

Fun Ideas Podcast #35 Audio Transcript

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0:00:00.2 Mark Arnold: Fun Ideas Productions presents the Fun Ideas Podcast! Hi, this is Mark Arnold, and welcome to Fun Ideas Podcast number 35. If you would like to comment and/or be a guest on this podcast, please drop me a line at funideas.mark@gmail.com. Become a Patreon at Fun Ideas Productions, and if everyone listening just contributed a dollar a month, that would be a tremendous help.

0:00:27.5 MA: Also, subscribe to my YouTube channel. "Aaaaalllviiiiinnn!: The Story of Ross Bagdasarian, Sr., Liberty Records, Format Films and The Alvin Show", is out. Order your hardback, paperback, and e-book copies today on Amazon and at BearManorMedia.com. I am currently still working on "Friendly Ghosts, Little Devils, Giants and Rich Kids: The Art and Creations of Warren Kremer", and the "Total Television Scrapbook", and a Monkees solo book with my friend, Michael A. Ventrella.

0:00:57.5 MA: Our guest today is a fan and collector of Harvey comics merchandise. You know, Casper, Richie Rich, and the rest. He likes Harvey comics so much, he built his own online museum. Here he is, the curator of the Harvey Mercheum, Jonathan Sternfeld. On the phone today, I have Jonathan Sternfeld, and he is the founder and curator of the Harvey Mercheum, yay! [chuckle] So, how or why in the world did you do this?

[laughter]

0:01:30.4 Jonathan Sternfeld: I ask myself that every day, Mark. It's a question of, I saw a need and I knew that no one else was going to, to fill the need, and I felt like I had some of the necessary skills required to do what needed to be done, and so decided to take a swing at it. I came into the hobby website thing a little bit late in the game, honestly.

0:02:01.7 JS: There's been people doing what I'm doing for quite a bit longer, and I think currently there's more of a move towards other social media platforms like Facebook and whatnot, so actual traffic to hobby websites is somewhat on the decline and certainly participation in comments and whatnot on the websites is on the decline.

0:02:30.1 JS: But regardless, I saw it as a chance to broaden my skill base. I was able to learn stuff about putting up a website and how to run it and whatnot, expand my photography skills and whatnot. One of the things I really enjoy is taking pictures of toys to post and whatnot. I had a decent collection to start.

0:03:00.3 JS: I was hoping that other people would contribute photos and what they had to the exhibits, but I figured if I started and then led the way and made the framework, then others could fill in. And I felt like at least I could get a start on it, and that's what I did.

0:03:22.9 MA: Yeah, I sent you a few things, but I freely admit I'm kinda lackadaisical about it. And it's like, "You wanna fly out here 3,000 miles and take photos of all my stuff? Sure." But you said you had a few items to begin with. What type of things did you start out with? Was it just general stuff you've collected over the years or in recent times, or were you always a Harvey collector?

0:03:48.6 JS: Harvey. Okay, let's see. I started collecting the comic books when I was a little kid,

specifically 1978, the summer of '78, I think was when I started. I was at summer camp, day camp, and I found a beat-up copy of Richie Rich Inventions number one. And I had seen comic books before that obviously, but something with that comic clicked with me. I really, really enjoyed it and kept the copy, brought it home, the typical wad it up, stuff it in my back pocket kind of deal.

[chuckle]

0:04:22.6 JS: I showed it to my folks, and they were like, "Oh cool, okay, whatever." And this was at the time that Richie was about expanding the number of titles to like 30 odd a month or whatever that were coming out. And so it was easy for us to go to the corner 7-Eleven store and buy current issues off the spinner rack. And so we started collecting the current issues that way.

0:04:46.3 JS: And then I started looking into comic book stores and back issues, and that's like, "Well, what's out there?" And then I picked a copy of Overstreet and started looking through the titles and said, "Oh look, there's this title. I don't have any of this" and whatnot, so put together a little checklist kind of thing, "This is what I have, this is what I need," and started hitting comic stores a little more vigorously.

0:05:10.4 JS: Until the local stores were pretty much exhausted. And then, by that time I had moved on to other interests and whatnot anyway and put the whole collection on hold. And it was basically after college and with the rise of the Internet that the interest was rekindled with eBay.

0:05:30.3 JS: eBay started back in, I think it was '95, but I didn't join until 2001. Once I joined, then I started finding some of the books that I hadn't been able to find locally. Looking for books, I ended up finding, it was one of the Larami Old Timer Cars, a rack toy that they had made. And I said, "Well, that's kind of cool, it's interesting, let me get that." And then I'm like, "Well, what other toys were made? What else is out there?" And, at the time, you started the Yahoo group, the Richie Rich Yahoo group.

0:06:11.1 MA: Oh, yeah yeah. That's right.

0:06:12.1 JS: Remember that? Does that even still exist at this point?

0:06:14.8 MA: It still exists. I actually didn't start it. I forgot the guy who did, but I assumed it because...

0:06:19.6 JS: At the time I joined, I think you were moderator of it or something.

0:06:22.8 MA: Yeah, yeah. There was an original moderator and he just got tired of it at one point, and so I assumed responsibility for it because it would have just died.

0:06:31.1 JS: Gotcha. Yeah.

0:06:31.6 MA: Of course, now it's year later, it's basically dead now. But all the old stuff..

0:06:34.3 JS: Right, but we got the Facebook group that kind of filled in for it.

0:06:38.6 MA: Yeah.

0:06:38.6 JS: Again, like I said, shifting paradigms in social media. So I said, "Okay, well, let me make a little list of what I've got and put it up there and see what else people say." And I got one response, Dave Holt came in with a list of items. Much, much bigger list than mine.

0:06:58.3 JS: One of the things that he mentioned was three variants of this car. And I'm like, "Ooh. Okay, well, that's interesting." Got me looking and sure enough, I did find two other cars and then I found one that looked different and I said, "Wait a second, that's kind of weird. Let me buy that." And I got it and looked at it and sure enough, it was a fourth variant. So I had found something that he didn't know of at that time.

0:07:21.8 JS: That's really what started the whole thing. All four variants, they used the same backer card and the same blister, so looking at the thing real quick, you can't tell what it is.

0:07:31.4 MA: Wow.

0:07:31.9 JS: They all... It's the same part number, same UPC. So it's like, "Ooh. Okay, it's an Old Timer Car. Fine." But if you look at the bottom of the car, they actually molded into the little base part of it, what car it's supposed to be, and at what scale and whatnot. So you can tell that way, if you can see the bottom.

0:07:54.4 JS: I found that very interesting. It's like, "Wow, didn't even realize that all these different things existed." So then I was thinking, "Okay, well, you need more than just a list, you need more than just text that says, 'Hey, Old Timer Car.' You really need pictures. You really need as much data as possible." And that's when I started envisioning... Actually, my original vision was a coffee table book. [chuckle] If you can believe such a thing.

0:08:18.0 JS: I was like, "Oh, I'll take a bunch of pictures, assemble them into a little price-guide kind of thing and get it published." And I was thinking: A) nobody would find out about the book and nobody would buy it, and B) as soon as the thing was even at the printer, it would be out of date. I was finding stuff regularly and it's like by the time I put together a script and had it approved and whatnot and sent off to the printer, by the time it came off the printing press, it would be completely and totally useless, 'cause I would have found twice as much stuff.

0:08:51.3 MA: Right. Yeah.

0:08:52.8 JS: The Internet allows for instantaneous updates.

0:08:56.0 MA: Yes.

0:08:56.5 JS: So it's like, okay, this is a dynamic format and it's... I run the site for free. I don't run any advertising. I don't make people pay for membership for the information. I run it like a museum. It's just, come, browse, look, respect the information, respect the site, but I'm not gonna charge you to look. I think that format has actually worked pretty well.

0:09:26.3 MA: Now, have you gotten some contributors from it besides myself? I know I have contributed a few things.

0:09:32.6 JS: Yeah, no, several people have contributed. In fact, this past year, I just finished up the fifth year of running the website. It's hard to believe. Time has gone so quickly. But this past year, I only put up 19 exhibits, which was a little on the low side, but eight of those exhibits were guest exhibits.

0:09:51.0 MA: Oh, wow. Cool.

