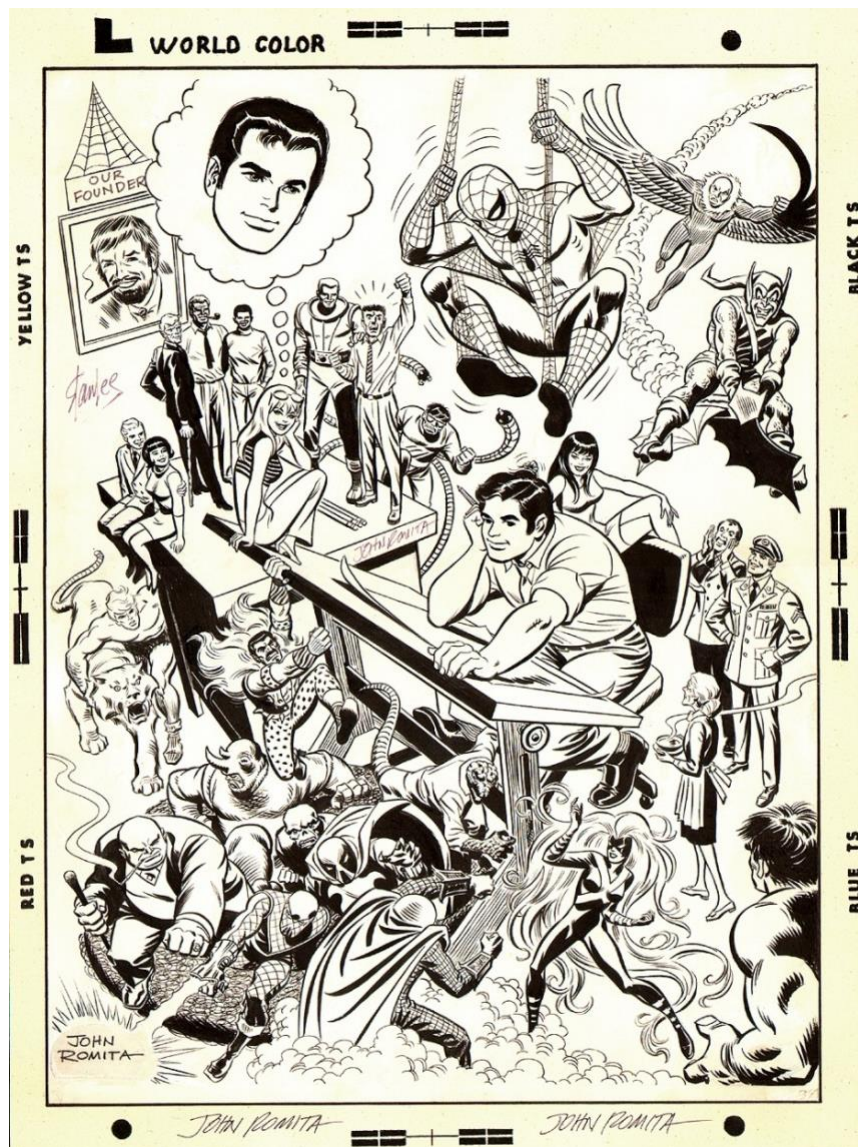


My True Origin Story



I am a reader. Over time I've come to realize that is the single most important influence in my life--after my parents, of course--of who I am.

I was raised in northeast Los Angeles, a neighborhood triangle roughly framed by Dodger Stadium, the Rose Bowl, and Cal State L.A. My love of reading started with comic books. Very early, so early I can't remember when or how it began, I read Marvel and DC superhero comic books with complete devotion. After Sunday morning services downtown, my father would take me and my three sisters to a magazine store near Pershing Square [now the Plaza entrance to the underground Metro station on 5th Ave.] to buy comic books for the week.

Soon, not only was I reading the stories over and over again, but I started drawing my favorite characters in the style of my favorite artists, like John Romita in the poster. From late elementary school through high school, I drew and drew, even as I was passionately playing all kinds of sports, going to school, being with my friends and surrounded by my extended family.

I thought it was the pictures that seduced me but it was really the stories.

By the time I was in high school, other priorities took over as you'll see and I stopped drawing. Still the love of reading was buried deep in me, too deep to ever leave.

So whenever I think of growing up, I think of myself as that young artist of the poster, daydreaming of what adventures lay in my future, surrounded by all my favorite things, what stories I would get to have and tell, not yet realizing that reading had already changed the direction of my life.

