

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.

Now starting with MAD XL#1, the book, with minor deletions, is being reprinted for the first time. Five more installments will be featured in future issues.

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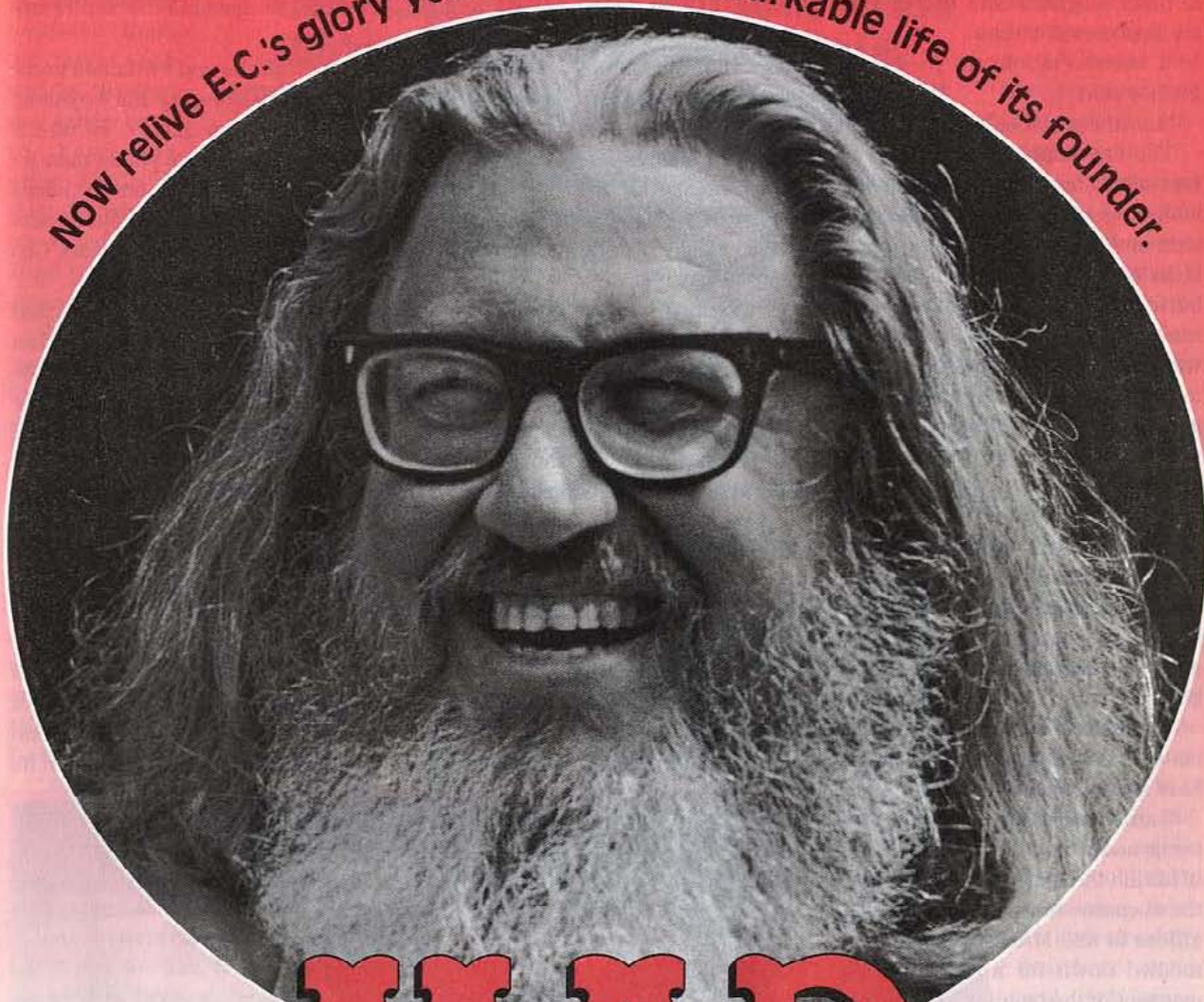


PHOTO BY JOHN PUTNAM

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

BY FRANK JACOBS



FROM THE PERSONAL COLLECTION OF EDWARD BRENNER

A PREFACE TO GAINES

One day, so the story goes, a teenage reader wandered into the offices of MAD Magazine and buttonholed the first person he saw.

