

TRU CONFESSIONS

In the back section of the first issue of Alan Moore's masterful *Watchmen* series, the character Hollis Mason is instructed by a friend that in order to write, one should "... start with the saddest thing you know."

In the early 1960s, when I was seven or eight, I was barely aware that comics existed. I had seen them around, to be sure (we still had newstands back then), but I had just mastered the new art of reading and was still engrossed in things like Dr. Seuss' cat.

Somewhere around this time, my best friend, Bob, inherited a whole bunch of comics from an older relative who had outgrown them. They were books from the late '50s and early '60s, gaudily colored and jammed cover to cover with equally gaudy characters and more action than you can shake a stick at. These books were a revelation. I was hooked, and my pal Bob decided to keep them to himself. Good ol' Bob, my buddy, my best friend ... the butthead wouldn't share.

Thankfully, I soon met other kids who had comics and more magnanimous spirits, and fascination became obsession. One day my new best friend Gary suggested that I start buying my own. Buy comics? You can do that? I was astounded; it had somehow never occurred to me that you bought comics ... I guess I thought they only came from family members.

I went to my mother and explained, as best I could, this pre-adolescent passion of mine, sneaking in a mumbled request for money to buy one of these four-color wonders. I had a heckuva wheedle prepared in case persuasion was required, but mom simply said "sure," and handed me a dime. (As hard as it may be to believe today, ten cents had been the going price for comics since the dawn of the medium.)

Clutching my shiny coin, my heart in my throat, I raced the three blocks to the drug store in just under a second and a half. Vic's Pharmacy was, even in 1963, a bit of an anachronism, housing as it did, a soda fountain along with all the paraphernalia of your standard drug store. They also had a wire spin rack loaded with at least a million comics. Heaven.

There, amidst the mingling smells of camphor, peppermint and old dark wood, I spun that rack over and over again, trying to make an impossible decision. I wanted them all.

It was, I think, the first time I can recall being conscious of my heartbeat; it was going a mile a minute and thumping heavier than it ever had. Otherwise, there was just a general lightness of being, an almost overpowering ... pleasantness, and remembering brings that all back.

Somehow, years later that same afternoon, I made my choice. It was a copy of *Action Comics*, starring that guy with the cape that I thought was only a TV star. With something akin to reverence, I approached the counter to make my purchase. I laid the book gently on the glass over the cigar display and held my dime out to the pharmacist ... and Vic, kindly gentleman that I'm sure he was, shattered my world.

"That's **twelve** cents kid, you don't have enough there," he said, and, as though he had spoken in Urdu instead of plain English, I could not comprehend his words. He repeated them more slowly and it finally hit home.

I put the comic back in the rack and left the store. With more heart-aching dejection than I'd ever felt before, or since, I trudged home. The three blocks took eons this time. Once home, I tearfully explained this apocalyptic event to my mom, who listened sympathetically, then simply handed me the needed two pennies.

The sun shone again and I vowed then and there to vote for my mother for president at the first available moment ... then I ran back and reunited with my comic book. A happy ending and just the beginning of a love affair with comics that continues, unabated to this day, some twenty-five years later.

I thought that was the saddest comics-related thing I knew, but upon reflecting it isn't really sad at all in the long run. It was that early excitement that led me to want to do comics and create wonders to excite others the way I was on that fateful day in 1963. And now here I am, fulfilling that near life-long dream, and having as much fun as I've ever had. Thanks.

I meant to start with the "saddest thing," but instead I'll end with it.

Not doing comics, that's really the saddest thing I can think of.

ENJOY -
BRIAN