The Cartoon Lady

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The Cartoon Lady

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at Syracuse University

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Honors Capstone Project in Newspaper Journalism

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Abstract

“The Cartoon Lady” is the biography of Bunny Hoest, a longtime cartoonist. The biography aims to tell the story of Bunny’s life and how she entered the cartooning world, as well as the history of cartooning and its future. Bunny’s story is used as an example and a vehicle to explore issues in cartooning, such as ownership and advancing technology.

This project preserves a history. Bunny is the subject of the biography because she is a pioneer in the industry as a strong, female figure. The text demonstrates her significant role in cartooning history as well as the resilience of human nature. This work also focuses on the shifting role of cartoons in our society and the decline of print.

The methodology used to write the biography was mainly interviews. In-depth interviews with Bunny in particular were essential to the project. Interviews with family members and additional cartoonists were vital as well. Information from journals, museum exhibits and newspaper websites was also important in fact gathering for the biography.
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Chapter 1

“Why Not You?”

“Bill Hoest asked me to marry him,” Bunny told her son, Chip, over the phone while he was away at college.

“No kidding,” he said, unsure of whether she was telling him she was getting married or if she told the guy to take a hike. “What’d you say?”

Bunny laughed. “Well, I told him yes!”

And life as Bunny knew it was forever changed. Bunny had been married once before and was mostly a stay-at-home mom, though she worked part time as an English teacher. After 20 years, her marriage fell apart. Her three children were grown, and she needed more activity. Part-time substitute teaching was no longer as satisfying and was not so great at paying the bills. Refusing to feel sorry for herself, Bunny decided to look for full-time work.

Her friend Bill, an artist, aware of her search, asked her to edit his book of cartoons. Bill was trying to promote his cartoon, The Lockhorns, by compiling some of the best comics into a book. Knowing Bunny had a knack for words and a killer sense of humor, Bill asked her to be the book’s editor.

“Bill dumped 5,000 cartoons in my lap and said, ‘Pick out 120 mixed cartoons.’ And I thought what a great job!” Bunny said. “I helped Bill with 25 books ultimately. And then I married the boss.”

Marrying Bill catapulted Bunny into a life she never expected. It re-energized her personal world and professional career. Bunny Hoest is known in
the cartooning world as The Cartoon Lady, one of the few females in the industry. The Hoest cartoons include Bumper Snickers, Agatha Crumm, What a Guy, Laugh Parade, Howard Huge, Hunny Bunny’s Short Tales, and The Lockhorns.

Stan Goldberg, the artist behind Archie for over 40 years and winner of a National Cartoonists Hall of Fame award for his lifetime contribution, said few other cartoonists have ever had as many successful cartoons as Bunny. “I can’t think of anybody, even some guys, that have had five or six things going,” Goldberg said. “Having the one thing, I never knew how they were able to do all of those. Bunny was very instrumental in getting those things. It has to be put together very well and promoted well. It’s a formula that works so well. I can’t think of any other wife who was as involved full time. It was more. She’s not just somebody who was involved then retired from it. She goes over everything that goes in and out. And they are surviving in a field now that has less space in the newspaper for the comics.”
Even after 40 years, The Lockhorns remains in print. It is a single panel cartoon depicting the misadventures of the married couple Leroy and Loretta Lockhorn. The lasting universal appeal stems from observations of life and the ability for readers to identify with the combatants. The two bicker about Leroy’s wandering eye and excessive drinking and Loretta’s controlling mother and squabble over frequent automobile fender benders, among other matrimonial matters. In every panel the two lock horns as deer charging each other in a fight, but their love endures. “The Lockhorns are so successful, they’re on more refrigerator doors,” Goldberg said. “It’s so apropos, it’s so perfect in everybody’s life. It’s that kind of panel that everybody can relate to. It works.”

Leroy and Loretta Lockhorn enter the homes of 100 million people around the world each week. The cartoon is syndicated by King Features, a unit of the Hearst Corporation. It is translated daily into 12 languages and appears in more than 500 newspapers. But as a child, Bunny would never have imagined her future avocation. She never fawned over comics or drew doodles instead of studying. Her development into a cartoon icon was not just unintentional but a surprise. Yet it grew into her passion as well as her public identity. And all from humble beginnings.
Chapter 2
“Keep Smiling”

November 12, 1932. Brooklyn. David and Ruth Mezz said hello to daughter Madeline, a tiny baby they thought looked like a bunny because of her big, brown eyes. Their small daughter would be known as Bunny.

Bunny went home from the hospital with her parents to the red-brick townhouse owned by her grandparents, Popsy Barnett and Grandma Rose. The extended family moved in together during the Depression. Everyone needed the economic support. Cousin Milton, who moved to New York City from Ohio to try to make it as a musician, lived in the attic of the townhouse. Bunny’s Aunt Silvia lived in the house as well. She was engaged to a man named Marshall, but Marshall had no job. Silvia and Marshall were to be married as soon as he found work.
The townhouse was the last in a line, so one side was not attached to the row. The small front yard was big enough for a tree and stairs leading to a front porch, where a glider swing sat to the right of the front door. Inside the door were the stairs to the second floor and a telephone table that held the house phone. The house was set up like a railroad flat, but just wide enough to include a thin hall along the side. A living room with a piano was off to the right, and the kitchen was down the hall. Behind the house was a small alley that ran parallel to the main road, where the garage sat unattached. The scent from a large lilac bush in the backyard regularly wafted through the kitchen window. There, Grandma Rose set up her sewing machine to enjoy the fragrant flowers while she stitched.

Upstairs were the bedrooms: Popsy and Grandma shared a room, as did David, Ruth and infant Bunny. Silvia had a bedroom, and Milton slept in the attic. The bathroom and adjacent shaving room were by the bedrooms. The family called the area “toilet square.”

Growing up, Bunny was the only child in an all-adult house. She remembers being fascinated by the rich, scholarly conversations during such economically tough times. “They were all Jewish intellectuals,” Bunny said. “They were not petty people who were just involved with making a living.”

At the dinner table, the family talked about international politics and music. Bunny’s mother sang opera, having graduated from The Juilliard School as a scholarship student. She had standing tickets at the Metropolitan Opera, a tradition Bunny carries on today. Language coaches came to the house to instruct her on how to pronounce Italian and French words as she sang. Foreign languages
flowed from the living room. Popsy and Grandma spoke, read and wrote Russian, German, Polish and Yiddish in addition to English. “The newspapers they read were in 14 different languages,” Bunny said. “Grandma Rose used to do cross language puns. She’d use a word in Polish that sounded like another word in English and play on that. She really was such a linguist.”

Politics, too, were a topic of conversation in the house. “My mother for some reason had heard that Japan was buying scrap iron from America and converting it into ships, which eventually became Pearl Harbor,” Bunny said. “She was boycotting Japanese toys. She wouldn’t let me buy anything that was made in Japan. The other thing we were hearing about was the rise of Hitler, which nobody seemed aware of. Everyone thought at last Germany was being united. A lot of people didn’t realize the maniacal scope.”
Bunny’s Aunt Silvia was going to school to learn how to teach kindergarten, studying early education. “She’d bring home all kinds of IQ tests and games from her homework and there was nobody to experiment on but me,” Bunny said. Other intellectual insights came from Bunny’s father. “My father was a scientist. He invented the nose clip,” Bunny said. “He was a great athlete and a swimmer and he realized that the water that gets into your inner ear through the nose is what gives people infections.” He experimented on a swim team and researched water mammals that seal off their nostrils before going underwater. “I remember seeing film at a really young age,” Bunny said. “These cute little furry animals would put on nose clips before they dove in.”

All this conversation and David’s research went on in the house. “It was amazingly diverse,” Bunny said. “It was ultra stimulating, overwhelming, and I loved it. Did I mind being an only child? Hell no! It was a wonderful environment for learning.”

Her father, David, was an ear, nose and throat doctor. But during the Depression, his business suffered terribly. “He was a specialist, and nobody had the money to pay a specialist,” Bunny said. “People would rather go to a general practitioner.” Resultantly, David did many procedures free of charge. “He did a lot of pro bono work at Coney Island Hospital, which was fun because he would take me to Coney Island,” Bunny said.

Bunny remembers the excitement when her Aunt Silvia’s fiancée, Marshall, finally got a job. No one even asked what it was, because it didn’t
matter. “Just getting a job was a big deal,” Bunny said. “Nobody even thought about fulfilling your life’s passion, the kind of luxury you have now.”

