



GRAAT issue #1 – March 2007

Institut Charles V, Université Paris VII, January 25, 2007

Alison Bechdel on *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*.

I'm going to begin by just reading a short passage from *Fun Home* after a little introduction.

I wrote this memoir about growing up with my father who was a closeted gay man, a high school English teacher and a mortician. But his real passion was restoring our Gothic revival house. And it was when I came out to my family as a lesbian that I learned that my father was gay; and a few months after that he died in an accident which I'm pretty certain was suicide. My memoir is also a book about literature, because my father loved to read and I found his favorite books creeping into my own work as I was writing. So this chapter that I'm going to read to you from is the Proust chapter.

[Reading of Chapter 4]

I'm going to talk to you a little bit about how I drew this book, because it's hard to talk about a graphic novel apart from its physical existence. And I have a theory that cartooning or graphic novel writing is a sort of obsessive-compulsive disorder. So I'm going to show you my evidence. I posed myself for almost all the figures in the book, for tricky shots—like bicycles, which are notoriously hard to draw—but even simple things like a person on the phone. I have thousands of such photos. I even posed dressed up as my father, for instance, to see what a necktie looks like from the floor.

I did not handletter my book, I cheated and used a digital font. This is an early draft where I was experimenting with what it would look like to do the lettering myself, but it would have taken forever and I don't think it would have been legible enough for the kind of material I was writing. The digital font is made up from my own letters.

Here's a few early sketches I did; it was hard for me to draw my family members, these people I'm so intimate with and know so well, it was hard to draw them objectively. So I did a lot of studies from photographs. Not tracing them, but looking at the photos and drawing them, which is a very different process.

Here's my real father, and here's the image of him I used in the book, in Chapter One.

It was a fun challenge for me to try and draw black and white, to draw photographs using pen and ink, because a photograph is a tonal image, with lots of gradations of color, so I liked that challenge, trying to capture the tonality of a photograph. Here's an experiment that wasn't that successful. I wanted to capture these incredibly subtle gradations of the sky at sunset in pen and ink, without using color; that was important to me, I wanted to prove that that was possible, but in the end I couldn't do this well enough, I didn't have the time to redo it.

Same thing for that image of Rob. This was actually the genesis of the whole project, finding that photograph when I was twenty years old, and so it sort of emblazoned itself on my mind. I spent I don't know how many hours and weeks doing versions of this photograph.

And then I had all these crazy projects I had to do, like copying my father's handwriting. This is a sample of my father's actual handwriting which is completely illegible, so I couldn't just copy his handwriting, and also I realized that it's very difficult to copy anyone's handwriting—I wouldn't make a very good forger. So I

ended up using a sort of hybrid of my handwriting to get the speed with which you must write to make it have that fluidity of handwriting, and copying some of his graphic quirks; but still I'm not entirely happy with it. And this took weeks! I'm telling you, weeks I spent on this!

I also got very obsessed with replicating the text from books in a very precise way, not just the text, but the curvature of a book, to get the feeling that you were really looking at a book. And that was hard to do unless I photographed the book, to get that perspective on a line of text as it receives into the gutter. And again I did not succeed very well.

And then I also recreated a lot of maps, which was incredibly time-consuming. This is a real map that I used to create my map from. First I did the shading, the little cross hatching in ink. And then I used ink wash to get the shadows. Then I created my own text layer, then I put them all together to make my map.

This is a map from *The Wind in the Willows*, a very formative image in my childhood. And I'll end by saying that maps for me function in the same way that cartoons do. I think of cartooning as a way of taking a complicated reality from the three-dimensional world, and ironing it up into a simple, accessible image. Here's my version of that map; that was fun, to copy it.

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