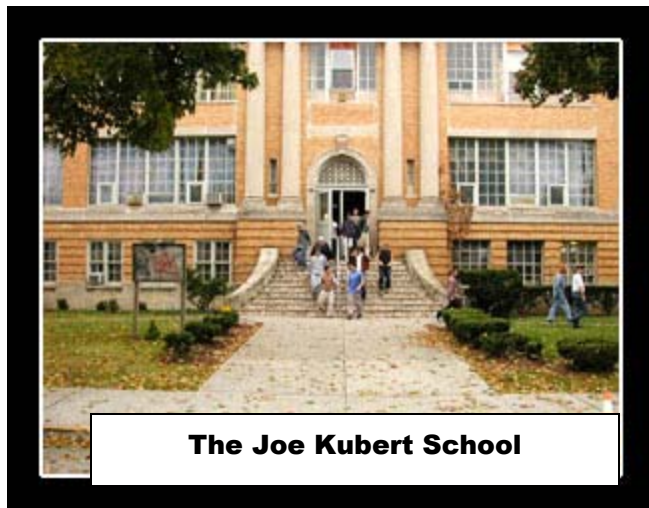


## How I got into Animation...



**The Joe Kubert School**

I can remember the first time I ever thought about animation as a career. I was standing on the back of a garbage truck in Rivervale NJ getting ready to finish work. It was pouring and cold and of course smelly. I thought to myself. There has got to be a better way to earn a living. The next day I stopped in to see my old Guidance Counselor Mr. Palmioti and asked him about art schools. They were all pretty expensive. The only one I could afford that he recommended

was a small one in NJ called The Joe Kubert School of Cartoon and Graphic Art. My grandmother loaned me the money and I took a night class in Computer Animation.

As it turned out it was an awful class that really showed nothing about computer animation and I think there was only one computer there at the time. I didn't even get a chance to use the computer. What it did do however was show me the school that I would ultimately go to full time. I enrolled quickly and went to the school the next semester. It was a crappy school to say the least but to me it was amazing that I could find people like me who just wanted to draw. They lived, ate, and breathed art just like me. It was really one of the most wonderful times in my life. Finally I had a place in life. Something to call myself. An ARTIST. It was awesome.

Another thing I got out of it was to meet my best friend Harry McLaughlin. I met Harry one day at school talking about doing music. We hung out that day and composed our first song. (Listen!) From the moment we met we were creating things. Harry was amazing to hang with because I would say something like "Wouldn't it be cool to make a comic book with our own characters?" Harry would say "Yeah! Let's do it!"





**Sierra On-Line in  
Oakhurst CA.**

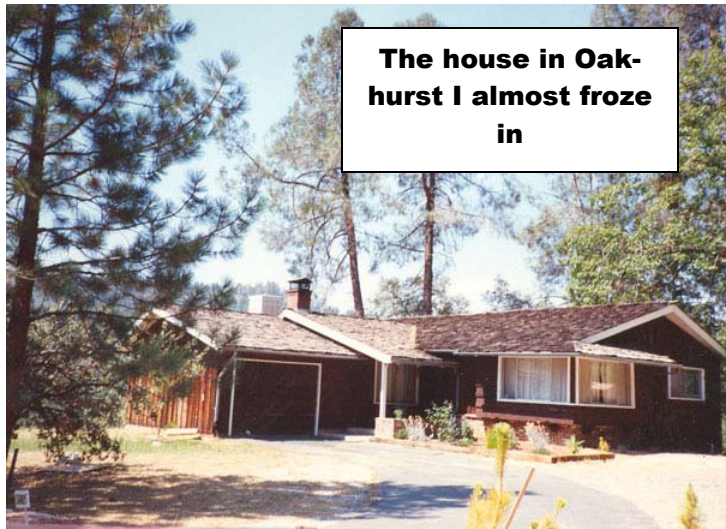
Nobody had ever told us that we couldn't do something like that and so we would do it without any knowledge about it but it would be a blast and we learned a lot from barreling ahead and just doing things. Yeah some of it was bad but it didn't really matter because we were having fun. With that mindset there was

nothing we couldn't do and we had quite a few projects that we worked on together from comics, to animation ( watch) to music ( listen!). We were like two peas in a pod. When school let out I got a job animating commercials at a studio in NYC called Broadcast Arts. One day I got a call from the Head of the Kubert School, a friend of mine, Debbie Kubert and she told me about a company out in California looking for traditional animators to work on video games. They would pay to move me out and everthing! I was there! I couldn't leave my partner in crime in NJ however and finagled Harry a job there too. We were on our way to sunny CA

