

Daily Planet

MY SUPER DAD

By Daniel Sanchez
Daily Planet Reporter

The legacy of legendary agent, collector, and founder of the largest Superman museum in the world, Jim Hambrick, lives on in his daughter Morgan. She tells us what it was like to "grow up super."

James Michael Hambrick passed away on Dec. 22, 2024, at age 70. To honor him and his achievements, the Daily Planet presents an exclusive Rooftop Conversation with his daughter, Morgan, and her husband, Adam.

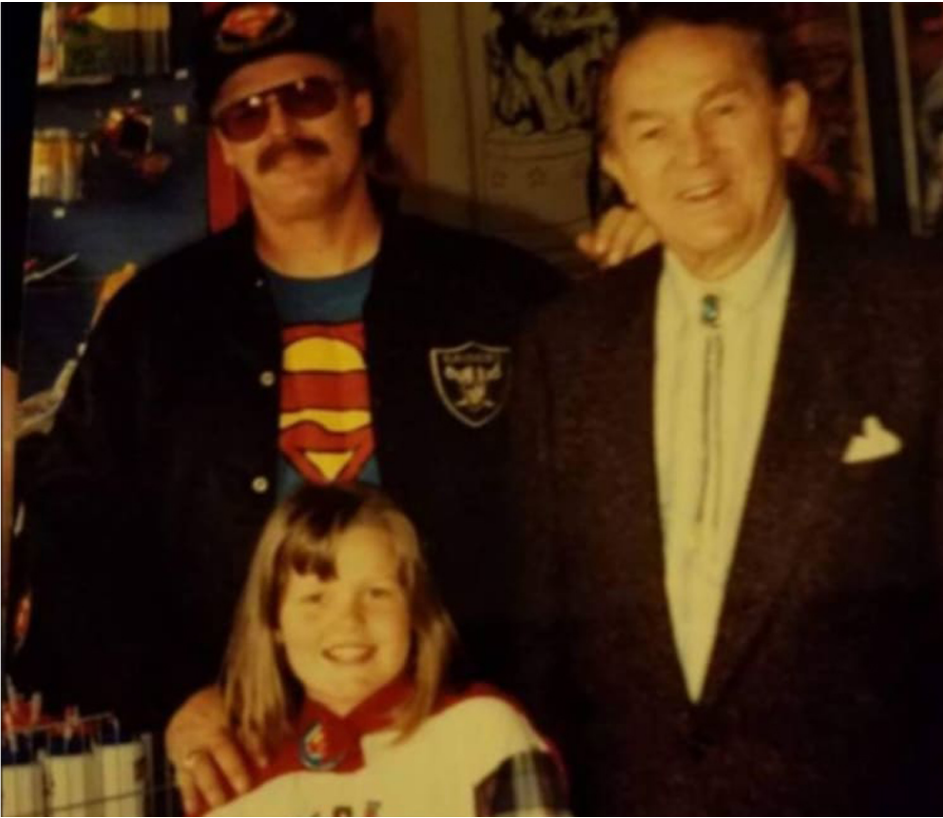
Daniel: Before we get into the huge contribution that Jim has made in the Superman community... What was it like growing up with your dad?

Morgan: Well, before being in Metropolis, I remember different news networks coming to our house [in Los Angeles] to film his collection. I remember him setting stuff up in our dining room. I also remember when he acquired the George Reeves costumes, how excited he was. He had mannequins set up and a wax figure and all these things in our dining room, which were kind of scary at night when you're a little kid and you see mannequins and different pieces coming through.

He got a Captain America shield from the TV series, and Adam West's cowl. Different things were rotating through the house. But I'd never seen him as excited as he was when he got George's colored suit and brown and gray suit, because he lined those up and he took bunches of pictures.

Then people like John Field, who used to do the video presentations for San Diego Comic-Con, those type of people would come over, and he'd be talking about his collection and their love for Superman. Dad had all these "Adventures of Superman" episodes on reels, and we had white walls in our living room, so he would project those. We'd lay out blankets on the floor and watch all the "Adventures of Superman" episodes.

