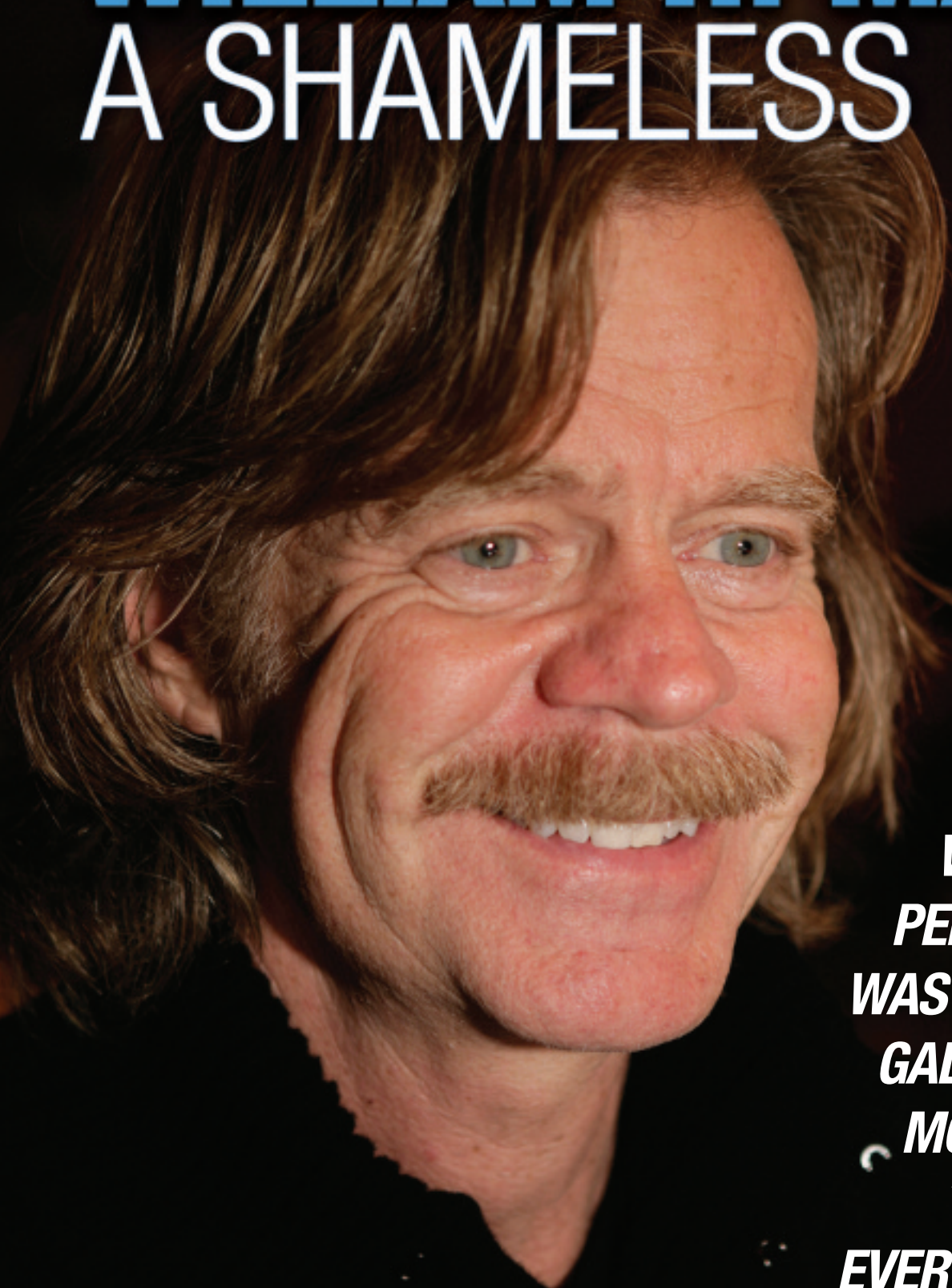


WILLIAM H. MACY

A SHAMELESS LIFE



THE ACTOR WHO PLAYS PERPETUALLY WASTED FRANK GALLAGHER IS MORE FRANK THAN WE'D EVER IMAGINED.

William H. Macy is a powerhouse who has appeared in dozens of movies. Some good (*Pleasantville*, *Magnolia*), some bad (*Jurassic Park 3*, *Mystery Men*, *Wild Hogs*) and some absolutely incredible (*Fargo*, *Boogie Nights*, *The Cooler*). The veteran film and TV actor stopped by HUSTLER to discuss everything from his college days and enduring relationship with *Desperate Housewives* star Felicity Huffman to visiting a porn set and, most recently, portraying Frank Gallagher on the brilliant Showtime series *Shameless*.

