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Saturday, September 28, 2013

## The Jeremy Show Interviews: Mister Rogers Archivist Tim Lybarger



Tim Lybarger visiting X The Owl in The Neighborhood of Make Believe.

It was announced this week that a film about Fred Rogers (based on a book by Tim Madigan's memoir *I'm Proud of You*) is in the early stages of development. I sat down with the Internet's authority on Mister Rogers Tim Lybarger, the creator of *The Neighborhood Archive: A Collection of All Things Mister Rogers*. Read what we talked about as we took a nostalgic walk through *The Neighborhood of Make Believe*.

So, what are your thoughts on the movie coming out?

I'm actually pretty surprised. There was a lot of talk a few months ago about this but it was all so vague that it didn't seem anything would really come of it. Looks like that may not be the case. I'm thrilled for Tim Madigan -- his book is wonderful and he's such a great person!

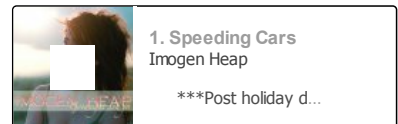
And who do you think should play Mister Rogers?

That's a tough call to make. I'm not sure that the actor have to be a spitting image of him, but thinking that way, Jim Parsons would be great!

I was a big Mister Rogers fan. My Mom said that she thought *Sesame Street* was too fast and loud for me. I didn't really get into it. Do you find through your archival work



Jim Parsons



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The Jeremy Show Interviews: Mister Rogers Archivis...

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Deleted Scenes

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with Mister Rogers that their are Mister Rogers people and Sesame Street people? Is there anything specific you've noticed about a Mister Rogers fan? Not to say that there aren't kids who enjoyed both programs, but there are definitely Mister Rogers kids and Sesame Street kids. These two programs were groundbreaking in very different ways. Likewise, they were applicable to children in very different ways. While one was fast-paced and emphasized the ABCs and 123s, the other kept a slow tempo and taught kids that it's okay to have feelings. Is there anything specific I've noticed about Mister Rogers fans? Absolutely. Among the many that I've heard from through the Neighborhood Archive, they are a very kind, caring, and patient group of people. Whether this is fully attributed to their appreciation of Mister Rogers' Neighborhood or not is up in the air...but I certainly think it's no coincidence.

You have six different websites/blogs which are all amazing. On the main portal to your site TimLybarger.com your intro line is "archiving the insignificant." Tell me about that statement. It takes a certain kind of person to have any kind of interest in what I do. Either you get it or you don't. My brother has a pretty solid music collection and I remember him jokingly saying once that he was "archiving for future generations." I, too, am archiving for future generations. I'm just archiving stuff that only myself and a very small niche of other people are interested in. To most people it's insignificant.

I think we are all librarians of pop culture in some way. We all have our libraries of DVD's and books and toys from our childhood. What is the focus of your collection? How much do you have? And how does your wife feel about it?

I guess the focus of my collection would be things that remind me of my own childhood. I've often said that I had a wonderful childhood and given the opportunity, I would relive ages 2-17 over and over again. So I often find myself picking up items at flea markets and garage sales that I owned as a kid -- books, games, toys. Likewise, I love watching television shows that I enjoyed when I was young. I'll take the A-Team or a healthy dose of Saturday morning cartoons over America's Got Talent any day. As for my wife...she's doesn't get it. I don't mean that in a negative way either. She's the type of person who is content to take a picture of something and throw it away while I love being able to physically see something to bring back memories. She does a good job of tolerating my collection and humoring me when I start telling her about the latest thing I've found.

My favorite Mister Rogers song, or the one I remember the most is "I Like to Be Told." Bette Midler sang it in a concert I saw and I cried. That song has so much meaning. The idea is mainly- children (and adults) like to be told the truth. And with truth comes trust. The more I think about it the more I can see it applies far beyond children and into the adult world- work, relationships, government. What Mr. Rogers song resonates for you? This is exactly what got me into archiving the career of Fred Rogers. I had grown up watching the Neighborhood program and as an adult, parent, and educator, I began to recognize that his message was one that wasn't just for kids. I Like To Take My Time can be applied to rush hour traffic and Let's Think of Something to Do While We're Waiting can help during a lengthy stop in any waiting room. I can't say that I really have one specific Mister Rogers song that resonates with me any more than others, but I often think about his overall message of patience, love, and compassion for others -- our neighbors -- in this world.

OK tell me everything you know about Lady Elaine. She is my favorite. What's her deal? She's a feisty one, that Lady Elaine. Fred often talked about how he expressed his various feelings through the puppets in Make-Believe. No doubt any mischief

Angry lesbians next door who don't say hello

The Best Of David Spade!?!

"I am out of meth and need to buy some from your downstairs neighbor."

