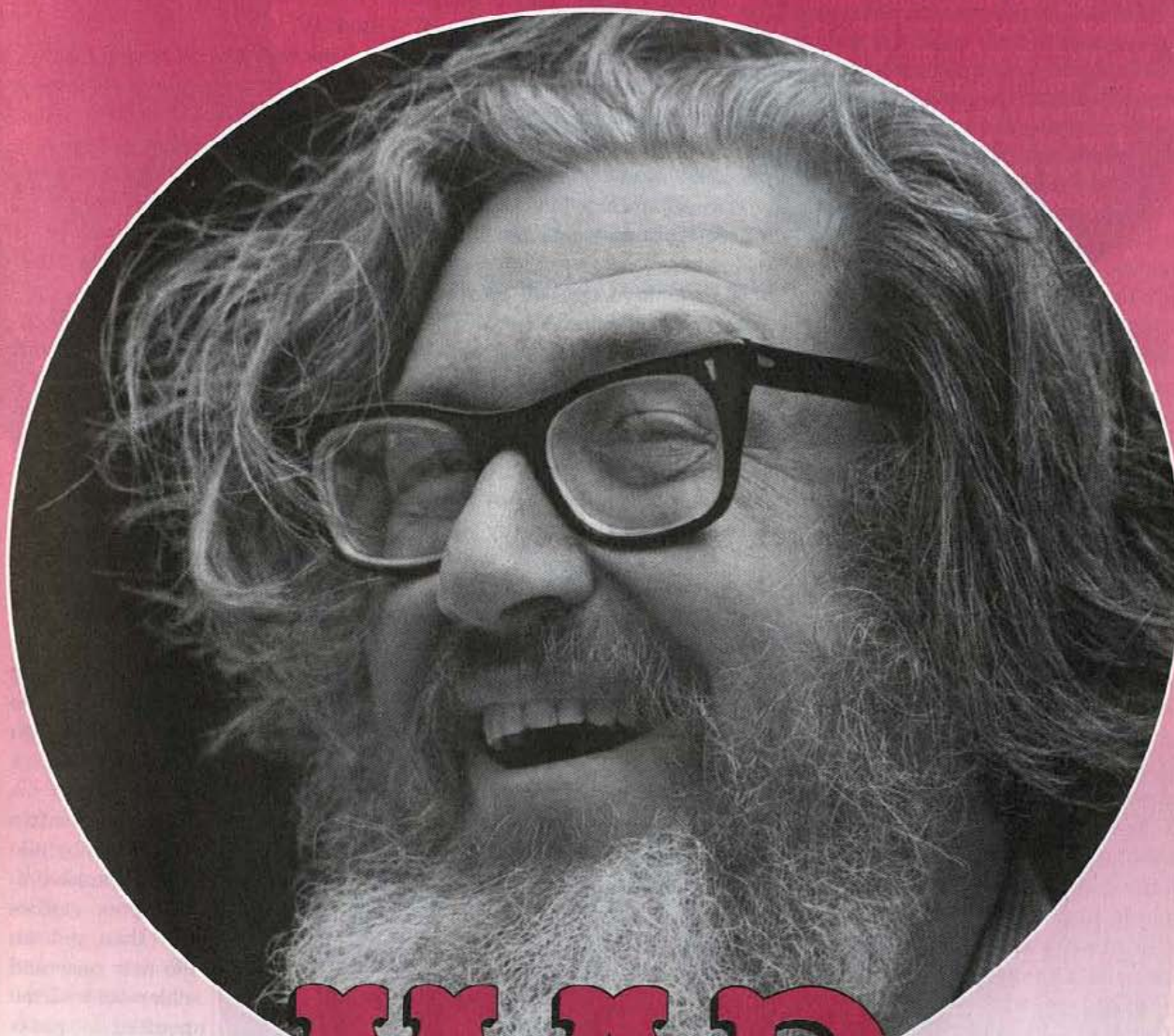


Many of our readers consider Frank Jacobs' *The Mad World of William M. Gaines* to be the definitive narrative of Bill Gaines' life and his E.C. empire. Scarce and long out of print, the book chronicles the Gaines era through 1972.

