

LESSONS FROM **LIFE** (Notes on the creative process)
ROCK & ROLL From someone

who's old enough to have experienced a bit of both

A Swan Song

The Ugly Duckling's Survival Guide

Written*, designed and illustrated by Robert Meganck

*For the most part





LESSONS FROM LIFE AND ROCK & ROLL

From someone who's old enough to have experienced a bit of both

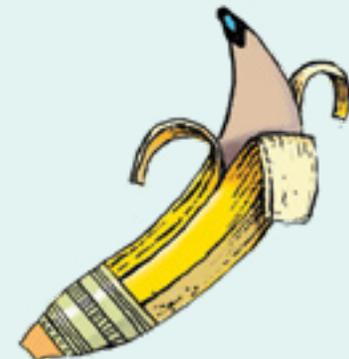
(Notes on the creative process)

A Swan Song

The Ugly Duckling's Survival Guide

Written*, designed and illustrated
by Robert Meganck

*For the most part, as I've lifted numerous quotes from a lot of real rock stars.



“This is dedicated to the one I love,”
My “Sweet Little Rock and Roller,”
“My Brown Eyed Girl,”
Candice

You and me
Sittin’ in the back my memory
Like a honey bee
Buzzin’ ‘round a glass of sweet Chablis

“Long Monday” John Prine



Thanks to Aaron, Shana and Seth Meganck for keeping the spirit of Rock and Roll alive at home, and to Cassie Price, my grammarian and proof reader.

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ISBN:



I know it is pretty **AUDACIOUS** for a not-so-famous illustrator, non-musician to think that he could write a book on creativity with reference to Rock & Roll, but what the heck – **I’m old.**

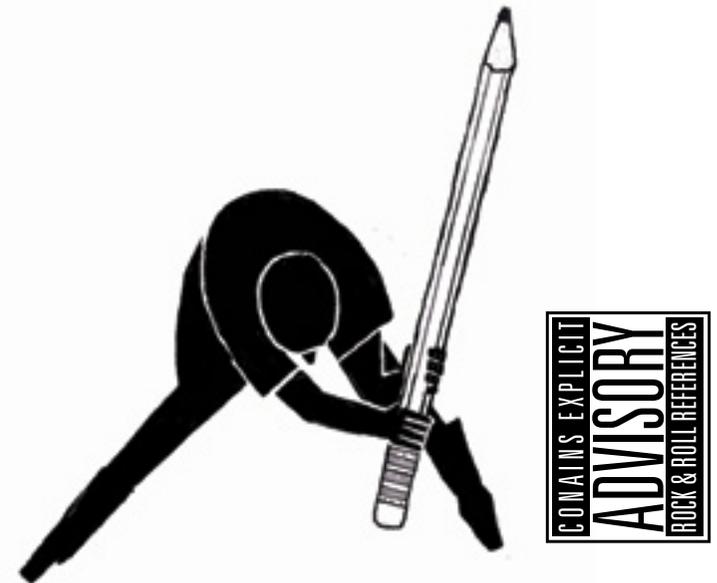
What do I have to lose?

Old people aren’t shy about expressing themselves, as they’ve been around for a while, have made enough mistakes along the way and feel they have the experience to let others know what not to do. They also know that you will either be interested in what they have to say, or senility can’t be far away and they won’t remember any of it anyway.

WARNING!

The points I’m making relative to the creative process are just that – points. I make no claims to their validity. If you get hurt or fired from your job for espousing any of them, I am not responsible. You proceed through life and through the creative process at your own peril. I will accept no credit or any blame for the choices you make.

Good luck getting on with it.



PICK THE RIGHT PARENTS, AND THEN PICK THE RIGHT BOYFRIEND, GIRLFRIEND, LOVER, LIFE PARTNER, FRIENDS, ETC., BECAUSE YOU'RE NOT GOING TO MAKE IT ON YOUR OWN.

