



A DOONESBURY PRIMER

By: Michael Giltz



As former president Gerald Ford once said, "There are only three major vehicles to keep us informed as to what is going on in Washington: the electronic media, the print media, and *Doonesbury*, not necessarily in that order."

And after a 20-month rest stop, that third vehicle is back on the road again.

For 13 years, *Doonesbury* had been, as *Newsweek* put it, "... the nation's most innovative and provocative comic strip." However, a change was needed.

Gary Trudeau, the strip's creator, who is notoriously publicity-shy (he once hid in his bathroom for three hours to avoid a reporter from the *Baltimore Sun*), said in a rare public comment that his characters needed time to make the transition from "draft beer and mixers to cocaine and herpes."

In case you have forgotten them, here is a recap of the main characters and their exploits over the years, including Trudeau's comments from various articles of their adventures during his absence.

Michael Doonesbury — The cartoon's namesake, Michael was the first character we met. "Hi there! My name's Mike Doonesbury. I hail from Tulsa, Okla., and women adore me!" Michael spent most of his early

years just trying to get a date. He interacts with the other characters more than anyone else, so his own episodes are few and far between. He did tutor in the ghetto during the early '70s, but his pupil sold the books that Michael gave him and bought alligator shoes. He also became very involved in the John Anderson campaign during the 1980 election. However, near the strip's end Michael fell in love with J.J., the daughter of Joanie Caucus.

Trudeau writes that, during *Doonesbury's* hiatus, Michael has come to grips with his career decision.

He writes, "Halfway through his first year in business school, Michael began to feel he was losing his grip on his principles; his choice of a career in business, it seemed, had placed his very soul in peril.

"Finally forced to admit he'd made a terrible mistake, Mike dropped out and switched to advertising. He's never looked back. Having joined a large Manhattan ad agency, Michael is already suiting up for the fast track. As the fair-haired boy of a blond senior vice president, Mike's looking to be mentored before he's 25. Cautionary tales of Mary Cunningham aside, he might just pull it off."

Joan Caucus Jr. — J.J. is the daughter of liberated Joan Caucus. In a role reversal, she once convinced her mother that if she were serious about her relationship with Rick Redfern,

she should marry him. During the early '80s, J.J. began to seriously date Michael.

About J.J., Trudeau explains, "Joan Caucus Jr., having spent the better part of her college career recovering from the excesses of her adolescence, finally emerged to reassert her womanhood in terms even Michael couldn't miss. Flushed with expectation, Michael overreacted and proposed marriage. In her sensible counterproposal, J.J. suggested a six-month trial period of cohabitation, an idea that, curiously enough, took root. Exactly 180 days later, J.J. and Michael were married"

Mark Slackmeyer — Mark is a campus radical who doubles as a disc jockey. He came to prominence during the Watergate scandal and would play Watergate profiles as requests. "OK! Profile on John Dean III going out to Joey with hugs from Donna!"

His most celebrated moment came when Mark did a profile of John Mitchell. He finished the story by crying, "He's guilty! That's guilty! Guilty, guilty, guilty!" As the '70s progressed, he hosted *Profiles on Parade*. A frequent guest was Dan Asher, author of such books as *The Mellow Parent: Sharing Your Space with Dependents*. Unfortunately, Mark lost his job and was floundering about when the strip left.

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Trudeau tells us that during the break Mark worked at a Long Island radio station where he finally got his break. He received his own show, *All Things Reconsidered*, and a set of White House



press tags. Trudeau promises that we'll be seeing a lot of him as Election Day nears.

B.D. — B.D. was Mike's first roommate and the star quarterback of his college's football team. He has never been seen without his helmet on. B.D. enthusiastically joined ROTC and eventually went off to Vietnam (wearing his helmet, of course) where he hooked up with Phred the Terrorist as they struggled for survival.

"Even though you're a commie, I think it would be worthwhile and inspirational to really get to know you. Also, I couldn't help noticing your can of rice," he said to Phred.

During Trudeau's self-imposed exile, B.D. had a shot at major league football. Trudeau writes, "Originally tapped by Dallas, B.D. was later traded to the Tampa Bay Buccaneers for two draft picks and a bus, only to be lost by that team's general manager to L.A. Rams' coach John Robinson in a poker game. B.D.'s only play of the season went into the record books as the worst fumble in Rams' history (98-yard runback by the opposing team)."

