

# Local Playboy Bunny Writes Memoir Of Her High Hefner Heyday

by Janet Manley

For Glendale area resident and recent author Melody Williams, becoming a Playboy Bunny was a life-altering experience, and one fondly recalled through foggy modeling shots on the walls in her apartment.

Her new book, *The Melody of a Playboy Bunny*, was written partly in response to fallacies about Playboy Bunnies. Filled with photographs of the heyday of the Playboy Bunnies, waitresses employed in Hugh Hefner's many clubs located around the world, the book accounts how Williams



**California Dreaming:** After being selected as one of the founding Bunnies at the Los Angeles Playboy Club, Williams signed up for the Playboy Modeling Agency, during which many beautiful shots of her were taken.

became a Playboy Bunny in Denver, her move to Los Angeles and her decade-long career spent in satin bunny ears, cotton tails, collars and cuffs.

"That we had to sleep with people to get the job; that we had to sleep with Hefner; that you had to sleep with people at the mansion — that was all false." In fact, Bunnies were not allowed to date customers, nor were customers allowed to ask the Bunnies out.

After spending less than two semesters at the University of Colorado at Boulder on scholarship, Williams decided that at the time, school wasn't for her. She moved on to serving cocktails at the upscale Piccadilly Restaurant in downtown Denver. After too many drunks left too many tabs unpaid, Williams decided she needed a new gig.

Two of Williams' co-workers told her, "You don't have to take all this, you can be a Bunny."

"I thought 'this sounds like a good dream. I'm

gonna do this,'" Williams recalls.

Hugh Hefner opened the first Playboy club in Chicago in 1960, a playground for wealthy "key-holders" — members — who were served by the Drinks Bunny, Cigar Bunny, Billiards Bunny, and so on. The last club in the U.S. closed in 1988 in Michigan, while the Manila club survived to 1991, the empire marred by corruption and crime.

When Williams applied for a job at the Denver Playboy Club located in the penthouse of the Radisson Hotel, where she tried on a costume for management, Williams was told to, "lose 10 pounds and come back in two weeks." She did, and returned to accept the job two weeks later.

Required to maintain a weight of 105 pounds, the girls were weighed every Monday by the Bunny Mother, a sort of surrogate and supervisor, on account of their tiny costumes — you had to be zipped into them — and the strict department regulations inside the club.

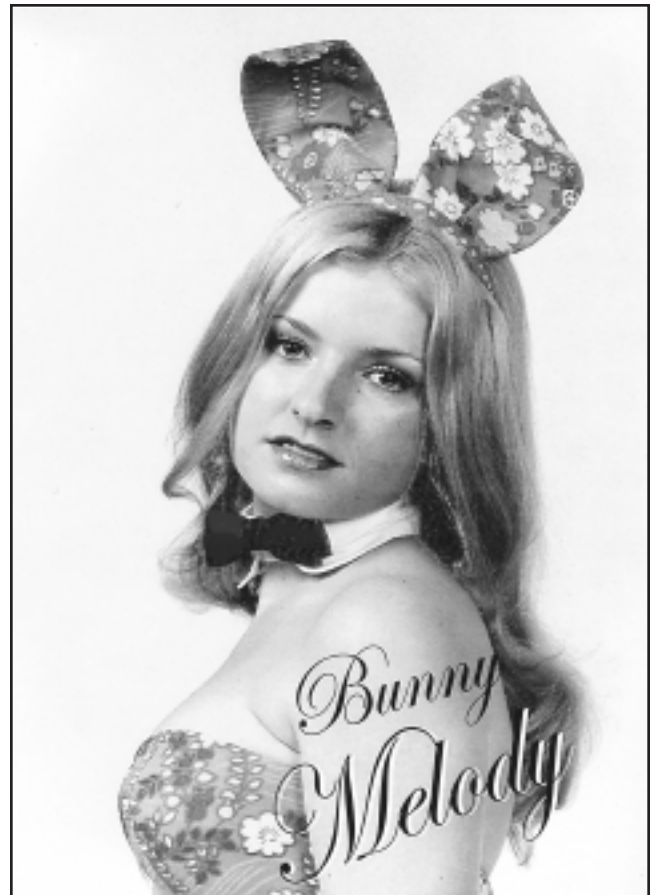
The money that a woman could earn as a Bunny often eclipsed that of a man at the time, tallying the minimum wage, 17.5 percent on each check, and tips, overtly placed into the corset, for an average of \$250 a night.

Although Williams was raised Catholic, she says that her parents were very proud of their daughter's newly acquired occupation and embraced her lifestyle. "My daughter's a Playboy Bunny, dammit!" caroused her father upon visiting the club.

"Even though my parents were Catholic they were ok with me being a Bunny," recounts Williams. "My mother was proud of me, knowing that so few people get to do this."

After a year working as a Bunny in the Denver club, Williams decided it was time to pursue her dream and move farther west. Aspiring to Los Angeles, Williams auditioned to be transferred to the first club in California in 1973, pitched against 800 other girls at the time. Warned by her Bunny Mother that, "LA girls are really beautiful." Williams retorted, "Well, so am I!" Weeks later, Williams was selected as one of the few founding Bunnies at the Los Angeles Playboy Club.

