

## AN INTERVIEW WITH PAUL HORNSCHEMEIER

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**GROTH:** *On some level you must like it.*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** That's what my therapist says, so. [*Laughs.*] But, yeah ...

**GROTH:** *You must be about the only cartoonist that can afford a therapist.*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Well, he's really cheap.

**GROTH:** *Bet you get a discount, yeah.* [*Hornschemeier laughs.*] Some sort of cartooning discount.

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Well, as far as afford, I don't know. [*Groth chuckles.*] But I'm certainly not the only cartoonist that *needs* one, that's for sure.

**GROTH:** *No no, that's true.*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** [*Laughs.*] I think it should really be mandatory with cartoonists.

**GROTH:** *Yeah, it might be something we could entice people with in our contracts* [*Hornschemeier laughs*], *offered free.*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** "We can only give you this much of a percentage, but it does come with mandatory counseling."

**GROTH:** *Yeah, yeah. Free therapy, that'd be good.*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Yeah, yeah.

**GROTH:** *We'd just hire some teenager in the office to talk to them.*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** [*Laughs.*] Yeah, yeah. So ...

**GROTH:** *I have a copy of the dummy of MOME in front of me and it's really good.*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Yeah, I flipped through the one that Eric [Reynolds] had, it was really just low-grade, ink-jet printouts, but it looked really nice.

**GROTH:** *I think it really works well, I think it's something to be very pleased with.*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Yeah, yeah. I'm excited to see the finished product. Have you guys decided on the cover? Because I think —

**GROTH:** *Well, you know, just today Jordan [Crane] sent a couple of covers, and we did finally make a decision. I it was Gabrielle Bell, it was an image blown up from her strip.*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Oh, OK. Cool.

**GROTH:** *It looked good, and has a nice, clean, iconic feel to it.*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Well, that's —

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**GROTH:** *Let me just start asking you stuff. I want to get some background first that I might compress into an introduction. You were born in Cincinnati and grew up in Georgetown, Ohio, which is a farming town?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Yes, the number one cash crop is marijuana, the number two cash crop is tobacco.

**GROTH:** [*Laughs.*] *That explains a lot right there.*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** [*Laughs.*] There you go.

**GROTH:** *When did you move from Georgetown to wherever you might have moved to?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Well, basically I lived there from about age 4 to 18, when I went to college, I moved up to Columbus, yeah. I lived a fairly boring life [*laughs*], very secluded. I was there through all of my schooling. I did go to catholic school for one month in Cincinnati, the beginning of my junior year in high school, and that was under some sort of pretense that I was seeking out better education, I think it was just because I hated everyone in my school, which is pretty universal at that age. I was basically in Georgetown until age 18 and then I never went back.

**GROTH:** *So what was your childhood like? The first comic book you were exposed to, I understand, was a Steve Ditko Spider-Man comic in your dentist's office?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Oh, yeah. Yes.

**GROTH:** *At what age would that have been?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** I'm not really sure. I think it was probably around, I'm guessing it was shortly after we had moved there, I'm guessing maybe age 5, 6, something like that. And it was kind of one of those free promotional things for All Detergent. But it was great, I still have it, and it's got basically everything you want out of a comic book. A few really great Steve Ditko stories and then, "How Spider-Man's webbing works," and all this stuff, comparing his strength to Thor and all the things you need to know. So that was the first comic book; That and *Karate Kid*, that I bought at a flea market — those were my first comics. [*Laughs.*] Probably the best and the worst of superhero comics right there. [*Laughs.*]

**GROTH:** *So did you start seeking out and reading comics at that point, or?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** To some degree, but growing up in such a rural community, there was really very little exposure. I mean, occasionally, we would be downtown and I did, once I got more into comics, when I was maybe 13 or 14, figure out where comic-book shops were and sought those out, but when I was young, no, there was really nothing. I remember my dad somehow procured a copy of *Aquaman*, I mean it really was, if I got a comic, that was very significant, it was kind of a big deal.

Also, we didn't have much money, growing up, so I had very few toys, or anything like that. My parents just sort of set us out in the yard and had us play with mud. [*Groth laughs.*] But not sticks, sticks were dangerous. [*Hornschemeier laughs.*] My parents were a little Spartan in what they allowed us to have.

**GROTH:** *I thought your parents were lawyers.*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Yes, my mother is a judge, my father is a lawyer. They actually had a practice together growing up, my mother no longer practices because she's ... I'm not sure if it's because of schedule or if she's legally not allowed to practice, there's all sorts of weird bylaws about that sort of thing.

**GROTH:** *Is she a felon?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** She is a felon, she can no longer practice [*joking*]. No, the court she was in was a municipal court, technically they had two judges, part-time, so she could still practice law. But I think currently it's more of a schedule thing. I think she could technically still practice, but there's only certain courts you can practice in if you're a judge, anyway.

**GROTH:** *She's currently a judge though?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Yes.

**GROTH:** *Huh. Well, with two parents being lawyers, why didn't you have any money?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Because they were lawyers in Georgetown, Ohio, which is a shocker, but actually there isn't much money in Georgetown, Ohio. [*Groth laughs.*] It's, well the thing is,

particularly Georgetown, and Brown County specifically, where Georgetown is the county seat, I don't think it's *the* most socio-economically depressed area of Ohio, but I think it was second or third. It's really not an affluent area at all.

**GROTH:** *Why did your parents move there?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Initially, I have talked about this and gained more detail and I've gotten older, I still don't think I necessarily understand how this made any sense, but my mother was a referee, which is not sports, but a legal referee, a quasi-judge. And I think, I'm not sure, my father was an assistant prosecutor in Claremont County, which is fairly close by, and they just decided to pack us up and move and set up this law practice. I think my parents were kind of failed hippies to some degree, which is kind of a "Hey man, let's do it," so they moved out there, set up the practice.

And my mother, the judge she was refereeing for, Judge [Nye?] passed away fairly soon thereafter, which is a little fishy when you think about it. And then she ran for election and very fortunately, the good people of Brown County voted her in. So she was a judge thereafter.

As far as money, my parents are just two of the most, selfless, nice people you could ever hope to meet, and they just, honestly when it comes down to it, my father particularly, has never charged anyone what he ought to. Which is good.

**GROTH:** *Geez, I should give him a call.*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** [*Laughs.*] Yes, exactly. So if you ever need really good, nice, free legal advice [*laughs*].

