

Carolyn Belefski, cartoonist, designer, Magic Bullet editor, podcaster
Joe Carabeo, film director, photographer, writer, podcaster
Matt Dembecki, editor of "District Comics," Magic Bullet contributor

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

Welcome to It's All Journalism. My name is Michael O'Connell. I'm here today with a full house. I've got Matt Dembecki, Joe Cara-byeo ...

Joe Carabeo

Carabeo.

Michael O'Connell

Carabeo. Carolyn Belefski. I knew I was going to screw one of those names up.

Joe Carabeo

That's OK.

Michael O'Connell

We're here to talk about a lot of interesting things. We're here to talk about podcasting. We're here to talk about self publishing, a do-it-yourself sort of approach to things. Multimedia platforms. The people I'm joined here with, Carolyn is the editor? Is that what you are of the most recent issue?

Carolyn Belefski

Yes. I'm currently the editor of [Magic Bullet](#).

Michael O'Connell

Tell us what Magic Bullet is.

Carolyn Belefski

Well, Magic Bullet is Washington, D.C.'s, comics newspaper. It's a free publication. We printed 5,000 last month, and we're spreading them all across the D.C. area and beyond.

Michael O'Connell

OK, and it's comics magazine.

Carolyn Belefski

Yes.

Michael O'Connell

It's got lots of different cartoons and comics in it from local artists.

Carolyn Belefski

Yes. Majority of local artists. Matt, actually, came up with the original idea of Magic Bullet a few years ago. Do you know exactly when that originated?

Matt Dembecki

It was a couple of years ago. Actually, it was myself and my friend Evan Keeling, as part of this group called the DC Conspiracy, which is a comics creators collaborative in the Washington, D.C., area. We've been around for almost eight years now. We used to do mini-comics and stuff like that and stuff like that, like jams, like Exquisite corpse-type of publication. And then we did some anthologies and we've always kicked around the idea of a comics newspaper. And at the time, there was another actually comics newspaper in the area. I can't remember the name of it.

Carolyn Belefski

I've never heard that there was one in there.

Michael O'Connell

We thought you were the only one.

Matt Dembecki

They were there for a while, and that's actually where we kind of —

Carolyn Belefski

Oh, you know what. I remember now. It's like Bam or something.

Matt Dembecki

Yes.

Carolyn Belefski

Blam or something.

Matt Dembecki

It was called Bam Magazine.

Carolyn Belefski

It was very short-lived. I remember seeing it on the Metro like around 2004.

Matt Dembecki

But, it was run by a guy who lived, I think, in Nashville.

Carolyn Belefski

What?

Michael O'Connell

Self-publishing here?

Matt Dembecki

His son went to Georgetown [University]. That's why.

Michael O'Connell

Oh, OK.

Matt Dembecki

He had the vision of having these newspapers in Chicago and New York as well, but I don't think had a really good marketing plan for it. So, it kind of died and that kind of gave us our in to try it.

Michael O'Connell

OK

Carolyn Belefski

I think there was only two, maybe three issues of that. But yeah, that's —

Matt Dembecki

Actually, they went to six.

Carolyn Belefski

Really?

Joe Carabeo

Well, I guess we're at that number then. We're at the make or break —

Matt Dembecki

We better surpass them.

Michael O'Connell

So you, Matt, you envisioned Magic Bullet as what? As a collection of local artists, a way to showcase that? Or did you have a particular direction?

Matt Dembecki

Yeah, I think initially our goal, and it wasn't just me, it was Evan and Andrew Cohen and everyone else involved, initially the project was to just kind of showcase our work. You know, we liked the paper format. We just felt like maybe that was our in since newspa-

pers were kind of going out of print, out of style. This kind of left us with an opportunity to showcase our comics in a bigger format too. It appealed to a lot of folks in the group that instead of having mini-comics where you draw fairly large and you have to reduce it, here you can kind of play with a larger format and try different things.

Michael O'Connell

Yeah, and it's a tabloid size. It's not like a comic book size. Each page is a single sort of entry from each comic. It's like an old time comic package that you'd get in the newspaper.

Carolyn Belefski

Yes, and then the center spread is kind of like our showcase. We pick one group of people for one story that's in color. That allows for, I guess, splashiness, that they can do something full center spread.

Michael O'Connell

I know that each of you Matt, Carolyn and Joe, not only Carolyn were you the editor of this, but each of you contributed something. I know Carolyn and Joe you did a strip, you did a page in it and Matt you did a page as well.

This is kind of how we're going to stretch this into that big umbrella of a journalism podcast. How is this journalism?

The fact is that cartoons have been a part of newspapers for a very long time. Anybody who's been following cartoons for the last, I don't know, three or four decades, has watched the slow degeneration of what's happened to the comic strip. It's gotten smaller, smaller and smaller. It's gotten less space, less space dedicated to it in the newspaper. As the rest of the newspaper has been shrinking, the comics section has been shrinking. So, there are plenty of people out there who are wielding their pen and brush in this genre who have things to say.

So, sometimes, people just "do-it-yourself." You go out and you create your own material. You sold ads for this. So it's sort of a self-supported effort. It's not just something as a vanity project.

Carolyn Belefski

Yes. Definitely. We needed to pay for the publication print fee and also other stuff that comes up for just our branding too. And, we also paid for our domain name for the next five years. Like, there's stuff that was added on that we couldn't actually pay for. I think we had, what was it, 39 advertisers or 29 advertisers? It was one of those. I think it was 39, actually. So, we do have a large support from the community and from other artists and it's interesting to see that grow and like have people throw money at us to say, "Hey, I want to have my ad in here and also I want to see this paper printed."

Michael O'Connell

What are the plans beyond this, well, let's not talk beyond, what are the plans at this point? You're distributing them in local shops?

Carolyn Belefski

Yeah.

Michael O'Connell

And people can order it online?

Carolyn Belefski

Yeah, right now, there's a full listing. If you go to [MagicBulletComics.Blogspot.com], you'll find a full listing of all the locations that it's available for free at right now.

Joe Carabeo

And photos of them too.

