

THE MAD WORLD OF WILLIAM M. GAINES PART II

(Continued from page 19)

Some travelers take photographs. Others carry souvenirs. Gaines carries the memories of his trips in his taste buds. Among his savored treasures:

RUSSIA "A bunch of us went to a restaurant but couldn't read the menu. I ordered all ten items on the menu, figuring that out of the ten there would be something everyone would like. The caviar was good, fresh Beluga. I had two large portions every lunch and dinner at a dollar sixty a portion. I had to eat it on bread. The Russians don't give you anything proper to eat caviar on, like thin toast or blinis."

BANGKOK "Don't miss a place called Nick's Number One. Nick is a limping Hungarian who makes a delightful Spaghetti Carbonara. He also happened to have a Tokay Aszu, 5 puttonyos, which is one of the world's fine wines, and a very decent Egri Bikaver (Bull's Blood) '61."

HONG KONG "At the Peninsula Hotel, we had a memorable breakfast, served in the elegant, old-fashioned manner, just what I'd expect from a fine, old hotel. During our stay, we had Mandarin, Shanghai and Cantonese cooking. We missed Szechwan, but I had it when I got back to New York."

AFRICA "I went there expecting to lose a lot of weight. I didn't. The food is excellent in Kenya, less so in Tanzania. The zebra at the Ngorongoro Lodge was a treat, as was the Fondue Bourguignonne. The restaurant at Treetops serves a great buffalo steak and there is a very acceptable wine list. I loved the poached kippers at the Keekoruk Lodge. Poaching takes out the salt and makes the bones easy to remove."

ROME "I loved the dives and street restaurants. We'd try the pasta in one place, then go down the street and finish the meal with the pasta in another place."

LONDON "I've had one good meal there, at a place called Wheeler's. They make Dover sole in two dozen different ways. Then MAD Art Director Lenny Brenner and I ordered four of them."

NEW YORK Gaines's list of memorable eating places includes one New York establishment that will not be found in any restaurant guidebook. "For getting sick, I like Doctors Hospital. Though it may not have the medical repute of, say, New York Hospital, it is the most enjoyable hospital to be sick in, if for nothing else than its food, which is excellent for a hospital. They even have room service, so you can order up a snack for a visiting guest."

HAITI "The Picardie Restaurant in Petionville served two dozen Haitian snails in a fantastic sauce, followed by Tournedos with a Béarnaise sauce unmatched in my experience."

cheering thought. It was, he decided, a beautiful way to die.

In restaurants, Gaines is an accepting patron who rarely causes a scene. There have been exceptions. One evening he and Nancy dined at the Asti, a restaurant that features opera singers. Gaines had just begun his main course when a tenor and a soprano, standing at opposite sides of the room, took up a full-voiced duet. Gaines can't stand opera, much less while he is eating. He rose from his table, left his wife, and carried his plate into

the kitchen, where he finished his meal in relative peace and quiet.

He did not leave a large tip that night. His method of tipping is unusual but consistent. If he is in a restaurant he does not intend to patronize again, his tip will be standard. If he is in a restaurant he knows he will patronize again, he will overtip. As he once told Orlando, "What one takes from Peter, whom he won't see again, one gives to Paul, whom you will."

Four times a year, Gaines attends a dinner for the Lucullus Circle, an

eating society that limits its membership to fifty and is very expensive to belong to. Each banquet, a black-tie affair, features seven courses and fifteen or so wines and liqueurs. After each Lucullus dinner, the chef is called in to hear a critique by one of the members. The night Gaines took me as a guest, the reaction by the diners to the cuisine was mixed.

"Shall we leave now?" Gaines asked me somewhat hopefully. "I think I'd like to hear the critique," I said. Gaines sighed and agreed to stay. It was obvious that he cared little about the critique, that once the food and wine were gone, he

Gaines is easy to please, just so long as there is enough of everything.



should be, too.

Gaines likes to take MAD people to the Lucullus affairs, if only to be amused. When Dick DeBartolo was a guest, he surveyed the elegant scene, scanned the extravagantly printed 12-by-16 inch menu and said, "Hey, Gaines, one night why don't we come up here early and stack a bunch of Chicken delight cartons outside the door to the dining-room?"

