Still asking, "Are we having fun yet?"

by Bill Griffith

Editor's Note: The following text is a transcript of Bill Griffith's talk at the 2003 UF Comics Conference. Where possible, we have included the images Mr. Griffith refers to. In some cases, the images will be added at a later date, so we have included a temporary placeholder image. Original prints of Bill Griffith's comics are available at his website: www.zippythepinhead.com.

1. In keeping with the focus of this conference on Undergrounds, I won't be doing my usual talk, which usually is a kind of evolution of Zippy story, chronologically told in slides. So instead, bear with me as I try to do a sort of a compare and contrast approach revisiting some of my underground stuff, much of which I had not looked at until I prepared for this talk. So some of the things I am going to say are going to be purely spontaneous as I read them and talk about them—and just kind of noting some of the consistent themes that I, in doing this and preparing for this talk, kind of noticed. Not that it was terribly subtle. But I noticed that I do tend to repeat and hopefully hone certain themes over the years, so bear with me. This is a debut of a new Zippy "show and tell".

![Zippy's House of Fun](figure1.png)

**Figure 1.** Zippy's House of Fun.

2. The first screen of that is up on the slide [Figure 1]—just to keep everybody familiar with the cast of characters that I have been working with over the past thirty years. The first on the left there is Mr. Toad, my very first comic character who made his debut in, I believe, in Screw Magazine or Screw Newspaper, in late 1968. Loosely based on the character Mr. Toad from the kid's book *Wind in the Willows*, kind of an egomaniacal, out of control, "all consuming id" character. To the right of him is Claude Funston and sitting next in order are Zippy's occasional wife and nuclear family: Zerbena, his wife, and Fuel Rod and Melt Down, his nuclear family children. Next is Shelf Life, reading the comics there at the kitchen table. Then you can see, if you can, its kind of hard to see, but there are the Toadettes watching television on the floor, and then there is Zippy himself, and the skeptical other half of Zippy's brain, Griffy, on the far right, who actually is
more like, more accurately my ego. I would break it down psychologically as: Griffy is my ego and Mr. Toad is my id and Zippy is sort of the awake part of my mind that is trying to get at the truth somehow.

Figure 2. from *Real Pulp Comics* #1, 1971.

3. This [Figure 2] is the very first Zippy comic strip. This was done basically as an assignment. There was a comic which came out in I think it came out in early 1971 called *Real Pulp Comics Number One*, edited by Roger Graham, who has deceased quite a while ago, but he put together the comic. This was after *Young Lust Number One* had come out, which was a parody of romance comics and for one reason or another just took off. It actually gave me the freedom to be a cartoonist because I was paying the rent very quickly as soon as I had arrived in San Francisco by doing Underground comics. I was one of the few people who was able to do that at the beginning—not that it lasted that long; I had some struggles ahead—but *Young Lust* sold so well it was literally like having a regular pay check for a couple of years.

4. So Roger approached me and said, "Why don't you do a *Young Lust* kind of story but make it like a really weird triangle". And that was his only guidance. At the time I also had just met Jim Osborne, another deceased underground cartoonist—there is a long list of them. He was fascinated with sideshow freaks, circus sideshow freaks, and he had a large collection of what were basically photographs that were sold in decks by retired sideshow freaks in their off season. You could
buy these things for $4.99 for a deck of 60. They were like little cards, and the back of them had a little bio and the front would have the classic picture of the freak. And there was a character named Schlitzie. This came to me as a kind of *déjà vu* because pre-cartoonist, when I was an art student at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn in the early 60s, some of the first films that were shown in the local student theater was *Freaks*, it was the 1932 top horror movie, which of course featured three real sideshow pinheads: Schlitzie, Pip, and Flip. We actually had a print of the film; the print was made available to a couple of friends of mine and I slowed it down to hear what the pinheads were saying cause they spoke so rapidly. And it was my first exposure to that kind of *non sequitur*, random firing mind of a so-called pinhead.

5. The technical term for a pinhead is microcephaly, which simply means "small brain". In actual fact, microcephalics are missing their frontal lobes, so they have that sloping forehead. What they are missing really is a sense of chronology, a sense of time. Future, past, and present are all mixed up. They tend to have very large vocabularies, very active speakers. They tend to be sort of happy. I have met a few of them in my day, all of whom—pardon the phrase—freaked me out because they were so frank and open. They were kind of scary in that sense.

6. Anyway, so this strip was the debut of Zippy in comics. He was based on Schlitzie and as you can see if you look at the bottom were he has got a little portrait, his name at the beginning of the strip was not "Zippy," it was "Danny," he became Zippy in the story itself.

7. This is a little hard to see this one so I will have to read it. This [Figure 3] is a strip I did actually very recently about Schlitzie because a very interesting thing happened to me about a year ago. I got an email from a guy who said, "I was Schlitzie's keeper." And he went on to tell me that in the last days of Schlitzie's career, Schlitzie was actually was exhibited as a female but was male. His real name was Simon Metz. He was born in 1892 and he traveled in various circuses and sideshows throughout his entire life up until 1977. All of this was new to me.
because this guy had written to me and told me he was Schlitzie's babysitter. Schlitzie was incapable of taking care of himself, so he had this guy take care of him. His last years were spent doing circus sideshows, believe it or not, mostly in London and Hawaii. So this all came to me as a big surprise. But this particular strip I did after I got this information because the guy also sent me a photograph I'd never seen of Schlitzie in his heyday. So the writing at the top read, "Schlitzie about 37 years old." This was a publicity photo and this was the information on the back of the photo. It was a publicity photo from 1929 from a circus sideshow, a place called Playland in San Francisco [reads]: "Schlitzie about 37 years old had been taught to talk by California speech experts. Schlitzie's head contains only two ounces of brains. She can count up to ten but refuses to speak the word eight. "Thought that was a beautiful non sequitur right there. She is just saying seven in the middle, there in the portrait of Schlitzie. "Her speech is often incoherent when she attempts sentences, but she can say one word at a time perfectly." And at the bottom it says from the 1929 press release, "Schlitzie's real name was rumored to be Simon Metz born in 1892."

8. This was just kind of a background to show you a little bit about where Zippy comes from. Zippy is kind of an amalgam of Schlitzie and a sideshow pinhead exhibited from the 1860s through the 1920s named "Zip the What-is-it," originally by the Barnum Museum of Human Oddities and then by the Barnum and Bailey Circus Sideshow. I don't know if you are aware of this—I have mentioned it in various strips—but Zippy's (that is, Schlitzie's) born, given name was William Henry Jackson, which is a fact I found out later. My name is William Henry Jackson Griffith, named after my great grandfather who was a well-known photographer. So there you go. It was cosmic—I was meant to do Zippy. [laughter]

9. This is just my way of showing my early struggling days in underground comics when I was trying to get my drawing style together. This [Figure 4] appeared in Short Order #1, and it's just an example to me of the nature of Zippy and how he has changed over the years. Zippy in the early comic strips I did was really much more pinheaded. His non sequiturs were truly off the wall. If I had tried to keep that up I think I would have become a pinhead myself after a while. It was just like being trapped in an elevator with someone that speaks random sentences to you—that can't go on for a career, I don't think. These are examples: the second row on the right panel Zippy is all of a sudden thinking [reads], "I used to be a Presbyterian. It was fun. Why am I not now a Presbyterian? I am having a vision. I see Jesus in a glass room. He is talking very fast. He is a disc jockey."
[laughter]. If you asked me what I meant by this, I didn't mean anything. It is kind of like riffing with a jazz instrument. Zippy's mind is disgorging sentences.

10. Another early Zippy strip in which he began to take a little more form and have a little more personality is in a strip I did for Arcade #3 in 1975, "A Fool's Paradise Revisited," where (and this is an odd precursor with what was going to happen to me career-wise ten years later) Zippy visits and gets involved in a story line with William Randolph Hearst, the newspaper mogul whose life inspired the movie Citizen Kane, of course. So Zippy here is visiting the Hearst castle in coastal California, and once again he is still the crazy, non sequitur-spouting pinhead but he is beginning to have some sort of relationship with other characters.
11. This is not the world's greatest slide, but this is a series of strips [Figure 6]. This is sort of to bring in the idea that I have got these themes that I keep revisiting. This is a series of strips I did in April of last year. Someone sent me a set of postcards of the Hearst castle circa, maybe, the early 60s just as a gift, and it just triggered this desire for Zippy to go back to the Hearst castle. So, it is an interesting contrast for me to see the Zippy of 1975 visiting Hearst castle and the Zippy of 2002 visiting the Hearst castle. I will read the strips here. These are the first three in a series of nine strips [reads]: So in the first panel Zippy is saying, "Hearst castle, still crazy after all these years." And from inside the castle a voice comes, "The old man is busy Zippy, but you can wonder around the grounds at will." And a decapitated nude statue speaks to Zippy and says, "Good to see you again Zippy, but you don't look quite as insane as you did in 1975." [laughter]. And Zippy says, "It is true. I have grown a lot in twenty-seven years." And the statue says off camera, "Say something zany, Zippy." And Zippy is looking out onto the landscape; he says, "Somewhere in downtown Washington, D.C., a formerly alcoholic underachiever who says 'new-kew-ler' is running the country." [laughter]. In a rare example of censorship King Features would not let me write "formerly alcoholic" so this appears this way in the latest Zippy Annual, but they would not allow this to go out to the Washington Post.

12. Second strip. Zippy awakens in Cardinal Richelieu's bed at Hearst castle (which is a real item there). And Zippy says, "Suddenly I realized that the state is everything and that the end justifies the means." [laughter] The three muses statue starts a dialogue with Zippy, "Oh don't be so crafty and powerman Zippy, cavort and frolic with us." And Zippy says, "It's a deal. I don't know what I was thinking. I'm not even French." [laughter]. Another statue speaks, "And remember Zippy, absolute power corrupts absolutely." Zippy dives into the pool screaming, "All life is a blur of satin sheets and Orson Wells movies." [laughter].