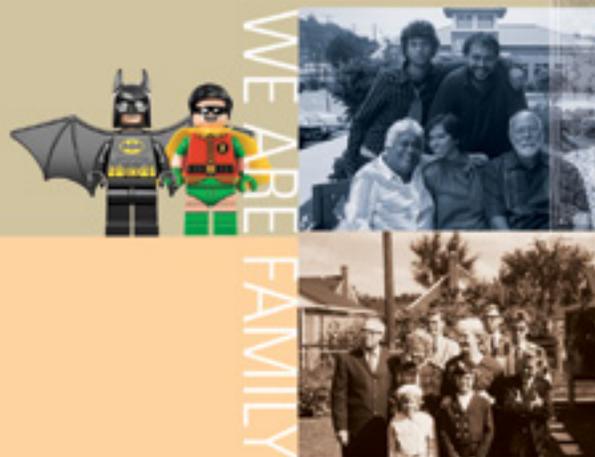
“When my daughter was about seven years old, she asked me one day what I did at work. I told her I worked at the college — that my job was to teach people how to draw. She stared at me, incredulous, and said, ‘You mean they forget?’”

-- Howard Ikemoto



Much has been written about nature vs. nurture and their respective roles in developing creative individuals. I have no background in either psychology or sociology, so I will not weigh in on the matter. However, I believe you will find that households, which allow imagination to flourish, tend to produce creative individuals. This is why musicians frequently produce more musicians. It doesn't, however, explain why so many very creative individuals come from very depressed backgrounds. “You need to suffer to sing the blues.” You don't need to teach someone to be creative, just don't stifle that which is inherent in the human spirit. Give any four-year-old a blank piece of paper and some crayons -- and just watch as their imagination blossom. They don't need to be told what to do, or what to draw. They just do what comes naturally. It may not matter so much what toys you are given as a child, but what you do with them. The best most of us parents can hope for is to not screw up their kids too much.

The relationships you foster as you move forward beyond childhood will impact heavily on who you become. You are not going to go through life isolated from those around you. Make sure you hang with the right crowd. Pick the members of your band that bring something to the group. A good band, and one with staying power, is one in which the members complement each other.



WE ARE FAMILY

We Are Family
 Sister Sledge
 We are family
 I got all my sisters with me
 We are family
 Get up everybody and sing
 We are family
 I got all my sisters with me
 We are family +
 Get up everybody and sing



--Sister Sledge



YOU DON'T NEED TO BE A ONE-MAN BAND

As we move from birth to death, we become members of different bands. Most worthwhile projects today are too complicated to be solved by a single person. No individual can be an expert in all aspects of a complex problem. A one-man band can be entertaining, but it can't compare to a well-formed jazz combo, where each member has his/her expertise.

*What would you think if I sang out of tune
Would you stand up and walk out on me?
Lend me your ears and I'll sing you a song
And I'll try not to sing out of key
Oh I get by with a little help from my friends
Mm I get high with a little help from my friends
Mm gonna try with a little help from my friends*

"With a Little Help From My Friends"
John Lennon and Paul McCartney

Hey! Mr Tambourine Man, play a song for me

I'm not sleepy and there is no place I'm going to

Hey! Mr Tambourine Man, play a song for me

In the jingle jangle morning I'll come followin' you

"Mr. Tambourine Man", Bob Dylan



YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT. Beyond the obvious statement promoting a healthy diet, this statement references the fact that you are what you consume. Not just in relation to food, but in terms of: what you read, which movies you watch, what music you listen to, the places you visit, etc. Unlike food, where a restricted diet might have its advantages, the consumption of experiences should be extensive. Every experience you have, every book you read, every song you listen to, every place you visit, every activity you engage in, becomes a part of who you are. No two people have the exact same set of experiences. This makes everyone of us unique, and you need to take full advantage of your uniqueness.

To this end, you need to "Get a Life." Don't expect someone to hand it to you. The more you experience life, the better you will be able to express your creative self. Don't live precariously through others. Too often, young people want of follow in the footsteps of those that they admire, be it a parent or a professional celeb. These people have already walked their path, and you cannot repeat their steps. You need to find your own way.



