

Josh Kramer
The Cartoon Picayune, Founder and Editor

Michael O'Connell, producer, It's All Journalism:

Welcome to It's All Journalism. My name is Michael O'Connell. Today, we're talking comics — comics and journalism, journalism and comics.

I've got with me today Julie O'Donoghue, who is now an official producer with our show.

Julia O'Donoghue, producer, It's All Journalism:

Yes.

Michael O'Connell:

Welcome.

Julia O'Donoghue:

Happy about that.

Michael O'Connell:

And we're happy about that as well.

And we're talking to Josh Kramer, who is the editor of The Cartoon Picayune.

Josh Kramer, editor, The Cartoon Picayune:

Hey guys, thanks for having me.

Michael O'Connell:

Let's start. What is the [The Cartoon Picayune](#)?

Josh Kramer, editor, The Cartoon Picayune:

Sure. It is a twice annual 'zine. I guess magazine is fair. So it's journalism in the form of comics. It's about the size of like an old TV Guide.

Michael O'Connell:

It's like a digest.

Josh Kramer:

Yeah, it's like 5.5 by 8.5. And it's in black and white, color covers, with different stories that are all about real people and true stories, but in the form of a comic book.

Michael O'Connell:

So did you come into this type of thing as a cartoonist, as somebody who is interested in journalism, as a little bit of both?

Julia O'Donoghue:

Yeah, can you tell us about your background?

Josh Kramer:

Yeah, absolutely, I went to American University just up the street from here, and I did undergrad in the School of Communications, and thought I was going to go into normal journalism, just like everyone else thought they were going to.

Michael O'Connell:

And make tons of money.

Josh Kramer:

Yeah, but I was also comics fan, and I loved picking up my weekly books and reading graphic novels and everything.

My best friend came back from studying abroad in Croatia, and he brought with him a book by [Joe Sacco](#), called — I said that weirdly — called [Safe Area Gorazde](#).

Julia O'Donoghue:

It's great.

Josh Kramer:

Yeah, it's one of my favorite books. It's a very complicated story in comics form about all the history in the Balkans, the recent history in the Balkans, and it kind of opened my eyes to telling nonfiction stories in the comics medium.

And so, I, kind of, from there started thinking about how the journalistic stories that I like — things like "This American Life" is a great example. How could I do that in comic books? And from there, I went to — I graduated from American in 2009 — and I went to a small school in Vermont. It's called the [Center for Cartoon Studies](#). It's an amazing two-year MFA program that allows to you take time off from the world and go make comics.

So, the first year is very intensive — lots of courses like drawing and all sorts of figure drawing, comics history. The teachers are amazing. You really get immersed and you're in this tiny community of, like, 75 people in this town of 2,500 in the middle of Vermont.

From there, my second year is a thesis year, and so Josh Neufeld was my mentor and adviser. He wrote a book called [After the Deluge](#), which is a book about Hurricane Katrina and its effects on the City of New Orleans. With his help and the help of my classmates, I came up with the first issue of The Cartoon Picayune.

From there, I've been doing it here. I moved back to D.C. Now I publish it from here. I'm the editor. I do stories in it and I bring in all sorts of contributors as an anthology.

Michael O'Connell:

Now, had you been an artist before you went to the MFA program?

Josh Kramer:

Not really. I always liked to draw, but I never had the knack for it. I mean I was never one of those kids who had to be doodling all the time compulsively. I was never one of those people. Starting around 2009 I really pushed it for my application and drew the very best that I knew how, and I barely made it in. I like to tell people that they had to have me submit an additional sample of my work to prove that I would be able to handle the drawing of the course load.

From there, I mean, I feel confident in my ability. I'm really happy that The Cartoon Picayune is at a point where I can pull in people that are better drawers than me, but I still like to do my own work. And I feel like I'm great example of the fact that anyone who is willing to do it, can learn to draw in a few years.

Michael O'Connell:

So what makes you — using cartoons to tell your story — what makes you a journalist? What are you looking for?

Josh Kramer:

Well, every story, I mean everyone is a little bit different, but especially the way I do it, every story starts out the same. You got out. You meet people. You interview them. You take notes.

In my case, I take a lot more visual notes. I'm taking a lot of pictures for reference. I am telling people, 'Don't worry about these pictures, I'm not going to use them for anything. It's just for my own notes.' But I am reporting the story like anyone else, and I'm looking for good quotes and I am pursuing it in that way, but, like I said, I am collecting a lot of information that is going to help me out later.

