



**Merle “Ting” Tingley Giants of the North Hall of Fame  
induction speech (May 9, 2015)  
by Seth**

Sometime in the late 1960's Mr. Tingley came and visited my grade one class in Strathroy, Ontario. I imagine that year we likely had a banker or a doctor come visit as well... And maybe a policeman too....but i don't remember those other guys. All i remember is the cartoonist.

If i hadn't been looking at his cartoons regularly in the paper before that visit i certainly was afterward. Religiously. I'm not going to pretend that i was precocious enough in Grade One to enjoy cartoons about John Diefenbaker or Robert Stanfield. Nope--it was his little trademark drawing the Luke-Worm that impressed me.

It didn't matter what the cartoon was about, as long as i could find that damned little worm hidden somewhere in the drawing. I can still recall the frustration felt when he couldn't be found--even with mother's help.

That visit might not be the exact moment when i decided to become a cartoonist but it was certainly the moment when i realized that cartoons were drawn by a real person and it was something you could do for a living when you grew up -- if you practiced hard enough.

Eventually my family moved away from the London area but i never forgot ting and later, in my twenties when my family moved back London I made it a point when visiting them to collect up all his books. He had remained a significant figure in my mind.

By that time my thinking about his work was a bit more sophisticated. I came to recognize Ting as having a genuinely rare sort of role in the cartooning world. Something only shared by a few cartoonists. Something that was disappearing even in the 1980's when i was collecting his books.

Ting was a regionalist. An artist whose work reflected a local environment instead of that of a national or international one. Now sure, a lot of ting's work was about NATO or Lyndon Johnson or Trudeau or whatever was going on in the big wide world, but it was also very much involved with the day to day life of London Ontario.

Let's face it, lots of political cartoonists did work about the world situation but only one covered London. That's surely his ticket to posterity. The subject matter of those specific local cartoons might be forgotten but the essence of them has become a part of the very history of that place. Ting himself has become something of an institution there- lodged in the memory of everyone who lived in the forest city during those decades when he published in the London free press. He became part of the spirit of civic London itself. A local political cartoonist is something of a public utility like the phone company or the fire department. They serve the public good.

If you know Ting's work and you know London, Ontario then you know that they are two sides of the same coin. One almost expects when looking at a street map of London that if you unfocused your eyes for a moment you'd see the streets converge into a diagram of a top-hatted worm smoking a pipe.

I've always liked Ting's drawings. He has a chunky drawing style with a terrific rubbery line. It's a style like no one else's--bold, animated, cartoony but most of all, friendly.

And very recognizable. Not long ago i was walking through an antique mall in Woodstock and i saw an old poster way up the aisle. I instantly knew it was ting's work and sure enough when i got close to it, i was right. He has the kind of drawing style you can spot from 50 feet away.

There is something unpretentious in that drawing style too. It suits London. It's not a New York style. It's certainly not a Montreal style. It's not even a Toronto style. It's far

too friendly for a Toronto style.

If I recall correctly, when Ting used to write an article in the Free Press he'd start it with the words, "Dear boss. I never quite knew if the "boss" he was addressing was the editor or the reader themselves ... but that always struck me as a wonderfully blue collar kind of thing to say. Again: unpretentious, humble--welcoming to everyone.

Ting's work was for the every-person in the street. That's probably why he's so well regarded by Londoners still is. Even after being retired for over two decades now.

His worm might have had a top hat, but Ting certainly wasn't high-hatting anyone.

If you watch this bit of footage here, you will see me inducting Mr. Tingley into the giants of the north last May at the London comics festival named after him.

Life is funny and strange. Over forty years ago I was a little boy in a small-town classroom watching a middle-aged man sketch a cartoon, and then decades later there I was, now the middle-aged man putting a medal around his 92-year-old neck.

I'm glad it was me. It was a personal pleasure to give something back to him.

Accepting the award, this time, for a lifetime in exceptional Canadian cartooning is

Merle Tingley's son, Cameron Tingley.

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