

STRIPPER TELLS ALL

:: '9½ Years Behind the Green Door' :: Art Mitchell's ex says she lived through an exciting time

If there's such a thing as a typical stripper, Simone Corday wasn't one. When she first went to work at the Mitchell Brothers O'Farrell Theatre in 1981, she was in her 30s with a master's degree in English from UC Berkeley.

By the time she left that world behind, a decade later, she had become a longtime lover of Art Mitchell, who was shot and killed by his brother Jim in 1991. Her recently self-published book, "9½ Years Behind the Green Door," tells the story of her time in the peculiar institution of San Francisco stripping.

She auditioned at the theater as a way to earn money outside of an office. "I didn't really have a calling to be a teacher, and I did some clerical work, but that bored me terrifically," she says. She also had some experience as a dancer. "I was comfortable on the stage," Corday says, and then pauses. "Of course, it was very different at Mitchell Brothers."

Corday writes near the beginning of her book that she doesn't regret being part of a sexually uninhibited place at a sexually uninhibited time. "Of course, it is unrealistic to claim that women never experience inequities and abuses when they experimented with sex. Sometimes, even I did. ... I live in a different century and place now, but to say I regret my experience during this turbulent time would be false to who I am, and to the spirit of this book."

So what, exactly, did go down at that Tenderloin establishment in the '80s? Not much suitable for a family newspaper. Orgies, drugs, politicians and, of course, Hunter S. Thompson play roles in Corday's

story, although no figure looms larger than Art Mitchell. While he was an inexcusable jerk, Corday says she couldn't help loving him. His death made her cut ties with Mitchell Brothers. She is still incensed at the sentence the now-deceased Jim Mitchell got after his manslaughter, not murder, conviction.

There are many times in the book when one would like to shake some sense into Corday regarding Art Mitchell's behavior. But she wouldn't have him any other way. "I'm a bit of an outlaw," she says. "I had a marriage to a man who became overly religious. I really wasn't seeking the most stable, conservative guy when I met Art."

Corday says that AIDS changed the promiscuous nonchalance of the place by the mid-'80s. Corday lives in the Bay Area, although she declined to be specific about her whereabouts or occupation. "There's a taboo, even here," she says about stripping. But in recounting that tumultuous time, she doesn't aim to impart many lessons. "I got to live through a very exciting time," she says, "and it gave me tremendous material."

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Simone Corday will read from her book at 6:30 tonight. Free. Good Vibrations, 603 Valencia St., S.F. (415) 522-5460. www.goodvibrations.com.