

Bathroom bards

Graffiti is often off-the-wall wisdom

By **JOE MORRIS**
Staff Writer

Imagine yourself in the bathroom of a popular Chapel Hill nightspot, confronted with the big question scribbled on a wall: *If you could talk to God, what would you ask him?*

If you are like most people, your concern would be with the foremost social and personal issues of the day:

Is there really a Bigfoot?

When's the new Blazers album comin' out?

Is Frank Zappa really Leon Redbone?

Throughout Chapel Hill, from campus buildings to bars, bathroom walls are one of the most common and effective forums for opinion. Graffiti, defined in a Pine Room bathroom as "the incoherent babbling of the voicelessly mad subconscious," ranges widely in quality from the mindless filth which dominates many walls to such erudite revelations as *There is no gravity: the Earth sucks*.

Stalls are filled with bits of friendly advice—*Watch out for limbo dancers*—as well as indispensable facts—*Forty-seven people fell off their bikes in Iowa last year. You can sit and ponder philosophies—I drink, therefore I am*—or inspect the foreboding beginnings of new political movements—*Reagan for Shah!*

Whatever the message, graffiti is certain to be provocative:

God is dead.

For every statement of such stark intensity, there is bound to be a rebuttal:

No he isn't he's just resting.

Right God prevents wetness.

This is all absurd because God simply doesn't exist.

Yes he does, but he's kind of wimpy.

God will gladly pay you Tuesday for a hamburger today.

Obviously, bathroom walls reflect a great diversity in attitudes and preoccupations. But sex, evidently, is foremost on the minds of most pen-wielding bathroom users. Most of the wall space is taken by smut. But even the sex-minded writer is not always witless. One wrote: *Chaste makes waste*.

In bars, graffiti artists often deal with the suds that send them to the writing room.

This place doesn't sell beer, it just rents it.

Dedicate yourself to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happy hour.

Other minds seem to be preoccupied with famous words.

To do is to be. -Bacon

To be is to do. -Shakespeare

Dooby dooby do. -Sinatra

Do be a Do Bee -Miss Mary Anne

And still others only want to stir up controversy.

Humpty Dumpty was pushed!

Blasphemy!

Politics is another popular subject for wall discourses. Much is written on the issues of the draft and the nuclear arms race, and presidential candidates are belittled on many walls. Often, a sense of political futility can be detected in bathroom scrawls.

If pro is the opposite of con, is progress the opposite of Congress?

Famous lie: Hi, I'm from the government and I'm here to help you.

Comments are also made on world affairs.

Iran is stuck between Iraq and a hard place.

Even the subject of child-rearing is dealt with:

Give your child mental blocks for Christmas.

So bathroom walls provide free and interesting reading on a wide array of topics. And everyone reads them. "Something to do," is the reason most people give.

"I read it because it's something no one would ever say in public," one student said. "It's like reading underground literature."

One graffiti reader said he preferred "the dirty stuff that gets down to the nitty-gritty." But most read the walls in search of wit, often preferring clever political statements like:

Serf's up. -Karl Marx

Some say they are offended by the obscenities, but read the walls anyway.

Opinions and policies also differ among those who have the job of cleaning the walls. Linda's manager Linda Williams paints her walls often.

"I don't mind the clever stuff," she said, "but the obscene things bother me." Williams said her bathroom walls get written on even before she can finish a paint job. "I don't think there is a cure," she lamented.

Troll's manager Roger Meylend takes a different stance.

"People can write whatever they want, it's all right with us," he said. The walls at Troll's get painted once or twice a year.

On campus, removing graffiti is a "fairly expensive operation," according to Housekeeping administrator David McCauley. He said that janitors try to keep bathroom walls as sterile as possible.

But a clean wall never stopped a determined graffiti writer. He always has something to say, and is blessed with the ability to boggle minds.

Water invented humans to transport itself from one place to another.