THERE ARE NO FRETS ON AN AIR GUITAR.

Strumming an imaginary guitar while you listen to someone else's music is fun, but not very productive. If you want to learn to play guitar, you have to get one. Learning to play a musical instrument, draw, write poetry, etc. can be a daunting experience. No one picks up a guitar and starts playing blues riffs. It takes time, a whole lot of practice and basically some pretty awful sounds before you play anything resembling a tune. You will never write a beautiful poem without trashing a bunch of really bad poems first.

Ridding a stationary bike won't get you very far.

When I tell people that I'm an illustrator, they frequently respond by saying "I can't draw", or something along those lines. To which I respond, "how hard did you try?" If I asked someone to draw a square, a circle, and a triangle, most would do it with relative ease. I can then point out that they have drawn something, and have the basis for completing more complex drawings. If I asked someone to draw a map of how they get from home to school or work most would also do it with ease (often adding stop lights and other graphic elements), to which I point out that that they have now created an illustration. Drawing is basically mark making, when those marks are for the purpose of communication, they become an illustration. Illustration is simply drawing with a point (to explain).

I got an iPod when they first came out. Upside: the iPod makes yardwork doable. Downside: when you're outside raking leaves and you feel like singing along (lousy and off key) and use the rake as a substitute guitar for a song only you can hear, has a tendency to scare the neighbors..



THE TIMES THEY ARE A CHANGIN'

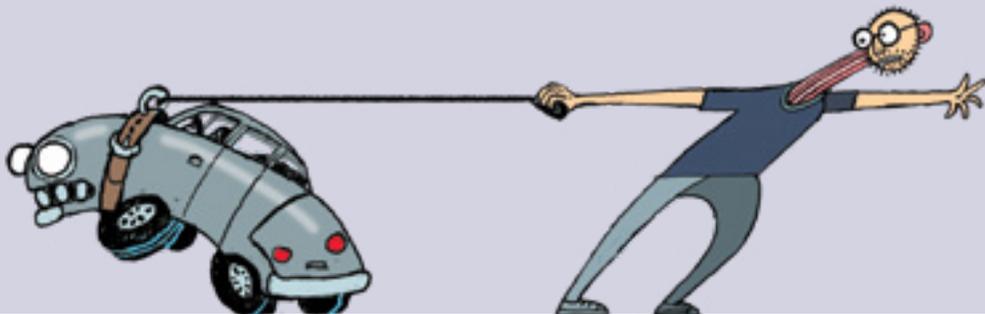
Our lives are stored on our hand held devices. They wake us up in the morning; they tell us how to get from point A to B; keep track of our schedules; monitor our exercise programs; and tell us when we are slacking.

We rely on software applications to keep us connected with each other. With apps. like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram we have given up the desire to communicate and simply settled for the ability to connect.

The theory of technological singularity hypothesizes that runaway artificial superintelligence will cause an information and intelligence explosion and in turn allow advanced technologies to replace human dominance.

In my day, the car provided a level of mobility and independence, which has now been replaced by the smart phone. Thirty percent of millennials believe giving up their smart phone would have the greatest negative impact on their lives.

Anyone who has ever ridden with me in a car knows that I should get a self-driving car – just tell the car where you want to go, and let a app. take you there. But I'm worried that if I asked a car to take me to the closest burger joint, the car would reply, "I can't do that Bob, I've looked at your medical records – your cholesterol is way too high. Let me take you to a nice vegan place I know, I'll phone ahead, let them know your coming and order a nice arugula salad for you. I will also let your friends know, to see if any of them want to join you, so you won't have to eat alone. **You can thank me later.**"



"Every new technology entails the obsolescence of an older one. It has been that way since the caves. Humans have been the only constant through it all. That is no longer the case. Within a few decades, perhaps years, we will be obsolete. We are past the stuff of science fiction. It is only a matter of time before these toys awaken to find us annoying. The Oracle at Hollywood has already spoken the prophecy, and we found it entertaining. Unfortunately, it may also be true."