"I want to talk to the publisher," the boy said.

"I am the publisher," said the person.

The boy blinked. The person he was talking to was a shaggy, rumped hulk, dressed in a faded, pink sport shirt and baggy, unpressed trousers. Most of the bespectacled face was buried behind a hopelessly untrimmed beard. The rest of the head was enshrouded in a puzzle of hanging hair, styled only by the force of gravity.

"You've got to be kidding," the boy said.

No, it was true. The hulk was William Maxwell Gaines, publisher of MAD, millionaire, gourmet, wine expert, practical joker, King Kong fanatic, zeppelin enthusiast, hater of exercise, and one of the least probable men in the world.

"We all have our many sides," says his sister, Elaine, "but Bill seems to have so many more of them."

Gaines runs MAD on his own terms and would like to run the rest of his life the same way. Shortly after the magazine moved into its present offices at 485 MADison Avenue, he toddled down for a chat with the manager of the building's restaurant, Morgen's East.

"I'm going to be in this building for at least ten years and I'm going to eat in this restaurant, sometimes with guests, at least four times a week, forty to fifty weeks a year,"

Gaines said. "The only thing I wish is not to wear a tie. If you insist on my wearing a tie, you will lose a lot of business."

"I'm sorry," the manager said, "but we can't let anyone eat here without a tie."

"Okay," Gaines said, and left, crossing the place off his list. Several years later, the restaurant lifted its ban and allowed guests to dine tieless. If Morgen's East thought Gaines would now become a patron, Morgen's East was mistaken. "There is no way I will ever set foot in the place," he says.

This is, in some ways, a pity, because Gaines likes comfort and convenience in his life, and the restaurant offers both. But, as he says, "There are some things you can't forgive."

If Gaines had his way, the outdoors would be air-conditioned in summer and heated in winter, and all stairs would be replaced by escalators. For the present, however, he must make do with the imperfect world he has been deposited in.

One night he and I were strolling to a restaurant.

"Frank, please," he objected.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"You mustn't walk so fast. We are going one degree uphill."

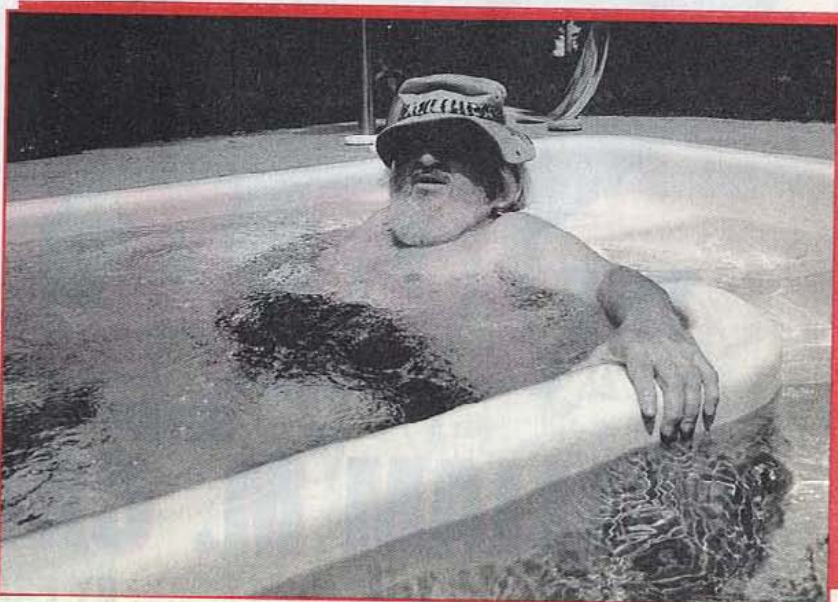
Gaines's mind is a nest of compartments, each programmed to make day-to-day living easier. He

has special routes for getting about New York and has been known to walk three blocks out of his way in order to avoid a short stretch of uphill climbing. Of course, these are one-way routes. When he leaves the MAD office to lunch at a place, say, five blocks downhill, he will return in a taxi.

