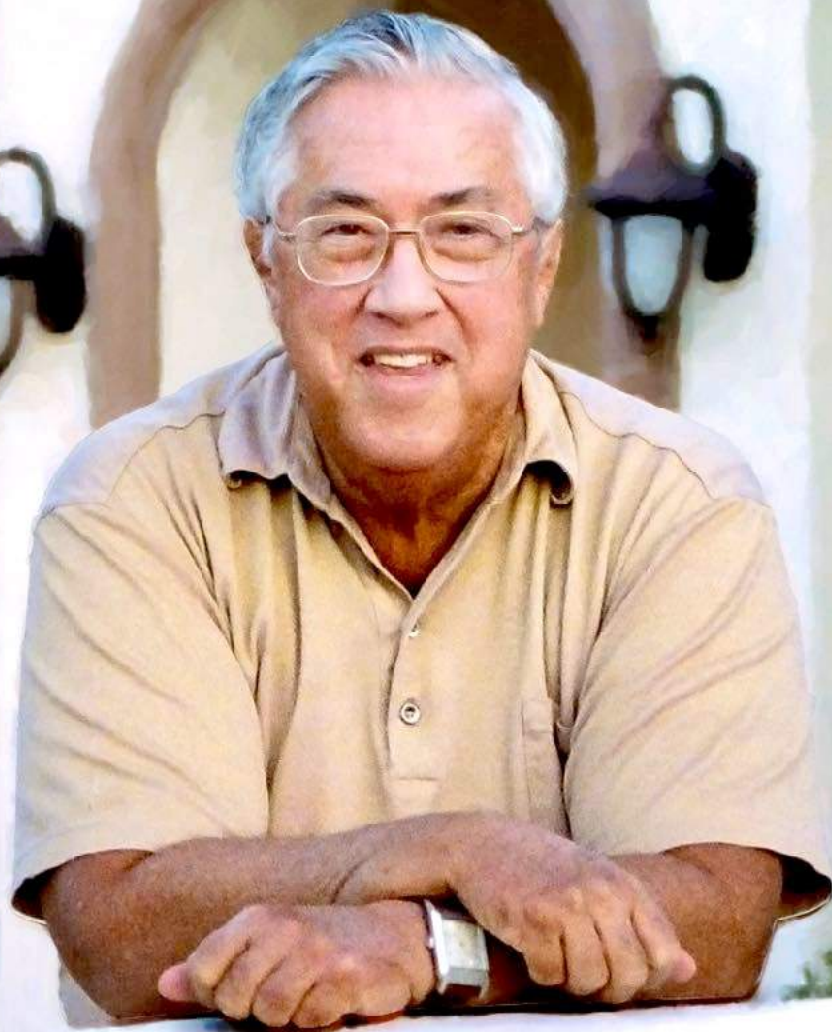


Skyliner



A TRIBUTE TO MALCOLM WILLITS

1934 - 2019



SKYLINER #7 • June, 2019 • Alan White • pixelmotel.com

A big thanks to Mark Willoughby for all your help • Cover Photo by Craig Gilbert

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This is a FREE PDF publication meant to celebrate the life of a lifelong Disney fan.



Once Upon A Time...

I walked through the door of an incredibly small shop at 1717 Wilcox Avenue at Hollywood Blvd. It was March 1965.

Shop? No, more of a vestibule fastidiously lined with books, pulps and ancient materials arranged so neatly one would scarcely think anyone would dare disturb the placement of each item displayed with painstaking perfection. The room was bright, and immaculate.

I'll bet two of me with arms raised could touch opposing walls. But I was only eighteen and had never seen such obsessed alignment of anything. The air was filled with the scent of furniture polish barely disguising that hint of vintage paper and custom-made shelving glistening with lemony goodness.

At the back of the shop which couldn't have been 15 feet from the very door through which I entered only moments before sat proprietor Malcolm Willits as if he were the guru in a cave whom all must see to achieve that certain "One" with the universe.

"Greetings" he said with a pleasant chuckle as if I was the first person to walk into his business where we chatted for some time about the treasures found within.

By eighteen, comics were old hat, but here were hardcovers brandishing names like

"H.P. Lovecraft," Clark Ashton Smith, Robert E. Howard and Edgar Rice Burroughs... yes, yes, I'd heard of *him* and owned many of his paperbacks; the ones with the Frank Frazetta covers. There were rows of Big Little Books and the higher shelves reserved for a colorful array of pulp magazines.



The room being so small I wouldn't have noticed on my own, but as part of the tour, Malcolm invited me up a narrow stairway to an even smaller room haunted by co-owner Leonard Brown, then sitting on the floor, inspecting a pile of movie posters. Working in such silence, had I not seen him with my own eyeballs, would not have believed anyone else was in the shop. But Leonard was carefully unfolding each poster, seeking damages by wear, calamity, or infestation.

I bought a copy of H.P. Lovecraft's "Dreams and Fancies" and went my way. I had no doubt I'd see these guys again.

I think it's safe to say Malcolm and Leonard are solely responsible for the comic book craze! A wild boast you say? Signs of dementia you wonder? Sure, it may have happened at some point in the future, but at that singular grand moment in 1966, it was all about Malcolm and Leonard buying that old trunk in a warehouse for a paltry \$4.16.

Inside this treasure chest they found piles of vintage comics, first issues of Batman, Superman and manuscripts claimed to have a value exceeded a rollicking \$10,000! This was the shot heard around the world via television, newspapers and magazines.

People across the country began pillaging their attics and basements hoping for an overnight jackpot. Malcolm was immediately inundated by hundreds of wild-eyed hopefuls hoping for a big score!





Tim Henderson, Steve Edrington, Malcolm, Howard Lowery, James MacDonald - 1966

A few did, most not-so-much.

To this very day, there isn't much in fandom whose direct line of lineage doesn't lead to this point in time.

Collectors Book Store was now on the map, and in less than two years, they kicked that little shop to the curb and relocated to 6763 Hollywood Blvd. A regal structure built in 1929 having once been a 34,452 sq.ft. bank that included a mezzanine, a big-ass vault and basement right in the heart of

Hollywood. They named it Bennett's Book Store.

Why Bennett's? Why not? On the outside of the building they installed a bronze plaque reading "Ubi Pequinia Regnat" (*Where Money Rules*).

Years later, Malcolm confessed the entire scenario had been a hoax. They had taken an ancient, weathered trunk, filled it with their own treasures then notified the media of their find, and here we are.



Comic fandom it seems is based on one clever and glorious prank!

I was manager of the Holly Cinema on the Boulevard, less than a block from the old store on Wilcox which had been turned into a hot dog vender known as "The Big Weiner"!

It was a glorious time, especially at night on the Boulevard, alive with hippies, stoners, hustlers, wide-eyed tourists and all those character actors strolling the boulevard praying someone, *anyone* would remember who the hell they were.

At some point, I split my days, from noon to 6pm at the theater and by night at Bennett's Bookstore where I ran the register till midnight. Popular books at the time were Carlos Castaneda's "Teachings of Don Juan," Abbe Hoffman's "Steal This Book," William Powell's "The Anarchist Cookbook," hundreds of books for the rage of the day: Witchcraft for Housewives and two copies of "Psycho-Cybernetics" I sold to a very young James Earl Jones.

Time came to leave the Boulevard for other things, but I always remained friends with Malcolm. His store moved thrice more over the years; finally ending up on the east end of the Boulevard at Argyle Avenue near the Pantages Theatre.

Malcolm lived a lavish life in Pasadena with a six door garage in which also retired a good ten vintage automobiles.



Leonard Brown "El Supremo"

Leonard lived a more modest life in the Los Feliz area until he died around 2006 of lung cancer.

Malcolm visited Vegas frequently for the vintage car auctions, and would always take us to dinner and a show at night. He was particularly fond of "The Blue Man Group".

The house that comics built: 1199 Wentworth Avenue, Pasadena



He retired near Palm Springs in 2005 and caught up with several long overdue writing projects, scripts for plays and movies, and then there were his books.

One thing about Malcolm, whenever he began a project, everything was top drawer. *Everything* was hardback and fully illustrated. He had Toby Bluth lavishly illustrate "The Wonderful Edison Time Machine".

"The Thief of Bagdad", contained scads of original photos from the Alexander Korda movie, plus the entire shooting script.

And then there was the play: "Shakespeare's Cat" illustrated by Bonnie Callahan. It won a "Best Narrative Play" award by The California Film Awards. And there was a brief moment when his movie script "Elmer Adams" was being considered by Michael Jackson.

In 2002 he really went off-stage opening a small Thai food restaurant: Khetpoom's Kitchen.

Their slogan was:

Just as Wagner's Music
is Better than it Sounds...
Khetpoom's Food
is Better than it Tastes!

Each menu carried a chapter from the continuing saga of mishaps off to the "Land of Easy Virtue" in search of the perfect Tiger Burger!

For a time he even had his own website touting each and every project. It had the clever title: Willitsellpopcorn.com

But here it is, all the days of his life have passed and now we share what he left behind. You might be asking: Did he ever find the perfect Tiger Burger? You'll have to ask Malcolm next time you see him.

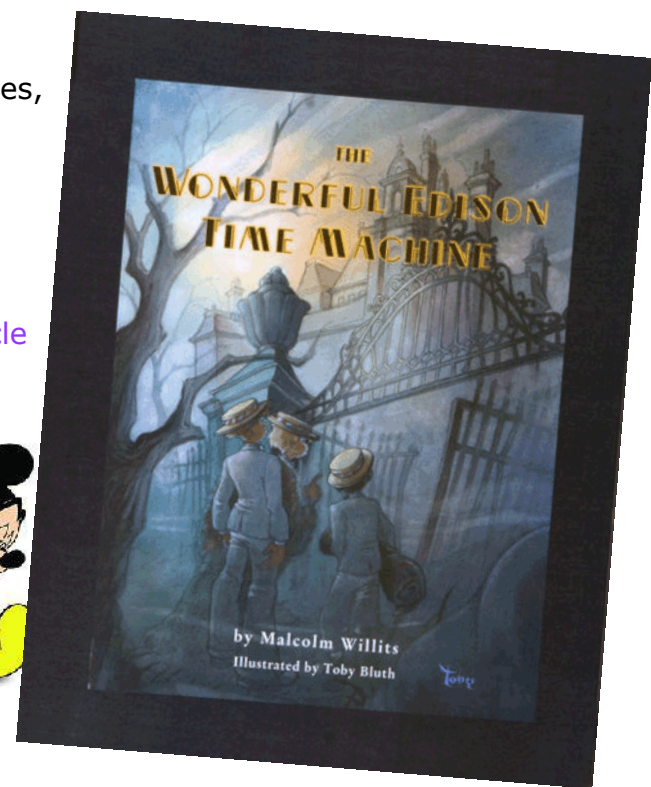
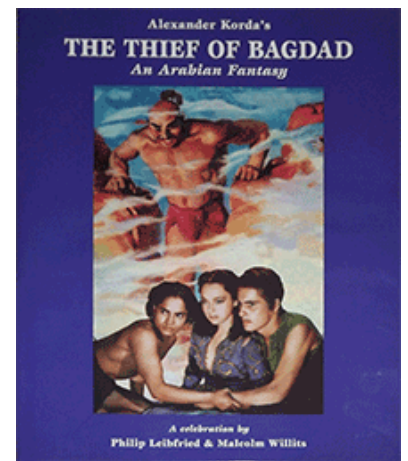
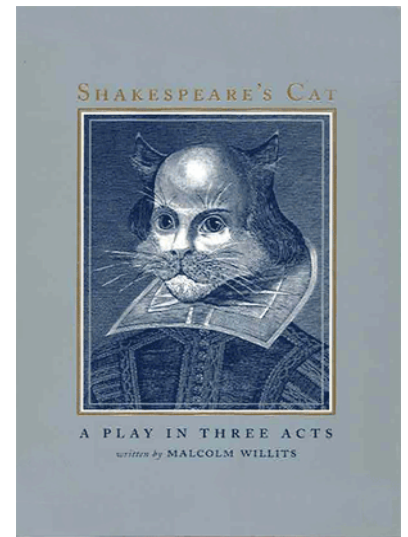
His last message to me read:

"I have stopped seeing my doctors and taking medicines,
so all is peaceful now."

Malcolm passed away April 15, 2019
Palm Desert, CA

[Malcom at Home](#) / [Carl Barks](#) / [L.A. Times Article](#)

[Trailer for Shakespeare's Cat](#)
(Made from Play Rehearsal)



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Pasadena's latest FOUR-STAR Restaurant!

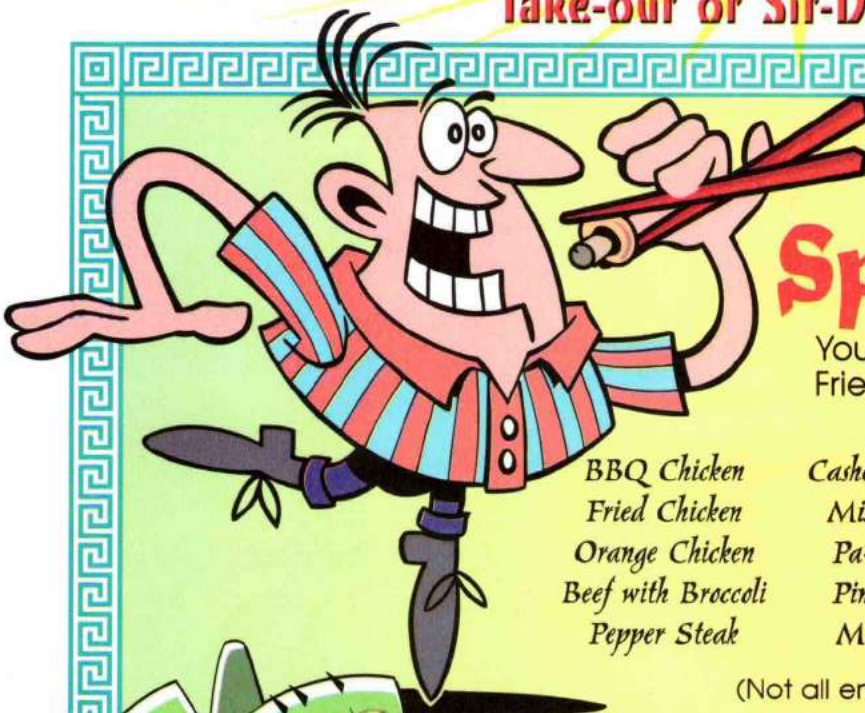
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We last reported that our expedition to the Land of Easy Virtue, while successfully obtaining the secret of Aphrodisia Sauce, had unaccountably failed to return. We have since learned that a mob of high-strung female miscreants had imprisoned our men in an impregnable hilltop redoubt where they faced new and untenable positions. But fortunately the local American consul was able to achieve their full withdrawal through using the soothing words of diplomacy as a lubricant. With their bondage at an end, we expect our men back shortly.





CONFESSIONS OF AN UNREPENTANT PORTLAND COMIC BOOK COLLECTOR

by Malcolm Willits

As I approach the ending period of my life and realize my generation *may* be the last to receive munificent sums from the meager amounts we have paid into Social Security, I regret that had my youth not been so misspent, I might today face the prospect of living high off the hog on more than just income derived from the back-breaking labor of our younger generations.

Because I could have made it on my own. In fact, I nearly did. This was because I collected Golden Age comic books during the Golden Age. Yes, the very comic books that today sell for ten, twenty, even a hundred thousand dollars apiece. I was there when they were 10¢ each, and I collected them.

I hid them from my mother, who was a noted Oregon composer and threw everything out if it did not have an immediate purpose. I hid them from my brother, who was a Golden Gloves champion and used me as his punching bag. And I hid them from my father, who for ten years vainly tried to save the world being an Oregon State Legislator.

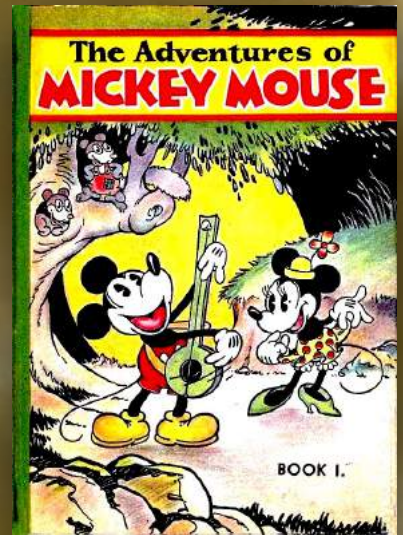
I could have been rich. And I would have been, had it not been for God and the Methodist Church. No spot, not even Portland, Oregon, is too insignificant for their wrath.

Read my story and take heed.





Malcolm at Age 2 with Mom and Brother Sherwood age 4

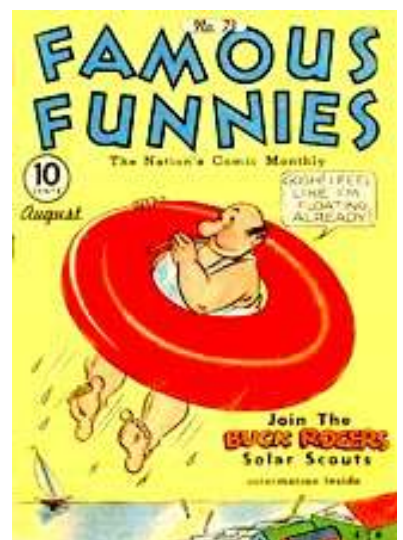


To have best appreciated and collected comic books in Portland, Oregon, during their Golden Age, one should have been born in 1924. That way the person would be 16 years old at the height of their greatest success, namely 1940. Sure, comic books may have been even more colorful and glorious in 1941 and 1942, but somehow 1940 really established them.

A 16-year old kid in 1940 could appreciate all the comic books, from the newspaper comic strips reprint titles such as ACE, KING, and FAMOUS FUNNIES, to the emerging Super Hero titles. The specialty funny animal titles such as LOONEY TUNES, NEW FUNNIES, and WALT DISNEY's COMICS were still a year away, and most 16-year olds would have disdained them anyway as being aimed at kids. But in 1940 our mythical teenager could be regally entertained with comic heroes such as Superman, Green Lantern, Batman, Captain America, and the Human Torch, all aimed at his own age group. And if these were not enough, there were a host of other fascinating characters appearing every month in PLANET COMICS, JUNGLE COMICS, JUMBO COMICS, and a tidal wave of others. My point is that a 16-year old kid in 1940, even though this was still a Depression year, could have afforded at least some of the new comic books which were appearing. And what is perhaps even more important, he might have been old enough to save them.