#### Labels

moods (50) television (50) music (30) celebrity (28) relationships (20) childhood (18) dreams (17) madonna (17) food (16) work (15) movies (14) poetry (14) favorite (12) characters (9) fear (9) men (9) politics (9) holidays (8) interviews (8) women (8) art (7) fantasies (7) health and beauty (7) bette midler (6) books (6) martha stewart (6) audio creations (5) photography (5) smoking (5) stories (5) youtube (5) being gay (4) deleted scenes (4) theatre (4) family (3) medical (3) oprah (3) video creations (3) art i made (2) disney (2) hollywood (2) money (2) npr (2) published work (2) advice (1) anxiety (1) architecture (1) chicago (1) contest (1) mental illness (1) moving (1) quotes (1) seasons (1) shopping (1) space (1) weight (1)

buy me a coke. \$2.98





Lady Elaine Fairchild

was expressed at the Museum-Go-Round! (Most) everything I know about Lady Elaine can be found on her page of the Archive site -

[http://www.neighborhoodarchive.com/mrn/characters/lady\\_elaine/index.html](http://www.neighborhoodarchive.com/mrn/characters/lady_elaine/index.html)

Tell me about the evolution of your amazingly thorough and beautiful archive. Where did it start? What are your future plans or developments do you have coming for the Neighborhood?

My brother and I had a Mister Rogers record when we were kids and one day I was looking for some details about it online. I figured surely there was some catch-all site detailing every nook and cranny about the long and influential career of Fred Rogers. Much to my surprise, there was nothing of the sort. Having spent several years detailing the career of constantly-touring folk singer Todd Snider on [EighteenMinutes.com](http://EighteenMinutes.com), I figured there was only one thing I could do. From there, the site just caught on like wildfire as other fans of Fred and his work picked up on my efforts. As the site continues to grow, I'm constantly amazed by the response I regularly receive from Mister Rogers fans around the world.

Did you ever get to meet Mister Rogers or other cast members? Tell me about that.

Although I never had the chance to meet Fred in person, I did invite him to my college graduation (sort of). Finishing my undergraduate degree, I was sending announcements to family and friends and had a few left over. Not expecting any sort of response, I sent one of the extras to Mister Rogers with a note thanking him for the message he instilled in me and countless other children around the world through our childhood visits to his Neighborhood. Much to my surprise, within a matter of just a few days, I received a personal response in the mail from Fred. It was at this point that I knew this man was so much more than just the host of some show I watched when I was a kid. As for others, I've had the chance to meet David Newell (Mr. McFeely) a few times and very briefly met Betsy Seamans (Mrs. McFeely) once. I've had a few phone conversations with Audrey Roth (Miss Paulificate) and Burt Lloyd (Mr. Allmine). Betty Aberlin (Lady Aberlin) and I have corresponded off and on through email and Twitter over the past few years and I've recently been in contact with Francois Clemmons (Officer Clemmons). In every one of these cases, I can say that each and every one of these people have been wonderfully kind and generous as they are very clearly not far removed from the characters they portrayed on the Neighborhood program.

As for the Neighborhood of Make Believe itself- it seems to be a trippy mirror image of what's going on in Mister Rogers "television home." What's the psychological reasoning for all of this as you see it? Why is the show set up in this way?

The shows were scripted from start to finish and no detail was left unaccounted for, so the similarities between the "real" neighborhood and the Neighborhood of Make-Believe were certainly intentional. I've always felt that the show spoke to children on various levels in different ways. While some were able to take away Fred's message from his "real" neighborhood segments, others were more comfortable with the make-believe portions. To me, this provided children at various stages in their lives with the opportunity to pick up the same important message being shared on any particular Neighborhood episode.

Who is your favorite Neighborhood of Make Believe resident and Neighborhood resident? In the Neighborhood of Make-Believe, if I had to pick a favorite, I'd say it'd probably be X the Owl as I appreciate his light-hearted outlook on life. That being said, I have a somewhat weird obsession with the alien character -- Yo Yo La Belle -- that only appeared in a few episodes. In the "real" Neighborhood, it's hard to pinpoint a favorite. If I had to choose, probably Mr. McFeely simply because of the regularity of his appearance and his fun interactions with Mister Rogers throughout the run of the show.



Yo Yo La Belle

Do you know what happened to the set and props of the show? Up until recently, most of the Neighborhood of Make-Believe set was on display throughout the building which housed the office space for the Fred Rogers Company.

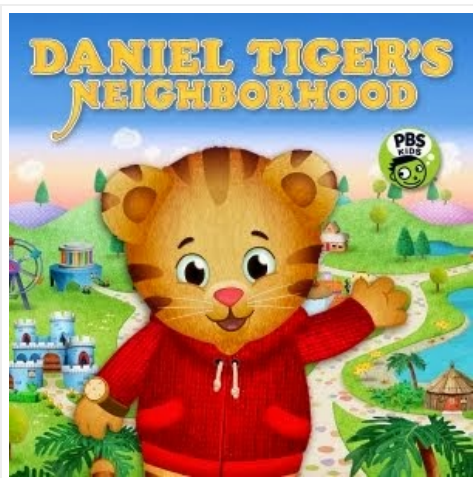
Earlier this summer, the FRC relocated to new space in Pittsburgh and I'm not sure if these pieces went with them or went into storage. The Neighborhood of Make-Believe models were on display in the FRC offices at their previous location and I can only assume that they are on display in their new space as well. I've also been told that the street display seen in the opening and closing of the program is on display in the new office location, too. As for the set of Mister Rogers' television house, the last I knew is that those pieces were in storage.

