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Batman & Bill

By Unknown

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(camera shutter clicking)

(cat meowing)

(soft whirring)

Good morning, guys.

Good morning.

Have you heard of Batman?

Yes.

Just checking and just kidding.

Of course you've

heard of Batman.

So I have had the honor

of getting invited to

speak all over the world

to tell the story that

you're about to hear.

And everywhere I go,

whether it's Tanzania in Africa

or Chile in South America

or Hong Kong or Thailand

or the United Arab Emirates,

everywhere I go,

I show that symbol,

and I have not been to a school

anywhere in the world where

someone doesn't know it.

Now don't worry if you're

not interested in superheroes

because I've done

this many times,

and I can guarantee everyone

here, including staff,

that you will walk out

of this room in an hour

with a different perspective

than you have right now,

I guarantee it.

On every Batman story

since the first in 1939,

there was only one name

in the credit line.

"Batman created by Bob Kane."

Here he is.

And here's the thing

about that credit line:
It is not true.
The reason I do explain why
that I like superheroes
is a little bit pat,
and it maybe is a
little bit disingenuous
because I wasn't thinking
like this as a kid.
But I do like stories
of selflessness
and I like stories of sacrifice,
and superheroes sacrifice
something on a daily basis.
Superheroes are not doing this
to get paid or praised,
and it is not about them.
They are doing something
for the greater good,
then they disappear
into the night.
The notion of that is
so rare in real life.
I mean, we know so few people
that can afford to be selfless.
As a six-year-old,
I wasn't thinking like that,
even as a 12- or 15-year-old.
I just liked a good story,
a good adventure,
and I still do,
so it was a combination
of those things,
this purity of purpose
and then just a
great cliff-hanging,
rollicking adventure.
Here is the Batman section.
One, two, three, four
full... almost full shelves.
And compare that to Superman.
Not knocking Superman,
but just looking at the reality.
Here's Superman

up to about there.

Batman is not only
the most identifiable
and recognizable and famous
and beloved superhero,
but he is one of
the most recognizable
fictional characters
of all time.

Can take almost any
Batman book off the shelf
and open to the title page.

"Batman created by Bob Kane."

Bob, for the few people who
come from another planet,
who may not know what you do,
what is it that
you're known for?

You've got to be kidding.

I am, of course.

Bob Kane is the original
cartoonist of Batman
and the man who has
been credited on Batman
for most of Batman's history.

When I was 18, I tripped across
a character called Batman.

Bat... how do you
pronounce that?

- Batman?

- B-A-T-man.

It was called

"Batman by Robert Kane."

In 1938, two gangly kids
from Cleveland, Ohio
sold an idea for a
character named Superman.

Superman was a huge
influence on Bob Kane,
not the creative side,
the financial side.

So I thought of, yeah,

"How much money is
Siegel and Shuster making?"

They were the
creators of Superman.
And in those days, in '39,
they were making
\$800 apiece a week.
When Bob Kane found
out how much money
the Superman creators were
making on a weekly basis
which was \$800 at the time,
he went to an
editor at National.
He said, "Listen, Bob, can
you do another superhero?"
I said, "For that kind of money,
you'll have it on Monday."
For that kind of money,
you'd be the superhero.
Boy, you better believe it.
I'll steal it somewhere.
And I went home,
and lo and behold
I thought about all
my childhood heroes
when I was a kid and
my world of fantasy.
And on Monday, I came up with
a very crude drawing of Batman.
And the rest is
history that Batman...
Batman is my claim to infamy.
Well, like most adults
that like superheroes,
my interest started
when I was a kid.
I just never outgrew it.
And that began a passion
that I had most of my life.
I had a little
gap in adolescence
when I had to distance
myself from things
that could get in the
way of girls and life,

but for the most
part, I've stuck
with superheroes my whole life.
I am an author of
books for young people,
and some of them are
books for all ages.
And I've written about 75 books.
This is my first-ever book.
The Felix Activity Book.
Tour de force, I'm sure you
remember it well from 1996.
And then here's the epic sequel,
Felix Explores our World.
I think the recurring
theme of my nonfiction
is untold stories.
Boys of Steel.
Biography of Jerry
Siegel and Joe Shuster,
creators of Superman.
There are sometimes
tragic stories
behind these iconic characters.
Marc loves to bring out
the story behind a story,
so he goes deep,
and he's also very
persistent also
as a human being.
You got two toothpastes
because you didn't know
if I wanted fluoride or not?
- Yeah.
- Because they just announced
that fluoride is a toxin now.
I know that.
I told you all along.
It's in the water,
it's in the toothpaste.
No, I know it's there,
but that doesn't mean
- it's a toxin.
- Oh, you're filming us?

I definitely feel sometimes
that I'm not only
married to a writer,
but also even
more so a detective.
When I decided to write a book
on the story behind Batman,
it hadn't been done yet.
Whenever you start
a research project,
you can't possibly know how much
or how little
you're going to find.
In this case, I was going
into the Batman book
knowing that there were secrets
that hadn't been
widely discussed,
but I had no way to know it
was a lot more than that.
So this story, for me,
was uncovering a
big superhero secret
that should have been
blown wide decades ago.
(car horn honks)
In New York in 1965,
was the first
official Comic Con,
and the reason that
this is considered
the first official Comic Con
is because it was the first time
that professionals showed up,
not just fans in
a hotel basement
with some back issues.
This was historic,
this was a big deal.
They didn't know it at the time,
but it was a big deal.
There were 200 of us
at that Comic Con.
And this place was so sketchy.

And we got there,
and my mother freaked
when she saw where we were.
There was literally
a guy drunk, unconscious
on the floor in the lobby,
and roaches on the walls,
and she just said,
"We're out of here,
we're leaving."
The hotel itself,
a few months later,
actually, much of it collapsed.
Luckily, it didn't do so
while we were in there,
but none of us was
particularly surprised
to hear that the Broadway
Central had collapsed.
My mom finally said,
"Okay, we'll stay,
and you can go up to this
comic book convention,
but don't touch anything."
And as we went through the bar,
we saw Otto Binder
sitting there at the bar
with another guy drinking.
And we go in and we sit
down on the stools.
And he goes, "What are
you boys drinking?"
We ordered our Cokes.
And Otto turns to me and Bob,
he said, "Boys, how
would you like to meet
the creator of Batman?"
And, like, our jaws dropped,
our eyes had to be wide open,
and we figured we were
going to meet Bob Kane,
which was the only
name we ever saw
on a comic book, it

was always in a box
with a big "O" for Bob.
And Otto said, "Fellas,
meet Bill Finger."
So in 1965 at this Comic Con,
in this dingy hotel in New York,
Bill Finger made what
is probably his first
and maybe his only
public appearance,
and he appeared on a panel
with three other
comics' creators.
At this panel,
Bill was introduced
by the moderator whose
name was Jerry Bails.
And perhaps we'll hear some...
Jerry was the fan,
who in 1964 or so,
figured out that it could not be
just this one guy, Bob Kane,
writing and drawing
every Batman story every month.
So Jerry did some
detective work of his own.
He wrote letters
to DC Comics saying,
"Who's really doing all this?"
And in those days, companies
would write you back
with a personal letter.
And the name that he saw
more than any other
was Bill Finger.
So in 1965, Jerry wrote
a two-page article
which was called
"If the Truth Be Known,"
"A Finger in Every Plot!"
And this was obviously
way before the internet,
so his way of spreading the word
was he made copies of

this and sent it out
to Batman fans all
over the country.
And that's when...
the controversy erupted.
Bill was given a forum
to tell his story
where we could
finally become familiar
with all these
characters and books
that he wrote over the decades.
It was the first thing
that, in writing,
really gave Bill Finger credit
for the co-creation of Batman,
and it was about time.
That fateful Friday in 1939
when Bob told his editor
that he would be able to
come up with a superhero
over the weekend,
he apparently did
go home that day
and work on a character
which he called "Batman."
Bob's idea for Batman
was a character
in a red union suit,
basically red tights,
a domino mask
which is a little mask
like what Robin wears now,
stiff wings
attached to the arms,
and, as far as we
know, nothing more,
no other
distinguishing elements.
And he had enough sense to know
that this was not good enough,
and he knew who to call.
Bill Finger.
They get together.

