

THE 64 GREATEST THINGS ABOUT LA*

Los Angeles

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HILLARY CARLIP HAS BEEN A FIRE-EATER (SHE

wielded the flaming baton with her foot) and a singing juggler who earned a perfect 10 from Rex Reed on *The Gong Show*. In the space of one week in the mid-'80s, she appeared on *Entertainment Tonight* as the lead singer in an all-girl ex-con band, Angel and the Reruns, and as Mindy Greenfield, founder of a rent-a-fan outfit that supplied screaming, fainting, placard-carrying groupies for any occasion. Both characters were fictitious—but the Reruns' single was a top hit on KRCQ for real. When Carlip, more recently the creator of freshyarn.com, a sort of cybersalon, decided to write her 2006 memoir, *Queen of the Oddballs*, she wasn't at a loss for material. ¶ With *À La Cart: The Secret Lives of Grocery Shoppers* (Virgin Books, 120 pages, \$17.95), she goes back to her performance artist roots. The book was inspired by a collection of discarded shopping lists that Carlip, who grew up in Bel-Air, has been amassing for decades. "I'd always wonder, 'OK, who could this list belong to?'" she says. "I'd try to envision the person who left it behind." With the help of makeup artists Dominic Till and Chris Nelson, she transformed herself into the characters she imagined had headed off to purchase Vasaline [sic] and a Home Depot tarp, or Postum and prunes. (Despite her history, we're trusting the lists are authentic.) Barbara Green's photos are accompanied by brief bios for each character. Carlip introduced us to a selection of her alter egos. — Margot Dougherty

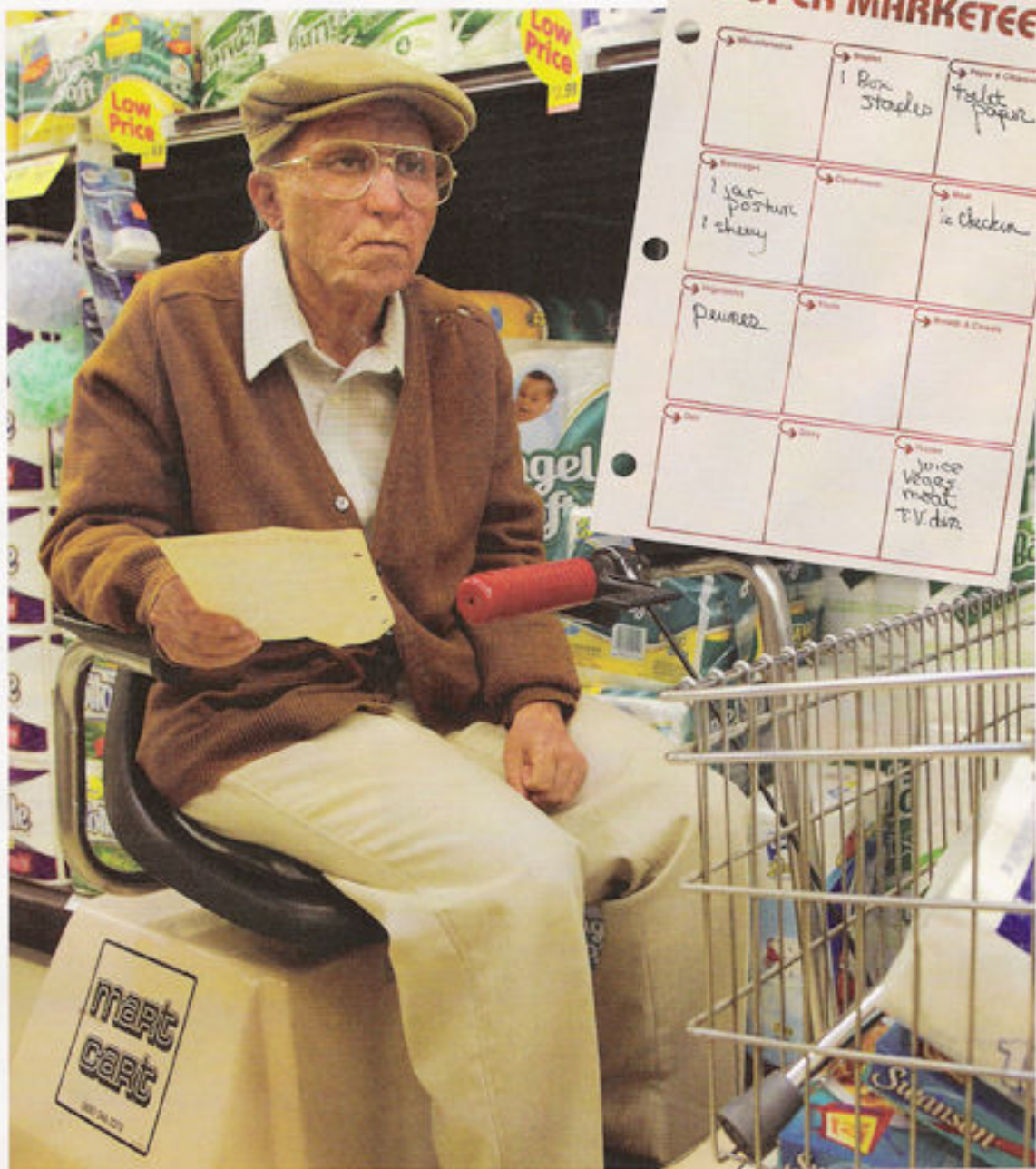
Working with discarded shopping lists, Hillary Carlip turns herself into a cast of imaginary characters