So if there was a particular billboard in the background or if the grass was very strange or whatever, you know, I'm going to want to know that stuff. Or, especially if I am trying to find out about something that happened where I can't be there, when I am trying to do some kind of light reconstruction I might say, I'm trying to collect as much information as possible.

Michael O'Connell:

I know something we have talked about in the past when we've had photographers or videographers in here — visual storytellers — when they talk about the way they choose to tell a particular story, they look for certain elements or something.

When you go out and think about a story or start talking to people, and saying well maybe this could be a story, what elements are you looking for?

Josh Kramer:

That's a great question. Yeah, it's different for everyone, but, for me, I really do think that there are certain stories that are better suited to comics. I have friends that take a more, like a small 'c' catholic approach to comics, and think that everything should be open to this medium, that this is a medium that can handle everything.

But, for me, these stories take so long to do, and you really have to be deliberate about what you choose to work on, and so, for me, I want something that — yeah it's a visual story. You want to see what's happening. So I want to pick something where it's a good story first and foremost. I want something that is a compelling narrative, or you don't know that going in necessarily, but you want to at least think there is going to be a good story there. And then, something that is going to look great on the page.

When you start working on it, some of that stuff comes out, but maybe there's like a visual metaphor or a way of communicating to the reader what's happening that's not completely obvious to you.

Michael O'Connell:

I first became aware of your work when we had [a podcast](#) a couple of months ago where we interviewed the editors and contributors of the [Magic Bullet](#), and you actually had a page in there. And in the conversation, Matt Dembicki mentioned something that you have done. And I went I checked it out. It was for the [Washington City Paper](#). It was a [two-page spread about food trucks](#). Could you tell me about that sort of project?

Josh Kramer:

So this is a great concrete example. Thank you. So, that story, I've actually done two stories about this guy Kirk Francis. He owns a milk and cookies food truck. The thing that you are referring to in the City Paper was great because it was a two-page spread. For me, as an artist, it was a wonderful, large canvass to work on. Twenty inches across by 10 inches tall, and I got to do something fun, which was I drew the food truck and I got to do a cross-sectional drawing, which is something where you can look into the truck and the little arrows explain what's inside, like the Viking convection oven that he drives around with and the 4G wireless card that he uses to run Square on his iPad.

I find that stuff really fascinating, and I also remember being a kid and loving those cross-sectional books of the Titanic and stuff like the Empire State building. So, for me, it's a straight forward journalistic story. It's kind of a light piece. It's a day in the life of this guy who does something a little bit interesting. But like, where else are you going to see something like this? Comics gives you a set of tools, gives you a medium to apply the journalistic tools that we already have.

You can do amazing things like change to an angle that a camera would never get, for example, or re-imagine a scene that there isn't any footage of. Yeah, it's amazing. Comics can do anything.

Julia O'Donoghue:

Can I ask you, so most people associate comics with fiction, dare I say, superhero fiction ...

Josh Kramer:

That's fine.

Michael O'Connell:

It's a big world.

Julia O'Donoghue:

And there's certainly a lot of famous comics stuff that has broken out recently that happens to be memoirs. I know [Maus](#) is not — I know that's not recent but ...

Michael O'Connell:

Well, Alison Bechdel's [books](#) about her family.

Josh Kramer:

Those are the big, stand out books.

Talking about [Fun Home](#), it won best book of the year in Time magazine in 2006, not best graphic novel, best book of the year. And Maus won a Pulitzer. I mean those are pretty significant books in the culture at large.

Yeah, they are very different from the kind of thing that I do, but it is helpful that more people know what comics are now. I mean more people are aware of complicated literature in comics form. I think that's helpful. And I do think they kind of lay the groundwork for there being a nonfiction or a true story.

I know I've listened to Alison Bechdel speaking a couple of times and I've met her. She's very committed and very hard on herself in terms of having a very high threshold for truth and authenticity. I appreciate that. I mean her works don't have a lot in common with what I do. Yeah, but I love her comics.

Julia O'Donoghue:

Can you explain what she does?

Josh Kramer:

Oh sure. So like Fun Home and her more recent book [Are You My Mother?](#) are memoirs. She uses like Virginia Woolf and Sylvia Plath, she uses texts like that, to explain her own life and her experiences. Very looking inward. Very analytical. I mean, the new book is very much about psychoanalysis and things like that.