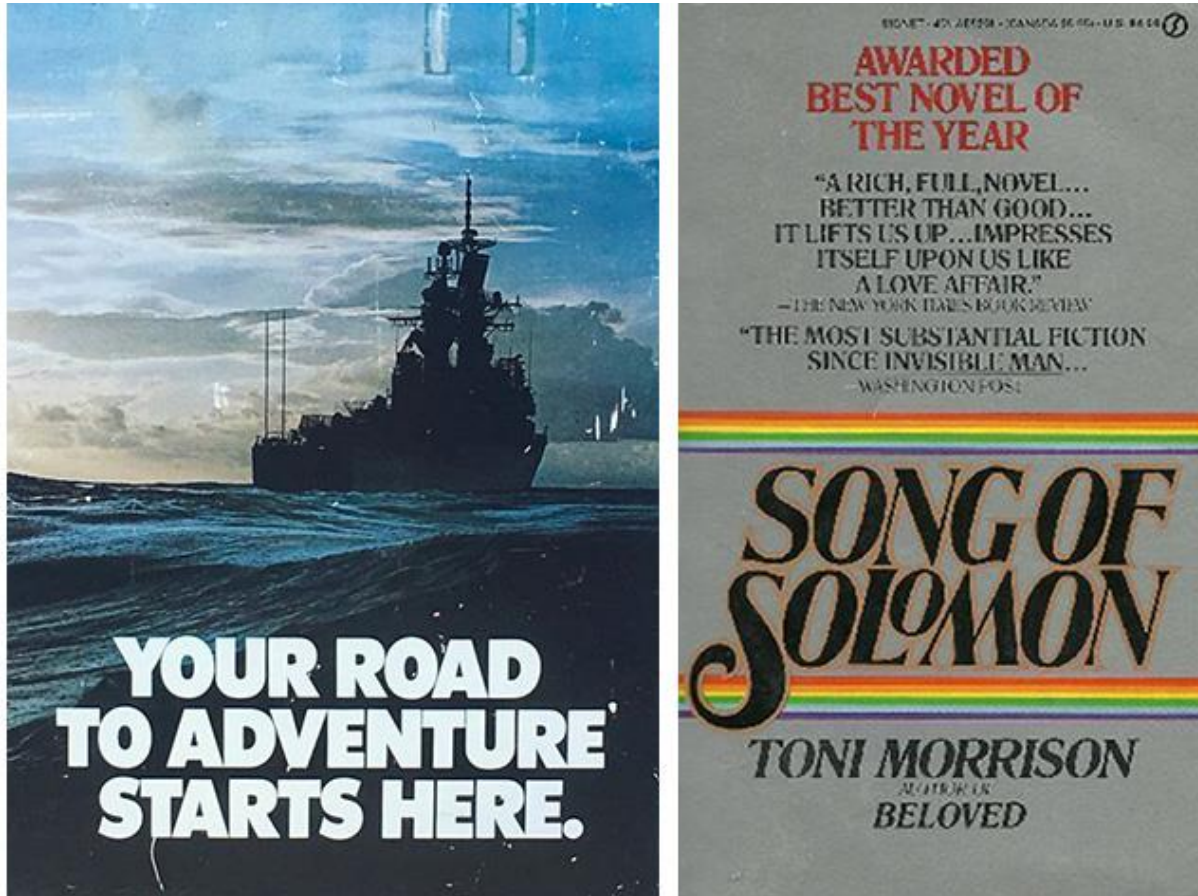


And the next chapter was already becoming clear. My shop foreman father, a former Marine who served during the Korean War, always had a large library of military history books and those were certainly in my mind when I decided to go to the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland, in those days seeing myself becoming an F-14 fighter pilot and future NASA astronaut, the waking dream that replaced being a comic book artist or shortstop for the Dodgers.

My eyesight started to become poor at the end of my 2nd year at the Academy so that prevented me from becoming a Naval Aviator but it didn't stop me from still reading and reaching for something more. Before I graduated, I still had a chance of seeing what that life would've been like flying jets and taking off and landing on an aircraft carrier and I have no regrets that my life and dreams took a different path.

I became an officer on guided missile ships stationed in San Diego. My specialty was what was called Combat Systems. I was the one who actually fired the weapons, much like a video game today, the one operating a computer console called the WEC (Weapons Engagement Controller).

After I left sea duty, I was assigned to be an NROTC instructor at the USD-UCSD-SDSU combined unit.



A recruiting poster featuring the US Navy guided missile cruiser I served on before I went to NROTC. [I may even be the one “driving.”] If I recall correctly, this picture was taken while we were going around in slow circles while our communication antennas were being calibrated off the coast of Southern California, less than 10 miles north from Catalina Island. When author Toni Morrison died in 2019, I showed my summer session 101 the exact paperback book I was reading when I left one job to start another, a trail that led me to be in that Trade-Tech classroom.

The Latest Chapter. When I left active duty and went to the Reserves because I didn’t want to deploy anymore, I went to work for Coca-Cola Foods as a production manager in Anaheim but something was off. I didn’t quite feel the same purpose and sense of accomplishment that I always had before, the feeling that drove me to do my best. Reading again showed me the way. At the time I was working my way through a novel by the late Toni Morrison called *Song of Solomon* and in the book it had a character who must decide for herself—after she has been stripped of what before she had treasured--what is really important:

... so [Pilate] threw away every assumption she had and began at zero . . . Then she tackled the problem of trying to decide how she wanted to live and what was valuable to her. When am I happy and when am I sad and what is the difference? What do I need to know to stay alive? What is true in the world?

Toni Morrison, Song of Solomon

Driving in to work the day after I read that passage, I decided right then to quit working and go back to school to finish an English Lit. Masters I had begun while I was still active duty at the NROTC. When I finished the degree, completing the units at UCLA, I started teaching English composition back down to San Diego State and have been a teacher ever since.

It was the long way around the horn but at last I am home.

It is not easy. Never has been. I find Trade-Tech infinitely more challenging than anything I did before. Whenever I am grading papers or making lessons, I try to remember I *chose* to become a teacher with all its endless hours, frustrations and sometimes hard-to-see results. One of my sisters began her fashion designer origin story of here at Trade so I know the road can appear for anyone, she drawing paper dolls as a little girl while I was drawing superheroes and fighter planes.

Where am I today? Still reading every day. Always. Still teaching, thinking, and dreaming and sharing stories about my City of Angels and military past--I tell my teacher "origin story" to every section I have--although now I stress to my students that it's now their time to seek their own dreams and follow the road wherever it may lead.

