

# We salute Howard Beckerman for over 40 years of excellence at the School of Visual Arts Film & Animation Dept.

A tribute to Howard Beckerman

by Meryl Rosner

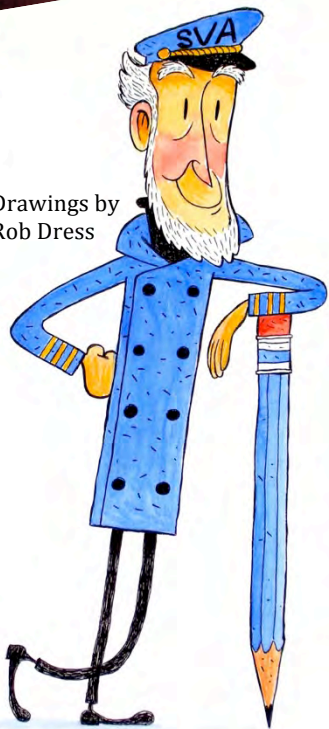


Sheri Beckerman Weisz

Drawing by Don Duga

Howard Beckerman is an animator, a historian and a professor. For over 40 years, he has been contributing expertise and joy to the art of animation at the School of Visual Arts. Currently he teaches classes in animation, storyboard and history of animation, and he also advises thesis students. On January 9, a dinner, "A Tribute to Howard Beckerman" was planned by Film Chairman, [Reeves Lehmann](#) and faculty, friends and family attended. It was held at the [Turkish Kitchen](#), an intimate venue, and people took turns telling stories and celebrating the ways in which they were impacted by him. For those who have read his books, chuckled at his cartoons and cards, sat in on a lecture or met him at an animation festival in [Annecy, France](#) or [Zagreb, Yugoslavia](#) and could not attend this gathering, I've asked a few people to gather here and share their thoughts about Howard. As Linda Beck, Co-President of ASIFA-East said, "Howard's dance card is always full. He has a way of putting the room at ease."

Drawings by Rob Dress



Celia Bullwinkel  
Eric Eiser



Doris Polansky

Sal Petrosino

Melissa Brown

Reeves Lehmann

Howard Beckerman

Photos by Laz Stathes

Photos: Tribute to Howard Beckerman dinner, January 9, 2014.



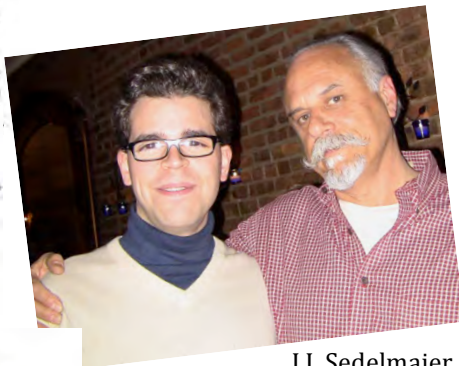
I had no idea how many people would want to talk about him and how much there was to see, so what began as a simple report on the evening, turned into something very different. He showed me portfolios and sketchbooks filled with his drawings and paintings that looked like they were done this morning...everything, fresh! So here is a showcase of his art, and highlights from his comic strip, *Miss Chipps*, and his animated short, *Boop-Beep*. There are also letters of “thanks” from Michael J. Ruocco, Tom Sito, Yvette Kaplan, Rob Dress and John Dilworth, all SVA graduates, Tommy Stathes, film historian and archivist, and daughters, Amy, Sheri and Mara.

“Howard Beckerman is a reminder to all of us that even as the world and technology change, the primary ingredient that moves us in all aspects of our lives is the human connection...and Howard is one of the great human beings. Whether it's his integrity discussing a topic, his wisdom of craft, or simply sharing a lunch together, he is consistently real and caring. His energy and passion are only rivaled by his wit.”

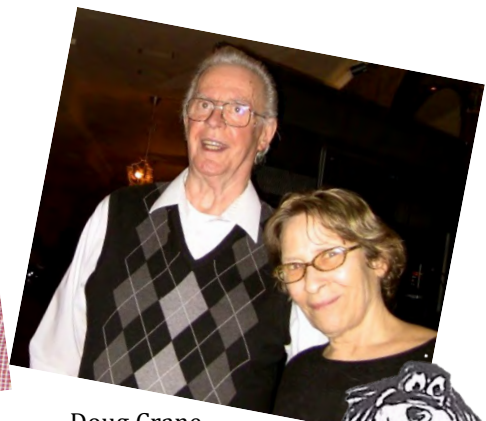
Sal Petrosino – Director of Operations  
[SVA Film and Animation](#)



