$5.95

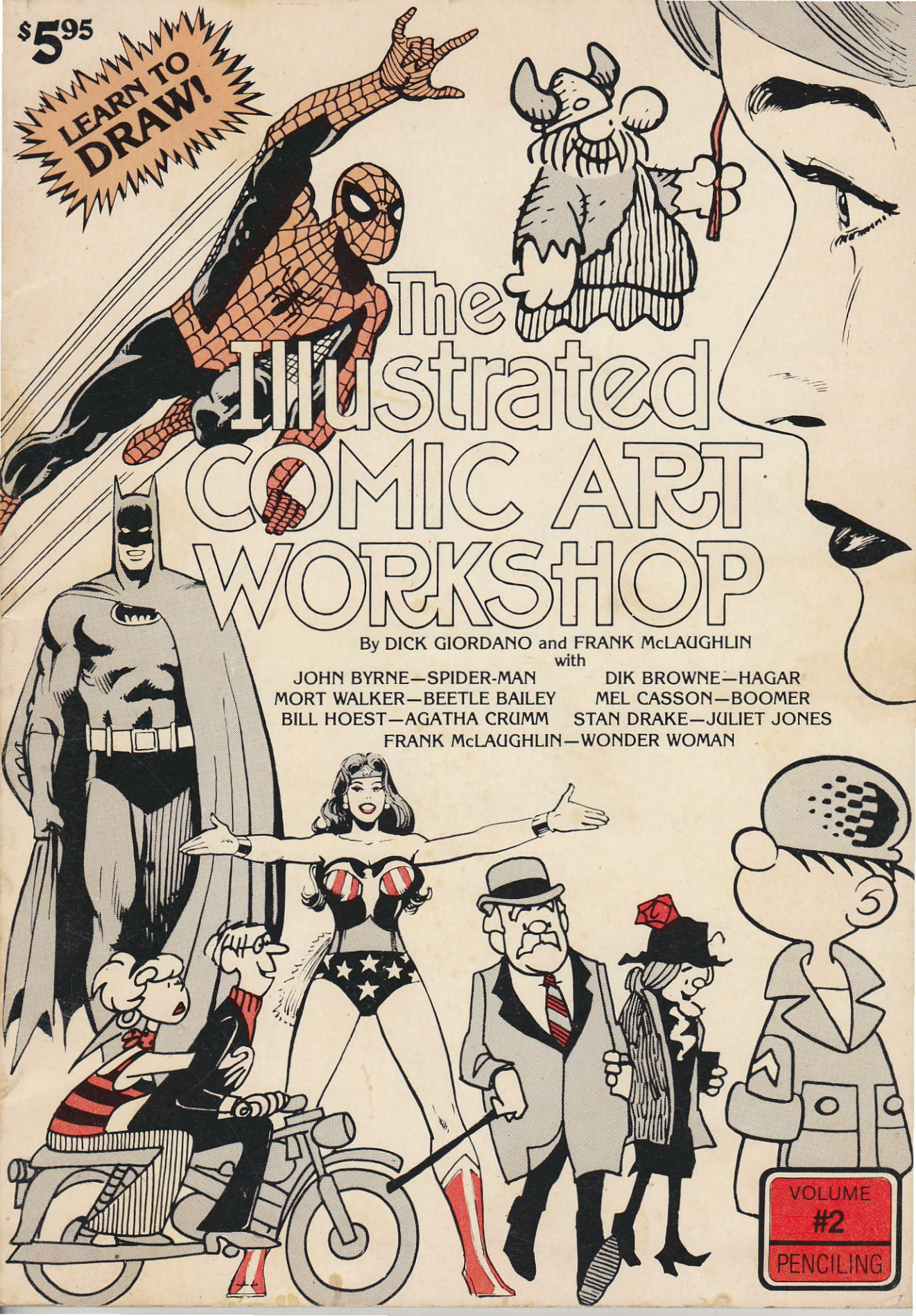**LEARN TO DRAW!**

The Illustrated COMIC ART WORKSHOP

By DICK GIORDANO and FRANK McLAUGHLIN
with

JOHN BYRNE—SPIDER-MAN DIK BROWNE—HAGAR
MORT WALKER—BEETLE BAILEY MEL CASSON—BOOMER
BILL HOEST—AGATHA CRUMM STAN DRAKE—JULIET JONES
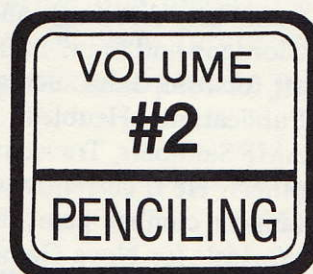FRANK McLAUGHLIN—WONDER WOMAN

VOLUME #2 PENCILING

The Illustrated COMIC ART WORKSHOP

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BY

DICK GIORDANO

AND

FRANK McLAUGHLIN

SKY MARG PUBLICATIONS

Special thanks to:

Art Director — **ARNE F. STARR**

Editorial Assistant — **MONICA VAN ETTEN**

Type — **STET-SHIELDS**

Photographer — **MARY KNIGHT**

Mort Walker and
Mel Casson's
portraits — **STAN DRAKE**

Arne F. Starr

Illustrator, graphic artist, cartoonist. Aside from art directing and inking for Dick Giordano and Frank McLaughlin, he has done art for companies such as Xerox Educational Publications, Heublein, Bic, Sheaffer-Eaton, AMF Sailboats, Travelers Insurance and many others. He is currently working on a series of fantasy combat game books entitled "Lost Worlds" for Nova Game Designs.

Dedicated to the professionals who I have been fortunate to know. Their creativity has inspired me to publish this with men whose talents have the respect of their peers.

We wish to extend special thanks to the King Features Syndicate, especially comics editor Bill Yates, for their help and co-operation in the production of this book.

Thanks also to Art Director Arne Starr who did such a fine job of preparing this material for publication.

Hopefully many of you future comics artists will, through the help of these books, join their ranks.

