoleon and Edgar Allan Poe, marriage is no guarantee to happiness by any means. With all due respect to Ketayoun, whom I still love, I am, in fact, happier now, alone, than when I was married.

But then there is the other prospect of looming loss: the chance, which grows increasingly likely with each passing year, that I will never be a father and experience the joys, pains, struggle, and spiritual ecstasy of fatherhood—in short, that in my love and roaming pursuit of human experience and adventure, that ultimately I will have missed out on one of the



Randy, thoughtfully, and Bob, ironically, contemplate the futility of Ray's existence.



Lawrence Chaves

greatest experiences of all—that of raising children.

I don't know if these thoughts are occurring to me now even more so than before because I am older, or because my beloved mother – the person I was closest to in the world – died just nine months ago (January 16, 2003). All I'm saying is that life is largely a gamble. I am playing the game the best I can, and that, by the end, whether I end up spiritually rich or poor, I hope that I will have few regrets. Hopefully, in 10, 20, or 30 years' time, I will still be as content with the hand I have played – as, indeed, I am, despite this rather grim meditation – and that I will not feel it was all lived in vain.

Sometimes, on very rare occasions, I feel my life might become like a passing train of empty boxcars, with each boxcar symbolizing a lost opportunity – all the fiction not written, the drawings not submitted, the children never had, the dissertation neither published nor completed. The train is going somewhere, yet sometimes seems empty. This, I hope, is not my fate, but only a possibility.

That's the down-side. On the flip side, I love my freedom. I love living alone. I love having my days and nights to spend entirely as I wish – taking into account all the grading and lesson-planning I must do, either late at night or in the hour before dawn. I love my job. I love teaching history, and being paid to learn and to impact the lives of others. I love my kids. I'm still in good health, and

bike 15-50 miles each week along the bayou, as well as play soccer with the girls and boys' teams each week, in my position as assistant coach. My Dad still skis at the age of 80, and I am hoping for the same. Finally, I love my mobility, of being able to pick up and move to another part of the country whenever I wish. And every time I hear a baby scream in public, I cringe and say a silent prayer of thanks that I am not a father.

There are also hopeful signs on the artistic front. Recently I was asked to submit some of my drawings for a fund-raising silent auction for my school. Three people took turns bidding on them (one I knew, our school accountant; the other two were utter strangers). My set of five framed drawings eventually sold for \$350. It was my first sale of art since 1972, when a Yugoslavian man in an airport bought one of my drawings for the East

bloc equivalent of a dollar. My most recent sale encourages me to put together a portfolio to show some gallery contacts in Houston, later this year.

As for my fiction, my long-neglected dream, I did teach a fiction-writing class last year, to a small group of freshmen and sophomores, and some good writing did result. And although the dissertation has been very much neglected in the five years since I became a teacher, I did a bit more work on it last summer, and so, for now, it's still alive; still there, lingering quietly beneath the surface of my subconscious, and has not yet been given up for good.

As for relationships, there is nothing on the horizon. Two friends recently said they want me to meet two women friends of theirs, one a hairdresser, the other a Russian translator for NASA, and so we'll see where it goes, if anywhere at all; my train continues on its track, and sometimes bumps into others. If nothing happens, that's fine, too, for life is still good. We are now in our forties, my old college friends, and things are growing more settled. Time is moving fast, but there is still much time to go. May each of us be blessed with what we want, and work hard to achieve it. And may our gatherings still ring with laughter in ten years' time. ♦



Youth, in the process of being wasted on the young.

WHAT MAKES AN IMMORTAL?

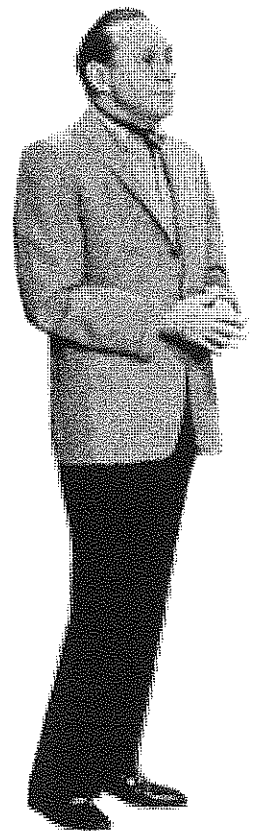
One of the dubious advantages of being an Immortal, other than the unlimited supply of moist towelettes at the local Carrows, a lifetime subscription to the rag you presently hold in your hands, and the opportunity to be given a secret name by Ray (as an alternative, we're also preparing a family vision plan),* is the wherewithal to pass judgment on absolutely anyone. After all, what fun is there in belonging to a group if you can't exclude others? To quote Kenneth Branagh in *Henry V*, "We are the makers of fashion!" (Regardless of what Steven Cojocarú says.)