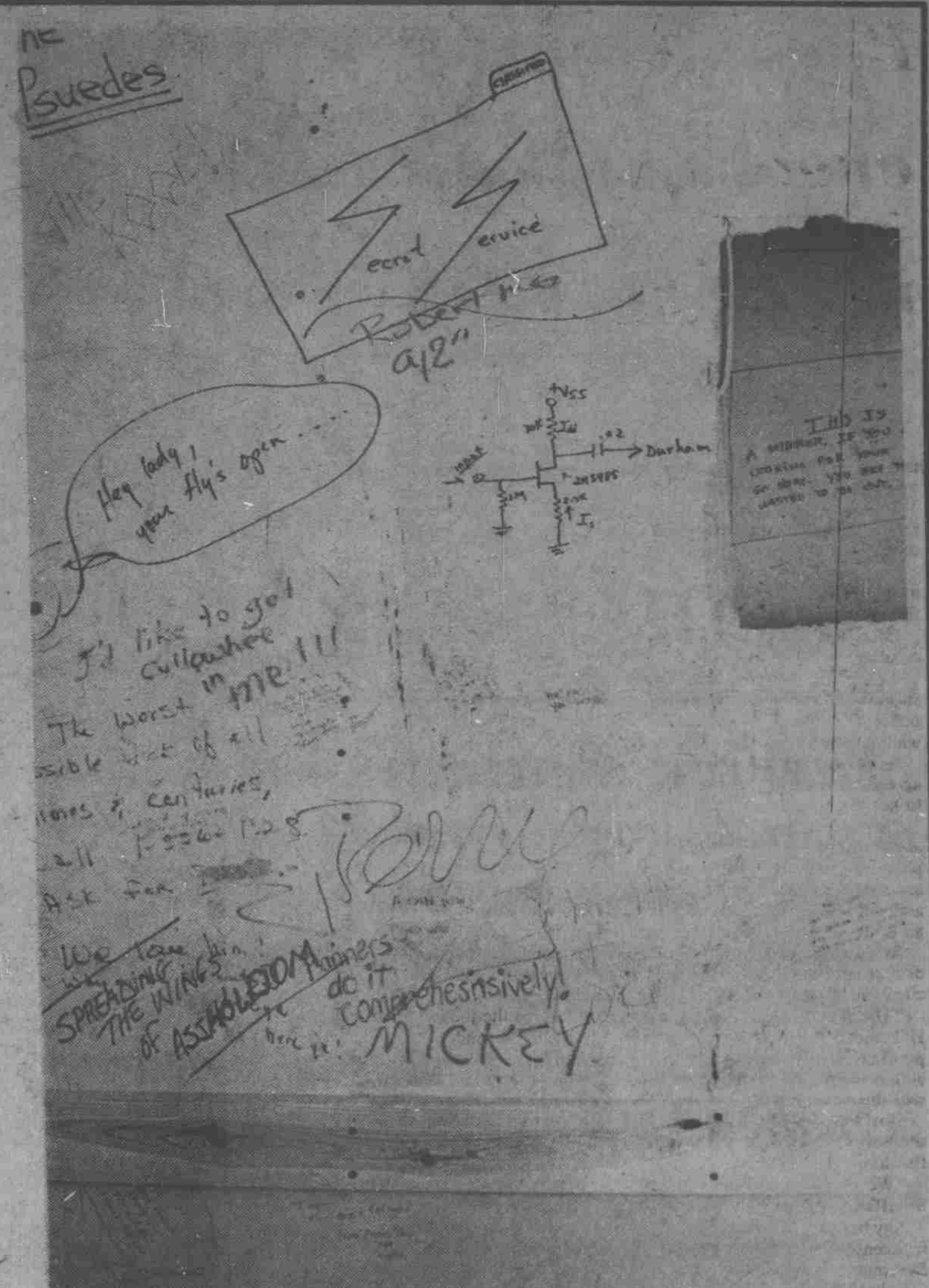
He has a fresh perspective to share.

Revolution is the result of one society pregnant with another.

Then America needs an abortion.

No, induced labor.

He is an inhibited comic, sharing his wit in its only acceptable place.



A typical sampler of the wisdom of Chapel Hill's bathroom walls ...with a few obscenities carefully obliterated

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