Now I was born in February of 1934, which means I was only six years old in 1940. So I can't write a definitive history of what it was like to read and collect comic books during their Golden Age. But I do have certain recollections from having grown up in Portland at the time which I'd like to share with you.

First of all, my father did not approve of comic books. This may have had as much to do with their price as with their content, as all his life my dad thought a dime was a big deal.



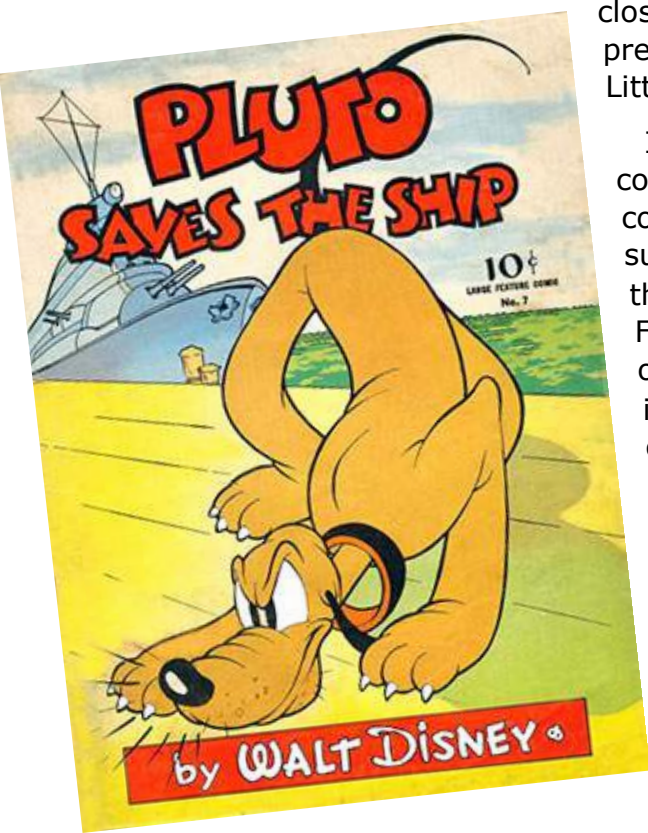
He did, however, have his own pre-Bretton Woods exchange rate in which a dime was worth one mowed lawn or sawdust hopper filled with sawdust. The latter kept us warm in good old soggy Portland, and me in an occasional copy of LOONEY TUNES. Dad was especially adamant against any of his money going to buy Defense Stamps (later called War Stamps), something I was expected to purchase each week in school or risk being called a supporter of Tojo and Hirohito. Dad based his principles not only upon frugality but also upon Christian pacifism, and it is true he was a man of peace, except in his domestic life. He was a YMCA Secretary, and sometimes money was tight, but Mother would slip me a dime each week to buy a War Stamp so I would not be labeled the only fascist attending Gregory Heights grade school.

No, my father was not a lover of comic books. One time when I was eight years old and earnestly perusing a copy of PORKY PIG AND THE SECRET OF THE HAUNTED HOUSE, Dad held it up for condemnation. He did the same thing six years later when I was enjoying a 1931 AMAZING STORIES QUARTERLY. It had a story by Stanton A. Coblentz which featured domesticated animals on the moon called "Mooncalves."

"Mooncalves" Dad snorted derisively. This from a man who would return from church every Sunday with garish pamphlets containing even more outlandish stories about pillars of salt, trumpets tearing down walls, and talking bushes. *This* I was supposed to believe, but not in mooncalves. In 1947 derision led to desecration. I had my collection in the basement of our house on N.E. 76th, and water began to seep in during a storm. My table model Victrola was threatened, so Dad reached for the closest thing to prop it up. That thing happened to be my precious copy of MICKEY MOUSE THE MAIL PILOT, a 1933 Big Little Book which was thereby ruined.

I trust you are beginning to see that growing up in a conservative Methodist home and not managing to be contaminated was a major undertaking. But I had a subscription to Walt DISNEY's COMICS. How that slipped through I'll never know, but I remember in particular the February 1941 issue arriving. I instantly began devouring it on the Davenport. In those days comic books were 64 pages in length with hardly an ad in them except for the back covers which offered such items as whoopee cushions and vomit plaques. Almost every boy of the period desperately needed one or more such things, and they were as indispensable to our lives as guns and syringes are to the present generation.

You could spend an *entire* day with *one* comic book then. And it was something just for you. No adults would be caught dead with one.



This is why so few comic books survived. It was a rite of passage to throw away your comic books once you reached a certain age and discovered that girls could serve more purposes than throwing mud clods at.

Truly it was an *event* to get a comic book then. I remember in the spring of 1942 my mother and I flew to Cleveland, Ohio, to attend my grandfather's funeral. One day while there I actually got *three* new comic books. It was the day of the funeral and one of my aunts said my grandfather had *ascended* to one place, and another aunt said he had *descended* to another. I felt that by asking questions I could con my way into a comic book. When I got *three* I was in hog heaven and cared not a whit where my grandfather ended up.

A few months later we returned to Portland, and I flew back with all the comic books I had accumulated safely on my lap. I had thirty or so of them, one of which was PLUTO SAVES THE SHIP. This was wartime and all the window curtains had to be tightly drawn upon departures and landings, lest some foreign spy observes the gun emplacements which were not there. I complied with this, but still, my patriotism was called into account, as was the transportation of these comic books truly vital to the war effort. I persevered by personally promising to poke Hitler in the eye if ever I should meet him.

As I said, I had a subscription to WALT DISNEY'S COMICS. It cost one dollar a year.

But all the rest of the stuff that flowed into our home was pure garbage. Things like THE CHRISTIAN CENTURY, THE PROGRESSIVE, THE NATION, and PARENT'S MAGAZINE. My grandparents had given me a millennium subscription to JUNIOR NATURAL HISTORY MAGAZINE without first checking to see if I had an interest in natural history (I didn't). Another relative gave me a subscription to CHILDREN'S ACTIVITIES. It must have come for ten years. Even at the age of six, I marveled that something could be so bad. It was clearly aimed at those still in the womb. Even publications by Dorothy Day of the Catholic Workers Movement choked our mailbox. Dad thought she was a saint. I thought she was a Communist.

Why couldn't my parents have taken LIFE or LOOK or COLLIERS or THE SATURDAY EVENING POST? Why couldn't they have let in some fresh air? I'd even have liked a subscription to THE NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC. Our dentist had copies in his waiting room going back to 1912, and it was through its pages I learned for certain I was male. But no, the world with all its imperfections was not allowed within our door. Some years later Mother boycotted Ingrid Bergman movies because she ran off with Roberto Rossellini. Dad fell into church every time the door opened and pried them open when they weren't.

Invariably there were no giants in the inside pages. The covers were symbolic. I felt cheated. They were hardly worth swiping from Fairley's Drug Store at 72nd and Sandy.





I also remember how BATMAN and SUPERMAN comic books would have long-written introductions to their stories.

It was tedious to read them, but it made me feel more adult-like to wade my way through. I didn't actually buy such comic books, but they were always available at friends homes. I liked Batman more than Superman because Batman could at least theoretically be hurt, while Superman's bravery didn't amount to much because he couldn't be harmed. That's why Kryptonite was invented. Superman had to be vulnerable to more than just the machinations of Lois Lane to be a hero.

To most parents, one comic book was much the same as any other. I remember being ill in bed in early 1943 and giving my mother careful instructions regarding the type of comic book she should buy for me. My instructions were as detailed as the later Allied invasion of Normandy, but when my mother returned, all she had for me was a copy of JINGLE JANGLE COMICS. JINGLE JANGLE COMICS? Why didn't she go all the way and buy me a copy of CALLING ALL GIRLS? Nobody read JINGLE JUNGLE COMICS. Why they ever published it was a complete mystery. They used to give them away at Saturday matinees at the Roseway Theater, and even then half the kids would turn them down. This was the culmination of nine years of insular living in a Methodist home. I realized I had to get out.



I mentioned SUPERMAN and BATMAN comics. But it was CAPTAIN MARVEL COMICS I really loved. Perhaps it was my growing enthusiasm for science fiction which led me to appreciate it. CAPTAIN MARVEL comics had no lengthy introductions. This was probably because its editors doubted any of its fans could read. And while the fans of Superman and Batman could look up to their heroes, a rock could feel superior to Captain Marvel. It must have taken "Cap" a year just to learn the word "Shazam." And talk about stupidity: Dr. Sivana could wreck half the Earth each issue and Captain Marvel would let him go if he promised to reform. Even a lowly worm, Dr. Mind, managed to best this superhero for most of 1943. But the artwork was clean and it was one of the few comic books that improved as the years went by.



It was especially gratifying that the Captain had no love life. This was because Captain Marvel was really Billy Batson, a teenage radio announcer too young to be interested in the facts of life. But even as Captain Marvel, no one seemed interested in the "Big Red Ox." Sivana's daughter always had the good sense to spurn him. It is true that Batman also never had a love life, but at least there was the Cat Woman, whose very name and sexy appearance indicated possibilities. For Captain Marvel, there was nothing, which was just what the kids wanted. Lois Lane was a pain, and everybody knew it. Having a woman cluttering up a comic book was too much like living at home or

being in the classroom where the girls got better grades. In those days women were solely for rescuing or helping across the street. All you asked in return was to have your bed made and a well-cooked meal.

I mentioned PARENT'S MAGAZINE a while back. It was the bane of every kid's existence. It had the effrontery to tell parents how to raise their kids. The fact that it failed miserably can be proven by succeeding generations. It was especially damaging in that it rated movies. And naturally, it gave abysmal ratings to all the movies I wanted to see. Ordinarily, this wouldn't have been so bad, as by the time the movie I wanted to see reached my neighborhood theater, that particular issue which rated it had been thrown away. But my older brother would retrieve these issues from the wastebasket and save them until it was time to strike.

The time to strike always came when a Frankenstein, a Wolfman, or a Maria Montez film was playing. If I was foolish enough to announce my intentions, my brother would immediately retrieve an issue of PARENTS MAGAZINE which reviewed it and point out I would be either prematurely aroused by seeing Maria do the cobra dance, or my hair permanently whitened by seeing Igor robbing graves. Little did any of them realize it was really Sabu I was going to see. There were more things in my closet than just my comic books.

To me, the Trinity consisted of Sabu, Maria Montez, and Jon Hall. And unlike my father, who would sometimes camp out, hoping someone would build a church around him so he'd be the first one in, I could actually see my gods most any Saturday afternoon at the Roseway Theater. All it took was eleven cents and the confiscation of my slingshot.

The rapture of this religious experience would often be accompanied by an Abbott & Costello film (for years I thought one of the Andrews Sisters was a horse), a cartoon, a newsreel of our bombing the hell out of some historic European city, and a serial chapter in which, true to form, women existed solely to be rescued. If I managed to survive the entire program without being kicked out, I would pick up my free copy of JINGLE JANGLE comics on the way out. The latter was not the unmitigated disaster you might think, as one could sometimes trade it to a girl for a real comic book, or convince the druggist your mother had gotten it for you by mistake (hoping he would not see the obsolete date) and exchange it for another.

Anyway, my brother's indexed copies of PARENTS MAGAZINE would put the kibosh on about any non-Disney film I wanted to see. So I learned to say I was going to some other films. Mentioning a Bing Crosby movie was a sure way to get permission. PARENTS MAGAZINE, probably in the pay of the Vatican, always rated them highly, and I



must have used GOING MY WAY ten or fifteen times. I'm surprised my parents didn't fear I was going to enter the priesthood, but it never seemed to bother them. Just So it wasn't Maria and her cobra dance. It was like a football game, with my parents running interference. You either ran around them or was plowed under.

He later climbed all sixteen major northwest mountain peaks and still managed to become an atheist. Succeeding years were not been kind to him. So I managed, one way or another, to see the movies I wanted to see and read the comic books I wanted to read and survived the maelstrom of World War II in the languid, provincial city of Portland, Oregon, whose innocent days now appear as far removed as old Pompeii.

It's too bad their Golden Age came at a time when kids had little money. It was the tail end of the Great Depression. In 1941 LIFE magazine had a photo of a 1940 high school graduating class. Only half the students had found jobs in the ensuing year, and this was at a time when war was raging in Europe and America was fast re-arming. It was tough to buy a comic book, and even tougher to collect them. It is a shame, but most collecting periods arrive when few have money to collect. The greatest cars America ever built appeared in the 1930s, but few could buy them. Comic books, the first and greatest outpouring of true children's literature the world has ever seen, appeared at a time when not many could afford them. And there were no speculators then. One purchased a comic book because one liked it, not because one felt it might appreciate in value.



Being a teenager in the 1940s was no big deal. Most kids regarded it only as a painful process through which one became an adult. Other than comic books, radio serials, movie serials, and breakfast food premiums, there was no subculture for kids, at least in Portland. Perhaps there was in Beverly Hills, with the bobbysoxers and the money to have cars and trendy clothes in the Hollywood environment. But in Portland, Oregon, we walked through ten feet of rain just to get to school, and the clothes we wore were intended mostly to keep us warm. In fact, we felt fortunate to have them.

We had no teenage idols. We may have admired our heroes' sidekicks: Batman had Robin, Tarzan had Boy, Dick Tracy had Junior, Red Ryder had Little Beaver, and for some unfathomable reason, Roy Rogers had "Gabby" Hayes. But for the most part, it's adults we wanted to become. The real youth culture was still a decade away, with James Dean and Elvis Presley and Annette Funicello appearing in the 1950s.

Comic Books: My partner, Leonard Brown, and I started Collectors Book Store in Hollywood,

California, in early 1965. The majority of our sales in the first few years were comic books. Leonard, a year younger than myself, really loved old comic books. He knew them all, inside out: the superhero comics, the newspaper reprint comics, the EC's, the funny animal, the off-trail titles, the giveaways. He knew the origins of all the heroes and the artists and the publishers, and when they started and when they disappeared.

For me, the comic books were merely a part of my life, not an all-consuming thing. They were so available one assumed their existence as a right. I do recall the privations of World War II hit me only when the comic books reduced their size and page counts to a point they seemed a shadow of their former selves. I could stand the rationing of food and clothing since everyone still seemed to have more than they ever had anyway, but to see the comic books deteriorate was hard to take. They were done in by the paper shortages plus so many of their artists and their writers were sent off to war. The Golden Age was over, never to return.

True, comic books did not end, and in some respects, they continued on to new and greater heights. They had just changed.

Millions had been sent overseas to entertain the troops and thus gained new respectability with a more adult-like audience. Now they were being aimed at the returning GI's as well. The EC comic books of the 1950s were just around the corner, and Carl Barks had yet to reach his pinnacle with his marvelous tales of Uncle Scrooge McDuck and a host of new Walt Disney comic book creations.

The mighty Marvel Comics with their Fantastic Four and Spiderman remained still in the future as well as Walt Kelly and his splendid Pogo Possum stories. But the innocence was gone. Now the field was ripe for sociologists and psychologists and all the do-gooders to investigate. No longer were the comics just for kids.

Comic books really influenced kids during their Golden period. My mother would take me to the public library in Portland's Hollywood district to ensure that proper reading material came my way.

Afterward, we would visit Yaws Restaurant where the lines were three deep behind each stool. But the day I remember most was in 1941 when we entered a ten cent store and I purchased a copy of MICKEY MOUSE



OUTWITS THE PHANTOM BLOT. What a comic book: Mickey is a detective and has a secret underground hideout in his back yard accessible only by a tunnel concealed beneath a rose bush.

I resolved immediately to duplicate his hideout in my own back yard. I dug for several days until my ever solicitous mother explained to me that government restrictions on the use of steel and reinforced concrete would preclude my ever finishing it. After Pearl Harbor, I resubmitted my idea as being useful for a bomb shelter, but it was a no-go as my father did not believe in bombs. So my brother used my excavation as a pillbox to shoot down enemy Japanese planes with his B-B gun until the winter rains came and silted it all over.

We did have books in our home. Most of them were given us by relatives in Ohio who were glad we lived so far away. Mother used them mostly to press flowers in, and my brother to hide his growing collection of pornographic pictures. But I actually read some of them.

One was called THE FAIRY BOOK. There was a story in it called "The Juniper Tree," It featured a wicked stepmother who murders her little boy, then chops him into pieces and cooks him in vinegar. When the boy's father comes home he finds the resulting meal delicious and eats it all, throwing the bones under the table. The boy's half-sister collects them and lays them under a Juniper tree.

Afterward, a beautiful bird (actually a stool pigeon) appears and proceeds to go around the neighborhood singing "My mother, she killed me; My father, he ate me." Even though the stepmother is later crushed by a millstone and the kid miraculously reappears, for me the story was a real downer. No comic book or Universal horror movie ever affected me as much. I made sure all the trees in our back yard were Douglas Firs, and remember the story to this day.

Comic books. One of the reasons I began collecting them in 1945 was that a friend of mine, Allen Keeney, had kept all his. His father was a druggist and had brought them home from work. I remember his father. He was always prone upon a Davenport. I never saw him standing, but I imagine he was vertical part of the time. Allen had comic books going back to the MICKEY MOUSE MAGAZINE of the late 1930s. I managed to get as many of them away from him as possible, and this was the nucleus of my collection.

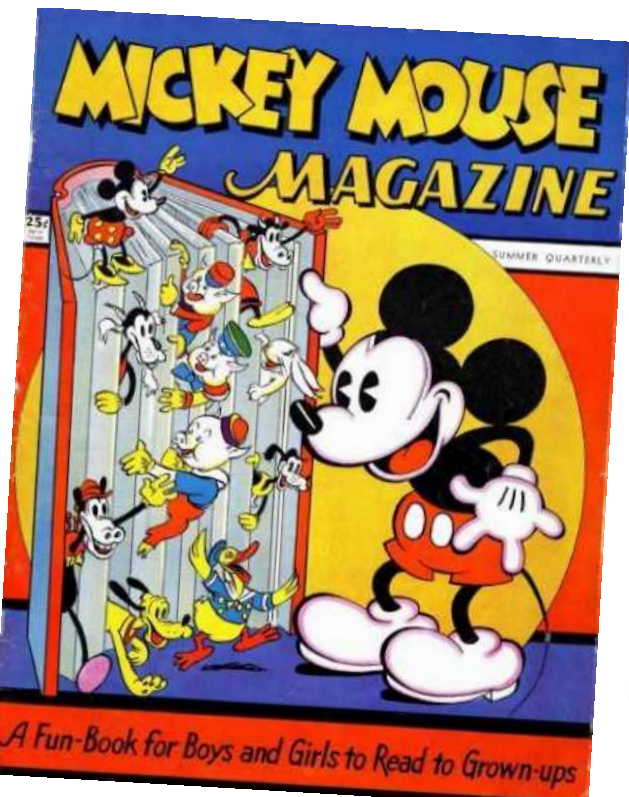


All my earlier ones had been given by my father to the children of Japanese-Americans in the resettlement camps. As a true Christian, my father not only gave his all, he gave other people's all as well.