**GROTH:** *Your mother is not one of those liberal activist judges, is she?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Oh yes, she is. No, that's the thing. My parents are not exactly *the* most liberal people I've ever met, but I mean, you know. Yeah, I'm sure that I can at least say that I don't think that President Bush would get along very well with my family. First off, my father would probably chastise him before he ever even reached the front door, but ... My parents are no great fans of the current administration. That's because they have fully functioning frontal lobes. [*Laughs.*] But I'm afraid she might fall into the category.

**GROTH:** *Did you start drawing as a kid, when you were little?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Oh, yeah, the first memories I have of drawing were probably around, we moved to Georgetown around when I was 4, and I just remember my mother handing me a kind of garbage bag — or no, not a garbage bag — a grocery bag kind of flipped inside out, and a box of crayons, and just kind of, "Here, draw while we're — " they were just kind of unpacking boxes and things like that.

And I mean, I'm sure I drew before that, but I really don't have memories of it. But yeah, the first things I remember drawing were Batman and Robin, and I think those probably caused by, I mean, because the thing is I don't think I'd really seen Batman and Robin comics at that point, but I think I really liked the television show [*laughs*], which obviously must have been reruns.

**GROTH:** *Yeah, I was going to say you must have watched that in reruns.*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** But I remember a babysitter we had, who I was just horribly attracted to, even at that age, which was probably the precursor to many bad relationships, she would watch that show with us, and later led to me coveting a Batman and Robin coloring book which I stole away in the middle of the night in my Winnie-the-Pooh sleeper and tried to steal from a store, but it just never really worked out, because I realized I would get caught and be in prison for the rest of my life. Because they usually do that with 6 year olds, you know.

**GROTH:** *Get a lot of work done there, though.*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Yeah, yeah. [*Laughs.*] That's true, actually.

**GROTH:** *So you started drawing. When did drawing become a passion for you?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** I think it's something I realized when I was maybe doing a little better than let's say, a few other kids or something like that, pretty early on. I remember in first grade — the main thing that I realized was it was something that I could do that I could give to people and then they would then like me, which, ultimately, there's the drive for a kid to do anything, right? [*Laughs.*] But I would draw little valentines for girls; At least they acted like they liked it. [*Groth laughs.*] As far as it being something that I was doing in earnest, it was probably more like, third grade or fourth grade or something like that, I was starting to get more into creating more my own things.

**GROTH:** *And did the interest in drawing somehow, in some way, segue into an interest in telling stories through drawing?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** I think I always — It's really interesting, because I have a lot of my earliest books, and that was something I was actually doing from a very early age, making books, like *Inspector Gadget*, and ... you know, and all these characters, and then eventually making up my own characters probably by the age of 8 or 9.

It's really interesting if you look at the books, I just went through one of them when I was at my parents' house, just a few weeks ago. It's just amazing, because it starts off — and, you know, they're fairly decent drawings for somebody at that age and then it just completely degrades to just ciphers and symbols. I actually can still understand the story because I wrote it, but it's so obvious that the only thing that was important to me was getting to the end of the story, like I just wanted to tell the story. The drawings just fell away to nothing, and there were just these completely abstract symbols for things.

So I think the storytelling, probably, really, got a hold of me pretty early, but I don't know when I decided "Oh, yeah, I should actually work on drawing better than some sort of Garfield reject."

**GROTH:** *So what kind of comics did you read ultimately through high school, or what comics were you exposed to?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** The only thing I had exposure to because of the shops I did finally manage to get to was mainstream comics. So I was reading all the sort of trite crap that is unfortunately still available today, I mean all the Image guys. I mean, of course, actually one of things that was exciting for me was when Image Comics was created, because I was kind just starting to learn about the industry, because I was like, "Oh," well, the industry as I, through my my mainstream glasses, was able to see it. And then, I was kind of realizing, "Well, these stories that I'm telling — " because my stories were getting less and less having to do anything with the superhero, I mean, it was some guy sitting in his bedroom being depressed or something like that — realizing there was just absolutely no place for that.

And I started to get some hint that people were doing crazy stuff like actually publishing their own stuff. I'm trying to remember, it was like [*Superior 7, or Supreme 7?*], it was like this comic book self-published in Cincinnati, and I still have it somewhere, but it was the first thing I found that was actually — you know, it was just printed on newsprint, with maybe like a full-color glossy cover, or something like that. And kind of realizing, "Oh, my God, people are doing this on their own, I guess I can make my own comics to some degree," but as I went on and was looking at what was happening with Image, and what was happening with the mainstream, I was like, "You know what, there's no place for me," and I just quite completely and stopped doing comics.

**GROTH:** *Huh. Approximately when was that?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** That was probably the last year of high school.

**GROTH:** *So somewhere around '94, '95?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Probably about '95, somewhere in there, yeah.

**GROTH:** *So how did you avoid being aware of alternative comics, like Chester Brown...?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** It required absolutely no avoiding at all [*laughs*]. I mean, I had seen *Keep on Truckin'* or something like that, and was aware, "OK, yeah, Robert Crumb does porn," and that was about it. The only awareness I had of alternative comics was, oh yeah, those are the dirty comics. And that's the other thing, I grew up Roman Catholic. So is as much as a breast popped out anywhere in my house, people would run screaming. It was a fairly sexually repressed kind of atmosphere. So I mean, to me, that was just "OK, that's that weird, creepy stuff, and I'll just read this good wholesome people with large breasts and muscles beating the shit out of each other."

**GROTH:** *Now, you went to Ohio State University to try and get a degree in philosophy. Did you succeed in getting that degree?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Yes, I did.

**GROTH:** *Wow.*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** I'm the proud owner of a philosophy degree [*laughs*].

**GROTH:** *I understand that when you were at the university, you had an epiphany when you read *Ghost World*, is that right?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Yes. I had started drawing just stuff, and I think I'd maybe taken an art class or two, before I read *Ghost World*, so I was slowly getting back into actual drawing.

**GROTH:** *At Ohio State?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** At Ohio State, right, I think I was taking a figure-drawing class or something like that. But the girl I was dating at the time for a Christmas present gave me *Ghost World* and she was like, "Oh, yeah, I've read a lot of this guy's stuff, I think you would like it."

And I think she just thought I would like the story, because I was kind of ... I was still writing stories from time to time, I was doing a lot more actual prose writing, and things like that. But yeah, I read it and I remember I was just sitting by myself in my apartment, my little crappy basement apartment, and reading this thing through and "Wow, I can't even believe this exists."