I remember going with him different places in Hollywood, talking to different people. If I ever got scared of something like Chuckie he'd just show up



(Above) Kirk Alyn (Superman) and Jim Hambrick holding Morgan's favorite childhood Superman item; Jim, Kirk, and Morgan (shown wearing the cape). (Below) Morgan's "supermom" Paulina Hambrick, posing with a mannequin of Christopher Reeve, and lifting up a very surprised Kirk Alyn.

with a behind the scenes video of how things were made—production and things like that—to show me that this is all a movie and it's all play, you know?

I grew up around a lot of props and toys—and staying out of his Superman room, because I'd try to play Barbies with his Mego action figures and I'd split a boot or something and he'd notice and get upset about it. So I had to be careful when I played with his toys.

Daniel: Were there items you were allowed to interact with? How did he bring you into your own hands-on experience with collecting?

Morgan: One day he just showed up with the Superman arcade machine and the pin-ball machine. So those were in our living room, and all the neighborhood kids would come over, and I had the key to the cabinets. I'd keep my foot inside the arcade machine and push the button that would give you more credits with my toe. I remember hearing the "dah, dah, dah, dum" every time that would go off. Me and my sister and all our neighborhood friends would play that.

I also remember watching the Fleischer cartoons, and



that really engaged me because I really liked "Batman: The Animated Series." Fleischer cartoons were older, but you could tell they were the same art deco style. I remember watching "Superboy" when that was on tv. Then when we moved here, it was "Lois and Clark."

And just engaging with the visitors here over the years—kind of growing up playing

barefoot in the museum, I really grew to love it and understand the deeper meanings behind it and what it means to other people. I loved their stories. I fell in love with what we do.

Daniel: Was there ever a gift your dad gave you that was part of the Superman collector world that was the most impactful to you?

Morgan: He gave me a cape that was handmade. It had a Kirk Alyn style shield on it and was made out of the same type of raw silk as George Reeves' capes. I used to run around the museum with that. When Kirk Alyn came here, I had Kirk sign it and Noel Neill sign it. Jack Larson signed it that year, or between the two years they came. That was my big Super-

man item as a kid that was special to me.

Daniel: That is wonderful! So, growing up, these items were part of a home collection. How old were you when it became an idea talked about around the house—"What if this were a museum?"

Morgan: That started in 1986, the year I was born. He started talking to Bob Westfield, who did the Amazing World of Superman museum here [in Metropolis]. It only lasted six months, but he was looking for a way to reinvigorate the idea in the early nineties.

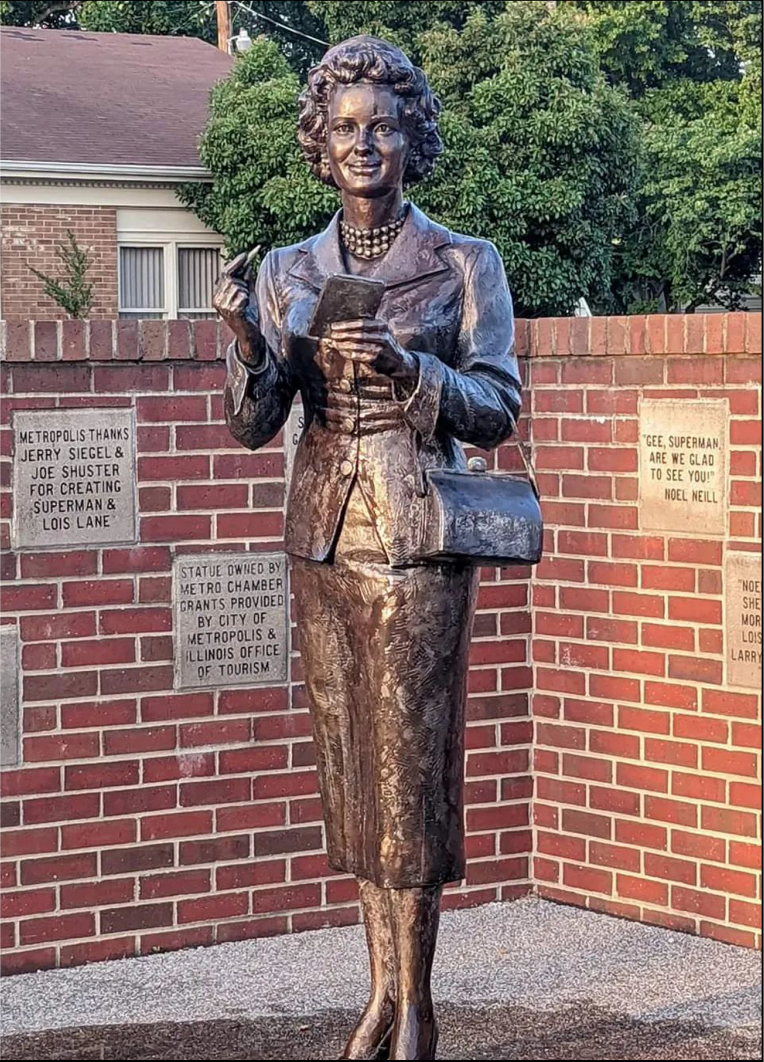
I remember sitting on the floor twirling my fingers through the phone cord while my dad was talking and I was playing next to him, and I heard him talking about what Metropolis is going to be like, and then he told me, "We're going to move. We're going to move to this small town. We're going to get out of L.A."