One night he and I watched home movies taken during his boyhood. During a party sequence, he directed my attention to a young man jitterbugging. "Look at him," Gaines said. "I'll have you know that he now wears a pacemaker in his heart. Can there be any doubt why?"

Gaines has danced twice—the first time when he took a lesson, the last time at a high school prom when he tried out the step he learned at the lesson. As a boy, he played softball once. He recalls getting one hit, which turned into a home run after the other team made four successive throwing errors. He might have played a second time, but someone told him he threw "like a girl," which ended any dreams of sandlot glory.

Gaines has skied once. He gave it up after twenty minutes because of two handicaps: he couldn't bend over to fasten his skis, and when he



FROM THE PERSONAL COLLECTION OF ANNIE GAINES

Bill Gaines enjoyed extreme water sports — as long as they involved no physical movement whatsoever.



finally got them on, he would soon fall and lie in the snow, like a beetle on its back, unable to right himself.

Gaines has aquaplaned once. Again there were physical problems. He required one hand to hold on to his horn-rimmed glasses (without them he can't see), and he required the other hand to keep his swim trunks from falling, which they did whenever the boat picked up speed. This left no remaining hand with which to hold on to the ropes.

But why dwell on one man's inadequacies? There are a number of things that Gaines does well — traveling, eating, wine-tasting, laughing, and, in between all these, publishing MAD.

"My staff and contributors create the magazine," he has said. "What I create is the atmosphere."

During MAD's early years, Gaines employed a stockroom boy named Anthony, a well-behaved, industrious chap, who suffered from only one character flaw — extreme gullibility. One day Gaines revealed that he had a twin brother named Rex.

"Watch out for him, Anthony," Gaines warned. "Rex looks exactly like me except that he has a scar on his cheek and talks loud and mean and nasty. He doesn't have any money, so he steals from other people. If you see him, he'll be wearing my clothes because he stole them from me."

A few days later, Gaines walked out of the office, applied a rubber cement scar to his face, and walked in as Rex. Anthony was appalled to see Rex stride through the office, shouting terrible oaths, bullying the employees, even rifling the petty cash box in Gaines's office. Anthony saw and Anthony believed.

Rex's visits continued. He would demand to see his twin brother,

refusing to believe Anthony's explanation that William Gaines was out. Sometimes Rex had a scar on his right cheek, sometimes on his left — Gaines could never remember which he'd used the time before —

"My staff and contributors create the magazine," Gaines has said. "What I create is the atmosphere."

but Anthony remained a believer.

Years passed, and Gaines feared that Anthony was catching on. One morning the phone rang in Gaines's office. "Anthony, it's for you," Gaines shouted. Anthony picked up the phone and, while Gaines looked on, heard Rex's voice, tape recorded, on the other end: "Anthony, don't say a G**damn word—just listen!" The voice screamed on for thirty seconds, then hung up.

Gaines's mother visited the office and was cornered by Anthony.

"Mrs. Gaines, you wouldn't lie to me. Do you really have another son named Rex?"

"I'd rather not talk about it," she said.

Anthony was an aspiring playwright. After he left MAD, he wrote a play called *The Canary Cage* and sent it to Gaines to read. A few weeks later, Anthony phoned to get Gaines's reaction. Rex answered.

"Anthony, I just wantcha to know I'm producing a musical with Rodgers and Hammerstein called *The Gilded Canary Cage*."

Rex proceeded to describe the plot, which, of course, came from Anthony's script.

"That's my play!" Anthony protested.

"Yeah," growled Rex, "but can you prove it? I stole it from my brother when he wasn't here, and now it's mine and you can't do anything about it."

Anthony became so hysterical that someone in the office — Gaines never found out who — broke down and revealed the hoax for what it was. Gaines was sorry the gag was blown because he had been planning to end it himself in more appropriate fashion.

"We were going to kill Rex off, stage a funeral, and put up his tombstone in a cemetery, carved for real — 'Rex Gaines, Born 1922 — Died 1959.' It would have been the perfect ending."

