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## “Started By A Mouse” An examination into the character of Walt Disney, and the Company that he built.

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## **“Started By A Mouse” An examination into the character of Walt Disney, and the Company that he built.**

### **Abstract**

Walt Disney's legacy reaches all over the world, which is a far stretch from his humble beginning delivering newspapers in Kansas City. This study will examine Walt Disney's life, starting with his humble beginnings on the farm, his early days as a cartoonist, to the rise of the Walt Disney Corporation. The examination will look at the man, Walt Disney, focusing on his upbringing and the various challenges that he faced throughout his life that shaped the leader that he would later become, and will reveal how, despite the adversities, obstacles, and challenges that Walt faced, and how they shaped Walt into a successful American entrepreneur, cartoonist, animator, director, and pioneer in animation. Walt can attribute his success to his incredible work ethic and five simple rules every entrepreneur should follow. For Walt, those four simple words, Dream-Believe-Dare-Do, have become the pillars for the Disney corporation and should be foundational for every entrepreneur as they begin to work towards their dreams and goals for their business, and perhaps one day they will be as successful as Walt Disney, remember "it was all started by a mouse."

Bellamy: "Started By A Mouse"

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCE

**“Started By A Mouse”**

**An examination into the character of Walt Disney, and the Company that he built.**

Submitted to Dr. Miles Smith,

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the completion of

HIUS 713

American Entrepreneurship since 1900

by

Micah P. Bellamy

August 16, 2020

## Introduction

In the Magic Kingdom at Disneyland in California, just in front of Sleeping Beauty Castle, stands a statue. The bronze statue was first unveiled in the Disneyland park on Mickey Mouse's 65th birthday on November 18, 1993. Designed by Blaine Gibson, a long-time Disney animator, Imagineer, and legendary Disney sculptor, the statue depicts a life-size Walt Disney holding the hand of his beloved character, Mickey Mouse. Walt appears to be mature, healthy, and is dressed in a suit while wearing a calm and gentle smile. His right arm is lifted towards Main Street as his left hand is holding the hand of a child-size Mickey Mouse. A single plaque immediately below reads, "I think most of all what I want Disneyland to be is a happy place...Where parents and children can have fun, together. Walt Disney."<sup>1</sup> The statue was "rededicated" to celebrate Walt's 100th birthday on December 5, 2001. A new plaque reads, "as a tribute to the Dreams, Creativity, and Vision of WALT DISNEY, whose legacy reaches around the world and here, 'Where the Magic Began.'"

Today, Walt Disney's legacy reaches all over the world, which is a far stretch from his humble beginning delivering newspapers in Kansas City. One man's love of animation, and desire to make other happy transforms him into a pioneer within the American animation industry and establishing a multi-billion-dollar company whose goal is "to develop the most creative, innovative and profitable entertainment experiences and related products in the world."<sup>2</sup> An examination into the man, Walt Disney, will reveal how despite the adversities, obstacles,

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<sup>1</sup> "Partners: The History, Details, and Insight Into Walt & Mickey's Most Famous Statue." *WanderDisney*. Last modified July 17, 2020. <https://wanderdisney.com/partners-statue/>

<sup>2</sup> "Disney - Leadership, History, Corporate Social Responsibility." *The Walt Disney Company*. <https://thewaltdisneycompany.com/about/#leadership>.

and challenges he faced, he became a central figure in the history of animation by transforming a minor studio into an industry giant always remembering that “it all started by a mouse.”<sup>3</sup>

Walter Elias Disney was the fourth son born to Elias and Flora Disney on December 5, 1901, at 1249 Tripp Avenue, in Chicago's Hermosa neighborhood.<sup>45</sup> Two years later, the Disney family welcomed their first little girl, Ruth, on December of 1903.<sup>6</sup> Walt's father, Elias, was a stern religious man. His son Roy once stated that he was a “strict, hard guy with a great sense on honesty and decency. He never drank. I rarely ever saw him smoke.”<sup>7</sup> Elias quickly began to fear that the big city life of Chicago with its crime and corruption would taint his children.<sup>8</sup> In April of 1906, Elias and his wife Flora moved their family to Marceline. Elias' younger brother Robert and his family had moved to Marceline a few years before and was a co-owner of a 440-acre farm less than a mile from the town. Elias was able to purchase a forty-acre farm that had previously been owned by civil war veteran, William E. Crane, who passed away a few months earlier. Walt was only four years old when he first arrived at the farm, but he wrote several years later that he clearly remembered “the day we arrived on the train. A Mr. Coffman met us in the wagon, and we rode out to our house in the country just outside the city limits. I believe it was called the Crane Farm. My first impression of it was that it had a beautiful front yard with lots of weeping willow trees.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *It All Started with a Mouse: The Disney Story*. United States: The Walt Disney Company, 1989.

