


# Scene



## AFTER DARK

Hurrah for  
J. Harrod's

## GIZMO

All this Web TV stuff...  
Is it for real?

## TUNE IN

What music makes  
for great romance?  
Jeffrey Lee is on the case

# FLYNT

The power of dirty pictures took him from  
Eastern Kentucky to Beverly Hills,  
and now his life is a Hollywood movie

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**ARRY CLAXTON FLYNT** is by some estimates the dirtiest man Kentucky has ever unleashed upon an unsuspecting world. But he certainly cleans up well. So well that he has a sheen about him. His head, which seems oversized for his body, actually shines. His face is smooth, soft, almost cherubic. The impression of softness is underlined by his voice, a subdued monotone.

"In the beginning," he says, "I used to think one person could make a difference. Now, I'm not so sure."

A new book and movie are dedicated to the proposition that one person can make a difference — that even a self-described scumbag and smut-peddler can make the Supreme

Court of the United States pay attention.

Flynt is 54, confined to a wheelchair since being shot nearly 19 years ago.

Flynt may even be slouching toward a kind of ragged respectability. From a 10-story office building in Beverly Hills, he publishes *Hustler* and 29 other magazines, some about sex, some about computers, boats and music. He is the subject of a movie wherein the operative F-word is "First," as in Amendment.

At the moment, he is ensconced in the leather seat of a white stretch limousine. His gold-plated wheelchair rests in the trunk. The limo is speeding across Cincinnati, a city whose own civic sheen, high-minded and moralistic, once bored in on Flynt like a laser beam. Twenty years ago, a Cincinnati judge sentenced Flynt to prison on obscenity charges. He spent six days behind bars; his conviction was overturned on appeal.

In a somewhat triumphant but low-key return, he attended the screening of "The People vs. Larry Flynt" this week. He rolled into the suburban theater on a red carpet, with a phalanx of bodyguards. Beside Flynt was his brother, Jimmy, who later confided some unease.

"When I think of Cincinnati," he said, "I have an insecure, almost look-over-your-shoulder feeling. . . . You get a Gestapo-type feeling. . . . It kind of scares me a little bit."

There was nothing scary in the theater. A friendly audience greeted Larry Flynt, who said: "I wanna innerduce you to the man who played me absolutely fantastic in the movie — Woody Harrelson."

"They looked around Hollywood long enough until they found the most white-trash actor they could find," said Harrelson, who had once mused: "Why would anybody want to make a movie about Larry Flynt's life?"

Because it's been an interesting life. And because the director, Milos Forman, having both fascism and communism in Czechoslovakia, brings an unusual sensitivity to the notion that free speech is fragile. "The hero of the movie," he recently declared, "is the Supreme Court."

"Because we've never been raised in a totalitarian regime, we have a tendency to take things like the First Amendment for granted," Flynt says, "and that sort of apathy is very unhappy for a nation."

**NOW, 14 HOURS** after the movie, on a bright cold day, Flynt is headed to a bookstore to sign his autobiography, "An Unseemly Man." (In the cover photo, he looks alarmingly like Rush Limbaugh — plump, confident and about to break into one of those world-is-my-oyster smiles.) Flynt may be an unseemly man, but he is, he says, a happy one.

"I spent so many years in chronic pain having to take painkillers. . . . Finally when I got rid of my pain five years ago (through laser surgery), it just seemed like I had a new lease on life. Other than not being able to use my legs today, I feel better than I have ever felt in my life."

Flynt looks exceedingly at home in the limo. "I have a limo in Los Angeles," he says, "but . . . I use the Bentley most of the time."

His first car, he says with a nostalgic smile, was "a 1951 Ford, stick shift, with overdrive." He used it to run bootleg whiskey around Magoffin County, Ky., when he was 16.

"Magoffin County was very poor," he says. "The biggest



People wait in line at Borders Bookstore in Cincinnati to have Larry Flynt sign copies of his autobiography "An Unseemly Man."

# IN THE LIMO WITH LARRY



Pornographer, patriot and pariah Larry Flynt returns to an old haunt

By C. RAY HALL  
The Courier-Journal

industry was jury duty. . . . We didn't even have coal mines."

Nowadays, Flynt travels by limo, and the only contraband in sight is a Cuban cigar.

"I used to smoke Cohibas," he says, "but they're \$40 apiece. This is \$2.50 and just as good."

The smoke drifts toward his fiancée of five years, Liz Berrios. They met six years ago, when she became his nurse. With an indulgent but irritated smile, she waves the smoke away, toward a placard reading, "Thank You For Not Smoking."