Which begs the question—what makes an Immortal? The traits that drew the Immortals together are no secret (and as a review of any member's current resume would reveal, it's obvious that the initial goal of the group was to aim low, puff up the numbers, and hope for the best—no Skull and Bones we!); most attended UCLA; occasionally got together to "play" baseball as a transparent excuse to imbibe breakfast before familial responsibilities and, yes, middle age set in; have a shared love for Arby's, Bob's Big Boy, and Johnnie's Pastrami; disdain popular culture while reveling in it; talk loudly over each other with total disregard of whether or not anyone else in the general vicinity wants to be part of our conversation (which is strange considering only one of us is a native New Yorker); and have an opinion about everything, often including subjects of which we have only minimal knowledge. In other words, we're pretty much the only ones who can stand each others' company.

Regardless, Immortality is more a state of mind than it is a predilection for pseudo-intellectual facileness and the ability to control one's rising gorge when the musical "1776" rears its ugly head once again as a topic of conversation. So, then, what exactly does define an Immortal? Even we have to admit it's hard to articulate: It's a lot like defining pornography—difficult to describe, but we know it when we see it (and some of us have seen a lot). Indeed, it is not just anyone who has the makings of an Immortal. Many are called to be an Immortal, but few return those calls.

Nevertheless, we have a large list of members that require management.

What follows is an exhaustive but no doubt far from complete list of people who embody Immortality and whose application—sent mainly through various forms of mental telepathy and cosmic rays—have been accepted. Other long standing members, sadly have been found wanting on recent review, and their Immortality stripped from them. You might say that our ejecting some of these folks comes a bit late—Josef Stalin has held on to his Immortals membership nearly twice as long as his Communist Party membership, but there you go.



MEMBERS IN GOOD STANDING



Jack Benny: Enshrined in our first issue as our Patron Saint, this man is the epitome of Immortality! Comfortable in his idiosyncracies and forever 39.



Abraham Lincoln: Any President who ended slavery, saved the Union, and fired that layabout General George B. McClellan, gets a free pass into the pantheon of immortals. And to show how fair and balanced™ we Immortals are, he's even a Republican!



Albert Einstein: To be a member of the Immortals, it always helps to be a Nobel Prize winner, or at least know someone who does. (How else do you think Ray became a member?)



Alyson "Band Camp Girl/Wil-low" Hannigan: This was Bob's entry, simply because he has a crush on her. (Ms. Hannigan, please contact Mr. Westal care of the *Immortal Chronicles*. We know you're just recently married, but you're one of them crazy Hollywood people who live by different standards than the rest of us.) We also needed a girl on this list.



Will Eisner: A cartoonist who helped define the comic-book medium in its infancy, he's like in his 80s and still producing groundbreaking work! A real mensch.



Orson Welles: A creative genius who burned brightly and quickly. Even more impressively, he could down three steak dinners in one sitting and eighteen Pink's chilli dogs. Someone once told us he was a regular at Johnnie's Pastrami. What's not to like?

Others Who We Deem Immortals: Abraham (the Bible guy), John Adams, Alec Baktwin, The Beatles, Tori Bessell, the Boston Red Sox, Kenneth Branagh (pre-*Frankenstein*), Jimmy Cagney, Milton Caniff, Art Carney, Raymond Chandler, Geoffrey Chaucer, John Cleese, Roy Crane, Joseph Conrad, Linda Darnell, Frederick Douglass, Roger Ebert, T.S. Eliot, James Elroy, Emerson and Lake (but not Palmer), Ella Fitzgerald, Gandhi, Gang of Four (the band, not the junta), Jackie Gleason, Tom Hanks, Alfred Hitchcock, Homer (the blind poet), Inshiro Honda, Peter Jackson and the entire cast and crew of the *Lord of the Rings* and everyone who sees it opening weekend, Thomas Jefferson, Ron Jeremy, Joan of Arc, Stanley Kubrick, David Lean, Leonardo da Vinci, Jack Lemmon, J.C. Leyendecker, Peter Lorre, Ida Lupino, Dean Martin, Nelson Mandela, Elvis Costello and everyone he has ever performed with except Gary Hall, Sr., George Marx, Ed McBain, Michelangelo, John Milton, Mom and Dad, Florence Nightengale, George Orwell, Peter O'Toole, Michael Palin, Alexander Pope, Rabelais, Willie Randolph, Carl Reiner, Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, John Frankenheimer, Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig and the 1927 Yankees, Noel Sickles, Dr. Albert Schweitzer, Shakespeare, Kurt Weill, Emerig Pressburger, Michael Powell, Frank Sinatra and the Flat Pack (except for Joey Bishop), Edward Woodward, Anthony Shaffer, Joss Whedon, Upton Sinclair, Sinclair Lewis, Sinclair Pains, Keeley Smith, Elizabeth Taylor, Emma Thompson, J.R.R. Tolkien, Alex Toth, Andie de Toth, Andre the Giant, Leon Trotsky, Dick Van Dyke, the waitresses at Carrows, the Who, and P.G. Wodehouse.