<sup>4</sup> Neal Gabler. *Walt Disney - the Biography*. London: Aurum Press Ltd, 2011. 8.

<sup>5</sup> In 1909, in a renumbering exercise, the property's address changed to 2156 North Tripp Avenue.

<sup>6</sup> Barrier, Michael. *The Animated Man: A Life of Walt Disney*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007. 9-10.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* 13.

<sup>8</sup> Leonard Mosley. *Disney's World: a Biography*. Chelsea: Scarborough House, 1990.

<sup>9</sup> “Walt Disney Recalls Some Pleasant Childhood Memories,” *Marceline News*, October 13, 1960. The newspaper marked a Disney visit (to dedicate an elementary school named for him) by reprinting a letter he wrote more than twenty years earlier on the occasion of Marceline's fiftieth anniversary.

Walt loved the farm, although he did not live there long, he held it close to his heart. He often reminisced of the many foxes, rabbits, squirrels, opossums, and raccoons that flourished there. It was there on the farm; his family planted orchards, apples, peach, and plum trees. Walt boasted that his family "had every kind of apple you ever heard of, including one called a Wolf River apple. Wolf river apples were tremendous in size, people came from miles to see ours."<sup>10</sup> It was here on the farm in Marceline, where Walt saw his first circus and even spent his own money to see Maude Adams play Peter Pan in a touring company. It was at the farm that Walt began his fascination with cartoons and began to develop his love and gift for drawing. Walt's sister Ruth recalled in an interview how she and Walt had found a barrel of tar. Walt believed that it would be a good idea to use it to paint with, and so the two of them began to "paint" the side of their white house with tar. Walt drew houses with smoke coming from the chimney's, while Ruth drew zigzags. The two were terrified when they realized that the resin would not come off, and Ruth mentioned that "it was still there on the side of the house when we moved."<sup>11</sup>

Walt's love for drawing continued as he would often copy the cartoons by Kevin Walker found on the front page of his father's copy of the Kansas-based socialist newspaper, *The Appeal to Reason*. With paper short to come by in the Disney household, Walt often resorted to toilet paper.<sup>12</sup> When Walt was around the age of eight, Dr. Caleb Sherwood, an old retired doctor, had seen some drawings of farm animals that Walt had in a notepad that his mother had given him. The doctor inspected Walt's pictures of his old Porker, his pig that had died, and Martha, a hen that the family had recently eaten, and Dr. Sherwood took Walt to his home and down to the barn where his horse Rupert was kept. He handed Walt cardboard and some crayons and asked him to

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<sup>10</sup> Neal Gabler. *Walt Disney: the Triumph of the American Imagination*. New York: Knopf, 2008. 10.

<sup>11</sup> Bob Thomas, *Walt Disney, an American Original*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1976.

<sup>12</sup> Mosley, 1990. 29.

draw the horse. After Walt had finished the drawing and Dr. Sherwood had inspected it, he told Walt how much he liked it and offered him a fifty-cent piece to purchase the picture. It was Walt's first commission, the first time he was ever paid for his drawings.<sup>13</sup>

Walt and his family remained on the farm for about four and a half years, until his father Elias had to sell it on November 28, 1910. Elias had “come down with a sickness” that evidently became known to be typhoid fever that progressed into pneumonia.<sup>14</sup> The family remained in Marceline until the end of the school year, renting a house in town. On May 17, 1911, the Disney family moved to Kansas City, Missouri, roughly 120 miles away from Marceline. The family rented a small house in Kansas City, and it was during his time in Kansas City that Walt began to work. In July of 1911, Walt's father had purchased a newspaper route for the *Kansas City Star* in Walt's brother Roy's name. By the time Walt was nine, he and his brother Roy were already businessmen, as they delivered the morning *Times* and the Sunday *Star* to over six hundred houses, which continued to grow over time. The Disney boys would wake up at 4:30 each morning rain, shine, or snow, and deliver their papers until it was time for school, and then would continue to deliver papers from four o'clock in the afternoon, until around supper time.<sup>15</sup> When the Disney family sold their newspaper route on March 17, 1917, they had 925 subscribers to the *Times*, 840 subscribers to the *Star*, and 876 subscribers to the Sunday paper.<sup>16</sup> At the age of sixteen, Disney followed his family back to Chicago where he worked a few odd jobs and

