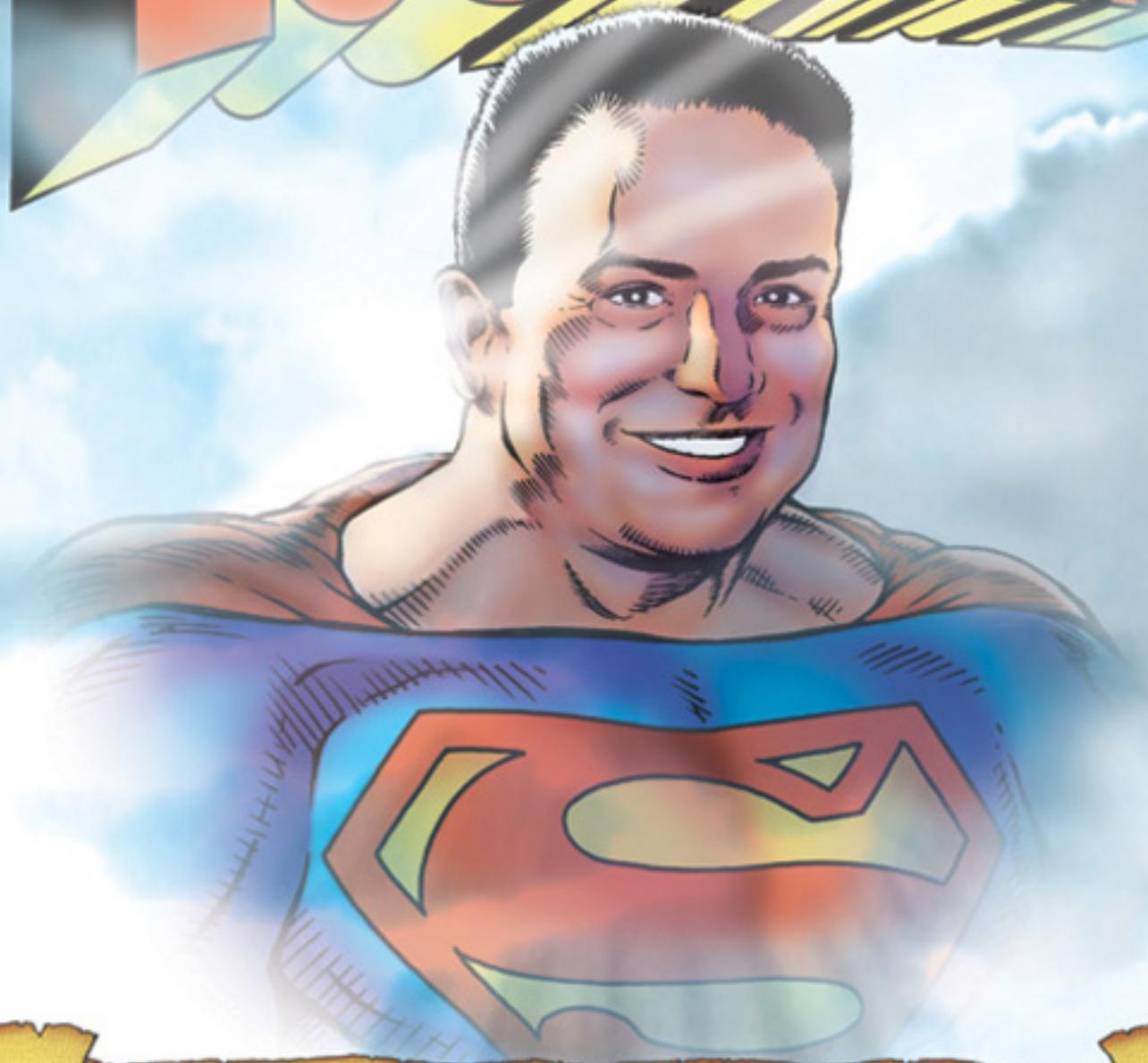


LOUIS NACKE



...WAS ONE OF THE *COURAGEOUS* PASSENGERS OF *UNITED FLIGHT #93* WHO *FOUGHT* THE HIJACKERS AND, BY NOBLY *SACRIFICING* THEIR LIVES, *SAVED* THE LIVES OF *COUNTLESS* OTHERS! DID *NACKE'S* *LOVE OF SUPERMAN--*EMBLEMIZED BY THE *SUPERMAN TATTOO* ON HIS SHOULDER--*HELP* HIM ACT *SUPER-HEROICALLY* THAT *FATEFUL* DAY? PERHAPS AN *ANSWER* CAN BE FOUND IN A LETTER TO THE EDITOR OF *SUPERMAN* (#182, JANUARY 1966), BY ONE TONY PEPARD OF HERTS, ENGLAND, WHO WROTE, "*SUPERMAN* IS NOT JUST A *FICTIONAL* COMIC CHARACTER; HE IS A *SYMBOL* OF ALL THAT IS *GOOD* IN *AMERICA*."

**TEXT OF ARLEN SCHUMER'S SPEECH DELIVERED AT
THE SOCIETY OF ILLUSTRATORS' MEMORIAL EXHIBITION, FEBRUARY 1, 2002**

In the wake of the tragic events of September 11th, a number of writers and columnists began to question America's idolization of Hollywood's heroes, whom these critics now felt had clay feet, unable to prevent any real crisis, like the one that befell the country that terrible day. Talk soon shifted to comic book superheroes, and how they, too, were rendered meaningless because they weren't real. Even comic book artists and writers themselves were agreeing with these pundits, asking rhetorically, "where are the superheroes when you need them?" One even wrote, "on a small subconscious level, I damn them for not being real."

It seemed to everyone that only real heroes—the police officers, firefighters and rescue workers who lost their lives trying to save others—only they mattered when it mattered most. Like the passengers of **United Flight #93**, who sacrificed themselves fighting the hijackers, saving who knows how many people had that plane reached its intended target.

One night, about a month after the tragedies, I was working the way I usually work, with the TV on in the background, when **Dateline NBC** came on, with a complete show devoted to the story of Flight #93. I really wasn't paying close attention until I heard Amy Nacke—the wife of passenger **Louis Nacke**—tell **Dateline** how much Louis loved Superman; why, she said, he even had Superman's "S" shield tattooed on his shoulder for years! I bolted upright from my drawing board when I heard that, because now I knew why it had bothered me so much when those writers claimed superheroes didn't really matter in real life. "Where were the Superheroes on September 11th?," they asked? Well, I'll tell you:

Superman was on United Flight #93.

I believe that Louis Nacke's love of Superman, emblemized by that tattoo on his shoulder, helped motivate him—even if only "on a small subconscious level"—to garner the courage to confront a terribly hopeless situation. And then to respond heroically, with his fellow passengers, in those desperate moments when action mattered most.

Maybe my conviction is so strong because I know that many of those who face life and death every day—police officers and firefighters—became police officers and firefighters because of superheroes like Superman. Lucio Perez, a police officer in the Mission District of San Francisco, upon receiving his fifth "Officer of the Year" award in 1995, said, "I owe it all to growing up reading comic books and wanting to make a difference. You would be surprised at how many cops were former comic book readers...tons of them."

Comic books, and Superman, certainly made a real difference in my life for the better, in so many ways. Through Superman, I developed a love for one of the greatest American artforms of the 20th Century, comic book art, a love that has provided me with a livelihood and a career. And growing up, in addition to teaching me how to read with a vocabulary studded with words no other 7-year old knew, like "origin" and "invulnerable," Superman afforded me, in a more dynamic and accessible form than family or religion could ever really compete with, a specific morality from which to understand the difference between right and wrong and good and evil; and with that, the strength to act on those convictions. Perhaps, on that late summer morning, in the air above Pennsylvania, Superman gave Louis Nacke that strength, too. And in that way, Superman became real.

While planning this illustration of Nacke as Superman for The Society of Illustrators' Memorial Exhibition, I happened to attend a comic book convention here in New York City, where I bought a few old issues of **Superman** comics. I was leafing through an issue from 1966 when I came across the letter column, and the last sentence of a particular letter seemed to leap off the page and into my heart, my heart that wants to believe Superman inspired Louis Nacke to act super-heroically on September 11th. Some kid named Tony Pepard from England ended his letter to the editor by writing,

"Superman is not just a fictional comic character. He is a symbol of all that is good in America."