As lead animator for Sierra On-Line I was truly on my own for the first time. It was bizarre and I didn't realize that it would be so different and I really at first hated it. When we got there everyone was asking us if we wanted to buy fire wood

and we thought they were nuts because it was 110 degrees out! That was the hottest I'd ever seen! Firewood? What would we need that for in July? Fast forward to December and it was still 90+ degrees ever day. We still thought those stupid fire wood people were idiots. Suddenly on December 22 the sky inexplicably dropped 2 feet of snow on the ground in one day and it stayed until spring! We were freezing and as luck would

have it now those Fire Wood people had no more firewood to sell. To make matters worse we found that the house we lived in had no heat and was heated by firewood only! We were gonna die! It was 35 degrees inside the house and there was FROST on the inside of the window! Yes, it was THAT cold!



**The house in Oak-  
hurst I almost froze  
in**



When you walked across the carpet it crunched from the frost. It was miserable. We resorted to burning everything we had, paper, books, boxes, even some furniture. Needless to say we were very cold that winter.

I was very homesick. Harry and I fought a lot. We did a lot of music then though and so I guess in hindsight there was something good that came out of it. Listen

to this song written about how we felt at that time (listen) Eventually we fought so much that we pretty much stopped doing art projects together. It was a bad time creatively. I was bored and poor so I called down to Los Angeles because I had heard of a new show called Tiny Toons that Spielberg was doing at Warner Bros. I sent my portfolio and got a job offer on *Tazmania* doing a now defunct job called Character Layout which was essentially animating key poses. Harry and I didn't speak anymore and I left without saying goodbye.

I moved down to Los Angeles in a truck that I had driven off a ravine after hitting black ice while going home late one night. I barely survived by hitting a tree growing from the side. They had straightened the frame out enough to drive it but it barely made it to LA.

Still I was at Warner Bros.! I couldn't believe it! This was the place that launched such amazing characters as Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck! My heroes!

As a character layout artist, it was my job to take the storyboards and blow them up and put them on model. I was also supposed to flesh out the acting and make the poses work well. At first I was really bad at it and thought I was going to lose my job. My boss would make me do each scene over and over. Once I did it 13 times before accepting it. Eventually I got better than he was at it and while you would think that would be great it wasn't as it caused a lot of problems. He started having me fix the other artists drawings and tweak their scenes as well and that caused trouble as you could imagine .



The other guys were fine at their work but my boss had trained me to draw just like him and he liked that. Once again I was causing trouble. Eventually that show ended and I moved over to doing the same thing on *Animaniacs*. Around this time I met a beautiful girl named Laura who would eventually become my wife and we started dating. Life was getting a bit better. I had a job, and I now had a steady love interest as well. Also around that time Harry and I started talking again. He was still up in Fresno working at some museum drawing artifacts for them. We started talking about ideas and began developing ideas for cartoons. He stayed up there but now there was a new thing called a fax machine so we could fax ideas back and forth. It was amazing!