13. The next strip. Once again a statue starts the dialogue, "Enjoying your stay at San Simeon, Zippy?" Zippy says, "Absolutely, but where are the other guests?" Then
he is inside the Hearst castle movie theatre and a sort of Picasso-esque figure on the screen says, "Who you expecting Zippy? Charlie Chaplin, Joan Crawford?" Zippy says, "I'd settle for Melvin Douglass." [laughter]. Suddenly William Randolph Hearst appears, "Mel's on location in Hollywood Zippy, but will I do?" "Mr. Hearst, is that you?" And they go on for six more days to cavort.

Figure 7. "The Rory Story."

14. This is literally from looking through my original art a week or two and suddenly coming across something that I had totally forgotten that I ever did, "The Rory Story." [Figure 7] This was, this was a little slice of life concerning an underground cartoonist who to me was one of the strongest of all of us graphically and every other way. Rory Hayes who died in 1983.

15. The genesis of this story concerned a visit Rory made to my apartment one day. He appeared at the doorstep, bleeding from the head, disheveled, filthy, and he asked for a glass of milk. Rory definitely gave me Zippy-lights. He was clutching his notebook, which he carried with him all the time, and after he got his glass of milk, I asked him if I could look at his notebook. And in his notebook was a kind of a break down of a movie script—an idea for a movie that he was been trying to. Rory made 8MM movies occasionally, homemade horror films. So this story is literally taken from his notebook. The dialogue and the action described scene-by-scene for the film. It reminds me actually a little bit of the film that Kim [Deitch] just showed us in many ways [Kim Deitch's movie is described in the annotations of his presentation, available in ImageTexT's first issue, here]. It's that kind of high-energy, adolescent vision of making your own. I'll just read the story. At the upper left, Rory is holding his major character, which is a kind of occasionally demonic teddy bear named Pooh-bear.

16. [reads]So Rory is saying, "Pooh-bear shutters in sheer terror. Dimensions are separated out. Three solid days and nights passed and I haven't come down yet." Pooh-bear says, "Yes, for me too it has been an experience." (This is all dialogue right from Rory's notebook.) In the next panel it says, "The orange glow of dawn illuminates my bed." Pooh bear says, "Are we going? Are we please going to stroll again Rory?" Rory, looking out the window, "It's a gray, overcast day, PoohRasts." Another name he gave to this bear. "There's a harmony, all the colors are blending." The bear says, "Let's go."

17. They go out into the street. "I have a great idea for a movie. It will cost 34 dollars to make. Listen, long camera shot showing a dirt path leading off toward cliffs. A man's figure appears in the distance." The bear says, "Does he have hairy arms?"
"No, make it a woman, an extreme close up of her face as she emerges from
growth of bushes. The camera tracks backwards. Top view of woman spreading
out on blank—" "Excuse me sir, where are we, uh?" "What's the matter, can't you
read the street sign?" Rory continues in his daze, "She settles comfortably and sits
in a yoga position. There's a rustling in the bushes." The guy in the background,
"Hey, who let you out?"

18. Rory continues, "Medium shot of woman as she reaches down and removes her
blouse. You can see a camera is framed at ground level looking straight across
blanket as she lies straight on her back, with her head, neck, and breasts showing.
Straight down, top view, lying on blanket, sun glistening on her body." The sky
breaks into lightning and thunder. "Camera eye is engulfed in shrubbery." Rory
begins to get a little carried away and starts stabbing the bear. "It awkwardly
moves through until bushes are parted until creature is looking upon Lorelei's
body. 'I hate, kill, fear, die, yet my mind longs to be eternally quiet.' Front view
close up as Lorelei sits up and looks around slowly, rises to her feet and walks
toward the bushes, camera moves with her and gets behind her. Bushes rustle.
Suddenly we see the creature." Rory throws the teddy bear off the cliff and he
screams, "Ha, ha, ha, I've evolved into cinders from the cosmos." The end.

19. This was also inspired by something that would happen occasionally which Kim
might remember, which is that Rory would show these movies—little evening
entertainments. And he would narrate them, but he would shift from third-person
narrative to first-person whenever he got to the violent scenes. Like he would be
saying things like, "The creature comes into the room, the woman is lying prone
on her back. The creature gets closer, and then I stab her." [laughter] Sometimes
he either became his mother or the girl became his mother. It was pretty intense.
20. The sideshow circus theme obviously has continued through Zippy over the years. This is kind of a classic setup here, the cover of *Yow Comics #1* from 1978 [Figure 8]. I was kind of hoping "I'm Zippy!! Who are you?" would be the thing I'd be remembered for, instead of "Are we having fun yet?" but it didn't quite...
work out that way. You can see one of my comic book inspirations from my childhood at the lower left there, "Little Lulu," sort of looking aghast. As I continued to write Zippy and as it continued to evolve a little bit. Just in one year, this was only one year later. I think you can detect a something more going on under the surface in Zippy's expression than just the desire to have fun and to scream non sequiturs. Once again, the comparison I couldn't help making. This is Yow Comics #2 from 1979 [Figure 9], most recent thing I've done. This is unconscious on my part, but I think there's a definite parallel going. To me, this is the kind of image that suggests something more going on behind Zippy's eyes than might appear from his insane persona. In keeping with the idea of the circus sideshow, here's a series of strips I did in 1994 called the "Meaning of Life" [Figure 10].

Figure 10. Meaning of Life Series. orig. pub. 10 - 11 June 1994.

21. Zippy and Griffy set out, they get into a Winnebago and start drifting across the country. Griffy having gotten one of his many identity crises, questing for what everything was all about. So they wind up at a sideshow at one point, so I'll read these strips here: [reads]: In his quest for the meaning of life, Griffy runs into a

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little difficulty with tabloid reality. Griffy is running off and someone is yelling at him: "Stop him, he's a Satanic child-molester." Griffy says, "Jesus Christ," and he runs into a sideshow tent to try to escape his demons. Second strip he's saying, "Thanks. It's kind of dark in here, my eyes will get adjusted in a minute. Is someone there?" And he's suddenly confronted by whole cast of sideshow freaks. "Gee-uh, Thanks for rescuing me from that guy. He was my worst nightmare: A beef-brained dirtball in a 'gimme' cap engorged on tabloid TV. Is someone there?" A giant screams, "What makes you think you're nightmare's over, bub?" Griffy says "Freaks!"

22. Unaware that Griffy is undergoing a debriefing by several very special people, Zippy is busy with his future. Zippy is getting his fortune told in the next tent. He says, "Will I come into a large sum of money and spend it all on cheap kicks and CDRoms?" The fortune teller says, "I see a big decision ahead for you Zippy." Zippy says, "Yeah, like should I get the bacon double cheese or the cheese double bacon?" The gypsy says, "You stand at a fork in the path of life." Zippy looks a little concerned, "How did you know I was searching for the meaning of life?" The gypsy says, "It's my job." And Zippy says, "Well, well, what is it?" The fortune teller says, "Life is a series of numbing crises. And then you go to Disneyland." [laughter]

23. Good an explanation as any. And I kind of gave away the joke of this particular image. This was the center spread for Yow Comics #1 [Figure 11] in which I specifically let it be known where Zippy's origins lie. It says, "The first pinhead to be widely exhibited in a circus sideshow was Barnham's "What is it?" an American black. A tremendously popular attraction, he was convinced he owned the circus and hired and fired at will. While reading a book of circus history, cartoonist Bill Griffith came up with some startling facts. The What-is-it? man, it turns out, was born one William Henry Jackson in 1842. The same name and birth year of Griffith's real great-grandfather." That's the truth. Kim was actually responsible for imparting this bit of information to me by showing me a book of circus history at his apartment in Berkeley in about 1977 or '78. As I said, it kind of convinced me that this was my life's work.
24. Here's something [Figure 12] that has not actually even been published yet, this is from March 4 of this year [2003]. This is once again revisiting the Zip the What-is-it? Character. [reads] So in the first panel Griffy is saying, "Look Zippy it's Zip the What-is-it? man, often called the wild man from Borneo." Zippy says, "He looks peeved." Griffy says, "It's only an act really." Zippy responds, "You mean he's just from New Jersey?" Griffy says, "Yep." Zip is screaming blood-curdling screams. Griffy says, "It's a good thing we're back in 1922 or this could get awfully touchy." Zippy says, "He's incorrect on so many levels I'm getting dizzy." Griffy says, "Still, is it that different from the reality tv shows of today, Zip?" Zippy says, "Hang in there, wildman, in 80 years you'll have your own talk show " Or more like 8 minutes.

25. These [Figure 13] are the other two pinheads from the movie Freaks, Pip and Flip. They were, I believe both female; I'm not 100% sure. They were billed as being sisters. Their sideshow attraction description was very often "the twins from Yucatan." So the first panel (this is pure pinhead talk) [reads]: "We're Pip and Flip ... twins from Yucatan. Pip ... and Flip ... We Like coffee ice cream ... it's our favorite part." It's the kind of thing that people in Memphis and Kansas City
usually get. Other areas, all you can say is "keep reading Garfield and everything will be okay." [laughter]

Figure 14. from *Yow* #1, "Zippy's Day".

26. Here's another theme I kind of uncovered in my rambling through my original art in the past couple of weeks: The Las Vegas theme. This [Figure 14] is a silent strip I did in 1977 in *Yow* #1 one called "Zippy's Day." I have to confess that when I began the strip, I had no idea what was going to happen from panel to panel. All I knew was that he was going to go through a day somewhere. What turned out was that he woke up and found out he was in Las Vegas. The continuity was strictly visual. There's a storyline, but it's more or less just him traveling through his day.

