

Unsuspecting grads make final statement

I was stumped.

While I had known Anzio to spearhead drives for neo-populist causes ranging from Quadruped Liberation to Post-Mortem Civil Rights, I never would have suspected that an arcane pagan ritual like graduation would be the student gathering to capture his anarchic imagination. God knows I sure didn't look forward to it — sal-low students in ebony shrouds thinking "what for?" while a minor dignitary chanted the Rites of Bureaucratic Passage — and I was only doing it for the folks, whose sweat-stained checks had kept me in books and granola for the past four years.

But Anzio — the same Anzio who regarded everything but earthquakes as overly ritualistic — was, unbelievably, more excited about the looming graduation exercises than he had been about the Hunger Shuffle. He had even managed to become head of the organizing committee, and spent hours in the study of his day-glo decorated bus poring over seating arrangements and typing up reams of notes. He had taken responsibility for picking up, preparing and delivering all of the caps and gowns and, through phone calls and visits, made absolutely sure that each student knew where he or she was to sit. In all it was an impressive effort, and more than one bystander was moved to comment smugly that Crazy Anzio had apparently Figured Things Out at last, and with the organizational skills he was showing, he should be a Marketable Commodity in the Job Market of the Real World.

Personally, I didn't know what to make of my friend's sudden reformation, but by the time the dreaded day arrived I was too caught up in my own crisis to give it further thoughts. Standing with the other students in the hallway, outside of the ballroom smoking and swearing and explaining that it was "for the folks," I happened to catch a glimpse of the latter through a crack in the partition. My worst fears were confirmed.

There, in the spectator section, flanked by bank after bank of softball-sized multi-megawatt reflector blubs, behind a Blastaar, Polychromatic, 16mm, full-racking, auto-zoom movie camera, holding an omnidirectional "pin-drop" microphone attached to a mammoth, reel-to-reel, fully-compensating tape recorder, under a maroon director's beret and behind a confident smile, sat my father. My mother was beside him, murmuring softly as he set the audio level.

As we lined up, looking for all the world like a great, black caterpillar, I whispered a tiny prayer, asking that this particular moviemaking effort by my father be more subdued than his previous efforts. Foremost in my memories were the horrible Hal-

loweens of my youth, when kindly neighbors opened their doors to my sister and me only to collapse in optic-overload comas as Dad seared their eyes with the ghastly light. (Later, Dad spliced all of the Halloween reels into a two-hour epic that Sis and I called "Attack of the Lightening Monster," which begins with scenes of naive citizens being mercilessly zapped by the intense candlepower, and ends with shots

of wary veterans of the Monster's attacks slipping Tootsie Rolls to us through the mail slots in their doors.) While I shuddered at the recollections the dirge began on the organ and the great caterpillar snaked inside and lumbered up the aisle, splitting itself into 30-leg hunks as we veered off into our rows. I glanced at Dad, surrounded by a frame of tiny white suns, and then sat and stared straight ahead, my eyes singed, resolved to ignore him in spite of the hot ivory light that bathed the left side of my face.

When my vision returned I took quick stock of my surroundings and discovered three interesting, if somewhat puzzling facts: 1) On the back of the person seated in front of me was a text of the speech that was to be given by the graduation speaker, intercut with weird parenthetical commands (i.e. "Flip hat, 5 sec."). 2) Anzio and some of his friends from the Bourgeois Busters Brigade were busily skipping through the rows pinning more of the sheets on people's backs, and 3) my mortarboard was pure white on the underside, like everyone else's. I was at a loss to explain any of this, though I suspected the two-tone mortarboards were Anzio's idea of a stylish change from the old-fashioned outfits. It seemed a token reform, however, certainly less than I had expected from such an accomplished radical.

Finally the dirge died out and the ballroom grew quiet as the speaker, a Mr. Hal Armstrong, the ancient retired head of the State Fish and Game Department, assumed the podium. He cleared his throat for a substantial portion of the afternoon and then began croaking in monotonous.

"Mr. President, faculty, parents and you wonderfully pacified students, the event of your graduation reminds me of a fish I encountered once at the Bonneville ladder. This fish, unlike you, never had the opportunity to attend college..."

