

THE NON-FICTION COMICS FESTIVAL

HEY KIDS, COMICS!

Vermont Comic Book Cultures

A Listening Party



November 17, 2023

Archives Arcade Bar, Burlington, Vermont

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 Fletcher
Free
Library

Intro

1. James K.

Well, I had hundreds of comic books

Well, I had hundreds of comic books, but they weren't well taken care of. For instance, my cat peed on my entire comic book collection [Laughs], which we still, I still have in my parents attic. And I'm going to have to move it there soon because my mom just moved out. But, then luckily, you know, several decades later, they don't smell like pee anymore. They're [Laughs] the cat pee smell is completely gone. If anybody wants to buy a prized, well-read cat pee comic book collection. [Laughs] I'm the man to talk to.

2. Andrew R.

You can't throw away a comic book.

No, you can't throw away a comic book. [Laughs] That's— somehow it just felt, I'm going to say sacrilegious, I guess. Like, yeah, it's—I think I knew from an early age, because also they were there, you know, born into them. So they're not— they're a thing that you keep in a box. They're not the thing you throw away. Like, that just feels like, oh, such a waste. I mean even now, like I've got, I've got this little box of all these, like, coverless comics, which, you know, they're not they, they

could, they could I could just put them in a recycling bin and then that's that. But I can't. I just can't do that. [Laughs]

3. Jim M.

One of the many wonderful things that you can do with Silly Putty...

One of the many wonderful things that you could do with Silly Putty was squish it down on a panel of the comic book and peel it up--and wow! It was there on the Silly Putty. What are you going to do with that? Nothing. You know, you couldn't do anything with it. You know, because the next thing you're doing is rolling it into a ball and hitting it with a hammer or something, you know. Whatever they suggested to do, but...I did that. [Laughs]

4. Ethan D.

They're just magical in that way for me.

I could go up and pull out a long box of right now and pull one out and probably tell you a memory related to it. Just whether it's just getting it or whatever. They're just magical in that way for me.

Early Memories

5. Rick V.

Uncle Scrooge and Little Lulu.

Uncle Scrooge and Little Lulu. I was probably four years old and my older brothers would read me their Uncle Scrooge comics and Little Lulu. I was fascinated by them. And there was this particular story of Little Lulu where she sort of imagines her life as the daughter of this witch, and she would sleep on this hard bed with a log for a pillow. And as a four year old, this drove me crazy, thinking about poor little Lulu with a log for a pillow. So that was the beginning of it. And we also got the Boston Globe on Sundays. So there would always be this big comic section that we would all read, and it was always around. But comics are some of my first reading experiences, and I instantly fell in love with them.

6. Stephen B.

Classics Illustrated and Dell Comics were okay, right?

Before I turned five we lived on Jackson Street in Essex Junction, Vermont. I had a younger sister, Kathie—I still have a younger sister, Kathie. Mom was walking Kathie in the baby carriage, I was walking and we went up Jackson Street into downtown Essex Junction, and just across the railroad tracks

and facing the railroad tracks was a line of stores. It's still a retail storefront there. And there was a store called Townes—and I think it was T-O-W-N-E apostrophe S. And Townes was like a little, you know, I imagine it was a tobacco store, but they sold magazines, comic books, a few odds and ends. Mom brought us in there. I remember her carrying Kathie, I walked in and the spinner rack had the Classics Illustrated World Around Us dinosaurs comic. So this would have been 1959. I was four and I really wanted it. It had this amazing cover painting with a triceratops and tyrannosaur facing off. And Mom bought it for me because it was a Classics Illustrated. Classics Illustrated and Dell Comics were okay, right? There was no question about those. And I remember DC Comics being okay. I remember a lot of Dell in DC when I was a kid. So that was the first comic I asked for and it was bought for me and we went home, and I not just fell in love with the comic, but I, I wore it out copying the artwork. I was already drawing at that time, and the pages were falling out—I hadn't torn them out. They were just, you know, it was a square-bound comic, so they were just falling apart. And mom did something she had never done before and never did again: she went and got me another copy, so that I had a copy of the comic. And so now I had a copy I could take pages out of, and that's when I

started a dinosaur comic book scrapbook—meaning, Andy, I cut up a lot of my favorite comics [Laughs] after that, and I would just like, cut out, you know, the cool dinosaur panels.

7. Ethan D.

Lawn sales are where I was first exposed to comics.

