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St. Louis Hometown Stories: Mike Peters, Cartoonist

Dogtown



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF MIKE PETERS

Mike Peters already had won the Pulitzer Prize and nearly every other imaginable award for his editorial cartoons when he set out on a new endeavor in 1984: a comic strip that chronicled the adventures of a yellow bull terrier named Grimm and an anthropomorphic bird known as Mother Goose. Those characters would go on to inspire a Saturday-morning cartoon and be syndicated in more than 800 newspapers worldwide. But it all started, appropriately enough, on a porch in Dogtown.

One of the greatest days of my life was when I was 8. The Superman TV show with George Reeves had just started airing on Sundays at 6; I'd go to Mass at St. James and then run back to see it. On Christmas night, my sister and I went to Mass and walked back in the snow. My mom [former KSDK-TV personality Charlotte Peters] was already on TV that night, but she had made me a *great* Superman outfit—she got the S just right, took long-john underwear and dyed it blue, sewed on red stocking slippers and the long cape. I couldn't believe it! I was going to school at St. James the Greater, where we had to wear a suit and tie, and I wore glasses because I had a lazy eye. I realized that Clark Kent wore a suit and tie, so I used to put on the Superman outfit under the suit and tie. Then I'd go around to older kids in the schoolyard and have kids hit me in the chest—I had a concave chest, so I would pad it—then open my shirt and show them the Superman outfit... I've had a Superman outfit all my life—my wife just gave me a brand-new one this Christmas.

For at least 45 years, I've been coming back to Dogtown and the house where I grew up. The owners of the house would say to the next one, "There will be a cartoonist coming up to the door. Don't worry—he's just going to sit on the front porch." I always thought it was weird that I was doing this. Then I went to Marceline, Mo., where Walt Disney grew up. They told me that all throughout his life he would come back to Marceline without telling anyone and walk around the town. After many years of doing this, he told someone, "I'm keeping the kid alive in me." I realized that's what I've been doing all these years: I'm getting in touch with my first 10 years as a kid, because that's Grimm, the dog in my comic strip.