Gaines is easy to please, just so long as there is enough of everything. John Putnam, a non-domesticated sort who possesses a limited knowledge of cooking, invited Gaines to dinner. Putnam decided that steak would be a sensible main course. He went to his butcher and said, "I'm having my boss over for dinner. Give me the best steak for two you have. Price is no object." The butcher picked out a huge chateaubriand and wrapped it. Putnam then pointed to the meat case and told the butcher, "Now wrap up that little shell steak. That'll be for me."

On the MAD trips, Gaines's most constant companion used to be Orlando, but after Orlando stopped drawing for the magazine, Leonard Brenner stepped in. In distant lands Gaines and The Beard are united by their love of food. In Kyoto, they and four other MADmen went looking for a new restaurant. Gaines and

Brenner selected a small eatery specializing in sushi, the Japanese raw fish delicacy. The other four decided on a restaurant next door. After Gaines and Brenner finished their several portions of sushi, they found the others next door, crouching unhappily before a sukiyaki-like dish called shabu-shabu. The four did not want the shabu-shabu, which was difficult to communicate, since neither they nor the restaurant staff spoke each other's language. Gaines solved the problem. He sent the four on their way, after which he and Brenner, to the absolute astonishment of the waiters, sat down and devoured the shabu-shabu.

ILLUSTRATION BY JACK BECKARD



CHAPTER 11

MIND YOUR OWN BUSINESS

Contrary to the size of his person, appetite, and bankroll, William M. Gaines thinks small — at least as publisher of MAD. He has sat by and watched the great magazines, *Colliers*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Look*, fall by the wayside. He has beheld the house that Luce built scrambling to hold on for dear Life. He has seen Hugh Hefner rise and fall with *Trump* and *Show Business Illustrated*, then parlay *Playboy* into a far-flung realm of clubs and hotels.

Years after the *Trump* affair, Hefner asked Gaines, "What new projects are you planning?"

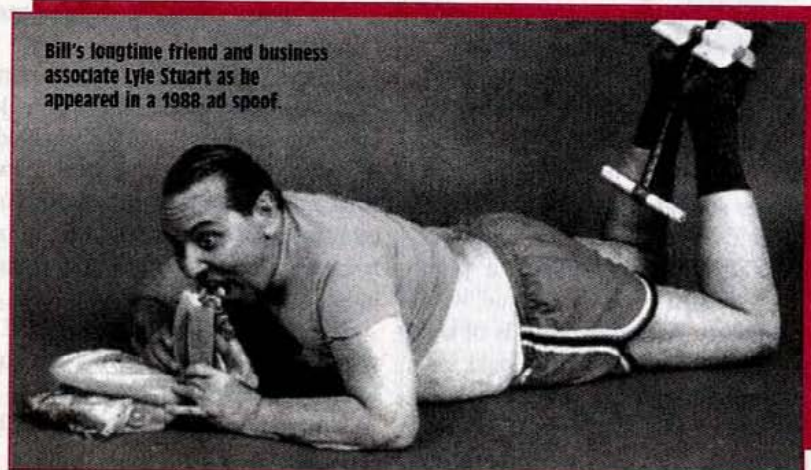
"None," Gaines said.

"None?" Hefner asked incredulously.

"It was like I was guilty of blasphemy," Gaines said later.

What one must realize is that Gaines is terrified of getting involved in an operation too big for him to handle personally. Therein lieth ruin, he feels, not for Hefner, perhaps, but assuredly for

Bill's longtime friend and business associate Lyle Stuart as he appeared in a 1988 ad spoof.



himself.

Gaines began thinking small when he took over the business end of MAD. He'd built up an empire with his horror comics and had blown the profits like a heedless dilettante. With MAD he'd be satisfied with a modest kingdom.

Back in 1956, you'll remember, he was deep in debt from his distributor, Leader News, going bankrupt. He was also in analysis, having finally given in to the appeals of Sheldon Mayer and Lyle Stuart.

"Bill was a virtual snakepit of neurotic problems, even during his early years of success," recalls Stuart. "He couldn't live with good fortune. He told me that when he stopped his Cadillac at a red light, he was convinced that the people waiting at the bus stop hated him."