**GROTH:** *It was a revelation?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Oh, yeah, absolutely. I mean, I'd just never seen anything even somewhat close to that, so the next thing I did was automatically seek out everything I could by Dan Clowes; That kind of segued to me trying to, once I started figuring out, "Hey, there's this Fantagraphics company that seems to be doing a few other books like this," and started checking those out, and found out about *Drawn & Quarterly* and things like that. And then shortly thereafter I actually got a job at a comic shop, so I was able to — one thing was, they had a stack of indy in the adult comics section, which is where all the *Bondage Fairies* sort of other fine publications ...

**GROTH:** *Which you studied assiduously ...*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Oh, absolutely. I spent hours looking at those. No, but it's shoved in there where all these R. Crumb comics, and all this great stuff that was just crammed in there because it was not superhero comics. So, it was basically, yeah, just sophomore or junior year of college that I really started going out and seeking out these things. That was kind of the revelation of "Wow, hey."

**GROTH:** *So that opened your eyes to the art of cartooning really, would you say?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Right, and that was the thing. I grew up reading Edward Gorey books, my mom was really into Edward Gorey stuff, and *The New Yorker* cartoons, we had collections of those and things like that. So cartooning was always something, and we always beat each other up to get the Sunday funnies and stuff like that. So, cartooning was always something that was really this fun thing that we all really liked, but beyond that, I just really had no exposure to—OK, maybe taking these people like Charles Schulz and people like that, which are obviously great artists, and then moving it over into a medium of actual serious expression, things like *Ghost World* and stuff like that.

**GROTH:** *Were your parents sort of artistically minded?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Not really, I mean it's really odd, my mother is, she taught math in a prison at some point. My family is, for the most part, more I would say more analytical than artistic, although my older sister and I, my older sister who is now a master physicist, she would draw, and I would say she was just as good if not quite a bit better than I was, she just stopped doing it at some point. But my father actually did do some drawings with me when I was really young, and I think he had some ability, he just also stopped using it. That was something my grandfather said to me at one point, that I will never forget. He said, he was talking about one of my cousins, and said, "You know, he had the same thing that you have, and he just stopped, and you can't stop."

So, you know. When your grandfather said that to you, well, you knew you just had to keep going. So that was my lot in life.

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**GROTH:** *Now, at Ohio State, you drew a comic called Squares the university paper, The Lantern?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Right.

**GROTH:** *What year were you in?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** That was junior year in college.

**GROTH:** *Was that your first real attempt to draw something to get it published?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Yeah, well, yeah. Basically it was just that I had seen these other comics in *The Lantern*, they were all just, with the exception of a couple comics that were in there, they were just all college comics, they were absolutely horrible. I remember sitting in this political science class or something and just looking at these comics and getting so angry, like "Goddamnit, I could do better than that! All right, I'm going to go home and do better than that." So I went home and drew up a strip. [*Laughs.*] And that was basically it. And I sent it in and somebody liked it I guess. It was mainly out of anger.

**GROTH:** *Wan you tell me what Squares was about?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** It was pretty horrible, it was basically about a few college students. Well, actually, no, it never addressed if they were in college. That was a major thing, I didn't want any references to OSU, I didn't want anything that had anything to do with the school or current events or anything, it was basically just some kids, you know, kind of trying to—I think the first arc was them going on some kind of road trip and they picked up a hitchhiker, hit some deer. I don't really remember, it was really kind of pointless, it was *Seinfeld* except horribly written and very boring. [*Laughs.*] Lots of crosshatching.

**GROTH:** *You stopped drawing Squares and, I think basically you started self-publishing the comic Sequential.*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Well, the plan was, “OK, I’m doing these cartoons,” and then I actually took a class, we were making a lot of Xerox books, and I was like, “Great, I can take these cartoons and kind of move them over into a Xerox book.” But I decided to do that, I’d really rather do full-page things, like things that were really attuned to that medium, so I started doing these one-page gag strips, for lack of a better term, and those were published in *The Lantern*. Basically I talked with the graphics editor and said, “Hey, instead of me doing a daily cartoon, how about I do this kind of large thing twice a week,” which of course immediately angered all the rest of the cartoonists in the paper, but ... So then, once I had done enough of those whole-page things, I collected those and that was *Sequential* #1. *Sequential* #1 actually still had a fair amount of *Squares* in it. *Sequential* #1 and #2, I think maybe even #3 had some *Squares* in it. Those were fortunately phased out rather quickly.

**GROTH:** *So let me see, just getting a chronology. So you actually graduated with a degree in philosophy?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Yes. I haven’t looked at my degree in a long time, I think it might say with some sort of emphasis in science or physics or something like that. That’s what I studied, yeah.

**GROTH:** *Did that area of study prove useful to you, did you ...*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** There’s definitely a lot of things — I mean, basically, when I was studying philosophy, it was really just these are the things that I’m thinking about all the time and that’s what I’m interested in, so that’s what I’m going to study. I remember having that argument with my guidance counselor, because I remember saying, “Well, I want to do some kind of art” and he was like, “Wait, but if you’re going to do art, you need to study art.”

And I was like, “No, that’s stupid. That’s just something that I need to learn on my own if I’m going to learn it, so I’m just going to study philosophy.”

[Laughs.] Which, you know, he was probably right, but yeah.

**GROTH:** *It seems to me that you had a pretty early occupation with formal aspects of comics.*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Yeah, definitely.

**GROTH:** *Did your studying philosophy have anything to do with that, do you think, or where did that come from?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** I don’t know, I’m not really sure, I think I just always was...

**GROTH:** *I’m thinking of the analytical aspects of philosophy.*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** I definitely think that from a very early age, I had this tendency to want to tear things apart, and mainly just do things that completely made sense as a whole, and I’ve known people who said, oh I’m some kind of formalist or something, and to me, it’s just, “Well, no, I just try to do cartoons where everything in it makes sense as a conceptual whole.” Which ultimately I think would mean occasionally not even doing comics, or doing the comics printed on a cube or something like that, but I’m a little bit too lazy to do that, I guess.

So I think mainly the interest in that was just taking these things and seeing like OK, you know what this thing is about. One cartoon I did was, “Well, this was going to be about pornography, I should do it all in the folds of some disgusting pin-up girl,” or something. You know, to me, honestly when I started off, I just had no clue what I was doing, so it was just, “OK, well, let’s make this make as much sense for me as it can,” and that was about it. It wasn’t really any over-arching goal.