To help launch the new MAD XL series, we are serializing this book over six consecutive XL issues.



FROM THE PERSONAL COLLECTION OF PAINE GAINES

THE **MAD** WORLD
OF
WILLIAM M. GAINES Part VI
BY FRANK JACOBS

THE STORY SO FAR

We've had a glimpse of MAD's editorial side, noting the magazine's most notable articles and sitting in on a writer's conference with the editors. The origins and popularity (or notoriety) of Alfred E. Neuman have been chronicled, and we've gotten a blow-by-blow account of MAD's most memorable lawsuits.

CHAPTER 15

GAINES — AFTER A FASHION

Each time he hits his top weight, William M. Gaines has the credentials to call himself the World's Largest Publisher. Since, most of the time, he is either advancing toward or retreating from that figure, he must choose the day's wardrobe to fit the day's weight — that is, if you consider a sportshirt and slacks a wardrobe.

In his closet hang slacks for seven different weights, each pair numbered on a sliding scale from 1 (smallest) to 7 (largest). Jackie Gleason also owns clothes to fit him at various weights, but in his case there are dozens of outfits for each size. Gaines owns one pair of trousers for each size, except for Number 3, of which he possesses two pair. On the rare occasions he

replaces a pair, he is measured sitting down, that being the position he is most often in.

The effect of the clothes on the man is what fashion experts might regard as the Laundry Hamper Look. Gaines, whom Larry Siegel calls "the ten worst-dressed men in the world," would be content to wear his sportshirt-and-slacks combination through eternity, but the dictates of society occasionally punish him. He explains:

"I own three ties, all narrow. I wear my multicolored tie to wine-tastings because it's required. I wear my bright red tie with my orange jacket and my green tie with my brown jacket to restaurants when ties are required. I own two bow ties, a black one I wear to formal occasions with either my small,

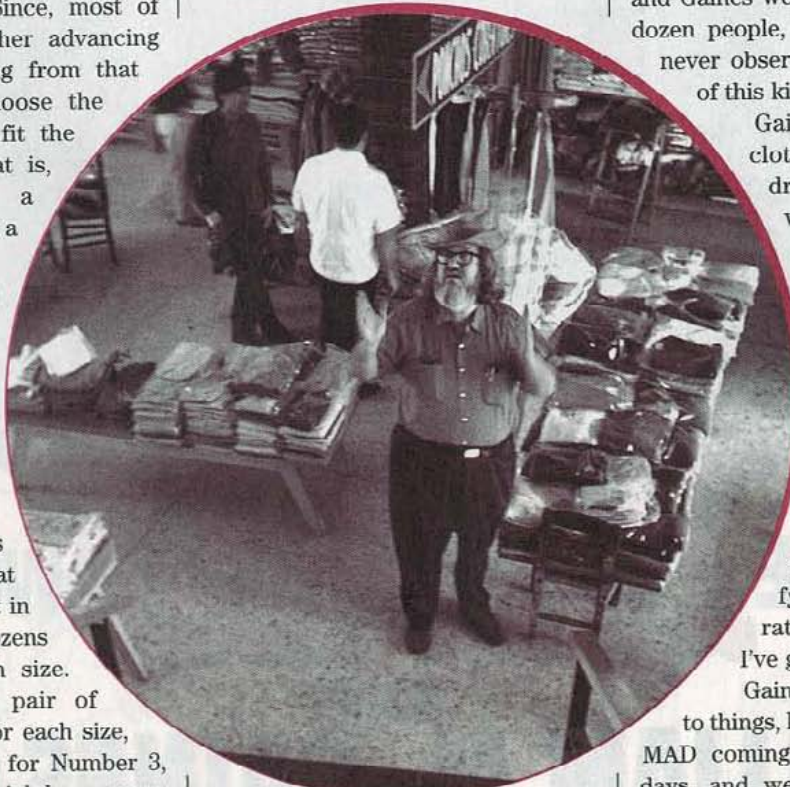
medium, or large black suit, and a red-and-green one that I wear to Christmas parties. I own six custom-made white shirts, none of which fits, and three noncustom-made white shirts, with neck sizes 18, 19, and 20."

