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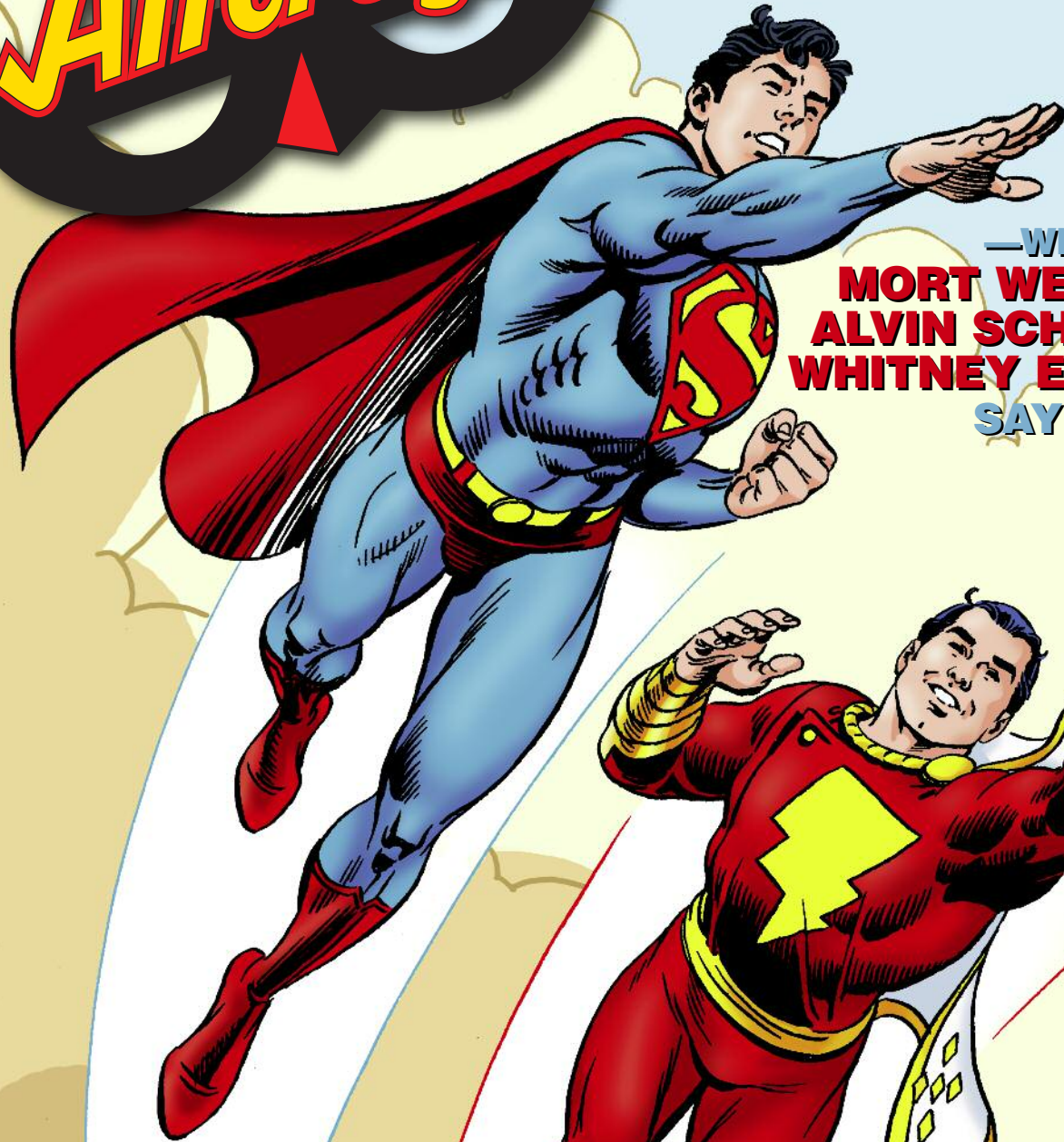
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No.98
December
2010



—WHEN
**MORT WEISINGER,
ALVIN SCHWARTZ, &
WHITNEY ELLSWORTH**
SAY SO!



AND SO CAN THAT
SHAZAM!™
GUY—COURTESY OF



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On Our Cover: We'll admit it—we're suckers for a good cover that co-features Superman and Captain Marvel—in Ye Editor's opinion two of the greatest creations in the 75+ years of the comic book industry. Our thanks to collector Dominique Léonard and to artist Jerry Ordway for their blessing in printing this breathtaking commission illo by Roy's 1980s collaborator on All-Star Squadron and Infinity, Inc. [Superman & Captain Marvel TM & ©2010 DC Comics.]

Above: Superman was an instant hit—and not just in English! Jean-Michel Ferragatti sent us this image from a French translation of a very early "Superman" story "Cible Humaine" (the translation of the French is "Human Target"), utilizing drawings from Joe Shuster's Superman art shop—and, in the foreground, what looks like a Superman figure by major early comics artist Lou Fine from a Fox or Quality comic... or possibly a Paul Gustavson figure from Centaur or Timely... in Kal-El's colors. Hey—Gustavson's Angel, in Marvel Mystery Comics, also had a red cape and mostly blue outfit—so maybe the Gallic licensee felt he was fair game as a stand-in for Superman! [©2010 DC Comics.]

This issue is dedicated to the memory of

Frank Frazetta & Al Williamson— also to Whitney Ellsworth & Mort Weisinger



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FIRST PRINTING.

"I Contain Multitudes"

Can we talk?

I thought I should mention up front—not that it's been an especially well-kept secret—that I have a long history with legendary DC/Superman editor Mort Weisinger, who is remembered by his daughter in one of the five "Superman"-themed features this month.

That history goes back to my two weeks of working as his editorial assistant during the summer of 1965... an unhappy situation that ended when, unexpectedly, I received a rival job offer from Stan Lee to come script for him at much smaller Marvel Comics. I originally wrote of that experience back in the '90s for the magazine *Comic Book Marketplace*; those notes were reprinted in *Alter Ego* #50, exactly one-half this volume's life ago. In the years since, I've never really felt I had much to add to or subtract from that remembrance.

However, I emphasized in that article—and quite sincerely—that I have a considerable respect for the talent and accomplishments of Mort Weisinger, both as writer and editor. How could I *not*? He was the first scripter and co-creator of such favored features as "Johnny Quick," "Aquaman," "Green Arrow," "Vigilante," "Seven Soldiers of Victory," and others—and if I was too old in the 1960s to be grabbed by his post-*Superman*-TV-series editorial additions to the Man of Steel's mythos (Supergirl, Bizarro, various shades of Kryptonite, Imaginary Tales, and, God knows, The Legion of Super-Heroes), I respected the abilities of the puppet-master who oversaw the development of a Superman universe that moved far beyond the one he had inherited from Whitney Ellsworth.

In addition, I've long been aware that Mort W. was involved with Kal-El for nearly two decades before his name appeared in the indicia of the "Superman" titles. When I was reading *Superman*, *Action*, *World's Finest*, *Superboy*, and *Adventure* back in the 1940s and '50s, I was giving Mort (as well as DC) my economic vote with each dime (or 15¢) that I plunked down.

And when, a few weeks after I moved to New York, Mort became an unscheduled part of the first-ever comic book creators' panel (a *writers'* symposium, of all things!) at Dave Kaler's 1965 convention, I didn't let the fact that I'd recently left his employment under stormy circumstances blind me to the certainty that he definitely belonged behind that long table with the likes of Bill Finger, Gardner Fox, and Otto Binder (as transcribed for *A/E* #20).

So it gives me considerable pleasure, at last, to be able to present this issue's memoir of Mort Weisinger as father and human being by his daughter, Joyce Kaffel. Her article, I hope, will come as a much-needed counterweight to some of the memories that others, including some of his fellow professionals, have shared concerning him previously in *A/E*.

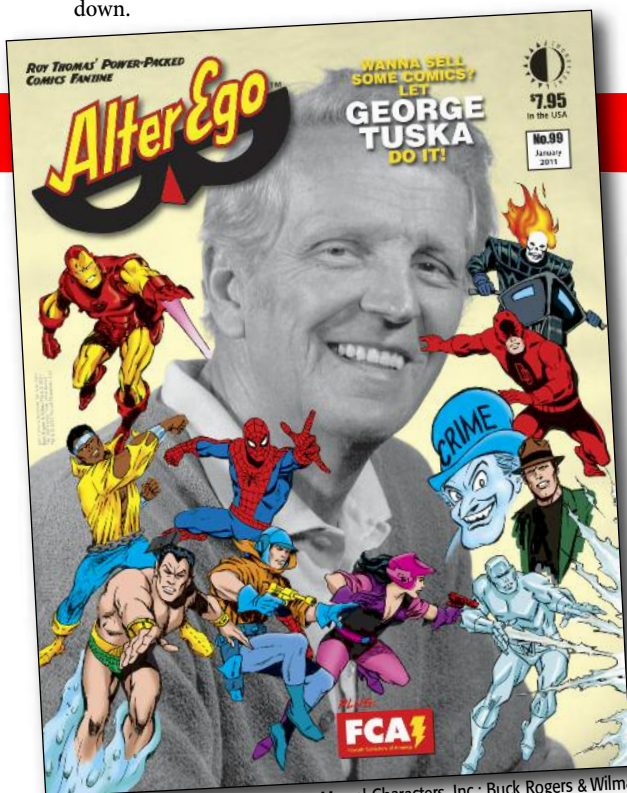
It's perhaps a bit awkward that—because Joyce's memoir appears in a "Superman"-themed issue between a study of early DC editor Whit Ellsworth and "Superman"/"Batman" writer Alvin Schwartz, who often scripted for Mort—it is sandwiched between some less than flattering comments about the man who oversaw so many Kryptonian classics. Joyce, however, was big enough to understand this. *A/E* doesn't want to censor writers' words and interviewees' quotations any more than we have to... and until I began to actually put this issue together, I was largely unaware of precisely what was related in the two surrounding pieces; that was up to writer Will Murray and interviewer Jim Amash.

