

Mike Lynch Cartoons
Monday, November 05, 2007

Syd Hoff



Above: "I have it on good authority, Peebles, that your blood pressure is down and your ulcer is inactive. Am I to conclude that you no longer care about moving up in the firm?" A cartoon by Syd Hoff from the book *CARTOON CLASSICS FROM MEDICAL ECONOMICS*, copyright 1963 by Medical Economics Book Division, Oradell, New Jersey.

Cartoonist and children's book illustrator [Syd Hoff](#) (1912-2004) may no longer be with us, but his niece, inspirational speaker [Carol Edmonston](#), has put together a Web page about him (with more to come) [here](#).

Syd dropped in on the Berndt Toast Gang from time to time; enough for him to be considered a member of the Long Island Chapter of the National Cartoonists Society. Unfortunately, I didn't meet him. But Bill Seay, the Berndt Toast Chairman, was a friend of Syd's. Bill told me a story about Syd's very early cartooning career, back when he was a teenager. Like a lot of cartoonists, Syd was determined to be one and, like so many cartoonists, Syd's mother was dismayed at his prospects. Heck, the woman just wanted her son to have a normal life! But if he had done what his mother wanted, there would be no *DANNY AND THE DINOSAUR*, no 571 Hoff cartoons sold to *The New Yorker*!



The September 1930 College Humor Magazine cover from a [page of College Humor covers](#) from the [Ellis Butler Parker site](#).

Here's the story I was told about Syd and his mother's three little words that signaled her acceptance of his career:

Bronx-born Syd sold his first cartoon at the age of 17 and didn't waste any time joining The Cartoonists Guild. The Guild, run by then NY Post cartoonist extraordinaire Roland Coe, was founded as a union for its members. (This is *before the existence of/no relation to* the current animators' union, also referred to as The Cartoonists Guild.)

When Syd joined in 1930, the prevailing New York City-based magazine gag cartoon rate was between \$3 to \$5. The Guild had mailed a letter to all of its cartoon markets. The letter asked magazine editors to sign it, pledging a uniform pay rate of \$15 per cartoon. Most of the magazine editors acquiesced.

However, College Humor magazine refused to sign. College Humor was an important, major cartoon market. So Coe, Ned Hilton, Colin Allen and other Guild members picketed in front of the College Humor offices. College Humor called the police. The cartoonists were hauled away.

That night, Syd's mother was at home, oblivious to all this, cooking dinner. The radio, as usual, was tuned to the six o'clock news. She heard the announcer's voice: "There was a demonstration this afternoon. Among the demonstrators arrested was Sydney Hoff."

And Syd's mother fainted.

As Syd told it to Bill, it was many hours later; late that night, when Syd was released from the Manhattan holding cell. Syd took the long subway ride back home, and walked back to their dark apartment building. Upon entering, his mother, who had recovered and was waiting up, calmly announced to her son, "Your dinner's cold!"

Bill would always laugh out loud at this moment of motherly resignation. Syd was, for better or worse, a cartoonist from that point on.

I regret not meeting Syd, but I'm so glad to hear that his niece has taken it upon herself to set up a site honoring him. Syd lives on in the Cyber world!



"You don't take 'em; you count 'em!"

From that same MEDICAL ECONOMICS book. Wow! Nice use of the seldom seen semi colon in a cartoon caption!