

# Fake Forrest makes gracious Gump

BY AUDRY L. LYNCH

**W**ERE YOU sorry when the movie "Forrest Gump" ended? Did you wonder what happened to the rest of his life? Would you like to meet Forrest Gump some day? If the answer to those questions is yes, I've got some good news. Forrest is alive and well and living in Santa Clara, where he's also known as Steve Weber.

On any given Saturday or Sunday you can sit on a park bench in front of the Bubba Gump Shrimp Company restaurant in San Francisco and talk to Forrest — er, Steve — just like in the movie. On Sundays he can also be found at the restaurant of the same name on Cannery Row in Monterey.

Every weekend Steve claims that he convinces at least one person he is the "real" Gump. At first he used to say no when people asked him if he was the sweet-natured Forrest, but when he told them that he saw their disappointment. Now he says: "Yes, I am the real Forrest Gump. That other guy, Tom Hanks, got the part in the movie because he looked like me."

How did all this happen? "My career is a combination of genetics and a bad haircut," Steve says with a laugh. "When Hanks starred in 'Bosom Buddies' on TV, people started telling me: 'You look just like that guy. You even have his mannerisms and sound like him.' It didn't happen just once or twice but hundreds of times. It gave me an uncanny feeling."

After "Forrest Gump" came out in 1994, Steve decided to try out the identity at a Halloween party. He bought a shirt and suit at Goodwill, a suitcase at an antique store, some Nike sneakers and hauled out his old colored hiking socks. His hair stylist gave him a buzz cut and to top it all off he toted a box of chocolates. "Everyone at the party loved it," Steve says, "but, personally, I didn't see the resemblance myself."

Two years later Steve, a sales rep, heard that Paramount Pictures and the Rusty Pelican Restaurant chain would be opening 22 Bubba Gump Shrimp Company restaurants, with the first one debuting in Monterey. He called immediately and talked his way into a meeting with the owners. Twenty minutes after meeting them, he had a job to appear at the



No, this isn't a scene from "Forrest Gump" — that's South Bay resident Steve Weber at work imitating the film's sweet-natured hero.

opening the following weekend. All these many months later, he's still showing up. "It was like fate tapping me on the shoulder," he says, "and I knew I had to answer."

Not only does Steve look like Forrest, he can easily slip into character. He admits that he watched the movie 20 to 30 times to get it right. Now he is a master of "Gumpisms" and enjoys talking to people on his bench all day long. He is so successfully in character that people often say, "Now speak in your own voice." He can truthfully reply, "I am."

Like the cinematic Forrest, Steve never seems to tire of meeting people. He has been so intrigued by the international tourists that he has learned some Portuguese, French, Italian and Spanish so that he can say a few words to visitors in their own language. Such foreign exchanges, he says, "make people laugh and roar."

*Audry L. Lynch lives in Saratoga.*

Predictably, Steve gets photographed constantly in his guise as Forrest Gump. One woman had his picture inserted on her credit card. The restaurant in Monterey has even started selling disposable cameras to accommodate tourists.

Steve's career as Gump has led to dates to appear at openings of other restaurants from Maui to New Orleans. He's also appeared in character at events like the San Francisco Marathon and the Salinas Rodeo, not to mention TV commercials for two area stations.

Even though he's met countless people in his new incarnation, the one person Steve hasn't come face-to-face with yet is Tom Hanks, and he has mixed feelings about that: "The movie came out on July 6, my birthday is July 7 and Hanks' birthday is July 8 so I think we would have a lot in common. I'm sure I'll meet him someday, but I want it to be under the right circumstances."