The two were married, and Silvia moved out of the family house to live with Marshall. Bunny was able to move into her aunt’s bedroom in the house. The family still stayed close, and toddler Bunny even helped her new uncle with his job. He delivered cartons of Camel cigarettes to refill machines. In the early 1930s, cigarettes cost 18 cents a pack. Smokers would slip two dimes into the machine, and they would need two cents change. Marshall would use a box knife to cut a small slit in the side of the cellophane covering the packs, and he would give the packs to Bunny. It was her job to insert two pennies into the wrapping and pile the packs into boxes. “I learned when I was three-and-a-half or four that there were 12 packs to a dozen, and there were 144 to a gross,” Bunny said.

It didn’t matter that Marshall didn’t have a glamorous job, Bunny said. The family supported him always. Her mother’s thesis was, don’t walk around with a troubled face. Whining was not going to help you get anywhere. Complaining did nothing. Keep smiling.

Today, Bunny’s autograph always comes with this advice. “Keep smiling,” she signs next to her name.
Chapter 3

“Guilt is Silly”

After the Depression, Bunny and her parents were able to leave her grandparents’ house. They stayed in Brooklyn, moving a few blocks away to a limestone English Basement house where they lived above her father’s ENT office. The house was in an attached row where several families lived in the top floor and had businesses on the bottom. Many other doctors filled the offices down the line, including an ophthalmologist, an obstetrician and an orthodontist.

Bunny’s grandfather, Popsy, began having luck in business, too. Originally a silk salesman, he got into the building business. He began investing and building apartment houses around Queens. Popsy was born outside of Kiev, the youngest of five boys. His family and community pitied him, calling him the fifth wheel, but Popsy countered, “I’m the spare tire.”
Popsy was the first in his family to travel to America. He came alone as a teenager and quickly sent for his family to follow him. Only two brothers came, and the rest of the family was annihilated during World War II.

Generations later, the family still honors those who were lost. Bunny knew she was lucky. “We had this sense of, oh my God, we’re so lucky. We feel blessed to be Americans and be the ones who survived. We also feel an obligation, because we didn’t survive for nothing. You have to make your survival worthwhile,” Bunny said.

This outlook led Bunny’s father to teach her that guilt is impractical. Other people suffered from survival guilt, but David said guilt was silly. “If you feel guilty because you’re doing something you shouldn’t be doing, stop doing it. If you feel guilty because you didn’t do something, do it,” Bunny said she learned from her father.

They did it—they made their survival worthwhile by helping others and excelling intellectually, fulfilling the Jewish pillars of charity and education. Bunny’s mother was a member of a committee called HIAS, Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, and helped bring Jewish children in danger in Europe to America. The children were being brought to live with Jewish families in Brooklyn. Some were in Bunny’s school district when she was in elementary school. The children spoke no English, but were thrust into regular classes. They were paired with gifted students to learn English and American culture. Bunny was matched with several different girls and instructed to share her desk. “They said, ‘Show her everything, show her where to put her coat, show her where we keep the chalk

and the pencils, show her everything you’re doing until she can do it on her
own,” Bunny said.

At first, the girls she was paired with could hardly ask questions. But after
just a few months, they spoke English well enough to have a desk of their own
and Bunny would be paired with a new girl. “I was teaching English as a second
language, or maybe a third language. We didn’t call it that. What I was doing was
assimilating a foreign child into an American program,” Bunny said.

Bunny excelled in her classes. She skipped two grade levels during
elementary school and started at Midwood High School when she was 12.
Midwood was a public school in Brooklyn that had a magnet music and arts
program. “There were stiff auditions,” Bunny said. “You had to sight read, you
had to sing a song from beginning to end without accompaniment to make sure
you didn’t go flat.” Bunny made it into the magnet program with a concentration
in vocal music. “I played the piano but I was in the chorus from day one,” Bunny
said. But she didn’t just stay in the music department. Bunny studied French and
Spanish throughout her four years at Midwood. After graduating, Bunny looked
forward to studying foreign language in college.
Chapter 4

“Say ‘No,’ Miss Fun”

As the only child in an all-adult house, Bunny quickly learned to keep busy. “Bored was not an option,” she said. “I think the family had that kind of philosophy. I think it was intrinsic in their lust for life.”

Bunny’s mother in particular taught her when she was young to seize the day and do whatever you can do. “When I got older she’d say ‘put on lipstick and perfume and go out,’” Bunny remembers. When you say no, Bunny says, you miss the fun.

When Bunny started at Adelphi University, she was only 16. She felt meek standing at 5-foot-3 in thick glasses, so much younger than her peers. Her mother told her to take off her glasses and put on a smile. So Bunny walked around blindly beaming up at anything that walked by her. She was quickly elected as the floor president in her dorm.

Bunny took Italian and Spanish during her first year of college, following the path to a degree in foreign language. Her mother even bought her a special foreign language typewriter. However, after her freshman year, Bunny decided to major in English instead. “I realized the people studying foreign language spoke it,” Bunny said. “I switched after one year to an English major because I figured that was my first language and I could probably do better in it. I loved words.”

During the summers, Bunny worked as a counselor at Camp Kee-Wah in New York. During the summer of 1951, Bunny met Ted Jungreis. Ted, eight
years Bunny’s senior, was working as a lifeguard at the camp. “He was this glamorous returning war hero and smart,” Bunny said. “He had medals and he was on the GI bill. He was going through college and a master’s program as a returning soldier. He was worldly, he had traveled.” At 18, Bunny swooned. The two were married in 1952, during Bunny’s senior year of college, and she quickly became pregnant.

* Photo: Bunny and her father on her wedding day, 1952
The couple lived with Bunny’s parents while they built a house on Long Island and Bunny finished her degree. As Ted commuted to work, he dropped Bunny off at school. Bunny had her first child, Charles, in May of 1953. She graduated from Adelphi the next month, and that summer the family moved to Huntington, N.Y. Bunny would live in that house for nearly 30 years.

Bunny’s next child, Sharon, was born in 1955 and her youngest, Patty, came along in 1958. Her grandparents, Popsy Barnett and Grandma Rose, joined the family of five in the summers, particularly as Grandma grew ill. “I was a full-time mom,” Bunny said. “I was running a household with three little babies and a sick grandmother.” Not to mention the family dog, Euripides, a massive St. Bernard. Ted, meanwhile, apprenticed under Popsy in the building business.
Popsy taught Ted about real estate law and how to get building permits through the town. Ted went on to build houses and factories.

The family lived on a charming cul-de-sac at the edge of a golf course in a half-Italian, half-Jewish neighborhood. The neighborhood kids ate kosher and Italian foods in the same meal as they drifted from house to house, having large delicious dinners at the Donofrio’s, Sclafani’s and Hirschfeld’s. As a young mother of three with zero culinary skills, Bunny struggled to keep up with the other mothers on the block.

One evening, many of the neighborhood kids were playing at Bunny’s near dinnertime so she boiled a pot of spaghetti for the crew. In typical Bunny fashion, she poured a bottle of ketchup over the pasta, stirred it up, and served it. Later that evening, after all the rascals had gone home, Bunny’s phone rang. It was Mrs. Donofrio from down the street. She had heard the kids raving about Bunny’s tomato sauce and wondered if Bunny would share the recipe. Sheepishly, Bunny admitted that she had used ketchup. In disbelief, Mrs. Donofrio snidely quipped, “Well, if you don’t want to share!”

Bunny’s daughter Sharon has written down her mother’s most famously abysmal recipes. Sharon calls one Eggs Bunn-addict: Bring over-salted water to boil. Drop eggs in, cracking shells willy-nilly. Set on high. Go to beach. Another notorious dish is Crepes Meshugenner: Pour store-bought batter into schlockiest pan available. Scrape excessively with abrasive spatula. Serve when simultaneously burnt and uncooked.
In her 70s, Bunny tried to really learn to cook as a pastime. She promptly preheated an oven full of pots and pans, turning them red hot. Then, she unknowingly served her lactose-intolerant daughter a dairy dish. The hobby didn’t last long. Bunny still prefers to eat out. A hobby that has stuck throughout Bunny’s life is music. When Bunny moved to Huntington she quickly joined a choral society and got involved with little theater. She sang, danced or directed music in various shows, including South Pacific, Plain and Fancy, Fiorello, Damn Yankees, Gypsy, She Loves Me, Guys and Dolls, Bells are Ringing, My Fair Lady and A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum. Bunny continued to play the piano and wrote her own music. “I composed three original scores for musical comedies,” Bunny said. “You don’t have to do your passion for money. People say, ‘If you have your dream job you never work a day in your life.’ What’s wrong with work?”
Chapter 5

“The More You Know, the More You Get the Jokes”

Bunny went back to school when her youngest daughter, Patty, was a year old to earn her master’s degree in education. She took her courses on Saturdays and at night, earning her master’s in June of 1962. “At that point there was still nothing called ESL but the ‘60s became when the communists were taking over Hungary and again, children were fleeing and they were non-English speaking,” Bunny said. Bunny was hired part time by the Huntington public school system as an English teacher for these students. “They didn’t call it English as a second language, but that’s what I was doing,” Bunny said. “Ironically, I called on my old skills. I didn’t just sit in the classroom with the kids. I would take them all to Heckscher Park, or the diner to show them how to eat. I was still trying to assimilate them the way I had when I was 6 years old.”
Throughout the 1960s, Bunny shuttled between schools in the district, helping small classes of French-speaking Haitian children and Cuban immigrants learn English. Eventually Bunny was replaced by a teacher with a master’s in English as a second language, a degree that hadn’t existed before, who could work full time. Bunny worked as a substitute teacher for a time but the district capped the number of days a substitute could work. As her teaching career fell apart, so did her marriage. Bunny and Ted found they did not get along, and Bunny wanted a divorce.