Carolyn Belefski

And photos. We do have photos on the [Facebook](#) page. We've been doing a lot of social media promoting this time around. Let's see, people can also order it online. I don't know the exact price yet, because we're putting it up in the [DC Conspiracy](#) store soon. But it will basically be enough to pay for the shipping. It's still free. We can't lose money on the shipping for that. But basically, when it comes down to it, the advertisers paid for our print run. So basically it's a way for all of us to get out there and have a comics publication and all of us are also individually represented through our single pages.

Michael O'Connell

What's been the feedback so far?

Carolyn Belefski

Feedback's been excellent. Like I haven't really heard any complaints. People have said the cover for issue number six is really eye-popping and the color bursts. I feel like it grabs a lot of attention.

Michael O'Connell

Now, Carolyn, you also do a regular cartoon strip online as well.

Carolyn Belefski

Yes.

Michael O'Connell

It's [Curls](#), right?

Carolyn Belefski

Yes.

Michael O'Connell

Could you tell me a little bit about that and why and when you started doing that?

Carolyn Belefski

Sure. Curls is technically a Web comic, but I actually have been recently calling it a comic strip, because now I don't think that there's any need to call it Web-anything, because everything's kind of online now. So, yes, Curls is my comic strip. It comes out every Monday and Thursday.

And I started it when I was in school at VCU [Virginia Commonwealth University]. That schedule was also Monday and Thursday. That was actually printed in the school paper. So, I decided to keep that same publishing schedule, but I wouldn't be printed anymore because I wasn't a student. So I just basically took those strips and put them online at first and started growing it from there. And now, I just continue to just publish it through the Internet.

Michael O'Connell

OK. One of the things that I find interesting about what you're doing and what you all have done with Magic Bullet is you've sort of combined not only the print, but that your online aspect. You're folding in social media to sort of help promote it. How important is it to help you guys get your message out or to sort of generate interest for what you're doing?

Carolyn Belefski

I think it's good that we have both print and Web abilities, because, for example, having it in print, we can have all of our newspapers at local stores or at pizza joints or record stores or Matt always likes the surf shop, especially.

Michael O'Connell

The Fairfax Surf Shop?

Carolyn Belefski

And so we can have our "rag" out there everywhere, our "fish wrap" out there everywhere. And people that are unsuspecting can pick it up and read it. And I feel like that's a cool discovery. Like if I didn't know about us already online, I'd be like, "Whoa, this is awesome" and just stumble upon it. And I feel like that allows for so much discovery, whereas if you just discover something online, it has to be, in my opinion, it has to really blow you away these days. Otherwise, it's just another thing online, it's another thing online, click, click, click.

Michael O'Connell

You're competing with a lot of different bells and whistles.

Carolyn Belefski

Yeah. So, I feel like, if I was to discover something at a restaurant or at an arcade or something, I'd be like, "Oh my gosh, this is amazing. I didn't know these things existed. What's a newspaper?"

Michael O'Connell

A lot of your advertising's targeted to comics shops.

Carolyn Belefski

Yes.

Michael O'Connell

To conventions and things that are going to appeal to somebody who finds this and for the patrons of the shops that you're actually distributing it in.

Carolyn Belefski

Yeah, there's definitely a certain market that we're trying to hit because, let's be honest, not everyone likes comics. And so, I feel like we're hitting a crowd that is open to reading comics that likes art, that likes visual things, that likes stories, so we're hitting on that demographic, definitely.

Michael O'Connell

Matt, I want to ask you about the strip that you had in here. I was looking at it today. What I like about it is it's sort of the embodiment of what people think of in editorial cartooning. You're taking a political stance, of a sort.

It's about the NRA [National Rifle Association] and, not to give everything away, but it's basically you have a character who's sort of spouting real testimony from an NRA representative. And you sort of play that it against a comic scene. What inspired you to do that?

Matt Dembecki

I guess when we started working on this particular issue, that was a hot thing in December, and I think it affected a lot of people. So, I kind of want to do something, but I didn't want to do something that was too heavy handed. So, the style I used was kind of playful, with the figures that looked like —

Michael O'Connell

They look like little Lego figures.

Matt Dembecki

They're little Lego figures. I think that kind of takes a little bit of that harsh brunt off it, kind of draws you in. But then, when I read some of the text from the NRA press confer-

ence, it kind of blew me away and I was thinking, "Well, how can I kind of incorporate this?" So I just decided to use it verbatim. You know, and I had to kind of condense it.

Then I had a little fun with the fumetti aspect. Fumetti is when you use photos and pictures in comics, actually photos and pictures. I used a little bit of that. I kind of thought that I delivered a good message and kind of what I thought and let it kind of speak for itself. Let the text almost speak for itself.

Michael O'Connell

Right. And the humor is played off the juxtaposition of the toy characters and this very sort of stark political message that the NRA is putting out.

Matt Dembecki

Right.

Michael O'Connell

Again, that's like classic editorial cartooning where you look at something in different way. And this is again, traditionally how comics played an important role in journalism over the last century or so, covering, certainly from an editorial standpoint, a lot of issues in a different way, getting people to think a different way by presenting them in the story balloons and the characters and sort of re-envisioning whatever a particular message is or anything like that. That's my schoolbook learning interpretation of it.

Carolyn Belefski

I really feel though that truly comics have not been as representative as they were in the past. Even like, I think with the Taft election, like some cartoons swayed the vote a little bit. I'll have to do some research on that, but I feel like people back then gave more respect to the comics than they do now.

But at the same time, comics in general have just broadened tremendously. Like there's political cartooning and strictly Web cartooning and historical cartooning. There's so many opportunities just to tell a story as a cartoon, but I think a lot of people don't realize that and they only think it's superheroes.

Michael O'Connell

Right.

Carolyn Belefski

But people need to realize that cartooning is just a medium.

Michael O'Connell

We were talking before a local comics shop that specializes in graphic novels and they have a whole section that's non-fiction, and there are a bunch of people who are doing really — dare I say — important work, telling stories graphically with comics stories. Art

Spiegelman, of course, is the one that everyone points to, who did "[Maus](#)." And then, Alison Bechdel, who does the "[Fun Home](#)" books about her coming out and dealing with the death of her father. You can tell very different types of stories, some of it very dramatic, but you can tell some very stark, real stories in a different way. It's what we do in journalism. We go out, we report and we bring it back and we tell it with the tools that we have, whether it's a microphone or a pen or an artist's brush, even though that brush is probably electronic at this point.