They're huddling
over this drawing,
and Bill looked at
the red suit and said,
"This is not suitable for
a creature of the night.
He's got to be
darker," so he said,
"Let's darken
the whole costume."
He looked at the
little mask and said,
"This is not going to
intimidate criminals.
Let's cover most of
his face with a cowl
and put pointed ears on it,
so that he actually
looks like his namesake.
The stiff wings
are not practical
for obvious reasons,
so let's ditch the wings
and give him a cape
with a scalloped edge
which will fly out behind him
and look like wings."
You set the tone of
this character's essence
from his visuals
before you know a thing
about his personality
and his mission.
So that was all Bill.
Bill reconstructed Batman
into the Batman that
we all know today.
Bob apparently
went to the company
on Monday morning
with this sketch.
Did not mention that there
was anyone else involved,
and said, "This is my idea."

I have been told, although I've never been privy, of course, to the contract, that that contract included specifically a stipulation that Batman would hereafter be listed as the sole creation of Bob Kane. Bob went back to Bill and presumably said, "Great news, they want to buy Batman, so you'll write it and I'll draw it, and my name will be on it because I sold it, of course, and I'll give you a portion of what I get paid." Nothing was signed, as far as we know, but it was something that they mutually agreed on. So Bill was not credited at all from the beginning, and within a couple of months, Batman was on the newsstands. Batman debuted in '39 and, essentially, it was from 1939 to 1965 where Bill was anonymous. It's one thing for Bob Kane in 1939 to take full credit for Batman when Bill Finger agreed to it, but where the story changes dramatically is in the '60s when Bill is coaxed out. At that point, Bob had a decision to make. "Am I going to own up to this or am I going to deny it from my position of power?"

He had a chance to take,
obviously, the high road
or the low road,
and he took the way low road.
When Jerry's article about
what Bill Finger had done
on Batman came out,
of course it made
Bob Kane go ballistic
the minute that he saw it,
so he went to the
editor of Batmania
and he wrote half a
dozen pages of diatribe.
Obviously, Bob Kane did not want
Bill Finger's story told
and took tremendous
offense at it.
"Here, for the first time,
straight from the horse's mouth,
is the real inside story
about myself and Batman.
It seemed to me that Bill Finger
has given out the impression
that he and not myself
created the 'Batman'
as well as Robin
and all the other leading
villains and characters.
This statement is fraudulent
and entirely untrue!"
There was one man's
word against the other.
There was no reality show
documenting the birth
of Batman, of course.
It was two guys in an apartment
in the Bronx in 1939
when most people had
much bigger things
to worry about
than who's coming up with
this guy dressed as a bat?
"The truth is that Bill

Finger is taking credit
for much more than he deserves,
and I refute much of his
statements here in print.
The fact is that I
conceived the 'Batman' figure
and costume entirely by myself.
I created the title, masthead,
the format and concept,
as well as the Batman
figure and costume."
I don't think that
Bob Kane ever wanted
anything out in writing
that would admit
that anybody else
had a hand in creating
anything for Batman.
His whole myth,
his contract with DC,
his name on the stories
all owed to the fact
that he was the
creator of Batman.
When Bob chose to respond
to Bill's coming out
by writing a letter
denying Bill's
involvement to that degree,
Bob was, in effect,
changing the course
of his life with this letter.
He was saying, "I'm
going to have to stick
to this story forever."
We're all born with a
natural creative potential.
Every man has it
and every woman.
The idea is to find
out what that is.
And it's like a
little birdie tells you
and whispers in your ear,

it's an intuitive thing.
No one can tell
you that but God.
And I knew I had that
when I was eight or ten
that I wanted to be
a famous cartoonist.
Bob Kane was a kid
from the Bronx,
and he was an artist
with big dreams.
He was a go-getter
and he was working
for the company that
would become DC Comics
which at that point was
called National Periodical.
Bob and Bill met at a party.
They didn't know each
other previous to that
even though they went
to the same high school.
And Bill was a shoe salesman.
He had aspirations
to become a writer.
I said, "Why don't
you try writing
for the new comic book?"
Bob was already
working in comics,
drawing stories, and Bob
could immediately sense
that Bill was good with
narrative, had good ideas.
It sounds like they were
very different types of people,
but I think what
they had in common
was their love of the
new medium of comics.
In the early days,
really, it was Superman
that brought the comic
book publishing industry

out of this mire of
reprints of comic strips.
It was very much kind of
a fly-by-night industry.
You had a comic publisher
which is maybe a couple
guys at a couple desks
in a couple of rooms
in Midtown somewhere,
and what they largely
did is they farmed out
the actual production
of comic book stories
to what were known as "shops."
You had guys just laying
down the pencil artwork,
you had inkers and finishers
that were then putting
permanent artwork
on top of that.
There were people
doing paste up,
there were people
adding word balloons.
Bob Kane and Bill Finger
were, in effect, a sort of shop.
Bob was the only one
dealing with the
publisher directly.
Kane had his name on
the Batman stories,
but he didn't tell
anybody about Bill Finger,
and, of course, you assumed
that he had done
the whole thing,
and I think that's just
the way Bob wanted it.
From a corporation
point of view,
they contract Bob Kane,
Bob Kane is supposed to
deliver pages to them,
and that's all they cared about.

They're going, "I don't care how you build it," right, just, "I need it built every 30 days because we've got a publishing deadline coming here." So in order to meet the demands of the hungry audience and feed the machine and earn money by cranking out as many different Batman titles as possible, they would hire ghost writers back in the day. Bob Kane would get credit for the story. He'd hand it in, "Here's my Batman story." They're like, "Bob, you're a genius," and, you know, that's how the industry worked for a long, long time. Most ghost artists or ghost writers were there just to execute the vision or the work directive of the guy hiring them. They weren't there to sort of create new concepts. But because Bill Finger was there at the beginning, he wasn't just a ghost writer. He wasn't just the guy that was brought on later on when Batman was already running and successful and all the tropes were in place. Bill Finger basically created all those tropes, but in the actual work hierarchy as just a ghost writer.

(birds chirping)
I had never researched
a person to this extent.
I mean, this became
such a quest,
and there just seemed to be
such a higher moral
obligation to this.
You know, this is 700 pages
of information on a subject
that some people told
me at the beginning,
"There's nothing more to
learn about Bill Finger."
I did feel this
calling to do this.
Especially with something as
phenomenally
successful as Batman,
how could this not have
been so well-known?
The first panel of
the first Batman story,
just setting up this mysterious,
foreboding character says,
"His identity
remains unknown."
Obviously that's Bill
writing about Batman,
but it ended up being a prophesy
because Bill was
Batman's secret identity.
When I started the
research on this project,
there were only two known photos
of Bill in circulation.
It was either him with
a baseball cap in profile
or him golfing, half in
shadow and not that close.
From seven sources
over nine months,
I ended up finding 11
more photos of Bill.

He was interviewed
only a few times,
so for a man of Bill's impact
to have only these few
recorded interviews
in existence is just staggering,
so the first time was
Jerry Bail's in 1965
and then for the 1970
book History of Comics.

And it turns out that in 1972,
a man in California
named Robert Porfirio
interviewed Bill on audio.
It took a while, but eventually
we actually did find
this audio recording...

Testing, one... do you want
to say something, or...?

Yeah, sure.

How are you?

...which was one of the
more emotional moments

I would say, for me,
because it was
the first time that
I heard Bill's voice.

To write this book,
I spoke to more than 250 people.

Of that number,
a handful, maybe a dozen,
knew both Bill
and Bob personally.

Two of the creators
that were hugely helpful
and impactful in this
process were Jerry Robinson,
one of the earliest
Batman ghost artists,
and Carmine Infantino.

