

A long lost friend returns

After a lengthy hiatus, *The Far Side* is back — online and with some new material

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Thomas Nast is considered the “father of American cartoons.” His drawings in *Harp-er's Weekly* during the late nineteenth century made him famous for skewering corrupt politicians, most notably New York's “Boss”



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InSites

Tweed. He also gave us the symbols of the donkey and the elephant for the Democratic and Republican parties. His depiction of Santa Claus as a roly-poly, bearded, jolly old elf also endures to this day.

Since Nast, it seems that every generation has its own influential cartoonists. In the early to mid 20th century it was George Herriman's ground-breaking *Krazy Kat*. That was followed by Walt Kelly's satirical *Pogo* from 1948 to 1975. *Peanuts* by Charles Schultz was a contemporary of *Pogo*, but surpassed it in popularity and longevity. *Snoopy*, *Charlie Brown's* dog in the strip, became a cultural icon that created the template for successful merchandising. His image adorned lunch boxes, clothing, posters and anything else you can think of. Those products, along with a more than 30-year stint as *MetLife's* main branding element, made Schultz a multi-millionaire.

In the '70s, Tom Wilson's *Ziggy* hit the scene and rode the merchandising wave for a while. The '80s brought us Jim Davis' *Garfield*,

which enjoyed tremendous commercial success, including *Snoopy-like* merchandising. *Garfield* is still running in syndication today. Scott Adams' *Dilbert* climbed to the top of the cultural/commercial ladder in the '90s and still publishes in syndication. From the mid-'80s to the mid-'90s, Bill Watterson's wonderful and beloved *Calvin and Hobbes* graced comic pages, as well as 19 books. It's safe to say it provided Watterson with a comfortable living, but he declined to pursue all the lucrative merchandising possibilities he could have.

There is one strip from my younger adult years, the '80s to the mid-'90s, that stands apart from them all. Gary Larson's *The Far Side* is the funniest comic strip I ever read. He created a world with an odd yet familiar cast of recurring character types that consistently produced belly laughs, a single panel at a time. His slightly-better-than-crude drawings of scientists, explorers, pudgy, bespectacled boys, women in print dresses with pointy glasses and tall hair, devils, cavemen and, of course, cows and all sorts of other anthropomorphic animals, gave us a twisted and hilarious take on life.

Larson enjoyed tremendous success with his strip, which he parlayed into books, merchandise and even a movie. But when he stopped doing his strip in 1995, it left a void on the comics pages of newspapers everywhere.

Fans of the strip can now celebrate a little bit. thefarside.com, launched at the end of last year, brings back a daily dose of the clas-

sic comic. It also has — wait for it — some brand new panels. That's right, Larson is once again writing and drawing new material in the same vein as before. Unfortunately, he's not doing a lot of new comics on a predetermined schedule, but he is making and posting them as the mood strikes him.

Besides the opportunity to see new work from a comic genius, the site also offers a laugh-filled trip down memory lane. Every day the home page features a handful of selected comics from his archives called the Daily Dose. There's also a curated Comics Collections section that is updated weekly with new themes.

The Sketchbooks section takes you inside the creative process of the artist. The About section gives you more insight into the man via his own writing along with biographical information. The Shop section has links to purchase his numerous books and calendars. Finally, the New Stuff section features the occasional new comics he's creating.

The site is cleanly designed and easy to get around. It's a great place to visit for a daily dose of gut-busting humor.

KEVIN O'NEILL is a staff artist for *The Times-Tribune*. Share your favorite websites with him at koneill@timeshamrock.com.