The sessions had begun in 1954, when the horror empire was crumbling. The analyst wanted Gaines to come in five days a week, but Gaines held out for four, it being part of his nature never to go all out for anything. Like many men of the couch, the doctor billed Gaines whether or not Gaines showed up. This was irksome, especially at vacation times.

"Since I have to pay you when I'm out of town," Gaines declared, prior to leaving on a trip to Haiti, "I want you to come into this office every morning and think about me for forty-five minutes."

"Are you getting anything out of it?" his sister Elaine

asked, when he was midway through his sessions.

"If nothing else, I don't feel guilty about things I do any more," Gaines told her. "I can go ahead and do them and not feel rotten."

"Did you get anything out of it?"

I asked him, long after the sessions ended.

"For six years I neatly avoided ever saying anything that would let my analyst help me," he answered, "but,

then, he never said anything to me, either — except for seven words that changed my life."

The help came when Gaines needed it most, just after Leader News went bankrupt. Gaines lay on the couch and poured out the whole sorry tale — that he owed George Dougherty, his printing representative, about \$110,000 and that the only honorable thing to do was to dip into his inheritance and pay Dougherty off, then close down MAD.

The analyst stopped scribbling in his notebook and said what turned out to be the seven magic words.

"Why are you worrying about George Dougherty?"

Boom! The words hit home. What they meant, of course, was that Gaines should start worrying about himself. So he started. He met with Dougherty and proposed a plan whereby MAD would continue, with Dougherty getting two-thirds of the profits until the debt was paid off. Dougherty agreed, the debt was squared in less than a year, and the two men have worked together ever

since.

However, the problem remained of finding a new national distributor for MAD. There are about a dozen of these distributors, each of which deals with some seven hundred wholesalers around the country. Gaines chose Ace News. The choice did not sit well with many of the seven hundred wholesalers, who were stuck with thousands of unsold MADs. Ordinarily, they would have returned them for payment to Leader News, but Leader was dead. The wholesalers told Ace News they wouldn't handle MAD unless Gaines made good on the returns, which meant paying them thousands of dollars. Bad luck, Gaines, or was it?

Gaines refused — it was Leader's debt, not his — and went to American News, which was the only national distributor that had its own set of wholesalers and newsstands. The contract terms were generous and Gaines was pleased. Leader News had been a fourth-rate distributor; with American News he was going first-class.

In less than a year, American News boosted MAD's circulation from 300,000 to half a million. Good luck, Gaines, or was it? After distributing seven issues, American News announced it was dropping the distribution end of its business. Bad luck, Gaines, or was it?

"Try Independent News," George Dougherty said.

"I can't," Gaines said. "they're part of National, and that's Jack Liebowitz's outfit. Liebowitz helped buy out my father, and you know what a bitter fight they had. What's more, Liebowitz hates my guts because he thinks I ruined the comic industry with my horror stuff."

Dougherty pointed out that MAD was looked on with growing esteem by the publishing establishment.

"Go to Independent News. They'll want you."



AN IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT FROM THE PUBLISHER



Dear MAD Reader:

Over the past few years, the cost of producing MAD has risen dramatically. Ink, paper, printing and shipping prices all have gone up. (In fact, just about everything connected with MAD has gone up, with the exception of the quality of the magazine!)

In order to avoid raising the price of MAD, I'm trying something in this issue that I swore I never would—running ads. I'm not happy about this, but I am trying to make the best of the situation out of respect to you, the reader.

Accordingly, I have established a Blue-Ribbon panel of experts who will carefully screen all companies who wish to advertise in MAD. In addition, every product advertised will be carefully reviewed and tested by this panel. You have my personal guarantee that only top-of-the-line companies and their products will appear in the pages of MAD. My foremost concern is that you, the reader, are satisfied. The "MAD Merchandise Mart" appears on pages 22 and 23 of this issue. Read the ads, judge for yourself, and let me know what you think!

If the response to advertising is good, we will try it again in future issues. If not, we will not use ads again and will maintain our "cheap" price as long as possible. Unfortunately, the low quality of the magazine will remain the same, no matter what you say!

William M. Gaines
William M. Gaines

Gaines trotted over. They did want him.

