

While they were married, Gaines and Nancy held annual parties for the MADmen and their wives. Gaines was never completely comfortable in the mixed surroundings, except on two of the occasions, when Meglin and writers Larry Siegel, Stan Hart, and I wrote and performed full-length revues. The sketches touched on everyone, especially Gaines, his girth, his money, his wine, his clothes, and, of course, his paternalism. Like for instance, this sketch, written by Hart, depicting a meeting between MAD's pair of Spanish-speaking cartoonists, namely Antonio Prohias, an exile from Cuba, and Sergio Aragones, who came to the magazine from Mexico:

PROHIAS: Hello, Sergio, how are you today?
ARAGONES: Not so good, Antonio. I am troubled by something.

PROHIAS: What is that?

ARAGONES: Nick Meglin called me a wetback yesterday.

PROHIAS: How did he find out? Señor Gaines promised he would never tell. If one cannot trust Señor Gaines, one cannot trust God, either.

ARAGONES: It is sad that it has come to this. Ah, how happy I was on that day when Señor Gaines came to my Mexican village and took me with him.

PROHIAS: Did you have a good trip?

ARAGONES: Si, he has a big American car.

PROHIAS: You rode inside his Cadillac?

ARAGONES: Not exactly. I was in the trunk—until we crossed the border.

PROHIAS: And then you rode inside to New York?

ARAGONES: No, then I ran alongside to New York. How did he get you into the states from Cuba?

PROHIAS: He hid me in his wine hamper.

ARAGONES: You are lucky indeed. America is the land of opportunity. Here a person with moderate talent can become a success.

PROHIAS: Señor Gaines tells this to you?

ARAGONES: No, Señor Gaines proves this to me. Look at him.

PROHIAS: Si, he is very kind. Each week I get a check for 437 pesos.

ARAGONES: That is fine pay indeed...for a farmer in Peru. But it only comes to seventeen dollars American money.

PROHIAS: Si, it is difficult. But I try to stay happy and try not to think of the terrible poverty I have seen.



ARAGONES: In your home in Cuba?

PROHIAS: No, in my home in New York City.

ARAGONES: Have you ever seen Señor Gaines's home?

PROHIAS: Si, I am there two times a week.

ARAGONES: You go there to eat?

PROHIAS: No, I go there to clean.

ARAGONES: Ah, he is kind. Just the other day he took me to the safe and showed me my passport.

PROHIAS: Ah, he is so thoughtful. Just the other day he took me to the broom closet and showed me my new vacuum cleaner.

ARAGONES: Of course, there are many times when I wish he would not be so fatherly.

PROHIAS: Si, but I cannot complain.

ARAGONES: You mean you do not mind?

PROHIAS: No, I mean I cannot complain because I have relatives in Cuba. Señor Gaines is a powerful man. He will stop at nothing.

ARAGONES: Antonio, take heart. Someday justice will be done. Someday we, too, will have four, six, eight-page articles in MAD. Then we will no longer be known as wetbacks. We will be known as MAD artists.

PROHIAS: Si, and people will look at us and say, "There go two of the usual gang of idiots."

ARAGONES: I think I like wetback better.

PROHIAS: I think you are right.

— in the deep end of the swimming pool. The next morning, Nick Meglin, who had retired early the night before, got up for a pre-breakfast swim. He saw the submerged set and gasped.

"Oh, my God! What drunken nut in this crew did this?"

Meglin, with great effort, removed the items from the pool. Later that morning, he ran into Gaines, who was seething.

"This is it," Meglin said to himself. "The hotel's found out and the manager's been chewing out Bill."

Meglin approached Gaines. "What's the matter, Bill? You

looked annoyed."

Gaines's eyes blazed. "After all our work, some G**damn idiot emptied the pool."

Meglin changed the subject.

Gaines hates the standard kind of party, where people sit around trying to make small talk, but he relishes any kind of offbeat get-together. One night in 1965, he and wife Nancy were planning to tour the New York World's Fair with Arnie and Sue Kogen. A thunder shower kept them from going, but didn't dampen Gaines's enthusiasm.

"I know what we'll do," he told the Kogens. "We'll go from house to house and pick up the MAD people and have a party."