It was difficult to find old comic books in Portland, even in late 1945. I remember finding a copy of the January 1939 MICKEY MOUSE MAGAZINE in a Goodwill store near the Weatherly Building. Boy did I feel lucky. But in 1947 catastrophe struck. Mrs. Jenson, our art instructor at Gregory Heights, spotted it and took an unnatural dislike to it.

She tore it in half, lengthwise, to the consternation of the entire class, who knew how much I treasured it (I should have collected old phone books; I'd like to have seen her try it with that). But I fished it out of the wastebasket after class and laboriously taped it back together again. I kept it for years until a mint one came my way.

The MICKEY MOUSE MAGAZINE was very rare. It was published between 1935 and 1940 and appealed to a younger age group than did the comic books. But as a Disney collector, I had to have them. I obtained a number of them from the Davis Bookstore on 3rd Avenue in 1952, but in 1954 I was really lucky. I received a letter from Anton LaVey, head of the Satanic Church in San Francisco. He had all but one of the missing issues I required. He preferred 50¢ each to the soiled soul I offered him, and I willingly paid his price. Years later when I met him he proved to be a delightful person, reminding me much of Reverend Black, a Methodist minister we once had at Bennett Chapel in southeast Portland. It wasn't until 1972 that I finally completed my set of the MICKEY MOUSE MAGAZINE, and then it was through the cooperation of the Disney Studio itself.



Speaking of Rev. Black, one evening in 1949 when I was quietly sitting at home savoring my latest Carl Barks acquisition, he rang the doorbell. Upon admittance, he claimed that while driving past our home God told him I needed saving. This was just like God, to stir things up. However, unknown to Rev. Black, who was new to our church, my parents tended to believe that Methodists are born saved, thus saving a lot of time and inconvenience. Plus they belonged to a faction in the church that already referred to the reverend as the "sneakin' deacon." So they gave him short shrift and I was truly saved. But my comic book was crumpled through my having hastily placed it under the davenport cushion, the next day, I buy another.

I liked Reverend Black. He created a great deal of dissension within the church, which is what Methodist ministers are for. And any man of the cloth my parents disliked I felt had possibilities.



I remember once, to prove himself a buddy of the young, he told me a lot about girls, a lot more, in fact, than I wanted to know. He didn't realize I wasn't interested, but I went along with him and drooled at the proper intervals. I don't know to this day if what he told me was true. I never looked.

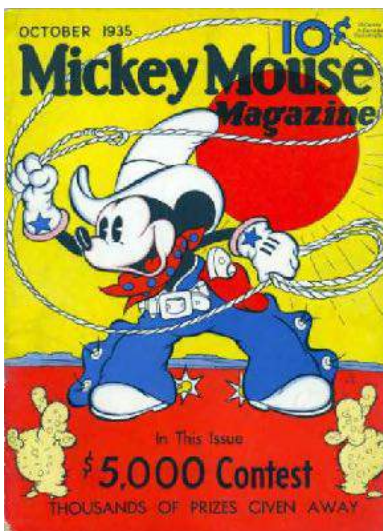
My early life always seemed to be a confrontation between the proud (comic books) and the profane (religion). There was an old Baptist church at 72nd and Sandy in those days, right across from Fairley's Drug Store. In 1941 I was sentenced to attend Sunday school there, and on those Sundays when Fairley's was not closed (they alternated with the Davis Drug Store a mile or so away) there ensued a lopsided struggle between God and mammon for my dime. I say lopsided because mammon always won. But on those days when Fairley's was locked up tighter than a drum, the Baptists cheerfully received their due.

This was because the Baptists put on a really good show. Reverend Travis was in charge of this travesty, and he was always in exuberant despair over the fact that cannibals in far off lands were eating Baptist missionaries faster than the Fuller Theological Seminary could replace them. It appeared that no sooner did the wide-eyed, hapless, Bible-stomping zealots step off the boat than the savages rang the dinner bell.

The good reverend had a felt blackboard upon which he would apply with ever-increasing fury cutout overlays which told the story. In those pre-Velcro days they would fall off almost as quickly as he applied them, but at the end, when he was knee-deep in discarded patches and the marrow of the martyrs had been marinated, the moral was that God had triumphed. I always left with a good feeling, knowing that my humble tithe was going for the nutritional well-being of our colored brethren.

Bennett Chapel was different, and how I suffered there. My folks joined it in 1948 when I was 14 years old. It was a picturesque New England type of church with a steeple, and the congregation was right out of *OUR TOWN*... the cemetery scene. Mother was the organist there, but even the most sprightly tunes sounded mournful when played within its narrow confines. Naturally this church had to have a youth group, and naturally, I had to join.

The youth group was based on the even then discredited Fuehrer Principal. This meant we were stuck with whoever managed a successful putsch. In early 1949 Sam Vahey accomplished this and was installed in pageantry not seen since the last Nuremberg rally. Sam's parents were pillars of the church and had been so since the days of the patriarchs. I was, therefore, more than suspicious of anything emerging from their loins. Added to this was the discomfort of knowing that Sam himself was handsome, talented, popular, intelligent, and





outgoing; in fact, he was everything except religious. His first words were: "Let's choose up sides and smell armpits." Our youth group was in good hands.

Reverend Irwin later became minister to this vale of tears on S.E. Ramona, where his sermons would cause birds to drop out of the sky. In 1952 I found a way around this.

The Guild Theater in downtown Portland suddenly brought back for one week only the 1940 *THIEF OF BAGHDAD* which starred Sabu. *THE THIEF OF BAGHDAD* was my all time favorite film, and in those pre-Video days, I didn't know if I'd ever be able to see it again. I had to go every night. And most of these were school nights.

It was my senior year at Gresham Union High School and I was taking an easy subject so I'd be on the honor roll and stay out of the Korean War. No way would my parents let me see a movie on a school night. I'm sure, sooner would people catch a cold in Hell.

I had to come up with an excuse. I told them in order to help gain a college scholarship I needed to be in as many extracurricular high school activities as possible.

One night I made it a chorus, and I even had my mother bone me up on "The Skaters' Waltz," the only song the Gresham chorus knew.

("The Holy City" was also in their repertoire, but they gave it up when their



only castrato made the football team). Another night I made it the Future Farmers of America, and I even took a sack of Vigoro to make it look authentic. Another night it was the swimming team, which involved a certain risk since Gresham didn't even have a pool. The last night I told them I was trying out for the part of Iago in *MACBETH*. They were sorry I didn't get it. They would have been even sorrier if they found out Iago is in *OTHELLO*.

But it was worth it. For my being able to see *THE THIEF OF BAGHDAD* every day for a solid week I was able to memorize all the scenes and all the dialogue and all the music. This came in good stead when Rev. Irwin would begin his sermons. For as soon as he began, I began rolling the title credits of *THE THIEF OF BAGHDAD* in my head.

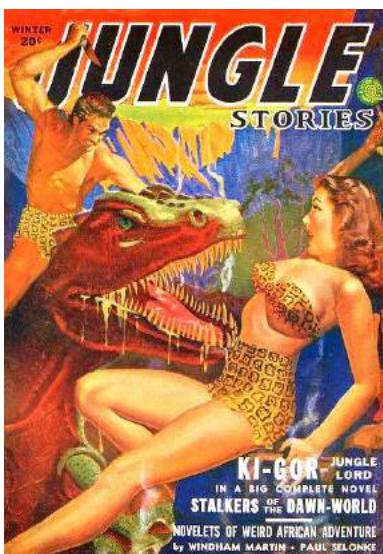
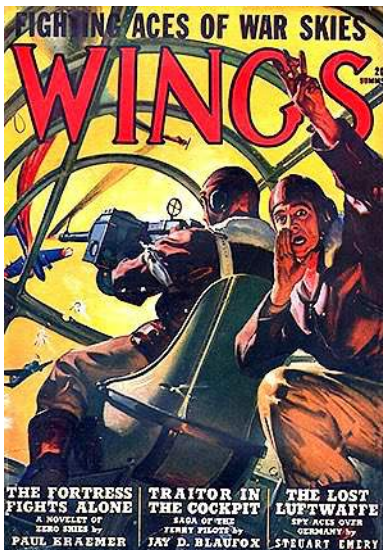
My eyes would glaze over as I envisioned the opening scene where the evil Jaffar's ship sweeps with billowing sails into the bustling harbor at Basra. Rev. Irwin may well have thought his words had induced in me a state of religious euphoria, but it was actually my being lost in this incomparable Technicolor fantasy. I always timed it so that just as he was announcing the Tuesday Club would meet on Wednesday, Sabu was flying past the towering minarets of ancient Baghdad on his flying carpet and proclaiming to the world that he was off for "Some fun and adventure at last."

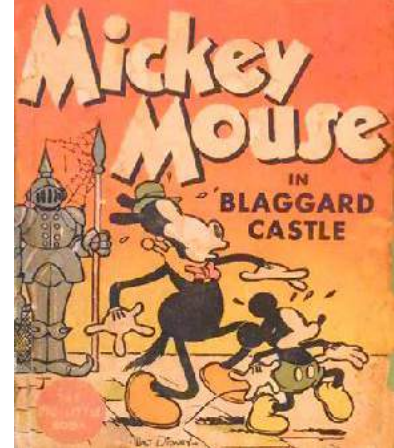
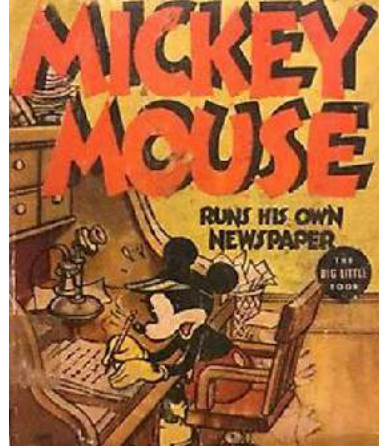
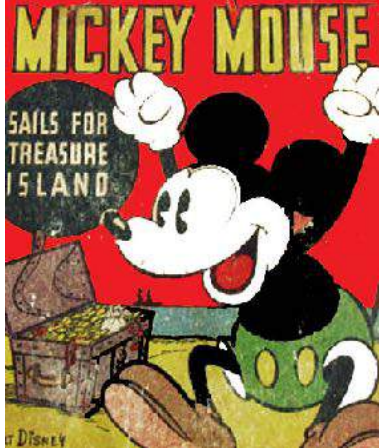
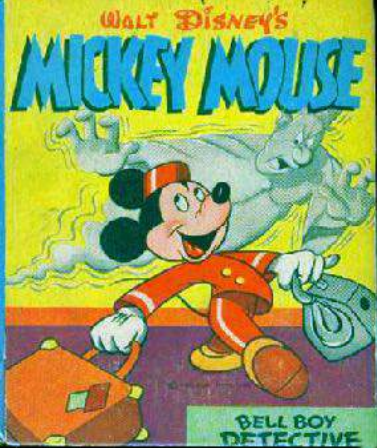
Many years later I wrote to Miklos Rozsa, the actual composer of the magical score for *THE THIEF OF BAGHDAD*, and told him how his wonderful music had helped keep me from becoming one of the walking dead at Bennett Chapel. He wrote me back that I had been "a naughty boy," but he sent me an autographed photo, which was what I really wanted.

Jim Bradley collected *PLANET COMICS*. I liked this title too, especially the "Mars, God of War" stories. It had a clean, representational style of drawing I have always liked. I purchased a mint copy of the 1940 first issue for him in 1951 as a birthday present. It cost me \$2.00 from Claude Held in upstate New York. Already, stirrings of comic book collectibility were being felt, and Mr. Held was the very first dealer, and hung in there till he died in 2012.

By this time I was heavily into collecting science fiction pulps. They were easy to obtain. All you needed was money. Donald Day, a Portland postal worker, had a complete collection of them, and it blew my mind to see them as a youth. He later published the world's first index to them, a reference work still unparalleled in the field.

Science fiction readers often kept their magazines. Few mothers made them throw them out. In fact, such fans were old enough to stand up to their mothers.





But the practically without exception, no collectors of science fiction magazines ever kept their comic books.

And this in spite of the fact that many of the pulps were little more sophisticated than the comic books themselves. Some of the pulps, such as PLANET STORIES, WINGS, and JUNGLE STORIES, had direct counterparts in the comic books, often with the same heroes. But it was the pulps that were kept, not the comics. There was a stigma attached to comic books. Perhaps their almost universal accessibility and identification with the young, made them seem worthless to collectors.

Consequently, many pulps survived, and their values are a tiny percentage of the values of old comic books. Comic books were everywhere when I was young. Heaven was as close as the neighborhood drug store, candy store, or ten-cent store. You couldn't avoid comics then, and almost every child had a sloppy stack or two beneath his bed. Nowadays you have to buy them in specialty stores. I'm not sure what goes on in these specialty stores, but somehow their proprietors do not seem as wholesome as the middle-aged women who manned the counters at Woolworth's and Newberry's for

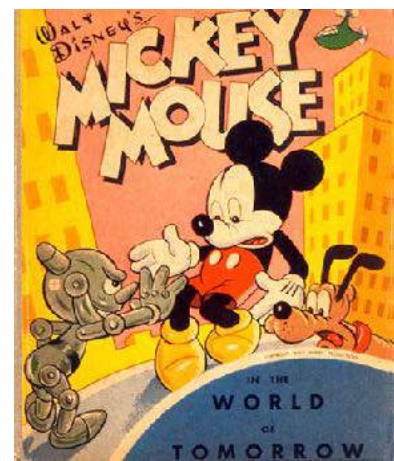
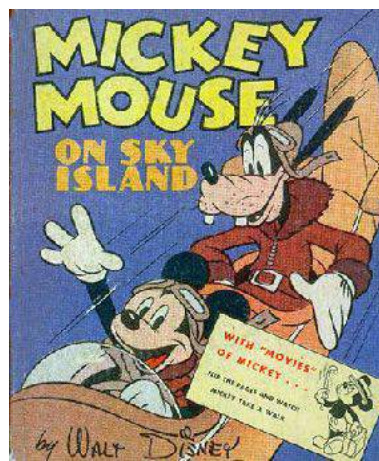
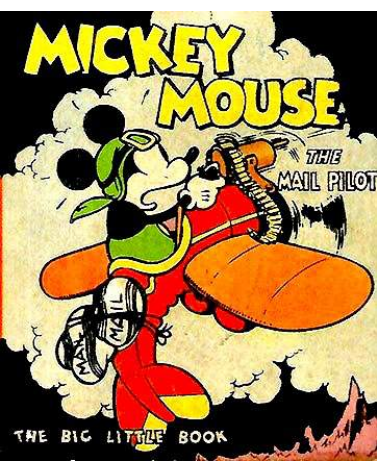
25¢ an hour and could spot incipient sin a mile off.

And we didn't buy whole cartons of the stuff in 1947, as the present speculators do. We couldn't afford to, and besides, we did not have the vision. And I'll let you in on a secret the speculators do not know. If 500 copies of anything survive, it will probably wreck the market for all time.

If you don't believe me, try selling 500 copies of ACTION COMICS #1 for \$50,000 each. Nothing will be rare if people think it someday will be, and save it.

I haven't even mentioned Big Little Books as yet. That is what I most loved about the ten-cent stores in Portland. One downtown city block across from Meier & Franks had three such stores, all in a row. And each one seemed to vie for the best presentation of Big Little Books. They had rows and rows of them, all spine out. They were as colorful as jewels, and the cost was only 10¢ each. I remember buying MICKEY MOUSE AND THE SEVEN GHOSTS and DONALD DUCK GETS FED UP in 1940. I enjoyed them for years until the Japanese got hold of them.

Adults were more tolerant of Big Little Books since they had no suspect



superheroes, and the stories were mostly reprinted from newspaper comic sections of the day. Adults had heard of the exploits of Little Orphan Annie, Dick Tracy, Flash Gordon, Smitty, the Gumps, and Li'l Abner, and even followed them themselves. I never had any trouble with my parents over BLBs. It was the comic books with their lower quality and need for suspension of belief which caused the trouble.

Speaking of The Gumps, the first Big Little Book title I can recall having was a Chester Gump. My family had just moved to Portland from Ohio, and my dad had found a church to his liking on Mt. Tabor. Its pastor, Dr. Reed, also didn't believe in guns or war. He later got into a lot of trouble during World War II when he refused to allow his church to be used for the draft. This only shows, you should never allow a Christian to head a church. But this was November of 1939, and fortunately, Dr. Reed believed in having carnivals.

They were holding one, one night and my family attended. Besides the obligatory table filled with lurid Sunday school pamphlets, there was a table full of used Big Little Books. I may not have ever seen any before, but they were five cents each, and I actually had

a nickel. It was probably left over from my last attendance at Sunday school when my teacher failed to shake me down. So I carefully looked over the titles and selected one which caught my eye. It was CHESTER GUMP IN THE CITY OF GOLD, and I was enthralled by the idea of an entire city made of gold. But I was disappointed when I got it home. The artwork was so poor I felt I could draw a better city. Not yet six, I knew the drawings sucked. But it was my first Big Little Book; the first of many.

But this "many" did not include the near-complete set of Big Little Books David Chamberlain offered me in 1951 for \$50.00. He was selling out, and while his set lacked thirty or so copies, it was truly something to behold. But I didn't have space for them, and more importantly, I didn't have the \$50.00. I was earning 30¢ an hour in my father's hardware store (the YMCA had jettisoned him in 1943 for maintaining the Japanese cemetery in Portland while the Japanese-Americans were in the camps) and I needed my money to purchase the bare necessities of life, like comic books by Carl Barks.

David had amassed his collection without too much trouble by haunting the Portland





bookstores for several years. You could do this with Big Little Books. Their odd shape made them unsuitable for wartime paper drives, and I've already mentioned their respectability made them less prone for throwing out. A number of used bookstores paid attention to them, and while it was worth your life to find a comic book older than 1943 in 1946, a Big Little Book from 1934 was not at all uncommon.

