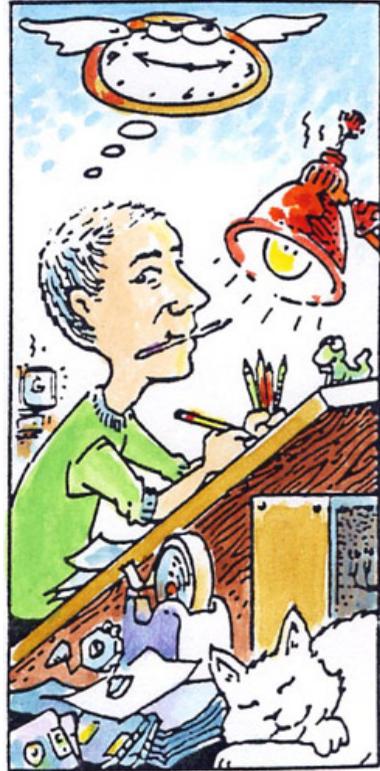


Duane Bibby

Cartoonist Duane Bibby is well known for the lion illustrations used in numerous T_EX books, starting with *The T_EXbook*, and by T_EX user groups.

[Interview completed 19 May 2006.]



Dave Walden, interviewer: I believe your first contact with the world of T_EX was with Donald Knuth himself. How did you two come in contact with each other?

Duane Bibby, interviewee: My first contact with Don came about because of a chance conversation an editor I was working for, Bonnie Bernstein at Fearon Publications, had at a Stanford function. At the time I was jumping around freelancing in the San Francisco Bay Area and had done a couple of book illustration jobs for them. I think Don mentioned he was looking for an artist for his book and my name came up. The call came just as we were packing up to move north, literally into the woods along the California coast near Eureka. We met, I showed some samples, and we almost immediately set to work.

DW: How did the lion motif come about?

DB: During that first meeting, Don showed me some writing he had done that had been published in Mad magazine. That not only greatly impressed me, because I had a fair stack of rejection slips from them, but helped in thinking about perhaps using a character to bind things together—somewhat similar to a job I'd just completed with Eleanor Mennick, the design director at Fearon. Don liked the idea, but we didn't have a clear vision at that time of exactly what sort of character. The obvious was, we thought, a kind of computer guy, of which I did some exploratory sketching around. But, as my wife Jeanette Ahlgren noted as I doodled in our cabin in the trees, also kind of boring. I'd also had a chance to read the manuscript and found the tone light and engaging even though I knew nothing of computer software. I think that influenced the approach too. Various animals came to mind and pad, but a classic lion finally began to pop to life. A

possible source of the lion idea was a very large Maine Coon cat—a rather large breed of house cat—that was wandering around. It had been abandoned, was looking for a new home, and was giving us new arrivals the look over, trying to decide if he would adopt us. He later did. We still have cats around; the photo shows Jeanette’s current guys, Cisco and Swank.



I tried the lion sketches on Don, which he liked right off, and we then began working out each chapter idea which further defined the character. Later when it came to Metafont, Don felt the lion needed a mate and so that made it easy.

DW: Do you view yourself as an illustrator or a cartoonist or an artist more generally?

DB: All of those and less. Seems I’ve not totally committed to one area over the years, being more what was once called a commercial artist. Lately the nature of artist/designer/illustrator/cartoonist is being further blurred, or maybe transformed, by computers and cyberspace—like everything else. I’ve always been fine with bouncing from one interesting area to the next, but lately I have been concentrating with some personal projects around the possibilities of the long format of Manga. I have a 200 page sort of auto-related anthology work nearly done and have equally long spin offs from that well under way, all in a silent, almost no words vein. And I’d like to finally get together a book on the T_EX drawings over the years, development, etc. So I’d have to say I view myself as trying to move toward being that new thing artists will have to be in the computer connected world.

