

THE MAD WORLD OF WILLIAM M. GAINES PART VI

(Continued from page 19)

assets," he says, "my life is worth virtually nothing."

If Gaines ever devises a personal coat of arms, its motto should surely be the latin equivalent of "Love Me, Love My Neatness." Nancy Gaines, who lived with this obsession with order on and off for fifteen years, left the marriage, in her words, "a strong candidate for military school." It will come as no surprise to her, I am sure, that her ex-husband has not changed.

He still leaves his apartment each morning with exactly four quarters and ten dimes in his pocket and exactly thirty 1-dollar bills in

his money-clip.

He still refuses to have either his office or his apartment painted, for fear that some object might be moved, misplaced, or (shudder) broken.

He still buys all household necessities in quantities of three, six, twelve, or multiples of twelve. There are always twenty-four rolls of Scott Tissue in his storage closet; when one is used, Gaines buys another to replace it. The cans of soup remain in orderly rows and alphabetized, beginning with Asparagus, Cream of, and ending with Vegetable Beef.

He still refuses to loan out his

apartment when he is away ("How could I enjoy myself in Amsterdam when I know someone is putting one of my books back on the wrong shelf in New York? When I go away, my apartment is hermetically sealed").

For years Gaines employed a maid who cleaned his apartment three days a week. He was fond of the maid but felt uneasy until he could come home and check the entire apartment to see if anything had been moved. "The trouble with maids," he says, "is that they dust, and when things get dusted they get moved." When the maid quit, Gaines felt a great sense of relief and made no effort to replace her.

Gaines can't stand any talk about mysticism or the occult. Knowing this, I asked Michael Lutin, a gifted professional astrologer, to cast Gaines's horoscope and tell me what he saw in the way of character and personality. I told Lutin nothing about Gaines, save that the person I was writing this book about was male and born in The Bronx late at night, March 1, 1922. (Gaines has never been sure of the exact time). I also provided the date of Gaines's father's death, so that Lutin could "rectify the chart," thereby determining the exact times Gaines was born. I won't go into any technical aspects, except to say that Gaines was born fifteen seconds after midnight, March 2, and is a Pisces with Scorpio rising and moon in Aries. Here is Lutin's astrological portrait of Gaines:

"Most of his self-development will take place in the second half of his life."

"He wants a sense of community with people, which always seems to be beyond his grasp. He will risk almost anything to gain affection and attention. He might even risk self-destruction."

"He probably has an antipathy toward discipline, but his work demands it, and this brings him up short, forcing him to mind what he's doing."

"He is probably a glutton. He has a fantastic love of life, wanting to stuff all of life inside him. He is jolly and tends to overeat."

"This person is constantly at war with two factors — reality vs. fantasy. Real life is always tugging at him, but so is fantasy. Each time he chooses one, the other butts in, pulling him the other way."

"He's a far-out kind of person. I would even call him zany. He possesses an ingenious, dextrous mind and is a free thinker. He escapes religion, but is pursued by it. I believe it's going to catch up with him as he gets older."

"Emotionally he's erratic. He's extremely interested in love and wants to be Number One in a love affair, but he's not lucky in love and he probably has better friends than lovers."

"He has a natural power, and people are attracted to him and they respect him. Especially, they respect him. They know he is keeping his eye on them to make sure they aren't pulling any fast ones. However, his inner self is very gentle, refined, and easily shaken. That's the part he keeps hidden and doesn't want to make public."