Every Saturday in 1946 my friends and I would go downtown to hit the stores for items for our collections. Cameron's Book Store was the most friendly and the most fun. Mr. Cameron seemed a simple-minded fellow who would pay too much and charge too little so no one could respect him as a businessman. But his was the most popular store in town and the only one which welcomed us. He had tables full of comics and Big Little Books, but what we especially liked was his backroom completely filled with the old boy's books from our parent's generation. There couldn't have been much demand for them, but apparently, Mr. Cameron liked them.

There wasn't much else to be amused by except watching the bridges over the Willamette open and close for passing ships. That and allowing the doorman at the Broadway Theater to examine certain parts of our anatomy in return for free admission.

The Highland Bookstore, two door's away from Camerons, had a basement table topped with comic books, but they hated all their customers, especially the younger ones. We would tiptoe down their broad, decrepit steps, but the creaking would invariably give us away, This would alert the two old harpies who ran this Stygian nether-land, and they would flutter over in a cloud of feathers to watch like hawks as we went through their meager stock. They never had anything anyway, and the place was terrifying.

Behind a curtain, they had stockpiled stacks of old science fiction pulps which were of increasing interest to me. But having lost the Golden Fleece, these ladies had decided to guard these pulps with ever greater vengeance. In fact, if they had been chosen to guard the Ark of the Covenant, it would still be around today. I don't believe I ever did see any of those pulps, at least close-up. But I don't mean to speak ill of these ladies, as they are now undoubtedly sentinels in Hell and I'm bound to run into them again. But it was like leaving Purgatory to ascend the steps and reenter the land of the living.

The old man's bookstore was better. It was really the Davis Bookstore, but we called it the old man's bookstore because Davis was an old man. He also was sour on life and had been thus since the Crimean War. Mr. Davis kept boxes of old Big Little Books under several tables, and they were a delight to go through.



Mr. Davis also paid attention to the science fiction pulps, and in 1948 Jim Bradley and I purchased for \$150.00 (on-time payments) a complete set of AMAZING STORIES from the first issue in 1926 through the last large size issue in 1933. I still have the set, having had it bound in the early 1950s after buying out Jim's portion.

The Portland Bookstore was best of all. It paid attention to *all* these areas and was the first in Portland to carry a full range of the new science fiction books which began appearing after the war. They had actually begun setting comic books aside in 1942, boxing them up for future selling. That was quite visionary for the time. Around 1950 we heard about this and began pestering the owner to bring them in. I guess my mother arranged it because about this time I had to have my wisdom teeth extracted, and Mother promised that if I lived through the ordeal, I could go through these comics at the Portland Book Store. So when we got there, with me still a bit groggy, there were five or six good-sized boxes awaiting us. I eagerly went through them but was bitterly disappointed. Not a funny animal comic among them. All were titles like BOY COMMANDOS, HUMAN TORCH, etc. Even at only 15¢ each, there were none that I could use.

The only other places where one could obtain old comic books in those days were

the Salvation Army and Goodwill stores. There were ghosts in all the bookstores then, but none more so than here. We would shiver in these places even in the daylight. They were staffed by ethereal older women who looked like they were waiting for something that would never come. Occasionally a man would stare at us with eyes like Jesus on the cross. Everything here had lost all hope, and anything we purchased smelled of fumigation.

It was there I resolved to allow no law to stand in the way of my becoming rich.

About the only real way to locate old comics in those days was to find someone who had kept them. I recall in the summer of 1946 Jim Bradley discovered that a nearby neighbor's spastic teenage son had several boxes of old comics in his attic crawl space. His mother would grudgingly sell any copies at 10¢ each that he no longer wanted. Jim and I would show up at their tiny residence and carefully select those precious issues, many extending back to 1940, that we needed.

The boy's mother would show her son the various issues and he would thrash around in bed, thereby signaling in some unknown fashion which issues he wanted to keep. Apparently, big money meant nothing to him. Would he want to keep those sunny mid-1941 Disney comics I had found? I prayed to the Methodist God, the only one I knew at the





time, that he would not — with the usual result. So when they weren't looking I place those Disney issues in the stack he was willing to part with. Was I sorry later? Are you kidding? Great collections are rarely built by honest means alone.

Also of interest to us was the classic Sunday newspaper comic sections of the recent past. But this was before the days of microfilming, and the downtown Portland public library zealously guarded their bound volumes. They wouldn't bring them out for kids, we were reduced to periodically checking the large reading stands on the second floor in the hopes a leftover volume would still be there. Occasionally an adult would take pity on us and put in a request for something we wanted to see. Then too, you could sometimes con your way into the newspaper morgues at the OREGONIAN and the journal if you had a suitable excuse.

In 1948 a real opportunity occurred. An article appeared in the OREGONIAN regarding a Mrs. Dill, who for twenty-five years had saved the Sunday comic sections bound them together with string to make large comic volumes for her grandchildren. My friends and I quickly made a beeline to her house.



There they were, a large stack of nearly mint Sunday comic pages featuring Buck Rogers, Tarzan, Flash Gordon, and Dick Tracy, almost all from the 1930s. She wasn't eager to sell, but we convinced her it would be better than having glue put in her Bechstein piano. So we agreed upon a price of 10¢ each, and I bought all the Buck Rogers pages. They were really glorious in 1932, full-page, full-color, and full of funky rounded space ships as published in the old Portland NEWS-TELEGRAM. I kept them for six years until Ray Bradbury wrote to me that he needed them, beginning an acquaintanceship with the celebrated science fiction author which lasted until his death. Sometimes there were problems even in obtaining new comic books. For years I haunted the local Firestone Store at Christmas time hoping to obtain a copy of their annual comic giveaway. It always featured a special Donald Duck story by the "good artist," Carl Barks. But you had to time it right. Too early and they hadn't come in. Too late and they were gone. Plus you were first expected to buy something.



This presented problems. Firestone sold automotive products, and my folks were still driving the 1936 Chevrolet they had purchased in 1939 to make the long trek west. Anything that dropped off it remained off. I don't remember how I obtained these comic books. It might have been through my soulful eyes or my sleight-of-hand. Or perhaps a doorman at the Broadway Theater had a cousin who worked there. Anyway, I got them. The give-away MARCH OF COMICS was more difficult. I never knew for sure they could be found. They contained some of the best Donald Duck stories Carl Barks did. But for these, I had to rely upon coming across used copies at some later time!



Carol and JoAnn Rosendahl lived two doors down from our house on N.E. 76th. They were girls. I recall in 1946 Carol told me they each got a dollar a week in allowance. Such extravagance seemed beyond belief to me, especially since I was getting only a dime and that dependent upon my schlepping sawdust and lawn clippings. At any rate, they used a portion of their fortune in 1945 to start a comic lending library in their basement. It was only a card table filled with comic books, but you could trade them two for one or outright for several pennies.

It was best to time your visit when they were having dinner and couldn't be around to pester you. But even then the comic books were the thinner, smaller ones from 1944 and on. Already the Golden Age was receding into the past.

Dolly Lind was in my 8th-grade class at Gregory Heights. She was cute and popular and all the boys had designs on her, but I coveted only her MICKEY MOUSE Big Little Book. She had the very first one, published in 1932. I had nothing she wanted except fifty cents, which she willingly accepted. I went to her house and she threw it down to me from an upstairs window. Boys weren't allowed in girls' houses in those days. I told you Portland was innocent.

I still have the Big Little Book, having never found a better copy. But I realized I couldn't count on completing my collection by having items thrown at me from upstairs windows. So in October of 1947, Jim Bradley and I started what may well have been the first comic collectors' fanzine.

We called it The Comic Collector's News, and while it featured article's, advertisements, and contests relating to comic books, its real purpose was to enhance our collections by making our wants more widely known. We knew the comics were out there; it was just a matter of finding them, By our third issue we had established the International Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Comics. Our editorial states "The I.S.P.C.C. asks for your help. Right now all over the United States, there are millions of comic books, both old and new, that are soon to be destroyed. These comics are valuable. We must contact everyone possible so that we can save these comic books from destruction."

Our slogan was: "Your Comics are Valuable. Don't throw them Away." Not considering comic books had been in existence for only fourteen years and practically no one at that time recognized their importance.

Fifteen more years would pass before comic collecting would be taken seriously, and another thirty before the field would so hit its stride that the great auction houses of the world would include them among their masterpieces, the very things we loved so much as kids.

Who would have believed that ACTION COMICS #1 would be worth more than any modern first edition by Hemingway, Faulkner, or Fitzgerald, all literary giants of our century? Certainly not our parent-teachers.

Prices were low in 1947. One collector advertised he would pay 5¢ to \$1.50 each for 1935 and up for each old PLANET COMICS. Another offered up to \$1.00 each for 1942-46 SPIRIT Comics. I myself offered to sell SUPERMAN and BATMAN number one. No price was listed but five or six dollars probably could have obtained them both. I offered to pay 50¢ (\$1.50 each for 1935 and up for MICKEY MOUSE MAGAZINES, WALT DISNEY COMICS, and Big Little Books). Perhaps even then the field was beginning to stir. Portland Bookstore placed an ad with us which mentioned they had "Rare Comics and Big Little Books."

As with most visionaries, we were somewhat prone to exaggeration. Our fourth issue claimed the I.S.P.C.C. was the biggest kids organization in the entire city. Actually, the Cub Scout Den of which I was an unwilling member had more kids in it. But I doubt if a 1947 Cub Scout manual with its outdated instructions to start a fire is worth as much today as a 1947 March of Comics giveaway with a story by Carl Barks.

The Cub Scouts! Why do parents think such wimpy organizations can make men of their sons? Once our den was taken deep into the woods and dared to get out on its own. We were expected to go west, but the compass they gave us only pointed north. Naturally, we got lost. We weren't dumb. We'd heard the sun set in the west, but Portland was overcast that year and there weren't even any shadows.

Eventually, we came upon a cliff much like that in KING KONG on top of which stood a number of hoodlums from the Hill Military Academy. Our earnest inquiries regarding the direction of civilization were met with a hail of rocks, which caused us to respond loudly on their proclivity for incestuous maternal relationships as we made our escape. Once out of range we continued to communicate our displeasure through sign language.

We now found ourselves at the portals of a magic grotto and a pool full of money which we enthusiastically helped ourselves to until some black-clad clerics who had staked out a prior claim to this paradise chased us away. We crossed a gravel pit and emerged on 82nd Avenue near a small country



store where we filled up on repeated rounds of Nehi Soda Pop and celebrated our good fortune.

YMCA summer camp at Spirit Lake wasn't much better. It lacked only an Arbeit Macht Frei sign and a Dr. Mengele to divide the arrivals to differentiate from its European counterparts. But we discovered where the capos cooled their beer, and with a carton of Lucky Strike Greens someone smuggled in we found a sylvan spot where the water sparkled through the pagan greenery of trees and we could talk dirty until the hour grew late and the white-robed goddess across the lake hid in shame.

I had my first cigarette there, and the moon understood. It was almost thirty years before God got around to blasting the place, and I could not take you to that spot today.

A scholarly article in our four-page June 1948 Comic Collector's News offered a complete history of the newspaper comic strip from the appearance of The Yellow Kid in 1895 to the first issue of FAMOUS FUNNIES in 1934. Another article pointed out that "Many people have tried to have comic books banded" (sic) and that already 36 comic books were not allowed to be sold in Detroit. The article concluded that while current comic books were still good, they will probably never be as good as the ones that came out 1934 to 1942."

This was years before the term "Golden Age" was applied to this early period, illustrating that even in 1948 fans were looking back to this great period in comic book publishing and lamenting its demise.

Our June issue even had a contest, the prize being a dollar bill (a fair sum of money in those days). Contestants were required to identify which comic books three characters appeared in, namely Strut Warren (FIGHT COMICS), Peter the Farm Detective (MICKEY MOUSE MAGAZINE), and Inferior Man (MILITARY COMICS). We even had a winner, John Baily of Oregon City. Encouraged by this, we had another contest in our August 1948 issue with a two dollar prize, this going to the contestant who could correctly identify the artists of The Spirit, Fantomah, and Espionage. But we soon realized it would be cheaper to fold the magazine than risk having to shell out the prize money.

The Comic Collector's News did little to enhance anyone's collection since we all knew each other anyway. We all haunted the local bookstores, but almost nothing older than 1944 ever surfaced.

Only when values increased to the point it became news did the old comic books start coming out of the woodwork, and that was many years after our young collecting days.

I always had to have the most perfect copy of a new one. The drug store at 122nd and Powell, which I used in later years, would



get in a good supply, and I would carefully examine each one for the slightest imperfection.

One time some kids were watching me from the soda fountain. Rather than admit that I still collected comic books at the age of 16, I told them I had been reading one while downing a milkshake and had used a five dollar bill as a bookmark. Now I couldn't find it.

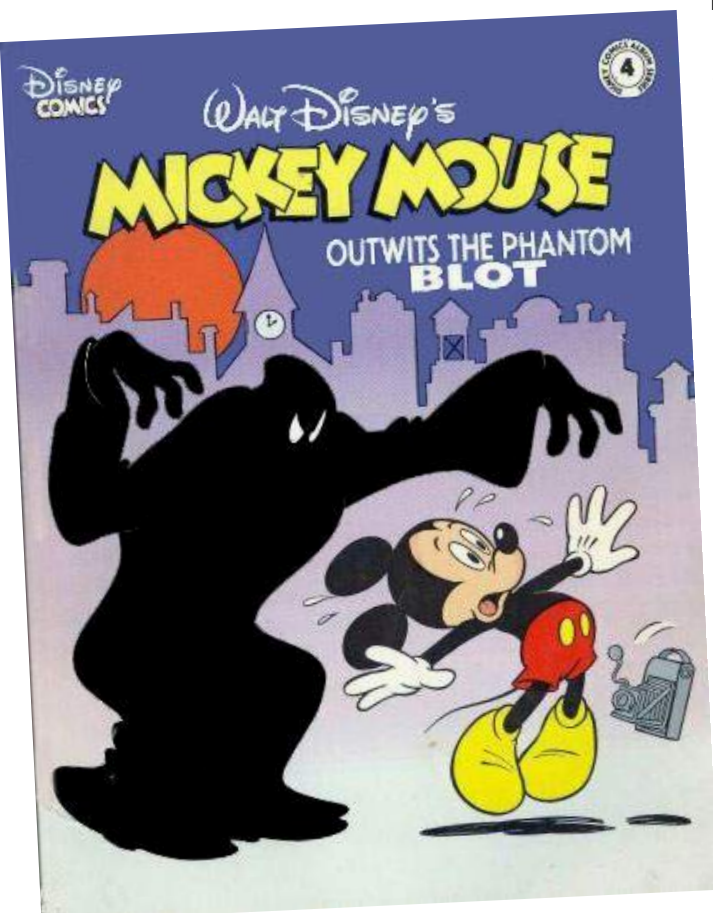
As I left to purchase the mint copy I had found, the sounds of mayhem from the comic section assured me no other collector would be able to purchase a mint condition copy of anything at this location.

It should be noted here there is a difference between collecting comic books and accumulating them. The accumulator merely keeps what he happens to buy or is given. The collector actively seeks out missing issues, purchases current issues, and upgraded condition whenever possible. The collector also protects his collection, while the accumulator often carelessly places it in his closet or cellar, where the greatest destructive scourge of modern civilization - The Mother - can get her hands on it.

It has been estimated by experts that collective destruction of comic books by rampaging mothers equaled the burning of *thirty* Libraries of Alexandria. I know, because I was one of the experts. Why mothers do this I do not know. Perhaps scientists will someday find a gene for it.

I notice these *same* mothers will save stacks of old NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC magazines for their grandchildren to make use of; perhaps they feel the only way of guaranteeing *having* grandchildren is through throwing out the comic books so their kids will grow up and produce their own. At any rate, out the comic books went. The GEOGRAPHICS stayed, with a resulting zero value. The grandchildren didn't want them, and their collective weight has slowed the earth's rotation several seconds since the magazine's inception. This is why the skyrocketing value of old comic books have been in the news so much. *Everybody* used to have them, and everybody's mother threw them out. And the present comic books the speculators buy? This time they'll be saved, to end up in the attic along with the NATIONAL GEOGRAPHICS and have the same resulting value.

Well, not quite everyone threw them away. In 1947 Jim and I found a young man in Portland who had actually kept his comic books throughout the years. Kept and cherished them. His name was Vic Flach, and he lived in a nicer section of town.



He was four or five years older than Jim and our bunch, and a fine artist to boot. He shared my love for *FANTASIA* and tended to draw in the same style.

Vic and his younger brother had stacks of old comic books, most of them accessible in drawers which pulled out from under their bunk beds. They didn't really collect them; they just *kept* them; all types.

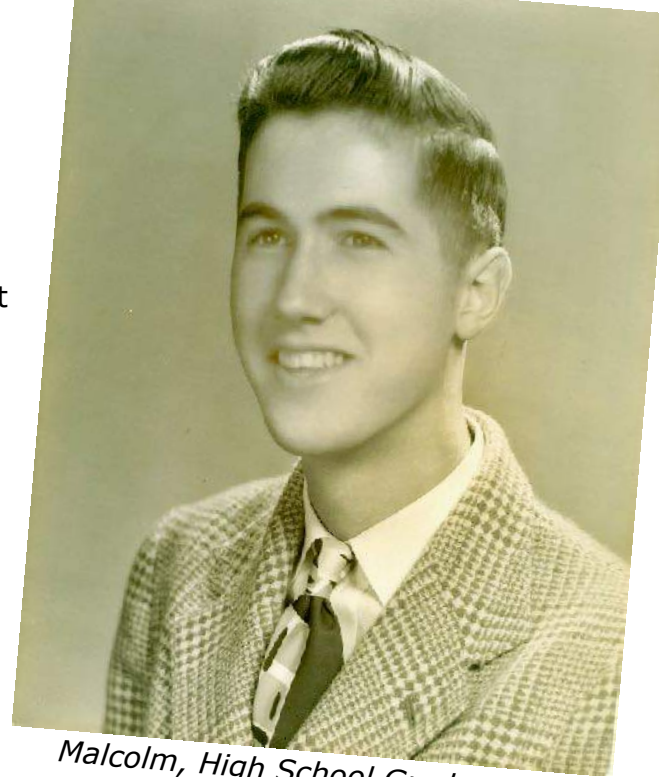
He never had a copy of the first issue of *WALT DISNEY'S COMICS*, which to me in 1947 was a greater find than the Dead Sea Scrolls. And the amazing fact is that he kept all those comic books through his entire life.