**GROTH:** *Sequential appeared between '99 and 2002; who were the cartoonists you were looking at ...*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Really, initially, it was just Dan Clowes, he was the only person that I had much exposure to because there was one record store that carried *Eightball*, and that was one reason I was able to get a hold of his stuff. I think ...

**GROTH:** *It certainly seems like Chris Ware might have had an influence at some point.*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** You know, that's the funny thing, I've been compared to Chris a million times over, and I think the first time I saw him ... The thing is, I read about the existence of Chris Ware in this book that I bought because it has an interview with Dan Clowes in it, *Dangerous Drawings*, I think was the name of it? Research Books? I think. It's got all these people in it. Anyway, I found out about Chris, and I think that was probably, oh God, I don't know, I know I was on at least *Sequential* #4 or #5 or something like that. So I think that the really weird experimental stuff that I did I'd already done before I saw one of his books. I did special order one of his books while I was still living in Columbus and that was the first one I got, I think the next few I got I actually got here in Chicago.

I came up here for a trip just to visit Quimby's [bookstore], because I was like "Oh, this guy designed his store," which is what I thought at the time. So I came up here and checked that out, and I remember giving copies of the first few *Sequentials* to Quimby's, which, when *Forlorn Funnies* came out, I went and bought those copies, because they were still there [laughs]. So I think it was Dan Clowes, and it was just kind of whoever. I mean, Robert Crumb was certainly an influence, but it was just whatever I could get my hands on. I mean, certainly eventually Chris Ware, Dave Cooper, just whoever leaped in through the cracks of a pathetic setup. Actually, there's another store in Columbus that I started going to, Monkey's Retreat, they're just sort of these old guys you would expect to see working in a head shop or something like that, in fact, the place smells like a head shop. But they had a lot of really great stuff, like all the older *Zap* comics and all this kind of stuff so that was the point that I was able to pick up some decent stuff. I think I started reading like Chester Brown and stuff like that.

I would definitely say that Dan Clowes was the biggest influence that I had, at that point, anyway.

**GROTH:** *Sequential seems like a real training ground where you were experimenting with all kinds of things, including eventually color, much more sophisticated design and production values. How did you evolve to be so acutely aware of those aspects of production?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** I think, like I said, it was just trying to bring everything into consideration. I mean, when I was first starting off, obviously everything was so unknown to me that there was a lot of stuff that I wasn't thinking about. And I think that's the way — if you listen to a lot of bands, they're going to start off putting down the tracks, and then eventually they'll start thinking about all the production, and then even branch out to, "OK, how is this thing packaged together when it's printed."

So I think that was basically it when I first started off, I mean, it was "How do I get this [poled?], how do I get from point A to point B, how should the layout reflect how I'm getting to point A, to point B, then what kind of pacing does this have, what kind of paper is it going on ..." Starting to think about all the things that were affecting how the reader absorbed the material I was putting out in front of them. OK, how is this thing printed, is it printed on newsprint, is it printed big, is it tiny, you know, what does that do to the story, how does that ... you know.

**GROTH:** *Right, right, seeing the object as a whole.*



**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Right, just seeing it as part of the entire experience. That was another thing because that was a leap too, moving from these single-page little strips I was doing to “OK, now I’m going to do a 10-page story,” and really starting to realize I need to stop — which I’ve tried to do as much as possible — designing in the unit of the page and start making it about the spread; and how the reader is moving from one page to the next; and what having set panel at the last panel on the right-hand side of the spread; and then having that one beat where they turn the page, what does that do, and just thinking about the entire reading experience, and exactly how everything is going to flow, which everybody reads differently. Ultimately, when it comes down to it, I’m designing the books for how I read, which is ridiculous because [*laughs*] I think I read like a lobotomized two year old [*Groth laughs*].

**GROTH:** *Yeah, but who else can you design them for?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** That’s true. [*Laughs.*]

**GROTH:** *In terms of the content of your stories, your major preoccupations seem to be with familial relationships.*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** I only realized that, it was pretty recently that I realized that, so [*laughs*].

**GROTH:** *Is that right?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Yeah. I don’t know, I don’t know what that’s about [*laughs*]. But it’s definitely true. I think that’s essentially when I was growing up, that was really the group that I hung out with, I mean I hung out with my two sisters and my parents most of the time, I didn’t really have as many friends, because, there was a lot of reasons, I was a total dork, but we just really, to some degree, didn’t fit into to Georgetown all that well, because where I came from a lot of people had the hick accent, [*in hick accent*] “talked like that,” you know. [*Laughter.*]

**GROTH:** *Why don’t you talk like that?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** I certainly have to some degree, particularly when I get really tired, there’s somewhat of an accent. But my parents were from downtown Cincinnati and people don’t really have the same accent there, so I don’t know. And my parents are strong proponents for proper speech, and there’s no way they would have stood for that if we did have a drawl or something like that. So I don’t know, yeah, I think language and various other things always — I mean, people would actually always ask me to pronounce words because they thought it was hilarious, and things like that really kept us apart and kept us in this cluster. I think it’s like, if you go to school and you meet one of these freaks, you kind of bond and become really good friends. Well, the other freaks happened to be my sisters, so we actually bonded pretty well together.

I think that’s not even so much necessarily familial relations, although that’s obviously one major concern, it’s just the kind of private [*hapless?*] lives of people.

**GROTH:** *There’s an interior quality to your best and most recent work.*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Right, and I think what has always been the most interesting to me is that there’s this exterior and reality and then the interior reality of what’s going on inside people’s houses and inside their minds ...

**GROTH:** *Mother, Come Home is currently your most sustained and most mature piece of work. Now I assume that it’s not autobiographical.*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** No, not entirely.

**GROTH:** *Elements of it, I suppose.*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** There are definitely elements, as I think, probably with any story there’s elements of autobiography and more overt biography about my father and his father.

**GROTH:** *You originally published it in three issue before collecting it into a graphic novel. Did you have the entire book planned out or did you work issue by issue?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** I essentially wrote it in chapters, but I did have, and this is basically this is the way I write everything, there's the essential points... One of the first things written was the ending and then various events leading up to the ending. I think that I tend to write that way, this is where this is going to get to, and then this is up to you, here's a few set points that happen along the way. It's kind of weird, the stories just kind of write themselves: "OK, I've got this, and I've got this, and oh ..."