Jorge Benitez

"We are currently preparing students for jobs that don't yet exist . . . using technologies that haven't been invented . . . in order to solve problems we don't even know are problems yet."

Karl Fisch and
Scott McLeod
from
Shift Happens



TECHNOLOGY

HAS DEVELOPED

TO THE POINT

WHERE A LOUSY

CAN EASILY

BECOME A

PROLIFICLY LOUSY

Artist,
Designer,
Musician,
Film Maker
Writer,
Poet,
etc.

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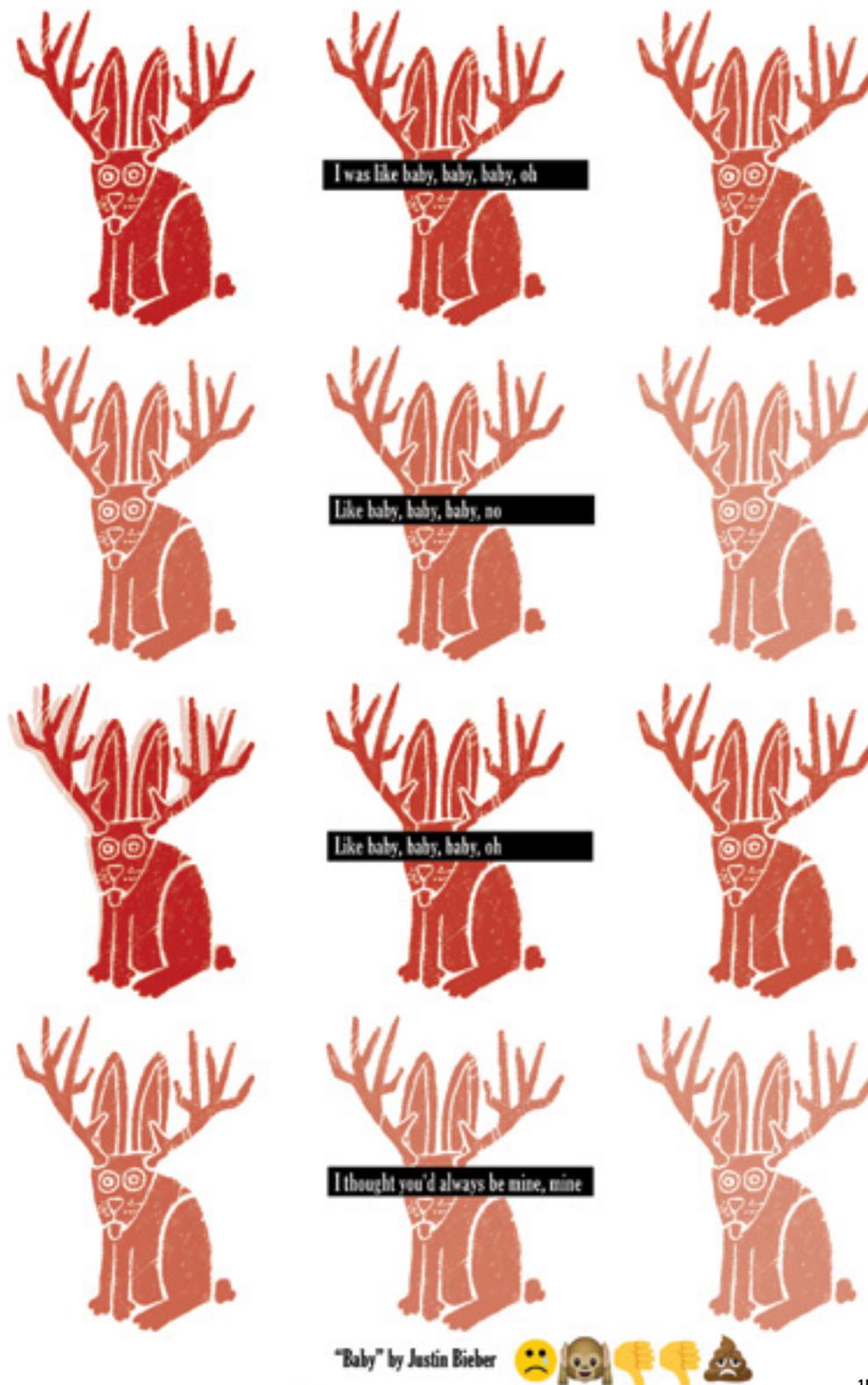
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"Baby" by Justin Bieber



THE BEST TOOL TO USE TO SOLVE ANY PROBLEM IS THE ONE BETWEEN YOUR EARS

What do you say to a student who raises their hand during a lecture to ask...