Why wasn't there much merchandising for the show?- it seems like Sesame Street was all over the place. I would have killed to get my hands on that playset.



Yeah. The playset. Tell me about it. I'd do anything to get my hands on one of those. I've tried asking everyone from the Fred Rogers Company to the individuals who designed that piece and have come up with nothing. The best I can put together is that a prototype was created but never marketed on a mass scale. I think the fact that there wasn't a huge market for Mister Rogers merchandise can be attributed to Fred's nature of

simplicity. I think his one and only focus was reaching out to children on a personal and individual level. He could have taken the Neighborhood to a mass market and capitalized in a major way through merchandising opportunities. Instead, he chose to keep the focus on the message rather than the market. Typical Fred, from what I understand.



With your own kids, do you see anything else on children's television that gets close to Mister Rogers' style? Nothing. There's Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood which is the "next generation" of Mister Rogers' Neighborhood, but there's nothing out there that comes close to a daily visit to the Neighborhood. Everything on TV for kids is either fast, flashy, commercialized, or all of the above. I've yet to find a children's program that has reached the masses that Fred reached in such a simple yet unbelievably influential way. For the record, my kids LOVE Daniel Tiger's

Neighborhood and I could not be happier to see Fred's message carried on in such a positive and popular program. The response to Daniel Tiger has been phenomenal!

What is known about Mister Rogers private life? Is there anything that has surprised you or that you found interesting in your research? Has there been any good biographies you can recommend?

When it comes to Fred's personal life, everyone has this part of them that hopes there's some dirt somewhere...some sort of secret life that could tarnish the seemingly perfect persona seen on television. While I hate to disappoint, everything I have gathered over several years of researching his life and career has pointed to one thing -- he was the same kind and caring person in real life that you saw on TV. There are two different biographies that I would recommend for anyone interested in a quick look at Fred and his career -- both in video format. The first is Fred Rogers: America's Favorite Neighbor. This one is a fantastic look at Fred's life and career scattered with many clips from the show as well as lengthy interviews with Fred himself. The other is Mister Rogers & Me (available on Netflix Prime) -- a documentary featuring various individuals touched by the message of Fred Rogers.

What do you discuss on your podcast?

The podcast started out with conversations with a few other fans of the Neighborhood and has evolved a bit into mostly interviews with people who have been involved with or heavily influenced by the Neighborhood program in some way. I've spoken with a handful

of Neighborhood cast members such as Audrey Roth (Miss Paulificate) and Bert Lloyd (Mr. Allmine) as well as others who were involved behind the scenes (Eliot Daly). I have to admit that the podcast is one aspect of the Neighborhood Archive that I tend to neglect. For some reason it always seems to go to the back burner as you can see by the fact that there are only about 20 episodes.

Clearly, you were a child of the eighties- what is it about the eighties? What do you remember as the vibe of that decade for you? It might just be that I was a kid and things are simple when you're young, but I feel like the 80s were a much simpler time than we live in now. We didn't have the flashy movies and video games we have today...but we didn't know any better. We were content to drop a quarter in a machine for a few minutes of Pac-Man or to hear a song we liked played from a jukebox. I'm sure that the 80s were no less complex for adults than today is for people my own age, but the feelings of comfort and simplicity that come back to me with memories of my childhood in the 80s cannot be matched.

When people are passionate about something (for me it would be Madonna, Martha Stewart) I find it interesting, no matter what it is. My boyfriend is a BIG Disney fan. I might be wrong but I do feel like you can follow the trail of our deep passions (like everything else) back to our childhood. How do you feel about that? Do you think that you are trying to get back something from your childhood? Or does your passion for pop culture relate to something else?

I think you've hit the nail on the head. Many people -- myself included -- find comfort in remembering simpler times. Being able to thumb through my baseball card collection from when I was a kid immediately takes me back to summer afternoons of backyard baseball and trips to the drug store to buy wax packs of the current cards. Listening to certain songs will immediately put me back in my bedroom on a warm summer evening with the windows open while I listened to the local pop music request show. I've often said that I can't tell you much that I learned in college, but I can easily come up with any detail from my childhood that you'd care to request. While some people may say I'm stuck in the past, I look at it as a recognition of the wonderful childhood that I was blessed enough to experience.

Visit Tim at The Neighborhood Archive and follow him on Twitter!

Posted by Jeremy at 8:25 AM



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