When we got here, we were supposed to open a bigger museum on the interstate, but we ended up in the building we're in and my dad built the museum from the ground up. He was a white collar guy, so he had guys here in town that did handyman work, teaching him how to build walls. All the cubbies and stuff my dad built himself. He was pulling display cases out of Service Merchandise, from behind Walmart, at Blue Light Specials...

When we really set up the museum, I was about eight years old. Then he booked Kirk Alyn,



The storefront of the Super Museum and the Lois Lane statue in Metropolis, Illinois.



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because he used to do a traveling museum with him. Dad was gone a lot when we lived in California, because he would be going to different state and county fairs and colleges, lecturing with Kirk Alyn.

So Kirk came here and so did Jack Larson. When Jack came to visit, he'd be a celebrity guest for the Superman Celebration. He and my dad were good friends because my dad managed Kirk, Jack, the guy that played Inspector Henderson—Robert Shayne, Noel Neill, and Phyllis Coates.

He booked Siegel and Shuster for a couple of conventions in California. I have some pictures from back then.

When Jack came here, he was really impressed by what my dad had set up. He took his fee for doing the appearance and he turned the check around and signed it over to my dad and gave him \$10,000 and said, "Good luck to you, Jim, I believe in you. And I know you're going to make this happen."

That was something that really meant a lot to my dad, because we were just really getting started. It took all of his resources just to move here to start this up.

Before Metropolis, my parents toured with the museum together. My mom would dress up as Supergirl and wave people in. They had a big balloon and things set up outside—"Meet the first Superman of film, Kirk Alyn!" And Kirk would sign autographs for \$1 an autograph.

People could tour my dad's collection through a basically a semi trailer. It was kind of a roadside attraction. A kind of hokey roadside museum.

Then he got the opportunity from Julius Schwartz to set up in the lobby of the Daily News building, and that's where he got to meet Christopher Reeve and Richard Pryor—during "Superman III."

Here in Metropolis, my dad was booking celebrity guests. The Superman Celebration used to be at Fort Massac, in the park. So it was really just food vendors, a dunk tank, things you would have at a small fair. My dad got the idea to "Hey, let's turn this into kind of a convention/fair."

The Superman Celebration is probably the most unique comic book type of event in the country, because it's all based around one character, and it's part fair, part convention. There's the hero parade on the street. We always do the celebrity photo ops at the statue. And Q&As are free. It's a really unique experience. It's the second weekend of June every year.

Daniel: Growing up with your father explaining to you the movie magic and how "this is pretend," but then later meeting Kirk Alyn and Noel Neill and Jack Larson—what was that like for you to not only meet those people who are part of the movie magic, but have them become your friends?