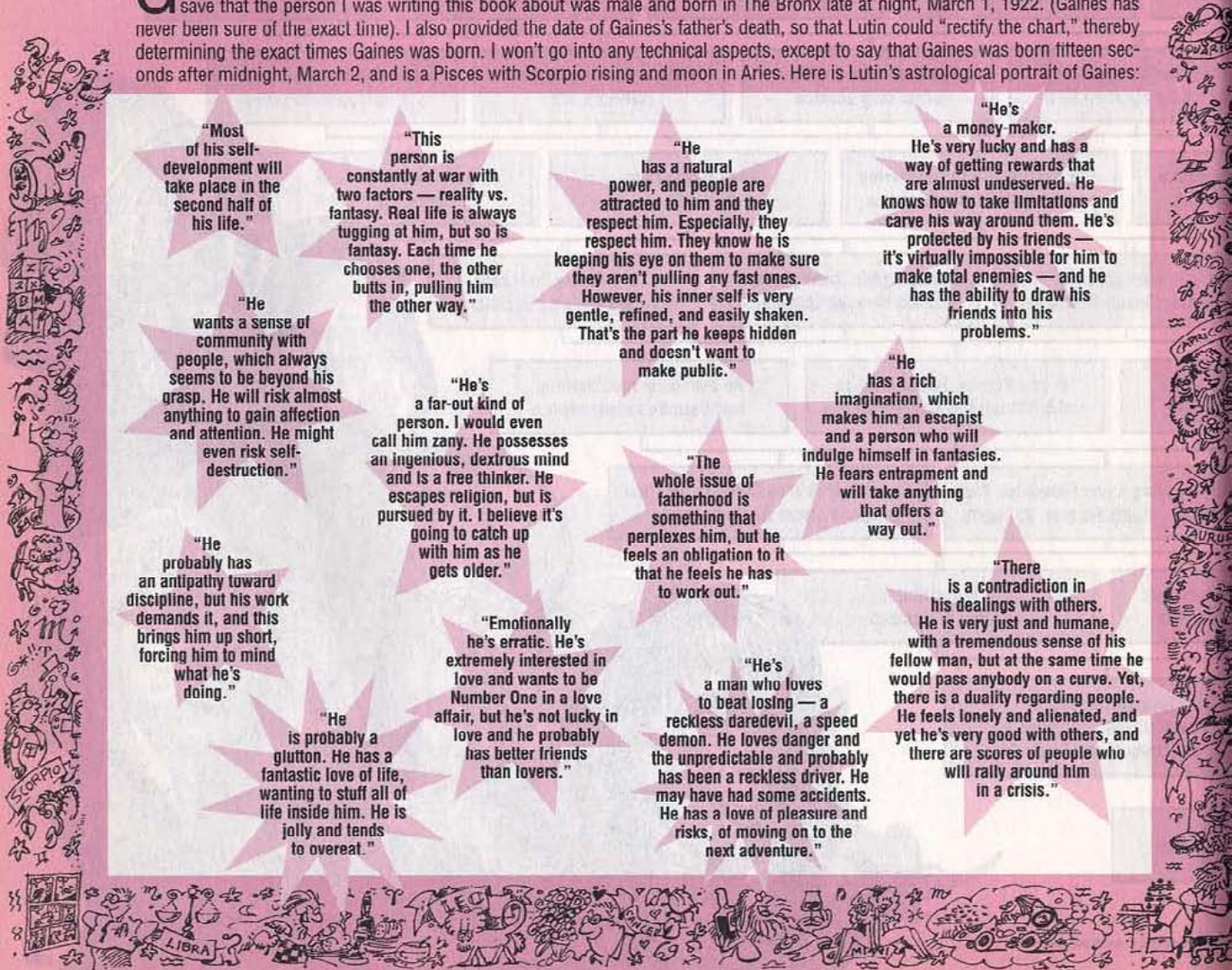
"The whole issue of fatherhood is something that perplexes him, but he feels an obligation to it that he feels he has to work out."

"He's a man who loves to beat losing — a reckless daredevil, a speed demon. He loves danger and the unpredictable and probably has been a reckless driver. He may have had some accidents. He has a love of pleasure and risks, of moving on to the next adventure."

"He's a money-maker. He's very lucky and has a way of getting rewards that are almost undeserved. He knows how to take limitations and carve his way around them. He's protected by his friends — it's virtually impossible for him to make total enemies — and he has the ability to draw his friends into his problems."