But we were determined to give Joyce her say, too... and we did... and one of these days we hope to feature a reminiscence, as well, by her brother, psychiatrist Hank Weisinger.

Like all of us, from the title-quoted Walt Whitman on down—like Whit Ellsworth and Alvin Schwartz, as well as their colleagues Jack Schiff, Jerry Siegel, Otto Binder, and so many others—Mort Weisinger contained multitudes.

Bestest,

Roy



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Edited by **ROY THOMAS**

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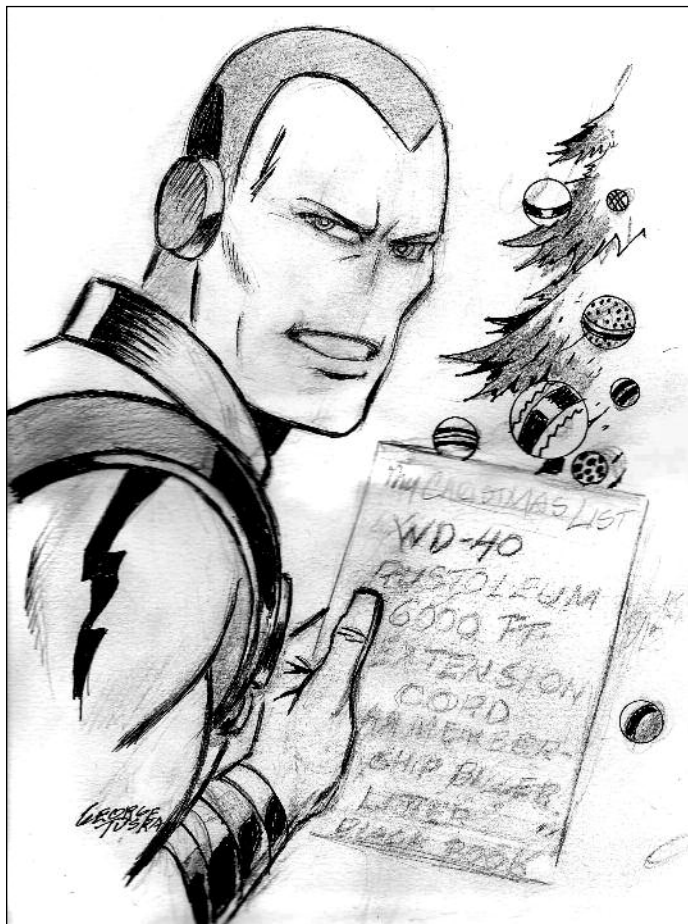
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The Unvarnished— And Unvanquished—Truth

A Guest Editorial by Jim Amash

Alter Ego editor Roy Thomas told me [re A/E #93-95 & 97] that a couple of readers were not happy that George Kashdan talked so much in our long interview about the personal foibles of the people he knew during his time at DC. I knew some of it would be controversial, but George felt a need to discuss it (which was his right), and historically, it fell into the realm of the biography of the times discussed. I've not personally heard any complaints, but I don't usually get much feedback from my work. I can say absolutely that George was not looking to settle old scores; he was giving me his honest opinions.

The truth is, we can't pick and choose the history we want to learn. At least, not if we care about biography. I know of one particular person



Yule Be Hearing From George Tuska!

We didn't have room for a selection of Christmas cards this year. Still, we couldn't let the season pass with no greetings at all, so here's a Yuletide drawing done by George Tuska a few years back for Dewey Cassell. It'll also serve as a reminder not to miss our January 2011 issue, which spotlights "Gorgeous George"! Oh, yeah—and Merry Christmas and/or Happy Holidays from the gang at *Alter Ego*! Oh, and the dimly penciled Xmas list asks Santa for, among other things, "WD-40," a "6000-ft. extension cord," and a "bigger little black book" for Tony Stark. [Iron Man TM & ©2010 Marvel Characters, Inc.]

[who canceled his subscription to *A/E* because of one or two of Kashdan's remarks in #95] who doesn't want to know anything negative about anybody, because he thinks it's not important to know those things. I once asked him, then why does he read so many biographies? He said he had been poring over a biography, some time back, when he had read a claim about the subject that he'd felt was in error. He also told me he didn't want to know about it, even if it was true, because he felt personal information was not as important as an individual's accomplishments. So what did he do? He quit reading the book, claiming that if one fact in it was wrong (although he couldn't even prove it was), then the entire book was untrustworthy. The book was tainted and useless to him. Funny thing is, when this individual himself makes an error and is corrected by someone, he considers that part of the learning process. For anyone else, it's a failure if they make a mistake, and their work is flawed and sloppily researched.

Sometimes the personal details of people's lives aren't pretty, and maybe they are unnecessary in understanding the work they produced. But in doing the biography part of comics history, I often hear stories involving creators' drinking, adulterous affairs, and underhanded little schemes relating to office politics and personal lives. I'm not always comfortable reporting them, but if I don't, I fail in the reportage of the personal biography of those who made the comics. A few stories have made me uncomfortable to the point of not printing them, and a few others I haven't printed because the interview subject asked me not to publicly repeat something they said. It's a balancing act, to be sure, and it's something Roy and I have spent time discussing over the years. Most of the time, I'll make the decision myself, though there have been times Roy and I make a joint editorial decision not to broadcast certain comments.

This past week, I turned in my long interview with Golden Age DC writer Alvin Schwartz. He was very harsh in his recollections of certain people, including Bob Kane and Mort Weisinger. Al didn't say much that would be disputed by those who knew those two men, and it seemed to me that his comments were in lock-step with what I've heard from others. Like George Kashdan, Al calls things the way he sees them. It's the interviewees' right to say (or not say) what they want, and it's my job to report what they said.

Did the personal lives/personalities of the creators affect the work they did? At times, yes... other times, no. In any event, comic book historians and fans make that decision for themselves and adjust accordingly. We know these kinds of stories about people in other fields of entertainment and the arts, and the world doesn't stop turning because we learned those folks had feet of clay. Knowing this about the people who made the books we've read and collected won't stop the spinning, either—but it does give us a clearer picture of what happened and why. It serves as a reminder that among the heroic, the good, and the gentle, the generous and gregarious, there were those who had faults and foibles as common as our own. They were more than just names in a book (when they were fortunate enough to receive credit). They were human beings who made a living creating fictional dreams for us to enjoy. They were *us*.

Jim Amash

"The Driving Force That Really Made DC Great"

WHITNEY ELLSWORTH And The Rise Of National/DC Comics

by Will Murray



Beginnings

Among the talents who jumped from the pulps to comics, the most powerful and influential has to be Frederick Whitney Ellsworth, better known as Whit Ellsworth. As the first editorial director for DC Comics, he went on to guide that company's super-heroes to greater heights, shaping the formative "Superman" and "Batman" features, consulting on virtually every DC film project from the earliest *Superman* cartoons through acting as a line producer on the classic 1950s *Adventures of Superman* TV series starring George Reeves.

For a simple gag cartoonist, Whit Ellsworth sure came a long way. The true story of his rise to prominence can now be pieced together.

Born in Brooklyn in 1908, Whit had early aspirations to be a cartoonist. "In 1927 I enrolled in a cartoonists' course at Central Branch YMCA in Brooklyn taught by Ad Carter, creator of [the comic strip] *Just*

Supermen & Super Markets

Longtime DC editorial director Whitney Ellsworth (on left in photo) served as producer for most seasons of the 1950s *Adventures of Superman* TV series—while "Superman" comics line editor Mort Weisinger (right) came to the West Coast at times to serve as the series' story editor. Below are the two halves of an ad spread for Man of Steel merchandise that, at the apex of the show's popularity, appeared, among other places, in *Superboy* #46 (Jan. 1956). Thanks for the photo to Joyce Kaffel, Mort's daughter, whose reminiscence of her father begins on p. 22—and to the Mort Weisinger Photo File, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Laramie, WY, with special thanks to associate archivist John R. Waggener. [Ad pages ©2010 DC Comics.]

