

## #TBT The Comic Books

The following is mostly true.

In the mid-50s there was a fair one summer at the high school across from my home on Chatham Street. Maybe it was an annual event but I remember just the one time. As I have discovered writing my stories, memory is a slippery little devil that often takes me back to points in time that never occurred or for which I have incomplete or totally false recollections. Someone once said that "memory is malleable - and tends to decay with age." Boy, don't I know that. Luckily, this story is not about the fair. It is about Boom! Pow! Crash! Biff! Kapow! Comic books! It involved disappointment, which is a type of painful emotional experience that often burns an event into our long-term memory.

The fair serves as background information. I'll get to the comic books shortly.

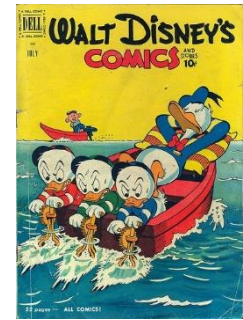
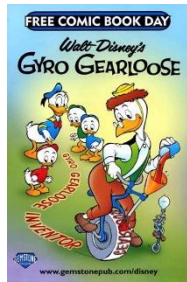
The main fair attractions were in the gymnasium. It is all a jumble in my mind and I can't tidy it up enough to see more than the one game. The object was to take a hammer and strike a 4-inch finishing nail (The kind with a small, narrow head making it harder to squarely hit.) three times, driving it all the way down into the top of a wood sawhorse to win a cheap prize. There were numerous nails already imbedded in the wood making it seem like this might be a cinch to do. I didn't stop to think that maybe the man running the game drove in the nails (with more than three strikes) when we kids weren't looking. Try as I might, I always failed. I came close, though; but this wasn't horseshoes. Either I left some or a lot of the nail exposed or bent it, which was an automatic disqualification. I only had so many tickets to play the games and I used them all on this one until eventually I gave up. The man running this game even showed everyone how it was done. Even he didn't do it every time, which made me feel a little better. Perhaps he was a carpenter who knew how to use a hammer and practiced a lot.

Using the double doors on the east side of the gymnasium, I discovered on my way out that there was a long table, perhaps 20 feet in length, made of sawhorses and planks of wood sitting in the middle of the hallway. It took up most of the space between the gymnasium doors and the exit doors right next to the spot outside where we played stick ball facing the elementary school on Fairmount Avenue. Literally, hundreds if not a thousand used comic books were scattered willy-nilly a foot high on the table, which to me looked like lost dollar bills waiting to be found. And I was a pretty good finder. I had never seen so many comic books in one place, which was overcoming me with excitement. Here existed the thrill of holding hours and hours of reading pleasure in my hands. I just had to buy them; at least as many as I could afford on my meager allowance or perhaps a small advance from Mom. I searched through every pocket in my jeans and couldn't even come up with a nickel. The handwritten sign said that each used comic cost one cent.

Comic books were a big part of my childhood and I'm sure a lot of other kids'. Not sure if girls were into them as much as boys. I'll probably find out if any girls happen to read this and correct me. I had a pretty good collection of comic books I had bought new for 10 cents each in Patterson's Cigar Store. As soon as I walked through the door the comics were prominently sitting on a wall display calling out my name. I stood in front of them, looking from side to side deciding where to begin. Carefully, I brushed my hand over the covers, picked one, opened it, scanned a couple of pages printed on recycled newsprint paper, then went on to another and another. Eventually, Joe (a permanent fixture behind the counter along with old man Patterson himself, and occasionally Patterson's wife and son; oh, yeah, don't forget the bulldog with one blue eye and one brown eye sitting on the floor by the newspapers) would call over and tell me to buy it or put it back. Well, 10 cents was a lot for someone my age to spend on one single item so it was important to pick the comic book that I would read or look at the most times.

So much color with dazzling illustrated art work almost made me go nuts trying to select one comic book not just to buy but even to pick up and carefully turn a few pages. I was holding in my hands a new adventure with old, and sometimes new, characters.

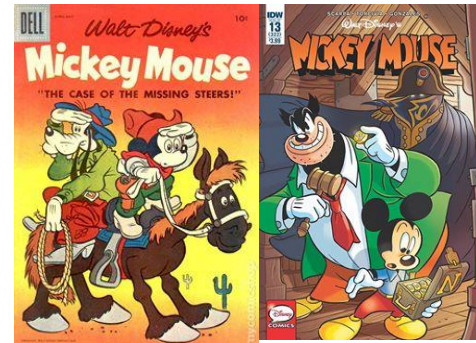
I went through phases as I grew older and my sense of adventure grew with me. In the beginning there were a lot of Donald Duck comic books with Daisy (Donald's girlfriend); Gyro Gearloose (a tall chicken who is a scientist and inventor); Gladstone Gander (an extremely lucky goose); Uncle Scrooge McDuck (the richest duck in the World); Huey, Louie, and Dewey (Donald's nephews); and The Beagle Boys (a gang of criminals always trying to steal Uncle Scrooge's fortune including his most prized possession, his number one dime). Donald was an easy going guy with a short temper; then he went ballistic. I even learned how to do a passable imitation of how he sounded when he talked on TV. Plenty more cartoon characters where these came from, but these were my favorites in the Donald Duck comics.



