



# The Babs T-Shirt

by Nick Holle

FLYMF November 2004, The Doubting America Issue, Volume 1 Issue 9

“It’s ten A.M. and, yes, only 182 days until Barbra Streisand’s birthday, but in the meantime we’re celebrating her half-birthday with twenty-four hours of commercial-free Babs. This one’s written by Mellencamp. I’m Stoney Wadkins playing the crap you know and love on 106.3 K-R-A-P.”

I killed that alarm clock. I absolutely fucking demolished it. With a hammer. And then I went into my bathroom, ripped out the shower curtain rod, came back, and bashed the clock with that. And I cooked it in the microwave after that, shorting a fuse and starting a small fire. I hated that clock. It was worth it.

So then I felt pretty good. I had overslept by three hours and missed work, but I had surely been fired at that point. It was a bullshit job and no big deal in the grand scheme of things. In fact, if you believe in certain religions this was all in God’s grand scheme anyway, so I wasn’t going to lose any sleep over it.

After extinguishing the fire and pulling the alarm clock out of the microwave, I rubbed my eyes and did a little stretching here and there, though it sounds better when I call it “my yoga.” I walked over near my closet and exchanged my briefs for a fresh pair of dirty boxers. I wore briefs at night because I once read in a magazine that they’re better for your sperm count. Not that I was trying to impregnate anyone, but a high sperm count works to give a man a sense of self worth when maybe a few other circumstances in his life don’t.

You see, my ex-girlfriend Peggy—chemically imbalanced, horribly out-of-touch with reality, slept-with-my-stepfather Peggy—had sometime in the previous twenty-four hours torched my entire wardrobe, including socks, in the courtyard of my apartment complex. She spared my underwear in what you might think was a last ditch effort at humanity, but what happened was when she threw in the socks, the flames got too high, caught her dress, and lit her up like a tinderbox, burned over ninety percent of her body. In fact, if you believe in certain religions, that’s just plain bad karma. I arrived home from a jog just as they shoved her in the back of the ambulance and the neighbor kids were roasting their marshmallows.

I thought it was fortunate that my girlfriend was burnt to a crisp. I hated her. And it was fortunate that I decided to

two things out of my life and now had some time to regroup. It had been a rough couple of weeks with the Peggy breakup, her sleeping with my step-dad Frank, me sleeping with her hated boss Nancy and her hated coworker, also named Frank.

I also got arrested for punching that guy in the wheelchair. A simple misunderstanding. He was pissed I parked in the only handicap spot at the Hardware Hank. I was pissed that he was pissed. I thought he wanted to fight, so I thought I’d get the first jab in. I actually got a couple in before getting pulled off by his attendant. I found out from the arresting officer the guy was quadriplegic. How was I supposed to know? I was arraigned the next day. Case is pending.

But yeah, with no work, no girlfriend, it meant I could start putting the pieces back together both in my wardrobe and in my life. I could go out enjoy the sun, then head to the mall for some new clothes. What better way for an American to get himself back on track than doing a little mall shopping? Well, besides getting boozed to the gills, smoking crack, and having cheap, meaningless, unprotected sex with someone you’ve never met before in your life. But the mall was a legitimate fourth option. My troubles would soon be over.

So the only thing that survived Peggy’s clothes fire, besides my underwear and Peggy, were the sweatpants I had on while I was jogging. All my shirts were now ash. I feared some prick mall cop would enforce the “no shirt, no service” rule, so I threw on one of Peggy’s old white tank tops. I figured with the burns, she’d probably not be wearing it, oh, ever again. I grabbed my car keys, and headed out the door. I went to my car, but it wasn’t there because it had been repossessed for nonpayment of loans after my wheelchair arrest.

I glanced across the street and saw a little girl riding her bicycle. The bike was small and pink, but it would do. I ran across the street. She smiled at me, one of those cute, innocent smiles. This was going to be easy.