Lawn sales are where I was first exposed to comics. And it was a very random sort of thing, and it was, like, Archie digests, Disney digests, random Richie Rich and stuff like that. Casper. And that was really my, my first time—Charlie Brown books. And I would take those and I would go sit in a comfy spot up in one of the hay mows while Ma and Dad were doing their chores, and I would just read them and reread them and reread them and it was great. It was awesome. And I could, like, kind of tell what time it was based on how I had to move with the sun to have light. And yeah, those are those are some of my favorite memories. I loved that. We'd always have barn cats around. They'd come and hang out, sit by me while I read. It was super cool.

8. John R.

My earliest memories actually link to my uncle Ray.

My earliest memories actually link to my uncle Ray. His name was Uncle Ray. He was my mother's step sister's husband,

and I think I only met him a few times in my childhood. And I do remember him, I think probably giving me my very first comics, which were Treasury Sized Editions of The Incredible Hulk, maybe a Spider-Man one too, but I specifically remember the Hulk ones. You know, especially being that they were these Treasury Sized Edition comics, which are bigger than normal comics, you know, I could just like lay on the floor and, like, flop the pages over and just like—I mean, the comics themselves were, were probably like three times the size of my head. So I felt like I was being almost swallowed into the artwork itself. And there were a lot of full page spreads, I feel like too, of the Hulk in like the Grand Canyon. Images that kind of stand out to me. And it just felt, it felt like I was just being transported to another world. And it was exciting because I was—yeah. I think it was—I was a very introverted child and finding, like, another place to go off to was pretty cool and much needed. There were no other kids in my age group growing up that I was aware of that had split up or divorced parents. I was like the only one. Being that my father wasn't present, I think the reason I latched on to comics so much so when I did at that young age is because this Uncle Ray person in my life—who wasn't present very often—he was, he made such an impact on me that there was finally, like, a male role

model figure giving me something. And I just treasured that, that gift. Like that—it was like immediately, like he got me. And it was just like, "Well, then I'm all in." He knows what I like, and that's what I'm looking for as a young, impressionable boy, is to be steered in a certain direction.

9. Travis G.

I was staying at my friend's house for the week.

So my father, unfortunately, was sick a lot as a kid, and I would get shipped to different houses to be taken care of while he was in the hospital. And there's one summer I was in the seventh grade, so it had to have been '87, '86. And I just had this kind of, this notion that comics were for kids. You know, again, I was 11, 12—was kind of a 12 year old boy, Franklin County, and like, you know, "Comics, that's, you know, kid stuff." And it was a *Captain America*. I don't know how we got it or what we were doing, but somehow I got to Captain America and I was staying at my friend's house for the week. And I remember opening it up, and it was Captain America with the shield. And he's bashing this person and there's blood splatter. And like, I was just so taken aback. It was, you know, it was just completely different than what I thought. I just thought it was like the greatest thing, especially being a Captain America

comic, you know, because it just showed me that it wasn't—you know, it's not like a three year old, you know. Because that's—again, like even today, people have that, you know, comics are for little kids kind of thing. And I did when I was 11. And I was just blown away. And that, really that summer sparked it. We started cutting lawns for quarter and doing this—and while I was with, stayed with my friend that summer, you know, we would both go down to the store. He would buy one thing, I would make sure I'd get something completely different. So then we'd switch in the evenings and basically during the day we would run chores to get money to get to the drugstore. And then in the evening just read comics and, you know, as much as we could get. And we would stay up all night and just, you know, read the comics passing back and forth. Eat our popsicles, went on to pretend we were Wolverine with butter knives and run around and chase each other. And, you know, and then the morning show was play outside, you know, basketball and pool, and then in the afternoon, do the chores, get your books. And then the evening was, you know, settle into that and stay up until like two in the morning and read them. That was a summer. That was—as bad as the stuff that was going on, I mean, I look at it, you know, as just such a fond memory of that whole summer. And, you know,

discovering—and doing it with a friend too, you know what I mean, so you had a buddy that was all in just with you. You weren't doing it alone, and you were reading at night. So yeah, I was pretty really special.

Collecting

10. James K.

You know, it's not like at the comic book store today...