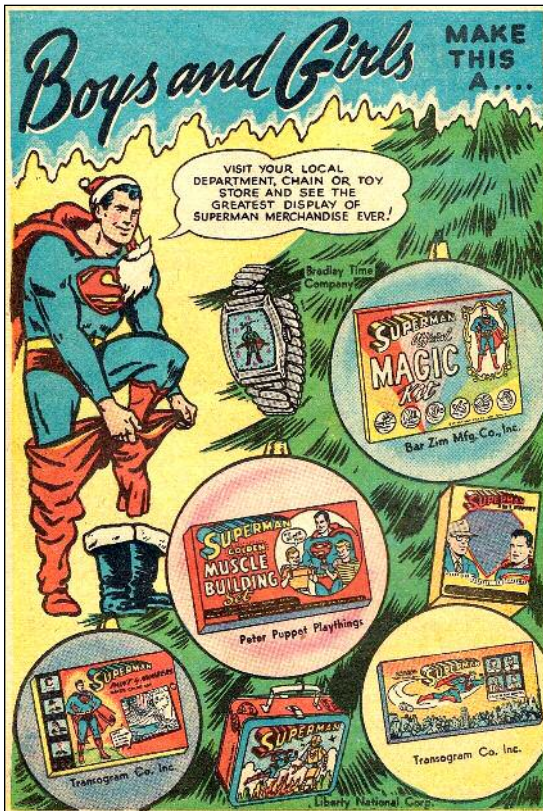
Kids," Ellsworth recalled to data-collector Jerry Bails in the 1970s. "Carter gave me a job as his assistant. I wrote more than I drew, for I was never any great shakes as an artist. He also introduced me to some of the other people at King Features Syndicate, as a result of which I, from time to

time, wrote (and did some drawing on) *Tillie the Toiler*, *Dumb Dora*, and *Embarrassing Moments*, among others. This was the heyday of advertising-type comics in the Sunday comic supplements, and I also did some of that."

Ellsworth found that many of the top cartoonists he toiled for were "not entirely reliable, either in terms of work habits or paying the people who assisted them." So he left King Features.

"I was fortunate enough," he said, "in the depths of the Great Depression, to get a job on the Newark *Star-Eagle* as a cartoonist and feature writer. There, and at the Newark *Ledger*, I spent three pleasant years before going to work for [Major Malcolm Wheeler-] Nicholson."

He also scripted off-Broadway plays, including *Maiden Voyage* in 1935.



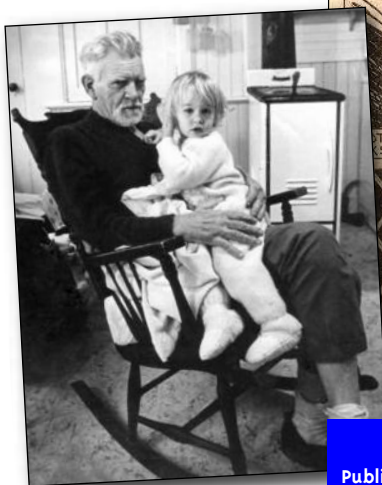
National/DC Comics—Round One

Somehow, Ellsworth drifted into comics. His humor strip “Little Linda” debuted in the second issue of Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson’s *New Fun Comics*, officially published by National Allied Publications, Inc. “Billy the Kid,” “Mr. Meek,” and “Jest Jokes” soon followed. He also drew numerous early comic book covers for the company, signing them “Whit.”

According to his daughter, Patricia Ellsworth, as quoted in Chuck Harter’s 1993 book *Superboy and Superpup: The Lost Videos*: “My father was one of the triumvirate of editors who worked for Major Nicholson on the very first original comics magazines that were. That was in the middle of the 1930s... and the triumvirate consisted of Whitney Ellsworth, Creig Flessel, and Vincent Sullivan. The owner of the group was Major Nicholson. Somewhere, maybe ’37 or ’38, DC Comics (Detective Comics) bought out Nicholson, and in 1937, Whitney Ellsworth left New York completely and went to live in Hollywood for a couple of years.”

[EDITOR’S NOTE: Creig Flessel was never actually an editor at National/DC... more like a staff artist, except that he was probably never technically on staff; he was just there. See A/E #88 for the oft-reproduced 1990s drawing by Flessel of Major Wheeler-Nicholson, Ellsworth, Sullivan, and himself during those early days.]

In a piece written for Robin Snyder’s magazine *The Comics!* a few years back, Creig wrote that it was unfair to blame Gardner Fox, early scripter of the “Sandman” strip drawn by Flessel, for writing “wimpy thugs.... All my thugs were wimps; all crooks are wimps, all murderers are wimps.... The truth is, I really patterned my thugs after my publishers and editors: Whitney Ellsworth, Vin Sullivan, Murray Boltinoff, Carmine Infantino, Harry Chesler.”



Sven Come Elven!
 Publisher Wheeler-Nicholson himself scripted a number of early adaptations that appeared in his comics, though it’s not certain whether he or artist Sven Elven scribed the black-&-white “Three Musketeers” episode in *More Fun Comics* #22 (July 1937). Thanks to Michael Fraley for the photo of Elven, seen in later years with a grandchild. [Comics page ©2010 DC Comics.]



Present At The Creation—Or Very Soon Afterwards
 (Above:) Three DC pioneers snapped at a 1993 reunion. (L. to r.): Creig Flessel (at whose Long Island home the pic was taken), *Action Comics* #1 “Zatara” artist/writer/creator Fred Guardineer, and Vin Sullivan, first editor of both “Superman” and “Batman.” Thanks to Joe Latino, Ken Gale, and the late Rich Morrissey & Tom Fagan for this photo.
 (Right:) Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson, founder of National Allied Publications, in a 1948 photo. Thanks to Nicky & Jason Brown; Nicky, the Major’s granddaughter, was interviewed in *A/E* #88.



“I remember,” Flessel recalled in another context, that “[Ellsworth] drove out in an open touring car with his suitcase. We looked out of the window that Wednesday and he’s waving, on his way to Hollywood.”

There, he married a Paramount actress named Jane Dewey and earned his living writing for the pulps. She was his true reason for moving West. He had met her in New York, and when Hollywood called, she went. Whit followed rather than lose her.

Ironically, Ellsworth might have been one of the many to see and reject *Superman* during the time when it was making the rounds of comics houses and syndicates before its 1938 debut in *Action Comics* #1. “Toward the end of the Nicholson venture,” he once reported, “Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster submitted *Superman*—in newspaper form rather than in comic book pages. It was turned down.”

In his 1944 *Writer’s Digest* article “A Yank at Yale,” later DC editor Mort Weisinger picked up the story from this point: “In 1941, Maj. George Fielding Eliot, who had been writing the *G-Men* booklengths for us [at Better/Thrilling/Pines pulp publisher], gave up the assignment for greener pastures. George is one writer who really has a gift of gab, and being a military analyst on him looks good. I get a funny



Gee, Men...!

Whit Ellsworth, Major George Fielding Eliot, or one Ed Churchill could be hiding behind that authorial house name "C.K.M. Scanlon" on the cover of the March 1937 issue of *Better/Thrilling's* pulp magazine *G-Men*. Cover by Rudolph Belarski. [©2010 the respective copyright holders.]

circulation than all the books put out by any pulp outfit, and mentioned that he needed an associate editor. I asked for the job, and got it."

Weisinger seems to be wrong on the above dates. In another *Writer's Digest* article, "At 41," Ed Churchill himself claimed that he alternated with Eliot during 1935-36.

Ellsworth's "Dan Fowler" novels in *G-Men* are not all identified, but he seems to have done over half a dozen of them circa 1937-38, including *Sealed in Scarlet*, *Sentinels of Slaughter*, and *The Poison of Power*. His byline was masked by the house name "C. K. M. Scanlon."

In 1939, Ellsworth ghosted at least two *Phantom Detective* novels for Weisinger: *Murder at the World's Fair* and its sequel, *The Forty Thieves*. Both featured the only foe The Phantom ever tackled twice, Clifford Boniface, and are considered classic *Phantoms*.

The Second Time Around

That was the year opportunity knocked once again. In the fall, Ellsworth returned to New York City, still hammering away for the pulps.