Q: "Is this information going to be on the test?"

A: Do you only read what an instructor assigns -- just what you need to read to pass a class? No, it's not going to be on the test for this class. So you can go back to sleep. Upon graduation, I hope someone hands you a study guide for life. Of course, there are the things you don't know, that you don't know you need to know, until you find out that there are things that weren't covered in Cliff Notes.

With technology, a wealth of information lies at our fingertips, but it's not the amount of information that sets us apart as an individual, it's knowing what to do with it.

I've heard critics say that any third string flautist in any city orchestra is better technically than Ian Anderson, the lead man and flutist for the band Jethro Tull. This I do not doubt. However, I would like to point out that what sets Ian Anderson apart is that these third-string flautists did not write "Aqualung."

SUBSTANCE OVER SURFACE
SHORT OF IMAGINATION, TECHNIQUE WILL ONLY GET SO FAR.

Good students want to be taught. Great students want to understand.



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„Imagine”
John Lennon



“I dream of painting and then I paint my dream.” -- Vincent Van Gogh

“IMAGINATION IS MORE IMPORTANT THEN KNOWLEDGE” --Albert Einstein

**“YOU CAN’T ALWAYS GET WHAT YOU WANT,
BUT IF YOU TRY SOMETIMES, WELL YOU MIGHT FIND,
YOU GET WHAT YOU NEED”**

Mick Jagger and Keith Richards

The problem statement is the seed of the creativity process. Every problem comes with constraints. There is no way to evaluate the success or failure of an open-ended problem, one where you can do whatever you want. It’s roadblocks that get us to seek alternative paths.

You need to make the most of what you have to work with.

You will always be able to find an excuse for failing to deliver what is required. When one of my students missed an assignment deadline, I asked him, “What do you think would happen if this were a real job and you missed a deadline?” The student replied that if he were getting paid, he would have completed the assignment on time. To which I replied, “I don’t think so.” Excuses come easy: you will never have enough time, a big enough budget, or enough resources.

If you look at constraints as barriers, you will never figure out how to get beyond them.

Walk on your tip toes

Don’t try “No Doze”

Better stay away from those

That carry around a fire hose

Keep a clean nose

Watch (those) plain clothes

You don’t need a weather man

“Subterranean Homesick Blues”--Bob Dylan To know which way the wind blows



THE SHOW MUST GO ON

Well, I won't back down

No I won't back down

You can stand me up at the gates of hell

But I won't back down

"I Won't Back Down", Tom Petty

In the early 70's, at an Aspen Design Conference, Richard Saul Wer-
man proposed establishing a Museum of Failures. After all it is failure,
and learning from ones mistakes, that leads to invention.

You can watch early films of man's first attempts at flying – crash after
crash, until 1903 when the Wright Brothers completed a flight of 120
feet (37 miles), at a speed of only 6.8 miles per hour. Then it only took
66 years from the time of the Wright Brothers flight for man to set foot
on the moon (a distance of approximately 238,897 miles with a top
speed of 24,000 mph) on July 20, 1969.

"Success consists of going from failure to failure without loss of enthusiasm."

Winston Churchill

There is a rather famous story about Thomas Edison's many failed at-
tempts to refine the light bulb so many times that it took some 700 at-
tempts to perfect it. However, rather than rejecting his many failures as
a problem, he is quoted as saying, "I have not failed. I have just found
699 ways that do not work." This story has been repeated with 1,000
and 10,000 attempts – it doesn't matter -- what matters is the idea
that Edison did not see these attempts as failures, but as meaningful
attempts on the path to a successful solution.

