



Nina Paley

doesn't matter that I'm a woman producer, just that I'm a good one," says Kris Greengrove, a valued member of the Curious Pictures studio whose current project is the critically acclaimed *Little Einsteins* for Playhouse Disney. "If I were to look



Lisa Goldman



Linda Simensky



Jennifer Oxley



Kris Greengrove

for something that might be a factor, I've heard it said that women are more nurturing by nature and that is certainly a necessary quality for producing. A producer needs to nurture both the project itself and all those involved in creating it. A hefty burden, but a satisfying one." She adds, "Animation is obviously still a male-dominated field and I would

Big Apple's Fantastic Toon Femmes

The women of New York's thriving animation scene are rewriting the old rules and breaking away from traditional stereotypes. by Jake Friedman

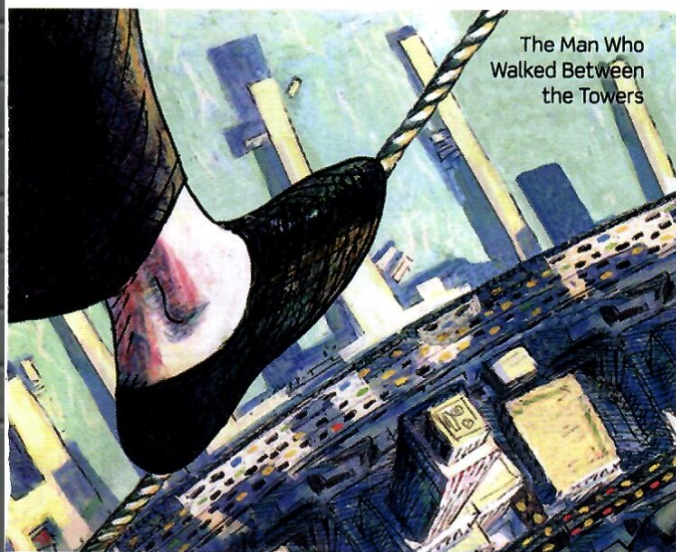
Meet Tissa David, a Hungarian-born animator who started working in New York in 1955. At a time when June Cleaver epitomized the American housewife, women in the animation studio were seen as little else than ink-and-paint girls. Of course, there were exceptions in the fields of concept design and a couple of assistants here and there, but by and large, animation coast to coast was entirely a boys' club. This is news to no one, but what's interesting is to look at the industry, specifically in New York, and see what it's like for women today, compared to David's recollections.

"You know, it's very funny," says David, who recently worked on Michael Sporn's acclaimed short *The Man Who Walked Between the Towers*. "Ollie Johnston once asked me, 'How do you do that?' I said, 'I used to be a young girl at one time.' Because a man can never really animate a female character that's a girl, a woman."

David worked at UPA as Grim Natwick's sole assistant before joining the Hubley Studios in 1960 as an animator. She was the only woman that she knew in the entire field. "In the early '60s, there was no place for a woman. Once I called the secretary of the union, and she said 'The men are complaining that you are animating.' John Hubley didn't care, not in the slightest."

"In my experience, I have never felt discriminated against because I'm a woman," says Lisa Goldman, a freelance animation writer and story editor. Simultaneously she acts as the head of the New York chapter of Women In Animation, a nationally recognized group built to help network people in the business. "I love the animation community in New York," she says. "I find that our members are so generous with their time and talents to other members... We are recognized as a source of talent more and more. It's been amazing to be a part of all this."

"Ninety-nine percent of the time, it



The Man Who Walked Between the Towers



Curious Pictures' Little Einsteins (Playhouse Disney)

like to see more women get into it. We do have a different perspective that is not always represented in mainstream cartoons and I think it would be welcome."

When it comes to representing the main stream, Linda Simensky would know a bit about the TV toon market. She was Cartoon Network's director of programming, has been a development exec at Nickelodeon in New York, and is currently the senior director of PBS Kids programming. "Women have always worked on the development and programming sides of the television industry, so there's not really much of a difference for men and women in what I do," she says. "I think there have been many more opportunities for women, especially as the industry has grown and has come to encompass more areas than just action cartoons. I think women have become more interested in working in television animation due to the variety of shows there are now."

One such person is Jennifer Oxley, an animator by trade who has grown to be creative director at Little Airplane Productions, a studio currently establishing itself with projects like Nick Jr.'s *The Wonder Pets* series. "I have to say I haven't given much thought to being a woman in the animation industry," says Oxley. "It is true there aren't a lot of female animators or animation directors in the biz. I am definitely proud to be one of them. I guess maybe not thinking about it or worrying about it has really helped me get to where I am today." She adds, "I think there are some truly amazing fe-



Nick Jr.'s *The Wonder Pets*

male animators working in the industry today. I only wish that there were more. Women have a unique way of animating which is extremely important for a strong animation team."

But let's not limit the woman's voice to the sole action of animating. "I got into animation for fun, not money, in order to make specific films which no studio would support," says award-winning independent animator Nina Paley. Paley has been using the medium to tackle topics such as pregnancy and, most recently through her *Sitayana* films, women's strength in popular Indian mythology. "Male bosses tend to feel more comfortable working with male buddies. It only takes one insecure sexist—male or female—in an organization to start screwing things up. For the most part, the men and women animators I've met are an exceptionally cool

bunch, and I hope to see proportionally more women in studios as time goes on."

With other big influences like Dancing Diablo studio head Beatriz Ramos, top indie animator Signe Baumane and director/producer/designer/co-owner of Buzzco Studios Candy Kugel, it feels easy to be optimistic. However, most New York women who have been in the business for more than thirty years, can remember when Tissa David was the only one.

David can recall when she was considered "the loner" in the industry. "But it's never lonely," she says, "because all the characters I've ever animated are all around me." At the end of the day, there seems to be a legacy of more than just her characters. ■

Jake Friedman is a New York-based animator. You can visit him at www.jakefriedman.net.