

FACES OF MISSOURI SHOWME



Staffers of *Missouri Showme*, Mizzou's legendary student-run humor magazine, tell it like it was. The magazine's editors, writers, cartoonists and business people were a talented crop of students — funny, serious about their work of running a funny magazine, and sometimes financially successful.

Excerpts compiled by
Jerry Smith, BJ '52

The 1949 *Savitar* calls this a photo of an editorial meeting "a la Shack." From left are Bill Gabriel, Dick Sanders, Jerry Smith and Philomena "Phil" Sparano.



From the 1920s to the mid-1960s, Mizzou had a winner in *Missouri Showme*, a student-produced humor magazine. To students, the magazine was great entertainment. To campus administrators, it was a live wire of a periodical that at times provoked censorship. But to the people who created *Showme* — its artists, writers, editors and business managers — it was something entirely different.

"*Showme* should be remembered in history — not just for the famous people who were once staff members, certainly not just for its troubles, but as an independent classroom where students of various talents could work together and prove themselves," says Jerry Smith, BJ '52, of Weldon Spring, Mo., writer and editor-in-chief for *Showme*

from 1948 through 1950. Smith is working to record the periodical's history as remembered by its staff. His work covers *Showme's* post-World War II revival, challenges the staff faced and the magazine's eventual decline. In the future, Smith's complete document will be available from University Archives at muarchives.missouri.edu.

After serving in the U.S. Navy from 1944-46 in the South Pacific, Smith arrived at MU in January 1948 for his first semester as a journalism student. One of his first purchases was a 25-cent copy of *Showme*. A few months later, he submitted four poems, saw them published and eventually joined the magazine staff. As a staffer, he produced two monthly columns, "Jerrymandering with Jerry Smith" and "Around the Columns,"

and 26 pieces of fiction. Smith and others who served as editor-in-chief set the direction of the magazine, contributed ideas, assigned responsibilities to staff members, edited stories and art, dealt with the occasional disapproval of the administration and "beat the typewriter to death."

Editors and staffers did "what they wanted to do in the way they wanted to do it — but with the ever-present reality of economic failure. In short, it was real life in the middle of academia," Smith says.

"I'm very lucky that I was at Mizzou in *Showme's* heyday. I don't like to believe that it failed, just that the era of such magazines had drifted away, and *Showme* went with it."

Smith's account shows that working on the magazine not only helped launch many a career but also generated more than a few fond memories. — Sarah Garber

Showme's golden years

**Mort Walker, BA '48, Stamford, Conn.
1947 and 1948 editor-in-chief**

After graduating from MU, Mort Walker went on to become one of the most popular cartoonists of the 20th and 21st centuries. His professional approach set the magazine's format for many of its best years.

"After I'd been selected to be the editor of *Showme* the coming year, I spent the summer studying national magazines to get ideas. I created the 'Around the Columns' feature from *The New Yorker's* 'Talk of the Town,' the contributor page, girl and boy of the month, the center spread and other features which were used in *Showme* for years after. I did the first full-color covers by making four separate drawings to achieve the colors.

"I assembled a staff of talented people with one goal in mind: financial success. I used my share of the profit to pay my way to New York to become editor of three magazines for Dell Publishing Co., and to become the top selling magazine cartoonist in the country before starting my comic strip 'Beetle Bailey,' which is now in its 57th year



and is sold to 52 countries with a daily readership of 200 million people. I credit *Showme* for paving my way because it had become nationally famous and editors recognized me when I came to New York.

"*Showme's* fame was achieved by its tangles with University administrators. I was called into Dean Frank Luther Mott's office after several offenses like my Sex Issue and my cartoon satirizing communism on the campus. He wanted to kick me out of J-School. I was a straight-A student, a member of the honorary journalism fraternity and editor of the school magazine. I also had three years of regular college plus officer's school and an engineering diploma at Washington University. I had four years in the Army with a year in Italy where I was an intelligence officer in charge of American GIs, a platoon of Italian soldiers and 10,000 German prisoners of war. I wasn't conditioned to take a back seat.

"When the dean asked me why I didn't take his prerequisite History and Principles of Journalism course, I replied, 'I was too busy saving the world for democracy, sir.'

"Get out of my office!' he commanded.

"I gathered all my credits together, graduated, left immediately for New York and started my career."

Postwar, pre-gray flannel

Charles Barnard, BJ '49, Cos Cob, Conn.
1948 editor-in-chief

Barnard's stint as Showme editor preceded a magazine career in which he was editor of True, a senior editor at Saturday Evening Post, the travel editor at AARP/Modern Maturity and a longtime contributor to National Geographic Traveler, Reader's Digest, Travel & Leisure and Smithsonian.