HUSTLER: Do you read our magazine?

WILLIAM H. MACY: I do. I don't subscribe, but I pick it up once in a while. I'm a fan of the whole organization. I love the slogan, "For the Rest of the World." I love that in the HUSTLER [Hollywood] store here in L.A. the wall says, "Relax, it's just sex." That speaks directly to me. I love the jokes in the magazine. I love how it pushes the concept of what is "dirty" in people's faces. They should have made Larry President for that.

During the Clinton Presidency, when everyone was trying to impeach him for his infidelity, I was wildly supportive that you put out the million-dollar reward for someone to expose Republican hypocrites. And I particularly loved when you rescinded it after exposing that Republican senator [David Vitter of Louisiana.] It wrecked his family, and he lost his job. It made fools out of the Republicans, and it scared the shit out of the entire Congress. But, Larry, I thought it was a stand-up thing to say, "I kind of wish I hadn't done that because it ruined the guy's life."

Do you remember the first time you ever saw HUSTLER?

It had to be in my teens. I know it was shocking because everyone had gotten used to their dad's *Playboys* at that point. Then you saw HUSTLER had gone pink. Is that still the term?

It's Think Pink.

Great!

When did you start acting?

I acted a little bit in high school, then went on to a little liberal arts college and acted in a bunch of plays there. Then I ultimately ended up at a school in northern Vermont called Goddard College, where I took acting seriously. I started pursuing it because I didn't fail at it as bad as I failed at other things. That's where I met David Mamet, the writer and playwright. He was my teacher at Goddard.

You mentioned you failed at everything but acting.

I had illusions of being a doctor and then a veterinarian, but I discovered you had to go to school to do all the things I wanted to do. So that wasn't going to work.

You've played a lot of losers. Do you

feel like they're losers? And do you ever feel bad for them?

It's sort of a rule of acting that you are in dangerous territory if you characterize the character you're playing. He's the smart guy, or he's the asshole, or he's the loser. You don't want to characterize it because you want to keep yourself from "acting the words" or acting clichés as much as you can. You want to do the character's bidding. The biggest assholes out there don't know they are assholes. Do I ever feel sorry for them? Yeah! (*Laughs*) When it's all said and done, I've played some guys that were pretty unfortunate—the most famous being Jerry Lundegaard in *Fargo*. What a schmuck!

Have you ever gotten lost in a role?

Not lost. It's occurred to me in the last couple of years that I should perhaps dig deeper. I think in the beginning of my acting career I was a bit glib about not taking the "living the role" nonsense very seriously. In retrospect I could have done myself some good by thinking a little harder and going a little deeper. One tends to do what one does naturally, and I'm a little bit glib. That hasn't served my characters well. On the other hand, I've worked with actors who get into character and stay in character all day. I just can't tell you how boring they are. It's so awful—awful for the crew, awful for their fellow actors, and it does not help their acting.

Do you prefer working in independent films over big Hollywood studio productions?

You have to be cautious in the indie world. Sometimes they're so low-budget, it's really brutal. The big-studio pictures are seductive because nobody in the world does them better than Hollywood. Some of them are really good—all the special effects. Being an actor on a big movie is a really pleasant way to spend your day. I like big trailers better than little trailers. I like big checks better than little checks.

The indie world is appealing because they don't have to tell a story that appeals to millions of people. They can tell a story and be successful if that story only appeals to about a million people. If you can find them all and get them to buy a ticket, you can tell smaller stories that are somehow more true without worrying about who you're going to offend.

Do you have any favorites roles?

Jerry Lundegaard, of course. I did a thing called *Happy Texas*. My guy's name was Chappy Dent. I loved him. He was a gay sheriff. I did a Mamet movie called *State and Main*. I really loved that script and playing that character. I did a movie of the week called *Door to Door* about this great salesman called Bill Porter. That was a great role. In all honesty, with Frank Gallagher on *Shameless*

I've got the best role of anyone in Hollywood right now.

Are there any roles you regret turning down?

Not really. On a regular basis I'll go to my agent and start screaming at him because I don't have good work. He very calmly sits at his desk and then prints something out. He puts this piece of paper in front of me and says, "These are the roles you turned down." I look at the roles that I turned down and say, "Oh, never mind." Then I leave. We do that about twice a year.

How do you choose your roles?

