Interview with Jaine Hernandez

by Ricardo Mena

Question: I'm going to try to ask you a question that I hope no one has asked

you before, and it's difficult; is there a question you would like someone to

ask you that hasn't been asked yet?

Answer: You know, yes, but I can't think of any right now. I can't think of it

at the moment; when I'm in bed tonight I'll say, "Okay, I should have said they

should ask me about this," but for now, no.

Question: I think with 30 years of career, I think everyone has asked you about

everything.

Answer: Sometimes I say, "Why didn't they ask me about that?" but I can't

remember.

Question: Fine, I'll try. First question: imagine that you need to introduce

yourself to someone who doesn't know you. How would you introduce yourself

simply?

Answer: I just say, "I draw comics." People get confused, like: "Okay, you draw

comics. Do you draw Donald Duck? Do you draw Batman?" And I say, "No, I draw." I

just say it directly because I used to say, "I'm a cartoonist." And people would

ask, "Do you paint the animations yourself?" And I would answer, "No, I'm not an

animator, I'm a cartoonist." And they would say, "Like in the newspaper?" And I

would say, "No, no." And I got tired of explaining it, so now I just say, "I

draw comics."

Question: And if they don't know your comics, what would you say to get them to

read them? "You should read my comics because...," or "You need to read my

comics because..."

Answer: You know, most of the time I say, "Oh, well, you don't know them. You're

not missing anything." Really, yes, because it's like, why should I spend all

this time explaining to someone who won't read them anyway?

Question: So, do you think it's easy for young or new readers to approach your

comics nowadays?

Answer: I think I don't know. I can only speak for myself.

Question: But when you sign your comics, do you see new readers or do you always

see the same people? Or do you hear from young people saying, "Okay, new

generations, yes."

Answer: Yes, they usually say, "Someone told me to buy this, to read it." And I

say, "Good luck, I hope you like it." That's all I can say to them. And then if

they become more specific, okay. But generally, someone just puts a book in

front of me and says, "Someone told me to read this, it's really good." And I

say, "Oh, I hope you liked it." Sometimes I never hear from them again.

Sometimes someone says, "I met you 10 years ago and you introduced me to your

comics." Fine. I'm really happy, but I can't tell another person how to think. I

can't tell them they should read this because they'll like it. I don't know if

they will.

Question: But the point is that still, after 30 years, I don't know if it's 30,

you keep selling comics, and this means you're not losing readers, or you're

increasing, because in Spain it's difficult to make a living from comics, from

the money of comics. So, oh, yes, the same here, but at the same time, when you

talk about it, you seem so calm. So I think no, you're like, I don't care. I

could live without this, right? Or is this just a pose?

Answer: Yes. It's, you know, it's so personal to me that it's like, how do I

tell another person how much this means to me and make them believe it? I think

it's not my job. I think they should read and form their own opinion. That's

why, many times when I write my comics, I give them enough to form their own

story. And I like that because that connects me more with the reader. And

sometimes they tell me something I didn't expect. "Look, I really like this, and

I saw this as Maggie doing this and that." And I say, well, then you're right,

unless it's a cold hard fact, like: "She dies." "Oh, I didn't know she died."

Well, it's in the book, but, but it's mostly, you know, this depends on you, you

know, I connect more with the reader when I do that. "Well, you were right, you

know what you're talking about." And they'll say, am I right? And I'll answer,

"Well, I intended this, but if you think it's something else, but in the end, it

reaches the same point, we both reach the end of the story, then good for us."

Question: I'm a big fan of Robert Crumb and always, every time I do an

interview, I ask about Robert Crumb, and I know you know him. I'd like to know

what you think of him. He was an influence on you, right? Very big.

Answer: Oh, yes. I know he's gotten into trouble, he's been canceled in many

places. People say, "Well, what do you think of that? Do you still like him?"

And I say, "Well, I like him because I think he was very talented and taught me

a lot about comics, and I love his approach to comics, but if someone tells me,

'But I hate racism,' I can't argue with that. I can't, it's there, you know, and

it's like, 'if you don't like it, I understand,' but I like what I like about

him, but I can't argue with the bad things."

Question: Yes, but the talent of the artist... the question about whether you

can separate the artist from the art.

