

Cancer-related comics benefit Komen for the Cure

At 13 years old, Michael Kaye didn't know anyone afflicted with cancer, but through sketches and imagination, he created Ulius Joules, a comic character who is cured of cancer when a supernatural gem crashes through his window and transforms him into a superhero called AmphoMan.

More than 20 years later, after having his own cancer scare, Kaye turned AmphoMan into a comic book series.

Now, the 36-year-old Cooper City resident has decided to donate 25 cents

per issue sold to the South Florida Affiliate of Susan G. Komen for the Cure, based in West Palm Beach.

As the AmphoMan story goes, souls trapped inside of gems start finding their way to modern-day Earth from a long-lost planet that was destroyed by a meteor. Joules, a marine biologist who lives in South Florida and works at a research lab trying to find a cure for cancer, is among the first people to find one of the gems: a green one containing the soul of a frog.

When activated by water, the gem fuses to Joules'

forehead and transforms him into a cancer-free frogman, known as AmphoMan, a moniker formed from the words "amphibian," "H2O" and "man."

"When he discovered this gem and it cured him, he was ecstatic," Kaye said of the character.

Then Joules discovers that he is only cancer free when he is AmphoMan and that there are other people finding gems and using their newfound abilities in destructive ways. "They're becoming like mutants. It's causing havoc," Kaye explained. "So he took it upon himself to kind of save people."

Kaye was 15 when he first tried to publish AmphoMan, but when he brought the storyboard to a printer and learned it would cost him \$10,000, he retired his creations to a box in the garage. Not long after that, he sold the approximately 500 comic book titles he had collected.

He went on to study 3D computer animation and work as a graphic designer at BEACON TV, a South Florida station that is run by the Broward County School Board and broadcasts educational programming.

In 2008, at age 32, Kaye decided to start collecting comic books again. That same year, he had to have two surgeries to remove melanoma from his back. "I felt like a steak on the table. You're getting cut up. And that was just a taste of what cancer could do to people," he said.

Getting back into comic book collecting and having a run-in with cancer reminded Kaye of AmphoMan. "I thought of the book and said, 'Well maybe I foresaw something in my future,'" he said.

Within the next year or two, Kaye resurrected his drawings and storyboard — by then yellowed and coated with lizard eggs in a box in his shed — and began reworking and expanding upon the AmphoMan story.

Because printing has become substantially less expensive over the past 20 years, publishing AmphoMan was no longer such a risk for Kaye.

The father of three published the first AmphoMan book in February 2012. It contained his original drawings and much of the same text he wrote as a teenager. By May of this year, he had published eight more issues that con-

tinued the story and featured all-new but still hand-drawn graphics. Last month, he published a remake of the first issue that better matches and sets the stage for the other books.

"It's definitely something now that I'm more proud of than any of the books," Kaye said.

He describes AmphoMan as a more classic series than those hitting the shelves nowadays and categorizes the humor in it as dark and slapstick.

So far, he has printed a few hundred books, which together cost him about \$1,000. Earlier this year, he sold a sampling of the series at Tate's Comics in Lauderhill and did a book signing there.

Signed physical copies are currently available for \$6 and digital versions for \$1 at AmphoMan.com. Kaye is also working to grow his audience with the help of vintage, thrift and consignment shop Thriftarella's in Davie. In late August, the owners purchased a copy of the first AmphoMan title.

"We have known Mike Kaye for some time and always try to promote our customers and local community efforts," said co-owner Dominick Masi.



KAYE

"The sign-up sheet is at our register, and we have quite a few pre-orders."

In December, Kaye will do a signing at the shop, and Thriftarella's will match what Kaye makes for South Florida Affiliate of Susan G. Komen.

Kaye said he plans to present the first check to the organization in December and will continue doing so at the end of each year. His donations will include half of the proceeds from any non-comic drawings he sells.

Although Kaye is promoting AmphoMan and working on issue 10 of what he plans to make a 100-book series, BEACON-TV remains his full-time job.

"Sometimes it takes me months to make one book," he said. "It's just a hobby, so I don't want it to become work. I just enjoy drawing. It's kind of like stress relief for me."



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cells are less protected, she said. "If the normal one gets knocked out, there is no normal cell protein to protect the cell" and the chance of developing cancer increases, Donenberg said.

The BRCA gene mutation occurs in one of every 400 women in the general population but it is found in one of every 40 women in the Ashkenazi (eastern European) Jewish population, she said.

The higher probability

that women of Ashkenazi descent who have the BRCA gene mutation will develop breast or ovarian cancers and the small chance that men of Ashkenazi ancestry who have the gene mutation will get breast cancer or prostate cancer (20 to 30 percent chance) make the criteria for genetic testing of Ashkenazi Jews less stringent, Donenberg said.

Sheila Jaffe, 70, of West Boca Raton was 46 when she was diagnosed with breast cancer. Jaffe tested negative for the

BRCA gene mutation.

Her father developed breast cancer when he was soldier in the U.S. Army. He was discharged and had breast surgery in 1943. He died in his early 40s from heart disease, Jaffe said.

Jaffe's mother died at the age of 86, and the death certificate listed breast cancer as a cause of death, Jaffe said. But she doubts that her mother had the disease.

Jaffe could have gotten breast cancer by chance, Donenberg said, explain-

ing that women in the general population have a 10 percent chance of developing breast cancer. "Having a father with breast cancer is unusual," Donenberg said she would like to see Jaffe tested for other gene mutations.

Donenberg recommends genetic testing for families where there is breast and ovarian cancer. "Follow-up is important for families who test negative and have strong family histories," she said.