Bunny and Ted belonged to the Huntington Racquet Club, where they entered tennis tournaments and made life long friends. It was through the Racquet Club that Bunny met Bill Hoest, and the two became fast friends. After a stint in the Navy, Bill studied art at Cooper Union and made his living as a cartoonist. He created The Lockhorns in 1968, but wasn’t paid much for his work. Bill had six
children to support from a previous marriage so he tried to sell freelance cartoons to magazines to supplement his meager income. He had good sales at the Saturday Evening Post and became known in the community as Hoest of the Post. But Bill wanted to further promote The Lockhorns and decided to compile some of the best comics into a book. After Bunny agreed to edit the book, the two fell in love.

Bunny and Ted finalized their divorce in October 1973. Bunny and Bill married days later, on Nov. 4, 1973, in the Plaza Hotel in New York City. The two quickly got to work.

“We married in 1973 and in 1974 we formed William Hoest Enterprises,” Bunny said. They became business partners. Bill did the drawing and Bunny helped with captions and promotion. In compiling books, Bunny learned the importance of selecting dynamic panels to pair together.

Photo: Bunny and Bill, 1976
“We thought we’d do a cooking book and shopping book and a drinking book, all the things that were characteristic to The Lockhorns, part of their personalities,” Bunny said. “But it just was too repetitive.” Mixing cartoons proved much more effective and crowd pleasing. The look of Leroy and Loretta was altered as well—being drawn with the “big nose, big foot school” in mind. The couple looked more clown-like, physically funny and squat, and The Lockhorns grew more popular. Bill’s work led the National Cartoonists Society to award him Best Syndicated Panel Cartoonist for The Lockhorns in 1975 and 1980.

Bill continued to approach magazines for freelance work. He had cartoons in Ladies Home Journal, Good Housekeeping, Cosmopolitan, and Playboy. He won Best Magazine Gag Cartoonist in 1977. “When we got married, we continued the freelance cartoons and we really shifted into high gear with The Lockhorns and they started picking up a lot of papers, so the money got better and better,” Bunny said. “We realized it was so much better to have a steady syndicated feature that we decided we should have others.”

Bunny and Bill had a strong relationship with the National Enquirer, and approached them about publishing a weekly Hoest cartoon. “Bill had had this idea for a cartoon about vehicles so we started Bumper Snickers.” The panel was all sorts of cartoons about cars, without any specific repeating characters. “Bill said he was sorry he didn’t have a character,” Bunny said. “He would have called him Bumper Jack.” The National Enquirer began publishing Bumper Snickers weekly in 1974.
“While I was married to Bill I became more interested in writing cartoons and became interested in other characters,” Bunny said. Inspiration came from observation. Bunny’s parents moved to a retirement community in Florida, and she and Bill visited for months at a time during the winter. “We drove down, we took all the studio, all of the files, the drawing board and all of the equipment,” Bunny said. “We worked down there for two or three months every winter. They had an extra room that we made a studio and we slept in.”

Bunny’s mother had made friends with many of the elderly women in the community. “They were dynamic old ladies,” Bunny said. “They were efficient and effective and smart. A lot of them had become widows and they were doing great. We were fascinated by these very dynamic women, and we came up with the character Agatha Crumm. We created a family for her. She lived in a house that looked a lot like mine and she ran a giant corporation.” Agatha Crumm was a three-panel comic strip. “It was a strip because we didn’t want it to compete with The Lockhorns,” Bunny said.
Bill started the drawings while they were in Florida and showed it to King Features. “We wanted it to be syndicated because that was obviously where the security was,” Bunny said. Additionally, their Lockhorns contract with King Features gave the syndicate the right of first refusal, meaning that if a contracted cartoonist had a new idea, King Features got the first look. If King Features rejected the idea, the cartoonist could then take it somewhere else. “But they took it,” Bunny said. “And that was very exciting.” King Features picked up Agatha Crumm in 1977.

By this time, the couple had a full schedule. Bumper Snickers was a weekly magazine panel. Agatha Crumm, a syndicated newspaper strip, and The Lockhorns, a syndicated newspaper panel, were both published daily and Sunday. “We were very ambitious,” Bunny said. “And we were working together. I was doing all of the writing and allocating. I write the date literally on every cartoon. They’re allocated for specific days so there’s a balance overall on the week. I don’t have her panning him six times in a row. I don’t have him doing her. I don’t want them always sitting at the kitchen table. That’s boring. One day they’re shopping and one day they’re sitting. Allocating means we have a balance through the week.”
The Hoests’ positive reputation grew, and Parade Magazine approached the cartooning couple in 1980. “Parade had a new editor and he wanted to do a column called Laugh Parade. He wanted it to have a certain look and he approached Bill,” Bunny said. Bill accepted the offer and drew the column, which consisted of three individual panels with no particular constant characters. Parade also gave ownership of the cartoon to the cartoonists, making Laugh Parade the first feature Bunny and Bill ever owned.

“It was fun, it was great freedom,” Bunny said. “But we decided that we wanted a consistent panel in the center that people came back to every week.” Bill had taken to drawing funny pictures of Bunny’s massive, mischievous St. Bernard, Euripides, who had just recently died. “We didn’t think it was funny, the kids and I were still in tears,” Bunny said. But laughter turned out to be the best medicine for the family. They realized the drawings were humorous and the concept even funnier. Bunny’s son had a roommate and dear friend in college named Howard. They affectionately referred to him as Howard Huge because of his enormous physical stature and robustness. Contrasting his intimidating appearance, Howard was gentle and sweet. After getting permission, Bunny and Bill named the panel about their beloved pet Howard Huge. In 1981, Howard Huge became the centerpiece of Laugh Parade.

Bunny and Bill couldn’t stop. By the mid-’80s, they were producing The Lockhorns, Bumper Snickers, Agatha Crumm, Laugh Parade and Howard Huge, when inspiration struck again as they noticed the growing trend of working mothers. “Women were getting married and keeping their careers, which was
different,” Bunny said. “When I got married I stayed home with the children. I did other stuff but it was on the side.” This observation was hyperbolized in their 1986 strip What a Guy.

“We made What a Guy about a little boy whose parents are both college grad professionals. The mother was a lawyer and the father was a banker, and he was a latch-key kid,” Bunny said. “Bill could relate to that because he was a latch-key child. His parents were not home. His father ran away and his mother was a single mom and she would have to go to work in the morning. He was on his own.”

The character, Guy Wellington Frothmore, was a little kid who carried a briefcase and went to a fancy private school. “He was imitating his mother and father,” Bunny said. “The kid represented a whole generation. This was in the ‘80s so it was very timely and this was very well received.”
"I dreamed last night that I was being overcharged by my analyst."

"OK... what's so funny?"

"Walk upright if you like. But I'm warning you... your descendants will have backaches and varicose veins."
Bunny and Bill were careful to keep their characters different from one another so they would not compete. They never wanted a publisher to think they only wanted one of the Hoest cartoons. What a Guy came from a rich family who lived in a fancy apartment in New York City. “We made it different from The Lockhorns, because that was suburban, and Agatha, who lived in a castle.” Additionally, What a Guy was an elongated panel, different than the traditional Lockhorns panel and comic strip style of Agatha.

As the features grew more and more time consuming, Bunny and Bill decided to drop freelance magazine cartoons from their regular schedule. “What happened in that period of time was that magazines were going out of business or weren’t using cartoons. They had maybe one cartoon a month,” Bunny said. “It became less cost-effective for us to waste time doing that. There was an overlap, but basically we dropped out of taking the rounds on Wednesdays and showing cartoons.”

While Bill was drawing, Bunny was in charge of writing and editing captions and giving stage directions. “It’s like a sitcom,” Bunny said. “We have sets.” Bunny helped Bill set up the cartoons, viewing the panel like a stage. In some scenes, Leroy and Loretta bicker in their kitchen but in others, they are at the theater. Bunny helped Bill decide how to position the characters to keep the
panels engaging and dynamic. “It shouldn’t be noticeable. What would be noticeable is if it’s wrong,” Bunny said.