Mort Weisinger continued the story: "Whit came from California

feeling whenever I hear him on the radio these days and remember how I used to give him plots for his "Dan Fowler" novels [in *G-Men*]. Ed Churchill was one of the writers who took his place, and when Ed went back to his publicity job at Paramount he recommended a friend, Whitney Ellsworth, for the chore. Ellsworth filled the breach admirably for three or four novels, then became editorial director of Superman, Inc., and his side output tapered down to novelets and shorts. Like most writer-editors, he didn't write for the dough, but just to keep from going stale. At lunch one afternoon, Whit pointed out that of the 15 comic mags his firm published, two of them alone, *Superman* and *Batman*, had a greater

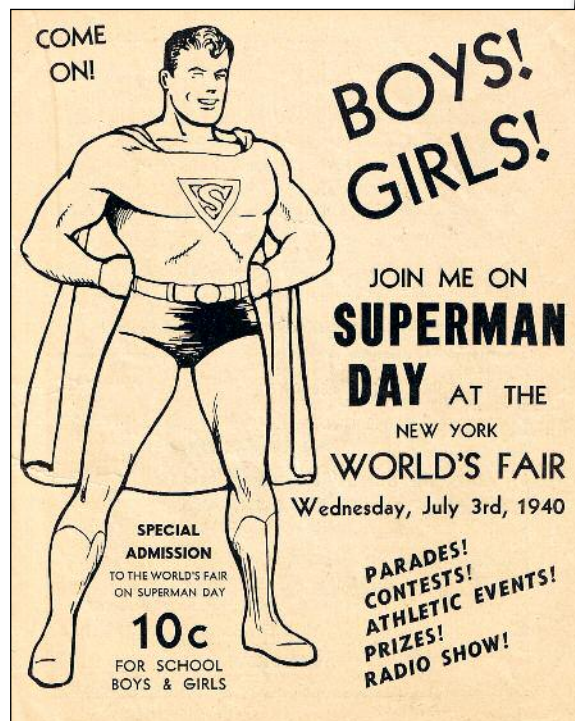
and knew Leo Margulies. Leo said to me, 'Why don't you try Whit on "Black Bat"?' So I gave him a springboard and he wrote half of it. He brings in the half and I read it. Then he calls me up and asks, 'How is it?' I said, 'Well, over here this has to be changed...' He cuts me off and says, 'Well, stick it up your —. Forget it.' I said, 'Wait a minute. I like it! Those are little things. I'm going to take care of it myself. I want you to finish it.' I gave him the advance and he started writing for me and he did all 'Black Bats.'"

This phase ended quickly. DC Comics and editor Vin Sullivan had a parting of the ways over the profits of the giant-size 1939 *World's Fair Comics*, which had apparently been a brainstorm of Sullivan's. In January 1940, DC's general manager Jack Liebowitz rehired Ellsworth as editorial director.

"I was the only editor to start with, and I also wrote a good deal of the stuff," Ellsworth remembered. Returning to *More Fun*, he created "Congo Bill" with artist Fred Ray—if a perfect steal of Alex Raymond's *Jungle Jim* can be called a creation. "Speed Saunders" was one of the earliest pre-existing features Whit took over. His official duties, he said, included "editing stories, initiating new projects, checking art—everything but mopping the floor."

One of Ellsworth's first tasks was to head off a legal confrontation with his old publisher. It seemed that DC's Batman bore a suspicious resemblance to the above-named new pulp character called The Black Bat, who had debuted in the July 1939 issue of *Black Book Detective*—only four months after the "Batman" feature debuted in *Detective Comics* #27 (April '39).

"It was a weird coincidence," writer Bill Finger told Jim Steranko for



From World's Fair To World's Finest

Ellsworth's early co-editor Vin Sullivan left National/DC over disputes arising out of the 1939 *New York World's Fair Comics* (forerunner of *World's Finest Comics*)—but Whit and the boys had the 1940 season well in hand! (Clockwise from above left:) An ad for Superman Day at the World's Fair, July 3, 1940... actor Ray Middleton portraying Superman at that gala event... and Jerry Siegel (on left) enjoying the festivities with DC co-publisher Jack Liebowitz (we think!). Thanks to Shaun Clancy for the ad, and to Michaël Dewally for the film capture. [Superman TM & ©2010 DC Comics.]

the latter's early-'70s *Steranko History of Comics*. "Apparently this character had been written and on the drawing board. Whit Ellsworth used to be a pulp writer for Better Publications. So through Ellsworth's intervention a lawsuit was averted. They were ready to sue us and we were ready to sue them. It was just one of those wild coincidences."

Since Weisinger was editing *Black Book Detective*, Ellsworth knew whom to negotiate with. It was ultimately agreed that the two characters could co-exist in their separate media without either having to surrender his fight against crime.

Whit brought into DC Mort Weisinger, who brought in Jack Schiff, who brought in Bernard Breslauer. All three of the latter-named future DC editors had worked with him at Standard. Ellsworth's first editorial hire was newspaperman Murray Boltinoff. [EDITOR'S NOTE: An oft-reprinted photo of Weisinger, Schiff, and Breslauer, probably taken during their Thrilling days of yesteryear, was last repro'd in The All-Star Companion, Vol. 4.]

Shaping Up The Company

According to Weisinger, Ellsworth quickly began delegating and compartmentalizing DC's editorial responsibilities.

"What I want you to do is shape up *Batman* and other magazines, because *Superman* is in a groove with Jerry Siegel," Ellsworth reportedly told Weisinger. "By the way, he [Siegel] recommended you."

Once All-American Comics editors Sheldon Mayer, Julius Schwartz, and then Robert Kanigher came in, when DC's sister company (co-founded by M.C. Gaines) was formally merged with the older firm in

1945, the powerhouse National/DC editorial staff that would carry the company deep into the 1970s was in place. All served under Ellsworth's superb guidance. "All the editors doubled as writers," Ellsworth recounted, insisting that his staff follow his creative lead.

The two companies, although ultimately housed on the same floor of the same building, were separate and unequal. They even had separate entrances. Ellsworth initially left Mayer alone. Kanigher once described Mayer as "running a kind of Republic Studios to Whit's MGM."

At DC, Ellsworth imposed the first editorial guidelines that reined in Siegel and Shuster on "Superman," enforcing on the Man of Steel a no-killing edict in order to protect the increasingly valuable property.

"As editorial director of Superman-DC," Jack Schiff outlined, "he supervised every aspect of the many magazines that were published, paying particular attention to the fact that the readers (in those days) were quite young. As a result, there was a great deal of action, excitement, and drama in the stories, but very little of the crude violence and killings prevalent in the field."

This was because the first glimmers of comics censorship were rearing. Writing to Jerry Siegel in January 1940, Ellsworth warned: "I must inform you that at the present time there seems to be a concerted drive against movies and comic books which parent-teachers groups and women's clubs claim are harmful for children. I know that there is definite objection to the *Dick Tracy* serial in the movies. We must point out our editorial policy with a viewpoint of obtaining the approval of parents, while still not sacrificing the adventure, the thrill Superman has always brought to children."



Right Off The Bat

The Black Bat (seen at left), the 1939-53 star of the pulp mag *Black Book Detective*, was reportedly created for a story that was submitted to the Better/Thrilling editors on Dec. 6, 1938, around the time artist Bob Kane & writer Bill Finger created Batman. Still, despite threats back and forth of a lawsuit, it seems neither creative team was aware of the other's work in advance of publication, and Whit Ellsworth helped settle the matter.

Ellsworth decreed early on that Batman should never again carry a gun, let alone deliberately kill anyone, as he did in the above panels from *Batman* #1 (Spring 1940), reprinted here from *Batman: The Dark Knight Archives, Vol. 1*. The Black Bat, however, brandished—and used—a handgun throughout his career. Thanks to Tom Johnson's 1989 study *The Black Bat* for the info in the first paragraph, and for the vintage Harry L. Parkhurst illo. [Black Bat art ©2010 the respective copyright holders; Batman panels TM & ©2010 DC Comics.]

In-house monitoring of editorial standards fell largely on Ellsworth. When Shuster submitted the cover of *Action Comics* #24 (May 1940), showing a girl being held up a gunpoint, Ellsworth returned it with the suggestion to redraw it so the crook was snatching her necklace, explaining, "We're trying to get away a little from the extreme use of firearms and knives on the covers, at least."

At the same time, Batman was also tamed after he machine-gunned a group of rampaging criminal giants in one brutal story in 1940's *Batman* #1. "I was called on the carpet by Whit Ellsworth," admitted writer Bill Finger in *The Steranko History of Comics* (1970). "He said, 'Never let us have Batman carry a gun again.' He was right."

Ellsworth was also instrumental in saving the life of Batman's chief nemesis. The Joker was introduced in the lead story in *Batman* #1, and was supposed to die of a self-inflicted knife wound in the fourth, and concluding, tale. Recognizing the Joker's potential, he told Finger, "Bill, are you crazy? We have a great character here." The ending was redone and The Joker survived to bedevil Batman ever since.

Bob Kane found the transition from working with Sullivan to Ellsworth seamless. "I liked Whit," he once recalled. "He was kind of a gregarious, easy-going guy. We got along well."

Writing Herd On DC

Ellsworth also spearheaded the rise of the company's big super-hero push in 1941, kicking off "Aquaman," "Green Arrow," "The Vigilante," "Johnny Quick," "Star-Spangled Kid," "Robotman," "Starman," and many others. Ellsworth reportedly drew the first conceptual sketch for "Aquaman"—a cartoon showing a humorous character smoking a cigar underwater—and possibly others. He retired older, outdated features like "The Crimson Avenger" and "Dr. Occult," and retooled others, like "Manhunter" and "The Sandman," the latter of whom he decreed would henceforth be a super-hero in the Batman mold, replete with kid sidekick.

"I have nothing but high praise for Whit Ellsworth," said "Aquaman" creator Paul Norris in *Comic Book Marketplace* #107 (Nov. 2003). "To me, he was exceptionally cooperative and helpful." Norris recalled some of the editorial strictures Ellsworth installed: "You couldn't draw snakes, for one thing. And you didn't show blood. He was very straightforward. He

knew what he wanted."

