

# INTRODUCTION

I grew up in a small town—Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania. It had a historic, downtown movie theater, *The Sherman*, which had been around since Lincoln was in office. It once featured live theater; with tunnels for the actors under the streets to move back and forth between costume changes.

I saw *Star Wars* there in 1977 and later *The Empire Strikes Back* and even lost my R-Rated virginity to 1979's *The Amityville Horror* in that theater. I have a hundred stories in its dark rows and popcorn butter scented lobby.

Stroudsburg was a town with an old main street that not only had a cobbler, local banks and a book seller or two. It had *Wyckoff's* department store, one of the oldest stores in the country that originated in our town along with an early *Woolworth's* on the corner.

Clothing shops, cafes, restaurants and appliance stores ran up and down Main Street. My favorite was *Sweet Creams*, an old timey, 1940s style ice cream and malt shop that I swear did something to the flavoring of their *Coca-Cola* that got me somewhat addicted. It was a faint strawberry taste that heightened the cola and made me come back for more.

Stroudsburg was progressive enough to have a gay bar; the first one I ever saw in the wild. It was called *The Blue Bugle*, and while I never stepped foot inside, it was the stuff of wild speculation and jokes because its blue tinted windows created even more mystery nestled in between high end clothiers like *Frances Burrows Routzhan's* and *Horn's*.

The *Bugle* was just a few doors down from the real-life, "You fucking betcha it's Italian" *Pizza House* which was some kind of symbol for Main Street night life.

We would dare each other to go up to the *Bugle* windows and peer in. I heard of others that took it a step further and went inside and as I got older, those stories included those brave straight (curious) souls who even had a drink at the bar. The truth of the matter was, it was no different than divey *Kay's Pub* down on the corner next to the *Kentucky Fried Chicken* or the trendy *Charlie's* just up the block.

There were two rival studio photographers who had some kind of cold war going on when it came time to get the Stroudsburg High School senior portraits contracts. One of these photographers also had a bridal shop on a lucrative corner and it was one of the go to places for prom as well.

Down by *The Sherman* was another clothier-tailor and my first wife would be related to one of the partners. They were serious about their business and that's where I went for my prom tux in 1985. They were known as the classy clothier shop.

Large maple and oak trees lined sidewalks. There was metered parking and you knew the local police who often gave friendly waves and smiles while ticketing over parked cars.

Main Street Stroudsburg with its cool pubs, restaurants and stores was the place to go for the locals and it could have been a perfect movie setting for a film needing that old fashioned, every day American look and feel.

Whatever you needed you could find downtown. You knew the shop owners by name and they knew you. You saw them out in town, at the football games. It was a community.

Then came the mall.

Main Street was sandwiched between "uptown" which was not much more than auto dealerships, a department store and beer distributor strung along Route 611 (locally known as

ninth street) and “below downtown” which counted past *The Kentucky Fried Chicken* and to the Inter-Borough Bridge that led to our rival high school football town, East Stroudsburg.

Main Street sort of ended after the *Kentucky Fried Chicken* with a new McDonald’s built down that way to continue the Main Street magic but it didn’t quite do it. The big draw down that way was the farmer’s warehouse, *Agway* owned by the parents of some kids that lived down the country road from my rural development about three miles from the heart of downtown.

Stroud Mall opened in 1978 as the 70s wound down. Carter was still President and the country was mired in stagflation and unemployment. That didn’t take away from the bucolic charm of downtown, but the mall promised some kind of economic renaissance.

We didn’t know it at the time, but it would become the symbol for the coming 80s and the decade of excess. It didn’t take long for some of the downtown store owners, fed up with parking issues and meters that pissed off and even deterred customers, to move “up to the mall.”

Large retail chains took shelter under one giant, skylight-pocked roof. A national movie theater chain, *Music Makers Theaters* opened, with a whopping three theaters and giant, modern concession lobby and theaters outfitted with booming stereo sound.

They got the major first run films, siphoning off that revenue from the downtown *Sherman*.

The real lure for me, my brother and a shitload of school kids was the *Time Out Arcade* which was this long, dark tunnel located at the end of the mall, in front of anchor store, *JC Penney*. A school friend’s family owned a small sports athletic supply shop next to the arcade.

