

THE **MAD** WORLD OF WILLIAM M. GAINES PART V

(Continued from page 19)

CHAPTER 13

THE NEUMAN CONQUEST

Newsweek wrote him up as "the jug-eared, gap-toothed MAD mascot." *Time* classed him as a "grinning imp." *Look* called his expression "daffily Kiplingesque," and his presence a reminder of "the imperfectability of man." *The Saturday Evening Post* termed him "idiotic."

The personage the publications were describing is, of course, Alfred E. Neuman, MAD's cover boy, who has become a national symbol of absurdity. Placards bearing his picture were paraded during a Goldwater rally at the 1964 Republican Convention. His features were sculptured in ice at a Dartmouth Winter carnival. Cartoonist Mort Walker turned him into an imbecilic bird colonel in an episode of "Beetle Bailey." Fred Astaire wore a mask of his face during a TV special.

His fame was spread beyond America. A party of mountain climbers planted an Alfred E. Neuman flag at 28,000 feet in the Himalayas. A reader in Auckland, New Zealand, mailed a letter bearing nothing on its envelope but Neuman's picture. The correspondence reached its intended destination, the offices of MAD, with no reported difficulty.

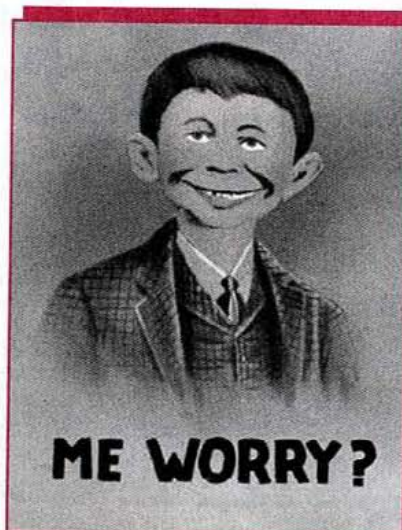


The idiot kid, as he is referred to by MAD staffers, owes his place in history to two men — MAD's first editor Harvey Kurtzman, who found the face and picked the name, and the magazine's current editor, Al Feldstein,

who put the face and name together and made the idiot kid MAD's symbol.

Kurtzman first glimpsed the face in 1954, while visiting Bernard Shir-Cliff, the editor of Ballantine Books. Pinned on Shir-Cliff's bulletin board was a postcard picturing a grinning kid and captioned, "Me worry?" "It was a

face that didn't have a care in the world, except mischief," recalls Kurtzman, who appropriated it for the cover of *The MAD Reader*,



An early postcard of the gap-toothed boy like the one that first caught the attention of Harvey Kurtzman.



Artist Norman Mingo refined the gap-toothed boy's look into MAD's revered (or reviled) Alfred E. Neuman.

VOTE **MAD** VOT
ALFRED E. NEUMAN
FOR PRESIDENT

Gaines's first paperback.

The name Alfred E. Neuman had its genesis on the Henry Morgan radio show. Morgan, searching for an innocuous name, landed on Alfred Newman, the conductor and composer. Alfred Newman became a running gag, a character who would make five-second appearances on the program, then vanish. Kurtzman latched on to the name. He liked it because it had the ring of nonentity. But Kurtzman misspelled the name and also, inadvertently, added the middle initial "E." In MAD, Alfred E. Neuman became the name for many different characters. His use even spread to other EC titles; Feldstein used the name as a pseudonym for several stories he wrote for Gaines's short-lived Adult Picto-Fiction magazines.

When Feldstein took over as MAD's editor, he decided to link forever Alfred E. Neuman and the face of the idiot kid. Feldstein told Gaines, "We'll put him on the cover and he'll be there from now on. He's going to represent MAD." So it was that Alfred E. Neuman, the "What — Me Worry?" boy, achieved immortality, making his debut as a 1956 write-in candidate for President on the cover of MAD #30.

Feldstein, his art staff denuded through Kurtzman's departure, was forced to place a want ad in *The New York Times* for a cover artist. The man who got the

job was Norman Mingo, whose rendering of Neuman became the prototype for all subsequent issues.

Alfred E. Neuman has since graced every MAD cover but one. His face has been a carving on Mount Rushmore, a drunken stopper on a wine bottle, a half-finished num-

Prince Charles was smiling in the photograph, and his face, so thought many dozen MAD readers who wrote in, bore a striking resemblance to Alfred E. Neuman.

