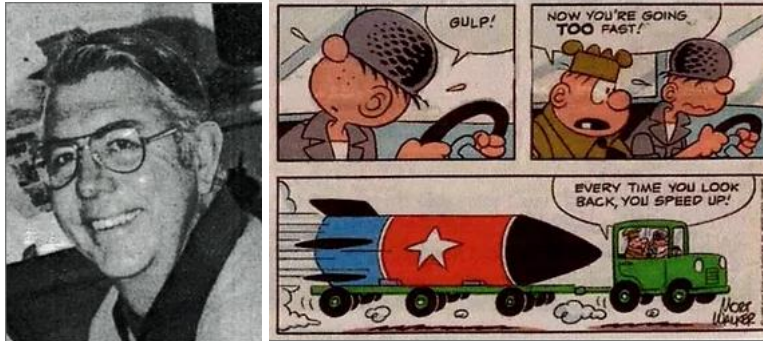


Mort Walker

1923 - 2018



BIOGRAPHY

Addison Morton Walker was born September 3, 1923 in El Dorado, Kansas, to Robin Adair and Caroline Richards Walker. The Walkers had a total of four children, two boys and two girls. At the time Mort was born, the family lived at 915 West Third Avenue. Previously, they had lived on a farm located at 800 North Topeka.

Mort has drawn pictures his entire life, beginning almost before he could talk. In fact, he can't remember ever not drawing. He also loved books as a child, learning to read before he started school. By age 7, he was devouring three or four books every week – mostly adventures and humorous tales. Once he read an entire set of World Book encyclopedias.

Best known today for his comic strip, "Beetle Bailey," Walker's ingenuity in portraying the army in a humorous manner has contributed to the morale of a multitude of soldiers, past and present, throughout the world. Wanting to be a cartoonist for as long as he can remember, he once remarked, "I 'commute' to a room in my home, sit down and draw funny pictures, and they send me money and give me awards!"

Mort grew up in Kansas City, Missouri. After graduating from Northeast High School, he attended Kansas City Community College and Washburn University, each for one year.

Schooling was interrupted when he was drafted into the army in 1943. Walker served in Italy as an intelligence and investigating officer, and was in charge of a German Prisoner-of-War camp. He was discharged as a first lieutenant four years later.

Returning to college at the University of Missouri, Walker earned his baccalaureate in Arts and Sciences in 1948. During this time, he also wrote gags for Bob Hope and Milton Berle, among others. Editing a campus humor magazine, he was regularly in trouble with the campus administration for his humor.

In March of 1949, Walker married Jean Suffill, an artist from Kansas City. The couple raised seven children together, but the marriage later ended in divorce.

Walker later married Catherine Carty Prentice, who had three children of her own from a previous marriage. With ten children in their blended family, the funny business has become a real family affair. Six of their children, along with the son of Mort's former collaborator Dik Browne, contribute to the business along with several other artists and writers.

Mort Walker holds membership in the National Cartoonists society, the Newspaper Features Council, and the Newspaper Comic Council. He has served as president of the Artists & Writers Association golfing group.

Nearly every week, he does free cartoons for schools, charities and other good causes that write him for help. He makes about twenty speeches and public appearances each year around the country and initiated the Cartoonists for Literacy program.

Walker enjoys playing golf and bridge, as well as inventing things. For many years, he has run the Connecticut Cartoonists Invitational golf tournament, the yearly winner of which gets hit in the face with a pie.

Mort's biography in Who's Who in America is extensive, unique in that it also contains his personal creed: "If I enjoy my own life, that's one life enjoyed. But if I can help others enjoy their own lives more, many lives are made more enjoyable."

In 2003, Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld sent Walker a birthday card, praising him for his ongoing support for the U.S. military, as well as his efforts on behalf of the World War II memorial.

With no plans for retirement in the near future, Walker quips, "Old cartoonists never retire – they just erase away."

CONNECTION TO BUTLER COUNTY

Having been just a baby when he lived here, Mort does not have any memories of living in El Dorado other than the tales his older brother has told him.

Their father worked as an architect, owning a business with his brother in El Dorado early 1920s. Their office was located in the Hoyt building at 208 W. Central; they designed several area rural schools in the area, including the original Haverhill school. Mr. Walker was also an accomplished musician, the designated Poet Laureate of Kansas and an impressionist painter; many of his poems were published in newspapers, often illustrated by his wife. Mrs. Walker was a landscape artist and also worked as a newspaper illustrator.