Looking back on it now I remember that most of us thought *Animaniacs* was going to bomb big time. For us, the crew, it was not much fun. Constant changes, micro management and endless re-dos of storyboards and animation made it not much fun. I remember one time our Layout Supervisor had me do a scene with Yakko and Dot. I did it to the best of my ability and handed it in. He commented that it wasn't the right bit of acting and handed it to the next artist to revise. He turned it in and got the same reaction and it went to the next artist. This continued for a week until, believe-it-or-not, it

**Jay Sherman from  
The Critic**

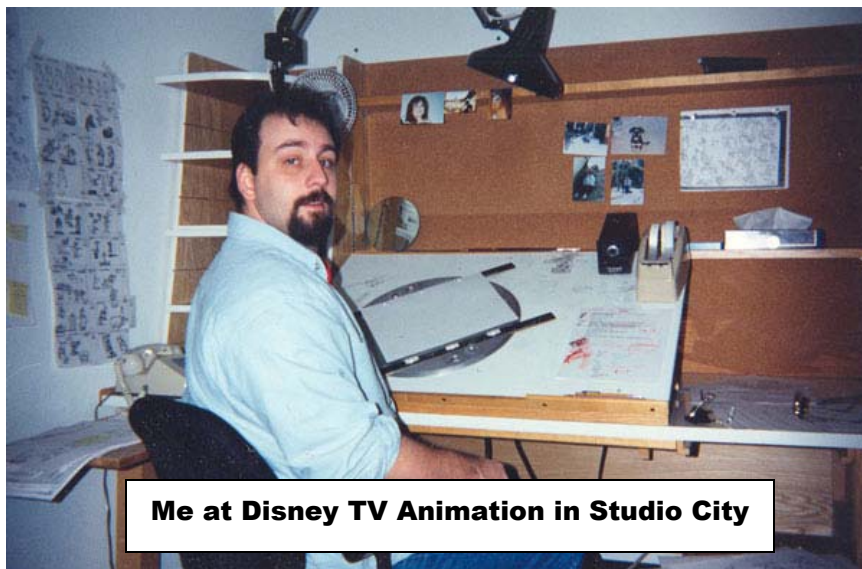


actually came back to me, and I handed the exact same art that I had done originally. It was approved instantly and I was actually complimented! Imagine the wasted money on that one scene! Eventually I got tired of all the politics at WB and wanted a change.

I had heard that a new show was starting up over at a studio called Film Roman. They were doing a hip new show called *The Simpsons* and I sent my portfolio over there. I got a job as a Character Layout artist on a new show

As luck would have it the Producers noticed my artwork and started having me fix other people's scenes that weren't quite right. This was starting to get ridiculous! The last thing I wanted to do was alienate myself again. This time it went a bit different and I was promoted to Assistant Director. That went well until the Northridge Quake hit Los Angeles at 4:31 AM. The building at Film Roman was knocked off its foundation and production all but stopped on the show. We finished it up quicky by working at home and the show ended. Unfortunately for me that put me out of work. I was jobless for 2 months, something that I would find was fairly normal in this business but for me it was a first of many.

Eventually I hooked up with some old friends at Disney and worked on a show called *The Shnookums and Meat Funny Cartoon Show*. It was a good show with some funny sensibilities. Unfortunately no one saw it due to the OJ trials. It was never picked up again and until recently even I never saw all the episodes on TV. I believe Disney now runs it from time to time on their cable channels. This was an odd time for me as the way the studio worked was to hand out two weeks worth of work at once and when you were done you were supposed to hand it in. No one cared if you never even showed up to work or not as long as your work was done on the final day it was due. For me that was very freeing as I got most of the work done in one week and had a week off to do whatever I wanted. It was at this point with so much extra time on my hands that I really started to develop television show ideas. The Industry was booming and there was a real need for content. Cartoon Network had still not become an entity yet but most of the TV channels had some form of animation on it. At this point in time we still hadn't seen the emergence of Cable as the definitive medium it is to-



**Me at Disney TV Animation in Studio City**

Cable as the definitive medium it is today. There were only about 50 channels around this time. There was still no real emergence of computers either. It was also before the Internet caught on. Once Shnookums and Meat wrapped up I started to work on *Timon and Pumbaa* still doing Character Layout. I got my work done so quickly that when they were searching for another layout artist and couldn't find one, I offered my services to them and they paid me a double salary and I STILL got the work done in time! It was a good thing that I had all that extra money because I bought my girlfriend Laura a ring and we got engaged! We didn't wait long to tie the knot either and my life would forever be intertwined with a spunky redhead named Laura.



