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## GRAFFITI

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# GRAFFITI

by Diane Olson

"The major form of creativity in America today is graffiti—that's why you see so little of it on UNI campus."—Anonymous UNI student.

The words hit without warning as you sit in an otherwise boring class. Suddenly you are reading not your notes, not your textbook, but your *desk*.

Graffiti ("graffito" in singular) is a universal plague not uncommon at UNI. These brief communications are found mainly on desks, less frequently in rest rooms and on walls all over campus.

Vicki Gach has been dubbed "UNI's graffiti expert" by Dr. Don Nilsen, her honors project advisor. The title is fitting because she has been researching and collecting graffiti since coming to UNI as a freshman in 1970.

Vicki has discovered that UNI graffiti concerns topics directly related to their creators, the students. Religion is a big favorite. "God's like Hallmark cards—He cared enough to give the very best." "God is not dead—he drives a hack in East Omaha." "God is dead.—Nietzsche/Nietzsche is dead.—God" "Into every life, a little rain must fall.—Noah" "Due to lack of interest, today has been cancelled.—God" "Only you can prevent bad Karma."

Ah, love, sweet love! "Things Go Better With Love." "Love is all around us (Where? Where?)" "Love isn't the answer, its the problem." "Love means never having to say you're horny." "Love means saying I'm sorry every five minutes."

And sex. "Sex is emotion in motion." "Virginity is a curable disease. Call for appointment day or night." "Incest—a game the whole family can play." "My mother made me a homosexual (Do you think she could make me one, too, if I brought her the yarn?)" "VD is God's perfect punishment for promiscuity." "Make Love, Not Children."

Drugs are commented on frequently. "Decriminalize Pot." "Grass is nature's way of saying 'Hi'." "POT-luck is fun." "LSD melts in your mind, not in your hand." "Elsie the Cow is on grass." "People who live in glass houses shouldn't get stoned." "Having teachers tell about drugs is like having a nun teach about sex."

Comments on politics and the country are numerous. "Amnesty + Freedom of Choice?" "National Guard - 4; Kent State - 0" "Kent State/LSU—Find the Cost of Freedom buried in the Ground." "I wish I was a dog and Nixon was a tree." "Nixon's a turkey-licking aardvark." "Bust the war into a billion peaces." "Nixon's Vietnamization plan sure got all Laosed up!" "Let's put the 'meri' back in America." "Spiro has no charisma." "Re-elect McGovern in '76." "McGovern didn't lose/America did." ("I haven't found anything on Johnson or Kennedy yet," Vicki says.)

The alma mater is not left out. "Donald Duck is alive and well and working in the UNI Administration Building." "UNI—leave it and love it." "Hitler is alive and well and cooking at Regents." "A man-eating tiger would starve at UNI." "The majority is not silent—the Admin-

istration is deaf." "The university was in a state of crisis and everyone knew it except for the Regents, the Administration, the faculty, and 99% of the students."

Iowa—mother state of most UNI students. "Iowa—a place to grow (grass)." "Suicide in Iowa is redundant." "Iowa is a four-letter word." "Oliver Cromwell is alive and well in the Iowa Legislature."

The names of several distinctive characters have been turning up all over campus. Vicki has found "Woody" (in both green and "grape"), "Earl the Toe Liver Lips," "Pale Bob", "Frank Zappa", and "Able Mabel Thunder-thighs". "Clem", the large-nosed little man peeking over a wall, has been found only once, as has the "Kilroy" of World War II fame.

Vicki's lists of collected graffiti cover a vast range of other topics, including the feminist movement, mental disorders, obscene words, people (generally and specifically), instructors and classes, dormitory houses, beer, cars, the Greek system, war and peace, "due to lack of interest. . .", personalities, animals, freedom, time, life and death, boredom, killing, woe, loneliness, Hell, and graffiti itself.

Form as well as topic is a method of categorization, says Vicki, and conversational graffiti is one form. This type begins with one word or phrase and is built upon or changed. "I want out of here (You're not the only one)". "I'm free, white, and 21, Who wants me? (Uncle Sam wants you)". "To do is to be—St. Augustine/To be is to do—Sartre/Do be do be do—Sinatra". Some lines pave the way for as many as a dozen comments to follow.

Another popular form is the one-word graffito. "Peace", "FRUSTRATION", "Augh!", "(cretin)", "basketball", "SnAkE", and various names and places are included.

One-liners comprise another group. "A 10 foot purple frog with terminal acne". "I think . . . therefore I (think I) am". "Lassie eats chickens." "It's crackers to slip a rozzer the dropsy in snide!" "Star Trek Lives!" "Take me to your liter." "This desk is rated X." "Mickey Mouse wears a Spiro T. Agnew watch." "Old soldiers never die, just the young ones." "F. D. killed a bug on this desk."

Vicki lists "profound questions" as another division. "Do chickens have lips?" "Did Adam and Eve have belly buttons?" "Is it really warmer in the summer than in the country?" "What do you give an elephant with diarrhea? (Room)." "What is Spiro Agnew? (Greek for athlete's mouth)." "Why do people always write on these desks?" "WHY POLAND?" "Does heat wave?" "Do fish swim? a) All of the above/ b) False/ c) 20,000 leagues under the sea/ d) On Main street in Tarrahote, Ind."

How about obscenity in graffiti? "It's very common," says Vicki. "There are a great many four-letter words used." Implications of profanity are in phrases such as "Yuck rhymes with muck, duck, luck, buck, cluck, stuck, truck, tuck, and et cetera." and "Duck is three-fourths obscene." (Vicki adds that "it has all been quite an education.")

What motivates the graffiti writer to do his thing?

"Some people don't like clean desks, so they defy law and order by doodling. Others like to destroy property, and some do it out of pure devilment, similar to drawing a moustache on a poster," explains Vicki. "Some people do it for self-expression, as an anonymous comment to the world, and some want their names to carry on even if they leave nothing else to history. Probably sheer idleness is the cause of a lot of graffiti."

Most of Vicki's collection is from classroom desks because the women's restrooms are "clean" and the men's are still unexamined. She cites some good hunting grounds as rooms 127, 129, and 244 in the Auditorium Building, and Sabin 102.

An interesting observation she has made concerns graffiti writing style. Almost all words are printed, many are capitalized, little is done in script, and some pictures are drawn. "There's not much of anything on instructor's desks," she adds.

Every collector of anything has a favorite item in his collection. Vicki is no exception. She found the following graffiti, already entitled "Poem on a UNI Union Table #2",

lost spaces  
lost horizons  
a thousand dead eyes  
on five hundred faces

tear cries  
lead feet  
a thousand lonely feet  
traveling to forgotten places

bleeding artist  
scared kids  
occupying this arena  
in a twentieth century rome

guitar chords  
written words  
trying to find a way  
find a place called home

all that's outside  
is what you want it to be  
and all that's inside  
is what you want it to be

really, man  
I wouldn't put you on  
so find a direction  
because you're on your own

Vicki tells of one minor problem that comes with being a graffiti collector. "I couldn't honestly write graffiti myself," she admits. "It would be like invalidating my collection."

Perhaps it would be appropriate to conclude an article on graffiti with this little bit of wisdom signed by one G. B.:

"Fools' names and fools' faces always are seen in public places."

Think about it.

## Poem

by Candida Maurer

They always come quietly  
afraid the mystery of  
their needs will not be enough  
they light candles to hide in  
they pull their clothes tenderly  
sacredly from long bodies  
the night stretches quietly  
as the loneliness of hands  
not often used for love  
then there are the silences  
and the words breaking on bodies  
soft, soft, speak only of poems  
you have yet to write.