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JIM from Page 9

funny. And in trying to figure out the meaning behind the cartoon's simplicity, he said, some people try to read things into it.

"People tell me 'Jim's Journal' says so much about life and it's so existential, and I just tell them it's not intended to be."

This deadpan humor is what sets "Jim's Journal" apart from conventional strips like "Garfield," Dikkers said.

"I hate 'Garfield.' It's the worst comic strip around," he said.

Dikkers said he dislikes both "Garfield" and "Marvin" because they not only are conventional, but predictable.

"The real comedy of it all is that they're very popular and syndicated -- to me that's funny and as good as a gag," Dikkers said.

"I like things that are off the wall, where you don't know what will happen next," he said.

"New Yorker" cartoonists George Booth and Roz Chast are among Dikkers' favorites because "they're offbeat and subtle," he said. He also said he enjoys Matt Groening, who is famous for cartoon books such as "School is Hell."

When asked how he comes up with ideas for the journal, Dikkers

said:

"I try to think of something I did that day -- something offbeat and memorable -- and then incorporate it into Jim's life," he said.

"I think up an event or situation and just write down what I would do."

Dikkers said he never has writer's block when it comes to his strip.

"I take pieces of life and write about them, so I usually have too many ideas and not enough time to write them all down."

Jim-O-Mania has struck the Madison campus with full force, according to Dikkers. Bookstores sell Jim T-shirts and Dikkers' first book, which includes strips from the first two years of publication.

The white T-shirts feature a black-and-white Jim and are available with about 10 different messages ranging from "I'm having a pretty good day" to "I'm kind of bored."

"Everybody has a Jim shirt," Dikkers said. "It's the thing to have a Wisconsin shirt and a Jim shirt."

Jim fans also can find these shirts in stores across the country, Dikkers said. The Shirt Stop in Madison has distributed the Jim souvenirs to meet a growing demand in other states.

His book, which he published last year and is nationally distributed by Capital City Comics, is a best-seller in a local book store.

"It has sold well in town and I'm going to make more of an effort to market it nationally," he said.

Dikkers also hopes to increase his syndication to national newspapers.

"So far they haven't been receptive because Jim is a college character," he said.

"Jim's Journal" is popular mostly

in the Midwest, Dikkers said, though the strip runs in campus newspapers as far away as Vermont, California and Washington, D.C.

"Jim is a Midwestern phenomena," he said. "Because in the Midwest, you're existential and polite, but on the East Coast you talk back to people."

Dikkers said the character of Tony is one of his favorites because he's a typical college guy.

"I'm a big fan of Tony because he's a jerk and he's funny."

According to Dikkers, Tony is based on a number of people he has known and represents the general male college student.

But Jim, on the other hand, is more of an exception to the norm.

"Jim is kind of kooky," he said. "I'm a social misfit myself."

And Mr. Peterson, Jim's cat, is modeled after one of Dikkers' three cats.

"I just got a baby kitten, Felix, when I introduced Mr. Peterson last spring," he said.

The reader sees everything that happens in the comic strip through the eyes of Jim, since he is the main character, Dikkers said.

"Many cartoonists talk about whether the main character in a comic strip ever has a personality," he said. "Basically, the artist comments on things through the main character."

Cartoonists use their main characters to express their own personalities, Dikkers said.

Dikkers said he doesn't do many interviews and likes to keep a low profile as the creative force behind "Jim's Journal."

"I like the idea of having people believe a mystery guy named Jim is telling them what he did that day," Dikkers said.

"I think that's what makes it work."

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MIDAS

THANKS from Page 9

character-building scars, both visible and visceral. And I guess I'm still a little uptight, just not preoccupied with getting ahead. After all, I'm a journalist, right?

At any rate, I still manage to see a great deal of beauty and poetry all around me.

Like the little blind dog who is tied up on a leash in the front yard of one of the houses in my neighborhood. He's always barking. Barking at leaves blowing down the sidewalk. Barking at rain. Barking at the rush-hour traffic going by in the afternoon. Sometimes he lets me pet him when I'm walking home from school.

To me, that little dog is more important than a fancy car, expensive clothes or any of the other toys lots of money can buy.

Pretty weird perspective, huh?

The point is, there are so many amazing and wonderful little daily experiences, that if you take the time to notice, can enrich your life beyond belief.


Always remember and never forget that it's your attitude that determines the quality of your existence.

It's something to think about over Thanksgiving.

That's another lesson Russ taught me.

Thanks, Russ.

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