Stephen Hillenburg is 53 years old. He grew up in Anaheim, California. “I was always interested in the ocean,” he said, “and also in art. I had to figure out how to put the two together, but painting fish sounded boring.”

Creating ‘SpongeBob’

Today, Hillenburg is the executive producer of “SpongeBob SquarePants.” He writes for the show, working alongside a large staff of writers and animators to put it together. The staff will make a storyboard—a series of drawings with dialogues (the words said by the characters) that serve as an outline for the animators. Then Hillenburg and others will add jokes “to punch it up, to make it better,” he said.

Are you a fan of the animated Nickelodeon show “SpongeBob SquarePants”? SpongeBob, Patrick Star and their friends have been entertaining kids and adults for 16 years! Let’s find out more about Stephen Hillenburg, the creator of SpongeBob.

Loving the sea

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Not just a TV show

Many times, a writer will base a character on someone he or she knows. Stephen Hillenburg says none of the characters are based on people from his life—except for Mr. Krabs. When Hillenburg was a teenager, he worked at a lobster restaurant in Marine during the summers. The owner of the restaurant reminded Hillenburg of a pirate with his strong Marine accent. He became the inspiration for Mr. Krabs. “I added the cheap part (to Mr. Krabs) to give him more personality,” Hillenburg said.

An all-ages audience

Hillenburg said that when “The Simpsons” took off in 1989, it really opened up possibilities for animation. “SpongeBob” appeals to kids and adults, he said. “SpongeBob is a kid living an adult life. He has a job. Kids think being a fry cook is a great job.”

Art or marine biology?

Stephen Hillenburg got a degree in marine biology from Humboldt State University in California and a minor degree in art. While teaching marine biology at the Ocean Institute in Dana Point, California, he wrote and drew a comic book about the animals living in tide pools. One of his characters was Bob the Sponge. After relocating from the California Institute of the Arts, where he studied animation, Hillenburg worked on an animated Nickelodeon show called “Rocko’s Modern Life.” He began thinking about a cartoon world where underwater animals live. SpongeBob became his central character. His last name, SquarePants, is because of his “square personality,” Hillenburg said.

Advice to kids

“Follow your interests,” Hillenburg said. “I never saw how my interests would collide. You don’t want to work on a job where you’re looking at your watch. “I never imagined that I’d end up in animation, but marine biology and art collided, and here we are!”

Try ’n’ Find

Words that remind us of SpongeBob are hidden in this puzzle. Some words are hidden backward or diagonally, and some letters are used more than once. See if you can find:

- Animation
- Art
- Characters
- Episode, Funny
- Hillenburg
- Interest, Marine
- Media, Movie
- Ocean, Patrick
- Show, SpongeBob, SquarePants
- Squidward, Star, Stephen, Storyboard

Cook’s Corner

Broccoli Bake

You’ll need:
- 2 (9-inch) packages frozen chopped broccoli
- 1 cup baking mix
- 1 cup reduced-fat milk
- 2 eggs

What to do:
1. Cook broccoli according to package directions.
2. Blend together baking mix, milk, eggs, salt and pepper.
3. Stir in cooked broccoli and cheese.
5. Bake at 325 degrees for 50 to 55 minutes until set.

Puzzling

Unscramble the words below that remind us of animation.

- enivo
- dyborosrat
- gideuloa
- rahtacher

Mini Fact:
At the end of this season, there will be 204 completed episodes of “SpongeBob SquarePants.”

Mini Joke

Buffy: Why did Dumpy Dumpy have a great fall?
Bob: To make up for a lousy summer!

Eco Note

The energy you save by recycling just one glass bottle could light a 100-watt lightbulb for one hour.

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