Artist Sy Barry commented, "He could tell you something with just a couple of words, in a diplomatic way, and you *understood* him. He was very pleasant about it, but you caught exactly what he was saying, without any question. You knew you either acted on it or you'd be out on your ass. He commanded respect, but he was a soft-spoken, intelligent guy who was always on top of things. He always knew *exactly* what was going on among the editors *and* in the business. He always knew what was going on in production. A beautiful person and a wonderful guy."

According to longtime "Batman" artist Dick Sprang, whom Ellsworth hired in 1941: "In my opinion, Whit was the driving force that really made DC great. He had a flair for working with artists and treating them with respect, which was a bit unusual around town. In some houses, the artist was the floor mat. Whit was a great guy, a humorous, non-assuming sort of character, and by the way, an ex-newspaperman. Whit had seen it all, and heard it all, but he was never cynical. He was appreciative. He could be tough—hardboiled as all hell, and he could take a lot. He had to, as executive editor."

"Writing for this group is not a pushover affair," Ellsworth told *Writer's Digest* in 1941. "Inasmuch as we pay better than most pulp houses, we have attracted many established pulp fiction writers. And not even all good pulp writers make good comic writers; this is a highly specialized field, and requires ability to express story through a visual medium. Anyone who makes the mistake of 'writing down' to the medium is licked before he starts. We require all the elements of a well-plotted action story: colorful locale, strong characterization, an original basic idea, tricky picture-making action, and heroes who work with their wits as well as with their weapons."

Ellsworth's description of his job in 1941 makes him sound like a hands-on editor who took his work very seriously.

"The average script accepted here is edited as carefully as a magazine story," he explained. "And a rewrite is the rule rather than the exception—at least until a writer has done enough scripts for us to get himself 'into the groove.' Our three-man editorial board 'talks' stories with writers, helping them to plot and slant, and almost never does a script go to an artist without one or more of the editors doing a polishing job on captions and dialogue."

Not content merely to edit and write, Whit executed cartoony covers, cover roughs for other

[cont'd on p. 14]



"I Now Pronounce You Superman And Wife!"

Superman's newspaper comic strip marriage to Lois Lane, as per dailies for Dec. 12, 1949, and June 14, 1950. Thanks to Jared Bond, who reminds us that "this was Clark Kent marrying Lois, not Superman (he kept his identity hidden from her during the marriage)." The wedding was ultimately treated as an extended dream. Jared reports that, when he interviewed Alvin Schwartz in 2007, the writer "thought they didn't actually plan on keeping the marriage or having a superbaby (as had been suggested in a *Time* magazine article)," and while he wasn't certain, he thought that this was "one of a number of storylines that Whit started, and then dropped in Alvin's lap to find a conclusion to." [©2010 DC Comics.]

Digging Up Superman

A Daughter Remembers MORT WEISINGER, Golden/Silver Age DC Editor

by Joyce Kaffel

The kids in my cozy, first childhood neighborhood in Great Neck, Long Island, always knew to come to my house if they wanted DC comics, because my dad, Mort Weisinger, often brought stacks of them home from work. Born in 1915 in the Washington Heights section of Manhattan, he was the editor of *Superman* for almost three decades spanning from 1941-1970, as well as a science-fiction and popular magazine writer. He wasn't one to disappoint young Superman fans when they came calling for freebies.

In the late 1950s, I was in elementary school when we moved to Kings Point, a fancy section of town. The street we lived on had a bevy of beautiful, large residences that were too far apart for the children on the block to develop easy relationships. Most of the neighbors didn't know there were comics for the taking.

My father loved our big house with its swimming pool and tennis court and manicured grounds. His parents were Jewish-Czech immigrants who raised him and his younger brother and sister in the Bronx, then settled in New Jersey. My grandfather was a shoe manufacturer whose prosperity slipped away when his factory accidentally burned down. To earn a living after the fire, he got a job as an egg candler for a dairy company, checking eggs for discolorations. He died in 1945. My widowed grandmother supported herself as the landlady of a four-family house in Leonia, New Jersey, and by peddling dry goods that she bought on New York City's Lower East Side.



The Weisinger Way (Clockwise from above:)

Mort Weisinger, circa the 1960s, in his heyday as editor of the "Superman"/"Superboy" comics lineup, which then included seven titles.

In *Action Comics* #275 (April 1961), a typical tale from the post-TV-series era that Mort made his own, the villainous Brainiac's red and green kryptonite combo forces the Man of Steel to wear a *hat* anytime he performs a super-deed—a mystery resolved only at story's end. Script by Jerry Coleman; pencils by Wayne Boring; inks by Stan Kaye.

That issue's "Supergirl" story was written by Jerry Siegel, "Superman" co-creator, who'd been allowed to return to DC as a writer a decade after he and artist/co-creator Joe Shuster sued the company over rights to Superman and Superboy.

Art by Jim Mooney. [©2010 DC Comics.]

All photos appearing with this article were selected by Joyce Kaffel; some, including the one above, are in the Mort Weisinger collection, American Heritage Center, at the University of Wyoming, in Laramie, WY.





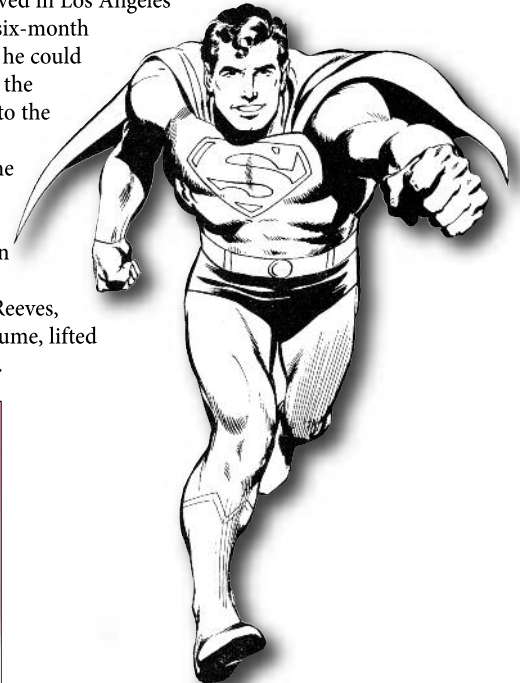
A Hall-Ful Of Fame

Mort and his friend and future fellow DC editor Julius Schwartz were active in science-fiction fandom during the 1930s; by mid-decade they were literary agents for sf writers. Seen above, probably at a World Science Fiction Convention in New York ('39) or Chicago ('40), is a gathering of sf, pulp, & comics greats, near-greats, and future greats. (Front row, l. to r.): *Wonder Stories* pulp editor Charles D. Hornig; prominent fan Jack Darrow. (Middle row, l. to r.): Julie Schwartz; unknown; writer Manly Wade Wellman (we think he's the cigar-smoker in the white coat); Leo Margulies, editorial director of *Better/Thrilling* pulp magazines. (3rd row, right three figures seated:) writers Edmund Hamilton & Otto Binder (both of whom would later script for DC); Mort Weisinger (who became an editor for *Better/Thrilling* circa '39). Thanks to Joyce Kaffel; repro'd from a scan made from the Mort Weisinger Photo File, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Laramie, WY.

familiar with his work as a journalist, but realized I had taken his talents in the sci-fi world for granted.

Through the years, I had read bits and pieces about my dad in books about Superman. More recently, I found that he was very Googleable. I learned that, around 1930, he was a member of the Scienceers, a science-fiction fan club. It was there that he met Julius Schwartz. In 1932, he and Schwartz founded *The Time Traveller*, the first sci-fi fan magazine. They went on to form the first literary agency for the genres of science-fiction, horror, and fantasy, the Solar Sales Service, which acquired many esteemed fantasy and sci-fi writers. My dad left the agency to work for a pulp magazine publishing house, Standard Magazines. In 1941, he was bitten by the comics bug and went to DC to edit *Superman*. It was a short stay, as the military called him for service in World War II. Sergeant Weisinger returned in 1946 to continue editing *Superman*. In the DC arena, he's mostly remembered for his impact on the Silver Age of Comics, expanding the Superman family to include Supergirl, Krypto, The Legion of Super-Heroes, and the Phantom Zone. Aquaman, Green Arrow, and Johnny Quick are characters he co-created.