0:09:52.0 JS: Yeah, so actually, it comes and goes. I can't rely on it, unfortunately, but this was one of the very hard things that I had to deal with when I first started the site five years ago. I knew I did not personally have very much, and I said, okay, if I posted stuff quickly that I would quickly run out of things to post and then the site would just sit there stagnant and dead until I got something else or somebody guest posted.

0:10:19.0 JS: And then I was worried on the other side that I would announce it and suddenly be inundated with thousands of guest contributions, "Oh here. Here's this stuff." You know, lots and lots of photos and I'm like, "Wait a second." I was afraid I was gonna be overwhelmed and unable to keep up with the flow.

0:10:36.0 JS: As it turns out, it's been more to the quiet side than the busy, but it has been going along well and I do have some possibilities lined up for contributions in the future, but it's gonna take a little bit of work.

0:10:50.3 MA: Okay. Is there... I had so many questions here.

[chuckle]

0:10:58.3 MA: I'll ask this, but I even know the answer myself, because, as soon as you find something, there's something else. Is there like a Holy Grail item that you're looking for? Or items?

0:11:11.3 JS: Right now, my Holy Grail is, Bally made a slot machine, a Richie Rich slot machine back in the '80s, and I would really kind of like to have one. In the New York State, they have to be set up to not take currency, they can only run on tokens or some crazy thing like that. But assuming you could do that, you can actually have a slot machine in your home.

0:11:35.3 JS: The problem is that the ones that have come up for sale have been like in Florida and I'm up in New York, so it would be a bit of a drive to go get it or very expensive trucking. They weigh about 300 pounds. So it's not something I'm just gonna pick up and throw in my car, like I did with my comic book spinner rack.

0:11:49.9 JS: That actually was my original Holy Grail, was I really, really wanted a spinner rack like the ones that I used to buy the comics off of at the corner 7-Eleven. And I did finally manage to get one. I had to drive pretty much to Pennsylvania to get it, but it was well, well, well worth the trip and it did fit in the car fortunately.

0:12:11.6 JS: I wasn't even sure I was gonna be able get it home. I was thinking it was gonna be strapped to the roof or sitting in my lap or some crazy thing like that. But it worked out okay. I did get the spinner rack and got it home. The slot machine is not gonna be so easy. And then one thing about me is I'm very much a completionist. If I know that there's something out there, I want it.

There's actually two variants of the slot machine. There is a round top and a flat top. [chuckle]

0:12:40.5 MA: That, I didn't even know.

0:12:43.1 JS: Just this weekend, I found that the casino closest to me just put in a Hot Stuff slot machine.

0:12:50.8 MA: Yeah, I saw that posted somewhere.

0:12:52.9 JS: You did see it?

0:12:53.6 MA: Yeah.

0:12:53.8 JS: Yeah. And so now there's a Hot Stuff slot machine. So in a number of years those will probably be phased out and start showing up in the aftermarket gaming sites and whatnot. So eventually maybe I'll want one of those as well, but the Richie slot would be very very fun. I actually own pieces of it, I own...

0:13:12.6 MA: Wow.

0:13:12.6 JS: One of the glasses and I own the reels. The reels are just pieces of cardboard that like fit around a big drum. So I've got the reels and I've got one of the glasses that says, it's called "Richie Rich Jackpots".

0:13:31.7 MA: At least...

0:13:32.1 JS: One of these days, maybe I'll built a little display case or something that's got little lights or something, light it up from behind. I think that would show very nicely actually.

0:13:39.8 MA: Now, do you still typically get things still from eBay or do you get it other places like shows, or both or what?

0:13:46.1 JS: Right now, it's primarily eBay, yeah. I have attended a number of different shows, and I've gotten positive feedback on what I'm doing, but if they have anything, generally it's stuff that I have already. I've picked up a couple of items here or there, but I keep saying to myself, "I need to go to more shows and get out there a little bit more," but so far, it hasn't happened.

0:14:13.1 JS: It's hard to just... Let me put it to you this way. If you've only got so much money, you can get on eBay, you could buy something, pay the shipping. Or not even, sometimes free shipping, whatever, and get the item in a couple of days. Boom, done. Go to a show, especially if it's a different state, across the country, you're talking travel, you're talking hotel, you're talking admission, you're talking food while you're there, and then you go around the show and you may find nothing.

0:14:40.5 MA: Yeah.

0:14:41.4 JS: Even if you find something you're adding all the cost of the travel, and the hotel and the food, to the cost of the item, so.

0:14:47.5 MA: Right, right.

0:14:49.4 JS: If you can make the trip into a vacation and make it worthwhile and make it vacation expense, that's fine. Otherwise, it's just really much more effective to try to buy online, I think.

0:15:02.8 MA: Right. And you probably have had this happen, which I think every Harvey fan has had this happen. I'm sure you have some sort of list, even if you don't have photos of something, "And this must be every Harvey item ever produced." And as soon as you say that, somebody will say, "Oh, I have this," just something you've never heard of at all. I get that all the time. Do you?

0:15:30.1 JS: Yeah.

[laughter]

0:15:33.6 JS: Basically, I try not to say, "Oh, I had... this is the list of every item ever," because I know that if I say that, I'm just gonna be proven wrong.

0:15:40.9 MA: Yeah. Well, it kind of ties into what you're saying about the book, you mentioned Dave Holt. And we had considered doing that same exact idea at some point. And the thing is, we started just grabbing photos off the Internet and stuff like that, and unfortunately, and I will say this on the show, we had a falling out at one point, so we don't really talk much anymore.

0:16:04.6 MA: But at the time, it's like every time we thought we had, "Oh, this is enough photos to do this book," we'd find something else. And it's like, "How much stuff is there?" And so, yeah, you'd have to do, "This is volume one," or something like that, because you knew there could be a volume two, three, four, five, six, seven, whatever. And...

0:16:24.2 JS: Or a second edition.

0:16:26.8 MA: Yeah.

0:16:27.5 JS: "Revised and expanded." You know what I mean? That's the other way to go. But yes, I know exactly what you're saying. Then you start getting into hard questions like... At one point, I just recently did an interview where I was talking about how, what a depth and breadth of characters Harvey published over the years.

0:16:44.4 JS: A lot of people don't realize that Harvey... When they think Harvey, they think Harvey World. They think the '80s. They think Richie. They think Casper. They think Little Dot Little Lotta etcetera. They don't know about going back to the Paramount properties and whatnot. Joe Palooka. And at one point, they even published Blondie and Dagwood. Things like that.

0:17:09.6 JS: So, it hasn't happened yet, but one thing that I've always wondered in the back of my head is, it's like, "Gee, should I feature Blondie and Dagwood merchandise if it came up?" Because, well, technically, it was Harvey. Or Dick Tracy. There was all these properties that at one point were in Harvey hands and it's kind of funny if you think about it, but it hasn't been an issue so far.

0:17:33.6 JS: And my general feeling is, well, it depends on the item, if it says "Harvey" or it's the

right time period, then maybe yes. I don't know. But again, if you're putting it into a book, how do you deal with that?

0:17:46.6 MA: Well, that was my question. I was gonna say, do you just stick with the Harvey World characters as it were, you know, the Casper, Richie Rich?

0:17:54.0 JS: Most of what I've put up...

0:17:55.1 MA: Or have you ventured out into the other ones at all?

0:17:58.1 JS: Yeah, most of what I've put up has been Harvey World, simply because that's the easiest stuff to find. It's the newest. It's the most recent. It's most plentiful. And, one of the things I really like about this hobby and enjoy about this is that it's not terribly expensive. Going back to limited funds, anybody can hop in and get a reasonable sized collection of Harvey merchandise for a very very reasonable amount of money. You start getting into some of the rarer items like the slot machines, obviously, you're gonna pay a bit more.

0:18:33.0 MA: Well, yeah, but even a slot machine that is...

0:18:36.7 JS: For a Larami rack toy, you can probably pick up for 10 or 20 bucks. And that's really not bad. You look at some of the other merchandise that's out there, some of the other comic lines, their characters, their merchandise, some items run into the \$20,000-\$30,000 range for one item.

0:18:52.4 MA: Right. Well...

