

“With The Fathers Of Our Heroes”

Personal Memories of CARL BURGOS, BILL EVERETT, & Their Seminal Brainchildren

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I. FIRST TIME WITH THE ANCIENT MARINER

Cartooning fandom was a different world when I was a teenager, back in a period that, for collectors of the pictographic magazines that are not necessarily *comic*, was, metaphorically, analogous to what Australian aborigines term “the dream time.” In that bygone era, there were few shops where you could find old “comic books” (cartoon magazines might be a more accurate term), few books about the history of the medium (and little money to buy them), and even fewer opportunities to meet the creators of the legendary characters: “the fathers of our heroes.”

For me, the first of these awesome encounters did not occur until I was seventeen years of age. Until that time, I was not aware of any conventions which such people attended as guests, perhaps because there weren’t any, which, I’m sure, had a lot to do with it. The fact that, in those more conservative times, I was considered too young to be traveling to and from Manhattan on trains, probably had as much to do with it as anything else. This was probably true for most kids, in those days. Therefore, all that remained was the printed page, but that was a wondrous fate!

Following my first few months of collecting the familiar likes of *The Amazing Spider-Man*, *The Fantastic Four*, and the anthologies that presented Hulk, Iron Man, Captain America and company, I bought *Marvel Super Heroes #1*. In this one-shot, twenty-five-cent special edition, published in 1966, a virtually lost era was briefly glimpsed through a somewhat blurry “window” of reprinting, when Smilin’ Stan Lee, in his editorial enthusiasm, included the Sub-Mariner story that had originally been presented in *Marvel Mystery Comics #8*, back in June 1940. Readers like me witnessed a furious young Prince Namor engaging in the destruction of a Hudson River tunnel and an airplane, the release of animals from their enclosures in the Bronx Zoo (softened with Namor’s rescue of a tumbled infant from the path of stampeding elephants), the partial demolition of the George Washington Bridge, and, as a topper, his first bout with the

original, android, Human Torch. This was not only *their* first meeting. According to one scholarly source, it was the first time in publishing history that cartoon characters from separate strips crossed-over into one story. The opening caption explained that the fantastically-powered Sub-Mariner, master of travel undersea, on land, and in the air, had been seeking revenge on humanity for attempting to electrocute him after he had promised to lend his powers to our cause. I didn't thoroughly understand, but it wasn't long before I found myself obsessed with the quest for every rare old issue that could tell me more!

The aforementioned reprint was soon followed by acquisitions of *Fantasy Masterpieces* #s 7, 8, and 9. In those 1967 issues, I became more familiar with the lost "Golden Age" genesis of Marvel from 1939 through 1941. Of particular interest to me was Prince Namor, the Sub-Mariner, and his encounters with the original Torch in *Marvel Mystery Comics* #s 8, 9 and 10. The reprints were slightly edited and condensed, but these were all that were available at the time, at least for kids such as I was at the time. I saw more of Namor's savage rampage against what he perceived as a villainous America, as the Torch and the authorities tried to stop him. I was also introduced to Namor's undersea people of old, and was particularly stricken by the large-eyed male Sub-Mariners with the huge, spine-like moustaches, which I mistook as products of primitive drawing technique by Bill Everett. I soon learned not to underestimate his titanic talent, for, those undersea guys look just as he, their creator, wanted them to look in those pre-revisionist Marvel times. I also quickly came to look upon the character of Officer Betty Dean with great respect. Betty was introduced in *Marvel Mystery Comics* for January, 1940. This clever-classy, charismatic, cute, courageous cop, originally assigned as a decoy to trap Namor, became his friend, ally against the Nazis, and the mediator who settled his battle with the Torch and humanity! As a character, and a female role model, she was, I think, ahead of her time. I had to get more old mags and learn more.

Shortly after my return from living in England for a year and a half, the opportunities for fulfillment began to present themselves. I was sixteen when I purchased *Marvel Mystery Comics* #s 78, 81, and 85, for \$15, at My Friend's Book Store, in Brooklyn, NY. I had never seen any older Marvels. Then, that summer, one of the first

conventions for comic book collectors was held in New York. In addition, “The Great Comic Book Heroes, featuring an impressive array of Golden Age reprints, came to my attention. Among the stories therein was the Sub-Mariner episode from *Marvel Mystery* #7. In it, Namor’s grandfather, the Emperor of the Sub-Mariners, opened the tale by saying: “Namor, you have been cheated and mistreated by the treacherous Americans. What do you intend to do about it?” Namor responded with plans to conquer America and would spearhead the invasion single-handed, and soon, he was well on his way to making it happen!

After vowing revenge before the Statue of Liberty, Namor shoved a ferryboat before an oncoming ocean liner, wrecked a trestle and train, and, after flying to the top of the Empire State Building, threw its mooring mast down on the crowds below! There was more than a little King Kong in the latter two depredations. I was hooked, and, I don’t think I was the only one, because “The Great Comic Book Heroes” was always out from my local public library, and my high school’s library, as well.

It was a hot vacation day in July when my father brought some newspaper articles about the convention to me. One had a photo of old Henry Keller, a dealer of cartoon treasures, with convention chairman Phil Seuling’s little daughters, Gwen and Heather. Eventually, I became well-acquainted with all of them, but not before fulfilling some important quests. On Sunday, July 7th, my father’s birthday, he and I got onto the train to Manhattan, to attend the last day of the convention. On the way into the Statler Hilton Hotel, I bought a *Marvel Boy* #1 for four dollars, and, up on the eighteenth floor of the hotel, I really got to work, going from table to table, asking the dealers whether they had *Marvel Mystery Comics* #1 or *Captain America* #1. Finally, I was directed to a friendly fellow named Roger Nelson, who, with an elderly, bespectacled gentleman, was in from Chicago with an impressive batch of Golden Age mags, including Marvel and Cap’s first issues!

Roger explained that the *Marvel Comics* #1 (the first issue of the series lacked the word *Mystery* in its logo) was missing its back cover, but even so, he treasured it, and it was not for sale. His face seemed to beam with wonder and delight as he made reference to “the Torch in the bottle.” As for me, I was transfixed by the cover alone. Artist Frank

R. Paul's rendition of the Human Torch looked like a fiery, pointy-eared genie, with blazing top-lock of hair.

Well, after I snapped out of my trance, I worked out a deal for *Captain America* #1, and *Marvel Mystery Comics* #s 13, 24, and 28, which were the earliest issues he had for sale. Apparently, Roger was very touched by my awe, because the batch was priced at \$152.00, but he let me have it for \$125.00, which constituted my life savings. I was never happier to go broke! Three more Bill Everett "Sub-Mariner" tales were mine, plus the fabulous *Captain America* #1. Then, some big guy at the door was shouting for everyone to get out of there, because the convention was closing soon. What a drag that was!

For the rest of the summer, I found myself dealing doubles of old mags and saving my allowance, because I called Phil Seuling, and he had a beautiful *Marvel Comics* #1 for sale at the price of \$250.00. I think I worked for my dad in order to earn a little extra. After some rocky negotiations, my dad and I went up to the Seulings', whose apartment overlooked the famous Cyclone roller coaster in Coney Island. I think my dad, who didn't approve of my hobby, loaned \$150.00 to me so I could make the purchase before another collector could beat me to the treasure. Upstairs, we were greeted by Phil. I recognized him as the loud guy at the convention who was ordering everyone out of there. Next, I met Carole, Phil's wife, who, like Phil, eventually did some writing for Marvel, and their two daughters, whom I recognized from the newspaper photo.

Phil took my dad and me into a little back room, where he kept lots of Golden Age mags, and two framed pieces of original art. He pulled *Marvel Comics* #1 from a box on a top shelf. With trembling hands, I counted the pages, glimpsing wonders as I went through the mag. I first noticed that the Human Torch's costume was blue, not red as it was in the *Fantasy Masterpieces* reprint. I flipped past the debuts of the Angel and the Masked Raider, and reached the Sub-Mariner, to which I paid more attention. I had read that the first two Sub-Mariner stories by Wild Bill Everett were done by an artistic process that the people at Marvel were unable to reproduce at that time. I soon had some notion as to why. The art had a kind of painterly quality that was very tonal, combined with the use of green, which, in its murkiness, produced an intriguing underwater effect. As I was later to verify by reading an interview with Bill Everett in *Alter-Ego*, conducted

by the very-accomplished Roy Thomas, who became head writer and editor-in-chief of Marvel, I got the right idea. Even Roy said he thought it worked pretty well, but Bill and some of his employers weren't happy with it.

It seemed that the use of Craft Tint, an illustration board that allowed shading by bringing out fine parallel and cross hatchings by brushing two different photographic developers on the illustration boards, combined with the screened tones of the colored inks added at the printers, were perceived as "muddy" by Bill and some of his superiors. Therefore, the use of Craft Tint for toning was dropped after two stories. Consequently, when reprint time came, over a quarter of a century later, the folks at Marvel couldn't separate the blacks from the colors, with the device they had at the time, without damaging or fading the Craft Tint hatchings that so delicately provided the half-tones. Still in all, I was captivated by the story of Namor's origin: Captain Leonard McKenzie's accidental bombardment of the undersea city of the Sub-Mariners; the Emperor's deployment of the lovely Princess Fen as a spy among the "white monsters" of the surface ship (written in a beautiful Shakespearian parlance); the ill-fated marriage of Captain McKenzie and Princess Fen; Namor's discovery of his surface heritage; and his first foreign mission of revenge against surface people for the deaths and damages inflicted on the undersea inhabitants and city of the Sub-Mariner race, years before, when a ship, the Oracle, captained by Leonard McKenzie, Namor's father, blasted out of an ice floe, using explosives. Ironically, it was mistaken as an act of war, not an accident. Such plotting was to become standard Marvel formula more than two decades later, but it began in *Marvel Comics #1*, back in 1939. I was also fascinated at seeing the debuts of the Emperor of the Sub-Mariners, Princess Fen, and Princess (later *Lady*) Dorma, who reappeared in the Marvel Age of the Sixties and Seventies, as well as the awesome origin of Namor in its seminal form. I paid every penny I had in the world to Phil, along with a large loan from my father which I repaid over several months, and, bidding goodbye to Phil, Carole, and little Gwen and Heather, who were two of the most precious little girls I've ever known, my dad and I drove back to Sheepshead Bay, where, in the lobby of the Seacrest Apartments, my gang was waiting, and beheld the treasure about which I had been carrying-on for months. Then, I went up to my original Chamber of Fantasy and

really got into the world's greatest cartoon magazine treasure, broke, in debt, and stunned. It was the best purchase I ever made, with the possible exception of my original, illustrated "King Kong" script, years later.

The year went by, and I continued to collect Marvels. A photostat of the cover of *Marvel Comics #1* was stuck on the wall of my room. Another shot of it graced the cover of my high school notebook. I got to know old Henry Keller, who was in the newspaper photo with Gwen and Heather Seuling, and bought some nice Golden Age Marvels from Henry and his partner, Al Faruggio, who had an old shop on Grand Street, in Brooklyn, that looked like a cover for Operation Rebirth, the project that had spawned Captain America! Finally, July arrived, and, to my great anticipation, there was another Comic Art Convention, of which Phil Seuling was chairman.

July came around too slow for me. I became more and more anxious. I was hoping and praying that I would be able to find and buy the original *Marvel Mystery* battle issues that featured the first cross-overs between the Torch and Sub-Mariner (the first cross-overs in cartoon-book history, by the way), and the second Sub-Mariner story, which had, according to the Marvel publishers, been done with the same artistic process used for the first Sub-Mariner story. I had real difficulty sleeping the night before the convention. Finally, morning came. Tired, but "wired," I got washed and dressed, had a nibble, packed by English duffle bag (symbol of the comic book collector when I went to the market bookstalls in England) with my *Marvel Comics #1*, *Captain America #1*, and maybe a couple of other non-conventional status symbols, and, with my \$200 loan, headed off for the D-Train into Manhattan.

When I arrived on the 18th floor of the Statler Hilton Hotel, I found a mob of enthusiasts on line, and soon, all over every floor area with suitcases of mags for sale. Soon, I was in the dealer room, going from table to table, asking for the issues I wanted. Almost immediately, I saw a *Marvel Mystery* on a wall. It looked like a very early issue. It was #2! With a little negotiating, Tom Altschuler dropped the price from one-hundred dollars to eighty bucks!

Having no further luck in the main room, I went to an adjacent one where fans were selling, buying, and trading, all over the place. I had been given a tip by the late

Jerome Tepper that a guy whom he had met in Robert Bell's famous comic book shop, in Queens, was going to be at the show with *Marvel Mystery* #s 8 and 10. Jerome was wrong. The guy, Louis Valladeres, was in that room with issues 7, 8, and 10! Issue 7, by the way, not only had that great Sub-Mariner story reprinted in "The Great Comic Book Heroes," showcasing Prince Namor's titanic, Kong-like rampage through Manhattan and the harbor, but also, the story of how the Torch joined the New York City Police Department, and first heard of the Sub-Mariner. With some high-powered bargaining, I got the price down from one-hundred-twenty dollars to eighty simoleons. Thank you, Lord!

Within another few hours, with the help of my new acquaintance, Perry Albert, whom I met that morning around the same time as our mutual pal, writer Nicola Cuti, I was introduced to a chap named Jeff Gordon, who had *Marvel Mystery* #9, priced at seventy-five dollars: an absolutely essential battle issue with the famous Torch-Sub-Mariner cover by Alex Shomburg. I had to have it, but he had to have his price, and I only had forty-five dollars left, but somehow, Jeff agreed to take *Captain America* #8 for the balance, which I intended to repurchase upon being "in the money" again! Wow! What a morning! I had accomplished my mission, and then some!

Broke but ecstatic, I received some exciting news, later that day. Bill Everett, creator of Prince Namor, the Sub-Mariner, was at the convention! With the same exuberant, almost fanatical drive that impelled me to those fabulous original editions of his work, I went from person to person asking where Bill Everett was, not having a clue as to how he looked! Fortunately, my search didn't last too long, for soon, in the main dealer room, not far from the spot where I got the great Golden Age mags from Roger Nelson at the last convention, I was directed to a tall, slim, Caucasian man, with back-swept black hair, wearing black-rimmed glasses, and a fashionable Army field jacket, which, as I eventually learned from Bill's pal, Torch creator Carl Burgos, he had well-earned as a serviceman during World War II.

I very politely greeted the master, and began to engage him in conversation. I felt (as I hope you do now, following my accounts of those Golden Age mags) that I had some meager foundation for *some* meaningful communication. Moments later, I asked

what I believe was a very good question, following what I believe was a very fair statement.

“Mr. Everett, the Sub-Mariner is such a great concept. How did you create him?”

“Well,” he replied, “I was an angry young man. I was fed-up with the world, and I wanted to see the world get what was coming to it!

“I was fascinated by the sea, so, I decided to create a character (sic) who came from the sea, and he would have his revenge on mankind; but, it wasn’t enough to have a super-powered character who would go around wrecking everything. He *had* to have a *motive*; so, I gave him the motive, and gave him the power, and thus you have Prince Namor.”

Impressed with his answer, I then politely asked whether he would draw a sketch of the Sub-Mariner for me. Obliging, he went with me to an empty dealer table, where he saw some sheets of typing paper. Then, with a felt-tipped pen, he began to draw a portrait of Namor on the otherwise empty, white-clothed table top. He stopped a few seconds later, apparently dissatisfied with the attempt. Then, he began again on a fresh sheet of paper, and, within a short time, he completed a nice portrait of his brainchild. Just prior to that, he signed my *Marvel Comics #1* in the right margin of page one of his first Sub-Mariner story, and then signed the first page of each Sub-Mariner story in issues 2, 7, 8, 9, and ten.

I thanked him for his generosity, whereupon he was approached by several other fans who wanted sketches. Patiently, he obliged all of his fans. One of them, a friend of Perry Albert’s, founded Phil’s Comic Shop, in Margate, Florida, many years later.

I attended the rest of the convention that week, broke but happy, and, each evening, at home, in my original Chamber of Fantasy, I poured over those wonderful, rare, old cartoon magazines. I immersed myself into the depths of New York Harbor, the East River, and Central Park Lake, with Prince Namor, and the adventure-fantasy world of William Blake Everett, as richly illustrated in the long-lost pages of *Marvel Mystery #2*, for whose original drawings Bill had worked, once again, on duo-tonal “Craft Tint” illustration board. As he explained in his best interview, with friend, editor, masterful writer, devoted fan, and sometime roomie, Roy Thomas, published in *Alter-Ego #8* (and a

later, augmented, reprint), he wanted to give the feeling of being underwater; of depth underwater. It should be understood that in 1939, when the first two Sub-Mariner stories were published, the artists had control over the pictures in terms of the line art, but not the colors. Beyond guides for specific costumes, all color decisions were made by the printers, so Bill attempted to provide watery tones and shadows with Craft Tint. It had line screens that were invisible until two different chemical “developers” were applied, each making a screen of parallel lines appear in black. The overlapping of these tonal screens actually produced a third gradation of black line screening. The results were three shades of grey for the human eye, but sharp black lines for the “eye” of the camera at the engravers, which enabled the preparation of plates for inexpensive “letterpress” printing. Later, color “Ben Day” dot screens were printed over this black line art.

Bill revealed that the printing for this second Sub-Mariner appearance was an improvement, but he and (probably) publisher Martin Goodman still weren’t happy with the “muddy” effect; but Roy Thomas said that he thought it worked fairly well, and I sure did! In fact, I will tell you that a couple of years after getting that issue, I had occasion to dive to the bottom of Central Park Lake, and I assure you that it was a hell of a lot darker than the allegedly muddy depiction in *Marvel Mystery #2*, but there I was, like Prince Namor, below a rowboat with two guys in it. Still, I had compensation for the darkness I experienced; there were two sharp, European blondes waiting in the boat, as well.

Speaking of lovely young ladies, one of the really striking features of the Sub-Mariner story in *Marvel Mystery Comics #2* was the young woman in the episode. She was a wealthy, young socialite, living in a Manhattan town house, where the curious Namor went to explore after obtaining clothes from an unfortunate tramp in a sewer tunnel. Initially resisted by the young lady’s servant, his posh dialect nicely depicted by the detail-minded Mr. Everett, she, being more “regular,” called from the inside stairs, to allow Namor to enter.

Moments later, her cigarette accidentally ignited her dress. Bill Everett made fine use of the Craft Tint to depict the shadows on her face, underlit from the flames on her dress. Namor charged to the rescue, unfamiliar with fire. As the flames spread to him, the reading public was treated to the introduction of Namor’s biological “sprinkler system,”

as water shot from his pores in sufficient quantity to wet their clothes and douse the rising flames. His humanity emerged.

Admonishing the servant to summon a physician, Namor became interested in the riches to be found in the house, while he waited. He replaced his stolen wet clothes with a red window drape which he fashioned into a cloak and hood. After the medics arrived with an ambulance and stretcher, he decided that he wanted the girl, and the action resumed!

Namor flew after the ambulance, actually grabbing its roof, slightly raising it, and zipping it along. Finally, near a hospital, he overcame the medics and took the girl. Flying above Manhattan with her, appearing all the more supernatural in his improvised hood and cape, Namor was sighted by astonished people below, and exclaimed: "Death's folly! The imbeciles have seen me! I have been careless!" I was jolted by the power of his words, and thrilled by the drama of the imagery, as though Namor, thusly enshrouded, were like Death himself in flight.

Unaware that the young woman could not survive underwater, he attempted to take her with him, culminating in a spectacular battle with the police, resisting gunfire, and hurling their car. He escaped without her.

I know Namor's later battles with Americans and the Torch were due to a terrible injustice that had been done to him in a later issue which had never been reprinted, and had, as yet, eluded my search for original editions. I knew it had something to do with an attempt to electrocute him, according to *Marvel Mystery Comics* #8, but I had no details. Well, that mystery had to be put, however uncomfortably, aside, as I was swept away into Namor's rampage, and his battle with the android Torch: his elemental counterpart.

Again, though, I was emotionally moved by the way Bill Everett injected his feelings of sympathy and conscience into Prince Namor, by having him rescue a baby, tumbled from his carriage by his panic-stricken nanny, into the path of a stampede of escaped elephants, in #8, and later, a pilot from a plane he wrecked in #9. The latter was an interesting change of heart for Namor. In #8, the pilot of the plane Namor wrecked, on the wing, wasn't as lucky. Namor, like Bill Everett, and like us, was emotional, but

capable of change; and no one was more influential on the avenging prince than Officer Betty Dean.

She was introduced in *Marvel Mystery Comics* #3, and assigned to fine the Sub-Mariner, dive in the water, pretend to be drowning, and then pull her “Roscoe” (her *pistol*, to you!) on him. She tried, but he was too fast and strong. Still, impressed by her beauty and courage, he started to take her out to sea. Not far outside New York Harbor, they encountered a torpedoed British ship, which Namor towed to a nearby shore. Learning of the war with Germany from a dying seaman, and further influenced by Betty, Namor was persuaded to turn from fighting Americans to battling Nazis, and he began with a personal super-assault on the sub and crew responsible for the strike on the British freighter.

This war on Nazis continued in *Marvel Mystery Comics* #4 (February, 1940 cover date), thanks to Betty’s influence, and Namor’s grandfather’s provision of a fleet of aerial submarines. These submersible sea-planes, powered by alcohol-charged steam, were very swift and maneuverable. They were also equipped with steam guns and magnetic tow-lines. I recognized an uncanny similarity to the famous “Flying Sub” in television’s “Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea,” but Bill Everett, who, as I later read, had been art director for an electronics and invention-related magazine, in the Thirties, had apparently designed *his* version over twenty years before the one made famous to television fans! The true genius of this man was reaching out to me, through his old work.

Still, not all I learned about this “father” of one of our greatest cartoon-magazine heroes, came through his work. I began to learn more about Bill Everett through other people. One was a future Marvel artist. The other was an Everett colleague and friend of long-standing.

The future pro was Alan Kupperberg. Alan was the champion author of published fan letters, who achieved the ultimate rank in the fan-legions of Marvel: Permanent Marvelite Maximus; a rank even yours truly never achieved, since I never had one of my letters published. Alan apparently was having much more contact with the pros than I, and could sometimes reveal some very personal stuff, which, maybe, wasn’t appropriate for impressionable young members of the public, like me, to know. It was during our first

meeting, in Brooklyn, as we were stopping at an emporium on Nostrand Avenue, that Alan mentioned that Bill was an alcoholic. I had no idea how this kid was so sure of this. I placed little faith in the statement; and I would not mention it except for the fact that it later became a matter of public record, and Bill Everett, being the great person he was, managed to emerge from it as a positive and inspirational force. I will elaborate on this, later.