27. I visited Las Vegas in November of last year. I was invited to speak there at a book festival, believe it or not, and I was given a tour of a place in Las Vegas called the neon boneyard, which is a repository of old Las Vegas casino signage—which I recommend to anyone highly who ever visits Las Vegas. Stay away from the strip. Go downtown and checkout the neon boneyard. You do have to make an appointment, but it is in the catalogue. I just took pictures, and I did a whole series of strips where Zippy was interacting with the signage. This is Zippy talking to a giant slipper from the golden slipper casino from the late '50s and early '60s. In the first panel, Zippy says, "Somewhere there's a 50-foot woman stumbling around on one gigantic high heel. If I return it to her, will she think of me as the dashing handsome prince or the incredible shrinking shoe salesman."

Figure 15. from *Yow* #2.

28. Las Vegas is both the American dream and the American nightmare. It continues to be one of the more fascinating visuals of the underbelly of the United States. I highly recommend visits there on occasion just to check things out—see how we're decaying and corrupting. I'm not going to read this page, but I'm showing this because this is where Zippy first spouted his catch phrase "Are we having fun yet." Not on this page, but in this strip. When Bartlett's approached me in—I forget what year, 5 or 6 years ago—I got a call from the editor. And he was going
to give me credit for the "Are we having fun yet" saying, but he wanted to know exactly where Zippy had first said it. I did some research, I had no idea, and I eventually found this page [Figure 15] in the strip "Back to Pinhead, the Punks and the Monks" from *Yow* #2 in 1979. In the third row on the bottom right; Zippy in a fit of inspiration. In this particular story, he's become the inadvertent guru to a group of twenty-somethings, and they're trying to interpret all of his *non sequiturs* as having heavy, very specific meaning. Says Zippy in that panel, screaming, while he's playing the violin, "Let me do my tribute to fishnet stockings, are we having fun yet? Fishnet, fishnet, fishnet, fishnet." These two groups of people, the punks and the cultish monks, and they are desperately trying to understand what Zippy is saying so they can achieve some sort of enlightenment. Anyway, that's the first time he said, "Are we having fun yet?" Certainly not intended by me to be anything more than another non sequitur coming out of Zippy's mind.

![This image is currently not available](image1.png)

**Figure 16.** inside cover, *Are We Having Fun Yet?*.

29. But I decided to exploit my saying a little bit, and in 1985, I did what is the closest thing I've ever done to a graphic novel—a book called, *Are We Having Fun Yet?*—a book in which Zippy goes through a whole series of adventures which are vaguely connected and do have a kind of conclusion at the end. But it doesn't have the kind of graphic novel structure you'd expect. Anyway, this is the cover [Figure 16]; it was a fold-out and it was showing a literal peek inside Zippy's brain. His brain is being revealed here to contain at the top [reads] "thoughts about stretch denim, a quarter pound of Gorgonzola, fear of Burt Reynolds movies, distressed carpet remnants, home of the spin cycle, the Flintstones memorial trampoline, Troy Donahue descending a staircase," and in the very timelines compartment of all, "major career decisions."

![This image is currently not available](image2.png)

**Figure 17.** Pirate's Cove

30. In 1997 (this happens very often to me) someone sent me a brochure. People send me all these examples all the time of "Are We Having Fun Yet?" as appropriated by other people, other organizations. There's a Howard Johnson's napkin that says "Are We Having Fun Yet?" There's Garfield T-shirts saying "Are We Having Fun Yet?" I've trailed behind cars with "Are We Having Fun Yet?" bumper stickers

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many times. So, I just thought I'd do a strip that kind of directly addresses the issue [Figure 17]. The strip is called "It Doesn't Mean What You Think It Means." The first panel, [reads] The entrance to Pirate's Cove theme park, Ocean City, Maryland. There is an asterisk saying this is a certified location. Griffy is pointing up at a giant "Are We Having Fun Yet?" banner over the entrance saying, "Look Zippy" and Zippy saying, "my copyrighted saying." And, Griffy says, "No Zippy, don't you remember. We looked into that and can't copyright a saying unless the words are made up." And Zippy says, "So I can't pursue legal remedies with Howard Johnson, Garfield, Pirates Cove or a thousand other imitations?" And Griffy says, "No, but don't you feel proud that you first uttered such a popular phrase and first presented the gift of laughter to millions around the globe?" And Zippy says, "I want a free corn dog."[laughter]

Figure 18. from Bartlett's Familiar Quotations

31. And here's proof positive of my entry [Figure 18]. And whenever I give this, I like to read it in sequence starting just above the Joni Mitchell quote. [reads] "We are stardust, we are golden and we got ourselves back to the garden." "Are We Having Fun Yet?" "Evil Empire." "May the Force be with you." Just let that filter down a little bit.
32. Gradually, as I said, it was getting a little tough to do the insane Zippy for me. He needed a partner. He needed me. He needed Griffy. Griffy was originally created as my stand-in in a series of strips called *The Griffith Observatory* [Figure 19]. This was done as a weekly syndicated half page comic through Rip Off Press Syndicate in the late '70s, early '80s. And this is the cover of the first collection. The Griffith Observatory, as you probably know, especially if any of you has been to LA or lives in LA, is a real place in Griffith Park. It's an observatory. I don't believe they do much astronomical observing these days, but its kind of a landmark. Kind of a place where school busses do tours. And, I just decided, wouldn't it be cool, its got my name, what if the telescope was turned down, you know, on humans instead of up at the stars? That would be a nice device to just, you know, as an observational gimmick to do a series of strips. So, in *The Griffith Observatory*, what I basically did was I picked a topic and I explored it.

![Image of The Griffith Observatory cover](image)

*Figure 19. The Griffith Observatory, cover.*

33. These are some early strips. I'll just read this one. This is called "The Doomsters" [Figure 20]. These here are strangely applicable to today still, I think. There's a,
kind of, professorial type guy pointing at a chart on the wall which is labeled "Irreversible Downward Curve." A couple of people in the class are saying, "Hopeless," "Inevitable." And the professor says, "The two factors are world famine and nuclear proliferation. There's absolutely no hope." In the next panel, there's an example of another kind of doomer scenario. Your astronomy buff. They tend to be another purveyor of doom, reveling in black holes, empty matter and a finite universe. So, the male part of the couple here is saying to his wife or girlfriend, "Listen honey, about this month's phone bill." And she's saying, "Henry, did you now that a giant dead star is heading towards earth on a collision course?" And I'll skip to the bottom left panel here. Another doomer category, and the radical who has his finger on the real source of the problem. And there's this radical saying, "It's simple. Eliminate Rockefeller and all the members of his trilateral commission. It's the only way. This planet is not their play thing." And, finally at the end, "Finally we have the all in one Doomster," namely me, "Who translates his own anxiety into plots or conspiracies both government and corporate, the existence of which keeps him in a state of constant revulsion with the modern world in general and the American society in particular. Cartooning is his only outlet. Lighten up. What the hell? Get mellow."

Figure 21. "Clothes That Wear People."

34. On a little more mundane level, this one was called "Clothes That Wear People" [Figure 21]. And I believe these jackets have never gone out of fashion so I don't have to explain what puffy jackets are. They're bigger than ever. The first row at the left says, "the popular down-filled ski jacket overwhelms its wearer with the pneumatic look. The slippery nylon material adds another repulsive quality to this garment." These people are all in line to see the first Stars Wars movie in 1977. Next row, "Men's formal wear today closely resembles a clown costume complete with frills and an exaggerated bow tie." Strangely, this still continues to this day. And the next panel, this is strictly disco wear, so its kind of back as a nostalgia thing. A guy shopping in a clothing store—like I said, this is 1977. [reads] "Can I help you sir?" And the guy says, "have you got the one with the speeding dune buggy and the foxy blonde in the front seat?" And at the right, it says, "The shirt that is not a shirt is everywhere. It has been mistakenly perceived as 'colorful' or 'far out' by a wide variety of visually naïve types. Actual photographs in all their glory often adorn these polyester nightmares." And the salesman responding to the guy's question says, "No sir, but have you seen our Rocky Mountain Sunset with Bald Eagle?"

35. And I'll skip down to the bottom right there. This is something I guess has never come back: leisure suits. [reads] "Leisure suits are a part of the feminization of
men's clothing, being a kissing cousin to that uncomfortable combo of casualness and correctness: the women's pantsuit." And, here's a couple I spotted in New York. The guy is thinking, "I guess this is good." And the woman says, "he looks so much younger." [laughter] And at the bottom here's something I completely made up. I'd love to say it happened, but I was just kidding. Flash: a disturbing new trend was noticed at several California resorts recently. This fashion is worn exclusively by teenage boys at present. And the arrow says, "Boxer shorts stick out beneath denim cutoffs." [laughter] I guess I have to feel responsible for that.

Figure 22. "Good for you/Bad for you".

36. A lot of people ask me what happened with The Griffith Observatory—"it was the best thing you ever did" et cetera. Usually, I interpret that as hostility towards Zippy and try to get out of the conversation. But, in truth, I really believe The Griffith Observatory is alive and well. It has just taken different forms. This is a strip I did [Figure 22]. At the bottom, the left panel depicts, I believe this is an old postcard, it depicts, I would say Milwaukee in 1948. Just a beautiful, classic, "Main Street USA." I have dreams about streets like this. I don't know what it is about them, but they just invoke my very early childhood or something and makes me feel very comfortable, safe and happy. So, I wrote "Good for you" on that and on the right the classic, grim American strip mall. And, I just wrote "Bad for you." I get a lot of reprints on this in various places.

Figure 23.