Personally, I try to keep myself out of the story. That's another conversation too. The guy who's most famous for comics journalism, who I started talking about, is Joe Sacco. He is in all the stories.

I've heard him say that the reason he puts himself in the stories is because he considers it an essential part of what he is trying to say. It's book length, the narrative, and he said, when he's in Sarajevo and there's a family giving him clothes to bring to their loved one in Bosnia, there is no going back for him. He's a character.

Michael O'Connell:

He's part of the story because he's there.

Josh Kramer:

Absolutely. I think there is no reason to fake that. There's no reason to say I can't be in the story. I'm a journalist. If you look at the evolution of the kinds of stories that people are used to seeing in comics, the most previous example of nonfiction is memoir, is what you're talking about. That's what people are used to.

I know you were curious about is this a trend? Is this new? Is comics journalism new? I think it's not because there are a ton of examples of this throughout the history of illustration and comics. But what is new maybe is this commitment to saying finally, "Yes. It is journalism and we're going to try to live up to some standards."

I know that even Joe Sacco, 10 years ago, was not willing to really cast himself as a journalist.

Julia O'Donoghue:

I think, gosh, one of the best books — books — I've read about North Korea was done by ...

Josh Kramer:

[Guy Delisle](#) or Delisle. I can never pronounce his last name.

Julia O'Donoghue:

I pronounce it Delisle. We should say he's French.

Josh Kramer:

Yeah, he's Quebecois.

Julia O'Donoghue:

Oh, I'm sorry. He's French Canadian.

Josh Kramer:

No, but that's a great example because he actually goes out of his way to say that he is not a journalist. For me, I'm opening myself up to libel law here. I'm in it and I want people to think that it's a real story.

For me, the rules I use to set the stories in the Cartoon Picayune separate from the other stuff that's out there that is nonfiction in comics is that every character in the book has to be a real person. No composite characters. I mean I love Maus, but I don't want you to draw people as mice as a metaphor.

Julia O'Donoghue:

Yeah, that was actually going to be one of my questions.

Josh Kramer:

So that's the one thing. Everyone who is drawn on the page has to be a real person. The other thing is that every speech bubble has to be a sourceable quote. In theory, I should be able to look through notes and see those quotes. As a contributor, I want you to be able to stand up for those quotes, but that's pretty much it.

I want there to be a degree of flexibility. I have a wonderful story in the new issue by [Emi Gennis](#). It's a historical look at these women who worked in a factory in the 1930s and received excessive doses of radiation. It's called "Radium Girls." I think it's a tremendous nine-page story, but yeah, it's a little — it's not strictly journalism maybe. It's definitely a historical piece and what I love about it is that she's able to use quotes and court documents, mainly, to reconstruct dialogue and scenes. And a treasure trove of photos from that era to grant the story verisimilitude, you might say. You really feel like you're there and I think that's awesome. That's why I don't want to say that The Cartoon Picayune is only contemporary journalism, because I want there to be room for stuff like that. I love that there are people like Emi who love those kinds of stories and who are really willing to pursue them.

Michael O'Connell:

With the other podcast that we had, they were also talk about the D.C. –

Josh Kramer:

[District Comics](#). They did this anthology of local stories.

Michael O'Connell:

I'm going to encourage people to seek that out. It's a really good book. I'm going to link to it. A lot of it is history. People going back and re-

imagining things from photos, but research went into that to try and make it as true as possible.

One of the things that you were talking about that you sort of mentioned is that, what makes your type of journalism different from that. Are you making a conscience effort to go out and find contemporary stories?

Josh Kramer:

Yeah definitely. It's not always — a lot of it is what people are willing to pitch me or stories that have already been published and they want me to republish.

Only recently have I really started taking pitches from people of ideas for stories that they haven't started yet and working with them as an editor with them as a writer/artist and developing that into a finished piece.

The other long piece in the new issue is called "Sex Workers of the World Unite!" by [Andy Warner](#), who's got, already, a kind of career for himself as a cartoonist and illustrator. His work is on [Slate](#) and a host of other awesome venues. His style is amazing and his work is very compelling.

What was really great for me in this piece is I had a budget to pay him and to make it worth his while to go out and report. He had never actually had the time or the inclination to go talk to people, record those conversations and try to put a script together and make a comic out of that. That is huge for me, that I have a budget to do that with.