More than a decade has passed, and MAD continues to be Gaines's private circus. Financially, the magazine is big business, bringing in a yearly profit in millions, but, unlike other publishing operations, there is a refreshing dearth of pomp and self-importance. This spirit was reflected on the cover of

MAD's centennial issue:

MAD PROUDLY PRESENTS ITS 100th ISSUE (Big deal!)

The staff works hard to sustain MAD's worthless image. The magazine puts itself down as a cheap rag, containing trash,



**OUR
PRICE
30¢
CHEAP**

garbage and other unworthy components. Gaines frets each time inflation forces the magazine to raise its newsstand price.

For years MAD flaunted its price as "25¢- Cheap." But rising costs forced up the price to "30¢-Highway Robbery." In 1971, MAD raised its price another nickel. For the next several issues, Gaines tried to placate his readers with these successive front-cover comments: "40¢-Ouch!" "40¢-Outrageous!" "40¢-No Laughing Matter" "40¢-Relatively cheap!" "40¢-Cheap (Considering!)" "40¢-Cheap?" and, finally, "40¢-Cheap."

This kind of self-deprecation is unusual for a magazine, but, then, Gaines is not your usual kind of executive. Other publishers may insist their employees punch a time clock. Not Gaines, who lets his people come and go as they please. Other company heads may demand quiet and decorum. Not Gaines, who summons his staff with an interoffice shout and who once gleefully filled the office water cooler with five gallons of white wine and roared with laughter as the day rolled on and he and several of his staff got gloriously swacked.

Gaines's laugh is large and rolling and fills a room, but, then, so does he. "There is no more musical sound

in the world than Bill Gaines laughing" says art director John Putnam. "Gaines has an infectious laugh, and if you stand too close to him you can catch a fat flu," says writer Larry Siegel. Even Gaines's ex-wife, Nancy, agrees that he is one of the greatest audiences in the world, although, reflecting on their stormy marriage, "I can't remember ever having done anything that amused him."

Gaines is not the marrying kind, although he has tried it twice. The closest thing in his life to a perfect union occurred when he began publishing MAD. Gaines and MAD, like a boy and his frog, are inseparable.

In the pages to come, we will explore the life and times of the creature called William M. Gaines. We will examine his feeding and drinking habits and watch him in moments of pleasure and in times of stress. We will note his behavior in

his native habitat and his adaptability to foreign climes. We will inquire into his methods of mating and see how they have failed. We will observe the changes in his shape and attempt to explain rationally why such changes are inevitable. We will see how he responds to the stimuli of his friends and how he defends himself against his enemies.

Join me, then, as we enter the MAD World of William M. Gaines.

CHAPTER 2

ONE MAN'S FAMILY

Assistant art director Leonard (The Beard) Brenner rose from his MAD drawing board and strode the thirty feet into the private office of William M. Gaines. Brenner faced his employer and glowered. Gaines looked up, suspicious.

"What do you want?"

"We're going to Little Charlie's for spaghetti and clam sauce, you fat bastard," commanded Brenner, who had no intention of going anywhere. "When will you be ready?"

"Whenever you are," said Gaines, picking up the gauntlet. "Twelve-thirty will be fine."

"Be ready at twelve-thirty or else," ordered Brenner, unable now to back out.

A luncheon group formed. Gaines, Brenner, associate editor Nick Meglin, and Bob Clarke, who was in the office dropping off an art job, taxied the eighty blocks to Little Charlie's, an Italian restaurant in lower Manhattan. They ate a considerable amount, washing down the spaghetti with several bottles of Little Charlie's sturdy red wine. Stuffed and swacked, they jaggged to the Bowery to hail a cab to take them back uptown. At the traffic light stood a bum, looking to wipe the windshields of cars that stopped and thereby pick up some tips.

