

# PIXTON COMICS: TELL YOUR STORY THE CLICK-N-DRAG COMICS™ WAY!

by David Morrison

In respect of my reading preferences I have twice recently had occasion to let out a little cheer. As a huge fan of graphic novels you can imagine my joy when, in November, Man Booker Prize judge, Stuart Kelly, supported the format when saying, "I would be very happy to see a graphic novel win." And two weeks prior, when delivering the 2nd Annual Reading Agency lecture at London's Barbican Centre, author Neil Gaiman (writer of the classic graphic novel, *The Sandman*) ranted, "Comics have been decried as fostering illiteracy. It's tosh. It's snobbery and it's foolishness."

I happen to agree entirely with Gaiman who, for the record, was raised on C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, and Batman comics. Like Gaiman, I believe that comics considerably promote literacy rather than stunt it, and can call on a small army that would concur. One of my generals would be Clive Goodinson of Parksville, whose childhood love of comics and technical prowess has led to the innovative, award-winning Pixton Comics website. In a nutshell, Pixton users can create their own online comic strips from scratch, exactly like the delightful representation of the Goodinson family above, created exclusively for EyesOnBC Magazine.

Goodinson (a.k.a. 'The Jokester') and his wife Daina launched Pixton Comics in its initial, primitive 'stick figure' format in January 2008. For its inventor, the professional journey to Pixton was as colourful as its panels. Born in the UK, Goodinson moved to Canada aged four, when his electrical engineer father secured a job in Ontario

with IBM. Soon after, care packages of English comics started arriving from Goodinson's grandfather, igniting a flame that thirty-five years later burns bright in his visionary comics-creation technology.

"He'd send titles like *The Beano*, *The Dandy* and *Whizzer & Chips*," Goodinson begins. "The visual nature of the stories really engaged me, so I can thank my granddad for my introduction to comics. But I also developed an interest in nature, and after high school went on to get a BSc. in Environmental Biology. I moved to Vancouver and did my master's at the (UBC) Faculty of Forestry, studying birds, specifically woodpeckers, graduating in 2001. Through my master's I rediscovered computers; when I was about ten I bought a (Commodore) Vic 20 with 3KB of memory, and learned a bit of basic programming, then didn't have my own computer again until my master's, on which I ended up developing a program for my thesis. Through those self-taught skills I got a job in mechanical engineering, and from that I serendipitously ran into some acquaintances while swing dancing in Vancouver! It was a fledgling design firm, and they took a leap of faith with me, because I didn't have much experience programming for the web. I worked there for just over a year, but quit because I wanted to be a musician. I had my own band, my most notable gig being Mike Myers' brother (Paul) opening for us!"

Whizzer & Chips, woodpeckers, swing dancing, Mike Myers' brother...are you keeping up? Long story short, within three years Goodinson was freelancing full-time in computer programming and website building. A personal and coincidentally professional turning point

came when he met Daina in 2007. "We hit it off, but also discovered quickly that we could work together, especially as Daina loves technology, computers, and the Internet."

The idea for Pixton (named by Daina, intended to be considered a 'place') had a gradual gestation and numerous origins. "One was certainly my familiarity with comics," Goodinson continues. "I always loved Tintin, and stuff like Calvin and Hobbes and Gary Larson's *The Far Side*. Anyway, I was playing around, generating randomized characters, little people with different skin colours, different heights, just randomizing these attributes, so that was one contributing pet project. And one day I was using Wikipedia, a wonderful collaborative body of work, but it's all to do with fact. I wondered what it would look like if it was similarly collaborative, but all from people's imagination, about ideas. I started putting that together with comics, thinking it would be cool if you had, say, a three-panel comic strip with two characters interacting, and blank speech bubbles, then you had a hundred or a thousand different people fill in what they thought they were saying. That led to the idea of creating a tool that anyone could use, myself included, to create comics that look like Tintin! I aspired to creating a Tintin-like comic when I was a kid, but didn't get past the second page; I realized that the patience and the practice it takes to draw the same character in every panel was patience I didn't have."

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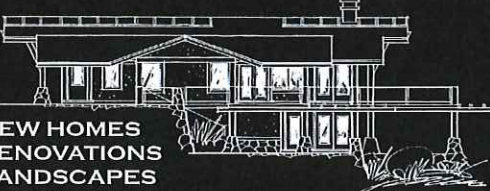


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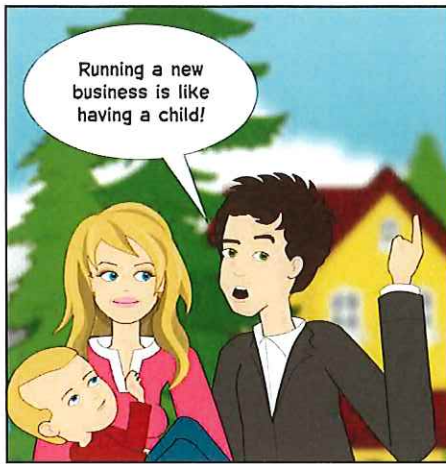
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**PIXTON**

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As someone whose very best past attempts at drawing could be effortlessly bettered by the average two-year-old, I fully understand Goodinson's frustrations at creating art manually - and therein lies one of the awesome aspects of Pixton Comics. While a person like myself might be artistically challenged I can spin a yarn, so can use Pixton to present stories or gags in a visual manner. (What crazy fun it would have been to create this article on Pixton!)

"With the tool I was looking to democratize the creation of comics, but not looking to supplant comic artists, whose skill I very much admire," says Goodinson. "It was more like this was something new you can do with the medium, but that anyone can participate in. I always wanted to build something of my own that was original and felt my idea had very powerful potential. It's a click-and-drag, intuitive comic maker for generating standard images, but the characters are articulated so you can click

and move their arms and legs, change their facial expression, that kind of thing."

'Powerful potential' is right! With minimal advertising, the site growing organically by word-of-mouth, Pixton Comics has thus far been a roaring success. Named an Official Honoree at the prestigious Webby Awards (think: interactive media's Oscars) in 2011, as well as garnering acclaim within the North American and international technology and education communities, Pixton goes from strength to strength. As Goodinson explains, coming soon will be Pixton for those on the move: "Our next major step is to go mobile, so before long we'll have apps that people can use to make comics on your Android, tablet or iPad."

Goodinson readily admits that his idea evolved from the desire to create something fun, but as it developed its massive potential became obvious. "Initially, the reason I was so passionate about it was simply because I thought it was cool! It was when we made

the decision to go full-time and make a business out of it that the educational and business components took shape. In school you have art class, but many students don't consider themselves artists or even creative, yet they know how to use a computer and are online all the time now. So they can use something like Pixton, and it makes them realize they can be artistic in a different way."

One beauty of Pixton is that anyone can use it, and have a lot of fun while discovering their inner creative. Over a million people around the world have already signed up for the free 'For Fun' option, so why not treat yourself for Christmas and join the Pixton community! I have, and using Pixton might yet get to create the first Man Booker Prize-winning graphic novel!

*For further information and to sign up to Pixton Comics, please visit [www.pixton.com/ca/](http://www.pixton.com/ca/), or call Clive and Daina Goodinson on 1-888-7-PIXTON.*



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