"He has a rich imagination, which makes him an escapist and a person who will indulge himself in fantasies. He fears entrapment and will take anything that offers a way out."

"There is a contradiction in his dealings with others. He is very just and humane, with a tremendous sense of his fellow man, but at the same time he would pass anybody on a curve. Yet, there is a duality regarding people. He feels lonely and alienated, and yet he's very good with others, and there are scores of people who will rally around him in a crisis."



MAD ABOUT THE WORLD

It was October, 1963, and several MAD staffers were sunning themselves on the sands of the Condado Beach Hotel in San Juan. Arnie Kogen emerged from a dip in the ocean and joined his colleagues.

"How's the water?" asked Nick Meglin.

"It needs salt," answered Kogen.

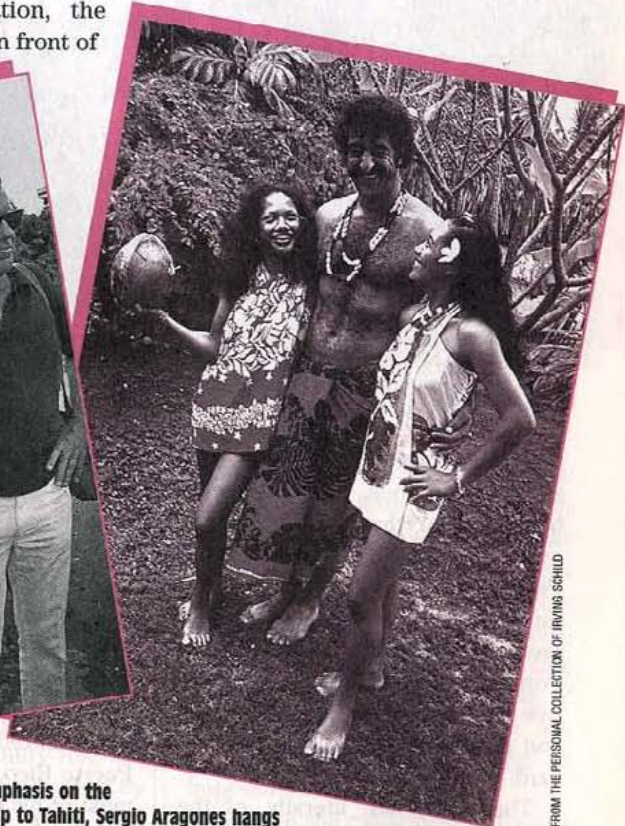
The occasion for the exchange was a MAD trip, and Kogen's remark was in the tradition of MAD vacation behavior. Since 1960, Gaines has taken staff and contributors on an annual autumn outing. "I originated the trips," he says, "with the idea that travel would be broadening and would help us put out a funnier magazine. I think it's worked, but don't ask me how."

Much of the time a MAD trip seems like an unrehearsed Marx Brothers movie on location. One of the chief perpetrators of the various lunacies has been Sergio Aragonés. In Florence, the vacationers were grouped on the steps of the Duomo Cathedral when a shouting parade of striking local laborers stampeded by. In the middle of the strikers, carrying an appropriate picket sign and his clenched fist raised high, was Aragonés.

In a restaurant in San Juan, Gaines spent several minutes reading off a complicated list of menu choices for twenty-one people before he realized that the waiter, scribbling silently, was Aragonés. Gaines, no dupe he, figured out a way of getting even. The opportunity arose in Africa on Aragonés's

birthday. After the group finished the main course at the Keekoruk Lodge in Kenya, the lights went out and a waiter came out of the kitchen, carrying a huge cake, candles aglow. As diners at other tables watched in anticipation, the cake was set proudly in front of

Convento restaurant, was approached on one trip by a brazen streetwalker. The girl offered herself. Kogen was not interested. The girl persisted, detailing her various charms and services. Kogen



Strangers in paradise (with emphasis on the STRANGE): On the 1974 MAD trip to Tahiti, Sergio Aragonés hangs out with Don Martin (above) and a couple of coconut-wielding locals (right).