DROPPED MEMBERS



Joseph Stalin: While a group pre-dating the Immortals had "Peace, Brotherhood, World Domination" as its motto, "evil paranoid totalitarian" is definitely grounds for denying membership among our mighty merry roll call. Sure, he should have been dropped sometime during the first purges, but we've been busy, okay?



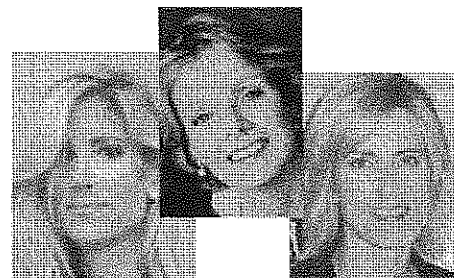
Vlad "the Impaler" Dracul: The basis for the fictional "Dracula," this was no idle nickname! Also known as Prince Vlad III, he never wore a cool tuxedo like Bela Lugosi and said "I bid you welcome," which was the only reason we accepted him in the first place.



Michael Bay: Anyone who aspires to be the poor man's James Cameron (making Chris Columbus the poor man's Michael Bay) has to go. Even if he was John Frankenheimer's son, we don't accept legacies!



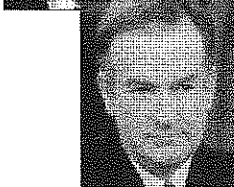
Fox News and Their ilk: Rupert Murdoch; Bill O'Reilly; Sean Hannity and (just to show we're fair and balanced) Alan Colmes. It's not that we hate all conservatives — it just that we have a problem with an overtly rightist network trying to pass itself off as unbiased, particularly when there is no overtly leftist network extant. (Sure, PBS and CNN can be seen as leftist — if your close friends generally address you as "Generalissimo"). Still, you've got to hand it to the folks at Fox News — from low-key neocon newsman Brit Hume to low-IQ idiot-con radio host Sean Hannity, they never slow their shows down with too many boring contrasting opinions.



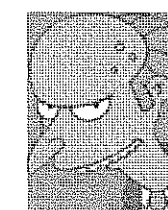
Ann Coulter, Laura Ingraham, and Peggy Noonan: What's it with the Republicans and their leggy blonds? Ann Coulter wrote on liberals called *Treason*. Is it okay if we write a book on conservatives called *Mass Murder?* Just asking? Who knew that such a triumvirate of evil could be so easy on the eyes!



Tina Louise: Refuses to be involved in any of the reunion shows or documentaries about "Gilligan's Island." We vote her off the Immortals Island!



Montgomery Burns: We like the fact that he was modeled on the banker guy from "Citizen Kane", but a villain is not a villain. We could drop him for many reasons, but mainly because we feel bad for his insensitive treatment of Smithers. Can't you see the man is in love, Monty? Have pity.



Others Who Just Don't Make the Cut: Agent Smith, Lee Atwater, Gary Bauer, William Bennett, Osama bin Laden, David Blaine, George Brett, anyone named "Britney", Barbara Bush, George W. Bush, Jeb Bush, Leslie Caron, Nicolai Ceausescu, Arnold Schwarzenegger and Gary Coleman (so as to be fair and balanced™), Dick Cheney, Chiang Kai-Shek and Chairman Mao (so we're fair and balanced, China-wise), Chris Columbus, Calvin Coolidge, Terrence Trent D'Arby (just because), Eurotrash soccer players, Brian de Palma, the Gang of Four (the junta, not the band), Herbert Hoover (though we love his vacuum cleaners), Joseph Goebbels (even if his name sounds like "gerbits"), Whoopi Goldberg, Jessica Hahn, Daryl Hannah, Don Henley, Barbara Streisand, Barbara Hershey, Hershey, Pennsylvania, Paris Hilton, Judge Judy, Christopher Katkin, Kim Il Sung, Ashton Kutcher, Patricia LeComte, Jay Leno, Rush Limbaugh, Huey Long, Gummo Marx, Dennis Miller, Nazis, Pat O'Brian, Stone Phillips, Bill Press, Marcel Proust, Ayn Rand, Ralph Reed, Karl Rove, Baron Philippe de Rothschild, Donald Rumsfeld, Aily Shedy and all worm faces, Aaron Spelling, Darren Starr, Martha Stewart (sorry Sadina), Sauron, Margaret Thatcher, USC, Andrew Lloyd Webber.

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