MAD published several of the comments along with the

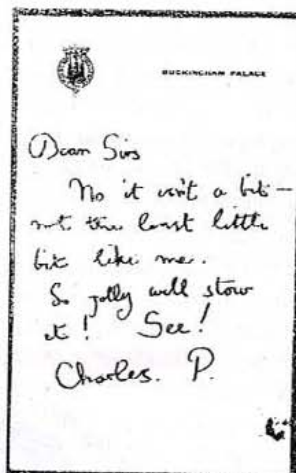
A party of mountain climbers planted an Alfred E. Neuman flag at 28,000 feet in the Himalayas.

ber painting. He has become Uncle Sam on a recruiting poster ("Who Needs You?"), a flower child, a guru, an organ grinder leading a King-Kong-sized monkey. He has been portrayed historically on MAD posters as Toulouse Neuman, Alfred von Richtofen the Red Baron, President Abraham Neuman, and Alfred the Hun.

Some years back, Charles Winick, a psychologist, polled some four hundred readers of MAD. He found that Alfred was liked especially by low achievers. "Less successful students," Dr. Winick said, "are more likely to identify with Neuman because he conveys a feeling of failure, defeat, defensiveness, and uninvolvedness. His non-worry slogan has a 'let the world collapse, I don't care' quality, and his appearance suggests stupidity."

Whatever the validity of his findings, Winick was right on one score — Alfred does suggest stupidity, which may lead to ill feeling on the part of a lad who is told he resembles MAD's mascot. Such a reaction occurred in 1958, the slighted youth apparently being England's Prince Charles. A photograph of the bonnie young heir to the throne, who was then nine years old, had been carried in newspapers throughout the United States.

photo on its letter page. A few weeks later arrived the following letter, postmarked London:



Dear Sirs
No it isn't a
bit—not the
least little
bit like me.
So jolly well
stow it! See!
Charles P.

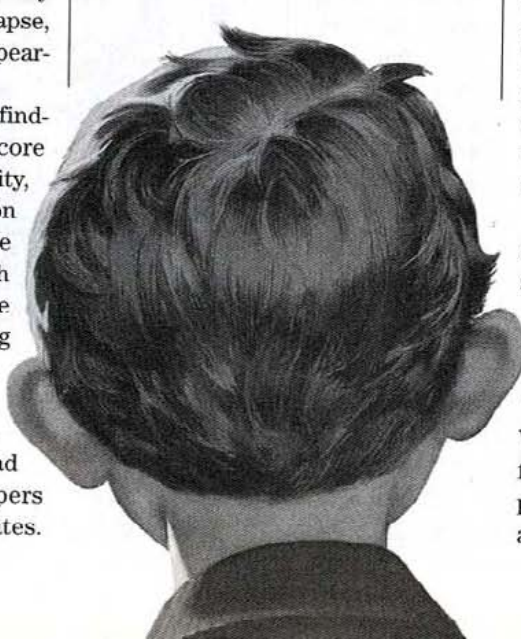


Did the letter really come from Prince Charles? John Putnam, who knows about such things, analyzed it. The handwriting was typical of a well-educated nine-year-old. The stationery was triple cream-laid paper, bearing the copper-engraved crest of the Duke of Edinburgh, and would have been commercially impossible to duplicate. The signature, "Charles P," was eminently correct, the P standing for Princeps, which is how Charles would have likely signed his name. A contact at the British Consulate in New York City noted that the postmark revealed that the letter had been mailed within "a very short walking distance of Buckingham Palace."

Putnam weighed the evidence and pronounced that, barring someone having pilfered the royal family's stationery, the letter was authentic.

What is the source of the "What—Me Worry?" boy?

When did he make his first appearance on postcards, posters and the like? MAD



An Alfred E. Neuman ancestor appears in an ad from the Topeka State Journal, September 24, 1910. Oddly, many have likened reading an issue of MAD to a painful dental appointment.

