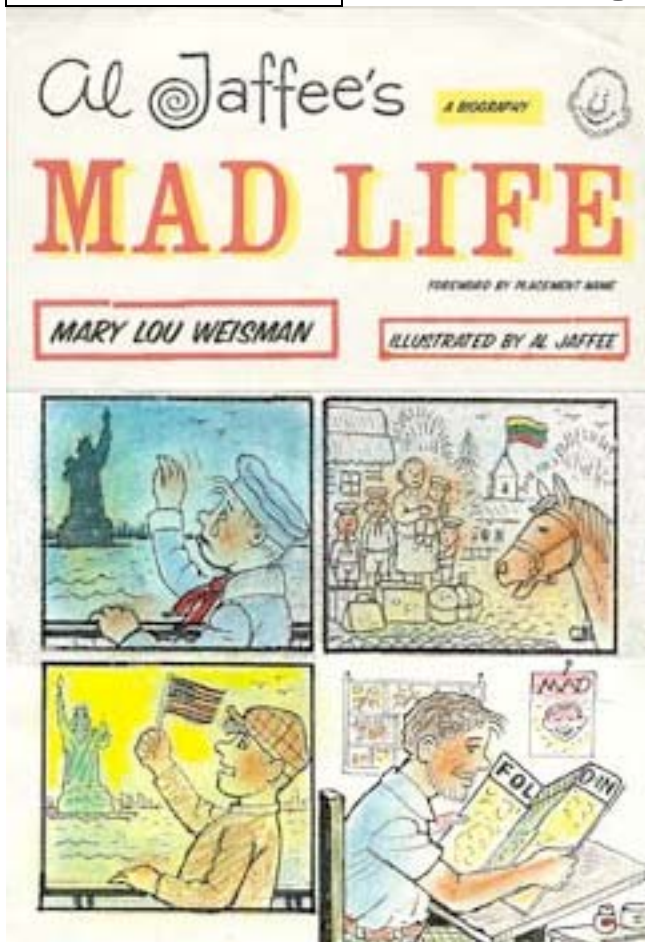


# AL JAFFEE'S MAD LIFE

COVER NOT FINAL



Sell-in Kit Includes

- Extended bio
- Al in the *NY Times*
- Al & Mad

## AL JAFFEE'S MAD LIFE

Mary-Lou Weisman  
With illustrations by Al Jaffee

It Books

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## Extended Biography

### Al Jaffee

Born in Savannah, Georgia, Jaffee spent six years of his childhood in Lithuania, returning to America in advance of the Nazi takeover. He studied at The High School of Music & Art in New York City in the late 1930s, along with future *Mad* personnel Will Elder, Harvey Kurtzman, John Severin, and Al Feldstein.

He began his career in 1941, working as a comic-book artist for several publications, including *Timely Comics* and *Atlas Comics*, the 1940s and 1950s precursors, respectively, of *Marvel Comics*.

Jaffee first appeared in *Mad* in 1955, shortly after its transformation from comic book format to magazine. When editor Harvey Kurtzman left in a dispute, Jaffee went with Kurtzman. Jaffee contributed to Kurtzman's first two post-*Mad* publishing efforts, *Trump* and the creator-owned *Humbug*.

After *Humbug* folded in 1958, Jaffee brought his unpublished material to *Mad*, which bought the work. In 1964, Jaffee created his longest-running *Mad* feature, the Fold-In. Originally, Jaffee intended it as a one-shot "cheap" satire of the triple fold-outs that were appearing in glossy magazines such as *Playboy* and *Life*. But Jaffee was asked to do a second installment, and soon the Fold-In became a recurring feature on the inside back cover of the magazine. In each, a drawing is folded vertically and inward to reveal a new "hidden" picture (as well as a new caption). The Fold-In has since become one of *Mad's* signature features, and has appeared in almost every issue of the magazine from 1964-2008. Jaffee's work has appeared in over 445 issues of the magazine, a total unmatched by any other writer or artist.

Jaffee won the National Cartoonists Society Advertising and Illustration Award for 1973, its Special Features Award for 1971 and 1975, and its Humor Comic Book Award for 1979. In 2008, he won the Reuben Awards' Cartoonist of the Year.

### Mary-Lou Weisman

Mary-Lou Weisman is an award-winning journalist and best-selling author. Weisman, who has known Al for over 30 years, has published several books including: *My Baby Boomer Baby Book*, *Traveling While Married*, *My (Middle-aged) Baby Book: A Record of Milestones, Millstones and Gallstones*, and *Intensive Care: A Family Love Story*. Her essays, feature articles, interviews, and film and book reviews have appeared in many magazines, among them *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The New Republic*, *Newsweek*, and *Vogue*. For several years, she wrote a column, "One Woman's Voice" nationally syndicated by the *New York Times* and, following that, the "Hers" column for the *New York Times*. She is a member of Phi Beta Kappa, PEN, and The Authors Guild. Mary-Lou Weisman lives in Westport, CT with her husband, a lawyer.

