

Jim Whiting, Cartoonist
Distinguished in the Field of Comic Art

The talent, innovation and enthusiasm of this 2016 Distinguished Alumnus was on display early in his high school years. Jim Whiting, a 1944 graduate of WGHS served as class president his Junior and Senior years. He was a founding member of the High School newspaper, *The Student Standard*, a publication familiar to all Watkins Alumni from the mid 1940's to the early 2000's. Jim's illustrations highlighted *The Student Standard* as well as a grass roots publication he and a friend created.

WWII was still being fought and upon graduation from high school Jim enlisted in the US Navy. Returning to Watkins after the war he married his high school sweetheart, Bernita Blanchard. Before Jim's death in 2015, he and Bernita celebrated their 69th anniversary!

The GI bill helped Jim begin his road to distinction in humor. With the encouragement of Sam Cobean, famed "New Yorker" magazine cartoonist who summered in Watkins Glen, Jim enrolled in the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts.

Upon returning to Watkins Glen he sold only an occasional cartoon to national publications such as *The Saturday Evening Post*. (A highly competitive field, cartooning today boasts no more than 250 successful syndicated cartoonists, with the expectation of increasing that number by no more than 20 in the coming decade – a field with little room for new talent!) Jim, determined to persevere, managed to win a subscription-selling contest for the *Watkins Review*. The \$1000 he won (a huge amount in 1951) enabled him to enroll in the NYC School of Visual Arts. Returning home 2 years later, he began taking the train once a week to NYC to try to sell his cartoons to various editors. According to Jim, the train fare and lunch costs of those trips often exceeded any sales he made! But his lifelong cartooning career was launched and before long, Jim's cartoons were regularly appearing in the nationally distributed magazines of the day, such as *Colliers*, *Saturday Evening Post*, *The New Yorker* and *Look* magazines, as well as over 75 others. His on-going comic strips (the "Gold Medal" for cartoonists), *Wee Women* and *Li'l Ones*, appeared regularly in syndicated newspaper panels. It was during this time in Jim's career, that Jack Benny, one of the 20th century's most renowned comedians, serving as guest cartoon editor for *Parade* magazine, selected Jim Whiting's cartoons as his favorites!

While cartooning was his career choice, for 28 years Jim also hosted local radio station WFLR's "Morning Show". His was a friendly, familiar voice to generations of Finger Lakes residents as they began their day.

Combining his love of cartooning, magic and people, Jim did close-up magic and chalk-board cartooning every month for 17 years for the mentally ill at Willard State Hospital. Jim's pockets almost always contained a coin, a thimble and a handkerchief. Kids anywhere, be it a bus station, waiting room or picnic ground, would produce an instant impromptu magic show. To quote Jim's son, "Bringing a smile was Dad's greatest joy."

A search for warmer winters in 1984 led Jim to reboot his cartooning career in the San Diego, CA market. There, his illustrations focused on books, manuals, corporate newsletters and advertising, with such clients such as "Value Shopper", "ComputerEdge" and others. In July 2013, at the age of 87, Jim was featured in the San Diego Union Tribune. The article also featured a picture of Jim, still creating art at that same desk he had inherited more than 50 years before from cartoonist Sam Cobean. It was also in California that he fell in love with tennis, which he enthusiastically played until the age of 86, with anyone, young or old, who could hold a racket!

Bringing people of common interests together was another of Jim's gifts. He founded the Upstate(NY) Cartoonist League of America(UCLA), a small group of cartoonists that included Johnny Hart of *BC* and *Wizard of Id* fame. He formed the Southern California Cartoonists Society(SCCS) and served as its president for 15 years. This group conducted an annual "Cartoonist's Day" at the San Diego Blood Bank for many years. Jim himself donated over 10 gallons in his lifetime, before leukemia forced him into a supportive role. Serving as president of 2 of them, he was also active in several business networking groups in San Diego County.

In 2005 Jim published a memoir titled Analecta: Selected Reflections of a Cartoonist's Life, which is a tribute to the many people he knew and admired—many of whom lived in Watkins Glen, a place he had never really left!

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Achievements and Recognitions

- Whiting Cartoons became long-term regulars in national magazines such as: *Look, New Yorker, Saturday Evening Post, Colliers* and over 75 others
- Syndicated newspaper panels for comic strips: *Wee Women, Li'l Ones and Ad Libs* for a combined 15 years
- Comedian Jack Benny, as guest cartoon editor for *Parade* magazine selects Jim Whiting's as his favorites
- Appeared in *Best Cartoonists Of The Year* from 1951-1964
- Illustrator of several long-term web publications:
Grammar Mechanics, Naked Grammar, The Bare Essentials (14 years)
ComputerEdge magazine (25 years)
- Founder and 15 Year president of Southern California Cartoonists Society
- Recipient of 10 gallon donor award from San Diego Blood Bank
- California Center for the Arts Museum(Escondido): July 2013 exhibition "Celebrating Comic Art" featuring 80 years of leading comic artists included eight Jim Whiting pieces
- Full page biography in San Diego Union Tribune "Local Artist Still Drawn to Work at Age 87" July 2013