He was also the story editor of the original *Adventures of Superman* television series. When I was a little girl, my family lived in Los Angeles for two six-month stints so he could work on the



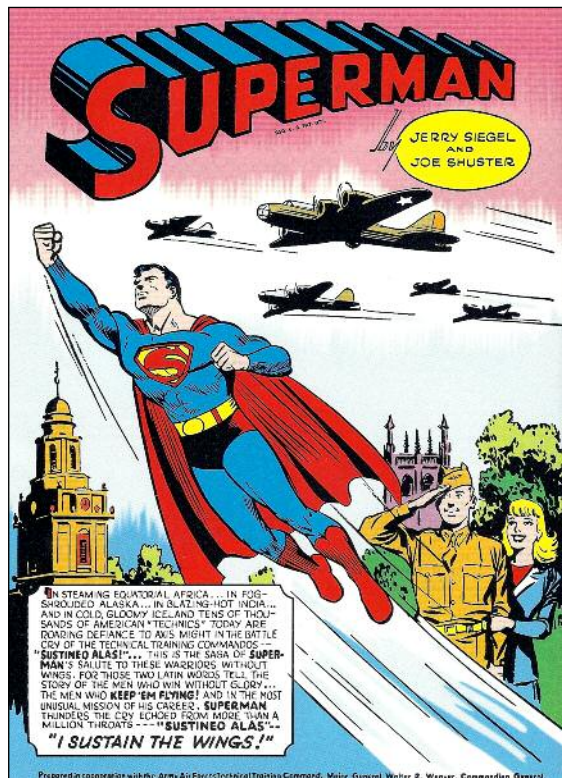
After experiencing the Great Depression and witnessing his parent's misfortune, my father was proud that he had achieved the American Dream. He still gave "Superman" comics to my brother's friends and romance comics to mine as we grew older. He lived with my mom, Thelma, on Hen Hawk Road in his own version of Superman's Fortress of Solitude. To him, his elegant home was a Fortress of Success where he had privacy and comfort until he had a fatal heart attack in 1978 when he was just sixty-three.

His untimely death was very hard for my family to accept. But with his overweight body, high blood pressure, and Type A personality, it wasn't a total surprise.

From the time he died, it took 29 years for me to visit his archives at the University of Wyoming's American Heritage Center (AHC). I might have gone sooner if his works were stored in the Northeast where I live, but Laramie, Wyoming, is not around the corner from my New Jersey home. For a long time, I was too busy with my own life and just not interested enough in his to make the trip. Although he was a devoted family man, he was such an overbearing presence that I needed to be secure in my own identity before I was willing to delve into his accomplishments.

The catalyst that finally motivated me to go was the 2006 film *Superman Returns*. As I watched the caped crusader fly across a huge movie screen, the fact that my father helped shape the granddaddy of modern super-heroes hit me like a ton of bricks. I was

scripts. I liked going to the TV studio to meet George Reeves and the rest of the cast members from the *Superman* show. I can still remember how magical it felt when Reeves, in his Superman costume, lifted me high up in the air.



"I Sustain The Superman!"

(Left:) One of the few "Superman" comic book stories known to have been scripted by Mort Weisinger—and apparently the *only* interior "Superman" adventure ever drawn by eminent cover artist Fred Ray—was this Army-Air-Forces-requested story done for *Superman* #25 (Nov.-Dec. 1943). Repro'd from the 2006 hardcover *Superman Archives, Vol. 7*. [©2010 DC Comics.]

(Above:) As reported in a previous issue of *A/E*, Mort apparently took a while to warm up to the new dynamics in artwork by Neal Adams—but once he did, he had the young artist drawing as many Superman-related covers as he could! This illo appeared in the program book of Phil Seuling's 1973 New York Comic Art Convention; with thanks to the Golden Age Comic Book Stores website. [Superman TM & ©2010 DC Comics.]



On many websites, my dad is praised as being a great editor. In a few that I looked at, his concept of Superman was criticized for being too wholesome. His take on the character during the Silver Age, I believe, was a reflection of the 1950s' traditional values and an adherence to the guidelines of the Comics Code Authority.

He was frequently described as being difficult and temperamental. Of course, my dad's mercurial nature was no secret to me. His lighter side glowed with an over-the-top enthusiasm for every meal, movie, or book he loved. He was childlike in his exuberance in that everything he enjoyed was "the best one" of its kind, even if the "one" before it had been "the best." His sense of humor was jolly. His eyes would sparkle and his face turned red with laughter when he played practical jokes on friends and family, something he loved to do.

He and Jay Emmett, one of the early licensing agents at DC, were close friends who liked to make mischief together. I remember a prank they pulled on my mom's friend Mary. They gave Mary a ride into New York City, handed her an empty cup, and told her that if she gave it to the toll taker, he would fill it with coffee. To their amusement, Mary complied, getting nothing but a dumbfounded stare from the man in the toll booth.



My dad chuckled every time he recounted that incident.

My dad was a dedicated husband. When my mom was bedridden with a temporary paralysis for six months, he insisted on taking care of all her physical needs when he was home, including emptying her bedpan.

We went on many family vacations. Until he was about 45, I remember him always bringing a typewriter with him. When we went on car trips, my brother, mother, and I were his captive audience as he used us as for sounding boards for "Superman" plots. Both on the road and at home, he especially liked to talk about stories with Bizarro, Krypto, and different types of kryptonite. He joked about Mr. Mxyzptlk because his name was unpronounceable. The imaginary tales of Superman, where anything could happen, were a source of delight for him under his editorship.



Lights! Comics! Action!

By the time of *Action Comics* #258 (Nov. 1959), Weisinger's name appeared in the indicia as editor. In the "Superman" story (top left), the hero fought what turned out to be a robot, with script by Bill Finger, art by Wayne Boring & Stan Kaye... "Congorilla," a golden ape empowered by Congo Bill's brain (above), did battle courtesy of writer Robert Bernstein and artist Howard Sherman... and "Supergirl" (left) got punished by Superman for revealing her secret identity—to Krypto the Superdog!—as written by Otto Binder and drawn by Jim Mooney. [©2010 DC Comics.]

Overshadowing his positive traits were his bad temper and a need to be harshly critical. His volatility easily upset family events that were supposed to be pleasant. When I was a teenager, he'd wave his hands in the air, yelling at the waiters in a local Chinese restaurant when the slow service displeased him. My mother would take my brother and me out to our car on those occasions. I can't remember if we ventured back inside or let him eat alone. Maybe he was just stressed and hungry, but we couldn't take the heat.

It wasn't easy being criticized for my appearance, interests, or choice of friends. When my dad spoke to others about me, I heard it was all praise. It was hard for him to give it up in person.

I was never certain of the reasons underlying my dad's temperament except from what I observed. Once he told me a story of his visit to a psychiatrist. He was leery of confiding in a type of doctor that he labeled

"I've Always Been A Writer"

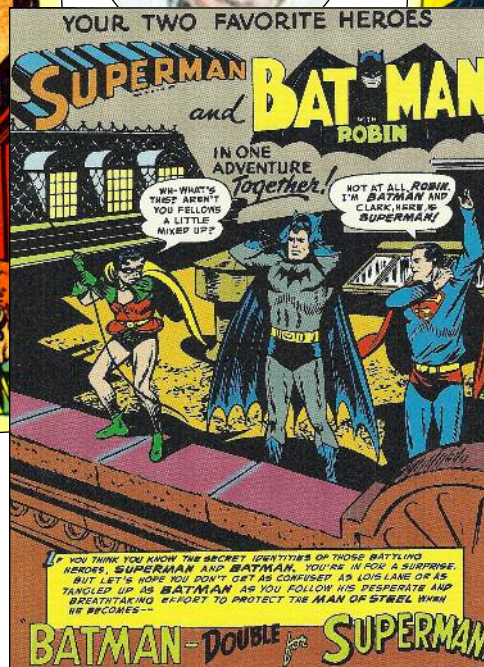
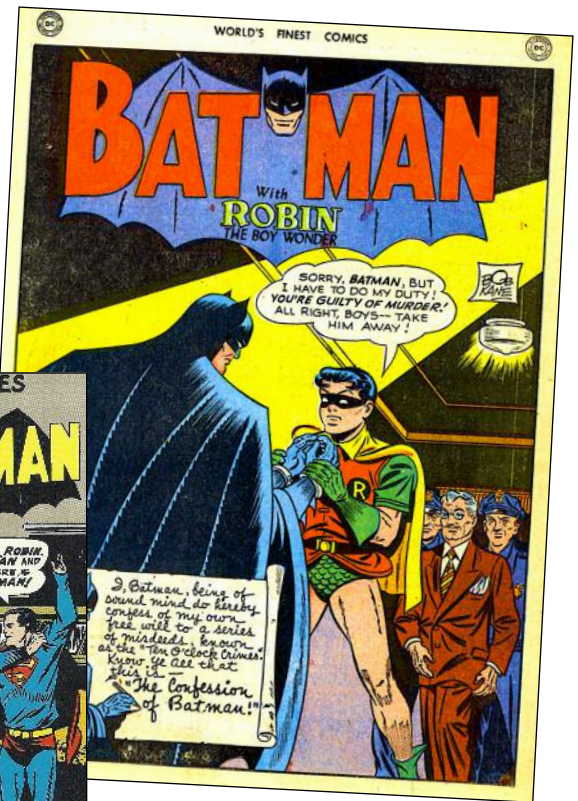
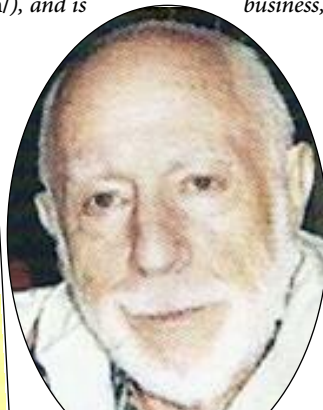
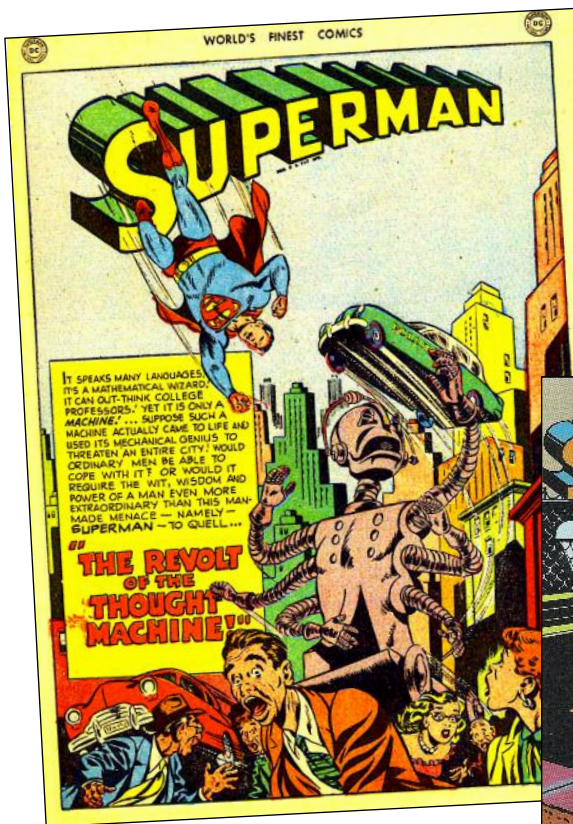
ALVIN SCHWARTZ On His Long Career In Comic Books— And Elsewhere

