



Walt Disney

The creator of Mickey Mouse, founder of Disneyland and Walt Disney World Theme Parks and the Walt Disney Corporate empire was born on December 5, 1901 in Chicago. His father, Elias Disney, was an Irish-Canadian. His mother was of German-American descent. Walt was one of five children, four boys and a girl. The family moved to a farm near Marceline, Missouri, where Walt was raised. Walt became interested in drawing at an early age. He sold his first sketches to neighbors when he was only seven years old. The family moved several times in his life: to Kansas City, Missouri and back to Chicago. During his High School days in Chicago, Disney divided his time between an interest in drawing and photography, working on the school paper. At night he attended the Academy of Fine Arts to perfect his talent.

When America entered the First World War, Walt attempted to enlist in the army to serve his country, but he was rejected because he was only 16. He joined the Red Cross and was sent overseas, where he spent a year driving an ambulance and chauffeuring Red Cross officials. His ambulance was covered from one end to the other with drawings and cartoons, instead of camouflage. After the war, Walt returned to Kansas City, where he began his career as an advertising cartoonist. Here, in 1920, he created and marketed his first original animated cartoons and later perfected a new method for combining live action and animation.

By the time Walt had started to create *The Alice Comedies*, which was about a real girl and her adventures in an animated world, he ran out of money and his company went bankrupt. Instead of quitting, Walt packed his suitcase and with his unfinished print of *The Alice Comedies* in hand, headed for Hollywood to start a new business at the age of twenty-one.

The early flop of *The Alice Comedies* didn't discourage Walt but gave him a respect for failure. He would risk everything three or four times in his life to succeed. Walt's brother, Roy Disney, was already in California, with encouragement and financial backing. The two brothers borrowed an additional \$500, and set up shop in their uncle's garage. Soon, they received an order from New York for the first *Alice in Cartoonland* (*The Alice Comedies*) short feature and they expanded their production operation to the rear of a real estate office. It was Walt's enthusiasm and faith in himself, and others that led him on the road to success. Hollywood would never be the same as a result of his perseverance.

On July 13, 1925, Walt married one of his first employees, Lillian Bounds, in Lewiston, Idaho. They would be blessed with two daughters, Diane and Sharon.

Three years after Walt and Lilly wed, Walt created a new animated character who would prove to be his breakthrough, Mickey Mouse. It is a well-known fact that Walt had a fear of mice. Mickey made his screen debut in *Steamboat Willie*, the world's first synchronized sound cartoon, which premiered at the Colony Theater in New York on November 18, 1928. Disney himself provided the original voice.

Walt continually wanted to perfect his animation techniques and every new cartoon showed improvement over the previous ones. He held the patent for Technicolor for two years, allowing him to make the only color cartoons. In 1932, the production entitled *Flowers and Trees* won Walt the first of his studio's Academy Awards. In 1937 he released *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, the first full-length animated musical feature, premiered at in Los Angeles. He had to literally act it out in the office of a financial backer to win his approval. During the next five years, Walt Disney Studios completed other full-length animated classics such as *Pinocchio*, *Fantasia*, *Dumbo*, and *Bambi*. The last was first premiered in France before its American debut.

His success brought he and his family great fame and fortune, however a painful episode occurred in his life. He and Roy bought their parents a home close to their new Burbank studios in California. Less than a month later his mother died of asphyxiation, caused by a faulty furnace in the new home. He carried the guilt of this for the rest of his life.

During World War II , the Disney studios and employees were engaged in special projects for the US Government, some of which are still shown through-out the world today. He was still able to devote time to the production of comedy short subjects, though to boost civilian and military morale. Disney's 1945 feature *The Three Caballeros*, combined live action with the cartoon animation, a process he used in other features such as *Song of the South* and the award-winning *Mary Poppins*. More than 100 features were produced by his studio. Later Disney expanded into live-action features like *Treasure Island* (1951) and then into television -- the family-friendly variety program *The Wonderful World of Disney* was a prime-time hit from 1954-83. During Disney's life his studios won 48 Academy Awards.

Walt had a vision to create an atmosphere for families to enjoy time together and amusement. In 1955 Disney opened a theme park, Disneyland, in Anaheim, California; it was an immediate hit and became the public flagship of the Disney empire. Other larger Disney theme parks followed in Florida, Tokyo and France. The Florida operation also saw his dream of the future in the theme park, EPCOT (Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow). He took a deep interest in the establishment of California Institute of the Arts. Of Cal Arts Walt once said, "It's the principal thing I hope to leave when I move on to greener pastures. If I can help provide a place to develop the talent of the future, I think I will have accomplished something."

Walt succumbed to lung cancer at the age of 65 in 1966. He left a mountain of work and accomplishments that are unparalleled to this day. Walt Disney still holds the record for career Academy Award nominations, with 64. His optimism came from his unique ability to see the entire picture. His views and visions, came from the fond memory of bygone days, and persistence for the future. He loved history. As a result he connected it to his lifelong mission of making life more enjoyable, and fun. He is

remembered around the world as a creative genius who bridged our past to our future.

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