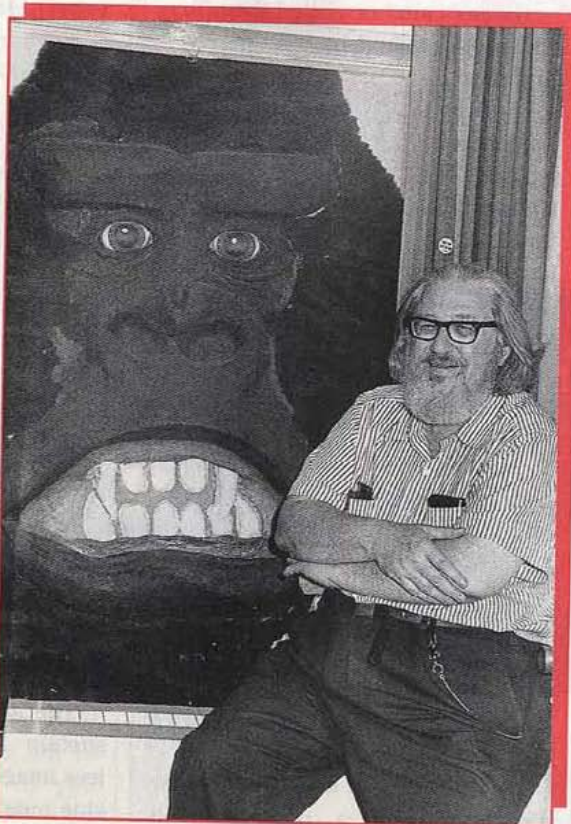


PHOTO BY ARNER SYMONS

Courtesy of Sergio Aragones and the MAD staff, King Kong peered into Bill's office window at 485 MADison Avenue for years.



A car stopped. Before the bum could react, Meglin, who was dressed in a suit and tie, raced to the car, flashed a silk handkerchief, and proceeded to wipe the windshield.

"I accept major credit cards," he announced proudly.

The driver stared in astonishment.

The bum looked perplexed. Gaines, leaning against a building for support, almost collapsed from laughing. Meglin knew he would, which is why he pulled the gag in the first place.

scratching their heads in puzzlement. Gaines roared with pleasure and declared it was too good a gag to waste. Thus, what began as a pri-

Push down the key picturing Leonard Brenner and at the top of the machine pops up a metal tab, proclaiming, "Whaddya want, ya fat bastard!" Push down a picture of omnipresent mascot Alfred E. Neuman and up pops "No Sale."

"There is no more musical sound in the world than Bill Gaines laughing."

vate joke wound up as the cover of MAD No. 94.

The first thing you see when you enter Gaines's office is the gigantic presence of King Kong peering in a window. The papier-maché, fur-cov-

What prompts these gifts? Well, for one thing, they have become a tradition. For another, there's Gaines's great spirit of appreciation. For a third, there's that thing called The MAD Family, with Gaines occupying the role of — there's no other word — Godfather.

The MAD Family could not exist without Gaines, who somehow has linked twenty-odd individuals into a flaky brotherhood. Outsiders marvel at the MAD trips, in which Gaines has taken his people to five continents, and there can be no doubt that the junkets have forged unity. But Gaines truly seems to worry

about the well-being of his charges. Like when he sold MAD, then phoned his contributors, one by one, to reassure them that he was staying on as publisher and that nothing would change. Like when John Putnam's mother was dying in Mexico City and Gaines paid the air fare for Putnam and his three children. Or like when artist Al Jaffee got his divorce.

Gaines knew that Jaffee was at a low ebb and dreaded the thought of traveling alone, so



FROM THE PERSONAL COLLECTION OF LEONARD BRENNER

Overeating at Little Charlie's: Al Jaffee, Dave Berg and an employee from a local burger joint invited to join along because the MAD staff found him funny.

"Gaines is a very responsive person, and he inspires you to bigger and better gags. You wind up doing most anything to hear him laugh."

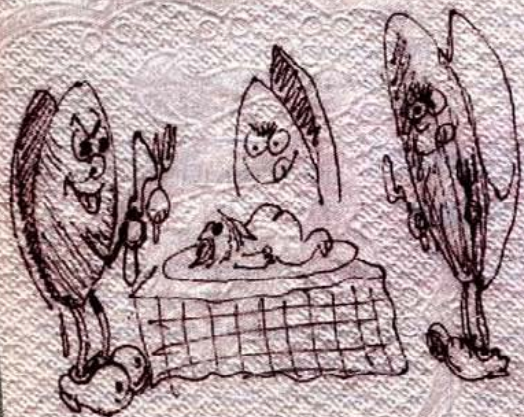
Truc. Gaines, the total audience, taps a wellspring of lunacy in the people who work for him. Knowing Gaines's love of the movie *King Kong*, Meglin sketched MAD's idiot coverboy, Alfred E. Neuman, on top of the Empire State Building surrounded by planes piloted by apes,