He was the artist that redefined
Batman's look in the '60s,
and Carmine went on
to become the publisher

of DC Comics for
a time in the '70s.
He was genius, literally genius.
I believe that.
I know Bob tried to take
credit for everything.
He should have been credited
as co-creator of Batman.
He said, "I'd like to
get some ownership."
No, he didn't say,
he said, "I'd like to get
a piece of that
because I did it."
So, but then he said,
"I can't afford a lawyer,
and they know that,"
quote, "They know that."
They told me in, you know,
in no uncertain terms,
that they thought Bill Finger
was deprived of his legacy.
He is the Batman, Bill was.
Everything you would think
that's good, that's Bill.
They take away their humanity
when you take away their credit.
Basically both of them said,
"Without Bill,
there'd be no Batman."
It's that simple.
And that's because
Bill did the following:
Bill Finger was the
dominant creative force
and original writer of Batman,
Robin, the Joker,
Catwoman, the Riddler,
the Penguin, the Scarecrow,
Commissioner Gordon,
Bruce Wayne, and Dick Grayson.
He named Gotham City.
He nicknamed Batman
"The Dark Knight."

He was the first person
to write a story
with the Batmobile
and the Batcave
called those things.
He wrote Batman's origin.
It was just a two-page
story, but it was seismic.
This eight-year-old boy
sees his parents murdered
right before his eyes
and makes a vow
that he will not let this
happen to other people.
I mean, the guy
built this world.
He kept what he called
the "gimmick book."
He would fill that
up with story ideas,
and he would just
sometimes take a bus
around the city to get inspired.
He would just notate
and just be an observer.
He would do extensive
research for scripts.
He would attach
clippings for the artists
so that they would
have reference.
He thought very visually.
He thought cinematically.
He would write these
big, epic scenes.
One of the things that
he's best known for
was writing stories
with oversized props,
so Batman and Robin
fighting on top
of a giant typewriter
with some criminals,
and this stuff was

just wildly fun
and inventive to look at.
He had a hero who
looked like a villain.
He had a superhero who
was also a detective.
He was smart, he wasn't
just using brawn,
he was using brains too.
Bill took all this and
put it in a crucible
and mixed it together
and brought this
deeper sense to stories
that up to that point were
considered somewhat frivolous.
The aspects of
the character, man,
that Bill brought to
it, like the notion
of a little boy in the
city with his parents
who get gunned down,
and at a young age,
that's what he's
going to take with him
for the rest of his life.
And the dude is
just a human being
who's just a guy.
That's it, got no superpowers.
He's got some
pretty nifty things
in his belt and stuff,
but he's relentless.
He's a creature of passion.
It's a character that
kind of keeps you reaching.
It's a character
that people build
their moral compass upon,
or, "That's my guy."
That's what makes
Batman so beautiful.

You don't get there
without Bill Finger, man.
Batman
Week after week,
the Caped Crusader
copes with the tricky
traps of vicious villains.
The breakout culturally,
as well as simply
in the ratings books,
was the 1966 Batman
television series.
See the Dynamic Duo
dangle from new
heights of danger.
Careful, Robin,
it's quite a drop.
This was not the
dark and serious
creature of the night
as created by Bob Kane
and Bill Finger.
It caused quite a stir
in what was the beginning
of the pop art phase
of America's culture.
Be with Batman and
Robin twice weekly
in color, of course, on ABC.
Starting with the debut of
the Batman TV show in 1966,
Bill and Bob's
trajectories diverged
even more starkly
than ever before.
You know, Bob was
just going up, up, up,
and Bill was really plummeting.
The TV show changed
Bob's life dramatically
because that's where he got
a big payout for Batman
which made him wealthy.
You stopped drawing the

comic book in the '60s,
and what happened, did
you sell the rights then?

No, it wasn't that,
when I stopped drawing,
I never sold all the rights.
I own a piece of the Batman.

And so you still have...
you still have a
copyright on Batman?

Well, everyone wants to
know that, don't they?
I'll let you figure it...
I'll let you figure it out.

I answered it before,
a piece of it.

A piece of it, okay.

It's a pie.

It's a pie that's cut up.

(chuckling)

After the Batman TV show,
Bob was able to parlay that
into some degree of celebrity
without being directly involved.

He was in full-on peacock mode
displaying himself as
Batman's real-life alter ego.
He wanted to be famous, right?

I mean, which was odd
because most creative people
in our industry
just... they did it
for the creative reasons
because they were
just manic artists.

But I got a sense
outta Mr. Kane,
that it was like a plan
and, "Oh, I got to do artwork
to get the quasi-celebrity,"
which was sort of
reverse engineering
from what most of us do.
We just go, "We do art,

and oh, by the way,
people think we're
famous, oh, cool."
And then I started
painting Batman oils
and I have other
non-Batman art,
and I've had shows all over
the world with my art.
So he starts doing a series
of Batman lithographs,
and he's pushing
these lithos as his,
and, again, he's got
another ghost artist
who's, you know, actually
doing these lithographs.
Bob made his careers
by having other
people do the work
and putting his name on it.
That was his...
That was his strategy.
It was Bob Kane's pictures
you saw in magazines
and newspapers.
It was about Bob Kane's
art gallery showings.
Bob became one
of the first-ever
comic book celebrities.
The Batman TV show did
almost nothing for Bill.
The significance of it was
that Bill was the
only writer from comics
who wrote an episode
of the TV show.
Actually, the Batman
show that he co-wrote
with his friend
named Charles Sinclair
was his only
published Batman credit.

We did a Batman TV thing,
and "The Clock King's
Crazy Crimes,"
thank you very much.
And Bill thought of
all kinds of gimmicks
for clocks and time.
When we got confirmation
that we had sold to Batman,
Bill was kind of digging
his toe in the sand
and hemming and hawing,
and I knew he had
something on his mind.
Finally, I said, "Come on, Bill,
what the hell's on your mind?
There's something eating you.
What is it and how
can I help you?"
Well, it was the
billing on the show.
Bill said, "Could I just
this once get top billing?"
I said, "Sure, why not?"
Bill Finger,
at that point in time,
had a little
black-and-white TV set.
I said, "Bill, you've
got to see this thing
in color," you know.
So I called a friend at ABC,
and we went and sat in
a client viewing room...
and saw this Batman thing,
Bill and I, on a big color set.
Bill was
thunderstruck, you know?
I don't know if he
actually had any tears
running down his
cheeks, you know,
but I think he
came pretty close.

Bang, he saw his name,
you know, top billing
in color on a big TV screen.
I mean, this was
like the high point
of his creative life.
Most of the Golden Age writers
began to be phased out
by the middle and
latter '60s at DC.
A new era of talent
were coming in,
fans who were becoming
the new writers of comic books,
the new artists of comic books,
and people from the
original generation
were finding it
harder and harder
and harder to adapt.
The company was saying,
"Just because they may have
co-created or written these
characters back in the '40s,
we need young, fresh blood."
Who cares if Bill
Finger writes Batman?
There seemed to be
a lack of respect
for his body of work.
I mean, that's how some
people would interpret it.
This was not just a guy
who created a character
that we've used a few times.
This is a guy who
created an entire world
that we are milking to the bone.
So I can't even
imagine what he felt.
He spent the rest
of the '60s writing,
but not Batman, not even comics.
He wrote carpentry articles,

he ended up writing for
the Army Pictorial Center.
So he was always
struggling for money.
He was under strain,
I think he was
skimping on medications.
I don't think
he was eating well,
and he was sliding,
and I couldn't do
too much about it.
He was just getting by
and slogging through
and watching his
character get bigger
than ever before and
being more detached from it
than ever before.
My very first comic convention
was the 1973 New York City
July 4th Com Convention
at the Commodore Hotel,
and the keynote speaker
of that convention
was Bob Kane, and
I was a Batman fan!
And I remember
standing in the back
of this packed ballroom
where Bob Kane
was a little speck
in the distance on the stage.
But what do I remember hearing?
"I created Batman,
I created Robin,
I created the Joker,
I created the..."
"I, I, I, I, I..."
that's what I remember.
And the thing is is that
we didn't know at the time,
but Bill Finger was still alive
in the summer of '73,

probably on his last legs.

So what really upsets
me about Bob Kane
is that right up until
the time Bill Finger died,
his friend and partner
who co-created Batman,
that gave Bob Kane a
living and notoriety
for the rest of his life,
he allowed to die
penniless and unknown.
And for that, there
is no forgiveness
for Bob Kane.

In the early '70s,
Bill did begin to write
for comics again and for DC.
He began to
write mystery stories,
and he had two
stories due on a Friday,
he turned in only
one and went home,
presumably to finish
the second one.

