



Episode 810, Story 1: WB Cartoons

Tukufu Zuberi: Our first case attempts to animate the hidden history of these cartoon drawings. March 1935: Porky Pig makes his debut in *I Haven't Got a Hat*, and quickly becomes the star of Warner Bros' Looney Tunes series. A parade of groundbreaking characters follow: Daffy Duck, Bugs Bunny, The Roadrunner. By the 1940's, Porky Pig and his Looney Tunes entourage overthrow the reigning king of cartoon shorts: Walt Disney's Mickey Mouse. But did an earlier cartoon creature attempt to topple King Mickey from his throne? Bruce Cockerill of San Ramon, California, has made a discovery that may shed light on the scrappy, early days of cartoon animation.

Bruce Cockerill: I found these drawings in a salvage yard in Berkeley, California and I have no idea what they are.

Tukufu: I'm Tukufu Zuberi, and I'm taking a first peek at Bruce's curious drawings.

Bruce: Here, I've got something to show you.

Tukufu: Alright, what have you got? Where did you get these from?

Bruce: At a salvage yard in Berkley, California.

Tukufu: Interesting. I mean this doesn't look like anything I've ever seen. And I watched cartoons when I was a kid.

Bruce: Okay. Me too. And I don't know much about them either.

Tukufu: You know who this guy is or this character is?

Bruce: No idea. No idea. Well I see Mickey Mouse in one.

Tukufu: This is definitely Mickey Mouse.



Bruce: And they're on plastic.

Tukufu: So this came with these?

Bruce: Right.

Tukufu: Do you know who this person is? Charlotte Darling?

Bruce: No idea.

Tukufu: What is it you want me to find out for you?

Bruce: How they ended up together, and to know if they were an important part of cartoon history.

Tukufu: Do you mind if I spend a little time just looking at them?

Bruce: Sure that's fine.

Tukufu: While I recognize some of the cartoon characters, several I have never seen before. Let's look at this one. Kind of a drawing and painting on plastic. The plastic itself feels crinkly and brittle, and you can see where the paint is chipping off in places, making me think these are fairly old. And this thing here, just like almost out of place. The drawing of the woman in bed is a little different from the other characters. There are signatures, and a message. 'We hope you'll soon be up and well. Charlotte Darling'. One thing is common is this little boy here is the most frequently illustrated image. My colleague Elyse Luray, has appraised many classic cartoons. She's recommended I meet Mike Van Eaton, a cartoon expert and collector who owns Van Eaton Galleries in Sherman Oaks, California.

Mike Van Eaton: Welcome to Van Eaton Galleries. Well, show me what you got.

Tukufu: Let me show you what I got. What is this?

Mike: This is a production drawing.



Tukufu: Ok, what does that mean?

Mike: Well, it's part of the process of making the animation for cartoons. Everything starts with a drawing; an animator draws with a pencil on paper. Oh, great! Now these are production cells.

Tukufu: Cells? And exactly what is a cel? Mike explains that cel is short for celluloid, a flexible, transparent sheet of plastic which would be laid over the production drawing to be traced and painted. He can tell by the feel exactly what kind of celluloid it is.

Mike: Now this one's made out of nitrate, so I know it's from the early '30s, maybe into the mid maybe early '40s.

Tukufu: Oh really?

Mike: Yeah. It's a type of reel that was used that was actually very flammable. Later on they changed to a more monocel called acetate.

Tukufu: The cells would then be filmed one at a time. And when that film was played back, you had an animated cartoon. I show Mike some more of Bruce's collection.

Mike: Wow! This is great! This is extremely rare. I do know this cartoon; it's one of the first color cartoons ever made.

Tukufu: Oh really?

Mike: Yeah, this is called the Snowman. It's done by a guy in New York named Ted Eshbaugh back in the early '30s. And of course that's Mickey Mouse right there. Now these are a little different. This is somebody practicing the inking technique, see, just doing the black lines onto the cel.

Tukufu: Oh really?



Mike: That's why it's not painted on the back, doesn't have any numbers on the bottom like these which indicate the sequence of the order that they're going to film.

Tukufu: Mike is excited to see such an early Mickey. He explains how by the early 1930s, Walt Disney's mouse had become the undisputed king of cartoons, after the success of *Steamboat Willie* in 1928. It was the first Disney cartoon with synchronized sound, and the audiences couldn't get enough.

Tukufu: So, I have several of these.

Mike: Oh, yeah. That's great.

Tukufu: Do you know this cartoon? Mike is fairly sure he recognizes the character. It takes a little rummaging, but we soon find a similar drawing.

Mike: Oh, you've got a pretty good eye. That's Buddy, and he's a Warner Brother's Studio character in the early 1930s. 1933 he came out with his girlfriend Cookie. Unfortunately, they weren't that popular, so after about two years he was gone.