0:18:54.0 JS: You know what I mean? And it's like, okay, that's nice, but I don't have those funds. I think I diverted from the topic here a little bit. [chuckle]

0:19:03.9 MA: Well, no. I was just asking about... You mentioned Blondie. It's like, when I did my "Harvey Comics Companion", I did a lot of information about advertising in the books. And things like this would be... like if I was doing the Mercheum myself, this would be like a fine line item. They got access to the Blondie cookbook, and it was an overrun and Harvey had access to it, so they started advertising that you could buy 'em in the comic books, but it wasn't produced... It wasn't produced by Harvey, it wasn't produced for Harvey. But...

0:19:40.0 JS: Right, because it's advertised in the book, is it... is it Harvey merchandise, yeah.

0:19:43.6 MA: Yeah, there's a weird judgment call, because they bought this over-stock of this book that stopped selling, and so the infamous Harvey warehouse had stacks and stacks of this book, and then you just sell them. Now I've seen the book for sale in regular bookstores, and I don't own it because I'm like, I don't know, it's like, I like Blondie, I don't love, love, love Blondie.

0:20:08.6 MA: And yeah, it doesn't make any reference to Harvey at all in the book, but it's a Blondie cookbook that they used to advertise. Another one I can remember is a book called "How to Dance", and that was just another overrun. It was just a general book on how to dance. [chuckle]

0:20:25.2 JS: Oh, yeah, yeah, sure. There was an ad. I remember the ads for that, for some of that, yeah.

0:20:29.7 MA: And then, the other one and people do...

0:20:32.4 JS: That was the same deal, they picked up over-stock?

0:20:34.3 MA: Yeah, yeah. And then there's another item, and I've heard different things on this one, you've probably seen that one, it's like a drink mixer, little freebie flyer or something like that. I don't think it was produced by Harvey, but there were stacks of those in the Harvey warehouse too, so now it's assumed to be a Harvey item.

0:20:56.5 MA: And then I go, "Well, yeah, I guess it is," because it was in their warehouse, but they didn't produce it, they didn't write it, they didn't create it, they just had it in there. [chuckle] So it's just gonna...

0:21:06.3 JS: Right. My definition, what I've used as a rule of thumb is: if a Harvey character is portrayed on the item somewhere, or the item itself is a Harvey character, like a Richie Rich doll, obviously that's a Harvey item. If it doesn't have a Harvey character, so then the question is, Blondie and Dagwood, are they Harvey characters? You could really argue it either way. I have not had to make that judgment call yet. The only call that I've had to make is what I'll call "ephemera".

0:21:37.8 JS: It's like originally, did I just want to do merchandise, did I really just wanna do stuff that people could readily buy in the stores? Well even that, then you get into what you were talking about with the comic books, and the coupons and cutting out the coupon and mailing away, for like the Pressman Richie Rich game versus the Milton Bradley Richie Rich game. Milton Bradley game you could buy in the store. The Pressman you had to cut a coupon and mail away for.

0:22:02.1 JS: So you get that distinction, and then you've got things like... something you see all the time on eBay, in fact I just got one in the mail yesterday, Harvey printed posters, calendar posters. The calendar posters, there's more than 300 of them. They're numbered. It's very, very easy to tell what you got because they're numbered right on them, numbered and dated. They did a monthly and they did an annual.

0:22:29.3 JS: But they sent them to the places that were selling the comics, they sent them to the distributors, they didn't sell them to the public, people didn't get them. So that kind of stuff where it's like, yes, it's there. Yes it exists. But no, it's not readily available. And then, my ultimate decision on that stuff was, "Yes, I am going to include it."

0:22:50.7 JS: I have not put much of it up yet. The posters specifically, I have not put up because I haven't figured out a good way to photograph them. Really what I need is almost like a drum scanner kind of thing that I could take... 'cause these are 18 by 24 full size sheets that they're... I want good quality...

0:23:12.5 MA: I have a couple of them, but yeah.

0:23:13.5 JS: Huh?

0:23:13.8 MA: I have a couple of 'em, but yeah. [chuckle]

0:23:15.5 JS: Yeah, yeah, I've got like 25 of 'em now, which...

0:23:17.3 MA: Oh wow.

0:23:17.9 JS: Like I said, there's over 300, so that's spit in the ocean unfortunately. But yeah, no, I need to say, I like to put up really good quality photos, I want everything to be very readable, and bright and vivid and clear. And I just, I haven't come up with a nice way to do the posters, so I haven't done them yet. What I did do was a couple of the... the company Christmas cards that they did?

0:23:42.3 MA: Oh yeah.

0:23:43.0 JS: I guess every year they printed out a stack of cards that said, "Happy Holidays from the Harveys," and they gave them out to the staff and whatnot, and I put, let's see, I've got two of those? Yeah, two of those on the website right now. And that's the kind of thing, again, it wouldn't be available to the general public, but it's definitely Harvey related.

0:24:01.7 MA: Yeah. For me, if I was doing it, and so I'll give you my two cents, I would include it because it's Harvey. Even if it's a business card or whatever, and it wasn't designed for public consumption, it was designed as a Harvey item. That's the best I can say about it, so.

0:24:20.5 JS: Yeah. It's featuring their characters. It's promoting their products. Why not? Although one of the... I'm pretty sure one of the Christmas cards I put on the website has Dick Tracey and Blondie and Dagwood on 'em. [chuckle]

0:24:32.8 MA: Well, I mean they do.

0:24:35.2 JS: Going back to that fine line again, it's like...

0:24:37.4 MA: If you go back far enough you can't avoid it, I mean, but then you have to make the decision.

0:24:41.5 JS: Right, yeah. No, I don't necessarily want to avoid it, I'm just bringing that back up again, there are a number of different decisions that need to be made all the time. But the other thing, when you're printing a book and you've got a number of pages, and every page costs money, versus I've got a website and technically unlimited storage, one of these days, they'll probably yell at me for having too much data up there, but for the moment I'm okay. And so, it's like "Hey, why not? Put it up there. If I've got it, go for it. The more, the merrier."

0:25:12.4 MA: Yeah. I would say my Holy Grail, since I was asking you about it, it actually have nothing to do with the Casper and Richie Rich stuff just because they didn't do this then, of course I like that type of stuff and have lots of it. But in doing the, again, the research for the book, is they used to give out these little subscription cards. I've never seen those. So there's one of Palooka, there's one of Humphrey, there's one of Steve Canyon, there's one of Dick Tracy. This is just a little...

0:25:38.9 JS: Subscription card?

0:25:42.7 MA: It's like a card...

0:25:42.8 JS: Acknowledging that you...

0:25:45.4 MA: Yeah, you know, just as a giveaway thing.

0:25:45.4 JS: You're not talking like the Bunny membership "I'm in with Bunny"...

0:25:49.1 MA: Not that, but that's a similar thing. But these cards, I believe, I don't really have one, but I think they're like 6 x 9 card, and I think they're either in color or black and white, depending on what it was, and they would say, "Thanks. Your pal, Joe Palooka," or something. It was like a signed photo, but it was just...

0:26:11.2 JS: Oh yeah, you mentioned that in the book. Yeah, yeah, I remember seeing those.

0:26:13.0 MA: And it's like, I've never seen any of those... that's quirky things I look for, is I do like to find things that were given away as subscription premiums, it's like, "What was this?" Another one, you may or may not remember, but they talk about this thing called the High Teen Club, and it was this little club you're supposed to set up if you're a teenager to do good morals.

0:26:37.9 JS: Again, I think you referenced that in your book.

0:26:40.1 MA: Yes, and there's a little button, and I love buttons, so it's like to have a little button that says "High Teen" and I do say this is a book. Unfortunately, "High Teen" has taken on a different meaning, and so you have to wade through porn sites with that terminology.

[clears throat]

0:26:55.3 JS: Yeah, searches you have to be careful with, I understand.

0:27:01.4 MA: For something like that, I'd probably just have to luck out just looking through somebody's junk box at an antique show and I go, "Oh, there it is." But you always wonder how many of these things were produced. You mentioned the Bunny...

0:27:14.5 JS: What happened to them when they were done with it. When they said, "Okay, this promo is over," did they take the box and throw it in the trash? Or did it get put on a shelf in the infamous warehouse?

0:27:25.3 MA: Right, and you mentioned the Bunny fan club. I have the Bunny button, it took forever to find it. I don't have the card, I've never ever seen it, and I don't have the poster, and I've never ever seen that. They've got to exist somewhere.

0:27:37.3 JS: Of course, I'm sure they grace the walls of teens in at least a few homes. [chuckle] My understanding is...

