

A DAD, A DAUGHTER, AND THE DARK KNIGHT

BY SETH MACBETH

I think I could say with firm, overly enthusiastic confidence—and have a roomful of 100 people agree with me—that there is no opening sequence crafted with such perfection and grace as that of *Batman: The Animated Series*.

Generations of people at completely different ages have come to know those Art Deco high-rises and shadowed goons as the promise of excellence in not only comic hero adventure but also in artistic distinction. And when the Batmobile fires up, our hearts fire up alongside it.

I watched that show every Saturday morning without fail when I was a kid. I lost myself in the stories and characters and then would replay the adventures in my own Batcave under the stairs. It didn't matter that I was too young to be a hero. It didn't matter that I was a girl. That show painted a landscape that mesmerized me. It talked to me like I was mature and somehow gave me permission to open myself to more articulate, refined taste.

But even with all its charm and immersive power, at the end of the day it was still a cartoon on Saturday morning TV. And as I started growing up and moving on, I abandoned my flights of fancy and went out with my friends, hung out at the park, and grew out of my childhood and into adolescence, something we all have to do, but if we had the choice afterwards, would probably try and avoid.

When I was around 14—many more years ago than I care to admit—my Dad was made redundant at his job. I remember one day stomping through the house and coming to a halt in my living room, my grubby shoes half a step short of what must have been 30 printed out résumés carpeting the floor. Before the days of LinkedIn and smartphones, it was hard to get by as a suddenly non-working man with no high school qualifications, a family to feed, and a preoccupation with inappropriate jokes.

I never really understood the hardship we might face if our primary breadwinner failed to regain his footing. I was a teenager, so obviously the universe was totally focused on me. I had real problems to think about, like perfecting my cat-like stride so my Walkman wouldn't skip, deciding which of my 25 texts I

could part with to make more inbox space on my Nokia, or finding ways to stick safety pins into everything I owned—you know, *real* problems.

Because of this rather large discrepancy in what we deemed important, we came upon a time of discord within our family—not quite cursing and yelling and slamming doors but definitely distance. My parents were always my heroes, but reaching that difficult just-becoming-a-teenager age is tough on everyone. For them, I was moody, distracted, uninterested, and downright rude. For me, I was trying to find my place, figure out who I was and what I was about, while fighting against a never-ending tidal wave of pop culture and mean girls trying to carve me into a shape I didn't want to be. Plus exams, homework, boys, looks, fashion, friends, falling out with said friends, hormones—being a teenager is a lot harder than we ever really let ourselves believe.

One morning I was packing my bag with all the essentials for school, like Walkman, nail file, four different kinds of lip gloss, pencil case in the shape of a zebra . . .

As I left my bedroom, a gripping, all too familiar theme song began its dramatic call, drifting from my parents' bedroom. Could it be? Those carefree Saturday mornings came flooding back with all their associations—a sense of wonder and beguilement, and a distant memory of the taste of cereal.

I peeked around the door. Mum had already left for work, which meant that all the rules were out the window. The dog was on the bed, curled up at the feet of my unemployed Dad, who was eating fruit roll-ups for breakfast and watching TV.

"Are you watching *Batman*?" I asked with excitement and awe.

Without another word, I dropped my bag down at the side of the bed and crawled up next to him. I put myself under his arm, and we watched our favorite hero together. Everything I had ever loved as that little girl under the stairs came flooding back. What had gripped me back then now permanently nestled itself beside the cornerstones of my heart.

Here was a show that never backed away from darker undertones, complex



honest—the gravelly, delectable voice of Kevin Conroy was definitely doing a number on me. But it was so much more than that. Look at the scene—it was a cartoon that appealed to both myself and my father and bridged a gap that had somehow formed between us in those awkward middle teen years. For us there was no need to distinguish age, maturity, gender, even roles in our family unit. Once again, I found that it didn't matter that it was a cartoon based on a comic book character who dresses up as a bat to fight crime. We found something in that show, something that helped us cross over expectations. I didn't have to be the version of myself I was building on a false foundation. It didn't matter if it was "cool," it didn't matter that we weren't their target audience. This masterpiece of a show had no limits to its enjoyment or its reach, which made me think that maybe I didn't need to put limitations on myself, either. Creativity can be appreciated in any form. And in this particular form, I loved it. I loved this cartoon, I loved the characters, I loved the stories—and I loved my dad.

Looking back now, I really can't tell you for certain that I'm not the person I am because of that show. Obviously, many little breadcrumbs of influence have led me down the path I've chosen of becoming a writer and an artist. But I do know that it had an impact on my creativity, my approach, and my relationship with my dad. And to me, that makes it valuable. Probably one of the most valuable pieces of television of my generation. Maybe 100 people wouldn't agree with me on the opening sequence, but I know they'd agree with me on that.

*As a writer, illustrator, and artist, **Seth Macbeth** tells stories in many mediums. Following an adventurous spirit, she moved from England to Vancouver, Canada, where she writes award-winning poetry, drinks tea, collects pictures of old ships, and makes collages at the base of a mountain of books.*

themes, or intelligent characters in favor of dumbing itself down or cheapening production. This was a stunning demonstration of gritty, imaginative world building that harmoniously courted the noir soul of our Caped Crusader's origins with an art style that was still modern and captivating. The sophisticated world of Bruce Wayne is captured perfectly with elegant orchestral soundtracks juxtaposed against the thwacks of punching villains, screeching car chases, and that iconic, manic laugh of the Joker. It all couples with a beautiful contrast and coherence that mirrors the character's dual life in a way you just wouldn't expect from a children's show.

All of this plays against a backdrop of stunning stylized Gotham, full of dim, cheerless side streets and gloomy corners, providing overtones that even manage to creep into the glitz and glam of the ritzier scenes. It's a clever choice of art style that serves as a reminder that the hidden murk of Gotham's underbelly can always be seen. Makes you feel sorry for the hardworking people of Gotham City's Real Estate Board...

These things appealed to a much younger version of me in a way I couldn't fully understand at the time. But they instantly won me over again, now as a surly, angst-filled teenager, unsure of herself and her world. I fell in love again with kick-butt gals like Harley and Poison Ivy taking on the city together, and—if I'm



ABOVE:

Art by
DAVID VELASQUEZ
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RIGHT:

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