The *Time Out Tunnel* went back about forty feet, lined with the current arcade games. This was pre-*Pac Man* but *Space Invaders* and *Asteroids* had landed and the mall was the exclusive place to play them.

There were new stores for music and toys that would become hubs for our high school years. *Kay-Bee Toys*, *Listening Booth* and *Waldenbooks* would become employment spots and hangout areas. Memories of getting *Atari* cartridges in *Listening Booth* or *Star Wars* figures at *Kay-Bee* and nabbing *Fangoria Magazine* at *Waldenbooks* (before it became my first subscription) would become fond memories one day after they all vanished from the landscape after the 80s and the mall era passed to the rise of online shopping.

While my mom didn't have the money to shop at the frou-frou clothing shops downtown; the mall provided an alternative to perceived low end department stores as *Jamesway*, *K-Mart* and *The Big N* (Yeah, that was the real name and the jokes it launched should not be repeated here).

The mall gave us *Clymer's Carousel*, *Copper Rivet*, *DEB*, *Fashion Bug* and jeans outlet *J&R Ranch* sported this giant pair of fat ass jeans nailed to their outside wall adjacent to the entrance to catch the eye. A number of kids used it as a joke for insults to friends and their parents. "Hey look! There's your mom's jeans!"

Food kiosks popped in the hallways offering ice cream, Bavarian pretzels and drinks. One store in center court was a repository of homemade candies and nuts and aptly named, *Just Nuts and Candy*.

A high school friend's father and uncle moved their restaurant/diner from the dead sector on 611 above the mall, down to inside the mall and it became THE dining place to go for good old greasy spoon eats.

This bordered a pet shop, *The Pet Corral* and right next to it was *Great Expectations*, a late 70s looking hair styling place with a hexagonal opening that looked like it was out of some 70s *Logan's Run* or *Battlestar Galactica* set.

The rival hair place, *Holiday Hair Fashions* was up the hall, outside center court and was my hair place of choice as “feathering” became the thing for teens. They got it right more often than *Great Expectations*.

Franchise *Italian Delite* was down the hall toward center court. It had dark lighting inside, reeked of pizza and the rumor was its young manager, (who hit on all the female staff) had a dick so crooked it bent upward like a curved banana when hard.

While there was this new, refined superficiality to the mall, it was populated by a number of local business owners who transplanted uptown.

Downtown stores went vacant. Brown paper went up in windows and signs told patrons to find them at their new store in Stroud Mall.

Old Main Street stalwart, *Country Camera* came to the mall, leaving *Stroudsburg Foto* the last photo store standing and in competition with a national chain that could pummel them with price reductions.

It was survival of the fittest as economic Darwinism revved up. The change was slow, but the impact on downtown was real.

All in all, sounds like a nice place to grow up, doesn't it?

It was. Some of the best years of my life and some of my closest friends even to this day came from this place.

Stroudsburg High School was the center of town social activity. Every Thanksgiving the “Big Turkey Day Game” was held between Stroudsburg's *Mountaineers* and East Stroudsburg's *Cavaliers*.

If Stroudsburg won, the entire town celebrated with a Thanksgiving Day march down Main Street.

You can't get more 1950s *Back to the Future* small town America than that.

Ronald Reagan was elected November 1980 and promised an age of American renewal. My mother did not see it that way. Summer 1980 was the last year she would grow marijuana in our backyard garden because, and I quote, "If that Fucking Reagan gets into office he will have the DEA raiding everything."

I think she envisioned military choppers dropping armed militia into our back yard, burning the twelve plants and laying waste to our home in a Vietnam-style search and destroy mission.

I was going into eighth grade the fall of that election year. I had no idea what she was talking about. She never said "Ronald Reagan." He was "Fucking Reagan" and he was going to make a mess of the country.

Wasn't the country already a mess I asked one night at the dinner table? That was a bad move. She launched into a hate-fueled anti-Reagan rant. Reagan was going to cause wars. He was going to take the country back to the 1950s.

I doubled down on stupid and asked her why that was bad thing when she loved shows like *Leave It To Beaver* and *The Andy Griffith Show*, often forcing us to watch them while we ate dinner next to the living room TV in our bi-level.

The US hostages were still in Iran. Gas prices were high. Food prices were high. We knew this because the old lady took my kid brother and me shopping with her to help carry groceries and she bitched at the prices with every click of her little red price counter she carried in her hand and with every lick of her *S&H Green Stamps*.