This was January 18th, 1974.
He was living alone in Manhattan
in a small apartment
in the same building as Charles.
On this particular day,
I had not heard from Bill
for like a couple of days,
and I'm carrying a duplicate key
for his apartment.
I went to the apartment,
and he was behind in his rent.
The landlord had eviction
notices on his door.
I used my key and went in.
I walked up to him.
He had a blanket like
pulled up to about here.
I pulled it down.

Looked, looked,
and looked, you know.
No movement, nothing, you know?
And I reached down,
shook his shoulder.
Nothing.
Poor Bill had died alone
with his little
television set going on.
I thought, you know, what a...
kind of a sad little end.
The world has lost a
very interesting guy.
So when I asked Charles
"What happened to
Bill after he died?"
Charles said,
"Marc, I don't think
we want to
talk about that."
And I said, "You're
probably right.
I know it's difficult,
but I do have to ask."
And then Charles
said that he thought
that Bill was buried
in a potter's field.
It's a graveyard
of unmarked graves.
People that don't have someone
to take care of them.
Homeless people... I
mean, it's desperately,
desperately sad.
The medical
examiner report says,
"natural causes,
no family, no history,"
which of course was referring
to his medical history,
but when you read
that now, textually,
it's eerie because

this medical examiner
had no idea the immensely
significant history
that this man had.
So when I heard
that, I just thought,
you know, just on a human level
we've got to do
something for this guy.
There are so many
fans who clamber
for justice for the creators.
I think in the end it takes more
than this amorphous
mass of fans.
There has to be one
person who steps up
and leads the charge.
When I started this project,
I was already a
published author.
I wanted to tell
another good story.
And then when I learned
how much there was to
reveal about Bill's life
and how much more we
could do on his behalf,
it became not only
a book but a crusade.
My goal became getting
Bill's name on Batman,
to get this man the credit
that will never go away,
that will hang over all of this.
I had a couple
of people that said,
"What you are trying
to do will never happen.
This is a contractually
bound line
that's been in
place for 70 years,
so what are you

going to do about it?
What is any one person
going to do about it?"
And I said to myself,
"I have no idea,
but I'm going to try."
(wind blowing)
Here it is, Poe Park.
So this is Poe
Park in the Bronx.
This is where Bill
and Bob would come
and brainstorm
ideas for stories.
They would sit on
park benches here
and discuss Batman.
I had no idea that
I would be doing
this kind of digging.
This is the apartment
in which Bill was living
in 1965 when he was
interviewed by Jerry Bails.
He's also very righteous,
and he wants to, you know,
he wants to do
right in the world,
and so he is driven.
Bill Finger was the
co-creator of Batman.
And I am pretty sure
that he was living here
at the moment that
he created Batman,
so I think he was living
in one of these three units,
and I'd love to see inside
if you could show it.
The parallel was not lost on me
that Bill made
Batman a detective,
and I was a detective in
pursuit of Bill's legacy.

That was part of the fun of it.
How did you find this out?
I did a lot of research.
I actually went through
the New York City phone book
every year from 1930 to
1974 looking for my guy,
and this is where it started.
It became addictive.
I felt like, if I
found this big thing
that wasn't known,
there's probably more.
When I started the research,
we knew this much:
Bill's wife was named Portia,
they were married
sometime in the 1940s.
I believe that their
marriage fell apart
in the '50s.
To try to legally
contest a credit line,
you need an heir.
That was my goal
was to find an heir,
so very early in my
Bill Finger research,
I learned that Bill
had a son named Fred.
I was super pumped that
day because I thought
it's going to take
me less than a day
to find Fred Finger,
and it took me less than a day
to find out that Fred
was Bill's only child,
Fred was gay, and
Fred died in 1992,
which to me implied
that he was the end
of the Finger family,
that there was nobody left.

And while I'm writing a
book to tell a good story
and tell an important story,
at the same time my goal
was to do what I could
to see Bill's name
added to Batman,
but I knew that to do that,
you need to be an heir
and there wasn't one.
So I was then going
to look for anybody
who might have had some
connection to this man.
Apparently when you are
doing detective work,
you find yourself doing things
that you wouldn't
expect yourself to do.
For example, I
called every Finger
in the phone directory,
which was 500 names
asking if they were
related to Bill Finger.
Not a one was.
I staked out the apartment
building that Portia,
Bill's first wife, lived
in at the end of her life.
I figured there
could still be people
in the building who knew her.
Next thing I know, I'm
sitting in an apartment
with two lovely
women in their 70s
who are in their nightgowns
at 6 o'clock at night
telling me stories about Portia.
When I didn't know
how to reach people
that knew Fred, I posted fliers
in community centers

targeting the gay
and lesbian community
saying, "Does anybody
remember Fred Finger?"
It was actually a flier
with the little
pull-off things,
you know, "I know Fred Finger"
with my phone number.
Yeah, it's crazy.
Bill Finger was a charming guy,
but he was not, I
think, a forceful guy.
He was making his own way,
and it was kind of permanently
on the outside looking in a bit.
At some point, Charles said
that Bill and Portia divorced
and Bill was
dating other people,
and in the late '60s,
he had a lady friend
named Edith Simmons.
That was what Charles
said, "a lady friend."
I discovered that Edith
was more than just
Bill's lady friend,
she was his second wife.
Someone that nobody in
comics had ever heard of.
He was a very amiable, pleasant,
and easy-going man.
He had a good sense of humor,
he... do you want
me to tell you
about the things he
was interested in?
She was, along with Charles,
the two biggest finds
up until that point...
the two people that I thought
would ensure that this was
the first real

version of Bill Finger
that we would get to know.
He was interested
in a lot of things.
He loved ballet, for
instance, I loved it.
We went together.
He was very knowledgeable
about theater,
about movies.
He was proud of being a very,
very good comic book writer.
There are several heroes,
in my opinion, in this story.
When Lyn, his second wife,
learned that they were making
a big budget Batman movie,
which would become Tim
Burton's 1989 Batman movie,
she tried to get Bill
credit in that movie.
This time it is
to the big screen.
Warner Brothers
is spending millions
to bring millionaire Bruce Wayne
and his alter ego to life.
Is this a gamble for the studio?
Will Batman pay off?
Will there be bat hysteria?
When the first Batman
movie was coming out,
my mother got very concerned
that Bill was getting
no credit for it.
Estimates are that
the final price tag
for the Warner Brothers movie
will be in the 30 to
50 million dollar range.
I thought he should
get some credit
on the screen,
and I tried to get in

touch with the managers
or whoever it was to tell them
that Bill should get credit.
We weren't interested in suing,
because we weren't
seeking money,
we were just seeking
credit for Bill.
I really dealt with
the legal department
a couple of times.
They weren't disagreeing
with Bill's
co-creating Batman,
there was no disagreement there.
They just didn't
want to get involved
in something they
didn't have to do
that might open up some
liability issues for them.
They, I would say,
politely declined.
That long-awaited
41 million dollar film,
Batman, got an old-fashioned
kickoff last night
when it premiered
in Los Angeles.
Thousands of fans, many
of whom waited all day
outside the theater in Westwood,
welcomed the scores of stars
who turned out for the opening.
So of course the Batman
movie was a juggernaut.
Batman owned 1989.
Are all those
people waiting now?
You're kidding!
It's Batmania this summer.
Everyone wants
to see this movie.
That movie was stratospheric.

I've been reading comic books since I was six years old. They couldn't have done this movie any better. Day by day, there are more and more signals that a phenomenon is emerging. There is even a 1-800-BATMAN number in here to get your merchandise to you faster. 1989 is when Batman moved from just another superhero to a fictional character that everybody knows. At our first Batman premiere in 1989, Bob showed up in like this black velour bat cape. Bob was fun, and Bob was a showman. He loved the attention, he reveled in the attention. My autobiography came out, Batman & Me. At the height of the movie of Batman One, it sold 250,000 copies. That's the cover of me. That's the first Batman I drew in 1939. Doing the book was interesting. I helped design the book and rewrote a lot of the book based on a lot of interviewing I did with him. I interviewed him for hours. For me, the most significant passage is on page 44, when Bob writes, "Now that my longtime friend and collaborator is gone, I must admit that Bill never received

the fame and
recognition he deserved.
He was an unsung hero."
"I often tell my wife,
if I could go back
15 years before he died,
I would like to say, quote,
'I'll put your name on it now.
You deserve it.'"
I remember when I read that,
and several other people told me
they had similar reactions.
They were just
dumbstruck, I mean,
it was just like...
it's one of those things
that'll just stop you
when you're reading it
if you know anything
about the situation
because you are looking
at a book written...
allegedly written...
by the person
who is totally responsible,
or almost totally responsible,
for the fact that
poor Bill Finger
never got the credit
he deserved for Batman.
He did have regrets at the end
about Bill not getting credit.
Never sufficient
regret to fix it.
I don't think he would've
ever put Bill's name
on the strip at that time.
It opens a legal can of worms
when he told me that,
which he wouldn't
have wanted to get into,
because then it wouldn't...
it would be not
only credit but money.