The first stop was the apartment of The Beard and his wife, Claire. The Brenners had a year-old baby.

"Bring the kid along," Gaines said.

The Brenners complied and the group drove out to the suburbs to fetch artist Mort Drucker and his wife, Barbara. The Druckers joined the caravan, which then proceeded to the house of the then-married Al Jaffees.

When Jaffee went to

On a door is a plaque with an inscription, translated from the Japanese, which used to adorn the walls of Geisha houses:

INSTRUCTIONS TO THE STAFF

DO NOT FORGET THE BENEFITS
YOU RECEIVE HERE
AND DO NOT, THEREFORE,
COMPLAIN OF ANYTHING

DO NOT TELL LIES

DO NOT BE UNREASONABLE

HONOR YOUR ELDERS AND BETTERS

BE GLAD YOU'RE ALIVE

Gaines put up the plaque believing its words might have some meaning for his employees. He was mistaken.



the door, he beheld Gaines and Sue Kogen. Jaffee was taken aback, wondering what the two were doing together. Gaines let him wonder for a while, then suggested the Jaffees join the gathering.

"We've got company," Jaffee said.

"Send them home," Gaines commanded.

The Jaffees complied, and the group, which now totaled eleven, drove to the home of

Al Feldstein. The house was dark.

"Now we'll see exactly what kind of humor editor he is," mused Jaffee.

It was decided to send Drucker, Nancy Gaines, and the Brenner's baby to wake up the house. Feldstein opened the door in his bathrobe and beheld the trio.

"What's going on?" he asked blearily, peering especially at Nancy, who was hysterical from laughing but who Feldstein thought was sobbing.

Drucker explained. "Al, I'm involved in the most insane triangle."

The procession eventually wound up at the Nick Meglins, who were

awakened to find that they were hosting a party. Gaines, who was responsible for putting the whole affair in motion, took in the scene for a few minutes, then, remembering that he hates parties, took his wife by the arm and went home.



"Gaines's office is a museum of sentimental and macabre memorabilia."

The door to Gaines's office is almost always open and, unless he's counting money or going over one of his endless lists, he's available to anyone. He loves gossip and will listen avidly to any tidbit, but will almost never contribute any view of his own.

"Bill will listen and Bill will laugh," says John Putnam, "but that's all. I've never heard him put anyone on the staff down."

Because everyone runs in to tell him everything, Gaines hears about everything—well, almost everything. The staff knows that he hates payola. In 1960, after the magazine parodied one of their ads, the makers of Esquire Shoe Polish showed their pleasure by sending MAD several shoe-shine kits. Gaines considered the gifts a payoff and mailed the kits back.

A few years later, after a spoof of a Zippo ad, the lighter company wrote MAD that it would like to have the signatures of the people involved in preparing the parody so that Zippo could send personal thank-yous. Obviously, the firm

wished to send a batch of gratis lighters bearing engraved signatures. The staff talked it over without consulting Gaines, and despite some concern over "what will Bill say," sent their signatures to Zippo, who mailed back the lighters as expected.

About a year later, Gaines called Meglin into his office.

"I want to know about those Zippo lighters," he said.

Meglin told the whole story. Gaines was upset and restated his feelings about

payola. He had learned about the freebies from a Zippo executive whom he met at a wine-tasting.

As for the lighters, I'm not sure if the MAD staff still has them. But

I'm sure of one thing. I've never seen one being used in the office.

Gaines's office is a museum of sentimental and macabre memorabilia. Facing his desk is a glass-door cabinet, in which rests the dual-framed photographs of a man and woman. Some visitors think they are the

portraits of his late parents, a supposition that Gaines often allows to go uncorrected. In truth, they are photos of silent screen star Fatty Arbuckle and the starlet he molested to death at a Hollywood orgy, Virginia Rappe. "I thought it would be a nice gesture to link them forever," Gaines says.

Nearby sits a genuine photo of his father, flanked by a skull. Gaines informs most visitors that the skull is his



THE MAN IN COMMAND

Pompos... Pig-headed... Pathological—a sucker for an ASPIRE shine-up



First and only blend of 9 delicious ingredients to make an Aspire shine-up palatable!