In 1958 the Ford Motor Company introduced the Edsel. It was a miserable failure. In 1960 they released the Falcon – an automobile that was probably an over correction for the Edsel's mistake. But then, in 1964 they go it just right with the release of the Mustang.

My father, an avid gardener, was fond of saying, "If all else fails, try a little manure." which some might interpret as, "when you find yourself in trouble, try and bullshit your way out", but I interpret it as, "if you find yourself in trouble, go back to the basics." But then, of course, it could just be about using manure to help stimulate plant growth.



*When I get to the bottom I go back to the top of the slide
Where I stop and I turn and I go for a ride
Till I get to the bottom and I see you again
Yeah yeah yeah hey*

"Helter Skelter"

Paul McCartney, John Lennon

NOTHING IS PERFECT EXCEPT
a No. 2 PENCIL &
Sgt. PEPPERS LONELY HEARTS CLUB BAND



When asked to select “my favorite” from all of the designs and illustrations I’ve completed, I have to reply, “The next one.” If I thought that the best was behind me, how could I move forward. And although I do think some are more successful than others, there are none that I believe could not have been better.

After spending millions of dollars on an “astronaut pen” that would write in outer space, NASA made a friendly call to the Soviets to see if they had solved the problem of writing in zero gravity. And it seems they had, it’s called a pencil.

At the 1965 Newport Folk Festival, Bob Dylan, the king of folk music at the time, came on stage and played an electric guitar, which sent his fans to booing him off the stage. The song causing the commotion was “Maggie’s Farm”, a song that signaled Dylan’s displeasure with the music industry and the way he felt trapped by the constraints other put on his creative freedom, “I try my best/To be just like I am/But everybody wants you/To be just like them”. Dylan did come back on stage for an acoustic set. Shortly after Newport Dylan would release “Blond on Blond”, an album which led with the very electrifying song Rainy Day Women #12 & 35, which references the “stoning” he took at the folk festival and includes the memorable verse:

*Well, They’ll stone you and say that it’s the end
Then they’ll stone you and then they’ll come back again
They’ll stone you when you’re riding in your car
They’ll stone you when you’re playing your guitar
Yes, but I would not feel so all alone
Everybody must get stoned.*



"I KNOW IT'S ONLY ROCK AND ROLL, BUT I LIKE IT" Mick Jagger

I will admit that Rock and Roll can't hold up to the beauty of classical music or the complexity of jazz. Overall, Jazz is the most advanced music genre, requiring the highest level of musicianship, but I simply can't get by my love all things Rock and Roll. It's just the way I am. What it seems to come down to is that with jazz and classical music, unless you are one of the performers, you are an observer. You attend these performances and stay silent. You don't join in and sing along to a classical coral piece; you don't get up and dance in the isle to Beethoven. To really appreciate Jazz, you have to stay fixed and focus on every note or you will miss something. However, Rock and Roll is a full-contact sport. It demands your participation.

"Adults agreed that 'this hooby-doopu, oop-shoop, ootie ootie, boom boom de-addy boom. scoobledy goobley dump' was trash."

*from "All Shook Up,
How Rock 'N' Roll Changes America"
by Glenn C. Altschuler*

In referencing the connection with her audience, Janis Joplin said, "If you can get them once, man, get them standing up when they should be sitting down, sweaty when they should be decorous, smiling when they should be applauding politely—and I think you sort of switch on their brain, man, so that makes them say: 'Wait a minute, maybe I can do anything.' Whoooooo! It's life. That's what rock and roll is for, turn that switch on, and man, it can all be."

"Rock and roll was elemental, savage, dripping with sex; it was just as our parents feared." -- Jeff Greenfield

As characterized by Arnold Shaw: Rock and Roll is "Body music rather than head or heart music appealing to the flesh more than the spirit ... [it] embodies the fervor of gospel music, the throbbing vigor of boogie woogie, the jump beat of swing, and the gutsiness and sexuality of life in the black ghetto."