### Party Animals



Tommy Stathes  
 J.J. Sedelmaier



Doug Crane  
 Deborah Ross



# Letter of thanks from Amy:

Dear Friends of Howard Beckerman,

It was a great joy and delight to see all the faces of my father's friends, colleagues, and former students last night at the lovely dinner in his honor. I couldn't quite put my thoughts together last night to get up and say something, but as these things happen, they have come together now in the afterglow of the event. I speak on behalf of myself and my two older sisters, when I say it was special and wonderful to grow up as the daughter of Howard Beckerman. I loved that my Dad was so talented and had such a cool job. And if you ever wondered if he was as funny at home as he was in front of an audience, the answer is a resounding yes, and we loved every minute of it. But we each had our own interests and own lives to live that had

absolutely nothing to do with his world of animation. Over the years, however, the names of so many of you became familiar in our home. A beautiful Christmas card on the mantel was from who? "Oh, that was one of Dad's students." A name was pointed out in the credits of a wonderful film, "That was one of my students." A phone call received, a gift that was sent, a date for lunch, or a party invitation. . . all from former students. They are the names of not just "former students," but people who became colleagues and friends to our parents. These are the names of people ~~that~~ touched our parents' lives. And so we wanted to extend warm and heartfelt thanks to all of you for the respect, support, love, and joy you have given to both of our parents over these many years. Every teacher should be blessed with students as talented, dedicated, and giving as you have all been.

Best wishes to you all,

Amy Beckerman Zarndt (the baby) - R  
Sheri Beckerman Weisz (the middle child) - C  
Mara Beckerman Sneiderman (the eldest) - L

## Mara

One thing I always loved and felt was so special about having him for a dad was the way he would show movies at home. He had a projector and being in the industry, he would not just show the footage he had shot of family trips, but he would carefully edit them and add a music soundtrack to it. In addition, he would procure old films and we'd invite friends over and have private screenings of some fun films. Our favorite has always been a Steve Allen little known film called "[Down Memory Lane](#)". Gosh I wish we could see that one again. Not many people could say they had a dad with such a cool job. I think I used that as a way to start conversation and help me sound cool.



# Sheri

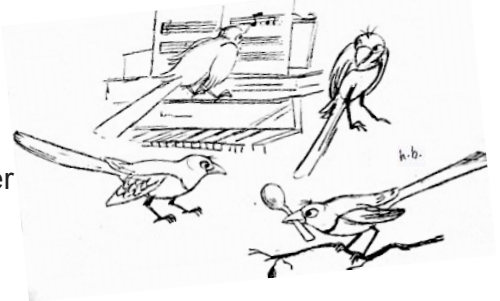
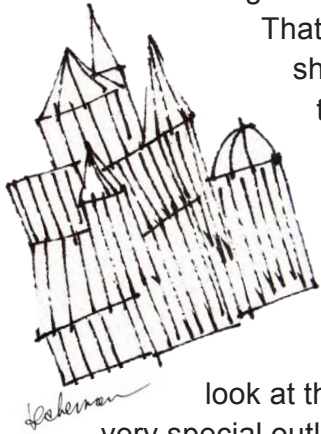
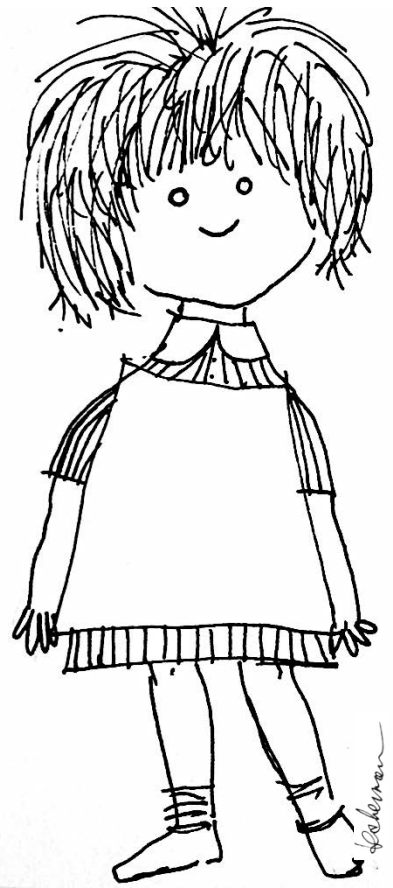
## My Dad



I feel very blessed to be one of Howard's daughters. When my sisters and I were growing up, Dad was very attuned to what we were into as far as books and movies and TV and music. He was always there to help us with school projects and non-school projects - things we were just interested in. And he shared his interests and work with us. He once worked on a comic strip with American Indian characters, and he was very interested in the research he did for this job. He shared this with my sisters and me by making an Indian club for us. We made Indian crafts and learned about Indian stories and life. I still remember my Indian club name (Little Feather). Of course, Dad was the Big Chief. That club gave me a strong connection with American Indian history and culture.