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<sup>13</sup> Luling, Todd Van. “Here's One Thing You Didn't Know About Disney's Origin Story.” *HuffPost*. HuffPost, December 10, 2015. Last modified December 10, 2015. [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/disney-animal\\_n\\_5668a3ece4b0f290e521e19f](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/disney-animal_n_5668a3ece4b0f290e521e19f).

<sup>14</sup> Bob Thomas, *Walt Disney*, 1976. 31.

<sup>15</sup> “Walt Disney, Showman and Educator, Remembers Daisy,” *CTA Journal*, December 1955, 4.

<sup>16</sup> Brian Burnes, Dan Viets, Robert W. Butler, and Donna Martin. *Walt Disney's Missouri: the Roots of a Creative Genius*. Kansas City, MO: Kansas City Star Books, 2002. 53.

took classes three nights a week at the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts.<sup>17</sup> Those classes were the only formal training that Walt had, other than a few children's classes he took while back in Kansas City.<sup>18</sup>

In June of 1917, soon after the United States joined in World War I, Roy Disney joined the navy. Walt met up with Roy in Chicago as Roy was heading to Great Lakes Naval Training Station.<sup>19</sup> A few months later when Roy came to visit family, Walt saw Roy in his uniform looking “swell” and wanted to join him, but at the time Walt was too young. Like many other patriotic American boys, Walt was determined to get into the war, by any means possible and would continually pursue recruiting offices. In the summer of 1918, Walt signed up with a “private subscription deal with forming the Red cross,” as a driver in the American Ambulance Corps. Still too young, and without his father's permission, Walt persuaded his mother to sign the required affidavit for him to join and get his passport, although Disney changed his birthdate from 1901 to 1900 to appear to be seventeen.<sup>20</sup> Walt set sail aboard the *SS Vaubin* in November of 1918, as a part of the last batch of Red Cross volunteers that would be sent to the war effort.<sup>21</sup> Walt spent about a year in France, but the war had already ended by the time he arrived. He spent most of his time drawing cartoons that he would send to various humor magazines, only to become disappointed when he received their rejection slips. He would often earn some extra money by drawing things for the guys – caricatures and decorations for the most part. Disney

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<sup>17</sup>Walt did not attend the prestigious Art Institute of Chicago, which was initially named the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts and then changed its name, but rather went to a rivalry school.

<sup>18</sup> Bob Thomas, *Walt Disney*, 1976, 331.

<sup>19</sup> Bob Thomas, Bob. *Building a Company: Roy O. Disney and the Creation of an Entertainment Empire*. New York: Hyperion, 1998. 35.

<sup>20</sup> Barrier. *The Animated Man: A Life of Walt Disney*, 2007. 22.

<sup>21</sup> Lemesh, Nicholas. “From the Archives - Walt Disney, World War I Driver.” *Red Cross Chat*. Last modified October 1, 2016. <https://redcrosschat.org/2015/09/17/archives-walt-disney-world-war-driver/>.

even decorated the ambulance that he drove around in with cartoon characters.<sup>22</sup> Despite his love of work, Walt realized that he wanted a job that did not demand the level of physical labor that had been a constant in his life from an early age. Disney applied for a discharge and was sent back on September 22, 1919. Upon Disney's return from France, he was determined to put behind him the kind of physically demanding work that his father had endured.