The long-standing colleague and friend of Bill Everett's was Carl Burgos: the "father" of the original Human Torch:

"THE MAN WHO LIT THE TORCH"

I was in my first semester of college at Long Island University's Brooklyn Center, just up the street, on DeKalb Avenue, from the site of the foundry where the casting of the famous statue of "The Flag-Raising At Iwo-Jima" had been done. My own "casting," so-to-speak, was in part being done by Assistant Professor of English Tim Boggan. Mr. Boggan became world-famous, in 1970, for being on the ping-pong team who sneaked over to Communist China, without U.S. State Department permission, to play those outstanding Chinese folks. That led to President Nixon's trip, and he and the Republicans got credit for opening diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China, but if you hear the famous quotation that "only Nixon could go to China," don't believe it, even when Star Trek's Mr. Spock says it. My esteemed teacher and friend, Mr. Boggan, went with his ping-pong-pals, first!

Anyway, it was around that time that I noticed some black and white, horror, cartoon mags on the stands. The art looked rather crude when compared with the familiar entries in *Creepy*, *Eerie*, and *Vampirella*, from Warren Publications, where I later did a day of temporary editorial work. What really caught my interest was the name Carl Burgos on the editorial credits. I immediately recognized the name of the creator of the Golden Age version of the Human Torch.

I was very interested in meeting him, so I wrote a very nice letter. I requested an appointment with the man I describe as one of the old grand masters of the cartoon

magazine field, though I wasn't sure that I was writing to *the* Carl Burgos, but the letter I soon received stated:

“Dear Warren:

The creator of the Torch is Carl Burgos; the same one whose name you saw in the horror books.

“Okay, you can have your few minutes, only call before you come up to the office...”

I telephoned Eerie Publications Inc. for an appointment. The call was received by Carl Burgos, whom I expected to sound like a Hispanic gentleman, as the name Burgos somehow suggested to me. I discovered that I was quite incorrect about my ethnic presumption. Anyway, he seemed quite friendly, and granted my request to visit him and have him autograph some early *Marvel Mystery Comics*. I looked forward to our appointment with great enthusiasm.

A few days later, I ran into an impediment to my planned historic journey. I had been “rushed” into “pledging” for the L.I.U. chapter of the Tau Epsilon Phi fraternity. The house chairman, Howie Mand, expected all “pledges,” or prospective frat brothers, to hang around their table at school and run errands, or do things like scrub things at the frat house. I remember telling Howie and a few of the “brothers” (I got reprimanded for calling members “boys” or “guys”) about my upcoming appointment. Howie raised a powerful objection to my going. I was expected to spend that time serving the fraternity. I was not about to cancel my appointment. Then, in front of the guys, Howie made some obscene remark about what he alleged I was going to do with Mr. Burgos, whereupon I responded with the time-honored obscene suggestion to Howie. In turn, he vowed that I would never get into that fraternity. Consequently, like the Original Human Torch, as he flew out of Professor Horton's house, at the end of his debut story in *Marvel Comics #1*, I “flew” out of the Tau Epsilon Phi frat house, likewise determined that no one would use me for selfish gain or crime! I knew what was more important to me, and it wasn't being used for things like scrubbing frat houses with tooth brushes, or whatever Howie may've had planned for me! I was free of the gang!

The day came for my appointment. I made the journey across Brooklyn and the East River to 222 Park Avenue South, only a short walk from where, years later, I was to freelance for *Marvel Age*, the news magazine of Marvel Comics, writing about the company's history, and culminating in the publication of Carl Burgos' obituary. That was something I wish there had been no necessity to write. However, that was years off. I was on my way with my little English duffle bag slung over me like Robin Hood's quiver of arrows, only I was carrying some of the very *Marvel Mystery Comics* later used for projects on which I worked for Marvel and the company's various licenses. I had studied them. I had gotten to know the Torch and Namor, who, in a sense, were the "fathers" of the modern Marvel heroes, and was on my way to meet the "father" of the Human Torch. As I gazed upon Manhattan, I almost expected to see the Torch and Sub-Mariner flying through the concrete canyons. Finally, I arrived at my destination: a building that wasn't a skyscraper, nor an old, cast-iron-facaded structure, and went up.

I reached the receptionist, and she announced my arrival. Moments later, I was greeted by a robust-looking, black-haired chap in his fifties, who wore no whiskers. He looked different from the image I imagined from his name, which seemed Hispanic, and he wasn't dressed in an artist's smock. He was in his shirtsleeves, and, as he soon made evident, was of a different ethnic group. He said something like, "Warren? Carl Burgos!" He stuck his drawing and writing hand out for a vigorous shake, and led me into the office suite, where we sat for a chat.

I withdrew the mags from my little black bag. He noticed the name Tom Altschuler on the label that sealed the plastic bag containing my *Marvel Mystery Comics* #2. "It would be an Altschuler!," he exclaimed. I explained that I wasn't the Altschuler guy, whereupon he made a similar exclamation about my name. He seemed taken by the notion that I was a Jewish lad. Years later, when my esteemed senior colleague, Roy Thomas, published an interview with Carl's daughter, Susan, in *Alter-Ego*, I learned a number of revealing things about the old master, including his original name: Max Finklestein. Clearly, the Torch hadn't been created by a Hispanic immigrant (what a great story that would've been!). That brought me up to asking the big, professional question.

“Mr. Burgos, the Torch was such a great concept. How did you come to create him?”

“Because I was hungry!”

Then, he went beyond the practical, Depression-Era motive, and added a little creative reference, to the part of William Shakespeare’s “Julius Caesar,” in which one of the conspirators describes seeing men in fire walking up and down the street. Then, he asked, “how’s my old friend, Bill Everett, doing? I hear that he’s getting’ around on a cane!”

I didn’t have too much to tell him, other than I had met Bill at the convention, where he signed my mags. I told Carl that Bill wasn’t using any cane when I saw him. He looked well. He was dressed in an Army jacket, like a lot of the hippies. Carl made a point of telling me that Bill had earned the right to wear an Army jacket, which, of course, was true. Bill, like Carl, Jack Kirby, and a lot of other “fathers” of our heroes, had served in the armed forces during World War Two, and some became heroes without the aid of super powers. I also told Carl that Bill had drawn a sketch of the Sub-Mariner for me. I was interested in having Carl draw one of the Torch. He had told me on the phone that maybe he’d do one some other time, after this appointment. I mentioned it again. Carl made a point of telling me that he had done such a picture for only one person. I believe that person was old-time collector and historian Chester Grabowski, because “Chet” told me about Carl’s having done a picture for him, in color, too, I believe, if my chat with Chet, many years later, is still relatively intact in my memory. Chet no longer had it, but it may be out there, somewhere. If so, I hope its custodian will contact me. There’s a piece for my future museum!

Then, we got to some mag-signing. Carl gingerly autographed *Marvel Comics #1*, and *Marvel Mystery Comics* (its continuation) issues 2, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13, 24, and 28. He made a point of telling me that he had never autographed mags for anyone else, which I took in a very awe-stricken, respectful way. Then, I remember that he took some of my mags, stood up, and proudly displayed them to people around the office. As I learned, years later, from Roy’s interview with Susan Burgos, Carl, like Bill, didn’t have those old mags anymore. Bitter over his unsuccessful attempt to gain ownership of his brainchild,

the Human Torch, Carl tragically destroyed his back issues that contained the Torch's adventures. Like his creation, he had an incendiary quality; an anger that blazed when he felt sufficiently provoked. I was later to experience that for myself, for, it didn't take much to make Carl blaze.

Anyway, our initial meeting went fast and pleasant. I gratefully acknowledged his gracious hospitality, and headed back to my Chamber of Fantasy in Sheepshead Bay, Brooklyn, with my unique treasures safely hidden in my bag, and the special memory of meeting the "father" of one of our seminal superheroes in my mind. I was elated, and very impressed. I took my custody of those autographed mags, which he had told me were the only ones he had ever signed, in a very serious way. I knew they were extremely special, and never to be sold. I was determined to be their faithful guardian, their curator, for the rest of my life.

After a little time passed, I wrote to Carl, to thank him, again, for his time, attention, and *generosity*. The generosity came in the form of two items. One was the pen with which he signed my mags; a felt-tipped one. The other was a piece of paper upon which Carl had simultaneously signed his name, forwards and backwards, with a pen in each hand, several times. There they were, like mirror images. I thought that was absolutely brilliant: a cosmic power exclusively possessed by Golden Age Marvel Cartoonists! Actually, like most magic tricks, it can be performed in a simple, effective way, for people can move their right and left limbs in relatively symmetrical patterns if the movements are simultaneous.

As I thanked Carl for everything, I remembered his telling me that he had never autographed any other mags, and that the Torch picture he had drawn (probably for Chet) had also been an exclusive. Inferring how special such things were, and remembering a story I heard about a fan who had Frank Frazetta sign a paper cup, and then the fan sold the darned thing, I asked Carl whether he might want to keep the several signed mags in my archive in the exclusive realm. I thought that by not signing others, he would be the focus of attention in the future for being part of these incredibly important and valuable collector's items, as well as not *being used for selfish gain* by having profiteers turn around and sell mags after he might sign them, along the lines of what his brainchild, the

Human Torch declared, in his debut story, concerning his never again being used for selfish gain or crime. Off went the letter, and time went by for quite a while with no response.

“WITH THE ‘FOSTER FATHERS’ OF OUR HEROES”

My later encounters with Prince Namor’s literary and artistic “father” had some connection with my first appointment up at the offices of Marvel Comics, at 635 Madison Avenue, in Manhattan. I managed to get an appointment around two years after my first personal letter from Stan Lee, for whom I had boundless high regard. Packing some of my sketches, I headed into Manhattan, imagining the Torch and Sub-Mariner’s flying through the concrete canyons and over the rooftops of the towering city, as though they had actually battled there, decades before.

Upon arrival, I was greeted by a robust, clean-shaven, dark-haired man, whose white shirt had its sleeves rolled. He vigorously shook my hand, and smiled, introducing himself: “John Romita!” Away I went with Marvel’s Art Director, who was drawing Spider-Man, to very good effect, in the wake of co-creator Steve Ditko’s resignation from drawing and sometimes plotting the strip, so Johnny Romita was sort of a foster father to Spidey. We settled into a cubicle partition that served as the in-house art department.

Sharing the area was a tall young man, also with dark hair and no whiskers: Herb Trimpe, who was drawing the Hulk: “Ol’ Green Skin’s” “foster father,” if you will, following in the path of Hulk’s co-creator, Jack Kirby, and successor, Steve Ditko.

Johnny looked at some of my work, especially a piece featuring characters of my own. He remarked that I had a flair for costume. In as much as the key character was cloaked and armored, he noted that it was an essentially Dr. Doom kind of character. Then, learning of my interest in writing, he taught me some stuff about a format he called a *storyboard script*. Instead of typing, he related how I might sketch a story using stick figures or somewhat more defined ovals, label them, and write the captions and word balloons, along the lines of comic book panels. He indicated, to my naïve understanding, something about how, with the simple oval construction, you could give an artist a better idea of what you, as the writer, really wanted.

Johnny and Herb were both very nice, and generous, as well. Herb reached on top of a filing cabinet, in the corner, next to the drawing table at which he was probably illustrating another Hulk episode. His hand came toward us with a wonderful little stack of drawings: blue-pencil cover roughs, on eight-and-a-half-by-eleven-inch sheets of yellow or white paper. They were quite detailed for roughs, as far as I was concerned. I was impressed. He allowed me to take a few. Overwhelmed, I gingerly selected three sketches of Hulk: one of his second battle with the Glob; one depicting the featured split into Bruce Banner and the Hulk; another illustrating a battle between the Hulk, and the Mole Man and his legions; and, for variety, a rough for the cover of *Silver Surfer #11*. Not to be outdone by his esteemed colleague, Johnny took a full-color rough, quite large, on tracing or vellum paper, for *The Amazing Spider-Man #80*: “On The Trail of the Chameleon,” and signed it, “To Spidey, from John Romita,” for, I was quite an agile little guy who could climb ropes quite well, tumble with considerable skill, and skitter along apartment house hallways without touching the floor, by wedging myself between walls! He gave that rough, the sample storyboard script page, and a little piece of paper on which he had tested his inking brush strokes, to me.

He encouraged me to try to create storyboard scripts. Apparently, Spidey’s “foster father” felt that these might be very useful for him. I was then graciously sent on my way. I was most thankful to Johnny and Herb, and very enthusiastic about the prospect of producing storyboard scripts, not only because I wanted to work for Marvel, but, moreover, because I had such a great deal of respect, gratitude to, and liking for, Johnny Romita. I thought it was a wonderful opportunity to be helpful to this great guy, whose work meant so much to so many.

“ON THE TRAIL OF THE TORCH AND NAMOR”

My quests for the missing *Marvel Mystery Comics* needed for my run of issues 1 through 10 had never really ceased since the July Comic Art Convention acquisitions, but my treasury *had!* Perry Albert had my wants, but it was going to take a lot of money and negotiation; money, because issues 3 and 4 were priced at seventy-five bucks apiece (with some photostatic restoration on the back cover of #3, and some tape in the inside of

#4's spine, which I didn't like, but what other copies were available?); negotiation, because Perry had the ultra-rare #5, and very scarce #6, in his personal collection. Therefore, my time became divided between college, studying old and new Marvel Comics in preparation for my career, working for my father and dealing back issues to save for the *Marvel Mystery Comics*, working on the storyboard scripts for Johnny Romita, and swapping letters with Perry.

Perry was impatient. He wanted to make the sale. He needed money for associates of his: "the vampires," as he called them. Words became tense. Letters started to become so hot that it was nearly a miracle that they didn't ignite. Profanity peppered the pages. Innocent lad that I was, I had the notion that we may've been violating obscenity laws, and I wondered what was liable to happen to us if governmental censors were to open any of our letters! Hey, those were wild times! Finally, though, around December, I was ready to close the deal on *Marvel Mystery Comics* issues 3 and 4. I don't remember whether I had saved the money, or my dad had granted another loan to me. I just remember going to Manhattan, one Saturday night.

My best friend and honorary brother, Gary Lipton, accompanied me on the journey; quite a trip for a pair of teenaged kids in those days. Once again, I headed into Manhattan, by bus and train, with one-hundred-fifty dollars—a bloody fortune, for a kid, in those times—and something incredibly special for Perry to see, guarded by my crazy pal, who was the most fearless fighter and daredevil I knew. Once again, the sight of Manhattan, as viewed from the D train as it crossed the bridge, pierced the night with its lights, and filled my mind with visions of the Torch and Namor, the print "fathers" of the contemporary Marvel heroes, in their fictional adventures there, almost as though they had really existed, long before my time. Anticipation grew as we neared our destination: the Statler Hilton Hotel, at Thirty-Fourth Street, right near King Kong's final hangout: the Empire State Building. Our business rendezvous was to occur at the very same hotel where I had met Bill Everett and bought most of the rare issues he and Carl had signed.

Gary and I soon entered the hotel. There, in a little alcove near the door, we met Perry, who had traveled in from Wantagh, Long Island. He, too, was not alone. He was with an entourage of collectors and friends. One of them was a chap named Phil, who, I

believe, was one of the lucky fans who got a Sub-Mariner portrait from Bill Everett, right after I got mine. It was really quite an assembly. Perry later founded Starwind Comics. Phil relocated to Margate, Florida, where he opened Phil's Comic Shop. I later went to work for Marvel, attaining the dubious position of principal archival researcher, for, as Stan Lee declared in his first letter to yours truly, I had a bigger collection of Marvel mags than the company did; and much later, I was to move to Florida, and get acquainted with Phil; but those times were a long way off.

As I recall, there was a shelf on the wall, near the telephones, I think, or maybe a deserted counter top. Whichever it was, we put our things down, and proceeded with our archival business. Collection history was being made, just a little more. As Perry withdrew things from his attaché case, I carefully observed the items: a memo on which was written, "for Warren to buy: *Marvel Mystery* #s 3 and 4. For Warren to see: *Marvel Mystery* #5 (photostat); *Marvel Mystery* #6." I felt a little cheated by the photostat, which wasn't very legible. I thought he was going to bring the actual book. I surmised that he was so fanatical about its rarity, which he had previously insisted, time and again, was unequalled, that he simply didn't want to risk bringing it. I took enough of a look to see that it had an impressive Human Torch cover. Then, I got to see something amazing.

We started leafing through *Marvel Mystery Comics* #6. From its heavily-restored cover of the Angel's swinging over a shark pool to rescue a girl from a room full of masked and robed or armored cultists, on, I was transfixed. I was anxious to get to "Sub-Mariner," and glimpse the event that sparked his return to revenge on humanity and his famous battle with the Torch. Then, we reached the mast-head of the story's first page. There, in the same layout that Bill Everett had used for the story in issue #4, of Namor, beautifully-costumed, seated on a throne, was the avenging prince, clad in simple swim trunks, with a black hood over his entire head, strapped in an electric chair! I only had time for a fast scan through the story, as the costumed and cloaked Namor was apparently hurling a large vehicle in a New York street, and a glimpse of the attempted electrocution of the misunderstood prince. I knew I had to get those mags, especially since it seemed unlikely that the Comics Code Authority was going to allow any reprints of such things,

assuming that Marvel Comics Group could even find these rarities, which I had been given to believe were no longer in the files of the publishers.

I proceeded with an examination of the two books I was there to buy. Their condition left much to've been desired. Still, I badly needed them, and had few, if any, others available. My copy of #4 was not in good shape, and another #3 on the West Coast was not likely, since I had a package deal with Perry for his #3 and #4. Reluctantly, I closed on the pair of mags.

Then, if I recall the order of events with accuracy, I flashed through my little Timely collection with Perry, Phil, and company: *Captain America* issues 1, 4, and 8, *Marvel Mystery Comics* issues 13 (debut of the Vision), 24, 28 (debut of Jimmy Jupiter), 78, 81, 85, and, *Marvel (Mystery) Comics* issue 1! Perry, taller and older-looking than I, with his jaw line beard, clad in his buckskin jacket which he nicknamed B.B.J. (Buffalo Bill Jacket), leaned over on my right. As he gazed with fascination at Frank R. Paul's cover of Marvel's very first, ultra-rare, 1939 cartoon magazine, with its weird rendition of the Human Torch, who looked like a genie, with pointed chin and ears, and a blazing top-lock, he was straight-faced and low key. Finally, he said, "that book has a *mystical quality* about it." I *still* agree.

As I will detail more, later, I corresponded with Perry, in an aggressive campaign to buy *his* copies of *Marvel Mystery Comics*, not forgetting to ask how B.B.J. was gettin' along! It was an enormously difficult process of negotiation. Perry didn't want to part with them, especially #5, which he insisted was rarer than just about any mag. He had parted with his copy of *Detective Comics* #27 (debut of Batman; May, 1939) in the deal that had gotten the mag and some cash for him. Finally, I went out to Long Island with my father and \$250.00 and bought Perry's 5 and 6. I later discovered that the #6 had the wrong back cover, but Perry discovered that his remaining #3 had the wrong back cover, as well! Boy!! Was he ticked off at himself!

Suffice it to say that at the following July convention, in New York, I traded my *Captain America* #1 in a deal that copped me a nice *Marvel Mystery* #6, signed by Bill Everett. I re-bought my *Cap* #1 the following week from good ol' Henry Keller and Al Faruggio, at their little shop on Grand Street, in Brooklyn, that looked liked like the curio

shop that covered the entry way to the Operation Rebirth lab featured in Cap's origin. Apparently, Thomas Czapliki had sold it to Henry and Al after our trade. I'll explain more, later.

Broke but fulfilled, I studied my treasures, experienced the reprinted stories in their original editions, and discovered those that had been reprinted. In issue #3, I saw the Torch's encounter with Martians, which I took as a nice echo of the Mercury Theater Radio show of "The War Of The Worlds," directed by Orson Welles. Carl Burgos was apparently very much in tune with his times. The Angel had a great encounter with costumed cultists who kidnapped a young woman as a sacrifice. Ka-Zar had a turning point in his relationship with Trajah, the elephant; and a debut occurred with the first of two chapters of the pilot adventure, "The American Ace." The biggest event, for me, anyway, was the introduction of Officer Betty Dean in "Prince Namor, the Sub-Mariner."

Betty was, quite probably, the first liberated woman in cartoon magazines. Beautiful, clever, courageous, and witty, she was the New York City Policewoman assigned to work as an undercover decoy, by the waterfront, to lure the rampaging Sub-Mariner and *capture* him.

Now, if you know anything about Namor, who had already wrecked a power plant, withstood gunfire, hurled a police car, lifted and ambulance, and was soon to shove a ferry into an ocean liner, wreck an elevated train trestle, hurl a killer elephant, and throw the mooring mast of the Empire State Building down to the street, capturing him was no small order! Needless to say, she did not succeed in arresting him; but, she did capture his *interest*, and, after a risky encounter, they discovered mutual admiration and friendship, and, perhaps, something more; something romantic; but, this had to remain sublimated because he was this avenging prince, and she was an officer of the law, who, at least for the early part of their long relationship, was legally part of the forces against him. There was great drama, here, and I was, in a greater sense, getting to know the "fathers" of our heroes, for not only was I getting to know Namor, whom Stan Lee later told me was very much like the later Marvel heroes, but, moreover, I was getting to know Namor's author, his artistic "father," with deeper understanding, story by story, within the pages of the

long-lost treasures that I was passionately discovering and assembling into a cohesive run.

I saw his respect for the capability and heroism of women through his characterization of Betty Dean. It was Betty who was sent to arrest the menacing Namor in *Marvel Mystery* #3, was overcome by him, and then had the insight to recognize the good in him and turn him from his war against Americans to a more appropriate war against the Nazis, which, in this initial sequence, carried over into issue #4. It was Betty who advocated Namor's release from a Manhattan jail after he was chloroformed by paramedics assisting police who had attempted to arrest him and chased him into a collision with a small plane. Her influence gained his unofficial freedom in time for him to rescue people from a flooded subway and thwart the gold thieves who caused the disaster, in the ultra-rare #5 I had finally bought from Perry. It was Betty who helped Namor by clearing gas from a room in police headquarters as a swarm of net-bearing cops tried to recapture him after... oh, did *I* learn why he turned against humanity again!

After his heroism in *Marvel Mystery Comics* #5 (March, 1940), he used his tremendous strength to stop and hurl a car full of fleeing criminals in issue #6. Upon his return to Police Headquarters, the Commissioner, thankful as he was, had to explain that "here in America, we let the people judge whether a man is guilty or innocent of a crime!" Betty further explained to the perplexed Sub-Mariner that in order to clear himself of the people he had killed in his initial battles with Americans, that he would have to stand trial, but she promised him that it would work out all right.

