Bill Juhre Is Still 'Orbiting'

P-G Photos by John Roemer

HIS CORNER OF THE WORLD

The view is almost endless from this corner of Bill Juhre's studio.

By LOIS KERIN
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"Whatever happened to Bill Juhre? Haven't seen him around much lately."

This coffee-counter conversation prompted a look at "What's happened" to the creator of "The Orbits," a family comic strip that was at home in the Press-Gazette and 92 other newspapers for almost eight years. Slowed down by a series of heart attacks, Bill Juhre is by no means retired. His now svelte figure and goatee add a bit of roguishness to complement his natural charm and sharp wit. His awareness of the beauty that surrounds his hilltop home on Scray's Hill seems, if possible, more acute.

Reflected Family Life

"Orbit" readers will remember the Juhres, their five children and their friends as the strip reflected life in a home that was shared with dogs, cats, ham radio sets, sports cars, paint brushes and musical instruments. It's still that way, though not so hectic, because the five young Orbits now have homes and children of their own. And the sports cars are only in evidence if Bill or Michael are vacationing there.

The Juhres' came to Green Bay 15 years ago. They were introduced to Door County, radio station WJPG (now WNFL) by the late John Walter and his wife, Mary. The "Orbits" were building a house on a country hill and that's the one Bill and Grace designed for their many interests. The studio, on the top level, affords an unlimited view. On a sunny day it's breathtaking, and on a rainy day, fascinating. Bill and Grace have watched more than one tornado on its destructive path.

Teaches Art Classes

Juhre still teaches two art classes each week, with students ranging in age from 18 to 78. Some of them have studied with him for 15 years. He's asked them several times "When are you going to graduate?" but believes they don't because painting has become a way of life for them. The artist still accepts commissions to do watercolor portraits, and illustrates children's stories for Golden Press and other magazines. He also paints an idea whenever he can.

OPEN LINE TO ANY CORNER OF THE WORLD

The artist was curator of art at the Neville Public Museum for seven years, resigning in July, 1960.

One corner of the studio is devoted to Juhre's ham radio equipment. The man who doesn't spend as much time circulating on Green Bay's downtown streets as he used to, is more and more becoming a well known "visitor" in Australia, Africa, England, the Hawaiian Islands and points all over the globe. Exhibiting a bit of practicality, Juhre also exchanges messages with a Stevens Point physician via radio.

While many artists look to the future, Juhre looks back, all the way to the 1600's if necessary, to study detail for his paintings. "People not only criticize serious work, they even question my cartoons," he mentioned. "Once I drew Finch, then 15, and had her wearing heels. A writer asked if she was really that square. She wasn't . . . just happens she has good legs and they looked better in heels."

Brought Credentials

Juhre brought quite an impressive background with him to Green Bay. He attended Milwaukee State Teachers College and the Audubon Tyler Art School and the Art Institute of Chicago as well as the American Academy of Art, also in Chicago.

His first job was as cartoonist on the Milwaukee Journal where he worked about seven years. He started his first comic strip there. Juhre later became art director of the Chicago Herald-American. He also did magazine illustrations and taught at the American Academy of Art. Then he began doing the art work for Edgar Rice Burrough's "Tarzan" comic strip. When World War II started he did the art work for "Draftee", a wartime comic strip, written by Paul Fogarty of "Betty Co'ed" fame.

As might be expected, the talents of Bill and Grace Juhre have rubbed off on their children and grandchildren. Finch, now Mrs. Toni Hoffer of Lockport, Ill., does fashion illustrations and Mrs. Dick Cavil (Sara) is a commercial artist in De Pere. Mrs. Jack Hahn (Zana), Charlottesville, Va., is the wife of a professor of experimental psychology and an accomplished artist. The mother of five is now studying for her master's degree in speech. Michael, who lives in Dundee, Ill., manages the repair department of a foreign car outlet at Elgin, Ill., and the couple's oldest son, Bill, works for a Chicago advertising agency, writing TV advertising. His job often takes him to Hollywood to work with the film people who promote the respective products.

Enjoy Same Interests

The whole family is camera crazy. Two years ago Grace and Bill flew to the Virgin Islands for a three-week vacation and came home with 800 pictures.

Mr. and Mrs. Juhre have very catholic tastes in reading, another hobby which they share avidly. Bill is in the middle of "The Learning Tree" by Gordon Parks and would like to meet the author. Writing is on Juhre's "some day I'm going to" agenda. A delightful raconteur, he could easily join the ranks of the Bennett Cerfs and the H. Allen Smiths.

Share Musical Talents

And then there's music, another family fun thing enjoyed by the whole clan. When they visit their children in Illinois, the mandolin goes along. Juhre teams up with his son-in-law, Tom Hoffer, who plays a Sousaphone. "You wouldn't believe what these two instruments can do to 'Nola' . . . it's great!" When the Hoffer's daughter, Heidi, learns to play the song on her bassoon, they'll have a three-generation "group."

So this is what's happened to Bill Juhre. He's very much around, though the circle of activity is more compact. His days are shorter on the advice of his physician, but each hour is enjoyed for what it may bring . . . a new challenge at the drawing board, a familiar "Hello" from down under, or a comfortable glass of sherry with Grace in the solitude of their home on the hill.