And I find myself often saying, "Oh, obviously this is what happens in between," which is not obvious that that's what happens in between, I'm making it up. But it's whatever always feels right in between those two points to me. And it's often if the characters, if I develop them the right way in my mind, then they just get themselves to the next point anyways.

**GROTH:** *You actually wrote the ending first?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** There were basically a few key images that I had. I do remember having the ending very, very early on. Actually, I just recently found the original notes that I had written in a parking lot. On some Micro Center receipt or something. Yeah, the story was actually initially quite different, I think I've sort of broken into another story I'll do later, but yeah, the ending was one the major ... The major thing that was there was the death of the mother and the father being very isolated and alone. And that's the initial image of this boy in a lion mask with a red cape walking across a snowy horizon, and comprised this camera zooming into a house and up in some attic space with a father sitting on a bed alone. So that was, I don't know, everything about the story was encapsulated in that one picture.

**GROTH:** *The pacing was leisurely, unhurried...*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Yeah, as far as the pacing, I don't know, that's what I try to do with everything, I just try to make it as close to real life as possible, what feels right as far as what feels right as far — "OK, what would this person actually say next?" and how quickly would they move to this next part.

**GROTH:** *Do you consider this to be the story of the child or the father? Or both equally?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** I would certainly say both. To me, it's this strange letter from the boy to the father, more than anything. This is me, now, looking back at the things that happened. Trying to take a look at, "I kind of understand where you were at that point now, I certainly don't have any real judgment on you for that."

More than anything, it's really the story of the father, because the child is just this ghost drifting through, trying to affect things, but ultimately, because he's seven years old, not being able to grab a hold of anything and really affect it. In a way, his role is the narrator looking back is very accurate in that he really thinks he's doing things like rescuing his father from the mental hospital when of course, his father has just signed himself out, and I think that's how things are through the whole story.

**GROTH:** *Was it difficult to depict the story through the eyes of a seven year old?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Not really; honestly, I think I perpetually see the world in simpleton terms. [Groth laughs.] It is a strange thing. You know, I just routinely look at myself in the mirror and be like, oh, OK, yeah.

**GROTH:** *What I thought what was most effective was that you narrated the seven year old from an adult point of view, remembering what it was like to be a seven year old.*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Right, and I think that's just unfortunately how I think often. [Laughs.]

**GROTH:** *Well, then it worked out beautifully.*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Wasn't that much of a stretch. People will be greatly disappointed when every one of my books is written that way. [laughter]

**GROTH:** *When I read it the first time, which was, I don't know, maybe a year ago or so, I didn't realize what was coming, and I was somewhat startled when I realized what was about to happen at the end. A feeling of dread came over me. In a way, it was pretty audacious of you to have that grim, almost nihilistic an ending. Was the rationale for that simply that the father just couldn't handle the suffering, the emotional stress he felt compelled to ...*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Right. I think what I was trying to get at there is that sometimes people really are just lost and that sometimes they are not going to come back. I think it was certainly a little bit fictionalized as far as the way I think it might more normally happen, in that the father is a little bit more cognizant of his departure from reality. But ultimately, it's about these events that have taken place, he's ... And it's not just that there was grief and the mother died, but obviously there's a very active role he took in some of the things that happened there, but I don't want to give away anything in the book for people that haven't read it. This certainly wasn't anything about me saying, "Life is horrible and everyone should just go off themselves," but ultimately saying that when somebody is basically gone to us already, physical death doesn't really mean much. That was simply the case with the father. For me it seemed in that story, he's already gone and Thomas doesn't have a father anyway. That was obviously one of the difficulties he was struggling with.

**GROTH:** *In the story in this volume of MOME, you're depicting a woman who's also struggling.*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Yes, different struggles, but everybody struggles.

**GROTH:** *So struggling, maybe struggling with inner demons would be a leitmotif...*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Right, in fact to get back to the familial thing, one of the major things, there're sort of two ends to it. The main character, Amy [Breese?] has grown up in a single parent family, her mother is really the only parent that she has. She's struggling with her relationship with her mother in that, her mother is just a clerk at a retail store, and that's all she's ever been doing through the entirety of Amy's life. And Amy's finding herself in the same loop, just working at some place, punching in 9 to 5, or in today's world, 8:30 to 5:30, and really disgusted by that, and trying to rebel against that, but doesn't really know how to, because she doesn't have any paradigm otherwise. So there's that, and then simultaneously, she's trying to figure out what's going on with her romantic life in that every person that she seems to get with there's absolutely at most a sexual connection and that's it, and the only person she has any sort of real, deeper connection with lives half the country away. It's more struggles. But she does have sex at least once in the book, that's already a vast improvement over the excitement of my previous books. [Groth laughs.]

**GROTH:** *Progress.*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** With an ice cream vendor, at that.

**GROTH:** *How many chapters will this story be?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** I think originally it was going to be six, and here you go, fast-breaking news, I think it's probably going to have to be more like eight, because as I've been drafting the story — it just felt like, the problem is it could be six chapters, but I'm doing it in 12-page increments, so I think doing it in that short a span may not work, because I've can't get too much done between that and where she needs to be at the end. There's me, I already know what the ending is. [Laughs.]

**GROTH:** *Do you?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Yeah.

**GROTH:** *Do you have the whole story basically outlined?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** All of the key points, yeah. When I script stuff, it's me writing down scenes, like I'll write down a scene, I put in a file folder, and I'll move on to whatever I'm working on and there will be some other thing, or there will be some piece of dialogue or some revelation that the character has or whatever, and then once it comes to start mapping all this stuff out, I'll start moving the pieces of paper around and start to connect them. "This needs to go between here and here."

**GROTH:** *Do you allow room for spontaneous creative inspiration while you're putting the story together?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Usually the technique that I've found that works the best is taking all these old scraps of paper and basically I just type them into to a word processor document, then I'll start to write stuff in between scenes, I'll start tacking stuff into scenes I've already written, and starting to flesh it out, and then I'll actually end up with a pretty full script. But that's going to go through three, four revisions, and even once I've actually got the script, I'll start going, well, that doesn't work as one page, that needs to be two, the pacing is all wrong, so I'll start hacking stuff up that way. Usually, once it gets to the finished script it's fairly finalized but it would be completely stupid of me to not change at all. And often there's something that you'll type that feels right, and then you go to put in a panel, and it's just "No, this is way too verbose," or "This needs to be split over two panels," or whatever, it's something you have to be organic about, or you're not going to be honest with the comic at all.