Namor allowed himself to be jailed and tried. Although his defense attorney got Namor to affirm his intention to aid and not harm humanity, the mercilessly aggressive prosecuting attorney tried to get Namor to admit that he would always be a menace. The jury believed the prosecutor and found Namor guilty.

The regretful judge sentenced Namor to die! Aspects of this situation bore a similarity to the trial sequence in the motion picture "Tarzan's New York Adventure," which came out quite some time later.

Perhaps with some inspiration from the Scriptural story of Samson, Namor showed disdain, and attempted to fly away, but crashed to the floor, bereft of his strength. He was

taken to prison (apparently, New York's Sing Sing; "Death Row") to await execution. He remained bereft of his strength, not knowing that *his food was being drugged*. In a scene worthy of "Castle On The Hudson," and "Angels with Dirty Faces," Namor was visited by the warden, cheekily refusing the offer of a final request. On the way down "The Last Mile," he blamed Betty for tricking him into what he seemed to regard as a mockery of a trial leading to this march to the death house, as he was told of the extra large dose of drug in his last meal; but, he was also told that it was *the doctor's idea, not hers!*

Namor was strapped into the electric chair. Bill Everett wrote: "THE SIGNAL IS GIVEN—THE SWITCH—IS THROWN—AND 2,000 VOLTS COURSE THROUGH THE SUB-MARINER'S BODY!" At that moment, those other move plot parallels terminated and the New York sequences of "King Kong" began!

Namor became *revitalized* as the electricity, insufficient to kill him, neutralized the drug in his system. He broke free, hurled the chair at his would-be executioners, and *broke the control panel to delay further execution*. Apparently, Bill Everett was, once again, infusing a measure of compassion into his rightfully-enraged super-menace. Off he went, through the prison, over the wall, onto a train, on to Manhattan, off the train's top, through Grand Central Station and the city streets, and into Police Headquarters, where he found and confronted Betty!

She was clearly surprised to see him. Angrily, he accused her of being as bad as the rest, and pledged himself to her—and our—destruction. It was then that a group of cops arrived with gas and a strong net, whereupon Betty opened a window to clear the vapor, enabling Namor to overcome his captors. Think of the conflict within Betty!

Namor paused to try, with some reluctance, to thank her, but she cut him short, imploring him to leave and never return, but, he had made a vow! Nevertheless, Betty whispered, "Goodbye, Namor—I don't ever want to see you again—but I hope I *will!*" This was obligation versus friendship—or maybe something *more* than friendship. This was complex plotting; high drama; and, *overall*, the story in *Marvel Mystery Comics #6* left a lasting impression on me, as powerful as the best of the Spider-Man and Fantastic Four stories of decades later; but, as Stan Lee later acknowledged, the work that Bill

Everett did on the Sub-Mariner was very much like what Stan and company did later in “The Marvel Age of Comics.”

The Kong-like rampage soon began. Namor went on an incredible spree in *Marvel Mystery* #7, including attacks on an elevated train and the Empire State Building. It was nice to surmise that Bill was a fellow Kong fan. Once again, at the request of the Police Commissioner, Betty tried to talk Namor into leaving America, adding that the Human Torch had become a member of the police force, a story in #7 that remains one of Carl Burgos’ best. The angry Namor was fearless and disdainful of the Torch, and was determined to continue.

Namor’s fantastic rampage continued through *Marvel Mystery* #s 8 and 9, but Bill tempered superhuman Sub-Mariner rampaging with human pity. Namor released a herd of elephants from the Bronx Zoo, but hurled the killer leader back at the others in order to save a baby from being trampled. Then, gently cradling the infant in arms that could bend steel beams (he half-toppled the George Washington Bridge, a few minutes later!), he flew over the tops of tall buildings to deliver the child to a high terrace of a hospital, and gently placed the tiny kid in the arms of a nurse. Namor later wrecked two airplanes, but opened the parachute of the pilot of the second small plane, which he briefly piloted, furiously firing its machine guns before the Human Torch blasted it in half. He fought the Torch to a standstill, trapping him under a bell jar in the Torpey (reference to writer Frank Torpey) Chemical Works, and otherwise resisting all efforts by the armed forces to stop him, even if they had to kill him. At that crucial moment, Betty Dean appeared with the Torch’s boss, Captain Rawlins. Calmly, she spoke to the perplexed Prince Namor and convinced him that there was nothing more that he could do, and that if he would cease his hostilities and leave, the Torch would never bother him again. Namor reluctantly freed the Torch, who then reassured him. The war was over, not by the triumph of super power, nor by the strength of armed men, but by the courage and reason of a clever and capable woman. I was getting to know Bill Everett through his characters, and was very impressed. This man could write!

Furthermore, through my seeing the aerial submarines—sort of small airplanes with underwater capability, powered by alcohol-charged steam, which were introduced in

Marvel Mystery Comics #4, for February, 1940—I learned of Bill’s talent for invention, and perhaps a gift of prophecy.

The former talent should not come as a surprise, because Bill had worked on a scientific magazine and although it was primarily concerned with radio and related electronics, he probably was exposed to other aspects of science and invention along the way. However, it *should* come as a surprise that there was a “Flying Sub” in the television show, “Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea,” over two decades later! This man was brilliant!, in the estimation of my teenage mind, and I took pride in my association with *his* works, as I did with the works of Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko, Roy Thomas, and company, comprising the later “Marvel Age of Comics.”

Of course, the work of Carl Burgos was not ignored. I studied the intro of the Torch’s influential friend, the undercover cop known only as Johnson, in *Marvel Mystery Comics* #2 (Dec., 1939). Then, there was the Torch’s encounter with Martians in *Marvel Mystery Comics* #3 (Jan., 1940), which I thought was a nice salute to Orson Welles and the Mercury Theater, whose famous radio broadcast adaptation of “The War Of The Worlds,” by H.G. Wells, created

((missing page numbered THIRTY-TWO))

Torch and the Sub-Mariner, who, stylistically, were the “fathers” of our modern Marvel Super-Heroes; and adventure incorporating inspiration from the 1933 rampage of King Kong, following his escape in Manhattan. Perhaps the most significant character in the epic, though, was Betty Dean. It was not the power of the Torch that ultimately stopped Namor from committing catastrophes like pushing a ferry into the path of a huge ocean liner, bombing a tunnel, releasing animals from the Bronx Zoo, wrecking an elevated train and trestle, and throwing the mooring mast of the Empire State Building into the crowds below. It was the intelligence, sensibility, and calm voice of Officer Betty Dean that brought Namor and the Torch from stalemate to truce.

Bill Everett not only injected powerful sympathetic elements into the story of having Namor rescue an infant from the stampede of elephants he released, and a pilot from a plane he commandeered in mid-air, but resolved this conflict of super-titans through the mediation of a clever, courageous woman. I was very impressed.

All told, I had done a lot of searching, acquiring, and studying, of those rarities from long before my time. I had done my homework. I believed I was prepared for my next encounter with the creators, the “fathers” of these seminal cartoon magazine heroes. What happened when I met them again, though, proved more surprising than the climax of “The Human Torch Versus The Sub-Mariner,” for me, anyway.

“THE WRATH OF THE FATHERS”

The order in which I encountered Carl Burgos, Johnny Romita, and Bill Everett, for the second time, has become vague in my memory, but what happened remains quite clear, even though that series of meetings was so long ago, perhaps because they happened within a few months.

I labored slow and thoughtful on my extra homework: the storyboard script for John Romita. I chose to create a Fantastic Four story that included some characters of my own, since I loved the F.F., and had already developed the supplementary characters in a novelette and pictures for which I had hopes of publication in some form, and what better place could I have directed them than Marvel Comics? What better opportunity did I have than the invitation to try a storyboard script for Johnny Romita, the art director of Marvel, whom I respected and liked beyond measure? I made a slight modification in procedure, though, for some good reasons.

Instead of drawing stick figures, which were far too primitive and non-specific, I decided to draw the whole thing in rough form. Johnny had made some reference to making things more specific for the artist at our first meeting. The sample sheet he had drawn for me showed figures that seemed a little more loop than stick. He also had put labels in the margins. Since then, I had seen some reproductions of some Jack Kirby pencil drawings for Marvel, and saw similar notations, by Jack, in the margins. Since I was an aspiring artist as well as an aspiring writer, I thought it would be better for the script, as well as more enjoyable for me, to sketch roughs. That way, Johnny would get a much better idea of what I was envisioning, and I would get some good practice along the way.

I worked in a sketch pad. It was about 18" by 24" in area. I stenciled a large rectangle onto each page I worked. I sketched the panels within those borders, not bothering with gutters in between them. Simple division lines were drawn. I wrote the word balloons and captions inside the panels, and notes for Johnny outside of the large rectangles that represented the page edges. The drawings were not polished, beautiful illustrations, like Johnny's or Jack's, but were, qualitatively speaking, like a combination of the storyboard sketches you might see on the special features disks of the Studio Ghibli theatrical cartoons from Japan, and the 1962-64 *Fantastic Four* work that Jack Kirby had done. Johnny had seen my adversary for the F.F. in a group scene of some of my characters, noting that he was essentially a Doctor Doom kind of character, and remarking that I had a flair for costume.

I tried it on a lot of people I knew, most of whom weren't comic book fans. One might imagine they'd've been the wrong test groups, but that worked to some advantage in a way. They weren't partial toward the medium. Most of them seemed very interested. I especially liked the moment when I was on a bench in the lobby of the apartment building where I lived, with a bunch of the crazy guys who lived in the block, and the craziest bully of the lot was looking at a page depicting my armored, cloaked, horned character's battle with soldiers. He looked over at me. I was dressed in my army jacket, with my Beatle-styled hair, looking quite like some of the other characters in my story, and the guy said, "y'know somethin'? You scare me!" It was a very satisfying, if funny moment; almost a Bill Everett kind of moment, because, even as Bill had his revenge on humanity through Prince Namor's rampages, I was having my similar moment with the guys, and not having to engage in any kind of violent or deliberately threatening behavior.

The pencil is mightier than the punch!

I made an appointment to see Johnny Romita. The fateful day arrived. Like so many aspiring cartoonists before me, off I went to see the art director, anxiously carrying my work on a rattling, roaring subway train. Finally, after train changes and walking through Manhattan crowds, clad in my customary outfit previously described, I was in a cubicle office near the front-right of Marvel's office suite at 635 Madison Avenue, with

Johnny Romita, who was clad in his customary dark suit pants and white shirt with the sleeves rolled, still dark haired, shaven, nice-looking, and as strong and capable as before, smiling with hospitality. As he sat near the wall on the “Uptown” side of the cubicle, looking at the first page or so of the sketchbook containing my storyboard script and model sheet, things precipitously changed. His expression became unfriendly. His voice became annoyed, and his volume became louder and angrier as he addressed me. His criticism was something like this: “Why did you do it *this* way? I told you to use stick figures!!” Stunned at this reaction to my carefully-prepared project, which I’d developed with months of sincere effort, I tried to explain, but it didn’t seem to matter to him. He angrily concluded, “this is too limiting to my imagination!!!”

As I recall, I tried to assuage the feelings of that angry man who was moving on, the man who stood in the place of one I had liked and respected to an enormous degree, warmly addressing him as “Mr. R.,” when a dark-haired, shaven, good-looking young man, dressed rather like Johnny, interjected, “you mean Mr. *Romita*!” Of course, my respect was implicit, but apparently not understood by the critical young man, who was at a drawing board, facing “Downtown,” just to the left of the exit from the office cubicle. Johnny left, as I recall. Still reeling from Johnny’s inexplicable rebuff, I gingerly approached the man at the drawing board for a little recovery time. It turned out to have been another big mistake. Like Peter Parker, I was living a typical Marvel Comics kind of plot!

I started watching what the artist was doing. He was inking what turned out to be the cover for the first appearance of the Defenders, with a big, bold image of the Hulk leaping toward the viewer, leading the other members of the new team, if I recall with any accuracy. I was very impressed, never having achieved such apparent mastery of inking myself using the crummy newsprint paper and dip pens provided by my art teachers back in junior high school and high school.

“Boy, you’re good with that brush!,” I exclaimed, as I recall.

“That’s very audacious of you,!” he exclaimed, shooting a piercing glance at me. “I am *not* good with that brush! I am *terrible* with that brush! What you mean to say is, you like the way I use that brush!”

I was still reeling from Johnny Romita's angry reaction to the storyboard script he hadn't even read. Furthermore, I had never heard the word *audacious* before, nor had I read it in all my years of high-powered schooling in the intellectual "fast lane." Apparently, I had much to learn, and I was discovering that life among people in the cartoon magazine industry was, and is, quite an education! As I recall, I tried to agree with him in some kind of tactful way, and as I recall, it went something like this.

"Well, perhaps you're not quite as good as Vincent Van Gough."

"Van Gough was a lousy artist!," he shot!

"Some of his work was good. I saw an exhibit, and his work in Antwerp was quite realistic. By the way, who are you, please?"

"Neal Adams," he replied, calming down.

I very gingerly talked with him for a while, trying to avoid another verbal explosion of anger. Two in one day were far more than sufficient. Soon, I left for the train. The repercussions were not over, because, some weeks later, I was over at the home of a collector friend, Billy Green. His folks were friendly with Tony Mortellaro, who worked for Marvel, and sometimes drew backgrounds for Johnny Romita. I briefly met Tony, who looked at my storyboard, not understanding what it was, nastily calling the art not *rough* but *bad*, and demanding me to decide, right then and there, whether I wanted to be a writer or an artist. I also heard, later, from Billy, that Tony said that they threw me out of the Marvel office, which I did not recall. In fact, I didn't even recall having been in the same room as Tony. He didn't seem to be as though he were a very nice guy. Therefore, I was not very surprised when, years later, as a member of the Marvel staff, my office mate, Stu Schwartzberg, reported to me that Mr. Mortellaro was dismissed from the Marvel company for a serious impropriety.

Anyway, getting back to that jarring day of encounters with Johnny and Neal, I took the long train and bus trip home. It seemed all the longer, for I was greatly shocked and deeply disappointed. I couldn't understand why my work was rejected without a reading. I couldn't fathom the anger of a man I admired, respected, and so very thoroughly liked, let alone the argumentative insensitivity of the man with the brush.

Only when I arrived back home, and was greeted by the slim, red-haired, bespectacled English lady in the kitchen, my late mother, did I begin to sort out the events of the day.

I recounted what had happened as accurate as I could. Regarding Johnny's reaction to my storyboard script, my mother's analysis was that perhaps Mr. Romita had felt threatened.

I couldn't believe that. I couldn't even understand that. It was beyond my comprehension, intellectually and emotionally beyond my psyche, that Johnny Romita, great and accomplished, could see a trace of competitive quality in my rough sketches, even though I recalled that in our first meeting, he remarked that I had a flair for costume, and noted a similarity between the character I later used in my storyboard script, and Dr. Doom. I couldn't believe that this man whom I regarded with such warmth and high regard could imagine that I would compete with him even if I could've! There had been a clue, though, at our first meeting; a clue that somehow I had missed.

Johnny had said something like this: "I see people come up here with artwork; work so good it would knock your eyes out, and I have to turn 'em away!" I was unable to understand why. Only after I eventually went to work for Marvel, and heard a similar story from colorist and secretary Bonnie Smith, was I able to deduce that Marvel had a budget, couldn't hire everyone, and that the people in charge weren't going to put their friends out of work to hire new talent, no matter how talented the new people might've been.

"A FATHER'S SECRET"

Johnny Romita had no real reason to feel threatened by me in any way, but, not everyone in the world may've been like me. My mother, a voracious reader of novels, as well as an adult who had some considerable knowledge of the human condition, had learned of nasty, over-competitive behavior in the publishing business. Apparently, with his having been a professional cartoonist for many years, Johnny was uncomfortably aware of such things. It was many years later when I bought a book about his life and art. In it, I read an account of his return to Marvel, after having been at another company where he was drawing romance stories, and being assigned to Marvel's *Daredevil*.

Johnny recalled feeling rather insecure when he was in the early period of that return. He wanted to make good in what he perceived to be a new kind of Marvel, which it was, compared to the Marvel of the Fifties, to which Johnny had been a pictorial contributor to horror, western, and romance stories. Johnny worked hard. He worked long hours. Often, he'd work well into the night, at home, tired, until, hunched over his drawing board, Johnny would be approached by his little son, John Junior, and get a neck rub accompanied by words of comfort and encouragement.

Stan Lee, Johnny's writer and editor, must've liked what the insecure artist was doing as much as the public did. Soon, Stan invited Johnny to illustrate the prestigious, popular, "*The Amazing Spider-Man*," in the wake of artist/plotter Steve Ditko's reputedly bitter resignation from his work on that magazine and his regular work on Dr. Strange in the monthly *Strange Tales* magazine. Johnny's work on romance features served him well, it seemed, enabling him to bring a new sense of maturity and attractiveness to many of the characters, vis-à-vis Steve's more "man in the street" kind of visual approach, which had, nevertheless, been very effective, and very in keeping with what Stan Lee had originally wanted for the Spider-Man feature.

A few years later, seeking greater creative control and income, artist, writer, and art director, Jack "King" Kirby, generally regarded as the most powerful and popular of Marvel's illustrators, departed, with the promise of better professional treatment at D.C. Comics. Although Johnny reported that Stan had never pressured him to draw like Jack, it is not hard to imagine that even as talented and intelligent a man as Johnny must've felt somewhat intimidated by comparison to Jack, whose awesome, if stylized, work, preceded Johnny's, and was internationally loved and respected. Nevertheless, in the wake of Jack's momentous move, Stan promoted Johnny to the prestigious and responsible staff position of Marvel's Art Director, augmenting Mr. Romita's successful freelance activities as an illustrator. How much better could things have been for Johnny? Surely, one would think, even though all that work and responsibility must've been daunting for a man who had to support a family.

Nevertheless, however improbable it seemed to me, maybe, when Johnny looked at the mock cover of my *Fantastic Four* story, perhaps when he momentarily glanced at a

few pages of my rough, Kirbyesque, storyboard sketches, he caught a glimpse of a kind of rudimentary, 1962 Jack Kirby, and a somewhat overly-ambitious one, at that. Perhaps he was looking into the future, in his imagination, and seeing me at a later stage of creative development; seeing me as a future Jack Kirby, and a competitive one. Those two were not to be my only experiences of being misunderstood and abused by “the fathers of our heroes.”

“THE TORCH’S FATHER BLAZES”

It was around the time of my ill-fated second appointment with Johnny Romita and unplanned encounter with Neal Adams that my next two encounters with Carl Burgos occurred. I hadn’t received any response to the letter I had written to him after our first meeting, when he signed my rare, early *Marvel Comics #1*, and *Marvel Mystery Comics*, and told me he had never done so for anyone else. I treasured them. I wouldn’t’ve sold them for anything. I was filled with something more than the pride of owning them. I felt an awesome sense of responsibility to preserve them and put them to good uses in the cause of history, which, over the years, I came to do, many times. To me, it would’ve been cheap, tawdry, and unethical, to get a rare autograph and turn around to sell it, as fans could and *did*. In fact, I didn’t like the idea of being a collector who got something great and then turned around and sold it for the temptation of a few dollars of profit. Those principles, or the lack of them that many guys had, led to trouble with Carl, much to my shock and dismay.

I was in Manhattan, in the neighborhood of Countrywide Publications/Eerie Publications, Inc. I thought I’d take a chance to stop by, ask for Mr. Burgos, and learn whether he had a few minutes for me. Soon, I was at 222 Park Avenue South. I went up, and spoke with the company’s receptionist. She checked with Carl. To my relief, she sent me in to my second meeting with the “father” of the original Human Torch. Unfortunately, my relief didn’t last too long.

Carl explained that he was very annoyed by my letter. I didn’t understand what could’ve offended him. The letter was very polite and appreciative, as far as I can recall. I soon learned that he had taken offense at my suggestion that we might keep the

autographed issues exclusive, having been moved to the idea by his having told me of the picture he had made for only one person, and the signatures on the mags that he had never done for anyone but me. Carl had taken that request the wrong way. It grew into a major misunderstanding and big problem.

Carl told me that if anyone would tell him not to autograph mags, he would tell ‘em to go jump in a lake. He said that more than once during his tirade. I tried to explain what I had meant in the letter, and my reasons, and that, certainly, I hadn’t ordered him not to sign stuff. I wanted to calm him, and make amends, somehow. An idea dawned!

I told him that I had an acquaintance who was a big fan of his, having been a reader of “Golden Age” the first time around, since he was a lot older than I was. I asked whether I might bring him up to meet the old master who had provided stories and art that had been such a memorable part of the fan’s boyhood. I thought it would be a very nice thing for both of them, especially since Carl hardly ever met with his fans. Needless to say, it would be a thrill for his fan. Carl consented to a future meeting.

I remember little else about this second encounter, except that Carl asked me whether I knew Nick Cuti. Indeed, I was Nicola Cuti’s first personal fan. Nick became a writer for *Vampirella* when he came out of the Air Force. I met him at the same convention as Perry Albert, on that same July morning. I remember how we three went for refreshments, together. I came to correspond with Nick, as his work soon spread to the other mags at Warren Publications, *Creepy* and *Eerie*, if I’m not mistaken; and, of course, Nick wrote, drew, and published, *Moonchild*. He must’ve contacted Carl to try to write for the horror mags that the Torch’s “father” was editing. I’m sure I spoke well of Nick, who, in my humble opinion, was a very nice guy, as well as a good writer.

Not long after, I spoke with the late Jerome Topper: the fan I had mentioned to Carl Burgos. Jerome was quite well-known among cartoon mag dealers and artists in the New York area. He was around twice my age, about my height of five feet, seven inches, shaven, with short, reddish-brown hair, and a little pudgy. He had an upper-mid range voice, with which he used to engage me for hours on the telephone, telling me about the great collection of Golden Age comics he was building. The trouble was, he did far more

bragging than collecting, and he never would buy anything from me. A colleague told me, years later, that Jerry wouldn't buy from me because of envy.

Jerry got into having professional cartoonists draw sketches for him. Sometimes, he paid the artists. This was back during a period when artists usually drew sketches as free gifts for their devoted fans. Jerry got around to many of the artists, including Johnny Romita, whom he called and visited at the Marvel offices, once he learned that I had done so. Jerry's dedication wasn't bigger than his greed, though. I remember being at a convention with him. He came over to me with a *Marvel Mystery Comics* #2 which he had purchased for \$75.00, probably from my associate, Perry Albert (who once referred to Jerry as "Hoppy, The Marvel Bunny," after the old Fawcett character), only to sell it for \$80.00 a few minutes later. When he eventually was going to sell the rest of his collection, years later, he made a deal with me for some art, only to sell it to someone else. I think that was when the colleague I mentioned said that Jerry was envious of me. Draw your own conclusions about that, but Jerry wore my patience very thin over time.

