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The mad MAD world of Al Jaffee

Meet the goofy satirist who gets us to move A to B and fold

Staff Photo by VINCENT DeWITT

■ Above, Al Jaffee, creator of MAD magazine's fold-ins, peruses his new book on the deck of his third-floor Provincetown condo.

WHAT'S THE ONLY WAY FOR TODAY'S

HERE WE GO WITH ANOTHER RIDICULOUS MAD FOLD-IN

Staff Photo by VINCENT DeWITT

■ Above, Al Jaffee, creator of MAD magazine's fold-ins, peruses his new book on the deck of his third-floor Provincetown condo.

By ALAN W. PETRUCELLI
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

PROVINCETOWN — This is the story of one man's ascent into madness. And those people he's helped crack up along the way.

Since 1964, Al Jaffee has created the fold-ins that have graced the inside back cover of MAD magazine — a trademark as synonymous with the publication as its gap-toothed icon, Alfred E. "What Me Worry?" Neuman.

Nothing is sacred in Jaffee's watercolor-and-acrylic world. He has tackled social, moral, political and environmental issues — everything from gay rights and assisted suicide to abortion and toxic waste. He's poked fun at the Oscars telecast, couch potatoes and such celebrities as Liz and Dick, The Beatles and E.T., in that twisted and warped — yet always thought-provoking — way.

Please see **JAFFE** /B-2

A fold-in from "MAD: Fold This Book!" by Al Jaffee. To complete fold-in, follow instructions at top of fold-in. For solution, see Page B-2.

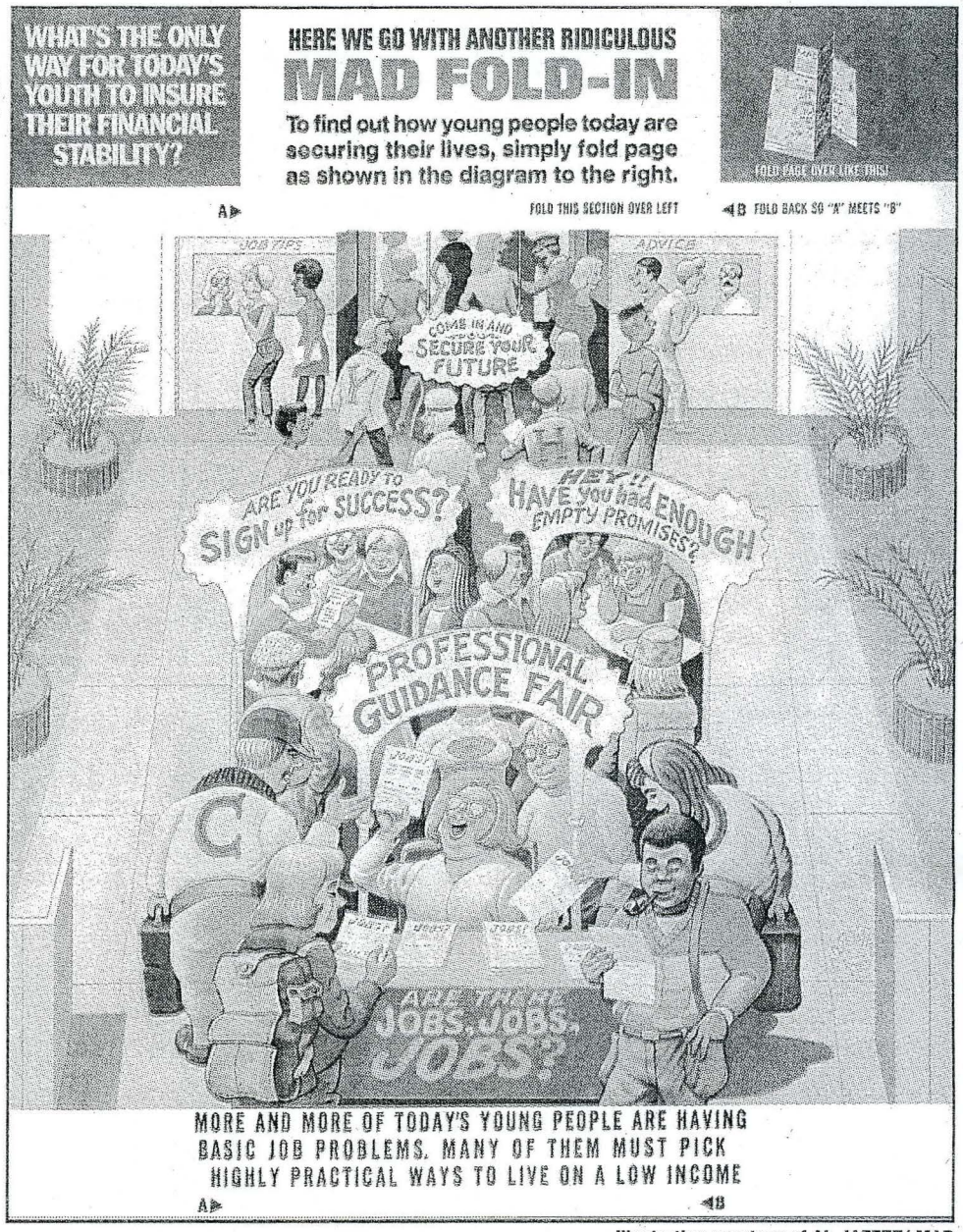


Illustration courtesy of AL JAFFEE/ MAD

ent visitation sad sign of the times

stepfather, claims Bianca is terrified of her grandmother.

The law is not on her side, however.