In addition to that Right around this time Hanna Barbera started a thing called *The What a Cartoon Program* and it was a big thing in the Animation Industry. The basic idea was to allow artists from all walks of life pitch ideas for



cartoons to them and to pick 48 brand new shorts to be animated and shown on the new *What a Cartoon* program which incidently spawned *Johnny Bravo*, *Dexter's Lab*, *Cow and Chicken*, *Courage the Cowardly Dog* and *Powerpuff Girls*. In addition to that Right around this time Hanna Barbera started a thing called *The What a Cartoon Program* and it was a big thing in the Animation Industry. The basic idea was to allow artists from all walks of life pitch ideas for cartoons to them and to pick 48 brand new shorts to be animated and shown on the new *What a Cartoon* program which incidently spawned *Johnny Bravo*, *Dexter's Lab*, *Cow and Chicken*, *Courage the Cowardly Dog* and *Powerpuff Girls*.

Harry and I actively began to develop ideas for shot cartoons. We came up with a character called *Planetary Pig* and I storyboarded my first cartoon idea. We were really excited about it and set up an appointment to pitch it to Hanna Barbera for their new shorts program called *What a Cartoon*. They didn't buy it. They did tell us to keep trying and so we did. Two weeks later we were back with another idea. *Bloo's Gang*. This time they bought it! We were making a cartoon!

At that time Harry, who was still living in Fresno, moved down here to work on it with me and we excitedly started to work on our first cartoon. It was

a lot of fun and we learned a lot. They set us up in a small office and we did everything. I storyboarded it, did all the designs, Harry did the props and the backgrounds, I did the Exposure Sheets and Directed it as well. My first Directing gig. I even key-animated it and did the lead character's voice! Man! We were having fun! By the time we were done



with the first one, they still hadn't filled all of the 48 proposed slots for the program so we pitched another one called *Ignoramooses*. We hit paydirt again! They bought that one to! We were hooked! We kept coming up with ideas over and over again but they didn't buy any more of them so we started pitch-

ing things around town on the side. It was still a lot of fun. Some of the ideas we had then are still swimming around in my head and I know that someday I'll sell them. It's a matter of timing. I figure if I throw enough darts at the dartboard, I'm bound to get a bulls-eye eventually.

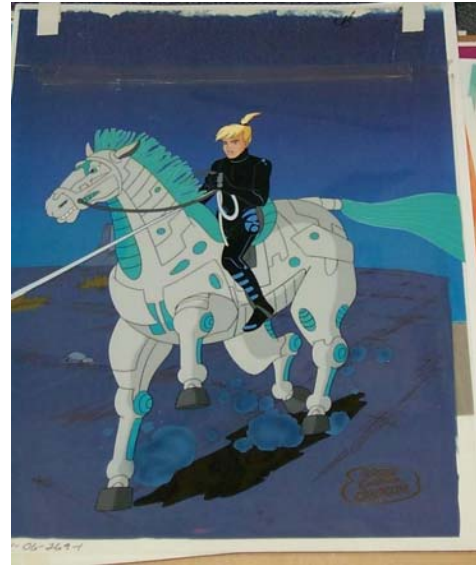


**A statue made for *Cartoon Day* at Fil-Cartoons in the Philippines where *Ignoramooses* was animated.**

The shorts program ended abruptly due to the ensuing merger and I found work Directing *The New Adventures of Johnny Quest* which was cool because it was the first time I was Directing on a series and not just some cartoon I had thought up. This one had a history and a fan base. It was really exciting for me. Back in those days networks green-lit 65 half hours of a series; essentially 5 years of programming if you figure there are 13 half hours in one season. Now you're lucky if you get 13 half hours. Sometimes they only green-light 6 episodes! Those were the days!