I used to ask, "What's the through line, and how does this speak to the human condition?" "Now I ask, "Do I have to get wet?" If I have to get wet, they gotta pay me more. I also ask, "Do I have to take my clothes off?" I don't know why, but recently people are requiring me to do nudity. Why now? I kept myself in really good shape all through my 20s and 30s. Why did they wait until I was 45 or 50 to ask me to drop my knickers?

Is nudity tough for you to handle?

It's not great. You should try it sometime. Gather together about a dozen Teamsters and take your clothes off. You have to book them in advance.

How much did you know about the porn industry before being cast in the 1997 film *Boogie Nights*?

Nothing—except as a consumer. I rarely do any research in advance for my roles, but with *Boogie Nights* I did. Some of the cast went to a porn shoot, which I found astounding. There were these three women in a hot tub who were just stupidly good-looking. They were having a party with this dildo that looked like a telephone pole. It frightened me. Just like with pornography, I was incredibly aroused and then sort of amused and then bored.

It was an eye-opener to go to that shoot. The crew was a lot bigger than I thought it was going to be. The director looked like any director of any film I'd ever seen. She was running around, harried, looking at the clock and trying to think ahead. The cars in the parking lot weren't brand-new. Most of them were five years old. Tells you a lot about who's making money.

What was it like having porn star Nina Hartley as your onscreen wife?

Omigod, she's funny! She's smart as a whip and very entrepreneurial. When I walked into the trailer on her first day, it was full of people. There was Nina shaving her lala with her legs up on the table. She said, "I'm Nina!" I thought, *Wow. Are we gonna get along!* I have this movie I wanna do about strip clubs, and she knows a lot about them. Since *Boogie Nights* I've met with Nina a

bunch of times to ask her the ins and outs of that life. She's a good friend.

Most Hollywood marriages last only two or three years, but you've been with actress/producer Felicity Huffman for 14 years. What's the secret?

Her. I'm the luckiest palooka. I wish I had a secret. I don't. I just married well.

Did it freak you out when your wife portrayed a transgender person in *Trans America*?

Not the transgender part, but that movie freaked me out. I know that woman [Felicity Huffman] and have known her forever and ever. We go back a lot farther than the time we've been married. I knew her since she was 22 years old, but where she went to find that character stunned me. It shocked me. I didn't know how to look at her for a long time. To see such a work of genius from someone you've grown so accustomed to put me off a bit.

Are you really an avid ukulele player?

That's true. I love the ukulele. I've been known to play it publicly. Some people have lobbied to stop me from ever playing publicly again. My wife was the mistress of ceremonies at the NARAL: Pro-Choice America luncheon celebrating *Roe v. Wade* in Washington a few months back. She asked me to write one of my little ukulele songs. I came up with a song from the point of view of a singing vagina. I played it for my wife, and she said, "Congressmen, senators, Washington lunch. Singing vagina? No. I don't think so. Go back to the drawing board." So I wrote another one. It's about choice from the point of view of a young Republican girl. It's pretty funny. You can Google it. I rhymed "utopian roots" with "fallopian tubes."

Is portraying Frank Gallagher on *Shameless* the most fun you've ever had as an actor?

Most fun. Outrageous. Shameless.

Have the producers imposed any restrictions when it comes to playing Frank?

We haven't found them. God willing, I'm going to write one of the episodes this season. We were in the writers' room, and somebody pitched this idea for Frank. I noticed that all of the writers were covering some parts of their faces when they contemplated what we were thinking of having Frank do. [Executive producer] John Wells said, "Okay. That's in. If you have to cover your face when you think about it, that's our territory."

Earlier you mentioned going deeper into a role and not being so glib. How do you go deeper with Frank Gallagher, who is such a train wreck?

That's a great question. It occurred to me last season that if this character is going to have legs, I have to make sure that the story doesn't stop while Frank does something funny. I looked at some of the work I did in Season One and thought I should investigate why Frank is the way he is. I'd never thought of this before. I think we can take it as self-evident that a fellow who needs to self-medicate from morning to night is running away from some serious dragons. Maybe in Season Two I can find some of those dragons.

Some people think being interviewed by *HUSTLER* is pretty shameless.

I don't understand that. Why? Because there are naked women in it? I'm fascinated by America's whole attitude toward sex. I find it endlessly upsetting and worrisome. We've got this heavy dose of Calvinism and repression that comes out in ugly, ugly ways. I think *Cigar Aficionado* [magazine] is probably more questionable than *Hustler*. *HUSTLER* is about sex, and sex is good. Even bad sex is pretty good, but smoking cigars will kill you! 🚬