It is a complex relationship, apparently. Around his neck, Flynt wears an Olympic-sized medallion saying #1. It was a gift from his late wife, Althea. To all, even his fiancée, he declares her "the love of my life."

Althea, who drowned in the bathtub in 1987, is buried in Magoffin County, next to Flynt's mother.

"Althea was an orphan," he says. "I was really the only one that she had. So she was my wife and the love of my life. I felt it appropriate that she be buried in the Flynt cemetery,

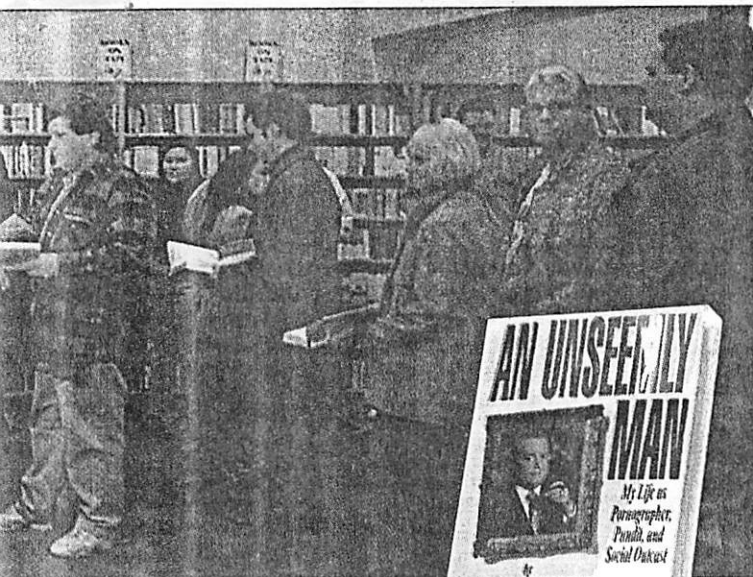
where I will eventually wind up someday."

**FLYNT IS, HE ALLOWS**, a sentimental man, and Eastern Kentucky is his favorite place on Earth. "I can't imagine ever living there again because of the scope of my business," he says, "but I always felt there was a unique wisdom that came out of those hills. People were very smart and very intuitive about life. They have their own simple philosophy, and I found them very compelling."

At 15, he lied about his age to join the Army. Booted from the service by a troop reduction, he joined the Navy two years later. Afterward, he bought his mother's bar in Dayton, Ohio, and changed its name to Hillbilly Haven. To enforce the peace in the roughhouse bar, he shot a man, slightly, and had to beat up a few others, not so slightly.

Ultimately he owned several bars in Ohio. He changed them to go-go bars, and called them *Hustler* clubs.

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PHOTOS BY SAM UPSHAW, THE COURIER-JOURNAL



## LARRY FLYNT'S LIFE AND TIMES

**1942** Born at home in Lakeville, Ky. (Magoffin County) on Nov. 1.

**1953** After parents' divorce, splits time between Kentucky home and Hamlet, Ind., home.

**1958** Drops out of school in the ninth grade and joins the Army, lying to get in, at age 15, but is soon released in a general troop reduction.

**1959** Works for \$1.15 an hour in an Ohio mattress factory, then \$1.35 an hour in a fireworks factory; runs bootleg whiskey in Kentucky.

**1960** Joins the Navy, again lying about his age (17), and becomes a radar technician on an aircraft carrier.



**1965** Tonya, first of Flynt's five children, is born; Flynt buys his mother's bar in Dayton, Ohio, and changes its name to Hillbilly Haven.

**1968** Opens the Hustler Club in Dayton; he eventually owns several go-go bars in Ohio.

**1974** Publishes first edition of Hustler magazine.

**1975** Prints nude photographs of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis in Hustler.

**1976** Marries Althea Leasure, "the love of my life."

**1977** Is sentenced to seven to 25 years on an obscenity conviction in Cincinnati; conviction overturned on appeal; Flynt moves Hustler offices from Columbus, Ohio, to Los Angeles; has a "born-again" experience and converts briefly to Christianity, with help from Ruth Carter Stapleton, sister of President Jimmy Carter.

**1978** Is shot and paralyzed during a lunch break at his obscenity trial in Lawrenceville, Ga.

**1983** Is sentenced to 15 months in federal prison for contempt of court; evangelist Jerry Falwell,



founder of the Moral Majority, sues Flynt for \$45 million over a Hustler magazine parody describing the preacher having drunken sex with his mother in an outhouse; Falwell is awarded \$200,000.

**1984** Mounts spurious campaign for president on a platform of ending sexual ignorance and venereal disease.

**1987** Wife Althea, drug-addicted and suffering from AIDS, drowns in bathtub.

**1988** U.S. Supreme Court reverses lower-court rulings, saying Falwell cannot recover damages from Flynt for emotional distress.