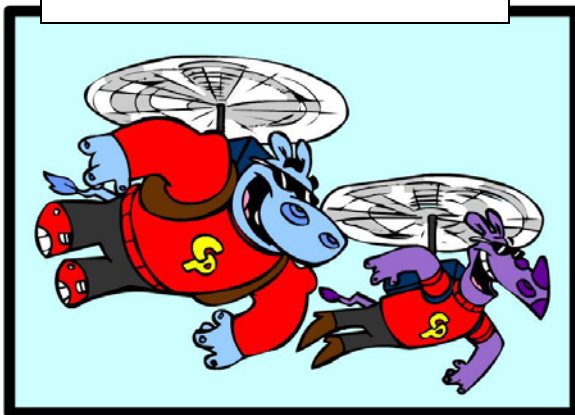
Johnny Quest was one of those troubled shows. As the story goes, the original Producer (who shall remain nameless) spent most of the money for the budget and yet had not produced any film to show for it! There was wide-spread talk of scenes with 2 frames of action in it; impossible to imagine if you figure that it takes 8 frames just to register something with your eye. Everyone on the project was let go and production grinded to a halt until it could be decided what to do next.

Hanna-Barbera called in two new Producers, Davis Doi and Larry Houston to fix the ailing project by re-editing and calling retakes on the original 39 cartoons and make the last 24 episodes. That's what I directed. There were some really cool stories as well and I thoroughly enjoyed the job. At this time we were also pitching other ideas around town trying to get a series going somewhere. We pitched an idea called *Cool Patrol* to Universal and they optioned it which means they give you money to not show it to anyone else while you develop it with them. It was a great project and Harry and I had big hopes for it. It was based on two super-cops; Luke and Lester, and their battles with arch villains in the city of Cosmopolis. While we were developing it, Universal was approached by a company called *Splam!* that wanted to do some revolutionary cartoons on a new technology called "the Internet". We said yes thinking it would be a great way to promote ourselves. Unfortunately we were a few years too early



**An original cel setup from  
The Real Adventures of  
Johnny Quest**

**Universal's *Cool Patrol***



and the technology wasn't ready. We ended up only doing two of them before the company collapsed. You can watch them [<here>](#). Remember this is around 1996 so there isn't much animation. We were paid \$500 to do each of these which we had to split between us AND our Agent as well. Not very lucrative is it? The worst part of it was that in order to do the shorts Universal had to buy the rights outright which was cool but it meant that they now owned our idea and we could no longer do what we wanted with it. I did however get a nice sum of money and put together a down payment for a house. I needed one at this point because

my wife and I had a baby on the way. As far as I know Universal is still sitting on it and won't give us the rights back. It's a shame because it was a funny idea.



**They're dinky, they're Piny  
and the Brain, Brain, Brain!**

Right about that time Turner was merging with Time Warner so I left Hanna Barbera and went back over to my old stomping ground Warner Bros Animation to Direct *Pinky and the Brain*, a spin off of *Animaniacs* which I had helped make a few years back. Now I was cooking! I was working on a hit show, had a baby on the way and even had my own crew! 14 people in all and they were the best crew anyone could ever want! The work was hard but rewarding. Most times we would get a script and it would be too long but the producers wouldn't want to cut it so we would storyboard it knowing things would

be cut out. Then I would show the storyboard to the Producers and they would make revisions. Usually there were a lot of revisions. Sometimes up to 90%! One of the nice things about working there, however was that every year, if we were nominated Warner Bros. would fly us to NY for the Emmy Awards and wouldn't you know it my first year Directing there, we won an Emmy Award! MAN, that was cool! I got to go up there on the stage and accept a statue as well which to this day sits atop my TV set. It was really exciting. That night I even met Merv Griffin at *The Tropicana Club* which he owned. It was a very satisfying night for me to say the least. While I was Directing *Pinky and the Brain*, I was also Directing *Animaniacs* on the side as well and we went back and forth between the two. One of the greatest cartoons I got to do was called Pinky's POV written by Gordon Bressack, which was a cartoon about just that; Pinky's point of view. It was told as if the camera was Pinky's eyes and we saw how he thought and what he looked at. It was a really funny cartoon. Once *Pinky and the Brain* ended I went on to Direct a show called *Histeria* which was kind of like *Animaniacs* but with historical figures. Being an avid history buff, I really enjoyed that show but it seemed that the network didn't because they killed it before we were done with it. That was the beginning of the end of the original Warner Bros. regime. For a while there was no production there and it was kind of scary. Then a friend of mine, Bob Doucette sold a show to Kids WB called *Detention* and I was asked to be one of the Directors on that. You might never see that show as Warner Bros. doesn't seem to run it much.