"They gave me the nicest, cleanest contract you'll ever see," he says, "and nothing in the past was ever mentioned."

Good luck, Gaines, and this time it really was. MAD's circulation zoomed in three years to one million and has been climbing ever since. In 1972, sales hovered just under two million.

Independent News helped Gaines in another way. Liebowitz was a tough businessman, which meant that Gaines constantly had to be on his toes. The first time the two men met, Gaines was vaguely perplexed

They're Available In Dozens Of Shapes!
They're Available In Dozens Of Colors!
They're Illegal In Dozens Of States!
They're Responsible For Dozens Of Injuries And Deaths!
FIREWORKS
FIRECRACKERS! ROMAN CANDLES!
ASHCANS! SPARKLERS!
plus: HAND GRENADES! LAND MINES! TORPEDOES! EXOCET &
PERSHING MISSILES! NUCLEAR WARHEADS & more!
For FREE CATALOG, send an unmarked five dollar bill (just to cover postage, of course) to T.N.T. FIREWORKS, 11 Sparkler Lane, Kaboom, Kansas 10314.

Readers opened MAD #275 and found this "Important Announcement" from Bill Gaines. It was a bogus set-up for a collection of silly fake ads by Dick DeBartolo, but many still thought it was real and wrote in to protest ads in MAD. Dick's complete article appears on page 50 of this issue.

by Liebowitz's face. After a while, he realized that Liebowitz was a near double for Jerome Cowan, the Hollywood character actor, who was cast often as an underworld mouthpiece or a slick-talking entrepreneur. The similarity made Gaines feel uneasy, which, he soon learned, was ridiculous. Liebowitz was a thoroughly honorable, if determined, adversary at the conference table.

Once Gaines conquered this mirage, he and Liebowitz settled down to more than a dozen years of hard bargaining over contract revisions and other disputes. More than anything else, the jaw-to-jaw encounters transformed Gaines into a seasoned haggler. After Liebowitz retired, Gaines experienced a feeling of loss. He realized that through the years a bond of respect and affection had been formed, something like the gruff mutual admiration of two heavyweight wrestlers battling to a draw.

"Independent News has pushed MAD like crazy," he has said, "but their success shouldn't really sur-

prise anyone. After all, they've had the most pushable product published since the end of World War II.

This is the remark of a confident man, which Gaines, tested by his fights with Liebowitz, has surely become. He still is stirred by many of his old fears and compulsions, but has channeled them con-

structively and is now, says Lyle Stuart, "the exact opposite of what he was, emerging as an astute negotiator who possesses the right instincts for a publisher."

Yes, Gaines has thought small and has wound up quite rich. The MAD operation has changed hardly at all. The magazine still contains forty-eight pages printed in black-and-white on uncoated paper. There are no frills, no three-hour, expense-account lunches, no feudal chain of command. People ask why MAD accepts no advertising. Says Gaines:

"We'd have to improve our package. Most advertisers want to appear in a magazine that's loaded with color and has super-slick paper. So you find yourself being pushed into producing a more expensive pack-

MAD-Sept. 1979 Volume 1 No. 209 Publications, Inc., 485 MADison Avenue, Subscription in U.S.A., 15 issues \$9.00. Our become effective, and include mailing label Entire contents copyright © 1979 by E. C. F Publisher and Editors will not be responsible for by a stamped self-addressed return envelope fictitious. A similarity without satiric purpose t

age. You get bigger and fancier and attract advertisers. Then you find you're losing some of your advertisers. Your readers still expect the fancy package, so you keep putting it out,





MAD's foreign editions have sometimes printed articles that infuriated Bill Gaines.

but now you don't have your advertising income, which is why you got fancier in the first place — and now you're sunk."

Like every other magazine, MAD is numbered consecutively. Unlike most every magazine, MAD is approaching its 160th issue and is still in Volume One.

"We'll never have a Volume Two," Gaines says proudly. "Should the Post Office complain that our Volume One is going on forever, I'll simply tell them its not true, that I intend to start Volume Two after the one thousandth issue."

