

Walt Disney: 1901-1966

The Man behind the Mouse

Have you ever been really proud of something you created? You probably know what it feels like when people praise you for a skill or talent you have. Have you ever had a family member or a neighbor offer to pay you for a piece of art you created? That happened to Walt Disney. He started drawing when he was quite young. Sometimes neighbors would buy his drawings from him. Think for a moment about what Walt Disney might have been like at the age of seven. We can imagine him cheerfully calling out to a neighbor across the street.

"Afternoon, Mrs. Miller! I have some new drawings today. Would you care to take a look at them?"

Mrs. Miller smiles at Walt and tells him to bring them right over. She disappears into her house for a moment, and then comes back with a small purse. "What have you drawn this time? Did you do some more of those cute ducks and rabbits?"

"No, Ma'am!" the boy boasts confidently. "This week I've been drawing mice!" Walt shows her his stack of sketches, and she carefully studies each one. She selects two and slips two coins into his hand.

"Good work!" she says encouragingly. "Be sure to sign these the next time you are here. Who knows—you might be famous one day!"

The Disney name did indeed become famous, but it wasn't always that way. Walter Elias Disney was the fourth of five kids. He grew up on a small family farm in rural Missouri. He spent hours and hours studying wildlife, farm animals, and the natural surroundings. His love for art increased as his sketches of these same animals came to life right before his eyes.



A stamp featuring Walt Disney

The Disney family moved to Kansas City during Walt's early teenage years. That was when Walt discovered a knack for performing. He entertained both classmates and teachers with impressions of Charlie Chaplin and captivating storytelling.

Later the family moved again to Chicago. There Walt attended high school by day and art school by night. He tried to enlist for military service during the fall of 1918, but he was too young. He turned to the Red Cross instead, lying about his age. They accepted him for volunteer service and sent him to France. He spent a year driving an ambulance and escorting Red Cross officials. When he wasn't driving, he was drawing. He covered his entire ambulance with cartoon figures.

When Walt came home from France, he began searching for his place in the world of commercial art. He moved to Hollywood with only his

In That Day

1901—New York State becomes the first to require automobile license plates; **1916**—The Summer Olympics are cancelled because of World War I; **1929**—The stock market crashes, leading to the Great Depression; **1941**—The United States enters World War II after Japan attacks Pearl Harbor; **1957**—The Soviet Union launches Sputnik 1, the first artificial satellite to orbit the Earth; **1964**—President Lyndon B. Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act of 1964, outlawing racial segregation in schools, public places, and employment.

In the News

Disney Reruns—When The Walt Disney Studios re-released *The Lion King* in 3D in September of 2011, they experienced a success that surprised even them: The movie has brought in over \$80 million so far. Because of this success, Disney Studios decided to do the same thing with four more of their classic Disney/Pixar movies: *Beauty and the Beast* will re-release to theaters in 3D on January 13, 2012; *Finding Nemo* on September 14 of the same year; *Monsters, Inc.* on January 18, 2013; and *The Little Mermaid* on September 13, 2013.

"Great stories and great characters are timeless," says Alan Bergman, President of The Walt Disney Studios. "And at Disney we're fortunate to have a treasure trove of both. We're thrilled to give audiences of all ages the chance to experience these beloved tales in an exciting new way with 3D – and in the case of younger generations, for the first time on the big screen."

brother Roy, a suitcase, and a handful of dollar bills in his wallet. They began working with Universal Studios on a cartoon series, but soon branched out with their own company and characters. They made a name for themselves when they produced the first all-sound

cartoon, *Steamboat Willie*, featuring a little mouse called Mortimer. Walt's wife, Lillian, suggested to him that perhaps the name Mickey would be a better fit. Walt agreed, and so Mickey Mouse was born.

Walt put all the money he made right back into his business. He was driven to combine creativity with technical perfection. His unique gift as a storyteller propelled him forward, while his love of history anchored him in the past. He was in the unique position of being able to combine nostalgia with innovative technology. The result of this combination bound the hearts of people to his stories while simultaneously wowing them with the potential of what could be.

In 1937, Walt captivated the entire

country with the premiere of the first full-length animated musical feature *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. His philosophy for weaving words into animated works involved retelling well-known stories. Their familiarity interested a broad audience. He believed in keeping the storyline simple. He also believed it was necessary to have elements of both good and evil in his movies. But he emphasized that the story's antagonist had to be personalized in a believable way. He felt that humanity as a whole held to some common moral ideals and he insisted these ideals be met within his stories. The victories of the good guys are never come by too easily in Disney movies. He believed that using strife to test the hero's valor was

a basic ingredient of the animated tale as well as all on-screen entertainment.

Walt Disney took what others saw as mere scientific advancement and showed them how to make art from it. He believed good storytelling by itself was okay, but that good storytelling combined with well-done and compelling technology was even better. He didn't stop with movies. He also branched out into television production in 1954 and then amusement parks in 1957.

Walt Disney was still moving full-steam ahead when he died at the age of 65. He left behind his wife of 41 years, two daughters, and a legacy that will last for decades to come.

—Megan Dunham

Bible2Life

"When you wish upon a star, Makes no difference who you are, Anything your heart desires, Will come to you." These words were sung by Jiminy Cricket in the 1940 Disney movie, *Pinocchio*. The song goes on to tell us that if our hearts are in the right place, fate will step in and guide us every step of the way.

The Bible reminds us this simply isn't true. In the book of Exodus, just after God led the people from their captivity in Egypt, Moses sings to God, "In your unfailing love you will lead the people you have redeemed. In your strength you will guide them to your holy dwelling." If you go back and read the story leading up to their rescue, you will see that the people themselves wanted to turn around and go back to their slavery. Thankfully, God is bigger than the desires of our hearts, and more powerful than the words of an optimistic cricket.

Qwisdom Check your reading. Check your thinking.

Walt Disney

- 1 ___ Walt Disney could spend hours studying and sketching animals because he grew up _____.
a) on a farm, b) near the Chicago zoo, c) going to the library every day
- 2 ___ Walt Disney's Mickey Mouse started out as _____.
a) Mitchell Mouse, b) Mortimer Mouse, c) Malachi Mouse
- 3 ___ When Walt Disney was a teenager he went to high school during the day and _____ at night.
a) worked at a restaurant, b) art school, c) drove an ambulance
- 4 Did Walt Disney think his stories should have only "good" characters? Why or why not?

For more space, use the back.

Qwisdom Answers (skip page when printing)

1) a, 2) b, 3) b

4) No. Answers may vary.