

The Blonde and the Chambers Stove: A Bold-But-Classic Film
by Michael Mech - The Bungalow Chef

Life is like a wild adventure film. For the movie to be good, you need to forget that you're sitting in a squeaky, plush red theater seat with popcorn in your lap, staring at a screen. When it's good, you lose yourself in the story. Of course, it means the actors are worth their salt too.

If my life were a film, it would need to have a blonde. She'd be cast as my best friend. Not just any old blonde. She's *The Blonde*.

There we were, sitting and squirming in those impossibly small, plastic chairs in Mrs. Gretties' kindergarten classroom. She was always nice to me. The Blonde, that is. That's saying something for kindergarten -- even at that stage of the game, kids can get pretty darn mean. The Blonde was *never* mean.

That she was nice to me was saying a lot -- all the more in kindergarten -- because I was always the big, doughy kid with dyslexia who hated sports. No wonder I started digging into the kitchen at a young age.

Advance the plot!

She was always there -- The Blonde -- and as we progressed to grade school, we were like bystanders in a horror film. Maybe we were even B-part players. We lived through years of bullying and other odd adolescent extremes: growth in fits and starts, awkward glances. For a while I think The Blonde was a spitting image of Jan Brady from TV stardom.

Years passed. I got doughier. She became more the scholar, and more the prophetess and purveyor of well-honed feminist ideology.

And with the advent and passing of high school, the story diverged into two paths, where we each went our separate ways. We both went out of state for college, for careers, and caring for different personal lives.

Fast forward. . .

Blue Island -- our hometown -- has a bit part in the screenplay for this movie, too. The city is known for calling back the ones who left the nest. And we both (The Blonde and

I) ended up returning to our quaint community -- perhaps a bit bruised, yearning and searching for that wondrous mid-century life we remembered as children.

Meeting again twenty years later at a political fund raiser, we re-introduced our friendship. The Blonde and I were both involved at the time. (And, yes, with the wrong people, for all the wrong reasons.) The conversation was friendly and polite, as both our personal relationships suddenly came to a crashing halt.

That's where things takes a turn in this flick: we began a wonderful friendship with each other.

Learning and laughing, and recovering from what we both went through in our previous, terrible relationships, we ended up christening one day a week to develop a fun and caring friendship. We called the event "Friday Night Adventures." We'd check out old neighborhoods in the south-side of Chicago. After seeing our 10th cop car with red-and-blue lights flashing in our eyes, or looking in areas begging for redevelopment, we would call it an evening and drive home.

Then the story took another turn.

The Blonde called me one sunny, fall afternoon (a friday, of course). She asked if she could kidnap me for a few hours. "Sounds good!" I said, with a sigh of relief, too.

You see, I just had returned from the business trip from hell. My "corporate America" boss informed me that 4 out of 6 sales team members were just dismissed, so I needed the break.

She picked me up and we drove to a small resale consignment shop. The Blonde looked at me and gave me a command I didn't think I'd ever hear: "Close your eyes," she told me.

I muttered to myself, *this has to be good!*

Finally, The Blonde said it, like only a leading lady on the silver screen could: "Surprise!"

There it was: a 1949 *Chambers stove*. (It had always been on my life's bucket list). And, oh my ... in school-bus-yellow! I already had had my own mid-life crisis with a European

sports car (and the divorce to boot). So for a culinary-freak-type-of-guy, the next course of action would be a Vintage Stove suited for my home and for “The Bungalow Chef.”

After a few quick negotiations, the stove was mine. A *Chambers* had always been a dream for me. Yes I have had a *Viking*, and a *Wolf*, and other prestigious brands to play in bit parts. But a *Chambers* was like having a “New Packard,” or “Coupe De Ville” in your kitchen. It was the leading lady in the century’s best film.



It gets better. Really, it does!

Chambers stoves were produced from 1912 to 1955 in Shelbyville, Indiana. The Chambers corporation had a great marketing scheme: the owner’s daughter would tour and have on-the-road “cooking schools.” The stove was so well insulated, that once it approaches the desired cooking temperature, you could turn the oven off and it would finish your meal. It was nicknamed the “going to church range.”

Later, the company had been sold to the KitchenAid division of the Hobart Company. Recently, I found out that many of the hip, cool “Food-Network chefs” have *Chambers* as their stoves-of-choice.

I had the stove delivered, and a second gas pipe fit into the kitchen. I checked out by a local stove specialist, and off I went into culinary Heaven.

And The Blonde?

She is a dear friend for life. She’ll always have a part to play in my feature picture.