Michael O'Connell:

Tell me about just being an editor as opposed to being an artist and writer yourself. I mean what are you able to, what do you take away from that experience as a collaborative effort?

Josh Kramer:

Yeah definitely. I want my own work in there because I want to develop as a cartoonist. But it is an equal priority that I develop as an editor for me. I think I want The Cartoon Picayune to be a well-rounded package.

There are all around themes now. The previous issue was distress. The current one is hard work, and I want different stories that are going to reflect the theme. I want high quality work that is really going to pop on the page and leave a lasting impression with the reader.

A lot of it is likr sending emails. It's like anything else. It's making sure there is enough to fill the pages. In this case, late in the game, there were three pages that we had to fill and that's why I have a story in this issue.

Michael O'Connell:

What's your story? Oh, it's "Feeding the Meter".

Josh Kramer:

I mentioned I did two stories with Kirk. This is a second piece following up on the milk and cookies thing and diving a little bit deeper into contemporary politics around food trucks in D.C.

Michael O'Connell:

We should explain the politics of it. So there is a big fight going on in the City Council that ...

Josh Kramer:

I think it can be boiled down to — there's this great opportunity for a lot of people and they are making a lot of money selling their stuff on the street, but there are some people who would prefer that they not do that as much.

Julia O'Donoghue:

Mostly people who own have brick and mortar stories who are concerned.

Josh Kramer:

Yeah I get that. I work at a restaurant, so I totally get that. Yeah it's kind of a mess right now, and kind of a fascinating mess. It's a great moment in time to take a look at it.

Julia O'Donoghue:

That's totally happening in Chicago too when you go there.

Michael O'Connell:

Yeah, the restaurants don't realize that the people who a driving trucks around have expenses as well.

Josh Kramer:

Oh my gosh yeah. The truck that he made - and he made it on the cheap -

Michael O'Connell:

Maybe you shouldn't say that. He made it on the expensive – on the economic.

Josh Kramer:

Yeah, exactly. Well, he made his truck, like, not from a kit. He bought it in West Virginia or something and he had family work on it. Still, the truck, altogether, took a year to make and \$30,000. So, if you buy it from a company that makes food trucks, it might cost upwards of \$50,000 or more. So it's not on the cheap. It's still \$30,000.

Michael O'Connell:

Going with this boon, I've seen a few trucks on the side of the road, waiting to be towed because they've broken down.

Anyway, enough of food trucks and things.

Julia O'Donoghue:

I just had a question. In terms of going back to the “not putting yourself in the story” type of thing, so Joe Sacco and Guy — the French Canadian — I can't pronounce his last name so...

Michael O'Connell:

Guy. It's probably Guy.

Julia O'Donoghue:

It's probably Guy.

Josh Kramer:

We'll call him Guy.

Julia O'Donoghue:

OK.

Josh Kramer:

Apologies to our Quebecois listeners.

Julia O'Donoghue:

It's been a long time since I've look at either of their work, but I know there is some — especially in the book about North Korea, we all know North Korea is pretty weird — there is some, he's not turning people into mice or cats, but there's some liberties taken with the way people look. I know in the book about North Korea, all the people have really wide, clown-like smiles all the time.

I was wondering how you felt about that, because some of attraction about comics is that you can take some liberties with people's appearances.

Josh Kramer:

Yeah you're talking about issues about caricature and also the fact that it is a medium that is a visual shorthand. I mean that is why it works so well.

That is tricky. I mean, for me, as a young artist too, I think, "How do I portray this African American and make it look not offensive, but like accurate?" I want the reader to be able to tell in black and white that this person is an African American, but I don't want it to be like, "Eww."

Michael O'Connell:

Sometimes I would imagine the challenge would be that there are certain conventions or techniques in cartoon storytelling where people are suddenly, like, a caricature of themselves jumping up and down because they are angry or something. You want to illustrate a certain emotion or something. Do you feel then that you have to be hyper-realistic or as realistic as you can be?

Josh Kramer:

I do feel like this kind of work, this subject matter, lends itself to being, unfortunately, a little less expressive sometimes and a little bit more text heavy.

That's kind of some of the challenge is, like, how can you say as much as possible from the perspective of the character, the real person, the source? How do you have them tell their story? I don't want it to be an illustrated essay. And I like illustrated essays.

