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# 1980S

## Redux



Starlight memories of the go-go days.

BY OLIVIA GUNN

It's a Saturday night in 1985. In his weekend best pulled together from Material Objects, 25-year-old Sid Tripp locks the door of his Exchange Street apartment at the Old Port Arms and heads down to see what the rest of Portland has been doing since Friday.



The golden age of Three Dollar Dewey's, according to Sid Tripp—back when it was on Fore Street, not Commercial.



## Stevie Nicks @ the Civic Center!

### From *BILLBOARD* Magazine's Boxscores:

The 28th show on The Wild Heart Tour  
September 8, 1983, Portland, Maine  
Venue: Cumberland County Civic Center  
Headliner: Stevie Nicks  
Opening Act: Joe Walsh  
Produced by: Frank J. Russo  
Ticket Price: \$12.50  
Available Tickets: 9,415  
Tickets Sold: SELLOUT  
Concert Gross: \$117,687

## Funny Gal

Portland's comedic actress Andrea Martin got her start on SCTV in the '70s and is still a force in film (*My Big Fat Greek Wedding*) and on stage, where she won a Tony award for her role in *Pippin* in 2013.



## Bad News Bears

Here's a painful blast from the past: On January 26, 1986, in New Orleans, the New England Patriots—led by Tony Eason & Steve Grogan—lost Super Bowl XX to the Chicago Bears—led by Jim McMahon (above) and Refrigerator Perry. The score? 46-10. The Bears added insult to injury by recording "*The Superbowl Shuffle*," which turned into a sleeper hit and Grammy nominee.



"We went out almost every night of the week," Sid says during our interview in his West End townhouse. "Sunday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday. On Monday we'd do laundry. Wednesdays we'd stay home to watch *Dynasty*..."



Sid is a graduate of the University of Maine who, like many of his friends, made a bee-line for Portland after graduation. He first took a job at F. Parker Reidy's, where you could go for a great steak. Today, Sonny's sits in its place.

It wasn't long before Sid was working on Congress at an advertising agency, making more money than a 20-something knew what to do with, and simply going out on the town.

"We all had full-time jobs. And we'd be out until one, two in the morning. We'd be drinking all day. Drinks were cheap, food was cheap."

## HOT SPOT

For their first stop, Sid's group, which from what I can gather was *the* group, would first head downstairs and hit HuShang on Exchange Street for appetizers.

The Szechuan- and Hunan-style restaurant originated on Congress and was owned by the Ng brothers, Ken and Henry. With a line outside every night, Eddie Fitzpatrick, former editor of the *Maine Sunday Telegram* once told *Portland Magazine* it was "...

the first good Chinese restaurant in Portland. Ken Ng had the ability to remember names. You'd dine there and then go back a year later, and he'd call you by name. HuShang was always full."

Susan Hellier, who arrived in Portland in 1981, tended bar there after having worked her way up the ranks in Ken Ng's troops.

"I started as a dishwasher [at the Congress Street location], and I'd get stoned every day between work. I'd leave one job, go behind the dumpster, take a couple hits of a joint, get into my overalls and do dishes at HuShang." She sighs. "HuShang. I'm sorry you missed it."

Though Sue would one day manage the Lewiston location, she laughs at the thought of her first promotion. "I wanted to bus tables, but Ken said, 'No. You are number one dish girl. Plus, you don't dress good.'"

After a promise of finding another supreme dishwasher and taking a comb to her curly hair, Sue was promoted to bussing at the second HuShang on Brown Street, where she eventually became a server before tending bar on Exchange.

"Oh, Sue poured me thousands of drinks," says Sid at the mention of her name.

## LURE OF THE BRIGHT LIGHTS

Sue first came to Portland when she was 21 years old, for a house-sitting job and a helluva good time as promised by a friend from

# A visit from Arnold Palmer

Orono. "I was going to go to Boston, but Julie said, 'It's going to cost us 70 bucks a month to live in Portland between the three of us.' You say 'yes' to that."

But when the girls arrived, the woman they were to house-sit for had postponed her trip—leaving them no job, nowhere to live, but a future wide open.