**1996** Flynt's autobiography, "An Unseemly Man," appears as his publishing empire grows to 30 magazines.

**1997** Movie "The People vs. Larry Flynt" opens nationally to general critical acclaim (Flynt plays the judge who sentenced Flynt to 25 years in prison).



Left, Althea Leasure stands by Larry Flynt, who was shot and paralyzed during a lunch break at his obscenity trial in Lawrenceville, Ga. Flynt, right, plays the judge in "The People vs. Larry Flynt."

"I could sell more nude photographs of Hillary Clinton than I could Cindy Crawford," Larry Flynt recently told National Public Radio. "It's the status symbol, the icon that they're buying."

Which gives rise to a question. Who is the one person Flynt would most like to see naked?

"Well, Hillary Clinton or Princess Di. It has nothing to do with sex appeal. It has everything to do with the sensationalism of the celebrity."

# IN THE LIMO WITH LARRY

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"We had all these women working for us," says Jimmy Flynt. "Neither one of us was exactly Don Juan, the tall, dark, handsome gentleman. We were just a couple of red-headed guys from Eastern Kentucky."

Larry Flynt started a club newsletter that became Hustler magazine in 1974. Dismissed by Screw magazine as the most boring publication in America except for Refrigerator Monthly, Hustler flourished toward oblivion. Then in 1975, Flynt paid a spy photographer \$18,000 for nude photos of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis. They ensured Hustler magazine's survival.

Eventually, Larry Flynt moved the magazine from Columbus, Ohio, to Los Angeles (celebrated in the movie as "a place more friendly to perverts").

His brother Jimmy, who has run the magazine during Larry's down times (prison, his addiction to painkillers) and who now works in marketing and promotion, lives in both worlds — Kentucky and California.

"People in Eastern Kentucky, when I'm in California, they think it's just one massive orgy, all we do is party with all these women," he says.

"I mean, there's no women around. We've got a studio in Mexico, a studio in L.A., but we never see the women. . . . We never see 'em till they come out in some kind of (photo) edit. It's this very conservative company out there; Larry requires everybody to wear suits and ties; the decor is very conservative. There's no naked women running around."

(We will pause now to reflect on a slight irony: Larry Flynt, free-speech champion, enforcing a dress code.)

**FLYNT IS NOT THE FIRST** Beverly Hillbilly, but he may be the foremost — the one who discovered, if you'll excuse the expression, pink gold.

"I've always felt, and the guys I grew up with and knew in the Navy felt, that the genitalia is the most erotic part of the female body, and that's what men wanted to see," he says.

This is not the kind of brilliant revelation that gets a man invited to speak at Harvard (although Flynt did speak there, in another context). Practically every man knows this. But Flynt is the one who acted on it. Bob Guccione of Penthouse introduced a new blatancy to men's magazines — pubic hair — forcing Playboy to more realistic depictions of female nudity. But Flynt's magazine crossed the final frontier into the realm of the gynecological. Nothing, as the saying goes, was left to the imagination.

Nothing was left unscorched, either. Flynt's magazine was, and is, a fount of insensitivity. It has made fun of blacks, Jews, women, feminists, homosexuals and amputees. It has depicted interracial sex and interspecies sex. It has made light of child molesting. The February



BY SAM UPSHAW, THE COURIER-JOURNAL



Left, actor Woody Harrelson, who plays the Hustler publisher in "The People vs. Larry Flynt," arrives for the screening with Kentucky teacher Donna Cockrel, who teaches at Simpsonville Elementary School. Above, Harrelson appears with Courtney Love (Allthea) in a scene from the movie.

issue has several entries on scatology.

Generally, nothing has been sacred. Except for that one time.

Jimmy Flynt remembers: "I was in Vail, Colo., on a skiing trip, and I turned on 'Good Morning, America,' and it came across there. 'Larry Flynt becomes born again.'"

"I thought, 'Oh . . . what's he doing now?'"

Through his friend, Ruth Carter Stapleton, Larry Flynt had become a Christian (albeit briefly, it turned out).

"I grew up believing there must be a God," he says. "I grew up in a Christian culture. I wasn't really committed to it until I had my born-again experience. But I'm thankful I got over that . . ."

"I've always questioned everything, authority in religion and politics. I questioned what had happened to me and I sought professional help. . . . I feel it's very simple: There was a chemical imbalance in the brain that was part of one of my manic-depressive episodes.

"I think if all those born-againers would just take a little lithium, they'd be fine. The visions would go away and the voices would disappear."

After his brief conversion, Flynt says, he returned to atheism.