Walt had ambitions of becoming a cartoonist, and so when he returned to the United States, he met back up with Carey Orr, a mentor of Disney's back in Chicago. Orr was the editorial cartoonist for the *Chicago Tribune*, known for his *Kernel Cootie* comic strip.<sup>23</sup> Before Disney shipped off to France, he had met with Orr about some of his drawings. Orr had told Disney that he liked the way he drew, stating, "you've got a good line and flair. All you lack at the moment is bite."<sup>24</sup> Orr then invited Disney to see him upon his return, so Walt did just that. Unfortunately, although Orr liked Walt's work, he felt that Walt was "too nice" to be a cartoonist. Fortunately for Orr, there were no vacancies at the *Tribune*, and so Orr encouraged Walt to look for work elsewhere for the time being. Passing up a twenty-five dollar a week job at a jelly factory, Walt headed back to Kansas City to meet up with his brother Roy, who had been discharged from the navy and worked in a bank. It was in Kansas City that Walt and Ubbe Iwwerks (later known as Ub Iwerks) decided to go into business together as freelance illustrators. The two had both worked at Pesmen-Rubin Art Studio and had recently been let go in early January of 1920. Disney used up the last of the money his father had sent him to

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<sup>22</sup> Lemesh, Nicholas. "From the Archives - Walt Disney, World War I Driver." *Red Cross Chat*. Last modified October 1, 2016. <https://redcrosschat.org/2015/09/17/archives-walt-disney-world-war-driver/>.

<sup>23</sup> Scapigliati, Giuseppe, ed. "Kernel Cootie (the) - Orr Carey Cassius - 1921." *Welcome to ComicArtFans!* Last modified May 13, 2007. <https://www.comicartfans.com/gallerypiece.asp?piece=264413&gsub=45026>.

<sup>24</sup> Mosley, 1990. 49.

purchase some essentials for the business: two desks, an airbrush and a tank of air, drawing boards, and some other small supplies. They named their new illustration firm Iwerks-Disney, and Walt set out to drum up prospects. Walt went to all of the printers in town and drew up a flashy agreement stating that Iwerk-Diseny would be the “official art department” for any printer that agreed to pay them thirty dollars a month. In their first month, Iwerks-Disney brought in \$135.<sup>25</sup> Disney once recalled how the two worked well together, “He was very good at lettering and I did layouts...in pencil. Then I would turn it over and he would do the final inking and cleanup.”<sup>26</sup>

Later that same month, Disney saw an ad from Kansas City Slide in the *Times* for a cartoonist. Disney had attempted to sign the company, Iwerks-Disney Commercial Artists, for the job, but A. Verne Cauger chose to offer the job to Disney at forty dollars a week. After speaking with Iwerks, Disney took the job. In February of 1920, the Kansas City Slide changed its name to the Kansas City Film Ad Company. It was on that date that Disney considered himself starting in the film industry. On July 27, 1959, Walt even wrote a letter to William Beaudine, congratulating him on fifty years in the movie business, only to remark “I want you to know that I am not far behind you – next February will make my 40<sup>th</sup> year as a part of the movie business.”<sup>27</sup> Iwerks stayed behind for a few months before finally joining Disney. Walt began learning a lot about animation during his time at the Kansas City Film Ad Company. The company produced commercials using the cutout animation technique, and so Disney found himself reading books and studying the process for film animations. He soon began to recognize

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<sup>25</sup> Mosley. *Disney's World*, 1990. 55

<sup>26</sup> Christ Mullen. “Ub Iwerks: Master of Animation and Technology.” *The Walt Disney Family Museum*. Last modified March 24, 2017. <https://www.waltdisney.org/blog/ub-iwerks-master-animation-and-technology>.

<sup>27</sup> Barrier. *The Animated Man: A Life of Walt Disney*, 2007. 334.

ways to improve the outcome of the film, believing that drawn animation and more realistic movements were crucial. Walt began experimenting with different techniques including celluloid animation late at night, and eventually was able to create a reel which he named "Newman's Laugh-O-Gram." Walt took the reel, named after the Newman Theater, to see if he could sell it to the theater. The manager liked it, and asked Walt how much it would cost, a nervous Walt agreed to continue making them for free.