That's the kind of effect my dad had on me. He showed me that learning and playing go together, that you have to love what you do, and do what you love. And if there is something you're interested in, learn everything you can about it. Dad taught my sisters and me to love and cherish books and we've passed that on to the next generation. I think my dad is such a good teacher, because knowing things is so much part of everything he does. He taught me to always

look at things in their historical context. He really has a very special outlook on life and the world and I feel very grateful to have learned to see that way, too. (Although, it does get rather expensive being so obsessed with books!)



# John Dilworth

I recall Howard analyzing people walking 45 Street from his top floor office window. He was the first to show me how to "see" personality in the real world physiology. For instance, a gentleman with a very large afro was spotted that Howard interpreted as pride. I thought to myself, "So, that's what pride looks like". The exercise is quite fun to play. People are truly unique in every imaginable physical aspect. No two people move exactly the same. And giving meaning to big hair gave meaning to human personality and onward to the greater parts of life, what is a human. Having Howard demonstrating this on an intimate level proved to have a lasting impression. I even grew my hair into an afro.



# Howard's Art

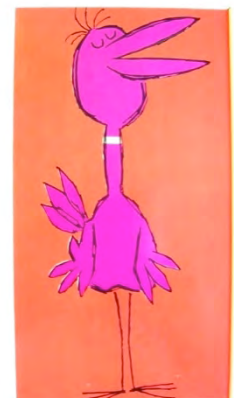
You know him for his animation skills on "[Popeye](#)", "[Heckle and Jeckle](#)", even "[Mighty Mouse](#)". But there is much before and since those hit shows in Howard's cache of creations. Here are some greeting cards: animals, quirky, wild yet cuddly.



And the people, imperfect, all sizes and shapes, are bursting at their seams with the joy of life.



When I visited Howard at home, it seemed as though every nook contained a sweet "moment" a framed drawing or painting where you would least expect to find one, and I began clicking away. The marionette, the watercolor tree over Thoreau postage stamp; each drawing breaks the mold of the one before. There is a strong connection to theatre in his work, the way things are lit and the knee-slapping humor are welcome in our ho-hum, computer lives. Physical humor, beauty, horror, and love have been replaced by digital forms, and it's good to let in some fresh air! There is nothing "old school" or old fashioned. This stuff is super fresh.



# Howard Beckerman

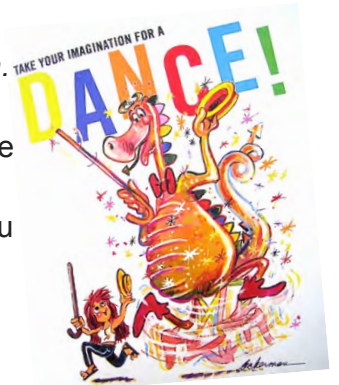
Howard talks about students now and the business of animation.



Once there were 1 and a half books on animation, now there are a thousand books and students don't read any of them.

Animation is all about communication. Students don't realize you have to communicate with others, they're in their own world.

They don't realize you don't do it all by yourself. At the theater they walk out on the credits. They fall apart when they realize they need someone for music, editing and all the parts to be assembled, they are so happy doing their own thing. It is a job like any other, you apply what you know usually with a tight budget and time constraints. You've got to do it even though you don't think you can do it, you've got to pull it out of a hat.



Computers allow for a great deal of latitude. They let you change things faster. In the old days, you had to animate it, shoot it, send it to a lab, get the film back and reanimate. Now an 8 year old can make a movie on a computer in the family living room without making a mess. The computer is not too smart on its own, you have to use your brain.



The students don't put their names on their work. Disney put his name on everything, even things he didn't do. Students have to see themselves as important in the creative process. It comes back to communication. We communicate with everybody in the production process in order to eventually communicate our animated story to an audience.