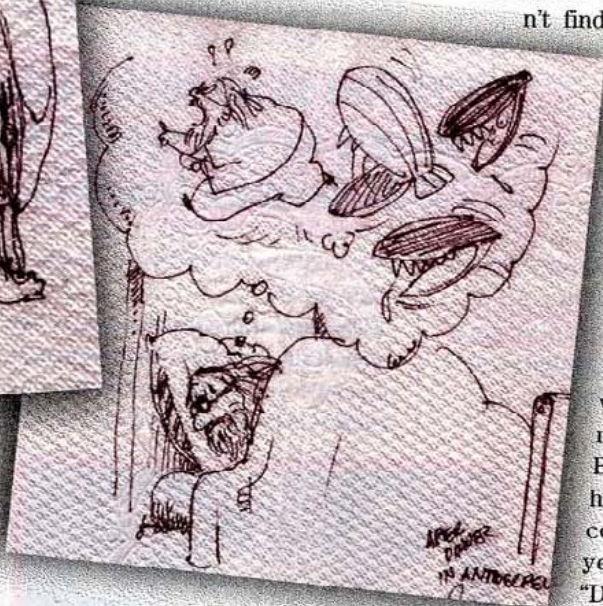
ered gorilla was hand-crafted by artist Sergio Aragones and presented to Gaines as a Christmas gift from his staff and contributors.

Hanging from the ceiling are various zeppelins — all gifts from MADmen — and the outlandish MAD Zeppelin, co-created by artist George Woodbridge and art director John Putnam and later included as a bonus cut out in a MAD Special. On a cabinet sits an old peep-show nickelodeon — also a Christmas gift — in which one can view a flip-card film, interposed with photos of the MAD crew, each greeting Gaines with an obscene gesture. Nearby rests another gift, an ancient cash register that once belonged to Meglin's grandfather. Each key bears a peculiar face or phrase.





Napkin sketches by Sergio Aragones depict Bill's nightmares after binging on another seafood meal.



he suggested that the two of them turn the divorce into a holiday. Gaines got hold of his travel agent and plotted an itinerary, and what Jaffee thought was going to be a quickie flight to Juarez became a five-day Mexican vacation.

When Nick Meglin began analysis, Gaines was eager to hear the details. "How did it go with your shrink?" he asked Meglin after the first visit.

Meglin put on his straightest face. "Bill, let me put it this way. He wants to talk with you." Meglin had a problem of being late for appointments, as did his analyst. One day the doctor walked in several minutes late and found Meglin lying on the couch, ranting about some problem. "I couldn't wait for you." Meglin said with a turn of his head, then went back to his ranting.

One morning, writer Dick DeBartolo came to MAD to drop off a story. As is his custom, he stopped by Gaines's office.

"Hi Fat," said De Bartolo.

"Hello, love. How are you?" responded Gaines.

"Adorable."

"Anything else?"

"No, that's it. Just adorable."

"Well, you're right."

"Bye, cookie."

Leaving the office, DeBartolo reran the conversation through his mind. Anywhere else it would make no sense, but it's the only way one can talk to Gaines, he decided. In any case, it was a far cry from a reaction he had several years earlier. DeBartolo was new at MAD and phoned Gaines on some matter of business. Secretary Gloria Orlando answered and told DeBartolo to hold on. The next thing he heard was Gaines's voice shouting in the

distance, "Good God, you didn't tell him I was in, did you?"

DeBartolo was incensed. He didn't find out until later that

this was the treatment Gaines gives many first-time callers. When DeBartolo was a writer on TV's "To Tell The Truth," he got Gaines on the show as a contestant. After Gaines's identity was revealed, Garry Moore made mention of DeBartolo, who then had been a MAD contributor for ten years. Gaines said, "Dick who?"

