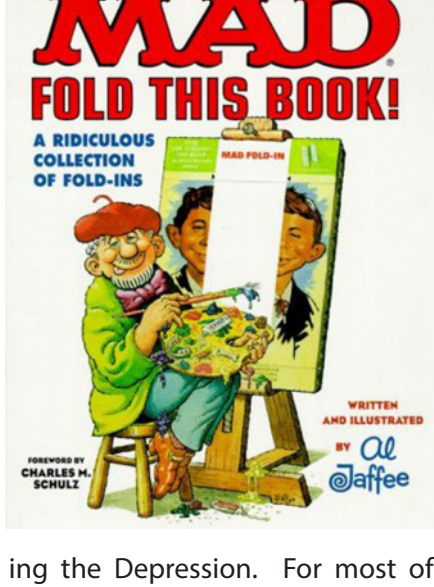




Video Chat: Al Jaffee – Cartoonist

By Elman + Perez-Trujillo + Richland

Al Jaffee (b. 1921) is an American cartoonist who is still making cartoons for MAD magazine and, at the age of 94, remembers every cartoon and human interaction we discussed (during our video conversation) in great detail. Al is best known for his work at MAD magazine, where his cartoons have appeared in every issue except one, and he is revered for his signature innovation, the MAD Fold-In. As of November 2015, he remains a regular in the magazine after fifty nine years and is its longest-running contributor. Al is fond of saying, “Serious people my age are dead.”



Al was born with a talent for drawing. During the Great Depression, he studied at the High School of Music & Art in New York City, along with his brother Harry and future MAD personnel Will Elder, Harvey Kurtzman, John Severin, and Al Feldstein. From the moment Al graduated from Music & Art, his primary quest was to figure out how to make a living from his superior talent during the Depression. For most of the rest of his adult life, Al was a freelance cartoonist who just happened to make a good living without a guarantee of the next paycheck or the benefit of company health or pension plans.

During World War II, Al was stationed in Miami, where the luxurious Biltmore Hotel of Coral Gables was converted into a convalescent home for wounded airmen. Al’s assignment was to teach the airmen how to draw, so he arranged for attractive young ladies to model for his classes to keep up both attendance and morale. Soldiers stationed in Miami were readily attracted to the tropical lifestyle and returned to vacation in Miami after the War — which was one of the primary springboards for Miami’s nationwide recognition as a tourist destination.



Illustration: Al Jaffee’s drawing class for wounded WW II Airmen at the Biltmore Hotel in Coral Gables, FL. From Al Jaffee’s MAD LIFE by Mary-Lou Weisman.

In addition to his collaboration with MAD, Al worked for many other publications and had a long-term working relationship with Stan Lee, the genius behind Marvel Comics.

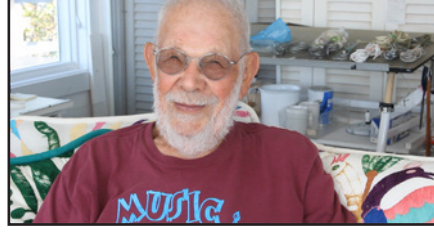
Not surprisingly, Al has won many awards for his work, including a Reuben Award as Cartoonist of the Year in 2008. And his irreverence has inspired others like Stephen Colbert and Jon Stewart.

The March 13, 2006, episode of The Colbert Report aired on Jaffee’s 85th birthday, and Colbert saluted Al with a Fold-In birthday cake. The cake featured the salutary message “Al, you have repeatedly shown artistry & care of great credit to your field.” When the center section of the cake was removed, the remainder read, “Al, you are old.”

