



# The Truth is Bad Enough: What Became of the Happy Hustler?

*Michael Kearns*

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## **The Truth is Bad Enough: What Became of the Happy Hustler?** Michael Kearns

“We are all lucky to still have Michael Kearns with us,” Sir Ian McKellen says “now recording his private and public story with an honesty and humor that put most other show-biz autobiographies to shame.” **THE TRUTH IS BAD ENOUGH**, What Became of The Happy Hustler? traverses more than a half of century—from Kearns’ roles as ribald party boy to impassioned artist-activist to doting father. From the Seventies’ sexual revolution to the gay parenting boom of the Twenty First Century, Michael Kearns has defined nearly a half a century of American life: culturally, politically, and sexually. In many instances, he was not only at the forefront of the historical milestones, he created them. • Ushering in the sexual revolution, starring in the L.A. production of Tom Eyan’s *The Dirtiest Show in Town* (1972). • Hoaxing the public by “becoming” Grant Tracy Saxon, the bisexual author of *The Happy Hustler* (a deliberate spoof of Xaviera Hollander’s *The Happy Hooker*) which sold more than 250,000 copies and resulted in Kearns’ nationwide notoriety. • Coming out as the first openly gay actor in Hollywood, while juggling a mainstream television career (*Cheers*, *Murder She Wrote*, *The Fall Guy*) with a revolutionary theatre career at the legendary *Déjà Vu* Coffeehouse Los Angeles. • Responding to the AIDS crisis in the mid-Eighties by co-founding two AIDS organizations (with partner James Carroll Pickett): *Artists Confronting AIDS* and *STAGE* (Southland Theatre Artists Goodwill Event, the longest running theatrical benefit in the world). • Accusing the television and film industry—as the “only openly gay actor in Hollywood”—of homophobia on ABC’s *Nightline* upon Rock Hudson’s death in 1985. • Creating *Intimacies*, a solo performance piece, depicting people with AIDS, that garnered international acclaim for the writer-performer; the first of a series of one-person shows including *Rock* in which Kearns revealed his dalliance with Hudson. • Disclosing his HIV-positive status on *Entertainment Tonight* upon the death of actor Brad Davis in 1991. • Appearing in the *New York Times*, after making television history as the first publicly HIV-positive actor in primetime (*Life Goes On*). • Bolstering the notion of gay marriage, Kearns wed his longtime partner, Philip Juwig, in a public ceremony (1992). • Adopting Katherine Kearns in 1994: the first openly gay, publicly HIV-positive, single man to become a father. • As the Twenty-First Century unfolds, the theatre artist as teacher has emerged and flourished, aligning with numerous non-profits (*Downtown Women’s Center*, *Katselas Theatre Company*, *Art Division*, and *Housing Works* among them) while the soloist continues to perform (a twentieth anniversary tour of *Intimacies* in 2009 and the premiere of *Torch* in 2012). **THE TRUTH IS BAD ENOUGH** covers this rich life of extremes, lived out loud—from its roots in the Midwest to his family life in Los Feliz where Kearns presently resides with his daughter. McKellen asserts that “this extraordinary life, lived on the edge of death...won’t depress, rather uplift you.” **THE TRUTH...** visits backstage dressing rooms, notorious bathhouses, Hollywood soundstages, and the deathbeds of fallen comrades where Michael has rubbed shoulders with Rock Hudson, Greg Louganis, Alan Carr, Michael Jeter, Burt Reynolds, Lew Wasserman, Barney Frank, Kitty Carlisle, George Maharis, Ann-Margret, Nick Nolte, Richard Thomas, Cal Culver, Betty White, Frederick Combs, Charles Pierce, Richard Chamberlain, Randy Shilts, Charles Nelson Reilly, Craig Russell, Elizabeth Taylor, Paul Monette, Robert Reed, Bruce Vilanch, Sal Mineo, John Ritter, Paul Lynde, Judy Garland, Merv Griffin, Tim Miller, and Armistead Maupin. **THE TRUTH IS BAD ENOUGH** is an illuminating story that holds up a mirror, not only to a generation lost but to a generation that is very much alive.

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