“Hi, little girl. I’m a police officer, and I’m going to have to borrow your bicycle for a couple of hours, okay?”

She got off the bike. What a nice little girl. Her parents had done a fine job, socially conscious, looking out for the local P.D. She went over into her yard and picked something up. I

started to climb on the bike when something hit me in the ear. Damn. That stung. And my ear was bleeding. I turned toward girl. She pumped three times and aimed the rifle at my head again.

“Holy moly shitcakes!” I screamed and dove off the bike. I felt a BB hit me in the thigh. She was a friggin’ madman! I got into the street, looking over my shoulder to see her pumping again.

That’s when the Passat clipped me. It screeched to a stop, clipping me at the knees. I remember thinking as I fell on my neck and slid across the pavement that this was it. This was the end.

The driver rolled down his window and asked, “Hey, man. Are you all right?”

I was sure I’d broken my neck, but in a true act of perseverance and heroism, I shook off quadriparalysis and screamed, “Don’t stop! Get the hell out of here!”

“What?” the driver asked.

I pointed at the girl, who’d fired again, just missing me. “Save yourself, you son-of-a-bitch!”

He sped off, and I managed to stagger to my feet and get behind the sugar maple outside of my apartment. She was aiming right at me. I took off the tank top and waved it from behind the tree. She shot it from my hand. This girl was ruthless.

I remember thinking that if I could get out of this alive, she’d be going to the slammer for attempted murder. She was about five or six; we could probably get her tried in adult court. I got my keys out of my pocket. If I did this right, she’d only be able to get one shot off. I ran, well, limped quickly to the door. I slipped the key in. There was no shot. I turned around, and there was the little girl back on her bike. There was no sign of the gun, but her mother stood there with a tray of cookies and lemonade. I was dumbfounded. She was going to get away with this.

Inside I found a couple of band-aids for my bleeding ear and thigh. That girl should be locked up, I thought. I took the back end of my hammer and wedged the BB out of my thigh. It had put a hole in my sweatpants besides staining them with blood. I grabbed a phonebook, opened the yellow pages up to “Guns” and dialed a number.

When the guy answered, I said, “I need a gun. Now.”

He said, “Sorry, buddy. Gotta wait five days for a background check.”

“No, I just need a BB gun. I’m not gonna kill anybody. It’s for protection.”

“Five days.”

“For a BB gun?” I asked.

“Hey, you should see the damage BB guns do nowadays,” he said.

“Yeah.” I nearly hung up.

“But hey, we’re having a Barbra Streisand half-birthday sale on flamethrowers.”

“A Barbra Streisand flamethrower sale? What the hell kind of gun shop is this?”

“My wife just can’t get enough of her, and she’s half-owner, so if she wants a Babs half-birthday sale, she gets it,” he said.

“So I can get a flamethrower today?”

“Sure.”

I looked out the window, the little girl sat on the curb, eating a cookie and polishing her rifle. “Look,” I said into the phone, “Is there any way you can deliver?”

He said, “Not today, but my wife could run out there in the morning.”

“Fine. I’ll take one.”

The next morning there was a knock at my door. It was the FedEx guy. I tore open the box. It was beautiful. God bless the internet. I held up what I thought would be one of the finest investments I had ever made. After I had talked to the gun guy I had gone on the computer my dad gave to me as a consolation for disowning me and bought a new shirt, a Barbra Streisand t-shirt. On the front was a big picture of Barbra with her hands outstretched as if she wanted to give me a hug. It read, simply, “Babs!”

A while later there was another knock. I answered and found a hideous looking Barbra Streisand look-alike standing there. Well, she was more hideous than Babs herself. In fact, it looked like she actually had plastic surgery to give herself a Barbra-esque nose. It was awful. If you believe in certain religions, you'd know that one should not covet thy neighbor's possessions, especially big fucking schnozzes.

I pushed my chest forward, so she'd see my new t-shirt.

"Hi," she said. "I'm here with your flame—oh my gawd! You gawt a Barbra t-shirt on! Can I touch it?"

