

## PROLOGUE

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# What Kind of Creep Runs *Hustler*?

IT TAKES A special person to work at *Hustler* magazine for 20 years and not crack up. From the dawn of the Reagan Administration well into Bush II, I was bombarded daily by sharply focused images of naked women and bare-assed men locked in the most primal and private activity human beings engage in other than defecation, and I'd been shown that too. I viewed these images, literally 1,000 every day, through powerful magnifying lenses ground in Germany. I evaluated each photograph for its prurient appeal, and selected the most effective among them to be presented to a drooling audience, a large portion of which would have paid a month of their salaries to spend a week on my job.

As a writer, I cranked out service pieces on how to dump a girlfriend before she dumps you, on romancing welfare mothers, on capturing for a moment the erotic affections of rich women, crazy women, gorgeous women, angry women, new age women, promiscuous women, aging women, and women with severe eating disorders. I clarified at least one mystery of the universe in a feature titled "Creeps: Why Women Love Us."

I'd been airlifted to a remote Nevada highway and embedded at a house of prostitution there. I'd infiltrated a convention of soldier-of-fortune mercenaries, and penetrated San Quentin Prison's death row to interview a man convicted of murdering two consecutive wives. I'd tagged along to the south of France with a planeload of porn starlets who plied their trade to private fans at up to \$5,000 per scene. I'd spent three hours in a cell with a tape recorder and one of California's most notorious serial killers. I'd hopped a redeye

to Atlanta, Georgia, where I delivered a staggering cashier's check to the second ex-wife of family-values congressman Bob Barr.

I entered the strange and titillating environment of Larry Flynt Publications as a married 27-year-old clinging to the shreds of a Roman Catholic education. Tentative at first, jumpy around all the sexual triggers, I quickly adopted a jaded sensualism which was put to the test once my wife had split. Acclimating well, I assumed a supervisory position within the hotbed of anarchy and depravity at LFP. I hired and indoctrinated others to the *Hustler* way. I directed talented underlings in the creation of aberrant literature and curiously lewd photographic scenarios. I trained attractive young women to compose debauched sexual memoirs, and then I made suggestions for improving their grammar. *Hustler* was not the vilest magazine on the market, but we tried.

Private sex videos never intended for public consumption crossed my desk, souvenirs that purported to show Ted Turner in a manic kinky mood with Jane Fonda, young Pam Anderson satisfying the singer from Poison, Chuck Berry despoiling a string of anonymous partners, some of whom treated Chuck (if indeed that was Chuck) to a bite of poo, Anna Nicole Smith playing the nude, inebriated seductress in a hotel bathtub, Mick Jagger captured by a crafty, spread-eagle stripper barely one-third his age, and Courtney Love cavorting with Scott Weiland of the Stone Temple Pilots. I came away with the opinion that all of these tapes were probably authentic, but I had learned to mistrust reality at large.

In 1998, I was plunged into the chamber pot of national politics. Suddenly, at the height of the frenzy surrounding the impeachment of President Bill Clinton, my actions were creating headlines in the *Washington Post* and being cited in *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* Op-Ed columns. There I was on prime-time TV, arguing public morality with big-haired news-channel blowhards. Functioning as equal parts reporter and vandal, I hounded down adulterous Congressional hypocrites wherever Larry Flynt's lure of a million-dollar reward could flush them out. Before the smoke and mirrors had cleared, the Speaker-elect had resigned from the United States House of Representatives in the face of my insinuation that *Hustler* had uncovered proof of his extramarital follies.

After having saved Bill Clinton's pasty ass, if not his legacy, I continued to guide staffs of writers and artists in producing the sarcasm, muckraking, celebrity bashing and go-for-the-throat eroticism of America's most iconoclastic stroke book, as well as being overlord on a half-dozen ancillary publications—*Taboo*, *Barely Legal*, *Chic*, *Asian Fever*, *Busty Beauties*, *Honey Buns*. At 46, a seasoned veteran of hardcore anti-journalism, I reigned over a fiefdom of quick-witted geeks with graduate degrees and no concept of a career path. Then I made one crucial blunder in my relationship with Larry Flynt, a faux pas so colossal that I must have committed it deliberately. Soon after, I was fired.

From my first day as an axed employee, casual acquaintances, relatives and former co-workers told me I should write the book on *Hustler*. To everyone who didn't have to write it, the book was a no-brainer, but I had to wonder: What is the specific idea? Do I intend to produce an exposé of Larry Flynt? How do you pitch a tell-all of a man who is on record as having had sex with a chicken?

Oprah tosses up her hands: "The man admits to raping a fowl. Are you telling me there is more?"

In fact, there is plenty more, but this book racket is turning out to be more work than I am accustomed to. Trying to make things easy on myself, I reached out to several former *Hustler* co-workers. Many of these are decent, conflicted men and women. A few are porno scumbags. I asked everybody the same questions: What had working in the peculiar biosphere of LFP been like for you? What memories typified or evoked the experience?

Most everyone agreed that their *Hustler* tenure had been weird and less than entirely pleasant. All the former employees I contacted shared one common thing that separated them from me: they'd come to Larry Flynt Publications, and then they continued on their way, having outgrown the *Hustler* environment. Maybe it wasn't a question of growth for all of them. Perhaps a few had simply burnt out on the beaver shots, the institutionalized paranoia and the unrelenting satire. The point is, these burnouts had moved on. My growth, if that's what I chose to call it, had all been confined within the structure of LFP.

I'd come in as an assistant nobody and risen to the top, like scum on a cup of hot chocolate. If this progression had occurred at

Condé Nast, I'd be pushing my publicist for a five-page profile in *Forbes*. When we met during the filming of *The People vs. Larry Flynt*, actor Woody Harrelson, who portrayed Larry in the movie, said, "You're the guy who's got the best job in the world." If so, why did I start my car every morning, then sit behind the wheel for 10 minutes debating whether or not to open the garage door?

A tougher question might be: how did I thrive so long in a bizarre world of bodyguards, cracker-rich hillbillies and high-gloss cumshots? Now here is an interesting question of character: what the fuck was wrong with me?