Walt continued to make a new "Laugh-O-Gram" film each week and even began working on his *Alice Comedies*, which combined live-action with cartoon interactions with the help of the New York-based distributor, Margaret J. Winkler. Walt cast Virginia Davis in the title role of Alice. Still, by that point, Laugh-O-Gram, Inc. was already behind on its debts. It had been swindled out of \$11,000 by Pictorial Clubs, which had recently gone out of business. Unfortunately, Walt was not a very good businessman, and Laugh-O-Gram, Inc. quickly moved towards bankruptcy.<sup>28</sup> Following another failed independent studio effort, Walt's brother, Roy, wrote to him from Los Angeles, California, "Call it quits, kid. You can't do anything more than you've already done."<sup>29</sup> Walt worked a few odd end jobs to earn enough money to pay off his debts and purchase a ticket out west to join his brother Roy. Although the center of the cartoon industry was in New York, Walt chose to join his brother Roy in Los Angeles in July of 1923, as he was recovering from tuberculosis there, and Walt had hoped to become a live-action film director.<sup>30</sup> Walt tried to sell his *Alice's Wonderland* to no avail, until one day he received word from New York film distributor M.J. Winkler. She had recently lost the rights to the *Felix the*

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<sup>28</sup> Catherine Nichols, and Sayuri Kumagai. *Alice's Wonderland: A Visual Journey Through Lewis Carroll's Mad, Mad World*. New York: Rat Race Publishing, n.d. 102.

<sup>29</sup> Mosely, 71.

<sup>30</sup> Frank Thomas, and Ollie Johnston. *The Illusion of Life: Disney Animation*. New York: Hyperion, 1995. 29.

*Cat and Out of the Inkwell* cartoons and was in need of a new series. In October of 1923, Winkler and Walt had signed a contract for six *Alice* comedies, with an option for two additional series of six episodes each.<sup>31</sup> In the deal, Disney would receive \$1,500 for a negative reel of the first six episodes, and \$1,800 for the second reel.<sup>32</sup> Walt and his brother Roy formed the Disney Brothers Studio—which later became The Walt Disney Company in 1926—to produce the films. In July 1924, Walt was able to persuade Ub Iwerks to move from Kansas City to join them in California.<sup>33</sup>

As their company began to grow, Walt hired an ink artist by the name of Lillian Bounds in the early months of 1925. Walt and Lillian would later marry in July the same year. The ceremony took place at her brother's home in her hometown of Lewiston, Idaho.<sup>34</sup> Lillian would become a strong support for Walt over the years, especially as the tensions mounted with various projects that he was working on, in the words of the historian Steven Watts, Lillian was "content with household management and providing support for her husband."<sup>35</sup> Walt and Lillian had two daughters, Diane, born in December 1933, and Sharon whom they adopted in December of 1936. The two girls were kept out of the public eye as much as possible, to protect them from being bothered by the press, and to afford them a somewhat normal life.

By 1926, Margaret Winkler had married, and her role in the distribution of the *Alice* comedies had been handed over to her husband, Charles Mintz. The series continued

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<sup>31</sup> Frank Thomas, and Ollie Johnston. *The Illusion of Life: Disney Animation*. New York: Hyperion, 1995.29.

<sup>32</sup> Gabler. *Walt Disney: the Triumph of the American Imagination*. 2008. 80.

<sup>33</sup> "About - Leadership, Management Team, Global, History, Awards, Corporate Responsibility." *The Walt Disney Company*. Last modified May 5, 2016. <https://web.archive.org/web/20160505063818/https://thewaltdisneycompany.com/about/>.

<sup>34</sup> "Lewiston Morning Tribune." *Google News Archive Search*. Google, September 1982. Last modified September 1982. <https://news.google.com/newspapers?id=D7peAAAAIBAJ&pg=4762%2C3438544>.

<sup>35</sup> Watts, Steven. *The Magic Kingdom: Walt Disney and the American Way of Life*. Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2001. 352.

for a bit longer, but the series came to a close in 1927, as Disney desired to move towards total animation.<sup>36</sup> The final *Alice* comedy, *Alice the Whaler*, opened in theaters on July 25, 1927.<sup>37</sup> Soon after the end of the *Alice* comedies, Mintz began to request new material to distribute through Universal Pictures, Disney and Iwerks began working on a new character. Disney wanted a character that was "peppy, alert, saucy and venturesome, keeping him also neat and trim," and what came about was Oswald the Lucky Rabbit.<sup>38</sup> Walt had allowed the Universal executives to choose the name "Oswald."