"In retrospect, I would describe the humor in *Showme* as not very sophisticated by mature standards, but to the audience at which it was aimed it was funny stuff. College students are a self-absorbed bunch and we played to that. Local references, poking fun at faculty, coded allusions to what we were up to on the banks of the Hinkson,

frat house humor and a near-preoccupation with booze and babes made up the formula. But not just at *Showme*. Almost all college humor magazines were the same.

"I didn't feel that the school administration paid much attention to *Showme*. We were never indecent or subversive in my time. Many of us male staffers were veterans of WW II, and that had a sobering, mellowing effect. I can recall no run-ins with MU.

"One of the first things I did when I became editor was to send complimentary subscriptions to MU's President Middlebush; to whoever was governor of Missouri at the time; and (yes) to Harry Truman at the White House. As I recall, the cover of our October 1948 issue featuring him drew an amused and complimentary response from the Truman White House after his re-election victory. What does this illustrate? Only that we weren't trying to be troublemakers in those days. We were in a hurry to get on with our lives. We weren't yet in our gray flannel suits, but that's where we were headed.

"How were editorial decisions made? Well, whenever we got together for meetings, it became show-off time. Anyone who had an idea for a joke, a cartoon, a crazy cover or a center spread put it forth. Looking now at the names on our masthead in those days, I recall a smart, wacky, uninhibited and, yes, funny bunch. And it was self-policing in a way. Any newcomer who couldn't keep up with this witty, crazy group soon sought other company.

"Were we conscious of remaining within bounds with our ideas and our humor? I suppose, yes, of course. Any of us would have been capable of putting out a rougher, coarser magazine, but I guess we understood that that might put an end to our fun. This was an interval, a pause in the country's social history — still postwar, still pre-television. Also, some of us were conscious, I'm sure, that the magazine might soon be something to be added to our job-hunting portfolios. It was in my case. I had met a publishing vice president at Journalism Week 1947, and I used *Showme* as a means of staying

in touch with him every month until I graduated. What a sensible bunch we were!"

A money-making venture

Philomena "Phil" Sparano Jurey, BJ '49
Washington, D.C.

1947-49 business manager

At the height of its popularity, Showme's circulation reached 6,000. The staff was running a bustling business. Jurey went on to a career in journalism that included 14 years as White House correspondent for the Voice of America.

"One of my duties was to send out the invoices to the advertisers and to dun by phone or mail those who were late payers. In promoting the value of *Showme's* ads, in 1948 we distributed a flier, 'Important News for Columbia Businessmen,' to local stores, restaurants and so on. It cited two things every businessman knows about advertising: An ad 'must be seen by a lot of people' and 'must be read by these people.' *Showme*, the flyer read, can give you both better than any other Columbia publication. 'Here's why: Last semester there were 3,000 *Showmes* per-issue sold, and each copy was read by an average of 3.3 persons. So, approximately 9,900 people read *Showme*.'

"We promoted the magazine in many ways. For example, we produced a *Showme* blotter, which listed the 1948 Missouri football schedule. This was cartoonist Flash Fairfield's brilliant idea. One of our most successful promotions was the 1949 *Showme* Queen election. The plans included events in St. Louis, sponsored by the MU Alumni Association of St. Louis, with the queen, her attendants and chaperone the guests of the Sheraton Hotel. Dick Sanders [editor-in-chief, 1949] and I attended.

"The president of the association wrote a letter to MU's President F.A. Middlebush, which included the following: 'I find my vocabulary inadequate to describe the superlative students who represented the University of Missouri in St. Louis last weekend. They more than measured up to what you and the University would expect — they exceeded every yardstick I know of for quality,



In this photo from the 1957 *Savitar*, *Showme* staffers gathered at the Shack. Front row: Dick Johnston, Barb Jones, Nanci Schelker, Skip Troelstrup, Ginny Turman and John McSkimming, J.J. Aasen. Back row: Barney Kinkade, Bob Clatanott, Brack Hinchey, Matt Hynn, Sue Wilson, Charlotte Peaslee, Dick Noel, Tom Watson, Margi Foster, Dave Freeman, Paula Fozzy, Ron Voigt, Noel Tomas and Ron Farr.

cooperation, good looks, citizenship and tolerant understanding of "old folks" alumni.' "

Is that a Picasso?

Bill "Gabe" Gabriel, BJ '50, Solana Beach, Calif.
1949 editor-in-chief

After Showme's first revival issue appeared in October 1946, it barely took a year before the staff crossed "the line," and administrators considered banning the periodical.