The other especially notable thing about Bob's book is this series of sketches, which are dated January 17th, 1934.

- Yeah.

- He has these drawings that he says were stashed away as a kid and wasn't sure whether to make it into a bird or a bat, and he said that when he was creating this new superhero, he remembered these drawings he had made in 1934 in this trunk, and he went to get them and this gave him the inspiration for making a character into a bat.

Wow.

I don't think that's ever been corroborated that that's an actual 1934 document.

I mean, somebody should do a Shroud of Turin investigation on those 1934 sketches.

I mean, right away, the date alone, it's like you're telling me that at the dawn of the comic book itself, which was created in 1933, before there were superheroes, obviously, you're telling me that you created a Batman-like character, Bob Kane.

Looking at the
drawing from 1934,
he's wearing a cowl,
and his original Batman
drawing didn't have a cowl.
It also... there's
a bat emblem on it.
The bat emblem was
suggested by Finger.
These are not
haphazard sketches.
These are something put together
by someone retrospectively
trying to talk about
how they came up
with this character.
In this case, for a man to say,
"Bill created a costume,
but here's my drawing
of the same costume
five years before."
There's just no
way to look at that
and not see... see
the scam going on,
see a man who's
desperately trying
to hold onto
something that he knows
is not rightfully his.
At some point, if
you tell the story
enough to yourself,
then it just...
your perception
is now your reality.
I do think that over time,
Bob started to feel differently
than he felt
when he was younger,
but he probably felt
trapped by the myth
of Bob Kane, which he created,
and I think he probably thought,

"I'm going to look much
worse if I come clean now..."
even if maybe his
conscience was saying
it would be the right...
better thing to do,
"...than if I just...
Let's see how long
I can ride this out.
Maybe I can get to the grave
with no one really
challenging me on this."
One day, when I'm 120 or so,
I'll look down from
the bat cave in the sky
at my little creation
that goes on and on and on,
and I'll just say,
"Hey, Warner Brothers
and Leonardo, just send me
the residuals in the sky.
I'll give you my address,
it's up there
where the angels are."
Bob died in 1998.
He got to live
through seeing Batman
become a worldwide phenomenon,
and had a proper
obituary in newspapers.
He was mentioned
on nightly news.
He went on to have a star
on the Hollywood Walk
of Fame many years later.
Bill died in 1974
with no obituary,
no funeral, no gravestone...
virtually unrecognized.
And Bob was remembered
as the creator of Batman.
His gravestone
says, "God bestowed
a dream upon Bob Kane.

Blessed with divine inspiration
and a rich imagination,
Bob created a legacy
known as BATMAN.

Bob Kane, Bruce Wayne, Batman,
they are one and the same.

Bob infused his dual
identity character
with his own attributes:
goodness, kindness,
compassion, sensitivity,
generosity..."

I didn't know him,
and I'm very careful
to emphasize that.

I don't know what
he was like as a son
or a husband or a father,
and I want to think the best.

And, you know, he
had a right to be proud
of his role in Batman,
but professionally,
he was not Bruce Wayne.
He was not what it
says on his gravestone.

(birds chirping)

Every child grows
up with parents
whose jobs become
part of their...

the texture of their lives,
and unfortunately for my kids,
that was Bill Finger,
so my kids knew more
about Bill Finger
at a very young age
than some hardcore
Batman fans have known
at the peak of their knowledge.

What about your daddy?

You're my daddy!

- What's my name?

- Marc Tyler.

And what do I do all day?

- Work!

- What's my job?

Bill Finger.

What do I do?

- Bill Finger.

- But what does that mean?

Bill Finger.

- Who's Bill Finger?

- Bill Finger.

Is that my friend?

Yes!

My daughter, for

all intents, grew up

with Bill Finger as a part

of the extended family.

My wife was very patient.

We were young and struggling,

and I was putting in a lot

of time for this project

because I did get

consumed by this,

and not to the point

that I was not showing up

for family events or forgetting

to put my shoes on,

but I was really

very focused on this.

Excuse me, Batman!

Can I ask you a

couple questions?

- Where's Batman from?

- Gotham City.

And what's his real name?

Bruce Wayne.

- And who created him?

- Bob Kane.

Just Bob Kane?

When I see people

wearing Batman shirts

or Batman clothes,

which I do all the time,

yeah, I do smile

to myself and think,

"Should I stop
that guy and ask him
if he knows who
Bill Finger is?"
- Who's Dick Grayson?
- Dick Grayson...
He's the first Robin,
also Nightwing.
Who's Bill Finger?
Bill Finger?
Him I don't know.
The story is so good,
anyone wearing a Batman shirt
would want to know it.
I have a few
Batman T-shirts left
that I would like to give out.
- Does anybody want one?
- Sure!
All right.
They probably
looked at those shirts
and said, "Wait,
this isn't Batman.
This is Bill Finger...
Who's that?"
It just got me thinking, well,
the only way this
would be possible
is if by some miracle
this book can be a part
of the larger
groundswell of support
that might be able
to overturn the idea
that you need to be an
heir to fight for credit.
Maybe there could be
enough public support
to say there's enough proof
that this person was involved
that we don't need an
heir to make this right,
to make this whole again.

I mean, maybe that can happen,
I mean, laws get
overturned, right?
When I started this research,
we knew just about
zip about Bill's family
with the exception of the fact
that he had a son named Fred.
So I learned that
Fred was a chef,
and I know that he
had spent some time
on the west coast,
and it also turned out
that Fred had developed AIDS
and died in 1992.
He was the last surviving
heir of Bill Finger.
So my next approach was
to try to find people
on his first wife's side.
So her name was Portia,
and I decided to try
to look through the
New York Times obituaries.
Prior to 1981 if you get a hit,
you don't bring
up the actual obit,
you bring up the whole page
where that obit appears.
So I did this for hours,
and I eventually found
the obituary for
Portia's mother,
which means Bill's
mother-in-law,
and in that obituary
there were three names.
Fred, Bill's son, which
I already knew, of course,
and two of Fred's cousins,
Judy and Eric Flam.
So I searched them,
and it was at probably

about 11 o'clock at
night on the east coast.
Judy was in Massachusetts,
too late to call her,
as excited as I was,
but Eric was in Arizona,
so I called him right then.
And when I called Eric,
I said, "I'm a writer,
and I'm working on a project
about a writer
named Bill Finger."
And he said,
"What did you say?"
And I said, "Bill Finger,"
and he put the
phone to the side,
and he called to
his wife and said,
"This guy's calling
about Bill Finger!
Uncle Bill, no one's ever called
about Uncle Bill before!"
And then he came back
on the phone and said,
"Well, I don't know much.
My sister Judy would know more,
you can call her tomorrow,
but I think what
you really should do
is talk to Bill's
granddaughter."
And I said, "But Bill
doesn't have a granddaughter!"
He said, "No, but he does,"
and I said, "Well,
he had only one child,
Fred, who was gay,
and that was it,"
as if I would know
better than the family.
And Eric said, "That is true,
he did have a son
Fred who was gay,

but Fred had a daughter."
When I first heard those words,
"You should look for
Bill's granddaughter,"
I feel like I saw
a movie marquee,
and it said,
"The Heir to Batman."
And it made me feel
like this might be
a bigger story than
anybody realized.
The next day, I spoke with Judy.
Judy was the one who told me
that her name was Athena.
The best she
could do was give me
her last known state, Florida,
so I was back to square one,
looking for an heir that
we did not know existed.
I did not find an Athena Finger
in the Florida directory,
so I wasn't even sure
that that was accurate,
so I ended up looking online
for any mention of her,
and I found record
of her wedding.
She married a man
named Zaido Cruz.
So I found mention
of a Zaido Cruz
on the website of a drummer
whose name was Lance,
if I'm not mistaken.
And I emailed Lance and said,
"Is this the Zaido Cruz
who's married
to Athena Finger?"
And he said...
he wrote back,
and I never spoke with him,
but this is the voice