Morgan: Kirk was like a family member. From when I was like two or three, he would call and I'd answer the phone and he'd be like, "Hey, is your dad around? How are you doing?" The same with Noel Neill and Jack Larson because they would be wanting my dad to book them appearances, or they'd have little inside jokes and stories they wanted to share with him.

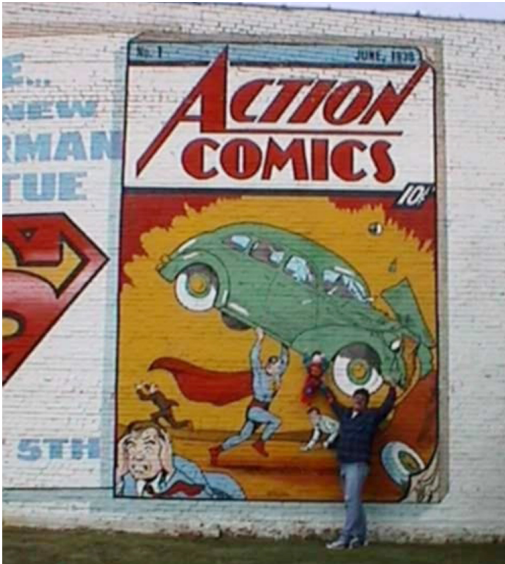
I have letters in the archives of correspondence between them and my dad. Noel Neill and Phyllis Coates had a really competitive little relationship. Noel was very witty. She'd be like "the other Lois Lane" in the letters and stuff. "The one we don't speak of" and things like that because they were very competitive about being Lois. Margo Kidder was really fun. She'd always tour the museum when she'd come to town. And Mark McClure is really cool. I have his cell phone number. I could reach out to him anytime.

I toured the museum during the last Superman Celebration with Brandon Routh and his son. That was really cool to see that father-son dynamic with them. He put him at his booth and his son was signing autographs too. It was really cute.

People that come like to bring their family members. Brandon Routh brought his parents. I think Michael Rosenbaum has brought some family members too. The Cele-



(Above) Jim Hambrick setting up the Super Museum in Metropolis, 1986; Jim holding the February, 2000 cover of Pop Culture Collecting magazine upon which he, Noel Neill, and Jack Larson appeared, 2023. (Below) Jim Hambrick next to the smaller original Metropolis Superman statue with black arm band honoring "The Death of Superman" in the comics, 1993; Jim in front of the Action Comics #1 mural painted by Morgan; Christmas-time outside the Super Museum.



bration is very unique, so artists are always like, "My whole family wants to come. I hope that's okay." It's different than other cons. Other conventions, it's so crowded and you don't really get a break away from your booth. At the Superman Celebration you get to walk around, go outside, get a funnel cake and hang out with the people.

Daniel: At what point were you truly bitten by the bug? Where you knew, "I want to be a part of this and really help Dad."

Morgan: It was kind of happening all along, but I think it really, really bit me after I had my own daughter, and I realized that this was bigger than just my dad, and it could be a generational thing for our family for years to come, and we can all be a part of it.

Then as you connect with the fans, you're like, "You could bring a lot to the table." So with Christopher Reeve, I stay in contact with Jim Bowers from Caped Wonder a lot. I'm always like, "You got any ideas for this?" I'll bounce ideas for that section off of him. Sam Rizzo was the Superboy guy, so I'd bounce ideas off him for that. John Field and Jim Nolt are the "Adventures of Superman" guys, so I bounce ideas off of them.

Fans are always sending little pieces of art, or little reminders of what something is, or connecting a moment to their childhood, so you're always kind of connected to a different little piece and learning things. There's just so much history in Superman.

Daniel: I think there's something really special about having a place like this—in the same way that if one were to visit Washington, D.C., you'd be surrounded by the history of the founding of our country as a 360 experience. Everywhere you look, you are in the epicenter of where this feeling resides. I would imagine it's the same standing in this museum.

Adam: It totally is.

Morgan: My dad actually loaned out a George Reeves costume and quite a lot of things from "The Adventures of Superman" to the Smithsonian and they put it in a display with "Superman: Many Lives, Many Worlds." So we have a couple pieces that have been on display at the Smithsonian.

