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# TLC in the Funny Papers

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# THE WARRIOR

FALL 2002



JOURNAL OF THE TRIAL LAWYERS COLLEGE



By Dana K. Cole TLC '95

**Tom Batiuk** is the creator of the syndicated comic strip Funky Winkerbean. The series is published in more than 400 newspapers worldwide. It has received critical acclaim in large part because of Tom's courageous and sensitive treatment of such issues as teen pregnancy, dyslexia, teen suicide, teen dating abuse and breast cancer. When one of the main characters in the comic strip was nearing graduation from law school, Tom wanted to research how it might feel to be a graduating law student. He contacted the University of Akron School of Law and was eventually routed to me. I invited Tom to visit my advanced trial advocacy class.

The class Tom attended was the last of the year and the last in law school for the sixteen enrolled students. It was not a typical law school class or even a typical trial advocacy class. The students participated in the painting exercise developed by Gerry Spence at the Trial Lawyers College.

## TLC IN THE FUNNY PAPERS

The three-hour painting class is held in the “old student lounge”—a spacious but windowless room in the basement of the law school. The students sit in groups of three or four at large round tables. The atmosphere is festive but with a hint of anxiety. In just a few short weeks they will graduate and say goodbye to each other and the experience that is law school. In addition to the students officially registered for the class, it’s not unusual for several former students and one of my colleagues to stop by to participate.

Most students generate three or four paintings—others even more. Like the exercise at the ranch, time is reserved for them to share their work. Invariably there is laughter and tears, *oo’s* and *aah’s* as the students reveal not only their creations but also their souls. They say things to each other like, “I’ve known you for three years and I didn’t know *that* about you.” Many of them later report that they framed and matted their paintings and hung them in their offices alongside their diplomas and law licenses. Some continue to paint after their experience in the class.

“Should we paint in law school?” I ask the students before they are given a supply of paper, brushes and paint. “Couldn’t we make better use of the time? What would painting accomplish? What relevance does it have to trial advocacy?” In one class, a student—apparently panicked at the prospect that we might not paint—responded to the questions without hesitation and in a tone that betrayed his concern. “We have to paint,” he pleaded. “I have to see if there’s anything creative left inside me!” His first paintings consisted of ominous, foreboding images. He vented anger and resentment—from his heart to the page—and, in the process, redis-

covered his creativity. As the class progressed his frustration abated and his paintings took on lighter tones. One of his first paintings—the darkest one—is an amalgamation of the oppressive, soul crushing teachers and professors he encountered in twenty years of formal education. He gave me the painting, thankfully not as a commentary on my teaching style but, rather, as a reminder of what not to become. It hangs in my office today—serving its intended purpose.

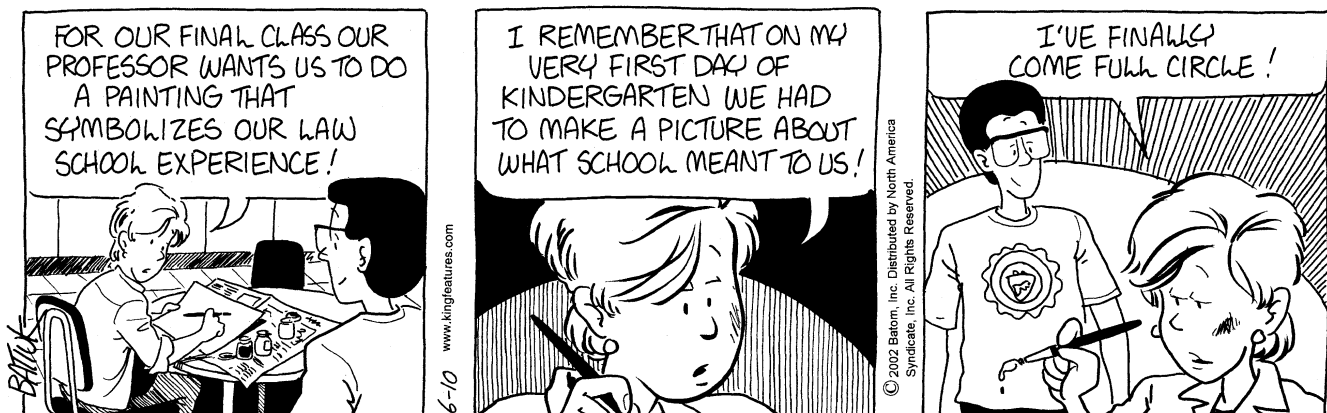
The pedagogical value of painting is simply this: It’s a kind of magic—a return to an innocent time when self-discovery and creativity came naturally—before we learned to hide from ourselves. Our paintings give us a glimpse of what’s inside. After all— isn’t self-discovery and creativity the essence of being a great trial lawyer?