"The Sex Issue [November 1947]. With its publication, all hell broke loose. Mort's cover of Picasso-style nudes put the focus on him as the editor and perpetrator. We also wanted to distribute a sex questionnaire — like Kinsey. Mort was briefly suspended as editor-in-chief, which we noted with a subtle change on the masthead in February 1948: 'Guest Editor-in-Chief Charles Nelson Barnard, Editor-at-Rest Mort Walker.' "

I'll take two

Robert Skole, BJ '52, Boston, Mass.
1950 and 1951 writer

Showme staffers were known partly for their

sometimes-boisterous meetings at the Shack.

"The thing I recall most about *Showme* in 1951 was meeting in the Shack's back room. We'd dream up the issues' themes, center spread gags, mostly enjoy laughs and goof-ball conversation. Out at the bar, George C. Scott (the future famous actor) would hold court. He'd show a profile and ask, 'OK. Who is this?' We'd say, 'Jimmy Durante? Groucho Marx? Gary Cooper?' He'd finally say, 'Nah, nah. It's Barrymore. Pure Barrymore.' He was good pal of *Showme* cartoonist Don Pengelly.

"Magazine cartoon editors in those days would see cartoonists one day a week or so, look at their work, and, if the cartoonist were lucky, the editor would buy one. One day, cartoonists Don Pengelly and Herb Green met in the waiting room of one of the top markets, *Saturday Evening Post*. They knew each other from *Showme*. By this time, Herb was well established. Don was brand-new. Herb told Don how tough it was to break in, don't get discouraged, it takes time, keep up your spirits, etc., etc. Don goes in to see the editor. Comes out after a while.

Herb asks how he did. Don says, 'He bought two.' Herb was amazed."

I'm not so think as you drunk I am

Joel Gold, BA '55, Lawrence, Kan.
1953 editor-in-chief

Joel Gold took part in several staff meetings at the Shack, where a golden liquid loosened the lips of staffers. He went on to teach English at the University of Kansas and publish The Wayward Professor (University Press of Kansas, 1989), a book of anecdotal humor about experiences in the academic world.

"Everyone with a sense of humor could be useful at the monthly gag meetings, essentially brainstorming sessions, fueled by pitchers of beer at the Shack. The key was not to shoot ideas down; one bad gag might trigger someone else's good one. If memory serves (and these days it often doesn't), the artist assigned to do the center spread, that two-page layout of crowded cartoon figures and bubbles of speech, was the only one not drinking — or maybe 'moderately' drinking — as he tried to jot down the rapid-fire sight

gags, obscenities, and comic situations being lobbed at him or her around and through the beer glasses.

"I do remember Pat Kilpatrick, funny and talented, jotting down ideas for her center spread and whispering to a less innocent staffer, 'What does that mean?' I'm not sure if she really didn't know, or was just putting us on."

Chief button pusher

Noel Tomas, BJ '59, Glastonbury, Conn.
1957 editor-in-chief

As Showme's popularity continued, the staff worked hard to come up with new, fresh material and ways to generate income. But in December 1957, one issue drew harsh criticism from the administration, resulting in a ban from 1958 to early 1960.

"We published four issues while I was editor-in-chief. From the beginning we began 'pushing the buttons' of the administration. One sore point was the use of nude women in ads, an ad salesman's idea that helped pump up income. The ads were for clothing stores and featured photos of unclothed women very carefully posed. Ad Manager Bob Weinbach was the man who brought in the bucks.

"But our fourth issue finally pushed too far. The Publications Board found it totally unacceptable. The magazines were shredded, and our staff and cartoonists just disappeared. We figured that the *Showme* era had ended forever and that we had muddied the good done by some of the illustrious past editors such as Mort Walker and Herb Green.

"Ironically, those shredded issues included a notice that *Showme* had been ranked third best of 50 college humor magazines."

Ah, whimsy

Ron Powers, BJ '63, Castleton, Vt.
1962 and 1963 editor-in-chief

The administration wasn't easily convinced to lift Showme's publication ban, but Powers and co-editor-in-chief Larry Roth, BJ '64, MA '68, of Germanton, N.C., finally persuaded the dean of students to entrust the magazine to them. Powers went on to win the Pulitzer Prize for criticism in 1973.

"Larry Roth and I brought *Showme* back

from the Realm of the Damned in the autumn of 1962 and the spring of 1963, when I graduated, and just a few months before the world cracked open and Hell herself bubbled forth as the societal norm.

"We were the last collegiate generation of the 1950s (some accused us of being the last collegiate generation of the 1930s). The coeds spent most of their time wearing pearl necklaces and arranging themselves in rows with perfect posture, ankles crossed, hands folded in laps, being photographed for the Legislative Council yearbook. The boys were all tall and rawboned and crew-cut, and wore Kingston Trio shirts and tapped a keg now and then, but most of all strode around the campus working on their grade-point and shouting 'Outstanding!' to one another, which they would continue to shout into their first few weeks in the Vietnam killing fields. 'Matriculating in a school for the blind,' as the onetime undergrad Tennessee Williams once put it. I think I'm digressing. Except to say that these postures and exclamations defined the limits of humor, and nearly everything else, back then.