Aragonés, who then was ignored completely by his colleagues for the rest of the evening.

In Venice, Nick Meglin scrutinized his admission ticket to the Palace of the Doges. "What does it say?" he was asked. "It says," answered Meglin, "You may have already won this palace." At the Vatican, Dick DeBartolo looked around him at the opulence and remarked, "God isn't dead. He just can't afford the rent." "Where does this elevator go?" one staffer asked during a Vatican ascent. "To heaven," said DeBartolo.

Kogen, who once requested hot cereal at San Juan's fashionable El

shrugged them off. Frustrated, she asked, "What do you want?" "What do you charge for heavy kissing?" Kogen countered.

In Port of Spain, Trinidad, Kogen was dining at a fancy café with the entire MAD group. The waiter approached. "Good evening," he said, "I am your waiter, Pierre." "Good evening," responded Kogen, "I am Arnie, and this is George and Nick and Bill and Lennie and Dick and Jack and Frank and John and Al and Sid."

Gaines, who himself left an "Alfred E. Neuman for President" poster



Entering a Mexican bullfighting ring during a 1975 MAD trip are (L-R) Jack Davis, Irving Schild, Nick Meglin, Sergio Aragonés, Bob Clarke and Paul Coker. The bull won.



atop the Leaning Tower of Pisa, is used to it all. "The quality of the remarks on our trips is, I suppose, above average."

The first trip, not surprisingly, took the group to Gaines's old stomping grounds, Haiti. It quickly became clear that a MAD holiday was of a different stripe than, say, a Fedders convention. Gaines set the tone the first day. Discovering that the magazine had one subscriber in Port-au-Prince, he piled his group in five jeeps, went to the lad's home, and presented him with a renewal card.

The high-point, literally, of the Haitian vacation was a visit to the sky-swept Citadel near Cap-Haitian. Each traveler mounted a burro and made the steep, slow climb up the mountain path, which was unspoiled by guardrails. Halfway to the top, at an especially tricky turn, MAD's then publicist, Larry Gore, looked down and duly noted, "My burro just crossed himself."

The following trip, to St. Thomas, was a complete disaster. It rained constantly. The hotel was changing ownership and in a state of inefficient flux. The menu was limited.

The cooking was joyless.

The service was nonexistent. The ocean was beckoning but the beach

was distant. The hotel swimming pool was vexingly warm and, for some reason never given, laden with salt. The week was so boring that, according to one staffer, the biggest kick he got was watching a jeep's odometer hit 30,000.

The early MAD trips were to the Caribbean and lasted about a week. But Gaines was not happy. With the exception of Haiti, the West Indies bored him. Especially Puerto Rico, where he spent most of his days reading and napping in his room or ordering a snack on a shaded terrace. True, there were the good restaurants in old San Juan, but these joys took up only a few hours or so each evening. Occasionally, in a neighborly gesture, he would tread cautiously across the beach to where the rest of us were sunning. Wearing his ever-present sportshirt and slacks, he would stand around for a while, exchange a few pleasantries, then shuffle back to the hotel, relieved to be away from the sun and surf and the picture of grown men actually enjoying the stuff, sometimes, even, exer-

cising in it.

There were better places to go with better things to see and better food to eat. It was time for the first giant step, and in the fall of 1966 Gaines loosened his belt and took the group to Paris. And to Surinam (1967), Italy (1968), Kenya, Tanzania, and Athens (1969), Japan,



Thailand, and Hongkong (1970), and London, Copenhagen, Leningrad, Moscow, and Amsterdam (1971). The trips became longer, lasting up to seventeen days. The editorial staff was automatically invited. The freelancers had to have sold the magazine a set number of articles or pages the previous year in order to qualify.