Gary Brodsky

Gary Brodsky
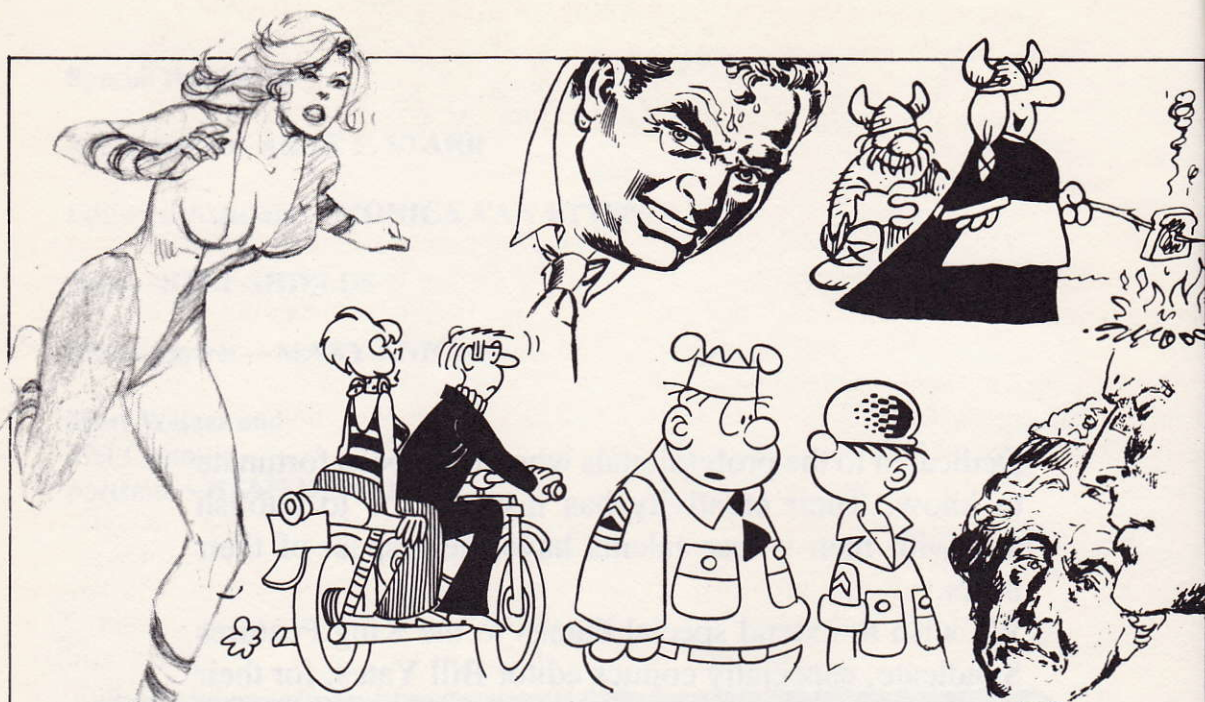
A special kind of creative process takes place when the artist sits down to draw comics. It involves much more than drawing skills and the ability to copy nature. What we've tried to do is explore the mind of the artist as he goes about the business of solving the problems that arise as he draws. We've tried to cover all aspects of comic art from the slapstick bigfoot of Mort Walker and Dik Browne to the gutsy realism of Stan Drake and John Byrne. We feel this is much more than your average How-to-Draw book, so grab a pencil and follow along as the world's greatest collection of comic artists *really* show you how to do it.

Dick & Frank
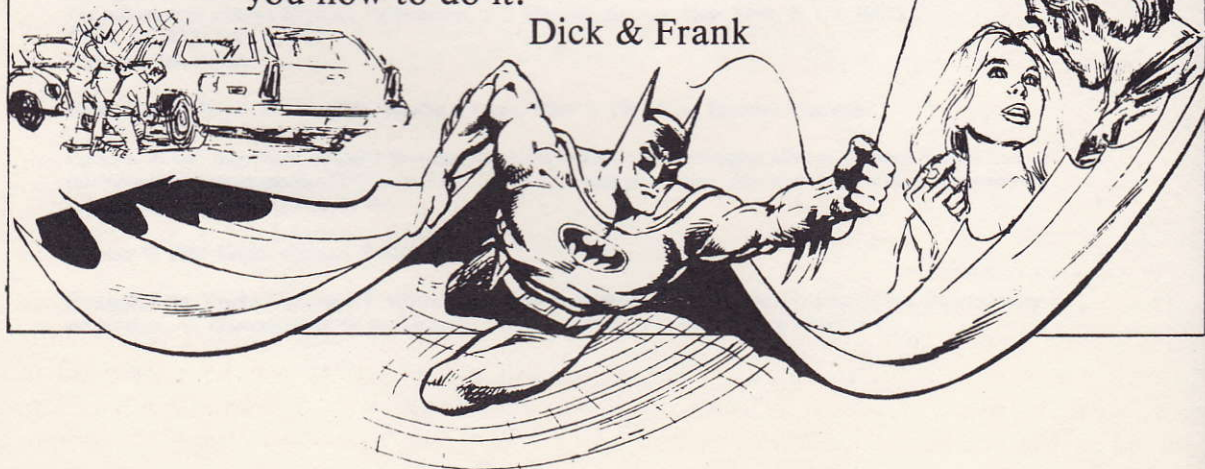
STAN DRAKE

When Frank McLaughlin and Dick Giordano asked me to write on the subject of pencilling I immediately thought of an inside golf joke.

A certain lady at a fashionable country club brought a non-golfing friend to the pro and arranged with him for teaching lessons which her friend desired. The pro described a typical session and her friend seemed distraught. "OH, my–" she sighed, "this sounds so difficult!" "Oh, no," her lady host protested, "I learned how to play last tuesday!"

That is to suggest no one can expect to master pencilling having read a ten-page lesson. "Pencilling" is much more than that, of course. A child of two can pencil, but we call that scribbling. Within this context it is a term the profession uses for the act of breakdown and layout of story. It can't be learned "last Tuesday" but I am pleased to have been asked to set down some random thoughts on the subject. This excellent course was designed to present methods used by experienced artists in the field of "cartooning" and should save the student many hours of trial and error. I hope I may be able to add a few thoughts which will aid you in this objective.

Since I ink my own work it is impossible for me to pencil without keeping in mind the finished look of the inking that will follow.

The effect of inking is quite different than the pencil it covers, so in this first stage I am not thinking so much of the pencil work — but of the finished product as I see it in my mind's eye.

One must "see" the end result as he faces the blank space at hand.

Let's take an example.

The scene: an interior. In the corner of the room is a window. A furtive figure is coming through this window from an outside fire escape. We know who he is — how he looks and how he is dressed. It is a modern, city apt. owned by a rich person, so the decor is lush.

For every scene there can be ten completely different ways to lay it out, but we must do only one. Precisely why we must "see" it all as though we were watching a scene from a movie.

Try to imagine that movie...play this scene over in your mind. Watch as the window opens ...where is your camera? Low? High? Left or right? Settle on what you are comfortably seeing and watch this drama as it unfolds.

Here is your moment—stop! You have a freeze-frame of exactly what you want. You see his expression—He has pushed aside a heavy drape. In the foreground is a bowl of flowers on a modern coffee table...it's all there in front of you...you see your drawing inked in.

To begin almost any purposeful drawing we must first have a concept.

The movie scene concept is simple and really takes little time. It settles you down because you're not groping — you know what you have to do and how it must look.

This is my version of layout...the way I see the story in order to set it down for the reader to enjoy.

You are the director, the cameraman and the actor.

As you proceed you see each drawing as though through the director's camera viewing screen. You change camera angles — choose close-ups or long shots — mood scenes and action. The better the imagination the less you and the reader will be disappointed.

If you are working from a writer's script read a single page and pick your "moment." Not every panel should be a block-buster panel!

On every page there will be one scene more dramatic than the others. Plan your efforts around this panel. If you have over-kill in every frame you will wind up with a page that may look jumbled—too "busy"—perhaps confusing. If you start your movie with a shout

and continue shouting, how do you top it when you need it?

Save your "shout" on each page for your "moment."

As you continue to visualize your work you will appreciate how the eye responds to variety. Not all scenes should be heavy and dark with much black and strong accents. Save those for the appropriate time. Sunshine scenes are light. Go from the outside light to inside darkness. Try to capture the moods of each panel as required...it's part of your director's job.

Alfred Hitchcock planned all his movies on story-boards. This great director literally himself, drew all the scenes on large sheets of illustration board, working out his camera shots directly from those layouts.

The shower scene from "Psycho", one of the most memorable, lasted only 45 seconds on the screen but took 70 separate camera set-ups to accomplish. He "saw" it all first, knew exactly what he was doing, and then simply shot it.