Vic and his wife visited me at my movie memorabilia store at Hollywood and Vine. It must have been forty years since I last saw him. He was retired from a lifetime of teaching art, and it was fun talking about the old days. I was gratified to learn he still had all those comic books from over a half a century ago. He was lucky. He had an understanding mother. Even when he went off to fight in the Korean War, she never touched his comic books.

My comic books were imperiled if I crossed the street. If my brother wasn't threatening them in reprisal for something he thought I'd done to him but didn't do but would like to have done, or my father was beginning to get misty-eyed over the children orphaned by the Greek civil war. I couldn't allow the always volatile world situation or my Tennessee Williams home life to endanger my growing collection, so in 1948 when we moved to 118th and Powell, I carefully hid most of them in our attic crawl space.

And there they slumbered for fourteen years while I attended Pacific University and the University of Washington, spent two years in the Army, and a tough high school in the state of Washington. What had I in the attic at the time? In 1948 not much. Several boxes of favorites, that was all. But in 1953, at age 19, I made one of the greatest comic book finds of all time.

Large Virgin comic book collections from the Golden Age are almost impossible to find, mainly because they never existed in the first place. Who could have wanted to, or could have afforded to buy *all* the comic books which appeared during the late Depression and early years of World War II? Certainly, no kid had that kind of money or the space to keep them in. For complete mint runs of these comics to have survived, it required adults to buy and keep them, keep them through the wartime draft and paper drives, through household moves and periods of unemployment, to protect them from the ravages of silverfish and sunlight, extremes of temperature and the destructiveness of children and grandchildren.



Malcolm, High School Grad: 1952



For any comic book to survive over ten years during the Golden Age was a little short of a miracle, as comic books were meant to be read and thrown away.

Sure, some publishers, artists, and writers kept file copies, and even collectors kept runs of a particular title or two, but for accumulations representing the *entire field* to survive the travails and upheavals most people experience, it just didn't happen. Except it did, in two instances I know.

One was the great Mile High Comic Book Store find in Denver, Colorado. A man there bought every copy new, kept them in pristine condition, and died still owning them. This was around twenty years ago. The guy had even bought the pulp magazines. There was nothing like it, and will not be again. So great a find was it that the government should have purchased it and kept it as part of our heritage. But it's been dispersed.

The other find was the one I made and just as good as the Mile High find. Which means that at least *two* people were actively collecting *all* the comic books and all the fiction pulp magazines during the 1930s and 1940s. It seems almost impossible that *two* people would have the money, the time, and the space to accomplish this. Mile High got the virgin one. Mine was more like King Tut's tomb. Someone else had gotten there first.

In 1953 I received a letter from an Antane R. King in Providence, Rhode Island, in response to an ad I'd run. He wrote in a sort of broken English as if it was a second language. He had comic books for sale, thousands of them, all mint, untouched. I purchased them all over a space of several months, first at 10¢ each, plus shipping. I asked him repeatedly how he had obtained them, but he would never say. I was attending Pacific University at the time, and I would borrow a bicycle to ride down to the railway express office and pick up the packages. A lot of the comics I didn't even want, but at the later price of 5¢ each, I just couldn't turn them down. I later sold most of them for 10¢ each and felt I'd done very well. Their value today is astronomical.

Naturally, I purchased the Disney comics first. He had *WALT DISNEY'S COMICS* from Feb. 1942 on up. He had *MICKEY MOUSE OUTWITS THE PHANTOM BLOT*, and all the subsequent Mickey comics from 1943 to date. He had the Donald Ducks from *PIRATE GOLD* on up. He had the *MADs* in comic book form to #11, and all the *BLONDIE* color comics from 1940 on. For these, I gladly paid the 10¢ each and had them bound into volumes which I still have today. I've had Carl Barks himself sign all the books which contain his work.

There were many other comics I would like to have purchased from Mr. King, titles like *PLANET*, *CAPTAIN MARVEL*, *LOONEY TUNES*, *NEW FUNNIES*, the *FOUR COLORS*, even *SUPERMAN* and *BATMAN*.

But he didn't have them. He'd sold them long before. Mr. King never really told me he'd once had everything, though I could tell from what he still had, that he indeed *had* everything.

In 1962 Leonard Brown in Long Beach was determined to track me down. By the time he'd located me I'd sold most of them off, but the acquaintanceship we struck led to our opening Collectors Book Store in early 1965. Leonard also took it upon himself to track down Mr. King, and he did manage to locate his widow, who had moved to Florida. Leonard asked her if she had any more comic books for sale. She said no. Leonard asked her how Mr. King had obtained them. She did not answer.

So I put one of the greatest comic book finds of all time in my attic crawl space on S.E. Powell, and there it stayed until I was able to double my money. Dick Wald of S.W. Portland and several other collectors saw it, but no one seemed to recognize its value.

I eventually sold them all for 10¢ each,

including *ADVENTURE COMICS* #40, which introduced "The Sandman," a copy of which sold at auction in Maryland some years ago for \$40,000. My *MARVEL COMICS* went for \$2.50. Today they are worth almost half a million dollars.

I had let a fortune slip through my hands, the kind of fortune few people get a chance at, even in a lifetime. God could have warned me. He knew where I was. Every Sunday I was in the furthest pew possible making up new words to the songs. ("On a hill, far away, stood an old Chevrolet...") We could have struck a deal. He'd have gotten his cut.

Now my chance for a sybaritic, hedonistic, existence was gone. I had received my comeuppance through an unprincipled and unrepentant youth.

I should have paid attention to Reverend Travis, Black, and Irwin, and not laughed at their threadbare suits. I should not have placed Crackerjack prizes in the church collection plate, or gone into convulsions when the Parsonage Committee urged parishioners to do something on the carpet. God and the Methodist Church had exacted their revenge. They had gotten me, quite good.

But it sure was fun at the time.







GOTTFREDSON AND ME

by MALCOLM WILLIS

I have long loved Floyd Gottfredson, even though I did not know his name. But I knew him through his work, through his wonderful Mickey Mouse stories, and especially through his wonderful artwork. I knew it first through the Big Little Books, those miniature jewels that came out during the Depression and reprinted Mickey's great adventures. I remember them from the ten cent store; whole counters full, all spine out and a dime

apiece. I remember teaching myself to read one in late 1940. *Walt Disney's Comics & Stories* began reprinting the stories in color: *Sky Island*, *Seven Ghosts*, *Foreign Legion*, *Mickey Mouse as His Royal Highness*. And then there was that glorious day in 1941 when an entire comic book appeared on *Mickey Mouse Outwits the Phantom Blot*. A dime went a long way then, and heaven was as close as the neighborhood drug store.

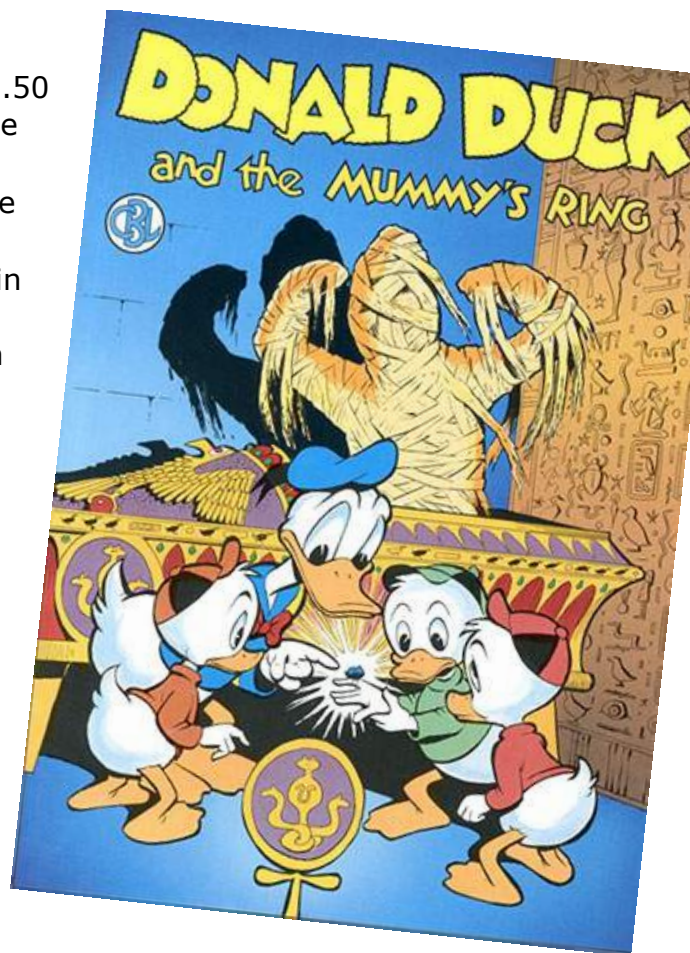
A few years later all my Big Little Books disappeared, along with the comic books I had carefully protected from the wartime paper drives, thereby prolonging World War II a microsecond. My father was a YMCA Secretary, and he had given all of them to the children of Japanese-American families being relocated to internment camps. In vain was my protest that the 10¢ war stamp I purchased each week in the 2nd grade was sacrifice enough. Nor was my offer to substitute my school books even considered. I soon found myself in a staging area looking at sad-eyed Japanese-American children being held in wire cages. Dad informed me they were as American as I. It was then I began to suspect his grasp of world affairs. Didn't he know who *Captain America* was fighting; had he slept through that *Don Winslow* serial we had seen a week or two before and neglected to notice who the villains were? But I acted properly contrite and was rewarded with some new comic books on the way home, so the world turned bright again.

When my father turned 90, he was honored for his work with the Japanese-Americans during World War II. My contribution remains unheralded.

Roy Chapman Andrews, Richard Halliburton, Sabu, and Walt Disney were my boyhood heroes. I'd seen *Fantasia* when it first appeared. I remember the speakers lined up against the walls, and how a woman seated behind us complimented my mother on how quiet I'd been during the performance. Quiet? I was so enthralled I could hardly move. When I was in Cleveland the summer of 1942 I saw the film again. My grandmother ordered a copy of the large *Fantasia* book for me from Higbee's Department Store, a book I still have. It cost \$8.50 new. I now saw every Disney film as it came out. With the appearance of the comic book *Donald Duck and the Mummy's Ring* in the summer of 1948, I found a new love in the work of Carl Barks. With lesser help from the fine material appearing in Looney Tunes, New Funnies, Captain Marvel and Planet Comics, plus the Technicolor extravaganzas of Maria Montez, Jon Hall, and Sabu which appeared periodically at the Roseway Theater, I was able to survive the maelstrom of World War II in the languid, provincial city of Portland, Oregon, whose innocent days now appear as far removed as old Pompeii.

I decided to collect Walt Disney material in November of 1945. Hitler was dead and more important, the wartime paper drives were over. The Japanese-Americans were back, and my father, having been booted out of the YMCA (he had been the "C" in its initials) had purchased a hardware store.

The world now appeared safe for me to begin an earnest effort to complete a set of Mickey Mouse



Magazine, Walt Disney's Comics, the Disney Big Little Books, and all the related movie material I could obtain by haunting a downtown poster exchange. So much of my lunch money went for these endeavors that I ended up being two inches shorter than my brother.

I didn't dare collect the Disney toys; my classmates were already suspicious of me for believing a man would someday travel to the moon. Collecting Disney wasn't socially acceptable, not even for an eleven-year-old boy, and it remained pretty much that way until Carol Burnett wore a Mickey Mouse watch on television. People, especially people with money, collect only what will enhance their reputations, hence their conservative taste allows them to purchase only what has already received the public's approbation. One need only look at photographs of the interiors of New York mansions during the Gilded Age to see walls filled with melodramatic but highly popular art. Not a Van Gogh or Gauguin in sight. The wealthy played it safe; they didn't want ridicule. Don't look for the rich to blaze collecting trails; their role is to follow, not to lead. Look to the little collector, the guy with just a buck or two but who knows what he likes and doesn't care what others think. Actually, so paltry and precarious is his position that nobody cares what he collects, but it is these people who keep the flame burning until the others finally get the word.

I'm speaking here of people who first thought it would be better to restore a Model T than junking it, at a time when doctors and lawyers would no more have added an antique car to their portfolio than they would have an Action Comics #1. I'm speaking here of people who saved their pulp magazines and purchased animation cels from bins at Disneyland only because they liked them. And I'm speaking here of those people who saved Hollywood history from studio dumpsters at a time when few others in the world realized its importance.

A classic period is rarely appreciated until it's over. Then people look back and say: "Wasn't that wonderful!" This usually coincides with the first stirrings of monetary value in material from the period. If something is worth money, people feel it must be good. Dealers open up and investors move in, and fairly soon the rich feel comfortable in announcing they collect it too. So the field is off and running, thanks only to the laughed-at saps who loved the material during the classic period and protected it until it was acceptable.

Well, there I was, one of the laughed at saps, collecting Disney during its classic period, and not having much success. For one thing, it's very difficult to find classic material during a classic period.



You'd think it would be everywhere, but it isn't. Sure, it's cheap when you find it, but that's the problem. It's so cheap nobody will bother with it. I spent twenty years looking for Walt Disney's Comics and Stories #2. It was dated November 1940, and I began looking for it only five years later. It was worth 50¢ and I couldn't find a copy. Today it's worth a thousand dollars and I can find plenty of copies. All I need to do is find the thousand dollars.

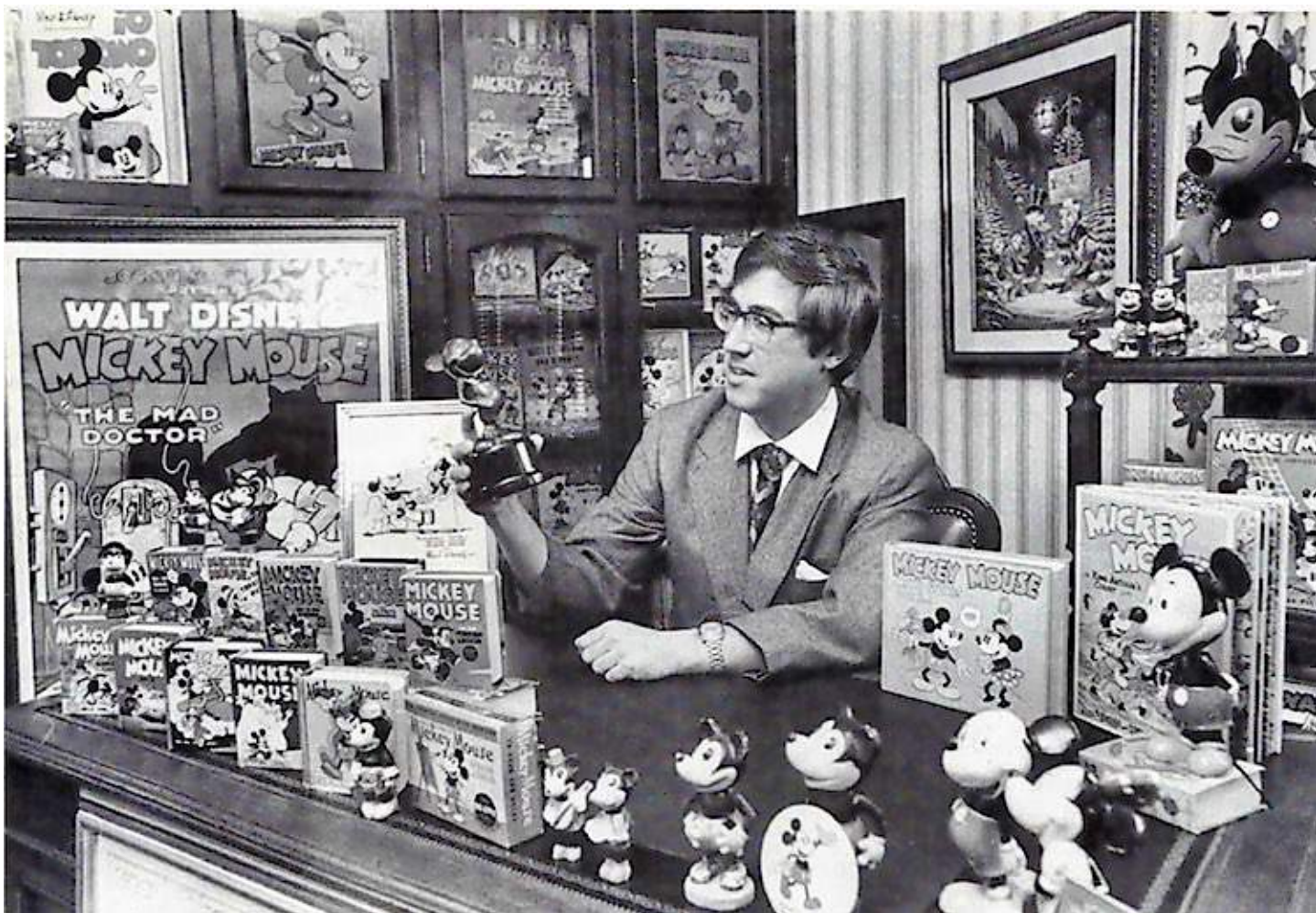
I owned a bookstore at Hollywood and Vine, dealt in movie memorabilia and have done so since 1965. Rare comic books and science fiction magazines carried our store the first few years. We had original movie lobby cards from Wizard of Oz, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, and Citizen Kane at \$7.50 each. Nobody wanted them. It was several years before people began realizing that Hollywood had a classic past (and, as usual, it was over) and a multitude of books began appearing on the subject, universities opened cinema departments, and research institutions began the building of archives. Only then was it possible for serious dealers to enter the field. A store such as ours would not have been possible in 1950, the revenues would not have paid the rent. No animation art dealer could have existed in 1960; the market wasn't there.

I tried to ferret out material long before it was respectable. In 1946 I wrote the Whitman Publishing Company asking if I could purchase old Big Little Books. Back came a printed postcard saying that they didn't have any. In 1948 I wrote Dell Publishing Company asking if I could buy old Disney Comics. Back came another form letter: they didn't have any. Twenty years later it turned out both had tons of stuff. And it's safe today in collectors' hands. But in 1947 it was a different story.