That's really cool too, because we are still a roadside attraction museum. We're trying our best. I look at pictures of people's collections at home and they've got milk crates stacked as bookshelves and I'm like, "Our archives are still like that." Very much like a 10-year old kid collecting toys and trying to set up their own little display. That's the roots of it.

Adam: That's the core of the whole collection of everything—Jim's childhood carrying forward.



(Above) Jim Hambrick, Noel Neill (Lois Lane), and Jack Larson (Jimmy Olsen) amidst a fraction of Jim's collection; Noel Neill and Jack Larson with two original George Reeves Superman suits. (Below) Morgan Siebert posing with "Smallville" actor John Schneider in front of the Super Museum this Spring in Metropolis, Illinois.



Morgan: Dad's collection started with a lunchbox his grandmother gave him when he was five. He started collecting things for birthdays and Christmases. Then he got a newspaper route and he would go down to the public library and they had archives of newspaper clippings of the funny books and things like that. Dad would ask, "Can I keep these?" and he'd take all the cartoons from the forties.

Adam: We've got, in the collection, the first black and white ones. We loaned a big chunk of them to the Superman Dailies books for their missing pieces so they could fill them in. That's an honor in and of itself.

Daniel: Were there ever any talks about the two of you taking this over at a certain point, as your dad became older?

Morgan: Those started when I was about 23. Then my dad got bit by a spider in 2006 that nearly took his life. It started putting him into that mindset of "I'm going to have to figure this out." He had a heart attack in 2017 and he couldn't run around and do things, so I would work on the computer and talk to him the whole time. And he would be, "This is what I think we need to do."

We set up a nonprofit organization to keep the museum together. After that, we just started mapping it out—what projects need to be done, how to take care of things—then get to the point where you're doing preservation instead of just accumulation. So that's been my focus: preservation.

I don't know at what point you stop collecting.

Adam: Never. We still accumulate.

Daniel: As for the future of the museum—what do you see happening over the next five or ten years?

Morgan: My dream is to be able to work alongside DC Warner and be able to pitch that this becomes more of a thing—not just the museum,



but Metropolis, Illinois—because it is like the official home of Superman. There's so much potential here to not just have the museum, but to theme out the town and create jobs and create an environment for fans to want to move here.

Adam: Merchandise could be made here.

Morgan: Open a factory here. Make some "Made in Metropolis" stuff. And the theme park thing has never died in my heart. That's something we've talked about always, is to have a museum and a theme park together. I would love to do a tiny home village that is all superhero themed.

I want to do a Walk of Fame here where it's all the Superman artists and writers and people from the films. So you keep honoring different people.

I would love to see a statue of George Reeves or Christopher Reeve.

Adam: Perry White, Jimmy Olsen. Just...more. Embrace us and let us do more.

Morgan: I would love to do more murals... I have a lot of ideas. You sit in the shop and talk to customers all day about what they want, like, "What if you guys had a Kent farm with a petting zoo, and you could go over there and spend the night like a BnB?" And "What if you guys had a spot where the spaceship crashed, and that was a photo op?"

Me, Adam, and my dad, we purchased a giant globe that looks like a Daily Planet globe. We want to do a mural that's a city backdrop, and then use that globe to basically create like you're on the top of the Planet when you take pictures. Or have a brick garden around it to make it look like Lois' apartment.

Adam: The basic idea that we've always wanted all along is for DC or Warner Brothers to accept us as the Superman Museum. Because we're currently the "Super Museum." If they would do that...you couldn't get any better than that.

Daniel: What can we do to help? We as the lovers of the myths?

Adam: This. Just spreading the word.

Morgan: Yeah, spreading the word. Understanding, you know, my dad's vision and goals for this. Maybe he wasn't a perfect man and he didn't always know the right way to do it, but his heart was always there and it was always about the love.

At this point, the recording time ended and I was given a half-hour virtual tour of the Super Museum that left me speechless. All I could muster is that it was magnificent—and we owe this family a great debt for what they have given us. Memorial contributions can be made in Jim's honor to the Super Museum Historic Foundation, 517 Market Street, Metropolis, IL 62960, or through the website at Supermuseum.com.