0:27:46.5 MA: I always think even the Harvey family had some of these things, I guess, but sometimes they sold them, sometimes they probably just tossed them out, so who knows.

0:27:55.5 JS: Right, right.

0:27:57.7 MA: But those are the types of things I look for. It's like, "Wonder what happened to that?" And I've done that not just with Harvey stuff, I've done it with other things. If I see some obscure button...

0:28:07.6 JS: Oh yes, you've branched into many other publishers, I know.

0:28:11.2 MA: Or like humor magazines. Like using MAD. MAD merchandise is pretty easy to find, so I don't tend to collect it much. But Cracked is harder, Sick is even harder. And things like that. So it's just different degrees. And I think, I don't know if this is a reason for you, but in the case of Harvey stuff, it's like some of it is cheap junk, but it's like I'd rather have that cheap junk than some nice porcelain Mickey Mouse statue, because, who cares? There's a zillion Micky Mouse statues out there. [chuckle]

0:28:44.5 JS: Absolutely, no, I agree 100%. Like I said, I think right now, the thing that brings me the most joy are the rack toys and rack toys are the ultimate definition of cheap and disposable. I remember as a child playing with rack toys, not the Harvey rack toys specifically, but you know, little pool sets and what I mean basically...

0:29:06.9 JS: By the time you unwrapped the thing from the cardboard and played it once or twice, it broke. [chuckle] It was unbelievable. They cost very little, but you got very little for what you paid. That's the way they work. And it's interesting that JA-RU is still in business in Florida, they manufacture overseas, but they're still around, still making the same kind of stuff.

0:29:35.3 JS: I just, I absolutely love the rack toys because the backing cards are really bright and colorful, the items themselves are fun. I'm looking right now, I have a little cabinet in my living room that I fill with stuff periodically, and right now I actually have some of my collection in it, and I've got right now, let's see...

0:29:56.0 JS: The Richie Rich Watch and Rings from Larami. And that's an interesting set, because one thing that the rack toys producers do to save money, they use the molds for different sets. They'll use... they'll print a different backing card with a different character and say, "Oh, okay, here's the Richie Rich set," but then they'll make Mighty Mouse or Heckle and Jeckle, or just some other property that they have, and they'll make the same item with a different backing card and get some more mileage out of the toys.

0:30:30.0 JS: The Richie Rich Watch and Rings, I have not seen anything like that set, whereas right next to it, I've got the Larami sunglasses that say "Richie Rich" on the bridge of the nose, and sunglasses, they made every single character they could. Why not? [chuckle] It's like, it has word on it.

0:30:47.4 JS: And then pinball games, that's the other thing. Pinball games, talk about the example of breaking as soon as you play with them. The little flipper thing there to get the ball to go, it's like you pull that once or twice, and boing there goes the spring, and the thing is shot. But it was fun while it lasted.

[chuckle]

0:31:00.9 MA: I saw, I did look at the website briefly before I called you today, so you have what you call a white paper about the JA-RU stuff. I didn't download it. So talk about it and then I'll eventually get one, but what's that entail? What's in that?

0:31:17.7 JS: What I did, it was actually part of an interview that I did recently, the interviewer was asking me, "Okay, well, you're coming up on your fifth anniversary. Are you planning on doing any sort of special content or anything for the thing?" And it got me thinking, it was an actually really interesting question, and my answer was that, in my opinion, the content of my website is the exhibits, it's the photos and the table of information that I put with the photos.

0:31:53.0 JS: However, one of the things that I did that I thought was kind of neat, was once I finished posting all of the JA-RU rack toys that I own, and there was one that was actually a guest exhibit as well, I made a separate table on the JA-RU manufacturer page, showing all the different product numbers and UPC codes and whatnot and linking to all the different exhibits.

0:32:17.5 JS: And when I put that table up, I was looking at it and I started seeing patterns in the UPC codes and the product numbers and whatnot. I said, "That's kind of interesting." So I took the table and threw it in Excel and played around with it a little bit, and ended up finding things like... Okay, well, I think it was the Richie Rich toys were all 2700 numbers, whereas the Caspers, were all 2900s or whatever.

0:32:39.4 JS: So I did all this little analysis thing and I wrote up a little blog post about it and put it up there, and I thought that that was kind of interesting. In looking at different types of content, different types of consumables, I've been looking into infographics, I've been fighting my way through Infographics For Dummies for a couple of weeks now. [chuckle] It's a little dry reading. But I'm trying to get through that.

0:33:06.9 JS: Video, podcasts, like what we're doing right now, and downloadables, PDFs or any sort of takeaway, are all considered things that websites can do to add value. And I said, "Well, hey, I've got content here. Why don't I make a downloadable?" And so I turned the content into a PDF and posted it up there with the tables, now that people can view all the data and the analysis all at one time, one page.

0:33:40.0 JS: The way I did it initially, I said, "Okay, well, you know, go to this page sort the... Cut the table this way, and then look at it." I just printed multiple copies of the table in the PDF. So that's... I'm working on more things like that. I like the idea of people being able to download things, print things.

0:34:05.8 MA: So different kind of like... Go ahead.

0:34:07.6 JS: What's that?

0:34:08.3 MA: So different like checklists or something? Is that what you mean?

0:34:13.6 JS: No, it's not really a checklist. It is a checklist that shows what's currently on the site, and I will update it if anything more ever comes, but it's just showing how they group their products and whatnot.

0:34:27.0 MA: Oh, I see.

0:34:28.8 JS: What I was starting to say is, I'm kind of old school, I really like printed paper. Even if I'm looking at a computer screen, if it's something long, I'd rather read it on paper, I'd rather print it and then take it and read it later on paper. So one of the things that I did... There's a couple of things I did when I set up the Mercheum website and some of them cause me extra work, and so in that sense, I regret it, but I still think it was the right decision.

0:35:00.4 JS: One thing is the duality between the blog posts and the exhibit pages. You go to a museum, you go to an exhibit, there's a thing there, you got the thing, you got a little card next to it, describing it, the name, an exhibit number, a little bit of data about it, in a neutral color wall. There's very little distraction, you got good lighting, you got the item, you got your information. That's it.

0:35:27.4 JS: I wanted to do something similar. The way I've set up the website, the exhibit pages, I take away the side bars, there's no comments, it's just the pictures and the table. That's it. Everything else goes on the blog post, on the blog post page, so that the comments and everything are there. If you wanted to get interactive and do it that way, you got that side, but if you're looking at the exhibit, it's clean.

0:35:51.9 JS: The other thing that that allows me to do, if you want to print the exhibit... Again, you don't have comments and whatnot printing with the pictures and whatnot, you can print a nice clean copy just of the pictures and the table and whatnot, and get it out that way. What I want to start doing and haven't quite gotten to yet, is converting instead of doing the "print" button that's there now, I want to actually make each exhibit printable as a PDF.

0:36:29.6 MA: Oh, wow.

0:36:30.3 JS: Instead of hitting the "print" button, going to a new page, which is "#print" of same thing, doing a download of the PDF and printing the PDF that way. I'm still working that out, but I think that'll be nice in the long run.

0:36:46.0 MA: I think you said this in the top of the show, but you have experience as a webmaster and did training, or did you kind of figure this all out yourself?

0:36:56.2 JS: I am a computer programmer by trade. I do business software, transactional processing. So I use the web, but I had never done any webmastering at all, and so this was all new learning for me. It was really some good experience for me to learn some new technologies that I hadn't been exposed to before.

0:37:22.1 MA: But I will say this, it is a very nice looking website, so you obviously learned things.

[laughter]

0:37:28.5 MA: I think I need your help to do my website. My website, I'm kinda so so with it, it looks dated and clunky, and I just, I haven't updated it because, yeah, I'm more on Facebook and

everything else, but I said, "Well..."

0:37:40.0 JS: Yeah, it's hard to find the motivation. And honestly, what's kind of funny, you're saying that dated and clunky. There are people who would say that my website looks dated and clunky. There's a number of websites out there that I used to read regularly that I used as inspiration for my site, and since the time that I put my site up, they've either ceased to exist or they've gone through these modernization facelift things that they don't look the way they did anymore. [chuckle]

0:38:08.6 JS: You know what I mean? So now my site is starting to look a little dated, but there's a reason I set my site up the way I did. You know what I mean? And I still think it works in that sense, and so I don't really want to change it. I may have to at some point, but for now, I'm pleased with the way it is.