Anyway, I asked Jerry whether he wanted to meet with Carl Burgos. Jerry, as I indicated, was a big Golden Age fan. Furthermore, he claimed he had visited Funnies, Inc., the shop that had produced *Marvel Comics* #1. Carl Burgos and Bill Everett's magnum opuses, the Human Torch and the Sub-Mariner, debuted there. Naturally, Jerry was very interested. I made him familiar with what I had learned on my two visits with Carl, if I correctly recall: about the single fan-picture he had made, and the mags he had signed only for me. I didn't want Jerome to pull one of his "get and sell" actions with an autograph on a Burgos story, and, as I previously indicated, I treasured (and still do!) my special, Burgos-autographed mags. Therefore, I asked Jerry to show a little self-control about such things, including, that if he wanted to get an autograph, which was perfectly understandable, that he would get whatever inscription he wanted on a separate piece of paper, rather than right on a mag. I told him he could put it in some old issue containing a Burgos story as a personalized flyleaf, or something to that effect. I thought that would be an honor for Carl and a nice thing for Jerry, without raising temptation for commercial gain by "Hoppy, The Marvel Bunny," to sell a rare, autographed mag, later on. Jerry agreed.

An appointment was made with Carl Burgos. Jerry and I met at 222 Park Avenue South, if I'm not mistaken. We went up to meet with Carl. Things seemed to go reasonably well, until the moment came when Jerome asked for Carl's autograph. Then, Jerome became *Jerry*, or, maybe, "The Marvel Bunny," again, and Carl showed the "blazing" side of his personality, the side that may well have expressed itself through his incendiary cartoon magazine character, the original Human Torch—and maybe the flaming android's boy partner, Toro, as well!

Instead of passing a piece of 8½ " x 11" typing paper to Carl, and politely asking for some nice personal message and a signature, Jerry made a point of telling Carl that he wanted the writing on the piece of paper, and not an actual magazine containing a Burgos story, so as not to interfere with my exclusive set of Burgos-autographed *Marvel Mystery Comics*. Suddenly, Carl became loud and angry. "I won't sign any of *your* books," he reprimanded me, claimed he had told me not to tell people not to ask for his autographs on books. I had no recollection of any such specific instruction from Carl. I did remember his statement about anyone's telling *him* what not to do, autograph-wise, concerning jumping in a lake, but nothing concerning the dynamics of my speech or actions on the outside world, which were my own affair. Carl calmed down a trifle. I remember very little about what happened for the remainder of our meeting. What I recall is that Carl said that he didn't want to come between friends, and that Jerry took Carl's inscription on a piece of typing paper. Soon, we left. I was very disturbed by the incident. Carl couldn't've come between friends, because Jerry wasn't a friend, as other people who knew both of us indicated. As for Carl, I thought he had misunderstood and overreacted. It was a typical Marvel Comics plot!

Needless to say, when I arrived back home, I didn't have good news for my mom. I was very aggravated by this incident. Around three weeks later, I wrote to Carl, trying to make amends. I never received a reply. Then, around eight years after my first meeting with the "father" of the original Human Torch, I was in the dark, hot, vapor-tinged Reproductions Department of the Marvel offices, where I was laboring at the time, when my senior partner, Stu Schwartzberg, came back to that stifling hell-hole from the Bullpen Room, to tell me that Carl Burgos was in there.

Carl was very friendly with Marvel's head letterer, Danny Crespi, and fellow paste-up and mechanical artist, and letterer, Morrie Kuramoto. He had worked with them in the Marvel Bullpen of the Fifties. I was told that he used to go to lunch or dinner with them (and maybe some of the other elders of Marvel's staff) just about every week. I gingerly walked into the Bullpen. There, sitting in front of the desk occupied by inker Frank Giacoia, adjacent to the desk occupied by correctionist John Tartaglione, was Carl. He was looking quite serious as he talked with them. I smiled, greeted him, and moved on. I didn't want to get into any problematic situation with Carl, especially in front of my colleagues.

I said nothing more to him. I'm not even sure that he recognized me. I never asked, and none of the guys said anything to me about him after that visit. Still, I had another incident concerning Carl Burgos; a far more significant involvement; one that I wish had never been necessary.

Around eight years later, I was contacted by Marvel's Jim Salicrup. Jim had been my senior editor on *Marvel Age*, the company's news and history magazine. My job had been writing the history feature entitled "The Marvel Age," until Jim's assistants, eager to write my feature, interfered in the editorial content of my work, in violation of my assurance from Jim that only *he* would edit my articles. I protested on numerous occasions. Finally, Jim replaced me with one of those characters. That guy got what he wanted: my feature, which long-time super-collector Perry Albert had declared as the only thing in the book that was worth reading, when I wrote it. Jim, in turn, got something: someone who, in all probability, was not nearly as qualified as I was to write that history feature.

Nevertheless, Jim *did* call upon me again, to write a very special piece for the first *Marvel Age Annual*. It was a very important piece. Unfortunately, it was a piece I wished that there had been no reason to write. It was the obituary of Carl Burgos. I responded with a compact but informative biography of the "father" of the original Human Torch; one of the "fathers" of the cartoon magazine industry as we know it. I tried not to be emotional. I wanted to maintain an appropriate level of journalistic objectivity. Still, I couldn't help including a small passage describing how, once upon a time, a lean, long-

haired kid visited him with a little stack of his earliest Torch works, how he had autographed those rarities, making them into exclusive treasures, and proudly displayed one of those wonderful old cartoon magazines to the other people in the office.

“THE SECRET FIRE”

It was a very long time before I learned some things about Carl that gave some insight to me concerning his fiery anger. I read an interview with Susan Burgos, Carl’s daughter, in an issue of *Alter-Ego*, conducted by its distinguished editor, Roy Thomas. In it, Susan recounted how her father reportedly sued the publishers of Marvel Comics over the rights to his brainchild, the original Human Torch. He lost. Of course, this shouldn’t surprise too many people, at least if they’ve worked for one of the big publishers, because creations are usually categorized, for legal purposes, as works made for hire, and all rights are contractually sold to the publishers. How Carl thought he could win is a mystery, but then again, I guess one can imagine that the creator of the original Human Torch, a character who blazed in more ways than one, a maverick who had to try to do as he felt compelled to do in order to accomplish an objective that he believed worthy, was a pretty strong, determined, gutsy kind of guy.

Angry and bitter over his failure to gain the rights to his pioneering creation, according to Susan, Carl gathered all of his old comics containing the Torch’s adventures, and took them out to the trash area, to be taken away and destroyed. Susan then related that she went out, found the mags, and took them to her room to save them. When Carl discovered this, he was furious. He confiscated the treasures she had rescued, and off they went for their appointment with oblivion. That’s how comics become rare!

Although the situation described by Susan Burgos was not identical to mine, it still provided some insight into the old master’s personality. I learned of a traumatic incident that apparently had deeply embittered Carl. Perhaps the stress of the legal action and the understandable disappointment resulting from his loss had exacerbated his inclination toward anger, particularly toward me, or his reluctance to do any Torch art. Apparently, it was the principal reason that he no longer had a collection of his old works by the time I found him.

In any case, though, I *did* find him. I *did* obtain those exclusive autographs on those super-collector items; but, maybe the best part was bringing Carl and the Torch back together, and presenting the opportunity for the old master to've had a moment of pride with his colleagues up at Countrywide. Yes, I, among the most obscure, lost individuals in the cartoon magazine field, had the distinct privilege of implementing a very special sort of father and son reunion, and, furthermore, was accorded the honor of saluting the father of one of our greatest fantasy heroes, in print, for the older fans who knew of him, and introducing him to a younger generation of fans who didn't know who and what they had missed. I hope, in my small way, that my humble, written salute, did justice to Carl, and pleased his spirit, in that wonderful place where those who have culturally enriched us eventually go.

“DID I DO THAT?”

Not all my experiences with the fathers of our heroes were as tough as those I experienced with Johnny and Carl, which was lucky for me. I needed some kind of therapeutic encounter to get my outlook back on track. Thank heavens for that distinguished great-grandson of the famous English artist/poet, William Blake; the “Ancient Sub-Mariner”: Bill Everett! Like a lot of super-people, Bill had a sort of “alter-ego,” which may've had some effect on our next encounter, but nothing that interfered with his being a great guy, friendly and generous, to me, and, for that matter, to any other fans with whom I saw and heard him interact.

Then, (as I briefly mentioned, before), just before my second encounter with Bill Everett, I first met fellow fan and aspiring artist Alan Kupperberg. Alan was more than a mere Q.N.S. (Quite 'Nuff Sayer) in the Hallowed Ranks of Marvel, as defined on the fan letter or *Marvel Bullpen Bulletins* pages, meaning that he had a fan letter published. He had so many letters published that he should've been awarded a doctoral degree for them, at the very least! I, on the other hand, never had a letter published. Unlike Alan, I wasn't as well-connected with the Marvel staff and freelancers, and I never thought to ask anyone which mags needed letters. Furthermore, I didn't try to write the kind of letters that were intended for publication on any of the fan-letter pages.

As a result of his published letters, Alan became quite well-known, I guess. In fact, I think he achieved every other Rank of Marvel, making him a P.M.M. (Permanent Marvelite Maximus), which I have never achieved, even after all my years of dubious Marvel-related accomplishments! Anyway, noting his contact info, I did as fans were intended to do, and got in touch with him.

Alan lived in the Canarsie section of Brooklyn, N.Y., in those days. I had my original Chamber of Fantasy in the section known as Sheepshead Bay: a little room, bedecked with repros of the covers of Marvel super-collector's items, psychedelic posters, and mobiles, in my family's place, at 3090 Voorhies Avenue, Apartment 2-D. Coincidentally, Winsor McKay, the creator of "Gertie the Dinosaur," "Little Nemo in Slumberland," and other famous classics of cartoon history, once lived in the large old house at 1901 Voorhies Avenue, unbeknownst to later residents.

Anyway, one day, young Alan came for a visit. I think that he was seventeen years old at the time, and I was eighteen. He was already quite a talented artist, as he demonstrated by sketching my armored, horned, cloaked character from my storyboard script, which he declared as less "clunky-looking" than my version. He did judge my inking as "not half-bad," though. I guess from Alan, who was a follower of Neal Adams, and eventually worked for Neal, that was a compliment. Like Neal, and others of his mindset, Alan said exactly that was on his mind, with little regard to tact, sensitivity, or similar regards for feelings or privacy.

As a result of that mindset, coupled with his contacts with professionals who worked for Marvel, Alan apparently gained a considerable degree of "inside knowledge" that would've best been kept private. It is with sensitivity and a constructive spirit that I will deal with it, as well as a touch of humor, since it has long since been a matter of public record, as far as Bill Everett's particular problem is concerned. Without my asking about anything private, Alan told me that Bill was an alcoholic.

I was rather disturbed by what Alan revealed. For one thing, I, even as naïve as I was, with little knowledge of the standards taught to objective journalists, did not have the feeling that the apparently brash kid who mentioned Bill's problem was a reliable source of information about such important people (or any other kind of people, for that

matter!). For another and more important thing, I didn't believe that he had demonstrated proper respect and discretion by revealing a very personal and private matter concerning Bill Everett, or anyone else, for that matter. Certainly I don't recall anything that resembled drunken behavior on the part of Bill Everett, and with good and admirable reason, as I learned, years later.

Anyway, around that time, I made a breakthrough with my obsessive efforts as a collector of Marvel's print items. My quest for the first ten issues of *Marvel Mystery Comics* was almost at its conclusion. Perry Albert had issues 5 and 6, as I mentioned before. As I was to discover, his *Marvel Mystery Comics* #6 had been improperly restored with an incorrect back cover. Many letters were exchanged in the negotiation process, for Perry was fanatically-devoted to *Marvel Mystery Comics* #5, which he claimed to've been, perhaps, the rarest cartoon mag of all. In fairness to Perry, I hadn't seen any specimens. Perry was quite insistent that he would never sell his super-rarity, but my persistent letters, coupled with his great need for money at that time, led to a deal for the two rather worn mags for \$250.00, which was a bloody fortune for a kid, in those days, especially for a couple of ratty old comic books, as far as regular human beings were concerned!

That negotiation process was not merely long. It was, at times, quite angry, and, in extreme cases, outright *profane*! I was not very experienced at the use of profanity through the U.S. Mail, nor the mention of some other things which are best left in the darkness of the past, and, therefore, I was sincerely concerned that some postal inspector might open one or more of the letters, in transit, and initiate obscenity charges! Ahh! How callow I was, back in the innocence of my teenage period! Did I know that my government had better things (or was it *worse* things?) to do?

Anyway, all those letters, and two trips to Wantagh, Long Island, later, I was broke, in debt to my father, but in possession of those two mags, but, at work, removing tape and resealing tears over a long period of times, but fortunate to've been able to study those rarities. Alex Schomberg's Human Torch cover for issue #5 featured the blazing android's attempt to rescue a woman in a glass tube from three menaces in flame-resistant costumes, as a pair tried to heave her into a furnace, while the third was blocking the

Torch with a stream of nitro chloride from a hose. The coloring was almost “painterly,” and very effective. The interior Torch story was unrelated, but good. Of course, Paul Gustavson’s Angel made his usual good show. The western Masked Raider went after the varmints. Electro, The Wonder Robot and the international operatives of the cyclopean automaton’s creator, Professor Zog, who guided all of them, made their second appearance, as did Ferret the detective and his ferret assistant, Nosey. The adaptation of the first Ka-Zar pulp came to an exciting conclusion, but the biggest feature, for me, was reading and rereading Bill Everett’s wonderful Sub-Mariner story about Namor’s return to New York, wearing that elaborate, cloaked costume, his battle against capture, his release by the Police Commissioner through Betty Dean’s help, his rescue of commuters from a flooded subway, and his capture of the gold thieves who caused the flood. I was getting closer to learning how Bill guided Namor into his historic battle with the brainchild of Carl Burgos, but it was still a mystery.

As I previously described, that mystery was solved for me in the pages of *Marvel Mystery Comics* #6. Never did I read anything that had a more powerful impact on my mind! It was a totally involved story, simultaneously charged with idealism and reality, trust and treachery, violence and romance, and plenty of action. Bill’s use of the “Namor in an elaborate chair layout” for the splash panel, as he had done in *Marvel Mystery Comics* #4, was ironic and chilling. Finally, Alex Schomberg’s cover of the Angel’s swinging across a shark-filled pool, rescuing a bound beauty from a den full of masked and costumed menaces, was a fine wrapper!

Over the next four months, I got ready for the July Comic Art Convention. I repaid my father. I sold doubles of Marvel mags to fund my upcoming purchases, and, I studied and restudied those thrilling rare issue of *Marvel Mystery Comics*, in preparation for another encounter with the “father” of the Sub-Mariner: Bill Everett. I imagine that you’ve been waiting for that, too, and wondering, perhaps with a little frustration, why I’ve related so many details of my hunting for those rarities, and my memories of them. It must be understood that those characters in the long-lost issues of The Golden Age of cartoon mags, were the “fathers” of the Marvel super heroes of today. They set the style. Even Stan Lee, co-creator of The Fantastic Four, Hulk, Ant-Man, Spider-Man, Thor, Iron

Man, and Daredevil, once acknowledged that the Marvel heroes of the cartoon-mag renaissance he began with Jack Kirby were a lot like what Bill Everett had done with the Sub-Mariner, back in “The Golden Age.” Need I say more?

July came. Acquisition-wise, I seem to recall that I met a young man named Thomas Czapliki, who was in from Michigan with a dealer named Bob Brosch. Tom had a *Marvel Mystery Comics* #6, autographed by Bill Everett, and a #10, as well. Upon my examination of his #6, I discovered that my copy had been given an incorrect back cover, as well as an incorrect, albeit clever artistic restoration of the lower-left side of the front cover. I had to replace it. After some edgy negotiation, I traded my *Captain America* #1, which had a rather poorly-restored spine, for the pair. Then, I spent quite a lot of time listening to Tom’s asking, “why don’t you sell me your *Marvel* #1?, in a desperately plaintive tone, which almost made up for the loss of my “*Cap* #1.” In those days, it seemed as though my Golden Age issues of *Captain America* were unfortunate pawns in my quest for the first ten issues of *Marvel Mystery Comics*.

You need not shudder. My new double of *Marvel Mystery Comics* #10 went in trade to Ken Michelson of Wisconsin, a bespectacled, dark, pleasant young man, also in his late teens, I think, who needed it to close his own run of *Marvel Comics*/*Marvel Mystery Comics* issues 1-10, which he was building the previous July when I met him at that convention. Well, there we were, in the same dealer room where we had met, in Manhattan, a year earlier, helping each other to make collecting history in the completion of those very special, rare, early runs; but, wait a minute! Aren’t you thinking that I’m mistaken? Didn’t I complete my early run in that rather bitter trade with Thomas Czapliki? Yes! You’re very attentive, and partly right! I *did* complete the run of *Marvel Comics*/*Marvel Mystery Comics* issues 1-10 that way, but, in the trade with Ken, something more was added!

Ken, bless his generous heart, traded good copies of *Marvel Mystery Comics* issues 11, 12, and 13 (a really nice 13, better than the one I’d bought in that same dealer room, two years before, in terms of its condition), and a *Human Torch* #5 (the famous battle issue that, again, featured a fight with the Sub-Mariner, and which, according to legend, was produced by a legion of creative people over a weekend!). That brought my run up to

#13. I eventually used my old #13 (minus autograph) in another deal, and, as I previously mentioned, my *Captain America #1* turned up in the little old shop on Grand Street, in Brooklyn, a week later. There, at 795 Grand Street, near Bushwick Avenue, I bought it again, from that lovable, grizzled old pirate, Henry Keller, and his very affable partner, Al Faruggio. This was most appropriate, since that little, old shop could've easily served as the front for the hidden lab in which Steve Rogers was transformed into Captain America—and, for all we know, maybe, decades earlier, it did...

You may also be pleased to hear that my badly-restored copy of *Marvel Mystery Comics #6*, and an *All-Winners #3* fetched a nice *Captain America Comics #3*, containing Stan Lee's first professionally-published story (which he later autographed to me!), *Mystic Comics* volume 1, issue 6, which introduced that weird hero with the Captain America-like origin, the Destroyer, and some other nice pieces like a set of *Yellow Claw*.

Naturally, I liked Carl's Torch stories dealing with the criminal gang headed by the mysterious "J.B.," and the Ka-Zar stories about his New York adventure (which preceded the film "Tarzan's New York Adventure" by nearly two years), but the really big treat for me was Bill Everett's aftermath to the historic battles between the Torch and the Sub-Mariner. I saw how Namor left the settlement with resentment and returned to his grandfather, the Emperor of the Sub-Mariners, and his people, in disgrace, and then, the introduction of two new and important characters, who were to become involved with Namor and others of importance to him, on more than one occasion: Luthor Robinson, a handsome, wealthy American adventurer, and his pretty, feisty blonde fiancée, Lyn Harris.

Their adventure with Namor in the first story arc was, in my view, inspired by the original "King Kong" film. Luthor planned to take Lynn and a crew of tough guys on an armed yacht, to capture the mighty menace known as the Sub-Mariner, or destroy him. Like King Kong, Namor, and his cousin, Princess Dorma, captured "the golden woman." Unlike the crew of the Venture, though, the party led by Robinson failed to achieve their objective. Complicating things was the wish of Namor's mother, Princess Fen, to have him marry the America human, for Namor was half human. An additional complication

was the operation performed on Lynn that enabled her to breathe water as well as air, and resist the Antarctic cold.

The operation to enable one to breathe water became very interesting and believable to me when I later studied Developmental Anatomy, at Brooklyn College. I learned that all vertebrate creatures are built on the same basic body plan. This includes clefts on the pharynx that correspond to the position of gills in fishes. Science *fiction* is extrapolated from science *fact*. Once again, I was impressed with Bill Everett's scientific sense, coupled with his adventurous imagination.

As Bill Everett, who had worked on an electronics magazine, and knew science, had done his homework, so I had done my homework. I had reconstructed that lost run of rare cartoon-mag treasures. I had studied them. I was ready to discuss them. I was worthy of another encounter with Bill Everett, yet, I might well have paused after my paper treasure hunt, with my terrible budget, and asked, under the watch of the Higher Power who must've helped me, "did *I* do that?" Then, the next momentous meeting came!

I was in the dealer room of the convention, on the eighteenth floor of New York's Statler Hilton Hotel. It was in the six o'clock hour, as I recall. Hardly any conventioners were in the room. Things were winding down for the dealers, whose tables bordered the walls. The floor was free of the sea of fans selling mags from suitcases and bags. I had a clear view. Then, I saw him: a tall, bespectacled, fiftyish man, with dark hair, dressed in long pants and a long-sleeved shirt. He was someone I knew. What followed went something like this.

"Hello, Mr. Everett!"

"Oh! Hi!"

"How've y'been?"

"Fine!"

"I met you right here, last year! You signed my *Marvel Mystery* #s 1 and 2, and my "Battle Issues" 7-10 for me, and did that nice sketch of Prince Namor for me!"

Bill put his arm around me like a "Dutch Uncle."

I continued, "since I saw you I got *Marvel Mystery* 5 and 6, and in number 6, I read that great trial and attempted execution of the Sub-Mariner story that you did, that led to

the battle with the Human Torch. That was such a great concept! How did you come to do that?”

“Did *I* do that?,” he inquired, smiling, with apparent amusement and surprise.

I don’t remember anything else about our chat, other than my coming to terms with the fact that a fabulous story, a great lost event in cartoon magazine history, was not only lost to most people because of its extreme rarity (and it had never been reprinted!), but lost to the memory of its creator. I had done all that searching, dealing, saving, buying, and studying. I had prepared for my next meeting with the great Bill Everett, expecting to hear a wonderful account of how he prepared for the historical (or hysterical?) battle with the brainchild of Carl Burgos, the original Human Torch, and learned that Bill had entirely forgotten about all of it! How do you think I felt?

Well, get ready for a surprise. I didn’t let it upset me! I just spent a few minutes with his hand’s reaching down to my shoulder, as though he were my uncle, and my looking up to him, physically and psychologically, trying to convey my respect and appreciation for him. It didn’t matter that I didn’t hear some elaborate explanation about his work on those amazing old mags, however fascinating that would’ve been. I was there with Bill Everett, one of the fathers of our heroes, letting him know how great his work was, and putting a smile on his face as I was letting him know how special and important he was, and, in doing so, I’d like to think that, in my humble little way, I gave something to him.

