

My Friend, Gentleman Jim

This past Sunday night, I was awakened by a nightmare. I won't go into the details of the nightmare, but as I lay there blinking into the darkness, I realized on a gut level that my friend of a quarter of a century, Jim Mooney had died. I learned the next day from mutual family friend Ray Falcoa, that Jim indeed had passed away Sunday. There's usually a tendency when a man with a degree of fame like Jim passes on for people to post long testimonials about him as if they knew him intimately although their relationship may have been tangential or marginal.

I probably knew Jim better than anyone else (other than his late wife, Annie), over the last twenty-five years. His health had been on the decline for several years and he often talked to me about how he had known getting old was bad…but just not this bad.

I'm not going to recap his long career in comics—that's been done elsewhere. What follows was originally composed as afterword for a never published biography about him. I've made some changes to account for the passage of time. The pictures stretch back over twenty years.

On an evening not too very long ago, me, my wife Melissa, Jim and his family sat around his dining room table, trying to figure out how long we'd all known each other. It was with a bit of a shock when I realized I'd known Jim for half of my life.

Jim in the early 1980s.

In 1982, I wandered into a Stuart, Florida used bookstore, managed by Jim's wife, Annie. My eye went to the many pages of framed original comics art hanging on the walls. When I asked her why she had so many pages by Jim Mooney, she was startled and pleasantly surprised that I recognized his work by sight.

That one chat began mine and my family's quarter-century relationship with Jim and his family. And so, 25 years and several comics projects later, found me, Jim, my wife Melissa, his now adult daughter Noelle, and his nine year old grandson Kaya,

sitting around the table loosening our memories with pizza and beer (Kaya kept to the pizza...his memory didn't need loosening).

Melissa reminded me how I had rushed home after that conversation with Annie, blurting about meeting the "wife of Jim Mooney". Although she had read comics in her youth, she didn't recognize the name until I said, "You know—the Supergirl artist!"

Then she remembered.

A lot of people remember Jim's work, if not his name...the impact of his art on two generations of comics-reading children was something that he never quite accepted. A few years ago Jim was telling me about a fan who had perplexed him by asking questions about an old, and in Jim's mind, a completely forgettable Superman story he had done in 1964 that dealt with a couple of brats from another planet.

"You mean Zigi and Zagi?" I asked.

"You remember that?" he demanded incredulously.

"Sure," I replied. "When you're ten years old and you read a story about other ten year olds bedeviling Superman, that's pretty memorable."

By and large, comics readers have always found Jim's work memorable and they remember it with a great deal of fondness, even if the projects were ones he himself cared little for, like Dial H For Hero. His style was always open, friendly, and when it needed to be, slick and illustrative.

However, telling the story took priority. That focus on story-telling is much like the man himself. Probably due to his Irish heritage, Jim is the greatest raconteur I've ever known. I can't count the many times he's had me literally rolling on the floor with hysterically funny recountings of his early days in the comics' field.

Jim and I promoting Star Rangers in 1987.

Jim explodes with excitement.

Just a casual, off-hand comment from him has been sufficient to send me into gales of laughter. A few years ago, he and Annie visited us in our home in Newport, Rhode Island. Since it was close to the Thanksgiving/Christmas holidays, several of the famous Newport mansions had been decorated to look like Gilded Age postcards.

Melissa and Annie toured a couple of the places and when they returned, Annie excitedly described to Jim how the domestic staff at the Astor's Beechwood mansion was dressed in the height of Victorian fashion. They affected the attitude that she and Melissa had dropped by to offer holiday wishes to the Astors--- and there was even ballroom dancing! Annie insisted that Jim accompany her back to the place so he could experience this bit of whimsy and wonder for himself.

Jim turned to me with beseeching, desperate eyes and in gravelly, horrified whisper, rasped, "Oh. My. Dear. God."

Don't ask me why, but I must have laughed for a good five minutes. Just remembering the incident now makes me smile. My family and Jim's have done a lot of things together over the years, and they always had a special quality to them, whether it was tramping through flea markets in the boiling Florida heat or attending comics conventions.

Our daughter Deirdre adores Jim because he encouraged her to develop her artistic abilities, which she did. Jim often introduced me, Melissa and Deirdre as his adjunct family. Jim also gave me great bits of advice about working in the creative arena, particularly in the comics field. Despite the fact that he wasn't always optimistic in his counsel, his insights were often---too often---on the nose.

Jim and I worked on several comics projects together, such as the four issue Star Rangers series, which due to arbitrary editorial interference was not what Jim or I hoped it would be (however, it was considered good enough to serve

as the "inspiration" for a short-lived TV series in the early 90s).

I'm also proud to have written the script for "A Trip To Necropolis" the story Jim considers his all-time best work. We also worked together on an adaptation of Anne Rice's "The Mummy". But I value Jim far more as a member of my family than as a professional collaborator.

When Melissa and I went through a bad period 13 years ago due to a very serious car accident and our financial situation was more than iffy, Jim was the only person who stepped up to offer a helping hand. Without being asked, he sent us \$1500 dollars, no strings attached, no questions asked. That one act essentially saved us from ruin until more money came in (and, yeah—we paid him back the following year).

Although Jim and I didn't collaborate professionally as much as we wanted, I treasure what we did do together, including the material that was never published, like "Lakota" and "Colonel Wildfire".

It's virtually impossible in this limited space to describe how important Jim has been in my life and that of my family over the years. Suffice it to say, his sense of humor, his kindness and his profound wealth of information on an astounding variety of topics has been a source of comfort and calm during some very tumultuous times. He truly lives the definition of friend and family.

I've been a full-time novelist for the past thirteen years, and I've dedicated several books to Jim. In my "Outlanders" science-fiction novel series (now in its eleventh consecutive year of publication), almost every book refers to a "Corporal James Mooney" and his artistic abilities.

Me, forcing Jim's foot into a conquistador's stirrup in 2006.

Jim asked me to go with him to the San Diego Comics Con of 2006, but unfortunately I broke my ankle and was unable to do much of anything that required walking for any distance. He needed a wheelchair himself to navigate around the convention center, so I would not have been much use.

This past February, the Everything Guide to Writing Graphic Novels (co-written with Melissa) was released. We dedicated the book to Jim, and put him at the head of the list of comics luminaries that included Milton Caniff, Don Heck and Will Eisner, among others. The book also features a great deal of artwork by Jim, some of it never before published.

I was gratified by how delighted Jim was by the book and the recognition he received. He had been very disappointed that the biography had never materialized, so the Everything Guide ameliorated some of that bitterness.

The last time I spoke with him (less than two weeks ago), he told me again how happy he was with the book and that we had featured his work so prominently. He added that a family friend had visited that week and was so impressed with the book, she bought all the available copies at their local Barnes and Noble and had him autograph them.

It was a small token of appreciation for a man who has been one of the most important people in my life, but we did what we could. There is far more I could write about Jim... but at this point, I'll leave it like this--Not a goodbye, Jim. I see your art every day when I walk into my office and I know I'll see you later.