Answer: It's interesting because he's not a very nice person, you know, and he's

been cruel to me in the past. Well, when I was a young talented artist, and he

hated that competition. He hated that about, like Daniel Clowes. He hated that

about different artists, like, "Oh, you think you're the new ones!" I would say,

"Don't worry, Robert, you're the king." So, you know, sometimes I have to

separate, yes, because I think some of the best things he's done are just

amazing. And then there's the other stuff, his beliefs, or whatever you want to

call it, yes, and, you know, you take the best of what you can get from it. I'm

not going to crusade saying, "That's not fair, Robert."

Question: When you started drawing or writing about lesbian love, love between

women, when it wasn't common, because nowadays feminism and these things are hot

topics, and it's easier, but when you started doing this, first time, why? and

second, did you have any problems, or was it something people were looking for?

Answer: It was more like, "Well, let's put women who love each other in the

comic, because no one is doing that, or not many people, sorry, yes, many people

weren't doing that in the early '80s, and people disapproved." And I said,

"Well, I know there's nothing wrong with it, so I put it in the comic. What do

you think of that? If you don't like it, don't read the comic." I don't think I

push it, but I show it and let them, as I said earlier, let the reader decide.

"Is this real? Is it good or bad? Well, that's up to you."

Question: I think you did a lot for visibility, that's my opinion. Maggie and

Hopey from Jaime Hernandez

Question: You don't like talking about politics in your comics, or you do, but

not in a way, I don't know how to say it, very clear.

Answer: Yes, for me, politics is just... How should I say it from where I come

from, the United States? Politics is very silly, very silly. And I'm just

watching these clowns run my country, and I almost can't do anything about it.

Yes, I mean, I can protest, like they are doing outside (At the time of the

interview there was a demonstration for decent housing outside the venue) and

things like that, but I start to say, "Well, this is just very silly. I have

very silly things happening in my comic. I don't need this." Yes, it's just,

it's a stupid thing. It's not what I think many of the discussions should be

about. I think what we're... you know, we care about, like the people out here,

you know, we care about living and having a place to live, yes, simple. It has

nothing to do with who gets the votes, you know. And, for me, that's just a

silly thing in my comic, you know, that's not what I'm interested in. My

interest is in the two people who live in that house, you know, and are able to

live in that house or not be able to live in that house. Yes, it's really hard

to explain, but it's just, I don't know what that has to do with some guy who is

a billionaire, some guy who is a millionaire.

Answer: Yes, yes, but I think somehow, if you're talking about the two people

who are suffering because they can't pay the rent. Maybe you're talking about

politics. You're talking about life, but yes, if they can pay, there's a reason.

So maybe you're talking about politics subtly. That's what I'm trying to ask. If

you use it consciously, or you just let it flow.

Answer: You know, you can only bang your head against the wall for so long, and

then nothing changes. Yes, you know, that's the sad part. So to save my sanity

sometimes I have to ignore it, yes, you know. And I mean, this is very

complicated, and I understand that, and that's another reason why I don't pursue

it too much, because it would drive me crazy. Yes, I can't afford to go crazy.

You know, it's already crazy enough. Yes, okay, yes, yes. So it's hard to

explain because it's so broad.

Question: Let’s talk about, for example, your characters. Okay, have you thought

of an end for any of your characters?

Answer: Yes. Especially recently, I've been thinking about who will live, who

will die, you know, because I'm reaching the end. When I was drawing the comic

for the first time, I couldn't, I just thought this would go on forever. Now I

can see an end. I'm 65 years old. How many years do I have until my hand stops

working or my brain decays, you know? So yes, I think about that, I think these

characters deserve to reach the end, you know, but I don't know how soon the end

will be for them, and I don't want to just start killing people, you know,

that's just cheap in storytelling. And I want to do it in the most honest way I

can. And yes, I've been thinking about that because it's like, okay, I only have

so many years. You know, how am I going to conclude this in a way that is

something satisfying, even if it may be something tragic, but still satisfying

in telling the end of the story?

Question: And have you thought about the exact mode of death they will have or

just?

Answer: No, I just know that some will last longer than others, you know, as I

said earlier in that interview, they are aging with me. I'm aging with them. So

it's more of a "we'll see what happens," because I don't know what's going to

happen. So I have to think of a timeline, it's almost like I have a deadline to

finish all this before, as I said, my head stops working.

Question: Thank you very much for your time Jaime, we would continue talking

with you for hours, but we prefer to leave you some free time.