Still, it didn’t end there. I was to meet Bill again, and, with the help of former Marvel writer and assistant editor Gary Friedrich, I was to get some significant answers.

“SECRETS OF THE SUB-MARINER’S FATHER”

What was the secret answer to my question about Bill’s work? I couldn’t get information about the preparation for and execution of the historic story sequence in *Marvel Mystery Comics*, but why hadn’t Bill remembered?

Well, one answer, which was to become more obvious to me as I became more familiar with industry professionals, was that they were in the business of creating new stories and art, doing various production-related chores, meeting deadlines, and just

trying to earn a living and have a bit of life outside of all that! They often didn't spend much time studying their works. Many of those people didn't even save their old mags. Bill certainly didn't. As he related to my accomplished editor, Roy Thomas, in an interview for *Alter-Ego* magazine, Bill not only didn't save his old mags, but, moreover, didn't even care to've saved his original art. He saved the original art for his covers, for a while, but, after a time, he even disposed of those artifacts. Then, there was another life factor, beyond the passage of decades, that may've had some affect on his memory of details about his early stories.

The information came to me through Gary Friedrich. Gary was an editorial assistant and writer for Marvel, back in the Sixties, and, by my reckoning, a very good story man. Back then, he was a young man with longish blond hair, a moustache, and, sometimes, a little beard, which, as I learned from him, was quite appropriate, since his great-grandmother, Maggie Calhoun, was the sister of the famous U.S. Civil War Brigadier General, George Armstrong Custer, who passed into history and legend at the Battle of the Little Big Horn: "Custer's Last Stand."

He also confessed to being related to Union Army Commander, and later U.S. President, Ulysses S. Grant, whom he described as having been not so much a great-uncle as a drunk uncle!

Gary may've inherited some of Custer's looks and boldness, as well as Grant's thirst for strong drink. Both may've contributed to his camaraderie with Bill Everett.

Gary met Bill through Roy Thomas. Gary (Ol' Yellow Hair) and Roy (he of the corn silk blond hair, resembling rocker Tom Petty) grew up together in the Jackson, Missouri area, before moving to New York, writing cards for Topps, and entering the cartoon magazine industry. Roy was hired by Marvel first, but soon brought Gary into the company. There, Roy got friendly with Bill, whose Sub-Mariner stories had been part of his life for many years.

Bill and his family actually had their home in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, but, in the Sixties, beginning with his art for *Daredevil* #1, for April, 1964, Bill found himself in Manhattan, on a more frequent basis, as his volume of work increased. It was something of a wonder that he got more work after *Daredevil* #1. According to some account I read,

possibly the one written by Stan Lee for one of his early “Origins of Marvel Comics” books, Bill was very enthusiastic, and drew great stuff for that debut issue, but missed a big deadline. Marvel was fined \$7,000.00, or something close, for missing reserved press time at the printers. Back then, that was money! Still, more work came.

Roy and Gary shared a pad in Greenwich Village, home of Marvel’s Dr. Strange. When Roy came to write stories for the aforementioned Master of the Mystic Arts (I mean Doc, not Gary!), he used their Bleeker Street address, in his writing, as Dr. Strange’s address; a very nice touch! As the decade progressed, with his fondness for Bill, Roy apparently invited the “father” of the Sub-Mariner to stay at the Bleeker Street apartment and/or their later apartment in Manhattan’s Eighties, when Marvel work busied Bill in Manhattan. It was a nice gesture, not only because Roy was a Sub-Mariner enthusiast from way back, but also because Bill’s wife, Gwen, passed away. As if having a demon like Namor, The Avenging Son, inside him, were not enough, Bill had to deal with the tragedy of Mrs. Everett’s death, too. All together, Bill apparently helped himself to deal with his great stresses and sadness by consuming more strong drink than was good for him. One major effect was his missing deadlines.

I read, years later, that Virginia Romita, wife of Spider-Man’s “foster father,” art director John Romita, was managing the production traffic of original art, up at the Marvel offices: “The Little General,” as their son, John, Jr., affectionately called her. She heard all kinds of explanations for missed deadlines, but none more original than one she got from Bill. On one occasion, he told her, “my hamster ate the pages.” Can you imagine the *size* of *that* hamster?

Anyway, Gary recalled coming home one day. There, on the couch, was this guy. The stranger said, “hi, I’m Bill Everett! How about a beer?”

Gary told me, “...right away, I knew that this was my kind o’ guy!”

Gary didn’t know anything about Bill. He had never even heard of the Sub-Mariner, according to what he told to me. It didn’t seem to matter. The two of them became close friends in short order, and drank together, more than they should’ve, until Bill, being the great guy he was, joined Alcoholics Anonymous, straightened himself out,

and then helped Gary to do likewise. Still, some rather amusing events occurred before that!

Bill, tragically (as it later proved to've been) was a smoker, as so many more people were, in those days, but Bill, Gary explained, had a cosmic power that only "fathers" of our Golden Age heroes of the cartoon realm had: he could smoke a cigarette, right down to the end, and the ash wouldn't fall off!

This amazing ability, far beyond those of mortal men, apparently did not stop Roy from following Bill around with ashtrays, just in case...

Gary recalled another amusing story about Bill, in a taped interview with me. Unfortunately, the tape is inaccessible at this time, but I am quite familiar with it, so, if I may, I will relate it, here, in the form of Gary's narrative. It went something very close to this:

"Bill was the king of Schrafft's Bar. The bartender, there, knew 'im, and he had unlimited credit. That was when we (Marvel's office staff) were at 655 Madison Avenue, the Standard Brands Building.

"Every week, we'd all go down, after work, for a drink. Everyone went. Even Marie Severin used to go. I never saw 'er get tipsy or anything, but, Marie's a fun gal. Bill would tell the bartender, "give everyone a drink on me," and he'd say, 'yes, sir, Mr. Everett,' and, you'd've thought 'is name was Rockefeller!

"One day, everyone came in, and the regular bartender wasn't on duty, and wouldn't give Bill credit. Bill put a ten dollar bill on the bar and said, 'fix me a liqueur parfait.'

"Now, a liqueur parfait consists of different liqueurs served in a parfait glass. The liqueurs are carefully poured off a spoon, in layers, and are supposed to be sipped off, slowly, one by one. Bill picked up the glass, tipped the whole thing up, and swallowed it down! Then, he looked the bartender right in the eyes and said, 'fix me another one.'

"Again, the bartender slowly poured the liqueurs, and again, Bill tipped it up and swallowed it down!! Then, he glared at the livid bartender and said, 'fix me another one!'

"Finally, he went in the back, found the regular bartender who knew Bill, brought him out to see what was the matter, and he restored Bill's credit."

Gary related another rather funny story about Bill, that I believe occurred after Roy and Gary moved uptown to an apartment in the Eighties, uptown Manhattan. If I rightly recall, it had a terrace, which is relevant to the story. If it was only a window, my editor and friend, Roy, will correct me! Again, I will closely recall the story, in Gary's voice with approximately (very close) quotes of the other people involved, as Gary recalled them:

"We had a party comin' up, and Roy thought it would be a nice idea to have Bill do a drawing of the Sub-Mariner, and have it framed on the wall, so, he asked Bill to do it. Well, a few weeks went by, and Bill still hadn't done the picture.

"Roy was becoming impatient. I told Bill. 'Bill, I don't particularly care what you do for me, but you'd better get that ---damn drawing done for Thomas, or the ----'s really gonna hit the fan!'

"Well, the time was drawin' close.

"Roy said to me, 'Bill won't let me down.'

"I said, 'Roy, Bill's an alcoholic. Don't bet on it.'

"Oh, no, he won't let me down!'

"O-kay!'

"Well, Saturday night came. The guests started showin' up. Larry Lieber (writer, artist, and editor) arrived. One drink is his absolute limit. He was depressed. *Everything* depresses Larry. He's living in the shadow of his older brother (Stan Lee: editor, writer, and co-creator of the major characters of "The Marvel Age"). He was standing over by the terrace, looking down, (as though) contemplating suicide. Denny O'Neil (talented writer and editor, like Larry, and, normally, a very nice guy!) went over, and said to 'im, 'if that's the way y'feel about it, go ahead and jump!' He was bombed out o' his mind! (The booze was talking, not Denny).

"Well, it must've been ten o'clock; still no sign of Bill, because Bill *had* to stop off for dinner at Schrafft's Bar. Roy was pacing up and back. Finally, I looked over by the door, and there was Bill. I don't know whether someone let 'im in, or 'e just poured 'imself under it!

"He said, (drunkenly), 'Roy!! 'got yer drawin' for ya, ol' buddy!'

“Roy was furious and said, ‘why don’t you just take it and stick it...?’

“Bill asked, ‘what the hell’s’ matter with him!?’

“I said, ‘never mind, Bill.’

“I leaned ‘im up against the door, put a drink in ‘is hand, put a cigarette in ‘is mouth, and lit it up.

“Now, Bill could smoke a cigarette right to the end, and the ash would never fall off. Roy proceeded to berate Bill for the length of the cigarette. Bill remained silent. Finally, he asked, ‘Roy, are y’done?’

“Roy nodded.

“Bill just flicked the ash off!”

I thought that was a great response!

It must be understood that Bill eventually straightened himself out, as he did others. He would tell Gary, “you’re gonna hurt yourself with that stuff,” before Gary also joined Alcoholics Anonymous, and that drink can bring the worst out of good people.

Aside from his unfortunate problems with strong drink and deadlines, or maybe in spite of them, Bill was, by all accounts that have come to my attention, very well-liked by his colleagues at Marvel. The character Captain George Stacy, in *The Amazing Spider-Man*, was reportedly modeled after him. He had a friendly spirit, which was helpful to my aforementioned acquaintance, Alan Kupperberg. According to Gary Friedrich, back in the days of young Alan’s visits to the Marvel offices, he was a kind of “uppity kid” who didn’t exactly endear himself to people up there, so, I guess that I wasn’t the only kid who ran into any problems! Maybe the pros had artistic tempers. Maybe youngsters needed to be brash in order to survive. I don’t know for sure.

In any case, according to Gary, Alan made some kind of harsh remark about Johnny Romita’s artwork. When Marie Severin heard about it, she was furious. She stormed over to Stan Lee and threatened to quit if Alan were ever allowed into the office again. In fairness to Alan, who was a very talented kid, he may not’ve meant to be insolent. He was, as previously indicated, from what might be described as “The Neal Adams School,” in both artistic style and stark frankness of verbal expression. In fairness

to Marie, she was rather conservative about things like respect, and quite loyal to her colleague. She apparently wanted appropriate business behavior, especially from kids.

Anyway, Stan decided that Alan could visit the office as long as anyone in the office would see him. Who came to the rescue? Gary Friedrich was one. Namor's "father," Bill Everett, was the other! Bill's beneficence was a Lordsend! Marie was very fond of Bill. It seems that after Bill's little return to drawing his brainchild, Prince Namor, the Sub-Mariner, in *Tales To Astonish*, which didn't score well with a lot of fans (The Lord knows why!!), Bill was put to work as an inker, frequently working with Marie Severin, and was very successful.

It's safe to say that Bill was very well-liked by his colleagues. He was also highly regarded by people in Alcoholics Anonymous. He was, according to an account written by Roy Thomas, a driving force in the New York chapter of that honorable and important organization. Still, alcohol and tobacco had done harm to Bill—much more than anyone, including Bill, probably knew. His remaining time in this life was short, as I learned when it was too late. Nevertheless, I saw him twice before he took his leave of us, and, although the occasions were brief, they were, for me, most inspirational and memorable, and, as previously related, I had one more brief encounter with Carl Burgos, before he died, and had the privilege to honor him in the wake of his passing, with a salute in print.

“LEGACIES OF THE ‘FATHERS’”

In the year or so following my second moment with the father of Prince Namor, I wasn't idle, and I was more learned. Certainly, I came to understand how and why Bill didn't remember his great story in *Marvel Mystery Comics #6*! Hell! Not even Stan Lee remembered a lot of his old work! These people had a lot of other pressing things to do! Still, someone had to collect those amazing old works and study them, and so I did, in preparation for a career with Marvel, and for the honor and glory of archival fantasy history. History, as I later learned, is a noble cause.

Acquisition continued. Phil Seuling added to the *Marvel Mystery Comics #21*, that he had sold to me for \$15.00, around a week after I had bought *Marvel Comics #1* from him, with issues 15, 18, 19, and 20, for \$112.50. Terry Stroud sold a *Marvel Mystery*

Comics #14, with a Bill Everett autograph discretely signed on its cover, for \$25, to my appreciative self. Billy Green, a friend, neighbor, and customer of mine from the early period of my archival career, traded a *Marvel Mystery Comics #17* to me for some Silver Age Marvels I had in duplicate. David Alexander sold a nicer *Marvel Mystery Comics #3*, to me, for \$120.00, and a better *#7* for \$70.00. I upgraded my *Marvel Mystery Comics #4* in an upgrading swap. Ted Kessler sold a *Marvel Mystery Comics #12*, to me, for \$12.50. Nick Pappas sold a *Marvel Mystery Comics #23* to me for under \$25.00. Tom Borchardt sold a first issue of *The Human Torch*, introducing Toro, The Flaming Kid, to me (Fall, 1940!), for \$60.00. Those prices may seem like peanuts, today, because they were what I paid before “the boom” set in, and prices went nuts, but, for a kid, on a small budget, that amounted to a lot of money.

There was other work that had to be done. Normally, I didn’t buy mags that were taped or had any writing or stamping on them, unless the writing was the signature of one or more of the creative contributors, or the ownership mark or stamp was that of a Marvel-related person like George Olshevsky, the noted Marvel indexer and super-collector-historian, or Biljo White, the old-time fan who actually became a bit of a Marvel character, courtesy of master writer/editor Roy Thomas, in his old series, *The Invaders* (which I thought was a very nice little touch on Roy’s part, thank you, my editor!). With “Golden Age” mags, though, I was sometimes forced to make exceptions, because of their scarcity. Therefore, I had much work to do. Tape had to be removed from some mags. Tears had to be sealed with carefully-applied glue. Sometimes, marks had to be erased. Finally, fun time began!

As a result of all the aforementioned transactions with dealers and friends, at conventions or homes, coupled with the restoration work, I found myself curating *Marvel Mystery Comics* issues 1-24. I was able to explore and study Carl and Bill’s work considerably beyond the original battle issues, and the aftermath with Luthor Robinson and Lynn Harris. Luthor and Lynn soon returned as important characters in Namor’s adventures.

Carl’s Torch had his encounters with the mysterious gang leader and arsonist known as “J.B.,” and some subway wreckers, in issues 11, 12, and 13. Then, he got into

the fantastic case of Fire Cult leader Caliph, his treacherous underling Culflam, and the cyclopean Fire Giants, followed by another “natural” for the blazing android: a criminal impostor in a flaming suit. That last adventure, from issue #16, also featured Torch’s new partner, Toro.

It was a treat to’ve studied Toro’s introduction in an actual specimen of the first issue of the Torch’s own magazine, instead of the reprint in *Fantasy Masterpieces* (#10, if I’m not mistaken!). ((no, #11)) The printing in the original was better, and, of course, there was that special feeling that came with examining an original, rare artifact. Torch discovered the orphaned fire-eater in a circus, while flying over it. He observed the kid’s spontaneous human combustion for the first time. Torch trained Toro. First, Toro performed as a flaming, flying acrobat, amid clowns who escorted him into the ring. Later, this situation brought Torch and Toro into conflict with the circus’ crooked strong man and his minions. Finally, Toro became Torch’s long-term partner in crime-fighting. That led to his later involvement with Captain America’s partner, Bucky, and four regular kids from Captain America’s Sentinels of Liberty, known as The Young Allies.

Carl’s art had strengthened since the Torch’s intro in 1939. The inking on Jim Hamond’s face was more powerful. Overall, the art acquired a look rather like the 1940 art that Bob Kane, Jerry Robinson, and, maybe, to a slight degree, Sheldon (Shelly) Moldoff, did for Bat-Man. Things like placing heroes in a yellow circle like a full-moon-background, could be found in both strips.

Anyway, the Torch’s adventures were leading up to another milestone event with the Sub-Mariner, and that meant another great collaboration with Bill Everett, who was creating some very interesting and complex adventures for Prince Namor and company.

Marvel Mystery Comics issues 13 and 14 sent Namor and his cousin, Princess Dorna, off to a personal war with the Nazis. Their tailor, Toro (no relation to the Torch’s Toro, as far as I know!) outfitted them in magnificent protective costumes for the occasion. Each got long, form-fitting pants and long-sleeved top, his in blue and hers in green. Both got red capes, long, red boots, long, yellow gloves, and, best of all, gas-mask cowls with goggle lenses, a pair of horns, and a long, decorative tassel, hanging from the top. Bill had infused a growing fondness for American, gangster-like quips, in Namor,

who, when asked by Princess Dorma, how she looked in the fanciful costume, which Toro described as "...metal cloth, pliable, but the stoutest armor," responded, "*colossal*, sweetheart! Like a lunatic's nightmare—but it's practical!" Bill gave both of them pistols that could shoot charges of steam, rather like the larger versions on the aerial submarines introduced in *Marvel Mystery Comics* #4. One might imagine that perhaps the pistols super-heated water capsules with an advanced electrical rapid-heater, akin to a modern, fast-cooling, instant-soldering gun, which, according to a television commercial, can heat and cool in a moment. Bill *was* into science, as evidenced by his having art-directed an electronics-related magazine, and he sure had an imagination. More of that, especially the latter, will shortly be described.

Namor and Dorma spent two chapters in an alliance with people on a French island, battling Nazis, overcoming bombers, and even having Namor haul defeated German submarines which he chained together!! After all, he had the strength of a thousand men, and a diabolical sense of humor to go with it. The people of the island, whose leader had heard of the avenging prince's deeds, both good and bad, soon had reasons to feel grateful for such things, though, in as much as Namor had brought those qualities to bear against their enemies.

Next, Namor returned to New York. There were some people he wanted to find, who were of value to him. He overcame a cop, switched clothes to the cop's uniform to be less conspicuous on the streets of the great metropolis (how could anyone be conspicuous in a blue metal uniform, red cape and boots, yellow gloves, and a horned tasseled, goggle-eyed gas mask?), and looked for Luthor Robinson's name and address in the Manhattan phone book. He soon arrived at Luthor's 799 East 52nd Street pad. Who answered the door? Lynn Harris did the honors, and beheld the smiling Namor.

"Greetings, chicken!!! I didn't expect to find *you* here! Is your boyfriend in?" Namor's use of that most gangster-like verbal patter was priceless, and only matched by the clothes—suit, long coat, and derby hat—provided for him by Luthor, after Namor slapped his reluctant host and fiancée into submission. The tough stuff wasn't strictly capricious. The fact that Lynn proceeded to empty a pistol at Namor may've had something to do with it.

Namor forced the pair into accompanying him. Actually, Luthor wasn't needed, but went along for Lynn's sake. Using an armed yacht, as in their previous encounter, Luthor and Lynn cruised to Antarctica, this time under Namor's control of commander and crew. Namor intended to consummate his mother's wish for his marriage to Lynn. Luthor was to allowed to remain if he would undergo the operations to become a human sub-mariner, and, like Lynn, agree to participate in the annual sub-mariner tribal religious ritual celebrating the birth of the seal.

Upon arrival at the home territory of Namor's people, the trio departed the ship. Luthor underwent the operation, but stabbed his surgeon in an escape attempt, during recovery. Namor overcame the game American, but didn't hold a grudge. He admired Luthor.

This led to an alliance. Outfitting his human sub-mariners in caped costumes, he took them on a mission to France, to fight the Nazis. Overcoming several, they disguised themselves, for several days, in Nazi uniforms, working as spies and saboteurs, culminating in the destruction of an entrance to a sub-oceanic invasion tunnel to England, and the discovery that others were planned for the invasion of America. Namor made a momentous decision, leading to a historical event, courtesy of Burgos and Everett.

In that same issue of *Marvel Mystery Comics* (#16), Torch also learned of the sub-oceanic tunnel plans, as a result of his battle with the long-skulled criminal known as Pinhead. At the conclusion of the encounter, Torch learned, from a fellow police officer, that Sub-Mariner wanted to meet with him. The stage was set for the first Marvel Team Up: Torch and Sub-Mariner, fighting side by side!

The great event, published in *Marvel Mystery Comics* #17, for March, 1941, began with a rough start, as the pair briefly fought, before Namor gave Torch the information about the tunnels. The one for the Japanese invasion was cleverly placed in the frozen north, under the Bering Strait. This was smart plotting by Carl and Bill, since such a tunnel would not be too long, nor conspicuous. Perhaps the cleverest plot principle, though, was the reversal of character roles, from enemies to allies, and that principle was furthered by Bill, following the successful mission of Torch and Namor, that resulted in the destruction of the tunnel.

Through issues 18, 19, and 20, Bill kept readers off-balance with plot twists, as Namor, Lynn, and Luthor, shifted up and back from being reluctant allies to reluctant enemies, coupled with similar personal situations involving Betty Dean, when she was contacted by Luthor in a radioed summons for rescue. That brought the dynamic policewoman to the rescue with her Legion of Loyalists.

The Legion of Loyalists was a group of wealthy adventurers, like Luthor Robinson. They owned ten armed yachts, like his. They were, apparently, organized to be a special force against the Axis. They were being summoned to battle the Sub-Mariner and his legion in order to rescue Luthor and Lynn. Fate (and Bill!), was about to give them the opportunities to accomplish both.

Using planes, bombs, gas, and flame-throwers, they caused such damage to the ice palace and aerial subs, overcame Namor, and escaped with Luthor and Lynn. Namor, bereft of a single aerial sub to chase the armed yacht that carried Betty, Luthor, and Lynn, stood, shocked and depressed. Then, out of tragedy and disgrace, the spirit of “The Avenging Son” began to rise again! He remembered “one of the cleverest inventions that ever came out of the Emperor’s brain”: The Trojan Albatross!

This device was the item hinted at a previous point in the approach to this complex combination of pioneering story arcs. The “Trojatross,” as Namor pet-named it, was a huge robotic albatross, controlled from within, by a pilot. It derived its name from the legendary Trojan Horse, but the concept was rooted in, or paralleled by, a similar device found in Korda’s 1940 film “The Thief of Bagdad.” It was a mechanical flying horse, assembled from segments, upon which a rider could take to the sky. The Trojan Albatross was assembled from stored segments, in a similar manner. At this time, it probably cannot be ascertained whether Bill was inspired by the film, which has been regarded as one of the greatest fantasies of all time, but his “Trojatross” combined mythology, technology, and a mischievous sense of humor.