They rented a room at the Eastland Hotel, which in Sue's words was the skeevi-est place in the '80s. "It was a lot of people just moving through. When you flushed the toilet, it sounded like the room had exploded." Even so, her eyes light up talking about the summer it all began.

## THE WAY IT WAS

As Sue would pour to the sounds of DJ Kris Clark, Sid and friends would decide whether to stay or move on to Squire Morgan's for free chicken wings and then to Moose Al-



Comedian George Hamm working the door at Three Dollar Dewey's in his salad days.

ley or Kayo's for one of the many live bands Portland had to offer.

"You could go anywhere and see friends of yours playing," says Sue. "All of my friends at the time were musicians. Charlie Brown, he was an amazing keyboardist, he had a band called Vito and The Groove Kings." She stops to make a mental checklist. "The Clouds, Buffalo Chip Tea. See, now I'm going to forget someone's band and they're going to be pissed."

If you were truly *in* the music scene, you might find yourself at a tiny hole in the wall on Brown Street called Geno's.

"You had to know somebody to get in, and if they didn't know you, you'd have to say who you were with," says Sid. "Punk rock had a home there at that point—the really early punk rock."

Sid adds a fun fact. "Where they are now used to be a porn theater. The State Theater was a porn place, too."

Wait—according to Google Maps, the city had two porno spots 230 feet apart. Does that mean Portlanders only had two dirty movie houses to choose from?

## ART-HOUSE HEAVEN

Obviously, pornography wasn't the only thing available in the cinemas. In 1980, Steve and Judy Halpert took over the Movies on Exchange, which offered independent, foreign, and documentary films to a town that craved it.

"There was a real need for it," says Steve. "There was a group of people who wanted to see those movies, so we could really do just about anything we wanted to do. There was no competition."

Films such as 1985's *Buddies*, said to be the first to tackle the topic of the AIDS pandemic, brought the Exchange Street audiences the same films that were current in New York and L.A. Portland welcomed films that touched on controversial subjects—and foreign films. The Halperts sought the "richer films with sophisticated characters."

"I came to the theater, and an hour early, they're lined up Exchange Street to see *The Seven Samurai*," Steve recalls. "I thought how starved people are—how many are lined up to see Kurosawa, and it's not even a new movie." [The Japanese classic dates to 1954.]

The Halperts ran the Movies for more than three decades.



Purpoock Golf Club, Cape Elizabeth, October 3-7, 1984. Arnold Palmer headlines a group of senior golf tour stars at the UnionMutual Seniors Golf Classic, including Don January, Billy Casper, and Doug Sanders. The event was the inspiration of [UNUM] president Colin C. Hampton, UNUM VP Bud Guthrie, and Maine golf great John Mills. Two years later, in September 1986, Palmer shot an eagle on the 16th hole to win the tournament and a \$38,000 first prize, with coverage by the *New York Times*. Palmer said his 65 in the opening round "put me in position" for the victory.

## High design...next to Portland Stage

**The Swan Dive** on Forest Avenue harks back to the smoky days when every decent place had its own matchbook.



# Live Music



## Kayo's

Shown during a 1981 performance at Kayo's on Middle Street in Portland, **Fashion Jungle** was one of several Portland bands embracing the punk aesthetic of "faster, louder, more fun." The short-lived original lineup of the band consisted of (from left) Doug Hubley, Mike Piscopo, Ken Reynolds, and Jim Sullivan.

## Geno's



Richard Julio, also known as Geets Romo, booked bands at Geno's from 1983 to 1993. That's at the *original* Geno's, 13 Brown Street, literally underground in the former Pickle Barrell Deli. Cover charge? "Two or three dollars," says Julio. Rent in Julio's record shop in the Mariner's Church on Fore Street? "\$75 a month." Bands he booked included The Brood (above), Chesterfield Kings, The Kopterz, The Del Fuegos, and BeBe Buell (below, a.k.a. Liv Tyler's mom). To hear BeBe at the mic singing "Normal Girl" visit: [bit.ly/NormalGirl](http://bit.ly/NormalGirl).