Boopsie — Boopsie is B.D.'s girlfriend and the proverbial dumb blonde. She took a memorable trip to Memphis to "do" Elvis and after some coercion from B.D., she also posed nude for *Playboy*.

"Gee . . . I would like to break into show business," she said. "Exactly! And this sure as hell beats drama school!" B.D. replied. Always up on the latest trends, Boopsie joined a Jane Fonda Workout class in which she exercised to the chant of, "Bran! Nuts! Germ! Seed! We don't want your corporate greed!"

Boopsie has been very active during the strip's hibernation. Trudeau writes, "A major motion picture actress in the making (described by one studio exec as 'another Meryl Streep, only without talent'), B.D.'s girl has been making quite an impression. Her first week in L.A., the Divine Miss B landed the plum role of Third Girl in Shower in last year's mega-hit, *Porky's II*."

Her eloquent defense of film nudity ('I only do it if the picture's in trouble') has



led to many other offers, but so far Boopsie has turned them down, preferring to devote her energies to a project she believes in — an aerobics video benefiting Malibu mud-slide victims."

Duke — Originally a reporter for *Rolling Stone*, Duke is modeled after journalist Hunter S. Thompson. His illustrious career is varied and notorious. Duke was the governor of American Samoa, which subsequently struck oil, and he went on to become the ambassador to China. Soon after that he became the manager of the Washington Redskins due to his experience in sports medicine ("steroids, stimulants, etc.").

Dogged by scandal and infamy, Duke was tapped by Universal Petroleum to go on a secret mission into Iran during the hostage crisis. Of course, he was caught and barely escaped execution. He quickly bounced back with a drug-running operation.

After that failed, Duke used the boat to charter a group of people to view the Falklands crisis. He misses the Falklands by "... just a few inches, at least on the map." The boat capsizes and Duke is marooned with Honey.

When he returns home, Duke gets involved in a cocaine deal to finance a movie about John De Lorean.

Since then, Duke has left the country



and convinced Haiti to let him start a medical college for Americans.

Honey — Honey was first introduced into the strip as the interpreter for Ambassador Duke. She grew to love Duke and is now his constant companion. She follows him everywhere, lends him money and continuously gets him out of jams. Currently Honey has joined Duke's Baby Doe College of Physicians in Haiti.

Zonker Harris — He is the Peter Pan of *Doonesbury*. Refusing to grow up, Zonker has proven himself remarkably adept at not graduating. "Now, there are all kinds of ways to forestall graduation! Taking a term off, getting suspended, not completing courses, all of these are valid!"

Zonker is at present facing a personal crisis: impending graduation. Trudeau writes, "Zonker withdrew into himself, where at this writing he remains holed up, venturing out only to rent videocassettes. His prospects? For the moment uncertain, although he has taken the time to fill out an application to Duke's medical school."

Joanie Caucus — She ran away from her husband and children to be liberated. Picked up by Mike and Mark, Joanie decides to live at their commune and get a job at a day care center but eventually goes back to college for a law degree.

While studying law, Joanie strikes up a

wonderful relationship with the perfect man. Unfortunately, after weeks of dating, she confronts him with her worst fear. "You're married, aren't you?" Joanie asked. "No, Joanie, I'm gay," Andy answered. To which she replied, "Well, what's wrong with that? I'm usually cheerful, too!" "No, I mean . . .," he tried to explain. "Oh, my god," she said.

She finally developed a relationship with Rick Redfern, an investigative reporter for the *Washington Post*. In a highly controversial strip, Joanie was shown in bed with him. They lived together, got married, and, as Trudeau's vacation approached, Joanie gave birth during her Lamaze class.

Trudeau has not shed any light on the fate of Joanie and Rick during his break.



Lacey Davenport — Trudeau admits basing Lacey on Congresswoman Millicent Fenwick and was first introduced when Joanie became her campaign manager. Decidedly unorthodox, Lacey refuses to have anything to do with the television media.

"Dick, I want my campaign coverage to be dignified! I'm going to urge the press to write short, tasteful essays."

"But, Lacey! Sweetest! No one wins without television!"

"Dick, I won't have those vacuous baritones tracking up my house!"

Lacey was on the committee that investigated Koreagate. Along with her husband, Dick (a bird-watcher who got involved in the fight to have James Watt kicked out of office), Lacey always pops up to give her insider's insight into political matters. Trudeau has made no mention of her adventures since either.