Hitchock's movies were always ahead of schedule and cost less to produce than any other director's efforts because he had visualized first.

Everything the writer has written will be visually interpreted by you the "director."

I feel it is the heart of the work. Call it draftsmanship—the art of drawing—or call it pencilling. Without a good director neither a movie nor a comic strip will "work."

The blank page is before you. White paper stares back, but it is you who must make the commitment. This may be the toughest hour.

A doctor friend of mine is a psychiatrist. He told me of a patient—a very successful golf professional who had slowly been developing an inability to start the clubhead back away from the ball during the first moves of his golf swing. He had won several big tournaments, but now—with the huge crowds lining the fairway, his playing partners waiting expectantly close by, he would approach his ball... select his club...take his stance and line up the shot. He was a famous golfer. He looked powerful and deadly efficient...but he couldn't take the club back. He would break his

stance and start all over again. Eventually h produced the shot but his backswing becam shorter and shorter. He quit the tour an sought professional help of another kind.

The Doctor's analysis was this:

So long as the golfer was striding down th fairway, acknowledging his cheering fans, h was okay. As he addressed his ball he was, b appearance, a champion. So long as he wasn' confronted by the necessity to actually strik the ball—he was fine. But taking the clul back began a commitment. He was committec to hit that ball on to the green. Suppose he missed? Suppose he hit the ball into the lake ...or the woods? Had he chosen the right club? If he missed he would let everybody down—he wouldn't be the champion they expected him to be.

The Doctor's advice:

You are very good but not perfect. No one is. You are so much better, however, than all those people watching you—even if you hit an imperfect shot it would look good to them.

In every game you are going to hit a few bad shots. Accept this and understand that 99% of all the other shots will be fine. Just hit the ball as you always have and if all of them are not perfect the gallery won't understand anyway.

Two weeks later he rejoined the tour and won that first tournament.

This is a true story.

When we try and be too good it can be a detriment, causing tightness and frustration— and may result in a lesser effect than if we just "let it go!"

Not every panel or figure will be 100%— but don't be afraid of that commitment.

Deadline means just that...the dead bottom line for delivery of finished work. I've lived with weekly deadlines for thirty years... Never loved it but I've learned to live with it. As that ominous day races closer and closer we look at the work remaining. "Impossible," is the usual decision.

How to work faster or more efficiently to meet my old friend?

I have timed to work out almost exactly how many minutes it will take me to layout a single panel...How many minutes for one figure...

for background effects etc., etc. Since math was never an award-winner for me I grab my pocket calculator and add: 12 minutes to rough in a daily strip layout. Five figures tightly pencilled: 60 min. one background, light pencil = 25 min. no background in panel 2—lamp, window and chair in panel 3;...18 min. Total: one hour, 55 minutes. Then it must be inked. Takes about the same time for that, so I'm looking at four hours work on one daily strip.

No getting around it, folks...three eight hour days and the dailies are done. But there's a Sunday page, too. Another long day. The fifth day is usually spent doing work I was called away from on the other days. Weekends? None. I'm working on 46 page albums for a French publisher, as well.

The daily newspaper comic strip has been reduced to less than 6 inches in length...hardly wide screen theater. Elements must be simple and much is symbolic rather than greatly detailed as detail will muddy up and won't look that great.

In order to save time I choose one of the three panels per day and concentrate on it, leaving the other two for a lighter touch. A close-up for instance will have no background work and if at all possible I do very little background for the remaining panel.

All-out daily
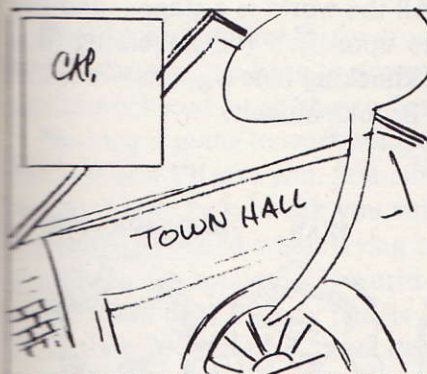
No frills daily

This is my solution for a "no frills" daily strip based on the original done many years ago. Basically, we simply pull everything up closer and in so doing eliminate smaller detail which is not always necessary.

Solid black on one figure for instance, replaced detailed working of clothing with a finish that doesn't lessen visual impact.

Shortcuts such as this are very important to me because I could get into a pit I'd never escape from. In these times of reproduction-kill you better realize that overwork on fussy detail is no way to an NCS award.

Behind the time saving lies simple, direct layout and directorial thinking. It makes for less work and a considerable saving of anguish.

The Importance of Emotion

The saga of "Juliet Jones" has led me through some 150 story adventures since 1953. (12 or 13 weeks per episode.)

Over 63,000 figures pencilled and inked plus all the backgrounds, has given me a pretty good opinion of what makes it all work. These are my own thoughts and I realize there are lots of other opinions out there but I can't speak for anyone but myself.

I feel that in the final analysis emotional interaction between people, no matter what the style of artwork, is the most important ingredient.

Imagine a broadway play for which you have plunked down $70.00 for two tickets. The actors come out on the stage and speak their lines...not looking intently or listening intently. There may be shouting but no subtle pauses...no bits of "business"...no clue as to how they really feel.

There is no place for cardboard people in any feature, if it is to be of any real value. The reader may not know exactly why he likes a certain feature—but I'll lay you 10 to 1 it's because he can identify with the characters.

Talking buildings may look impressive but only as a relief panel.

People is what made that well know magazine what it is today. My greatest efforts go into trying to create the proper expressions and body positions for exactly what the characters are saying. I've directed the scene and now I'm the actor. I'm **over**acting a bit, perhaps, but that's to convey the emotion more clearly for the small stage on which it will appear.

When I look at the people I have drawn I like to feel I almost know what's going on without reading the balloons.

The person speaking should have the appropriate expression reflecting his words...and the party being spoken to should have a reaction expression. I just can't do it any other way, for I would feel I had failed in my attempt to entertain the reader. When a young couple in love walk past a beautiful lagoon on a moon-lit night they may remark on its beauty —stand enthralled by the splendor of all that surrounds them but it's each other they want —not the lagoon—no matter how lovely it is. The stage setting is a plus, of course. Shakespeare said "All the world is a stage—and we are the actors upon it." (or something like that) I'm not knocking blue lagoons—but I'd rather watch Brooke Shields!

Expressions

IRRITATION INCREDIBILITY RAGE DISDAIN FEAR DETERMINATION

These half dozen expressions cover only a small number of possibilities. My point is to show how important it is to reveal the inner emotions on the surface of the face.

Each of these heads can relate to all the other heads—and in so doing—dozens of different meanings would apply. (Try it!)

Alex Raymond once explained to me how he felt about black areas. "Quiet areas", he called them. "Pools of Quiet" next to the busy linear work make the finished art more pleasing to look at, more balanced.

I like that thinking and although I'm no Alex Raymond, I have kept his thoughts with me all these years.

The late Roy Crane (Wash Tubbs) is another of my all-time idols. He had everything—story sense—dramatic and original layout—superb character types—and worked his scenes magnificently with that old craftint paper.

No one worked shadow-blacks better than Milt Caniff. He started it all. That stuff knocked my shoes off when it first came into being.