King Features always syndicated Bill’s cartoons. As the works of Bunny and Bill grew more popular, other syndicates gave higher offers. But the pair stayed loyal to the publisher that had remained loyal to them. Bunny and Bill continued working furiously to meet the deadlines of their six features. “I once counted up how many we did a week. It was better if we didn’t know. It was so much work. We killed ourselves in those years,” Bunny said. “We were killing ourselves, really working day and night. Looking back now, I can’t imagine how we did it.” The couple worked on a four-week schedule, where they had to mail in four weeks of finished cartoons by each tight publishing date. Bunny and Bill always tried to work ahead of schedule.

Bunny and Bill shared the studio during the day. Bill divided the day into three parts and would work two parts of the day. “We both got up early so we could be working from 6 in the morning until 12,” Bunny said. “We’d take a break in the afternoon, go out to lunch or go play tennis, and then we’d come back in the afternoon and then work until 10. He spent the time in the studio drawing. I would hand him six daily captions that were pretty much ready to go, then he
would draw six cartoons. And then we’d make little edits. ‘Can you make her
expression more joyous?’ It was kind of passing it back and forth.”

Many of the joke concepts came from mail the couple received, from both amateur and professional writers. Bunny reviewed the lines, deciding if they were gems or germs. “We’re looking for a gem, which means it’s perfect as it is,” Bunny said. “That rarely happens. Usually you have to beef it up. You have to make it shorter and snappier because that’s the style of our cartoons. They’re very black and white. They’re not fuzzy. The writing style and the drawing style are compatible. A germ of an idea we run with, but we have to fix it. It’s not funny the way it is. And some you just scrap. Most we scrap.” Bunny focuses on articulating the jokes. She uses words that are comic and direct to make short and snappy lines in the final edit.

The couple’s hard work paid off, and by the mid-’80s they were making a couple thousand dollars per week. Work was good, and life was good, too. Bunny and Bill traveled. “Wherever we went, Bill took pictures of interesting architectural details,” Bunny said. “He had a gazillion creative hobbies.” Bill
loved to dance and to garden. He was a woodworker and an artist. The two took long motorcycle trips and played tennis. They wrote shows that they performed at the Racquet Club—Bunny wrote them and acted and danced and sang. And soon, they built the house of their dreams.

* Photo: Bunny and Bill, 1977
Chapter 6
“Do it Now”

Bunny and Bill bought property in a remote part of Huntington along the beach in 1974. They put $100 down on two acres, and that $100 held the land for them until building permits cleared in 1981. Though they couldn’t build during all those years, they used the waterfront property when they could. “We used to go out there and have picnics with our friends, and get poison ivy,” Bunny said. They also swam at the beach and sunbathed.

Bill’s big dream was to design and build his own home. He designed it for years, even designing several houses. “He loved the creative process,” Bunny said. “He felt architecture was the ultimate sculpture. Besides being beautiful, it also has to function.” When the permits finally came through building was supposed to start immediately. But Bill had made the house a little quirky, and the original builder said he wouldn’t be able to take on the project after all. At the moment when the builder abandoned them, Bunny’s friend Jimmy Russo happened to be swimming at their beach. Jimmy was a shop teacher in the school district where Bunny used to work. As they explained the bad news to their friends, he interjected. “Jimmy said, ‘I can do it,’” Bunny remembers.

Jimmy worked around his teaching schedule, going to the house before and after school hours and even during his lunch break. “He was a great seizer of opportunities,” Bunny said. “We would get out there before Jimmy went to school, he’d be there at six in the morning, and he’d go back to high school
around eight. At lunchtime he would come back, and we would come back. Every time we saw something we’d say, ‘Jimmy, when you get a chance, do you mind carving off that beam?’ He said, ‘What do you mean when I get a chance? I’m going to do it now.’ He would drop what he was doing, interrupt it to do the quickie, immediate project, and then go back to what he was working on. It made such a lot of sense,” Bunny said. “It became our slogan because he was so efficient.” The house was finished in nine months. “It wasn’t finished completely,” Bunny said. “It didn’t have the back terrace. There was no banister, no fireplace front, no moldings.” But the couple was able to move into the house in 1982.

The long road from town grew narrower and windier and the forests more overgrown as Bunny and Bill would drive toward their new home. The house is built out of gray cobblestone, salvaged from the old cobblestone streets of New York City. The city’s tar is still on many of the blocks. The house is not visible from the street but comes into view around the curve of the steep driveway. The home looks modest from the front, the corners of the roof dipping down low, giving it a cottage-like appearance. But the back of the house is grand, with many windows and a round turret that transforms the house from cottage to castle. Bill designed the house to include a studio, and the turret housed his drawing desk. “He designed the turret for himself,” Bunny said. “It’s only 10 feet in diameter. He was a woodworker so he built his own wood cabinets, and he could spin in his chair and touch every surface.” The lawn stretches out back until it ends in a 30-
foot bluff overlooking the Long Island Sound. Thirty-nine slate steps curve down to a bathhouse and the water. Bunny still lives in this house today.

* Photo: Bunny’s house, 2012
Chapter 7

“Shut Up, Bun!”

Bunny became a grandmother for the first time on July 7, 1985 when her daughter Sharon and son-in-law Nigel had their first child, baby boy Ian. Bill’s son John had his first daughter, Lindsay, the next month. The families came to Huntington when the babies were about a year and a half old to stay with the new grandparents.

One morning during the visit, Bunny, always an early bird, scooped up the children at dawn and loaded them into their car seats. She set off down the road, taking the kids for a long drive around town in her boat-sized Cadillac. She wanted to get the infants out of the house early so all of the exhausted parents could sleep in.
As the winding road led the group into town, Bunny played tour guide and spoke loudly and enthusiastically to the children. She pointed out different stores and beaches and described the people in the town. She delved into details that fueled her monologue. Her chatting eventually developed into a melody.

“Good morning to you! Good morning to you!” she belted. Over her singing, she heard a small voice from the back seat.


“Shut up, Bun.”

After a hearty bout of hysterics that nearly led Bunny to drive off the road, Ian’s words inspired a realization: she didn’t always have to intervene or micromanage all the time. Often, her unnecessary involvement resulted in an undesirable outcome. She said she realized that sometimes it’s best to let situations play themselves out. This can be difficult for Bunny because she is anxious by nature. In her professional life, Bunny works months ahead. “I work very far ahead because I’m neurotic,” Bunny said. In January, Bunny often sends in the four weeks of April cartoons.

Ultimately, Bunny wound up having six grandchildren, two from each of her children. The family uses Bunny’s house like a vacation home, coming to swim in the summers and play music in the winters. Bunny’s living room currently has two pianos, a guitar, and countless recorders and tambourines. There is an instrument for everybody, and stacks of music from show tunes lie on every surface. Bunny has taken her grandkids to shows on and off Broadway since day
one, sometimes mistakenly inappropriately. She accidentally took one
granddaughter to a nude ballet, which they giggled their way through. “It was
hysterical,” Bunny said. “I’ve seen every Broadway show I’ve ever wanted to see.
Every show I’ve seen with a different grandchild.”

"CAN YOU BELIEVE IT, HOWARD? THAT LADY IS TALKING
TO HER CAT."
Chapter 8

“Do it Right”

In the years after Bunny and Bill moved into their new house, Bill’s mother, Dot, moved in with them. They continued the building so she had her own private wing over the garages. Dot was growing older, and they wanted her to be close just in case her health deteriorated. However, it was Bill who grew sickly. “He was getting one disease after another,” Bunny said. Bill fought through a kidney infection and pneumonia. He had pain in his jaw and mouth so he visited a dentist. The dentist was concerned by the way Bill’s gums looked, and he had samples of the tissue sent for testing.

* Photo: Bunny and Bill in Sag Harbor, NY, 1985
On the morning of Bill’s 60th birthday, Bunny was preparing for a big birthday party when she received crushing news. The tissue samples had been tested, and Bill had non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma. Unsure how to handle the news, they went on with the party. “At the end of the party a couple people stayed behind and we told them that we had found out that morning,” Bunny said. “From then on it was horrible. The first doctor we went to in Long Island looked at the report and said he had two to three years to live. We thought, ‘we can’t accept two to three years, that’s insane. The guy is still on a motorcycle, playing tennis, he goes skiing.’ The irony is, Bill lived exactly two years and nine months more.”

As Bill underwent chemotherapy, he grew weak and struggled to meet the demanding deadlines of his six cartoon features. His friends in the cartoon community pulled together to help their ailing peer. They said they would ghost for him, imitate his style, tide him over. “We thought he’d get better,” Bunny said. MAD Magazine cartoonist Mort Drucker was a friend of the couple, and he recommended to them John Reiner, a young cartoonist he’d worked with who was looking for a job.

