



Walt Disney and Mickey, aka the “Partners” statue, in front of Cinderella castle in Walt Disney World. June 2015. Photo by author.

The Man Behind the Mouse

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Table of Contents

A Creative Beginning	3
Animated Success	4-5
The Happiest Place(s) on Earth	5-10

A Creative Beginning

Walter Elias Disney was born on December 5th, 1901 in Chicago, Illinois, and spent most of his childhood in Marceline, Missouri. He had no formal education until he was eight, and didn't attend high school until he was 16.

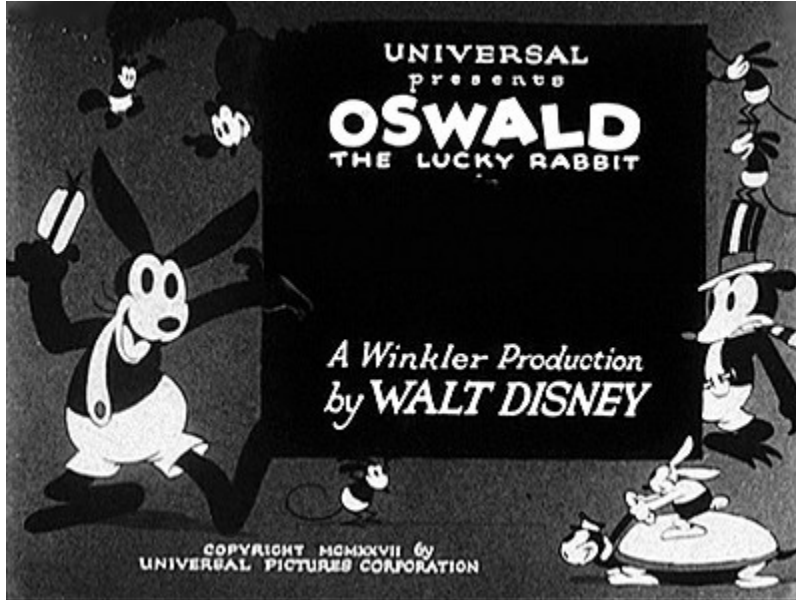
Instead of following in his family's footsteps and working in a Chicago factory, he began searching for an artistic position. After several failed jobs, Disney eventually found success creating animations in a series of cartoons called "Laugh-O-Grams." This sudden triumph led Disney to pursue a career in animation.



Screenshot of Newman Laugh-O-Gram. (*Public Domain*)

Animated Success

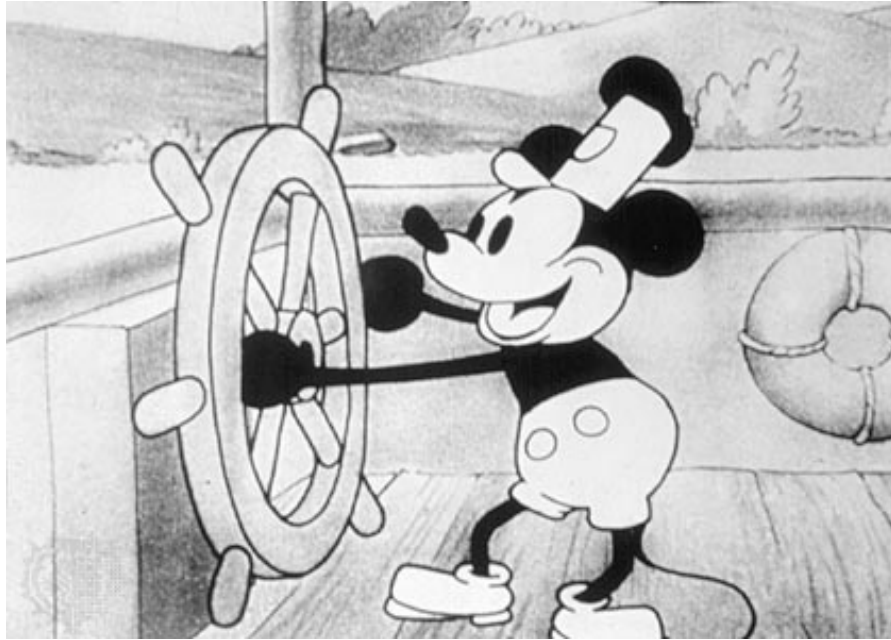
In 1926, Disney created his first real, original character: a rabbit named Oswald.