DW: In the previous answer, I don’t know what “long format” means with regard to Manga, which I believe is a Japanese name for a sort of book length comic. Also, by “auto-related anthology” do you mean a collection of your drawings relating to autos or do you mean something else?

DB: Some Manga stories commonly have a thousand page arc and more. That and the graphic novel, both of which naturally have to be approached differently than, say, a standard 32-page super hero comic or 2-page gag panel, appeal to me as a way to stretch out as a cartoonist and designer, and of course, really test one’s ability to engage and hold the reader. The anthology is a collection of short and shorter pieces, none much

more than 30 pages, which are sort of a tying off of the work I once did for the likes of *DRAGcartoons*, *Cycletoons*, *Cycle* magazine, and *Hot Rod* magazine, and bringing it forward, hopefully with appeal to more than the motor minded. More hopefully, some of those shorter pieces are now springboards for longer things that won't be characterized as automotive. The plan is to make them available directly on the Internet at some point.

DW: Did you study your art formally?

DB: The best formal training came my way up to the 5th grade at Tulelake Elementary. Not sure there is even a school there anymore, in the new corporate farming world, but at that time there were many small homesteads in the area just south of Klamath Falls along the Oregon–California border. Every day the teachers would devote at least an hour, and many times half the day, to art projects. I did a mural of ducks on the lake with help of a blow-machine in the 3rd grade. We had a kiln in the room in the 5th grade and the ceiling was covered with model airplanes. We could hardly wait to get to the 8th grade where the room was nearly impassable because of art and science projects. But when we homesteaded again in southern Arizona there were zero art classes. So volunteering to do posters for school functions and the like was my art training thereafter until graduation from high school. I did collect rejection slips from *Mad*, as mentioned, and also from *Cartoons*, a hot rod humor magazine. Maybe building a couple frame-up hot rods at that time was also good design training. I think the local teachers had me tagged as an engineer when I went off to Arizona State, but I surprised them by signing up as an art major. I barely lasted the year, being fresh off the farm, and ended up in a three-year Army hitch. I did finally crack *Cartoons* during that time and continued to draw like crazy even after returning to Arizona State as an electrical engineer major. But that didn't take and within a year I switched back to art for the next year. Then off to Art Center College of Design in Los Angeles for three semesters, which was invaluable, before leaving for the enticing world of freelancing.

DW: Do you do your work out of your home or have a separate studio?

DB: To turn it around, as a smarty cartoonist, I'd have to say we have a home in our studio. It's efficient and convenient but one has to be alert to wandering distractions and tangents.

DW: Googling for background information for this interview, I found an article on your wife's "bead-loomed structures" (*Bead&Button*, February 2006, pp. 100–104). Is there any cross-pollination from having two artists in the family (beyond her getting inspiration from your taking her Porsche apart, as reported in the *Bead&Button* article)?

DB: Quite a bit, since we did meet at Art Center and she has two more semesters than I there, I'd have to say I steal more from her than she borrows from me. She had classic oil painting training from early on growing up in Palo Alto and was an art major at Stanford and San Francisco State before Art Center. Her color sense and practical ability to effortlessly mix the exact right color the very first time is amazing. I try to pay attention to her adventures in color and design, which is always instructional. Currently Jeanette is working full-time, as fast and furious as tiny beads allow, for her next show at Fuller Craft Museum, opening nearly now and one later at Mobilia in Cambridge, Massachusetts, this coming October.

DW: You have done the illustrations for several computer-related books in addition to those by Knuth. The connection to L^AT_EX book seems obviously to have happened because of your work on Knuth's book. Did the others (for example, the books by

Friedman and Felleisen on programming languages) result because they saw your work in Knuth's books?