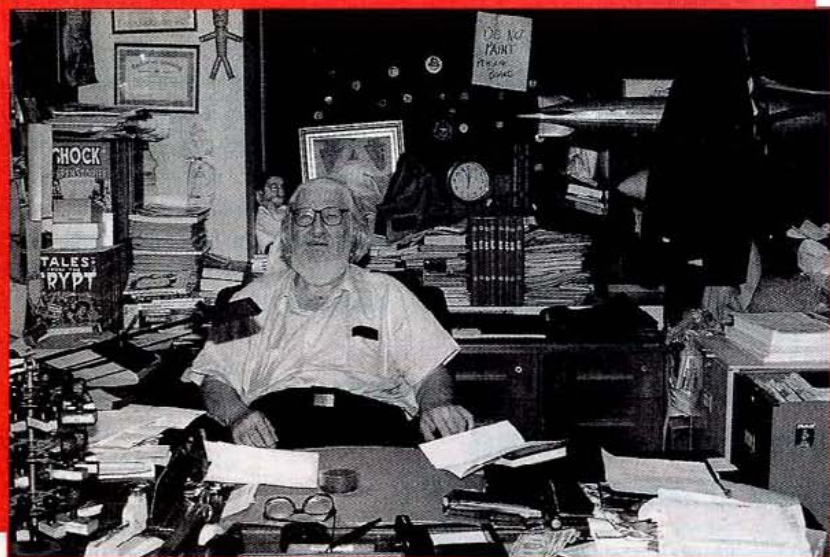
NEW FORMULA Aspire Boot-Lick Polish is a unique blend of delicious ingredients developed after years of research by the Aspire team. It's the only boot-licking polish you can get your hands on.



ASPIRE BOOT-LICK POLISH

The Esquire Shoe Polish Company's bootlicking response to this ad spoof got the MAD staff in trouble with Gaines.





Gaines behind his allegedly "immaculate" desk, circa 1989.

father's, and may or may not, depending on his mood of the moment, reveal that it isn't. On top of the cabinet are a cup, saucer, and milk glass bearing pictures of Shirley Temple. "I don't know why I keep them," Gaines says. "I wasn't especially fond of Shirley Temple."

Behind his desk are two framed diplomas certifying that he is both a Minister and a Doctor of Divinity of the Church of the Universal Brotherhood. The certificates can be purchased, for a small contribution, by anyone. The only explanation that Gaines, an atheist, can give for buying them is that they give the right to perform marriages. So far, he's had no takers.

Other walls bear the originals of MAD covers. For years, Gaines used the same picture framer, but recently the man died. Since then, no covers have been framed. Gaines maintains this is because there is no more wall space. John Putnam is convinced that Gaines, being an indomitable creature of habit, was comfortable with his old framer and

when the man died, opted to store MAD's covers unframed rather than go through the agonies of initiating

a new relationship.

When one visits Gaines at work, one faces a slovenly man sitting at an immaculate desk. The desk is checked by its owner many times a day to make sure that each item thereon is in its proper place. One notes a No Smoking sign and one soon finds that one may not light up. Gaines once chain-smoked, gave up the habit, and now can't stand the sight or smell of cigarettes.

Dwarfing everything else on the desk is a circular rack on which hang thirty rubber stamps, nearly all of which Gaines uses regularly. Many of them bear the names and addresses of people Gaines regularly corresponds with, and thus save him the time of inscribing outgoing mail by hand. Gaines admits that he needs more than thirty rubber stamps, but, again, being a creature of habit, he makes due with what he has.

"Why don't you buy another rack and place it alongside?" he was asked recently.

"Because my clock is there."

"Why not move the clock?"

"I like it where it is."

