

Almost Almost Famous

Encounters with Music, Hollywood & Media legends

By Larry Jaffee

When I was a teenager, I remember being extremely jealous of Cameron Crowe, as I read his cover stories in *Rolling Stone*, touring with the likes of Led Zeppelin. Not that I liked Led Zeppelin, I actually hated them and despised Plant's screech on "The Immigrant Song," in particular. But it was the idea that someone only a few years older than me can achieve that level of success so soon which bothered me so.

I wrote to Lester Bangs in response to a *Creem* review trashing *Goat Head's Soup*; he never wrote back to me, unlike Crowe or his fictional teenage protagonist in the 2000 feature film *Almost Famous*, about touring with an A-list band before he even graduated from high school.

In any case, my journalism career had some degree of success early on, including being regularly published in the *New York Times* at 23 and a one-off feature *Rolling Stone* at 24. When I dropped off my audiocassette at the latter's office to get my November 1982 interview with Ed Asner transcribed, I learned Hunter Thompson did the same on the same day. On the verge of landing a full-time *Rolling Stone* position, my editor Paul Scanlon shared some news that falls in the "the lord giveth and the lord taketh" category (even though I'm hardly religious): "I'm leaving. Wenner reneged on the new movie section he promised me."

In any case, since the early 1980s I interviewed dozens of celebrities, but I've never written about the following tidbits of encounters, which will be eventually explained in great detail:

Music

- Sid Vicious (in the elevator with just him & his lawyer during pre-trial murder hearing; I asked him whether he heard new Clash album to which his lawyer said, "Don't answer that")
- Paul McCartney (I broke up his 1994 historic meeting with Yoko backstage at R&R Hall of Fame when she gave him John's "Free As a Bird" demo tape, where I was snubbed by Clapton, Robertson, Bono)
- Joey Ramone (threatened me in a phone call a week after I interviewed him in person and asked to confirm he was Jewish: "I know where you live")
- Debbie Harry's beagle Ace and my dachshund used to play in the same dog park and get bologna from the same deli man

- Patti Smith (somehow making it into her dressing room as an underaged teenager)
- Jack White (thanked *me* for keeping vinyl going after a concert in April)
- Ringo Starr (“No, we had littler” looking at my 2-year old daughter at a CD signing in 2000)
- Lou Reed (glad he didn’t kick my ass after I made a slight mistake with a question; this was after 25 years of finally getting an interview with him)
- Cedella Marley (visit with Bob’s mom at her Miami home that he bought her)
- Billy Bragg (laughed for 10 seconds when I told him I published an EastEnders zine called the “Walford Gazette”)
- Bunny Wailer (still angry with Chris Blackwell)
- Kris Kristofferson (almost fell out of my chair when I heard his voice)
- Patti Smith (as a 17-year-old I snuck into her dressing room with my girlfriend and we had a conversation)
- Ian Hunter (sympathized that it must have been difficult for me listening to Mott the Hoople while everyone in high school was listening to Led Zeppelin)
- Steve Harley (huge in the UK as a musician, couldn’t get arrested as an actor in the U.S.)
- J.J. Cale (“I know Kiss,”he tells me after Gene Simmons interrupts our interview at BMG)
- Little Steven (really uses Twitter; how I landed him as keynoter)
- Gil Scott-Heron (wondered where the Clive Davis who signed him went)
- Al Stewart (stupidly didn’t take his advice about getting my divorce over as quickly as possible)
- T Bone Burnett (“the hell I know,” regarding what he was going to talk about at my vinyl conference)

Hollywood

- John Travolta (wanted a roast beef sandwich at a fancy NYC French restaurant)
- Ed Asner (lusted after Mary Tyler Moore)
- Dennis Hopper (coked up at the Plaza Hotel, tells me: “I don’t know man, but it’s fucking brilliant,” on hearing back his quote about maverick filmmakers like himself in the late 1960s)
- Roger Ebert and Gene Siskel (the TV movie critics really hated each other)
- Robert Evans (the former Paramount studio chief shows up 45 minutes late, and screws up my DVD conference schedule)

- John Waters (tells me to say I'm Mink Stole to get into a party)
- Billy Bob Thornton (hanging on his couch talking baseball & about our 11-year-old sons)
- Al Pacino (I pissed him off by asking if he reads his reviews)
- Jane Fonda (I pissed her off for commending her in supporting ex-husband's political career)
- Tim Curry (don't ask him about *Rocky Horror*)
- Peter Bogdanovich (proved I could be persuasive, getting him \$19k for a 30-minute speech)
- Mel Brooks (hung up on me at his Fire Island summer home after her declining to doing an interview with me and I suggest maybe his wife Anne Bancroft could come to the phone)

Media Moguls

- Ted Turner (CNN & TBS)
- Chris Blackwell (Island Records)
- Rupert Murdoch (News Corp., Fox)
- John Malone (Liberty Media)
- Chuck Dolan (HBO founder, Cablevision, AMC)
- Seymour Stein (Sire Records)
- Al Goldstein (Screw magazine)

Other Notables in American Sports, Politics, etc.

- Ron Swoboda (became friends baseball player who was my childhood hero, made iconic catch otherwise mostly mediocre career)
- Clark Gilles (NY Islanders hockey star wanted to shake hands with me while him being stark naked as he stepped out of the practice ring showers)
- Gerry Ferraro, 1984 VP candidate (later covered her husband's corruption trial)
- Marilyn Klinghoffer (HR director who oversaw my firing for freelancing for the NY Times and whose husband was murdered by terrorists while they were on a European cruise)