Michael O'Connell:

Have you ever seen any of the alternative work that [Steve Ditko](#) has done? He will have a symbolic character and an entire page filled with text.

Josh Kramer:

Oh my God. Let's not talk about late Ditko.

Michael O'Connell:

You know he's not unique. There are a lot of people who do that, and I was looking at your book, and it sort makes you wonder. You know comic

books is a visual medium. Cartoons are a visual medium. The pictures are there for a reason. They are not just like illustrations via a photo. That's part of your storytelling technique.

Josh Kramer:

I appreciate you for making that point for me. It's not that the images are doing the job of communicating, and it's not that just the words are doing the job. It really should be a marriage. It really should be one cannot exist without the other. The best stories do that.

Julia O'Donoghue:

But you do put some limitations — I mean because that's very effective. I mean, as much as we are saying, I don't want people to look like animals. That is a very effective tool used in *Maus*. Are you saying you think that's off the table for you a little bit?

Josh Kramer:

It depends. I don't want to say that anything is completely off the table. It's a discussion maybe.

Here's a great example of something of where I had go back and forth a little bit about what I would want in *The Cartoon Picayune*. The previous issue has a wonderful story by [Matt Diffee](#), who is, by trade, a *New Yorker* cartoonist. He does single gag panels, and he's great. He's super funny. You can see his stuff in every issue of the [New Yorker](#), and he came to me and said, I have this story that [Texas Monthly](#), would you like to reprint it in *The Cartoon Picayune*? And I said, yeah, it's hilarious.

Michael O'Connell:

Would I?

Josh Kramer:

First of all, the story is very impressive.

Michael O'Connell:

It's beautiful art.

Josh Kramer:

Yeah, it's very beautiful, and it works in black and white, which I was afraid it wouldn't, because it is a watercolor piece. This is his first multi-panel piece too, which is kind of unbelievable.

There is a sequence in this story — which I found myself doing kind of a read through before sending it off to print — and I'm asking myself, "This is really funny. This is too funny. Did these people actually say this? Are these real characters?" So, I emailed him and went back and forth, and it turns out that they weren't. But people that looked like that had said stuff like that while he was there.

So, I decided to put a little disclaimer up on top of that. It says something like that the following sequence is comedic fiction based on reportage, and I think that is a reasonable compromise. I wanted to put a flag to the reader that says "Hey! Look out." I didn't want to take it out of the story 'cause it's funny, and I think people get it because of that note. But that was the closest I've gotten to an exception to the rule.

Michael O'Connell:

So you sort of thought that, maybe because of journalistic integrity, that that was something you needed to address.

Josh Kramer:

Yeah. And it's not like...

Julia O'Donoghue:

It worked. I read it. I saw it. I saw the note.

Michael O'Connell:

But you know, otherwise, there may be people out there, if that's not there, are just going to take that as you know ...

Julia O'Donoghue:

Right.

Josh Kramer:

So for me, it's not even like, objectivity, right? Objectivity is kind of questionable in general. This is a medium where you cannot help but being subjective because the entire thing is interpreted through your brain and your hand. It's drawn. It's not as if — you know photography is subjective because it's all edited right?

It's not uncommon to find a picture from North Korea with those missiles that have been copied and pasted into another part of the picture, if people remember that from a few years ago. It is an inherently subjective medium, but I feel like, in general, it is pretty easy to trust what is being communicated to you.

Just like with radio, when they explain that something is happening, you believe them. For me, it's not so much objectivity. It's doing the due diligence and making sure that your facts are right, and also, having some humility about it. It saying, you know, I'm not omnipotent. I don't know everything, but this is my version of it.

Michael O'Connell:

It's kind of interesting because I would — do you see yourself more as an artist or journalist? Or a combination of both?

Josh Kramer:

A combination of both I guess, if I am flattering myself, on a good day. I think of myself as a journalist.

Michael O'Connell:

So you're constantly weighing the artistic merit of something against the — not that they are necessarily mutually exclusive ...

Josh Kramer:

I don't know. It's not usually that hard of decision. Honestly, it's not something that I like wrestle over. It's not like some brilliant metaphor that I am beating myself over the head with. Usually, it's just like straight forward stories about normal people and it makes sense in comics, you know.

Michael O'Connell:

Are the things that make a good comics story the things are what make a good text piece?