So Matt, one of the other things that we were talking about before Carolyn and Joe got here was this book that you published recently. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

Matt Dembecki

"District Comics?"

Michael O'Connell

"District Comics," yeah.

Matt Dembecki

["District Comics: An Unconventional History of Washington, DC."](#) It's a comics anthology. It's, I think, a collection of about 25 stories about Washington, D.C., and they span the time period from the beginning of the city.

Michael O'Connell

Like when they were laying out the city, even before that.

Matt Dembecki

Yeah, absolutely. Actually, I think the first story that we have is the first newspaper in Washington, D.C., before it was even much of a city, all the way through President Obama's first election. And we were looking for stories that were a little bit offbeat, stories with a narrative. And all the stories were researched, but we tried to give it that personal voice. Whenever possible, we reached out to the original sources if they were still alive. For example, one kind of unique story is the punk band Bad Brains.

Michael O'Connell

Right.

Matt Dembecki

So, you know, we reached out to them. We interviewed them. Even some of the local folks that were in that scene are still around. Ian MacKaye is a local institution. So, we interviewed him and actually his brother provided a lot of the photos that we used as references for the story. And Carolyn and Joe, who wrote a story about a spy.

Michael O'Connell

Yeah, what was that story called?

Joe Carabeo

It was Spytini.

Michael O'Connell

Spytini. Yeah, that was set at a bar. I really liked that. It was really moody.

Carolyn Belefski

The Red Spy Queen.

Michael O'Connell

Very Georgetown spy type of story..

Joe Carabeo

I really enjoy D.C., like when there's no one on the streets. So, I was like, I need to tell a story at nighttime, because I feel like that's where D.C. is the most beautiful for me.

Martin's Tavern, you know, they even have it like up in their showcase. They have articles about the Red Spy Queen and I just couldn't pass that up. It seemed like a really hot spot for a lot of espionage activitiy is Martin's Tavern. I don't know if it still is now. I don't know if I'm allowed to say, but ...

Michael O'Connell

Well, one of things I really liked about the book, I really loved the book. It really captures the flavor of D.C.

D.C.'s a different type of town. People kind of think of it just as a political town, but to the people who live here, there's a whole culture and a whole history of people living around the federal government and sort of developing their own music, their own style, their own way of living.

And the way the stories sort of unfold, they tell different aspects of it, so that by the end of it, you kind of get a real sense of what D.C. is. Again, that's a book I really highly recommend for anybody who's looking for an interesting read or a different take on the Nation's Capital.

One of the other reasons I invited Joe and Carolyn in here is I owe them a debt. When

—

Joe Carabeo

Oh, do you?

Michael O'Connell

I do. This is where I write the check. No, actually, in the early stages of conceiving of this podcast, I didn't know what it meant to do a podcast. So, I did know Carolyn sort of vaguely and I reached out to them because I knew that they had their own podcast and I'd listened to it a bit and I kind of wanted to get a sense of what it takes to go and do a podcast. Can you guys tell me how you came up with [The Carolyn and Joe Show?](#)

Joe Carabeo

I feel like the creation of The Carolyn and Joe Show sort of just fell in our lap. To me, I was already on a radio show, like a weekly radio show before that. There were times where the hosts, they weren't available. And I was like, "Well, I can do this show by myself. Why not?" After that —

Michael O'Connell

You have to have a degree of bravado and ego to do a podcast I think.

Joe Carabeo

You certainly do. I'm not going to lie. I have both, like equally. Since I started subbing for their show specifically, I was like, "Hey, why don't I have Carolyn on and see what happens from there?" That felt pretty honest and we had a lot of fun doing that.

Since that show ended and since I had my own production company for photo and film and we have our own sound equipment, so I was like "What's stopping us from recording our own show using the same equipment?" And, that's pretty much how it was. Once one show went down, we were like, "Hey, let's keep on doing this." And here we are almost 230 or so? I've lost track. Just keep going.

Carolyn Belefski

Yeah, I lost track. I remember when we hit 200, but then after that I'm like, "Uh, yeah... . It's every Tuesday."

Joe Carabeo

It's a lot of fun. But it also felt like it was a big learning curve about like holding a conversation with yourself.

Michael O'Connell

Right.

Joe Carabeo

And what you come up with. Since The Carolyn and Joe Show wasn't really about, "Oh, let's talk about comics. Let's talk about movies." It was just really a documentation of what's going on in the world from our perspective. We didn't want to get political. We didn't want to do this and that. We just wanted to be real.

So, we used to edit, but now we don't. It's more or less, "Hey, what can we come up with in this sort of 51-minute time and let's make it entertaining and let's keep a little showmanship to it and let's see what happens. It's live. It's how it is."

Michael O'Connell

Yeah, I think the most recent episode you were talking about My Chemical Romance, which, I guess meant different things to each of you as far as a band that had just broken up. You sort of talked about that.

One thing I kind of admire about your show sort of what you were just talking about, Joe, is that you don't really have an agenda. You just talk. I think, that's one of the things I love about good podcasting, is that it is conversation and it's not necessarily forced. It's actually two minds or more minds working at the same time and that's kind of the exercise you get to see and kind of enjoy. Cause I think everybody enjoys a good conversation and it's so rarely that we get to be involved in one or even listen to one.

Joe Carabeo

Usually, the biggest challenge was just focus.

Michael O'Connell

Yeah.

Joe Carabeo

I remember at the beginning of our show it would be, "Let's talk about spaghetti and how I love spaghetti. I love bread. What about water? Water's great." Now in our shows we're like, "Let's talk about bread, but slow it down. Let's really talk about how we love bread."

Michael O'Connell

Let's really talk about bread.