Grandparents historically have lacked special legal standing to seek visitation rights, but in the last 30 years all 50 states have passed some type of grandparent visitation act.

Maine's law reflects a recent trend. Laws used to apply to single-parent families or situations where a parent's divorce or death might keep a grandparent and grandchild apart.

Cross-country trend

But now more than a dozen states, including Maine, allow grandparents to sue for visitation even when the child lives in a healthy, two-parent home with no evidence of abuse or neglect.

Although no one knows how many grandparent visitation cases have been filed, courts and legislatures across the country have been kept busy by the issue:

■ A New Jersey couple sued their daughter and son-in-law after they were denied visitation with their grandson. The child's parents, who are Jewish, said the grandparents, who are Catholic, were interfering with his religious upbringing. A New Jersey court ordered visitation, but a court in Texas, where the child now lives, ordered mediation.

■ A Georgia grandmother sued her daughter and son-in-law after the couple barred her from seeing her granddaughter because of an unrelated dispute. A lower court ruled in her favor, but the state Supreme Court eventually ruled the law unconstitutional, saying it interfered with parental rights. The U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear her appeal. Georgia now has a new, narrower law that makes it more difficult to sue for visitation.

■ The Kentucky Supreme Court upheld a lower court ruling awarding a grandfather visitation rights with his granddaughter, even though his son and daughter-in-law opposed the visits. The court said the visits were in the child's best interests. The U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear the case.

Please see **RIGHTS** /B-3

ition to fold-in on B-1:

MOVING
BACK
HOME

and he asked Jaffee if he
l be interested in doing "some
ional work."

started as a script writer and
moved to the popular feature
py Answers to Stupid Ques-
"

April 1964, MAD decided to spoof the Playboy centerfolds as well as the fold-outs that were appearing in such other magazines as Life. "They were doing expensive, full-color fold-outs, so I figured I'd reverse the trend do cheap black-and-white fold-ins," Jaffee says.

The first fold-in featured then-sizzling Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton; when folded, the "joke" was a commentary on the couple's recent highly publicized affair. (At the time, Liz was married to Eddie Fisher, who also appeared in the fold-in.)

"There was little effort to hide the answer to the question with tricky artwork and text," Jaffee recalls. "And that's probably why we thought there would never be a second one." But the next one did appear, two months later during election time: a drawing of Nelson Rockefeller and Barry Goldwater, which, when folded, turned into Richard Nixon. (All folds-in have appeared inside the magazine except for the one that appeared on the cover of the July 1993 issue.)

Not too rough

Jaffee attributes the popularity of the fold-in to the fact that the feature always satirizes its subject or topic. "It makes a point, even if it's done with tongue planted firmly in cheek," he says. "What I don't like is gratuitously attacking someone or something for the sake of getting a laugh at someone's expense. You can make fun of people and still like them a lot. It all boils down to one question: Do you get more reaction by hitting someone over the head with a club or by tickling them to death?"

Jaffee admits that there are many topics he would never tackle. "I would never want to do a fold-in that says a lot of problems in America are due to welfare mothers," he says. "I think that's stupid— and the congressmen who get up and say such things are stupid. I wouldn't do a fold-in that was based on hatred or indifference. That would go against my grain. I also don't like to insult religions. I would never make fun of the pope or Orthodox Jews, unless it could be done in such a way that's really not a attack. The fold-in is an artistic puzzle. I don't have an ax to grind. And I don't want to appear as a liberal or conservative. My job is simply to entertain."

But not everyone has found the fold-ins funny. Jaffee clearly remembers the furor created by the fold-in he did for the October 1987 issue. It featured a crowd of customers at an adult sex shop, ogling "filthy post cards" and drooling over "inflatable playmates." The question read: "What group displaying deviant sexual behavior did The Meese Commission overlook?" Fold the picture and the answer emerges: TV evangelists.

"Some self-appointed guardian of our morals from Michigan made a stink and threatened to picket the supermarkets that sold the magazine," Jaffee recalls. "So we got knocked out of a lot of stores, and we lost a lot of sales." Then there was the June 1968 fold-in that mocks the Mafia. Did Jaffee look over his shoulder a few times or check under his bend when that was published? He laughs. "I'm no threat to the Mafia," he says. "By and large, most people didn't dignify the fold-ins because they probably knew they would be laughed at. I guess the attitude was, 'Gee, you're gonna be insulted by MAD? MAD insults everyone!' "

Tyson-Holyfield gets KOed

Jaffee works on fold-ins three months in advance of the issue date. It's not an easy task because, he says, "I have to be somewhat of a mind reader. I have to know that what's relevant in August is gonna be relevant in December. I just finished one on Newt Gingrich and his rebellious cohorts, and hopefully it will still have an impact when it comes out."

He runs his ideas past his editors, and though they place no restrictions on him, "we all agree the message has to say something." They can veto ideas — and sometimes do.

The most recent example: Jaffee wanted to do a fold-in spoofing the Tyson-Holyfield fight, which would have ended up a picture of a huge ear, complete with a "chomped out section, teeth marks and spurting blood.

The editors knocked it down," Jaffee says, "because they felt that when it came out in November, it would be old and that no one would remember it."

Once an idea is approved, Jaffee first scribbles numerous sketches on numerous scraps of paper that are folded and refolded. At the same time, he perfects the text that will provide the answer to the unfolded drawing's question.

Most of his actual work is done in his New York City apartment, since he finds the glorious Provincetown waterviews "too distracting. I may work one day when I'm here, maybe just a half-day. I sort of shut down when I'm here for the summer."