**GROTH:** *You have a slightly elliptical narrative technique, where things are implied more than they're stated. Actions almost speak louder than words.. Were you influenced by anything in particular, or did you just come upon that as your natural way of ...*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Right. I don't know, I think I've been realizing more and more that that was actually really heavily influenced by Edward Gorey, because he really does that in his books a lot. I've just been reading all the books that I have of his. I am actually reading some interviews with him and realizing "Huh, this was just something that was massively important to him," that he said was influenced more by Japanese sort of storytelling. To me, what was interesting was not showing what you didn't show kind of speaking volumes more than ... Because most of life is just interpretation and assumption and extrapolation from things where we don't necessarily know what was going on. I think that's always been something that's been more intriguing to me and a natural way to tell a story, because you don't walk into a room and people are like, "Oh, well, this is what is happening with my life."

And you say, "Ah, well, that makes me angry that you say that," and you know, *[laughs]* you get one facial expression, and then the person reaches for their glass and their hand shakes a little bit, and then you have *[?]* because you had Mexican, but they don't know that, they think you're mad. *[Laughs.]* That's how things work, I guess. That's always seemed like the best way to tell things for me. And it keeps it fun for me writing it.

**GROTH:** *Well, now you've been doing comics for, I don't know, five, six, seven years now.*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** About six or seven I guess.

**GROTH:** *Are you making a living doing comics?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** It's kind of strange, I'm making a living doing comics and comics-related things, but I'm doing some coloring for Dark Horse and Marvel and DC and all these big companies. But yeah, for the most part, my income comes from comics and selling original art.

**GROTH:** *And you juggle commercial work with your more personal work ?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Right. Occasionally art commissions and advertising, which is, you know, real soul-sucking stuff. Some sort of artsy stuff is what is usually paying the bills.

**GROTH:** *Do you find that you can put yourself on autopilot when you color?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Oh yeah, I mean the coloring stuff is great, that's like doing masonry or something, just building the stuff. It's really just filling in shapes. I mean, as far as actually selecting a color palette, that's the fun part and that I certainly spend a fair amount of time on, but once you've selected a color palette, most comics don't change scenes every three panels, so you're reusing the same rooms and things like that. Well, I don't know, like most mainstream colors, maybe you do want to change color schemes every page to justify your salary but I'm fairly boring and stagnant when it comes to color palettes. So yeah, for the most part, it's autopilot once you get past a certain point.

**GROTH:** *I'm curious as to how you view your generation of cartoonists as distinct from previous ones, or if you even do.*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** I'm not sure.

**GROTH:** *What cartoonists in your peer group do you have the most kinship to?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Well, direct kinship is obviously Jeff Brown, I hang out with him all the time, probably. As far as people's work I just absolutely love, I think John Pham is one of the most genius people working in comics today. Unfortunately, yeah, it's going to sound like I'm trying to sell *MOME*.

**GROTH:** [Laughs.] *Right.*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Basically most of the people in *MOME*. Jeff obviously is a huge influence on me because we are constantly trying to kick each other's ass as far as, "You need to concentrate on this," "Well, what about this?"

I feel that most of the people I'm friends with, we all have this sort of, I don't know what it is exactly, it's this need to push comics forward somehow. We're all doing in very different ways, but feeling like "OK, we know what's already been done, let's really try to do something a little bit different," but at the same time, really incorporating a lot of the things that have come before.

**GROTH:** *You think you're conscious of trying to do something fresh and —*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** I think so. I think at the same time we're all trying to figure out, "How do we really make this the most honest means of personal expression that we can?"

I do think the one thing that I've certainly noticed is pulling, and I think actually it was either John Pham or Sammy Harkham that was talking about this, really pulling influences from just everywhere; from film; from music; obviously other cartoonists, but modern illustrators, painters, things like that. Me and Jeff, for instance, I know he's more influenced by German Expressionism and things like that. I find myself really influenced by British animation from the '60s and stuff like that, so it's all over the place.

**GROTH:** *So what were your influences, outside of comics?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** I'm really into old animation, not really super old animation, but a lot of the animation that was happening, the '60s, '70s, stuff like that.

**GROTH:** *God, what would that be? [Ralph] Bakshi?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Well, yeah, to some degree.

**GROTH:** *Sixties and '70s.*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Well, some of the stuff is even later than that. A lot of the stuff that Jay Ward worked on, like Rocky and Bullwinkle. Rocky and Bullwinkle just, oh my God, half the stuff I draw is either a muppet or Rocky and Bullwinkle rip off.

**GROTH:** *Well, Jay Ward was great.*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Oh yeah, absolutely. Actually, something I've been realizing more and more had a huge influence on me was a lot of stuff that [Jules] Rankin and [Arthur] Bass [Jr.] did, sort of the weird Claymation stuff, like *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer* and stuff like that. But one thing that just absolutely destroyed my mind at a young age was *The Yellow Submarine* animation.

**GROTH:** [Laughs.] *Yeah.*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** I don't know why they aired that thing. It aired several times, too, and we didn't have cable, but we would go to our grandmother's house, and I remember that thing being on a couple times and it did not do good things to my head. Yeah, I think that's something that's affected me.

**GROTH:** *Do you read much fiction?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Oh, yeah, not as much as I should, for sure.

**GROTH:** *What do you like there?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** I really like a lot of the stuff that Jonathan Lethem has been doing. I don't know if I'm pronouncing his last name correctly.

**GROTH:** *You know, I just heard it on NPR and he pronounced it "Lee-them."*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Is it Lee-tham? OK. That's the way one of my friends was pronouncing it, so I guess ... But Jonathan Letham. My favorite author is Kurt Vonnegut, I unfortunately have not read every single thing he's written, I'm in the process of doing that.

**GROTH:** *Right.* Welcome to the Monkey House.

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** I haven't read that one. That's one of the next ones to read. I just got finished with, I can only think of the alternate title, *Goodbye Blue Monday*. What's the real title, *Breakfast of Champions*. I really like his stuff. It's all over the place. There's a lot of authors I'm sure most people like. Actually, somebody who is absolutely amazing is Kelly Link, probably the person closest to my sensibilities as far as writing and leaving things out ...