0:38:28.0 MA: Well, I do...

0:38:28.3 JS: And certainly, if you want any help, I'll be more than happy to help you. One of the rules of thumb that I've been doing, I really must sound like a cheap skinflint, I was talking about how I enjoy the hobby because it's inexpensive earlier, saving money on travel and all this other thing. Well, I'm gonna continue that theme here for better or worse. I've tried to do the website as inexpensively as possible.

0:38:54.8 JS: It's not completely free. I do pay for hosting. I do pay for domain name registration. But I'm using a free theme, I'm using free plugins, and so it doesn't cost as much per month as it could. And that's simply because I would rather put the money into buying another rack toy or something.

0:39:15.8 MA: Right, right, right. Well, I appreciate you don't have a lot of Flash animation and stuff like that. Sometimes it can get distracting or annoying, or...

0:39:26.8 JS: Yes.

0:39:26.9 MA: Lots of pop-ups or something. Things like that.

0:39:29.2 JS: Yeah, can you imagine Sid Jacobson's Richie Rich, "Richie Rich has a heart of gold," that little theme song. You go to the website that starts blaring over your speakers. That would really drive people crazy. No. And again, like I said, it gets even quieter still when you go from the blog page to an exhibit page. Then you're really just looking at the... then it's very distraction-free, and that is what I was aiming for. Thank you.

0:39:56.0 MA: I do have a question here, and this will get you out of the cheap thing. [chuckle] Well, I am totally cheap. So I understand. I love to find... Actually, here's what I'd like to do. I like to find something that's worth a lot of money and I spend nothing on it. For example, recently, I was at an antique show or it was actually a garage sale, same type of thing, and I saw a little Davy Jones doll and said, "Those are worth some money."

0:40:22.2 MA: And I asked the lady, "How much is this?" She goes, "A dollar." And I said, "Okay." Then I look it up and they're worth like 85 bucks, 100 bucks, depending. So it's like, yeah, that's what I like. So yes, I'm cheap. But is there something in all your years of collecting or

whatever that, "This is expensive, but I'm plopping down the money for it and I've bought it"? So what's the most valuable thing, either that you did pay a high price or maybe you didn't pay a high price, but it's the most valuable thing in your collection?

0:40:52.5 JS: Oh, definitely the spinner rack.

0:40:55.1 MA: Oh, okay.

0:40:55.6 JS: I got a very good deal on it, but it was still up and away by far, the most expensive item in the collection.

0:41:00.7 MA: Now, is that the spinner rack...

0:41:01.9 JS: And even if...

0:41:02.3 MA: That has Richie on it? Is that the one it is?

0:41:03.1 JS: Yes.

0:41:04.0 MA: Okay.

0:41:04.9 JS: This is the... This particular item, to my knowledge, it came in a four-sided, a five-sided, and a flat. My local comic book store has three of them flat, and I'm like, "Please sell me them" and they won't. But anyhow, I've got the four-sided, and it's got Archie, Superman, Spider-Man, and Richie Rich.

0:41:33.5 MA: Okay, got it.

0:41:34.4 JS: The four of them, their heads, and the Comics Code Authority logo. And so that pattern is repeated, in my case, four times, one on each side. The five-sider has it five times. And the flat one has it once.

0:41:49.0 MA: Okay.

0:41:50.1 JS: That just goes to show the power that Harvey had at the time. Richie is up there with Superman. People don't think about that.

0:42:02.9 MA: And Spider-Man.

0:42:04.6 JS: Yeah. Richie is there with Spider-Man. Richie is there with Archie. It's like, Archie, people can believe. The other two, it's like, no. He was a marketing powerhouse for years, and that was the time that I started collecting. That was when I was into it. So it was a very significant part of my life.

0:42:18.8 MA: I figured it was that one. But I wanted to ask, because the spinner rack that's like for non-Harvey collectors is always the...

0:42:26.1 JS: Hey Kids! Comics!

0:42:27.2 MA: Yeah, the Hey Kids! Comics! one, which is a cool one. And I really like that one.

0:42:30.9 JS: Very cool. Yes.

0:42:32.3 MA: I don't have any spinner rack, but it'd be nice to have. My choices are both of those. The Hey Kids! Comics! Or the one with Richie on it. But again, don't have either of those, so.

0:42:45.0 JS: Yeah, and that that exceeds even... In the comic books, the most expensive comic book I owned or, was actually from my childhood, Poor Little Rich Boy number one. My local comic book store at the time was able to get a copy of it and sold it to us at what was then a reasonable price, but the reasonable price was still such that my parents were like, "This is what you're getting for Christmas. That is it. Period. End of discussion. Don't ask for anything else." "Shut up and give me the book." That was it.

[chuckle]

0:43:15.3 JS: So I've had that my whole life and I still have it. But the spinner rack was three times the price of that.

0:43:22.5 MA: Oh wow. [chuckle]

0:43:24.5 JS: In terms of outlay. In terms of value, you know what Poor Little Rich Boy number one goes for now.

0:43:30.1 MA: Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

0:43:34.4 JS: My copy is really hard to grade because it's really, really clean, but the staples are popped on the cover.

0:43:39.2 MA: Oh wow.

0:43:39.2 JS: That detracts from the... Yeah, I know, I know. So it's like, "Well, it's kind of this, but it's kind of that." You know? It depends on who's grading it, I suppose.

0:43:48.9 MA: Yeah. I got in on it... When I started Harveyville Fun Times! It was 1990. And I just knew at that point, I'd better get all the number one issues, but they were already going up in price at that point.

0:44:00.8 JS: Yes. By '90 they definitely were, yes.

0:44:03.1 MA: And so, these sound like nothing now, so I got my Richie number one, my Little Dot number one, everything number one. \$50 or less, which was insane then I thought for myself, because I'm so cheap.

[chuckle]

0:44:20.3 MA: 'Cause I hate paying more than maybe 10 bucks for a comic book ever. Even now.

So it's like for me to plop down \$50 here, \$50 there and everything, and now people look at 'em and... And we'll talk about this in a minute. When I went down to LA with my collection, and they have Little Dot number one there and everything like that, it's like, "Oh, I'll take these," and I mentioned that I paid \$50 for my Little Dot number one, they're like, "Gulp. Really?" And it's like, "Yeah, 30 years ago."

[chuckle]

0:44:55.4 JS: Yup, yup. That's the way collectibles go. I mean they either go up in value or they don't. Definitely with the comic books, they've gone up a bit. The thing that discouraged me from really actively pursuing more of the comic books was the warehouse. The file copies. I mean at this point in time, you can get on eBay and buy complete runs of titles in like Near Mint file copy condition. If you have enough money.

0:45:23.4 JS: And so it's like, okay, where is the thrill in that? So my copies, a lot of them are Good. They've got writing on them, they've been read. Some of them are missing the centerfolds, 'cause Harvey was very fond of doing four pages of ads in the middle. You know what I mean? The kids, the first thing they would do is rip out those four pages and goodbye, there you go.

0:45:44.7 JS: I actually sat there one time and page counted every single one of my 2000 books, and made sure, "Okay, yup, this one is missing its centerfold. Damn." So my collection, yeah it's complete, but it's not worth anything, and to make it worth something just to me, again, it's not worth it. It's not worth the money to me.

0:46:03.8 MA: I'm kind of in the same boat.

0:46:04.8 JS: So that's why I really shifted to the merchandise, 'cause the merchandise...

0:46:06.8 MA: I'm kind of in the same boat. It's like when I started collecting them for reals, I told people, "VG or better, must be complete," and that was my only rule. So you know, I have quite a few that are in okay shape, but you know it's like... [chuckle]

0:46:21.6 JS: They're readable, that's good. The story is all there, great. Because one of the things that I still hope to live long enough to retire and do is index all the stories.

0:46:31.1 MA: I wanna do that too, you know.

0:46:33.8 JS: Yeah everybody wants to do that, that's why the Grand Comics Database came about, you know. That's what I'll probably do is contribute to them instead of doing it myself. I actually set up a Microsoft Access database and started doing it myself. And when I got to... I was gonna scan the books as well, and then I was like, "Wait a second, we got those 68 page giants with the the saddle bound stitching. How do you put that on a flat bed scanner?" You can't.

0:47:00.3 MA: You don't, unless you destroy the comic.

