

# Article



## Comics that Grew Me Up

*By Susan A. Tolliver*

I have abandoned my heroes. So I've thought.

It is true that I no longer keep up with their lives. For reasons from growing up to financial distress to disenchantment with the story lines, I have chosen to stop reading the stories of the men, women and children who for years captured my heart and enriched my life.

On and off since childhood, I have enjoyed the company of many of comics' characters. While I consider many of them true heroes, only a few would I call "mine", my heroes.

My relationship with comics began when my father had to work out of town. Certainly I remember him coming home and being excited about being with him. I also remember vividly the anticipation of discovering what he brought home in his beat up old black metal suitcase. There was always treasure, gifts in the form of comic books. My dad wasn't particular about title or character or genre. He brought home a diversity of stories and art and imagination. My mom gravitated toward the scary books while my older sister enjoyed Archie and the like. My first choice was action and adventure.

The first hero I can remember calling mine was Tarzan. Richie Rich followed. While I read them as a child, it wasn't until much later as an adult reader that I made Spiderman and Superman mine.

On the surface, this is a disparate group. However, they all share characteristics that are similar, characteristics that helped grow me into who I am today.

Tarzan, Lord of the Jungle was strong and fearless yet sensitive to those with whom he shared his world. It was from him that I learned that man is much more to be feared than beast, that animals are true to their nature, living their life with integrity. Humankind at its worse lives for itself unto itself. Tarzan was an example of humankind at its best, bridging the worlds of jungle and human habitation, showing compassion, striving for justice.

Richie Rich was the only son of parents of wealth and power and influence and importance. Little was beyond Richie's ability to acquire. He could have had anything and nearly everything. Yet while extravagant and perhaps even wasteful, Richie chose to spend his money on others, on things that benefited the greater good. He was lavish and humble. His two best friends were among the poorest kids in town. His family employed an English butler, a French chauffeur, a robot maid. His cousin was a rich, obnoxious, annoying brat. He treated them all the same, somehow finding the gift each offered—even Reggie.

Spiderman was driven by "with great power comes great responsibility". Peter was smart. He was a science nerd. His life from childhood was marked by sadness and tragedy. He was the one who never caught a break. His spider bite offered him many alternative avenues for his life. He had a short run of arrogance and apathy before the death of his uncle delivered a burden of responsibility. Peter was in many ways everyman. He made bad judgments and had to live with the consequences. He loved hard and felt hard pain and disappointment and rejection. Rarely did Peter enjoy smooth sailing. Even so, even when he knew his life would only be more difficult, Peter was champion of good, fighting valiantly many very, very evil and harmful people.

Superman has been my most enduring hero even until today. Truth, justice and the American Way are pillars in which he believed, pillars that I incorporated into my own values. Rarely did Superman ever struggle with what was the good and right action, the best path to journey. While faced with monumental challenges of both blatant and subtle evil, singular and corporate evil, Clark with rare exception knew what to do, both while wearing the cape and behind his typewriter. He respected person. He honored life. He was centered in who he was, the values instilled in him by his parents, and what he knew were his capabilities.

Tarzan, Richie, Spiderman and Superman are my heroes because of that common characteristic each exhibited. Each of them in his own way with his own unique talents, gifts, and abilities strove to do the good and right thing always. Each fought for justice. Each esteemed others. Each cherished life—even to the peril of his own.

It is no real surprise that all four of these had a strong female in their lives. Tarzan had Jane. Richie had Gloria. Peter had Mary Jane. Clark had Lois. They were all drop dead gorgeous but they were more than just beautiful women. While these women were enamored with their men, each was independent and of impeccable character. While Tarzan and Richie, Peter and Clark guarded and protected most fiercely Jane and Gloria, Mary Jane and Lois, the women were highly capable and smart, influencing positively their own microcosms. Tarzan was better because of Jane. Richie was better because of Gloria. Peter was better because of Mary Jane. Clark was better because of Lois.

I am better today because of all eight of them. I could never abandon these my heroes because they are an integral part of who I am, the matrix that makes me me. Tarzan, Richie, Spiderman and Superman, yes especially Superman, gave to me their values, their characters, their passions.

I grew up with them. I continue to grow into that which has made them mine.