37. And apropos of the underground comics theme of this weekend's conference, I thought I would show one of my random memory strips. I do these strips irregularly on Sundays, once every six to eight weeks or so. And these, to me, are a little closer to The Griffith Observatory spirit maybe than any other thing I do. But, this [Figure 23] is specifically a memory of my very literal beginnings as an underground cartoonist, when I had brought my first underground comic to San Francisco to be published. So, the first panel is me lying on the bed of a cheap hotel. I arrived in San Francisco in January 1970 and checked into a cheap Chinatown residential hotel. So, I am lying in the bed wide awake. [reads] "Is that someone being pistol whipped in the next room?" [laughter] This is all 100% true.
On the table next to me it says, "the artwork for 'Tales of Toad #1'"

38. Just a quick aside. I was so naïve at that point about comic production. I was four pages short. I arrived with 28 pages and was told very quickly, "Bill, it's got to be 32 pages. That's the correct number; it's multiples of eight." So, I spent the entire week in the cheap Chinatown residential hotel doing four very quick pages. Anyway, the second panel. "I spent all my time putting the finishing touches on my very first underground comic book." And, I'm looking askance. "Is that someone being stabbed in the very next room?" And the third panel, "There was a strangely touching note taped to the door of the ladies' room on my floor." This is absolutely true. This is a picture of me looking at the side that says, "Women lonely. Men not hallowed be." (Women only, men not allowed in the ladies' room.) The last panel. "I ate tomato beef chow mein for two weeks and talked to no one but the waiter." And, I'm talking to the waiter, "This is my last day. What do you recommend?" And the waiter says, 'Kentucky Fried Chicken.' [laughter] And the bottom says, "it was all very film noirical." Other random memories that I've done: a couple of years ago, I was mugged in Montreal and I did a strip about that. I did a tribute to Jean Shepherd when he died, the famous writer.

39. In 1955 to 1958 I believe, my mother had a very interesting job. She was a secretary to a man named Lawrence Lariar who was a cartoonist of no particular note, but what he was well known for doing was a book called The Best Cartoons of the Year. And you can still see this in used bookstores. I think they began in maybe '53 and went to the early '60s. In reality, my mother and I selected all those cartoons. It was a job that he turned over to her. What he would do was he would ask all of the gag cartoonists—Saturday Evening Post, Colliers, you know, gag cartoonists of the day—to submit what they thought was their best cartoons of the year. The original artwork. That pile of original art was delivered to my mother one day and laid out on the living room floor. And she and I went over it and just picked out the best cartoons of the year. So if you ever see those books, you can see my 35 year old mother's and my 12 year old self's taste in gag cartoons for that year. That's basically what you are getting.

40. Speaking of which, since this all happened in Levittown where I grew up—the belly of the beast. Here is the strip I did of the subject that was featured in a comic book called Let Me Out of Here edited by Diane in 1978 called "Is There Life After Levittown?" [Figure 24] Once again I'm just following some themes in my comics career. There's a quote in the first panel here from an article on Levittown
that came out. A critical article. There were nothing but critical articles on Levittown when it first appeared. A man named Eric Larrabee in Harper's Magazine had a quote that says, "The little Levitt house is American suburbia reduced to its logical absurdity." Which I concur with highly from experience.

![Figure 25. "Ye Olde Levittowne." orig. pub. 24 June 2002.](image)

41. And here's another Levittown strip I did in June of last year. As a kid, I was aware of something that I never could document, but we moved to Levittown in 1952. Levittown was actually first built in 1947 or 48. My mother remembers from speaking to friends who had bought the original Levitt houses that you had to sign a restriction clause. She did not personally have to sign when we bought our house, but she remembers others having signed. I came across it, of all things, in an authorized chamber of commerce history of Levittown, just put in there as an artifact, not specifically focused on this clause, but there it was. So I'm quoting from the contract you had to sign when you bought your Levitt house [Figure 25]. It starts out very harmless. These Levitt houses are kind of speaking. These are the classic ranch houses. The one I lived in is the second model. The first panel - these are quotes, once again, from the covenant you had to sign— [reads] "No fences, either fabricated or growing may be put up without the written consent of County Community Corporation." Second panel: "Only portable revolving dryers are permitted. They must be used only in the rear yard -- not on Saturdays, Sundays, or holidays." Third panel: "Lawns must be cut and tall weeds removed at least once a week between April 15 and November 15." And the fourth panel: "The tenant agrees not to permit the premises to be used or occupied by any person other than members of the Caucasian race." So, there's the smoking gun of Levittown.

42. I delivered newspapers as a kid, Newsday specifically. And there was literally one black family in town and they were on my newspaper route. They lived, not in a Leavitt house, but in one of the few remaining Victorian farmhouses around which Leavittown was built. They were these so-called "hold-out houses." I would occasionally spot them riding down the street; I would look between two houses and in the back yards of these houses would be this trapped farmhouse.
surrounded completely by these Leavitt houses with a little pathway leading to it. In one of these houses a black family lived—multi-generational, grandparents, parents, kids, and the youngest boy went to my school briefly. He only attended for one year and then disappeared, I don't know what happened to him. But, I would come once a week and collect my sixty cents and just kind of wonder what it was all about and where I was living. I was desperate as a kid to get out of Levittown and find what I thought would be a real place. A place with a main street, with a variety of buildings, with—I didn't put it in these terms—with some sort of ethnic and cultural diversity that was sorely lacking in Levittown. And the only way I could do it was to get into New York. So I'd get on the Long Island Railroad as often as I could, starting at the age of fifteen or sixteen, and get into Greenwich Village. I literally once bumped into Bob Dylan coming out of a bank. But, I was just desperate to be in a real town. Looking back, I'm actually grateful for the whole thing because it gave me a huge amount of material. Your past is your material.

Figure 26. from *Young Lust* #5

43. Continuing on from Zippy, I'm going to go through my major characters, kind of loosely, roughly now. Claude Funston was an early invention. Once again, I had no intention of continuing this character, he just came in and sat down and took his place in my little pantheon. This [Figure 26] is from *Young Lust* #5, "Too Much Fun," year 1977. Claude's kind of a perennially lovesick urban hillbilly whose real life kind of parallels the guests on tabloid talkshows. He's kind of shamelessly American. The first panel, Claude is just reveling in his leisure suit, sitting in the living room and he's saying, "Gorsh, I've become so suave and sophisticated that I'm exciting myself just trying to think of what degenerate activity to engage in next." The next panel, "Claude Funston drives a 1957 Thunderbird." And, he's driving through downtown LA here. "Guess I'll check out the Thrifty Drug on Wilshire, I'm out of Listerine anyways." So he enters the drugstore. The dialogue above the balloon continues, "It needs a new muffler, but that can wait." And Claude says, "Where's the party at? When you're looking for a good time, a lot of things can wait." He comes up to another character. This character is actually based on a real LA icon named Nudie, the Rodeo tailor, who has since gone on to glory. Nudie says, "There's one in Malibu, but they hire guards." Claude says, "That don't stop me. All you have to do is dress right; that's the secret of gettin' in anywheres." Nudie says, "Well, we got nothing to lose." This is basically a mood piece about Claude's life.
44. Later as I tried to develop a musical, he became more of like a vehicle for my critique of dirtball America—dirtball America meaning the beloved redneck America that we all cherish. This is Claude's world. This [Figure 27] is from the Zippy the Pinhead Calendar from 1991. These are Claude's touchstones: on the left wrestling, below that televangelism, below that heavy metal, to the top right guns and stuff, gambling, and home shopping. Claude's just in dirtball heaven, screaming, "Yee-ha!" In a souped-up mud monster truck. What he's running over and destroying with the giant monster truck wheels are a Picasso painting, a Greek vase, a book labelled Sartre, another book labeled Plato, an artist's palette, and another book there—Alfred Jarry. We can see Griffy in the back seat, who has been tied and gagged. Zippy's getting into the spirit with the American flag. "America, love it hate it, love it hate it. When do I collect unemployment?" one of Zippy's catch-phrases.
45. Here's an updated recent Claude [Figure 29]. This is from January 1999. The first panel, Griffy and Claude are together. [reads] Griffy says, "Suprised to see you reading Claude, what have you got there?" And, Claude says, "Book on dinosaurs, hoo-whee them puppies was big!" Griffy says, "Let me ask you a question Claude, do you believe in evolution?" Claude says, "You kiddin? all that hogwash about us rising out of the goo millions of years ago? No way. It goes against my religion." Griffy says, "Okay, well you like dinosaurs and they existed millions of years ago." As Claude is coloring in the dinosaurs, Claude says "Yeah, so? What's your point partner? I'm busy coloring in T-Rex here." Griffy leaves in disgust, "What was I thinking, pointing out a logical contradiction to someone who's whole life is a logical contradiction." Claude says, "Hey, everyone knows they came from space anyways, brain boy."

46. Embarrassing as this is, here's the cover of *Tales of Toad #1* 1970, my first underground comic book. [Figure 30] Creative use of moiré patterns. Moiré patterns, in case you don't know what they are, is what you're NOT supposed to
do with color separations. Color printing was done, as it is today in four colors, red, yellow, blue, and black. In those days, you had to literally take acetate overlays, put down what they called cipitone, and put them down at the right angle so when they mesh with each other they did not create weird patterns. I did not know that at the time and the patterns on Mr. Toad's pants were a complete shock to me at the time this came out. Actually, I thought it was kind of cool.

Figure 31. Toad T-shirt design.

47. Another very early Toad image [Figure 31]. This is from a t-shirt design put out by Rip-Off press in 1971: [reads]"Mr. Toad's essential three qualities, knowledgeable, sophisticated, and gross." As I said, Toad is a full-blown version of my stalking id I guess—kind of a big green sociopath with a permanent chip on his shoulder. He too has evolved over the years. I think he's gone from being just a bully physically and kind of intimidating out-of-control character to a much more threatening movie intimidating character. And here he is in the strip from 1995 with Griffy [Figure 32].