Josh Kramer:

Oh yeah. Totally. I don't know if everyone thinks like this, but especially now, doing this, like I will read an amazing essay, for example, and I'll just be, like, I wish I could see this. A good, detailed story has you picturing it in your mind, and I want to actually see it. That's why I think documentary is so powerful. It's not secret that people want powerful, visual images to accompany narrative.

Julia O'Donoghue:

Right. [30 for30](#) is super successful.

Michael O'Connell:

Well, and people tend to forget that documentaries are subjective as well.

Julia O'Donoghue:

Yeah for sure.

Josh Kramer:

Yeah and I think a lot of the ethical issues are similar in documentary. How do reconstruct something that you can't get footage of is the same as I wasn't there to see it?

I always think about that scene in the [Thin Blue Line](#) with the milkshake flipping through in the air, which is so powerful and goes such a long way.

Michael O'Connell:

It's good that his camera happened to there to shoot that.

Josh Kramer:

Oh my God yeah, and I've heard him interviewed, and there are some people who think that he was there to shoot that.

Julia O'Donoghue:

That is ridiculous. I mean ...

Josh Kramer:

I'm like, well, maybe that is a failure on your part, [Errol Morris](#), because how could people possibly think that?

Julia O'Donoghue:

I don't know. Those reconstructions are pretty noir. They're like, dark and people are walking and there are shadows around. In fact, that actually makes me uncomfortable about that documentary, even though it's beautiful — or the Paradise Lost series. I don't know if there any reconstructions in Paradise Lost, but there are things that happen there that make me a little uncomfortable, so you're totally right about that.

So can I ask you about the financial end of this? So how are you supporting yourself? Can you pay your contributors and all those nice things?

Josh Kramer:

I should say, first of all, it's on a very small scale. I print 300 of these every time I make them. I will print more. You know it goes up every time I print. I do not support myself with The Cartoon Picayune. I have a full-

time job. I'm on number 5 now. I can kind of lay out the way it works pretty easily.

The margin is not amazing, but it works. Each issue costs less than \$1.50 to print and I sell them for \$4. I sell them in a variety of different ways, the best of which being hand-to-hand or through the Internet. That's where I sell most of them probably, either at comics shows or just at events around town. I just did a small press event that was sponsored by the [Washington Project for the Arts](#). I'm going to the [Zinefest](#) on July 21 at St. Stephens Church for those in D.C.

I mean that's the best, is to meet somebody and convince them that they should spend money on my art. I mean that's hard, but it's worth it, and it creates repeat, lifelong subscribers and everything.

Michael O'Connell:

I assume you've been to the [Small Press Expo](#) up in Bethesda, [Md.]?

Josh Kramer:

Yeah, I'm there every year. Yeah.

Michael O'Connell:

I've been the last couple of years. It's great.

Josh Kramer:

It's getting bigger and bigger every year, but it's great.

Michael O'Connell:

It's a lot of people that are in the same place as you are. They're producing work. Some of it's hard bound, really nice printing, you know, and other people are doing stuff on a really low-end scale.

Josh Kramer:

I definitely would like to play with different media too. I mean I would like to do a bigger, fatter version of The Cartoon Picayune that has a perfect bound edge and everything like that. When I can figure out how to do it, I will.

I'm actually dipping my toe into e-book territory right now, trying to figure out iPad versions and different apps that make sense. That I hope will be another revenue stream.

Generally — you asked whether I pay creators — generally I am coming from a mini-comic context. You know I am coming from this community of artists and everything. People don't expect to get paid. I wish that I could, but for most of the stories, I can't pay anyone. So, they give me a finished story or they tell me that they intend to make this story for me. I more or less take it as is.

I will always copyedit and do light fact checking as much as possible. I have some friends from journalism school and my girlfriend help copyedit. I will offer changes — I mean if it is a big copy edit thing, they have to change it — but I will offer changes and say: "Make as many of these as you would like. Feel free to argue with me. You don't have to."

I mentioned that story with Andy. I paid him for it, and we started that story together, so it started as a pitch. We went back and forth on the script a lot. And then, I kind of kept a close eye on his pencil work. Well, "pencils" because he works all on the computer, so it's a whole different process than I am used to, but "pencils," then inks, then final. Basically, I exerted more of an editorial influence because I felt like I could. I was paying him for it, and I felt like it was appropriate. Whereas, I will offer as many edits as people want for stories I'm not paying for, but I'm not going to hold it to them.