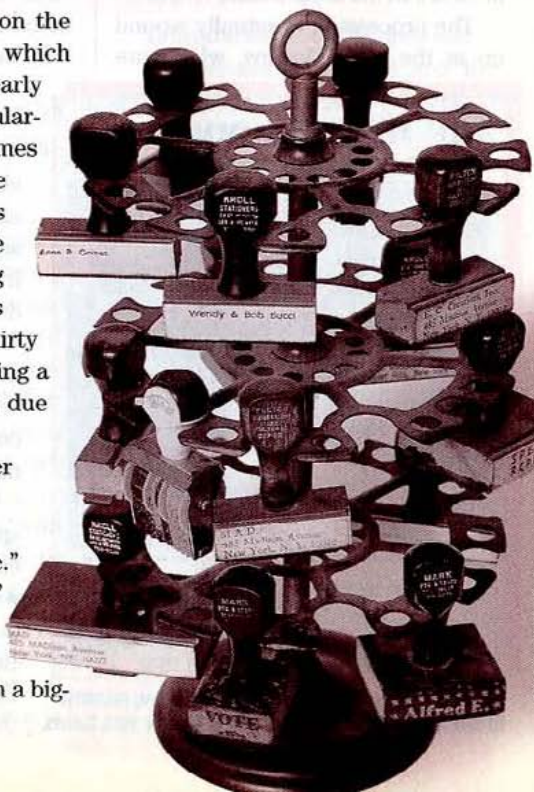
"Why not replace your current rubber-stamp rack with a big-

ger, double-size rubber-stamp rack?"

"Because it might topple over."

Attention: *Guinness Book of World Records*. Gaines's most noteworthy rubber stamp, which he uses to inscribe the back of every check he makes out to MAD's contributors, bears a single sentence of 104 words, which may well be the wordiest, one-sentence rubber stamp in the history of man. It reads:

Endorsement by the payee of this check shall constitute his, her, or its acknowledgment of the receipt of payment in full for the work, labor, services or materials furnished to E.C. Creations, Inc., as described on the face thereof and of the absolute transfer and sale by the payee to E.C. Creations, Inc. of all his, her, or its right, title, and interest in all artistic, literary or other property so conveyed and an authorization to E. C. Creations, Inc. or its assignees or transferees to use and re-use all or part thereof in any form or medium without further compensation.



Gaines's most cherished possession is his calendar, on which, in a script that only he can decipher, he writes his missions for the day. As each task is completed, he blackens out the notation with savage satisfaction. Gaines must get his calendar crossed out by the end of the day. Let us illustrate this with an example:

Gaines comes to work at 10 A.M., glances at his calendar, and sees twelve notations for the day, one of which is "Call Lou Silverstone." Gaines dials the number of Silverstone, who is one of MAD's writers. There is no answer. Gaines summons associate editor Jerry DeFuccio.

"I've got to talk to Silverstone. keep trying him."



Harvey Kurtzman,
MAD's first editor, left MAD after a fight
with Gaines over control of the magazine.

An hour goes by. Gaines, who meanwhile has crossed out six items on his calendar, begins to fidget. He summons DeFuccio.

"Did you get hold of Silverstone?"

DeFuccio reports the line is busy. Gaines returns to his duties. At 1 P.M. he has crossed out nine items on his calendar. He summons DeFuccio, but DeFuccio has gone to lunch. Gaines is getting restive. At 2:30 he summons DeFuccio.

"What about Silverstone?"

DeFuccio explains that he

This weathered door plaque greeted visitors to the MAD offices at 485 MADison Avenue for 29 years.

has reached Silverstone's wife, who expects Silverstone home any moment. Gaines continues working. At 4:45 he has crossed out eleven of the twelve notations on his calendar. He pounds his right foot on the floor in impatience and summons DeFuccio.

"Silverstone."

DeFuccio reports that he has called again and that Silverstone has been delayed and won't be home for at least an hour. Gaines rips the day's page from the calendar and scribbles "Call Lou Silverstone" on the page for the next day. He straightens up his desk and goes home. Whatever he does that evening will be clouded by the knowledge that he was unable to cross out "Call Lou Silverstone."

The next morning Gaines comes to work at 10 A.M. He glances at his calendar, then picks up the phone and dials Silverstone. Someone answers. It is Silverstone.

"Lou, I just wanted to tell you how much I liked that article you did on TV commercials in the last issue."



The mood at MAD is often casual and the activity chaotic, which is why Al Feldstein works much of the time with his door closed. He admits he has built up a sequestered image, but has found it the only way of working amid the bedlam.