Carolyn Belefski

We should have a whole show about bread now. I also feel like, before, we never had time limit. So we'd just talk and talk and talk forever. Now we do have a music cue in the background. I think that it's good to have a time limit, definitely. I feel like a lot of people when they first start their podcast, it just rambles. And I feel like you need to hit at least 50 shows even just to get some type of groove going.

Joe Carabeo

But I also feel it's good because now we have musicians that want to come and just showcase what's happening or people just want to come and promote on our show and that's always a good feeling, because it's always nice when people trust you in their hands. To be like, "I know can have a good time and it doesn't have to be super-serious, it's an organic thing."

Michael O'Connell

And it's not like, sometimes you'll listen to a podcast, like one of the entertainment ones, and it's really, the good one's aren't this. But there are some that are really heavily promotion. People come in and talk about stuff.

Carolyn Belefski

We don't have like bullet points to hit necessarily. You're talking about the My Chemical Romance show. They just broke up. So we, were like, "We need to do a podcast about how we think about them." They've given us so much for several years and we're both big fans, so we're like, "We need give them some spotlight."

Michael O'Connell

And actually that episode is a really good example of it, because I was listening to it driving home today and there was a whole section where you just really confessed your feelings about My Chemical Romance.

Joe Carabeo

The show is honest. We have people that come on and after they're done, they're like, "I can't believe I just said that." There's something about being in a circle that makes you tell the truth.

Carolyn Belefski

It's also the radio medium. I feel like people just become more humble and more raw and they will just release to you the deepest, darkest secrets. And I feel like people are not as on edge as much as if there was a camera on them necessarily.

Michael O'Connell

It's easier for them not to lie, I think.

Carolyn Belefski

It's like a confessional.

Michael O'Connell

Yeah, it's very much like a confessional, not realizing that there are hundreds or whatever on the other side of this who are going to hear it.

Joe Carabeo

It's really best not even to think about it. I used to like sweat over, "Oh my God, we lost this many viewers." Now, I don't even look. At the end of the day, I feel like it's almost for us too. It's for us to, what would happen when we do reach 600 episodes and we look back. "Wow, remember episode 10. I can't believe that. Wow, I look fat."

Michael O'Connell

On a very special episode of The Carolyn and Joe Show. It'll all be clips. "Remember when we said this?"

Joe Carabeo

I tried that. It's so difficult to go back and just find one clip. But it's also a good reminder, because we do have a section where it's The Carolyn News section, where we're plugging Magic Bullet. We're always telling people what's happening.

Michael O'Connell

Your comics or your video that just released.

Joe Carabeo

Yeah, it is promotion. But we don't want it to be promotion. We just want to remind people.

Carolyn Belefski

It's just the length of one song. So it doesn't take up too much time. It's just like clearing the air and being like being the newest, hottest thing.

Joe Carabeo

We've got to get Matt on here sometime. He has so many secrets.

Michael O'Connell

Tell us your secrets, Matt.

Carolyn Belefski

Tell us.

Michael O'Connell

Tell us a secret that we haven't discussed. Now you work for an education association, a publication for that.

Matt Dembecki

That's right.

Michael O'Connell

Which one is that again?

Matt Dembecki

I work for the American Association of Community Colleges. They have a publication called CommunityCollegeTimes.com. It's a daily. We update it daily. It's pretty much me and the part-time person put that out.

Michael O'Connell

Is that for an industry, an education industry?

Matt Dembecki

It's actually geared mostly towards our members, which are community colleges and all the stakeholders, government officials who might listen in or read up to see what community colleges are doing. A lot of times, people will use our articles when they go and they advocate for community colleges, whether it's to seek more funding or if it's for maybe some policy changes, things like that. They're pretty hot now given that a lot of colleges are getting quite expensive and community colleges are still an affordable alternative. It's getting a lot of play with the current administration. That's kind of good.

Michael O'Connell

And I know, I hear this every once in a while. One of the things we talk about in journalism is journalism education. We constantly are hearing about people doing online courses and stuff like that. I imagine there's probably some impact. People going elsewhere, feeling that they don't feel they need to go to a regular college and now maybe don't even feel they need to go to a community college. That they can get all education online.

Matt Dembecki

Yeah, you can go to the [Khan Academy](#) or the MOOCs [Massive Open Online Courses], stuff like that. But what I think right now what the defining factor is actually a credential, an accreditation, really. That you have that kind of proof and confidence that it's a quality program. And that's the one difference right now, but the way things are going, education is changing almost as fast as journalism is.

Michael O'Connell

Right. Oh no, that's the thing. The Internet has changed everything up and down the line. Every industry, whether it's education or newspapers or whatever, they have to adjust. We all saw what happened with the music industry and the movie industry and how it's changed the way that that's distributed.

Matt Dembecki

Tying it back in, we were talking about comics journalism.

Michael O'Connell

Let's talk about comics journalism.

Matt Dembecki

One thing I wanted to mention is, there are other publications. One of our guys, Andrew Cohen is involved in an online publication called [The Appendix](#). It has to do with history again in comics format but even more offbeat history. And there's a new publication out called, [Symbolia](#).

Michael O'Connell

Yeah, I've heard of that. What is that?

Matt Dembecki

It's a grant-funded comics journalism effort. I think you have to subscribe to it. I've seen like some of the preliminary stuff. I haven't subscribed to it myself. But it's like human rights, whatever's going on in a particular country, they'll write a little story about that.

Even locally, there's a guy named Josh Kramer, he went to the Cartooning School of Studies in Vermont. He's got a mini-comic that he puts out every quarter or something like that. It's called [The Cartoon Picayune](#). And so, he's been kind of pushing that and doing some comics from that. He actually had the center spread in City Paper. He did something about the [Milk and Cookies Truck in D.C.](#).

Michael O'Connell

Oh my God.

Carolyn Belefski

A food vendor.

Matt Dembecki

I think we're finding new ways to incorporate comics into different, I don't know if you call them mediums, or whatever.

Michael O'Connell

It's an incredibly powerful mechanism. I think people still like it. They like the idea of having art and the words. And there's a great book by Scott McCloud about "[Understanding Comics](#)" and there really is a whole lexicon to it that the way that images are paced and pages are laid out. There's a whole formula in the way the artist and the writer are presenting things to you. It's a completely different experience from reading a book or seeing a movie or something like that.