that I heard, he's like,
"Yeah, man, hey,
dude, I know Zaido!
Yeah, he's in my band!"
or "I've played with
him, we've jammed,
and you should
totally look him up,
and you should find
them and, you know,
Athena should
be easy to find!"
And I said, "How's that?"
And he said, "Well,
just look her up
on her Myspace page."
In 2007, I was not
thinking Myspace
or Facebook or
social media at all.
So that was a revelation,
so thanks, Lance!
So I looked Athena
up on Myspace,
and when I found the
only Athena Finger there,
the first thing I saw
was a photo of a dog,
and the caption was,
"My Dog, Bruce Wayne."
That was a fist pump moment.
I don't think I
literally stood up
and did a fist pump,
that's maybe not my character,
but in my mind I
was doing somersaults
and throwing the football down
and doing a dance
in the end zone.
That was my moment.
So I had that moment before,
I had that moment with Charles,
I had that moment with Lyn,

but those things filled in gaps.
They didn't completely
change the story.
We are en route to
see Athena Finger,
the only heir to Bill Finger.
This would be
a big shake-up.
If the credit line
to Batman was changed
after 72 years,
that would be a big deal,
and that would
actually be a first.
I can't think of
another comics character
whose credit line
has been changed.

- Hello... hey!
- Hey!
- How are you?
- How are you?
- Good, how are you?
- Good!
- And here's Bruce Wayne!
- That's Bruce Wayne!

How you doing?
I found out about Bill Finger
and his association with Batman
at an early age,
and I knew that my father
was excited and thrilled
about what his
father had created
with the Batman storyline,
and how he made it
what we love today.
Marc had found me,
and he explained
what he had been doing
and shared a bunch
of information
that he had found
that I didn't know

about Bill's family
and things like that.
She said to me, you know,
"I never knew my grandfather.
I was born two
years after he died,
so you could probably
tell me more about him
than I can tell you,
but I'm very interested
in hearing what
you have to say."
Bill used to keep copious notes.
He had gimmick books
where he would jot down
an idea that he
would use in the future,
- and a lot of it was...
- It was kind of exciting,
but it also was upsetting.
It brought up a lot
of this old stuff
that had been going on before...
around my father's death
and around my
grandfather's death,
and just how everything
was not really
in its proper place.
I told you that I found
an interview with your dad.
- Yes.
- And I have it.
Oh, you have it!
He had to write a lot of stories
in order to make
any kind of money.
He would get together
with a couple of
the other writers...
And I didn't know yet
that there was so much
trauma in the family.
It wasn't just a story of a girl

who never knew her grandfather.
It was also a story of a girl
who had issues with her father.
I haven't seen my
dad in, like, forever.
My parents split when
I was three and a half,
so I didn't grow up with my dad.
I only got to see him
maybe a couple times a year.
It was really like,
if we went to New York,
we would go to the restaurant
that he was working
at and have dinner,
or he might come
up to Massachusetts
and spend a couple days.
It wasn't like I
had extended amounts
of time with him,
which kind of sucked,
because I only had him
for such a short amount of time.
I was married six years.
I just understood
that he was bisexual
from the day that I met him,
and it wasn't a situation
that needed to be spoken of.
It was something
that we both understood
and accepted.
I learned that Fred
was HIV positive
the summer after I
was in the fourth grade,
so that's, what, 10?
I spent a week with
him during the summer,
and he and I were at
the beach in Long Island,
and he's like, "I
got to talk to you."

So he was explaining,
"This is what's going on,
and we don't know
how long I have."
And then when he
came to visit us
right before he passed away,
he was teeny-tiny,
just skin and bones.
I mean, he was down to nothing.
When he came to visit
near the real end of his life,
we asked him not to leave.
How did he respond,
what did he say?
He said, "I have to go back.
I have to die in New York."
That year was rough.
Being 15 at the time,
not quite an adult,
but had to deal
with real adult issues,
and I was very angry
about a lot of things.
And then, when he passed
away two months later,
I wasn't included,
I wasn't informed,
I wasn't...
I just was excluded
from everything.
I was really upset about it,
very angry about it
because I was his only child
and I should have been
there and I wasn't.
AIDS was still very new
and stigmatized
and scary.
There was a lot of comfort
being with people who are
experiencing the same thing
and he created
a family of friends

that were there
when it got tough.
So New York was where
he really had to be,
he felt.
I still don't have closure.
I was excluded from everything.
I really was.
Sorry.
I wasn't even there
to spread his ashes.
I don't even know where he is.
When Marc Nobleman called me,
I said to him, "I'm not sure
that this is beneficial
to our family welfare,
for this to be
brought up again."
We tried our hardest to do
something about it in the past.
I mean, I love Fred and
I wanted credit for Bill,
but we had spent years trying
to get the credit for him.
Fred really just wanted
his father to have recognition.
It was very important
for Fred to validate
the existence of his father
and his artistic talents
and he gave it his best.
I never went to DC,
Fred went to DC alone,
but I understand the way
that it was dealt with.
They treated you
like you were family
but gave you nothing
in return for it.
Anything to make you
feel comfortable
but they were keeping
everything for themselves.
After about the third attorney,

Fred just said, "We just need to stop this, Bonnie, and go on."
So Fred never got to see his father get, on the screen, "Co-creator William Finger."
The tradition in our family, unfortunately, is being excluded from everything.
There is this sense of not being acknowledged, of what I'm part of and who my family was.
I remember in the third grade we had to do this book on our lives, so I included the information about my grandfather and his involvement with Batman and stuff and people wouldn't believe me or they questioned me.
So for a long time I kept quiet about it, especially after my father passed away.
I always kind of referred to it as, like, the dark cloud that hung over my head because it was something that I knew that needed to be corrected, just didn't know which avenue to take.
So it was always, like, looming.
I wasted no time in telling Athena that I would be disappointed in myself if I didn't tell you that this is your birthright and I thought for a year that nobody could ever do

anything about this credit line,
and I'm going to
write this book,
but if we want a shot at
changing that credit line,
it has to be you."

I had been told for a long time
that it was kind of a dead issue
and I shouldn't really pursue it
and I should just let it be,
and it would take tons of money
and, like, all
these other excuses
of why I shouldn't pursue
adding Bill's credit.

I encouraged Athena
to contact DC
and at first she was
not keen on that.

She was a young mom
with a career and a life
and she said, "Of course
I've thought about this,
but this is too daunting.

I mean, where do
you even start?"

It took some
convincing of Marc to,
"Athena, go, talk to them.
Call this person."

I'm like, "Eh, I don't know."

Like, I was really hesitant.

I didn't know what to expect.

But as soon as I spoke to them,
they invited me up to come
and take a tour of the office
when it was still
in New York City,
which was very cool.

So then after that,
we went to the movie premiere
for "The Dark Knight"
and did the whole red carpet
and then the afterparty.