No, he doesn't think about retiring, and no, neither he nor the magazine is training anyone to take his place "when I kick the bucket. As long as MAD wants me, I am here," he says.

He pauses, scanning the horizon on this brilliant day. "I never tried to look at the future," Jaffee says. "I just floated with the wind. I never knew if MAD was going to work, but it seems to have worked very nicely. All I hope is that people enjoy what I am doing. I've never been out do anything of world-shaking importance . . . all I have tried to do is be eye-opening and entertaining." A wry smile. "And drive people mad."

MAD

The Plausible Impossible

Al Jaffee

By Mary-Lou Weisman

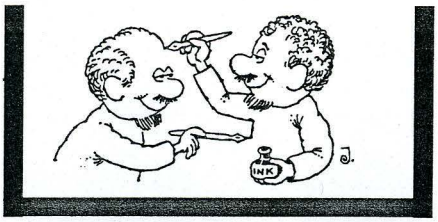
THE "PLAUSIBLE IMPOSSIBLE" is a term unique to cartooning. It is what holds Bugs Bunny up when he runs off a cliff, traverses a yawning chasm, and continues running on the other side, completely ignorant of the terrible fate that, except for a magical, momentary suspension of the laws of gravity, should have been his. It is the guiding comic principle—at once thrilling and ridiculous. What keeps Bugs aloft, what makes the impossible plausible, is not looking down.

LONG BEFORE he became a cartoonist, Jaffee, 72, knew what Bugs knew about looking down. A synopsis of Jaffee's formative years reads like a comic strip of traumatic cliff-hangers with cartoons by Jaffee and captions by Freud. By the time he was 12 years old, Jaffee was separated from his father, uprooted from his home in Georgia, reared for six years in a Lithuanian ghetto, starved, beaten and abandoned by his mother, and then returned to America. His flamboyantly perverse youth has made him the man he is today: an artist, a writer, a raconteur, an arrested adolescent, and an alien—a person uniquely qualified to introduce the young people of America to the world of adult hypocrisy in the pages of the satiric magazine called *Mad*.

COMPARED TO THE SIX YEARS that were to follow, the first six years of Jaffee's life were relatively sane. He was the first of four boys born to Mildred and Morris Jaffee. His parents had emigrated from Zarasai, Lithuania, to Savannah, Georgia, in 1914. His father was an up-and-coming immigrant who couldn't wait to shed his greenhorn status. Within days he had perfected a Southern drawl. He joined the Shriners and became a third-degree Mason. An ambitious and hard-working man, he landed a well-paying job as the manager of a department store, and moved his growing family into a white clapboard house on a tree-lined street in Savannah.

AS A CHILD, he was an adventurous troublemaker, which may be why his mother beat him more than she did his less defiant, younger brothers. He drew on the walls and in the margins of books. It never occurred to him that white walls were valued for being unmarked. Hardly more than a toddler, in Savannah, his playtime frequently concluded with the wail of a siren. He lit a fire in an abandoned store across from a fire station, having promised his little friends that they could see the fire engines come out. Trying to fly from the roof of his house to a neighboring palm tree, he knocked his front teeth out. "These crazy ideas I have that I control now," he reflects, "when I was a kid, I put them into practice."

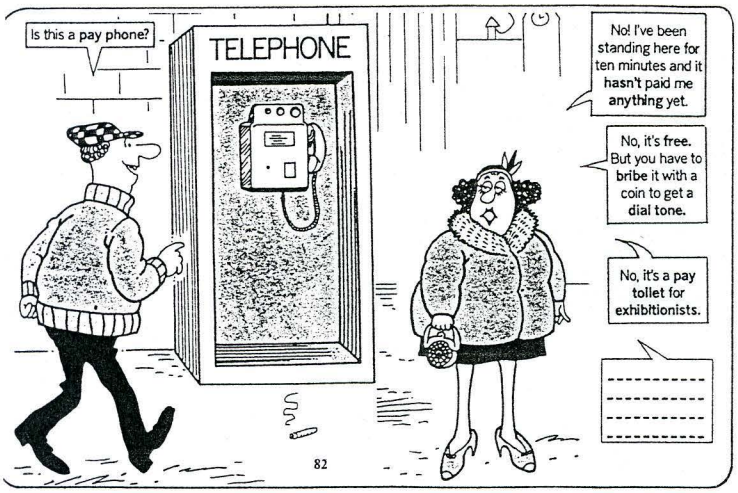
IN SPITE OF AL'S catastrophic behavior, his father doted on him. Sundays were their special time together. Sprawled on his stomach on the living room floor, feeling his father's warmth, Al would listen while Dad narrated the funnies, pointing to each frame of *Bringing Up Father* or the *Katzenjammer Kids*. The balloons, indicating the speech of the cartoon characters, exploded with meaning and laughter. Later, after the funnies were read, Morris Jaffee would draw replicas, spellbindingly exact, of *Krazy Kat*, *Little Nemo*, and *Maggie and Jiggs*.