Not everyone can live with Gaines's paternalism. Harvey Kurtzman, who was MAD's first editor, felt he was being strangled by it. "Gaines holds his people very tightly and jealously, and he treats them like little children," Kurtzman told *Fact Magazine*.

"This man was daddy," recalls former MAD writer Gary Belkin, who of all the magazine's contributors stands out as Gaines's staunchest critic. Belkin went to Haiti on the first MAD trip and was appalled by Gaines's paternalism. "The kind of camaraderie where you make fun of your boss didn't exist," he says.

Belkin wrote about thirty pieces for the magazine, then left, permanently embittered. Among his resentments:

"I found the magazine completely unresponsive to what the writers did. There was never any assurance that they would buy what you wrote, which was disgraceful. This was comic-book orientation and a comic-book mind. I always resented Gaines owning all rights to my material."

Belkin's biggest beef was with



FROM THE PERSONAL COLLECTION OF LEONARD BREWSTER

MAD writer Dick DeBartolo and Gaines often shared cryptic conversations.



Gaines's annual bonus and profit-sharing plans. When, in 1963, Belkin received nothing, he complained to Gaines that he had "been taken." Gaines wrote Belkin that MAD's policy for the year was to limit bonuses to contributors having sold at least nine pages of material, and that Belkin had sold three. Belkin also felt that he deserved a profit-sharing payment because his material was being reprinted in MAD annuals. Gaines explained

payments were gifts, not obligations, and that he handed them out as incentives to entice recipients into doing more work the following year in hopes of getting another, perhaps higher, payment.

Belkin remained unmoved. "If Gaines said 'Nice day' to me, I'd check it out first." Gaines has continued to measure the value of his freelancers by their output. For the last ten years, writers and artists must have sold a minimum number of pages to qualify for a MAD trip. Gaines has adhered to his formulas strictly, and in 1966 the page requirement eliminated veteran writer Arnie Kogen.

The same year Gaines's mother died. Someone asked Kogen if he were going to the funeral.

"I can't," he said. "I don't have enough pages."

Then there was Kelly Freas, who for years drew most of MAD's covers. Freas wanted a higher rate and didn't like the increase Gaines offered, so he quit. Actually, Freas

was trying to free himself from MAD in order to do more portrait painting.

"Alfred E. Neuman was making me stale," he says today. "I found it difficult to shift my artistic gears from the sublime to the ridiculous and back again.

It didn't have anything to do with money."

As for Gaines's paternalism, Freas found it "pleasurable, but you can't live with it for too long because you come to

depend on it."

When did it start, this penchant for fatherliness? MAD's editor, Al Feldstein, saw it back in the 1950's, when he and Gaines plotted horror comics together. "When I wrote a script, my first and foremost motivation was for Bill to read it and enjoy it. Bill supplied my need for a father. For this I did all I could to earn his love."

"Gaines is a father image," agrees Putnam. "I've found myself wanting to give him things in return. He can be a warm friend and yet keeps a workable distance between himself and his employees. I'm never made to feel like an employee, but I'm not going to walk all over him — no one is."

While writing this book, I devel-

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Alfred E. Neuman
 ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
★ for ★
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President
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oped a theory that Gaines took an abnormal interest in my disease. I asked him about it.

"What the hell are you talking about?" he retorted.

"Don't you remember when I had that problem with my stomach? You were the only person who seemed interested when I went into detail about the treatment," I said.

"I was interested in you, not your G**damn treatment," he snarled.

Gaines is a social animal and this sometimes ruins his attempts at paternalism. I mean, how can you project a father image when you're zipping like a lunatic around the Statue of Liberty in an outboard with Dick DeBartolo? Or when you're getting zonked on Chianti with The

Beard in a street dive in Rome? Or when a planeload of your hirelings, heading home from five days in San Juan, are breaking you up singing "F**k you, Bill," to the tune of "Over There"?

On the last night of the MAD trip to Haiti, a bunch of us, including Gaines, took a table, chairs, and service for four and arranged them elegantly for breakfast



One of the 30 MAD front covers illustrated by longtime contributor Kelly Freas.

"How can you project a father image when you're zipping like a lunatic around the Statue of Liberty?"

(Continued on page 54)