ALL OF US BEGIN AS MEMBERS OF A COVER BAND, BUT AT SOME POINT YOU NEED TO START TO WRITE YOUR OWN SONGS.

The Beatles completely changed rock & roll in four years. Going from:

It won't be long yeh, yeh, yeh
It won't be long yeh, yeh, yeh
It won't be long yeh, till i belong to you

on *Meet the Beatles* in 1963, to:

Yellow matter custard dripping from a dead dog's eye
Crabalocker fishwife pornographic priestess
Boy you been a naughty girl, you let your knickers down
I am the eggman oh
They are the eggmen oh
I am the walrus
Goo goo g'joob

on *Magical Mystery Tour* in 1967.

If the Beatles had come out with *Magical Mystery Tour* as their first album, I seriously doubt that they could have broken onto the rock charts the way they did. Their early albums gave us only what we could accept, including a number of familiar cover songs: "Chains" by Carole King & Gerry Goffin; "Twist and Shout" by Phil Medley & Bert Russell; and "Roll Over Beethoven" by Chuck Berry. We were already familiar with these songs, and new songs easily fit into our existing rock and roll lexicon, which made it easy to instantly fall in love with these guys.

Bob Dylan, who along with Beatles changed Rock and Roll in 1963, is probably the greatest Rock songwriter ever. His first album contained only two original Dylan Songs.

Initially we all start off as a member of a cover band. We learn our craft from those that came before us. Most of us start off **imitating** the work of others, before we move onto **interpreting** the work of others, to simply being **influenced** by the work of others, before we become the **innovators** of original work.



NEVER SAY DIE!

In 1975, 31 year-old, Mick Jagger, said that he didn't want to be singing "Satisfaction" when he was 45 years old. Mick, who is now way past 70, is still rocking.

Towards the end of Matisse's life, while confined to bed and no longer capable of painting, he created his famous cutouts.

When his eyesight started to fail, Edgar Degas moved from drawing and painting to sculpture.

"Painting may give me up, but I will never give it up." Françoise Gilot

I went camping a long time ago with friends (a banker, an architect, a dentist, and oral surgeon). The subject that dominated our campfire conversation was golf. I commented (as a non-golfer) that they really seemed to love the game. The bank executive said that it was all he enjoyed, and that he couldn't wait until he retired so that he could play golf everyday. He then asked me what I planned to do after I retired. I replied: "Now, I get up in the morning, have a cup of coffee, listen to rock and roll, draw pictures, and people send me money." So I guess that upon retiring, "I'll get up in the morning, have a cup of coffee, listen to rock and roll, draw pictures, and try and live off of Social Security."

"It's better to burn out than to rust." Neil Young

The point to all of this is that the creative process doesn't stop; the desire to create doesn't end when you get old. It defines who you are.

Being creative is different for each of us. To be creative: do something new, or something familiar in a new way. It can be as simple as changing a standard recipe, taking a new way home from school or work, notice things you've never noticed before, and then apply what you've discovered to a project. You may not be successful, but then accepting a misstep is just part of the process. To be creative you need to simply recapture the imagination that came so easy as a child. And in that sense, creative people never grow up.

*May your hands always be busy
May your feet always be swift
May you have a strong foundation
When the winds of changes shift*

*May your heart always be joyful
May your song always be sung
And may you stay
Forever young*

"Forever Young"
Bob Dylan



“The arts are not a way to make a living. They are a very human way of making life more bearable. Practicing an art, no matter how well or badly, is a way to make your soul grow, for heaven’s sake. Sing in the shower. Dance to the radio. Tell stories. Write a poem to a friend, even a lousy poem. Do it as well as you possibly can. You will get an enormous reward. You will have created something.”

Kurt Vonnegut Jr.

