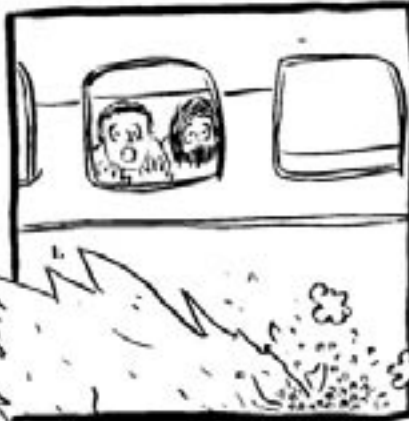
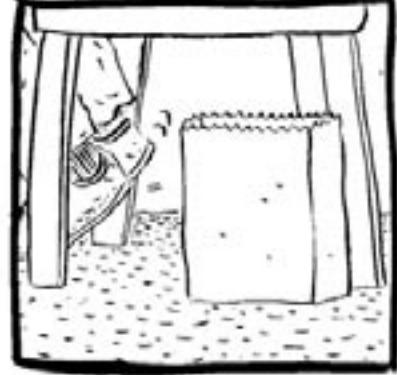
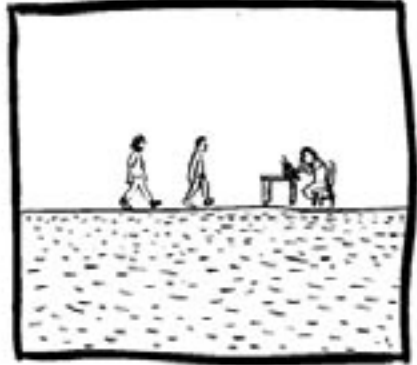
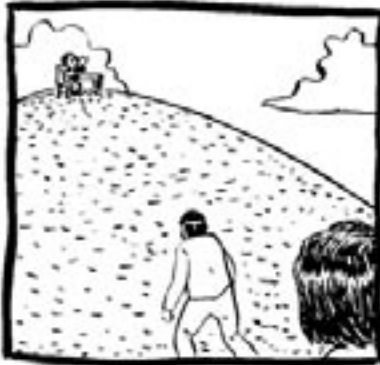
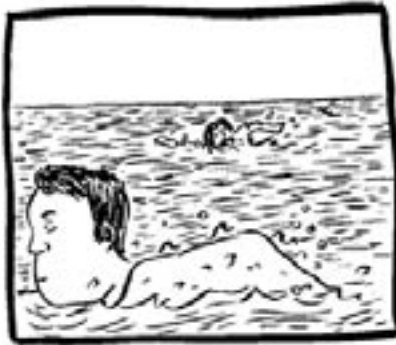
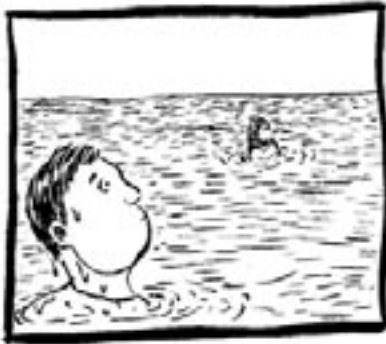


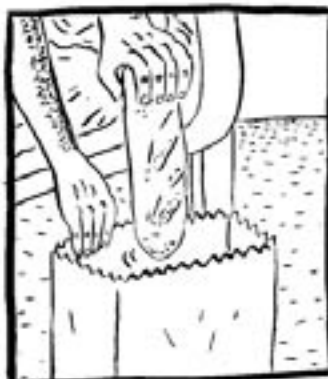
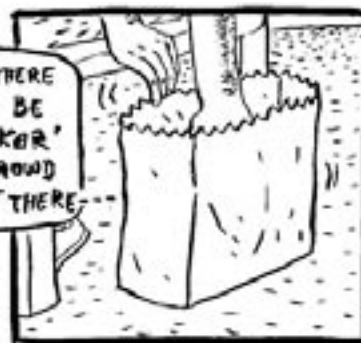
# HARVEY PEKAR

by LIM CHENG TAU  
&  
CHIN YEW









Harvey Pekar was born in 1939 and worked as a clerk in a veteran hospital in Cleveland for most of his life. This would have been an ordinary life if not for Pekar's friendship with underground commix legend Robert Crumb who encouraged Pekar to write his first comics stories in the 1970s and drew them. The first issue of American Splendor came out in 1976.

What is different about Pekar is that his stories deal with his own life. He was not the first to write autobiographical comics, but he defined the genre, influencing Crumb himself as well. Others whom he inspired were Chester Brown, Seth, Joe Matt, Dennis Eichhorn, Ed Brubaker and Roberta Gregory among many others. For me, it was through Pekar that I knew about the art of Gary Dumm, Joe Sacco, Dean Haspiel, Joe Zabel, etc. Heck, it was through one of his comics music 'reviews' that I learned about Masada. That's good taste and that's real generous of Harvey to share his knowledge and help people like me know the works of other artists.

Acclaim came to Pekar late. Our Cancer Year, about his fight with cancer, remains his magnum opus but for him to get cancer to write that story? What the fuck! Through the 1980s and 1990s, Pekar continued working at his clerical job until he retired in 2001. Finally, the big time came in 2003 with the release of the American Splendor movie starring Paul Giamatti. A decent and enjoyable adaptation of his life and stories. Pekar wrote about the effects of the film on his life in American Splendor: Our Movie Year.

Like others, I sort of lost interest in Pekar's works after that. It's like he has hit the big time and how interesting can things get once you have had your own movie premiere and your books have been published by Vertigo?

But I came back to Pekar again in the last few years and I'm glad about that. His last few books were solid journalism and about history. The Beats: A Graphic History reignited my interest in the Beats again. It has been more than 20 years since I read On The Road and Junkie. But the one that stands out is Students For A Democratic Society: A Graphic Novel. I have been working with a few friends on the history of the University of Malaya Socialist Club in Singapore and that book about student activism in 1960s America serves as a good comparison.

Thank you, Harvey, for the stories, the warts and all.



CHENG TJU

American Splendor is an autobiography written as it's happening. The theme is about staying alive. Getting a job, finding a mate, having a place to live, finding a creative outlet. Life is a war of attrition. You have to stay active on all fronts. It's one thing after another. I've tried to control a chaotic universe. And it's a losing battle. But I can't let go. I've tried, but I can't.

HARVEY PEKAR



1939-2010