Because—because I was buying them on the spinner rack, you'd never know. You know, it's not like at the comic book store today, like, if you follow a comic, you can subscribe through the store and you get, like, a discount, and you always know when it comes in because they save it for you and they give it to you. Back then, no one was saving it for you, and no one would—in the store they probably barely even noticed whether, you know, like—they're just jammed in the spinner rack. And you might find an issue from three months ago or it might be the new issue you hardly could tell. And I would never, I would never read two comics of the same storyline in a row. Like, it never made any sense. You'd only get a tiny piece of the story. It's like when it starts, something has already happened and it ends on a cliffhanger and you never find out

what happens. And then you buy—the next time you buy one, it might be three issues later, and they're on to some completely different adventure, maybe vaguely related to the one that you read before, but maybe not at all. So I actually—when I did my superhero comic that has a swear in the title, but when I say it out loud I pronounce it without the swear: "Super F-er's." I tried to, I tried to recreate that feeling. So I actually numbered—I started it on, like, 200 and something. And then I skipped a couple issues, and then I skipped a couple issues. So I never did two issues in a row in my own comic. Yeah. So it's just recreating that that experience of of—I mean, I was trying to recreate that experience of just buying the comics off the spinner rack and not knowing what was going on. Which I actually think—that I feel like it's better that way because the stories don't make a lot of great sense anyway. [Laughs]

11. John R.

They had two spinner racks at Video One...

So going to school in Manchester, I was going to Burr Burton, which also took on kids from surrounding towns like Dorset, East Dorset, Danby, Londonderry, things like that. So my inner circle of, like, my very small class I was growing up with in Manchester suddenly grew. And there was this one kid, Matt, who I had met freshman year in like an algebra class, and we

just hit it off. We were fast friends, but never about, with comics. It was just like we got along, you know, sense of humor-wise, music interests, things like that. There was a video store in town which was then called Video One, but it used to be New England Video, which I think had quite a few shops around Vermont in the early days of video. And they had two spinner racks at Video One, but they insisted on keeping those spinner racks in the children's section of the video store. I'm already getting bullied and beat up and picked on for reading comics. And this is now—I'm like in high school—still existing as like my, my secret, you know, passion. But now if I want to buy comics at the video store, I have to go into the children's section where, you know, they've got the TV playing like Strawberry Shortcake and Pippi Longstocking and all these, like, kids' movies, with like toddlers sitting in the little plastic chairs watching them while their parents are selecting their movies. And I'm like—but I couldn't pass up two spinner racks. I had to still go and see what they had. So, I would sort of position myself close enough to the rack, that like with my back to them so it looked like I was looking at, like, the drama section, which was sort of over here. And I'd sort of, like, look over my shoulder and spin the rack and then like, "Oh, there's a new issue this." And I'd pull them out, and stuff like that and

then make my way up to the counter and hope that nobody saw me buying the comics. But one day I'm in there heading to the racks, and I who do I see is this kid Matt, that I had become friends with freshman year of high school, doing the same thing that I do. And I was like, "Oh, my God, Wait. This is amazing." So, it was like the next day at school. I just sort of like, quietly was like, "Hey, psst, I saw you buying comics—". And he like, had this look of shame on his face, and I was like, "No, no, it's fine," like, "I buy them too." Like we came out to each other in some regard, of like, "I read comics. You read comics. Like, we're already friends like this, well, this relationship's going to be great!" And then he became like, my, my comics buddy in high school.

12. Cole O.

When I first went to Moondance...

I live in Brattleboro now, and possibly-maybe some of the reason why, when my wife and I our baby moved back to Vermont after her grad school, and we didn't really know where we wanted to live, and a house came open and here in Brattleboro, and I was like, "You know, I just have a good feeling about this town because every time I was here is as a kid, it was a happy day because it was a day I was going to the comic book store." And my first memories of Brattleboro, and

the Common Ground restaurant in downtown, and heading out onto Putney Road before it was as developed as it is now, and going down that really steep hill, you know, just behind town—those were things that I remembered from being a kid. When I first went to Moondance, it was in the Harmony parking lot in the middle of downtown in this tiny little narrow store right on the edge of an underpass. But it was just the coolest little space. And the idea that it was devoted entirely to my interest blew my mind. And then the next time we came down, or maybe the time after that, the store had moved across the street onto Elliott Street in a more traditional, bigger storefront. And I remember—Vermont's a very small place, and you said you were talking to Steve Bissette. The first time I went into that storefront, I think, I came out of there with my first signed comic, because the day before I visited the store he had been in for his very first appearance as a comic book creator, signing issues of *Saga of the Swamp Thing* number 16, which was his first issue. Back when, I think Marty Pasko was still writing the comic, before Alan Moore came on board. But it had Steve Bissette's name written in red ink on it. It's like, "Wow. There's a Vermonter who does comics, and I got a comic with his—." That was impressive to me.