0:47:01.6 JS: And I'm like, "I'm not gonna take my \$100 Millions number one and then break the spine to flatten it out in my scanner. Sorry".

0:47:07.8 MA: Well, you just have to get a rotten coverless one or something, but then who... Where do those show up?

0:47:14.7 JS: Right, so I mean that again, I've had a number of really really great ideas over the years. The only one that stuck is the Mercheum. Everything else I've talked myself out of for one reason or another.

0:47:28.0 MA: Yeah, well, I've talked myself out of doing the index too. I did start and then Grand Comics Database came along. But we could talk offline and see if there's a way to figure it out. 'Cause there are problems I have with GCD too, but at least they did it. That's the only thing I could say about it.

0:47:47.2 MA: Let's see, so I was gonna ask you about... And I just mentioned, so let me give you... give everyone out there listening a little bit of background. So, Jonny Harvey is Leon Harvey's grandson. Leon Harvey was the brother of Alfred Harvey, who is the founder of Harvey Comics. And in recent times, Jonny Harvey realized all this, that his family's legacy and everything, so he's creating a documentary called Ghost Empire.

0:48:16.6 JS: Ghost Empire, yes!

0:48:17.9 MA: So he's travelled around the country, and so I was... I'm up here in Oregon, so I flew down to LA to be with him. I brought some of my merchandise with, which you'll see in the film. And it was a very quick shoot, I came down one night, slept, did interviews, they shot all my merchandise, and then that next night I was back on the plane up here. It was that fast. But we got it done. So I know you're in the film, so what was the New York experience like? And what did they do when they showed up?

0:48:51.9 JS: I took a day off of work. Stayed home. They came, 8, 9 o'clock in the morning or so, and they were here until about 4 in the afternoon. Most of the merchandise lives in a bedroom upstairs, so they spent a bunch of time in the bedroom upstairs shooting stuff there. And then we brought some of the merchandise downstairs and spread it out on the dining room table.

0:49:15.7 JS: And they set up their film equipment and whatnot. They had all these rigs to do pans and whatnot smoothly, and they were playing with a couple of the board games that I have. They had the board game set up on the table and they were moving the board pieces around the board, stuff like that, it was really quite fun.

0:49:36.9 JS: And then while they were doing that, I took all my dolls and I spread them out on my couch, and they did this big pan shot where they moved the camera across the couch and showed all the dolls, and that came out really good. And I think that's actually in one of the trailers that they put up online. You can see the dolls. I thought that was kinda interesting.

0:49:54.8 MA: Now, were you interviewed as well?

0:49:56.4 JS: I don't get a speaking part. They didn't interview me at all. They just shot the merchandise, unfortunately.

0:50:01.6 MA: Alright.

0:50:02.7 JS: I told them if they ever wanna come back and talk to me or shoot more stuff, they were welcome to.

0:50:08.3 MA: Well, at least they got your stuff on there, and I've seen photos of it, like I saw the group shot of you and all the filmmakers and everything, so I was just kind curious about you know how long it took and what they did and everything. Because it seemed like... Go ahead.

0:50:22.6 JS: It was surprising how long it took them to do each shot. There was multiple, multiple takes of each shot. Especially like the board game and whatnot, they wanted a very specific look and feel to the shot, and so they did it 30 or 40 times.

0:50:34.5 MA: Oh wow.

0:50:35.9 JS: They probably spent like two hours shooting that five seconds of footage of playing the board game. It was really very interesting. But whatever, if that's the way they wanna work, that's the way they wanna work.

0:50:44.3 MA: And I think they got more efficient...

0:50:47.0 JS: When they were done, they were satisfied, so that's what really counts.

0:50:50.4 MA: I think they got more efficient when they got down to LA, but they also had a very tight schedule. I don't know if they did when they were in New York, but they were shooting...

0:50:58.3 JS: I think they were pretty relaxed, actually. They had a little bit of a drive to get back down to the city in that evening. But I don't think they were feeling the pressure as much, and so I think they took the time to really get it the way they wanted it.

0:51:11.2 MA: Because on the LA one, it was me one day, and then the next day... They found Jeff Montgomery, believe it or not, and so they were interviewing him.

0:51:20.7 JS: Really? Oh wow.

0:51:22.3 MA: And then they had a day where they're going to DreamWorks to talk about the newer cartoon shows and everything, and... It seemed like they had a fourth thing set up, but those are the three I remember. I was really shocked they found Jeff because I wanted to interview him for my book, but I lost track of where he went. So I put the photo of me when...

0:51:46.0 JS: Obviously they've got connections. That's good.

0:51:48.1 MA: It's kind of a sad story in a certain way. He makes the company public and does some movies and then they kick him out, and so it's like I could see where he kinda would wanna disassociate himself a little bit from the Harvey story, but hey.

0:52:02.9 JS: Yeah, I wouldn't blame Jeff too bad. I think Jeff just, it was a question of timing. I think the market was declining for comic books in general at that point of time, and even if the Harvey family had still been running things, I think there would have been a decline in comic sales

during that time period regardless.

0:52:21.5 JS: That was the start of video games and whatnot, and so kids were spending their time and money differently already. Making movies was a really smart move 'cause kids go to movies.

0:52:38.3 MA: I forgot that... I forgot... Go ahead.

0:52:42.0 JS: No, I'm done, go.

0:52:43.6 MA: Oh. But I forgot if I mentioned it in my book, but it was also at the same time when Harvey went under his... Charlton went under, although it came back a little bit later on too, and Fawcett threw in the towel, they'd come back with Dennis The Menace and had all those books, and then they went under in the early '80s as well.

0:53:07.4 JS: Right, so, it's indicative of the marketplace, so placing the blame on Jeffery Montgomery's lap is a total extreme, I think.

0:53:13.3 MA: Yeah. Well, that was later on when they got rid of him, that was the not early '80s, that was late '90s, but, you know...

0:53:18.7 JS: That was the '90s, yeah. You're right.

[chuckle]

0:53:26.1 MA: But Montgomery's thing, at the time I thought was a big mistake, but looking back, it probably wasn't, is he put out the Richie Rich and Casper films, and then he said, "Well, this is where it's at, these films. I'm not gonna do the comic books anymore." And it's like, well, if anything, he was kind of premature. I mean, look at Marvel and DC. Now, the films are where it's at, and forget these comic books. [chuckle] It's like...

0:53:50.1 JS: I was gonna say, they're talking about the same thing. There's actual talk of stopping printing Marvel comics right now. I can't even comprehend. It's like that's where this all started. But I don't know. It's an interesting time right now, that's for sure.

0:54:09.6 MA: Now, you said you had most or all the comic books. Do you still collect the comic books too? Or you just whenever... Or, what's the deal on that?

0:54:19.4 JS: I've been, I've got all the mainline Richies, because Richie was my character, Richie was really what I was into. I've been filling in the Little Dots and Little Lottas at my local comic shows and stores because there are a lot of Richie stories in them, and again, not well-indexed. There are stories in Dot and Lotta that never appeared in any of the Richie titles.

0:54:45.1 JS: I'm not sure how it happened, 'cause Harvey was famous for re-using the stories that they had, and yet there are a number that appear only in the backs of Dot and Lotta. So I've been picking up more of those to try to finish out those collections, but no, I don't have every single Harvey comic, no.

0:55:01.1 MA: Okay. The more obscure ones are the ones that appeared in the back of Little Max

and Mutt & Jeff.

0:55:08.3 JS: Those I've got.

0:55:09.4 MA: Oh, you do have those. Okay.

0:55:11.4 JS: Yeah, I've got all those, because those were in Overstreet.

0:55:16.0 MA: Okay, that's good.

0:55:17.7 JS: Really, I rely very, very, very heavily, too heavily on the Overstreet price guide. I use it, use it as a checklist to figure out what's there, what's out there and whatnot. They at one point did index, "Okay, Little Max 127 or whatever has a Richie story in it." They actually put that right in the book and I said, "Okay," and I went out and I bought that copy.

0:55:36.2 JS: So those I actually... The one's that I'm missing, you and I are both missing some of the Astro Comics. Those are very, very hard to find all of them, and it's not even easy to determine what really was printed. I use, again, the Grand Comics Database. Grand Comics Database comes to...

0:55:51.9 MA: I believe that's all of them. I think there's 21 or 22 of them, I can't remember the exact number without looking it up.

