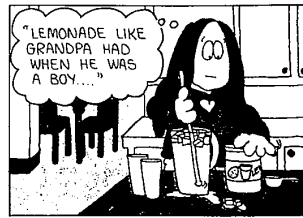
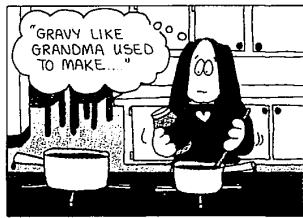
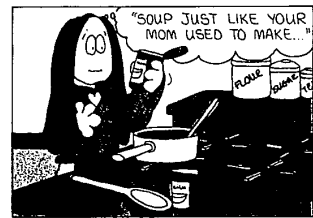


Meet the creator behind the character



By SHIRLEE IDEN

Cathy is an impish character in the comic strips who wonders why the only ladies called "working women" are the ones who don't stay home and do laundry, dishes, vacuuming and dusting.

She's not quite a feminist, rather is caught between a feminist friend and a very traditional mother.

She knows a contemporary woman doesn't have to pamper a guy's ego anymore by letting him win at tennis.

Cathy has long hair and worries about men, credit and her own femininity.

Her creator, Cathy Guisewite of Southfield, admits there's a lot of her in the comic strip Cathy.

Comic Cathy has been appearing in a number of newspapers around the country, including the Detroit Free Press, for about a year now.

"I had a nice career going at W.B. Doner Advertising Co. in Southfield," she said. "In fact, I became their first woman vice-president. But it was a pretty high tension job and when I came home at night, I'd draw out little scenes of my life and its frustrations and send them home to my parents instead of letters."

"IT'S A great way to let off steam. My parents liked them and encouraged me to send them out to be published. But I didn't so my Mom went to the library and researched the whole thing and threatened to send my stuff off herself."

"So I sent some to Universal Press Syndicate and they came back with a contract."

Cathy worked at Doner until last June when doing both the cartoon and her advertising job became too much.

"I finally quit because of lack of sleep," she said. "I'd work on the cartoon every night and every weekend."

decided on a career in advertising, which pleased her parents since her father has always been in that field.

When she sent off her first "Cathy" drawings to the syndicate, the cartoonist said they were just stick figures.

But the syndicate liked the writing and said to work on my artwork," she explained.

For seven months, she did just that, concentrating on drawing. "I really worked at it," she said.

"But if you read the strip regularly, you'll notice that no character has turned both ways yet."

CATHY, 27, lives alone in a comfortable townhouse, and likes it. Friends who predicted that she would leave Southfield for more glamorous surroundings following her resignation from the ad company were mistaken.

"Since the cartoon is taken from my own experiences largely, I can draw it anywhere and I'm quite comfortable right here," she said.

She's quite sure that creating a cartoon is the best way there is to earn a living, but adds: "You never know just how long a new comic strip will last."

Cathy loves the fan mail. She said it doesn't weigh on her but it's fun and she loves to hear from people. "Mostly it's from women, but it's interesting that older women read 'Cathy' too."

She thinks that both she and Cathy are caught in the middle between the traditional role of women and being more assertive and independent.

I've been torn between being in the traditional role of women and being more assertive and independent the last few years. When comic Cathy is like that, it's a reflection of my own life.

-Cathy Guisewite

"I've been torn in the last few years between being both," she said. "When comic Cathy is like that, it's a reflection of my own life."

"People who write to me speak of the same dilemma, including guys who write. Men realize women are changing."

Cathy appears in daily and Sunday papers and her creator is kept busy meeting deadlines. She says it takes about two hours to do a daily strip and five hours for a Sunday block.

"IT USED TO take much longer," she said. "I try to send in four weeks worth at a time. I spend many days writing and then do all the drawing. There's no nice neat schedule."

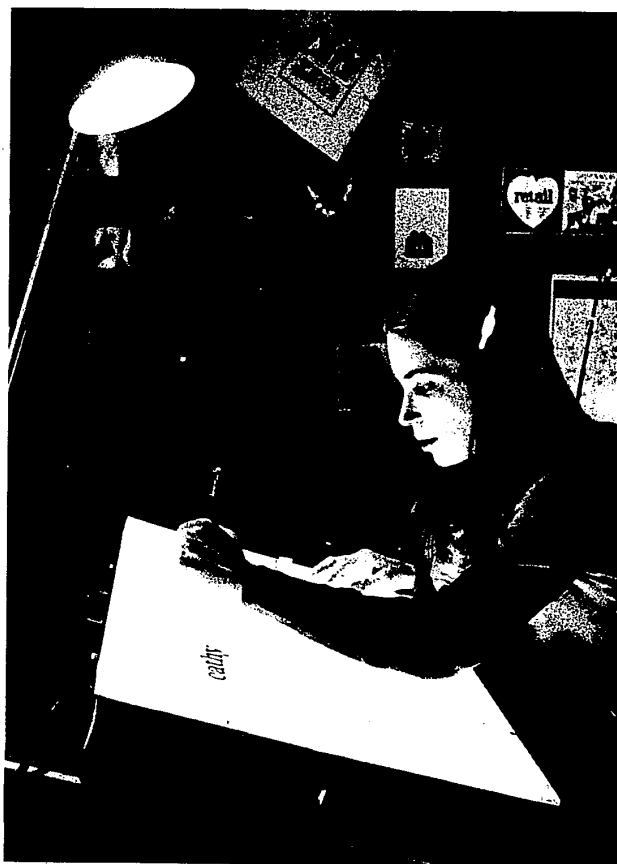
Cathy's syndicate is in Mission, Kan., a suburb of Kansas City.

"I'm very happy with them," she said. "They're one of the youngest syndicates in the country and represent 'Doonesbury,' 'Ziggy' and 'Herman.' They do things that are different from the traditional comic strips."

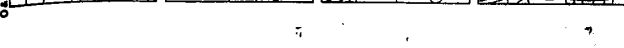
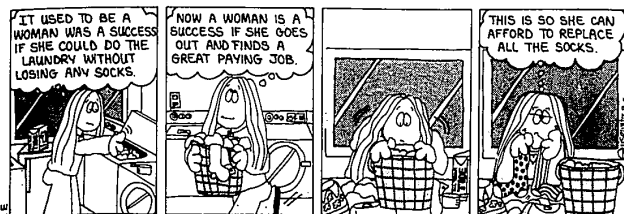
Drawing and writing Cathy is a full-time career for Ms. Guisewite who says she can't figure out how people find time to do three or four comic strips at the same time.

She's content with Cathy, although she does have plans for the comic character.

"I believe I'm going to try to get Cathy into greeting cards and little books too," she said. "Actually the possibilities are endless."



Cathy at work in her studio. At left, the end result of hours at the drawing board. Life for the comic Cathy and her creator sometimes follow similar paths.



Staff Photos by Gary Friedman