DON'T GIGGLE AT THE WORD PAINLESS

For This Boy Tells the Truth



READ WHAT PATIENTS OF Painless Romine HAVE TO SAY OF HIS PAINLESS METHODS

Topeka, Kan.
Dear Doctor: I feel that it is my duty to inform you how well pleased I am with the dental work you did for me. I have been praising your painless method of extracting teeth to my friends. Will always speak words of praise in your behalf.
Any use you can make of this letter will be perfectly agreeable with me.
Wishing you the best of success,
(Signed) Wm. S. DONNELLY.
1000 E. Sixth Ave.
All My Friends: must recommend Painless Romine. I extracted for me 23 teeth at one sitting and each and every one was pulled out the least particle of pain. His method is something wonderful.
Michigan Ave. LUTIE WATSON.
remember, when there is so much there must be some fire. There be some extraordinary system of business behind all such testimony. So positive that my testimony of owning and extracting teeth is absolutely painless that I agree to fill or any number of teeth without pain at no pay. In other words:
IF IT HURTS DON'T PAY"
U EVER HAVE A DENTIST THINKING RIGHT NOW ABOUT YOUR THEY NEED ATTENTION. T WANT TO BE HURT. call at once and consult me? y price for first class, but ut half you.

once asked its readers to help out and was deluged with suggestions. The kid was used in 1915 to advertise a patent medicine; he was a newspaperman named Old Jack; he was taken from a biology textbook as an example of a person who lacked iodine; he was a testimonial on advertisements for painless dentistry; he was originated by comedian Garry Moore; he was a greeting-card alcoholic named Little Herman; he was a fictional moron named Hooey McManus. One reader even dug up a 1909 German calendar bearing a version of the inane smiling face.

By far the most pertinent correspondence came from a lawyer representing a Vermont woman named Helen Pratt Stuff. The woman claimed that her late husband, Harry Stuff, had created the grinning kid in 1914, naming him "The Original Optimist." Stuff's copyrighted drawing, she charged, was the source of Alfred E. Neuman and she was taking MAD to court to prove it.

Thus began the great Alfred E. Neuman lawsuit. The stakes were

not small. If MAD lost, it would be liable for millions of dollars in damages. And Alfred no longer would be permitted to show his worryless countenance in any MAD publication or property.

MAD's attorney Martin Scheiman hired tracers on both coasts to hunt for pictures of the idiot kid that had been published before 1914. A number of renderings popped up, several of them almost dead ringers for Harry Stuff's "Original Optimist." It became evident that portraits had been floating around the United States since before the turn of the century. But exact dates were hard to pin down.

Mrs. Stuff had sued before and had won several cases. Scheiman argued that Stuff, in copyrighting his "Original Optimist," had not created an original face, that he had based his version of the idiot kid on pictures in the public domain. In other words, Stuff's drawing was not properly copyrightable. Also, there was no copyright notice on most copies of Stuff's drawings, making

it impossible for MAD to know it was copyrighted.

The trial of the case in United States District Court was full of legal infighting, most of which would bore readers of this book to tears. Nevertheless, Neuman-philosophers could rejoice at the deference shown their idol. Alfred, for



"The Original Optimist"

years the butt of a thousand jokes, was, for once, being treated with respect. For example, this exchange

United States District Court

FOR THE

SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK

DIVISION

CIVIL ACTION FILE NO. 141-10

SUMMONS

Plaintiff

9.

E. C. PUBLICATIONS, INC.,
WILLIAM H. GAINES, JESSIE K. GAINES
and VIRGINIA E. MAC ADIE,

Defendants

between Mrs. Stuff's attorney,
Samuel J. Stoll, and Gaines:

STOLL: Has any MAD issue
appeared since the adoption of this
character, Alfred E. Neuman, with-
out Mr. Neuman appearing on one of
its pages or cover page?

GAINES: I don't believe an issue
ever did come out without featuring
him in some way, sometimes more
prominently than others, but he
would always be there.

STOLL: Would you consider Mr.
Neuman to be a rather prominent
and substantial part of your publica-
tion?

GAINES: I consider Mr. Neuman
to be our trademark at this point, an
identification with the magazine and,
as such, very helpful.

This testimony prompted Gaines
to wonder how an issue of MAD
would sell without Mr. Neuman's
picture on the cover. The experi-
ment was tried with issue #115 in
1968. The issue sold very well.

After listening to some six thou-
sand words of arguments and testi-
mony and after pouring over several
hundred pictures of Alfred and his
ancestors, Judge Lloyd F. MacMa-
hon arrived at his decision. MAD, he
declared, had not infringed on the
Stuff copyright, mainly because the
copyright notice was rarely included
on copies of Stuff's pictures. To put
it another way, it was as if the grin-

ning boy was a bastard orphan and
that MAD had every legal right to
adopt him, give him loving care, and
provide him with a Christian name.

What—him worry? No longer.
The idiot kid was, at last, legitimate.