In February 1928, as the *Oswald* series had grown in popularity, Walt sought to discuss a larger fee for the production of the *Oswald* series with Charles Mintz, but Mintz was scheming behind his back.<sup>39</sup> Mintz had gone and persuaded many of Walt's artists to work directly for him, including some of Walt's closest artists: Harman, Ising, Maxwell, and Freleng. What made matters worse, was Walt discovered that he didn't actually own the rights to *Oswald*, but that Universal owned the rights as a part of their payment for the films. Charles Mintz told Disney that he could accept the reduced payments, or that he would start his own studio with Walt's old staff and produce the series himself. Walt declined Mintz's ultimatum and left with only Ub Iwerks remaining with him.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> "Alice Hits the Skids." *Alice Hits the Skids* | *The Walt Disney Family Museum*. Last modified February 1, 1926. <https://web.archive.org/web/20140714201543/http://www.waltdisney.org/content/alice-hits-skids>.

<sup>37</sup> "The Final Alice Comedy Is Released." *The Final Alice Comedy Is Released* | *The Walt Disney Family Museum*. Last modified July 25, 1927.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20140714145210/http://www.waltdisney.org/content/final-alice-comedy-released>.

<sup>38</sup> Soteriou, Helen. "Could Oswald the Lucky Rabbit Have Been Bigger than Mickey?" *BBC News*. BBC News, December 3, 2012. Last modified December 3, 2012.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20160308094315/http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-19910825>.

<sup>39</sup> Barrier. *The Animated Man: A Life of Walt Disney*, 2007. 55.

<sup>40</sup> "Secret Talks." *Secret Talks* | *The Walt Disney Family Museum*. Last modified January 1, 1928. <https://web.archive.org/web/20150429005131/http://www.waltdisney.org/content/secret-talks>.

Universal owned the rights to *Oswald*, so Disney needed to find a replacement. In an interview in 1956, Lillian Disney remembered Walt discussing a number of ideas on a train ride home from New York. "He was talking about different things, kittens and cats and this and that. Well, a mouse is awful cute, and he just kept talking about a mouse. So that's where he originated Mickey Mouse, was on the train coming home all by himself without asking anybody. He just decided it was a cute idea."<sup>41</sup> Walt came up with the early sketches for what would become Mickey Mouse, but it was animator Ub Iwerks who reworked Disney's sketches, making the character easier to animate. Walt in return supplied the personality and voice for many years. As many of the older Disney animators would attest, "Ub designed Mickey's physical appearance, but Walt gave him his soul."<sup>42</sup> Ub may have given Mickey his physical appearance, and Walt may have been his voice, but it was Lillian Disney who gave Mickey his name.<sup>43</sup>

The first short that Mickey Mouse appeared in was not the first short that Disney had filmed. Iwerks, who was the primary animator on every Disney short released in 1928 and 1929, had spent six weeks working on the first Mickey short along with Harman and Ising. Both Harman and Ising had signed contracts with Mintz, but since he was still working on getting his new studio up and running, the two continued to work for Disney. Together they created the Mickey short, *Plane Crazy*, whose test screening on May 15, 1928, had failed to impress the audience.<sup>44</sup> Their second Mickey short, *The Gallopin' Gaucho*, was not released because they

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<sup>41</sup> "You've Come A Long Way, Mickey!" *The Walt Disney Family Museum*. Last modified November 4, 2010.

<https://www.waltdisney.org/blog/youve-come-long-way-mickey>.

<sup>42</sup> Solomon, Charles. *The Golden Age of Mickey Mouse*.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20080710052034/http://disney.go.com/disneyatoz/familymuseum/exhibits/articles/mickymousegoldenage/index.html>.

<sup>43</sup> Suddath, Claire. "Mickey Mouse." *Time*. Time Inc., November 18, 2008. Last modified November 18, 2008.

<http://content.time.com/time/arts/article/0,8599,1859935,00.html>.

<sup>44</sup> Jeff Lenburg. *The Encyclopedia of Animated Cartoons*. New York: Checkmark, 2009. 107.

could not find a distributor.<sup>45</sup> Initially, there were some doubts that a sound cartoon would be believable to an audience. So, before Disney paid to record the soundtrack, Walt arranged for a screening of the film to a test audience with live sound to accompany it.<sup>46</sup> The screen test went over well, and *Steamboat Willie* opened at the Colony Theater in New York on November 18, 1928. It was the first animated film with synchronized sound and became an instant success. The success of *Steamboat Willie* and the introduction of Mickey Mouse saved Walt and the Walt Disney Company from going bankrupt.