Dolly Lind was in my 8th-grade class. She was cute and popular and all the boys had designs on her, but I coveted only her Mickey Mouse Big Little Book. She had the very first one, published in 1932. I had nothing she wanted except fifty cents, which she willingly accepted. I went to her house and she threw it down to me from an upstairs window. Boys weren't allowed in girls' houses in those days. I told you Portland was innocent. I still have the Big Little Book, having never found a better copy. But I realized I couldn't count on completing my collection by having items thrown at me from upstairs windows. So in October of that year, a friend and I started what may well have been the world's first comic book fanzine.

Jim Bradley and I called it The Comic Collector's News, and while it featured articles, advertisements, and contests relating to comic books, its real purpose was to enhance our own collections by making our wants more widely known. We knew the comics were out there, it was just a matter of finding them.





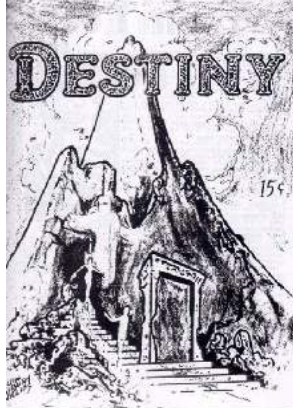
By our third issue, we had established a club, The International Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Comics.

Our editorial stated: "The I.S.P.C.C. asks for your help. Right now all over the United States, there are millions of comic books, both old and new, that are soon to be destroyed. These comics are valuable. We must contact everyone possible so that we can save these comic books from destruction."

Our slogan was: "Your Comics are Valuable. Don't throw them away." Not bad, considering comic books had been in existence for only fourteen years and practically no one at that time recognized their importance. Fifteen more years would pass before comic collecting would be taken seriously, and another thirty before the field would so hit its stride that the great auction houses of the world would include among

their masterpieces the very things we loved so much as kids. Who would have believed that Action Comics #1 would be worth more than any modern first edition by Hemingway, Faulkner, or Fitzgerald, all literary giants of our century? Certainly not our parents or our teachers.

Prices were low in 1947. One collector advertised he would pay 5¢ to \$1.50 each for old Planet Comics. Another offered up to one dollar each for 1942-46 Spirit Comics. I myself offered to sell Superman and Batman number one. No price was listed, but \$5 or \$6 probably could have obtained them both. I offered to pay \$.50 to \$1.50 each for 1935 and up Mickey Mouse magazines, Walt Disney's comics and stories, and big little books even then the field was beginning to stir when a Portland bookstore placed an ad with us which mentioned they had "rare comics and Big Little Books."



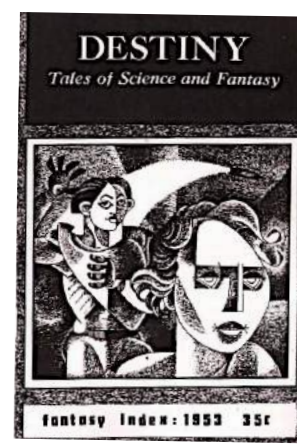
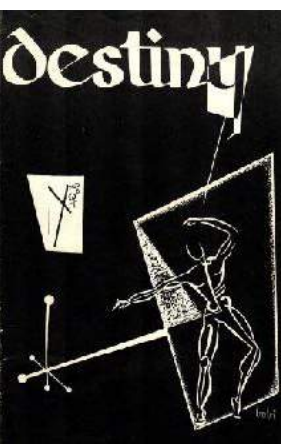
As with the most visionaries, we were somewhat prone to exaggeration. Our fourth issue claimed the I.S.P.C.C. to be "the biggest kid organization" in the entire city. Actually, the Cub Scout den of which I was an unwilling member had more kids in it then the I.S.P.C.C. but I doubt a 1947 Cub Scout manual with its outdated instructions on how to start a fire is worth as much today as a 1947 Firestone giveaway with a story by Carl Barks.

A scholarly article in our four-page June 1948 issue offered a complete history of the newspaper comic strip from the appearance of *The Yellow Kid* in 1895 to the first issue of famous funnies in 1934. Doubtless such authors as Croulton Waugh, Jerry Robinson, Richard Marschall, M. Thomas Inge, Richard Olson, Bill Blackbeard, and Ron Goulart, later mined most of the information they use in their own writings from this trailblazing article. We rightly pointed out that "Many people have tried to have comic books banned" (sic) and that already 36 comic books were not allowed to be sold in Detroit. The article concluded that while current comic books were "Still good, they will probably never be as good as those published in 1934 to 1942." This was years before the term

"Golden age" was applied to this early, illustrating that even in 1948 fans were looking back to this breed. In comic publishing and lamenting its demise.

Our June issue even had a contest, the prize being a dollar bill (a fair sum of money in those days). Contestants were required to identify which comic books three characters appeared in, Strut Warren (*Fight Comics*), Peter the Farm Detective (*Mickey Mouse Magazine*) and Inferior Man (*Military Comics*). We even had a winner, John Baily of Oregon City. Encouraged by this, we had another contest in our August 1948 issue with a two dollar prize, this going to the contestant who could correctly identify the artist of *The Spirit*, *Fantomah*, and *Espionage*. But we soon realized it would be cheaper to fold the magazine then risk having to shell out the prize money. We didn't think to protect our treasury by asking our readers to identify the artists who were drawing Donald Duck and Mickey Mouse. *No one* knew the answers in those days.

The Comic Collector's News did little to enhance anyone's collection, since we all knew each other anyway. We all haunted the local used bookstores, but almost nothing older than 1944 ever surfaced.

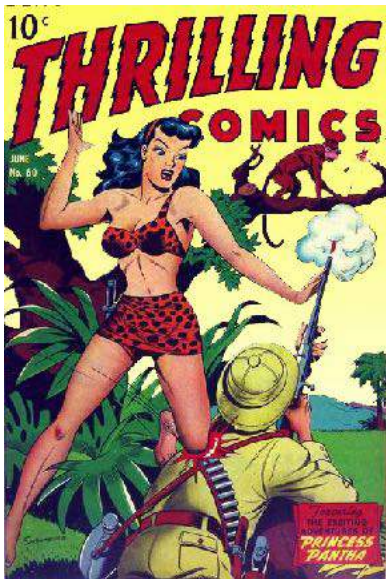




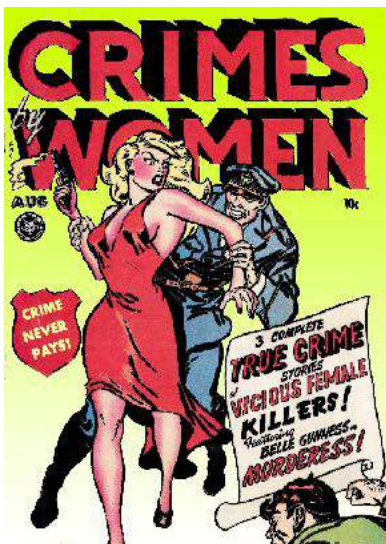
Only when values increased to the point it became news did the old comic books start coming out of the woodwork, and that was many years after our young collecting days.

Jim and I were also avid science fiction fans, and Spring 1950 found us publishing the first issue of our fanzine *Destiny*.

It continued for eleven erratic issues. In it, I continued to advertise for "Early Walt Disney items, comics, newspaper strips, etc. Up to 1942." Besides offering to pay "Good prices," this time I offered to trade old issues of *Astounding* and *Unknown*. I did manage to purchase a good many copies of the Mickey Mouse Magazine from a controversial gentleman residing in San Francisco named and Anton LeVay. But generally speaking, old comic material was so worthless nothing but luck could bring it out. One thing we did with *Destiny* was publish a fine 10-Page article titled "Fantasy and the Animated Cartoon" by Robert R. Patrick. In it, the author referred to me as a "Walt Disney specialist," which doubtless pleased me, plus he quoted me as saying: "Cartooning isn't science-fiction, but in many cases it is fantasy." Actually, I had done this to justify the article's appearance in a science fiction fanzine.



One result of my publishing destiny was that I used it as an excuse to write the Disney Studios in the fall of 1957 to ask for the name and address of the "Good" Donald Duck artist. I was in the army at the time, and I truthfully told the studio I planned to do an article on this artist for my fanzine once I was released from service. It was fortunate I chose to write to the studio rather than Dell publishing, as the latter had a long-standing policy not to turn over the artist's name to any of his friends. Apparently they feared he'd want to raise if you knew how popular he was for the first time that the artists name was Carl Barks. Had it not been I, it was inevitable that someone else would have soon discovered it, as the works of Carl Barks were just too widely known and love for his name to remain much longer in obscurity.



I wrote Carl as soon as I received his address. He later recalled he felt my letter was a "put-on" by a fellow artist. He couldn't believe that someone could be so appreciative and knowledgeable regarding his work. I later was the first to interview him for publication, just as I was the first with Floyd Gottfredson. This may be a source of pride for me, but it doesn't mean that the interviews were good. In this case being first did not mean being best.

I even took a friend of mine along, Steve Edrington, to help me deal with Barks. Steve did not know a single scrap of Shakespeare, but he could quote his favorite Barksisms by the hour, and he knew stories inside out. But try as we could, he and I could not elicit much information from this first interview with Barks.



WALT DISNEY PRODUCTIONS

2400 WEST ALAMEDA AVE. • BURBANK, CALIFORNIA • CABLE ADDRESS: DISNEY

November 6, 1957

Mr. Malcolm Willits
Co-Editor DESTINY
2631 Irving Avenue, South
Minneapolis 8, Minnesota

Dear Mr. Willits:

The artist who does the lead DONALD DUCK cartoons in our comics magazines is not employed by the Studio but by the Whitman Publishing Company, which produces these magazines for us.

We are glad, however, to give you the name and address of this fine artist:

Mr. Carl Barks
1612 East Acacia
Hemet, California

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Frank Reilly".

FRANK REILLY
Comics Department

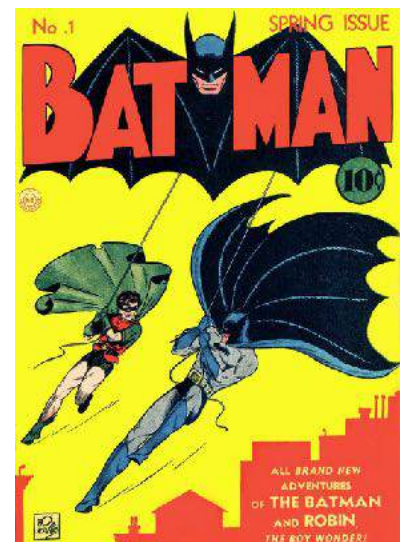
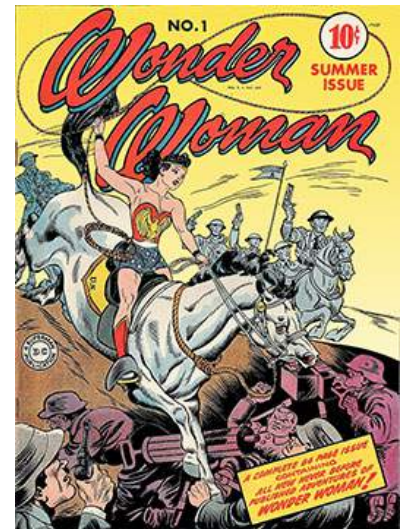
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The problem was, Carl didn't recall much of his earlier work. Like most geniuses, he was embroiled solely in his latest work. It was only after several interviews by other friends, and a growing realization of his many friends, that he took the time to reread his earlier work and become cognizant of it. It was the same with Gottfredson.

In vain did I take my Mickey Mouse big little books to my interview with him in an attempt to jog his memory. He welcomed them as long-lost friends, but not having read the stories in 30 years, there was a little definite he could say. He felt his best work was his latest work. It was only later that, like Carl, he came to realize the importance of his early work and reacquaint himself with. This was due to increasing requests for interviews along with an adulatory reprinting and scholarly appraisal of his earlier efforts. But a word to my readers: If you ever discover an unsung genius, don't be there first to interview the subject; be the *fifth* or *sixth*, if you wish a valid and comprehensive judgment of his work.

Do artists such as Carl Barks and Floyd Gottfredson really need their friends? John W. Campbell, legendary editor of astounding science-fiction once said that if all the fans stop buying his magazine he would never know. He meant the fans that filled the letter columns, attended the conventions, published the fanzines, and badgered the authors. They probably compromise 1% of the readership, and 90% of the headaches. By being so vocal they could manage from orbit the general policies of the magazine that were keeping the rest of the readership contented. Yet where would Barks and Gottfredson be today if it were not for the godsend that two fans, Bruce Hamilton, and Russ Cochran, we're born to collect and publish the works of these two artists? How difficult it would be to place a historical perspective on them without the pioneering works Tom Andrae, Donald Ault, Bill Blackbeard, Geoffrey Blum, Barbara Botner, Mark Evanier, Alan Dean Foster, Bob Foster, Frank & Dana Gabbard, Gottfreid Helnwein, Gary Kurtz, George Lucas, Leonard Maltin, John Nichols, Tor Odemark, Mark Saarinen, Horst Schroeder, David Smith, Kim Weston, myself, Mark Worden, and many others both here and abroad.

Millions of people love *Lost in the Andes* and *Phantom Blot* and then went on to other things. Only a handful said: "Wait a minute; this material is too good to be forgotten who did this artwork, who wrote the stories? Let's study it and reprint it and make it available to future generations." What would we have of Shakespeare today if the gathering of his plays had been left to the general crowd who filled the Globe theater? It took a handful of dedicated fans and friends of the playwright to gather his plays after his death and publish them in so impressive a folio that they have come down to us through the centuries to enrich

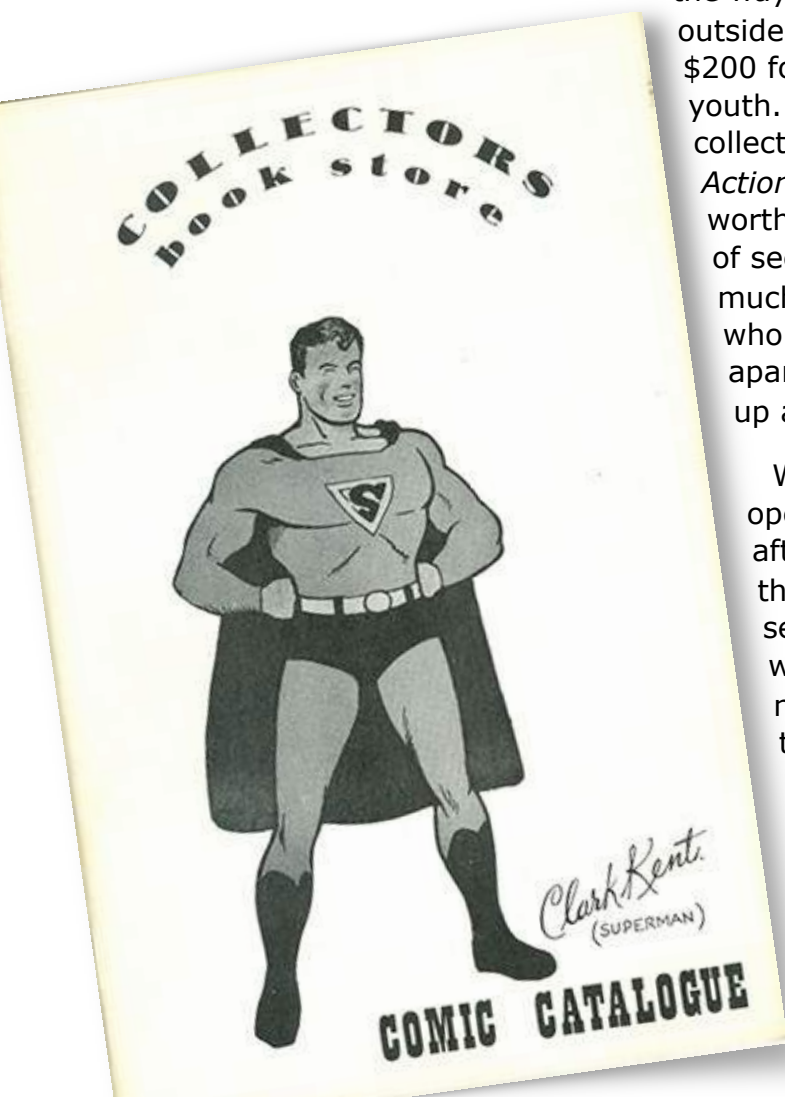


our world today. Even geniuses need fans, those dedicated few who will move mountains to preserve for the future what has only temporary respect today. Whether the fans to work *during* a classic period or *after* a Classic period, it is very who preserve the material for posterity.

I moved to Southern California in 1962, having accepted the position of a high school teacher with you in the Los Angeles school system. I began meeting other collectors, the most important of whom turned out to be Leonard Brown. He not only loved old comic books, but he was also actively dealing in them while attending USC. Within a few months of my arrival, he turned up a copy of *Mickey Mouse Magazine* #1, the only remaining issue I needed to complete my set. Since I didn't have a phone, he sold it to Steve Edrington, which induced me to have one installed.

"Leonard and I were soon running ads together to buy old comic books and movie material the latter being a field I was exploiting since I still knew about that untouched Portland poster exchange. In 1962 he still had original posters of *King Kong*. I spent the summer of 1964 driving across the United States buying of such collectible material, having first spent several thousand dollars advertising in major cities along with the way. I still remember the vacuum cleaner salesman outside Philadelphia laughing at me for having paid him \$200 for the two boxes of old comics he'd saved since youth. I never even got them home. I sold them to a collector in New England for \$3000. They included *Action* #1 and *Marvel Mystery* #9, and it would be worth a quarter million dollars today. I realize my goal of seeing the New York world's fair, and I shipped so much material home that a few months later Leonard, who had tons of his own material came over to my apartment one evening and suggested that we open up a store.

We did! We called it the Collectors Book Store and opened in March 1965. I figured I could work in it after school and grade papers, after all, I noticed that the owners of other used bookstores never seem to do anything except play chess and talk with her friends. But in our store, we quickly noticed that the rent came due every 30 days, and the only way to have it was too *work*. Our store proved so successful that within 10 months I was able to quit my tenured teaching position and join Leonard full-time. We also needed the \$2000 I had in my retirement account as *Batman* had just started on TV and suddenly comic book collecting was really big.





Floyd Gottfredson, Malcolm and Carl Barks sharing Christmas

Our store encompassed three main fields: comic books, science fiction, and movie material. But it was definitely the comic books which carried us the first few years. Leonard put out the first real catalogue in the field in late 1965, a 36-page booklet which incorporated 21 separate collecting departments including "Sunday Pages," "Big Little Books," "3D comics" "EC comics," "Dell Color and Four Color," "Miscellaneous Superhero-Comic Code," etc.