# Al Jaffee in the *New York Times*

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March 30, 2008

## A Veteran Mad Man Remains in the Fold

By [NEIL GENZLINGER](#)

THIS was going to be a simple artist-at-work article about Al Jaffee, a man who could lay claim to being the world's oldest adolescent and who just now is enjoying a fresh burst of public and professional recognition. The idea was to look in on him as he created the latest installment of a feature he has been drawing for Mad magazine since, incredibly, 1964.

But because that feature is the Mad Fold-In, which embeds a hidden joke within a seemingly straightforward illustration, it should come as no surprise that the simple article ended up being not so simple after all. There were times when Mr. Jaffee, who faced a serious health scare over the last few weeks, thought it might be something closer to a eulogy.

If you were young at any time in the last 44 years, you know the fold-in: the feature on the inside of Mad's back cover that poses a question whose answer is found by folding the page in thirds. September 1978: "What colorful fantastic creature is still being exploited even after it has wiggled and died?" A picture of a garish butterfly, folded, becomes an equally garish Elvis.

The fold-ins these days are as full of youth culture as ever. (March 2008: "What major star has recently admitted receiving illegal career-damaging human growth injections?" And a picture that looks as if it's going to be [Roger Clemens](#) folds to become [Jamie Lynn Spears](#), pregnant.) So the first thing that strikes you when Mr. Jaffee greets you at the door of his studio on the East Side of Manhattan is his age. This man, still credibly negotiating the milieu of teenagers, is 87.

"I work for a magazine that's essentially for young people, and to have them keep me going, I feel very lucky," Mr. Jaffee said. "To use an old cliché, I'm like an old racehorse. When the other horses are running, I want to run too."

As that deference implies, the second thing that strikes you upon meeting Mr. Jaffee is that the Mad wiseguy one expects is nowhere to be found. Mr. Jaffee is a genteel, unassuming fellow whose demeanor instantly suggests "gentleman."

That is especially surprising because in addition to the fold-in, he is well known for Snappy Answers to Stupid Questions, another longstanding Mad feature that is basically a running clinic on how to insult someone. No insults here. But plenty of quick wit. When he was told that this article was intended for the Arts & Leisure section, where high culture is often documented, he tossed this off: "It'll be Arts & Seizure when people see Mad in there."

Mad is, incongruously, a publication that seems to cultivate longevity, as evident from artists like Mort Drucker (first appearance, 1957) and Sergio Aragonés (1963). No current contributor, though, goes back further than Mr. Jaffee. And while other Mad features, like *Spy vs. Spy*, have changed artists over the years, only Mr. Jaffee has drawn the fold-in. Since the first appeared in April 1964 all but a handful of specialty issues of the magazine have had one.

"A number of months ago I counted, and I came up with something like 396," Mr. Jaffee said. "I must have done No. 400 by now."

He started work on No. 4—whatever, for the issue that goes on sale in mid-May, as he has all the others: with a rough pencil sketch. This one shows an altar scene invoking the "Raiders of the Lost Ark" movies. "Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull" is due out soon, and the fold-in question is, "What frightening ancient relic will be the focus of much attention and fanfare this summer?" The folded-in answer, of course, has nothing to do with Indiana Jones.

Mr. Jaffee seemed completely absorbed by the task at hand, explaining how he would do a fuller sketch, then ultimately render the scene in watercolor and gouache, with the entire process usually taking 10 days or so. But — and here is where the simple feature turned not so simple — he had something else on his mind as well: the day after that initial interview, he was to go in for a lung biopsy, which he suspected would show that spots turned up by a recent CAT scan were cancerous, a re-emergence of the colon cancer he fought off years ago.

"I'd like to have a few more years," he said at the time. "But I've had a good run."

This was back in late February, only the beginning of an eventful couple of weeks. Mr. Jaffee, at that point, had this itinerary:

¶Have biopsy.

¶Leave with his wife, Joyce, on annual two-week trip to Mexico.

¶Come home, get biopsy results and finish fold-in, inviting reporter back to see the other steps in the process.

But about the time he was supposed to be on the plane to Mexico, he politely rang up the reporter. He had had to cancel the trip, he said, because the biopsy attempt, in the process of failing to get the necessary tissue, had partly collapsed a lung. So he was back at his drawing board; c'mon over.

And so in early March there was Mr. Jaffee, leaning in to put a mustache on a piece of statuary in that altar sketch. It is, these days, a two-handed job: he has a condition called essential tremor, which makes his drawing hand, the right, shake.

"When I have to get these figures tightened up, that's when I put a finger in here just to steady my hand," he said, using his left hand to still the right. "I don't have a really bad tremor, but some of this stuff is very small."

He thinks the shaking has cost him a certain stroke-finishing panache. "The only thing I miss, which I never had in abundance, is a flourish," he said. "I don't have a flourish anymore."

His editors at Mad — men who perhaps got their first paper cuts doing Jaffee fold-ins as boys — might disagree. “When he brings in fold-ins now, a lot of times, it’s, ‘Geez, this guy’s painting better than ever,’” said John Ficarra, Mad’s editor.