Conducted by Jim Amash

Transcribed by Brian K. Morris

Alvin Schwartz (born 1916) has been a professional writer since 1933. His résumé is so vast that even Jerry Bails' online Who's Who of American Comic Books (1928-1999) does not have a complete list of his works. (Neither does Alvin, for that matter.) And he's still writing! A poet, pulp writer, novelist, lecturer, documentarian, economist, sociologist, religion expert, metaphysicist, literary critic, radio and film writer, union organizer, and oh, by the way, a comic book writer, too. Alvin maintains an online community board that we highly recommend (www.comicscommunity.com/boards/alvin/), and is

a continuous student of humanity and world politics. His 1997 autobiography *An Unlikely Prophet: A Metaphysical Memoir* by the Legendary Writer of Superman and Batman was followed up in 2006 with *A Gathering of Selves: The Spiritual Journey of the Legendary Writer of Superman and Batman*. Graciously, Alvin let me focus on his comic book career so that we could fit this interview into the issue you hold in your hands (or lap, if you bought the download version at www.twomorrows.com). Alvin had a lot to say about his time in the business, so let's see what he thinks of that chapter of his life. —Jim.



Walk A Mile In My Cape!

All knowledgeable comics readers are aware that Superman and Batman first appeared together in *All-Star Comics* #10 & #36 back in the 1940s, but didn't really team up—let alone learn each other's secret identities—till *Superman* #76 (July-Aug. 1952). Before that, for over a decade, they appeared together only on the covers of *World's Finest Comics*, with Alvin Schwartz writing the interior adventures of both in issue #44 (Jan.Feb. 1950), as per the splash pages that flank his pic. It was only with *World's Finest* #71 (July-Aug. 1954) that Man of Steel and Caped Crusader became a regular twosome (as seen directly above)—in a landmark tale likewise scripted by Alvin, who's seen above in a photo from his 2007 book *A Gathering of Selves: The Spiritual Journey of the Legendary Writer of Superman and Batman*. (See how we tie these things together?) We'd prefer to think it was someone other than Alvin who coined the un-arithmetic logo for that series: "Your Two Favorite Heroeses SUPERMAN and BATMAN with ROBIN in One Adventure Together!" Pencils by Winslow Mortimer; inks by Stan Kaye. Thanks to Jim Ludwig for all three art scans. [Comic page ©2010 DC Comics.]

“Jack Schiff Was The First Man [At DC] To Hire Me”

ALVIN SCHWARTZ: I’ve always been a writer. I was a poet. I was published in some of the best quality poetry magazines. I was very big in the little magazine movement. Do you know anything about that, which involved almost all the major greats of the late ’Teens and ’30s, to right about the end of World War II? Well, we didn’t have anything to eat, and my wife and I used to sit in my window in Greenwich Village on a street which was the main drag, and watch for a friend to come by so I could borrow a quarter. You could buy quite a sumptuous meal for a quarter in those days. Anyway, who should walk by but Jack Small, who was an artist originally from England, whom I knew quite well.

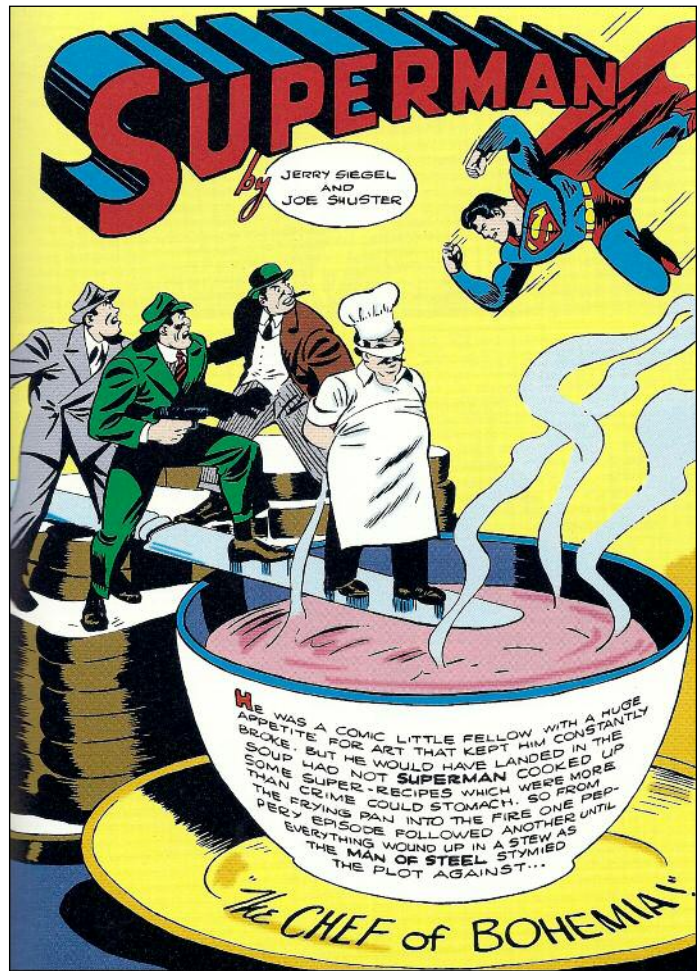
Jack told me, “Look, this is a great time for you to go over to Street & Smith.” Street & Smith [publishing house] was putting out a whole series of new comic books, and were looking for all the new stuff they could get. They were particularly interested in Indian stories, so Jack said, “Go up to the library, look up typical Indian material, and see what you can come up with. Bring it over and tell them I sent you.” So I did that. The editor, William DeGrouchy, looked at it, shook his head, and said, “Our staff writer just did this story.” That looked bad. Don’t forget, I was already an established writer, having worked in the literary field for some time. I’d also done a lot of ghosting. So I go home, figuring that’s over, and there’s a call from the same editor. He said, “We read your story, and we liked it better [than the other one]. We’re using it. How soon can you get over here so we can plot a whole series off of it?”

I also remember writing a Russian fairy tale, but my memory is blank on the rest. I didn’t stay with him very long. DeGrouchy was a typical editor, very businesslike, and [my time there was] nothing like what developed later with DC.

JIM AMASH: After you worked for DeGrouchy, I have you in 1941 writing for Dell Publications, *Fairy Tale Parade* [comics]. Does that sound familiar?

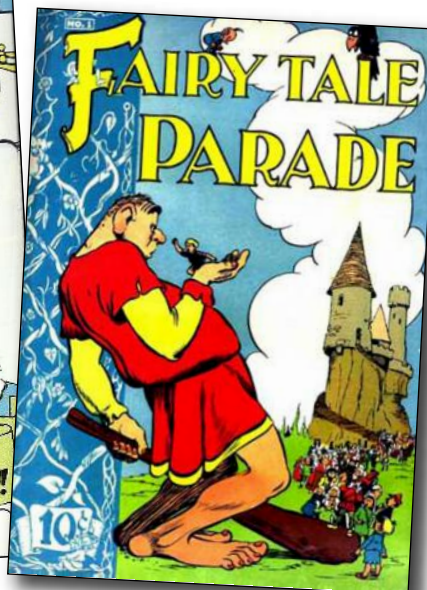
SCHWARTZ: It sure does, but I don’t remember anything else about Dell.

JA: Then you wrote some “*Captain Marvel*” stories for editor Lynn Perkins at Fawcett Publications.



Hail To The Chef!