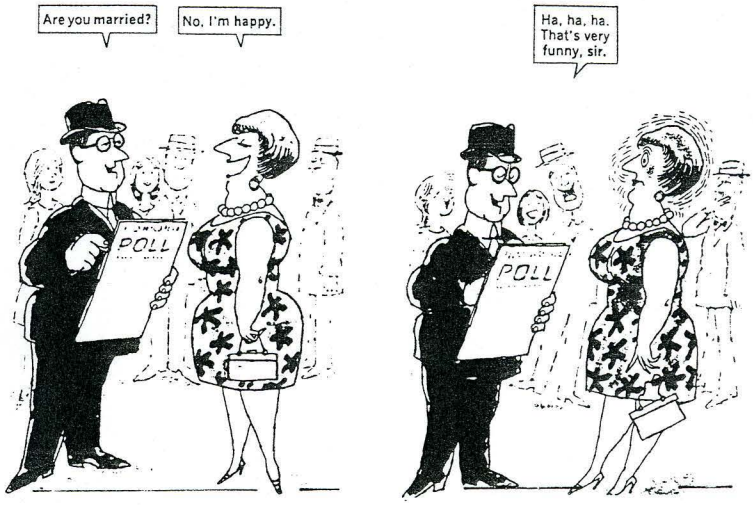


WHEN AL REMEMBERS his mother, it's quite another matter. To this day, he doesn't know what to make of her. She was beautiful. She beat him. She was a clever mimic. She neglected him. She was diabolically clever. She once scared him into taking his castor oil by dressing up as a witch. She gave the household money to rabbis and disappeared for days on religious retreats. At the age of 30, for no apparent reason, she had all her teeth pulled.

UNLIKE HER HUSBAND, Mildred Jaffee was never happy in America. In 1927, at a time when sane Jews all over Europe were trying to get to America, she decided she wanted to go back to Europe. She told her husband that she was going to take the children to visit relatives in Zarasai but, in fact, she never intended to return. As Al said goodbye to his father, he managed to impress him with a single, desperate plea: no matter what, he must not miss the installments.

AL REMEMBERS the day his childhood ended: "We were in a railroad depot in Bremen on the way to Lithuania. I was frightened and yelling to my mother because my younger brothers were running all over the place. Bernard was on the tracks. Harry was waddling off in another direction. David, the baby, was screaming. It was chaos. It is a moment that is as clear to me today as it was then. I realized that I must not rely on this woman for my survival. I must not. I realized she was irresponsible. I knew I knew better than she did. I knew that I could not put my life in her hands. I knew I was on my own." Suspended between two worlds, Al understood this was no time to look down. He was six years old.





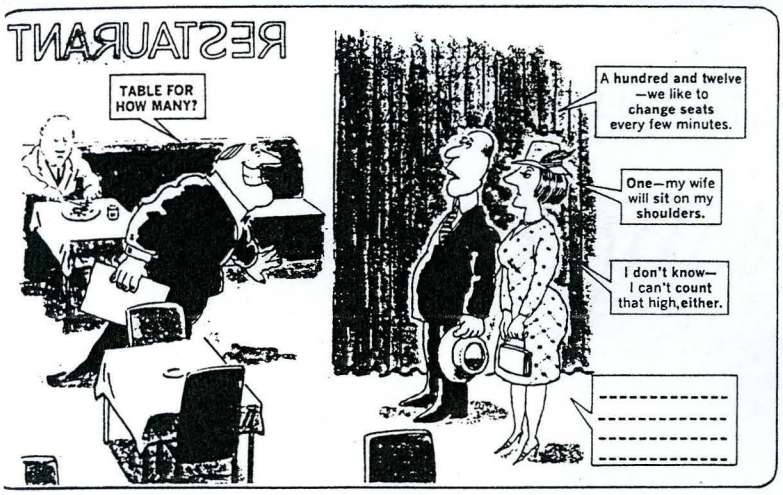
more and more remote, and then almost unimaginable.

ZARASAI WAS A TOWN on a hill surrounded by lakes. Jaffee still remembers the names of the friends he made there: Chaimke Musel, Berke Lintup, Itzke Schmidt. They showed him how to run his fingers down the flanks of molting cattle, grab the sweat-covered hair and mold it into a ball that would bounce. They smoked cigarettes. They braved encounters with wolves in the forest in order to find wood suitable for fishing poles and to feast on the hazel nuts and wild strawberries that grew in profusion. In the winters, Al, his brother, and their pals rode their homemade sleds down those hills and spun out on the frozen lakes below. In the brief summers, like Yiddish Huck Finns, they built rafts out of the reeds that grew along the sides of the lakes, and floated the day away. At the end of a summer's day, they sat barefoot on the dusty dirt street in front of Chaimke Musel's father's grocery store. The Musels gave them great slabs of still hot, freshly baked bread slathered with butter and sprinkled with sugar or honey. Chaimke's mother warned them to wait until the bread cooled off, or they'd get stomach aches. Monday, Wednesday, and Friday were market days. Wagons, filled with chickens, pigs, corn, fruit, and vegetables from surrounding farms, converged on the village square. Horse races were staged there, not for sport, but to exhibit the strength and vigor of the animals for sale. Jaffee picked up some useful pointers, for instance, that a hot potato inserted in a horse's rectum at the approach of a potential customer will make the animal very lively.

JAFFEE HAS CONCEALED the pain of his childhood in Lithuania like a rock in a snowball, packaging it instead as a comic myth of survival. When his mother forgot to feed him, which was often, he learned to beg or steal. Stealing appealed more to his sense of adventure and genius for engineering. In the spirit of Rube Goldberg, he built a remote-control fruit-picking device that allowed him to pluck apples from fenced-off orchards. When his mother left him and his brothers locked in a snowbound cottage for three days with no access to an outhouse and no food except a lump of butter, he and his brothers took their revenge on her rubber plant. "Four little boys watered it daily. By spring, it was dead. She never figured out why."