Screenshot of Oswald the Lucky Rabbit film. 1927. (Public Domain)

Oswald's immediate success came with a drawback: Universal reduced Disney's contract compensation. Disney refused the offer and lost the rights to his lucky rabbit. However, with this loss came the motivation to create a new character. Disney had been sketching a cartoon mouse character for years, but it wasn't until 1928 that he took to the silver screen.

Mickey Mouse debuted in a black and white short called “Steamboat Willie.” Mickey took on many new roles in countless shorts, feature films, and animated TV roles.



Screenshot of Mickey Mouse from the film *Steamboat Willie* (1928). Copyright MCMXXIX (1929) DISNEY.

The Happiest Place(s) On Earth

In the late 1940s, Disney began planning a theme park after visiting a park with his children. His inspiration came from wanting a place that children and their families could play together.

Disneyland opened in 1955 on July 17th. On a live television broadcast, Disney said the following words:

“To all who come to this happy place; welcome. Disneyland is your land. Here age relives fond memories of the past ... and here youth may savor the challenge and promise of the future.”

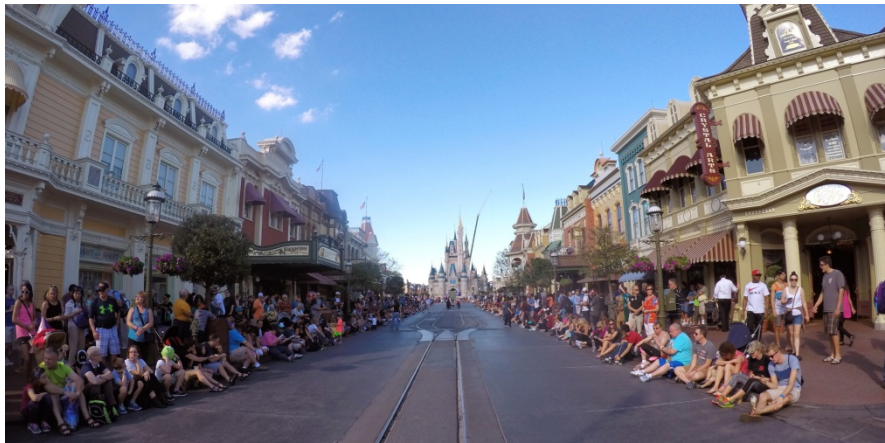


Walt Disney sits on a grassy lawn with his grandson, in front Sleeping Beauty's castle at Disneyland. (*Gene Lester/Getty Images*)

Despite a few hiccups on opening day, Disneyland was an immediate success. The seventeen-million dollar investment had paid off, and Walt Disney was an international hero to families all over the country.

In 1965 Disney announced the plans for his second theme park after purchasing a very large plot of land in Orlando, Florida. Then called “The Florida Project,” the new park resort would include the Magic Kingdom and the Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow (E.P.C.O.T.) The Magic Kingdom would be very similar to its Disneyland predecessor, though Epcot was originally planned to be a futuristic livable city.

Sadly, Walt Disney died of lung cancer before the park was even opened. However, the park now known as Walt Disney World was finished and opened by Walt’s brother Roy in 1971.



Crowds line Main Street USA awaiting a parade in Magic Kingdom, Walt Disney World. January 2015. Photo by author.



Walt's voice can be heard at the end of the "Wishes" fireworks show nightly. July 2015. Photo by author.

Works Referenced

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CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.1

Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.3

Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., a character's thoughts, words, or actions).

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