CHAPTER 11

SUNG TO THE TUNE OF "SUE ME"

Cynthia Piltch was not amused.
The source of her displeasure was
an item in "Protest Magazine," a
1966 MAD piece spoofing the protest
movement. Writer Larry Siegel had
included this item:



Bowing to psychopathic pressure from prudish school authorities in Brookline, Mass., Yetta (Get Mt. Rushmore Out Of South Dakota) Piltch (ABOVE) has finally agreed to go to school in tight slacks. For the past three months, Yetta has been attending classes naked. They may have won the battle, Yetta, but they haven't won the war!

Cynthia Piltch, who at the time was a freshman at Brookline, Mass., High School, felt the similarity in names was too close for coincidence, as did her parents, Maurice and Charlotte Piltch. Together they decided to sue MAD for \$250,000. It was a coincidence, of course, but a pesky one. MAD's attorney Jack Albert suggested that Gaines settle the case out of court. Gaines refused. To him it was cut and dried. MAD was a magazine of satire and was not obliged to check out every made-up name it used in its articles. Anyone could see that the reference made to Yetta Piltch had been made in jest, and Gaines felt that, if anything, it had raised Cynthia Piltch to a position of some fame in her school. Furthermore, another Piltch, namely Annabelle Piltch, of Flushing, New York, had read "Protest Magazine" and was delighted. Wrote Annabelle:

"The success of your satires, I feel, is due to your imaginative choice of fictitious names. The most hilarious name thus far...is Yetta Piltch. My husband and I enjoyed a hearty laugh over it and wonder how your staff could ever conceive such a funny name. I trust that all your readers have as fine a sense of humor as we do."

Clearly, the Brookline Piltches did not. Cynthia, so the official complaint charged, had been "injured in her reputation and health" and had "suffered damage to her feelings, mental anxiety and annoyance." Maurice and Charlotte charged that the MAD item made it appear as if "they had neglected the moral education of their daughter



and had permitted her to carry on a course of immoral, obscene and illegal conduct."

Gaines pondered it all. It seemed that one Piltch's meat was another Piltch's poison. He looked over the family's testimony given in the pre-trial hearing and decided that perhaps MAD had hurt the Brookline branch. If this were so, MAD should make amends. Once again it was cut and dried, and he promptly settled for what may be described, in this book at least, as a modest sum.

MAD is probably the only publication that names its attorney on its masthead. If you look at a current issue you will see beneath the list of editors: "Jack Albert—lawsuits." This information is not given to solicit business for Albert. It is given as a service to offended readers so they know whom to contact when they sue. Despite this courtesy, MAD has been involved in only a dozen or so legal hassles, most of which have never reached the courtroom stage.

In the 1967 article, "The Ten Commandments Revisited," MAD's photo-humorist Max Brandel selected a picture of a motel to illustrate the Seventh Commandment, "Thou Shalt

Not Commit Adultery." The most vehement criticism of the piece came

not from some offended orthodox religionist, but from a lawyer in Salt Lake City, who charged that MAD, in publishing a photograph of his client's motel, had caused a "substantial number of tenants to vacate their rooms" — he didn't make clear

his motel was being singled out.

Albert heard nothing more from Salt Lake City.

A far greater clamor was heard in 1971 from North Miami, Florida, the home base of the American Federation of Police. The men in blue were outraged by the MAD Flag, a poster included in a MAD Special. The MAD Flag resembled the United States flag, except that the red stripes were replaced by words, namely a

parody of the Pledge of Allegiance.

"Those terms are words which cause riots," declared Gerald Arenberg, executive director of the police group. "Satire is one thing, but to make a representation of the American flag and subject the nation for

which it stands to abuse is offensive to all Americans."

Arenberg sent copies of the poster to every Congressman in Washington. At least three of the Representatives agreed with Arenberg, their views sounding like a Cole Porter lyric.

"Disgusting," said Earl F. Landgrebe (R., Ind.), "Disrespectful," said Lawrence Coughlin (R., Pa.). "A defilement," said John E. Hunt (R., N.J.).

The police group took the issue to court to get the flag edition banned from newsstands. The summons to defend the suit was the first MAD heard of the affair. Gaines was put out. "They

**"Let's do a song book,"
said Nick Meglin.
"A song book? I don't know,"
said Feldstein.**

just why — resulting in damage to his client. The lawyer added that his client was suing MAD for libel and defamation of character for forty thousand dollars.