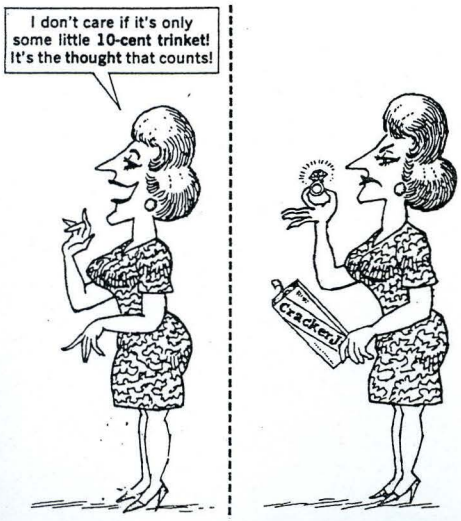
AT SOME POINT during his six years in Lithuania, his mother moved the family from Zarasai to a ghetto called Sloboda within the city of Kaunas. This second uprooting, which tore him away from the now familiar life of Zarasai, his playmates, and the few relatives upon whose kindness he had come to rely, was so wrenching that Jaffee has little recollection of what followed. Worst of all, the installments stopped coming. Did they live in Kaunas for months, or was it years? He does not know. He cannot remember the apartment, the street they lived on, or the names of any of the children with whom he must have played. He does remember that his mother sent him to Jewish parochial school. He loathed *Cheder*. He can summon the sensation of the itchy wool uniform, topped by a stiff, pill-box hat, and recall the virulence of his protest. He refused to learn the prayers. While other children *shuckled* (swayed back and forth, literally "shook") and *dovened* (prayed), he faked it. He never said a word of Hebrew. He thinks it was the American in him protesting, "What am I doing with these strange people, shaking back and forth?" His prospects for achieving total immersion in the religious culture were also undermined by recollections of arguments between his father and mother in Savannah, during which his father would express disdain for rabbis, calling them beggars and thieves. He also remembers that his perpetual hunger—more acute now that he was no longer able to raid the gardens and orchards of Zarasai—was relieved by a weekly meal at the home of the only relatives the Jaffees had in Kaunas, the Simitzes. On one of these weekly visits, Naftoya, one of the Simitze's grown sons, greeted Al with a big smile. "Come right in," he said. "I have a surprise for you."

THE SURPRISE WAS his father, who put his arms around Al and held him close, saying, "I'm going to take everyone back to America." He remembers having very funny feelings. His father was smoking Lucky Strikes. "I didn't trust him," Al recalls. "I didn't think that this was going to be a particularly good turning point in my life. What did begin to seem okay was that my father was going to take us back to America. I could get out of this ridiculous school I was going to. I wouldn't have to dress like a bell hop.



with a Yiddish accent. The kids called him greenhorn. But not for long. Once again, he was saved by his ability to draw and to ingratiate himself with his peers. He told jokes. He drew exact replicas of Dick Tracy and Popeye on the sidewalks in chalk. He made friends. By the time he graduated from the High School of Music and Art in Manhattan in 1940, he was voted class wit. In spite of the fact that the curriculum did not include cartooning, the school nevertheless confirmed Jaffee's sense of himself as an artist.

AS A SENIOR at Music and Art he met the late Harvey Kurtzman, then a freshman, who was to become the founder of *Mad*. Even then Kurtzman dreamed of publishing a humor magazine. In an interview shortly before his death, Kurtzman remembered how Jaffee used to clown around with another classmate, Will Elder. Jaffee, always careful to avoid any risk of humiliation, would play the straight man. Elder played the fool, filling his mouth with catsup, climbing into the phone booth at the school cafeteria, and grabbing at the glass enclosure as if he were a German pilot trapped in a cockpit of a plane that was going down in flames. Jaffee stood coolly by, narrating Elders shenanigans. "I always had the impression that Al was playing a game with the outside world, desperate to make everybody like him," Kurtzman said. "And everybody did." In 1953 Kurtzman created *Mad* with his boyhood friends, Jaffee and Elder, in mind. Jaffee, however, didn't join the staff until 1958.



WHEN KURTZMAN tapped him for *Mad*, Jaffee pondered the decision with his usual excess of caution. By now he was married, had children, and a house with a mortgage. Uncharacteristically, he decided to leave a steady, lucrative job at Timely Comics for an uncertain paycheck and future at *Mad*. He had done some freelancing for the magazine and he was itching to join the fun.

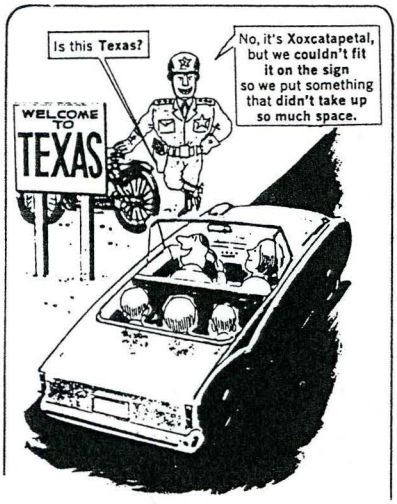
"OK," he told Kurtzman, "I'm burning my bridges. I'm coming to *Mad*."