The success of *Steamboat Willie*, and the introduction of Mickey Mouse, gave Walt and his company the edge it needed, and they quickly began making several more Mickey shorts. Soon after the production on *Steamboat Willie* was complete, Walt signed a contract with Pat Powers, the former executive of Universal Pictures, to use the "Powers Cinephone" recording system,<sup>47</sup> which became Disney's new distributor for his early cartoons.<sup>48</sup> When the film's production costs went up, Walt went to Powers to request an increase in payments for the movie. Powers refused Disney's request and subsequently persuaded Iwerks to work for him. Iwerks had been frustrated at how Walt required him to abandon the practice of animating every separate cel in moving towards a more efficient technique where Ub would draw the key poses and allow his assistants to sketch the in-between poses.<sup>49</sup> The culmination of the Depression, Ub leaving,

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<sup>45</sup> "Plane Crazy: 'A Mickey Mouse Cartoon.'" *Disney Shorts: 1928: Plane Crazy*. The Encyclopedia of Disney Animated Shorts, n.d.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20120301151952/http://www.disneyshorts.org/shorts.aspx?shortID=94>.

<sup>46</sup> Jim Fanning. *Walt Disney*. New York: Chelsea House, 1994.

<sup>47</sup> Mark, Langer. "Disney, Walt (05 December 1901–15 December 1966), Animator and Motion Picture Producer." *American National Biography*. Last modified 2000.

<sup>48</sup> Christopher Finch. *Art of Walt Disney: from Mickey Mouse to the Magic Kingdom*. NY: Harry N. Abrams, 2004. 23-24.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* 26-27

Walt's own perfectionism, Powers scheming against him, and his ever-going work ethic drove Walt into a breakdown sometime in October 1931.<sup>50</sup>

In an interview twenty-five years later, Walt recalled, "I had a hell of a breakdown. I went to pieces...I kept expecting more from the artists and when they let me down and things, I got worried. Just pound, pound, pound. Costs were going up...I just got very irritable."<sup>51</sup>

Fortunately, Walt heeded his physician's advice, and he and Lillian got away from the studio and enjoyed their first-ever vacation in six years of marriage. Together they flew to Washington D.C. and spent a few days exploring, next they took a train down to Key West, Florida, a boat ride to Havana Cuba, and followed by a quiet cruise through the Panama Canal.<sup>52</sup> Upon Walt's return, he exclaimed that he and Lillian had the "time of our life." The liberation of Walt's burden of perfectionism had been lifted, and he was ready to return to work, but not without making some crucial decisions. Walt began to make time for exercise, going to the gym two to three times a week, boxing, horseback riding, and golf. More importantly, Walt returned with a renewed vision for his role within the Walt Disney Company. Within a year, Walt and his team had recovered from their financial trouble, begin introducing color into their films, and turned out *Flowers and Trees*, the industry's first color-and-sound. *Flowers and Trees*, a Silly Symphony, won Walt his first Academy Award for Best Cartoon in 1932.<sup>53</sup> It was the first year that the Academy offered such a category. A Disney cartoon won an Oscar every year for the rest of the decade. The rest is history.

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<sup>50</sup> Walt Disney, and Kathy Merlock Jackson. *Walt Disney: Conversations*. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2006.60.

<sup>51</sup> Barrier. *The Animated Man: A Life of Walt Disney*, 2007. 84.

<sup>52</sup> Gabler. *Walt Disney: the Triumph of the American Imagination*. 2008. 166.

<sup>53</sup> Dove, Steve. "1932: THE 4TH ACADEMY AWARD WINNERS." *Oscar.go.com*. Last modified December 10, 2014. <https://oscar.go.com/news/oscar-history/1932-4th-academy-award-winners>.

Although the Walt Disney Corporation was not without its challenges and struggles moving forward, it continued to do just that, move forward. After years of animating and directing, and before that years of various forms of work that required Walt working with his hands, before that years of hard manual labor all the way back to his newspaper-delivery days, the challenge for Walt was to convince himself that it was time for him to focus his attention on the mental side of the business. Walt had gathered a large number of talented individuals, and it he needed to focus his attention on coordinating the talent of his team to the various projects that they were working on at the time. "The vital part I played is coordinating these talents. And encouraging these talents."<sup>54</sup>

By today's standards, Walt should have failed, and he did over and over again. Although he had no talent for numbers, going over budget on every film, Disney was a man with ideas. Ideas inspired by his time on the farm, his experiences as an ambulance driver in France during World War I. Ideas of talking mice, flying elephants, all inspired by the laughter of children, and the thought of bringing families together so that people of all ages could feel like a child again.<sup>55</sup> Walt Disney became a successful American entrepreneur, cartoonist, animator, director, and pioneer in animation. Walt's success can be attributed to his incredible work ethic and five simple rules every entrepreneur should follow.