My good friend, Bob Hilliard (TLC ’95), put it this way:

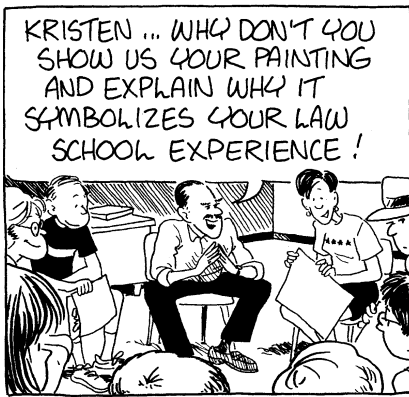
What unlatches the gate for me isn’t the idea of being a perfect man, it’s the willingness to know the man I am. To stand in the middle of all of me. To be sustained by the nourishment of my own fruit. My own changing tastes and needs. A willingness to not control and still find love.

Tom Batiuk’s humorous treatment of the TLC-inspired painting class is reflected in the Funky Winkerbean series published June 10th through 14th and is reprinted here with special permission of King Features Syndicate. The caricature of Gerry Spence is courtesy of Schuyler Abrams—a very talented and creative sixteen-year-old artist from Alaska. You can see more of Schuyler’s work by visiting his web site at [www.tornacinder.com-8.net](http://www.tornacinder.com-8.net). 🍷

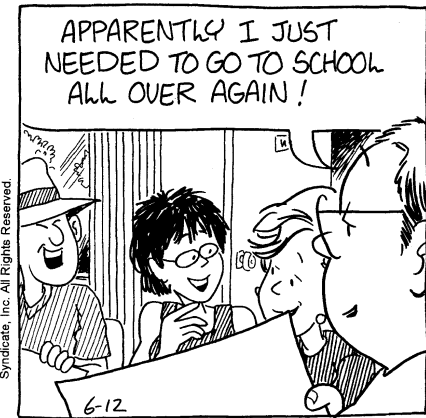
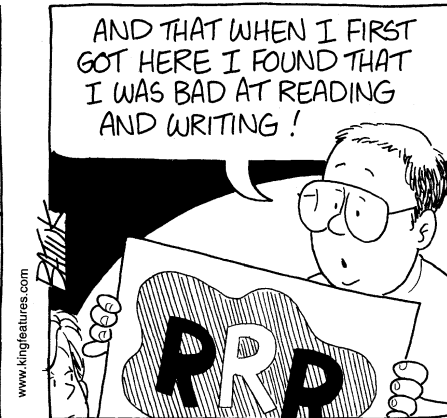
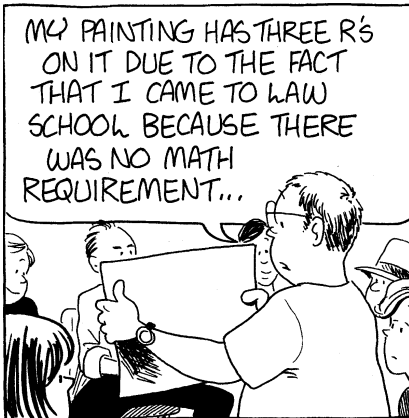
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