

# Calvin students get a visit from their subject

Students taking a class entitled "Growing Up in America: the Wit and Wisdom of Jean Shepherd" at Calvin College had a unique experience — the subject of their studies, Jean Shepherd, dropped in for a chat Tuesday.

Actually, Shepherd was a bit late for the 9 a.m. class, so Professor David Holquist, who is co-teaching the class with Professor Quentin Schultze, warmed up the audience with a few comments about some papers he had been grading.

When Shepherd arrived, he took over the class immediately as he sipped coffee from his newly acquired Arnie's coffee cup.

Dressed casually and sporting a wide grin that peeked out through his beard, this most accomplished of American humorists fielded questions from the class of about 50 students.

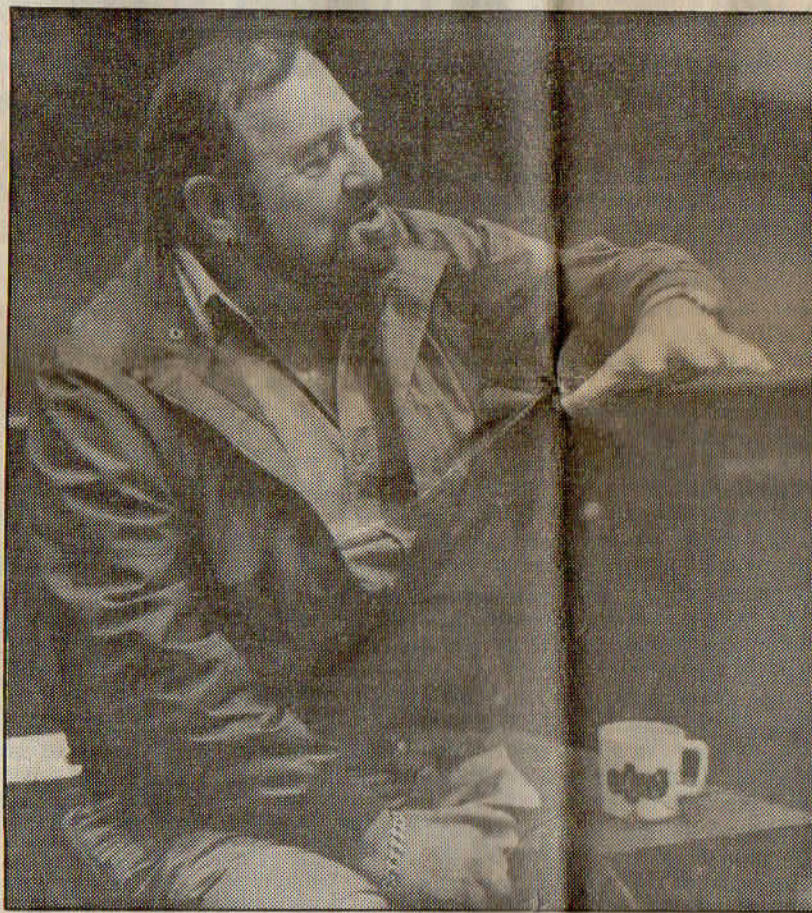
Even though Shepherd has worked in radio, television, legitimate theater, movies, phonograph recordings, and on concert stages most of the questions concerned his work as a novelist.

"I don't usually talk about my writing because no one ever asks me," commented Shepherd who is the author of such best selling novels as "In God We Trust, All others Pay Cash," "Wanda Hickey's Night of Golden Memories and Other Disasters" and most recently "A Fistful of Fig Newtons."

When asked, Shepherd seemed more than willing to share some of his secrets.

He wanted the class to be sure that Ralph Parker, the kid who appears in his novels, is not Jean Shepherd.

When one of the students pointed out that in some of his writings the kid is called Ralph Shepherd, the author was quick to explain that the name was changed by a Playboy editor who refused to be-



Press photo by Chief Photographer MARVIN LANINGA

**Jean Shepherd talks with Calvin class that is studying him.**

lieve that Ralph Parker was not Jean Shepherd.

That mistake is "like crabgrass, you can't get rid of it."

Shepherd says he gets a bit bugged by people confusing his life with his fiction. After all, he says, people didn't go around asking Herman Melville if he'd seen that big white whale lately.

"My real father was a remote intellectual type, revealed Shepherd as he compared reality with fiction

for the students. "He was a cartoonist for the Chicago Tribune. One day he took off and I never saw him again. I've always admired him for that. It took a lot of guts. My mother was a Certified Public Accountant."

Shepherd also told the students that his stories almost always commence with a moral.

In the story "Wanda Hickey's Night of Golden Memories" Ralph wants to take the beautiful Daphne

Bigalow to the prom but instead ends up with the plainer Wanda Hickey. The story started with Shepherd's idea that "most people are vaguely disappointed. Men want a Daphne Bigalow but they get a Wanda Hickey."

From his discussion about Wanda Hickey, Shepherd digressed — a technique at which he is a master. He began to talk about how men think of women constantly from the time they are little boys until they are in their 90s.

Women go about their business unconcerned about men, he said.

"Cosmopolitan magazine is about women. Playboy, on the other hand, is about women," laughed Shepherd.

Then he went back to talking about the inspiration for his stories. In the story about the raucous Bumpus family moving next door to the Parkers, Shepherd related that the tale was based on "the universal fear is that you will wake up in the morning and the barbarians will have moved in next door."

Shepherd, who by this time had made himself comfortable on a desk top, was obviously enjoying the class.

"Are you having fun? I am," he stated.

Shepherd went on to answer questions about how long it took him to write a story (up to six months) and if he had full control over his projects (absolutely).

When asked if there was a common theme in all his works, Shepherd answered that the closest thing to a common theme he could think of was "we're all in it together and no one really wins in the end."

But then he reminded the class with a twinkle in his eye, "losers are at least in the game."

— By John Douglas