Tukufu: Wow! So now we know who are guy is: Buddy.

Mike: And you know it's from Warner Bros Studio.

Tukufu: But Mike's not sure why we have such a curious mixture of production cells and drawings from competing animation studios. So, I have one more thing to show you.

Mike: Great.

Tukufu: What do you think about this?

Mike: This is not a production cel at all.



Tukufu: Mike guesses it's some kind of get well card for Charlotte Darling. And although he doesn't know the name, he has an idea of who she might have been. She probably worked in the Ink and Paint Department sometime in the early '30s.

Tukufu: The Ink and Paint Department — what is that?

Mike: Well, you know what? Rather than try to explain it, it's probably best I show you and I'll give you a demonstration.

Tukufu: Mike takes me to Woodbury University in Burbank to meet Dori Littell-Herrick, the chair of the Animation Department.

Dori Littell-Herrick: So this is animation art, what would have come to the Ink and Paint Department, and I'm going to get a cel and I'm going to ink the drawing.

Tukufu: Now, is this how they would have done it in the 1930s?

Dori: It's similar to what they would have done. I'm actually going to use a new piece of technology, a paint pen. They would have worked with quills.

Tukufu: Dori explains that the animation department, made up entirely of men, created all of the initial production drawings. Although she's not familiar with the name Charlotte Darling, Dori tells me she could not have been an animator, because women were excluded from these higher paid positions. Instead, they worked in the Ink and Paint Department. And were often paid less than \$3 per day for the pain-staking work of tracing the drawings onto cells and painting in the colors. It wasn't until the late '30s that animators were able to successfully form unions such as the Screen Cartoonists Guild.

Dori: The Ink and Paint women were really talented artists. They brought a lot of skill to the animation film making process in the way they inked. The lines you saw on the screen whenever you looked at an animated film in the days of ink and paint would have been done by the women in the Ink and Paint Department.



Tukufu: Ok, so back in the 1930s about how many of these cells would they need to paint for a typical cartoon?

Dori: Ah, they'd paint about 5,000 cells, maybe 10 for a regular cartoon.

Mike: After they inked these 10,000 or so cells and painted all these cells and then filmed them onto the camera, the studio norm was to wash them off so that they could reuse the cel material again.

Dori: There you go.

Tukufu: Wow. If most cells were eventually erased and reused, why did somebody save so many Buddy cells? Jerry Beck is a cartoon historian and Warner Brother's expert.

Jerry Beck: These are amazing.

Tukufu: He says the Buddy cartoons are a real find.

Jerry: He was part of the early, early period of the Looney Tunes.

Tukufu: They date from a moment in animation history when Warner Bros was launching an attack on Disney's Mickey Mouse empire.

Jerry: Mickey was the big character that Disney had. And all the other Hollywood studios wanted to compete. For example: This is Bosko. He was the first star of the very first Looney Tune in 1930.

Tukufu: Like many early cartoons, Bosko was a minstrel character based around the racial stereotypes of blackface Vaudeville performers. But Jerry explains that Bosko's duel with Mickey was short lived.



Jerry: The problem was, the two animators who created him wanted more money, they wanted to make the cartoons better, they had a little dispute with the producer and they split. They said 'Bye-bye, we're going to take our character somewhere else.'

Tukufu: Warner Bros was left scrambling for another character to take on Disney.

Jerry: So they came up with something really, really fast. It was kind of a derivative version of a stand-in version of Bosko which they called Buddy, who was just a little boy.

Tukufu: So what you're telling me is that Buddy was going head-to-head with Mickey Mouse! Why don't we know who Buddy was? We know Porky Pig, we know Bugs Bunny, we know all of the Looney Tunes, but we don't know Buddy.

Jerry: Buddy was really the end of an era. He was the last of the singing and dancing, optimistic, Depression-era Mickey Mouse-like characters that really all of the cartoon studios were doing back then.

Tukufu: In 1935, Warner Bros found a team of young animators with new ideas, and Buddy and Cookie were shown the door.

Jerry: The idea of Buddy and his musical cartoons was a little too stifling for these new young guys. These young guys included Chuck Jones, Bob Clampett, Tex Avery and Frank Tashlin. They were just the amazing group that created what we think of as the Warner Bros cartoons; this new comedic attitude where they broke the fourth wall and talked directly to the audience, you know, for a gag.

RECORDING: "You know, that duck's screwy!"

Tukufu: It was this innovative style which valued comedy over cuteness that would eventually help make Looney Tunes the most popular short cartoons in America. Jerry's also confused why cells from Disney and independent animators are mixed in with a collection dominated by Warner Bros characters. He thinks this cel, the only one in the collection not of a recognizable cartoon character might be the key.