Gaines buys his socks, size 12, all gray or blue cotton lisle, eight dozen at a time. At least he tries to. Most stores no longer carry them. Recently he found a discount store on Route 17 in New Jersey that had several dozen in stock. "How many pair do you want?" the salesgirl asked.

"All you have," said Gaines. There were seventy-seven. The salesgirl sighed and began ringing them up on the cash register, one by one. After a while, she developed a rhythm to her ringing, which attracted a small crowd of curious shoppers. By the end of her ringing, she and Gaines were circled by several dozen people, who seemingly had never observed a clearance sale of this kind.

Gaines hates buying clothes. "It's a terrible drag," he says. "You wait two hours for a salesman, who makes you go into a little cubbyhole where you have to take your clothes off, then put on the new ones and schlep out with the uncuffed pants dragging all over the floor. This is so horrifying that I'd much rather live with what I've got."

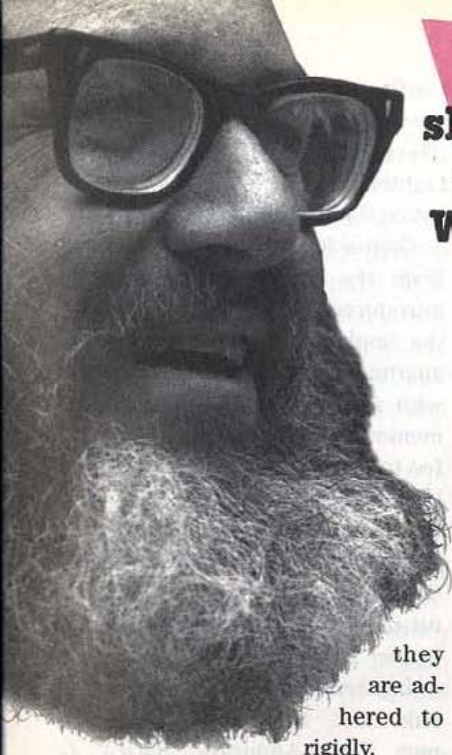
Gaines, you see, gets used to things, like the sun rising, and MAD coming out every forty-five days, and wearing wool trousers. The changes in his life come slowly, if at all. But when they do come,



Something we thought we'd never see: Bill Gaines browsing in a men's clothing store.



Gaines's beard is a shapeless expanse that reminds one of Walt Whitman on a bad day.



they are adhered to rigidly.

He has always worn his hair in a crewcut and shaved several times a week. He hated going to the barber and he hated shaving, but it was not until 1968 that he did anything about it. What he did was to stop going to the barber and let his hair grow. Soon afterward, he traded away his last electric shaver to Meglin and let his beard grow.

This solved his tonsorial problem, but caused a sartorial one. The pride of his wardrobe is a T-shirt bearing a caricature of him done in 1965 by Sergio Aragones. Letting his hair grow was making the T-shirt obsolescent. Therefore, Gaines has regularly called in Aragones, who updates the shirt to conform with the appearance of its owner.

Gaines's beard is a shapeless expanse that reminds one of

Walt Whitman on a bad day. The sight of his bushy countenance staggers the uninitiated. During his trips to Haiti, native children behold this large, hirsute, white god, steal up and touch the beard of hair, then shriek and run away.

Even before Gaines's Hairy Period, his I-don't care look evoked strong reactions. Dr. Mack Lipkin, his physician of fifteen years, was initially dismayed by what he saw as "a rather crude, fat buffoon, very often showing pleasure in affronting the establishment, such as his insistence on appearing everywhere without a tie.

"He was the stereotype of the slob. You'd never suspect observing this tailor's model of how not to dress that this was a man of sensitivity, a man who could rave about the nuances of fine wine. Then, as I got to know him, I got to appreciate how sharp and shrewd he really is."

