

Art and Story

by Penelope Merrell

My mother disapproved of comic books, so we weren't allowed to buy them. We would sneak them from friends to read. She reluctantly allowed Archie or Little Lulu, but grumbled if she saw us reading one. Since I was an avid reader of any other book, the comic books were usually an occasional treat. I gave little thought to them beyond childhood.

About 10 years ago "graphic novel" registered on my radar. I happened on *PERSEPOLIS* in the community library. While the artwork seemed over simplified, I was fascinated. Once I checked around, graphic novels of varying length were everywhere.



After moving to Los Angeles I decided to cease painting and looked to another outlet for my artwork that fit my smaller living space. Checking for classes, I happened a series given Santa Monica College, "Comic book, Graphic Novel, and Sequential Art." I took the four quarters of classes during the next two years.

Sequential art is inherently different than illustration. Rather than complementing the story, the art panels must carry the story, supplemented by text. Stories with no text were part of the exercises required each week. We

learned the drawing conventions of comic book standards. Then we did our own stories, using or breaking these "rules."

One example is a story about a cat and dog we had. Nigel, the cat, moved in with us and Jinx, the dog, wasn't too happy. Eventually they became buddies. Old and sick, early one morning Nigel walked into the ravine behind our house and never returned. This series of panels was at the end of my graphic story.

SQUAWK! A Story in Fowl Language has just been published by Mud Flat Press.
<http://www.mudflatpress.com/Squawk.html>

Visit Penelope Merrell's website: <http://merrellart.com>