There was, of course, madness to Gaines's motives. He hoped the appeal of visiting distant lands would raise the output of certain contributors, like old EC hand

Jack Davis, for example. "I knew Davis loved to travel," Gaines says, "and since he's become eligible he's never missed one. I like having Davis in the magazine, and the trips are a way of keeping him there, despite the fact that I know he can make more money elsewhere."

Also, Gaines felt that the annual vacations, with their anticipations and memories, would knot the ties of the MAD family even tighter. Especially if the trips were stag.

"I never met two wives who could get along with each other," he says. "Bringing wives on the trips would tend to divide the convivial MAD group into cliques. The wives would spend so much on clothing trying to outdo each other that it would cost the boys a fortune, and I can't see any point in that."

Two of the magazine's mainstays, Al Feldstein and Mort Drucker, pass up the trips because of the husbands-only edict. The other MADmen, not necessarily accepting Gaines's anti-feminist philosophy, go readily, eager for a



Jack Davis, Sergio Aragones, Irving Schild, Don Martin, John Putnam, Jerry DeFuccio, George Woodbridge and Al Jaffe (L-R) take a break during a 1970 MAD trip to Japan. Many Japanese citizens considered this MAD trip the ultimate revenge for Pearl Harbor.

fortnight away from the drawing board and typewriter. Skeptics might point out that Gaines, being divorced, is not burdened with the problem of leaving a wife at home; the trips, however, were stag while he was married.

And lest Gaines's hirelings be labeled male chauvinist pigs, I can state with some reliability that the trips are considered a vacation by at least some of the wives. Year after year, I have seen them at air terminals bidding us goodbye and welcoming us home. They are a happy lot, and to my mind there is little doubt that they are better off for the spouseless holiday Gaines

In recent years, because of the new counterculture informality and that special nonchalance that marks most world travelers, the dress could be described as late 20th-century optional: safari jackets, chinos, T-shirts with clashing sportcoats, Keds, anything. The exception is, of course, Gaines, whose attire has never deteriorated, that being an impossibility.

Despite the casualness in today's fashion, the sight of the MAD group often stuns the populace of less sophisticated lands. Many of the once fresh faces are now covered with hair. The abundance of beards prompted one observer to remark that the MAD gang looks like a road company of Benjamin Harrison's cabinet.

In Moscow, Gaines was continually stared at by the local popu-

lace. At first we thought it was because of his massive mop of hair and beard. We later learned from our guide that, to Muscovite eyes at

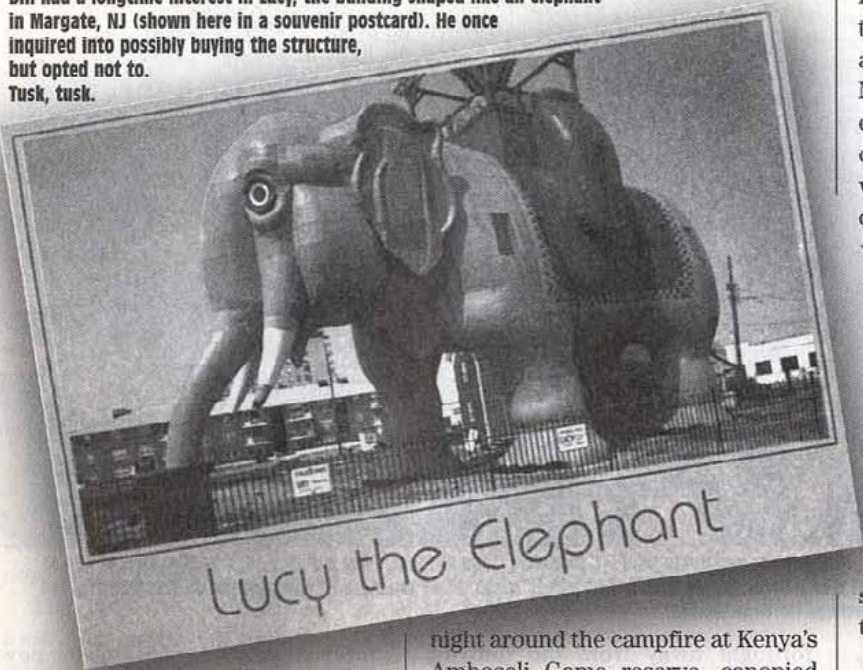
In Moscow, Gaines was continually stared at by the local populace.

has given them.