I learned how films are made from my experience on the first story I sold to UPA Pictures. It was for a segment of the very first full color animated show for children. It was 1956 and it was "The Boing Boing Show." [Phil Moore](#) was chosen for the music, he did music for Lena Horne's nightclub routines and also was the voice of one of the crows in "Dumbo". [George Dunning](#) came from Canada, he was the director. He went on later to do "[Yellow Submarine](#)". The great bass player, [Milt Hinton](#), was one of the musicians. They took my board and changed it. It was called "Two by Two" about Noah's Ark. In the theater a playwright's play is what you see on the stage, it's basically the same, it doesn't get changed much, unlike movies. Dunning redesigned the look of it, Moore wrote lyrics and composed music for it. I animated it. Each person contributed his own expertise, and that's why it looks professional. It's all in the service of communication.

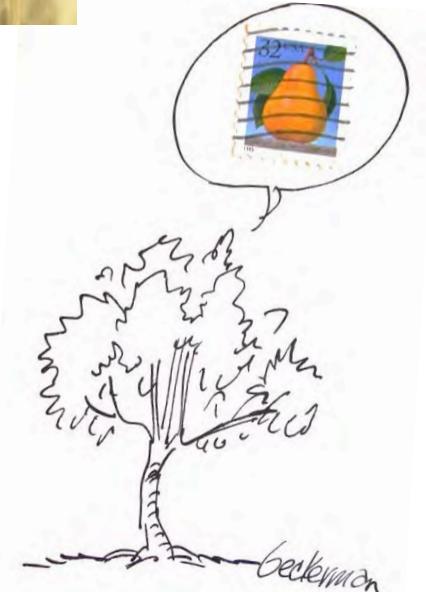
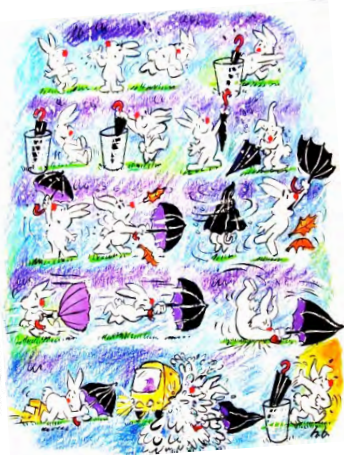




Now computers came on the scene, and where prior to this time computers weren't good enough to do cartoons, they could, however, handle the effects. It took about 15 years of finessing the computer programs to be able to animate "Toy Story."



What students must learn is that an animator, like [Arthur Miller's Willy Loman](#) character, goes to work with a smile and a shoeshine. But unlike Willy Loman the animator is a contributor to the final product, not a one-man show. You have to learn to communicate.



# Tommy Stathes

*Tommy is passionate about film, film reels and especially rare animation footage. I'll let him give you the details.*

I met Howard as a teenager, when I was approximately 14 or so. My mother was looking for someone who could possibly mentor me in my area of interest, animation history, and found local comic artist [Ray Alma](#) mentioned in a local newspaper--if memory serves me correctly.

She got in touch with Mr. Alma who suggested we speak with Howard.

As it turned out, Howard lives four blocks away from us and we met after I wrote him a letter introducing myself. Howard invited my mother and me to visit with him and his wife Iris. From that point on, I spent many casual afternoons at the Beckerman home, lugging 16mm prints of early cartoons I was (and still am) buying which Howard and I both thoroughly enjoyed watching together. Howard was the first person I could speak with and physically spend time with who not only understood my interest in early animation history and shared that interest with me, but also validated my research and archiving work, which was unusual. It was as if

fate decided that this wonderful veteran animator and historian would be so physically near a young and growing *early* animation historian and archivist whose efforts were not always understood or shared by others, even in the field of animation history itself. I have learned a lot from Howard and in turn have shared many of my discoveries with him. Needless to say, we've had an enriching personal and professional friendship for the past ten or twelve years.