MAD is dated two months ahead. This is a holdover from the comic book days, when newsdealers would pull off any comic that looked the slightest bit dated. Gaines has calculated a system where-

by no issue is on sale during the month printed on its cover. An October issue, for instance, will go on sale August 5 and be removed September 20.

The magazine enjoys its best sales in the summer, followed by the spring and winter. the worst sales are during back-to-school time, when, as Gaines mysteriously puts it, "Kids are too busy to read."

MAD is ninety-five percent newsstand sales, the rest subscriptions. Gaines makes no effort to push subscriptions ("My girls can just handle what they've got now"), in fact, barely makes it worthwhile for a reader to subscribe. A pitch in a recent issue offered nineteen issues for seven dollars, which comes to a saving of less than four cents an issue.

Gaines has managed to achieve growth without really growing. Three times a year he published MAD Specials, containing eighty pages of mostly reprinted material plus a bonus, such as a giant poster, or a construct-it-yourself MAD Mobile, or a hangable MAD Calendar.

Then there are MAD's paperbacks, eight published per year, some containing reprinted material, some completely original. As of this writing, there were close to sixty of them, all in print. In addition, MAD is translated into seven languages — Swedish, Norwegian, Finnish, Dutch, Italian, German and British. Yes, British — "dollars" become "pounds" or "quid," "garbage-man" becomes "dustman," etc.

Neither the paperbacks nor the foreign editions are published by Gaines, who lacks the time and the

Longtime MAD cover artist Norman Mingo and some of the paperbacks for which he painted covers.

facilities to market them, but he still regards them as part of his flock.

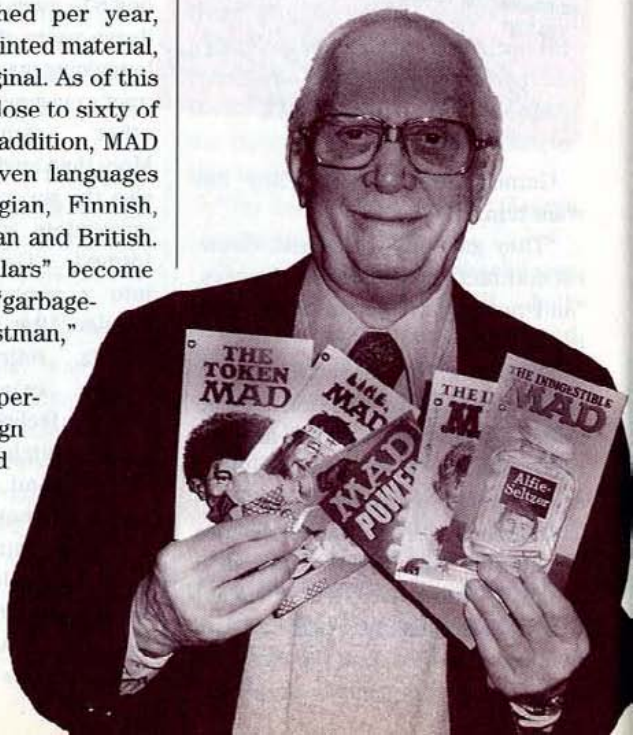
One day, John Putnam peeked into Gaines's office.

"Hey, Bill," he said, "I've a great idea for an ad parody. It's built around these three guys in a men's room. Two of them are standing at urinals and the third is peeking over their shoulders."

Gaines waved Putnam away. "Get out of here with your nutty, radical ideas."

"It's not my idea," Putnam said, throwing a magazine on Gaines's desk. "It's right here in your Dutch edition."

Gaines was infuriated. MAD has rarely resorted to outhouse humor and never overtly. The Dutch editors had added the offending pages on their own. Gaines has never minded that MAD's foreign editions contain an occasional home-grown item, but this one was intolerable. He sent off one of his typically dreadful, blistering letters to the Dutch publisher, informing him that nothing original can be put in MAD that is not in tune with the tone and morality of the American MAD. There has been no further trouble.



Not too long ago, a member of the Vietcong was captured with a copy of *Mad* hidden on his person. No one knows how the guerrilla got his copy or if it made him fight harder or made him want to surrender, but Gaines has no intention of bringing out a Vietnamese *Mad*. However, in 1968, during the time of the uprising in Czechoslovakia, he wrote Alexander Dubcek:

Please allow me to introduce myself. I am William M. Gaines, and I publish Mad, the leading satirical publication in the United States.

