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Zine on the scene

Local zine culture still thriving decades after the do-it-yourself movement began

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All Katherine Hill wanted for her high school graduation was a long-arm stapler – classic behavior of a zinester.

"My parents thought it was weird, but I got it," she said.

The Walkersville High School graduate, now 22 and living in Towson, began her zine, Macaroon Shindig, when she was 14. She read the teenage novel "Hard Love," whose main character finds a zine collection in his local record shop and later goes to zine conferences.

"I just thought it was so cool," Hill said. "It was this creative contribution to society ... our own writings. ... The novel made it seem like zine subculture was a defining factor in their lives. At the time, I could take or leave it. I just wanted to make something."

She "tried immediately" – and failed – with a friend to create the zine Spasmic Adam.

The publication that was successful, and in its eighth year, she called Macaroon Shindig, because she liked the word macaroon (even though she really doesn't like the coconut-based cookie) and a friend took a particular liking to the word shindig.

"Now that I'm older, I feel a little silly about that," Hill said.

She put out her first 10-page issue as a freshman in high school, filled with "whatever I was interested in, in September 2000."

It was created with Print Shop software (she switched to Microsoft Word and later to PageMaker, her current choice), printed on a copy machine at Walkersville Video (which closed while Hill was still in high school), and stapled together in her parents' basement. Fifty percent of its content was writings about how much she loved the band Good Charlotte – and about how badly she wanted to vote in the 2000 election ("I'm still irritated," she said).

Subsequent issues came out monthly for the next three years.

She moved her photocopying sessions to the Staples on Seventh Street, where she learned the art of two-sided copies.

By 2001, she put Macaroon Shindig material online.

"It drove my parents nuts, because I'd come home and type and type and type," she remembered. They worried she wasn't focused enough on schoolwork.

She figured most of her teachers were probably annoyed, too, minus her enthusiastic computer teacher who would let Hill work on Macaroon Shindig after finishing her schoolwork.

"I wanted to think people would adore me," she said.

In truth, her classmates were a little bored.

A few other girls at Hill's school started a "perfect photocopy zine" after her zine was known throughout the school.

By her senior year, her monthly editions slowed to a yearly edition, which she has continued to publish through college (she graduated from Towson University in May with a degree in journalism).

Her parents accepted Hill's ritual as fact. They no longer minded that she'd bring thousands of copies and sit in the basement with her stapler.

She distributed zines at high school, then college. She left copies at bookstores and record stores, never charging people for her art.

Her zines have always been comprised of three basic elements – politics, music and random lists – but the content has become more sophisticated and the writing better as Hill grew.

She said she doesn't think she knows how to stop making zines. She can't imagine not struggling each year to publish another edition.

She focuses on band reviews and interviews and sometimes includes other writers.

She once set up a phone interview with Mike Doughty, formerly of Soul Coughing, when he was scheduled to perform in Frederick. Extremely nervous, she held a tape recorder to the receiver and listened intently as Doughty talked while walking home in New York City. He was "patient, funny and nice," she said.

One of her "greatest personal highlights" was an interview with Henry Rollins. Other memorable moments: she talked to Gerald

Casale, founding member of Devo; These Arms Are Snakes, a personally gratifying interview because band members were "as interesting in the interview as they are onstage"; and Olympia.

For her "Welcome Back" issue (January 2005), and most issues thereafter, she collected brown grocery bags from Safeway, cut the bags to fit her printer and printed the zine cover using her computer. A grocery bag yields at least four covers, and while she's aware she can buy a roll of brown paper at the dollar store, "It's not as much fun as dissecting the bag and watching the logo and form of the grocery sack slowly evolve into something new." And craft paper doesn't hold the ink as well and appears altogether less attractive.

Hill takes submissions and publishes with "varying degrees of pickiness." Needless to say, most – and sometimes all, as is the case with her current issue – content is by Hill. Photography being another longtime passion, she uses her own shots in the zine.

While Macaroon Shindig is printed in black and white on her computer (photocopies are unreliable and typically turn photos grainy), color versions are usually available on her website (www.macaroonshindig.com), and she is in the tedious process of uploading all previous editions.

Even though she was interested in graphic design, Hill never thought a webzine was the way to go. Reading articles on a computer screen was not the experience she was after.

"Zines are so handmade and personal," she said. "Part of the process is the human interaction of giving them to people ... to have something that has been handcrafted."

Dylan Petrohilos and Brian Henry – best friends and Frederick zine-makers – agree. They want something tangible and think other people do, too. They want a zine that can be read outside, in the sun, in the grass, a zine that can be shared.

"That can be a very emotionally uplifting event," Petrohilos said. Henry pointed out that some people will read a zine before a book because they're usually short, while some people are at-

tracted to zines because of an interest in the DIY movement and/or underground literature.

And Petrohilos argued that cutting down trees might prove to be more sustainable than using the energy it takes to run a computer to read zines on the Internet.

Their zine, In Debt Analysis, focuses on issues in and around Frederick, such as gentrification and the "threat of Fort Detrick." They are currently working on their third and take submissions from FredPAC members (printed articles are kept anonymous).

Petrohilos said he's noticed a generation of kids who aren't exposed to DIY culture, and he wants to change that. "DIY is empowering," he said. "It's about reclaiming my life. ... Zines are a way for me to express ideas in a positive way."

The boys are currently collecting zines to start a zine library at The Mudd Puddle in downtown Frederick, scheduled to be up and running this month.

Hill said her own collection of independent-press publications started in a shoe box and eventually had to be moved to a bookcase.