**Thomas Jefferson from WB's  
Histeria**

Then a friend of mine, Bob Doucette sold a show to Kids WB called Detention and I was asked to be one of the Directors on that. You might never see that show as Warner Bros. doesn't seem to run it much.

While I was doing that I kept on pitching ideas to the Development Executives at Warner Bros and one of the ideas I pitched seemed to strike a chord with them. One of the characters in a show I had pitched was called Swaroop about a boy from India living with his family, in NJ. The Development Executive; Linda Steiner thought it would be a funny idea to pitch to Cartoon Network. We did just that and once again I struck gold! My 4<sup>th</sup> idea was going into development! Unfortunately it would take 2 years to get it to the small screen so we'll get back to it later.



**Swaroop has a tickle fit!**

Production at Warner Bros. was starting to wind down and I once again



**Molly O! from Generation O!**

started to look for my next gig. By this time I had a family to feed. My daughter Melissa was born November 29<sup>th</sup> in 1996 and so I was not on my own anymore. I now had an agent trying to get me work and he landed me a whopper! I left Warner Bros. for the 2<sup>nd</sup> time to do my first Producing job on a show called *Generation O!* for the Kids WB and Sunbow Entertainment, a division of Sony Wonder. I was starting to hit my stride!

*Generation O!* was a complicated show in many ways, mostly because there were a lot of cooks in the kitchen. There was Sunbow Los Angeles who was making the series, Sunbow NY

who was commenting on it and handling the notes from the creators and network, there was Ravensberger in Germany who

was a Co-production partner, Kids WB who, of course, was set to air it, and lastly the Creators themselves who had a lot to say about what they wanted to see. Still it did end up as a cute show. Sunbow closed it's doors soon after I left after being bought out by a German company called Loonland. It was unfortunate as it was a trend start to be the norm as smaller companies were

After Sunbow closed the Industry started to fall apart and I didn't work for a few months. This was the start of the huge unemployment in Animation and the worst was yet to come. I mostly spent my time with my children and yes, developing *Swaroop* and other series ideas.



My luck changed when I got a job Directing ABC's *Mary-Kate and Ashley in ACTION* for Dic. It was a very different kind of job for me in that it was a co-production with France. All the art was done there and I mostly made comments on it and watched over the timing and pacing of the show. It was largely done on auto-pilot and it was not one of my better pieces of work to say the least.