Figure 32. "The tie that binds."

48. Griffy is looking up saying, "Mr. Toad, how can I be more like you?" Mr. Toad is taking something out of a drawer and says, "Wear this bowtie." Griffy's holding the tie and says, "If I do, will I stop whining, complaining and self-obsessing?" Toad says, "Instantly." Toad puts it on Griffy and Griffy looks a little bit questioning, "I just feel so cut off from feelings of love and hopefullness and compassion and vulnerability." Toad says, "It's beginning to work." [laughter]
49. Here's a scene between Toad and Zippy from May of 2000. A strip called "Four Frame Game;" [Figure 33] they're at a bowling alley. As with all of my strips in the past five years or so, all locations are 100 percent authentic; they're all real, all based on places I've been or photographs sent to me by readers. I never use secondary source material - I never use books or magazines. I have this obsession, wherever I place Zippy in a real world context, the photographs that I use for the exteriors and interior drawings are unique, are unique to the world and have never been published. I don't know why. It's just one of my things. Anyway, so this is a bowling alley in, I think, Lahabra, south of LA. [reads]First panel, a balloon is coming out of the coffee shop in the bowling alley saying, "Alright, go on, ask." Zippy's voice says, "Why do we bowl, Mr. Toad?" Mr. Toad says to Zippy, "You want to know why we bowl?" And Zippy says, "Yes, I want to know why we bowl." Toad says, "We bowl to keep death away." Zippy says, "I thought the automatic pin-setter took care of that." It's fun to do Toad because he's so bad and so evil, and yet I control him.

50. Shelf-life, another continuing character. This is Shelf-life's very first appearance [Figure 34] in the pages of National Lampoon from 1983 when they had something called "The Funny Pages." Once again, I had no inkling that he would become a continuing character. I had just come back from a visit to New York. I either met someone like this or made an aggregate out of various people I had met. Shelf-life is a guy who's always looking for the next big thing. He's kind of a street hustler.
51. My more recent Shelf-life strip, just to give you more of a continuity here, this is from 1994, its called "Cry Me a Cash Flow" [Figure 35]. And Griffy sees Shelf-life and says [reads] "Shelf-life! It was you who stole Edward Munch's 'The Scream' from that museum in Oslo! But wasn't that returned ... I can't remember." This is based on a real event; I don't know if you remember. The famous Scream painting was indeed stolen from this museum in Oslo. And so Shelf-life says "Well, maybe it was. Maybe it wasn't, but this is the real 'Scream'!" And Griffy holds it and says, its the second most merchandized painting in the world, after Da Vinci's "Mona Lisa." And Shelf-life goes—and he's constantly changing shirts and this particular shirt has the motto "Take a bite out of Munch"—says "That's why I took it, I've got licensing deals lined up like you wouldn't believe! And Griffy looking very disconcerted says "Sigh, the angst, despair, this perpetual torment at the heart of the human condition." And Shelf-life says, "Sigh, the t-shirts, the dolls, the TV movie of the week.

Figure 35."Cry Me a Cash Flow" orig. pub. 9 April 1994.
52. So, here's my first claim to fame, Young Lust [Figure 36]. It was a parody of something that kind of faded out of existence, very shortly after I parodied it. I hope I wasn't responsible. They were romance comics, which I am sure you are familiar with, just in the general history of comics. They are very much ignored. I think they are worthy of an academic dissertation, I really do. In a weird kind of way, this is what I was doing. It was meant, clearly, to be much more than what made it sell, which was sex. It was meant to be social satire. But this cover as I was saying, paid the rent for the first couple of years. And the cover has a lot to do with it. [reads] The woman is thinking as her clueless boyfriend stares off into the distance. "Two weeks ago, he was dry humping me in the elevator. And now, I'm lucky if he remembers my goddamned name!" And at the bottom right, the Young Lust pledge: "This is the comic that goes all the way. It's for gals, guys, whatever. There is excitement here for everybody." A lot of people that bought this don't quite get the satire—It just kinda goes past them. Now, it was a little like the Tijuana Bibles, let's face it.
53. This [Figure 37] was the very first page of the first story on the list. Literally, just a send up of the idea of the social mores of the day. The first panel is a guy with two women in bed, and the dialogue says "Ted and I were an average young couple. We had our difficulties. After five years of marriage, the truth of the matter was, we were getting bored with our sex life. One day after I ran home from work, Ted picked up one of those tabloids with all those funny ads." And at the bottom left, "No darling, it isn't you. It's us. Even, sob, changing positions can't help!"

![Figure 38. cover, Young Lust #8, 1993.](image)

54. Fast forward, 1993. Is anyone familiar with Young Lust #8? I have to ask, because I have never gotten one comment, in my entire life, from this story. This is Young Lust #8 [Figure 38]. It has a Dan Clowes cover. It came out in 1993, and it must have gone instantly in the shredder, because I have literally never gotten one response. I decided to put all of my characters into the most explicitly sexual situations I could possibly imagine, as a tongue-in-cheek critique of pornography. It was called "Fleshed Out," and you could see Zippy and Griffy arriving at a party at the upper left. I mean it's a porno. 1993, I was seven years into my daily comic strip appearing in respected newspapers across the country. I was sweating this out for months after I did it, thinking, "What have I done? Someone's gonna find out. They're going to cancel me in the Washington Post and the San Francisco Examiner, Seattle Post. It's the end of my career. Why did I do something so stupid?" But as I said, no one has ever noticed it. [laughter] I think I did a really good job. I highly recommend it. I reread it last week. This is the last page. Every one of the characters is engaged in a sexual romp. Explicit and pornographic as it could possibly be. In a previous page to this, I have Griffy in a compromising position saying, "Well, what is pornography? Whatever turns you on, right? Human sexuality is a complex phenomenon." And his girlfriend at the moment is saying "Hey, wait a second, I'm not finished with my scathing, uh"
he says "Of course, the male and female versions differ widely, in very distinct ways. The clinical approach puzzles me. These videos with their tight close ups of plunging meat. Only a dirt bald brute could find that arousing, n'est pas?" The punch line of this whole strip is at the end, his occasional wife and Zippy are having explicit sex and she says "Oh, Zippy, I love it when you talk dirty." And Zippy says, "Are we having sex yet?"

Figure 39. Zippy Calendar, 1995.

55. A little softer core was the 1995 Zippy calender [Figure 39], which was dedicated at the bottom right, it says "Zippy and Zerbina take monogamy to a whole new level of ecstasy. 365 days of delirium." It was a lot less lurid on the inside, but you know, a cover is a cover.

Figure 40. "Two Guys and a Girl Group" orig. pub. 12 August 2002.

56. Now here's something very Young Lust related, once again...the mood just struck me. It was time to revive Young Lust, maybe. This is a series I did in August of last year. Now, I got the most responses to it of anything I've ever done. It is a series of strips that went on for about three weeks in which, at the beginning, a Young Lust-type (pretty girl type) character suddenly appears in the Zippy comic strip. The first panel of the first strip, entitled, "Two Guys and a Girl Group" [Figure 40]. The young lust girl is saying "I don't understand, how did I end up in this awful (sob) comic strip?!" And Zippy is looking at her: "I don't know, but I think I'm in love!" And Griffy says "Control yourself, Zippy, she may be some kind of spy!" Yet another conceit of this strip is that the female character changed from panel to panel into another character. It's just a whole series of iconic, stereotypical, Young Lust-type girls. So in the second panel, Zippy is saying "A
spy, yes, a beautiful spy! Just like an intense, Ben Affleck thriller!" [laughter] And Griffy says "Watch it, Zippy, she's obviously from another strip and I'm going to investigate." In the next panel, Griffy is beginning to apply something to his face and he's saying "Wait here, as soon as I redraw my features, I'm off to check out the few remaining realistic comics in the paper." And Zippy says "Sigh, isn't it magical the way she morphs into different lovlies each time I look at her?" And she's sobbing in the next panel.

![Zippy comic strip panel](image)

Figure 41. "Let's Get Real" origin. pub. 20 August 2002.

57. The next strip [Figure 41], actually I think its a few strips later but I'm condensing this, [reads] "Desperate to locate the comic strip home of the 'pretty girl character,' who wandered into Zippy's domain, Griffy ransacks Apartment 3-G." And there's a character from Apartment 3G who's saying "I don't know why, but I have this terrible feeling I'm being satirized. Now please leave." And Griffy says, "But, but, but, we're working for the same syndicate!" All of the strips that I played with in this series are King Features strips, which is my syndicate, just so I don't get in trouble with anybody. I cleared it with them at first. The second panel, Griffy visits the Judge Parker strip. The chiseled, handsome Griffin I've completely redrawn says, speaking of the pretty girl that entered his reality, "She may be in copyright violation." The Judge Parker character says—actually, I don't know who Judge Parker is, I have to confess. This may be Judge Parker, I'm not sure—he says, "I don't see a search warrant, Mister! I'll see you in court!" And in the third panel, Griffy tracks down Mark Trail, Griffy says "No, she doesn't have an ear tag or a tufted forelock." To which, Mark Trail responds, "Sorry chief, if she isn't tagged or tufted, I can't help you."
And I believe this is the second to the last strip. It's kind of the end of the story [Figure 42]. So Griffy's been searching from one comic to the next, looking where this character has escaped from. [reads]And the first panel of this last strip, he's saying, "Listen to me!" He's figured it out, actually. He says, "Listen to me! You escaped from Our Love Comics #122, February 1973. You must leave Zippy and return to your hackneyed storyline." She looks up at Griffy and says "How can I ever thank you, this is such a relief!" But Zippy, who has also been redrawn at this point, says "But I, but I completely redrew myself for you! My nose is chiseled!" And she's sobbing. "No, it's no use. I need to go home where everyone's nose is chiseled." And in the last panel, Zippy looks kinda pissed off "Well, to tell you the truth, I was getting really tired of all the morphing and the sobbing!" And she says "And to tell you the truth, I'm just not ready for a man in a muumuu! Goodbye!" To which Griffy responds "Let her go, Zippy, she's a registered Republican." [laughter] Kansas City didn't like that one too much either, but it's a daring job.