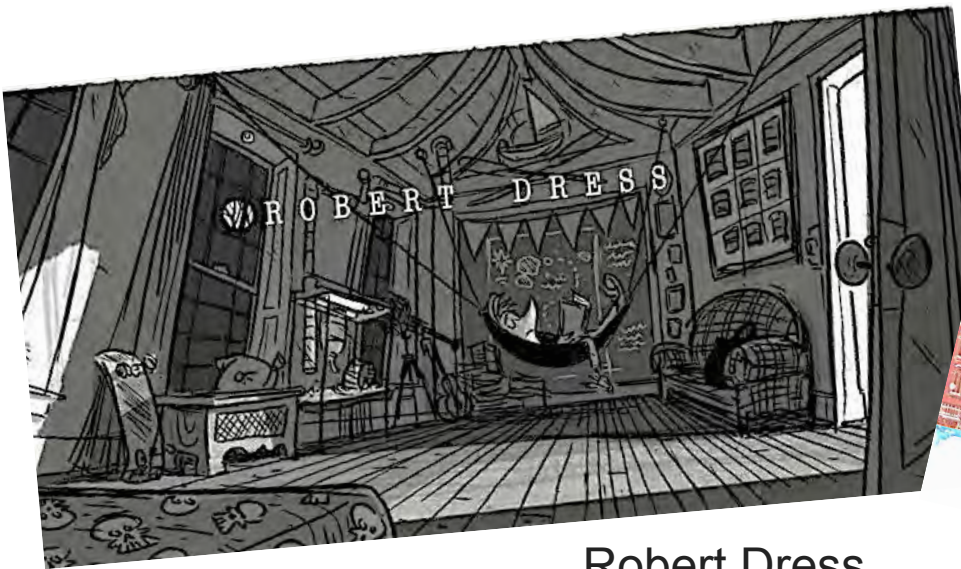


Howard's tribute dinner was quite clearly an SVA-sponsored and centric event. However, there were people from all facets of Howard's life in attendance...family members, personal friends, former students, professional colleagues and other. I was particularly moved by a gentleman who spoke about his early life with dyslexia at a time when schools and teachers did not cater as much to students with special needs, and later becoming a budding animator who was patiently coached by Howard--thus touched and inspired by Howard's guidance. It was a proud moment to see all of these people gathered to celebrate not only his career at SVA, but, more importantly his character.

My focus has always been the early period of animation, specifically the silent-era and early sound-era which comprised the 1900s through the 1930s. I'm not an animator myself, purely a historian and archivist. I seemed to have always been interested in the oldest films and cartoons I could possibly see, and it

frustrated me as a kid that I could read history books about certain early cartoons but not actually go out and rent them on video. So, for the past several years, I've been researching that area of film history and especially collecting as many of the films as possible, since many have been considered lost and circulating examples could not all be found from one or two sources. I began all of this work as an informal childhood enthusiast, and in the years since, I've located many films I never thought I would see, and have been showing them publicly in the NYC area and sharing my finds in other ways--one example being a program of early New York cartoons that I curated and provided to Turner Classic Movies in 2012. I have plans to make more of my archive available to the public through additional avenues in the near future.





## Robert Dress



As a freshman at SVA, I only knew I wanted to do cartoons. Howard was my first connection to the animation world. Animation technique and storyboarding were emphasized and I wanted more opportunity to draw, so Howard took me to the Bronx Zoo. He believed in me, he helped deepen my convictions and gave me confidence. He also taught me the importance of keeping a sketchbook. I had 3 classes with him: Advanced Animation, History of Animation and Storyboard. Howard has a frank way of teaching that gets to the point...and a sort of “clean living” about him! During my third year, I was chosen to participate in the first Disney Animation Boot Camp in 1998. They put us up in a dorm in Monterey, California, and we trained for a month with Disney’s best talent: [Jean Gillmore](#), [Dave Pruiksma](#), [Andreas Deja](#), [Dave Bossert](#), [Ron Husband](#), [Andy Gaskill](#), [Charles Solomon](#), [Walt Stanchfield](#). We learned to execute

the basics with precision. It was an invaluable experience.



Images © Robert Dress  
<http://robertdress.blogspot.com>

# Tom Sito

## An Appreciation of Howard Beckerman

Howard Beckerman was one of my first animation teachers, along with Gil Miret and Marty Abrahams. During my years at SVA 1973-1976, I took him for Animation Drawing, and History of Animation. Over those years I got to know Howard very well, as well as Iris and his family. Howard had a way of spotting those students serious about wanting to be animation professionals, apart from others just passing through. Howard taught me what it meant to be an animator. He just didn't teach me how to animate, he taught me how to conduct myself as a professional. He showed me what it was like to live and function in a team of professional artists. He introduced me to the larger community of animation professionals. He took us to a major international animation festival in New York, where he introduced us to animators from Italy, Canada and the Soviet Union.



Howard taught us not only the skills of the animator's art, he taught us a respect for the history of animation. That what we would do would not just be to pay our bills, but that we would be part of a legacy of animation that reached back one hundred years, to artists like Winsor McCay and Max Fleischer. He taught us to cherish that tradition, and pass that sense of history on to our students. He brought into class legendary animators like Milt Kahl, Bob Clampett and Grim Natwick (Betty Boop).

I also learned from Howard how to be a teacher. His breezy, unaffected, conversational style of lecture conveyed important lessons to us without pontificating. Many of his anecdotes in class I still repeat to my own students. Plus, you never felt talked down to. He always treated you like an equal. Which for an insecure kid like me, was therapeutic.