Namor was able to follow the ship, which was carrying the fleeing trio, without detection. Soon, though, his attention and hostilities were diverted, when a battle began between the Legion of Loyalists and Nazis based on an Antarctic settlement. Again, Bill’s

evocative story sense was expressed, as Namor's gallant heart changed his course of action.

Using the versatile mechanical abilities of the Trojatross, with its special binocular periscope that connected to the avian robot's eyes, Namor spied something. Using its powerful wings and feet, he swooped down to mines he spied, grabbed some, and proceeded to fly a bombing mission on the Nazi invaders, thereby helping to save the very people who, moments before, had been regarded as enemies.

"Merry Christmas, Kids!," quipped a loud voice from the Trojatross, just before one of Betty's friends could shoot it. To everyone's surprise, out climbed Namor: Namor, the "enemy," the "Avenging Son," who had just rescued them from the Nazis, the worst of enemies. What then transpired, between Namor and Betty, was dramatic and beautiful; almost romantic; masterful writing, I believe, on Bill Everett's part.

Namor, apparently depressed by the state of things between his people and the Americans, made it known that he nevertheless had regained enough of his power to sink the yachts single handed, but had no wish to do so. He had only detained Lynn and Luthor because his mother believed the American girl would've been a suitable wife for him, and Namor felt that Luthor would've been a valuable asset for his army, but those motives were no longer valid. His armed forces were severely disabled, and Lynn clearly didn't belong with him.

Betty, gently taking hold of Namor, confessed her feelings of friendship and admiration for her noble adversary, and encouraged her "friendly enemy" not to give up, even though her side was more-or-less victorious at that moment. Realizing that the Nazis were their true enemies, they agreed to form an alliance.

With a new bond of trust, the Legion of Loyalists returned with Namor to the home base of the sub-mariners. The diplomatic Namor met with his grandfather, the Emperor, and explained the situation. Once again he received carte blanche. Then, with the co-operation of their new allies, the sub-mariners reorganized and focused on an accelerated reconstruction program, restored their fleet of aerial subs, and attacked the Nazi invaders. The Nazis were soon defeated—in Antarctica, anyway—but there were to be others to battle, even as there was to be another shared mission between Namor, Lynn, and Luthor,

and many, many more, between Namor and Betty. Indeed, the meetings between those two amazing people were to span the decades; and speaking of momentous meetings...

The time came for a brief, but very special encounter, again, between someone very special, and me. This was to provide a personal legacy to me. This isn't to say that the stories just described weren't a legacy. They contained the best elements of what was to be described as "The Marvel Style," over two decades later, but they were a legacy to lovers of heroic science fiction. I'm doubly blessed, for I received a special legacy that was, and is, all my own.

I was up at the publishing offices of Marvel Comics, toward the end of that period of a year or two which was previously described. I was seated, with my artwork samples, in the waiting area. It was lunchtime. Many members of the Marvel crew filed past my view, around twenty feet away, from right to left, headed out the doorway. I recognized some of them from their photos in *Marvel Tales Annual #1* and *Fantastic Four Annual #7*. I think I even spied my inspirational role model: Stan Lee, but, uncertain and insecure as I was, I did not call out to him. In fact, I did not call out to anyone, until one very special and familiar person walked by, after all the other members of that Marvel-ous procession had gone out the doorway.

As I sat there, momentarily breaking my concentration on my past meetings with John Romita, remembering how he had told me how he had to turn down artists whose work he claimed was better than anything they had up at Marvel, I greeted the very friendly figure who was halfway out of the doorway. He held the door as we briefly spoke.

"Hi, Mr. Everett!"

"Oh, hi!," he responded, with apparent enthusiasm.

"How are you?"

"Fine!"

Bill wasn't really fine, as I later learned, but his robust voice, energetic step, and friendly face, gave the impression that for him, there was never a better day, as far as I could tell.

"How are you?," he continued.

“Scared!,” I exclaimed, with a smile.

“Why?”

“I have an appointment with Mr. Romita.”

“Don’t be scared,” he replied, with warmth and reassurance that was to last me a lifetime; a lifetime of struggling against more career difficulties and overall injustices of life than just about anyone, let alone myself, could’ve imagined then, or could probably imagine now. With that, he went out, releasing the door. Still, his words, and that wonderful smile, were with me, when I went into that meeting with John. His critique of my work was not, as I discovered later, completely correct in terms of at least one carefully-referenced piece, which I later checked for accuracy. It was so accurate that it was better than the version pencilled by some apparently professional artist, who had it published on a magazine cover, years later. I didn’t make it into Marvel’s company of professionals that day, or that year, but, I wasn’t going to be stopped forever.

Several months later, I attended another July Comic Art Convention, in Manhattan. A wonderful thing happened, there. Phil Seuling, the Chairman, who had sold my copy of *Marvel Comics #1* to me, a few years before, presented a lifetime achievement award to Bill. It did my heart good to learn that this modest man, so under-discussed by overall fandom, got that special recognition before an enthusiastic crowd of cartoon fantasy aficionados. I’m sure that you can understand how much I believed that he deserved that, and more, but there were Phil, a giant in the collecting field, who revolutionized it, and all those collectors and fans, giving more than a trophy to Bill; giving attention, appreciation, respect, recognition, and warmth, to Bill Everett, one of the great “fathers” of our heroes.

As I recall, joining in that awards luncheon was fellow artist Joe Kubert, who received an award, along with Guest of Honor Bill. In a published interview, Joe joined in the account of their very distinguished careers. I remember his account of how the guys of their generation went to see the original “King Kong” and “went crazy.” Indeed, I saw the influence of that pioneering work of adventure film fantasy in the early Sub-Mariner epics previously described, as I hope you will be able to infer. “King Kong,” like the Sub-Mariner, was powerfully influential on me, also, as my friendship with veteran Kong

technician/artisan Orville Goldner, and my acquisition of one of the classic film's 1932, hardbound, gold-stamped, special, presentation scripts, indicate. I didn't get to meet with Bill at that convention, but I didn't mind. Bill belonged to all his fans, and it was wonderful to know how they were regarding him. He deserved admiration and appreciation so very much, and that modest man was getting a measure of what he had earned, because of his decades of pioneering, influential work, in a public ceremony, at last; *at last*. I wish those were not ironic, as well as narrative.

Not too long after that ceremony, Bill suffered a heart attack. He seemed to rally toward recovery, though. His family, friends, and colleagues, were hopeful. However, the period of alcoholism, and years of smoking, had, apparently, done too much damage to him. He had another heart attack. Gary Friedrich recalled going to visit Bill in Manhattan's Roosevelt Hospital. About the last thing he remembered Bill saying was (sic), "Freddick! Get me a damned cigarette!" Bill Everett soon died—and way too soon. He was only about fifty-six years old.

Like most of Bill's admirers, I didn't learn of the loss of him until I read of it on the *Marvel Bullpen Bulletins* page of one of the Marvel Comics that carried it, around three months later. I don't think I need to tell anyone how I felt. I will say that it was a loss that became more and more meaningful to me during the years that followed.

Bill's pal, Carl Burgos, survived him by around a dozen years. I seem to recall hearing from the late Danny Crespi, Marvel's head letterer during my time with the company, that he, Carl, Morrie Kuramoto (I think), and maybe some other old-time members of the Marvel Bullpen of the Fifties, used to go out for a meal, together, every week or so. In so doing, they learned that Carl had developed cancer. In the brief period that followed, they still got together with him when it was possible, and kidded the "father" of the original Human Torch that he'd beat the silent, hidden villain. How wonderful that victory would've been! How I wish that there would've been no need for editor Jim Salicrup to assign the job of writing about the life of Carl for the first *Marvel Age Annual*... to me, when Death took the Torch's "father." It was a tragic honor for me. I'm sorry that there was any cause to've written it.

Bill and Carl were dead, but their legacies lived on, and in my humble ways, I made many efforts in their behalf. Around two years after Bill's death, it seems that the estate of John Compton, a member of the Funnies Inc. that produced the contents of *Marvel Comics #1* for then-new cartoon mag publisher Martin Goodman, yielded some amazing and controversial items. One was a drawing of the Torch, by Carl Burgos, in the revised style he used for *Marvel Mystery Comics #4*, with a notation on it, indicating that it was the new Human Torch. It eventually sold at auction for approximately four-thousand dollars. A color rough of the rampaging Namor, intended for the cover of *Marvel Mystery Comics #2*, fetched a reputed fourteen-thousand dollars, at auction. Those prices exceeded any I'd heard for cartoon-book art. Although I cannot claim any direct credit for those phenomenally-motivated bids, I had done much campaigning, through displays, articles, and media, to promote the "fathers" of our heroes, long before those auctions.

Perhaps the most controversial items in the history of cartoon-magazine collecting emerged from that estate, including five copies of *Motion Picture Funnies Weekly #1*. It had a color cover with a solicitation to theater managers on its back, instructing them as to how they could contact Funnies Inc. if they wanted to carry this proposed premium giveaway in their theaters. It had a black and white interior, including eight pages of the origin and debut of Bill's Sub-Mariner, from *Marvel Comics #1*. The empty caption box in the final page of page eight was filled with the words "CONTINUED NEXT WEEK." One copy was incomplete.

It was soon marketed by dealer Don Phelps as the first appearance of Sub-Mariner, and the rarest, most valuable comic book in the world. The publisher of *The Comic Book Price Guide* bought the incomplete one for approximately \$2,000. He promoted the mag in his guide. The promoters claimed that the use of Craft Tint illustration board proved that Bill Everett created Namor for that black and white magazine. Marvel super collector George Olshevsky and I became the primary opponents of those claims.

It was too bad that people not only failed to read the definitive interview by Roy Thomas, with Bill, published in *Alter-Ego* prior to the discovery of the formerly unknown *Motion Picture Funnies Weekly #1*. Many also ignored the interview when Roy

augmented and reprinted it, years later. Bill clearly stated that he used Craft Tint to give the feature of being underwater, and related the problems that occurred in *Marvel Comics #1* and *Marvel Mystery Comics #2* when the Ben Day color dots were printed over the Craft Tint black line screens. He apparently intended the feature for Martin Goodman's color mags, but didn't count on the consequent muddiness that would occur in the printing processes.

Huge sums of money were being spent on that group of samples, as the specimens were continually promoted as the first appearance of the Sub-Mariner: thousands of dollars apiece. The asking price for a sixth copy, later revealed, with notes concerning the pay for each feature listed in it, was in the tens of thousands of dollars, or more, but, the prices for specimens of *Marvel Comics #1*, including the pay-noted specimen from that publisher's estate, skyrocketed way beyond those for the sample movie premiums, as the years rolled by. Perhaps my campaigns publicizing *Marvel Mystery Comics*, and the work of Bill and Carl, may've had some effect.

At Brooklyn College, my specimens of *Marvel Comics #1* and *Marvel Mystery Comics #s 2-13* were displayed in the student union building with many of my other Timely-Marvel treasures. Student Union Building Organization Director Phil Zaretsky described it as the best display ever exhibited there. The mags were prominently featured in the ExCo (Experimental College) course I taught in that building. Some were later pictured, with me, in an article by Mary Jane Medvecky for *Spigot*, one of the Brooklyn College newspapers. Bill's influential work was also mentioned in an interview with Stan Lee, by Alan Dulfon, Robert Schoen, and me, for *Kingsman*, at Brooklyn College. I was not going to let Carl and Bill be forgotten!

My autographed *Marvel Comics #1* was seen by millions of people on N.B.C. television's "The Tomorrow Show," as the late Tom Snyder hosted Stan Lee, Carmine Infantino, the late Julius Schwartz, and me, for a discussion of comic books. A lot of bickering went on between Stan and his friendly competitors from D.C. Comics, but I got a very good review from Murray Bishoff, in *The Buyer's Guide For Comic Fandom*. The recognition I got from my peers was very gratifying, but the recognition I got from Stan Lee was not only gratifying, but professionally helpful—for a short time.

Before I elaborate on that, I will tell you that right around that time, I completed a quest of almost mythological magnitude: I became one of the very few people (or entities) in the universe to've acquired all ninety-two issues of *Marvel Comics/Marvel Mystery Comics*, along with master collector George Olshevsky, who sold my last missing issue to me. I also bought a few issues from Ron and Jean West, of Michigan. I recall that George, Ron, and Jean, all called long distance, to speak with me after the television gig.

That appearance led to my first professional association with Marvel. This is not the place to elaborate on my staff life with the company, except to say that I never got the job I was supposed to get, and was largely imprisoned in their reproduction department for two years, because, as I learned from my first freelance work editor (an honest and ethical guy), "when you were on that show, with Stan, you had 'em runnin' scared, up here. They said, 'there was this guy on the show with Stan, last night, and he's got all the old books, and he knows them backwards and forwards, and Stan wants him up here, and if he gets up here, Stan's gonna start listening to him, instead of us, and we can't let that happen!'" *To this day*, I'm paying for the damage that they did to my career.

Nevertheless, like Carl Burgos, in a figurative sense, I was hungry, and, despite the threatening people I encountered, Bill Everett had told me not to be scared, so, I persevered. One very important objective of mine was to bring the complete Everett Sub-Mariner series from *Marvel Comics/Marvel Mystery Comics* #s 1-12, and the major Torch stories that interacted with them, to the public, through accurate reprints from my original mags. I received two letters, during my staff period, from a fan and collector who'd been around in the Golden Age: Ed Lahmann. The importance of his letters should not be underestimated. He presented two very important cases.

The second case he made was that he believed that *Marvel Comics/Marvel Mystery Comics* issues 1-10 was the most valuable run of ten in antique comics, that I should provide the rare material to bring them to the public through reprints, and that I deserved to share in the profits of the venture.

The first case he made was more important. He recounted how, as a boy in Indianapolis, Indiana, he had both *Marvel Comics* #1 and *Motion Picture Funnies Weekly*

#1. His reliable information was later incorporated into the definitive article I had published, which I will soon describe, with some additional facts that have never been published.

Humbled, as well as encouraged, by Ed's kind words, I kept trying to help bring Carl and Bill's seminal works to the public, not only when I was on staff, but in the years that followed. I couldn't get anywhere. Thank heavens for Roy Thomas!

Roy was working on *The Invaders*, a mag that principally featured his new stories about Golden Age Marvel Heroes, but, occasionally, included abridged reprints. Through Roy's connection with Bob Weiner, the low-profile individual who was said to've been the purchaser of the rarities from the estate that revealed *Motion Picture Funnies Weekly* #1, and, of course, Roy's great knowledge of, and personal fondness for, the early works of Bill Everett and Carl Burgos (especially his former roomie, Bill!), two very important reprints were included in the series. The *second* was an abridged edition of the teaming of the Torch and Sub-Mariner from *Marvel Mystery Comics* #17. That was a very worthwhile choice, but the *first* was *so* worthwhile that its importance, especially for that period, cannot be overestimated. Through Bob's co-operation, Roy obtained line art reprints for the first eight pages of Bill Everett's first Sub-Mariner story. It was carefully recolored, giving, perhaps, less attention to strict underwater realism, and more attention to reproduction clarity. In doing so, Roy, Bob, and colorist Don Dickens (Dickens was a pseudonym for my old pal, Donald Warfield, I think!) enabled Marvel to bring that virtually-lost treasure to the public, for the first time since its 1939 debut, making *The Invaders* #20 into a milestone!

I was far from oblivious to the importance of what I saw. As the material from *Motion Picture Funnies Weekly* #1 came into the Marvel Reproductions Department, I made additional, high-quality photostats of that historic line-art: one same-size set, two pages on a sheet; one same-size set, one page on a sheet; one double-sized (at least double-sized!) picture of Namor's face; and, most important, one set of pages enlarged to fit on sheets that were either eleven by seventeen inches, or twelve by eighteen inches, approximately the size that the original art may've been, as close as I could. These were all done on Kodak photostatic paper. I kept these for deposit and preservation in my own

Chamber of Fantasy, in anticipation of the probable time when Marvel would be unable to locate *theirs!* *Motion Picture Funnies Weekly* #1 had finally fulfilled a destiny, even as I prepared for a future destiny.

My efforts to keep the “fathers” of our heroes in people’s minds continued. Aside from my display of their earliest Torch and Namor appearances at the second Marvel Comics Convention, even as they had been displayed several years before at Creation, I prominently-featured reports about the characters in the Marvel Character Profiles series I wrote for company use, a couple of years after Roy worked his wonders in *The Invaders*. I was, through the mediation of Gary Friedrich, able to resolve an unfortunate difficulty with Roy, and allowed to submit something that, for me, at least, was very special: a plot for an untold portion of the origin of the Golden Age Human Torch.

Gary told me that Roy liked it. He was going to develop the full script for it as soon as he could raise the circulation figures of *The Invaders* with his own stories. My story of how good-hearted, clever gangster Jim Hamond sacrificed his life to save that of Professor Horton, and had his mind engrams encoded into the brain of the Professor’s project android with a device invented by Tony (Iron Man) Stark’s father, before the gangster financing the project could sell it to the Axis Powers, probably would’ve done honor to Carl Burgos. Unfortunately, Marvel cancelled *The Invaders* before Roy was allowed to bring his intelligence and talent to the development and publication of my plot. *It* got lost in our personal files. *I* remained lost in company oblivion.

Nevertheless, I continued to be professionally associated with the “fathers” of our heroes. I wrote a special detailed report about the Sub-Mariner, commissioned by Sol Brodsky, the Vice President in Charge of Operations at Marvel, for a group of film makers. It included a complete checklist of all of Namor’s American appearances: cartoon magazine stories; reprint anthologies; puzzle books; bubble gum cards, stickers, and comics; animated cartoons; and just about anything else I could find, besides ads. It was estimated by some folks that a regular researcher would’ve taken over a year to’ve accomplished the gathering of the info and writing of the report, for a pay of approximately thirty-thousand dollars. Sol had the finished job in his Manhattan office by the next day. He offered seventy-five dollars to me!

“I was hungry!,” Carl Burgos had told me, when he described his motivation for the creation of the Human Torch.

“Don’t be scared,” Bill Everett had told me, smiling, as I had waited to see Johnny Romita, years before.

I “piped up” to Sol, sort of like Peter Parker as he used to bargain with J. Jonah Jameson.

Sol reluctantly paid a grand total of one-hundred-fifty bucks!

I continued to make efforts to bring Bill and Carl’s early treasures to the public. While Marvel refused to publish complete reprint volumes, I did manage to convince Editor-In-Chief Jim Shooter to make note of Timely/Marvel’s fortieth anniversary. I was paid to provide a color photo of my October-marked *Marvel Comics #1* (the only known specimen at that time; the rest were November-marked specimens). People were treated to Frank R. Paul’s rarely-seen rendition of the Torch, as they viewed that ultra-rare, historical treasure’s cover, even though it was past the anniversary by the time the photo was published on the Marvel Bullpen Bulletins page that was carried in all the Marvel Comics, each month. My specimen of *Marvel Comics #1* was later pictured in *The West Kendall Gazette*, *Comics Interview*, and the *South Florida Sun-Sentinel*.

It was exhibited, along with *Marvel Mystery Comics #10*, at the Fantasy Symposium, in San Jose, California. My current editor, Roy Thomas, and his lovely wife, Dann, were among the honored guests at that show. My rarities were placed in the same display case as original art from the aborted film production “Creation,” which led to the “King Kong” project. My dear friend, the late Dr. Orville C. Goldner: M.B.E., who worked on “King Kong” in 1932, provided those wonderful pieces of production art, and was responsible for my invitation to the Fantasy Symposium. Augmenting our display were my other first-issue Timely mags like *Captain America #1*, *Human Torch #2* (actually the first issue), and *Sub-Mariner #1*, as well as my 1932, illustrated “King Kong” script.

In addition, I was privileged to’ve performed an official presentation about Marvel in an auditorium (with Orville and wife Dorothy in attendance), and an unofficial presentation for a group of Timely/Marvel enthusiasts, in my room, later. Orville, a great

educator, was very pleased with my performance, which, of course, prominently featured information about Bill's Sub-Mariner and Carl's Torch, as well as the great works of Lee, Kirby, Ditko, etc. I was honored when he told me that he wanted me to be on the lecture circuit, but I was also very gratified when, at the private show in my room, dealer Rick Callou, of Comic Detectives, told me how the cartoon-mag dealers of the time would talk about Bill Everett.

I continued in that spirit. I talked about Bill's wonderful Sub-Mariner stories, over the years, in numerous presentations at conventions and in schools, sometimes with a slide show, and other times, with the original magazines. I also made reference to Carl's work, as well as Joe Simon and Jack Kirby's *Captain America*.

In addition, I made numerous attempts to bring those fantastic rarities to museums, including: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, in New York; The Museum of Modern Art; The Jewish Museum, in Georgia; The Jewish Museum, in Miami, Florida; The Cartoon Museum, when it moved from Rye, N.Y., to Delray Beach, Florida; and even the world's largest, most prestigious museum organization in the world, the Smithsonian Institution.

None of the people at those museums did much. It wasn't that none of them were interested in the collection. It was primarily money problems. They usually claimed that they didn't have the funds to hire me. When I suggested offering a share of the admission proceeds, a representative of the Metropolitan Museum of Art said that the museum people would not share the proceeds. At the Museum at Old School Square, where, according to a newspaper account in the *Delray Times*, Executive Director Joe Gillie was very impressed by my presentation and material, I not only heard that money wasn't available, but over subsequent years, that they weren't going in that direction, and from his curator, Gloria Adames, that they didn't have the room, and had no display cases!

Charles McGovern, former Curator of The National Museum of American History, at the Smithsonian Institution, saw my video taped presentation, and was more gracious, if not more encouraging. He indicated that he was very impressed and interested in the collection, more than once. Still, like the other museum people, Charlie (as he had me call him) claimed that he didn't have the money. Nevertheless, before he moved on to a teaching position at William and Mary College, he wished me well. I felt that his wishes

and interest were genuine, especially because of his repeated references to my work promoting “The Life and Legend of ‘Mr. Lucky.’” That was the autobiography of the gangster-turned-hero I had edited and was agenting. Like most folks I had familiarized with “Mr. Lucky,” Charlie seemed genuinely interested, if not charmed, by my late honorary “Uncle Lucky’s” exploits and escapades. His letters and chats seemed friendly and sincere, rather than cold and business-like.

His successor, Dwight Blocker Bowers, seemed quite different, and what was more, we were not only back to lack of funds, but lack of space, as well. It was in the period of his then-recent succession to the Curatorship, that a news program showed a new exhibit at the museum, featuring a huge locomotive, and a station set that was built for it. Furthermore, in another news item on National Public Radio, astronomical salaries that were being paid to top Smithsonian personnel were revealed. Laurence Small, the Executive Director, was said to have been receiving \$800,000.00 per year! One has to assume that he brought no *Marvel Mystery Comics* with him, since, according to a member of the Smithsonian staff, the first time I tried to get a position, they would not hire collectors!

