

Women's Comic Strips

By Patricia Morgan © 2006

My interest in women's comic strips resurfaced as I sorted through some magazines ready for recycling. In an issue of MS (May/June 1997) I re-discovered an article called ***Paper Movies: Feminist cartoonists create characters that are real, raunchy—and they'll knock your socks off.*** Now I'm not a big fan of raunchy but much of the rest of the article interested me. The article described ladies in the comic industry in the 1930s and 1940s drawing for women's magazines. Apparently they drew a lot of plump and adorable toddlers. There were cartoon characters like Brenda Starr and Tessie the Typist that were created to appeal to women.

The one old comic book I have held onto is **Wonder Woman** and I even have a small figurine of her as she has *real* thighs. It's interesting that **Betty Boop** has renewed interest. Maybe it's, again, the *real* thighs aspect.

In the 1970s when we lived in Ontario the local rag, the Sarnia Observer, discontinued the only comic strip to which I related--**For Better or Worse** by Canadian, Lynn Johnson. In my frustration I actually amassed over 100 signatures on a petition to try to change the editors' decision. Originally, when I called the paper to protest, the *gentleman* who answered told me, "We guys at the Observer don't think it's funny." Of course they didn't! Lynn Johnson's topics included bathing suit shopping after giving birth, wiping toddlers' noses, girlfriend chats and miscommunication with husbands.

In later years, Johnson explored tough social issues such as teen sex, homosexuality and caring for the older generation. I snicker to think of all the awards Johnson has won. Now I have many of her comic strips in book collections (there are over 30 book compilations) such as *I've got the One-More-Washload Blues*, *Our Sunday Best* and *Do They Ever Grow Up?* Did you know that Johnson is the world's most widely syndicated female cartoonist and was mentored by Charles M. Schulz of **Peanuts** fame? The **For Better or Worse** website is <http://www.fborfw.com>

Now and then I come across Nicole Hollander's **Sylvia**, a smoking, cat loving woman of radical opinions. Some of her publication titles give you a feel for her humor: *Female Problems: An Unhelpful Guide*, *My Cat's Not Fat*, *He's Just Big-Boned*, *101 Reasons Why a Cat Is Better Than a Man*, *Women Who Love Their Cats Too Much* and *Everything I Know About the Rat Race I Learned From My Cat*. Visit Hollander's fun website where you can order a T-shirt with a choice of comic images. <http://www.nicolehollander.com>

The over 20 titles of Cathy Guiswite's comic collections about her character **Cathy** reflect the single woman blues: *Men Should Come with Instruction Booklets*, *A Mouthful of*

Breath Mints and No One to Kiss, Wake Me Up When I'm a Size 5, Revelations From a 45-Pound Purse and I Am Woman, Hear Me Snore. The social and office life of a young single woman is described in John Forgetta and L A Rose's **The Meaning of Lila**.

In 1982 Greg Howard created **Sally Forth** that features a working mother's story along with the challenges of parenting and relating to her husband. Periodically I nod and gain some marital insights from this strip. **Between Friends** created by Sandra Bell-Lundy features four contemporary women friends. If you want to learn about her characters go to <http://www.betweenfriendscartoons.com>

Although, not a comic strip, worth mentioning is the comic character, **Maxine** of Hallmark cards created by J. Wagner. Hilarious images accompany cantankerous lines like, *Don't Worry. Be Crabby. Or Tried on a thong yesterday. I'm still trying to dig it out. Or I've still got "it", but NOBODY wants to see it! Or Ever get the feeling your stuff strutted off without you? Or With each passing week, the days are getting a little bit shorter. Kind of like me.*

Kind of like me, I hope your morning paper provides some smiles along with a fresh perspective of women's comic strips.

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