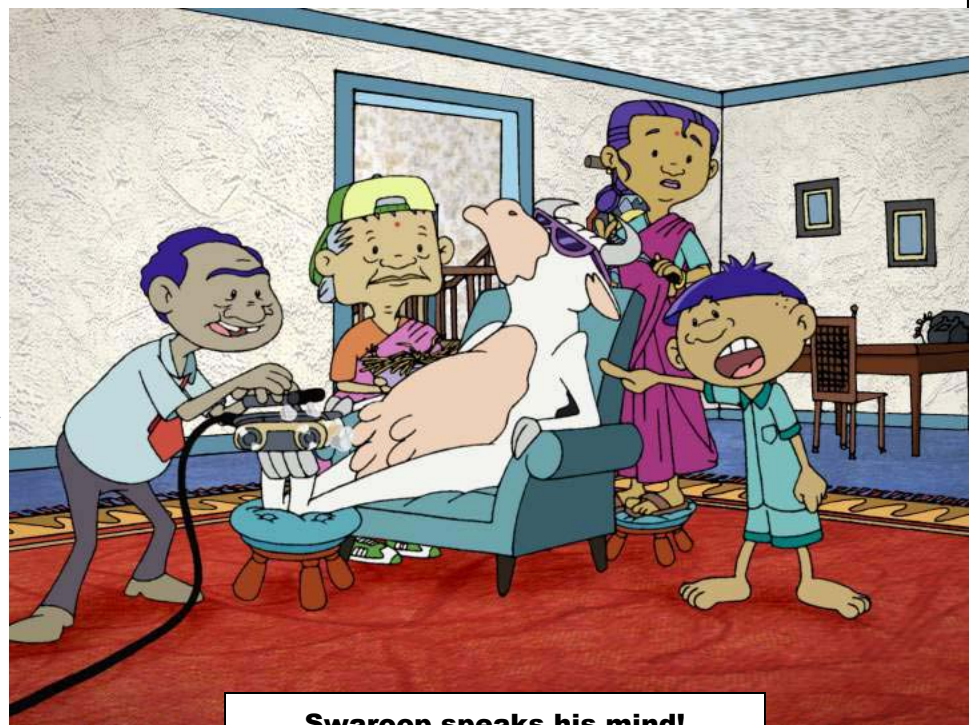
### **Mary-Kate and Ashley in ACTION!**

During all this I was working diligently on my now green-lit pilot *Swaroop* for Cartoon Network with a new partner Atul Rao who helped me make the film a reality. The basic premise was as follows:

*Swaroop* rescues a "sacred" cow from his beef-eating neighbor, Steve, who won the animal in a poker game. Hiding at home with *Swaroop's* family, the cow becomes a sacred nuisance taking advantage of their hospitality. In

an effort to get rid of this unwanted house-guest, *Swaroop* ultimately dresses the cow like a rich lady and puts her on a cruise ship to India where the animal will be both safe and far away.

What sets *Swaroop* apart from other cartoons is the fact that it is the first American East



### **Swaroop speaks his mind!**

# Swaroop: The first Indian American cartoon character

LOS ANGELES: This is the story of a boy, an eleven-year-old Indian boy from New Jersey, a la Bugs Bunny incarnate.

Swaroop meaning true to one's own nature is the very first animated cartoon about Indian/Americans. Produced and written by an American Indian, Atul Rao, the pilot episode of this film will be aired on the Cartoon Network on July 27<sup>th</sup> at 8.00pm (E/P).

This is a part of the Cartoon Network's summer programming, where every Friday a pilot episode of different cartoon films will be premiered. Viewers can vote online for the film they liked the best and that very particular cartoon will be then aired as a se-



ries. Swaroop is the only Indian entry in this competition.

This cartoon is the first inroad for Indian/Americans into animation in the U.S main stream media. Wouldn't it truly be lovely to see a little Indian boy hopping around your TV screens trying to figure out a balance between his Indian origins and American upbringing, trying solve problems, his own and in the bargain maybe even create some for others. Here is hoping that this cartoon becomes a reality and we see Swaroop in it's true image and glory on the cartoon network, sharing the same limelight as Bugs Bunny and Scooby Dobby Doo.

## India Post Article - July 27th, 2001

Indian ever

made. Sure, you say, there was Hadji from *Johnny Quest* and also Apu from *The Simpsons* but neither of them had their own cartoon! We got quite a bit of press from the Indian community as well. Unfortunately it aired just before the 9/11 tragedy that threw our economy into a depression and Cartoon Network, while it liked the idea, didn't want to spend the money developing it any further and dropped the idea. It was really sad for me because it was my best work to date and I felt sure that this was "it"... this was the one that I would finally get a series with... but it didn't happen.

To make matters worse, after that blow to my ego, I didn't work for a YEAR. Nevertheless, I kept busy. I learned Maya and Flash and had a lot of fun animating the films you see on my site. My favorite is *The Grill* series because it was based on my friends' and my exploits at a bar called *The Peanut Grill* in Blauvelt NY. I loved working on it and hope someday it might turn into a TV show.