»» Dr. Bloom

"The first clue about Dr. Bloom is the Prozac notepad. She's a therapist. There's something very sophisticated about the handwriting—it screams liberal New Yorker. The Black 'forrest' ham and roast beef and smoked turkey are very hors d'oeuvres-y, suggesting someone throwing an intimate party. I'd get reference photos to put together the costumes and for my makeup person, and I always imagined Dr. Bloom in a shawl. It was very tough in thrift shops finding different-looking wedding rings, but Dr. Bloom has a good rock from her judge husband. She's looking at the Hormel, but it's a brand beneath what she'd really get."



» Lloyd

"This still gets me: '1 Box Staples' in the Staples box. With the 'T.V. din' and the shaky handwriting, this list totally said widower. It felt very lonely and sad, but like he was trying. So a whole story came to me of Lloyd's children trying to get him to move into a home, but his wanting to stay independent. From the start I envisioned an old guy and the cart. When I saw this sweater in the thrift store, it was torn, and I thought, 'That's so him'—because his wife's not around to fix it. I had really good shoes, but you can't see them. Beige with tassels. To this day, if my mother looks at this picture, she says, 'This is not you.'"



» Pammy

"I had the most fun doing Pammy. Literally every male in the store—we were in the Gummi Bears aisle—was checking her out. One offered to carry her groceries to the car. The 'Vaseline' and the tarp and the fox and the Listerine strips, they just said ex-porn star to me—she's producing a film and needed a tarp on the set. I thought, 'What happens to porn stars when they get older? How would a smart one figure out how to continue in her field?' That's the place I started, and Pammy went off from that. She started Silver Foxes Productions and makes millions shooting and directing porn films for the senior set."



»» Woody

"A matchbook that just says Coors and Oreos? How can that be? Someone can't remember those two items? We shot this at a liquor store in the Valley. Dominic, the makeup artist whom I found on Craigslist, was so detail oriented—she worked on *Lord of the Rings* and *King Kong*. She put dirt under my nails and reddened the knuckles. I imagine Woody lives in Alhambra. I signed him up for eHarmony because I wanted to see what kinds of questions they ask. He still gets updates and newsletters from them."



» Estelle

"This is a gal who enjoys her dairy—and then pays for it. I didn't base many of the characters on real people, but Estelle is based on my mother-in-law, Esther Lapiduss. [Carlip's partner of 15 years, Maxine Lapiduss, is a business consultant and former sitcom writer for *Roseanne* and *Ellen*.] Esther is 87 and still performing stand-up—she's opened for Phyllis Diller. She saw this and said she wanted the shirt. I said, 'Of course you do—it's like every shirt you wear.' I think she was flattered. As long as I gave her the shirt."