

# The Story of Yellow Feather



I don't know how I ever found the (courage, arrogance, stupidity... insert your favorite word here) but I enrolled in college as a theater major with a concentrate in acting without ever having set foot on a theatrical stage.

My first role as a college freshman was certainly one to remember. I was cast in the Nelson Eddy/Jeanette MacDonald musical spoof, Little Mary Sunshine, as the villainous Indian, Yellow Feather. He doesn't appear at all in the first act until the final seconds but the character is talked about with such impending dread that the audience is expecting to see evil incarnate. Here's what actually happened (mind you, this all happened opening night of my very first theatrical performance).

- My first entrance was to be a dramatic onstage leap onto a 3 foot platform where I was to strike a menacing tableau pose as the first act curtain was falling. I somehow made it up on the platform without tripping and struck my pose with my tomahawk held high. The music built to a crescendo... and the audience howled. I discovered that I was holding my tomahawk backwards so

the little dinky tip was facing front and the sharp blade was pointed towards my own face.

- My next scene was a solo dance number to cover for a scene change. As I got into place, the scrim upon which was painted a mountainous background was to fly in behind me. It got hung up on one of the stage lights and in trying to force it free, the backstage crew managed to dislodge the 30 pound Klieg light which came crashing down at my feet, narrowly missing my head. I had the presence of mind to kick the light under the descending scrim but forgot the steps to the dance number. Instead of an Indian war dance it looked more like an uncoordinated Boogaloo.
- Next, I was to kidnap the female star, Little Mary Sunshine, and tie her to a tree. I got behind the musical beat and didn't have enough time to complete the task so I handed her the rope and the poor actress was forced to hold it up and "pretend" she was tied to the tree.
- Then, the hero, Big Jim of the Forest Rangers was to arrive and save the day, after a fierce struggle with me. During that choreographed struggle, I broke the blade of my plastic knife on Big Jim's wrist. My next move was supposed to be to threaten him with the knife but since I now only held a hilt, I decided to choke him instead. I probably should have first consulted with the actor playing Jim. Surprised, he threw me off so violently I ripped the seam of my buckskin pants, leaving me wearing a pair of yellow leggings and exposing my lucky bikini blue underwear I wore underneath. (This was the fashioned challenged 70s after all.) I finished the fight scene with my thighs held so tightly together I probably looked like I was channeling Jerry Lewis.
- At the end of the play, to show my conversion from bad guy to good, I was to walk out during the curtain call waving a large patriotic flag as snow gently fell from

above. The crew lost control of the snowbox and ended up dumping a carton of shaved styrofoam directly on top of my head.

That was my theatrical debut. But I have to say, it got better. I think back now with the fondest of memories of my time spent in front of the footlights. And I'm very happy that a number of those performances have been preserved in a digital form so I can revisit them from time to time. Even the embarrassing moments.

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