And as a capper to this series, I just decided to do a color version [Figure 43]. In the first panel, I mean these are pure Young Lust takeoffs here, obviously swiped from real women's comics. I'll read this and then I'll talk about something else. [reads]The first panel, the sobbing girl is saying, "it's no use. I'll never be free of them!"
him!" as she morphs into two other girls, "He's never given me a reason to doubt him, or has he? Maybe I (sob) don't know what love is!" In the last panel, the chiseled Griffy and the chiseled Zippy. Griffy says, "Being incredibly good looking can really be a curse, Zippy." To which Zippy says, "So true."

60. This whole thing kinda brings up the subject of Roy Lichtenstein to me. I remember when I first saw Lichtenstein's pop comic panel blow up paintings in the mid '60s. I just laughed my head off. I thought it was great. I was going to school at the time. I thought it was hugely liberating to see Abstract Expressionism finally take off and be replaced by something a little more interesting. I had yet to get the cartoonist bug. I thought of myself as a serious painter at the time. But my paintings were getting to that point where, even in art school, there would be an occasional word balloon pop up there. You know, you can't suppress who you are for too long. But, I was very happy to see the Lichtenstein paintings; I thought they were very funny. But once I became a cartoonist, I looked at them a little differently. The Griffy part of me was outraged. That Lichtenstein would, in effect, swipe and copy a panel from from a Romance comic or from a war comic, or (as he did in his very first pop art painting) he swiped Mickey Mouse. It was Mickey Mouse talking to Donald Duck. And this was on canvas, in oil paint, and in a gallery. So it had been transformed, in other words, into fine art. "Appropriate" is a word I would rather use for what Lichtenstein did. All I could think of was, "What did the guy who inked that panel think of that painting? What did, probably the hack cartoonist who did that war comic in 1953 think when he looked at that Lichtenstien painting?" Because that ended up being my perspective. I have to say that Roy Lichtenstein's glow considerably dimmed in my eyes after that. Of course, it's more material for satire, so I can't really get too serious about it. But the whole pop art thing, as funny and important as it was at the time, had a kind of dark side for me as a cartoonist. Because it doesn't acknowledge. It says, "There's high art and there's low art. And then there's high art that can take low art, bring it into a high art context, appropriate it and elevate it into something else. Just because I say I'm a fine artist I can do that." There's a certain tension there that isn't acknowledged. A certain theft going on that isn't acknowledged, that is very disturbing, you know, if you want to get technical. That's just my Griffy rant on that subject, it's not something that deeply disturbs me. But, there it is.

Figure 44. from, Real Pulp #2

61. Another of my comic-related obsessions over the years, this is something truly obscure, even to me. As I said, when I was looking through my artwork to prepare for this talk, I once again came across something I hadn't seen since I did it. This
was from *Real Pulp* #2, the comic that followed Zippy's debut, in 1973, also edited by cartoonist Roger Grant.

62. This was my exorcism of Richard Corbin [Figure 44]. I don't know if anybody remembers Richard Corbin? He had a highly prolific early career in underground comics doing the most hackneyed, garbage storylines with this intensely eroticized violence that was just ... it wore me down. It was the kind of stuff that, I understood what he was doing, but there was something so humorless, so completely seriously humorless about it, that it just seemed like nothing but material for satire. I mean, it was literally just put there for me to satirize, and so I did this strip. It's almost incoherent. I'm not going to bother reading it. Corbin's dialogue was incoherent, too. I called it "Muscle Men from Mars," and it's nothing but these eroticized overly muscled figures fighting each other in this kind of pansexual—I just wanted to get something out of my system. There's really no point in reading the dialogue. It's just "take this," "take that," "I'll pop your eyes out." This was the only comic strip I ever did that S. Clay Wilson liked. [laughter] It really made me feel kind of warm and fuzzy when he told me how much he liked this comic strip. And he said, "You really should do more like this, you know." He absolutely missed the satire.

63. To continue the theme, this, as I said, the previous strip was not specifically aimed at the superhero genre, it was actually aimed at this kind of fantasy slightly superhero-ish genre that had taken root in underground comics in the early '70s, which I felt completely alienated and separate from. This evolved in my critique of this kind of comics into a gradual kind of repulsion that I felt toward superhero

![Image of Zippy Quarterly #12 cover](image-url)
comics in general. To get that out of my system I did a whole series of strips for my daily strip in which Zippy and Griffy become superheroes. This is the cover [Figure 45]. The graphic sexual imagery, of course, did not appear in the strip. But, for Fantagraphics, I can take some liberties. So there's the superhero version of Zippy, tightly, tightly, costumed in a spandex polka dot outfit, approaching a classic comics fanboy, saying [reads] "Yo, comics geek! Check out my new ding-dong-o-matic! Eat taco sauce and die!" The sweaty, pimpled, sort of stereotypical fanboy is holding a five dollar bill in his hand and drooling. At the bottom right it says "Special! Incredibly commercial hot-selling issue! Attention retailers, this one is going to leap off the shelves!" I had a motto for each Zippy Quarterly at the top—it says "A quarterly collision of pondering, pandering and arrested development."

[Figure 46. "Pinman and the Chastiser".]

64. So this was the series [Figure 46]. It went on for weeks. I had a lot to get out of my system. So, it's called "Pinman and the Chastiser." The first panel is, as you could see, I mean it's directly related to the "Muscle Men from Mars" thing in its look at least, this kind of random eroticized violence. So, the first panel, the first strip at the bottom of the page here is called "Strap on Your Ammo." Griffy and Zippy are approaching the comic book store, and Griffy says "I don't know if I can do it, Zippy, I get so depressed in these places." And Zippy is opening the front door "C'mon, it'll be fun! Little Lulu! Tubby! Ignatz!" So they go inside and Griffy is really bummed out: "Yeah, if only it was Little Lulu, Tubby and Ignatz. Instead, it's Swamp Thing, Scrawl, Extreme Justice and the Beast." Zippy says "No no, Gandy Goose! Mighty Mouse! Pat the Prat! Little Max, I'm coming!" Zippy manages to find one Little Max comic. "Griffy why is that teenager over there covered in leather and tattoos and why am I holding a copy of Spawn #34?" Griffy says "Be afraid, Zippy, be very afraid. You've entered an - ulp! - comic books store."

[Figure 47. "Pinman and the Chastiser"]

65. A few pages later, through the magic of fiction, Zippy and Griffy have been turned to superheroes by something [Figure 47]. I can't even remember what.
They drank something or whatever. I just used one of those standard Spiderman kind-of methodologies to get a character from being wimpy to being overmuscled. And the first panel of this strip, in this series, the Zippy and Griffy superhero characters, the Pinman and (Griffy being the Chastiser, of course) are being approached by some rival superheroes. So the rival superheroes in the background's saying, [reads]"Party's over, Chastiser. No one messes with Dirtball's plans for world conquest and RV sales." "End of the ride, Pinman, your crusade against rationality stops here!" In the next panel, these two heroes actually confront each other, and one says to the other, because they haven't met before, in the strip. That is, the Zippy and Griffy superhero characters are about to be mugged by two other characters who don't know that they're both together. So, in the second panel, one of these rival superheroes says to the other, "Huh? The Reasonator? What're you doing out of your Ivory Tower? Climb down and check out the hoipoloi." And the Reasonator says, "Dirtball? You down-vested, backward ball-cap wearing cretin! I'll teach you a lesson you should have learned long ago!" And they get into a big sock-'em battle; "It's clobberin' time, brain boy!" And the Reasonator says, "Die, you wimpy little sandslug!" And Griffy as the Chastiser says, "Look! Our arch-enemies fighting to the death over us!" And Zippy says "Holy rollovers!"

Figure 48. "Pinman and the Reasonator"

66. The next strip [Figure 48]: [reads] Dirtball and the Reasonator, arch enemies of the Chastizer and Pinman battle it out behind a comic book store." Dirtball yells, "Say sayonara to your left brain, egghead!" And the Reasonator says, "I want you to know, while I'm killing you, that I abhor violence." In the next panel, they're actually kind of almost like melding into one big, overly muscled arm, and Dirtball says, "Uh! I cannot fight your reasoning powers! I'm beginning to - uhh! - think!" And the Reasonator says "I too am overcome - I'm starting to - uhh! - find neon skiwear attractive!" In the last panel, the duel ends in a draw and the Pinman says, to the Reasonator, "Alright you, promise me you'll never employ Cartesian logic again!" And Griffy's got Dirtball by the scruff of the neck; "And you! There'll be no more heavy metal music or Budweiser beer for you for a long time!" And Dirtball says "Please, please I beg you, don't take away my Bud!"
67. This is not the last strip [Figure 49]. It's close to it. Pinman and the Chastiser finish stuffing Dirtball and the Reasonator into two enormous grain silos outside Emporia, Kansas. Griffy (the Griffy character) says, [reads] "Well, we've made the world safe for good taste (mine) and random behavior (yours). Now what?" And the Pinman says, "Well, do we have the power to destroy John Tesh's career?" The Chastizer says, "Unfortunately not." To which the Pinman replies "Chasty! You've suddenly become dark and brooding! Are we about to grow even more muscle sub-groups?" The Chastiser says, "I'm beginning to recognize an awful truth, Pinman. We have met the enemy and he is us." To which I attribute, of course, the famous quote by Walt Kelly, creator of Pogo. In the last panel, Pinman, as they walk off into the distance, Pinman is saying "You mean?" and the Chastiser says, "Yes, we must destroy our own careers." Which they do.