"I today feel that life is very much like an assembly line. At some point you get on and at some point you fall off."

Even if life is like an assembly line, the parts have a peculiar talent: to think and wonder. When you're a pornographer for nearly half your life, do you learn something about men and women that eludes other folks?

"I think I've learned a great deal," he says. "Women are . . . much different than men, much more insightful, in many ways much more compassionate, and much more complex, even in their sexuality. . . ."

"I don't think the large majority of women are bothered that men see them as a sex symbol. I think they accept that

and understand it. . . ."

"To men, sex and love are two different things. To women, for the most part, sex and love are joined in one."

**SEVENTY-FIVE BOOKS** sell out quickly at the Borders Bookstore, leaving Flynt autographing magazines and slips of paper. But Cincinnati is still not Flynt-friendly. It's easier to buy a Hustler magazine in Salyersville than in Cincinnati:

Flynt says he hopes to change this, even if he has to come back and sell the magazine on the street corner. (His old nemesis, prosecutor Simon Leis, is the sheriff now, so one has images of a showdown, with Flynt flashing his magazines and Leis flashing a subpoena.) Flynt says he has no nostalgia for the old days of courtroom battles, though.

"Life was hell then," he says. "People see the movie and see my odd and bizarre behavior in the courtroom. You've got to understand by that point I'd been shot, paralyzed. I was in chronic pain. I just took the attitude, 'What can they do to me now but kill me?'"

Now, he does care. Enough to wonder about his place in history.

"I think that we all, regardless of how significant, would like to leave some footprints," he says.

Invited to imagine the first paragraph of his eventual obituary in The New York Times, Flynt muses. . . .

"Maybe . . . 'He outraged the nation . . . and made some significant change.'"

Later on, he adds: "One thing for sure. Much of the stuff you see, especially on cable TV today, is as explicit as what we were publishing in Hustler in the beginning. I do feel I helped advance the parameters of free speech."

## The preacher and the pornographer

Campari, an Italian maker of liqueur, once ran a series of magazine advertisements in which celebrities described their "first time." (The first time they drank Campari.)

In late 1983, Hustler magazine concocted a parody advertisement in which the Rev. Jerry Falwell ostensibly described his "first time." The ad, which was labeled "parody, not to be taken seriously," alleged that a drunken Falwell lost his virginity to his mother in an outhouse.

Falwell, founder of the Moral Majority, sued for \$45 million. A lower court awarded him \$200,000 for emotional distress. "The court wanted me to pay for hurting his feelings," says Larry Flynt, owner of Hustler magazine. He appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, gathering support from mainstream media.

Roy Moore, a lawyer and professor who teaches press law at the University of Kentucky, uses the case in class.

"I show the students a copy of the parody and they're just shocked, particularly when they read it's basically saying Jerry Falwell lost his virginity by having sex with his mother in the outhouse," Moore says. "That's pretty shocking. And initially, their reaction is, 'How in the world can somebody get away with this?' They're absolutely sure that the Supreme Court must have decided in Falwell's favor.



Rev. Jerry Falwell

"I explain to them that, first of all, Falwell is a public figure; Falwell himself has attacked other individuals, perhaps not in that same fashion, but certainly he's been pretty strong and some would say vicious in his own attacks on other people."

In February 1988, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled unanimously that Flynt's magazine had the right to lampoon Falwell thusly.

The public-relations apparatus fueling Flynt's biography, "An Unseemly Man," and the movie, "The People vs. Larry Flynt," cite this decision as momentous.

"Obviously, in attempting to sell this movie and book, they're going to hype it and make it sound like the most important case ever decided by the Supreme Court, which is certainly not the situation," Moore says.

"But it certainly is among the cases that demonstrate how broad our First Amendment rights are. . . . It demonstrated how far an individual could go in effect criticizing, making fun of, satirizing . . . a public figure.

"Flynt, if you give him credit for anything, has never been afraid to see how far the protections of the First Amendment go, how broad it really is, and I think he deserves credit for that."

— C. Ray Hall, The Courier-Journal

## The avid Kennedy-watcher

Larry Flynt published nude photos of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis. But that's not the extent of his Kennedy-watching.

"I grew up with (John F.) Kennedy, and I admired him a lot," Flynt says. "I'm really hoping John Jr. will seek a political career and try to play out some of the vision that his father had. Al D'Amato in New York is not very popular. I think he could have that Senate seat."

Flynt was 21 when Kennedy was assassinated. Did that event change him?

"I became extremely disenchanted after that. I don't think my faith ever got restored in politics. He had his flaws, like we all do, but he seemed to give the country a new sense of purpose, and more people seemed to be willing to participate."



John F. Kennedy Jr.