

The True Mickey Mouse: A Walt Disney Biography

Introduction

Have you heard of the person behind the Disney company?

The famous cartoonist and animator, Walt Disney, was born on the 5th of December, 1901 in Hermosa Illinois. He is most well-known for co-founding- with his brother Roy- Walt Disney Productions and Disney World. He shared his success with his brother Roy until Walt's death in 1966, but his company is still producing TV shows, cartoons, films and merchandise today. His work is extremely popular, loved globally and he has Disney theme parks in many places.

Childhood

Walt Disney, born Walter Elias Disney, lived with his mother, father and siblings. His father, Elias Disney, who was Irish-Canadian and his mother, Flora Disney, who was German-American had five children- four boys and one girl. For most of Walt's childhood, the family lived in Marceline Missouri, where he began painting, drawing and selling pictures to neighbours, family and friends.

In 1911, the family moved to Kansas City and Walt developed a love for trains. In fact, his uncle, Mike Martin, was a train engineer and managed to get Walt a summer job, selling snacks and newspapers to travelers.

He attended McKinley High School in Chicago and took drawing and photography classes. Interestingly, he was a contributing artist for the school paper.

During the night, Walt would attend art classes at the Chicago Art Institute.

At 16, he dropped out of school to join the army, but was rejected for being underage. Instead he joined the Red Cross and he was sent to France for a year to drive an ambulance.

Adult Life and Cartoons

In 1919, Walt returned from France and moved to back to Kansas City, where he wanted to pursue a career as a newspaper artist. His brother Roy helped him get a job at Pesman-Rubin art studio, where he met the cartoonist Ubbe Eert Iwerks, who became good friends with Walt.

After that, he worked at Kansas City Film Ad Company and made commercials based on cutout animation. After Walt experimented with the camera, doing hand-drawn cel-animation, he decided to open his own animation business, shortly afterwards. His first employee was Fred Harman, who was a recruit from the Ad Company.

The new company made many cartoons such as: *Laugh-O-Grams*, which aired on theater screens; seven minute fairytale cartoons, called *Alice in Cartoonland* and a cartoon called *Oswald the Lucky Rabbit*, which was a favourite for many children. In 1925 Disney hired an ink-and-paint artist named Lillian Bounds and after a while they married. However, in 1923 the company was burdened with debt and was forced to declare bankruptcy.

Mickey Mouse and success

Roy and Walt moved to Hollywood and Iwerks also moved to California. The three of them then decided to create Disney Brothers Studio.

A few years later, the company realised someone had stolen the rights to the Oswald cartoon and all of the Disney animators. The three Disney brothers and their wives worked together to create a new cartoon, Mickey Mouse. The first Mickey cartoons were *Plane Crazy* and the *Gallop in' Gaucho* and the third one, *Steamboat Willie*, was the only one with sound. With Walt as the voice of Mickey, the cartoon was an instant sensation.

Silly Symphonies, was a cartoon created in 1929 and featured Mickey's new friends: Minnie Mouse, Donald Duck, Goofy and Pluto. One of the most popular cartoons, *Flowers and Trees*, was one of the first animations in colour to win an Oscar. The *Three Little Pigs* and their theme song "Who's afraid of the big bad wolf?" became a theme for the country in 1933. On December 21st of 1937 was when *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (their first full length film) was premiered in Los Angeles. This film produced an unimaginable \$1.499 million and won eight Oscars.

Over the next five years after *Snow White*, the company produced a string of full-length animated films: *Pinocchio* (1940), *Fantasia* (1940), *Dumbo* (1941) and *Bambi* (1942). In 1940 a setback occurred, when the Disney animators went on strike. However, by 1950 the company was focusing on animated films once again: *Cinderella* (1950), a live-action film- *Treasure Island* (1950), *Alice In Wonderland* (1951), *Peter Pan* (1953), *Lady and the Tramp* (1955), *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) and *101 Dalmatians* (1961). More than 100 films were released.

His last major success was *Mary Poppins* in 1964.

Disneyland and death

Disney's \$17 million Disneyland theme park opened on July 17th in 1955 in California. The park became a place where children and adults could have fun and meet the Disney characters. The park soon expanded in attendance and attractions, adding new rides. They soon opened parks in Tokyo, Paris, Hong Kong and they are planning to build one in Shanghai, which is to open in 2016.

Walt and Roy decided to open a Disney theme park in Florida. It was still under construction when, in 1966, Walt died of lung cancer at the age of 65. After his brother's death, Roy carried on with the plans to finish the Florida theme park, which opened in 1971, under the name of Walt Disney World.

Although he died in 1966, he is still extremely important. Since his death, there has been other Disney theme parks built all over the world, that attract millions of visitors. The Disney company still make films, which are some of the most popular in the world, like Frozen. Disney also owns big franchises like Star Wars.