How could Reagan make it worse? I was asking genuine questions but she thought I was being a wiseass.

We watched the 1980 debates (there wasn't much of a choice in my house) and when we got to the final one before Election Day, Reagan asked his now famous question: "Are you better off than you were four years ago?"

By the time he was done my mother was quiet. There was no "Fucking Reagan," or any piss and vinegar for the bold actor turned politician. I think this was because she knew the answer and it was no. She wasn't better off.

The country thought the same and the former Hollywood actor won in a landslide.

Carter was not only kicked to the curb, he was tossed down Pennsylvania Avenue with a hearty "Get the fuck out!" from the electorate.

However, Reagan wasn't the only thing the nation elected and brought into power.

I was in eighth grade algebra that January, 1981. Class and lessons were suspended as the whole school had to watch Reagan's Inauguration.

Our middle school was an "open concept" building meaning it had no walls. It was this giant circular "education experiment" that was to encourage some kind of big picture learning with a "least restrictive environment" concept.

Grades were separated by book shelves and mobile coat racks. There were no classrooms but rather "learning areas" which again had subjects separated by tote tray closets, bookshelves and coat racks. The place was never quiet, it was like a hive.

25-inch *Magnavox* TVs strapped atop tall wheeled carts were rolled out into every learning area (every subject teacher's space) and hooked up by cable to the school's TV feed. The outside news was piped in for the entire school to watch at the same time.

To be up front, I was too caught up in the tall, blonde cutie I had been steadily dating. With lights dimmed, some network brought us Reagan's swearing in live. My attention was

devoted to holding this girl's hand, and trying to get a peek between the buttons of her shirt to see her bra. I had seen her naked already, but it never got old. Not like the guy taking the oath of office at in front of us.

Sitting alongside me was a friend, a girl who resented my dating of the tall blonde. She was intellectually way ahead of me and lived just a few houses down from. Jealousy was a factor for sure, but she was also in an extra cynical, sarcastic mood with Reagan's taking of office.

She looked at me flirting with the blonde with as much distaste as Reagan giving his first day speech. He promised an age of "American Renewal" and stating that government was the problem for our national woes. He promised big change.

None of it mattered to me and then it was over. The TVs went off. They would be wheeled out later in the day and back into the huge TV corral behind the open library called "THE IMC." (I still can't remember what that stood for. I know a friend called the "Insobolic Moron Club" whatever the hell that was).

Classes resumed. We went to lunch and just after we got back to our post-lunch class the principal got on the announcements to interrupt the entire building. His voice was alarmed, maybe even a bit frantic and even as dazed and horned as I was, I knew this was no normal class disruption.

He told the entire school staff to turn on the TVs in our areas immediately. They were still connected to the giant cement pillars that helped to segregate the grade levels.

Teachers showed concern. What was going on? Some of the most jaded, couldn't care less kids were on alert as our teachers scrambled to get the TVs powered up. Kids voiced out loud their questions: Was Reagan shot? Did Reagan start World War III?

Some network news channel came on the screens as it was a single broadcast to the whole school. They were taking us live to President Reagan who had an important announcement from The Capitol Building in Washington.

The new President looked back at us and his face was serious. He looked right at those cameras, totally comfortable in the TV lights like being on a movie set.

Then he spoke. "Some 30 minutes ago planes bearing our prisoners left Iranian air space, and they're now free of Iran."

The school erupted into applause and cheers. I saw teachers choke tears, some with hands to their faces. Reagan wasn't even President two hours and he did what Carter couldn't for over a year.

My cynical friend, the one who watched me flirt with my blonde girlfriend sat aside me once again. This time she turned from the screen and looked right at me, and with a small nod back toward the TV and Reagan said, "Well, that's convenient."

What? What the hell was she talking about? Didn't she hear the guy? The hostages were on their way back home. Reagan did it! He did what he said he going to do and I told her I bet it was because those Iranians were afraid of him. They saw him as this Wild, Wild West Sheriff gunslinger that shot first and asked questions later.

They didn't respect Carter but they did Reagan—and they feared him.

Go Reagan!

I couldn't wait for my mom to get home from work and hear her thoughts around the dinner table. When we all sat down I asked her what she thought of Reagan getting the hostages freed.