Three completely different styles but all shunning the overworked panel—all telling the story simply but dramatically.

As a director, you must **set all the stages** and place the people on them in their proper places —in the proper moods required. As a cameraman you will select a variety of angles with a few surprises thrown in. As the actor you will catch the expressiveness of life—and in so doing raise the drawings above mere ink on paper.

There are inhibiting forces around us all the time, however, we have to accept this as part of the work and learn how to handle them.

Nothing is going to work smoothly...that's the first hint I'll give you. Sometimes the story material may be so weak you will be psychologically depressed when trying to hold it together. In the comic book world we face volume. There are so many panels to do and so little time in which to meet deadline it will force you to realize there is not enough time to experiment and polish each drawing to its height of excellence. Because of this, I am constantly amazed at the high level of quality I see in comic books—knowing how long it takes to finish a 10, 12 or 20 page story with the time allotted in which to do it.

I guess what I'm saying is that it's not a small order to pull all this together—but when it works it is surely a reward.

My feature stars two gals—one in her 20's, the other in her 30's. Long before "Juliet Jones" was created, however, I worked in the advertising world of New York. Life was hectic there as well—and I faced stiff competition, as everyone else did.

At the outset, one art director implanted a deathless gem in my head. "You want to be successful in this business?" He wisely stated (he never asked a question—he told it) "Then learn to draw pretty girls and handsome men." Taking him at his command, I bought all the women's fashion magazines in print and every night I placed sheets of tracing paper over the gorgeous creatures posing therein. I traced and traced and traced until I discovered what it was that made them beautiful. Eventually it got so I could draw a pretty face without tracing it. A rough estimate would be 2,500 faces over a six month period. That's about 15 heads a night, 7 days a week. It only took an hour or two after dinner—and really paid off.

My art director friend (?) was impressed. I began making money by drawing pretty girls for magazine and newspaper advertisements.

One day I read an article about a famous illustrator and how he worked. He hired a beautiful model and took pictures of her! He then placed her picture in an opaque projector and traced her down on his illustration! No 15 heads a night for this guy! I was shocked. So that's how they did it!! Well...I was young. Naturally, everything we did would look so much better if we simply took photographs and traced them down.

A ten page comic book with 7 panels a page would add up to 70 panels. If all the figures were photographed...perhaps 15 figures to a page...we would have a $123.00 poloroid film bill plus whatever it cost to get that beautiful girl to pose. I've always enjoyed posing pretty girls (yeah, I've done it too, guys!) But that six month period—way back in 1947 has saved me a pile of money and made possible my whole career.

Despite all my emphasis on the need for drawing skills—it is nevertheless, the **story** we are reading. A good novel has no pictures. Books are, after all, just words and our mind is carried aloft or dumped, depending on the story and how well it is written. It is difficult to destroy a really good story with mediocre art

—but our intentions are to impress you with the need to make that story even better with your art.

Never let your pictures get in the way of the story. Story must move ahead—and you are the amplifier—producing excitement and realism, using emphasis and restraint.

Let me try to convey the range of emotion you have at your disposal, by depicting reaction expressions on one model—reacting with the same words "He **what**?" To different situations.
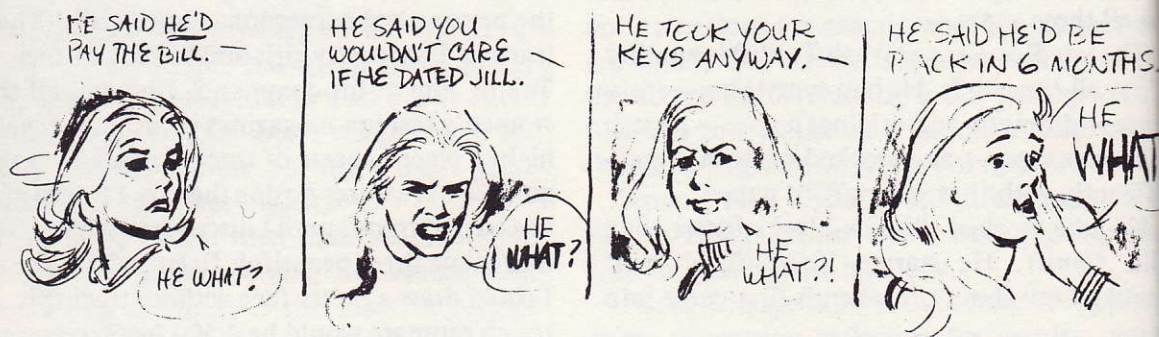
I feel it is important to depict the whole gamut of emotions with all your actors. The reaction, "he what" could be depicted with many more facial expressions than the above...but you get the point.

The possibilities of expression are almost endless. The problem is to fit the right expression to the words being spoken at the time. Obviously a reaction overdone is as bad as one underdone. But at all times you, the artist must be the actor placing yourself in the shoes of the people talking or those being talked to. It is not enough to draw people with pen, brush and ink standing under balloons that are saying things the actors are not acting out. It's much the same as actors trying out for a part. The one who conveys the writer's words with the most believability will win the role. The others will lose out. That's a tough summation —but it's true. Let's take Jill...her friend has just told her that her fiancee is going to leave her. According to Jill's personality—and we must assume the writer has clued you in as to what her personality is...she will react based on her personality. Remember this! If she is a shy, quiet girl, her reaction will be almost a whisper—with almost no expression. If she is a live number—she might shriek her disbelief. As you can see—the more you know about the people you draw—the easier it will be to fit their behavior to the situation on hand.

Another situation: Scene—a park bench. Early autumn. Carl and Deborah seated. He is

going to have to kill her (He's mad, of course). He hates doing this. She doesn't know he is diabolical. She trusts him. He cares for her a great deal—but for reasons not important here—he has one thing in mind...end her life. Debby catches on to his intention. She is petrified—she tries to reason with him—to no avail. He kisses her as she recoils—he pulls the trigger on his silencer. End of scene.

Do you realize how many ways that little epoch could be illustrated? Many!

Let's go back to earlier words in this discussion. You are the director—you have 7 panels for this event to unravel before the story moves on.

1. Read the entire scene and choose your moment. It may not be when the gun actually goes off. 2. Lay out that panel using the movie scene technique we talked about earlier. Knowing her personality you can "see" her expression, and his. 3. Choose your camera angle carefully—get a freeze-frame and quickly pencil it in. This is your big panel—all the others lead up to it and trail off after it. 4. Consider employing other uninvolved figures in your drama. Perhaps a young couple, arm in arm—happily saunter by the park bench—on which Debby is slumped. This

couple is unaware of her death—she has a quiet smile—her eyes open—but in the foreground we play up the young couple, alive and in love. Think of how it should be done so it looks like nothing you have seen before.

We face the fact that almost everything has been done previously. There are, actually only eleven basic story plots and all the thousands of books we see displayed in a large book store are based on those eleven plots. Very rarely do we come upon anything totally **new**.

What I'm trying to say is: Always be as original as you possibly can—remembering that it has probably been done before—but your way will be a new treatment—and as valid as anything before it. Try not to use stock poses. Be daring—don't be shy. Life is gutsy.

Freedom of "style" will come much more quickly once you have accomplished good basic drawing. If you want proof—trace a good figure from any magazine and you will be able to experiment freely with folds, accents and anything else because the drawing underneath is "right."