Michael O'Connell:

So you mentioned the artist who was drawing digitally, what about the digital realm, as far as a publishing medium?

Josh Kramer:

I should explain that the way most of these comics are made is a little bit interesting for those who aren't familiar with it. It starts just on pieces of hard paper, like a bristol board, and then it's ink, like India ink, with like a dip pen or a brush or rapidograph, technical pens. Then, with a white white-out ink on top of that, and then you erase the pencils and you scan it in, and then it is in Photoshop. The whole book gets made in Photoshop and InDesign, just like any other publication. Then I have a PDF that I send to the printer.

I'm working online too. I have the cartoonpicayune.com. That's Cartoon P-I-C-A-Y-U-N-E. I want to do some publishing on there. You know it's tricky because it's art, and copyright is a bundle of different rights that people own. I make it clear that I don't own their stories. I only have the ability to publish in print what people give me. If they want me to put it on the site, I will, but it's up to them.

Again, that's something I am negotiating around e-books too. If I'm actually making money off of e-books, I want to split that off like royalties and I want to pay people, but who knows.

There are different opportunities online too. There's a great piece of software called ThingLink and it's amazing for annotating images. So, you roll your mouse over an image and you can see other images nested in there or videos or links. It's amazing for comics because you can read the whole comic, and then it's a jumping off point to all the research that went into it and all the other relevant information. So that, I really want to explore some more. I'm thinking that almost everything that's in this new issue is going to have a super-annotated version on the website.

It's different generationally for different cartoonists. One of my teachers in Vermont, [Steve Bissette](#). He was the penciler on the famous Swamp Thing run in the 1980s.

Michael O'Connell:

By Alan Moore.

Josh Kramer:

Yeah exactly. Legendary comic artist, and he had been screwed over by the big comic book companies, over and over again. He has every right to be bitter about that stuff. I totally get it. His whole generation had to deal with just being treated like crap.

So, I'm not really coming from that place is what I am trying to say. I look at the Internet as a chance for someone to see my work in a passing way maybe, and then, maybe later, they will want to buy it. Maybe they'll be interested or maybe they'll remember it when they see it again, and decide to purchase or something. For me, I look at it more as an opportunity, and I'm not scared about putting my stuff on Facebook, and putting my stuff on Instagram.

I read the terms. I read the conditions and everything, but I think a lot of my generation aggressively embraces that stuff, and not necessarily to our detriment.

Michael O'Connell:

Yes, because the whole name of the game is creating opportunities. I think somebody once said that the artist, the thing that makes them famous is not the thing they make money on. That's the thing that gets

them out there, but then they go on and negotiate better deals afterwards.

Before we wrap up, I want to ask you to “How to” questions. The first is, if someone wants to get into this, what would you recommend?

Josh Kramer:

Comics journalism? I'm trying to start calling it CoJo, but I don't know if that's going to catch on. Comics journalism – capital 'c', capital 'j'.

Julia O'Donoghue:

You work on that.

Josh Kramer:

We'll see how that goes. So if someone wants to get into CoJo, here's what I would recommend. There are some big books that are really great. Anything by Joe Sacco is wonderful. I think his masterpiece is probably [Footnotes in Gaza](#). It's huge, but it is just like, great. It's a tremendous book, but maybe that's not the first thing you read.

I might start with something a little bit more accessible. [Sarah Glidden](#) is one of my contemporaries, and she had a book by Vertigo a couple of years ago called [How to Understand Israel in 60 Days Or Less](#). It's not straight forward journalism, but I don't mind putting her in this group because that's what she's pursuing now, and this is the book that she kind of started on.

A lot of that stuff you talked about before, about metaphor that might not be right for journalism and comics stuff, she uses that to amazing effect in her book. She'll be staring out the window and picturing dinosaurs fighting and stuff like that. I love it and it is such a good book. It really is like a memoir, but once you are into Sarah, you'll keep following Sarah because her stuff is beautiful.

After the Deluge by Josh Neufeld, and pretty much everything by Josh Neufeld is pretty awesome. If you want something quick, he has a great story on [Atavist](#), the narrative, nonfiction, publishing site. It's a really good story about an undocumented worker traveling through the whole world, basically, and ending up in the United States, in some weird territory. You can get that -- the iPad version is really fun because it is full of interactive stuff.