Some prices included: Amazing Fantasy #15-\$4-\$5; Fantastic Four #1-\$7; All-Star #3-\$75; Batman#1 - \$100, Wonder Woman #1 - \$20; Action #40 - \$50; and Mad #1 at \$10. With it, we were on our way.

Some 28 years later, with Leonard retired and my having a new partner, Mark Willoughby, we are almost exclusively in

movie material. Our store is stuffed with movie stills, posters, lobby cards, magazines, scripts, books, and props. It's a lot of fun, but we miss those heady early days when people would drive up with trunk loads of old comic books they just found in their attic. You could buy them for a song, and you could sell them to people who love them for what they were. These are the true collectors who *stabilize* the market because they love the stuff. They'll sell only when they have to, and they hold on as long as they can.

I remember an old car meet I once attended. I overheard one collector remarking to another in anticipation of a change in taste and prices: "Do you think I should get out of Packards and into Cadillacs?" My answer would have been: "Stay in what you like, and to heck with everyone else. You look at your collection only as an investment, it would be

better If you purchase stocks and bonds." Few people feel they're parting with old friends when they sell their shares of IBM or General Electric. It's strictly business! I collected Disney at a time when boys were expected to collect stamps or coins or play something called "baseball" I didn't even think about the future value of my collection; I liked it for what it was. There can really be no other reason for collecting.

It was during our store opening that I made an acquaintance with the Disney studio.

Some of their buyers heard we were heavily into Disney and came in to stock up on items for the opening of their collectible store at Disneyland. I remember delivering an original Barks painting, *VooDoo HooDoo*, the night before they opened to have as a centerpiece. The park was closed that evening, and it was strange to see Main Street filled with cars and trucks. Their full size made the buildings seem diminutive. During this period the Los Angeles Times ran a lengthy article on my Disney collection and quoted me as a major buyer at several Disneyana auctions. When David R. Smith, a Disney collector and librarian in Santa Monica, contacted the studio and asked for it helps in creating a definitive bibliography of Disney books, the studio advised him to check my collection too. Mr. Smith found some of the items they didn't have, and I later traded them to him when, based upon his own enthusiasm and professionalism, the studio made him its first archivist.

In 1967 I gave Cal Arts \$750 in memory of Walt Disney and received a gracious letter of appreciation from Mrs. Disney herself. And in 1973 the studio asked me to appraise for insurance purposes all the awards and decorations Walt received during his long and creative career, plus all the items in his too-Room office on display at Disneyland. You can imagine my joy at being able to handle every Oscar Walt ever received, Plus every scrap of paper, every pencil, every book, and every piece of furniture within his office. I mention all of this, all my past interests in Disney, all my collecting, all my dealing in Disneyana and encounters with the studio as a preamble to what happened later when, one fateful day, I first heard the name of Gottfredson.

One of the first customers of our store was a young man named Milton Gray. He was from Vancouver, Washington, just across the river from Portland, but I hadn't known him then, but here he was in Hollywood, seeking his fortune just as I. As an in-betweenner in the Disney animation department. He rose to be a full animator employed at various times by almost every studio in town. He took his animation seriously, so was naturally appalled at most of the work he was required to do.



Even at this early date, he wanted to open a theater devoted exclusively to showing old cartoons. One time he showed me his projected budget. "I see the ticket seller, the refreshment stand attendant, and the projectionist,"

I said. "But what will be your job?"

"Oh, I'll be watching this show."

"Every night?"

"Every night!"

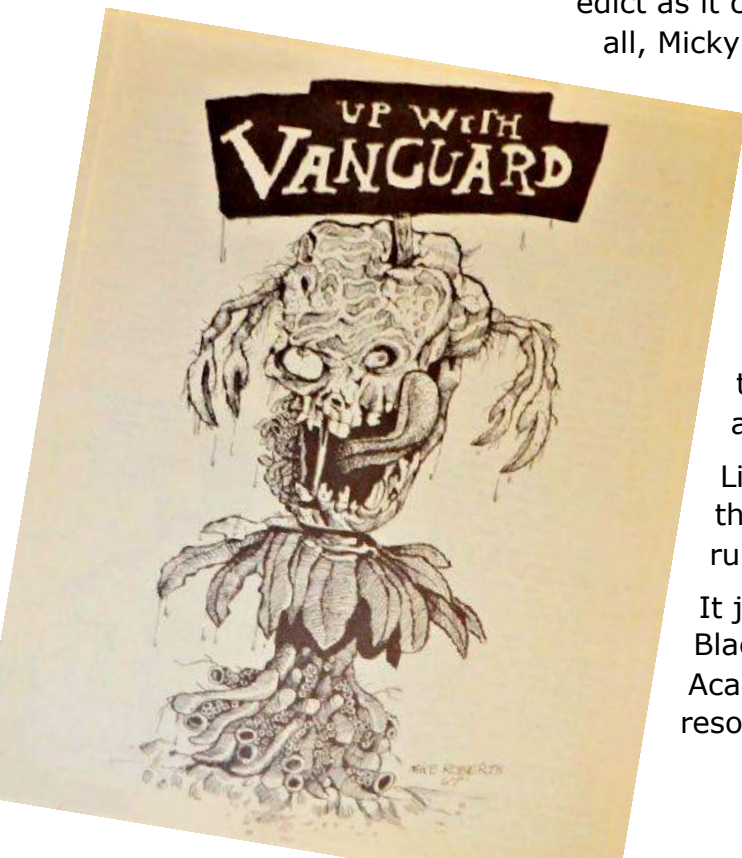
He *was* and *still* is a real fanatic, and his book *Cartoon Animation, Introduction to a Career* and is a valued addition to the growing number of volumes on the subject.

Just being at Disney was Mecca for Milt. He lost no time in exploring the lot, especially the comic strip department, since he had long appreciated the great Mickey and Donald stories in the past, and had an interest in drawing strips himself, introduced him. Milt turned out to be the first fan Floyd had ever met of 30 years before when his present work was so much better? Milt in turn was thunderstruck. Could Floyd be the same person who had done all that glorious work before? Did one man carry Mickey from the days of being a great adventure to the present pathetic figure who spent his days sitting in an armchair or walking the streets with this simpleton like smile? Carl Barks hadn't changed. Over two decades had passed and his artwork and his stories and his demanding, domineering, duck were still as good as ever.

Floyd stayed at Disney, whereas Carl left, welcoming each edict as it came down and changing his mouse accordingly. After all, Micky was the acknowledged symbol of the studio and his representative on TV as well as Disneyland. Floyd could no more have maintained his 1930s Mickey than Henry Ford the Model A. Barks hid himself in various desert locations and had a freer hand. But now the word was out. Floyd Gottfredson was the man responsible for all of Mickey's great adventures of the past. Now both great men were known, the two that had done the most to deepen and in Rich the Disney characters don't parents is in comic books and newspaper strips.

Like others, I was astounded when Milt first told me of the news. "You mean the guy who drew Mickey Mouse runs his own newspaper is *still* doing the strip?"

It just did not seem possible. When I told Bill Blackbeard, who later established the San Francisco Academy of Comic Art, he too was incredulous. But I resolved to meet with Floyd as quickly as I could.





My contact at the studio was George Sherman, an exceptional individual who died tragically from cancer. He was head of the publications department, along with his able assistant, Mary Carey. Though I could no longer use Destiny as an excuse, I asked him if I could interview Floyd Godfrey for publication. He liked the idea and arranged everything. I titled my resulting article Mickey's Mainstay - The Incomparable Floyd Gottfredson. Floyd changed it to Mickey's Chronicler-An interview with Floyd Gottfredson. Like Carl, he was modest to a fault. The article appeared in Vanguard in 1968, edited by Robert Latona.

It didn't set the world on fire, but it proved to be the first of an ever-increasing series of books, articles, and interviews on whom I still term today the incomparable Floyd Gottfredson.

I spent the next 10 years tending to our store. Leonard and I moved it to Hollywood

Boulevard in 1968. I was making money now, and since Republicans were in the White House, I was allowed to keep some. I even bought a home in 1972. But always there lurking in the back of my mind just thought I should somehow get Gottfredson to paint. After all, Carl Barks was painting, creating a legacy of Disney art that would prove a capstone to his own career and that of Donald's too. But *how* could I get Gottfredson to paint? And could he re-create his classic style of the past?

I hit upon the idea of having Floyd create a series of paintings, each one devoted to one of his classic Mickey mouse adventures. From these could be manufactured buttons, medallions, or even commemorative plates. While each painting would it be rectangular inside, the necessity for roundness would require all the action and background information to be contained within a *circle* in the center. And the paintings

would be designed so that the *essence* of each story would be apparent and a single scene. In a few cases, this required a repositioning of facts.

Floyd Gottfredson

Malcolm Willits

Carl Barks

For instance, in *Sails to Treasure Island*, the actual reuniting of Captain and Mrs. Churchmouse and the display of the treasure takes place in the Churchmouse home, whereas the spirit of the adventure which has taken Mickey and Minnie across the sea is better shown at the dock. Mickey's jousting tournament in *Adventures with Robin Hood* is not witnessed by the Maid Minerva [Minnie], but her presence in the painting proves much more indicative of the story as a whole. Mickey did not rub the magic lamp in the antique shop where he found it, but Floyd's placing the scene there makes the painting more interesting than where it *did* occur, in Mickey's living room. Dippy was not present in *The Detective* when the rock came crashing through the window.

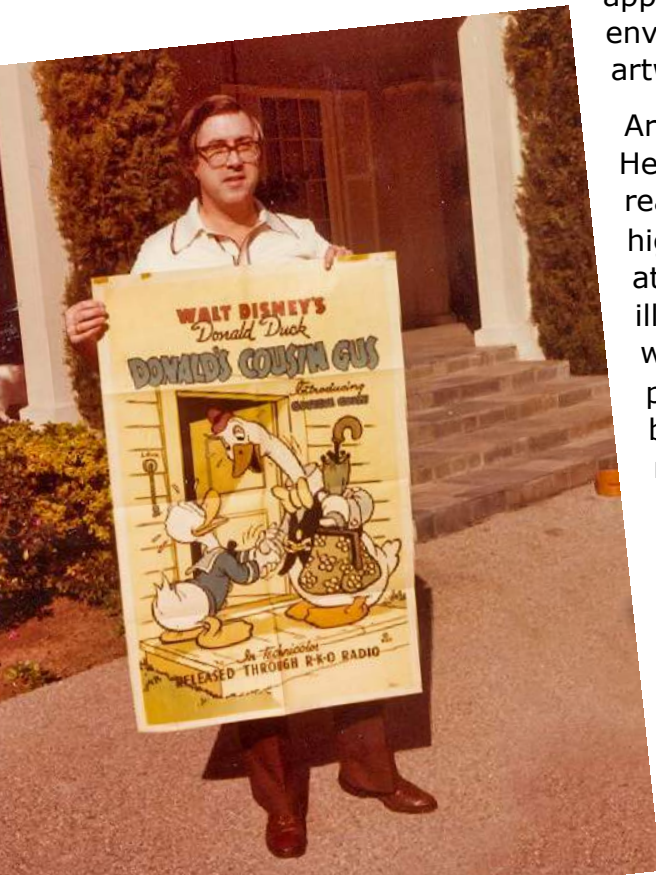
In fact, it's message was that Debbie has been kidnapped. But it is better to show him with Mickey working as a team.

And Mickey and Minnie were not shown saying goodbye to the King and Queen of Medioka on the palace steps, but Floyd's painting is infinitely more charming.

So on a fateful day, I drove out to the Disney studio with my ideas. I met with three executives, one of home I already knew quite well through the opening of kids Disneyana store. Their response was very enthusiastic. Say *liked* my idea of paying tribute to Gottfredson Mickey Mouse adventures through some new manufacturing product. We mutually agreed that final approval and a license would be dependent upon the artwork I envisioned. Naturally, I envisioned Floyd himself to do the artwork, as who could paint better than Gottfredson?

Armed with encouragement from Disney, I approached Floyd. He too was most enthusiastic. In the proceeding years, he reacquainted himself with his earlier work and now held at a higher opinion of it. He agreed to take up painting, although at the time he had never done more than black and white illustration. I offered to provide him an instructor in watercolor or oil, but he declined. I told him I desired 24 paintings from which could be manufactured two sets of 12 buttons each. A brief story synopsis would appear on the reverse of each button, and an accompanying booklet would feature a history of the strip and the contributions Walt and Floyd made to it. With a little more and then at a handshake, Floyd and I set immediately to work.

A title for my project: *Walt Disney Presents the Classic Adventures of Mickey Mouse by Floyd Gottfredson*. For the buttons of themselves I chose: Walt Disney's Golden age commemorative, Series A and B.



I wanted the buttons to reflect all the stages of *Mickey's Adventure Strip Career*. Floyd's simple Mickey of 1930 was a far cry from his highly sophisticated mouse of a decade later. Floyd was the greatest guy in the world to work with. Not an ounce of pretension or ego; just a simple indication to do the best job possible. I often had to remind myself: "My God, I am working with one of the greatest Disney artists of all time. This guy wasn't entertaining millions before I was even born. How can I criticize his work; how dare I even make suggestions?"

Yet we *did* work together. There were things I know and love about his work that only a fan would know. In the final analysis, I always deferred to him. After all, they were *his* paintings, *his* creations.


Yet he would listen to my own ideas And defer whenever possible.

A word here on what Carl Barks and Floyd Gottfredson accomplished in the painting careers they overtook so late in life. The Disney company is not an artists' studio with flocks of students creating individual works of art. The Disney company is a movie company and produces things that *move*. This requires *a team* effort and a final product that succeeds or fails in *movie theaters*, not in art galleries and museums. That is why it has rarely produced any permanent artwork on any of its characters. Great artists have worked at Disney, but their work has been in the sketches, backgrounds, and animated cels. Their contributions could it be viewed as a completed work only in the context of the final film. There was little need at Disney for completed works that could stand on their own as art. How many accomplished, finished painting of Mickey and Donald has it ever done? Some fine art was created for the Disney cartoon posters, but even here it was more often illustrations than finished works of art even the panels drawn by Barks and Gottfredson were meant to flow as part of a larger picture and ended up in the highly perishable form of comic books and strips.

Practically the only serious and *permanent* artwork ever created on the Disney

characters was done by Carl Barks and Floyd Gottfredson. And they did it in painting form. All other Disney artwork, no matter how unique and wonderful was done only a *sequence* in a larger effort. I'm speaking here of definitive artwork, something created solely to be appreciated on its own. When you think of cartoon characters like Bugs Bunny or Woody woodpecker or Tom and Jerry, you invariably think of their appearance on screen. No one recalls their appearances in comic books. No one has created fine art on these characters. Only Floyd and Carl gave so much importance to the Disney characters that when one thinks of Mickey Mouse and Donald duck one thing almost as much of what *they* did has what the studio did. And their paintings are their high points.

Floyd couldn't paint with the frequency of Carl, and I was lucky to obtain four paintings a year from him. His health was failing, and I put no pressure on him. It wasn't a question of money toward the end of our project; he was no longer capable of creating a scene from scratch. So for the last two paintings, I had him copy illustrations he had done many years before. By this time Bruce Hamilton and Russ Cochran were preparing a limited edition book, *Mickey Mouse in Color*, to be signed by both Floyd and Carl. I felt Bruce and Russ didn't realize Floyd's deteriorating condition, so I suggested they immediately have Floyd sign his blank pages. Cynical Floyd was never able to sign all thereby limiting the addition to the number he could. It was sad to see Floyd's long life driving to a close.

There will never be another Floyd Gottfredson, the times are not the same. I wish he could have lived to see his paintings sold. He truly labored over them, probably more than I ever knew. I wish he could have lived to see the wonderful plans the Disney Fine Arts Program had for using them. Sufficient to say it will be the finest and most sincere tribute the Disney company can possibly pay to Floyd and his wonderful Mickey Mouse adventures. I know he would be very pleased, and therefore so am I. 



© Walt Disney

Mickey's Chronicler

An interview with
Floyd Gottfredson

by Malcolm Willits
in 1967

The Disney Studio animation section lies as a shady oasis under the hot Burbank sun. The trees, well-kept lawns, and luxuriant flowerbeds give it more the appearance of an exclusive resort than one would expect of a fantasy factory famous for its employ of artists and craftsmen. Small quiet streets almost devoid of people border upon air-conditioned bungalows and buildings, all of a style strongly reminiscent of the 1930s. In the distance on a newer section of the lot thrust the bulky shapes of several sound stages, triumphantly proclaiming the ascendancy of their live-action films. A spirited drone of activity emerges from their carnivorous mouths and the cluster of workshops which surround them. On an outdoor set depicting an early American town, workmen are setting up giant reflectors in preparation for filming a scene. Here though, the animation buildings lie somnolent, metal awnings, like half-closed eyes, shutting out the world. It is three o'clock on a quiet September after noon in 1967.

I had come to visit both a man and an era. The man was Floyd Gottfredson, the Disney artist who had done so much to help Mickey Mouse become the world's most beloved character.

The era was those halcyon years during which it happened.

Mickey's personality, best known and loved through his cavorting on the movie screens of every continent, was for this reason somewhat limited. Subject to brief cartoons composed of visual gags, and often surrounded with competing characters, Mickey rarely emerged as a dominant personality who caused, rather than reacted to situations. He was a one-dimensional character, and we relaxed with him but seldom fought with him. But in another medium, Mickey soared to a height entirely removed from the motion picture realm, a medium which bestowed upon him a true richness of personality. The medium was that of the newspaper comic strip, and it was here that Mickey really lived. The man chosen for the task of drawing it was the man I was about to see.

Floyd's office, which could more appropriately be called a cubbyhole, lies on the second floor of a stucco building which in the early days was part of the Disney studio at Hyperion Avenue in East Hollywood. Walt took it with him when the studio moved to Burbank in the late 1980s. A drawing board, side table, and a couple of chairs complete



*Malcolm celebrates the purchase of Carl's Menace Out of the Myths - 1982
Attending: Bruce Hamilton, Malcolm, Russ Cochran, Carl Barks and Floyd Gottfredson*

the Spartan furnishings; several model sheets for Mickey are tacked upon the wall. Clearly this is an office designed for work and not for impressing visitors. The man who with a friendly smile rose to shake my hand had just moments before been deeply engrossed over a half-completed comic panel. Harried though he may have been, he handled my intrusion as a welcome respite.