Good drawing is at the core. No one can make you excellent...you yourself have the adventure to face...but style will come naturally as you solve and produce each new problem. I'm not sure I know what "style" is anyway. If your drawing looks good...it's good.

Newspaper story strips..."soap operas", if you will—can be infuriatingly dull to illustrate on occasion. Unlike action adventure the plots are usually based on more intimate situations that do not have sword fights and flying people. The trick is to make as appealing as possible, scenes in which nothing at all is going on.

To illustrate my point I selected a daily "Juliet" from 1968 and read it over. A woman and her daughter sit in a drab bedroom. Daughter says "why am I here?" Mom just shifts her eyes and offers that there is a reason —the girl then says... "I wonder." Powerful stuff!

I decided to be direct. No fancy angle shots. The people were bored so I kept the atmosphere boring. I zoomed in on the mother's response to show her expression...just her eyes move. In the final frame I tried one of

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those "you don't see it very often" compositions, shoving the girl's head way over to the right edge and blanked in the rest of the panel in an attempt to convey a mood of mystery in the girl's mind. This example is not one of my better attempts but I do believe I caught a mood that reflected exactly what was going on. Also, that daily—when reduced to 5½ inches would be lost on the comics page if it were not for that single large area of black—another reason I used it.

The idea I have in mind when laying out is premise. What is the premise of the page or daily strip? Is there to be a sudden revelation? Is the air electric with suppressed emotion?

There must be something about to happen (or going on) that will call for your mood choice.

It's very important to ask this question of yourself. As nothing will deaden your work more than just drawing people with no thought to their body actions and expressions.

I am far from satisfied with my work today. There is so much to learn and it seems as if it will never end. We have to guard against getting in a rut, because it is easy to do certain things over and over that look good and work well. I am always experimenting in order to maintain my interest—trying to see thing with a fresh eye.

I see so much good work all about me. Fres talent with efforts that leave me shaking m head. That's good, though, as fear is a moti vating force too! There are scores of unbeliev ably good illustrators in Europe—guys doin things I would never attempt.

Since I contracted with the French Publish ing House, Dargaud . Editeur, I have gone t school! It is so refreshing to see all this brillian work I had never noticed. It is helping me t push even harder and go beyond the work I've done of late.

I'm giving you the same message I've got ten: never be satisfied—never stop where you think you've got it.

This work is fascinating because of the very elusiveness of art. If it is going to captivate your readers it must captivate you.

It has been an exciting trip for me—these 30 years of grappling with all the requirements of this genre. I hope my words pass on to you a few of the things I feel are important in the over-all task.

Good luck and remember—you are totally unique. Your work will reflect you and your persistance.

Stan Drake

Stan's unique style is instantly recognizable throughout the world. His drawing ability and emotionally realistic art propelled him and "Juliet Jones" to the top of the heap some thirty years ago where he remains today. In collaboration with fellow artist-writer Leonard Starr, Stan and his creation "Kelly Green" have become household words in Europe as well as here in the United States.

MEL CASSON

THE PENCILING OF THE HUMOROUS COMIC STRIP

This section of the book is devoted to the penciling of the **humorous** comic strip.

Penciling literally means **drawing** the comic strip. It is obvious that in this short chapter I cannot teach you how to draw. That is a craft and an art which people practice daily all their lives. What I am going to attempt is to show you how good professional cartoonists pencil their comic strips. We still study and discuss their methods and we will examine some short cuts and try to sort out what is right and wrong.

The key is hard work. Remember, your competition is the cartoonist with a daily comic strip in the paper. He is drawing and writing every day. You have to play "catch-up" to him, and the only way you can do that is to draw, draw, draw and draw.

The gag is the most important element in the strip. Most top comic strip artists agree that the gag is at least seventy-five percent of a cartoon, but in the remaining twenty-five percent, it is expected that you can draw. What you do with that twenty-five percent determines how good a cartoonist you are.

The penciling process, however, is probably the most difficult, since this is where you interpret the script and sell the idea. Most cartoon-ists spend more time on the penciling than on either the writing or the inking. Perhaps the best way to learn this process of translating a gag into a picture is to study the work of good comic strip artists. Your first and last impression should be, "Gosh, how **simple** it looks!" And you're right! **Simplicity** is the keynote of a humor strip. A joke in any form at all should be economical. Like a machine, it should have no unnecessary parts. The best explanation of creative economy that I know comes from a sculptor who was asked how he made such a splendid statue of an elephant. "Oh," he said, "that was easy. I just chopped off everything that didn't look like an elephant!"

Put into your drawing only what helps you tell the story. Leave out any and all drawing that doesn't contribute to developing the idea. In a well-executed cartoon, nothing is left to accident or chance. Every dot, every line is put in for a definite purpose.

A big key word to hang on to is "THINK". Comic art is not the result of wild inspiration. It is the result of thinking about pictures, about people, about the time in which you live, about what interests you. So before you draw aimlessly, **think**. It will save you time in the long run.

SIZE
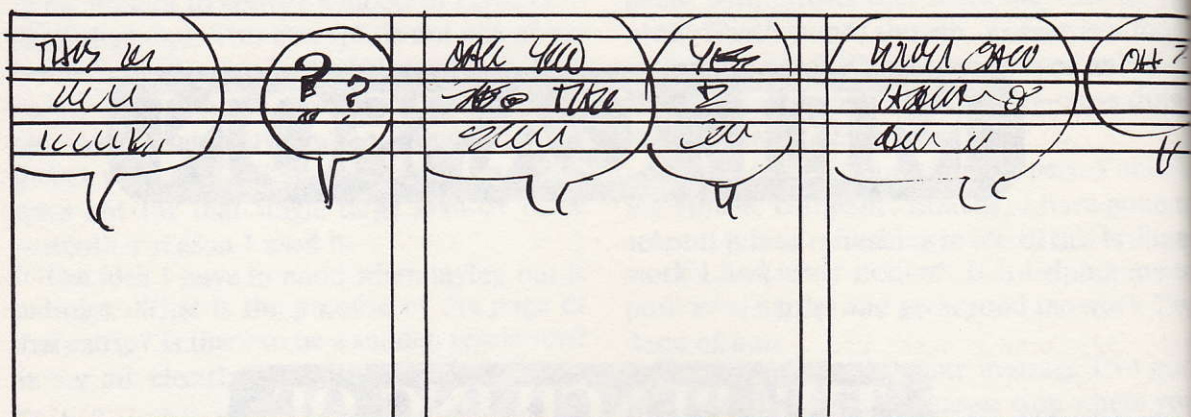
*After the lettering and balloons are in place there's **little** room left for drawing.*

The size of a comic strip appearing in a tabloid paper is approximately two inches high and six inches wide. The dialogue in the balloons cuts that space in half. It is your job to attract the reader to the strip and sell the idea with as much impact as possible. In the small space left for you, you must find room for a smash opening and a crash finish, and keep 'em close together!