Jerry: Obviously it's a get well card, and the ladies signed it and they made a little cel for her to put it in her hospital bed. And what's great for me is that there's a whole bunch of names on there that I'd never heard before. These are the unsung artists in animation history.

Tukufu: But one name Jerry does recognize: Charlotte Darling. He says she was part of Warner Brothers Ink and Paint Department, and suggests I speak with someone who knew her back then. Martha Sigall also worked in Warner Bros' Ink and Paint Department in the 1930s.

Tukufu: Alright, so this is what I have. That look familiar to you?

Martha: A little bit, yes, that's Buddy! There's Buddy in the car with Cookie. Yeah, that's cute. Oh yeah, that's wonderful. Oh gee, these are really old.

Tukufu: Then I have this. Now, do you know the women here?

Martha: I recognize every one of them. They were inkers when I came to work there. Jerry Brimhall — she left her gooseneck lamp on. These cells are flammable, and it got too close to the cells and it started a fire. Oh, Mabel Andes, she was a painter, she was a fabulous woman. We had such a deep appreciation for each other. Ah, everyday there was something fun; I couldn't wait to get to work in the morning. Isn't that amazing? Charlotte started as an inker, she was a very good artist. She was always dressed very sophisticatedly.

Tukufu: Right, she was a sharp dresser.

Martha: Sharp dresser. One of the first people to sign up for the Guild, and she was always trying to raise money, a few cents at a time.

Tukufu: Martha explains that the Screen Cartoonists Guild played a big role in their lives. While the women loved to come to work, many believed they were being paid too little because they were women. Charlotte was one of these protesters.



Martha: Kind of politically Left-wing. One of the girls said to her: "Charlotte, are you a Communist?" and she said, "Yes I am, and I'm proud of it!" and she says: "We're not trying to overthrow the government, it's not what you think. We just want to make working conditions and life better for people."

Tukufu: Wow.

Martha: So, that was Charlotte.

Tukufu: So, she was a pretty interesting woman?

Martha: Very interesting woman.

Tukufu: Have you ever seen a cel like this or do you remember this character?

Martha: Not at all; I've never seen that character,

Tukufu: This is a piece by a guy named, I think it's Ted Eshbaugh.

Martha: Oh! That strikes a bell! Because Charlotte did work for him!

Tukufu: Martha says Charlotte had also worked for other top animation studios, including Disney and Hanna-Barbera. The collection had evidently belonged to Charlotte.

Martha: If it hadn't been for that get well cel, I don't think we'd ever know.

Tukufu: I can't wait to tell Bruce the story behind his collection. But Jerry Beck wants me to swing by a movie theater in West Hollywood. It seems he's made another discovery.

Tukufu: So which film is this?

Jerry: This is *Buddy's Day Out*.



Tukufu: Wait a minute! What I see next will certainly interest Bruce. We were able to find out that this guy was a very pivotal character in the development of animation history in this country. His name is Buddy. Buddy was going toe-to-toe with Mickey Mouse. The connection is Charlotte Darling because Charlotte worked for all of the major animators in the Golden Age of animation. And this is a card that her colleagues made her; they were in the Ink and Paint Department.

Bruce: Oh my goodness! Wow!

Tukufu: But your story didn't end there. I tell Bruce about my surprise visit to the movie theater with Jerry Beck. Wait a minute! That's the same scene pictured in our cell!

Jerry: Yes, that's the exact drawing, the exact cel that's been photographed in 1933 and here it is in this film. This is the first Looney Tunes cartoon to star Buddy and Cookie and the baby, Elmer, so you've got a series of cells from the very first Buddy cartoon. These are very, very rare. You're holding not just a piece of the film, you're holding the original art. It's like touching Judy Garland or, you know, Fred Astaire. It's the actual thing that was photographed by the camera.

Tukufu: This is the very first Buddy cartoon. These cells were used to make this cartoon.

Bruce: I'm speechless! That's incredible.

Tukufu: Now, so what do you think about this collection now?

Bruce: I have to put it in a bank vault or something! I'm dumbfounded. Oh, that's fantastic! This is truly a jewel. Yeah. Thank you very much.

Tukufu: Thank you!

Bruce: Thank you. Amazing.

Tukufu: Decades after encouraging her co-workers to unionize, Charlotte Darling's activism and Communist associations apparently caught the attention of government officials. In 1953, she was called to testify in front of the House Un-American Activities Committee in Los Angeles. She



confirmed her membership in the Communist Party up until 1946, but stated that her interest stemmed from her desire to organize cartoonists. In her testimony, she also named the names of four other Communist Party members. In 1985, Charlotte received a Golden Award from the Screen Cartoonists Guild for 50 years of service in the industry. Charlotte died in 1990.