COMING TO / LEAVING THE AREA

The Walker family came to El Dorado in the early 1920s, following the oil boom. Robin Walker figured that where oil booms were, families were. Where families were, schools needed to be built. As an architect, he hoped to get some of those jobs.

The senior Walker moved his family from El Dorado when Mort was three years old, in pursuit of other building opportunities in Texas and Oklahoma. The family finally settled in Kansas City, Missouri in late 1927.

In 1994, Mort Walker arranged a Walker family reunion to be held in El Dorado, giving him opportunity to get to know the city of his birth.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Publishing his first cartoon when he was ten years old, Mort soon sold others. At fourteen, he was selling gag cartoons regularly to Child Life, Inside Detective, and Flying Aces magazines. At fifteen, he did work as a comic-strip artist for a weekly metropolitan newspaper. By that time, he had had published more than 300 of his magazine cartoons.

At age eighteen, Walker became the chief editorial designer at Hall Bros., which later changed the name of their greeting card line to Hallmark Cards. His cartoon style was an innovation in the greeting card business of the day. Most of the previous cards were described as being mushy and sentimental. His new styles created a whole new market at the beginning of World War II, selling cards with a male point of view. He also drew the Disney line of cards.

After graduating college, Mort went to New York City in 1948 to pursue a career in cartooning. To pay the bills, he also worked as editor of three magazines for Dell Publishing Company. His first 200 cartoons were rejected, but he persisted, regularly submitting thirty cartoons each week compared to the usual ten submissions of other cartoonists. Editors started to recognize his talent; in two years he was the top-selling magazine cartoonist.

"I carry a little book around with me, " he said in a later interview with the El Dorado Times, "and if somebody says or does something which I think is a universal truth and I can get an idea out of it, I jot it down." Walker said he likes to base his ideas on things that give the reader reason to pause and think, "Ah, that happened to me and I didn't think it was funny until I read about it."

His first big break came in 1950, when King Features picked up "Beetle Bailey" for syndication. The strip is noted as the last strip personally approved by William Randolph Hearst. Originally called "Spider", Beetle began as a college cutup. During the Korean War in 1951, the character stumbled into an Army recruiting post and circulation began to climb.

There were two other notable jumps in circulation. The first came in 1954 when the Tokyo edition of Stars & Stripes banned the strip, saying it engendered a lack of respect for officers. The U.S. press had a field day with this and as a result, 100 more newspapers enlisted the strip.

The second jump came in 1970 when Lt. Jack Flap first entered Sarge's office. The first established strip to integrate a black character, Stars & Stripes and some Southern newspapers cancelled the strip, fearing reprisals from the black community. But again, 100 other newspapers signed up.

A third controversy involving the strip came from the women's movement against General Halftrack's sexist attitudes towards his secretary, Miss Buxley. In response, Walker gave her a more modest wardrobe and sent the comic strip general to sensitivity training.

"Beetle Bailey" is now distributed to roughly 1,800 newspapers in over 50 countries, a readership of over 200 million every day. Most of the characters are based on real life people. Beetle is based on a lazy goof-off college friend, Sarge on Morton's real life tough-but-soft-hearted army sergeant, and Miss Buxley finds her roots in Marilyn Monroe. The over-eager Lt. Fuzz is based on Walker himself, as he recalls all the obnoxious, stupid things he did in the army. Camp Swampy is based on Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, one of his former posts.

Today Walker says he owes a debt of gratitude to the army for giving him so much fertile material to work with. He likes to say that he spent four years in the army and then the next forty years getting even.

At the end of the Korean war, Walker feared a possible drop in circulation of the strip. In 1954, he created a spin-off strip when Beetle Bailey went home on furlough to visit his sister, Lois and her family. "Hi and Lois" is the resulting family-oriented strip, which Walker wrote for and collaborator Dik Browne drew. Dik also created "Hagar the Horrible."

In total, Mort has created nine comic strips, four of which are still in syndication, including "Boners Ark" (under the name "Addison"), and "Sam & Silo" with Jerry Dumas. He has also been associated with "Mrs. Fitz's Flats," "Sam's Strip," "The Evermores," "Betty Boop and Felix," and "Gamin and Patches."