Joe Carabeo

A little spoiler from the next Carolyn and Joe Show or the current one, we talk about how the comics is actually like a full assault of the sense in a way, except for smell.

Carolyn Belefski

You can smell it. You can smell ink.

Michael O'Connell

You can smell the paper. I've smelled ink on new books.

Carolyn Belefski

Yeah, that's such a great smell. It

Michael O'Connell

It is. It sort of makes your brain hurt a little bit, but ...

Joe Carabeo

When it is done just beautifully, you are visually seeing and you're reading. You are hitting all those senses.

Carolyn Belefski

Actually, the best comics and this also works with music, if I can smell it, even though there is not a smell, technically. But if it creates a world that I can smell, I feel like those items and those creations bring it to a whole other level for me. I've heard music before that's like, "Ok, this smells like something. This smells like I'm in the desert and I smell the dirt." Stuff like that.

Matt Dembecki

That will be the next challenge for Magic Bullet.

Carolyn Belefski

Have a comic that smells?

Joe Carabeo

Odorama.

Michael O'Connell

Scratch and sniff.

Carolyn Belefski

Or like if you draw, let's say, a piece of stinky cheese. Like visually, you can look at that. But mentally, you can be like, "Wow, that smells like old cheese." Or something stale or ...

Michael O'Connell

Well, Alan Moore's Swamp Thing was a real smelly book. That was real swampy.

Carolyn Belefski

I think that that strikes a cord. Like if you can bring in all these senses that don't actually exist, but mentally you're creating them.

Joe Carabeo

What's cool about comics over like movies, movies work at their own real time speed. But with comics, you can sit on it. You can go back and be like, "I really do smell that."

Then you turn the page and be like, "Wait a minute, let me go back." You can't do that if a movie is playing straight. You've got to go with their own time."

Michael O'Connell

Or you can linger on an image.

Joe Carabeo

Exactly.

Michael O'Connell

Or the images can be paced a certain way to suddenly you're reading faster and it's all to create suspense and everything. That was one of the things that Alan Moore was saying about why he would never see Watchmen or why he didn't care if Watchmen got made into a movie, because it would be a completely different product than what he had created.

Joe Carabeo

Oh definitely. One of the earliest memories I have of comics for some reason, I don't know if anyone else has this, was The Bible. I remember during the daytime I would actually see ads for The Comic Book Bible. It was actually The Bible, but it was all illustrated.

Carolyn Belefski

It's like the kids' version? The Illustrated Bible.

Joe Carabeo

It's something that still sticks to me and to see like now, these days even go full history.

Michael O'Connell

[R. Crumb's Genesis.](#)

Joe Carabeo

Yeah, I got that. I like that book a whole lot.

Michael O'Connell

It's high art.

Joe Carabeo

Except it's not for kids.

Michael O'Connell

No. There's a lot of killing and other stuff.

Joe Carabeo

There's a lot of violence in The Bible too.

So, I like that as a medium. I feel like every single year, like when I was going to school. I was just thinking about this the other day when I was having a talk with my friend Cooney. He was wonder like how far comics go back in my life and I realize like in grade school, I brought in comics as like a showcase for people. Like show and tell, I brought comics. Or like when you're supposed to choose a book to share with the class and tell a stories, I brought a comic in. And even in high school in art class, I'll bring comics and then, I remember now, even in film school, when we're supposed to bring in our own textbook, I brought in Stray Bullets trade paperback number one as this is what's going to teach me how to make movies.

Carolyn Belefski

Even like the first humans, the neanderthals, they were making comics on their walls. Cave paintings.

Michael O'Connell

And Japanese writing is pictures.

Carolyn Belefski

Egyptian stuff too.

Joe Carabeo

They're all comics.

Michael O'Connell

They're all comics. They're all visual and cool. And I think everybody sees imagery and processes it differently. I know, my two daughters are autistic and they're very much visually cued. So, they react very much to images and video and comics as well. They like the colors. They like the images. And, you know, it's just something about linking images to words, it creates something in people that's really powerful sometimes, in the hands of a really good artist and writer.

Joe Carabeo

Oh yeah.

Michael O'Connell

That's my two cents.

Matt Dembecki

Actually, growing up, my parents were Polish immigrants and mom got me comics to help me to learn how to read, to encourage me to read.

Joe Carabeo

Nice.

Matt Dembecki

So, it was weird. She read and this was like in the '70s, she read an article in the local paper, The Hartford Courant, about how some schools were using comics to introduce or use them to encourage kids to read. I think she went to the local comic book store and found out which ones were the popular ones of the time. Of course, it was Frank Miller was on Daredevil. You had John Byrne who was on X-Men. So some of that stuff, I don't know if it was really appropriate for like a 9-year-old.

Carolyn Belefski

You turned out find.

Michael O'Connell

But that sort of touches on the whole idea of what people's perceptions of what comics are. That they're kids books. Certainly, what the biggest movies are are superhero movies. Again, reinforcing the stereotype that the only comics that are out there are superhero comic books. For every 50 superhero movies, there's one [Ghost World](#), which is based on a comic book.

Matt Dembecki

It's interesting. I think there's been a shift. People really appreciate comics. I really do think that. Whereas, 10, 15, 20 years ago, they were kind of viewed as kids books. If you read them as an adult, you were kind of looked down. But other countries, you go to Japan or [France], it's a very celebrated art form.

Michael O'Connell

Right.

Matt Dembecki

It's no big deal to see someone reading it on the subway or finding it in a vending machine.

Michael O'Connell

The French call it the 10th art form or something. They numbered each of the art forms and comics is the last one because it melding of art and words. [Editor's note: The French number the art forms from one to nine, with comics being called the Ninth Art-form.]

Matt Dembecki

The United States pretty much invented the comic book format. And here we have the least respect for it.

Michael O'Connell

And the comic strip.

