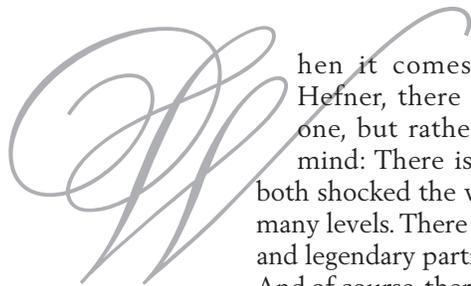


# Hugh Hefner's Wonderful Ride

THE MAN WHO FOUNDED *PLAYBOY*, CHANGED AMERICAN CULTURE AND WAS A PIONEER IN JOURNALISM



When it comes to Hugh Hefner, there is not just one, but rather several things, that pop to mind: There is the magazine, *Playboy*, that both shocked the world and broke ground on so many levels. There is the mansion, with its grotto and legendary parties. There are the silk pajamas. And of course, there are the women, among them the girlfriends, the Playmates and the bunnies.

Rather than be the sum of the man, however, these elements and cultural touchstones are only the proverbial tip of the iceberg. For Hefner, the Editor-in-Chief and Chief Creative Officer of *Playboy* has influenced the world's thinking and behavior on sexuality at the same time that he has been a pioneer in journalism. He's been a leader in entertainment, and has helped preserve some key parts of American and Hollywood history.

So far, it's been a wonderful ride for the man whose first issue—the famous one with Marilyn Monroe on the cover—hit stands 58 years ago. The Los Angeles Press Club is proud to honor Hefner with the Lifetime Achievement Award at the fourth annual National Entertainment Journalism Awards.

## TOP JITTERBUGGER

The fact that Hefner's story has been told many times doesn't make it any less fascinating.

He was born April 9, 1926, the eldest son of conservative Protestant parents, and grew up in Chicago. In Brigitte Berman's 2009 film *Hugh Hefner: Playboy, Activist and Rebel*, he described

BY JON REGARDIE

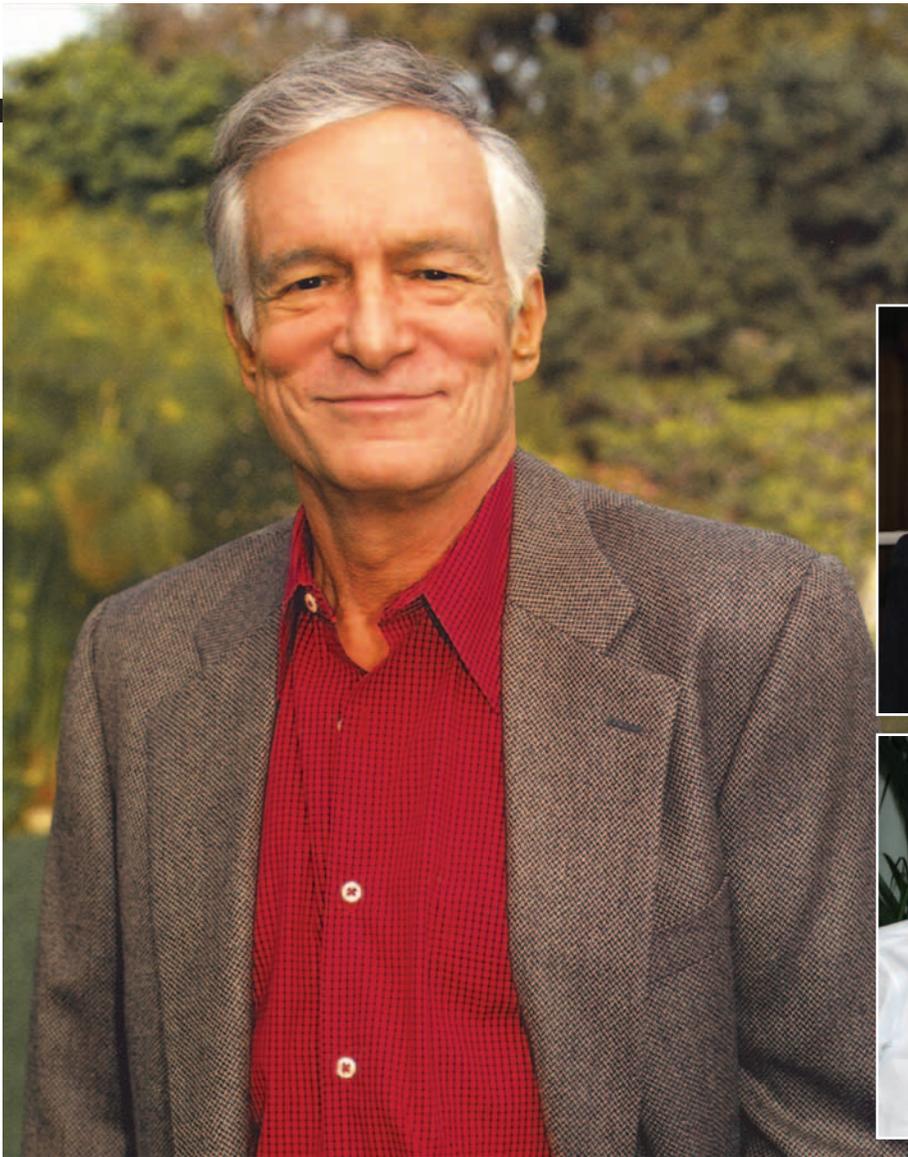
a youth without much affection. He escaped into movies and music, fascinations that would remain at the forefront of his life decades later. In high school he wrote editorials for the school paper and found other outlets of self-expression.