68. Sub-theme number twenty-seven "a": my love-hate relationship with the fine art world—undoubtedly springing from my frustrated career as a fine artist. I went to art school from 1962 to '64. Actually that's where I met Kim. We both attended Pratt; we're both proud dropouts. Perhaps some part of me still secretly harbors the desire to be a gallery artist and to have gallery and critical reviews and all that stuff, so I constantly revisit this theme in my strips. In the Zippy, the 1990 Zippy art calendar [Figure 50] I just really took it on headfirst and just had fun parodying different art movements. You can see Zippy here parodying the famous panting by Ang, Odalisque, and to the right of him is the sort of Peanut version of Picasso's "Demoiselles d'Avignoon" and on the back cover, four major artists of our time: Walter Keane, the big eyed velvet painting guy; Rodin's "The Thinker" with Zippy holding a bottle of Taco Sauce; Van Eyck, at the bottom left, which is
a famous painting of a Dutch couple getting married and this little tiny mirror in which you can see them reflected behind them, it's got Zippy and Zerbina; and of course, the "Mona Zippy" at the bottom right with a little flying saucer in the sky.

Figure 51. "High Art / Low Art"

69. This strip [Figure 51] I did, I think, apropos of a show, I'm not sure, maybe it was a precursor. There was a show at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, called "High Art / Low Art." Art Spiegelman did a great critique of it in *Art News*. He did a full-page, "just let 'em have it" critique of the whole thing. I think I might have done this before that, I'm not sure. Anyway, I'm parodying four different artists here. First, of course, Magritte's famous surreal painting of the guy with the green apple floating in front of his face and he's saying, "What's all this controversy over high art and low art?" Then this weeping Picasso woman in the second panel is says, "The distinction has become academic, n'est pas." Then the Keane painting girl in the third panel says, "Just dial 411." And then Sluggo, from the Nancy and Sluggo strips says, "Art is information."

Figure 52. Sunday strip. 16 December 2001.

70. This is something in the same vein that I did in December 2001 [Figure 52]. It requires that you be familiar a little bit with the career of Thomas Kinkade, a mall artist who specializes in cozy New England farmhouses and sort of Christian themes and sells them. He has a career based on reproductions in which he fools people into thinking that reproductions are actual paintings by reproducing them on textured material that reproduces the brushstroke. And I think for, like, 25 more dollars you can get what is called the "highlighted" version where the little gleaming drops of water have little drops of actual paint in them. As far as I know, he never sells originals. He sells strictly reproductions. This is Zippy coming back from the mall, holding a Thomas Kinkade painting. [reads] "Griffy, look! I just bought this hand-retouched canvas lithograph at the mall!!" And Griffy, looking skeptical, reading a book entitled "Japanese Manhole Cover Art"
says, "Not one of those garden cottage things!" And Zippy says, "It's almost real! He's the painter of light! He evokes feelings of a simpler life! Plus, there's a bit of the artist's DNA in the signature!" (This is true.) "Oh man, I've never seen anything so cloying - it looks like it came from some cheesy thrift shop." Zippy's still holding it up with pride. "Look closer. It's all about family and love and nostalgia! It gives me a warm and fuzzy glow." Griffy says, "Aw geez, it's starting to evoke a glow inside me too—of nausea." Later: "Gee Zippy, I'm sorry I upchucked on your mall collectible." Zippy is scrubbing the painting and says, "That's ok Griffy, it blends right in to the golden tones of the sunset. Plus, now it has a little of your DNA."

71. Here's an example of something that kind of blew my mind, and a number of readers. I did a number of comic strips in 1994 in which the idea was that Zippy and Griffy were going to, at least Zippy, enter, literally, the world of The Family Circus, a single panel comic. Into the strip a few days I thought, "What the hell, I'll call Bill Keene. I'll get his phone number, and I'll see if he wants to literally jam this strip with me." I figured the chances were zero, but why not? I called him up; he was incredibly friendly. He lives in Phoenix, where Zippy is published in the local paper. Loves the strip; reads it every day. Y'know, at the end of the phone call I thought, "He's my blood brother. We're like the two surreal comic strip artists." [laughter]

72. So instead of me parodying—I mean, I do but instead of me literally drawing his characters into my strip—I said, "How about you draw them and you write the dialogue?" He said he'd agree to draw them, but I had to write the dialogue. So I said, "Okay." Anyway, I'll just read this series of about seven or eight strips [Figure 53]. Here's the first strip in which Zippy actually enters the Family Circus reality. The top right panel of the first strip which is called "The Jeffy Principle." [reads]

Suddenly Jeffy appears at a window, looks in on Zippy and says, "Psst. Zippy, it's sad bein' an inner child—Come outside and play." And Zippy says, "Jeffy!" Next strip: Zippy enters the magical world of the Family Circus, and Zippy and Jeffy are cavorting in a suburban back yard. Zippy says, "Jeffy, I'm confused about life! I need answers!" And Jeffy says, "Let's go talk to Mommy and Daddy!" (These are balloons actually lettered by Bil Keane). Next panel: Zippy approaches Jeffy's parents: "Bill!! Thel!! I've lost my direction! Show me the way! Show me the way!!" Bill says, "The way? I'm afraid I don't ... that is ... I, uh ..." Thel says, "I think I know what he means dear. Just follow the dotted line, Zippy, and you'll find the answer to your questions!" [laughter] And Zippy says, "It's Billy's path to happiness!!"
73. Then he approaches Billy—in the strip at the bottom. The strip is titled, "Billy Knows." "Billy!! I need guidance! I need enlightenment! I need a new entertainment system!" Billy says, "Uh-oh! I'm not s'posed to talk to strangers!" Zippy says, "But, Billy, I'm not a stranger! I've been obsessed with your rounded reasoning for decades! Tell me stuff!" Billy spills the beans: "Life is a circus, Zippy! It can be a circus of pain or a circus of delight!" [laughter] "You wear baggy clothes! You don't make sense! You're a clown. Make other people happy and you'll be happy! Bye!". And Zippy's very happy—he's actually holding the dotted line at this point. "Billy's right! I need to follow my own dotted line to
inner peace and job security!" Followed by, a couple of months later, Bil Keane sends me a Family Circus strip with the top panel left blank for me to include Zippy. Billy is dreaming of Zippy, and at the bottom, he wakes up. His mother trying to console him: [reads] "Why did you turn it off, mommy? I was watching *Zippy the Pinhead.*" What can I say? It's not exactly biting satire. [laughter] But it is surreal—you can't deny that. I have this original, proudly framed on my wall.

![This image is currently not available](image)

**Figure 54.** Zippy Movie promotional poster.

74. Next theme: The Zippy Movie. Zippy in Hollywood—A Twenty Year Odyssey. It ended last May, which I'll elaborate on in a few minutes. This at the height of our folly [*Figure 54*]. I don't know exactly what year this was. I'd say... late eighties? The idea to make a Zippy movie first reared its ugly head in the early '80s. I got a registered letter in the mail from a Hollywood lawyer. Inside was a check for $500, and it said, you know, "I want to make a Zippy movie."

75. I looked at the check and on the back of it and, in fine contractual language, it said basically that if I sign this check, he owns the rights to Zippy forever. I had no trouble turning that deal down, but that was just the first of many, many people who approached me over the years. And it grew in seriousness and intensity to the point where scripts were commissioned, stars were signed—or almost signed, deals were almost closed. At one point, we had NBC behind it, the NBC film division, not the television side of the business. Brandon Tartikoff himself was the, kind of, midwife of the whole project and was convinced that he could get this through. Michael Nesmith one of the Monkees was the co-backer of that particular insanity, and I remember once we had a meeting. We walked into the (Michael Nesmith had a production company called "Pacific Films" or something like that, and he claimed to have invented MTV; he did the first music videos) and we walked into his office, and above his desk was a big, red circle with a line through it—you know, the symbol for "banned" or "stop"—and it said "Monkees Jokes," with a big line through it. I looked through the window to the right and through the window was a huge sign for the Chinese restaurant next door and it was called Mon-Kees—M - O - N - dash - K - E - E - S. And I'm not sure he noticed that; he was a very strange person.

76. The first meeting ended with his sage advice, which was, "Let's submerge, but don't lose sight of the doughnut." This was the meeting during which we—Diane and I—were to be inspired to go out and make this screenplay. "Submerge, but don't lose sight of the Doughnut." It was a wonderful Zippy moment. I should have thought, "This guy is not going to get the financing together" at that
77. But what can you do? Brandon Tartikoff seemed like a serious player. We had Randy Quaid waiting to be Zippy. Unfortunately, his career was never quite at the level where he could get a movie made on his own. We were always told we had to get the elements together. Randy Quaid was one element, the script was one element, but it wasn't enough. We needed a famous director, a famous producer. Like I said, scripts were commissioned. Diane and I wrote 9 versions of the screenplay through all the years—well paid for every one of them. Many options came through from different people.

78. This particular piece here was commissioned—I did not do it, this is an air-brush painting. The movie's title was "Zippy Vision" and this was intended to raise finances. It appeared as a 2-page, center-spread ad in Variety Magazine. It, I believe, cost $25,000; that was the fee. The painting itself probably cost another $25,000. At the bottom—you can't see it—but at the bottom there was a line of type: "In Japanese." Aimed at Japanese investors, saying, basically, "We need money to make this movie." The guy who put the money up for this was named Bill McEuen, and he had just come off the Pee-Wee Herman film. He had just produced the first Pee-Wee Herman film, which also prompted a meeting with the Disney studios at this time.