0:55:58.8 JS: I probably got about 13 of 'em, I'm probably missing quite a few of them, unfortunately.

0:56:02.8 MA: I know I'm missing three, and every time I've bid on 'em on auction sites, I'm always outbid at the last minute because I will only pay so much for 'em. I'll be crazy if I'm gonna pay more for an Astro Comics than I did for my Little Dot number one. Gee.

[laughter]

0:56:18.6 MA: That's how I think about it. Even if it's worth more now.

0:56:22.3 JS: I agree. I totally agree. At some point, maybe. But yeah, no, I hear you. And then you and I at one point had talked about those, the baseball, the Richie Rich, Casper and Wendy National Leagues.

0:56:37.1 MA: Oh yeah. Yeah.

0:56:39.4 JS: Which leagues actually... Which teams actually got prints and which ones didn't, 'cause they didn't do the whole league. So that one, I'm not positive whether I have every team or not.

0:56:47.2 MA: I think there's six of them now. Six versions.

0:56:50.5 JS: Six of 'em?

0:56:51.8 MA: Yeah.

0:56:51.8 JS: Okay, so I may have all of them actually. But I always keep my eyes open in case something random pops up, because that's happened with the Old Timer Car. I thought I had 'em all, and all of a sudden I said, "That doesn't look right."

0:57:01.9 MA: Well, it's just like the thing...

0:57:03.9 JS: And I bought it and it turned that, "Yeah, look at that. It's a different one." So it's good to keep your eyes open, even if you think you know everything.

0:57:10.4 MA: Yeah. Well, the one that's coming up now, and you may have seen it on the Harvey page on Facebook, I mentioned three of 'em, and I have to give credit to the late, great Quinton Clem, he was the one who actually put a lot of that information in Overstreet, from Little Max and stuff like that.

0:57:30.0 MA: And then he was the one who pointed out right before he died, "You know what I found out? That there are some issues that came out in 15 cent regular editions and 25 cent giants, the exact same issue," and he pointed out that there was three of them, and he gave me a photo and I put it in the book and I figured, "Those were the three, because Quinton knows. He knows everything." But now it's up to like seven, and it's like, "Wow. How many of these did they do?"

0:57:57.6 MA: And I thought I had found them all because I... There is another website called Mike's World of DC Comics or something like that, that's great if you want to look at covers. All of the covers that came out in a particular month. Of just Harvey or you could put every title up if you want to.

0:58:15.5 JS: Okay.

0:58:16.0 MA: I'll recommend that to you to look at sometime. But, anyway, and I go...

0:58:21.3 JS: I think I have looked at it actually, when I was trying to research the... the matchbook covers.

0:58:25.5 MA: Yeah, okay.

0:58:26.5 JS: I don't know if you remember there's that... Back in the '40s, Harvey used matchbooks to advertise their comics. Now, at the time, they were doing romance comics, True Love Stories and whatnot. But I picked up a matchbook from a collector of matchbooks that was Harvey, there was like three different covers and I'm like, "Okay, well, what covers are these?" and I ended up using...

0:58:47.4 JS: Actually, no, I did use Grand Comics Database on that one, but I did have to look for a couple of sites trying to figure out, narrow down the year, the month, "Oh okay," and then figure out which ones were depicted there.

0:59:00.2 MA: Yeah. You look in those and it's like nobody talks about those 15 and 25 cent variants, even Grand Comics Database. Of course...

0:59:10.0 JS: Right, and I really...

0:59:11.6 MA: Of course, like you, they like to have photos of things and it's like...

[laughter]

0:59:14.1 JS: Right.

0:59:15.7 MA: I don't always have a photo...

0:59:19.1 JS: There's Canadian variants of some of those, some of the covers too, right? There's... there's Canadian pricing on some...

0:59:26.3 MA: Yeah, yup, and Quinton pointed that out to me, it's like the giant's usually 35 cents, and it's like, "Oh, those are Canadian printings." Originally we thought they were test markets, and then we figured out they were Canadian printings, so that's what that is.

0:59:37.9 JS: Yeah. So you gotta be careful all that kind of stuff, it's very, very tricky.

0:59:41.6 MA: And Harvey wasn't the only ones who did that, I mean it's like...

0:59:44.5 JS: No, not at all.

0:59:44.7 MA: We're finding that out. You know, doing Cracked magazine and stuff like that. It's like, "Oh, oh yeah, they did that up there." And sometimes they change text, there's one issue of Cracked, now I'm on the lookout for this, because I collect that too, is the standard version says something like, "America's funniest magazine."

1:00:05.2 MA: Well, it's Canada, so it says, "Canada's funniest magazine," or something like that on that version. It's like, it's the exact same cover, but they changed the text. I was like, "I want that one." Nobody sells this on eBay, you know, nobody has it. And it's like... [chuckle]

1:00:21.8 MA: And Harvey did similar things like that. It's like, "Oh, you know..." You were talking about those National League comics, so it's like, why did they do that, you know? Just to annoy us fans. Now, do you go into collecting original art as well, or you try to just stay with the merchandise type stuff?

1:00:41.9 JS: Original art tends to be outside my price range, I'll be honest with you. I like the original art and I would be happy to own original art, but I have not gotten into collecting it just because it tends to get pricey, and there are people who specialize in collecting original art. I actually had a Harvey original art collector contact me and say, "Hey, I've got some original art. Do you want it?"

1:01:06.2 JS: Going back to what we were talking about earlier, and the fine lines and the distinctions. That collector contacted me and said, "Hey, do you wanna put up some original art?" And I thought about it, and I very politely said, "No." I'm like, "You know, what I'm trying to do here is I'm trying to show stuff that is not otherwise documented."

1:01:25.4 JS: I'm not putting comics up because comics are well documented in the Grand Comics Database. I'm not putting original art up, because presumably for every book that exists, at some point there was original art for that book. So you can make a one-to-one list and say, "Okay, well, there you go. This is it."

1:01:47.4 JS: So it was a tough call for me, but I did have to pass on that because it's like, that's just opening up a lot of possibilities for what I perceived as little gain. It would be cool to look at, but I just didn't see it as a good fit and turned it down.

1:02:06.2 MA: Well, I do like it that you...

1:02:07.4 JS: Like I said, I have very... I have a couple of pieces, but I certainly don't have a collection of... I've been focusing more on the calendar posters, 'cause those, you know, you can sometimes get a deal on 'em.

1:02:19.8 MA: Yeah, that's what I was gonna say, I'm glad you're putting promotional items, because they're kind of one of a kind, but not so one of kind that... Like the original art.

1:02:31.6 JS: Well again, I can't see... Grand Comics Database did finally put the Tempo books up. I was very surprised they did. I didn't think they were going to. I was actually gonna put the Tempo books up. But I can't see them putting the calendar posters.

1:02:45.1 MA: Yeah, never.

1:02:46.4 JS: Never. It's not a fit. It doesn't fit, but it fits me. I'll put 'em up, as soon as I can figure out how to get them nice looking. I'll put them up.

1:02:53.7 MA: Right, right.

1:02:55.5 JS: So I'm trying to fill... I'm trying really hard to fill a niche that is not being filled otherwise. That's 100% my goal. You know, why reinvent the wheel?

1:03:05.6 MA: Right.

1:03:06.0 JS: So I'm really trying to focus on stuff that other people aren't doing. And yeah, the calendar posters, I don't see anybody else doing. It's just not a good fit.

1:03:16.6 MA: Now, if somebody wanted to contribute, if he's never seen your site, I guess you could give the actual website here and then give like little tips on how to contribute if they wanna contribute.

1:03:29.7 JS: I'm not looking for money, I'm not looking for people to send me the actual stuff. What I want is photographs and... you know, the typical side, front, back, any... any part of it that actually has printing or other information on the item. Like the rack toys, I'll go back to again. Some of the rack toys, the barcode is on the back, so I'll show the front and the back, so that the barcode is visible on the back.

1:04:00.1 JS: Some of them, the back is completely blank, to save printing costs. Well, I don't show the back because there's no information there. So basically all I want is email me the photos, and if I can read all the information off of the photo, if the photo is clear enough, then that's really all I need.