The tip-off came after Gaines lost weight on a diet. "Suddenly," Lipkin says, "he looked like the man of intelligence that he is. When he's heavy, he's not the person anyone suspects lives in that body."

Gaines's appearance is further flavored by his horn-rims, which he is rarely without, principally because his left eye is 6/400 and the right one

8/400. Translated, this means that in order to be able to read the largest letter on an eye chart without visionary aids, he must be no further than six feet away using his left eye, 110 further than eight feet away using his right.

After he was fitted for his first pair of glasses at the age of eight, he was surprised to find there were leaves at the top of trees. Until then, he thought there was fuzz.

Gaines owns four television sets and watches none of them. He used to be an avid theater-goer, but now rarely attends. He's convinced they don't write plays like they used to — "they're all too damn relevant" — and what is probably more important, he doesn't think the seats are comfortable. He reads occasional books about wine and zeppelins and subscribes to *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *New York*. He reads *The New York Times* and *Daily News* while having his morning cup of coffee. He used to read the *Sunday Times*, but gave it up recently because of its size, which intimidates him.



One year, the MAD staff presented Bill with an emergency clean white shirt and tie, encased in glass, fire-alarm style. Please note the glass is unbroken.



The times that Gaines shops are as infrequent as sightings of the ivory-billed woodpecker. A few years ago, having worn out both his summer sportcoats, which he wears the year around, and a Number 6 pair of slacks, he was forced to replace them. He summoned Nick Meglin, the only person at MAD whose taste rivals his own, to accompany him.

The scene, recalls Meglin, developed as follows:

(Gaines and Meglin enter store specializing in large sizes. Salesman approaches)

SALESMAN: Yes, sir. May I help you?

GAINES: I'd like to see some sportcoats.

(Salesman disappears, returns with several sportcoats, shows Gaines double-breasted, blue-and-white houndstooth check)

SALESMAN: This is the latest cut. It's very popular this year.

(Gaines frowns, shakes his head)

SALESMAN: How about this smart cream shantung with the double vent? They're wearing it a lot just now.

(Gaines makes face as if he has been served soft-boiled egg)

SALESMAN: Hmm. Well, we do have a few of last year's styles left. Of course, I don't suppose...

GAINES: Let me see them.

(Salesman brings out two single-breasted, solid-color sportcoats)

SALESMAN: You may find these a wee bit outdated.

(Gaines tries on the first sportcoat)

GAINES: Does orange go with pink?

MEGLIN: For you? Of course, Bill.

(Gaines tries on a second sportcoat. It hangs like a tent)

GAINES: What do you think?

MEGLIN: Bill, can there be any question?

GAINES: I'll take these. Now let me see a pair of black slacks.

(Salesman brings out slacks)

GAINES: Is this my size?

SALESMAN: yes.

GAINES: Then bring me a pair two sizes larger.

SALESMAN: Aren't you going to try them on?

GAINES: No. if this is my size, I want one two sizes larger. C'mon, Nick, let's go.

(Gaines and Meglin leave store)

GAINES: Thanks a lot, Nick. I couldn't have gotten through it without you.

Gaines is the only person I know who, when he gets up in the morning, puts on pajamas. He is allergic to wool and wears the pajamas underneath his slacks. I wondered why he hadn't tried trousers made of cotton or a synthetic fiber.

"How would I get them?" he asked.

"Where do you buy your clothes?" I asked back.

"Mostly at Imperial Wear."

"Ask them."

"I never thought of that."

"Well, now you have."

"If they came to my house, I might do it."

"Did you ever ask them to?"

"No."

contradictory, it should be explained that he joined the American Legion in order to be able to drink liquor on Sunday in a Post tavern in Pennsylvania, where he visited relatives. When his visits became less frequent, he left the Legion.

As for the ACLU, Gaines once donated seven hundred dollars a year. He stopped his membership a few years ago. "I still believe in civil liberties," he explains, "but I won't give a dime to an outfit that defends people who destroy Government property."