It was just like, "Woo!"
It was awesome.
It was a really amazing scene
seeing all these people
and it was like Hollywood.
Like, it was so
cool to be there.
Like, "Oh my gosh,
I'm a part of this."
And then they just kept
inviting me to things.
You know, just really
accepting and, like,
"Please, join in."
PR people got in touch with me
and informed me that they were
going to pay for the room
and fly me and
my friend out here.
I get to play movie star
for a little while.
The whole thing was very fast.
Finding the heir and then DC
being quite cooperative
about the whole process.
I was very surprised
by how that all happened.
They were very generous
and they did send me
a bonus sum of money
for the movie.
It said, you know,
"This is," you know,
"for his contributions."
You know, "We're so glad that
you're part of the family now."
So I was like,
"Oh, this is nice."
The term "Thank you payment,"
it's a case where a
company writes a writer
or an artist a check
and says, "We're giving you this
because you contributed

something or other
to this character."
I guess that's the kind of
thing that the companies
have wanted to do
in the last few decades
as the things got to be
really big business.
There's so much money involved
and nobody wants
a lot of lawsuits.
So it just makes a lot of sense
giving a few thousand dollars,
\$10,000 or \$20,000 to somebody.
You know, somewhere between
creator credit and hush money.
The Bill Finger story
has a number of imperatives.
There's the cultural
side of this,
there is the moral side of this,
there is the
financial side of this.
How much is Batman worth now?
A gob!
What are you talking about?
It's movies,
it's toys, it's pajamas,
it's cartoons, it's comi...
I mean, it's a vernacular.
You say "Batman" to a grandma...
This is the greatest brand...
"Batman," grandma
knows through attrition.
When you open a comic
book, there it says,
"Created by Bob Kane."
When you see the movies, it
says, "Created by Bob Kane."
Correcting that is something
that terrified everybody,
I think, for decades
because correcting that
isn't just a simple matter

of putting Bill Finger's name onto Batman. It also opens up the floodgates to a massive conglomerate for potential revenue tapping. DC Comics is one spoke in the massive operation that is Warner Brothers, which is underneath Time Warner. So, I mean, it's a huge media company, of course, and Batman is one of the biggest money makers in fiction, period. So DC was under the umbrella of Warner Brothers but as soon as we got to "The Dark Knight Rises," Warner Brothers was really overseeing all of the corporate side. Which brings me into in 2012 when "The Dark Knight Rises" came out and I got an email saying, you know, "We would like to have you sign this document so that we can cut you a check, so sign it and please return." But the gist of it was they wanted me to terminate my rights to any kind of claim. They wanted me to close the door on Bill getting any kind of credit. They were trying to make me quiet. Yeah, right?

- So is this for you?

- Yes, please.

Alex or Alex...

- Alex.

- Okay.

I had this blind faith all along
that I would see the book
through to publication.

Although, believe me,
there were plenty of roadblocks
and obstacles.

So getting the book out
was a huge accomplishment;
just to see any book through
is something I'm proud of.

The book came out in 2012
and with it came a
chance to talk about Bill
in an arena that was
even bigger than a book.

Secret identities
are for superheroes,
not the guys behind them.

I had the chance
to do a TED Talk.

Bill Finger's life
ended tragically,
but his story isn't over yet.

I was interviewed on NPR.

Now if you've seen

"The Dark Knight Rises,"
the name not there
is that of Bill Finger.

I had the chance to go
on Kevin Smith's podcast.

Does he have heirs,
is there a family?

Yeah, well, that
was the biggest, uh,
discovery of my research.

Legally I can't do
anything to change this,
but she can.

She is Batgirl
for heaven's sakes.

When you have somebody
who's speaking that loudly,
advocating that loudly

on behalf of a cause,
something is going to get done.
It incited this bubbling
movement, you know,
where suddenly
you started hearing
more and more about Bill Finger.
He had no Batman of his own,
but I think you are
Bill Finger's Batman,
for heaven's sakes.
You're the one that's
going to find him justice.
I kept talking
about raising an army
and groundswell of support,
but I never actually
stopped to think about,
"Well, those are people too."
So that did start to really
become my driving force
was I can't let
all these people down.
So I was doing some
groundwork on one level,
but we needed
something else to happen
on another level.
It had been a year
since Marc Nobleman's
book had been out.
So more people were
starting to contact me,
"Are you really
Bill's granddaughter?"
(laughter)
And this is her
first convention ever.
(applause)
I brought Athena
into the conventions.
Whether we're talking about
a Wizard World convention,
or San Diego,

or the New York Comic Con,
I brought her into
a number that year,
to meet the fans
and to get her out
from those curtains that
she was staying behind,
to meet other people.
I had never been to a
formal convention before,
any of that stuff.
So I did my first panel,
I was so nervous.
I'm like, "I don't even know
what we're talking about."
The fans would ask her
questions and she would say,
"I'm learning about
these things from you."
She was learning things
about her grandfather
and the legacy and
exactly what Bill did
from all of us
because she'd grown up
with it being this thing
to be uncomfortable about.
Was it not just this wonderful
thing to tell everybody,
"Hey, my granddad was
one of the co-creators
of Batman," when
you were growing up?
Well, you would think
it would be a great thing,
but, um, growing up,
no, it wasn't.
I shied away from
talking about it.
As I got older...
She's not eager to talk
to the crowd herself,
she's eager to get
the information out,

so she's doing it anyway.
And I think that's a bit heroic.
Part of Athena's
grieving process
is going to Comic
Con and talking
about her grandfather
and her father.
It's wonderful to see.
And he would be
right there with her
because it was something
Fred wanted for his father.
- Okay.
- There we go.
There was so much
support from people.
They really, really
wanted to see Bill's name
attached to Batman,
as it should be.
Comic book fans, their
fights are on the page.
They don't bring it into
the real world or anything.
But the fights that
they do get involved in,
it's not fisticuffs,
it's battles for what is right.
And how could they not?
Because the characters
they read about
all the time do the same thing.
Those are your role
models on the page.
So while Bill
didn't train people
to fight for him
after he was dead,
you have a bunch
of people who read
and were influenced by
the work of Bill Finger,
like this is what's right,

this is what's just.
So that's really where I
got a lot of pressure from,
was from the fans.
"Why isn't this happening?
Why isn't his name attached?
What's happening?
Why... what, what, what?
Tell me, tell me, tell me.
How, how, how?
Do, do, do."
And so I knew that
something was going
to come out of it.
In 2014, WonderCon was
held in Anaheim, California,
and there was this Batman panel.
And an audience member
gets up to the microphone
and asks this question about,
"Will Bill Finger get credit?"
And there's just
silence up there.
One member of the
panel says, "Crickets."
And a person working for DC,
Larry Ganem,
gets up and he says that,
"We're all good with
Finger and his family."
And that was when, "Okay,
we've got to reply to this."
Athena and I put
the statement together that,
"No, things are not all good
with the Finger family."
Timing is everything.
75th anniversary
of Batman's coming up,
it was the hundred
year anniversary
of my grandfather's birth,
it was the 25th
anniversary of the '89 movie.

Like all this stuff was
coming together in 2014.
I called Athena
and we had a huge cry
over Fred being gone.
And then we discussed it.
Maybe it's time that Bill Finger
got the recognition he deserved.
And that's when
it became a fight.
I felt that the
timing was right.
I knew it was
either now or never.
And I think I
called my sister first.
We have different fathers,
she's older than I am.
She felt like it was
really a burden in her life
to have inherited this
controversy, basically.
Knowing that I was the
only one that could do it
was a huge burden.
So it really... I wanted
to get it finished
knowing that I
only had one chance.
Being an attorney,
I... I was able
to assess what resources
we had and didn't have.
So she contacted me
because she was seeking
a copyright attorney to help her
with the situation.
The copyright law says
that when two people
create parts of something
that are intended to be merged
into an inseparable work,
then it's a joint work
and each of them

is a co-owner.
So coming into this, one of
the most commonly cited facts
of Batman lore is that Bob Kane
negotiated a contract
in which he would be
the sole creator
in perpetuity of Batman,
he would be the only
name listed as creator.
The only thing I've always
gotten from the people
that I have talked to at DC is,
"We know what
your grandfather did,
we wish we could
put his name on it,
but we can't because of
the contracts that we have."
This infamous Bob Kane contract
has never been
publicly disclosed,
as expected.
I mean, these are big
characters, big companies,
they have no obligation so share
all of their contents
of their vault.
If any company had an agreement
that clearly spelled
out their rights
and that shut down
a copyright claim,
it seems to me that
they would produce that.
I don't know why you wouldn't.
It might be hearsay,
it might be a myth
that DC Comics is perpetuating
because it helps them.
Or it might be real
and the original source was Bob.
That is another
interesting thing

about the copyright law
that was in play here.
Somebody is simply claiming
that they are the sole
author when they're not,
that's not really...
That doesn't really do it.
So then you look at what
did Bill Finger contribute?
Did that make him a joint author
or joint owner of the work?
Marc Tyler Nobleman
sort of taking this case on,
delving into the research,
and then, of course, Bob Kane,
you know, eventually
kind of helped
by talking about Bill's
contribution himself.
Um, that was very important.
If poor Athena,
like, had to start
with that threshold issue,
that just would have been
really, really difficult.
I mean, this is a huge
with an entire department
of, you know, attorneys.
And then there's,
you know, Athena Finger.
Sadly, for people
who are creating stories
about superheroes
who are selfless
and saving people's lives,
there's not a whole lot
of generosity going on here.
You've got creators fighting
a company over a character.
And, you know, it's a classic
David and Goliath story.
And in these cases, usually
the underdog doesn't win.
As teenagers in