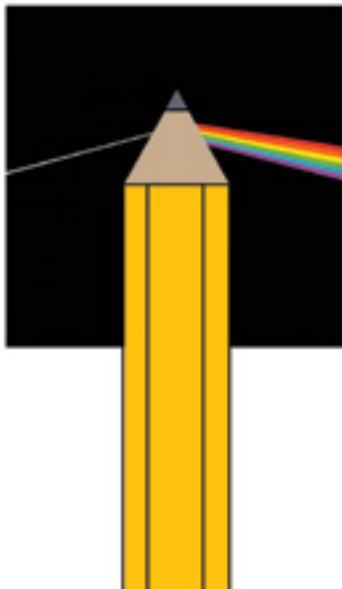
“This is the End”

The Doors



“I’ll see you on the Dark Side of the Moon”

Pink Floyd



About the Author – the line between illustration and rock and roll

Robert Meganck was born in Detroit Michigan (home of Motown Records) a long, long time ago. He grew up and came of age alongside of Rock and Roll. He remembers sitting with his family to watch Elvis Presley sing “Hound Dog” on the Ed Sullivan Show. Through out his elementary year’s he remembers rushing home to watch American Bandstand. Elementary school was also where he found his love of drawing – he’d spend more time drawing the pictures for his book reports than he did on the report itself. At St. Jude Elementary he joined the school band as a drummer, but quit after two years to play football (although he was not very good), because he felt girls were more attracted to football players than they were to drummers – he now realizes how terribly wrong he was. In high school he found his talent was more in making the banners for the football games rather than in game itself. He also confesses that he liked drawing not because he was so good at it, but because he was so bad at everything else. He went to college to study Commercial Art. At Farris State College his constant sermons on Rock and Roll earned him the nickname “Motown”. His dream of becoming the lead singer for a blues based Rock and Roll band took a backseat when he realized that he was tone deaf and couldn’t sing for shit.

He was drafted into the Army in 1967 and missed Woodstock. Although, while stationed in Germany he did manage to see Janis Joplin in concert – probably the best concert he’d ever seen. He had to go AWOL to attend the concert, and upon his return to base, where his Commanding Office planed to make the remainder of his tour a living hell, Meganck said, “No problem, I’ve just been to heaven.”

After his discharge, he went on to study design and illustration at the Center for Creative Studies, and to see as many live Rock and Roll performances as possible: The Who, The Faces, Joe Cocker, Leon Russell, Jethro Tull, 10 Years After, Bob Seger, The Stodges, The Flying Burrito Brothers, The Allman Brothers, Bob Dylan, Procol Harum, Eric Clapton, Neil Young, etc.; and has a vague memory of seeing Jimi Hendrix at Cobo Hall in Detroit. The fact that this memory remains vague, adds credence to the fact that it probably happened. As he explains, he never smoked “tobacco”.

His very brief music career was a one night, fund raising performance with Polly Mer and the Emulsions, for one song at Cranbrook Academy of Art. Meganck played a toy melodica. He only needed to lean one song and, as a wind instrument playing, the melodica has the additional advantage that its user is prevented from singing.

His drawing skills far surpassed his music skills, which never passed beyond a passion for playing air guitar. He still enjoys playing air guitar – although after a hip replacement, a bad back, and arthritis, his movements more closely resemble Joe Cocker, then Eric Clapton.

Lessons from Life and Rock and Roll are a collection of notes that I've tried to address with my students over the past 43 years of teaching. The book is subtitled "*A Swan Song*" – as in "a person's final public performance or professional activity before retirement." – which this is. But instead of a swan's song, it is probably more appropriate to look at the book from the perspective of the Ugly Duckling. As you know from the fairytale, the ugly duckling grows up to become a beautiful swan– although this is not a fairytale. It is about the creative process and rock & roll. Growing up I was kind of an ugly duckling, and age hasn't helped. The beauty I found did not come with an improved outward appearance, but from the love I found from art, the interaction with my family and students, the practice of creativity and – from **Rock and Roll**.

Robert Meganck

*He wear no shoeshine
He got toe-jam football
He got monkey finger
He shoot Coca-Cola
He say, I know you, you know me
One thing I can tell you is you got to be free
Come together, right now
Over me*

"Com Together"
Paul McCartney & John Lennon