**GROTH:** *Kelly Link?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Kelly Link. She has a book out, it's a collection of short stories, *Stranger Things Happen*, which absolutely everyone should go buy. I have, at this point, bought about five copies for friends. It's... oh my God, yeah, I just love her writing. I was fortunate enough to meet her recently at one of the book expos and she's also a very nice person. But I would say that her and Kurt Vonnegut are my two absolute favorite authors. Lethem I like, but occasionally he's not weird enough. [Laughs.]

**GROTH:** *Are you pretty optimistic about the future of cartooning, the future of your own work?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** If we take that in the void of what's going on in the world, sure.

[Laughs.] Because am I optimistic in general? No. But, I would certainly say that provided we're all still here. It certainly seems like comics particularly in North America are really experiencing a decent amount of boom time. It certainly seems like things are being better received by the press, there is a little bit less mention of superheroes and the "Zap, pow, boom" kind of crap when people write about more literary comics. I'm definitely pretty optimistic about it.

I'm hoping that some of the publishing houses that have made attempts to set up graphic novels do so with people who actually know stuff about them, because — clearly, Pantheon is doing quite well. But you got things like the Doubleday atrocity. I'm just scared about that kind

of thing, maybe because I feel like it causes publishers to shy away from making the effort when I think they certainly should be making the effort.

I do feel like things are being better received; it's, not anything against Chris Ware, but he thinks everyone hates us cartoonists; I really don't. When I tell people that I'm a cartoonist, that's actually pretty warmly received by pretty much everybody. There's maybe a negative stigma to being a comic fan to some degree after you explain what kind of stuff you're into, but I really feel like a lot of that stuff is starting to fall by the wayside. I think that's one thing that's good about the more recent crop you have coming through now, these are people, just everyday people that I don't think anybody could call any of us more freakish than the next person. It seems like there's a more diversified ... I mean, it's not as ghettoized as it used to be, I think, and that's starting to be true of the talent pool as well, these are people that aren't necessarily like "Oh, we're crazy counterculture types," or something like that. Most of us have day jobs.

It's just like buying a CD, I would go into a Virgin megastore and there's the CDs, there's the DVDs, and there's the entire floor of comics.

**GROTH:** *Yeah, yeah, they're becoming an unembarrassing part of popular culture.*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** It was funny, because I remember telling someone in college, "What I want is —" I just wanted this right from the beginning — "what I want is for somebody that looks like my dad to sit at a bus stop, and read one of my books and have nobody think anything of it."

And I saw that in France. I saw a grown man, sitting, reading a graphic novel. Nothing big, you know. I feel like maybe we're headed more toward that direction. It's going to take a long time before that's going to happen for sure, but ... I don't know if that will ever happen, honestly. Comics are always going to have an uphill battle in that it is an active medium, it requires participation. I overheard John Porcellino saying this to someone, "Unfortunately you have this set of people who read, and then this subset of people who are willing to read the comics that we produce, and you've just gotten to a very small set of people."

**GROTH:** *That's a good description.*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** I do think it will grow, obviously it is going to be a gradual thing, certainly with people like Chris and Dan getting more mainstream attention and the kind of people in general getting more attention through things. I'm pretty hopeful about things.

**GROTH:** *There's certainly seems like there's a growing mainstream audience for comics like this.*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** I think the problem is in general, you have a lot of people like the junior in college version of me, or the sophomore, more appropriately, version of me that, I had no idea, I just had no idea that this stuff existed. And the second I found out it existed, I just started devouring it as fast as I could. Because here was this entirely new thing, and it was very exciting for me. I think that's one of the major thing — you do now have things like Barnes and Noble and Borders and Virgin Megastore putting comics out on the front table and things like that.

**GROTH:** *At some point you outgrew the Marvel/DC/Image kind of comic, which a lot of people never do.* [Laughter.]

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Don't get me wrong, I still like old superhero comics. I can't read like Image or any of that crap.

**GROTH:** *By old you mean what?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Really, the stuff that I started of with, like the stuff from the '70s, I love all that stuff. Is it Buscema, Sal Buscema?

**GROTH:** *John Buscema and Sal Buscema?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Yeah, but him, John Romita ...

**GROTH:** *Well, you know you were barely around in the '70s.*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Right, right.

**GROTH:** *So you're talking reprints of the '70s?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Everything I read I was clearly reprints, probably reprints of reprints for that matter. Yeah, all those older superheroes. I love reading stuff from back in the early '40s, Batman, Superman, stuff like that, but I mean superhero comics — and that's the weird thing, superhero comics used to be fairly cartoony. Now they're just, ugh. [*Laughs.*] Now everyone's wearing wet rubber and look like they're cut out of diamond and it's just ugh. It's not open and it doesn't really allow people to get into the comics, in my opinion, it's too sharp, everything's sharp and bright, and everything's ... I'm certainly no, "the past is better" or anything like that, but there's a warmth even to the drawings of the '70s, and that's just gone. It's really horrible. It's just really, truly pretty trashy stuff. It's really heartbreaking for me, because I would think I'm in pretty good company with the rest of the people in *MOME* and cartoonists in general in that, I love superheroes and I kind of love that whole mythology of the superhero and things like that, but it's just, "Look, these people aren't wearing wet latex, they should be wearing cotton, and these stories should be fun."

You obviously have something as brilliant as the latest *Eightball*, but I don't ever see a mainstream publisher ever doing something like that. Don't get me wrong, *Watchmen* is great [*laughs*].

**GROTH:** *I wanted to know at what point you started making a distinction between superhero comics or mass-market comics, and the kinds of comics we're talking about, I don't know what you want to call them, alternative, literary comics or whatever.*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** I tend to tell people literary comics; for some reason, that makes sense when I'm telling people like my parents' friends.

**GROTH:** *I think you have to get in their faces, and literary is a good word, because they're taken aback by it.*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Oh, absolutely. It really is strange, like people still — it's been pretty rewarding, my parents have actually started pushing my book, and other books on people, and people are starting to be like, "Oh, so this is what you do."

**GROTH:** *Yeah, there's something shockingly oxymoronic about "literary comics." It's like hitting them in the head with a two-by-four, you get their attention.*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** [*Laughs.*] Right. There was the mother of a girl I was dating for a short time period time. I was like, "I do literary comics."

And she was like, "How can that exist?" And I was like, "Uggh, this is going to be good. Can we end the dinner now?"

**GROTH:** *I was just wondering when you started making that distinction. Was it early on?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** I don't know if it was really necessarily making the distinction, it was just "OK, here are the stories I'm telling, and they're not this. There's some sort of difference."