“I was doing work for Mort Drucker at the time and I was living here in Huntington,” John said. “He had a comic strip at the time called Benchley, which really was just a satire about the White House. Unfortunately it only lasted about three years.”

All of the cartoonists in the area became friendly through a monthly meeting. “Those that wanted to get out of the studio—obviously working alone all the time you wanted to be with others of the same profession,” John said. “We got
to know one another and when anyone ever needed any help we were there for one another.” Bill took Mort’s advice and asked John to help him. “I think that was the year he was diagnosed with lymphoma, so he knew he was not going to be able to do all the work he wanted to do,” John said. “He needed an assistant.”

John apprenticed under Bill beginning in 1986 and couldn’t have been a better match. “Not only did he have the work back in a turnover, but he imitated the lettering,” Bunny said. “John did everything. He just got it. He got the expressions on the faces without being told. He got the body language.”

At first, Bill and John were able to work side by side. “He was actually quite strong,” John said. “I was surprised. For about a year or so, every time I saw Bill he looked hale and hearty. He was still riding the motorcycle, still playing tennis, still just as active as he always was. I thought this was one of those things
that was totally and completely under control, as you hear about some cancers that are managed. This appeared to be perfectly under control and later, he started to decline.” John said it was around April 1988 when Bill really started showing signs. “From that point it was clear we would have to increase the amount of activity. No one knew when the end would come,” John said.

Soon, Bill had to move into the hospital full time. John picked up work from Bunny in the evening and returned it to her in the morning. She then took the cartoons to Bill at New York University Hospital and together they made suggestions. Bunny either then drove back to Long Island, and John picked up the cartoons in the evening—the cycle starting over—or she stayed with family in the city and used Federal Express to mail the work to John. “John became invaluable,” Bunny said.

Even though there was a distance, John said he felt there was enough communication that he was receiving training from afar. “Bill was able to sit up in his hospital bed and look over material,” John said. “That apparently had to end when he was no longer able to do anything. He had no choice.”

Bill died on Nov. 7, 1988. “I didn’t honestly know if I could go on,” Bunny said. “I certainly wasn’t feeling funny. John was a mess. He was hysterical, he was dissolved.”

“It was a terrible experience,” John said. “And his mother was present, she was living upstairs, so that was painful.” Bunny and John leaned on each other to keep the business going. “This was not only her creative outlet, it was her livelihood,” John said of Bunny. “She had the house and everything for which she
felt responsible. We weren’t going to ourselves quit because we just felt this tremendous responsibility and obligation to what Bill had created. We weren’t going to end it. And Bill was the most prolific and busy cartoonist I’d ever met. He had more work than anybody and he was doing it all himself. We certainly weren’t going to dishonor him.”

The pair agreed they would continue cartooning, with one caveat: Bunny wanted ownership of the cartoons to protect Bill’s legacy.

“‘In his name I continued all six features,’” Bunny said. Though Bill created The Lockhorns, King Features owned the cartoon. “‘We were just work for hire,’” Bunny said. “‘It was a bad situation. They would take over your idea, your intellectual property, and hire you to do it.’”

“No one had had ownership before that,” John said. “‘It was always work for hire. What people don’t know is that the first person to try and really break the contract was Milton Caniff, who had done Terry and the Pirates. They wouldn’t
give him ownership, this was in the late ‘40s. It was an enormously popular strip. All the cartoonists at that point had had no ownership. They felt like indentured slaves because they always had the syndicates over their heads saying, ‘if you don’t behave we’ll take it away from you.’ He was so annoyed with the lack of ownership that he left. That began the start of the rumblings in the industry.

“Back in the 1960s the cartoonists got together and helped Siegel and Shuster, who created Superman. They sold Superman to DC comics in 1939 for $135 and so they lost all rights and over the years as billions were made, they made no money and they were starving to death, they were old and broke. Everybody said this is unconscionable. Ownership became a big issue and Bunny was the first at that time, because of the loss of Bill, she felt that if she didn’t get ownership, she would walk because it was that important. As a widow, perhaps they would not be so inclined to throw her out into the street,” John said.

Bill always used to tell Bunny that they had to get ownership. But in Bill’s lifetime, it never happened. Shortly after his death, King Features approached Bunny about signing a new contract.

“I encouraged her to find an attorney,” John said. “I wanted Bunny to have more security.”

“I told them, ‘I’m not going to do it unless I have ownership,’” Bunny said. “I don’t know where I got the nerve. And they said OK. And I thought, ‘Oh God, I hope Bill is listening wherever he is.’”

“It was an enormous win,” John said.
King Features hasn’t owned any of Bunny’s features since 1989. The syndicate could not fire Bunny and hire a new cartoonist to continue The Lockhorns. Having ownership makes Bunny inseparable from her characters. Bunny is the CEO and president of William Hoest Enterprises, and she owns all the stock. The corporation will live on as an entity after Bunny, the stock passing on to her children and grandchildren. But in the meantime, Bunny is the director of the cartoons. John moved his workstation to Bill’s studio in the house and continued to work nights. “It seemed a little strange but it was nice,” Bunny said. She felt less alone in the house, and in the morning John’s work waited for Bunny on the cutting board. Bunny spent the day making revisions, and John came back in the evening to make corrections and work on the next set. “We’ve never altered the system,” Bunny said. “I pay all the bills, pay any gag writers that contribute ideas, pay the people to buy paper. I also lay out the cartoons,” Bunny said. “John is called an independent contractor. He produces whatever I need and he gets paid by whatever he produces.”

John said he feels he has free rein as far as the illustrations go, unless there is something specific about the gag that he has to include. “In terms of interpretation when you’re doing things creatively like that you don’t want to be so specific unless the joke requires specificity like, it must take place in a
supermarket or it must take place in a bar,” John said. “Other than that it’s the artist’s interpretation.”

The 24-hour workday the duo developed helped them keep up with demanding deadlines after Bill’s death. “The system that has evolved is that she takes the first part of the day, which is to run the business, answer the mail, talk to the syndicates, deal with the attorneys, do all of the things that are necessary for running the business,” John said. “Bunny fortunately is a morning person and I’m a night person. At the end of the day when I come in, she has the jokes that I’m to illustrate. If I feel that there’s something to be edited, to improve it in some way, we discuss it. And then after about six or seven, after we have dinner, I usually spend the time drawing. It was necessary in a way to do this because Parade, when we were doing that, used to call at four or five in the afternoon and say, ‘we need cartoons in the morning,’ so I could do the work in the evenings.”

Even with dividing the workload, the demands were overwhelming for the pair. John decided he needed to hire some additional help. “The original point was that when we were doing all these features there’s a certain amount of what I’d consider grunt work that I did in the beginning for many other cartoonists which is to cut up the paper, rule the outlines and so forth,” John said. “As cartoonists you take work not only to make money but to learn, to see how the cartoons are constructed.” John needed such an apprentice and hired Adrian Sinnott, one of the local cartoonists he met through the monthly cartoonists meetings.

“Back then when they were doing Agatha Crumm and What a Guy, it was a tremendous amount of work,” Adrian said. “I used to fill in all the blacks and
draw the borders around the boxes. If Loretta burned something, I inked the smoke in. For most people one comic strip is a job that would take all your time. They were doing six. It was an incredible amount of work.”

In 1992, Bunny tried a new feature with the help of her daughter Sharon and artist Adrian called Hunny Bunny’s Short Tale. Each column was a short children’s story, written by Sharon, with whimsical drawings by Adrian. “They took one minute to read, they were on one page,” Bunny said. “People were saying that young people weren’t reading the newspaper, so we wanted something that would attract young parents and get the children into it.”

“That ran for two years,” Adrian said. “It was probably a little ahead of its time because shortly after we stopped, Universal Syndicate, who is the competitor to King, brought out something similar. But because it wasn’t a comic strip, it was bedtime stories, the newspapers were having a difficult time figuring out where to put it within the newspapers. They put it in the financial section at one point because they figured the fathers would see it.”

“King Features never got the spirit,” Bunny said. “It was a darling column. I think it’s still a lovely feature. I think it’s got everything that a newspaper column should have. It attracts young readers. It hooks young children into reading the newspaper.” But King Features dropped it after 104 columns ran.
"FIRE! FIRE!" IAN SHOUTED. HE LOOKED AROUND HIS DARK ROOM AND COULD SEE NOTHING. HE LISTENED FOR NOISE FROM HIS PARENTS' ROOM OR HIS BABY BROTHER; THEY WERE STILL SLEEPING TOO. HE THOUGHT, "I MUST HAVE HAD A BAD DREAM." THEY HAD HAD A FIRE DRILL IN SCHOOL THAT DAY AND IAN AND HIS FRIENDS HAD PRACTICED "STOP, DROP, AND ROLL" AT RECESS. BUT THEN HE SMELLED SMOKE. IT WAS NOT A DREAM!