I thought that was as ludicrous as Major League Baseball’s people’s not hiring anyone who’d played Little League Baseball as a child! For \$800,000.00 per year, they could’ve hired ten dedicated, knowledgeable people, with outstanding collections, to bring their expertise and *artifacts* to the Smithsonian, for \$80,000.00 each, per year! How much better might *that* have been than spending all that on one guy and no artifacts? I was learning the hard facts of budget and *politics* in museum organizations. I shouldn’t’ve been too surprised. The people at the headquarters of Marvel hadn’t been much better. It seemed as though such folks presented an appearance of altruism to the public, but were, in reality, more concerned with their own income and power than anything else. Still, I remained determined to preserve the treasures I had collected, and bring them to the public, while—yes—earning a decent living, which was necessary, if I was to survive and carry on my work.

Occasional convention exhibits followed, and many encounters with dealers and power-people in the cartoon magazine hobby, as well as print publishers and folks in the

news media. I had a brief opportunity or two to promote the Golden Age works of the “fathers” of our heroes when I was commissioned to write the history series for *Marvel Age Magazine*. It was an extremely difficult gig. I had little space, low pay, and intolerable interference from a succession of assistant editors who were interested in writing the series themselves. Their interference in the content of my work was not only a probable conflict of interest, but a violation of my agreement with my editor, that only he would revise my work, if necessary. Finally, he took me off the feature, and gave it to one of his assistant buddies, which was probably not a good move for the quality of the series.

That last evaluation was not, strictly, my opinion. I was at a convention, and ran into Perry Albert, the master-collector and dealer who had sold *Marvel Mystery Comics* issues 3-6 to me, many years before, as well as engaged in exchanging a very heated series of letters with me, during some of the negotiations!

“Are you the Warren Reece who writes the history series for *Marvel Age*?,” he inquired.

“Yeah,” I replied, pleading guilty to the crimes.

“It’s the only thing in the whole magazine that’s worth reading,” he deadpanned, much to my relief!

Then there were the school kids. On several occasions, during the period in which I was working in the public schools in Marine Park, Brooklyn, New York, I noticed copies of *Marvel Age* on a classroom reading table, or maybe showed a copy or two of my own. When those kids found out that *I* was the guy who wrote those history articles, they raided the local comic book shops and bought every available back issue containing my work! They brought them to me for autographs (not knowing that anything I sign is automatically worth one-third less, right away), but what was important was that they were learning about the “fathers” of our heroes, and I felt a sense of gratification for the departed masters.

Likewise, I felt great when I did remedial reading sessions with tough little boys at George Gershwin Junior High School, some years before, in the East New York section of Brooklyn. Little guys who fumbled through professionally-prepared remedial reading materials (due to boredom, as they soon revealed), came alive when I brought reprints of

works by the “fathers” of our heroes, in Jules Feiffer’s book, “The Great Comic Book Heroes,” and an original *Fantastic Four* #1. One time, I assigned a different character to each kid, and we performed the story like a play, doing the voice-overs. Carl Burgos, Bill Everett, Jack Kirby, and Stan Lee, would’ve been delighted to’ve seen and heard the wonderful effects that their works were having on those little guys, who needed and wanted what the “fathers” of our heroes had to give.

As the years passed, whether through my meager efforts, or by other means, interest and expenditures, in and for, the early works of Carl and Bill, grew by leaps and bounds. Things jumped wildly beyond a \$15,000.00 price for *Sub-Mariner* #1, from 1941. By the time the millennium turned, a special copy of *Marvel Comics* #1 allegedly changed hands for an unbelievable \$1,000,000! Certainly, I remember seeing an ad for a *Marvel Comics* #1 (it may’ve been the Funnies, Inc. office copy with the pay notations for the contributors, in it), and the only known page of original art from the mag, known to survive, from the last page of Bill’s Sub-Mariner intro story, for \$200,000, in one of Jay Perrino’s catalogues. I have it on good authority that the page of art ultimately changed hands for \$88,000.00, which had to’ve been a record price for a page of original cartoon mag art. I doubt that poor Bill earned that much in the first decade of his career in the cartoon magazine field!

Prior to that, an original color rough, of Namor, painted by Bill, from the estate that produced most of the known copies of *Motion Picture Funnies Weekly*, as an unused prep for the cover of *Marvel Mystery Comics* #2, was auctioned to a representative of the Marvel publishers, wearing a Spider-Man costume, for a reputed \$14,000.00. A color rough by Carl, on a note, introducing “the new Human Torch,” to the boss, for *Marvel Mystery Comics* #4, allegedly fetched approximately \$4,000.00. Furthermore, on the subject of art, Bill’s memory was honored by industry artists. The Bill Everett Heart Fund was established at Manhattan’s Roosevelt Hospital, and later, The Bill Everett Fund For Indigent Artists. At conventions for cartoon-mag fans, artists charged a fee—initially \$5.00—to draw a sketch for an enthusiast, and donated the money to the Bill Everett Fund. Through their philanthropy, the legacy of Bill Everett was memorialized in his

name. Could Bill have wanted a better legacy? There probably weren't any better ones, but there were more.

Phil Seuling, who sold my *Marvel Comics #1* to me, did more than run annual conventions with the help of his former wife, Carole, the costume chairwoman, and daughters Gwen and Heather, and more than recognize Bill's great talent by honoring him with an award. Phil began to run little conventions every month. They were named Second Sunday. Through Phil's efforts, a deal was made with the major publishers of cartoon magazines. They allowed advanced distribution and sale of their publications at the Second Sunday Conventions. The dealers were given a better price than owners of newsstands and such outside venues, but could not return the unsold magazines for credit. Later, Phil founded Seagate Distributors, in Brooklyn, and a vast array of stores devoted to cartoon magazines, science fiction and fantasy publications, and related models, toys, and games, began to grow, throughout the country, and beyond. Phil revolutionized the industry.

Several years later, I learned that Phil had contracted cancer. He managed to get treatment, and apparently recovered to some degree. I remember seeing him at one of his conventions. He looked much thinner to me, but was smiling and lively.

His expression seemed more appropriate for the man who had done a freelance gig for Marvel, writing limericks for their funny mag, *Not Brand Echh!* One of them impressed my memory. It went something like this:

“An inquisitive seagull named Pete,
chanced our bonny Prince Namor to meet,
so he said, ‘tell me, guy,
how the heck can you fly,
with those dumb little wings on your feet?’”

I approached Phil. Our exchange went something like:

“Hi, Phil! You look good!”

“I *always* look good, Warren!”

Phil died not too long after that. He's still missed, but that dedicated fan of Bill Everett and Prince Namor left a legacy to the cartoon magazine field.

Gwen and Heather Seuling grew to be beautiful young women, and married. I heard that Gwen married a French producer. I figured that she was living in France. Then, one day, several years after Phil's untimely death (he was little more than fifty years old at the time), I was in one of the stores that he helped to make possible: Forbidden Planet, in Manhattan. I was quite some distance from the counter, on the street-level floors, and there was a lovely young lady, talking with staff people.

Suddenly, she looked toward me. She smiled. Her face lit up with recognition. It was Gwen! I smiled, and approached her, much surprised in more ways than one, for, not only did I not expect to see her, but I wondered how she recognized me, and had no notion that I meant anything to her! We embraced one another. Gwen gave a really nice hug to me. I was delighted to know how well she'd turned out. I wished Phil could've lived to see it; and, I was warmed by the thought that Gwen and Heather knew how their father had changed our field—and, probably, the world—for the better; Phil Seuling: collector, dealer, conventioneer, founder of Direct Sales, and, Bill Everett fan, who described Prince Namor, the Sub-Mariner as “the thinking man's anti-hero.”

John Romita continued to draw Spider-Man, and enrich Marvel Comics as Art Director. He did so for many years. His wife, Virginia, and son, John, Jr., both worked with him.

Herb Trimpe continued to draw Hulk, and created the Phantom Eagle. I think of him as a nice guy, and that's more important than being a good artist. Herb did very well as the latter, too.

Neal Adams drew *X-Men*, designed characters and sets for “Warp,” the world's first science-fiction play in serialized form, created *Ms. Mystic*, and founded the highly successful art service known as Continuity Associates, which had studios in New York and on the West Coast. I must add that the parents of “Warp” creator Lenny Kleinfeld lived in the apartment directly beneath the one occupied by my parents and me back on Voorhies Avenue, in Brooklyn!

P.M.M. Alan Kupperberg, who had received considerable attention from Bill Everett and Gary Friedrich, eventually found success as a professional artist in the cartoon magazine field. He was, I believe, one of the anonymous “Crusty Bunkers”: an

art squad who performed inking and/or other visual services in the field, under the auspices of Neal Adams. Alan professed an enormous respect and admiration for Neal as an artist, but more-or-less confessed that, like me (and numerous others), found Neal rather impossible on a personal basis, but, as our colleague, the late Mark Hannerfeld, wrote, in a bio of Neal for one of Phil Seuling's convention program books, regarding Neal's various, (shall I say?) difficult personality traits, "he'd be the first to tell you so!" Neal has found enormous admiration and success. Need I add anything?

Gary Friedrich wrote for many Marvel mags, and was one of Marvel's editors. He twice took leaves of absence from the company, which probably damaged his career, but he did create *Hell Rider* and related characters for SkyWald Publications, did later work for Marvel's British Department (for which I provided some research assistance), and is said to've created the motorcycle *Ghost Rider* who went from magazines to motion pictures. Finding himself in an adversarial situation with Marvel's later Editor-In-Chief, Jim Shooter (a problem *I* had, as well), he left the field, working in other areas, but, I understand, he is now involved in a legal struggle for the rights to Ghost Rider. Gary was a pal to me, as he was to Alan Kupperberg. I wish him great success in his quest for success with Ghost Rider, and beyond. He was great pals with Bill Everett, and benefited from Bill's guidance, which helped him beat his own problem with alcohol.

Roy Thomas has many credits to his ongoing creative career. In addition to being the Editor-In-Chief and head writer of Marvel Comics, he performed in the Carnegie Hall stage presentation "A Marvel-ous Evening With Stan Lee," wrote Marvel's *Conan The Barbarian*, *Savage Sword of Conan*, and the Conan material for *Savage Tales*. He was involved with the "Conan The Barbarian" motion picture, and was long-time editor of the Conan titles, before resigning (at least, for a while), when Marvel instituted a policy prohibiting being an editor and writer on a title. I was up at the Marvel offices, delivering my latest batch of *Marvel Character Profiles*, when Roy announced that to me. His feeling, regarding Marvel's replacing him with Louise Jones (a very nice, intelligent, experienced editor, as Roy would probably agree) was, "what can *she* tell me about Conan?" Considering who and what Roy was, especially with regard to his long and successful experience on Conan, I understood his position. Roy went on to do writing for

D.C. Comics, with a special regard to their stories relating to “The Golden Age.” He later went on to edit and write for *Alter-Ego*, and the books “Stan Lee’s Amazing Marvel Universe,” and, “The Marvel Vault.” He was personally responsible for discovering where, in exile, I was (and am!), and I was privileged to provide archival images of rarities for his magazine and the two books. He lives with his lovely, intelligent wife, Danette, on a combination estate, farm, and exotic menagerie. I really love the last part, having worked on a hydroponics farm and exotic menagerie *myself*: The Girls, in Delray Beach, Florida. I am most thankful to Roy.

Perry Albert, who sold my original copies of *Marvel Mystery Comics* issues 3, 4, 5, and (partial) 6, to me, went on to found Starwind Comics, in his native Long Island, with the help of his wife, Barbara. I hope they’re doing well.

Perry’s friend, Phil, who was there when I first met Bill Everett, and, like me, got a sketch from him, ended up here in Florida, like me! He is close with Shelly Moldoff, the very fine and intelligent contemporary of Bill Everett and Carl Burgos, whose art graced Golden Age Batman, Hawkman, and other D.C. material. I’ve met him, here in Florida, several times. Phil eventually sold the Sub-Mariner sketch. It was finally purchased by my friend, collectables price guide advisor and dealer John Chruscinski, of Tropic Comics fame. My friend, John, even had a copy of *Marvel Comics #1*, which he sold in order to purchase his castle-like Victorian house, and church building, where he and our pal, Big Bill Vogel, live and work.

George Olshevsky, “The King Of The Timelys,” went on to write and publish “The Mighty Marvel Index,” first as a computer printout which was provided to the Marvel staff, then as an illustrated set of booklets sold to the public, and later, as a set of magazines published by Marvel Comics. According to my colleague, dealer-collector giant Carlos Rosario, George was once given “sick pay” for an issue he missed, due to illness. A new corporate owner of Marvel insisted he make that issue up. He didn’t have time to do the exact thing they wanted. He offered to generate a special “Wolverine Index” from data he had already, but, the corporate bosses insisted on an extra edition of the regular index, or else... Outraged, George sold his beloved complete collection of Marvel super hero sets for approximately \$300,000; quite a price at the time. Carlos paid

around ninety grand for George's *Marvel Mystery Comics as a dealer*, according to the account he related to me. A great, important research collection was gone. I was starting to feel like one of the last of the Jedi, so to speak.

I continued to struggle on. I was in negotiation with an associate of television nostalgia expert Joe Franklin, to provide material for a proposed museum of nostalgia in Atlantic City, and had just received a new research assignment from Marvel, when a fire caused by a malfunctioned electrical power bar struck my apartment/archive—the third Chamber of Fantasy—on the evening following my meeting, up at Marvel, to get my new research assignment. That ended both projects before they began, and I was forced to move to Florida.

Two lawsuits were propounded because of the fire. I did most of the legal work myself, writing hundreds of pages, and fighting three teams of lawyers and (I believe) judges partial to their fellow members of the Bar Association, to a standstill. I felt like Prince Namor and the Torch, fighting against corrupt politicians and the powers that be, on those occasions, and others, since living in Florida. I even had another legal misadventure involving highly questionable action by branches of both Federal and local government that got me in a lock-up from which I *escaped*, like Namor (or maybe Houdini), and evaded law officers of two counties while I sought documentation to clear myself, risking recapture during that week in order to perform life-saving acts, in the spirit of Namor, as Bill Everett scripted him, in *Marvel Mystery Comics* #8.

I learned how to settle my legal conflicts, time and again. As I said at the settlement conference for my product liability suit concerning the product that started the aforementioned fire: “everything I needed to know about settling a conflict, I learned from page one of the August 1940 issue of *Marvel Mystery Comics*.” I learned how to recognize when I had fought a legion of adversaries as far as I could, without being destroyed, even if I could destroy them with me. I may not have been with the “fathers” of our heroes, at such times, but in a very important sense, they were with me.

Also, during the period of my forced exile to Florida, I recall having to fight for my omitted credit on “Marvel: Five Fabulous Decades of the World's Greatest Comics” (by Les Daniels, published by Harry Abrams and Company), as though almost being left

off a history project that I was once considered to author myself (through Tetra Books, in which Phil Seuling was involved) wasn't insult enough. I should've been used to that kind of sin of omission, but I wasn't going to take it. My credit was finally added when the trade paperback version was published. Keeping me from the public's notice became something of an unofficial, but institutionalized, Marvel staff practice.

I was in negotiations with Micro Color International, a company who produced microfiche, which are like tiny sheets of microfilmed pictures. They wanted to borrow many of my rarities, including my triple-autographed *Marvel Comics #1*, for their extensive series of rare cartoon-mag runs on microfiche. They wanted me to send my treasures to them in another state, for them to use for profit. This was a worthy opportunity for me to help bring the brainchildren of the "fathers" of our heroes to a public who could've benefited so much, but there was a knotty problem beside the physical risk to my rarities: the company refused to pay any money to me. They offered a set of the microfiche (they didn't specify whether they would be from all the cartoon mags, or just the sets containing mine) and a microfiche reader. Like the Human Torch, on page sixteen of *Marvel Comics #1*, I was determined not to be used for selfish gain.

Although their project apparently failed to achieve great acceptance by the cartoon-mag collectors of the time, they did provide a new and accessible record of Carl and Bill's seminal stories. I remember hearing John Chruscinski's telling me that he had ordered a set from Capital City Distribution, when the microfiche were being liquidated, but, moreover, the microfiche enabled the publishers of Marvel Comics to bring those long-lost stories, and more, to long-delayed, series reprints.

Marvel enlarged the microfiche images, printed them in full (and largely accurate) color on slick paper, and made them part of their "Marvel Masterworks" series of hard-backed books. There was one significant problem, though. The black lines did not reproduce to the satisfaction of the project supervisors, which later led to a couple of incidents involving me.

That happened several years later. I had contacted Marvel for more work. This led to a conference with Jeff Youngquist, who was Special Projects Editor. Learning of my complete run of *Marvel Mystery Comics* and my complete sets of everything from

Timely/Marvel's first two years of publication, it was proposed that I might sell high-quality reproductions of those things, and/or others, with which he would implement revised printings of books from the "Marvel Masterworks" series. There remained the subject of payment rates. Such things have long been troublesome for me.

I was later contacted by someone identifying himself as Mark Beasley, at Marvel. Like many people who had come to Marvel since my time with the company, I had little notion of what he was, but he told me, "the matter has gone before the rating committee, and we are pleased to offer you a rate of four dollars a page."

I was stunned. I told him that I had been paid as much as twenty-five dollars per image. In fact, Marvel had paid that for the cover picture I provided of *Marvel Comics #1*, long before. I also explained that the pages would cost me approximately one dollar each to reproduce on the high-quality machine at the professional copy center where I did similar reproductions for "Stan Lee's Amazing Marvel Universe" and "The Marvel Vault." Finally, I reminded Mark that the rarities involved could've cost Marvel as much as four-hundred grand, if the company could've found them.

Mark indicated that Marvel got use of (if I recall right) a *Captain America #2* for free, and was sure that other collectors, apparently eager to be a part of the project, would do likewise. "We're throwing you a bone," he scornfully declared.

I thought back to what Bill Everett said. "Don't be scared." I also thought back to a line vociferated by Merian C. Cooper (creator of the King Kong concept) to my gangster-hero literary client, Mr. Lucky. I used that line.

"Nobody talks to me that way, kid!"

I then phoned his superior, Jeff Youngquist, and related what happened, indicating that I would not do the work for less than my usual rates. He reaffirmed their position, and then said "good luck." His last words didn't sound sincere, to me.

I then left angry messages for the Editor-In-Chief, Joe Quesada, and the Publisher, Dan Buckley, to let them know who I was, and what had happened.

An industry professional, who shall remain anonymous, described the offer I had received as "niggardly" treatment.

Several months passed. Then, I received a message from Mark Beasley, who, I learned, was the Assistant Special Projects Editor. The recording indicated that he thought that the Marvel people could probably come up near my quoted rates. I called him. In our conference, he agreed to my rate, but there were new problems. First, they would not pay for my expenses. Next, they severely reduced—virtually *imploded*—the volume of pages I was to provide, narrowing the books down to the rarest and most expensive ones. I didn't like that. My quoted rate was an average of sorts, based on a large volume of material, both super-valuable, and lesser value. Finally, there was the contract.

With some reluctance, I told him to send it. Then, I found more trouble. One clause prohibited revealing one's rates, which I thought was dreadfully opposed to the interests of freelancers. The other troublesome clause demanded one to grant all rights to Marvel regarding the work to be done.

I called Mark. I told him that my rates were already known, since I had provided images for Marvel licensees, among others, so, I would be in violation before the fact. In the second place, the images I was to provide were already the property of Marvel in terms of copyright, so, the rights were not mine to grant. Finally, I told Mark that unless laws were changed, the copyrights on many of those Golden Age mags were going to expire in a few years. Then, they would be in the Public Domain. Anyone would be able to use them. I could be sued for granting perpetual copyrights that were not mine to grant.

Consequently, I told Mark that I could not sign that contract, which could've placed me in legal jeopardy. Mark told me, "you have to sign it, or we can't work together." I checked with Jeff and David (I had called David Bogart, Vice President In Charge Of Creativity before, including after Mark's "we're throwing you a bone" episode), explaining my difficulties with the contract. No one budged, even though I had never signed such a contract in the past, and that it was apparently designed for people who would be working on new stories featuring copyrighted Marvel characters.

Well, I wouldn't budge, either, I had to lose the project, and a lot of money. The public had to lose better reprints. Once more, I thought, I had been the victim of injustice. Even David admitted, with a good-natured tone, that nothing had changed.

By an amazing coincidence, or maybe Fate, several months later, I was on the phone, long distance, doing business with an entirely different kind of company. As I chatted with the customer service representative, a young lady named Stephanie Kelleher, I learned that her father, Mike, had been commissioned to perform restoration (digital, I believe) on the microfiche images. I could not believe that it was less costly for Marvel to go that route. Nevertheless, I bought the omnibus volume that featured *Marvel Comics #1* and *Marvel Mystery Comics* issues 2-12. I thought the images looked wonderful, so, I guess Mike did a great job, and the public had access to those wonderful works of the “fathers” of our heroes. I was (and am) gratified. Still, in a history segment, authored by Will Murray, there was a glaring problem. The book was perpetuating the allegation that Sub-Mariner first came to the public in *Motion Picture Funnies Weekly #1*. This was contrary to information that was published, years before, in *The Comic Book Marketplace #21*. I authored the article, explaining all the facts I had learned indicating that *Marvel Comics #1* had predated *Motion Picture Funnies Weekly #1*, but, years later, I had a telephone conversation that provided priceless illumination for this aspect of Bill Everett’s Sub-Mariner legacy. It is published here, for the first time.

“SECRET ORIGIN DEBUNKED”

As detailed in my long article which editor and publisher Gary M. Carter retitled “The History, Contents & Controversy of *Marvel Comics No. 1*,” *Motion Picture Funnies Weekly #1* was never received for copyright by the National Library of Congress. Its back cover had a solicitation to theater managers, asking whether they would be interested in carrying such a premium, and where to contact Funnies Inc. All the known copies came from “the estate of the deceased publisher.”; all the surviving ones, anyway. Original Golden Age fan Ed Lahmann had written to me during my staff period at Marvel, explaining that he had owned both *Marvel Comics #1* and *Motion Picture Funnies Weekly #1*. Ed wrote: (sic)

“Now, when I was a boy we lived next door to a distributor for periodicals and I remember very well the various old comics as he used to give me his extra or damaged copies. I had many in addition to the ones I bought. A small neighborhood movie used to

give several different kinds of premiums and I remember that one of the premiums was *Motion Picture Funnies*, so it did see some distribution in some areas. I had it but like many of my other old comics it flew by the way; however I remember very well that I had gotten a copy of *Marvel Comics #1* from the guy next door some time before I got the movie premium.”