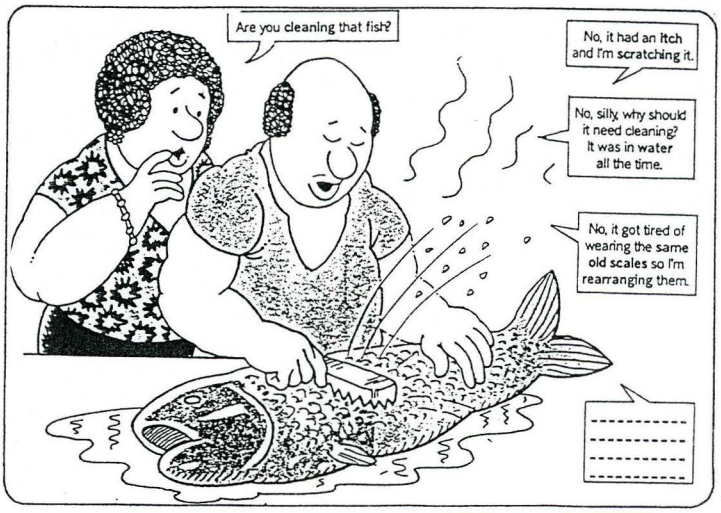
"WELL, Al," Kurtzman said, "I'm not with *Mad* anymore." By the time Jaffee had made his decision, Kurtzman had quit over a disagreement with William Gaines, *Mad*'s publisher. "Don't worry, Al," Kurtzman insisted. "Everything's going to be all right." Jaffee believed the confident, paternal Kurtzman. At first everything was all right. Kurtzman, lavishly financed by Hugh Hefner, started a new magazine, *Trump*, a slick *Mad*, intended for the adult *Playboy* audience. Hefner was riding a rocket and the money flowed. Jaffee, working with his high school buddy Elder, Arnold Roth, and others handpicked by Kurtzman, had the time of his life. After two issues, Hefner folded *Trump*. Even when Jaffee, Elder, Kurtzman, and Roth all lost a lot of money investing in yet another Kurtzman magazine, *Humbug*, the normally cautious Jaffee had no regrets. He still considers the work he did during those years some of his best work, and the men he worked with some of his best friends. "I felt safe with Harvey," he says. "There was a sense of family. It was like being a child again." When *Humbug* folded in 1958, Gaines grabbed Jaffee for *Mad*, where he has worked ever since.

JAFFEE'S engineering ability, as much as his drawing or even his talent for satire, has distinguished him as a cartoonist. In 1964, he invented his masterpiece, the *Mad* fold-in, for which he won a National Cartoonist Society award in 1972. The fold-in was his answer to the lavish fold-outs that were appearing at the time in such magazines as *National Geographic*, *Life*, *Sports Illustrated* and, of course, *Playboy*. His first fold-in was a simple black-and-white that made fun of the Liz Taylor-Eddie Fisher-Richard Burton scandal. When the page was folded, Eddie disappeared from the picture, leaving Liz and Burton in a clinch. That fold-in was supposed to be a one-time shot, but its instant popularity created a demand that continued unabated for almost 30 years. To date, he has produced 235 fold-ins for *Mad* at the rate of eight per year.

JAFFEE IS RELENTLESS in his pursuit of the silly. "I get so close to the real thing that it's almost interchangeable," he says. Just how close determines just how funny. A few years ago a *New York Times* ad for inflatable sneakers inspired him to invent a pump-up watchband for people with small wrists, pump-up gloves to hold open subway doors, diapers that inflate to prevent leakage, and a ski jacket that pumps up into a ball, rolling the fallen skier painlessly downhill. Sometimes Jaffee gets so close that he breaks the time barrier and enters the zone of ideas-yet-to-be. Jaffee pre-invented the word processor (complete with word check), the car phone, and the garbage compactor, to name just a few of his *Mad* concepts that society has eventually taken seriously.

HIS "Share the Wealth Income Tax Form," published in 1966, is vintage Jaffee. Working on the premise that most Americans can't fill out their income tax forms without the assistance of a certified public accountant, Jaffee asked his readers: Why should accountants be guaran-





"MY MOTHER REFUSED to come. She promised she'd rejoin us in America. She wrote two beautiful letters that I read and reread. The letters were so loving and needing of us: *My dearest darling children. How I miss you! I will be with you one day not too long from now! Please take care of yourselves! I miss you! I think of you all the time!* But the unwritten message was, "*Goodbye and good luck!*" The letters stopped coming. Six years earlier in Lithuania he had learned how to stop waiting for his father. Now he would learn to stop expecting his mother. He never looked down: "I expunged her from my life." He was 12 years old.

JAFFEE PRESUMES his mother died in the Holocaust. After the war, his father suggested that he try to find out what happened to her, but he declined. "I'm not a big asker of questions. What if she had survived? What if we found her? What if we brought her here? What would we do with her? I didn't want her back in my life. I didn't want the madness." Even today, when information may be available from the American Red Cross office just minutes from his winter home in Manhattan, he doesn't want to know. "I see her walking up to a Nazi soldier and telling him that it is not God's way to point guns at people. And I see happening to her whatever it was that happened to people who stuck out."

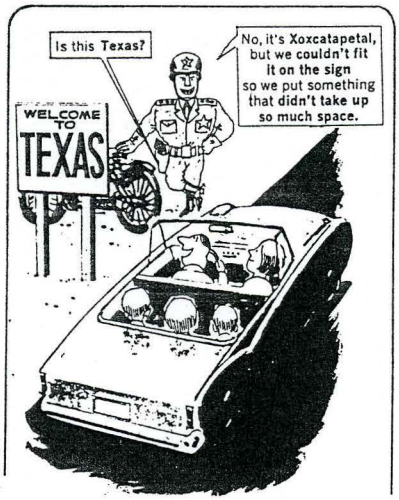
FOR THE PAST FIVE years Jaffee has been contributing drawings to *The Moshiach Times*, a magazine for Jewish children published monthly in Brooklyn by the Lubavitchers, an activist Orthodox Jewish sect. They drive him crazy and pay him very little and yet he won't quit. He once did a drawing for the Lubavitchers of the interior of a castle to illustrate a story about a king. "I put a mouse in the corner and a spider hanging from the ceiling. They took the non-kosher mouse out. They left the spider in. The editor was able to find a rationale in the scriptures for the presence of the spider. In the Talmud it is written that even in the castle of the king there will be a spider." Spider in, spider out, it's the same to Jaffee. Why does he draw them month after month for a fraction of his usual fee? "Maybe I suffer from a kind of conflicted nostalgia. I abandoned all of the zealotry, along with my mother, years ago in Lithuania, but I like the kind and gentle souls of the people of orthodoxy. Or maybe I'm doing penance for my mother. I keep asking my rabbi-editor, 'Where was our God while they were roasting our people?' I know its an elementary question, but I still haven't gotten an elementary answer."