"Mom! Dad!" he yelled, "Fire!" He ran over to the crib and grabbed the baby who was sleeping all snuggled up in his blanket. He wrapped the blanket tightly around the infant and went to the door. Ian remembered what they had said in class: feel the door and only open it if it doesn't feel hot. The door felt fine so he opened it a crack. Smoke came into the room but high up and Ian was pretty small so he could breathe without having to crouch or crawl beneath the smoke.

Suddenly his mother shouted, "Smoke! The children!" His parents ran out of their room toward his room. By this time, Ian was down the stairs. He yelled to his mother, "I have the baby," and went out of the house. In a minute his mother and father were outside too, where they had decided to meet in case of emergency, by the birdbath. She hugged him and the still sleeping baby. "I am so proud of you, love. You saved yourself and your brother. What a hero!"

In a few minutes a big red fire engine was at Ian's house. The firefighters put out the small fire and then came outside to chat with the family. The next day the fire chief gave Ian a badge for bravery and everyone cheered and hugged each other.

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BOWERS/SINNOTT
The cartooning community was supportive of Bunny as she grew more popular. “There wasn’t this sense of competition,” John said. “There’s really no point of jealousy. It’s different among other professions. Illustrators are notoriously competitive. Cartoonists are enormously supportive of one another, so they never looked at her and said, ‘you’re just a business person.’ Nobody ever said, ‘we don’t consider you a cartoonist.’”
Chapter 9

“Love is an Action Verb”

Bunny and Bill had been dear friends with a couple in town, Docky and Joanie. William “Docky” Carpenter got his nickname from being the town’s favorite pediatrician for decades. Bill was in a tennis group with Docky, and the four double dated and traveled together. Around the time Bill grew ill, Joanie did also. Joanie died mere weeks after Bill. Bunny and Docky were left, broken. “We just sort of consoled each other,” Bunny said. “We went to the beach together, we cried together.”

* Photo: Bunny and Docky, 1992
The two became inseparable companions despite a 21-year age difference. “He loved all the things I loved. We were old friends. In 1995 he gave me a big engagement ring and said, ‘Let’s get married, we’re not getting any younger.’ This was not a blind date. He was somebody who I loved and trusted, and a most remarkable man.” They were to be married in July of 1996, but the wedding almost didn’t happen.

“In May, he had some kind of attack and he needed a quadruple bypass,” Bunny said. An ambulance rushed him to the hospital, but doctors refused to perform the procedure. “They said he was not a good candidate, he was too old. They thought it wouldn’t be a success,” Bunny said. Bunny found a doctor at another hospital who would perform the surgery. “He was dying, he was on life support. What did he have to lose?” Bunny said.

None of Docky’s family was local, and the surgery had to be performed immediately. “I wasn’t his wife at that point,” Bunny said. “But I signed the rights giving them permission. I had no authority. They didn’t realize. By the time his family came in, he was in surgery. Had it not worked out, I would have been in jail. That was risky.”

Fortunately for Bunny, the surgery was successful and the two were married in 1996. “I made my first husband rich, my second husband famous, and saved my third husband’s life,” Bunny said. “I’m an enabler. In a good way!”

Bunny moved into Docky’s house mostly, but kept her house for the studio and for Bill’s mother. John kept working in the studio during the nights. “Bunny would go home to Docky and I could be here with Grandma,” John said.
However, the studio started housing fewer and fewer features. “When I married Docky I downsized,” Bunny said. “At that point I was older and I’d been through a lot. I decided I wanted to spend time with him. The contracts were up for the others and they weren’t making all that much money so I ended everything except The Lockhorns and Parade.”

John said it was a relief to scale down after years of hard work. “What is difficult for people to understand is that when Bill passed away, we were doing six features at once. Three syndicated dailies and three weekly features, not to mention the occasional outside job, when someone would call and say ‘we’d like to do a calendar, we’d like to do a book.’ We had seven or eight projects going at once,” John said. “That was a lot of work, an enormous amount, and fortunately we were younger and more energetic. But as time progressed and Bunny and I grew tired, we decided which ones we didn’t want to continue.” Agatha Crumm and What a Guy ended in 1996, and Bumper Snickers in 1998.

Bunny, John and Adrian continued with Laugh Parade and The Lockhorns until Parade Magazine wanted to feature new artists. “New
management came in and they didn’t want our solitary look,” Bunny said. “They wanted young and the young people were amateurs. The cartoons became crude humor. We didn’t want to have the column be contaminated, or the integrity of our column changed, so we just bowed out.” Hoest cartoons haven’t appeared in Laugh Parade since 2007. “I didn’t miss it at all,” Bunny said. “It was a pleasure. I’ve been working hard with publishing deadlines for all these years.”

Laugh Parade cartoons are still sought. “I still sell Parade cartoons to encyclopedias and textbooks,” Bunny said. Most recently, textbook publisher Cengage bought a Laugh Parade cartoon.

Tragedy struck again when Docky suffered from a bout of pneumonia that he was too weak to fight. He died in 2009 at age 96, spending his last few days in
his bedroom. Family gathered around his bed as Bunny’s daughter-in-law nursed him and made him comfortable. He died peacefully at home. The heartache too much to bear, Bunny moved out of the house as quickly as possible. To cope, she buried herself back in work. “I loved every man I married,” Bunny said. “I loved them when they died. But you have to move on, for the rest of the people you love. You have to put on a happy face. You have to press on. If you just isolate yourself and go into mourning because somebody died, one person, your husband, your mother, your kid, it trivializes every other person you love. You love a lot of people, hopefully, in your life.”

The most consistent part of Bunny’s life was Leroy and Loretta. Bunny, John and Adrian continued with The Lockhorns, the most successful of all the features. Back in 1994, for example, John Reiner won the National Cartoonists Society award for “Best Gag Cartoons” for The Lockhorns. Over the decades, The Lockhorns have adapted with society. “In the ‘60s and ‘70s Leroy used to wear a hat,” Bunny said. “And somebody said, ‘stand outside that building and see how many men wear a hat.’ Nobody was wearing a fedora, a regular felt hat. Men stopped wearing men’s hats.” Leroy no longer wears a hat in every panel, nor does he smoke. “Leroy smoked a pipe in the early ‘70s, but then smoking became a no-no,” Bunny said. “There’s a whole bunch of subliminal reflections of society that the comics do casually.” Small changes have kept a crowd chuckling at the cheeky couple.

Adrian’s role also shifted as time passed. “He originally started in the blacks and cutting up paper and doing all sorts of odd jobs, which was fine,” John
said. “I wanted somebody who was dependable. He was good at it. As time progressed, the world became more technological. We needed somebody who understood the computer and he’s brilliant at it. With each step in technology, Bunny called him for maintaining the website, responding to e-mail. He is the tech guy.”

Since starting to work with Bunny, Adrian has always tried to adapt to new technologies. Hunny Bunny was one of the earliest comic strips delivered digitally, rather than by mail. “We actually threw King Features off because I said, ‘here’s a floppy disc,’” Adrian said. “And they said, ‘can you print it?’ They didn’t know what to do with it.” Adrian set up The Lockhorns website and responds to e-mails. “People would ask the same kinds of questions. Why didn’t they get divorced? Where can they get an autograph? I also took Bill’s hand lettering and turned it into a typeface, instead of John having to write it.”
Chapter 10
“We Are Not Sheep”

“Print is dying,” John said. “The young cartoonists and the middle-aged cartoonists are the ones who are suffering. We’re the last of the cartoonists that were enjoying the Golden Age. Technology allows people to do some quick illustration on the computer, it fills the space, so it’s really not the same business. We’re happy to sort of slow down as people behind us are taking whatever opportunities come their way.”

Newspapers in the United States have contained cartoons since the 1700s. Lack of technology made their publication rare, but cartoons nevertheless made their way into the news. Benjamin Franklin is credited with penning one of the earliest cartoons, a snake in pieces labeled as different states with the caption "Join, or die." In 1754, the Pennsylvania Gazette published Franklin’s encouragement for colonists to unite. Newspapers began running even more cartoons after lithography was developed. This was a process where scripts could be duplicated by writing or drawing on limestone with oil-based ink and rolling the stone onto another surface, like paper. The ink would be transferred, and the material copied. Lithography was developed toward the end of the 18th century in Germany and grew prominent in the U.S. around 1828. From then, more and more cartoons began to surface.