Gaines's clubmanship is now

confined to his wine and food societies, the Museum of Modern Art ("So I can see free movies"), and the Lighter-Than-Air Society, an organization for zeppelin buffs.

Gaines fell in love with zeppelins from the moment John Putnam introduced him to them, and today the bookshelves and walls of his apartment are filled and decorated with zeppelin books, posters, and memorabilia. He once paid an extra fee to the state of New York to get license plates for his Cadillac with the number DLZ127, which was the identification number of the famed Graf Zeppelin. Except for Putnam, no one paid any attention to the license plates until Gaines attended a Lighter-Than-Air convention at Lakehurst, New Jersey. There he met Vice Admiral Charles E. Rosendahl, who is to dirigibles what Babe Ruth is to baseball.

"I like your license plates. Most appropriate," Rosendahl noted when Gaines led him by his Cadillac. Gaines beamed. He had owned the plates for years, hoping someone would notice them. That it was Rosendahl more than made up for the wait.

I asked Gaines why he is a nut for zeppelins.

"Because they're a phallic symbol," he snapped. "Isn't that what you want me to say?"



"Come on," I persisted, "What's the reason?"

"Because they're big and you can't miss them."

That's probably closer to the truth. You'll note that Gaines's three great pursuits, not counting food and wine, are zeppelins, King Kong, and the Elephant Hotel, all of which, in their own way, are big and unmissable. Which figures, because so is he.

Al Jaffee believes zeppelins represent a world that Gaines yearns for but is beyond his grasp. "It's a pity they don't exist any more," Jaffee says. "I can just see Bill luxuriating in one of them as it makes its slow, tranquil passage around the world. It would be a dream come true."

Gaines owns a print of *King Kong*, which he shows at the slightest hint of interest. He also possesses those parts that were cut out before the movie was released — scenes in which the great ape strips the clothes of Fay Wray, crushes various victims underfoot, and, at one point, has a man for lunch. The scenes were removed for fear that King Kong might appear too unsympathetic.

The films Gaines owns tell something about the man. Among them: *Welcome Danger*. "I first saw it when I was seven, and it was the first movie I fell in love with. I identify with Harold Lloyd, constantly risking his life and always coming out on top. I've been very, very lucky in my life."

Inherit the Wind. "I'm a Clarence Darrow buff. I like the film because it goes along with my being a defensive person, which is what Darrow was."

Freaks. "Todd Browning used circus freaks as his supporting cast. It's one of the most unique horror films ever made."

The Last Angry Man. "Because I

like Paul Muni. I'll see anything from Muni, Spencer Tracy, or Edward G. Robinson."

I asked Gaines if he liked the new-wave pictures with their avant-garde plots and symbolism. "Heavens, no," he said. "I rarely go out to a movie any more."

Gaines has not had good luck with cars, nor they with him. He has usually owned Cadillacs. In 1955, he asked his dealer to paint a white stripe down the side of one he wanted to buy, in order to make it look like that year's Oldsmobile, the racy look of which Gaines admired. The Cadillac dealer refused to deface his product, so Gaines bought a Lincoln from a dealer more amenable.

The next year he and Nancy drove to Mexico. This was the trip during which Gaines came down with *tourista* and was convinced he was going to die. Feverish and wanting to get the hell out of Mexico, he barreled toward El Paso at a cruising speed of 110 miles per hour. One of the few vehicles he encountered on the road was a truck, coming from the opposite direction. The truck was just large enough to hide the object behind it, which was a horse ambling across the road. Gaines saw the horse and jammed on his brakes, reducing his speed to fifty. He could not avoid a collision, and the damage to both the horse and the car's hood was irreparable.

A Lincoln dealer in El Paso installed a second-hand hood, and the couple proceeded toward Las Vegas. The hood turned out to have a defective latch, and halfway to Las Vegas it sprang up and doubled back. Gaines stopped at a gas station and had the hood wired shut, at which point Nancy advised, "Sell the car."

"I'm not selling this car," Gaines thundered. "Anything that's wrong can be fixed."