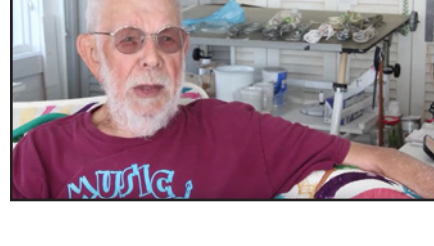
Al also recalled, “In 2010, I received a call from The Daily Show asking me to contribute a Fold-In to their book, America. I said I’d be happy to do it. When I was done, I called up the producer and said, ‘I’ve finished the Fold-In, where shall I send it?’ He replied, ‘Oh, please Mr. Jaffee, could you deliver it in person? The whole crew wants to meet you.’ And that’s where I met Stephen Colbert for the first time and Jon Stewart and all the writers. They told me it was our work in MAD that inspired them. Not me in particular, but us, generally. They said, ‘Without you guys, we wouldn’t be here.’ And I felt really good about that.”

The videos below are organized by topic and run between 60 seconds and 8 minutes. Tap on any video. You must be connected to the Internet to view the videos.

INTRODUCTION: 1:25 min.

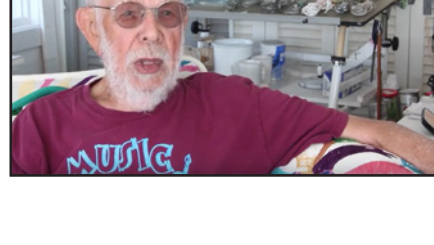


CURIOSITY & AWARENESS: 2:26 min.



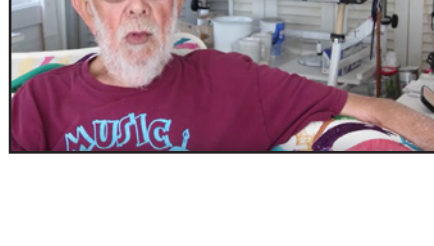
What was your first awareness of art, and when did you start drawing cartoons?

SKILL DEVELOPMENT: 1:16 min.



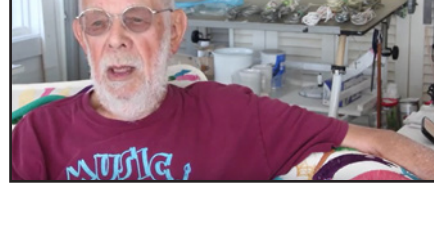
What was your process for improving your drawing and cartooning skills?

SEIZING THE MOMENT: 2:02 min.



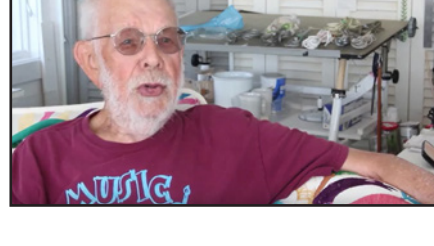
When did you decide to make a career out of cartooning?

NETWORKING: 4:04 min.



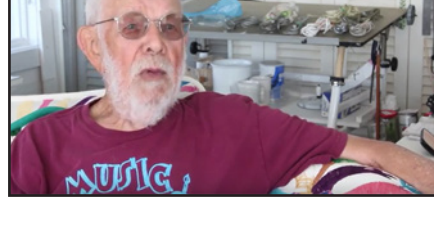
How did you get your first paid assignment in cartooning?

COLLABORATION: 2:41 min.



Stan Lee is one of the most famous names in comics. When did you start working with him?

INNOVATION: 7:39 min.



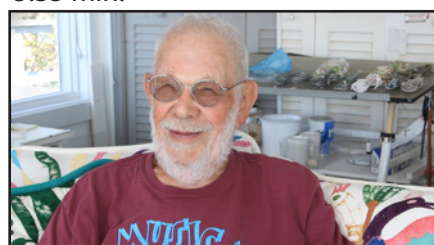
Which aspect of cartooning do you like best?

INNOVATION: 4:38 min.



MAD magazine was like the Saturday Night Live of the 1950s. It was irreverent, outside the box, and broke a lot of rules. What was the inspiration for MAD?

INNOVATION: 5:35 min.



Please describe the creation and evolution of the “Fold-In” for MAD magazine.

CRITICAL THINKING 8:08 min.



Describe a challenging situation with a successful outcome.

STAYING INFORMED: 3:14 min.



Was there a point in time when you started thinking of your cartoons as “art,” and realized that you had been undervaluing your talent?