When the trips began, most of the MADmen had traveled little outside the United States. We were fresh-faced green-horns then and our airplane attire bespoke the fact: suits, white shirts, ties and shined shoes.



Bill had a longtime interest in Lucy, the building shaped like an elephant in Margate, NJ (shown here in a souvenir postcard). He once inquired into possibly buying the structure, but opted not to. Tusk, tusk.



least, he resembled Karl Marx.

Unlike other vacationing professionals, the men of MAD leave their work behind them. Shop talk is rare, although the junkets have inspired an occasional piece in the magazine. In the Vatican, DeBartolo listened as a guide explained that it took Michelangelo four years to paint his Sistine masterpiece. "And that was only the first coat," added DeBartolo. Later that day, several MADmen asked Gaines to extend the tour, already an hour behind schedule, so they could visit a building not on the official itinerary. "Well, okay," said Gaines, "but no looking!"

Both of the above quips were appropriated by Dave Berg, who then worked them into a five-page MAD piece, "The Lighter Side of American Tourists."

The conversation on the trips is seldom solemn, rarely thought-provoking and never stifled.

I can't remember a serious conversation of any length. I can remember a

right around the campfire at Kenya's Amboseli Game reserve, canopied by the oddly placed constellations of an equatorial sky, the drums of the bush villagers rumbling in from miles away, and ten of us breaking up at one-liners for two solid hours.

Gaines and DeBartolo barely knew each other until the Paris trip. One night over dinner, DeBartolo mentioned he had recently sailed his boat down the New Jersey shore.

"Oh, yeah? Where'd you go?" Gaines asked.

"A place called Margate. Margate City."

Gaines's eyebrows lifted. "Why there?"

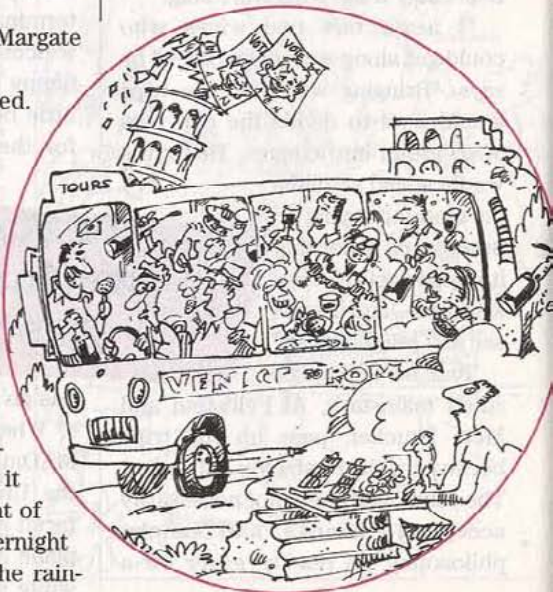
"I wanted to see the Elephant Hotel. You see, it was built by this guy named Lafferty, who..."

"I KNOW! I KNOW!" Gaines exclaimed, all the time asking himself why he hadn't gotten to know this DeBartolo fellow earlier.

Despite his hatred of exercise, Gaines enjoys roughing it — well, sort of. The highlight of the Surinam trip was an overnight expedition to the heart of the rain-

forest. Gaines and five other volunteers boarded two motored dugouts and churned thirty miles up the Marowijne River to one of the government cabins in the interior. The cabin turned out to be equipped with running water, electricity, and comfortable bunks, most of which was lost on Gaines, who, having eaten thirty bananas en route, had come down with one of his periodic digestive ailments. For thirty-six hours, he screamed and moaned and gave the appearance, recalls Al Jaffee, of "a beached whale." Despite his ravings, Gaines remembers eating a delicious jungle pie called pom, made of taro root and a dried meat, the source of which he has never cared to learn.