1:04:17.2 JS: I just ask people whether they want to be acknowledged by name or remain anonymous. That was one of the things that when I first was setting up and was talking to different collectors and even in different genres, it surprised me a little bit. And then, I said, "Well, no, that kind of makes sense." Some people have wonderful collections, massive collections of stuff. And they don't want anyone to know about them. They don't want their name out there.

1:04:43.0 JS: They don't wanna be acknowledged by name as having this stuff. And I said, "Well, fine. I'm the public face. I'll be the name. I'll put the stuff up there. And you, you're anonymous. That's fine." And people have taken advantage of that. I have several anonymous contributors and I'm fine with that.

1:05:00.2 MA: Yeah. Well, yeah, they don't want to catch wind of people steal it or... they don't wanna catch wind, so people steal it or something and was like, "Oh, he has that?"

[chuckle]

1:05:12.0 JS: "Oh look, I've got all this stuff." Okay. And then people come, break in and steal it, exactly. So, pictures, and then, "Do you want to be acknowledged or not?" And if I can't read all the information off of the pictures, then sometimes I'll be like, "Oh, what is the copyright on that? I can't read that copyright." There will be a little bit of follow-up with that. But that's all there is to it. It's very, very simple. I try to make it painless and I try to make it... Like I said, I respect people's privacy if they want that.

1:05:42.8 MA: Okay. And I guess there's no real resolution, but yeah, you probably wouldn't want something... you know, that's probably not a problem with today's...

1:05:51.4 JS: The better the picture, the better. Send me the best you can do, and I can scale it down. I edit every photo that goes up.

1:05:58.9 MA: Got it. And...

1:06:02.9 JS: It takes me a lot longer to put up each exhibit than I ever thought it would. I originally figured, "Oh a couple of pictures, a little table. Boom. Five minutes, whatever." No, it takes me probably two or three hours to do a typical exhibit and post, with the photo editing. That's assuming the photos are already taken. I usually take batches of photos at a time and put them on the computer and just leave them there. And then I'll edit them and post them one at a time. But yeah, it's a process.

1:06:30.6 MA: Yeah. And I will say, because you told me this before, and so this is why it takes me so long to get you anything, is you want original photos, not a photo from eBay or something like that.

1:06:42.8 JS: That is a whole intellectual property thing. There are a number of things that I would

love to post that I have seen on eBay. And it's like, "Well yeah, that's nice, but..." Sellers have not been very receptive to using their photos in other ways. They're generally very protective. And they go, "No, no, no, I'm using the photo to sell the thing. That's all." They have no interest in the item above and beyond getting rid of it.

1:07:14.5 JS: And a lot of them don't even know what they have. They're not really interested in it the way that a collector would be. It's like I more need to know who does the item actually get sold to, and then contact them and say, "Hey, by the way, I really like this item. I didn't get it, but can you send me pictures of it?" But of course, it's not gonna happen either.

1:07:34.4 JS: So yeah, no, I really wanna know that people are taking pictures of things that are in their collection, that's things that they own. And so that they can talk about it intelligently. They can read the label if need be. Because, hey, they own it. As opposed to these things that are just out there and it's like, "Yeah, I don't know what that is really."

1:07:52.8 MA: Yeah, I just wanna say that so you don't get inundated with somebody who says, "Well, here's 300 photos off of eBay of stuff I saw." It's like, "I can't use any of it." [chuckle]

1:08:03.5 JS: I appreciate that. Thank you.

1:08:07.6 MA: And again, the website is just harveymercheum.com. I forgot it off the top of my head. I just have it bookmarked. [chuckle]

1:08:15.8 JS: www.harveymercheum.com. The easier way to get to it if you don't want to try to remember how to spell "Mercheum" is harvey.toys. I bought the "dot toys" domain name. So, if you do harvey.toys, you will still get to the Mercheum website.

1:08:34.2 MA: Okay. And if somebody wants to just get a hold of you, just in general if they have questions or anything?

1:08:38.5 JS: There's a "Contact the Curator" page on the website, they can email me right from there, curator@harveymercheum.org. And that's definitely the easiest way to get a hold of me.

1:08:52.9 MA: Okay. And I guess I never asked this, but do you ever sell any of your items? Or is it all one of a kind, so you just kinda keep everything?

1:09:00.9 JS: I have a couple of duplicates. Actually, as part of a, my trying to drive more traffic to the website, a number of different toy collectors, not Harvey merchandise, but other toy collectors and myself did these little contests where we'd have people get on our sites, and leave comments and whatnot. And then we would draw, at random, one of the commenters and send them a prize bundle. And so some of my duplicate items I've contributed to prize bundles.

1:09:30.0 MA: Oh, okay.

1:09:32.1 JS: The rest of the duplicates I still have, and at some point I may sell off. But generally, it's work to sell on eBay. It is. I've done it before and I may do it again. But for now, I'm just holding onto the dups.

1:09:48.8 MA: Alright. Well, any final comments to say about Harvey or anything else before we wrap it up here?

1:09:58.2 JS: I just want to say that at some point, I really hope that we can do another show like you guys did at MoCCA in New York City back in 2008, 2006. When was that? It was a while ago.

1:10:09.1 MA: 2009 actually. 2009 actually.

[chuckle]

1:10:12.2 JS: 2009. That sounds right. Okay. I was really looking forward to meeting you there. I was planning on coming down Friday night for that gala, and I just could not make it.

1:10:21.2 MA: Oh wow.

1:10:22.3 JS: And it was a shame. I actually came two days later, I think I was [chuckle] and saw the exhibit, but by that time, you had gone home. But I was really hoping to meet up with you. And even at the time, I looked around, and I'm like, "Damn, I've got stuff that's not here. I really wish I could have contributed to this."

[chuckle]

1:10:37.4 JS: So I'm really hoping that at some point that... That's one of the things with the collection. I really don't want it to just sit here and be hidden. I want it to be shown. I did an exhibit at my local public library back in 2016, and I'm actually gonna do another one this August. This August, for the month of August, I'll be back in the library. So that's good.

1:11:06.3 JS: The Ghost Empire film, showing the stuff and letting them shoot footage of the collection, that was great. I would love to do a show like was done at MoCCA or something like that, and contribute stuff to that. Or I've consider contacting like the Strong Museum of Play out in Rochester or one of those kind of things and seeing if there'd be any interest in doing an exhibit there. Or even at a comic show, or any sort of toy collectors show, doing a little pop-up display.

1:11:40.9 JS: My wife and I collect gems and minerals, and when we go to the gem shows, right by the entrance where you come in and buy your tickets and whatnot, they typically have a little display area set up that's not for sale. It's set up like a museum. It's little display cases, where they've got a bunch of specimens on display. I was thinking it'd be kind of cool at a comic show to set up some merchandise as a little display when you come in and buy your tickets or something like that.

1:12:05.9 MA: Yeah, you mentioned Jonny Harvey and the Ghost Empire. That might be our next chance. You might be able to wrangle some sort of world premiere maybe in New York. And then, you could have a display there or something like that. And then...

1:12:18.6 JS: Oh absolutely.

1:12:19.2 MA: Maybe I could come out there too.

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1:12:22.1 JS: I would totally be open to that concept. That would be great.

1:12:24.8 MA: But I...

1:12:25.1 JS: That would be a lot of fun actually.

1:12:26.4 MA: I have no idea of his final schedule. He says he's trying to wrap it up this year. And so, probably come out sometime next year, I would think.

1:12:33.8 JS: Right. Well, he's still shopping it around, too.

1:12:35.7 MA: Yeah. Exactly. We'll see. [chuckle]

1:12:39.3 JS: Yeah, keeping my fingers crossed. I'm really looking forward to it.

1:12:42.4 JS: Alright, Jonathan...

1:12:43.8 JS: I'm gonna keep playing around and going along with my thing and doing what I can to promote the hobby.

1:12:50.1 MA: Okay.

1:12:50.1 JS: Keep the name alive.

1:12:51.2 MA: Alright. And I will definitely keep in contact with you and try to take some more photos and get them out to you too. [chuckle]

1:12:58.3 JS: Sounds good. I would appreciate it.

1:13:00.0 MA: It was very good to speak with you today, Jonathan. And thank you for being a guest on the show. Thank you for listening. And thank you again, Jonathan Sternfeld for being my special guest. Episode number 36 will be coming soon. This has been the Fun Ideas Podcast. This is Mark Arnold speaking. This episode is copyright 2019 Fun Ideas Productions. Thank you very much and have a good night.