Studying the history of cartoons in newspapers is a relevant way to study the history of journalism, wrote Stanley Harrison, former journalist and professor
at the University of Miami School of Communication. "Editorial cartoons provide a long and interesting illustrative history in American journalism, reflecting the politics, issues and people of every era," Harrison wrote in a “Journalism & Mass Communication Educator” journal article in 1998. "Moreover, the cartoons can inject a variety of contrasting points of view. The policy issues of the United States appear one way in the pages, say, of the Chicago Tribune, as compared to the St. Louis Post-Dispatch. Journalism history reflects the nation's history.” Harrison's logic posits that cartoons play an important role in the nation's history.

**THE LOCKHORNs**

Political and editorial cartoons are not the only cartoons that reveal American history. Comic panels and strips, too, provide social commentary and social criticism, as well as a laugh. One of the earliest comic strips was Hogan’s
Ally, originally a single panel drawn by Richard Outcault. The comic ran in New York World beginning in 1895. The protagonist of the cartoon, the Yellow Kid, was a street urchin living in a slummy city, which had “much to say of the culture of his time,” Harrison wrote. The term “yellow journalism” stems from the name of the character, as a war among newspapers erupted over the cartoon.

Other comic strips quickly appeared. “Since their inception, the comics have mirrored American mores, manners and enthusiasm,” The Frye Art Museum stated in an exhibit about early cartoons. The 1918 comic strip Gasoline Alley gained popularity at a time when cars were becoming available to the average family. Cartoon Polly and Her Pals appeared in 1912 as women were gaining independence. “Cartoon strips reflect the culture of America,” Harrison wrote.

John said the Golden Age of cartooning peaked in the 1970s, when MAD Magazine saw high sales, and Gary Trudeau began drawing Doonesbury. “He changed the face of comics, I believe,” John said. “He did in fact bring a breath of fresh air to the comics page. It was the first time anyone had seen comics that were geared towards a younger audience. It was one of the reasons why the editors had begun believing you replenish the supply of readers by getting younger readers, and you have to cater to their tastes. Doonesbury was liberal and provocative. It dealt with issues some people felt were inappropriate for a daily paper. But other artists started emulating him. Guys like Jim Davis and others who had negotiated ownership and merchandizing and licensing suddenly realized there was a tremendous amount of money to be made making dolls and mugs. He
had everything. Toys, mugs, mouse pads, you name it. There was always a Garfield something.”

Bill Hoest, John said, had a significant and extraordinary role during the Golden Age. “There was always this idea of ‘Hey I’m a cartoonist, isn’t this fun,’ but Bill always thought of it as a profession. You certainly wouldn’t have one client if you were a doctor or a lawyer, you’d have many, you’re constantly cultivating people. He said that’s what you do. You are a professional. You don’t treat it as a hobby. A lot of cartoonists that are successful just think of it as a hobby, and have been lucky enough to make enough money to live off of. But Bill was not that way. He was somebody who had an extraordinary sense of professionalism. He would always dress to work. He was always impeccably dressed. When he went to magazines and newspapers to show his cartoons he was always well-dressed, while the other cartoonists were there in T-shirts and sweatpants.”
John said Bunny and Bill’s business mindset put them ahead of the other cartoonists. “It’s ridiculous but many of them just do not have the same work ethic and like to tell these stories about how they played golf all week or that they got drunk with their friends,” John said of other cartoonists in the community. “Always very funny stories because they love this idea of being not only in a creative profession but having all of this freedom. But the truth of the matter is that they’re always behind. Deadlines are really terrible.

“I think Bill was so enormously prolific. People forget he was also doing cartoons for Playboy, for every magazine in the country. Family Circle, Glamour, Cosmopolitan. Any magazine that took cartoons, he was there. He was published constantly. It never surprised me that he came up with an idea. The volume of work is a testament to that. There’s physical evidence of all the cartoons he’s ever done. Even the ones that were rejected, even the ones that never got published. There are just boxes and boxes and boxes. Finishes, drawings and tracing, ideas written on paper. It’s beyond belief.”

Adrian, too, said the volume of work is outstanding in the industry. “Nowadays if you have one successful cartoon, you’re quite lucky,” Adrian said. “Laugh Parade, for some cartoonists to do that once a week would have been enough. Just, I mean, trying to get it done. The only other cartoonist who had a run of things like that is Mort Walker, who does Beetle Bailey.”

However, John said he thinks Walker falls short of Hoest. “The only one who claims to have had that kind of a prolific career is Mort Walker. But my feeling is that Mort Walker was never involved in the magazine industry the way
Bill was. While Bill had syndicated strips, he also worked with color, with wash. Mort Walker never really got involved with the Wednesday morning rounds showing cartoons to the editors and they would pick them. He wasn’t working for The New Yorker or anything. Any place that published, Bill was there. In terms of being prolific, I think Bill was unique in that respect. He was just more creative.”

* Photo: Bunny and John Reiner in a promotional photo for King Features, 1996
The Hoest cartoons were unique, too, because a woman was so highly involved in the process. “Bunny was probably among the first,” John said. “The precedent was Dale Messick, who had done Brenda Starr. She was the only cartoonist who was a woman in daily.” John said the first woman to really get recognized was Cathy Guisewite, who started Cathy in 1976. “Lynn Johnston came shortly thereafter,” John said of the For Better or For Worse cartoonist. “At that point it was still Bill Hoest, but Bunny was running everything so that he could spend the time drawing the features.” Bunny’s crucial role with numerous cartoons over decades landed her the name The Cartoon Lady. “These were my girlfriends, they are my girlfriends,” Bunny said of Cathy and Lynn. “But I had so many features, and they each had one, which were semi-biographical. Cathy really was a single girl and Lynn really was married to a dentist. Mine were absolutely not. They were all based on observation. I had such a stable of cartoons.”
Chapter 11
“*These are the Good Old Days*”

“Our newspapers are dependent on our economy and advertising dollars; both are in a sharp decline,” Tom Watkins of the Michigan Chronicle wrote in 2007. “The reality is that ad revenue is down for newspapers. Advertising reportedly represents 75 to 80 percent of most newspaper companies' revenue.” Watkins said that newspapers such as The Washington Post, The New York Times, Boston Globe, Los Angeles Times and Chicago Tribune are downsizing their staffs to compensate “as profit margins tighten and readership drops.”

Large newspapers have even had to file for bankruptcy. In February 2009, The Philadelphia Inquirer cited declining advertising sales and readership for its demise. Ultimately, the paper was saved by the formation of The Philadelphia Media Network, which owns the Inquirer as well as Daily News and Philly.com. The network aims to focus more on its digital strategy. By May 2012, the Audit Bureau of Circulations found that over the previous six-month period, the
Inquirer’s Sunday editions were on the rise, while weekday papers declined. Compared to the same period in 2011, Sunday paper readership rose by 5.9 percent, while weekday circulation dropped by 5.4 percent. The bureau said Sunday’s popularity is thought to be because of coupons and other offers found in the paper during a time of recession. Additionally, the bureau said the weekday drop is perhaps because of a necessary price increase of the paper.

However, the bureau noted a trend in the circulation of digital editions of newspapers across the nation. Online versions of newspapers accounted for 14.2 percent of overall circulation in March of 2012. During the same period in 2011, digital editions accounted for 8.7 percent.

The New York Times, too, has seen some fluctuation over the decades but follows the same general trend. From 1998 to 2010, circulation of the Times’ Sunday paper has in general been slightly higher than the daily circulation. However, overall circulation has dwindled. In March 1998, for example, 1,110,143 copies of the daily paper circulated through home delivery, single copy sales, and electronic access. In March of 2010, circulation was 951,063. Within that decreasing circulation, the number of people accessing the paper electronically has increased greatly. In March of 2002, 1,090 copies circulated electronically, compared to 90,935 in 2010.

While having an online platform will be beneficial to newspapers, going digital has been bad news for Bunny. The Philadelphia Inquirer, for example, cut The Lockhorns from the print edition of the paper in 2012, posting the panel online instead. “Online doesn’t pay well,” Bunny said. “I make peanuts. When
cartoonists say they’re selling their cartoons online, it either means they’re starving or they have another job. I don’t know anyone making a living online.”

The New York Daily News also changed The Lockhorns to be online only in 2012, having the same devastating effects as the Inquirer change. “My income is slashed,” Bunny said. “It was a big financial blow.”

Still, Bunny, John and Adrian are optimistic, and said they think the cartoon will continue to see success. “The thing is, it doesn’t have a gimmick,” John said. “It’s not as if it’s time travel and you get bored with that idea. It’s always about real life. You have to be able to think in terms of your audience. Some people make the mistake of thinking it’s about themselves. Selfish, narcissists. Bunny is the opposite of that. That’s why it’s been successful, because it’s about observation.”