"Of course," I said, wincing.

"You like Barbra?" she asked, tracing the picture on the shirt with her fingers.

"I love her," I said. "I'm in *love* with her."

She looked at me, curiously and more interested. And then she just kept touching. And I let her. And soon I was having sex with this giant, creepy pseudo-Barbra Streisand. I don't know why I did it. Okay, I did it because the flamethrower was three hundred bucks, and I didn't have three hundred bucks. I didn't know she would look so awful. I didn't know she wouldn't stop until I came, quote, "at least three times, honey", endquote. And I sure didn't know she'd be sixty-two years old, which I found out post-coitally.

But I got through it, and I got the flamethrower for free. So it worked out okay. But Jesus, she made me call her Babs the whole time.

When she left, she blew me a kiss and said, "Gawd, Larry, this could be the beginning of something special. I'll call ya!" And she walked out humming "Happy Days Are Here Again." Ugh.

I had to shake it off, though, because I had business to attend to. I hopped out of bed and grabbed the flamethrower. I pulled the trigger a bit and flames shot out across my room. Whoa, this thing was fucking awesome.

When I got outside, I hid behind the sugar maple again. From there I scanned the other side of the street, looking for the little girl. Now I had no intention of hurting her, even though she seemed to have no problem with hurting me. I just wanted to give her a little scare, so she'd think twice about doing it again.

Eventually she came out into the yard and started playing with her dollies near the sidewalk. When her head was down I dashed across the street and behind a bush in the neighbor's yard. She hadn't seen me and was still playing. I planned to run out, start screaming, light the flamethrower, and get the hell out of there as fast as I could before any adult would see me.

I took a deep breath then counted, one...two...three! I burst out from behind the bush, roaring at the top of my lungs, "Ahhhhhh!" I fired off the flamethrower, and it burst into a twenty-foot flame. But then I noticed the girl wasn't there anymore, and before I could slow down, my foot hit a BB gun that was sticking out from behind the other side of the bush. In my peripheral vision, I saw the little girl crouched down, holding out the gun.

I tripped and tumbled forward into my flames. I hit the ground, and my sweatpants and Babs T-shirt started on fire. I was screaming then, horribly in pain. I rolled around trying to put the flames out, but not before they had gotten all over my body.

"Oh, sweet son of Christ!" I screamed as my skin was melting.

I was able to stop the burning by getting on the wet, morning dew grass. I lay there in the worst pain of my life, my body sizzling. I couldn't see a thing. I wanted to die so bad. My body was in shock, but there seemed to be total calm around me.

Then I heard the girl yelling, "Mommy! Mommy!"

"My God, Jenny, what was that screaming?" I heard steps approaching.

"Mommy, the man tripped and fell on his flamethrower." The little girl laughed.

"That's not funny, Jenny," the mom said. "Oh my God, does he have a Barbra Streisand t-shirt on? Huh. That's hilarious."

That was when I lost consciousness.

When I came to I still couldn't see anything. "Hello?" I said.

"Larry, you awake? Oh gee, I thought you were a goner."

"Peggy? Is that you?"

“Yeah, you’re in the hospital. ICU, the burn unit,” my ex-girlfriend said. “We’re sharing a room actually. Dumb luck. You got burned pretty bad, over ninety percent of your body.”

“Oh,” I said.

“And you’re blind. Your eyeballs got burnt right off.”

“Oh.”

“And you lost an arm and a leg. If you didn’t notice. Just one of each.”

“Oh.”

“And you’ve got a visitor.”

“Oh?”

“It’s a guy. He looks sort of like James Brolin. Funny thing, he’s got a sawed-off shotgun and a couple of .38s stuck in his pants. He’s been sitting here, waiting for you to wake up.” She laughed.

A man’s voice, sounding an awful lot like the gun shop owner, said, “Hey, asshole, you fuck my fuckin’ wife?”

“Oh,” I said.