Of course, there were the comic books featuring Mickey Mouse along with Minnie Mouse (his girlfriend), Goofy (a brave but clumsy friend), Marty and Ferdie (Mickey's twin nephews), Pluto (Mickey's faithful dog), and Black Pete (Mickey's arch-nemesis).



Eventually, my interests morphed into comic books with a super hero or heroine, a fictional character "of unprecedented physical prowess dedicated to acts of derring-do in the public interest." Some of my favorites were Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, Plastic Man, and The Phantom (his skull ring was so cool).



Over time, the width of a standard-sized comic narrowed, and page counts gradually dropped from 64 pages to 32 pages so that by the mid-1950s, the standard comic format looked much like the standard comic format does today.

One thing that was constant in just about every comic book was the use of words imitating the sounds that they represent, referred to as examples of onomatopoeia. You don't know how long I have waited to use that word in one of my stories. Examples of onomatopoeia are included at the end of this story. Some words are shown more than once because the sounds they imitate fall under more than one category.

There I was within reach of so many comic books and I was so broke I didn't have two nickels to rub together. Not even one. I hatched a brilliant plan to get those comics. I spent about an hour carefully going through most of the comics based upon my interests at the time in super heroes and heroines. I was picking issues that were dated in the late 40s and early 50s. These were some of the first comics that contained certain characters. They weren't rare but they weren't commonly found anymore. When I had 100 comics, give or take a few, that I wanted to buy, I stacked them neatly under the table in between some cardboard boxes. Then I half-ran home where I took a dollar from my piggy bank and high tailed it back to the school.

I couldn't have been gone for more than 15 or 20 minutes. With my dollar bill secured in my pocket, I bent down and reached in between the boxes to get my stack of comic books. They were gone! I thought maybe I had placed them under a different part of the table so I got down on all fours and crawled around under the table until my knees were sore. Still no comics. Someone was either watching me and bought my stack of comic books or happened to accidentally come across them and bought them or scattered them on top of the table. The pile of comics was already smaller as more kids heard about them. I started searching through the pile like a maniac but couldn't find one that I had saved.

I was so disappointed and mad that I went back home, returned the dollar bill to my piggy bank, and spent the rest of the afternoon reading many of the comic books I had sitting on a built-in shelf unit in my room. There were probably many lessons for me to learn that day, but I didn't spend time mourning my loss. However, it was

one of those experiences that I have filed away in my long term memory like it happened yesterday. And boy, whoever took those comic books better watch his back! Snort! Sputter! Dang it to heck!

### Onomatopoeia

#### Human Sounds

Voice: hum, grunt, mutter, chatter, yack or yak, blab, lisp, sneer, snicker, giggle, whimper, bawl, squeal, shriek, whoop

Nose and Mouth: shush, whistle, smooch, cluck, smack, crunch, munch, gulp, spit, sputter, splutter, slobber, cough, sniff, snuffle, hiccup, huff, snort, snore, belch

Hands: pat, clap, slap, smack

#### Animal Sounds

Dogs: woof, yip, yap, growl, snarl, howl Cats: meow or miaow, mew, purr

Birds: chirp, cheep, tweet, peep, twitter, crow, squawk Insects: buzz, chirp, hum

#### Vehicle Sounds

Engines: roar, hum, purr

Horns: honk, beep

Exhaust pipes: sputter, rumble

Brakes: squeal, screech

#### Other Sounds

Explosions: boom, bang, pop

Collisions: crash, bang, clash, wham, smack, whomp, whump, thump, bump

High Speed: zoom, whoosh, swoosh, zing

Actions: zip, tap, click, clip, snip, knock, rap, bang, thwack, flap, smack, smash

Objects: creak, squeak, pop, boing, sizzle, fizzle, and flap

Groups of Objects: rustle, clack, clunk, clank, jingle, rattle, and clatter

Sirens: blare, shriek

Alarms: ding, buzz, beep, clang

Music: drum, throb, thump, twang, plink, plunk, bong

Liquids: squish, slush, burble, gurgle, trickle, glug, splatter, squirt, fizz, plop

Air: puff, hiss, whistle, swoosh, and whoosh

Electricity: buzz, hum, zap