From then on, the fates took over.

Hubcaps fell off, windows jammed, door handles came undone, but Gaines wouldn't sell the car. In Las Vegas, while buying a new hood, Gaines found that the two front tires were worn thin because of bad alignment. He bought two more and drove on to the West Coast. The car held up until the return trip eastward. In Denver, Gaines noticed that all four tires, including the two new ones, were worn thin. He went to a Lincoln dealer, who told him that the entire frame of the car was bent.

"Sell the car," the dealer advised. Gaines did, at a great loss, and bought a new one. He later calculated that he had paid out seven hundred dollars in repairs during the trip. During the drive home, Gaines and Nancy detoured several hundred miles to see the Grand Canyon. Arriving there, Gaines got out of his car, took a look, said, "yep," then got in the car and drove on.

A few years later, he switched back to Cadillacs, which he drove without serious incident until 1970. Late that year, he and his son, Chris, motored to Pennsylvania. Gaines had just returned from the MAD trip to the Far East and was suffering from jet lag. He began to feel drowsy and pulled over to the side of the road to catch some sleep, but a highway patrolman told him he had to keep moving. He tried to get a cup of coffee, but could only find beer taverns. Figuring the best plan was to get to his destination quickly, he set the car's cruise control at eighty and sped onward.

The next thing he remembers was waking up with a jolt and seeing a Cadillac flying through the air. It wasn't his own. It was the one he had just collided with after falling asleep. Gaines's Cadillac careened off the turnpike and cut a swath through a patch of woods, then came



to a stop. Neither he nor Chris was hurt, nor were the three young men in the other car. Both Cadillacs, however, were totaled.

People who have driven with Gaines differ on the quality of his driving.

"He is an unheeding driver," says Arthur Dreeben.

"He is a maniac," says Sergio Aragonés, who recalls a hair-raising dash through a Puerto Rican rainforest, in which Gaines stripped a Jeep's brakes in less than one hundred miles.

"He is a good driver, and thanks to him, so am I," says Nancy Gaines, who credits her ability on the road to the driving lessons he gave her.

"He is an expert, if somewhat daring, driver," says old friend William Woolfolk. "He once told me that he drove the way he did because

of his father's constant haranguing. I've seen him miss cars by two inches to prove that his father was wrong about his ability as a motorist."

Gaines once told Paul Kast that there is a law of relativity to driving. If all cars are traveling at the same speed, one may assume that they are all standing still. Therefore, if one accelerates a bit, one is able to

maneuver around the other cars as if they were, indeed, standing still.

During his period as EC office boy, Kast was given the opportunity to put the theory to test. Gaines had suffered a sudden gallbladder attack and ordered Kast to drive him home to his apartment in Brooklyn. Motivated by his employer screaming in pain next to him, Kast zoomed through traffic at speeds of up to one hundred miles per hour. On reaching the apartment, Gaines, in his agony, looked at Kast admiringly.

"Paul, that was a great driving performance."

Not too long ago, Gaines and I were zipping through Long Island. I decided to attach my seatbelt, but I couldn't locate the straps. I felt behind me and realized they were already connected. I disconnected them, which set off an electric buzzer, indicating a seatbelt was disconnected. I tried to lock the belt around me, but the straps wouldn't reach.

A statue honoring Bill's cheapness, sculpted by MAD's late Art Director John Putnam.



"Something's wrong with my seatbelt," I shouted over the buzzing.

Gaines said nothing.

"I'm trying to put it on, but the straps won't reach," I yelled.

"Of course they won't," Gaines said.

"Why not?"

"Because I've tied every one of them in a large knot."

"But why?"

"So that no one can use them."

"Why don't you want anyone to use them?"

"I'm against seatbelts. They're un-American, police state, and make people do what they don't want to do, and I'll be G**dammed if anybody's going to wear them in my car."

As an executive of MAD's parent company, Warner Communications, Gaines is entitled to a Cadillac. Recently, however, he switched to a Ford Torino.

