



1954 PROFILE

CENSORSHIP: BANNING COMIC BOOKS

Working and raising a son on her own after her husband died in World War II was difficult enough for Ann O’Conner without having to worry about the dangers of her child reading lurid, violent comic books.

Life at Home

- Ann O’Conner of the Bronx, New York, was obsessed with one dream: a better life for her and her family.
- Most of those dreams revolved around her only son, Jonathan, and her plans for his attending college.
- Education was the key to a good life, and she knew that she could not allow comic books to get in the way, no matter how much her teenaged son protested.
- After all, she had seen in a national magazine the scientific evidence that excessive comic book reading was directly linked to juvenile delinquency.
- It was hard enough to raise a son alone in a major city without the corrupting influence of innocent-appearing adventure comic books.
- Jonathan’s father had died in World War II without ever meeting his son and namesake.
- He died in 1943 when the truck he was driving crashed on a wet English rural road.
- Ann and Jonathan had dated for two years, fashioning luxurious plans for the future, before hastily getting married only weeks before his deployment to Europe.
- After his death, Ann raised her son with the help of her father and mother, Karl and Mary Pagel, in their tiny apartment.
- Mary Pagel often watched Jonathan while Ann worked during the day or evenings as a waitress at a local diner.



Ann O’Connor worried about the effect of comic books on her son.



Jonathan's father was killed in WW II.

- The Bronx was full of activity and the restaurants were often busy, but Ann's tips rarely provided enough money to raise a child with college in his future.
- On her down days she was reminded that no one in her family had graduated from high school, much less college.
- Her father worked in the shipyards of New York as a loader while her mother stayed at home to raise children.
- But mother and daughter were united in the dreams for Jonathan by faith; Ann and her family were practicing Catholics and attended church in the Bronx at Blessed Sacrament on Sundays and holy days.
- The most treasured items in the home were the family Bible and a crucifix Karl Pagel had brought from Germany when he emigrated in 1913.
- Ann loved to hold the Bible, but because it was in Latin, she could only read the most familiar phrases.
- At Blessed Sacrament Elementary School, Jonathan was an exceptional student.
- One of the nuns informed Ann about the opportunities at Regis High School in the Upper East Side of Manhattan.
- Regis High School was a tuition-free high school founded in 1914 by the Society of Jesus, also known as the Jesuits.
- The high school accepted eighth-grade Catholic boys with an "A" average regardless of their family income.
- Ann couldn't believe her good fortune.
- After a lot of tutoring and hard work, Jonathan was accepted into Regis High School.

- In the spring of his sophomore year in 1954, however, Jonathan's grades began to slip.
- One of his teachers, who reported that Jonathan enjoyed reading *Batman* and *Superman* comic books, was sure the books were influencing his academics.
- The news alarmed Ann.
- The detrimental effects of comic books were in the news; the U.S. Senate judiciary subcommittee was even holding hearings on the role of comic books in the rise of juvenile delinquency.



Jonathan was a Grade A student when he started high school.

- Reports from educational experts warned that the publications, especially those that emphasized crime fighting and horror, were having criminal effects on children.
- The comic book industry scoffed at the claims that mere comic books could turn children into "little monsters."
- Ann's worst suspicions were reaffirmed in May when she read that month's *Reader's Digest*.
- Inside the monthly magazine was an excerpt from a book entitled *Seduction of the Innocent* by Dr. Fredric Wertham, whose studies indicated that comic books contributed to delinquency in children through the picture stories of unabashed violence and sex.
- According to Dr. Wertham's research, juvenile delinquency had increased about 20 percent since 1947.
- The books also illustrated "foreign-looking" people as villains, which belied American efforts to persuade the world that race hatred was not a staple of American life.
- The article disturbed Ann, who immediately feared that these books may corrupt her son and jeopardize his future.
- As a result, she banned comics from her home, over Jonathan's protests.
- Then she discovered he was visiting his friends' homes to read the books.



HE SCREAMED AS I DROVE IT IN. I FELT IT TEAR FLESH, CRUNCH AGAINST CARTILAGE. I RAISED IT AND STABBED AGAIN AND AGAIN...

