



secret asian man

## Faculty Feature!

### Learn about Tak Toyoshima, Instructor and Exhibiting Artist at South Shore Art Center

Written by Joey Faulkner & Ben Foley,  
Artists, Writers and High School Students at Pilgrim Area Collaborative

**Have you ever** had the opportunity to interview someone who is a success in the field you want to get into? Two young adults had this opportunity. What follows is their interview with artist and public speaker, Tak Toyoshima.

**Tak is a local artist** and public speaker, famous for his “Secret Asian Man” comic strip. He was the Creative Director of DigBoston and is now the Creative Director at Rustic Marlin in Hanover. He was kind enough to spend a little time with us and answer questions about his life and work. He was also kind enough to share tips to guide our own artistic endeavors.

**Tak’s father** was a sculptor and mom a dress-maker. His brother was also artistic but didn’t choose an artistic career. His family encouraged and supported artistic talents, and that helped to inspire him. Art came naturally to Tak. He says his drawing skills are more self-taught than a skill he was born with, and it is a skill that he continues to work on and improve.

**Growing up in New York’s Chinatown with Japanese heritage** provided Tak with life experiences. Some of his characters and stories came from his youth. He said it was “a therapy for me to draw”. He likes to tell stories about his experiences or topics he feels are important. As his art progressed, the stories and characters grew beyond his immediate experience. Major influences include Frank Miller, Sam Kieth and Frank Frazetta. Anime and manga influenced his work as much as Western comics.

**We asked Tak about becoming a public speaker** and how he finds the confidence to do it. He got invitations from college professors and then from a “speaking agency” that became interested in him. This gave him a lot of practice, the key to gaining confidence. He recommended having something to say, and making sure the audience gets something out of it. He likes to involve the audience in his public speaking and this can take the talk along unexpected paths.

**Tak talked about character representations** and how he tries to change comic book ideas. There are a lack of Asian characters and female characters. When female characters were created, they tended to have names like “Batgirl” and “Supergirl”, as opposed to “Batman” and “Superman.” Comic book artists are now trying different things, for example, a female Thor. Tak observed that originally, “comics were written for kids, but those kids grew up” and became the artists of the future, so comics have evolved along with the fans.



Picture 1: Joey, Tak and Ben at South Shore Art Center

## SECRET ASIAN MAN by Tak Toyoshima

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**Tak first got paid for his work** when he was in his mid-20s. He asked neighborhood store owners if they would give him a little shelf space. When they sold his comics for a dollar, he got his fifty cents. Eventually, he got his fan art published in *Wizard* magazine alongside his comic-writer heroes. This, while being a great opportunity, also created additional pressure for him to improve his work, deadlines, and take the work more seriously. This led him into working on a comic book called *The Tick*. Tak published his comics in many newspapers. Various steps that are involved in creating a comic for publication, include writing, penciling, inking and coloring. It can take a long time to create a single comic book page. The covers of a comic, in particular, can be very time consuming. He shared some of the differences between the processes of a one-man operation and a large national brand (e.g., Marvel or DC Comics).

**Take says the Amateur Press Association** is helpful for artists. It is an opportunity for artists to get constructive feedback from other artists in a supportive and non-competitive environment, helping artists to realize what they do well, and what might need a little more work. It helps artists to get practice in producing work to a deadline and receiving constructive feedback. Having a deadline makes it feel more real, but also makes it more exciting and scary.

**Tak got into graphic design** when he started using computers, and was hired by a newspaper. When his work went online, it felt strange when he realized his work was now “out there for people to do with as they pleased.” His artwork led to online discussions and fan fiction based on his work. He enjoys participating in the “Massachusetts Independent Comics Expo” (M.I.C.E.), a 3-day show held at Lesley University in Cambridge, featuring independent artists. It gives him an opportunity to support his artist friends. He also helped create Comic Con at South Shore Art Center in Cohasset.

**Tak’s favorite movie genres** are fantasy, science fiction, and superhero movies such as “The Avengers.” We asked if he drew any inspiration from movies and he said he likes to draw characters he sees but put his own twist on them. Finally, we wrapped up, with Tak giving us personal, practical, artistic advice regarding our own artistic pursuits.

**Tak was a fun interviewee. We learned a lot from him and enjoyed our conversation.**

**About the Authors:**

Joey and Ben are young adults who are both students at the Pilgrim Area Collaborative and budding artists. Joey loves to draw cartoon characters of his own design, his primary characters are "Teddy and Squeak" who get into a variety of adventures. Ben enjoys writing articles about his scientific interests as well as short science-fiction stories. Both young men have been published in Duxbury High School Online magazine and Joey has had some of his cartoons published in the "Duxbury Chronicle" and in "The Wanderer" (covering the Marion, Freetown area).

Teddy and Squeak Art courtesy of Joey Faulkner

To see more work from Joey and Ben, please follow the links below. This is work they have had published in the Dragon Flyer, Duxbury High School's online magazine.

For a sample of Joey's art work, please follow the following link:

<https://dhsdragonflyer.com/2017/11/17/teddy-1-and-2/>

For an example of Ben's research, please see his article at link:

<https://dhsdragonflyer.com/2017/12/22/mario-gets-mysterious-the-shiverburn-shadows/>

