

Tom Batiuk

Cartoonist

Age • 60

Why he's interesting • The creator of popular comic strips "Funky Winkerbean" and "Crankshaft" recently allowed one of his main characters (Lisa Moore from "Funky Winkerbean") to die from breast cancer. In memory of the character, a cancer research fund, called Lisa's Legacy, has been created in collaboration with University Hospitals Ireland Cancer Center.

Doodle all the day • "I always wanted to do cartooning." Batiuk grew up with "Prince Valiant," "Dick Tracy," "Terry and the Pirates" and "Flash Gordon." "Even before I could read, my dad would read those to me."

Most influential cartoonist • "Peanuts" creator Charles Schultz. " 'Peanuts' had a huge influence on me. For good or bad, he shaped what we do."

Art mirrors life • Just about every character in "Funky Winkerbean" was inspired by someone Batiuk knew. Funky was modeled after Batiuk's college roommate, and Mr. Dinkle, the band director, was inspired by Batiuk's junior high band teacher.

What about Tom? • "It's clichéd but it's true, you're a little bit of all your characters. ... Probably most of my traits get focused into Les. My concerns and anxieties became his."

The loss of Lisa • Some felt that death and dying had no place in the funnies, but many more were supportive, says Batiuk, a cancer survivor. "They seemed to be gratified to see their lives reflected back at them in my work."

Buy the book • "Lisa's Story: The Other Shoe," a collection of strips chronicling Lisa's battle with cancer, was published in October. All proceeds go to Lisa's Legacy. "I don't think a comic strip character has ever been used in quite this way," says Batiuk. "It's amazing to see your character step off the page into the real world to do good."