Walker is recognized not only for the wide and enduring popularity of his work, but also for his stylistic innovations and leadership in the comics field. His use of high-contrast, deceptively simple imagery and compact gags has become the industry standard of today.

Walker considers his greatest achievement to be the International Museum of Cartoon Art, which opened in 1974 as the Museum of Cartoon Art, the first museum dedicated to the preservation and elevation of the art of comics. Many museums have cartoons in their collections but they are rarely exhibited. This museum was founded to give people a chance to see this, the most popular art form in the world, according to Walker.

Now housing the largest showcase for one of America's few native art forms, the museum was first located in Greenwich, Connecticut, then experienced moves to Rye Brook, New York and Boca Raton, Florida. It has now moved to The Empire State Building in New York City, with its new name of The International Cartoon Museum. Walker organizes exhibitions, creates fund-raising campaigns, and is involved in all facets of the museum.

According to Walker, “The wonderful thing about comic strips is that they take the mundane, the hum drum, and the failures of everyday life, and transform these minor happenings into humor, philosophy, adventure . . . and eventually into history.”

Mort has worked on a number of advertising campaigns featuring his various characters. There are also hundreds of Beetle Bailey products on the market. In 1963, Paramount Studios created fifty animated shorts for Saturday morning television, also seen in movie theaters overseas and now available at video stores.

Having written several books on the art and history of comics, as well as children’s books, Walker has also published numerous collections of his comics work, including 92 Beetle Bailey and 35 Hi and Lois paperbacks. He has written his autobiography, *Mort Walker’s Scrapbook: Celebrating a Life of Love and Laughter*, and created an animated Beetle Bailey television special, as well as producing a short-lived stage play based on the strip.

He still oversees the 9-to-5 work of the staff at his Connecticut laugh factory studio, unofficially dubbed “King Features East” due to the amount of work generated there. There are more than 10,000 unused gags in the vault. In over 55 years, the studio has never missed a deadline.

On the subject of cartooning art, Walker once wrote: “The comic strip creator must be a prolific author as well as an artist, set designer, humorist, casting director, sociologist and producer. It is only one of the few creative areas left where the individual is personally in complete control of his product.”

In July of 2000, a 45-foot tall helium balloon of Beetle made its debut. Several characters from the strip are now available as balloons for rent to parades. Live costumed characters are also featured in Universal Studios Orlando’s Islands of Adventure theme park in Florida.

AWARDS, RECOGNITION

Among Mort Walker’s many awards are the following:

1953: Cartoonist of the Year, receiving The Reuben (cartoonists version of the Oscar) from the National Cartoonists Society

1955: Banshees Club Award, the Silver Lady, as Outstanding Cartoonist

1966 and 1969: Best Humor Strip from the National Cartoonists Society

1967: Citation of Merit from University of Missouri College of Arts and Science

1972: Il Secolo XIX Award, Italy

1975: Adamson Award for Best International Cartoonist, Sweden

1977: Power of Printing Award

1978: Fourth Estate Award from the American Legion

1979: The Jester from the Newspaper Features Council

The Inkpot Award at the San Diego Comic Convention

1980: Faculty Alumni Award from the University of Missouri, Scholar in residence

1981: Doctor of Letters from William Penn College

1987: Man of the Year by Kappa Sigma Fraternity

1988: Adamson Award Platinum, Sweden

1989: Man of the Year by Kappa Sigma

1990: U.S. Army Certificate of Appreciation for Patriotic Civilian Service

In 1992, there was a dedication of a life-sized Beetle Bailey statue on the University of Missouri campus. Mort designed the piece and his son, Neal, sculpted it. The same year, he served as the university's William Francis English Scholar-in-Residence.

The National Cartoonists Society awarded him the Golden T-Square in 1999, for fifty years of service. He was the second ever to receive the award. That same year he received the Order of Chevalier from the French Minister of Culture and Communication, and the Elzie Segar Award for Lifetime Achievement.

In May 2000, the United States Army at the Pentagon honored Walker with The Decoration for Distinguished Civilian Service, the highest award the Secretary of the Army can bestow on a civilian. The Association of the United States Army, the National World War II Memorial Campaign and the Non-commissioned Officers Association also lauded him at the ceremony for his efforts towards the National World War II Memorial. A Twilight Tattoo sunset parade was performed in his honor.

In 2005, he received the Connecticut Legend Award.

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