Through the years, Feldstein's closed-door policy has impressed

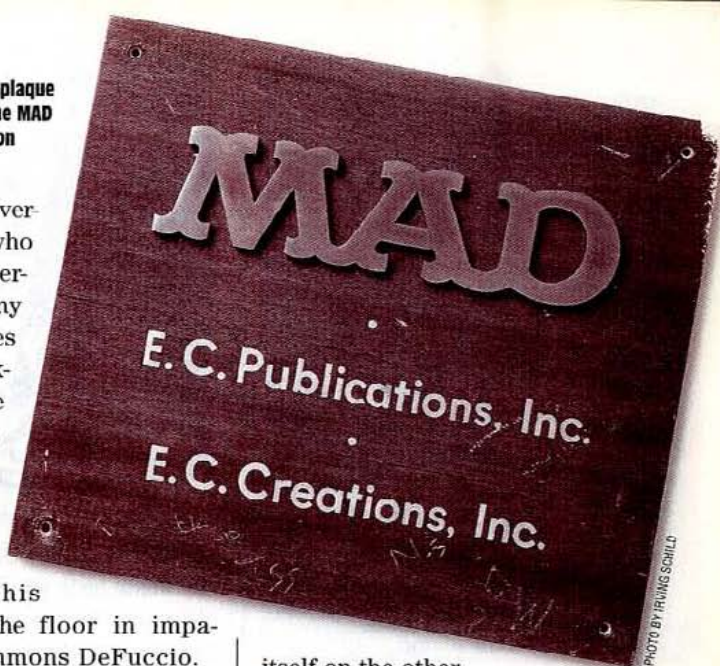


PHOTO BY IRVING SCHILD

itself on the other MADmen. One morning, Al Jaffee had a 10:30 script conference set up with Feldstein, Nick Meglin and Jerry DeFuccio. Feldstein's door was closed and no one dared intrude. Finally, around noon, Jaffee knocked on the door and poked his head in.

"Where have you been?" asked Feldstein, looking up from an article he was putting into the works. "I've been waiting for you."

Feldstein edits MAD with a kind of ruthless energy. He arrives late in the morning and works without letup until 6 P.M. Other staffers break for lunch; the editor dines at his desk and leaves his office only when necessary. It has been said that Feldstein strides down the hall to the men's room with the determination of a man en route to the most important conference of his career.

"Al possesses three times the energy of the rest of us," calculates DeFuccio. The ratio may not be absolute, but I do know that Feldstein's workday leaves little time for socializing. One contributor has likened getting a phone call from Feldstein with receiving a tele-



gram at two in the morning. The recipient knows instantly that whatever the message, it will not involve small talk.

When a conference with a writer or artist is over, Feldstein returns at once to the article he was working on before the conference started. After one meeting, I remained in his office and began talking gibberish, it took a full minute for my babbling to penetrate Feldstein's mind, which was now completely on the page of dialogue in his typewriter. At last he looked up.

"Are you still here?"

I left, closing the door behind me.

Feldstein's face and accomplishments have been featured in half a dozen national magazines and countless newspapers. Nonetheless, I frequently meet people who believe that Harvey Kurtzman, who hasn't worked for Gaines since 1956, still edits

MAD. I attribute this in part to what has been called the Kurtzman cult, which began when MAD was a comic book and lingers on even today.

"People remember 'firsts,'" says Kurtzman, who is in regular demand as a speaker at comic conventions and writers' gatherings. "It's the same in any field, like remembering the man who flew the first plane over the Atlantic."

"Kurtzman started MAD. Feldstein made it a commercial success," says Gaines. "Giving Harvey credit for MAD is like giving Robert Fulton credit every time a new ocean liner is launched."

"If Kurtzman's name is more of a household word today than Feld-



stein's, it is partly because Feldstein has made little effort to mingle with his peers in the publishing world. Kurtzman, despite being what he

calls a "super-private person" is friendly

with numerous editors and writers of the literary establishment. Feldstein has never explored that realm, in fact seldom fraternizes with anyone connected with MAD. He tunes in to his work in the morning and tunes

out at night.

He calls himself "a mercenary on the worst level," which would appear to mean that he edits MAD only for his salary, which happens to be larger than that of any editor in the world. Whatever his motivation, he has performed a remarkable juggling act, taking the output of two dozen freelancers and blending it every forty-five days into forty-eight pages of crisp, readable humor.