79. We walked into that meeting, and the Disney people said, "We love the script, we love the concept, we just have one problem." And I said, "What's that?" And they said, "Stubble." I said, "What do you mean?" They said, "You know, Zippy's stubble. We think it might frighten small children." I said, "Well, perhaps, but that's not really how I see Zippy's audience, small children." "Oh no, we're not talking about the movie, we're talking about the theme park. Can you picture a giant-head, walk-around Zippy? The stubble would be these big black things sticking out. How would we deal with that?" They wanted me to solve that problem. If I could have solved that problem for them, who knows, we may have had a deal. Instead we were in the elevator and then the parking lot five minutes later, because I defended the stubble. This was at the time of Miami Vice, I said, "Well, Don Johnson's got stubble." [laughter] "It could be a good thing, you know." It was just a whole series of absurdities.

80. I'll fast forward to the last one and the punch line of my Hollywood career. After endless options, screenplays, finally Zippy Hollywood focus became an animated TV series—which almost got made, through Film Roman, the company that does The Simpsons. It was scheduled to go on Showtime. I won't go over the details of how that deal fell apart, but after it did—and I thought that surely this was the end, this was just a couple years ago—within a few weeks I got a call from Klasky Csupo, the production company that does The Rugrats and The Wild Thornberry's, a major success. They also, originally, of course, did Ren and Stimpy. So here's a Sunday strip I did when that deal came to a conclusion, which
I actually withdrew. I finally withdrew from negotiations on this particular one, so I — Oh, gee, I didn't even know which slide I was on.

Figure 55. Artist's depiction walk-around-character Zippy.

81. This slide is an artist's depiction of Zippy as a walk-around character at a Universal theme park in Florida [Figure 55]. [laughter] This was presented to me as Zippy's glorious future by King Features. They have a section in the Universal theme park called "King's Row" in which all of the King Features characters have little concession stands. There's a Dennis the Menace stand, there's Beetle Bailey. You can sort of see the Zippy building to the right there. To the left of it is Hagar the Horrible's viking ship. And you can see that Zippy character raised concerns about frightening small children [laughter]. They had no idea that that line had been used by Disney. They must have been on the same wavelength.

82. Anyway, Csupo reality struck me: they literally had no interest in Zippy as Zippy. They wanted to make Zippy into another Klasky-Csupo character. They sent me what are called "pitch books" or "bibles" showing how they had turned different characters into their, what amounts to, a studio "look." And it suddenly dawned on me that that's what they wanted to do with Zippy. So I killed the deal and I did this comic strip two days later [Figure 56].

Figure 56. Sunday strip. 28 July 2002.

83. So Griffy in the first panel is saying, "Hey Zippy? What would happen if you suddenly found yourself being produced by that big animation studio, Klasky Csupo?" And Zippy thinks, "You mean the ones that do The Rugrats and The Wild Thornberry's?" And the next panel, "Well, I might look like this." "Or this." "Or this, or this, or this." And at the end he turns into a Rugrat: "Or this—Oh no!" And Griffy looks at Zippy and says, "But Zippy, every cartoon character dreams of being bought by a major animation studio and going on television." To which
Zippy responds, "I'm a cartoon character?" [laughter]

84. This is the reason Zippy was never made into a movie. This is pure Zippy, to me. This is 2002. Zippy is staring off the balcony of some crazy-looking castle: "I can't get the lyrics to 'I think we're alone now' by Tommy James and the Shondells out of my head!" [laughter] Second panel: "They echo through my mind in an endless loop over which I have absolutely no control!" Last panel: "I feel like a Shondell."

85. I wish I had time to read this whole thing, but I don't. Once again, looking through my artwork, this just, sort of, screamed out at me. This is a strip I did for a comic book called *Zippy* #3 in 1980 in which I envisioned the future of all the underground cartoonists winding up in a big retirement home somewhere in Southern California. It's called "Cast of Characters," and in the splash panel you see in the middle, there's a nurse delivering me, as a decrepit old man in a wheelchair. [reads] And she's saying, "End of the line, Mr. Griffy." To which I respond, "A very nice inking job on the palm trees, nursh." The sign from the building says, "The Underground Cartoonist's Retirement Center: A Division of Leisure Villages, Incorporated." In the bottom right panel, you see me being wheeled in. There's Art Spiegelman, in the center. He says, "Is that you, Bill?" And to the right of him is S. Clay Wilson: "Bill? Bill who?" In the next panel I'm wheeled into the room, and there's Kim wearing a faded Pep Boys t-shirt. [laughter] And I look off down the row of people sitting: "Art? Justin? Those voices sound mighty familiar. Kim?" Kim says, "That hair! I recognize that! Sure, it's Griffy! I'll be. It took him long enough!" And the next panel. That's Michael McMillan, Robert Crumb, and Gilbert Shelton. McMillan's saying, "Are you positive? I thought he was here already." Crumb says, "Didn't he come in with Spain in '05?" Gilbert says, "Nah, that was '99." Then I start spouting off: "This is what you guys get for quittin' comics. You've all gone senile." The next panel. Justin Green says, "Yep, that's Griffy alright. Giving us a lecture as usual." And then Spain, holding a copy of *Subvert*, "I never could figure that boy out." And I'm ranting in the background, "Listen! It's not too late for another come-back! One more issue of *Arcade*! Whadda ya say?" [laughter] And I start hectoring Art, "Art! You're game, right?" Art says, "Well, maybe. It's been a long time. There is a small press here and some staples, I think. Crumb says, "Looks like Spiegelman's going for it." McMillan says, "Naturally." And art says, "T-squares need adjusting, we're a little low on rubber cement, but I've got three completely worked-out story ideas. I can get started on Thursday!" I say, "We may not have til next Thursday, pal. Come on, we all meet at the drawing tables." And there's Aline Kominsky holding a cane—she looks over her shoulder at Art pushing me down the hallway—saying, "Newsweek was here a few years back interviewing everybody for a nostalgia piece on underground. Uh, Bill?" I've fallen asleep.

86. I haven't got time to read this whole thing, but what happens is Art wheels me into a certain spot and then forgets what he was doing. And I wind up being confronted by all my characters who live in bungalows behind the retirement
center. One-by-one, Mr. Toad reveals who he really is to me, Claude reveals who
he really is to me, Alfred Jarry—they all start saying basically, psychologically,
what they mean. Just to fill out the cast of characters, in the top right there's Bob
Armstrong, there's Diane reading a copy of *Twisted Sisters*. The next page shows
me and Jay Kinney on exercycles in the basement. Jay was my collaborator on
*Young Lust*, and he's saying, "Bill, did we ever get paid for that ninth printing of
*Young Lust #2*?" I say, "I don't know, I'll check my files." At the bottom right is
Rory Hayes as embodied by his horrible skull character, and there's Jim Osborne
with a copy of one of his comics. I'll just get to the end here.

87. Art and I indeed decide to do another issue of *Arcade*. Art says, "The printing
will be done in Switzerland. I can arrange for a museum show to coincide with the
publication date." And I'm sort of in a delirious daze, "And I'll have five copies
put inside our medically sealed spaceship and sent off to the nearest live-
supporting solar system. It will be so perfect." Then it kind of starts to fall apart.
And there's Jay Lynch at the top left there holding his Pat the cat character.
Everybody's wondering where I am, and I'm on the bridge between the retirement
center and the cartoon characters' bungalows: "What are they all trying to tell me?
Have I clung too tightly to my mortality? Is that the lesson? Am I only a stage
prop? As much a cartoon character as my own creations? I've made a career out of
tearing apart illusions, pointint to the grotesque, the absurd. Was it merely to
avoid my own grotesqueness and absurdity? I've exposed human and social flaws,
and failed to advocate any remedy or alternative. Do people need to be reminded
how foolish they are? Why didn't I stay in Levittown and get a job selling vinyl
seat covers? Or become a real artist and make statements about space and time?
Or a movie director? Or a novelist? No. I had to make with the yuks. I had to go
into comics. Couldn't have chosen a nice, respectable art-form. No, not me. I was
a 'funny guy.'" And the bridge turns into the Golden Gate Bridge. "Well, at least I
knew how to deliver a punch-line to this story." And at the last second, the young
Griffy, in a kind of *It's a Wonderful Life* moment, stops the old Griffy from
committing suicide: "Hold it pops! This trip ain't over yet! You've forgotten one
thing, old man: we create them, not the other way around. We pull the strings;
they jump." And the old Griffy says, "Why, you're me!" Young Griffy continues,
"Uh-huh, and I take exceptioon to your 'hearts and flowers' speech. There's no
higher calling than that of the cartoonist, pop. After all, 'What fools these mortals
be.' It's only human." Toad hops by at Griffy's instruction, "And don't let these
segments of your psyche get the best of you. Watch this: Okay, Toad, quack like a
duck!" Toad bounces by: "Quack! Quack!" "Sure, they all represent one thing or
another, but they're your symbols, pop. Have fun with them while you can. I take
it you haven't seen the corral out back, huh?" "A corral?" All of his characters are
out there and Young Griffy has complete control over their every movement:
"Zippy, do the twist! Claude, down on all fours! Cherice, up on your head!
Vizeen, speak colloquial Hungarian! Hoppy, wiggle like a snake! Bilco, roll over
and over. Hahaha! Quick! Somebody turn the page!"

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editor.
88. I did try to insert these sayings into the English Language, unsuccessfully. Catch-phrases that never quite made it to Bartlett's: "Accept provolone into your life." "Laundry is the fifth dimension." And the classic, "If you can't say something nice, say something surrealistic." But they never quite made it. And could this be the harbinger of me in my later years? Is that me and Diane [laughter] in retirement home still asking the unanswerable question, "Are we having fun yet?"