She didn't launch into her usual rabid diatribe. Instead she smoked her cigarette and looked up at me and said, "You're not gonna think he's so great when he sends you off to war to die."

Shit. I wasn't expecting that answer.

"Just like Vietnam. I had friends who never came back. Well I am going to tell you something," she glared at me, pointing her index finger and cigarette at me simultaneously. She exhaled a blast of blue smoke.

"I will break your fucking legs before I ever let that sonofabitch send you to war. Got that?" She stared at me, her eyes locked with mine. I broke the staring contest and shrugged. I offered some kind of nervous laugh.

"Yeah," was all I said. Why was she so hateful about Reagan? The entire school and the teachers cheered for him today. What was her problem?

She went back eating and that was the end of the conversation.

I wanted to be a filmmaker and the best pathway I knew was college. I had been making films with a silent Super 8mm *Kodak* camera and was known as a local Spielberg. That wasn't going to walk me into a major studio so college was the best way.

This was the mid-80s and my high school guidance counselors had no idea in a way to help me. There were these giant catalogues in their cramped office and no Internet. At that time the choices for "film school" were limited to: NYU, USC, UCLA.

That would take money. A little digging into the massive college books in the guidance office revealed Penn State University had a film program. It was a state school. Maybe I could afford that and it wasn't all that far from home and not in a big city.

I had become a popular class president and social butterfly and graduation was not something I was looking forward to experiencing. I wanted to stay at Stroudsburg High School forever.

I worked my way through the dreaded “financial aid” forms and brought them home for the parents to fill out. My mother knew it was coming but resented it all the same.

The “FAFSA” was a giant pink form that asked your whole financial history as you laid out your case for federal assistance to go to college. The forms got filled out and sent in and the waiting part began by the middle of my junior year.

I was accepted to Penn State and I had a choice between Main Campus and a satellite. The scared part of me leaned toward the Hazelton campus. It was just a little over an hour from home, and my logic was that I had to transfer to Main Campus after two years anyway. Might as well acclimate myself to the college life on a smaller campus before getting lost in the masses of Main.

The federal government responded on financial assistance eligibility and I could tell by my mother’s face as she read the response that it wasn’t good. When she put the letter on the table I sat beside her and just asked, “What?”

“Well, according to Ronald Reagan, our family is too rich to qualify for financial aid.” She was pissed.

Reagan had announced cuts to student loans and financial assistance, citing large numbers of college kids using the loans for anything but paying tuition. He said kids were buying cars, clothes, trips and not using the funds for their intended purpose.

It was a lot of static that I didn't understand, but the bottom line was paying for college was not going to be easy and there was no guarantee I would get through all four years without some kind of major financial plan.

My mother went on another "Fucking Reagan" tirade. By 1985 things were shaping up for a possible US intervention in Central America, and she reminded me of her leg-breaking policy should the draft return.

That leads me into The Selective Service Act that came roaring back and dragged with it the ghost of Vietnam. My mother saw it as a precursor for re-instating The Draft and now her fears of me being sent to fight some foreign war were confirmed.

I had to register my junior year and she accompanied me to the local post office just off our withering Main Street. She walked into the massive, World I era building and up to the main windows where a nice lady greeted her with a smile.

"I'm here for the death warrant Ronald Reagan has placed on my son," she said with not a trace of humor in her voice. I rolled my eyes, wanting to slink away.

"Selective Service form," I interpreted.

The woman smiled, nodded and got me one of the post card-sized forms. My mother seethed as I filled it out and handed it back to the postmaster.

"Fucking Reagan," she hissed.

Something else was happening at this time.

Our town was undergoing an invasion.

The Pocono Mountains were known since the 60s as "The Honeymoon Capital of the World." We were a vacation destination and close weekend trip for New York and New Jersey

and until the 1950s, it took at least three hours to get from those states to Poconos destination spots.

The Catskills were the big vacation place but then resorts started popping up in The Poconos and they were built around skiing and boating. It was a close getaway and cheaper than the New York spots.

Then Eisenhower brought about the construction of the massive highway system that would crosscut the country. One of those east bound highways, Route 80, would cut right through Stroudsburg and it would incoming from New York and New Jersey.

What once took over three hours via Route One from those states to ours was now reduced to a 90 minute drive.

