

Cartoons a serious business

by Gerry Yampolsky
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He is a man who attacks with pictures and one liners. His arena is four inches by three inches and allows for one or two lines of print, yet he uses that space to convey a message more powerful than even the characters he satirizes.

Terry Mosher, better known as Aislin, proves that the quill is mightier than the pen, which leaves the sword far behind in the modern pecking order.

His cartoons, if they can be defined as such, educate the reader while tickling his funny bone. He uses images rather than words to point out the "wrongdoings" of people and institutions in the news.

Aislin has just published his book entitled *Did the Earth Move?* (Link, September 19) and it has gone into a second printing with sales of over 15,000 copies, a rarity in Canada.

He is also published three times a week in the Montreal Gazette and does freelance work for other interests.

Mosher's office speaks loudly of the man. It is messy, but organized and very interesting. The walls are cluttered with awards, posters and buttons. Buttons from everywhere and for anything. Old political campaigns, old movies, old stars, new businesses, and one that simply states that "Mary Brown has the best legs in town", vestige of a modelling agency's creative push.

His collection of baseball hats and vast library remind the visitor that he is dealing with a crazed intellectual who can comfortably discuss the roots of Country and Western, European art, or Civic Politics.

Mosher's hair and beard are speckled with grey and he reminisces about the Yippies and underground newspapers. He is not a radical in the bomb-throwing sense, yet his art does tend to shake up the establishment from time to time.

"I am the typical Canadian, born in Ottawa on Remembrance Day."

His success and recognition come after years of hard work and many hungry weeks when cartoons, caricatures or other works did not sell.

That has all changed. Mosher proudly tells me about the new second hand Mercedes sports coupe he has just purchased. He then shrugs and grins, "Every second printing deserves a Mercedes, even if it is a second hand." Then he throws back his whole body and the laughter booms out, rattling the windows.

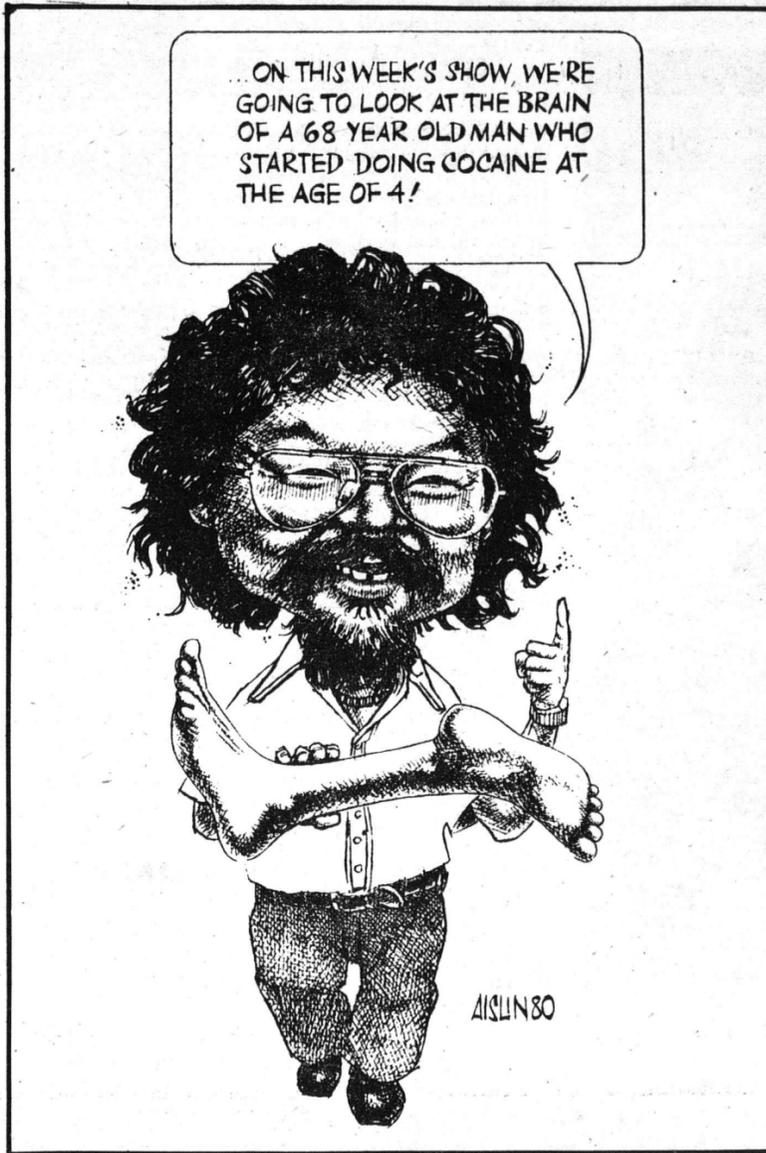
The Link: Don't you get tired of doing the same cartoons?

