



He gives us something to laugh about

By Lori Ward Bocher

Let's have a show of hands here. How many page through *The Grass Roots* to look at the cartoons before reading any articles? Let's be honest. I know my hand is up.

There's so much stress in normal, everyday life that we're all eager for a bit of humor to lighten the load, to loosen those tense muscles with a good laugh. And how lucky we are to have cartoons that speak directly to the readers of *The Grass Roots*. Who could better appreciate the humor in grass heights, green speeds, demanding golfers and a shop dog named Putter?

Steve Scoville, a high school physics teacher, is the man behind the cartoons. How he got his start with *The Grass Roots* is a testimony to the fact that editor Monroe Miller always has his eyes open and his mind on this award-winning publication.

How it all began . . .

In the fall of 1993, Steve was working as a waiter at Blackhawk Country Club where Monroe is superintendent. There was a dry erase board in one of the small meeting rooms at the clubhouse. "One day after Halloween I drew a cartoon on it about how the scariest thing from Halloween is the rotting pumpkins," Steve recalls. "Monroe saw it. Since he liked the idea of having cartoons in *The Grass Roots*, he asked the manager who had drawn the cartoon, and then he contacted me."

Steve has been drawing for *The Grass Roots* ever since. "Usually I get a call from Monroe a week or two before the next deadline, and he invites me in for a meeting," Steve explains, adding that they collaborate on ideas for the next issue's cartoons.

"Sometimes he has written down a couple of ideas that have occurred to him during the past two months," Steve says. "Sometimes his ideas are very specific, like the time he



Steve Scoville

said, 'There's this guy delivering gold-plated toilets and he's trying to deliver them to the shop. The guys at the shop tell him he must want the clubhouse which is up on the hill.' So he's got this vision of what the picture looks like and what the general message will be, and he needs me to put that down on paper."

Steve continues, "For other ideas, Monroe will say things like, 'You know, there's this continuing rivalry between the GCSAA and smaller golf courses - this whole thing with dues and money being a problem.' He'll gripe about a particular aspect of the

job, and I come up with an image or cartoon to express that."

"Other times he'll just say, 'Spring is coming. Draw me some cartoons about spring,'" Steve adds. "And some ideas I come up with on my own based on my experience of working at a golf course and from seeing what happens around a shop."

Good old Putter . . .

The idea for "Putter," the shop dog, came from one of Monroe's "Tales from the Back Nine" fictional columns. "I picked up on the idea, gave the dog a name and a personality, and tacked on the specifics of what kinds of things he'd be doing," Steve points out.

Putter is the only named character in Steve's cartoons for *The Grass Roots*. "There are other characters who appear frequently - the dumb, irate golfer who complains about everything; the golf course superintendent; the young, novice crew member. But none of those characters have a well-defined personality, except for Putter," Steve explains.

Steve averages two or three cartoons per issue, and it takes him one and one-half to two hours to draw each cartoon, from coming up with the idea to finishing the art work. "Monroe and other people have told me they've seen my cartoons crop-

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ping up in other publications," Steve points out. "It's nice that they're being picked up. And I've received calls from other people who have seen my cartoons and want to know if they can use them. One of my cartoons about miscommunication was used to illustrate a point in a language training program."

A diverse life . . .

Cartooning is just one side of Steve's multifaceted life, and I enjoyed delving into his short life history a bit. The diversity in his life began when he was born to an American father and a Japanese mother. "How did they meet?" I ask.

Steve explains that his father, a college math professor, met his mother while he was on sabbatical in Japan for a year. She's been in the U.S. for 30 years now, working as a mom, as a Kindergarten and pre-school teacher, and as the owner of a company that helps Japanese people who are coming to the U.S. or Americans who are going to Japan — mostly for work or study purposes.

Steve was born and spent his

childhood in Durham, N.C., where his dad taught at Duke University. He graduated from a private high school in 1987 and then attended Williams College in Massachusetts where he received degrees in Asian studies and studio art in 1991.

"Asian studies and studio art seem to be an unlikely combination," I point out. "How did you choose those two majors?"

"I was a coxswain on the crew team. I also did a lot of theater. And I had a cartoon strip in the campus newspaper," he answers, leaving me to believe that he's ignoring my question. But the answer is forthcoming. "So there were all of these other things that I wanted to do. I needed a couple of majors where I could set my own schedule and make room for all my extracurricular activities.