He did regard me, however, as somewhat of a curiosity. Apparently, as with so many artists, the fact that others regard his work with importance is news to him. As the questions and answers progressed, it became distressingly plain that he did not equate his work with the discovery of fire or the wheel.

Still, he was impressed that someone should show such interest in his work, and he gradually warmed to the subject.

The best place to begin is at the beginning, so I asked Mr. Gottfredson whose idea it was to begin a Mickey Mouse newspaper strip. He leaned back in his chair, folded his hands behind his head, and began.

"Well, I wasn't at the studio quite at that time, it was in January of 1930 that a representative of King Features Syndicate wrote to Walt with the idea of nationally syndicating a daily Mickey Mouse strip. This was a direct result of the first few Mickey cartoons which were just beginning to capture the public's imagination.

Walt himself did the writing for the first daily strips, the Sundays not coming along for another two years or so. Ub Iwerks, an equal partner with Walt at the time, did the penciling, and Win Smith, a professional cartoonist in his mid-40s, did the inking. This continuing for the first eighteen strips. These consisted of straight gags, all adaptations of the Mickey movie cartoons. After the eighteenth strip, Walt continued to do the writing, but Smith took over both of the other positions.

Within two months, King Features wanted continuity, in other words, a regular story and plot. Walt undertook this task for about two months, always trying to inveigle Smith into writing the story. By this time I had joined the studio, mainly in the hope of being a comic strip artist. Walt talked me out of it for the time being and placed me in animation. I had grown to like it, so when Smith finally quit and returned to his newspaper work and Walt asked me to do the strip, I was quite reluctant. Walt finally asked that I only take it for two weeks while he found someone else, but he eventually forgot about it. So I took the strip over in April, 1930 and never regretted it."

**How old were you at the time? I asked.
What sort of experience did you have?**

"Well," he said, "I was 24 years old at the time and had been married for five years. I was born in Kaysville, Utah, in the railroad station there, since my granddad was the station agent. When I was still young I became interested in cartooning and took several very fine correspondence courses. I began entering contests and won second prize in a national cartoon contest sponsored by the American Free Association and judged by the top cartoonists in the field. My parents were not particularly impressed or bothered by my decision to become a cartoonist, but on the strength of this contest I came to Los Angeles armed with samples, hoping to get a job with one of the local newspapers. The job wasn't forthcoming, and as I had been a projectionist in Utah, I found the same type

of work here. One day while on film row I saw some Disney posters in a window. I asked the person about them and he mentioned that Walt was going to New York to hire animators, so I hurried out to Hyperion in Hollywood where the old studio was then located. I wasn't the best businessman in the world, however. I was earning \$65 a week as a projectionist, which was very good wages for the time. At Disney's I began at \$18 a week. However, I did freelance cartooning on the side for an automotive trade journals publishing firm in Terre Haute, Indiana. Within eight months my salary was greater than I had ever earned as a projectionist."

What was it like to work at the early Disney studio?

"Just great, like a big family. The Disney brothers were fine to their employees; it was exciting and strange work. Sometimes people ask me what I believe was Walt's most lasting contribution or highest achievement, and I can only reply, 'Just being Walt Disney'. He brought fairy tales to life; he was always making a dream of his own come true. And I think the fact that his dreams were also the dreams of almost everyone else is one of the things that made his many projects so successful."

Over the years, Mickey's appearance changed drastically. Do you feel you had any hand in this physical evolution?

"Actually not much. I mostly tried to keep up with the studio, to parallel the Mickey I was drawing for the newspaper strip with the Mickey of the films. In January, 1938 for simplicity's sake, I dropped the thin white line above Mickey's eyes. But generally the improved designs for Mickey would filter down to me in the form of new model sheets. As I recall, when work began on *Fantasia*, it was decided that Mickey should acquire pupils in his eyes for the *Sorcerer's Apprentice* sequence, so I followed suit in the work I was doing. And, of course, periodically Mickey would lose, and then regain his tail. Mickey's famous short red pants were changed in the

strip a few years after the 1940 cartoon, "Little Whirlwind", which was the first to show him in long pants. I believe these changes help keep him alive; I don't regret them."

There have been a great many changes in the drawing style of your strip over the years, people express astonishment the same person is still drawing it today.

"Artistically, in my opinion, the mouse has never been drawn better. Now his figure is streamlined, shows sophistication, the drawing flows more. In the 1980s, the period you seem to admire so much, Mickey's figure, construction-wise, was crude, anatomically bad, bumpy, stodgy. There was no flow of composition; the design wasn't there."

But Mickey seemed to have character then. Maybe not 'sophistication', he was meant to be a mouse, not a man. There was a charm to your work then, a real quality which frankly I just don't see today.

"Well, nostalgia may play a big part in your feelings. A lot of people feel that the things they had in their youth are the best things. Then too, what you may be complimenting is the fact that the strip in those days had continuity, a regular plotted story. But for me, I shudder to look at the work I did during that period."

I loved the color reprints in Mickey Mouse Magazine of the late 1930s and Walt Disney's Comics 81 Stories of the early 1940s. I've met others who feel in the mid-1940s the strip lost a great deal of its value because Mickey became too modernized. This can't all be attributed to nostalgia. If a thing is good, it lasts. And your work of this early period is remembered.

"Well, this is all very flattering, but I just don't like to look back on any of my work done more than six months ago. In fact, I wouldn't ever want to see it reprinted. I think it's aged too much.

Of course, I will admit that the smaller reproduction of comic strips in today's newspapers and the reduction in panels does pose certain problems. In the old days comic strips would be five to eight columns across, while today a paper will devote only four columns. A lot is lost in such reduction - the quality of the inking and pen lines, for instance. The introduction of advertising into the Sunday comic pages, which I believe was an innovation of the Hearst papers, led to this. Publishers realized that the comic pages were highly popular, so why not cut them down to make space for advertising."

You may be right that the fact of the earlier Mickey strips having continuity explains partially why we feel they were so good. Why did you give up the continued stories?

"This wasn't my decision. Continuity was discontinued due to the emergence of television, with its story telling ability. King Features felt that we should therefore return to the old 'gag-a-day' formula. This was in the very early 1950s, as I recall. I would prefer to return to some continuity - if it is handled in a humorous manner so if a reader misses a day or two, it doesn't matter. And if it didn't become quite as involved as in the older stories."

Did you actually write the stories as well as doing all the illustrating?

"I never quite did all the strip myself; Al Taliaferro did the inking and lettering from 1931 to 1937, at which time he began the Sunday and daily Donald Duck strip, which he still pencils today. He is most certainly an artist of the first rank. However, since 1951 I've been doing my OWN inking again because it just cannot be denied that something is lost when someone else does your inking.

But I would do almost all the plotting and idea-finding. Various writers would polish what I had done and prepare a type-written script.

Sometimes I'd make a few changes, as in the dialogue. We've had a number of writers over the years.

Our first was Ted Osborne, who with Merrill DeMaris alternated on stories between 1934 and 1939. Occasionally Walt would pull one of the writers off for a picture. From then until 1942 DeMaris was the sole writer on the Mickey daily and Sunday comics, and when he left the studio Dick Shaw, who is a fine artist in his own right took over. In 1944 Bill Walsh began. Since this man is a skilled professional, I no longer even had to plot. Bill is now one of our top men here at the studio; he wrote and produced *Mary Poppins* for example. But he continued writing for us up to 1964, just because he liked to do it. Roy Williams is now doing the writing."

How did you select your stories; what type did you prefer to do?

"We were usually stimulated by the usual fads of the time — what was going on. For instance, during World War II there was a lot of speculation about what the postwar world would be like, so we did "Mickey Mouse in the World of Tomorrow" in 1944. In 1933 we did "Mickey Mouse in Blaggard Castle." In some ways we were probably influenced by the studio's Mickey cartoon of the same year, "The Mad Doctor," but I recall having three mad professors in our story, all with deep black eyes and modeled after a Boris Karloff movie I had just seen. There were a number of good science fiction movies in the 1930s, one in particular being *Things to Come* in 1936, so the same year we did "Mickey Mouse on Sky Island," which incidentally, had as part of the story the use of atomic power. In the early 1930s when aviation was all the rage, it seemed natural to do "Mickey Mouse the Mail Pilot." After seeing such movies as *Scarface* and *Little Caesar*, it was fun in 1935 to do "Mickey Mouse Runs His Own Newspaper," in which Mickey is beset by Chicago type gangsters who run a protection racket and spray machine gun bullets from speeding limousines."

One of your greatest stories was your wonderful 1939 'Mickey Mouse Outwits the Phantom Blot' which was reprinted in full color in 1941 in a special comic book which is today a highly prized collectors' item. Do you recall how you came to create this character?

"I remembered from my younger days, around 1919, a very fine daily and Sunday comic strip called 'Jerry On the Job' by Walter C. Hoban. It was drawn in sort of an animated cartoon style. Once he used two Negro twins who were drawn completely black, calling them "The Blots." When it came time for us to dream up another story, I felt it would be fascinating to have a sinister figure, dark as night, as an adversary for Mickey.

I remember also, in 1937, doing a takeoff on *The Prisoner of Zenda* movie then in release with our story, "Mickey Mouse as His Royal Highness." As you know, it concerns the king of a mythical Balkan-type country called Medioka who is driving his country to financial ruin due to his high living. Mickey happens to be his exact double in appearance. At least one Balkan country actually refused to print this story of ours, probably because it hit too close to home."

Several times you used Donald Duck very advantageously in your stories, most notably in 'Mickey Mouse and the Seven Ghosts,' my favorite story. Why didn't you use him more often?

"Well, the main reason was that Donald's popularity increased so phenomenally that he very quickly achieved his own individual strip. Plus the fact that the two strips would sometimes sell to rival newspapers, so if a paper had signed up for Donald, it would have been unfair for him to appear in the Mickey strip being carried by the rival. It was fun having Donald around, since Mickey is not a strong comic character who can carry a gag like the Duck."

According to Dave Smith, the Studio archivist, Peg Leg Pete, who later

became known as Black Pete, appeared in 29 cartoons, the last one being a 1954 Chip & Dale cartoon called *The Lone Chipmunks*. How did Mickey's greatest adversary lose his peg leg?

"Walt Disney invented the character of Peg Leg Pete to play the villain against Mickey Mouse, the new hero of his first sound cartoon, *Steamboat Willie*. In the first few cartoons, Pete walked straight on his peg leg, and Walt came to feel this was wrong. So he told his animators to 'put some weight' on the leg SO Pete would be awkward and walk with a limp. But eventually the animators got over-enthusiastic and caused Pete to walk with such a pronounced limp that Walt feared it was becoming painful for cartoon audiences to watch. So one day he told his animators he'd led them astray and that it would be better to drop the peg leg entirely. Naturally the Comic Strip department followed suit, and since his name no longer fit the character, a new name, Black Pete, was created."

Did the studio ever place any restrictions on you or your strip?

"No. We were just supposed to follow the general studio rule that any violence was to be done in a comedy vein - sort of 'tongue-in-cheek'. Newspaper strips don't seem to have the censorship problems associated with the children's comic books, possibly because the strips are aimed more for the adult level."

You are probably familiar with the work of Carl Barks, who draws Donald for the comic books and created Uncle Scrooge.

"Oh, yes, he worked here at the studio in the late 1930's and was a fine gag man and animator. He does a beautiful job of adapting the Duck for comic books, although the studio draws him a bit differently now than does Carl."

Do you ever receive any fan Mail?

"I remember once in 1931, we offered through the strip an autographed picture of Mickey free for the asking. It wasn't long before we began receiving eight to ten sacks

of mail a day. Perhaps my first personal realization of having a few fans was when I met Mort Walker, creator of Beetle Bailey. Upon learning of my job here he immediately recalled how much he admired our "Mickey Mouse and the Bat Bandit" story which he had read more than twenty years before. A few others have mentioned that story to me as well. However, I really don't have any favorite story among all those we've done. I enjoyed them all during their creation, but then forgot them."

Did you ever draw any of the Sunday pages or do any book illustrations for the Disney studio?

"I never did any of the books, but I did draw the Sunday page until 1938 when Manuel Gonzales took it over. A Sunday then would take approximately twelve hours to finish, although it takes a bit less time today. A daily strip now takes about five hours to complete. In the 1942-1945 period Bill Wright drew the Sunday as Manuel Gonzales was in the service. 'Gonzy' took over again in 1945 and continues today."

Perhaps you can help clear up one matter. At the World Retrospective of Animation Cinema held at EXPO 67 a few months back, Ub Iwerks was given credit in the program as being 'best known as the creator of Mickey Mouse'. This might come as a surprise to many people. What is the truth?

"Walt did create Mickey, definitely. Walt had lost his creation, Oswald the Rabbit, to Universal Studios so he began searching for a new character. He thought of the idea of a mouse, and made all the preliminary sketches. These were somewhat stilted by nature, and it was Ub Iwerks, Walt's top animator, who designed him and gave him the appearance the world was soon to know. Of course many of the other Disney characters were created by various people here at the studio, and Walt was always one to give generous credit for the creativeness of his fellow artists. His films, for instance, list ample credit for animators, storymen,



Floyd and Carl - One Man, One Chair

background artists, etc. But it has always been felt that it would only confuse the public if the comic books or strips said 'Mickey Mouse by Floyd Gottfredson' or 'Carl Barks presents Donald Duck'. And I agree."

Do you have any plans to retire?

"No plans as yet. While I have no real hobbies, I'm interested in everything. I have three children and five grandchildren. My oldest son is an art director, artist, and part owner of Fred Calvert Productions in Los Angeles. They produce industrial films, commercials and animation entertainment films, among which are some subcontracted Bullwinkle cartoons."

As the shadows of late afternoon were now moving across his desk, I felt it would be best to terminate the interview, as all shrines, even one as plebeian as this small room, must have definite visitors' hours.

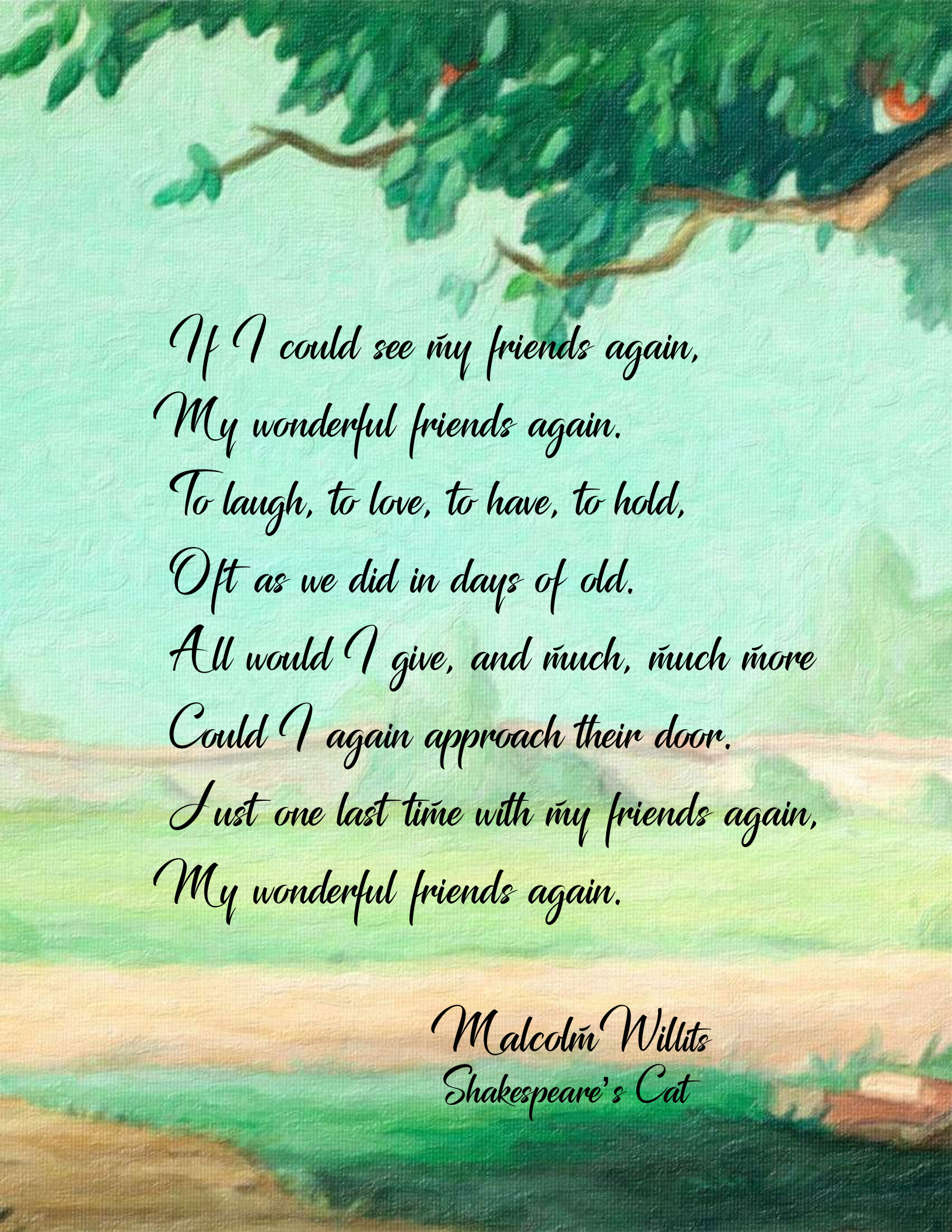
How do you regard the future of Mickey Mouse? He no longer appears in films. He has no adventures; he doesn't even seem to have a job. His days are now

spent in an aimless series of visits to Minnie's house, or Goofy's, or in concealing a wan smile over some activity of his nephew. Does he have a future?

"Mickey will always be alive because he is a symbol, the very trademark of the studio, and because of the late Walt Disney's affection for him. One of the main functions of the comic strip is to keep him alive."

I thanked him for his time and he accompanied me the few steps to the door. I hoped my visit had shown him the importance I attached to his work and my admiration for the quality he had so long maintained. Like Carl Barks, he probably maintained his standards because he knew no other way. As joined the closing-time exodus from the studio I felt a renewed confidence that Floyd Gottfredson had well earned a position of highest honor among the giants of the field. 🐭

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If I could see my friends again,
My wonderful friends again.
To laugh, to love, to have, to hold,
Oft as we did in days of old.
All would I give, and much, much more
Could I again approach their door.
Just one last time with my friends again,
My wonderful friends again.

Malcolm Willits
Shakespeare's Cat