Cleveland in 1933,
these two boys
signed a piece of paper
that, in effect,
sold their rights,
and they sold them for \$130.
Well, they were just kids
and they were so anxious
to get published,
so anxious for recognition,
that they signed away
their copyright.
Superman became what Superman is
because of DC building Superman
to the industry that it is.
But still, Siegel and Shuster
deserved a lot
more than they got.
You know, they made
a couple of efforts
to get greater credit.
In their 1947 suit,
Siegel and Shuster did not
get ownership of Superman.
They did get \$94,000 more,
but National Periodical
then owned Superman and Superboy
and fired Siegel and Shuster.
The creators of Superman
first sued over credit in 1947.
They were still working
for the company at the time.
So they lost the lawsuit,
they lost their jobs,
and the company
that became DC Comics
took their name off Superman.
In 1963, Siegel and Shuster
started another suit,
this one to win
back the copyright
when it came up
for renewal in 1966.
The court finding,

"Superman belongs to National Periodical." Long story short is Superman has been the subject of litigation almost from the beginning, and it's been going on for decades at this point. And most of the major players are gone, so it's passed on to the second generation. When you're dealing with something so big, the stakes are big on either side of a challenge, of a contest. And, you know, the Superman situation would not have instilled a lot of confidence that you can win. To push this type of a claim further, you have to have the means and, frankly, the money to do it. And no single person, really, even if you had multi-millions in the bank, would want to go through that risk. We would have been possibly investing five to ten years of our life entering into a litigation against a multi-national corporation. Frankly, it was my strategy to not go down that road, but to, of course, make it appear that we would. We're going back so far in time. If we're going to assume

that all of these things
that people said in
the press were true
about Bill Finger and
about his contribution
and the way it went down,
then they each own half
of Batman as a whole.
There could be an argument
from the corporation's side
that it's not a joint work
because he was employee.
I've never heard of any document
that said that he was.
I never heard of
a document that said
he was working under
a work for hire.
So, here's step one and step two
and step three and step four
and all this leads
to, hypothetically,
yeah, you take it back.
That's the leverage
of the copyright law,
to actually allow
people to take it back
or to put that large corporation
in the position of
having to renegotiate
their royalties
or whatever it is.
I do believe that there
was risk on both sides
and we had highlighted
enough of that risk
to get them to talk to us,
and that was the goal.
I didn't imagine that I would
actually be at
the final meeting,
but it took place in July,
it was closed door negotiations,
and it was a big deal on

so many different levels.
Somebody has a goal and
somebody else has a goal
and how do you negotiate
and maybe not
make everybody happy,
but make everyone
not horribly miserable.
I don't know if they could tell,
but I was very nervous.
We really wanted to get credit,
but we didn't know which
way this was going to go,
we really didn't.
There came a point where
I wasn't leading the charge
anymore because I'm not family,
and there's only so far I
can go without being family.

Hey, Raf-bear.

- Good to see you, boy.

- Hello.

- How's my favorite fuzzi-ball?

- Good.

Yeah?

So in the summer of 2015,
everything was building.

I could feel it.

And in September,
it felt like we were getting
to that tipping point.

It was September
18th, it was a Friday.

I travel a lot,
but I happened to
be home that day,

In fact, I was home alone.

And by chance I had
this set of things

I had to do for the day,
and, very atypically,

I finished it
pretty much before noon.

And the tweets and the emails

and the blog posts
and the Facebook posts
started to pour in.
And I had a couple
hours to myself
where I was just
catatonic almost.
The first person in
my family to come home
was my daughter.
Did you see it?
Yeah!
What did it say?
"DC to give Bill
Finger official credit
on 'Batman'" versus, I think,
'Superman' and 'Gotham'?"
Mm-hm.
They're giving him the credit?
They're giving him credit now.
What?
What?
(laughs)
How did you do that?
How did you do that?
"You did it, Marc, you got
justice for Bill Finger
and righted a lifetime wrong!
You are Batman for Bill!"
That's Kevin Smith.
There's quite a big difference
between me and Batman,
but I'll accept that
as a nice compliment.
"Bill Finger getting
his justice."
That's from Kevin Conroy,
who was the voice of Batman
since the beginning of

Batman:

"On my honeymoon
in Mexico from Ireland.
Just saw the news.

Thrilled for you, Bill,
and the Finger family."
But I'm pretty sure one
person who wasn't thrilled
was his new bride,
whose new husband is
tweeting about Batman
on his honeymoon.
But thank you very much, Burke.
"DC Entertainment and
the family of Bill Finger
are pleased to announce
that they have
reached an agreement
that recognizes Mr. Finger's
significant contributions
to the Batman
family of characters.
We are pleased to confirm today
that Bill Finger will
be receiving credit
in the Warner Brothers
television series 'Gotham'
and in the forthcoming
motion picture,
'Batman v Superman:
Dawn of Justice.'"
Our goal was to get
Bill's name attached.
That's what we did.
We changed history.
But in 25 years of
writing Batman comics,
1,500 stories in all,
including the first one,
Bill's name appeared
in a Batman comic
as the co-creator,
or the original writer,
exactly zero times.
Because Bob Kane said...
I have often asked myself,
"Why has he been doing
this for all these years?"

And I do believe he's
just passionate about it.
He does believe in the
causes that he writes about.
You're probably wondering
if I found any photos
of Bill Finger in the backyard
mowing the lawn
with his shirt off.
And the answer is
yes, yes, I did.
(laughter)
You're welcome, ladies.
The driving force though, still,
is to right a wrong
and to try to stay
on that good side.
So you can't see Bill
too well from where you are,
but he's there in the shadows.
Marc always strives for equality
and it's really his whole being,
I mean, that's him.
He's very brave,
he's a very brave person.
He really... if he thinks
that something is not fair,
he will go for it.
So I think that this is
not the end, to be honest.
There's always
more to the story.
I mean, what I always
say is that no story
from history ends in a period.
They all end in a dot, dot, dot.
We're just waiting for someone
to find the next part.
Do you want to do
lashes as well?
- Sure.
- Yeah?
Again, I'm going to be
on film and stuff,

- so I want to...
- Yeah, we can add
- the lashes if you like.
- Okay.

So what are you
guys filming for?

It's a documentary
about my grandfather.

He was the original writer
and co-creator of Batman.

- No kidding.
- Mm-hm.

That is awesome.

(laughs)

I don't have black socks.

Almost there.

All right, Alethia, tell me,
is it okay with the leather?

This is my tenth

Batman premiere,

but it's very special

because this is the first time

that Bill Finger is

getting onscreen credit

in a major motion picture

for his co-creation of Batman.

And that's very,

very exciting to me.

It's amazing that

so many years later,

we are now en route

with his granddaughters

and great-grandson

going to a premiere

in which his name finally is

going to be up on the screen.

I'm very excited.

It was a curse in our lives.

Bill was unknown, unrespected.

My dad was in the same position.

I was trying to cope

with my father's death.

I'm hoping that I've broken that

by getting the closure for Bill,

for myself, and for my son,
so that we can move forward
and not have this dark cloud
following us around.
It's been ten years that
I've been telling this story,
and to hear that Bill
died and was buried
in a pauper's grave,
in a potter's field,
was devastating,
and that was the only
story that anybody knew.
Until I found two people
who both knew Fred,
Bill's son,
and who both told me
a different story.
So what these two people said
was that Fred did come
forward after Bill died
and just... he was not
there the day that he died,
which is why he doesn't appear
in the medical examiner report.
Fred had his father cremated,
and he was living
in Oregon at the time.
And he took the ashes
to the shoreline
near where he lived.
Spread them on the sand
in the shape of a bat.
And let the water come in
and wash it out to sea.
Have fun.
Uh, one "Batman
v Superman" please?