"It was Roth, more than I, who burned to bring *Showme* back. Roth deserves the credit. It was Roth who pursued the delicate negotiations with a skeptical administration, while I did little more than lend my star-power as the recently acknowledged Top Collegiate Cartoonist in Missouri. (Actually, it may have been 'in Mid-Missouri,' or perhaps even 'in Boone County, Missouri — with the exception of Joe Jahraus.' But an accolade is an accolade.)

"Roth and I were off-campus roommates that year, and fellow J-Schoolers. We lived in a little white frame house behind a pizza joint on South Ninth across from the J-School called the Agora House and run by a bald-headed former merchant marine (an intellectual with huge forearms) named Ralph. This is where most of our issues got put together, often after hours, as we munched naughtily on pizzas we'd ordered from someplace else. We were whimsical, don't you see. Ralph elected not to activate his massive forearms

and be whimsical along with us, or both of us would be long since dead by now.

"Roth and I were probably the only two late-adolescent males in the Midwest who could have pulled it off — persuaded the administration that in bringing back *Showme*, we wouldn't Offend. We were that dewy and dopey and innocent.

"Our big hurdle in gaining permission to bring back *Showme* was to persuade the dean of students that we would keep it ... wholesome. The dean of students was a terrifying straight-arrow and veteran of the Salem Witch Trials named Jack Matthews — 'Black Jack,' to the student body.

"Black Jack Matthews wore a flattop and dark-rimmed glasses, and he ran his office pretty much the way J. Edgar Hoover ran the FBI. Black Jack was about control and reprisal, and catching Communists, with which our Midwestern land-grant campus of course teemed. Black Jack's informational reach was infinite. Some said he soaked intelligence out of everyone's minds via some occult reverse-energy trick he played with the public-address system during football games at Tiger Stadium. Black Jack liked his students sober and virginal, and his humor ... wholesome. His idea of a filthy joke was the one about the ram that ran off the cliff because he didn't see the ewe turn. I actually sort of liked him.

"If memory serves — and it still doesn't, probably — our 'pitch' meeting in Black Jack's office, in which we assumed the traditional knees-on-carpet posture after being frisked in the outer hallway, went something like this:

"Black Jack: So, you want to bring back *Showme* and keep it ... wholesome.

"Roth: We're very wholesome. We don't like dirty jokes.

"Black Jack: That's what they all say. And they always foul it up. Get hung up on that

Here's the 1963 Savitar caption for this photo: "One of the great rewards of work on a humor magazine is hearing a joke for the first time in history. Paul Hurst cackles. Frank Weltner roars. Winston Gifford smiles. Ron Powers chuckles."

monthly deadline. Throw in something off-color, Communistical, just to get the ball rolling.

"Roth: We'd do it as a quarterly.

"Black Jack: You still might get hung up.

"Roth: A quasi-quarterly?

"Black Jack: One foul-up ... just one ...

"Roth: A queasy quasi-quarterly?

"Black Jack: You think you can be funny without being off-color?

"Roth: A crazy queasy quasi-quarterly.

"At that point, Black Jack must have decided that no kid this dorky could be much of a threat to community decency or national security. He said, 'Sure. Bring it back. But one foul-up ...'

"After that, it was a matter of assembling

The Team. Between us, Roth and I knew people who knew people — people who could do ... wholesome, if kept on a tight leash, but who'd walked on the wild side, some of them. There was the massively muscled, steely-eyed Frank 'The Insinuator' Weltner, who'd narrowly beat a double-entendre rap at a junior college a year or so earlier, and his baby-faced accomplice, Paul 'The Baby-faced Accomplice' Hirth, who could slay you with a fast quip or a faster shiv between the ribs, he didn't much care which. There was Joe 'My Cartoons Are Better Than Your Cartoons' Jahraus, a cartoonist like me; good, some people said, real good; I figured that sooner or later we might have to go up against each other. There was Mike 'The Canadian' Miner,

whose lanky frame, deep-set eyes behind thick glasses and nearly incomprehensible way of murmuring belied a near-incredible capacity for really obscure, convoluted and ultimately disposable jokes. And none of it could have worked without the market-savvy of Miner's roommate, the advertising major Winston 'I'm Going to Work to Change the System from the Inside' Gifford, who rounded up a lot of ad revenue for the magazine, I think. We got to work. There was humor that needed creatin'. Wholesome humor." ■

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