

BOB KANE BIOGRAPHY:

Almost 75 years ago, in a New York art studio, Bob Kane created one of the most popular characters of the twentieth century-The Batman. Kane's creation has become the star of comic books, Saturday afternoon movie serials, newspaper comic strips, a live-action TV series, several animated TV series, and several of the largest-grossing feature films of all time.

"I suppose I must have had printer's ink in my blood," Kane said of his childhood, "for as far back as I can recall, I've had a pencil in my hand. When I was ten, my dad was a printer for the NEW YORK DAILY NEWS. He'd bring home all the paper's comics, and I copied them constantly. It got so eventually I could do them as well as the cartoonists themselves." This informal training led the young Kane to create his own comics, and by 1938 he was selling humorous stories to DC Comics, including the features "Professor Doolittle" and "Ginger Snapp."

In 1939, one year after Superman's debut, DC Comics editor Vincent Sullivan decided that he wanted another costumed hero. He asked 22-year-old Bob Kane for his ideas. "I went home that weekend," Kane recalled, "traced some sketches of Superman, and started penciling different costume ideas. It was then that I got my first brainstorm: I remembered one of Leonardo da Vinci's sketches-a drawing of a flying machine with bat wings. That's what germinated the idea for Batman. The second influence on me was the hero with the dual identity in THE MARK OF ZORRO, starring Douglas Fairbanks Sr. And then I thought about THE BAT WHISPERS, a mystery movie written by Mary Roberts Rinehart.

"I realized I was getting closer. I drew a character with bird wings and called him Bird Man, but that wasn't quite right. So I changed the wings, made them bat-like, and called him Batman. Almost every famous character ever created had a kind of simplistic, definitive design that was easily recognizable, and that's what I was striving for with Batman."

The first published appearance of The Bat-Man (as he was then known) was in the May 1939 issue of DETECTIVE COMICS #27. The character was so successful that one year later the first comic book devoted exclusively to the Caped Crusader's adventures, BATMAN #1, hit the newsstands. In that issue, Batman battled the Joker and Catwoman for the first time.

Batman differed from Superman and from most other super heroes that were to flood the market after him-he had no extraordinary powers. But there was nothing ordinary

about his life: as a young boy, Bruce Wayne witnessed the murder of his parents. Vowing to avenge their deaths, he spent the years before he donned his cape to hone his abilities to the peak of human performance. By the time Bruce adopted his forbidding persona he had become the world's greatest detective and best athlete. Convinced that "criminals are a superstitious, cowardly lot," he wore his signature costume to strike terror into their hearts, stalking the mean streets of his native Gotham City as a solitary, driven crusader. He relied on his athletic prowess, his astute wits, and acute observation.

Bob Kane continued to illustrate Batman's comic book adventures until 1943, when he switched to draw the daily "Batman and Robin" newspaper comic strip. After the strip's 1946 demise, Kane returned to drawing Batman and remained involved with comic books until his retirement in 1968.

The success of the BATMAN television show in 1966 brought Kane and his art back into the public eye. He was subsequently featured in various one-man art shows at galleries and museums nationwide. He served as a consultant on the 1989 BATMAN feature film and its three sequels. His autobiography, BATMAN AND ME, was published in 1989, and in 1996 he was inducted into the Eisner Awards Hall of Fame. Bob Kane died on November 3, 1998.

Batman has captured the hearts and minds of succeeding generations for the last seven decades, and today the Caped Crusader is as popular among adults as children. The character has achieved a legend surpassing his incarnations on the printed page, television screen, and film. Batman has become an integral part of our culture, an American folk hero as immortal as Paul Bunyan, Hank Aaron, or George Washington.