Before Styxx, there was the Underground. Photos from [facebook.com/pages/The-Underground-Portland-Maine](https://facebook.com/pages/The-Underground-Portland-Maine).

"Every six months, you could play *Casablanca* or *The Maltese Falcon*. You could still get an audience because there was no other source. You couldn't watch them on television, you couldn't rent them and take them home," says Steve. "The big, big change came when cable and videotape made these [films] readily accessible."

What may once have been a threat to movie theaters in Portland—video rentals—has had to face its own obsolescence. In recent weeks, Portland said goodbye to a long-standing landmark, Videoport. Owner Bill Duggan acknowledged online streaming and a changing market as contributions to the closure.

Movies on Exchange survives in the form of PMA Movies at the Portland Museum of Art, where Steve runs the weekend screenings. And today you can find 18,000 former Videoport relics available to rent at the Portland Public Library.

## FINISHING OUT THE NIGHT

By 11:30 p.m., Sid Tripp and his crew would have been making their way down to the place close to all of their hearts, Three Dollar Deweys.

Deweys wasn't at its current spot on Commercial Street then. Once upon a time, at the spot where the nightclub Pearl sits today, Three Dollar Deweys was the place to be if you were anyone in Portland...

"We'd always try to make it there before 11 o'clock, because there'd be a line out the door," Sid says.

He describes a bar we all hope to know

at one point during our drinking years. Cheesy maybe, but it *was* the place where everybody knew your name. And if no one knew your address, they could send your post to Deweys.

"Do you know the old Deweys?" Sue asks me over a beer at Sonny's. I shake my head. "Oh, my God," she says. "Deweys was awesome. It was all benches. You were forced to sit next to people you didn't really know."

## SIRI, TAKE ME TO MEMORY LANE

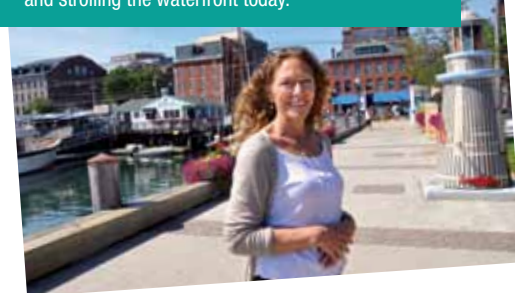
"It was *Cheers* before *Cheers*," says Sandy Flanagan, a bright, warm woman with red hair to match. She's brought out a giant scrapbook created by Dewey's regular Roland Waddington Jr., who'd visit every Saturday and sit at the back table and hold court.

"He was kind, wonderful, interesting, and he loved people. Roland drew everyone together." The book is filled with pictures of Roland's friends, postcards, newspaper clippings—and not a single selfie.

She points out a note written on a napkin from local writer Al Diamon, promising to bring Roland back a bottle from England.



Susan Hellier then & now: partying in the '80s (above) and strolling the waterfront today.



Sandy flips through the pages, inviting me into a warm, friendly, bygone bar to meet the likes of Manny Verzosa, Claude Von Schmutz, even *Breakfast Club* star Judd Nelson. Also floating in: rockers like Tom



Greetings from Maine! An unusual 1980s postcard.

Petty, Metallica, and a kilt-wearing French artist who'd left his goose farm behind for a new start in Portland.

Deweys was opened by a man named Alan Eames, who Sandy describes as a brilliant shyster.

"He made up these fantastic stories," Sandy laughs. "This is the story. I know it's not true, he'd say. Or, 'This is all a lie.'" She grins. "Three Dollar Deweys came from the Gold Rush. It was the name of a bar whose house. One dollar lookee, two dollar touchy, three dollar dewey. Completely made up by Alan Eames."

Though Eames was the owner and mastermind behind Portland's favorite bar, he wasn't often seen there. Sandy says Eames would come in, clean, make chili, and return upstairs to his loft and hit his punching bag. That is until one Sunday morning a U-Haul pulled up front of the bar. "He left Portland with a U-Haul, basically escaping."


[Eames ended up in Brattleboro, opened another bar, and became known as the Beer King. He died at age 59 in 2007.]