"Looking at my freshman grades, I did the best in Asian studies and studio art," he continues. "I knew that I really enjoyed cartooning and that it was a possible career path for me. I tacked on the Asian studies as a fall-back major in case I couldn't be gainfully employed as a cartoonist."

Move to Wisconsin . . .

As it turns out, he wasn't gainfully employed in either major. His first year after graduation he stayed at Williams College as coach of the women's crew team. He also became engaged to Jennifer Cartier, a native of Maine, who subsequently was accepted into graduate school at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. "So that's how we ended up in Madison in the summer of 1992," Steve explains, adding that they were married on New Year's Eve of 1993.

"The plan was that I would go back to school to get certified to teach physics," Steve recalls. "To do that, I needed to establish residency. In order to do that in Wisconsin, you have to work for a year before applying to any schools. Looking through the paper one day, I found an ad for a job at Blackhawk Country Club which was very close to where we lived in Eagle Heights. I could walk to work, and I thought it would be nice short-term employment. That's how I ended up at Blackhawk waiting tables."

Steve continued to wait tables at Blackhawk when he started taking

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classes in the fall of 1993. He received a bachelor's degree in physics education in the summer of 1997, and in the fall of that year he became a physics teacher at Middleton High School. He teaches five sections of a general physics class to mostly juniors and seniors.

"How do you like your new career choice?" I ask.

"I love teaching," Steve answers. "I love to explain things that folks have been wondering about. I like watching the lights go on when students realize that they're able to solve a problem. I like interacting with the kids."

"Middleton High School students are, as a whole, a great group of kids," he continues. "I have very few discipline problems. Of all the fears I had about teaching, none of them have been realized. Except for the fact that it just eats up your entire life as far as time commitment, especially in the first year."

Cartooning is part of life . . .

But he still manages to find time for cartooning, something that has been with him for most of his life. "I

was one of those kids in school whose notebooks always had little pictures all over them," Steve points out. "I did some cartooning for the yearbook in high school. But college is where I started getting paid for my work. I didn't make much. But just the idea of getting paid to draw was appealing to me."

For about two and one-half years he drew a weekly cartoon strip, "Sea Minos," for the campus newspaper. "It was about a kid with a dragon living in his room," he says. "I wanted to write about things I was familiar with, so it was about college life."

"How do you come up with ideas for cartoons?" I ask Steve. "Is it easier for you to come up with the image or the words first?"

"Usually I go with the words first," he answers. "With a single-frame cartoon, I have to get the meaning tied up in one picture and one caption. With a four-panel format, I generally start with the last panel – the one with the punch or twist. Then for the first three panels, it becomes a question of how I set up the reader's mind for the twist at the end."

Besides his work for *The Grass Roots*, Steve has done a limited amount of cartooning on a professional basis. "But I'm certain I'm going to continue cartooning for the rest of my life," he says. "I'm hoping that, once I have enough experience in the teaching field, that experience will coalesce into something that I could turn into a pictorial story. Teaching could be a cartoon-generating experience."

"I'm willing to draw for *The Grass Roots* as long as Monroe wants to publish my cartoons," Steve continues. "It would be nice to have more places where I could be published. But I'm not going to be actively seeking those outlets right at the moment."

A matter of time . . .

Time, or lack of it, is one reason he's limiting his cartooning. Steve and Jennifer have two young children, Delia Jane, 3, and Owen Phillip Arthur, 1. After earning an MS degree in biochemistry, Jennifer is now working toward her PhD in science education.

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"Do you have other outside interests?" I ask. "Or isn't there enough free time?"

"Ideally I'd like to get out and play more," Steve answers, then pauses. "It's been so long since I've considered what to do with free time that it's hard to imagine. But I do enjoy writing. I write in a journal which I e-mail to a lot of friends."

"Any goals?" I ask.

"I haven't really been one who's much for goals," he admits. "I'm always happy with what I have. So when anything extra comes along, I'm ecstatic about it. I never really set my sights too far ahead."

With the interview about to come to an end, I ask Steve if there's anything else we should know about him.

"This is the most thorough outpouring of personal information I've given in a long time. I can't even imagine what's been left out," he laughs.

And, thanks to Steve and his cartoons, we all get a few extra laughs out of life. Those laughs are much appreciated. ♣



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