



Name: Joel Guthrie

Major: Animation

Job Title: Animation Assistant

Graduation Year: 2021

What is a day in the life like at your job?

I'll drive over to John's house at 10:30 on any given morning to pick up hand-drawn animation for whichever project we're contracted with at the time. At home, I scan the dozens of animation drawings into my computer and insert them into the digital project we submit to the studio (usually a Toon Boom Harmony file). Sometimes I'll digitally revise the drawings or add in-between animation. On Mondays, I help John set up his Lipscomb classes – setting up Zoom calls, assisting with technology, and fielding student questions. John may also contact me at any point in the day to help prepare his art posts on Instagram, or to help with any tech issues he may be experiencing. I also provide animation for other projects through Lipscomb's animation program, such as Mike Nawrocki's project Dead Sea Squirrels.

What do you love about your job?

Cartoons have always been a foundationally important part of my life and I love being able to say I make cartoons for a living. I love the opportunity to support creative projects and having a home for my artistic abilities. I love creating things that bring joy to people. Most of all, I love the community with the fellow animators I know from Lipscomb and keeping up with each other's projects. Animators are usually very nice, low-key people and they love the dumb nerdy things I love.

What is challenging about your role?

Some of the studios John and I work for have very high standards, so they'll frequently put us through several shot retakes over trivial details. When this competitive industry mentality seeps in, it saps the fun of bringing characters to life, or the excitement of creative exploration.

What are the benefits of working in this field?

It keeps your creative problem solving alive, and (depending on the project) feeds childlike wonder and playfulness. You get to do art! And sometimes have fun! And get paid for it! It can connect you to a sense of greater purpose, being behind the creation of art that brings joy to an audience. You'll also be surrounded by fellow artists with the same loves and ambitions you have. They will encourage you and also, by watching their work, inspire you to become an even better artist.

What experiences did you have that prepared you for this role?

Four years being in Lipscomb's animation program. I not only learned crucial art skills that developed me into a better artist, but I also ended up forming connections with people that led to good work opportunities.

What do you see happening in the future for these types of careers?

We're already seeing an animation boom and I think it will continue to grow and flourish – not only in LA, but across the world. I belong to an entire generation of people inspired by the animation they grew up with in the 90s/00s, and many of those people are now here in Nashville! I wouldn't be surprised to see an animation boom here in the near future.

What should a student know about your field?

Thick skin is necessary. The animation industry is all about constructive criticism. Some people will tear your work apart, and you may have to throw away something you've spent hours on and start over. But you've got to understand that we're all on the same team, helping each other to make our work the best it can be.

What advice do you have for a student considering a career in your profession?

My advice would be to do your best with whatever opportunity you're given, but also know your limits. I attribute my success to the heart and effort I put into my animation assignments. Even if I couldn't see any practical value in whatever homework or job opportunity I'd been given, I never viewed my work as a means to an end (ie a grade, a job, etc). I tried to put excellence in everything I did – and as a result, I gained a good reputation in the animation program, which led directly to the work opportunities I have now. No job is too small.

On the other hand, you need to be careful not to overwork yourself. It's too easy to compare yourself to other artists and put yourself under horrible pressure to measure up to them. You may also get friend-of-a-friends left-and-right asking you to animate their five-minute music video for a few hundred bucks, and you have to learn how to say no to them. Always try to center your work on what you love, not on the pressure to please people or to reach a certain standard.