There's some great, great short stories — really fun — on cartoonmovement.com. They don't have any new stories in the pipeline I believe. This site, mostly funded by the Dutch government, has some awesome, awesome comics journalism from all over the world. They went to Haiti. They did some amazing work in Haiti. They had people in Afghanistan. I hope they do more work, 'cause it's great.

Some of my contemporaries, who I have published a bit and I think you should definitely keep your eye on, are [Darryl Holliday and Eric Rodriguez Nelson](#). Oh wait, I have that backwards – [Eric Nelson Rodriguez](#). He's going to kill me. These guys are in Chicago and they are a writer/artist duo, and they make some amazing work about Chicago. They do some really great personal stories. Things like playing chess in the park, and undocumented workers being deported out of Chicago. People getting married in the jail. I have that in The Cartoon Picayune. It's a great story.

I can't forget to mention [Symbolia](#) too. Is kind of like The Cartoon Picayune, but a supped up, awesome version for the iPad. It's an iPad-only tablet magazine. Not only I guess. They're on different platforms now. They do amazing work. They pay people really well. Very proud of what they are able to do.

Michael O'Connell:

The other “how to” question is how to — you don't have to give me everything — but what should someone do if they want to self-publish? If they want go out, what should they be thinking about?

Josh Kramer:

Well, mostly just start doing it. I think that is the advice that everyone gives, but I think it's true. I mean I really do think that no matter what you put on, say like, Tumblr. I mean, if you put something on Tumblr every day, people will read it, no matter what it is.

Michael O'Connell:

Because people are just like that.

Josh Kramer:

I mean, that's just the way that community works and it's awesome.

Michael O'Connell:

People are just so hungry for content.

Josh Kramer:

Listen I know people who do fan fiction right? The fan fiction community on Tumblr ...

Julia O'Donoghue:

No. In the comics world?

Josh Kramer:

I'm just saying that there's more people — I have this friend who does fan fiction and more people read her every day than even remotely look at The Cartoon Picayune website. That's just like, showing up and doing good work and having it reliably in one place.

Julia O'Donoghue:

What does she do fan fiction of?

Josh Kramer:

I think Hunger Games.

Julia O'Donoghue:

Oh OK. Nice.

Josh Kramer:

Yeah, so, know your audience.

Michael O'Connell:

But show up and do the work?

Josh Kramer:

Yeah, exactly. I love print. You know I really love making these mini comics because, for a long time, for as many people as have iPads and stuff, you know, until my girlfriend just got one, I had never seen Symbolia, which is a tablet app.

I can hand anyone a Cartoon Picayune. They can read it, and they'll know what I am all about. I love that immediate accessibility. You know, if I tell you, well it's comics, it's journalism, it's like a comic book, but it's kind of like This American Life. You might not know what I am talking about, but as soon as you read it, I think you'll understand. It's just good stories.

Michael O'Connell:

Good stories told well. I think that's a good place to wrap it up. Now, again, how can people find you?

Josh Kramer:

Yeah definitely. Can I mention a few events here in D.C.?

Michael O'Connell:

Yeah, mention a few events. This goes out to the world. We have listeners in China.

Josh Kramer:

Well sure. That's great. If you do happen to be in the D.C. area, I'm going to be at St. Stephen's Church on the 21st of July at the D.C. Zinefest, which is a really cool event if you've never been, totally free, really great.

The Small Press Expo, Sept. 14-15, I believe, is amazing. It's in White Flint, Md., very easy to get to on the Metro. It's a great way to be overwhelmed by a ton of small press and comic books.

I'm having a release party for this issue. I'm hoping this will be out by the 21st?

Michael O'Connell:

We'll see. Perhaps.

Josh Kramer:

Friday, June 21 from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. I'll be at - you can find all the information at the cartoonpicayune.com.

Release party. June 21· 923 F St. in Penn Quarter from 6- 9 p.m. It's my studio. I share a studio with some lovely artists, who are jewelry makers and painters. It's be a great chance to see some of the original art that goes into making this stuff, and also, drink some free drinks, and buy some comics.

Michael O'Connell:

OK. People can go to your website to get your...

Josh Kramer:

Yeah, the new issue is out and it is awesome. So buy it.

Michael O'Connell:

Well, that's good. Thanks very much for coming in. It's been great talking to you.

Josh Kramer:
Thanks.