And Sam Viviano, the art director, seems in awe of Mr. Jaffee’s old-school technique. “I think part of the brilliance of the fold-in is lost on younger generations who are so used to Photoshop and being able to do stuff like that on the computer,” he said. “It’s matching the colors and keeping the sense of what exists at two levels, the original image and the folded-in image. We’ve never actually known anyone else who could do that.”

Mr. Jaffee does have a computer, but its main benefit, he said, has been to make the typographic tricks in the fold-in easier to create. He doesn’t draw with it, which leads to another surprise: the master of the fold-in never actually folds.

“I’m working on a hard, flat board,” he said. “I cannot fold it. That’s why my planning has to be so correct.”

“The computer would make it so much simpler,” he added. “But I think I’m going to remain a dinosaur.”

The dinosaur is enjoying a resurgence lately. Beck, for his 2005 song “Girl,” filmed a fold-in video, full of collapsible sets. Two years ago on “The Colbert Report,” [Stephen Colbert](#) did an 85th-birthday tribute to Mr. Jaffee, complete with fold-in cake. (“I have a vast Mad collection, but they’re not collector-worthy,” Mr. Colbert said in a telephone interview — too heavily folded. “Perhaps I should have bought two.”)

Even Mr. Jaffee’s less-known work is getting a new appreciation. In August Fantagraphics will bring out a hardcover collection of all 11 issues of Humbug, a magazine that Harvey Kurtzman, Mad’s founding editor, published in 1957 and ’58 with some now-venerable cartoonists, including Mr. Jaffee. In July Abrams Image is publishing the best of Tall Tales, a vertical comic strip Mr. Jaffee drew daily from 1957 to 1963. And a few weeks ago, as he was getting ready to check into the [Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center](#) for another try at getting a diagnosis, Mr. Jaffee learned that he is one of three nominees for the prestigious Reuben Award for cartoonist of the year, to be presented by the National Cartoonists Society in May in New Orleans.

Not bad for a guy who started at Mad not as an artist but as a writer, and whose most enduring feature was supposed to be a one-off.

Mr. Jaffee, born in Savannah, Ga., met some of Mad’s founding brains when they were students together at the High School of Music and Art in New York in the late 1930s. Mad appeared in 1952, and soon he was among the freelancers writing for it. Mr. Kurtzman left in 1956 to try other ventures, and Mr. Jaffee was among those who followed. But after Humbug failed in 1958, Mr. Jaffee returned to Mad — still as a freelancer; he has never been on the staff. And still as a writer. Eventually, he said, the sketches he used to illustrate his ideas caught the eye of Nick Meglin, an editor, who realized they were funnier than what the artists were producing.

So Mr. Jaffee became a writer-artist. And in 1964 he had an idea. Playboy, Life and other magazines had their lavish color fold-outs, so Mad, he thought, should parody them with a cheap black-and-white fold-in.

“That was the one-time gag,” he said. But he was sure Al Feldstein, the editor, and William M. Gaines, the

publisher, wouldn't go for it. "I said: 'I have this idea, I think it's a funny idea, but I know you're not going to buy it. But I'm going to show it to you anyway. And you're not going to buy it because it mutilates the magazine.'"

They bought it, and then they asked for another. And today you could teach a pretty good course in modern American history just using Mr. Jaffee's fold-ins. June 1970: "Who is fast becoming our all-time top comic character?" A collage of every cartoon figure you can think of folds into one big Spiro Agnew. July 1968: "What is the one thing most school dropouts are sure to become?" A picture of teenagers at an employment center folds into a piece of artillery with a kid stuffed in it, and the answer: "Cannon fodder."

For much of his run Mr. Jaffee has been the sole architect of the fold-in. These days, though, it's a collaborative effort, with Mr. Ficarra and others on the staff offering him ideas.

"Now we go, 'Al, we want you to start with the scene of the Ten Commandments and have it fold into a mosquito,'" Mr. Ficarra said. " 'Good luck.' And son of a gun if the fax machine isn't humming within three hours."

Mr. Jaffee made sure to put the finishing touches on the Indiana Jones fold-in before checking into Sloan-Kettering, partly to accommodate the writing and photographing of this article and partly — well, just in case. In his several days there, he acknowledged, he pondered how he might put across his own exit in the form he has made famous. " 'Jaffee's Last Fold-In' would be the answer," he said, "but I couldn't come up what to do with it."

Mad, though, is the magazine with the motto "What — me worry?" About two weeks ago Mr. Jaffee called a reporter to relate that, to his doctors' surprise, the spotting was not lung cancer; it appears to be a less serious inflammatory or infectious condition.

Among those who will be pleased with that news are the Mad editors, because they know that their future holds an impossible dilemma.

"I can't imagine a fold-in done by anyone else but Al," Mr. Viviano said. "But the fold-in is such a part of Mad that it's hard to imagine Mad without it."

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Al Jaffee & **MAD**

Jaffee's work has appeared in over 445 issues—a *Mad* record!

Jaffee's signature fold-ins have appeared on almost every back cover



"After *Mad*, drugs were nothing."—Patti Smith

"*Mad* became the Bible for me and my whole generation."  
—Terry Gilliam

At its peak, *Mad* had a readership of over 2 Million!