



Volume 1, Number 2

October 1995

## A Note from the Editor

**HOW I SPENT MY SUMMER VACATION:** Well, you know, for folks in the comics biz, summer is *no* vacation, but rather lots and lots of hard work. My personal convention schedule included the Small Press Expo, Chicago ComiCon, San Diego, and the New York Comic Book Spectacular. Meeting and greeting people at the booth, throwing another fabulous party, and getting to wear my new FoL T-shirt were definite highlights of the summer. It was really neat how the FoL booth became a nexus for female cartoonists and pros from all parts of the business.

Now the nip of autumn is in the air, and so are gloomy outlooks on the comics biz. I don't need to tell anyone that times are, well, sort of not-so-hot. Heck, they're awful. Sales are down, companies are scaling back industry-wide, and no genie is coming to whisk us back to the boom days.

It's going to take a lot of hard work to rebuild the industry. The problems in retailing, distribution and storytelling that took decades to create aren't going to be fixed over night. "And Not All the Crossovers in the World Can Save Him," as Stan Lee might have titled this tale.

However, I'm convinced that comics can grow again and that this time it will be healthy growth, and not speculation. For companies to have healthy growth, however, they *must* reach out to the audiences that comics have abandoned—women, children, and the non-superhero crowd.

An example of this was drawn into sharp focus during con season. I became increasingly disturbed over the summer by a phenomenon I noticed each time I sat at

the Lulu booth. Our big summer project was to get women to fill out our reader survey, which covers women's comics reading habits and demographic information. My standard operating procedure would be to see a woman walk by and call her over. About 50% of the time, a conversation something like this ensued.

*Me:* Excuse me, miss (or ma'am). Do you read comics?

*Woman* (usually accompanied by a man or a child, looks a trifle exasperated or embarrassed): No.

*Me* (smiling): What are you doing here?

*Woman* (looking at man or child): I got dragged along.

The plight of the drag-alongs, as I soon started thinking of them (we *gotta* find a better term!) loomed larger and larger as the year went on. Fully half of the women at conventions were bored sidekicks or chaperones. While most of them had a good attitude about the show and were having fun with their boyfriends, husbands, or families, there were quite a few who saw it as an annoying or tedious duty.

As I can testify from personal experience, if there is one thing

**How can we address "The Plight of the Drag-alongs"?**

that bored women like to do, it's *shop*! And yet the drag-alongs were empty-handed. What's wrong with this picture?

The comics industry *must* recognize the potential of the drag-alongs. Comic cons, with a few notable exceptions, aren't comic book shows; they're "superhero shows." Nothing against superheroes, but why shouldn't the biggest marketing events in the industry target other, wider audiences? Give me one reason why Mom shouldn't have something fun to do at

a comic con? I did my best, as did everyone else staffing the booth, to talk to the drag-alongs, to let them know they weren't alone, and to suggest comics that they might like. Several retailers have told me they have had great success introducing non-comics-reading women to comics, but it has to be an intelligent, targeted approach.

Converting drag-alongs (male as well as female) to regular customers is time consuming, yes, but it's an example of the healthy growth I alluded to earlier. Drag-alongs are potential new customers who are *already in the store, or at the con*. Let's not let them slip away.

In 1995, one of FoL's biggest goals using the reader and retailer surveys was to get some concrete answers to the questions of what women do and don't like in comics. In 1996, we have to try to bridge the gap by giving these answers to retailers.

We've got our work cut out for us. But remember, FoL's membership spans the entire range of the field—creators, readers, publishers, retailers, distributors. If we can't do it, no one can.

Are we here to save comics? You bet.

—Heidi MacDonald



Jennifer Graves