"What do we need him for," Gaines wondered when John Putnam came to work as art director. Being an old comic-book person, Gaines didn't understand that MAD

was a magazine that required special layouts and typefaces. He would walk into the art department and eye Putnam suspiciously. "What does he do?" he would ask no one in particular.

For several weeks, Gaines looked on Putnam as an intruder and greeted him with studied politeness. This worried Putnam until one afternoon Gaines stood outside the art department and reeled off a list of Putnam's sexual aberrations. The list was entirely spurious, but Putnam knew, at last, that he had been accepted.

Putnam is a curious blend of intellectual, Francophile, hippie, collector, and dirty old man. He is a

Lenny Brenner shares a tender moment with Arthur the Plant.



grandfather and the oldest member of the salaried staff, but in outlook is the youngest person in the place. His interests range from stamp-collecting to the rock culture, from appreciating Beethoven string quartets to grooving folk guitar in lava-lit walk-ups. For years, he lived in a flea-sized, one-room Greenwich Village apartment that served as combination living and sleeping quarters, music room, sculpture studio, camera den, and model railroad museum. In the center of the room, taking up the last of the available space, sat a large, faded, stuffed armchair. "For homeyness," he explained.

At MAD, Putnam's work area abounds with mixed treasures. Remains of salami slices fight for space with pieces of artwork. Orange rinds nestle with pencils and paper clips. I asked him how many bits of food he had spilled on lay-outs. "None," he said. "Fortunately, my

clothes get in the way."

Nick Meglin doubts this. "John will come in and ask to borrow my knife in order to cut some cheese. I'll tell him, 'Sure, John, but please return the knife when you're through with it.' John will look offended, hurt that someone would doubt his reliability to return something."

"Four weeks later," concludes Meglin, "the knife will turn up with a piece of artwork, both streaked orange with cheese."

The old MAD offices on Lafayette Street were infested with cockroaches, most of them lured by Putnam's insatiable lust for Italian delicacies and breadstuffs.

"Roaches from as faraway as Elizabeth Street and Great Jones Street must have raised their antennae in the air and come running to the feast I left about," he has said. "Gaines

"Putnam is a curious blend of intellectual, Francophile, hippie, collector, and dirty old man."

would see the roaches and scream to DeFuccio, 'Jerry, call the Bugman!' But the Bugman could never exterminate them all. To have eliminated the roaches, Gaines would have had to



FROM THE PERSONAL COLLECTION OF NICK MEGLIN

John Putnam in a photo we have no clue about.

have gotten rid of me."

Putnam stores MAD artwork in drawers labeled "Pornography," "Dirty Pictures," "Transvestia." The practice reflects his Rabelaisian side. When MAD moved uptown, Putnam bought a pair of high-power binoculars, in the

hope of detecting scenes of hanky-panky in nearby office buildings. Sadly, he has reported that the people he has observed are fully clothed and working.

He does a tremendous amount of work, but one wonders when he finds the time. Recently, he made up and sent his friends a handsome certificate commissioning them "Major General Grand Field Marshal of the Roumanian Army." Accompanying the certificate was a letter, informing each appointee that he had a choice of units to command, among them "The Sixth Battalion of Gypsy Malingers," "The 405th Airborne Bidet Repair Team," and "The Roumanian All-Violin Military Band."

(Continued on page 86)



Art Director John Putnam's phony Roumanian Army certificate and accompanying letter.



Dear Major General Grand Field-Marshal.....
Welcome to the Roumanian General Staff! As a new member you can share in the advantages our organization offers to men of questionable good will everywhere! As a Roumanian Staff officer, you have the historic opportunity to help bring back poverty, ignorance and appalling sanitary conditions to the Balkans. Your military career will be enhanced by your assignment to various units, such as Colonel-in-Chief or Vice-President of the National Committee, Executive Officer of the 300th Field Officer's Courtesy Regiment, The Command of the 10th as Musical Director of the World's only all Violin Military Band! Always remember that you are a Roumanian Officer and key to the bedroom of our best friend's wife!
Yours, for Roumanis!

Executive Field Marshal
and Royal Jewel Boy