"When I had a Cadillac, taxis were driving rings around me," he explains. "Now I can outmaneuver the bastards."

One night I introduced him to a small restaurant near the MAD office. The portions were huge and the prices moderate. He thanked me for suggesting the place.



PHOTO BY IRVING SCHILD



There are four areas in which Gaines is so cheap he gets sick about it.

1. ELECTRICITY.

He will turn off a lamp in his bedroom even though he is going to the kitchen for a soft drink and will return within seconds. He would rather stub his toe and curse the darkness than keep a two-watt night light burning. One can point out that he keeps the air conditioner going in his wine closet twenty-four hours a day, but the closet houses thousands of dollars worth of wine, and, as I said, his attitudes on spending are extraordinary.

2. BEING OVERWEIGHT ON A PLANE.

He will spend one thousand dollars force-feeding himself in three-star French restaurants but can't stand the thought of parting with twenty dollars because his luggage is over the limit.

3. CUSTOMS.

Again, despite whatever generosity he may have shown overseas, he will strive like a Spartan to re-enter his homeland without having to pay duty. "It makes it difficult to bring back gifts of any merit," he has admitted.



4. THE TELEPHONE.

This is his only area of cheapness that spills over into the office. Once a month, the MAD phone bill arrives, and on that day Gaines is a creature obsessed. As he explains:

"Everyone who makes a long-distance call is supposed to give me a slip of paper with the name of the person they called, the number, and the date. Needless to say, half the time this isn't done.

"When I get the bill, I first mark off all the numbers I have received slips on and all those I recognize as belonging to our out-of-town contributors. I'm then left with what I refer to as the Mystery Calls. I go around the office and ask everyone if they've made any of the Mystery Calls, and occasionally someone will own up to it. I then go to my master list of all the calls anyone has admitted to in the last two years. This list contains about two hundred fifty numbers.

"After I've exhausted all channels, I call the phone company and tell them we have no record of these Mystery Calls. The phone company checks its records, then calls me back and gives me the names the Mystery Calls were made to. I tell the phone company we've made none of these calls, and quite frequently the phone company will do away with them."

Nick Meglin, who is always one of Gaines's top suspects in tracking down perpetrators of Mystery Calls, enjoys compounding his employer's frustration. Often, when he hears Gaines about to pass his door, Meglin will pick up his phone and say loudly, "No, you don't have to tell me your name. I just wanted to see what it was like talking to someone in Anchorage."

ILLUSTRATION BY SERGIO ARAGONÉS

"Then you liked the meal," I said.
"Not really, but who can beat the value?"

His attitudes on the spending of money are extraordinary.

"I'll blow ten thousand dollars taking my kids on trips without thinking twice, but when Wendy screams she wants her own phone, there's no way she's going to get it. I won't be tied down into paying fifteen dollars a month forever."

Because he regards himself as a defensive person, one might suspect Gaines is heavily insured. One would be correct. Gaines is protected

against almost every conceivable disaster short of planetary collision. He keeps his negotiable securities in a safe-deposit box at his bank, then pays seven hundred dollars a year to insure the safe-deposit box. I asked him if he had insurance to cover something happening to the company that insured his safe-deposit box. "I don't," he said, "but I worry about it."

When MAD first started, Gaines decided to insure the glass tops of the office desks. He called his insurance broker and told him he wanted coverage to begin immediately. Five minutes after he hung up, Harvey Kurtzman

accidentally dropped a paperweight on his desk, smashing the glass.

Gaines pays cash for almost everything he buys, but has a policy that covers the loss of credit cards and another that protects him from people forging his name on a check. His most valued policy is his \$10 million liability policy that covers "anything I own against anything." The premiums are three thousand dollars a year, and if someone slips on a wine label in his apartment, or breaks one of his lightbulbs, Gaines is covered for \$10 million.

Gaines values himself least of all, carrying only \$25,000 of life insurance.

"Compared with my

(Continued on page 54)

"When I had a Cadillac, taxis were driving rings around me," he explains. "now I can outmaneuver the bastards."

