

I Scared Gore Vidal

Written by Bob Alexander

Wednesday, 01 August 2012 22:09 - Last Updated Wednesday, 01 August 2012 22:09

Living and working in LA was always pretty ugly but starting in the early 80's it became especially brutal. All the dirty effing hippies were out of a job and the stupid swaggering Republicans who took over walked around like they owned the place ... because they did. In the early 80's nobody in the "Entertainment Industry" talked about making records or movies anymore. Now everybody made ... product. And if I wanted to work in "The Industry" I had better jettison any idea I might have about doing something good and wrap my head around cranking out the movie equivalent of Velveeta Cheese ... The Sequel.

The balancing act of artistic vision vs. making money created a dynamic that made for some pretty good movies. But accountants and lawyers found out you could make a whole lot more money if you threw away the script and just filmed the bottom line.

Porky's made money ... crank out two more.

Police Academy made money ... shove out six more.

A Nightmare on Elm Street made money ... punch out nine more.

Friday the 13th made money ... extrude *twelve* more.

A sleaze in a good suit told me if I ever wanted to make a movie again to come up with something people had seen before and describe it like a TV Guide listing:

Citizen Kane. 1941. 119 min. Orson Welles, Joseph Cotton.

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A man inherits a fortune, is raised by a bank, runs a newspaper, and dies thinking about his old sled.

No way that project's ever going to get green-lighted.

In between working on crap I got a job at a cable TV company in Los Angeles. The cable industry was still fairly new and there was a huge demand for "product." If you were an HBO subscriber you could watch Robin Williams in *Popeye* 27 times in one week. I wanted to work there because the Public Access Division had cameras, editing equipment, and a studio. For Free! All I had to do was figure out what to put in front of the camera.

I'd film commercials in the dead of night and sometimes was paid off in "product" in lieu of cash. How else do you think I got that wonderful portable dishwasher?

During the day the Public Access Studio was used to produce "Must See TV" like *The Jewish Television Network*

which consisted of two bearded guys in black hats talking about Current Events with a Hassidic slant a couple of times a month. Two guys, two chairs, against a white wall. That was it. Some "Network."

One morning the studio was all abuzz. I noticed *three* chairs in the studio. The boys had a guest coming in. Imagine my jaw-dropping surprise when I saw Gore Vidal enter the room. What in the Wide Wide World of Sports was he doing there?

In 1982 Vidal was running against Governor Jerry Brown in the Democratic primary election for the United States Senate. Somehow somebody on his staff thought it would be a good idea for him to be on *The Jewish Television Network*. I don't know what the two bearded, black-hatted guys expected from the man who had said, "*I would stop all military aid to the Middle East. This would oblige the hard-liners in Israel to make peace with the Palestinians. We have supported Israel for forty years. No other minority in the history of the United States has ever extorted so much Treasury money for its Holy Land as the Israeli lobby.*"

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One of our cameramen was a 23 year old muscle-bound dimwit who once said he was sorry he was too young to have gone to Vietnam. Throughout the interview I heard him muttering into his headset that this effing commie faggot shouldn't be an effing Senator but should move back to effing Russia. Direct quote.

I don't know where he picked up his political views because he never read *anything*. He used to derisively call me "The Professor" because I always had a book with me. He once said, as he was working himself up to throw a punch at me, that I didn't really know nuthin' because I read too much.

Now all this took place during a time when I wasn't drinking constantly ... a guy has to sleep so *metime*

... but I was drinking just enough to be somewhat oblivious to the effect of whatever I was saying had upon whoever I was talking to. Case in point:

If you're drunk, but still drinking in a bar, seemingly getting along with all your bar buddies, **Do Not** turn to the drunk Black Guy next to you and describe Eddie Murphy as a Black Bugs Bunny. Regardless of how cogent and apt your observation might seem to you at the time ... there's a chance something bad will happen.

But I digress ...

The interview was almost over. I suddenly remembered I had one of Vidal's books in my desk and I wanted him to autograph it.

Here's how the studio was laid out. The control room was actually a video truck in the back parking lot. I had to leave the truck, run down an alley to the street, enter the main building, run through the maze of cubicles, get to my desk, grab the book, run to the back of the main office area, open another door, and run down a long dark hallway to get to the door to the studio before Vidal left.

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That's a lot of running and a lot of territory to cover to get to Vidal in time. I was about halfway down the long dark hallway when Vidal came out of the studio. I raced up to him, shoved the book at him, and asked him to sign it. He took it from me. His hands were trembling. As he scrawled his name I asked him how the negotiations for the movie version of the book were going. He mumbled something about Mick Jagger being interested, fumbled the book back to me, and walked off.

That was weird. He looked like a nervous wreck when just minutes before he was calmly and effortlessly skewering *The Jewish Television Network* guys. What had happened to him?

Well just maybe he saw some wild-eyed long-haired freak in a leather jacket running pell-mell straight for him down a long dark *deserted* hallway. The faint but perceptible bourbon-scented cloud enshrouding said wild-eyed long-haired freak in a leather jacket probably didn't help Vidal's piece of mind either.

And that's how I briefly met one of the best writers of all time.

Rest in Peace Mr. Vidal. I'm sorry I scared you.