Adrian, with technology in mind, sees possibilities for The Lockhorns in the digital world. “You can pick it up online from any one of the newspapers that have it now, so you might see it in many more places,” Adrian said. “One of the things I’ve talked to Bunny about is putting out an iBook for the Kindle, iPad, any
of the Android tablets. It’s a direction it could go in. I think there could be more
done with some of the possibilities that are out there these days. There could be
more use of the electronic side of things to complement the strip and generate
additional revenue. It has quite a following. People see a lot of themselves in it.”

For now, Bunny prefers to do things the old-fashioned way. “Bunny is something of a Luddite,” John said. “She doesn’t like the idea of technology. All
of the other cartoonists use it. They color it, they send them over the computer,
which allows them to keep the original artwork. And it’s cost-effective because
Bunny is spending money each month mailing the physical items. At the end of
the year it’s an enormous amount of money spent on postage.”

Bunny said she has economized by switching from using Federal Express.
“It was easier for me because they used to come to the door,” Bunny said. “It was
a couple hundred of dollars every four weeks.” Now, Bunny mails the materials
from the regular post office. “I can do it for under 100 dollars,” Bunny said. “It’s
much cheaper. I have to bring it and we get less insurance coverage, but it makes
a tremendous saving.”

The team, however, doesn’t push Bunny to adapt to the technology. “For
the work they do, it wouldn’t really help them to draw directly in the computer
other than storing it and saving it,” Adrian said. “The one thing with drawing in
the computer, even if you have one of the monitors where you can draw right on
the monitor, you don’t have the same feel. You’re one step away from it.” John
draws in black and white, and Bunny mails the cartoons to Reed Brennan Media
Associates to be colored by computer. “John tells them what color to use where,
but a lot of the other strips, the artists are actually doing the coloring themselves,” Adrian said. “They’re pushing as much work as they can off on the artist. They told the new artists, if you want contracts, this is what you have to do. I would be angry if I was the cartoonist and they were asking me to do more and not giving me any more money to do it.” Bunny’s long-lasting contract, however, does not require the team to do the coloring.

Leroy and Loretta Lockhorn, already in print and online, may be taking their bickering from the pages of the newspaper to the theater soon. A play featuring the two has been written by author Martha Bolton. “It’s a musical comedy,” Bunny said. “And they’re using my music, which I’ve been writing all my life. It has a double meaning for me. It isn’t just the characters, it brings together all the areas of my life.” Keynote Productions, a production company that fills regional theaters, has picked up the play, and the show is third in line to be produced. “We’re not doing it for Broadway,” Bunny said. “It’s going to be accessible and affordable. Broadway productions make a gazillion dollars but you have to invest a gazillion. These don’t take that much investment.” When writing the play, Bolton also wrote a movie version. “She said it was easy for her as long as she was already doing dialogue,” Bunny said. “She's very optimistic.”
Today, Bunny is still an active member in the Berndt Toast chapter of the National Cartoonists Society. They meet for a Chinese-food lunch on the last Thursday of every month. Since moving into her beach house in 1982, Bunny has invited the chapter to her house in June instead of having the regular meeting. They had lunch on her terrace, and the luncheon has grown every year since. It has expanded to outside the chapter and to include cartoonists who are not members of the National Cartoonist Society she met while working in magazines. Bunny always invites the cartoonists to come with their whole families, typically bringing the headcount to 150. The summer party is now known as the Bunny Bash. Bunny has tents installed over the terrace to shade her friends from the heat and hires caterers to spare her friends from her own cooking. Cartoonists travel across the country for the party every year. The party has even drawn cartoonists from Australia and Mexico. The bash has helped secure Bunny in comic history, and the future looks bright.

“Last year, the crazy kid at King Features offered me a 10-year contract with a 10-year option after that, and I turned 80. It’s like an ironic twist,” Bunny said. “I’m flattered and excited and I signed. I’m very lucky to be in the business this long and have The Lockhorns so popular that they want to keep it for 20 years. A lot of cartoonists in my age group are out of work.

“I do love my job, but I’m living Bill’s dream. This is not what I ever aspired to do personally. This was trusted on me. I’ve had a great life. I’ve had much more good stuff than bad stuff. If there’s any message in my story, it’s that
you're really not in control in your life. You have to seize the opportunities that come,” Bunny said, smiling.
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John Reiner, 631-827-4459


Sharon Bowers, 843-276-2468

Summary of Capstone Project

Leroy and Loretta Lockhorn enter the homes of 100 million people around the world each week. The Lockhorns, a cartoon syndicated by King Features, is translated into 12 languages and appears in more than 500 newspapers. But who is behind the characters?

She was born Madeline Mezz. She is known to the masses as Bunny Hoest. But I affectionately refer to her as Bun. Bun is my grandmother. My capstone project, “The Cartoon Lady,” is a biography of Bunny Hoest, a cartoonist who has been relevant in the industry for decades.

Bunny was born in Brooklyn in 1932 with a fierce sense of humor. Her father, David Mezz, was the quirky and brilliant doctor who invented the nose clip for swimmers. Her mother was a Julliard trained opera singer. After a childhood living through the Depression, Bunny went to Adelphi University where she majored in English and nurtured her love for words. Bunny was never an artist, and she stumbled into the cartooning world rather unexpectedly. She fell in love with a friend, Bill Hoest, who was an artist. He drew cartoons, and Bunny, always a wordsmith, helped him edit his text and write gags, the joke line. Bill passed away in 1988 and ever since, Bunny has been running the business. To this day, Bunny is the face behind The Lockhorns and one of only a few women in the cartooning industry.
The Lockhorns is not the only cartoon Bill developed. With Bunny’s help, he also drew What a Guy, Agatha Crum, Bumper Snickers, Laugh Parade and Howard Huge throughout his working life.

“The Cartoon Lady” follows Bunny through her childhood into adulthood, where she had to call on skills she had learned at a young age to help her succeed professionally. The biography takes the reader from the streets of Brooklyn during the Depression to Bunny’s life now in a seaside castle, where she lives as an internationally known cartoonist. Through funny bits, anecdotes of the highs and lows of Bunny’s life, and even some advice, her story is told in these pages.

In addition to the human-interest aspect of this work, the biography serves as a vehicle to explore the world of cartooning and how it is shifting in modern times. Technological advances result in serious consequences for cartoons, much like they do for newspapers. Cartoons and newspapers are linked in such a way that a failing newspaper means struggling cartoonists. Additionally, software programs that make drawing and animation simple are devastating to older artists who draw everything by hand. The changing times have led to the downfall of many cartoonists, and even some losses for Bunny. But with one cartoon, The Lockhorns, she remains in print.

Since the 1970s, Bunny has worked with comic strips, which are sequences of several related cartoons typically arranged in a horizontal strip, as well as cartoon panels, single drawings in individual frames. Bunny is a member of the National Cartoonists Society, a group of professional cartoonists who serve the nation in person and through their art. At an annual gathering, the society
gives division awards to cartoonists in particular categories, such as gag cartoons, newspaper comic strips, and graphic novels. The group awards the highest honor, the Reuben Award, to one outstanding cartoonist each year. The Hoest cartoons have received several division awards.

Bunny has never been the artist behind her work. Her focus has always been on running the business and communicating the punch lines. She edits the lines of text and oversees the operations of her arts company, William Hoest Enterprises. Yet she is welcomed into the community by fellow cartoonists.

To compile the information for this project, interviews were essential. Extensive interviews with Bunny provided much of the necessary information. Additional interviews with the people she works with directly were used to fill in important details. I talked to John Reiner, the artist who has worked with Bunny for years and draws The Lockhorns, and to Adrian Sinnott, Bunny’s technological specialist. Their perspectives were important in understanding the cartooning process. I also talked to Stan Goldberg, a famous, longtime cartoonist involved with cartoons such as Archie and The Simpsons. He provided additional context and made clear the important significance of Bunny’s role in cartooning. Family and friends were other valuable resources that helped me string together events chronologically and paint accurate pictures of periods in Bunny’s life.

I used information from newspaper websites and the Audit Bureau of Circulations to include a discussion of newspapers and connect cartooning to newspapers. I also spent time searching the Syracuse library databases, such as ProQuest and JSTOR, to find scholarly articles about cartooning and the history
of cartooning. I was unable to find any sort of comprehensive history, and thus had to piece together many different articles.

This lack of information about the history of cartooning plays into why this project is significant. As print is slowly dying, so is traditional cartooning. Its history must be documented. Furthermore, Bunny’s shift from willing wife to cartoon tycoon makes her stand out in the industry. Her role in cartooning is significant, and nothing biographical has been written about her. Her story is interesting and informative, and should be on paper. This biography provides a unique look into Bunny’s life as well as the changing cartooning world.