13. Rick V.

I wanted to read every issue of Fantastic Four...

I wanted to read them, you know, get into the story. I wanted to read every issue of *Fantastic Four* because I wanted to know what happened to Reed and Ben and Johnny and Sue. But the other thing, of course, was the artists themselves. Certain artists just really did it for me. Jack Kirby being one of them, Joe Kubert being one of them. Carmine Infantino being one of them. I think I didn't get a jump on the *Fantastic Four* thing until the Doctor Doom/Submariner issue, which I think was 6? The Marvel comics, they were interesting. Visually interesting. The monster books were almost a little too intense with what Jack was doing on the covers, so I couldn't bring those home just because, you know, Gongor or Groot and all that kind of stuff. But I—when I would go into the newsstand, you know, I'd sit there and just pore over this stuff till the guy kicked me out. But I really dug what Infantino was doing with this sort of modern, clean, almost abstract style like that, really. And so the early Marvel stuff, you know, I was interested in it, but, you know, it was something about Infantino I dug. The one Marvel book that I did buy regularly was *Amazing Adult Fantasy*. For the Ditko. And like the graphics of Ditko just had me, you know. And the stories are actually, you know, of a higher quality than *Tales to*

Astonish—I don't know if he wrote them or what, but, you know, they had the O. Henry ending and they were always like really weird. And so I was there for the transition to Spider-Man. I got that one. That was like one of the first ones. I think that all happened right around the same time. Transition to Spider-Man, *Fantastic Four*. And then I was hooked. And of course, once Stan brought in that whole Merry Marvel thing, the participation mystique, I bought into all of that and loved it.

14. Stephen B.

Comic trading was tough.

Yeah, comic trading was tough. I mean, kids are—kids play hardball at all times, kids are little, you know, misers and merchants without even knowing it. And I remember trading bubblegum cards, you know, and that was always a pretty equitable swap. You'd swap one-for-one. And whether it was baseball cards or something weird, like Mars Attacks cards or Outer Limits cards—and those were real aberrations, you know. You'd trade one-for-one, that was just fair trade. But comic books was another story. I remember really wanting—I didn't own *Kona Monarch of Monster Isle* number 2, which is still one of my all time favorite comics. One of my friends had a copy. And any time we'd discuss trade, the quantity of comics I would have to give him went up. And so I never ended up with their

copy of *Kona* number 2. It undoubtedly got trashed or sold off in some garage sale. But trading, you know—you know, if it was just trading comics to read, it was one-for-one. But once it was known anyone in the group was really coveting a comic, suddenly—and that was my first exposure to price gouging. [Laughs] I can't think of anything else in a child's economy or social circles that involve that kind of, you know, entrepreneurial mean spiritedness that would go with multiple comics having to be traded. And then there were comics everyone wanted to trade off, and that would be like *Lone Ranger*. Like nobody wanted to keep *Lone Ranger* comics. I remember when *Fatman the Human Saucer* came out, and like for some reason it would always get slipped into a pack of comics you had traded for. *Super Green Beret* was another one that was like, "Get rid of this comic." And, but then there were comics that were even beneath trading contempt. You know, like I don't ever remember romance comics—romance comics are everywhere. I remember reading them and finding them and they were at people's houses, but nobody ever tried to swap romance comics, you know, that wasn't done. And same with educational comics—I don't remember ever trading for *Classics Illustrated*. You know, those were all considered

like sort of la-de-da, you know? When you were trading comics, it was the cool shit, you know, or the sort-of-cool shit.

15. Ethan D.

I miss those comics.

I've sold a lot of comics over the years. I've donated a lot of comics over the years. I miss those comics. There's something about it, and I guarantee at least half of those comics are comics I probably would not touch again. But—but there's memories attached to them. You know? There's an issue of *Cable* that is him and his dad, Cyclops fighting—I think the villain's name is Trevor, which is like, “Come on, Marvel.” [Laughs] But—and I don't have that comic anymore. But I remember that comic, on the way home my girlfriend and I stopped at a store to do some shopping, and in the middle of that store I had one of the best kisses of my life. And it's connected to that comic.



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