Carolyn Belefski

I think we've still got a long way to go, though. People recognize it and people that value it value it. But then there's a whole bunch of people that, I don't know. Comics might not be everybody's jam, you know, and that's fine. It's like anything, with books. Somebody might not like fiction or somebody might not like non-fiction or fantasy and sci-fi. I get that, but then it's also, I feel like comics could be a little bit more respected rather than "You just draw pictures."

Michael O'Connell

The New York Times reviews graphic novels. What was it, Time Magazine, their [top 100 novels of the last half of the 20th century](#), one of them was [Watchmen](#). So I mean ... one.

Carolyn Belefski

And that always gets respect. [Bone](#) always gets respect. There are like select comics that are well known.

Michael O'Connell

Maus.

Carolyn Belefski

Yeah.

Michael O'Connell

That people point to. But there are other. If you're somebody who reads them regularly, you're going to know about a lot of things or know ahead of time, certainly, of a lot of things that are much more interesting and sort of cutting edge.

Joe Carabean

I have a different perspective on this. Sorry to cut you off. But like, it doesn't get respect, right? There are a lot of things that don't get the respect that they deserve. Part of me almost feels like that's pretty cool. There's part of me that's almost like it's underground danger to it.

Carolyn Belefski

It's underground

Michael O'Connell

It's outlaw.

Joe Carabeo

Because it's almost like once it becomes hip, now it's too cool for the party. Oh forget it, that's a bad analogy. You know what I'm saying?

Michael O'Connell

Yeah.

Joe Carabeo

Once it's over all, will it be just as appealing?

Michael O'Connell

I've been a comic book fan off and on since the 1970s, which tells you how old I am. And I can tell you, there were periods of my life where I was going, "Oh, if there could be a really good TV show or a really good movie about this, this would change people's minds or something." There've been some really good movies and some really good TV shows, but it really hasn't changed people's minds.

People are going to like, sort of what Carolyn was saying. People are going to like what they like. I think there's probably a wider base right now of what people like in comics and graphic novels. But, one good thing is that in the U.S., I think we've got a wider variety than we had 20, 30 years ago, which is really good.

Matt Dembecki

In terms of an indication on how people feel about it, all you have to do is look at libraries.

Michael O'Connell

Yeah.

Matt Dembecki

Twenty years ago, did they have any comicssd? Well, maybe they might have one.

Michael O'Connell

Did they have a manga [Japanese comics] section?

Matt Dembecki

Now they have specialized comics sections, depending on your library. I live in Fairfax [County, Va.] It's got a great system there. They're very in tuned to graphic novels. That's the great things about librarians. They kind of know what the next wave of things are. They know how to get kids interested in books and how to appeal to adults too. There's a lot of stuff. There's a lot of books in the Fairfax system that are geared toward adults.

Carolyn Belefski

The upcoming generation is, I think, going to be better with comics than the current generation, because a lot of them are already reading it on the iPad and digital downloads. I think, a lot of times, the younger generation is really big, like you were saying with your daughters, they have visual learners. And so I feel like people are more open rather than, I feel like the older way of thinking was just memorization.

Michael O'Connell

Right.

Carolyn Belefski

One plus one equals two. Robotic like that. And I feel like now there's so many different styles of learning. So, it will only get better for comics.

Michael O'Connell

And I think the mobile devices are making a difference. Once tablets started coming out you started seeing the big comic companies, Marvel and DC, releasing stuff in digital downloads, where you could sort of move through a page and read a comic online. Now, I know that they're still trying to figure out that magic formula of —

Carolyn Belefski

Monetizing.

Michael O'Connell

Monetizing it. "Can we go 100 percent digital? Should we just sort of package some digital comics and do some special editions for digital?" Like everybody else, they're just trying to figure out that formula.

Joe Carabeo

I feel like people will figure out that formula once they figure out how to actually get the security up and running to be able to lock things down, without things easily being stolen.

Michael O'Connell

Yeah.

Joe Carabeo

Cause that's what it really is. That fear of one person downloads and they can just easily share with a million other people. Then, "Wow, one person spent 99 cents and we lost 200 possible ..." I don't even know how you'd solve that. There's no way to solve that, from my perspective, you just let free.

Matt Dembecki

You sell ads.

Joe Carabeo

Yeah, you sell ads.

Matt Dembecki

That's the way comics used to be.

Joe Carabeo

That's how music is now too.

Matt Dembecki

You sell ads for it. I think it's going to happen. I would venture to guess that within five to 10 years, most comics are going to be online. That's the way things are going.

Michael O'Connell

Economically, it just makes more sense.

Matt Dembecki

People are getting on the ground floor right now to feel their way around. And the way, for example, I have two little boys. The things they do when they work on the iPad and stuff like that, I'm like, my God. They're comfortable with it. And you know, in five years, when they're older, they're going to demand that most of their reading material comes on that, whether its comics or news information or whatever it is.

Joe Carabeo

It's smart for business people to go where the people are.

Michael O'Connell

Right.

Carolyn Belefski

At the same time, it also like leads back to Magic Bullet being a physical newspaper on newsprint. It just makes it even more special, because you don't find it as much anymore.

Matt Dembecki

We kind of distinguish ourselves in the market a little bit.

Carolyn Belefski

Yeah.

Matt Dembecki

And I think one of our successes has been kind of our guerrilla distributing.

Michael O'Connell

You actually have gorillas.

Joe Carabeo

That's true. I have two.

Matt Dembecki

I think Joe mentioned that we go to venues that we know people appreciate it.

Michael O'Connell

Like tattoo parlors.

Matt Dembecki

We're not going to go to The Mayflower. You know what I mean? But we will go to the tattoo parlor. We'll go to an auto —

Michael O'Connell

Customize shop.

Matt Dembecki

Customize shop.

Joe Carabeo

I was going to hit up the barber shops. You know?

Matt Dembecki

Whatever it takes. When we started distributing, we actually hit the Metros too. We learned a lot that way. So we're out there, distributing with a guy who hands out The Express. They're looking at this like, "Who are these guys?"

Joe Carabeo

Competition.

Matt Dembecki

People walk by and then like every once in a while, somebody would turn back and come back and grab the issue. We learned a lot from that. We haven't done that recently, because it's very intensive. People have jobs to go to and stuff.

