

Trabing

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Mostly about People

By Wally Trabing



Dennis--The Rich Little Menace

Fred Toole is the most successful unknown writer I know of.

Which is not an academically correct sentence, but as I don't feel very academically correct today, I'm going to let that cute little preposition dangle.

Toole's books sell about a million a year. Comic books.

He's unknown because the name that appears instead of his is Hank Ketcham, who created Dennis The Menace.

Ketcham lives in Switzerland, a very rich man. He still draws his daily Dennis panel which appears in more than 700 papers. But his staff turns out the Sunday strip and the comic books.

Toole serves as Ketcham's public relations man and comic book writer and I had a chat with him the other day. He's helping to plan a national cartoonists convention here July 31, August 1 and 2. VIP's will be here, Rube Goldberg's been asked and all the other characters who will be featured in the Soquel-O-Rama parade and festivities during the same dates.

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Ketcham's single panels appear in many countries. Only in France it's called "Le Petite Peste;" in Spain, "Daniel El Travieso;" and in England "The Pickle."

He started Dennis back in 1951. Got the idea when one day his wife, in a fit of pique, said of their own son Dennis: "Hank, this boy's a menace!"

WHAMBO. That was a million dollar utterance.

The real Dennis is a strapping 17-year-old now, but Ketcham's famed cartoon Dennis has remained stunted. He's still four, going on five, said Toole.

Toole is a wavy haired, mustached, soft talking gentleman of 51.

"But when I work I have to be a 4-year-old.

"I work about a year ahead, we put out travel books with Dennis as the main character and we are very exacting on research. When we did the book on Hawaii, myself and the cartoonist spent a month over there getting the feel of the arena and people."

Ketcham works six months ahead. He airmails his work over from Switzerland. His writers send him the lines and he fits the cartoon to them.

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Toole has been with Ketcham for about 10 years, and lives in Carmel Valley. He used to live in Santa Cruz. Operated an ad agency with Bob Barnes who now draws the syndicated panel "Better Half."

And Dennis is all the children Toole has.

I asked Toole what single panel of Ketcham's over the years received the biggest response.

"Well, it was one with Dennis kneeling beside his bed for his nightly prayers.

The line said: "Well, God, I've goofed again."

Peaceful Demonstrators