Gaines chooses varied forms of transportation for his junkets. In Italy, he chartered a bus, loaded it with wine — "seventy cents a quart and delicious" — cheese, sausage, salami, and other local produce and barreled down the boot from Venice to Rome. In Africa, the MADmen piled in Volkswagen station wagons, four travelers apiece, and criss-crossed the game reserves of Kenya and Tanzania on a photo safari.



By now the men of MAD are experienced travelers, their passports bearing stamps from five continents. Even so, this does not prevent an occasional embarrassment. In Bangkok, one of the group fell victim to the old Motor Launch Ploy. Sightseeing alone, he was approached by two well-dressed Thais, who invited him to see a Buddhist shrine, which was open "only one day a year." When he agreed, his hospitable hosts, who spoke impeccable English, took him on a motor launch to a distant island and treated him to several shrines and ruins. On the way back, an argument developed between the hosts and the motor launch driver.

"Such a dreadful thing has happened," one of the hosts explained to the MAD traveler. "The driver wants more money or else he will turn the boat over. We have paid him all we have. It is several miles to shore. Perhaps you can contribute and he will not turn the boat over." The MAD traveler, who could not swim and was carrying an expensive camera, complied, his "contribution" cost him thirty dollars.

No such losses occurred visiting Russia. But entering Russia—that was a different story. The customs inspector began by confiscating all pornography brought in from our previous stop, Copenhagen. This was not too surprising as many countries take a dim view of tourists bringing in the stuff. Jerry DeFuccio, who was carrying no pornography, expected to get by the inspector with no problem. The inspector had DeFuccio open his suitcase.

"What are those?" the inspector asked.

"Fifteen copies of MAD



FROM THE PERSONAL COLLECTION OF IRVING SCHILD

Bill makes friends with two tourists on MAD's first trip to Bermuda (1975). Bill's phenomenal sexual magnetism remains one of the great unanswered questions of the 20th Century.

Magazine," DeFuccio answered.

The inspector leafed through a copy, then summoned another inspector. They scrutinized the magazine. They did not laugh. They confiscated the fifteen copies.

The official Russian tourist bureau, Intourist, provided a guide, an attractive woman in her thirties named Vera, who met us in Leningrad and remained with us through our last moments in

For thirty-six hours, he screamed and moaned and gave the appearance, recalls Al Jaffee, of "a beached whale."

Moscow. Intourist guides are a dedicated lot and Vera was no exception. She was our shepherdess; we were her flock. Her English was excellent, except that like every English-speaking Russian we met, she usual-

ly avoided using the words the and a. For instance: "This morning we will get on bus and go for ride on subway." Or "Tonight those who wish may go to ballet at People's Theatre."

Vera seemed all business and I wondered if she possessed a sense of humor. The first morning in Leningrad, we boarded bus for tour of city. Vera sat up front facing us. At one point she announced, through her microphone, "We are now driving on Moscow Highway." I leaned forward and asked, "If there is a Moscow Highway in Leningrad, is there a Leningrad Highway in Moscow?"

The first smile crossed Vera's face. "Yes," she said.

Three days later we were in Moscow, again in bus, again with Vera. She was describing a monument to Nazi resistance during World War II, then departed from her memorized script and proclaimed, "Mr. Jacobs will be interested to know we are now approaching Leningrad Highway... in Moscow."

The next day, Vera and I were standing outside our hotel and looking at the Kremlin across the street. "Did you know," she said, "that each of red stars on towers is made of rubies?"

My eyes widened because the stars seemed at least twenty feet in diameter. I looked at Vera incredulously. "Entirely of rubies?" I asked. "Well-I-I," she shrugged, maybe a little crystallite."

Gaines had been to Russia on a private

(Continued on page 86)