HIS PREMONITION THAT LIFE with father in America might not turn out to be any better than life with mother had been in Kaunas was quickly verified. He was overwhelmed and disgusted by the noise and filth of New York where his father now lived. "I think I envisioned a better life," he remarks. "I had the notion that there might be a house. I thought we'd all be together. In fact we got parceled out to relatives. I lived with my father, but, for the first time, all four brothers were living in different places. I went into another kind of shock." What awaited him in America was a one-room apartment in a Bronx tenement, furnished with two cots, a table, two wooden chairs, and a single-burner stove.

AL LEARNED that Morris Jaffee had gone into a financial and psychological decline after his wife and children went to Lithuania. By the time he rescued them six years later, the father he remembered no longer existed. The Depression and the protracted drama of his own ineffective efforts to convince his wife to come home had destroyed his ambitions and reduced him to a defeated man. He had lost his job in the department store and moved to New York, first to sell cigars in a newsstand in a bank, then, when he lost that job, to work as a part-time postal clerk. Jaffee came to understand why his father did not rescue him sooner: "He simply stopped knowing what to do. My father showed me this trunk filled with receipts from money orders—a sea of pink receipts. When I saw them, I remembered my mother receiving papers like that enclosed in letters from my father. After he showed the trunk to me, my father threw the receipts away. Finally he had a witness. I felt bad for him and angry with my mother. She had lied to us. She was getting all this money and yet there was no food for us, no way to get back to America. The money was going to the beggars and the rabbis."

WHEN HE registered for school in New York, 12-year-old Al was placed in the second grade. "I couldn't fit into the seats. I was humiliated. We were schlepped outside where there was a big pole. Each one of us was given a ribbon to hold and we were going to dance around something called the Maypole. Running around with these little farts, I felt eight feet tall. We sang a song about two lips: tiptoe through the two lips. For a moment I wished I was back in Europe with sane people."

AGAIN HE FOUND himself suspended between two worlds. He had arrived in Lithuania from America speaking English and wearing Keds. When he returned to America in 1933, he wore cobbled boots and spoke his native tongue



teed an income by the Internal Revenue Service when there are so many occupations in greater need of federal support—writers and artists, for instance? What if the IRS required taxpayers to offer an illustrated answer to Schedule C: Number of Dependents Claimed as Exemptions? Jaffee obliged with a drawing of a family consisting of a sad, skinny, brow-beaten fellow and his bevy of buck-toothed dependents, including a beaverish mother-in-law and a maloccluded baby. And what if taxpayers needed to hire a poet to fill out Schedule L: Deductible Contributions:

To the N.A.M. and the C.I.O.
To the group that fights dread POLIO
To Rockwell's Nazis, B'nai B'rith,
And my Alma Mater. Dear Ol' Mith!

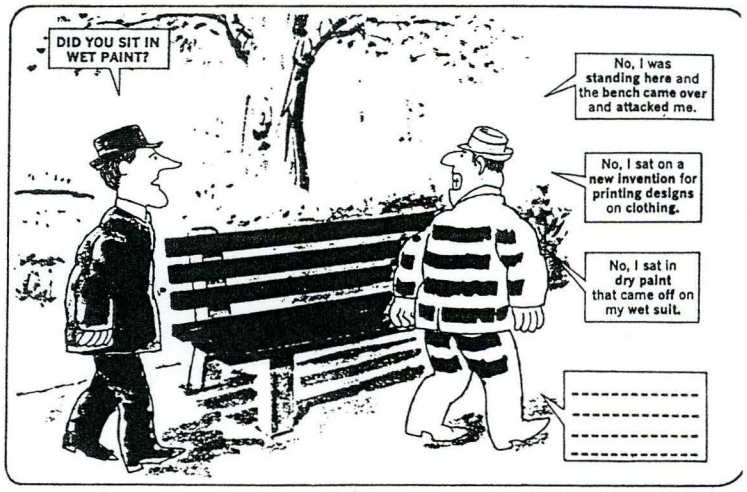
A FEW YEARS AGO, Jaffee watched a gay rights parade make its way down Fifth Avenue toward St. Patrick's Cathedral. Whatever catches his satirical fancy, he tends to see in frames, and he simultaneously translated the events of the parade into a cartoon strip in his head. Frame one: Men in bizarre costumes are parading by—guys in gowns, guys in satin and gold lamé. The crowd mocks and jeers. Frame Two: Cardinal O'Connor, dressed in his clerical gown, appears on the steps of St. Patrick's Cathedral. The crowd cheers wildly. Then Jaffee wonders out loud, "What if someone from Mars landed and witnessed this? Would he think that this is a costume contest and that the crowd has picked the winner?"