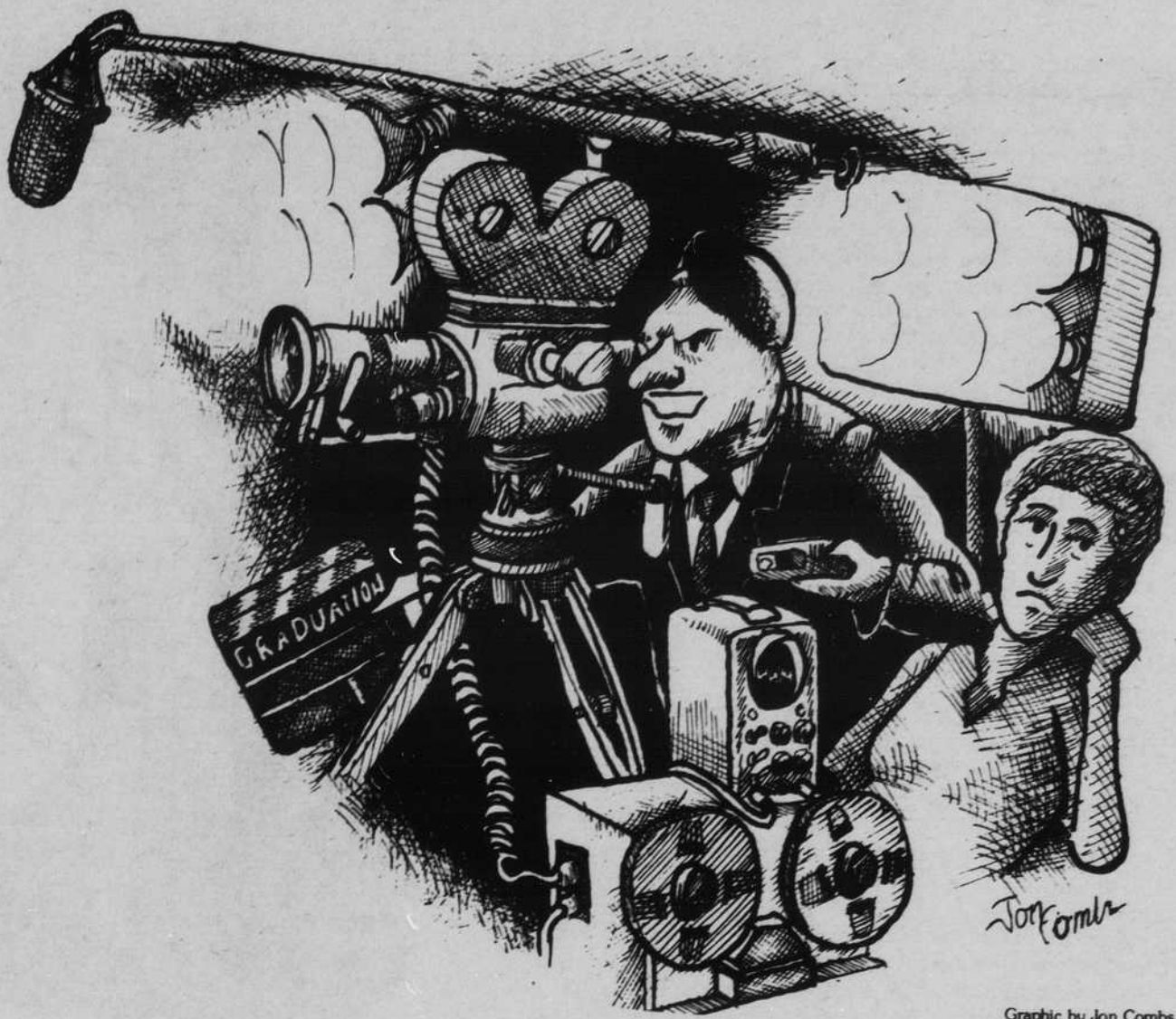
While Mr. Armstrong related the hopeless situation of the uneducated fish I leaned back, bored, and looked enviously at the smiling face of my friend Frank, who was seated on my right. Frank had ingested 15 micrograms of powdered Vicks 44, 6 saguaro buttons and half a liter of Wild Turkey an hour before the ceremony began, and whispered to me, giggling, that we certainly were lucky to have a fish for a graduation speaker.

I wasn't so sure. The speech droned on, while the uninterested students followed the texts in front of them. We read along as Armstrong continued, "... and just as the deer have learned the wisdom of knuckling under to the supremacy of the hunters, so too will you discover that life is a series of compromises, and that each of us must

... helmeted policeman swirled into the melee...

crawl before (flip hat, 5 sec.)..." Now Mr. Armstrong did not say "flip hat," but there it was on the text in front of me, so feeling a little foolish but wanting to do the right thing, I casually reached up and turned my mortarboard over, holding it on top of my head, and counted to five as Mr. Armstrong continued "... before the corporate powers that have made this country great."

Finally helmeted policemen swirled into the melee, cordoning the square battlefield into sections and ushering the combatants into the hallway a section at a time. The family scenes that greeted me as I was escorted with my group into the hallway were strikingly similar: A



Graphic by Jon Combs

Suddenly a muffled gasp broke out in the spectator section, and I turned to notice my father panning his camera across the graduates. Someone with more courage than myself, I figured, had probably registered his or her disappointment with this foolish ceremony by lifting his or her gown to reveal a birthday suit to the shocked audience. I turned my mortarboard back over and returned to my text.

"... along with the new conservatism winging its way across the land like a gaggle of mallards, we see spawned an age of (flip hat, 5 sec.)..."