The Eames-era Deweys was filled with welcoming faces. "The employees ran the place. And that's what was so good about it. People trusted one another, people were



At left: *Portland Monthly Magazine's* premiere issue—April 1986—set a newsstand record with 70.1-percent sell-through. Right: The July 1986 cover poked gentle fun by wrapping fish in the *Press Herald*.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: JEFF STANTON; COURTESY SUSAN HELLIER; MEAGHAN MAURICE; FILE PHOTOS; NINA FULLER; THE BROOD; COURTESY GEETS ROMO



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## ZEITGEIST

kind to one another. There were so many artists. They worked there, hung out there.”

Musician Manny Verzosa was a name most everyone knew. He’s described as a “rising star” in a worn *Press Herald* clipping Sandy proffers. Manny died in a car accident at 30 on his way home from California.

Sandy’s voice still carries a twinge of pain when talking about him.

“He wrote a song, and I have it here,” she taps her heart. The song is about Portland and the Longfellow monument. “When I come home to my city by the sea, I’ll sit by you and I’ll talk of places I’ve seen...”

Sandy describes Manny as having the gift of making everyone feel like the most special person in the world. “He was also a pain in the ass,” she smiles affectionately.

“You had to sit with somebody if you wanted to sit,” says Sandy. “You had to talk to the person next to you, across from you.”

She describes Claude Von Schmutz, one of the bartenders who squatted across the street in an abandoned building.

“The first night we met, he pulled off one of my turquoise boots and drank champagne out of it.”

*Why?*

“Because he was French, damn it.”

## CLOSING TIME

From what Sue, Sandy, and Sid can all remember, Portland bars closed at 1 a.m. But in 1985, that didn’t necessarily mean the parties were over. Back then, after-hours clubs would open around midnight, and if you brought your own booze, the party would last till dawn.

These clubs—The Maxx, Back Street—are described to me as places out of *Saturday Night Fever*.

The Maxx was located on York Street near where Portland Pie is today and was what Sid remembers as the after-hour club for straight people. It was the place to go to meet someone and leave with someone, even if you only made it to the parking lot.

Sandy’s sister, Nancy Guimond, describes The Maxx as having no windows and a fog machine on the dance floor.

The sisters crack up as they’re swept back to the glory days.

“When you’d come out of there at six in the morning, it was like being a vampire,” Nancy howls, covering her eyes as Sandy laughs.



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“But we looked good,” says Sandy.

In those days, we’d get dressed to the nines,” says Nancy. “You weren’t allowed in if you weren’t.” They reminisce about their get-ups and walking down fire escapes in platforms.

“We might fall, but we looked good going down.”

Oasis, The Underground, Page 1, The Maxx, the list goes on. All places to go and dance. Imagine that. People actually dressed up, went out, and danced. Together.

“I’m so glad I grew up then,” Nancy sighs as the two come down from their laughter high.

Sid, Sue, Sandy, and Nancy—each offers me a piece that, once put together, build a beautiful puzzle of a city I don’t recognize.

And that’s okay. It wasn’t my city then. It wasn’t my time. But after hearing the stories of what Portland once was, who roamed its streets, and laughed in its bars, I’m making a promise to love what Portland has become. Hopefully, just maybe, when I revisit the memories years from now, I can laugh just as hard.

“It was a young person’s town,” Sue smiles before we wrap our interview. “It still is, but I mean, in the ’80s it was great to be 20 in Portland, Maine.”

### IS IT ALL GONE?

The good beer and music gave Deweys its charm, but it was the people who gave it the heart so few places have today.

Now we have so many places to choose from. If you want a hometown dive, head to Ruski’s—oh wait! They opened in 1987. A younger scene? Walk along Wharf Street and you’ll find 20-somethings with their game faces on at Bonfire, Oasis, Foreplay...

Cocktails—Hunt+Alpine, Sur Lie. Craft Beer? Check out the breweries.

Our options are becoming endless, and we’re told it’s great for business, but I wonder if there’s something we’ve lost that many of us never knew we had. ■

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