Most young cartoonists are always asking, "What size shall I draw my strip?" The working size of the strip varies with each artist. For example, here are the sizes used by some well-known cartoonists:

Dik Browne . . . . 11½ x 3⅜"
Johnny Hart . . . . 17½ x 4⅞"
Mort Walker . . . . 13 x 4"
Bud Blake . . . . 15 x 4⅜"
Mel Casson . . . . 16 x 4½"
Russ Myers . . . . 20¾ x 6"
Bill Hoest . . . . 13 x 3¾"

As you can see, there is no constant size. Some cartoonists prefer to draw large, some small. It is only by experimenting that you will eventually find a size that is comfortable for your drawing. For what it's worth, most top cartoonists I have spoken to started out with a larger size and as they refined their drawing, and made it simpler, they went to a smaller size. They concluded that the smaller size was closer to the reproduction that appears in the paper, so they could see more clearly what to include or exclude in their art work.

ALWAYS USE A T-SQUARE TO RULE THE GUIDE LINES FOR YOUR LETTERING

After you've determined the size you're going to draw your strip, with your T-square draw the guide lines for the lettering and letter the dialogue roughly to determine how much space it will occupy. Remember, the person who speaks first *always* must be on the *left* side of the box. Do not criss-cross balloon tails. Make your lettering large so it can easily be read by a youngster just learning to read as well as by an elderly person whose eyesight isn't what it should be. A good way to write comic strip dialogue is to speak it out loud. Try saying it in different ways, and you'll find you can reduce the number of words in the balloon. Too many words in a strip makes it look heavy and discourages readers. It also cuts down on the space you have left for drawing. There's little enough as it is!

THE STAGE

We are now ready to examine the space left for drawing. Think of each box, or panel, as a stage, and you are the director.

Box #1: Set the scene: Like the first paragraph in a newspaper story, it should tell who, where and when. Try to identify the characters by name. Tell something about them. Box #1 sets the scene and the mood for the entire strip.

Box #2: Come in closer, and show the characters' faces so the reader will know who's talking. This is the build-up stage of the gag. This is where you "hook" the reader.

Box #3: This is the pay-off to the gag. Everything in the strip builds to this moment, and the build-up should move along as quickly as clarity permits. The action of the characters in Boxes #1 and #2 should move toward the payoff in Box #3. Professionals refer to this as the "rhythm" of the strip. Many cartoonists actually pencil the **last** panel first, then go back and build up to it. Some comic strips (Peanuts, Blondie, Doonesbury, etc.) always use four boxes in a strip. If you follow that pattern, have Box #3 continue the build-up begun in Box #2.

MATERIALS

Materials should be kept to the barest essentials. Some pencils with HB, H and F leads, soft pencil erasers, (Pink Pearl, is what I use), T-Square, ruler, some scratch paper and a tracing pad. The two-ply Bristol Board should be plate-finished (very smooth) or kid-finished (a slightly rougher surface). A light box is also very handy to have, and I will talk about that later. That's all you need for the penciling stage.

PENCILING

We are now ready to start the most important and exciting phase of the work; the penciling, or creating of a comic strip. We must interpret the gag, keeping four things in mind: clarity, simplicity, punch and emotion. Most cartoonists start this process by making a series of "thumbnail" sketches on scratch paper. These are for your eyes only, but they will lead you into the drawing and help you solve any problem that might arise.

When you pencil your drawings, try to show not only how the people you're drawing look, but also how they feel, the emotions they are experiencing in the scene you are drawing. You should have a little bit of actor in you so that you can portray these emotions. Look into a mirror and twist your own face into the same expression as that of the character's. It will help you sell the idea.

Draw objects and people loosely. **Think funny** when you draw them. It will help you maintain the "cartoony" flavor. When you sketch two people talking to each other, make them **look** at each other. Remember, you are drawing funny pictures and every line you put on paper should work toward that goal.

EYE APPEAL

To attract a reader to your comic strip, you must catch his eye with your art work. There are twenty other strips on that newspaper page screaming to be read, so you'd be wise to give a lot of thought and effort to your product. It's so easy to just say, "Make your drawing interesting"...but how? **By experimenting with your pencil drawings.** This is where the **success** or **failure** of your drawing rests.

#1. Variety in Panels

Try not to draw the same scene in every panel. Vary the sizes of the figures and the scene. Don't show off and try to over-draw. Letter a sign "KEEP IT SIMPLE" and tack it to your drawing table. It will remind you at all times.

#2. Exaggerate:

When you are penciling action, **over-do** it. You can always tone it down. This is the fun in drawing cartoons. Keep a small mirror handy and when you are looking for a particular expression such as anger, look in the mirror and portray anger. Serving as your own model will help you get the feel of the mood and action.

#3 Color.

Yes, I know you are only using white paper and black ink, but when you plan your drawing, think in terms of three colors: white, black and gray (either Ben Day half-tone or pen shading). Plan them while you are penciling. Don't be afraid to fill in a black area on your pencil drawing. It will help you visualize the finished strip as you progress.

#4 Research

Study and clip the exciting strips of some good cartoonists. When you see a strip that has eye appeal and impact, save it and study it. It usually takes a lot of hard work to make it look very easy.

THUMBNAIL SKETCH

THIS IS MY THUMBNAIL SKETCH..

© 1979 United Feature Syndicate, Inc.

2 IN.

5 1/2 IN.

HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT ABOUT GETTING MARRIED AGAIN, GYPSY?

ONLY ON **TWO** OCCASIONS.

WHEN?

DAY AND NIGHT.

3-9

... FOR THIS STRIP

I have used the phrase "The thumbnail sketch will help you solve your problems." LET ME ELABORATE ON THAT. As you read a strip and digest it, a picture of some sort should start to form in your imagination. To capture and record that elusive picture, a small, quick sketch is your best choice. That thumbnail sketch is just a small, loose drawing, an elaborate scribble or a form of graphic shorthand that perhaps only you can read.

After studying your thumbnail sketch, you now have an idea of what your strip is going to look like. Make these quick, mini-sketches part of your regular routine, and they will help you work faster and more efficiently. Making the sketch loosely will help you get more action into your drawing.

LIGHT BOX

A light box is merely a box with a hinged lid into which is set a large pane of frosted glass. Two white Flourescent bulbs are mounted inside. It is a very useful device for tracing and reworking drawings.

While writing this chapter, I talked to a number of cartoonist friends: Dik Browne, Bill Hoest, and Bud Blake. They all said that the light box plays an important part in their work. (I, too, use the light box.)

After they make their thumbnail sketch, these cartoonists draw the pencil sketch on tissue paper the same size as the finished drawing will be. After they refine the tissue drawing, they put it on the light box, place a clean sheet of Strathmore board over the tissue, and trace though with a hard pencil. They are then ready to start inking the finished strip.

LIGHT BOX

FROSTED GLASS

INSIDE TWO FLOURESCENT BULBS

PENCIL DRAWING

NEW STRATHMORE BOARD
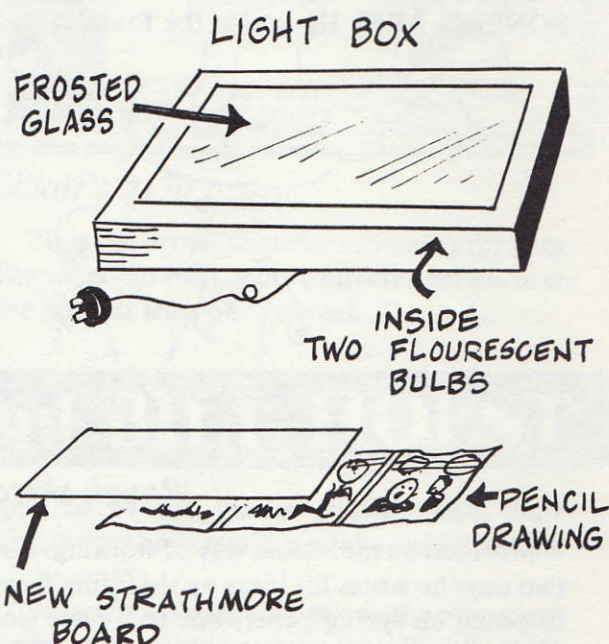
Some DON'TS

1. Don't get so "hung up" on the style of one cartoonist that your work starts to look like his. You're not giving yourself a chance to develop your own style, and you are reducing your chances of selling your feature since it looks too much like someone else's. It can ruin your reputation.