Tourism exploded. Resorts went up with champagne tower and heart-shaped bathtubs. Tennis, skiing, amusement parks...it helped to turn Stroudsburg into a Boom Town as Stroudsburg was labeled by The Pocono Mountain Vacation Bureau as "The Gateway to the Poconos."

Our little slice of heaven was so beautiful and now so convenient that a number of vacationers saw the 90 minute drive as not so much of a commute from the cities. Over time as we crept toward the 80s, those vacation homes became permanent residences.

Then the developments and planned communities started and the Pocono region went into capitalistic overdrive.

New home builders popped up almost as if overnight. They also disappeared as fast because it didn't take long for these "Citiotis" (as builders and some locals started calling the transplants) to be ripped off with substandard construction, inflated building costs and subprime mortgages that would eventually contribute to the 2008 housing bubble pop and collapse.

It was The Reagan 80s and the mantra “Greed Is Good” fused with consume, consume, consume. The mall expanded, adding four new movie theaters and a food court as well as *Sears* coming in as a new anchor store.

The Stroudsburg Class of 1985 was the last to go through the school before major expansion renovations commenced the summer after we left. Today the campus is virtually unrecognizable, but Stroudsburg High and the surrounding town came out the least scathed by The New York-New Jersey Invasion.

A rival high school, Pocono Mountain, saw massive and sudden growth by the mid-80s. Enrollment shot up and the halls became crowded. This was a result of the Mount Pocono area having so much developable land whereas the Stroudsburg area was zoned and built up and had more resistance to the wave of home builders trying to fill up every green patch and field they could.

Planned and gated communities proliferated, spreading like cancer cells throughout Mount Pocono-Tobyhanna areas. You could drive in New York City and New Jersey to see billboards advertising a perfect way of life in The Poconos. Those billboards might as well have said: “Consume.” “Reproduce.” “Buy.”

Pocono Mountain High School would become so inundated by The Invasion they would split into a new campus, Pocono Mountain West, by the early 1990s.

New York stations aired infomercials on how cheap land was in The Poconos with their nice, empty schools and...low taxes.

The first wave of The Invasion started in the early 80s and a few kids with those Jersey and New York accents popped up in our school and my graduating class. They were seen as

curious things...a little alien...amusing even as we busted on the way they said “water, garbage, Long Island, New York” and on.

By the close of the 80s, the second wave of the The Invasion ramped up. Housing infiltrated areas previously thought to be “too far” from Route 80. This extended out to an area we called “The West End.” We sophisticated Stroudsburg folk thought his area of rolling farmland and fields was reserved for the redneck hayseeds we would torment when their high school football team would play ours.

We joked that the West End football players dated and impregnated their sisters and first cousins on the cheerleading squad and wore shit kickers onto the field. The jokes went on and on. It was such an ignominious title to be a “West Ender” that when I met girl from there at the movie theater I worked in high school, I had to lie to my Stroudsburg friends that she was from Pocono Mountain.

I didn’t want to be seen as dating a rube hayseed from “The West End.” A popular joke about their end of summer fair throughout high school was: “What’s a mile long and has six teeth?”

The answer: “The funnel cake line at The West End Fair.”

The housing expansion didn’t discriminate. Empty fields started to fill up as the housing industry and builders swarmed out that way. This was a good 30 miles from Route 80, but that didn’t discourage the Urban Wave.

They were not just among us, they were dominating.

While The Invasion expanded throughout the 80s, something else contaminated our little town. Downtown was a place you could walk and feel safe. Crime was overall unheard of and usually relegated to some drunken horseshit outside one of the pubs in rare, isolated incidences.

As kids, we walked up and down Main Street never worried about being mugged or accosted let alone kidnapped. There were no weirdoes on the sidewalks or sitting in back alleys. If there were, we never saw them. That's how few, if any, there.

Then the homeless appeared. It started with a few panhandlers but by the start of the 1990s the destitute and mentally ill were shuffling the downtown sidewalks asking for money, crying, mumbling and shouting.

The 80s ended with one homeless man murdering and decapitating another right down by our post office.

Something was going on, and it had been coming for some time.

Down Town changed as the New York population shaped Main Street into a college town and mini Times Square. A condom shop, complete with squiggly sperm painted on the windows replaced the once top of the line formal attire clothier where I got my prom tux.

*The Sherman* theater closed up shop and across the bridge the old time *Grand Theater* where I saw *Jaws* with mother back in 1975 became a porn house.

