

Biography

Robert Crumb

Robert Crumb was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on Aug. 30, 1943. All through childhood and adolescence, he and his brother Charles drew home-made comics. Among these was Fritz the Cat, a character he would continue to draw up into his 20s.

In 1962 at age 19 he left home and moved to Cleveland where he went to work for the American Greetings Corporation. He married his first wife, Dana, in 1964 and began doing work for other venues, including HELP magazine, where he worked with one of his greatest influences, comic artist and MAD co-creator Harvey Kurtzman. Many artists who later became part of the underground comics culture with Crumb also did work for HELP.

Throughout the later '60s Crumb was experimenting with psycho-active drugs, resulting in some good as well as some bad experiences, but these bad trips only led him to create some of his most enduring characters, including the ever popular Mr. Natural. During this time he was doing illustrations and strips for New York's EAST VILLAGE OTHER, an important underground newspaper of the time.

He moved to San Francisco in January, 1967 and almost immediately began interaction with many other blossoming artists, including Rick Griffin, Spain Rodriguez, S. Clay Wilson and Victor Moscoso. It was not long before their creative minds were tapped by San Francisco's Don Donahue and Charles Plymell, and ZAP COMIX no. 1 was published in early 1968. A smash hit, Crumb and the other artists became overnight sensations. Many young artists were then inspired to try their hand at underground comics, precipitating a flood of highly individualistic comics and the broadening of the medium to include a much more personal approach than ever before, for both male and female artists.

In 1969, Crumb's JOE BLOW story, which appeared in ZAP no.4, resulted in a number of obscenity arrests in New York City and elsewhere because the story portrayed incest in a comical way.

A son, Jesse, was born to Robert and Dana in April 1968.

In 1970 Crumb sold the film rights to Fritz the Cat to animator Ralph Bakshi. The X-rated film was released to international acclaim, and a sequel was made, but Crumb is known to have voiced his displeasure with both films and disowned them.

Also in the early '70's, Crumb, along with Robert Armstrong, Al Dodge and Terry Zwigoff (the producer/director of the 1995 film on Crumb's life), founded a string band called The Cheap Suit Serenaders, which, through the 1970s, played regular gigs and recorded three albums.

The '70s were also some of the most difficult times for Crumb. His popular KEEP ON TRUCKIN' cartoon was the subject of a long legal battle over copyright ownership, which was lost in 1977 when a judge in San Francisco declared the cartoon to be in the public

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domain. It was also in 1977 that Crumb went through a painful divorce from his first wife, Dana. Crumb did not see his son Jesse for seven years.

Then in the late '70s he was hounded by the Internal Revenue Service for back taxes. It took Crumb many years to finally pay off this debt.

In 1971 Crumb met Aline Kominsky, also an underground cartoonist and the first woman to draw highly personal, autobiographical comics. They began living together in 1974 and married in 1978. They lived in the central valley of California, collaborating on many comics together, including DIRTY LAUNDRY COMICS. In September 1981 Aline gave birth to their daughter, Sophie. In the '80's, Robert and Aline were editors of WEIRDO magazine.

By the mid-'80s Crumb was beginning to be recognized as an artist of international significance. His work was featured in the New York City art gallery Psychedelic Solution, and in 1990 the Museum of Modern Art in New York City included his work in an exhibit called HIGH AND LOW, which also featured work by other cartoonists, including George Herriman. Crumb's original art began to be sold in art galleries though the value was still quite modest compared to the "fine" art market.

The Crumbs moved permanently to France in 1991. In the '90's Crumb produced two series of comic books, HUP COMICS and MYSTIC FUNNIES, and has continued to make collaborations with Aline for The New Yorker.

Robert Crumb has gradually become an icon of popular culture, beginning with the publication of ZAP no.1 in 1968. His charming "bigfoot" style, influenced by an older cartoon style of the 1920's and '30s, infused with overt sexual release in contrast with his own self-repression, contains a disturbing revelation of the American psyche.

Crumb's latest and biggest single project to date is a serious 200-page comic book version of the BOOK OF GENESIS from the Bible to be released in the fall of 2009.