2. Don't make your strip too black, or too tricky with excessive cross-hatchings, clothing patterns or Ben Day paper. A sound bit of advice is "If you don't know how to shade, don't!" Your strip should be easy to look at and it should register clearly in a single glance. Errors can be avoided if you plan carefully in the pencil stage or your work, rather than try to fumble through during the inking.

3. Don't put a lot of words in one balloon. If you can't reduce the dialogue, make two smaller balloons rather than one large one. Make sure your balloon captions contain the following:

- Make them brief and to the point
- Make them express your idea clearly
- Make sure they have the flavor of the character speaking
- Make sure you have good timing in telling your gag

4. Don't make the last box (the pay-off) too

obvious or the drawing in the last box too strong. This "don't" comes from Dik Browne. Dik says, "A reader picks up the comic page and glances at the total strip before he starts to read. If your last box is drawn so strong that it leaps off the page, you could gi your gag away."

The fun of creating a comic strip is in yo penciling. And the penciling is the way to t success of your drawing.

MORT WALKER

Mort Walker is one of the best and most successful cartoonists in the business. He is involved in creating three comic strips each week: BEETLE BAILEY, HI AND LOIS and BONER'S ARK. He is also the founder and prime mover of the Museum of Comic Art i Port Chester/Rye, New York. He handles a this with ease because he is totally organize and fully enjoys his work.

Plate 1
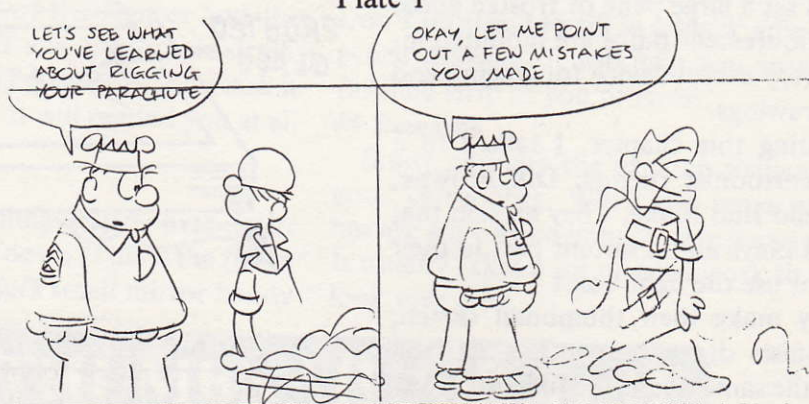
Rough sketch on typing paper.

Mort has an individual way of working. For two days he writes his ideas by sketching them in pencil on typing paper, one to a page (see Plate #1). This is a sound way to work since you can easily see and evaluate how the gag will look in its entirety. This is Walker's equivalent of the "Thumbnail sketch." It is most impressive to see how he sells his idea so well with so few lines. He is the ultimate master drawing simply. When you look at Mo Walker's work, it is important to recogni what he leaves **out**. Most young cartoonis have a tendency to overdraw and try to dazz the reader with detail. Take a lesson fro Walker and learn about economy in drawin

Plate 2

Finished pencil on Strathmore plate finished Bristol board.

Plate #2 shows Mort's finished pencil drawing, made directly on plate-finished Strathmore Bristol board. I repeat, there isn't a wasted line or an extra word, yet it's all there and it's very solid. There is hardly any change in the action from the sketch on typing paper to the finished pencil drawing. He has moved the figures closer together and added some black areas to give contrast, but essentially, it is the same drawing.

He pencils an entire week of strips in one day.
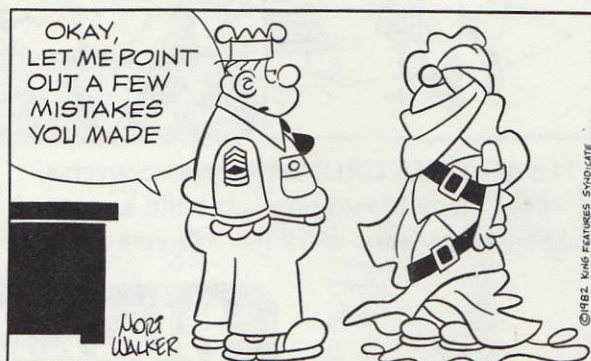
Finished strip — Gillott's #170 pen.

He inks the week's strips in one day with a Gillott's #170 pen.

Mort Walker passes on this bit of advice:

"It is important to create sympathy for your character, so have your character get hit over the head at least once a week."

DIK BROWNE and BILL HOEST

The two strips, "HAGAR THE HORRIBLE" by Dik Browne, and "AGATHA CRUMM" by Bill Hoest, are good examples of how to sell a gag simply and effectively. Notice how both of these great cartoonists use the white areas. Then notice how they lead you from box to box with their carefully-planned spotting of the **blacks**. Notice, also, how simply they have established the outdoor scene of the action.

Generally, the gag strip shows the characters from left to right in an even line. It is the story strip that seeks unique composition and dramatic angles to sell the story.

In the HAGAR strip, the "gimmick" is that the stick Hagar is presenting to his wife. Notice how effectively Dik Browne isolated the stick by placing it in the middle of box #2, where it is the center of attention.
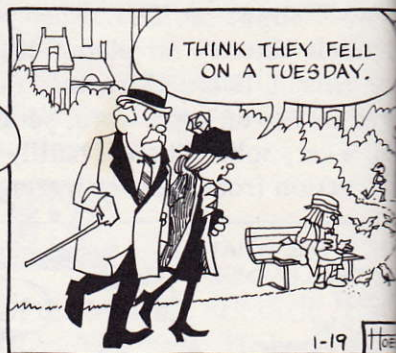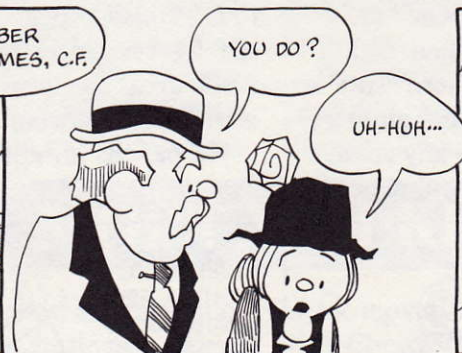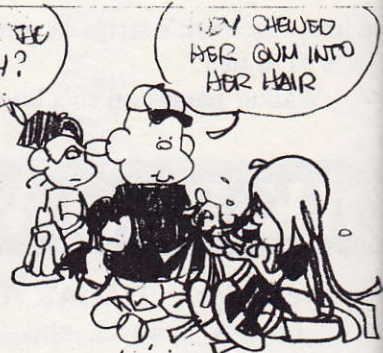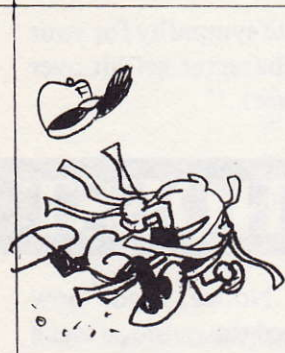
The AGATHA CRUMM strip is a conversation gag. There are no props to build around. The characters must carry the ball verbally.