"I was the best jitterbugger in the class," he said in Berman's film.

After a stint in the army, Hefner attended the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and studied psychology, because, he recounted in *Playboy, Activist and Rebel*, he wanted "to try to understand why we are the way we are, and maybe make a difference." Yet hints of his future bent were already apparent—during a semester of graduate courses at Northwestern, he wrote a paper titled "Sex Behavior and U.S. Law," examining sex statutes in the then 48 states.

He soon entered the magazine world, though





circulation manager for a children's publication, but in the early 1950s he was thinking bigger: He started planning a men's magazine, working on it in the kitchen of his apartment. The fantasy became reality when he secured a \$600 bank loan and borrowed \$8,000 more from friends and family.

The hook of the first issue was the famous nude photos of Marilyn Monroe that had been taken for a calendar in 1949. Hefner learned that a local company owned them and bought the rights.

The fact that those pictures appeared in *Playboy* was ironic. During the planning process, Hefner intended to call his magazine *Stag Party*, feeling it would draw male readers. However, in the run-up to the premiere issue, he received a cease and desist letter from another magazine called *Stag*. His fate was sealed: The renamed *Playboy* hit stands in December 1953 with a 70,000-issue run.

**Above: Hefner with daughter Christie, and with sons, Marston and Cooper.**

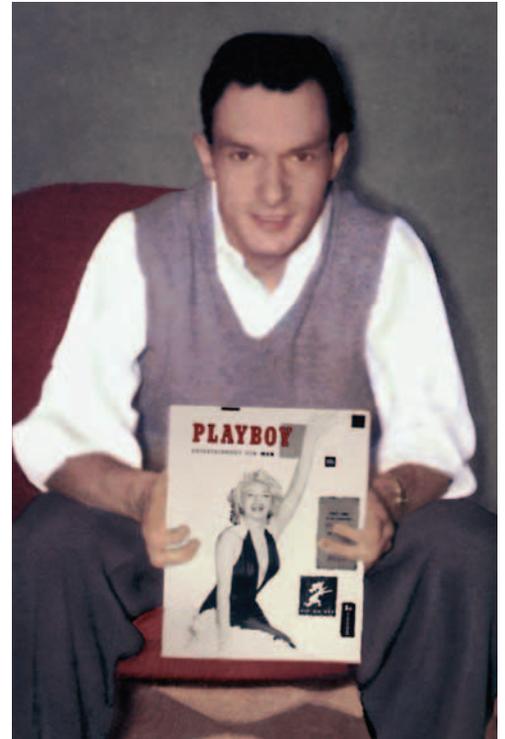
**At left: Hefner at 14 years, and in the army in the mid 1940s.**

**Page 16: The Hefner family in 1934.**

working for others clearly wasn't in his blood. He did time as a copywriter for *Esquire* (he was earning \$60 a week, then quit when the magazine wouldn't give him a \$5 raise) and had a job as



Hefner working at a typewriter on the first issue of *Playboy*, and holding the magazine with Marilyn Monroe on the cover.