But it was not just about copying old principles and ideas. One time he said to me, "Everyone talks about Old Animation. No one ever talks about New Animation." I said, "What is New Animation?" He smiled wryly, "I don't know. I'm an old animator. That's YOUR job!" Now that I am an old animator, I can say the same thing to my students. Howard Beckerman taught on the principle of art once voiced by Winston Churchill "Art without Tradition is like Sheep without a Shepherd. But Art without Innovation is a Lifeless Corpse." We need to know tradition to see where we've come, but then we need to take what we have been given and move forward with it.

Thank you Howard, for befriending this smart-aleck son of a Brooklyn fireman, and teaching me how to be a professional artist.



*Tom Sito*

*Animator, author, animation historian, Professor of Cinema at the University of Southern California.  
President-Emeritus of the Hollywood Animation Guild.*



## Michael J. Ruocco

Learning from Howard was one of the highlights of my time at SVA. In my first year there, he reinvigorated my interest in animation history. He guided me through the ins and outs of storyboarding in my second year. And during third year, he was my advanced animation teacher, pushing my abilities as an animator further and further with every class.

I remember speaking to Howard right as my third year classes were ending, and I was pretty concerned about the following year, when I would be in heavy production on my thesis film. Howard took me aside and asked, *"How're you feeling about working on your thesis film next year?"*

*"I'm gonna be honest with you, Howard... I'm REALLY anxious about it. It's all I've been thinking about these last few weeks, and I know I'll probably continue to rack my brains over it for the entire summer."*

*"Wonderful! That's great to hear! I'm so glad you said that."*

Asking why being so anxious about it was supposedly a good thing, he explained:  
*"That means you're thinking about it. You must genuinely care about doing a good job, and that means you probably will. I know you will do fine."*

In an instant, Howard took what I thought was to be an absolute nightmare and turned it into a fun, spectacular dream. Through all 9+ months of production, Howard was alongside me every step of the way, from overlooking my initial storyboards right down to final editing. He constantly gave great advice in his own charming and approachable way, and was a perfect gauge as to how my film would play to an audience.

My thesis, which I believed nine months earlier would be a nightmare, ended up winning an award at the 2011 Dusty Awards show. The cognitive part of my brain must've been barely functioning that night, because through the pressure and adrenaline of going up onstage completely unprepared and accepting my award in front of a packed theater, I stupidly neglected to thank Howard! To this day, I still kick myself for not acknowledging how much I owe him for getting me there that night. If it wasn't for Howard's patience and passion for the art form, his eagerness to share his knowledge with others, and his invaluable friendship through all four years of school and beyond, I wouldn't have won that award, let alone move clear across the country and begin my animation career in full-swing. Howard helped me live my dream.



# Yvette Kaplan

## My Thank You To Howard

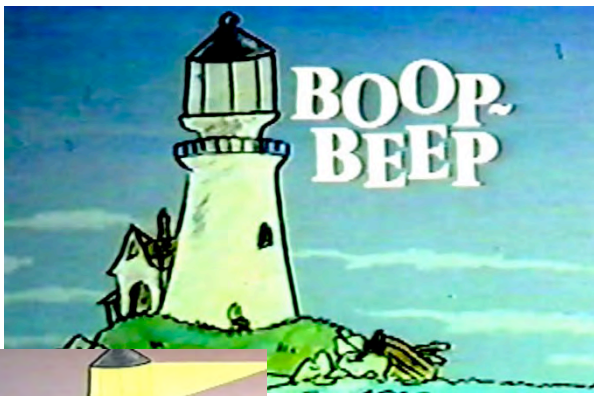
How do I begin to express how Howard influenced my calling, my career, my life? And in which role? As Teacher? Mentor? Employer? Champion? Inspiration?

Friend? How lucky I am to be able to say he's been all of those! His influence during these many years would take volumes to do justice to. But having been asked, I've decided to focus on one memory from my time as his student at SVA, a day I think started the bouncing ball rolling for me as a director and story teller. I had just recorded the music sound track for what would become my thesis film, my first film with sound. I ran into Howard's Animation Drawing class excitedly waving the 16mm mag track, and I probably