Low level party bars took over from the classier pubs and food spots. Cigarettes and cheap alcohol quarter stores cut into the now gone *Pizza House* and catered to a more low income clientele.

Two local banks closed up. Clothing stores went away, leaving empty buildings. Some chain retailers came in like *Benneton* and a few more bars popped in.

Homeless were now in Courthouse Square, sleeping in the courthouse parking deck and under the bridges that took you into and out of Stroudsburg in tent villages. Some nights you could see their burning barrel fires way down there as you crossed over into East Stroudsburg.

What was happening?

Reagan left office in 1989 and Reagan-Lite George HW Bush took over to give us four more years of Reaganomics (The very economics he once called “Voodoo Economics”).

Stroudsburg had changed...and not for the better. The problem was, the whole country seemed to be going that way. Homelessness was a national crisis.

As the 80s ended we found out that Reagan’s miracle of getting the hostages released hours after taking office was likely tied to a bigger “arms for hostages” deal that would translate into an “October Surprise” designed to prevent Jimmy Carter from getting the hostages free and a second term.

We found out that the rich got richer and while they benefitted from the terrific tax breaks from the Reagan Administration (which fostered relocation of American business overseas to avoid taxes), the homeless situation seemed tied to the ignored AIDS epidemic and the early 80s closure of mental facilities and shelters due to “budget cuts.”

Then we found out that the hero of New York, Mayor Rudy Giuliani, made his homeless problems vanish by packing homeless onto buses and into vans with one way tickets and a few bucks in pockets--shipping them out to distant suburban locales.

The Poconos were one of those locations. Our Stroudsburg homeless problem wasn’t a local one. It was a New York one and it had been imported into our town while Giuliani reaped national praise for curing his city’s homeless problem and cleaning up Times Square.

By the early 2000s you couldn't walk down Main Street Stroudsburg without encountering a homeless person. They came and they stayed.

To be fair, Giuliani wasn't the first to try this and I will lay that out later.

Before it sounds like I am some kind of effete, ignorant monster, let me provide context. To do that I have to go back to high school.

Social Studies (formerly known as history) became "Senior Social" for our senior year. The teacher was a popular assistant football coach in addition to a card-carrying Reagan Republican.

Reagan won re-election in a bigger landslide in 1984 and proclaimed that his "Trickle Down" economics dispelled the economic malaise of The Carter Years and it was "Morning Again In America."<sup>1</sup>

My teacher smugly stood at the front of the room, one leg up on the desk, showing off his balls package in his tight slacks and expounded on the greatness of "Trickle Down Economics."

Before I go further, let me say something for the good of the order. I was a successful and popular class president. I was elected at the end of my tenth grade year and through my junior and senior years we raised large amounts of money laundering money we made from large beer parties through our class account and fake receipts.

My speeches were modeled on Ronald Reagan's. When it came time for re-election I stole Reagan's 1984 banner "Stay the Course" and urged my classmates to do the same.

They did and all four of us officers were reinstated for a final senior year term.

I studied Reagan. I listened to how he spoke. I parodied him with love, to the point that another popular guy and class Adonis copied me and adopted Reagan's voice for comedic effect.

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<sup>1</sup> To this day I proclaim Reagan's "Morning Again in America" TV ad as the best political ad ever created. There is no argument against it. If I had been Walter Mondale at that time, I would have quit after seeing that ad. You can't beat it.

We aped Reagan's penchant for starting many sentences or responses with "Well..." and how he bobbed his head and offered those "Aww shucks" smiles to the press.

Some kids had pictures of Reagan taped to notebooks or inside lockers. Many watched his press conferences and we talked the next day in class about the time he told Helen Thomas, a particularly fact-picking journalist to shut the hell up.

My mother was worried I would become a Republican, much like Michael J. Fox's Alex Keaton in *Family Ties*.

I didn't know much about Reagan politically, but as a character, I loved him. He was funny, he exuded Presidential authority, he made the press laugh and he knew how to work a crowd.

I needed those things to go from an introverted horror movie nerd to a popular John Hughes movie class president who got invited to the best parties with the elite of our class.

Some said I sold out.

We will get to that.

On the flipside, sitting in Senior Social, I listened to my teacher exalt Reagan's economic policies. When I asked to him explain "Trickle Down Economics" he was happy to do it with a touch of smiling condescension.