Aislin: Not really, you can only do Levesque and Drapeau so many times, but they are interesting. I guess my favorite character has been Levesque, but Ryan is coming in fast. It has to do with the person being 'in the spotlight'.

The Link: What about the beginning of Aislin?

Aislin: The name is my daughter's. I graduated from Grand Ecole de Beaux Art in Quebec City. I used to earn cash by drawing caricatures of tourists.

Then I hitched down to New York and knocked on the door of Paul Kraszner (Yippe leader) and he liked my work. Kraszner managed to get me a double page spread in a rock magazine, now defunct, named *Cheetah*.



The Link: How did you start with the newspapers in the city?

Aislin: When I arrived in Montreal I went to see Frank Walker at the *Star*. The other cartoonist, McNally, broke his ankle and they called a few weeks later for a cartoon. That was my first piece published in the city.

There were rumors circulating that I was working in University papers and underground press (Logos) but that came only after the *Star* I was willing to work for anyone, both for experience and the exposure.

The money was pretty tight; about fifty to a hundred dollars a week was good. Then I started doing more freelance stuff for the *Star* and artwork on their ads.

Walker called me in and said that "We might as well hire you full time for all the money we pay you in freelance." That was acceptable, but I had to be able to continue my freelance work.

The Link: How did the October Crisis affect you?

Aislin: I did some of my best work during those few months. There were front page courtroom scenes, political cartoons, just tons of stuff. It was a time of intense pressure, and many opinions. About six months later, my kids were still young and here was an chance so we left for Europe "en famille". I took a year of absence.

It was wonderful, exciting and educational. When we hit Spain I was broke, so I called Frank Walker at the *Star* and asked if I still had a job.

He said there was one available, and I told him to wire me a thousand dollars to get home. He did.

When I arrived back in Montreal, things had changed at the *Star*.

Although Walker and others defended me, the *Star* felt my cartoons were too radical. So I left the *Star* and took advantage of a standing offer at the *Gazette*.

The Link: Do you think that your work is radical?

Aislin: People did then. My work hasn't changed, but people's ideas have. I write what the average Joe thinks, but can't say without seeming pretentious. I listen to them and try to speak for them.

When I joined the *Gazette* in 1972, it was during the rough times. I was using many chemicals that were somewhat less than legal, but I smartened up. Things have been on the rise ever since.

"Ever since I quit heroin I've taken to Scope."

The Link: How did you feel about the *Star's* demise?

Aislin: I felt awful about it. Cities with smaller anglophone populations support two English dailies successfully.

Montreal is a newspaper town. People here have a tremendous diversity of opinions and they should be able to express it. Besides, many good friends lost their jobs at the *Star*.

The Link: Your work seems to typify the common man, and take his side.

Aislin: My work does typify the common Joe and describe his perceptions. When Eaton's has to drop the "S" from their name, it's a corporate decision made in Regina, or some other place. When Ed's in Verdun, or anywhere else, have to change their sign, it's a big deal. They can't run away to Calgary.

The Link: Why are you so cynical?

Aislin: I'm cynical on occasion; the event or action really determines the outcome. For a simple event, I won't be caustic, but for a major issue, out comes the cynicism.

It can run from poking fun at an individual to "bringing out the sledgehammer."

News scares me, some of it is awful. When I read in the *Toronto Globe and Mail* last week about the dumping of TNT near other industrial wastes, each unknown to the other, I was mad. One cartoon will be hard, another soft; the reaction depends on the story.

The Link: What bothers you about society?

Aislin: Complacency and privilege are the most distressing things today.

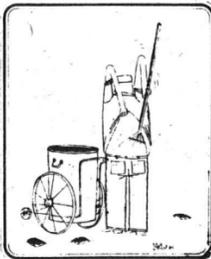
The Link: Aren't you one of the privileged?

Aislin: I don't want to be hypocritical; I'm not perfect. When I say that bothers me, some things that I do also bothers me; I'm not perfect.

The Link: Do you feel your cartoons preach?

Aislin: Political cartoons bother people if you preach to them. It should reflect how people think, the average person. I do it for the people out there, but being paid for something I love to do is great.

As far as preaching, for me to preach would be hypocritical. I sign my work. Because of tradition, editorial writers in the English press don't. Many of them would like to so they can be stronger in their words. I say what I want and I sign.



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