Albert wrote the lawyer, expressing MAD's regrets that the motel owner should feel that his establish-



The "MAD Flag" poster got MAD and Bill Gaines into hot water — again.

ment was being accused of begetting adultery. No such impression was intended. The offending photograph, Albert said, "was directed toward a class of motels where such occurrences do take place" and that the lawyer's client should not feel that



could have at least dropped me a line," he says. "I'm used to the people sulng me observing the niceties."

The case was taken to court, then dropped when the police group realized that since the flag poster had been off sale for several weeks, nothing could be gained by having it banned. It was then that Arenberg finally wrote Gaines. "Each time I see this poster I am offended as an American, as a Police Officer and as a Jew," he stated.

MAD's response was an exclamation-pointed reply that was vintage Gaines:

Dear Mr. Arenberg:

So at long last you have written to me directly, rather than simply throwing lawsuits! Had you had the courtesy to do this in the first place, perhaps all this nonsense would have been avoided!

Because, you see, you are barking up the wrong tree! You have goofed — you have pulled a boner! Why do I say this? Simply because you and I are on the same side of the fence, and you're not "with it" enough to know it!

I bow to no man in my regard for Flag and Country, and in my appreciation for the difficult, strenuous, and thankless job of our Police Forces. I am, unequivocally, a "law and order" man. As an old "Roosevelt Liberal," I have always deplored the use of terms such as "Kike," "Nigger," and the like, and their use in the flag poster was obviously not intended to show the magazine's or my acceptance thereof. On the contrary, the intent was to show that too many of us who claim to be offended by the use of labels, employ and accept more subtle forms of hate and bigotry. Our method is satire, and satire requires exaggeration.

MAD is directed to the younger reader, and I know that our younger readers understand that the flag poster, far from being anti-American, or anti any ethnic or religious group, was a plea for equality.

Please be advised that in the satiric terms of the flag poster, the ethnic make-up of the 11 salaried employees of MAD, including myself, is as follows:

2 1/2 "Kikes" (my father was Jewish!)

5 "Wops"

2 "Niggers"

1 1/2 "Wasps" (my mother was Protestant!)

Sorry, no "Spics" on salary, but Angelo Torres, one of our finest freelance artists, qualifies for that term.

Since you misunderstood the poster, you should be proud to have been offended as an American, as a Police Officer and as a Jew! But you did misunderstand the flag poster — because you are over 30, perhaps! And you ought to feel damn foolish!

Incidentally, Al Jaffee, the MAD writer who conceived the poster, is Jewish! His brother, Harry, who lettered it, is Jewish! Their mother was murdered by the Nazis in Lithuania in 1944.

No record exists of Arenberg's reaction to Gaines's letter.

In the summer of 1961, Al Feldstein was looking for a bonus piece to insert in an annual, More Trash from MAD #4.

"Let's do a song book," said Nick Meglin.

"A song book? I don't know," said Feldstein.

"I like the idea," said Jerry DeFuccio.

Feldstein talked it over with Gaines. "The guys want to do a song book," he said.

"We've done worse things. If you want to

do it, do it," said Gaines.

So was born "Sing Along With MAD," a project that would evolve into a landmark case in American law. Larry Siegel and I were assigned the task of taking several dozen popular songs and parodying their lyrics into comments on the current scene. There would be songs of show business, publishing, sports, doctors and medicine, and other fields. Siegel and I plunged in,

completing forty-six parodies in less than two weeks, and Feldstein and his editorial crew added eleven more. The lyrics were completely distorted as were almost all of the song titles. For instance, this offering by Siegel from "Songs of Education":

SING ALONG WITH MAD



A COLLECTION OF PARODY LYRICS TO 53 OLD STANDARDS WHICH REFLECT THE YOUTHFUL WORLD WE LIVE IN TODAY

ON THE SEAT WHERE I SIT

A tribute to the crowded conditions in our schools.
Sung to the tune of: "On The Street Where You Live"

I have often sat in this seat before,
But I never shared it with Joe, Jim, and
Pete before,
Oh how sad am I, four kids occupy
This old desk and the seat where I sit.
I can hardly move, books are poking me,
There are now 12 arms and legs here that are
choking me.
And to seal my doom, I can't "leave the room,"
Things are tough in this seat where I sit.



And oh that horrible feeling
When I know that lunch-time is near.
That very terrible feeling
That any second I may lose a nose or ear.
Taking spelling tests is no fun for me,
By the time I reach my pen, we are on history.
The best seat in school is the Duncce's Stool,
I'll go there from this seat where I sit.

(Continued on page 86)