

# Smash Pages Q&A: Maria Scrivan

The creator of the comic strip 'Half Full' discusses her new graphic novel, 'Nat Enough.'



*Nat Enough* is the debut graphic novel from cartoonist [Maria Scrivan](#). People might recognize the name, as she's been making the daily comic [Half Full](#) since 2013 in addition to contributing to Mad Magazine and other publications.

The book is about Natalie adjusting to middle school and the way her best friend has changed, as well as trying to meet new people while feeling like she's good enough. It is a painfully relatable middle school story and I spoke with [Scrivan](#) over email about trying to capture that voice, structuring a book length narrative and having already finished a sequel.

# NAT ENOUGH



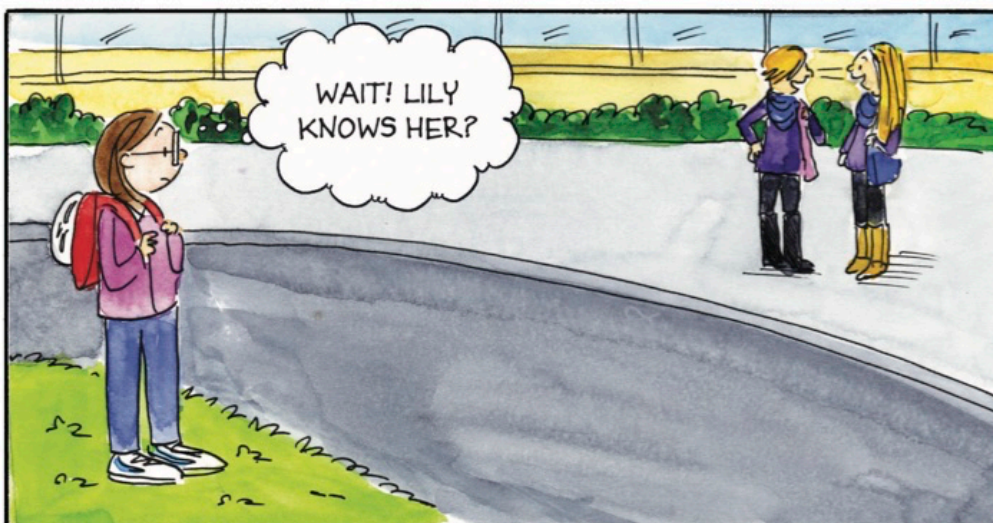
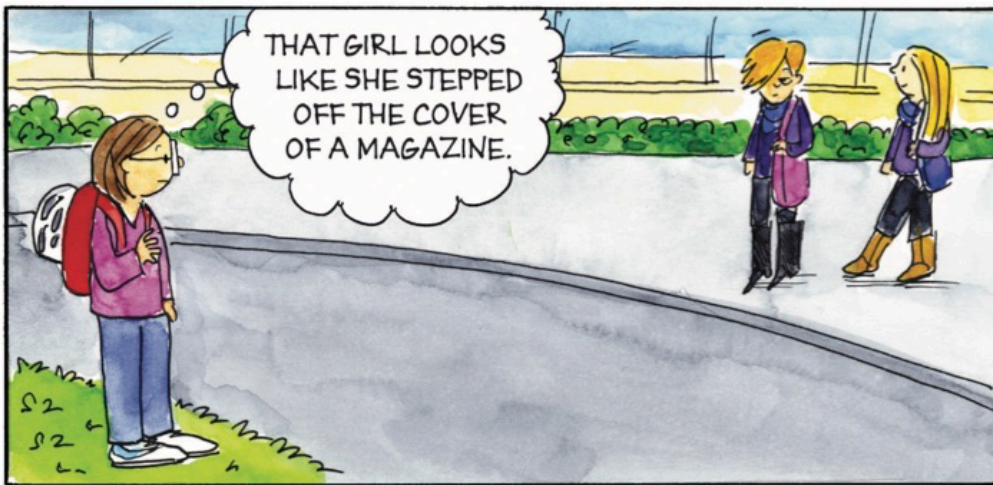
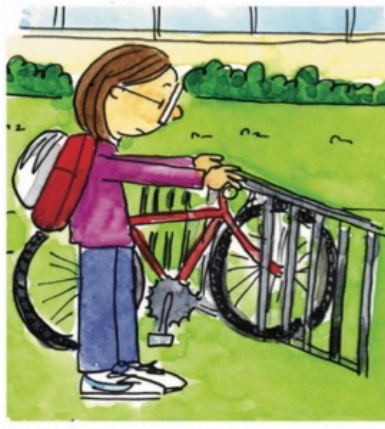
MARIA SCRIVAN

## **As a first question, I always ask, how did you come to comics?**

All I ever wanted to do when I “grew up” was be a cartoonist. I’ve always loved writing, drawing and making books. My father, while digging through old papers, recently found a tiny book that I made when I was 7 or 8 years old from folded paper, drawn in crayon. I’ve always loved the combination of writing and drawing to tell stories.