And one of the biggest problems, in my opinion anyway, is that there is that line drawn. To me, it's like, "Look, this should just be a genre. Superheroes should just be a genre, autobiography should be a genre."

Unfortunately, yeah, there is really hard-drawn division between, "OK, there's the superhero clichéd stuff, and then there's this other stuff, it's the weird literary comics or alternative comics."



So I think for me, I just found myself in the other camp. It's like, "This is the kind of stuff I want to do," because those were the kind of stories I was writing.

**GROTH:** *You were never compelled to work for Marvel or DC, and do superhero stuff?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Not really. I mean, I obviously work for those companies as a colorist, but as far as like producing my own ideas — do not get me wrong, if I had a chance to draw Batman, I would probably do it just because that would be fun, [laughs] but —

**GROTH:** *You'll be getting a call next week.*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** [Laughs.] But, you know, the thing is like, yeah, when it comes down to it, and that's something I, I've only been fully self-employed for a little over a year, and something you really do gain appreciation for is like, OK, I've only got so much time, I've only got so much time to produce a certain amount of work per day, per week, per year, per life. You really do realize "Oh, this might be fun, or that might be fun, but what do I really want to do, what's really important?"

When it comes down to it, some of that stuff might be a little entertaining, but at the end of the day, did you get anything out of it? I don't know.

**GROTH:** *That becomes increasingly important.*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Yeah, that's just it, don't get me wrong, I'll sit down and watch a soap opera while I'm eating a sandwich or something, but I don't understand how those people do that with their lives. [Laughs.]

**GROTH:** *One of the things I love about MOME is that every single artist has his or her own very distinctive style and approach.*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** That was the thing. Looking through it, I was like, wow, you definitely — I feel like most of the people in there are certainly narratively dense, you know? At the same time, you just couldn't get more different people as far as the actual aesthetics and approach.

**GROTH:** *Your next book is The Three Paradoxes. How's that going?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** It's going well, but honestly, it's [sighs] my God, it's a huge, huge, problem because it's just going really slow at this point. I've unfortunately had several projects that have been going on and on and on that are really interfering with it, because I have to pay rent, apparently. That's the thing, man. I'm like, "God, can't I get a movie deal or something?" I need to sell out, hardcore.

**GROTH:** *I hear ya, I hear ya.*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** I was hoping I'd finish by the end of April. Now I don't know, I don't think it's going to happen, because there were some pages that I was fine with, and then once I got toward the [?], it was like these don't even work any more.

**GROTH:** *The Three Paradoxes is the new stand-alone graphic novel you're working on, and this also revolves around a father and son. I haven't seen much of this, but it certainly looks like it's about a father and son, which was very much what Mother, Come Home was about, and it also looks like you're pushing the formal structural elements —*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** This one actually way more so than *Mother, Come Home*. *Mother, Come Home*, in my opinion, had certain formal elements that were being messed with; this one is very, very much doing that.

**GROTH:** *There's a post-modern narrative element to it, isn't there, where the narrator is a cartoonist who's working on a story that interweaves with his own story...*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** It's just flat-out autobiographical. The main character is Paul, me. I mean, there are some strange scenes where the cartoon then I'm drawing is actually — there's a scene where I'm talking on the phone and it's a real conversation that I had with a girl that I was

supposed to meet in the near future in the book, and the actual person who's talking on the phone in the story is the cartoon character ... there's a lot of zooming into and out of and blurring of various realities, hopefully not just for the sake of being a formal experiment.

**GROTH:** *What purpose do you think that serves in terms of narrative?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** For me, it's all trying to convey what we talked about before, trying to convey things without really saying them. Switching to other styles or doing something else is, for me, trying to evoke something without coming right out and saying, "Oh yes, and this is how you should feel." If there's anything I absolutely want to stay away from, it's smacking people over the head in this Spielberg-esque kind of way, like "OK, here's where you should cry, here's where you should do this." Because that's just ugly and dirty and manipulative, but then again, what I'm doing is manipulative; I guess I just want to be secretly manipulative. [*Laughs.*]

**GROTH:** *You want to be manipulative and complicated.*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Right. [*Laughs.*] I want to manipulate you, but you don't really know about it until it's too late. *The Three Paradoxes* for me is probably going to be one of the most formally experimental books — well, that's not true, there's another book I've planned that will put this one to shame as far as how weird it's going to be — but it's definitely in service of the narrative. Obviously, you need to keep it in check.

It's hard to put a finger on, but there's about five distinct narratives going on in the book, but they all share this common theme about what is — I don't want to give much away \_

**GROTH:** *Give a little away.*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** I would say mainly a lot of the gist of the book is looking for some kind of control or certainty in life, debating whether or not that actually exists; whether or not one can actually influence anything, whether one can take control of various aspects of one's life; whether one can change from where one has been in the past. Those are the sort of things that run through the book. Most of it's just me, but there's also fictionalized parts and parts with pre-Socratic philosophers and hopefully it all makes sense in the end.

**GROTH:** *Is your relationship with your father complicated?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Not really, no. That's another thing I have to admit, that I'm sure that some people will think "Oh, yeah, this is the follow-up to *Mother, Come Home*." But in a way, this is very much written by the person who wrote *Mother, Come Home*, and knows that people had whatever reactions to it. First off, the speaker's my real father, who is still alive as a lawyer in Georgetown. And it's really me walking with him and talking about the fact that he goes to this monastery and does chanting, trying to get more in touch with what makes him feel peaceful and things like that. So no, actually my relationship with my father, and with my mother for that matter, is just anything but complicated. We have a very good relationship, which I'm sure will confuse everyone [*Laughs.*] expecting my parents to be horrible or dead.

**GROTH:** *One question I have to ask you; How do you pronounce your name? Don't say, "Paul" — I know that.*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** It's Hornsch-meyer.

**GROTH:** *Hornsch-meyer?*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** It's supposed to be pronounced Hurn-sheer-meyer, but we don't pronounce it that way, so. There's supposed to be an umlaut over the "o," and then you're supposed to pronounce the "e" before the "m," but we don't do either one of those.

**GROTH:** *That will be a challenge to phonetically spell the pronunciation out.*

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Right, right. I think H-U-R-N, she-meyer, I think that's the proper way to pronounce it. And I there are still many of our people over there.

**GROTH:** *Right, when I send the transcript to you, you can make sure that the phonetic spelling*

...

**HORNSCHEMEIER:** Is all typed in. Don't ever worry about mispronouncing my name.