JAFFEE IS OUR MAN from Mars, by way of Lithuania, suspended between two worlds in a state of plausible impossibility. He is not at home anywhere, certainly not perched high above 56th Street in New York, where he waits out the winter tethered to his drawing board, and not even in his beloved Provincetown, where he comes as close as he ever does to relaxing, tethered between his drawing board and his tennis racket. Provincetown is Jaffee's reward for enduring yet another winter in Manhattan and for living the portable but financially perilous life of a freelancer. But before he can claim his reward he must suffer several weeks of anticipatory stomach cramps—an intestinal homage to his mother and her penchant for traumatic travel. The cramps start around Memorial Day and do not end until he and his second wife, Joyce, catch a first glimpse of the Pilgrim Monument from Route 6.

BUT even in Provincetown, among friends, Jaffee says he has "the fear of the outsider who is behaving himself in America. I have a desire not to rock the boat. I envy people who feel comfortable. I envy people who flout the law. Some people have the balls to park in an illegal zone in the the middle of a busy street, and then yell at the cops for even implying they have no right to park there. A guy who can do that is home. When Joyce asks me to drop her downtown in Provincetown at the library, where there's never a legal parking place in summer, right away I ask her, 'Do you mind jumping out of the car while its moving?'

"WHEN people invite me to sleep over, I wonder, Sleep over? When will I be able to wash the sheets? I'm uneasy ordering food in a restaurant or using a coin phone. I'm afraid to spend money. Every once in a while I tell myself, Live it up, you're an American. I don't know what I'm afraid of. Maybe that they'll send me back."

Mary-Lou Weisman is a freelance writer who lives in Connecticut and summers in Provincetown, next door to Al Jaffee.



AL (né Abraham) Jaffee arrived in 19th-century Zarasai, quaking in his Keds. He stared at the high stockings and cobbled boots of the kids who huddled together at a safe distance to look him over, babbling excitedly in a language he did not understand. Although he didn't realize it at the time, they were scared of his shoes. Later he would learn that the only other sneakers these kids had ever seen were in a poster being worn by Jack Sharkey, an American boxer of Lithuanian descent. He was such a major national hero that a copy of a poster announcing a fight long gone had found its way to Zarasai. Jaffee was ignorant of the extraordinary powers being credited to him because of his Keds, but he sensed the awe and he attempted to make the most of it.

IT DIDN'T TAKE the Lithuanian kids long to learn that the shoes imparted no special powers to the wearer. The knowledge came suddenly and in the person of Shimeonka's Shaygetz (Simon's gentile son), a huge, eight-year-old Slavic bully who used to walk around pushing a primitive toy, a wheel on a wire. "There were no toys in this town," Jaffee remembers. "You looked for a round log and you had someone cut off a two-inch-thick piece. Then you drilled a hole, put a wire through it, and you pushed it around." The mere mention of Shimeonka's Shaygetz's name struck terror into all the little Jewish kids. "It was like *High Noon* whenever this *bulvan* came down the street. The others would be jumping into windows, over fences." The next time Shimeonka's Shaygetz appeared on the main street of the ghetto, pushing his wheel, Jaffee stepped fearlessly into his path. "I believe I called out to him in Russian,

Ya Amerikansky! I'm American!
I am not afraid.

"SOMETHING LIKE THAT. The next thing I know I am being awakened at the house across the street where they are putting cold compresses on my head." This incident permanently extinguished what had been a childhood passion for confrontation. "I suffered an abrupt personality change after being hit by a log," he says. "Ever since then, even when I'm completely in the right, I back down from confrontations. I'm afraid of becoming a babbling idiot. Anger overwhelms me. Maybe it's the anger of wanting to get back and kill that sonovabitch and I know I never can."

JAFFEE HAS BUILT a career on that childhood humiliation. When the going gets rough in the real world, he slips into something more comfortable, like a cartoon. Twenty years after receiving that crack on the head, he created his first satiric cartoon strip and alter ago, *Inferior Man*. It appeared briefly as a two-pager in *Military Comics* around 1941. "*Inferior Man* was the right thing at the wrong time," he says. The right time would have been just before Batman appeared on TV. The wrong time was 1941, the year the United States went to war. Americans were taking their newly created superheroes like Superman and Batman very seriously. Because it seemed natural to swim against the tide, Jaffee created short, bald Courtney Fudd, an accountant by day and an anti-superhero by night. His outfit included dingy underwear emblazoned with the letter I, garters to hold up his droopy socks and, of course, a cape. "Inferior Man would prance around looking for crimes, but if the crime was a little more than he could handle, he would go into a phone booth, change into street clothes, and blend into the crowd."

FOR MOST OF THE SIX years Jaffee spent in Lithuania, the Sunday cartoons served as a lifeline between him and his father. Just when he thought he could not suffer his terrible homesickness another day, the funnies would arrive, an enormous newspaper roll of installments that his father had hoarded for weeks. On the hard cottage floor, he and his brother spread out the pages of *Boob McNut* and *Mutt and Jeff*. In 1931, when the very first *Dick Tracy* was published, they read it. He learned to read English by deciphering the funnies in Lithuania. Then they translated them into Yiddish or Lithuanian, and read them to their friends. "I regaled them with stories beyond their wildest dreams about tall buildings, trains, and huge ocean-going ships."

AT FIRST JAFFEE nagged his mother constantly—"When are we going to go home?"—but she never gave him a straight answer. After a few weeks, he stopped expecting his father to appear at the door to rescue him. After a few months, he outgrew the hope. He had a cousin his own age in Zarasai, a sophisticated, bookish kid named Daniel who knew a lot about naval history and who told him about the sinking of the *Titanic*. "I used that information to console myself," he says. "I started to accept more easily the fact that maybe staying in Lithuania wasn't so bad, considering how dangerous it could be to go back." He knew he had a father who lived in America—he never forgot that—but the possibility of ever seeing him again became