Joe Carabeo

It's pretty scary to walk up to anyone, any stranger in D.C., actually.

Michael O'Connell

Here, read this.

Carolyn Belefski

It helps when The Express people are next to you too though.

Matt Dembecki

It kind of does. It confuses them.

Carolyn Belefski

That's where they pass out the newspapers.

Michael O'Connell

We had a guest in a couple of weeks ago and we were talking about the whole print thing. And she was pretty adamant in saying that print is not going to go away. There may be content that's going to be primarily online, but print is such a powerful thing that it's still going to stay around.

I think people appreciate it. You look at The New York Times and there paywall and the fact that they're still publishing so many copies of their paper. And there are so many people who want that Sunday section to sit down and look through. That's an experience you can't translate so easily online. And, you know, people still look for unusual experiences or nostalgic experiences.

So, maybe that's where something like the Magic Bullet, that sort of crack that it fits through, that there are still people wanting to have the touch, the feel of paper and want to read their comics.

Carolyn Belefski

The fabric of our lives.

Michael O'Connell

The fabric of our lives.

Joe Carabeo

I wanted to have like a scene in one of my films, you know like, if it's like a city and you see like the wind blowing and like a newspaper's going by. I want that to be a Magic Bullet. It'll be like that. Like historically in the film or something.

Matt Dembecki

You have like the holocaust and the only thing that survives is the Magic Bullet.

Joe Carabeo

Yeah, that's why we want Magic Bullet to go throughout the land, forever.

Carolyn Belefski

I feel like I'm like probably the last of the generation of, I guess, if you want to call it. Paper will still be around for a while, but I feel like I'm the last of the truly holding onto paper generation.

Michael O'Connell

"Grandma, tell us about paper."

Carolyn Belefski

Yeah, I know. I'm already feeling like that. Like kids are going to be, "What's a newspaper? And, I don't know what a book is."

Joe Carabeo

We were talking about that before. There's a feeling that I enjoy more is seeing like a really thick book of work that we just did for like 10 years, right? As opposed to just like a file.

Carolyn Belefski

Yeah. It's a file.

Joe Carabeo

You're like, "Wow, a file." It looks like I did something with the book, but with the file, "Well, delete. That's all gone."

Carolyn Belefski

But also at the same time, I personally like to read my literature in bed. Before I go to bed, I sit in bed for a little bit and read. And I feel like whenever I do that on an electronic screen, it messes up sleeping a little bit. It's almost like, "Oh, I'm so intense. I've got to check my email now." And you get preoccupied with being on the Internet. It's nice just to be able to sit and relax with a publication like on the sofa or on your bed.

Michael O'Connell

You can mentally muscle a book.

Carolyn Belefski

Exactly. And I feel like there's a feeling there that might get lost. Even, personally, when I might take notes or write down ideas, I always write them down on paper. I've seen people do it on their cell phones and they'll type in a note on there phone to remember something. But —

Joe Carabeo

That's what I do.

Carolyn Belefski

And there's nothing wrong with that. You know, that's your process. But like for me, I have to write things down and mentally I will remember, usually, what I write down. It's kind of like in school where, have you ever had a test where you get an index card and the teacher's like, "You can write all of the answers on it."

Joe Carabeo

It's a cheat sheet.

Carolyn Belefski

The cheat sheet and like have it with you at the test and like every's writing like 5 point text, that's like really small or they'll print it out super small —

Michael O'Connell

And then they can't read it.

Carolyn Belefski

And bring a magnifying glass and read it. And like, they'll have it with them on the test, but I guess like with me, the process of writing that down actually made me remember. And so, I didn't have to use my notes as much.

But, I just feel like the process of writing things down, using paper, things like that, I'm still holding onto. I'm relatively young, so like for me to do that, and then I see people five years younger than me completely addicted to the Internet. So, I feel like I'm the last generation that's still trying to hold on like the Grandma.

Michael O'Connell

I've started taking pictures of things as opposed to writing them down and that's starting to worry me. That, if I'm writing a list or something, I'll take a picture of this, I'll take picture of that.

Carolyn Belefski

People get sent to jail and they're not even going to know a phone number to call.

Michael O'Connell

Yeah. Oh my God. I worry about that.

Carolyn Belefski

If you take your phone, they're going to confiscate your phone. People aren't even going to know their spouse's name or, not name, phone number or name.

Michael O'Connell

Well, then you probably should be in jail at that point. You're not a responsible citizen.

Joe Carabeo

This whole talk is exactly why the story I wrote for the newest Magic Bullet was so difficult. Because, every Black Magic tale, I wanted to make some sort of statement and it is sort of political. But, I don't want it to be literal political.

Carolyn Belefski

It's not direct.

Joe Carabeo

It's not direct political. It's just a commentary on life. But it is about technology just how far is it going to take and how much are we going to lose touch with the whole, entire world or even people that we're next to standing with.

Michael O'Connell

Well, once the singularity comes, we'll be able to download our comic books into our head.

Carolyn Belefski

And you'll read them on your eyelids.

Michael O'Connell

Yes. Exactly.

Joe Carabeo

That's exactly what happened in the new story.

Michael O'Connell

That's my plan. We're all going to be, it'll be the Matrix.

Joe Carabeo

I like that idea, because everyone has to think green and that's where we're going. So, no use of paper.

Michael O'Connell

There we go.

Matt Dembecki

But is using paper, is that less green?

Joe Carabeo

I don't know. They keep on saying.

Matt Dembecki

Than computers.

Carolyn Belefski

The energy is going on.

Matt Dembecki

Exactly, you have to use energy. And there are chemicals and stuff in here. My point is that I don't know if it's environmentally better, that computers are environmentally better than newspapers.

Joe Carabeo

I personally think anytime someone —

Carolyn Belefski

Trees can always regrow.

Matt Dembecki

Yeah, absolutely.

Joe Carabeo

It's funny. They're all saying, "Oh, think green. Let's do this to make the planet better." But then whenever you want to buy something that's more green, it's still expensive than anything else.

Michael O'Connell

Yeah, but think of all the packaging that goes into an iPad. How much trees and materials that they're doing just to bring you this wonderful package.