He sold 52,000 copies, enough to guarantee a second issue. American culture was forever changed.

#### ACCOMPLISHED CONTRIBUTORS

Over the decades it became something of a joke to say that one picked up *Playboy* for the articles. That said, the magazine has featured long-form contributions from some of the world's most accomplished journalists and authors. Ray Bradbury serialized *Fahrenheit 451* over three early issues. Writers such as Ian Fleming, John Updike and Irwin Shaw contributed.

The photo spreads weren't the only controversial or boundary-pushing elements in *Playboy*. During the oppressive years of McCarthyism, blacklisted writer Dalton Trumbo wrote for the magazine. At a time when racial lines were still clearly drawn in the United States, Hefner hired a young African-American writer, Alex Haley, to conduct the first "Playboy Interview," with jazz man Miles Davis. Haley, in the years before writing *Roots*, would go on to do "Playboy Interviews" with figures including Malcolm X, George Lincoln Rockwell, the founder of the American Nazi Party, and Martin Luther King, Jr.

A piece by King, titled "A Testament to Hope," was published in *Playboy* shortly after his death.

Of course, the magazine was known for its Playmates and pictorials, and while they would help drive *Playboy's* circulation to more than 7 million in the early 1970s, they made Hefner a target. In addition to encounters with police and

the judicial system, he drew heat from activists who charged that the photo spreads objectified and exploited women. Hefner always defended his magazine passionately, answering claims that *Playboy* sexualized women by pointing out that people are, indeed, sexual.

Of course, in 2011, the images, video and so much else on the Internet make *Playboy's* offerings look comparatively quaint.

#### USING POWER

*Playboy's* success gave Hefner immense wealth and power. What many people are unaware of is the way he used it.

Yes, he embraced hedonism, freedom of choice and sexuality, and turned the mansion into perhaps the most famous party palace of the last 50 years, but he also frequently used his position to combat oppressive social mores that had nothing to do with sex.

In 1959, Hefner hosted a syndicated TV show, "Playboy's Playhouse," and a decade later would have another show, "Playboy After Dark." Along with figures such as Tony Bennett, Buddy Rich and Tony Curtis, Hefner welcomed African-American guests and performers to the programs, including Dizzy Gillespie and Sammy Davis, Jr. "Playboy's Playhouse," Hefner noted in Berman's film, could not get distribution in the American South.

The love of music and film that was ignited in his youth spilled out decades later. In 1959,



Hefner with Ella Fitzgerald at the first Chicago Playboy Jazz Festival in 1959.



Surrounded by Bunnies at the Playboy Club.

Hefner organized the first Playboy Jazz Festival, a three-day blowout in Chicago that included the biggest names in the form, among them Count Basie, Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong. Although it would be another two decades until the second festival, it is now a mainstay of the summer at the Hollywood Bowl.

Hefner's love of film also never diminished. His movie nights at the mansion have also become something of legend. At the same time, he has put his money where his passion is—he donated \$2 million to the USC School of Cinematic Arts and endowed a course in censorship in film at USC. He has also been a sponsor of the Last Remaining Seats, the series that each summer screens classic films in the original movie houses on Broadway in Downtown L.A.

It's not the only aspect of Hollywood he's helped preserve. In 1978, when the famous Hollywood sign had become dilapidated, Hefner put up money to repair it. Thirty-two years later, he again came to the sign's rescue: A developer was threatening to build housing on the open space just west of it, and a campaign to acquire the property was short on cash. Hefner donated \$900,000. The land is now part of Griffith Park.



Hefner led efforts to raise funds to save the Hollywood sign which had fallen into disrepair.

Nearly six decades after *Playboy* first hit stands, Hefner remains its guiding force. American culture and journalism today are nothing like they were back then, a fact due in part to the influence of Hugh Hefner.

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