Again, I self-consciously flipped my mortarboard, and again the gasp swept through the auditorium; with an ugly, growing undercurrent this time, as if the audience was beginning to understand the affront — whatever it was — and did not like it at all. Armstrong, however, was reading his speech with the aid of a plate-sized magnifying glass and, blind beyond the edge of the podium, continued speaking unperturbed:

"... power, taming the wild atom, creating clean (flip hat, 10 sec.)..."

The angry buzz, continuous now, rose in pitch.

"... like the grizzly, defending his den, out B-52's. (flip hat, 10 sec.)..."

And so it went, the crowd growing uglier, until finally parents and grandparents, aunts and uncles and the very administrative heads and captains of local industry onstage could stand the mysterious outrage no longer; they descended on us, their surrounded, bewildered prey, like the seine-net that the oblivious Armstrong was calmly describing in another of his naturalistic analogies. Mothers stretched on tiptoes to snag the ears of six-foot sons and tugged with a ferocity that must have inspired some painful nostalgia, and fathers smacked the graceful folds of daughters' gowns with equal zeal. I glanced around nervously and was reassured by the sight of my seated father, grinning hugely as he panned the chaotic scene, with Mom swiveling the mammoth lights to capture the action.

The rest of the film was just as delightful. Following the wonderful caricature came the slogan, in Gothic lettering, "The Rock Owns a Piece of You." This was succeeded at two-minute intervals by a variety of leftist catchphrases, including "Swat the Fascist Insect", "Free

pink-eared and confused son or daughter being lectured in stereo by irate parents, who sprinkled words like "circus" and "stunt" into their castigations.

Eventually the roar died down to angry stares and the family groups detached themselves from the crowd. Going away, the scenes were once again similar: two flushed, red, wrinkled necks, and, between them a foot higher, a curly head that shook back and forth wonderingly.

I did not have the slightest idea of what had happened.

Dad explained it to me later, and it was all over the newspapers the next day, but it seemed so... bizarre that I knew it would take Dad's film to explain it fully. The wait seemed interminable, but the film was developed by the following evening, and so, before an audience that included dozens of my fellow graduates, including the now-famous Anzio, Dad flipped the switch and the sliver screen on our living room wall glowed to life.

Even Dad's theatrical zooms and pans could not make the start of the ceremony any more interesting than it had been originally. There was old Armstrong, his boring croak revived through the speaker beneath the screen, and in front of him a black sea of mortarboards rippled softly, as if stirred by his gasping inhalations. He was just warming to his topic, the desirability of bourgeois supremacy, when suddenly hundreds of hands popped up like periscopes from the ebony expanse, grasped the sides of their mortarboards and turned them over to reveal their white undersides.

Dad had explained it fully, and the Associated Press had even hastily thrown a diagram into its account, but neither had prepared me for watching that black, anonymous plane transform itself into a perfect, white-line caricature of Nelson Rockefeller, smiling toothily and framed by a dozen fat dollar signs. The cheers in our living room drowned the shock gasp that whooshed from the speaker as we congratulated ourselves on the radical statement that he had made, albeit ignorantly.

Just a shot in the dark," I mumbled at her retreating form. I leaned back, sighed, and watched an out-of-focus housewife sing a lilting serenade to her dishwashing liquid. Next time, I resolved, I'm coming in through the post office.

Patty, She's Suffered Enough", and "Get the Rich Out of Their Cadillacs." There was also some nostalgia: "Hell no, We Won't Go", "What, My Lai?", some environmental pleas: "Save the Whales", "Split Wood, not Atoms", some general obscenity in beautiful script, and a final eloquent two-part statement that began "When Freedom is Outlawed..." and ended "Only Outlaws Will Be Free!" The tumult began after this, and the final scene was a zoom of Anzio, smiling and riding the crest of the battle like Todd Hackett happily greeting the day of the locust.

In the end, everyone was happy. Dad sold the film to CBS for twice what Zapruder got for his, and became a local celebrity. Due to the random luck of my seating position I was also brushed with fame, as I stammeringly told Barbara Walters in a live interview how it had felt to be the dot on the "i" in "Remember Attica."

But it was Anzio who reaped the greatest notoriety, as he was swamped with interview and speaking requests from all over the nation. And after some of the damor had died down, he ironically, ended up fulfilling the earlier expectations that his organizational skills would get him a Good Job. Proudly showing me his first paycheck, a \$2,000 draft from a Mexican bank, Anzio explained that he was now "Opposition Destablizer" for an idle California politician who was gearing up for a comeback try in 1980.

Causes...

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more, what with traveling and everything."

"I haven't got any fertilizer," I muttered.

"Oh, that's okay, they sell special sacrificial packets at a garden shop on 13th. Each packet has enough fertilizer to conduct a Chlorophyll Catechism, and they only cost..."

"One dollar," I muttered, flipping a bill into the hubcap.

"Yeah, how did you guess?" she said, snatching up the money and heading for the door.

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