Several years after the publication of my article, and a much longer time since Ed had written to me, I obtained contact information, for Ed, from collector Stephen Keisman. I phoned Ed with the hope of learning more details about the historic mags. My quest was not disappointing! Stimulated by my questions, Ed provided more information about how he had obtained both items.

Ed’s next door neighbor was a certain Mr. Ringer, according to the account provided. Ed said that Mr. Ringer gave two coverless copies of *Marvel Comics #1* to him. In as much as it was, to my understanding, the practice of such distribution people to send the cover mast-heads of unsold issues back to the publishers (or their main distribution people) for credit, this indicated the copies of *Marvel Comics #1* received by Ed were the remains of unsold copies from *several months before*.

As for his specimen of *Motion Picture Funnies Weekly #1*, Ed explained that a local theater which he attended used to give a voucher to each customer who attended a certain number of shows for which he or she paid. That voucher was good for a grab bag at the candy store adjacent to the theater. It was in one of those grab bags that Ed claimed he got his specimen of *Motion Picture Funnies Weekly #1*. The magazine apparently was not given to patrons in the theater.

It isn’t hard to imagine that the candy store was owned by the same party who owned the adjacent theater. The manager of the theater probably got the magazine as a solicitation, and had no intention of paying for lots if they were made available for patrons, but, the solicitation piece looked good enough for a grab bag, and *didn’t cost anything!* Why throw it into the ashcan when it could be put to a good purpose, and why would the candy store owner honor a voucher from the theater unless both were owned by the same party? Apparently, they were connected in more ways than one.

The significance of the evidence for cartoon magazine historians and collectors is nothing short of monumental. The only reliable person who claimed to have had both mags back in the Golden Age provided the account directly quoted from his letter to me, and augmented it with the details provided in our teleconference.

Even if, for a moment, I might allow the possibility that what I've presented is not absolute proof of which magazine came first, the evidence that *Motion Picture Funnies Weekly #1* was an inexpensive, black and white reprint compilation, made as a sample for the purpose of solicitation to theater managers, not distributed to patrons, and never able to have its contents copyrighted since they were already copyrighted by the publishers for whom they had previously been produced, is overwhelming beyond any reasonable doubts. What remains to be done is definitive correction.

The Comic Book Price Guide makes reference to the pair of controversial mags in at least two sections, with varying info about which came first, and exactly what each is. The publishers of Marvel Comics have been provided with the facts shared here. My additional documents, especially copies of Ed Lahmann and Bob Overstreet's letters, were offered. Marvel has yet to make corrections. In my most recent telephone conference with Jeff Youngquist, he declined to be quoted in this article, citing "issues" and feeling "uncomfortable" about involvement with this.

Nevertheless, the information is here, and I submit that I have proved, after over three decades of controversy, beyond any reasonable doubt, that the "secret origin" of Prince Namor, *Motion Picture Funnies Weekly #1*, is not, and never was, the magazine from which Bill Everett's seminal brainchild, a "father" of our contemporary Marvel heroes, sprang. I wish Bill Everett could've had the many thousands of dollars spent by collectors who thought that they were buying Namor's first appearance, when they were apparently misled into buying *Motion Picture Funnies Weekly #1*. Nevertheless, the enormity of the controversy over the two mags and the tremendous amounts of money expended on them are monuments to the importance of the "father" of Prince Namor, the Sub-Mariner, as well as his great seminal brainchild, who, in terms of his influence, may well have been a "father" of later heroic characters.

“CAUGHT IN ‘THE MOUSE TRAP’”

My many involvements with the “fathers” of our heroes probably would not be complete without making some concluding references to my efforts to bring exhibits of the original cartoon magazine rarities to the public. Since Marvel, my former employer, chose to eliminate the Chamber of Fantasy archive from the production of the color reprint books for which I had campaigned long before their eventual publication, there still remained the idea to bring the original editions of *Marvel Mystery Comics*, and many other collector’s items which are generally unattainable by most people, to venues where folks could experience the wonder of being close to such treasures of our cartoon magazine heritage.

Sometime in 2009, I believe, Marvel Comics was bought by The Walt Disney Company. There were several venues in Orlando, Florida, such as Islands of Adventure, that seemed to present possibilities for exhibits, and, of course, Walt Disney World was there. In addition, I knew that the Disney organization was good at the preservation of their archival history, whereas Marvel’s archives were far less complete than the collections of myself, and that of George Olshevsky until he sold his treasures in an angry response to his treatment when Marvel had previously been purchased, years before, by a different corporation, plus the apparent resentment he had concerning conflicts of interest in the hobby, especially market manipulations influenced by powerful people connected with the annual preparation of *The Comic Book Price Guide*. Again, that resentment was exemplified by the *Motion Picture Funnies Weekly #1* affair, but, let me add, that I was professionally involved with a very important person connected with Overstreet, and was told, in metaphoric terminology, that many of the listed prices, especially those of the super-collector’s treasures, were not being determined by having reliable sales figures averaged. Rather, they were price estimations; that is to say, values felt appropriate by Price Guide Advisors who knew no more about, say, *Marvel Mystery Comics* than George or me. Neither of us was allowed much influence on *The Comic Book Price Guide*, although Bob Overstreet tried to learn whether either of us would be interested in buying his incomplete *Motion Picture Funnies Weekly #1*. We were frustrated.

Anyway, in the wake of my being an archival image contributor to “Stan Lee’s Amazing Marvel Universe,” and “The Marvel Vault,” thanks to Roy Thomas, who asked around for me until my longtime friend, and former Assistant Editor of *Marvel Age*, Sandy Hausler, solved the mystery of my disappearance, about which Mr. Thomas had allegedly been wondering for two years, I got the inspiration to approach Disney. I thought that the company’s interest in original archival artifacts would be conducive to my bringing my archive to exhibits, and my expertise to be used for various professional purposes. Then, of course, I was a writer and artist of considerable accomplishment. I began my new “quest for the golden fleece.” Instead, my voyage became another career “odyssey,” or maybe, an oddity. You may decide which it became.

A voluminous series of phone calls to various parts of the vast Disney organization, over a period of months, finally led to their legal department. As I came to learn as the agent for “The Life and Legend of ‘Mr. Lucky,’” organizations connected with motion pictures are so apprehensive about plagiarism lawsuits that almost everything that anyone wants to accomplish, in terms of professional creativity, has to filter through legal departments, guilds, or both. Disney was no different. Adding to the problems was the company’s insistence that everything had to come through their web site. For me, that was practically impossible. I didn’t own a computer. Furthermore, what I had to offer was not likely to’ve been adaptable to some formatted web site.

Fortunately for me, I finally connected with Linda Bixby, a secretary in the Disney Legal Department. Linda was very friendly and helpful, especially after hearing all about the Chamber of Fantasy archives, the “fathers” of our heroes, and my creative skills. She understood my consequent problems with the computer website. Therefore, she started looking into who might have need of what I had to offer. Not long after our initial chat, she began to refer me to people in the organization, even as I had been given reference to her department by people at the office of the late Roy E. Disney.

The first person I remember contacting was a certain chap named Dave Smith. Linda gave me reason to believe that he was a person of some importance with the Disney Archives. My conversation with him was quite brief. He expressed no interest in anything that I had to offer, and didn’t sound friendly, to me.

I phoned back to Linda. She decided to have me phone Becky Cline. Rebecca “Becky” Cline was the Director of Disney Archives. I did as Linda advised, with cautious optimism. I had a nice chat with Becky. I told her quite a bit about the Chamber of Fantasy, detailing highlights of the archive. She seemed reasonably interested, in spite of her not being able to arrange any professional involvements for my collection and me at that moment. Nonetheless, I was invited to be in touch again.

I reported back to Linda. She sounded reasonably pleased for me. In the meantime, if I correctly recall, she had me send my promotional packet to her, consisting of my educational and career highlights, letters of recommendation from Marvel’s Stan Lee, “King Kong” technician/historian Orville Goldner, and Joseph A. Palermo, Vice-President of The Boys Farmers Market and The Girls Strawberry U-Pick, for whom I had been “troubleshooter,” customer relations assistant, and performer with the exotic animals on display for visitors to the strawberry farm. She kept giving referrals to me, or otherwise tried to learn who might look at my art samples, which were part of my professional promo packet, if I rightly recall. She wanted me to check in with her again.

When I did, I couldn’t reach her. I wasn’t sure that there was a problem, since there was sometimes more difficulty reaching certain people at Disney, due to time differences between the east and west coasts. Still, I had a bad feeling from my “Spider Sense.”

Then, one Friday, I received a telephone call from someone who identified himself as Brandon Zimmerman, of The Walt Disney Company. I told him that I really wanted to speak with him, but needed to call back in approximately four minutes. He said that he would call me.

When he did, he told me that he was returning my promo packet. He claimed that they couldn’t examine anything like that, saying that everything had to come through their web site. I explained that it was impossible for me to do so, and that I was told to send my packet. He claimed that he didn’t understand why Mrs. Bixby would’ve told me to do that. I told him that it probably had to do with the advice I had received from someone at the late Roy E. Disney’s office. He remained insistent on the use of the web site, and, I think he mentioned their concern with possible claims of plagiarism from

people sending things on paper, like plots or pictures. I know he made reference to such things in the cover letter that came with my returned packet.

I made it clear that no such things were in my packet, and the nature of my professional advances necessitated the submission of the documents. He insisted on my perusing the positions offered on the website. I told him that I didn't have such access, and, furthermore, questioned him as to how there could possibly be a job on the website for the best collection of Marvel Comics print items, world-wide. We were at an impasse.

Subsequent telephone calls revealed that apparent orders had been sent to key people, instructing them not to speak with me, and to switch me to Brandon Zimmerman. This happened with Becky Cline, who even asked me why I called. I told her that she had told me to keep in touch. She merely said that she was transferring me to Brandon Zimmerman. I told her I had nothing to discuss with him. Still, I did a little checking.

On another call to Brandon's number, I learned that he was a mere paralegal. I had one more chat with him, during which he claimed to've told me that he was a paralegal during our second teleconference. I told him I had no such recollection. The only thing I remember after that was that our exchange was unpleasant.

In the weeks that followed, remembering Bill Everett's telling me "don't be scared," I made a series of calls to Disney people, Stan Lee's office, David Bogart, and Roy Thomas. The Marvel people didn't think that anyone at Disney would know of them well enough to make any difference in the matter, but in my effort to bring the original rarities containing the works of the "fathers" of our heroes to the world, I kept trying. I was quite sure that my trouble had much less to do with the web site procedure, and much more to do with the fact that my resume described my period as a pro se litigant. I had done much legal work. Members of the Bar Association usually hate pro se litigants, since, in representing themselves, they are threats to the power and income of lawyers. Personally, having seen and heard the lies and vicious actions of lawyers, and the tacit cooperation of the judges on our cases, I developed an abiding hatred of them, and indicated that in my professional history.

My quest for justice at Disney finally took me up to the voice mail of the organization's Chief Executive Officer. I never got a reply from him, nor any other top

officers, but, at least, I tried. I showed some determination to bring the treasures of the “fathers” of our heroes to the public, and did so with some courage, as Bill, and, for that matter, Carl Burgos and Jack Kirby, probably would’ve wanted me to do.

I got caught in a “mouse trap” at Disney, but it couldn’t hold me. I continued, elsewhere. I stayed in touch with David Bogart, at Marvel. He told me, around a year after my trouble at Disney, that he couldn’t arrange anything for my collection and me through Marvel, at that time, but that it didn’t mean no, forever. I certainly hope not. I submit to those of you who want to see fabulous cartoon magazines and historical motion picture items connected with them, decide whether the reasons presented against funding such exhibits are satisfactory, and contact the appropriate Marvel and Disney people with your demands, while I continue with my efforts elsewhere.

I will conclude this segment with my belief that creative people should be the ones who make decisions about hiring creative folks; not lawyers or regular business people. I often think that Walt Disney’s original animators and “imagers,” his “Nine Old Men,” wouldn’t make it into the Disney Company today, if they couldn’t apply on a computer!

“CONCLUDING MEMORIES”

My interest in the fathers of our heroes was not confined to the early adventures of Torch and Sub-Mariner. I collected many other mags containing Carl and Bill’s work, thanks to an ongoing search among the wares of many dealers.

It was an ever-changing marketplace, and I found myself missing folks from the old days. Henry Keller and Al Faruggio closed their little old “Magazine Center” at 795 Grand Street, Brooklyn, N.Y., shortly after my last visit. I remember seeing Henry, that lovable, grizzled old pirate, in the darkened old place, amid fallen shelves and stacks of old magazines. I went next door and bought two tall cans of beer. We had a very pleasant time, as I thought about the old days, building my collections, of which Al and he had been such a significant part, as they had been for writer/artist/historian Jim Steranko, and dealer Howard Rogofsky. I was sad when I learned, after moving to family in New Jersey, that he passed away, being quite old at the time. When I look at my *Strange Tales* #2, I think of Henry and Al. I’m still not sure that their little old shop wasn’t the front for

the secret Operation Rebirth lab in which Professor Reinstein transformed Steve Rogers into Captain America! It was a place of hidden wonders, and hidden wonders brings me back to Carl and Bill.

My narratives about their work on Torch and Namor have not shown how multi-talented they were. Both of those gentlemen also excelled at horror, humor, and the combination of both! Carl drew two fine examples for the covers for *Strange Tales* #15 (February 1953) and *Strange Tales* #16 (March 1953), showcasing decapitated characters with happy talking heads! I didn't know Carl had done such things for years, because they were unsigned works, done in a very different style from his Golden Age works. Carl drew other covers like those two, combining humor with horror.

Bill did such things, as well. Although he did a lot of straight horror covers, he also drew humorous horror. His cover for *Strange Tales* #8 (July 1952) was a fine example, showing the beautiful brunette fearfully asking two denizens of the walking dead for whom they were digging a grave! Then, there was Bill's funny monster cover for second series *Crazy* #1 (December 1953), and his cover for *Marvin Mouse* #1 (September 1957). The latter, a funny animal one-shot mag, was drawn in such a different style, that if Bill hadn't signed it, I'd never've suspected that Prince Namor's "father" had drawn it. That impish sense of humor that Bill had reminds me of a very funny story that Gary Friedrich told!

The incident apparently happened back in the Sixties, when Gary was writing and editing for Marvel. It seems that Bill wrote and drew a western story, but this wasn't any ordinary cowboy comic. This one really was *comic*, in a very wild way. The plot was that three old codgers got rip-roarin' drunk, rode off on their horses, and shot up a town! That was it!

Well, that story was absolutely unpublishable under the stringent rules of the Comics Code Authority, but that didn't stop the members of the merry Marvel staff from getting into it! According to Gary, the Bullpen people were passing Bill's original pages around the office, laughing harder than the people up at D.C. did when they saw Siegel and Shuster's first Superman pages, back in 1938! Gary and company were absolutely in

tears from laughing so hard! He wished he knew where those pages went! So do I! It'd like to see them myself! Wouldn't you???

All this shouldn't be surprising, though. Bill and Carl were very bright, creative people, and such people frequently have great versatility. This is also frequently true in other areas of endeavor, both professional and private. Unfortunately, in this society, many people try to narrow people down to one category.

Most things have to have an end, and so does this journey through time in which we have met Bill Everett, Carl Burgos, and their seminal brainchildren, or we'll never get to my encounters with the other "fathers" of our heroes, like Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, and Steve Ditko. This could've been a very short piece, for, as you have seen, my encounters with Bill and Carl were few and brief, but, especially because so many people of today are unfamiliar with what they did, and why it was so influential, and also because I've been asked about those wonderful old rarities containing their primary works, and how I collected them, I felt combined to present some descriptions of their stories and my quest to find them.

"MAY THEIR FORCE BE WITH US"

Perhaps I can best conclude the wonderful effects of Carl and Bill's work on Torch and Sub-Mariner with these last little stories. Through them, you can experience what others thought and felt when I shared those old *Marvel Mystery Comics* with them.

It was Senior Day at my high school. Twelfth graders were allowed the run of the school. It was customary to allow one student in each class to teach a lesson. I was given the privilege to teach a lesson about cartoon magazines in my English class.

I brought my doubles of things like *Amazing Fantasy* #15, *The Incredible Hulk* #1, and *Daredevil* #1, to pass out to the class for examination, and some of the students were, from my past experience, far from fans of *any* comics, let alone Marvels. Nevertheless, I elaborated on the more mature approach to storytelling that had been introduced, or reintroduced, in the mags, while recounting some of the most important things about each series.

Finally, we got to the jewel in the crown: *Marvel Comics #1*. My teacher, the late Mrs. Sylvia Smith, (whose son, my chemistry teacher, the late Mr. Barry Smith, not the artist) was an avid collector claiming to own sets of Fawcett's *Captain Marvel*, *Captain Marvel Jr.* and *Mary Marvel*), and my classmates, gathered around her desk with me. On it was that rare treasure, which I carefully displayed, page by page, explaining the wonders within. Everyone seemed to regard the contents with interest, as I called attention to such things as the Shakespearean parlance of the Emperor in Bill's first Sub-Mariner story.

The overall effect may be summarized by Mrs. Smith's concluding remark: "This is the closest I've ever come to wanting to read a comic book."

From the reaction of my English teacher, the late Sylvia Smith, let's move on to the reaction of another Sylvia: my late mother. My mother was from another country, as well as another age. She was from England. In the time of her youth, cartoon magazines from America were not sold in the U.K. They did have weekly comic papers, mostly in black and white, but the kind of mags that we understand as comic books, especially with superheroes, were outside of her experience.

My mother, or Mum, as we would say in England, was a voracious reader. Although she was very fond of Barbara Cartland's romance novels (cartwheels, as I used to call 'em), she also read more serious stuff. I remember her telling me about "The Captains and the Kings," by Taylor Caldwell. It was an extremely revealing political novel, which was adapted into a very successful mini-series for television. It was a great influence on my beliefs about government, industry, and people, and I'm thankful to all concerned with bringing the story to me, especially my late Mum.

It shouldn't be difficult for most people to understand that one could not live with me and have no knowledge of the things I collected and studied. Therefore, it was only a natural thing for her to've developed some familiarity with Prince Namor and Bill Everett. I remember that she learned to recognize some of Bill's work by the distinctive line he drew to accentuate a cheekbone when he illustrated a profile view of a face, just as I did when I studied Bill's work.

Mum suffered from myopic macular degeneration in the closing years of her life. This prevented her from reading. That was a great loss to her. Then, her problems compounded. She was diagnosed with two kinds of cancer. Her condition was allowed to advance way too far by our wonderful American doctors. A decision was made to have her return to England, which she did. She was readmitted to the National Health system, and had the biggest specialists in England tend to her. I cannot overemphasize how much we need that kind of system in America; but I digress.

In the last few weeks she spent in America, I tried my best to help her pass time in ways that were interesting and uplifting. Somehow, she decided to have me read Bill's early run of "Prince Namor, The Sub-Mariner" to her, along with the Torch crossovers by Carl. We did this a little at a time. Let me tell you, my dear "cousins," that I didn't have to force those wonderful old stories on her. She came to ask for them, and she thought that they were *good!* Draw your own conclusions about those stories, based on the reaction of *that* critic! I'd like to think that the spirits of Bill and Carl took great satisfaction in the fact that their seminal stories about their brainchildren were the last things enjoyed by this foreigner, who had not known such things in her youth, before she returned to her native land, with terminal cancer that had been allowed to advance to that stage, in great part, because of the neglect of our American medical "experts." It's a comfort, to me, to know that the creative force of Carl and Bill was there for my mother, at that very important time.

I will bring our journey to its conclusion with one more story. This one, appropriately enough, involved young people, and their experience with those wonderful old mags, but, as with my mother, in a time far beyond their original release.

It was summer, years ago, back in New York. I was required to take a course in how reading was taught, by the N.Y.C. Board of Education. I hated to take it, but I needed it in order to maintain my Temporary Per Diem Teaching License. The course was offered at Brooklyn College. There were three instructors.

Our work wasn't done on campus, though. We couldn't be *that lucky*. We all met in a big old school on Albemarle Road, in Brooklyn. As we all stewed in that hot old place, we understood why schools are closed, during the summer, in New York. The kids, who

apparently needed help with their reading, didn't want to be there. The student teachers didn't want to be there. I'm quite sure that our three supervisors didn't want to be there. I thought that it was lucky that Greenwood Cemetery (a national historic site) was only a few blocks away. Just in case that any of us dropped dead of the heat, I figured that they didn't have far to take us!

My instructor was a wonderful, very bright and dedicated woman from one of the Caribbean islands; Jamaica, I think. Her name was Joyce Gerald. Both of us had known British education, so we were kindred spirits. She had a profile of me, as the other supervisors had of their charges. Around lunch time, everyone needed a break. Therefore, our instructors, knowing our backgrounds and specialties, put us in charge of special activity groups, and when they found out what I was supposed to've been, they put me in charge of (you guessed it!) The Comics Club!

There I was, several days a week, in a little classroom with a group of little boys—maybe third graders—having to fill their time in some kind of uplifting, meaningful way. They were mostly little African-American kids. I looked at their tired, bored, little faces, as they were stuck in this oven with this long-haired paleface, and took pity on them. Remembering my time at George Gershwin Junior High School, years before, I decided to bring those treasured old *Marvel Mystery Comics* for them to see.

Session after session, I showed those amazing “Human Torch” and “Sub-Mariner” stories to those great little guys. I watched those youngsters come to life, viewing those old pages with enthusiasm and wonder. The Torch blasted enemies with flame, Namor was cheated and mistreated and rampaged through Manhattan like King Kong. I still remember what those hard-boiled kids, from a generation described by Professor Gerald as being “very into ‘the *now*,’” had to say about those old mags:

“*These* are better than the comics they make *now*!”

At that moment, I felt a great warmth and satisfaction. At that moment, I felt that my efforts to collect those rare old treasures was worthwhile. In that classroom, I was bring those mags to a useful purpose, and continued to do so for the rest of the course, in which, by the way, I received an A in the middle of a bunch of *real teachers* who went down in a hail of C's, D's, and F's.

In those moments with Mrs. Smith and my classmates, my late mother, and those wonderful little guys, I think that the spirits of Carl and Bill stood there smiling at us, like the spirits of Obi-Wan, Anakin, and Yoda did at the conclusion of *Return of the Jedi*. Their “force” was with me...with *us*...and, my dear “cousins,” may their force be with you, as you discover their works and go on, inspired, to create wonderful works of your own....