He said the real term should be "Supply Side Economics." For sake of argument, "Trickle Down Economics" referred to economic policies that disproportionately favored the upper tier of the economic spectrum--the wealthy and large businesses. The idea was that spending by this group will "trickle down" to those less fortunate in the form of stronger economic growth.

The rich will help us by being rich and spending like rich which in turn helps out business, consumption , production and so and so on.

I thought about it because it didn't make much sense to me. "It sounds more like scraps from the table," I told him.

He flashed his *Pepsodent* toothy smile and shook his head that said, "Oh kid...you just don't get it."

His answer was harsher. "That's because you're 17 and stupid," he told me in front of the entire class.

It was gonna be like that, was it? I brought up my recent rejection for federal loans and wondering how anything was going to trickle down to help me pay for college since the government declared my family too wealthy for financial aid.

He shrugged, that insipid grin still on his face, and offered up "What can I tell ya" hands. "Don't know what to say about that, Smith."

He went on to praise Reagan's economic policies while I thought about the homeless appearing downtown and across the country.

While not real news, *HBO* ran a relatively popular comedy sketch series called *Not Necessarily the News*, which was an American version of a British comedy news satire, *Not the Nine O'Clock News*.

They ran a skit around 1983 that was pretty clever the more I thought about it. They made a video that compiled footage from The Great Depression. That footage consisted of soup kitchen lines, long unemployment lines and homeless along with migrants traveling the Dust Bowl for work.

The editors cut all of this with present day footage of similar images: homeless sleeping on city sidewalks, drug addicts, mentally ill wandering the streets, screaming in parks, unemployed people outside job finding and welfare offices.

It was all cut to the Depression Era song, “Everything Old Is New Again.” To top it off they cut in footage of Ronald and Nancy Reagan dancing at their opulent Inaugural Balls in expensive clothing and jewelry in front of an audience of elites, superstars and businessmen.

I got it and I think that video fueled the challenge I threw at my Senior Social teacher.

The 1980s came to an end, but just before they did, in that election year of 1988, horror master, John Carpenter—a filmmaker who inspired me and one I studied with every resource available, made a small, low budget indie sci-fi thriller called *They Live*.

I tried to catch everything Carpenter did in the theater. I was one of maybe twelve people who sat enthralled in a dark theater watching *The Thing* in 1982. I returned to the theater in '88 for *They Live*.

It was like putting on the sunglasses for real. I got what he was saying because I saw it happening around me. While I felt the ending seemed rushed and maybe even chopped up, I liked it and the message was clear and strong.

We were living *They Live* right now. It had been happening for a long time and I watched it unfold on a very local level with the decay of our Main Street downtown and the out of state consumption invasions that brought similar images that played up on that big screen.

Our town was being run by the local business and resort owners under the umbrella of the elite vacation bureau and home builder associations. They were fleecing The Poconos and in my view, running them into the ground. All for their enrichment.

We continue to live it and the recent “Let them eat cake,” influencer viral video kicked off a small reaction to it. We have a few who can see. The number needs to grow exponentially.

The alien elite are here. They are us.

We don't need David Grusch and Congressional hearings to tell us that. They're sucking the resources from this planet, and maybe that's why they are hell bent on developing space exploration...so they can move on to the planet.

The time has come for everyone to put on the glasses and see things for what they are. We have been marginalized, divided and distracted. The 80s told us to reproduce and consume and the endless capitalistic high would go on forever.

Now the malls, which dispensed the drugs, have gone dark and empty, withered in the same way they did to downtowns and small businesses across the nation decades before.

The search for the next high...that dopamine rush from buying and consuming isn't giving us the stylized happiness we once worshipped and were told to pursue through the 80s decade of excess. We are finding out there are limits.

I am no socialist. I am no communist. I am neither conservative nor liberal. I am neither Republican nor Democrat.

I am all for capitalism, but I am also for responsible capitalism as we approach the advent of the world's first trillionaire while millions each day can't keep the lights on or afford a home or lose theirs while not having basic health care and 1% of the world's population controls 99% of its wealth and resources.

The scraps from the table have gotten pretty meager since I sparred with my Senior Social teacher forty years ago. They seem more like crumbs.

Maybe they always were.

B Harrison Smith, May 2024