said something about how I couldn't wait to animate to the music, though I wasn't sure how. The next thing I knew, I was following Howard to the moviola. I was confused: moviolas were for viewing, and I didn't have anything to view. But Howard clearly had a plan: he threaded the mag thru the machine, grabbed a pencil, turned it on and said "Watch." And watch I did, fascinated, as Howard tapped out the beats of my music with the pencil, marking them on the mag as it passed thru the viewer window, playing in real time. Ba..ba...ba... my head nodding along as I followed my conductor, and then it was my turn. I was a little nervous, but Howard nodded approvingly and supportively as I made my marks, a little wiggly and not as assured as his, but surprisingly and intensely felt with every cell in my body. Ba..ba..ba... every 10 frames, occasionally 11, as I discovered later, running it thru the synchronizer with my exposure sheets spread out. Thanks to Howard, I was already well versed and dependent on exposure sheets, but thus far, had only used them for exposing drawings and camera moves. This though, was different; I was transferring those little marks onto a middle column I'd never used before. So THAT'S what it was for! And THAT was my "Aha!" moment; the first time I'd seen the connection between sound and picture for real, right there on the paper. And something clicked. I know now that that day with Howard, was my introduction to timing. And I was hooked big time. From that point on, I became like a human metronome, tapping out a click track in my head to everything and every move I made. All these years later, the biggest compliment anyone can give me as a director is to compliment my timing. But I know they're really complimenting Howard, my virtuoso professor with a pencil, and what he ingrained in me.



Of course, Howard's skill with a pencil extends way beyond a moviola screen. He's a brilliant animator, and his drawings, just like the man himself, are filled with a joyous spirit and a mischievous wink. He can make you laugh with a minimum of well picked words—and impeccable comic timing—and he can do the same with a minimum of fluid and well placed lines. A master of simplicity and restraint, Howard taught me to strive for what I consider the greatest skill an animator or storyteller could hope to attain; to be able to convey a thought or an emotion as quickly and deeply as possible. Dealing with fractions of a second, and just a moment on screen to make a point, there's no time to waste. If you don't grab your viewer, and make him laugh or gasp or get a tear in his eye, it's a lost opportunity you're not getting back. I'm grateful to Howard for encouraging me to avoid fluff and smoke screen, to choose well, and to try to say a lot with just a little. I might not always succeed, but I guess I'm going to keep trying. I want to make sure Howard's proud.



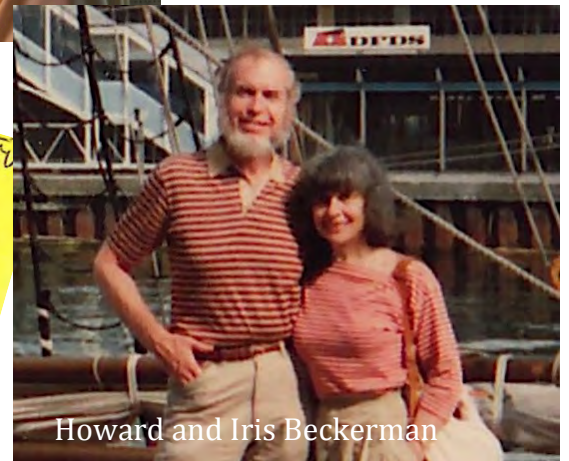
Here are some stills from the interview, [At Home With Howard Beckerman](#) by [Casey Safron](#).



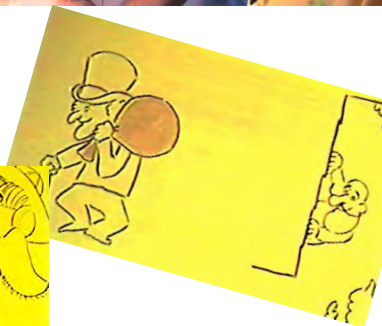
Howard:

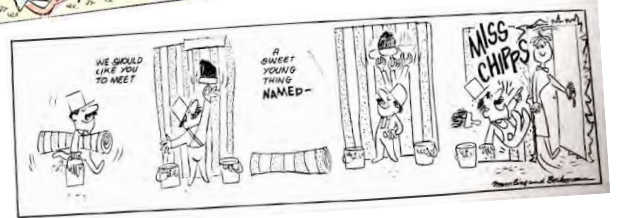
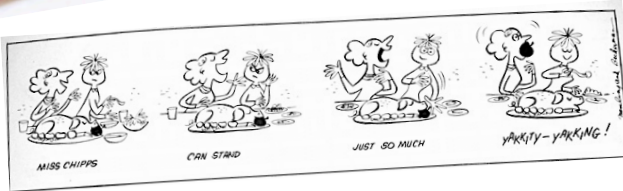
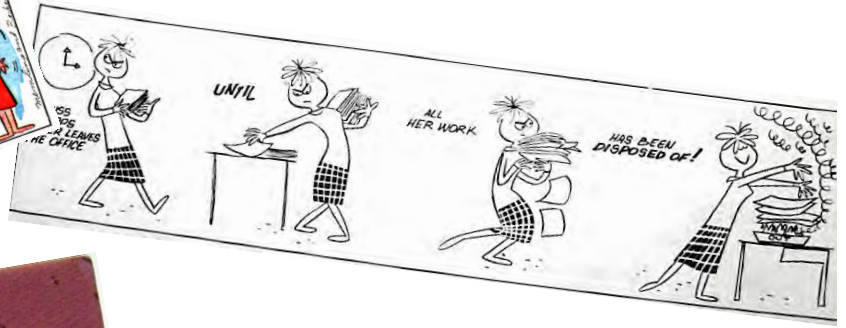
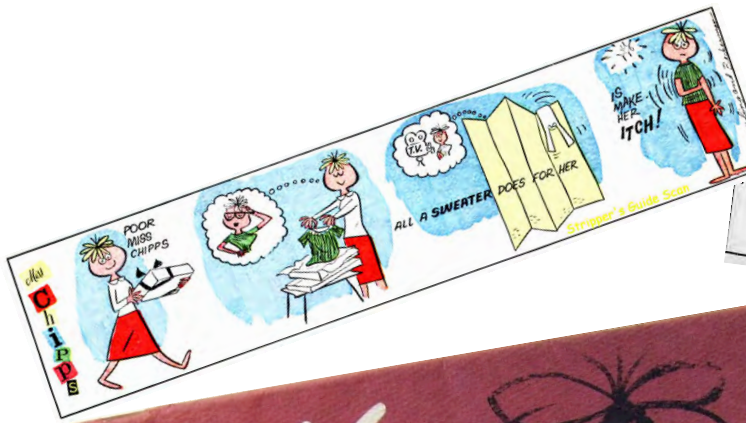
“*Boop-Beep* was created by me and Iris to enter into a Danish film festival that we were going to. It was based on a theatrical form called “blackouts”. I created the story to employ its use as an animated short. The original ending had the old man getting the fish and the old lady winding up with the money. It felt incomplete. It was Iris who came up with the idea that the miser marry the woman for *his* money. The ship captain came in handy to fulfill the marriage ceremony. It won

various prizes and took us around the world.”



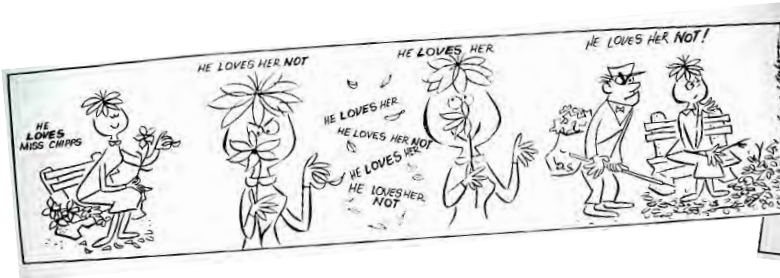
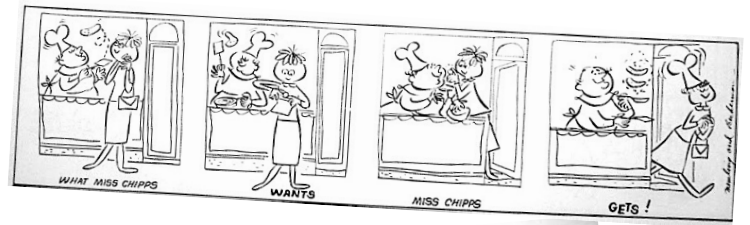
Howard and Iris Beckerman





“Howard, how did Miss Chipps get started?”

“Miss Chipps was a strip written by Carl Memling and designed and drawn by me that ran for a brief time in the late 1950s in a special comic strip newspaper distributed with advertising in supermarkets. The creator of the newspaper was a key cartoonist on the popular Bringing Up Father (Jiggs and Maggie) comic strip distributed by Kings Features.”



## On a personal note.....

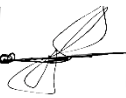


It's hard to describe in a paragraph the many ways my art and my life have been enhanced by my friendship with Howard. He has been a mentor to me

for several decades. I took his animation class, then, I worked beside Iris in his studio on 45<sup>th</sup> Street. He would tip me off to some new production that was staffing up, looking at portfolios, and I would hustle off to try to land a "gig." I became the background designer on several TV series. A few years ago, I also began teaching at the School of Visual Arts, so we met again in the halls there, and even now he continues to give me tips on so many things. And he makes me laugh!

Wishing you continued success in all endeavors, Howard.

Meryl Rosner



Roberson