*"I'd say it's been my biggest problem all my life... it's money. It takes a lot of money to make these dreams come true."*

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<sup>54</sup> Barrier. *The Animated Man: A Life of Walt Disney*, 2007. 86.

<sup>55</sup> "The Blending of Fantasy and Commerce Reaches New Heights in Disneyland." *Newspapers.com*. The Kansas City Times, July 23, 1955. Last modified July 23, 1955.  
<https://www.newspapers.com/image/657766819/?terms=elias%2Bdisney>.

First, an entrepreneur must be a salesman. Walt was never really great with money, but he believed in himself and his dreams. Halfway through the making of Snow White, Disney ran out of money and wasn't going to finish the film. It was termed "Disney's Folly," as even his own family begged him to give up, but Disney pressed on. He personally went to different producers and showed them some of the raw footage of the film to convince them to finish financing its production. A huge success, Snow White ushered in the Golden Age of Animation.<sup>56</sup>

*“You can design and create, and build the most wonderful place in the world. But it takes people to make the dream a reality”.*

Second, Leadership is inspiration, innovation and focus. Walt was known as a wonderful storyteller. Any boss can tell an employee to do something, but a great leader inspires them to action. Walt would often go into great details explaining an idea that he had, to make it come alive for them, and then he would inspire them to make themselves a part of the story so that he could get more out of them. Walt knew how to inspire their creativity and get the best out of each employee.

*“Whenever I go on a ride, I’m always thinking of what’s wrong with the thing and how it can be improved.”*

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<sup>56</sup> Hammond, Trevor. “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs Released Nationwide: February 4, 1938 - Fishwrap The Official Blog of Newspapers.com.” *Fishwrap*. Last modified February 3, 2016. <https://blog.newspapers.com/snow-white-and-the-seven-dwarfs-released-nationwide-february-4-1938/>.

Third, when the doors of Disneyland opened, Walt would regularly walk around the park. He would personally test all of the rides, continually noticing things out of place, and asking guests their opinions. Walt even got upset at his animators for going off-campus for lunch, he required them to stand in the lines, and experience what the guests experienced so they could see how they could improve things first-hand. As his animators would attest, good enough was never good enough for Walt Disney.

*“All the adversity I’ve had in my life, all my troubles and obstacles, have strengthened me... You may not realize it when it happens, but a kick in the teeth may be the best thing in the world for you.”*

Fourth, change your attitude on failure. Walt Disney failed a lot. The first several businesses that he started failed. When Walt’s animation company Laugh O’ Gram, never made a single dollar. But the most notable failure of Walt Disney has to do with Oswald the Lucky Rabbit. Walt lost everything. He lost his studio, equipment, the majority of his animators, and even his creation, Oswald. But, it was because of this failure that Walt created Mickey Mouse.

*“The difference in winning and losing is most often not quitting.”*

Lastly, remember that Resiliency is an entrepreneur’s best friend. Despite all of Walt’s success, it is important to remember that it took Walt 16 years to obtain the rights to make Mary Poppins. The difficulties that Walt faced with P.L. Travers were so infamous that it even became its own movie. Walt was also turned down 302 times when trying to find financing to build Disneyland before he was able to strike a deal with the television studios. And, Walt was also

fired from his first job at a newspaper because he wasn't thought to be creative and innovative enough.

Walt was asked in an interview once what the secret to his success was, he thought for a while and then he said this: "I dream, I test my dreams against my beliefs, I dare to take risks, and I execute my vision to make those dreams come true." Those four simple words, Dream-Believe-Dare-Do, have become the pillars for the Disney corporation, and should be foundational for every entrepreneur as they begin to work towards their dreams and goals for their business, and perhaps one day they will be as successful as Walt Disney, but even he would want you to remember that "it was all started by a mouse."

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