I was a huge *Garfield* fan when I was a kid and devoured every *Garfield* book as soon as it came out. I would read them over and over again, studying the art and the humor. I read the Sunday Comics from start to finish and loved *Peanuts* and *Calvin and Hobbes*. I have always been a tremendous Chuck Jones fan. Bugs Bunny was my idol. He might still be.

I HOPPED ON MY BIKE, EXCITED TO GET TO SCHOOL AND SEE LILY.



## **Where did *Nat Enough* start?**

*Nat Enough* started as a series of vignettes of stories from my childhood, many inspired from entries in my *Garfield* diary from sixth grade. I wish I had written more in that diary, and I've said the same thing about journals I kept in my 20s. I have been journaling my entire life, and I finally will not allow myself to get a new journal until I finish the old one.

Over time, the vignettes became a story. I originally intended for the book to be prose with spot illustrations, but after attending some author seminars at CXC (Crossroads Columbus) a few years ago, I knew that it had to be a graphic novel.

**Was the concept that this would be her sketchbook there from the start? Why did you think you needed the story to be told in the first person and to have her sketchbook?**

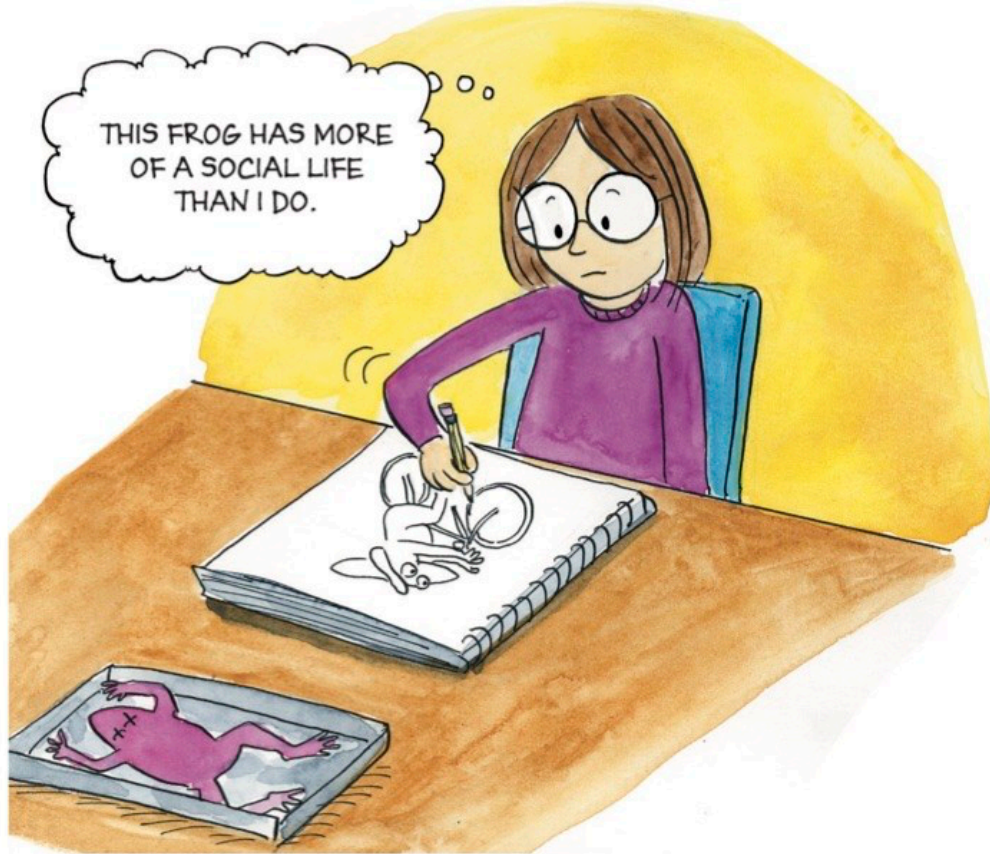
I knew that the story needed to be told in the first person because so much of it was based on my own childhood experiences and feelings. The concept of Natalie telling the story through her sketchbook evolved as the story developed. I wanted a visual way to show her thoughts and perspective outside of the actual story.

I personally can't leave the house without my sketchbook. I get that same panicky feeling of not having it with me as I do if I forget my phone. It was only natural to make that part of Natalie's life as well. With my sketchbook, I'm never waiting for anything. A late friend, a delayed flight, a trip to the DMV are all opportunities to write and draw.





I WAS TOO BUSY DOODLING TO EVEN THINK ABOUT CUTTING INTO THE FROG, EVEN IF IT WAS MADE OUT OF JELL-O.



**Now this is a story of middle school, so why is it not in the horror section?**

Haha! Excellent point! Maybe I should have called it *Night of the Living Ex-Best Friends*. Middle school can be a really tough time of life, and it certainly was for me. It is a difficult balance between figuring out who you are while wanting to fit in, and being yourself while trying to be like everyone else.

I always had the “wrong” thing. The wrong jeans, the wrong haircut, you name it. I remember finally getting the popular jacket at the time in my favorite color, raspberry pink. I loved it until I realized all of the “cool kids” had it in grey or navy...mine was button down, they had pullovers. I tried to fit in by getting the thing everyone else had but still managed to mess it up. Small things like this are GIANT in middle school. You want to fit in. It’s hard to stand out. I didn’t realize until later in life that standing out is a gift.