DB: I assume that is the case because, rather than me approaching publishers to do further software books, I began getting contacted by art directors who had writers requesting my illustrations. Most involved the creation of a mascot to represent software which I greatly enjoy. Don had given me the stamp of approval, I suppose, and other sorts of smaller jobs also materialized. MIT Press used me for a catalog cover at one point, and over the last few years I've been pleasantly surprised by T_EX user groups around the globe commissioning drawings used for posters, t-shirts, coffee cups, and whatever else they might imagine.

DW: Do you ever get tired of drawing the T_EX lions?

DB: No, not yet and I don't expect I will. Seems each assignment has a unique situation which, if I can, I try to bend or expand the lion character to react or at least seem to fit well in whatever new world or garb comes along. Quite often there's some research involved with getting props and the background right especially if it's for an exotic location and I get jogged awake learning something new.

DW: For what other types of books or documents have you typically done illustrations?

DB: Looking back, I'd guess the bulk of my work has been doing kids' books for the educational system. Teacher's aids, workbooks, posters, some textbooks, and even coloring books. Almost equal to that is technical illustration for manuals and teaching materials in the work place. During one year, along with doing *Hot Rod Cartoon* stories through the mail and occasional Bay Area illustration jobs, I spent some of most every week in the air, flying to jobs drawing training materials for one of the world's largest business consulting firms. I was their west coast artist and drew mainly factory machines, scenes, and the processes to make things. Those illustrations had to be done quickly, in color markers, and at a borrowed desk; so they were nothing like T_EX drawings. In another vein, not long ago I did a group of vector tech drawings totally in Adobe Illustrator on how to fix or hot rod your PC. At the other end of the spectrum, I'm currently doing color covers and interior watercolor and pencil drawings in a very soft style for *Herb Quarterly*.

DW: I'm curious how the illustration business works. Do you typically sell a drawing and all rights for its reuse as part of your fee, or do you license it for limited use (e.g., in one of Knuth's books) and retain the reproduction rights?

DB: Mostly it's a "work-for-hire" situation or I assign all rights of individual drawings. Actually, everything is negotiable, depending on all the typical business criteria and is a tricky part of the art of the business of art.

DW: There is a note posted from you and your wife at <http://www.912registry.org/racing/rcommnts.htm> that suggests a hot rod or classic car connection, you have already mentioned doing illustrations for car magazines, and there is that note in the article on her beadwork about you taking her Porsche apart. Is auto-related stuff a big hobby of yours?

DB: Yes, as a typical teen kid of the sixties, I was nutty about cars, not so much to race, but how they look and act. At the time there were plenty of abandoned junk cars laying around in the desert, so putting together a mode of personal expression or death trap was fairly easy. I went through the standard string of dubious dune bugs, manic motorcycles, and rambling street rods, but lately have mainly restoring some perky

Porsches. Jeanette is also an enthusiast, so that helps — or we’re both hopelessly lost, depending on perspective. Lately, I think we’ve stopped looking for the next project, and are more concentrated on trying to keep what we have working — which makes so much sense, better not hold us to it.

DW: Let’s finish with one more question about T_EX. Have you ever used T_EX, L^AT_EX, or any of the other T_EX-derived systems yourself? More generally, you mentioned using Adobe Illustrator. Do computers play a significant role in the way you do your art?

DB: So far, I’ve not had the “need to know” and haven’t dug in yet. My thought was, a while back, when I did some work toward getting together a book on the early T_EX drawings, that it should be set in T_EX, natch. At that time, I probably didn’t try hard enough to find a version I could run on my ancient Mac, and then, in other scattered ways, got bogged down. Still think it’s a good idea. Meanwhile, the computer, besides being essential just to connect to the world, has greatly speeded up the give and take of rough drawing development, since a file can travel to many parties quickly, relieving a lot of the stress in moving a job along. Its ability to scan and manipulate is nearly magical. But it seems for me, everything still always starts with a pencil sketch.

DW: Thank you very much, Duane, for taking the time to participate in this interview. I am sure I am far from alone in the T_EX community in being very glad to know more about the man who draws the ubiquitous T_EX lions.