I have been watching, as has the rest of the world, the exciting events transpiring in Czechoslovakia. I am excited because I feel the only hope for any of us is some sort of co-existence between the Communist and Capitalistic systems, and the changes taking place in your country would appear to make such an eventuality more probable than ever before.

*Accordingly, I have a wild idea. One of the delights of democracy is the right of the people to make fun of themselves, of each other, of their leaders. I would like, as a gesture of friendship, to grant the right to a responsible Czech publisher — perhaps one of your courageous newspaper publishers — to publish *Mad* for a year, perhaps two years, without the payment of any royalty (the only expense would be a small sum to cover the photographic duplication of the art and script).*

We have much material which could be translated and used, but I would also suggest some original material dealing with Czechoslovakian life and problems.

If you are in any way interested, please answer at your convenience (and continued good fortune).

Gaines received no reply. He would have made nothing from the venture; indeed, he nets little from any of his foreign editions. "I have only one big market and that's the United States," he says.

Gaines has never met C. Northcote Parkinson or Dr. Laurence J. Peter, but these gentlemen would be delighted, I am sure, to know that Gaines applied their methods long before he read *Parkinson's Law* and *The Peter Principle*. Among the precepts of the Gaines Formula:

"Don't let your business expand to the point that you can't control it. Keep your staff intact and don't hire unnecessary people just because you're successful. Insist the people who work for you are efficient. Provide incentives, such as bonuses and trips. Increase salaries regularly, but not capriciously. Provide a quality product for your customers at a price they can afford. Do not gouge them with spin-off merchandise. Make everything — your people, your offices, your operation —

just big enough for success, but no bigger. The result: Happiness." Why, for instance, does *MAD*, unlike any other magazine, come out every forty-five days, not monthly? Because Gaines believes his staff and he could not do their jobs efficiently if the magazine were published more frequently.

Al Feldstein would have liked Gaines to expand, to publish other titles. When Harvey Kurtzman's *Humbug* was faltering, Feldstein suggested that EC take it over.

"We'll let *Humbug* be esoteric. I'll keep *MAD* on a more basic level," Feldstein suggested.

They had lunch, Gaines, Feldstein, Kurtzman and Will Elder. Feldstein outlined his plan. Kurtzman, thinking there would be strings

"Everything else is for fun."

Fun? Well, sort of, as long as the overseas publishers play by Gaines's rules. There was the time when the British operation wanted to sell a poster of Alfred E. Neuman for about a dollar. Gaines, who detests merchandising gimmicks that soak his readers, suggested the poster should be sold for no more than fifty cents. The British publisher argued there were many reasons for the higher price. Gaines gave grudging permission on the condition that he be allowed to see the poster before it was printed. The next thing he heard was that the posters were printed and being sold. Gaines screamed via airmail:

This is a perfect example of why it is difficult to do business with you. In our contract it is clearly indicated that we must have approval of the art layout and the lettering. Since you have already printed 4,000 posters, what are you going to do if we decide to disapprove of the posters, which we may very well decide to do?

The British publisher apologized, but the affair was a fait accompli. Two years later, Gaines wrote:

I note that we have received no money from you since the advance) for the thousands and thousands and thousands of posters you must have sold by this time. When you insisted on charging a dollar for the posters, you were quite sure it would be a smashing success, so surely we have some royalties coming.

The British reply was:

I only wish that we could tell you that we have sold thousands and thousands of the poster. I even wish we could tell you that we have sold hundreds and hundreds. Sorry to say, it has had a steady sale of two a week, and on a recent check-up I find that we have sold just under 500 copies.

attached, wanted no part of it. Gaines relaxed.

"I had a great feeling of relief when Harvey refused," he says.

Because of the way he works, any major acquisition, Gaines feels, would boost him to his Level of Incompetence.

"I do menial things that no executive in his right mind would do. By making my own deposits, writing all the checks, making all the payrolls, even serving as stockroom clerk, there's nothing that goes on that escapes me."

"It's easy getting in the habit of taking long lunches and socializing through the day.

(Continued on page 70)