### A scene from *The Grill*

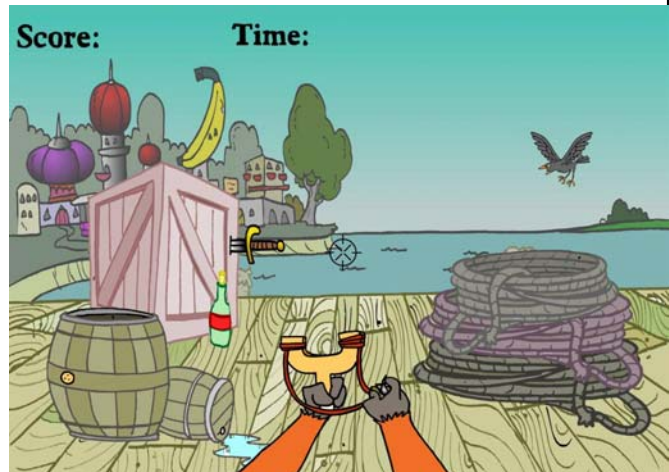


I made a lot of flash content that year. Most of the films you can see on my website. One I made was for a new church in Simi Valley called Discovery Church. It was called *Angel Angles* and I really like the idea of merging Christian values into a cartoon. It wasn't easy though and I'm not sure I did it just right. Either way I did have fun making it.



I also made another short called *Just Dessert* which was supposed to be a statement about rich snotty idiots thinking they were better than everyone. I find Flash to be an amazingly robust tool that allows you to do so many things I sometimes don't know where to start! I have so many ideas in my head it's quite often more a matter of *which* one to do as opposed to *how*.

In addition to all that I also learned how to make games in Flash which has turned out to be a great hobby for me. I love being able to make a character I created run around a room and pick things up or shoot stuff from his hand. It is amazing to play a game that you made and so much fun! Now before you go thinking I'm a code-hound and I can write programs and stuff... trust me it's the complete opposite. What I mostly did was use existing code from various games and combined them to do what I wanted. Granted it's a bit of work to figure out but the results are worth it. Besides it's a great way for people to see your characters and learn more about them.



I finally landed a job almost one year to the day at a small studio called 3DBob Productions in Burbank. They were animating a 3D feature called *The Godman*. I headed up their animation department for a while which was fun. It was the first time I had ever done anything 3D except for some consulting work on a show called *Rayman* for a UK company. It's amazing how



**Still from *The Godman***

realistic it can be. I hope I get to do more like it the future. For me working on *The Godman* was special also because, as a Christian, I got to work on something that had meaning and could change someone's life... something I know for sure *Pinky and the Brain* would never do funny as it is.

Meanwhile my old buddy Harry and I were working on a novel which would be an adaptation of some characters we pitched for the old *What a Cartoon* series so long ago. It will be called *Ribeye the Bullbarian and the Jewel of Baloni* and should be out in the first quarter of 2004. This time we weren't going to wait to see if a Network Executive said it was good enough. We knew it was and Harry, having been laid off himself after a 6 year stint at Klasky-Csupo, diligently began to work on the book while I planned the illustrations. Wanting to be able to collaborate more, I persuaded my bosses to hire Harry to help with the animation on *The Godman* and once again we were working side-by-side on an exciting project.

Well, all projects come to an end and *The Godman* was no exception

and I was once again beating the pavement looking for work. I found it

at Mike Young Productions Directing on three projects for them one of which was *Polly and the Pockets Direct to Video*, a prime-time pilot for Spike TV, and believe-it-or-not consulting on a UK 3D series as well.

Now you would think that with all that on my plate I would have been happy and left well enough alone but the first week I



**Ribeye and Cubesteak**



started at Mike Young I got a call from someone telling me that the money was in place for a set of four short in a Direct-to-Video release called *Itty Bitty Heartbeats* for Toys R US and we could start today! This was all based on a discussion I had with him while I was out of work 6 months before. Now I REALLY had

my plate full! I hunkered down and did what I could on all 4 of the projects and in the end, they all came out pretty good.

So, finally as I write this, I find myself back where I started at Warner Bros getting ready to work on some hush hush stuff! Don't worry, I'll spill the beans as soon as I possibly can. If there's one thing I've learned in my 14+ years in the Animation Industry it's that you have to toot your own horn because no one will ever do it for you!