Alvin says he made use of his Greenwich Village days in “The Chef of Bohemia” in *Action Comics* #78 (Nov. 1944), which he calls “one of my best Superman stories of the forties.” It was drawn by Ira Yarborough. In his Oct. 25, 1999, “After the Golden Age with Alvin Schwartz” (Column 24) done for the “World Famous Comics Network” website, Alvin says “Chef” was written as a tribute to a cook (“Not a great cook, either”) who owned a “hole-in-the-wall” restaurant called the Borsht Bowl. Check out his entire fascinating essay online... and let it lead you to other of Alvin’s oft-fascinating writings on comics, the literary life, spiritual journeys, and everything in between. Repro’d from the 2007 hardcover *Superman: The Action Comics Archives*, Vol. 5. [©2010 DC Comics.]



Fairy Tales Can Come True...

(Near left:) If Alvin wrote for Dell/Western’s *Fairy Tale Parade* in 1941, it might’ve been for #1 (cover-dated June-July 1942). Cover by Walt Kelly, who in ’42 would create Albert the Alligator and Pogo Possum, in that order. In the FCA section of *A/E* #17, Alvin informed J.R. Cochran that he was acquainted with Jack Small, “who used to draw for *Fairy Tale Parade*”—though the entire first issue is generally credited to Kelly. [©2010 the respective copyright holders.]

(Far left:) Schwartz also told Cochran that he scripted roughly ten “issues” (or stories?) of *Captain Marvel Adventures* in the early ’40s, but he couldn’t recall which ones—so we’ll let this introductory page from *CMA* #5 (Dec. 12, 1941), drawn by C.C. Beck, stand for all of them! Repro’d from *The Shazam! Archives*, Vol. 4. [©2010 DC Comics.]

SCHWARTZ: Lynn Perkins didn't have any talent; he didn't have any skills. I don't know how he got to where he was, I don't know how he ever called himself a writer, and if he wasn't a friend of the friend who introduced us, I probably would never have had anything to do with him. I don't think he lasted very long there, either.

JA: Was Fawcett a hard place for you to work?

SCHWARTZ: I don't remember working at the office particularly as much as [Perkins'] friend's place, sitting down in the apartment and plotting together. I remember some arguments about plots, but it was all kind of vague. That part of my career was not the happiest or the most enjoyable.

JA: Did you have to turn in synopses, and then write a full script?

SCHWARTZ: It varied with the editor. Some editors wanted you to turn in a whole script, some editors wanted a synopsis, and with Perkins, it was mostly try to get acceptance from the fans. But Perkins didn't seem to know what he was doing or what he wanted particularly. He was not a very gifted man in the field, and he soon went back to England.

I really didn't write a hell of a lot there, because I got into something much better. My friend Charlie Green—who wrote pulp fiction—and I used to do a lot of plotting together. Charlie was a Russian emigrant who taught himself English. I learned plotting just from walking the Village streets with Charlie, helping him plot pulp stories, and he helped me on my stories. So come Christmas time, Charlie says, "I'm going to this party over at DC. Why don't you come with me? They want me to write their stuff [comic books], and I don't think I know how." So I went with Charlie. DC offered us a shot at a number of characters. Charlie was reluctant to work on his own; he was afraid of writing comics. We did our first story together, and as far as I was concerned, it turned out so-so. We got by. He didn't want to do any more, but they loved my contribution to the work so much that I continued to work for them.

JA: What was the first story that you guys wrote?

SCHWARTZ: At the moment, I don't remember it, and yet I remember telling somebody about it recently. It is mentioned somewhere in the *After the*



Golden Age column [on the Internet]. Jack Schiff was the first man to hire me. He was a hotheaded, strongly-oriented "right-wing Communist," I call them. That is to say, he was a Stalinist. You know the situation in those days? Jack and I used to argue politics. We liked each other. We got along with each other, though we never agreed on politics. We'd go out to lunch, and a bunch of the other guys would come out to watch the two of us while we argued Trotsky versus Stalin. But on the other hand, Jack Schiff was also one of the fairest, most decent, best-equipped—in a literary way—editors that I ever had. I'd say there might be one exception, and that was Bernie Breslauer. Bernie and Jack were friends. They were both of the same political club. Bernie died a little early and suddenly. Heart attack.

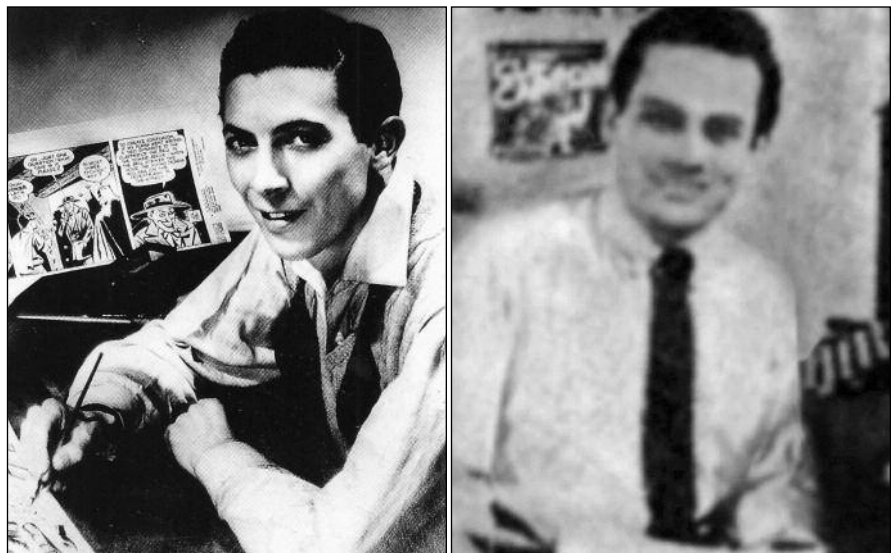
But Jack was always going out of his way to help writers, to see that everybody got a fair break. He was one of the most decent men in the field. Jack didn't maintain this reputation, because there were a lot of people who were out to get him, mostly because they didn't like his politics. Now if *anybody* didn't like his politics, it was me. But Jack was among the best where it came to just straight human beings, seeing to it that writers were comfortable, that they got enough advances so they could get their work done. And he was very good at plotting, so we'd often work together.

"Bob Kane And I Were In Grade 1A Together"

JA: When you came in to see him, did you bring plot ideas in with you, or did he have some ready for you?

SCHWARTZ: When I went in to see Jack, you did one or the other. Jack had an idea that he wanted to try out, I had an idea, someone else had an idea. [Sometimes] we discussed somebody else's idea, but usually it was all quite fair. Nobody tried to grab credits, not when Jack was editing. His fairness extended to the point where everything was straightforward; everybody got credited for what they did, with *one* exception. That was Bob Kane.

Bob and I were in Grade 1A together. I knew Bob from the first day of school, and I remember him sitting on that dunce bench with the dunce cap on. The classes were divided by half-years: 1-A, 1-B, 2-A, 2-B, and so on. In the middle of a grade, you would change teachers and courses. In



The Brethren Of The Bat

An undated Batman sketch by Bob Kane—plus photos of the hero's co-creators, artist Kane and writer Bill Finger. Sketch retrieved by Dominic Bongo from the Heritage Comics Archives—Kane photo from Les Daniels' 1999 book *Batman: The Complete History*—Finger pic from 1941's *Green Lantern* #1. The latter, supplied by Anthony Tollin (who reproduced it in the 29th issue of his monumental *Shadow* reprint series), is more than a wee bit blurry, but we'd grown tired of showcasing the same handful of Finger photos over and over. [Batman TM & ©2010 DC Comics.]

DOG STEARN...

MR. MONSTER'S

COMIC CRYPT!

BY MICHAEL T. GILBERT

MR. MONSTER © AND © 2010

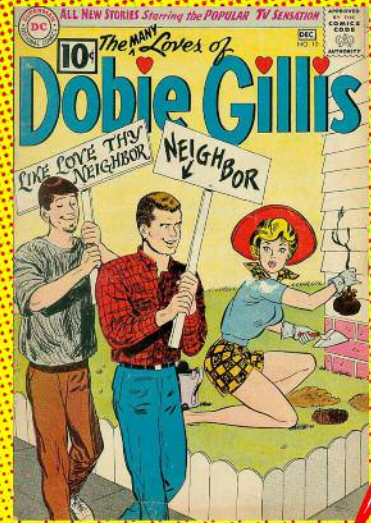


HI, KIDS!

MR. MONSTER ASKED ME--FAMOUS COMIC BOOK MASCOT JOHNNY DC--TO INTRODUCE TODAY'S KOOKY KROSSOVERS! LET'S START WITH STRANGE ADVENTURES #122 (SEPT. 1960), FEATURING TEEN HEARTTHROB DOBIE GILLIS AND HIS BEATNIK BUD, MAYNARD G. KREBS. DC HAD STARTED A NEW DOBIE COMIC AND FIGURED ANY PUBLICITY WAS GOOD PUBLICITY!

IN "DAVID AND THE SPACE GOLIATH," A HUMORLESS SPACEMAN LEARNS TO LAUGH WHEN A YOUNG COMIC COLLECTOR SHOWS HIM DOBIE'S COMIC! KOOKY, HUM? AND WE'VE GOT EVEN KOOKIER KOMICS IN THIS SPECIAL EPISODE OF...

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#157
December 2010



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