**You’ve been drawing comics for a while now, but I’m curious about making a graphic novel and telling a longer story. Did this require a big adjustment as far as how you work or how you think?**

I’ve been writing and drawing stories since childhood, so while graphic novels were new to me, storytelling through words and pictures was not. I would write and draw comics to replace assignments in school anytime I could. If a teacher gave us a creative assignment, there was a 100% chance I was handing in a comic. The scene of Natalie doing a comic for her in-class essay happened to me in high school. I had written a comic comparing Bacchus and Dionysus in class. I brought in large pieces of paper, pencils, erasers and an entire set of markers. We had a sub that day and the teacher wasn’t there to see me draw it. She didn’t believe that I could finish it all in class and was going to fail me on the project. Thankfully the class backed me up and I got an A. In high school AP English I made a mock *Cliff’s Notes*, spoofing all of the books we read (or were supposed to read). I had also been

working on several picture book pitches before *Nat Enough* and am looking forward to revisiting those stories in the future.

Since *Half Full* is a panel comic, I'm usually creating different scenes and characters for each comic. One of the most fun and interesting things about writing and drawing *Nat Enough* was watching the characters take on a life of their own. Even though Natalie was based on my childhood self, she grew and evolved and became one of my greatest teachers.





**Related to that, I kept thinking about how you structured the book. The scenes, the interludes, it feel very much like you using this skillset you had of making comics for years but turning them toward a larger narrative.**

I guess I can't help myself! I love the panel format and it was so much fun to come up with chapter opener comics featuring the characters Cat and Treat.

Adding to what I said earlier about Natalie being my greatest teacher, the entire process of creating the book helped me realize what unique perspectives and skills I could bring to the project. The book gave me the opportunity to be more of who I am.

**When did you know that you had to include Nat's comic at the end of the book?**

Adding the comic at the end of the book happened organically in the process. At a certain point I thought it would be fun to have a story within the story. Natalie's frog comic punctuates the theme of being more of who you are and illustrates her growth and transformation. Plus, it was a ton of fun to bring the Jell-o frogs to life.

**To make some of us feel like slackers, you have a sequel already finished. Tell me about *Forget Me Nat*.**

I am so excited about *Forget Me Nat!* It takes place in the second semester of the same school year as *Nat Enough*. In this book, I explore crushes, braces and band, along with even more friend issues. Some of the other hardships of my middle-grade life! While *Nat Enough* is focused on self-worth, *Forget Me Nat* is about self-love. It is also filled with humor!





**In addition to the book, you also have a comic strip, *Half Full*. For people who don't get it in their local paper – or read it on go comics – what is *Half Full*?**

*Half Full* is a daily syndicated panel comic with different characters and scenes. It appears daily on [GoComics](#) and in newspapers nationally, including the L.A. Times and the Chicago Tribune. I started *Half Full* in 2013 and will celebrate its seventh year of publication this September. That's 2,555 comics! I explore a wide range of topics, mostly from daily life. I get a lot of inspiration from my pets, things that make me happy and some of the best material comes from things that are frustrating or annoying. I typically write a list of gags and then draw the comic. Every once in a while I'll doodle a funny image and add a caption to it. Those spontaneous images are some of my favorites.

**Now you are also a Connecticut person – I refuse to use the term Nutmegger – so why CT? What brought you here? What keeps you here? Why set Nat here?**

I was born and raised in Greenwich CT, so I guess my parents brought me here. I now live in nearby Stamford, CT in the northern part of city, away from the downtown. I am an avid runner and cyclist and love being so close to gorgeous hilly and windy roads that will take me out to horse farms and apple orchards. There is so much accessible nature here, in the woods and beaches, and I love being outside. I spent a good amount of time working on the first draft of *Nat Enough* at a picnic table at the beach. One of the best parts of living here is the proximity to New York City.

While I never officially say that *Nat Enough* takes place in Connecticut, there are some strong clues in the changing of weather from fall to winter as well as the drawing of the capitol building in Hartford. Just like Natalie, I won a book contest in sixth grade and was invited to Hartford to pick up my award.

Remaining in the area has some other perks as well, like bumping into my sixth grade teacher while working on the first draft of the book. It was uncanny. Although we lived in adjacent towns all these years, I hadn't seen her since sixth grade. She remembered me immediately and that I loved to write and draw. Seeing her ignited a cascade of memories that became integral parts of the book.

### **Just to end, what's your elevator pitch for *Nat Enough*?**

*Nat Enough* is an authentic story based on real events and feelings from my childhood. Just like Natalie, I was dumped by my best friend and was bullied. And just like Natalie, one of my biggest bullies was myself in the form of self-doubt and self-criticism. Natalie teaches us not to let anyone dim our sparkle, especially ourselves.

*Nat Enough* is a story of self-worth and being more of who you are that is filled with humor, fun and the occasional Jell-o frog.

I hope *Nat Enough* helps my readers realize they are already more than enough, just as they are and have as much fun reading it as I had writing it!

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