Matt Dembecki

I think that the whole thing that it's more green, more environmental friendly is a marketing gimmick.

Joe Carabeo

It is definitely a marketing gimmick.

Matt Dembecki

And we've kind of bought into it. Cause like that newspaper when you are done with it, eventually it's going to —

Michael O'Connell

Break down.

Matt Dembecki

Break down. You can recycle it.

Joe Carabeo

Make Magic Bullet seven.

Carolyn Belefski

It's coloring pages for kids too.

Michael O'Connell

What are we wrapping our fish in if we have no more newspapers? And our garbage and our cat turds?

Matt Dembecki

And when you send packages and stuff, it's a perfect kind of cushion thing. The newspaper, you don't need plastic bubbles.

Michael O'Connell

This color cover. When I was young, we would this section to wrap gifts, so can't wrap gifts in ...

Carolyn Belefski

Or to help start your fireplace.

Michael O'Connell

Yeah.

Carolyn Belefski

So many uses.

Michael O'Connell

There we go. Paper.

Joe Carabeo

So, with the iPad, you can't start a fireplace. I don't even think you can set it on fire.

Matt Dembecki

You can, but you'll probably die.

Carolyn Belefski

You can have an app. It'll be an app. It'll be like a yule log app.

Michael O'Connell

I seriously injured myself with my iPad.

Joe Carabeo

Really?

Michael O'Connell

Actually, I dropped it and I said, "Oh no, it's going to hit the tile floor." So I stuck my bare foot under it to stop it and the corner just like BOOM hit me right on the top of my foot. And, because I have weird hours, I went upstairs to take a nap and there was this huge knot on my foot afterwards. I could barely move my toes.

Joe Carabeo

So, it's pretty robust machinery.

Michael O'Connell

Oh yeah.

Matt Dembecki

But you know, if you dropped the newspaper, it wouldn't hurt your foot.

Joe Carabeo

Exactly.

Michael O'Connell

There we go. Wow. It's, yeah, you've opened my eyes. We need to start a new luddite movement at this point. We need to take back our paper. We need to take back all of our things and get the big bicycles with the giant wheels and move back and live in cabins. Be like Henry David Thoreau and live next to Walden Pond.

Joe Carabeo

Isn't that called steampunk?

Michael O'Connell

Yeah. Please.

Joe Carabeo

That's coming in. Steampunk is coming.

Michael O'Connell

That's the next hour of our discussion. I think this is a good point for us to call it quits. I think we've kind of hit a lot of different things. Some of them very serious, maybe some of them not too serious. Matt Dembecki. Joe Carabeo.

Carolyn Belefski

Carabeo

Joe Carabeo

Carabeo. Cara-not-going to work. My name is Joe Carabeo.

Michael O'Connell

This is all going to be cut down. And Carolyn Belefski.

Joe Carabeo

No. You should keep it live. You need to keep it live.

Carolyn Belefski

I like it.

Joe Carabeo

I feel like people want to hear all of our, you know.

Michael O'Connell

Our foibles.

Joe Carabeo

Original moments.

Michael O'Connell

I'm going to do the 24 hour podcast. I'm just going to sit and play it for 24 hours.

Carolyn Belefski

Do they have that?

Michael O'Connell

No. I don't know.

Carolyn Belefski

Let's invent it. We were talking about that the other day, weren't we?

Joe Carabeo

Why don't we just do this for 24 hours.

Matt Dembecki

Isn't that called it a telethon?

Joe Carabeo

It is, except nobody's going to give us money. It would be cool if people gave us money though.

Michael O'Connell

Did you guys do the 24-hour comic book?

Carolyn Belefski

Yeah. In 2008 we did.

Joe Carabeo

Yeah.

Michael O'Connell

How was that?

Carolyn Belefski

It's an exhausting experience. We did like roughly a page an hour, which equalled 24 pages. And, it was a good time, but mentally ...

Joe Carabeo

The battle is always like, "I want this to be good."

Michael O'Connell

You're suffering on the quality end of it, you think?

Carolyn Belefski

No. I think it was a good story.

Joe Carabeo

I'm actually a big fan of the story. We still have it at our table every show. The thing still stands.

Carolyn Belefski

I thought it was a good challenge. Like, it basically made me really focus, but at the same time, also deranged. So, you get like both sides of things. But also, I feel like in my head I'm like, "I can do a page an hour, sure."

Michael O'Connell

Not necessarily one hour after another.

Carolyn Belefski

But, yeah, I used kind of like a sketchy style. I feel like that you got to go more sketchy and not as refined and just get the idea out there.

Michael O'Connell

Well, I think anything when you're in a time situation where you introduce a deadline, I think that improves your work 100 fold. Not your work, but anyone's work, because then you start making smart decisions about what you should and shouldn't do. And quite often, you're going to make those decisions that you wouldn't normally make if you had that extra time.

Joe Carabeo

Self-imposed deadlines are good. Cause deadlines are just —

Carolyn Belefski

It makes sure that the project gets done.

Joe Carabeo

And deadline's just another word for a goal.

Michael O'Connell

Yeah.

Joe Carabeo

Having goals in your life is always good to have.

Michael O'Connell

Yeah. OK. Well, that's good. We'll leave on that very positive note. Thank you very much Matt, Joe and Carolyn for joining me. This was kind of fun.

Joe Carabeo

It's kind of fun?

Carolyn Belefski

Thank you.

Michael O'Connell

OK, it was very fun.

Carolyn Belefski

"This is kind of fun."

Joe Carabeo

It was solid, solid.

Michael O'Connell

It was all right. It was OK. It wasn't as good as having ice cream.

Joe Carabeo

I thought there was going to be pizza.

Matt Dembecki

When he edits this down it's going to be like four minutes.

Joe Carabeo

And it's all just getting the names right.

Matt Dembecki

"I'm pretty sure we slandered someone when we said that. So let's cut that out. Oh, well."

Michael O'Connell

I have the final say in the end.

Joe Carabeo

Thanks for having us on.

Carolyn Belefski

Thanks for having us.

Michael O'Connell

No, this was great. Thanks a lot.