Notice the tiny figures jogging and feeding the pigeons. Bill Hoest obviously has fun drawing.
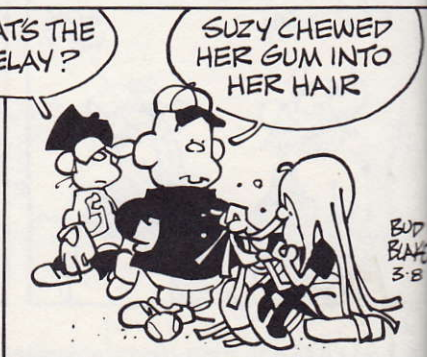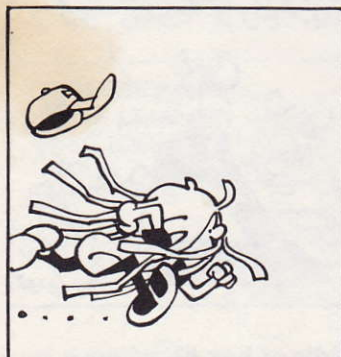
BUD BLAKE

Bud says:

"The first thing I do is make several tiny thumbnail sketches on the edge of the pad for arrangement, etc. I then make a carefully detailed pencil drawing on tissue. I draw on **both sides** of the tissue to try to get a fresh look at the pencil and better the drawing and animation. The pencils are put on the light box and redrawn with HB Venus pencils on a 3-ply Strathmore board, then inked and lettered with Gillott's #170 pen point."

If you compare Bud Blake's pencil sketch to his inked drawing, you can see nothing was left to chance. **Everything** in that inked strip was planned and worked out carefully in the pencil stage, right down to the pebbles on the ground. You would have no problems inking

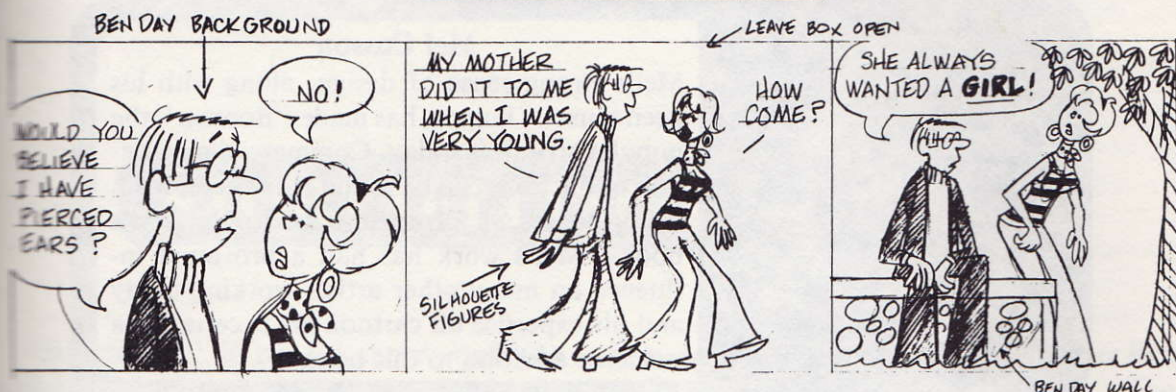that strip yourself. That's the way your pencil sketch should look.

After your strip is completed in pencil, look it over carefully before you ink it. Ask yourself if you've sold the gag the best way. Can you improve the wording of the balloons? It's hard to change ink, so be sure everything is just the way you want it before you pick up your pen.

I can't impress upon you enough the importance of keeping your drawing simple. Bud Blake offers this advice:

"A lot of what the cartoonist gets paid for is knowing what to leave out. And 80% of his fee is just for knowing how."

BOOMER

BEN DAY BACKGROUND

WOULD YOU BELIEVE I HAVE PIERCED EARS?

NO!

MY MOTHER DID IT TO ME WHEN I WAS VERY YOUNG.

SILHOUETTE FIGURES

LEAVE BOX OPEN

HOW COME?

SHE ALWAYS WANTED A GIRL!

BEN DAY WALL

Dik Browne, Bill Hoest, Bud Blake and I go through approximately the same process in penciling. We all make a series of thumbnail sketches to interpret the gag; then we make a careful, complete pencil drawing on tissue paper. They, however, go to the light box and trace the drawing on the finished board in pencil, then ink it.

I eliminate this step by placing a clean piece of 2-ply Strathmore board over my final pencil sketch and inking **directly** with a Rapidograph pen. I later use a brush and ink to fill in the black areas.

Let's look at my pencil drawing, and I will show you how I arrive at some conclusions.

Box #1: Since both characters are blonde, I plan to put some tone behind their heads to bring them out. I will use commercial Ben Day paper, which can be purchased at any good art supply store. It is merely pasted on and cut out with a razor blade.

Box #2: Since I have already shown a close-up of the characters, I felt I could get some "color" and action into a "talk" gag by silhouetting the figures. It breaks up the monotony of watching two people just talking. By eliminating the lines around the panel and opening the strip, it calls attention to it on the comic page.

Box #3: I sat Arnold down to deliver the gag, because he's "putting himself down." Also, by sitting him down, I give the standing character a chance to react to the gag line.

BOOMER

WOULD YOU BELIEVE I HAVE PIERCED EARS?

NO!

MY MOTHER DID IT TO ME WHEN I WAS VERY YOUNG.

CASSON

HOW COME?

SHE ALWAYS WANTED A GIRL!

If you compare my pencil drawing to my final ink drawing, you can see there is hardly any change. Everything was solved in the pencil sketch, and the inking went very fast.

By now I hope you have gotten a message. The more time and care you spend penciling your strip, the better the result will be. It is **hard** work. No professional cartoonist ever said it was easy. By constantly simplifying a drawing, a good cartoonist makes it **look** easy.

They say that selling a comic strip in today's market is partially luck. But remember, **chance favors the prepared**. The best and the funniest idea is yet to be written, and the greatest comic strip is yet to be drawn.
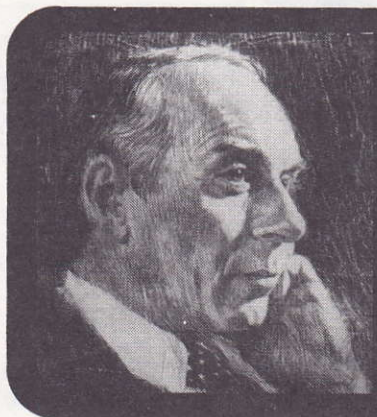
Mel Casson

Mel's strong sense of design, along with his keen sense of humor, has made "Boomer" the popular strip it is today. Commercial application of his work can be found everwhere, from many phases of advertising art to children's books. Mel's work has had a profound influence on many other artists working today and his expertise on cartoon art is certainly a welcome addition to this book.