In L.A., Bunnies were invited to the Playboy Mansion every Sunday for a buffet, movies, and an opportunity to visit the iniquitous "grotto," a cove beyond the swimming pool where Williams says "proposals — and not the marriage type —



**Back In The Day:** In her new book, *The Melody of a Playboy Bunny*, former Playboy Bunny Melody Williams tells it like it was during her days in Hefner's world.

would occur." Forgiven for her naiveté once, Williams asserts that, "If you went once, you knew what was going to happen. You were going to be told to take your clothes off and 'let's get going.'"

Celebrities like Warren Beatty and many jazz musicians were regular visitors to the Mansion, and it was during this time that she moved in with her future husband, Floyd Butler, the lead singer of Friends of Distinction. They had met in a Denver jazz club and had been off and on since. They married in 1977 but after six years they divorced.

In addition to working at the Los Angeles Playboy Club and spending time at the Mansion, Williams signed up to be part of the Playboy modeling agency called Playboy Models. Williams was chosen to be on the iconic '70s television program, "The Dating Game," during which a celebrity bachelor anonymously interviews three bachelorette contestants with prepared questions from behind a wall. The celebrity bachelor ended up being world class body builder and future governor of California Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Although Williams was not chosen as Schwarzenegger's bachelorette, she describes him as being "the perfect gentleman."

As part of being in the Playboy modeling agency, many Bunnies were asked to become Playmates, the centerfold models in *Playboy* who were paid \$10,000 per shot that ran. Williams did a shoot, though she ultimately refused to let it run, for moral reasons.

"A variety of shots were taken, but I was not happy with any of them," noted Williams. "I felt the photographs could have

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been much better, as in many of my Playboy Models pictures. Also, for me, the \$10,000 just wasn't worth it. I have nothing against other women doing nude shots and I don't believe there is anything wrong with it."

After 10 years as a Playboy Bunny, Williams quit at age 33, in 1983, to finish her BA in Health Science, and recalls that Playboy paid 80 percent of the tuition for any girl wanting to study while working under their banner. In spite of this, there was no severance pay, no benefits, and no pension; something Williams is critical of today: "That I thought was wrong, because [Hefner] could afford it." The career of a Bunny lasted no longer than age 35.

Indeed the impact of time on women who once depended on their appearances seems minimal for Williams, today a qualified acupuncturist. However, she does concede the "Bunny mystique," and glamorization of the girls at that time — far from ubiquitous, the alumni is perhaps of greater diversity than the current crop of blonde Playmates.

Pressed on the branding of Playboy, acknowledging that there was a major sexual revolution at the time, though, "I don't think it expanded to the Bunnies, the models. You just keep doing what you're doing, and say nothing." Such hegemonic indifference is perhaps expected from those who relished their role, amidst strong self-conviction and ambition.

Many who once toted the fabled silk ears, collar and cuffs, corset and heels, could be seen in August celebrating the sisterhood of the travelling cottontail at the ex-Playboy Bunny Reunion on a cruise ship out of Chicago; a middle-aged crew of indomitable women in colored bunny ears that had been privy to the secrets of the Playboy Empire.

"It was so great seeing the girls I used to work with," noted Williams. "It was like sorority sisters getting together again after years of not seeing one another; we just picked up right where we left off."

At the reunion the ex-Bunnies told stories about their Playboy glory days. Her tailored orange Polynesian bunny costume a thing of the past, Williams remembers trying to find shoes to match the hue. "We would go to thrift stores and buy old wedding shoes to dye. They were really sad shoes." In spite of the persistence of the Playboy brand, each girl had her own costume color — in a sense her own identity, within the ranks. Senior girls could earn the right to a black and white tuxedo bunny outfit.



**The Bachelor And Bachelorettes:** When Williams was chosen to be on the TV program called "The Dating Game," the celebrity bachelor ended up being top notch body builder and future Governor of California Arnold Schwarzenegger.



**The Cosby Show:** During her time as a Playboy Bunny, Williams had the opportunity to meet many celebrities including actor and comedian Bill Cosby.

These days, Williams says that Playboy has changed. Clearly, she does not approve of Hefner's current harem, branding the charade a "joke." "He's become a cliché of himself," she smoothes, contemplating that Hefner is the only person out of the scene allowed to continue his role unabated through the roll of decades. Her friends, who she remembers as a close-knit "sorority," have all gone on to varied

careers as nurses, yoga teachers and businesswomen.

In July 2007, the Palms Resort and Casino in Las Vegas opened the first club of recent times. There are plans to open satellites in Mexico and on an island off China's coast in the near future.

Living again in Denver, Williams returned for her mother, seriously ill six years ago, and so the costume returned with her; the relic of a bright, graceful past. "It's still the most sought-after job for women in America." Says Williams, "I worked during the hottest years of Playboy."

*The Melody of a Playboy Bunny: My Life as a Playboy Bunny*, by Melody Williams, can be purchased by calling 303-691-3726 or by e-mailing mrosew306@comcast.net. RRP: \$20 plus \$4 postage.



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