

THE FLORIDA PROJECT

by

Amanda Canupp Mendoza

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty

of

George Mason University

in Partial Fulfillment of

The Requirements for the Degree

of

Master of Fine Arts

Creative Writing

Committee:

_____ Director

_____ Department Chairperson

_____ Dean, College of
Humanities and Social
Sciences

Date: _____ Spring Semester 2016
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA

The Florida Project

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts at George Mason University

by

Amanda Canupp Mendoza
Bachelor of Arts
University of Central Florida, 2011

Director: Kyoko Mori, Professor
Department of English

Spring Semester 2016
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA



This work is licensed under a [creative commons attribution-noncommercial 3.0 unported license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/).

DEDICATION

To Javi & Mom. Thanks for making my world magical.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I've had so much support in the forging of this narrative about reality and magic. I'm grateful for support from the strangers who also happened to be accomplished writers—Peter Trachtenburg, Ben Percy, Sam Chanse, Chiwan Choi, and Alyse Knorr—whom I drove around the DMV area during Fall for the Book, and who were curious and excited about my work.

Thanks to my MFA cohort—Rajpreet and Eric—who are always eager to read about a little bit of Disney: I was lucky to have the time I had with you. And thanks to Robbie, who took the time to help me get unstuck in my stickiest essay. Thanks to Alisa, my friend and my ear and my problem-solver: you are an inspiration! I learned so much from you about being a leader and a teacher. You got me through this program.

Thanks to Steve and Tim for asking me think more deeply and ask more questions. Thanks to Susan Lawrence, the starship captain who told me to boldly go wherever I wanted to go.

Thanks to Will and Katie, our Virginia family, pushing us through those 13.3 miles of Disney “fun” for our betterment. Thanks to Jenn, my BFFL, most-def, FWEV. Mom, you are a princess, a queen, a friend, a guide, a healer, a confidant, a stalker. Javier, you are the Flynn to my Rapunzel, taking me on adventures around the world, the Mickey to my Minnie, keeping me company and listening to my stories, and the Captain Hook to my Peter Pan, returning me to reality when I fly too high. Without you, my life would be far less magical.

Finally, the biggest thanks go to Kyoko Mori—my mentor, supporter, and guide. Your wisdom changed this work into something I'm proud to put into the world.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	vi
The Florida Project	1
How to Become a Cast Member	11
Escape	24
Said	28
Wishes.....	32
Forged	39
Déjà Vu.....	53
In Beaune	61
Disney Vintage	68
On Time.....	81
Go-Away Green.....	93
Escape Again	104
Obituary Notice.....	110
Stars	114
How to Survive A Terrorist Attack.....	122
Unsaid	125
Escape Again And Again.....	129
Annotated Bibliography	133

ABSTRACT

THE FLORIDA PROJECT

Amanda Canupp Mendoza, MFA

George Mason University, 2016

Thesis Director: Dr. Kyoko Mori

This collection of essays is my attempt to closely read a place that I once called home: Walt Disney World. This is a world of fantasy made real, a world carefully constructed around a narrative of happiness and wishes coming true. And wishes do come true. I've seen it. I've been part of it.

This subject is one already considered by many intelligent writers from many perspectives. There's very little that hasn't been considered: Disney the company, Disney the man (or the myth), Disney parks behind the scenes, Disney from an economic or historical or cultural standpoint.

But there's something still to be uncovered in how magic and reality work together. This project is my attempt to uncover those things through personal essay, memoir, analytical essay, and narrative research, delivered in several forms: lists, traditional essays, collage, and flash nonfiction.

When I look at Walt Disney World, I see something unique because of my unique standing as a former cast member, a writer, a believer, and a doubter. I see its layers. I see its “go away greens” and “blend in browns,” specific paint colors designed by Imagineers for use on fences and buildings designed to do just those jobs: merge reality with magic. I am fascinated by these greens and browns, by the real work it takes to create spectacle, by the real people pushing the green button on the rides and making characters and settings from cartoons real. I’m attracted to the true ingenuity it takes to design the latest attraction, the mythology handed down about this world’s creator, and the authentic dedication to an ideal passed down by a man with a mouse and an idea. The fact that this magic is so real astounds me, confuses me, pushes me to wonder. It is from this place of wonderment that I consider the reality of terrorism in magical places, the reality of the life drained from its cast members, the reality of time’s place in a timeless world, the reality of how much this world matters to its guests. This is my exploration of Disney through Walt’s Florida Project, studied through a lens of my personal history and my research.

THE FLORIDA PROJECT

We didn't have the Disney Channel when we were growing up in the '90s, but we did have Disney movies. My two younger brothers, Josh and Dustin, and I used to watch *The Little Mermaid* over and over, sitting for hours in front of the T.V. in our three-bedroom trailer in upstate South Carolina. We were amazed every time Ariel magically got her legs and scared every time the pointy end of Prince Eric's ship killed the evil sea witch Ursula. Her eyes fell back into her head and a fork of lightning struck her crown, terrifying us as skull and bones were illuminated from the inside out. We watched it over and over again, potentially damaging the fragile VHS with every re-watch.

In 1965, the *Orlando Sentinel* broke the news with the headline: "We Say: 'Mystery' Industry is Disney." Walt Disney had been all over the country looking for land to host the new world he was envisioning. A deal had been struck to build in St. Louis, but a man in the local government had drunkenly challenged Walt about his decision not to sell alcohol in his parks, so Walt went home. He'd been to Niagara, but it was too cold. He'd been to his parents' former hometown just outside of Ocala in central Florida, but that was too swampy. He flew over a lake in Kissimmee and didn't have to land the plane he was piloting to know that it was the place.

Before the *Little Mermaid* there was a grainy black and white video of a man with dark slick hair and a mustache. He stands in front of a desk ringing a "pixie bell," which

he says makes a sound much too high for human ears. He didn't have to introduce himself for my brothers and me to know that he was the man with the loopy signature and the castle at the beginning of every Disney movie. A tiny cartoon version of Tinker Bell flies into view, coating Walt with a shimmering powder that raises him up in the air. Walt dusts himself off as his feet move closer to the ground, laughing as he says that Tink's pixie dust could make you fly. Walt invites the audience to follow Tink, who flies out the window to Disneyland. My memory insists that then the camera would fly through the window and focus in on a Technicolor version of the same man in a different office standing in front of a giant map of Florida, but that doesn't make sense. My mind must have conflated my only two experiences watching Walt Disney the man. In this second film, Walt sits on the edge of a desk in front of a wall-length map of Florida, pointing with a thin stick to a space that he says is in between Orange County and Osceola County. The seven-year-old child in front of the television couldn't know that the new world he was building in Orange County would become her home 15 years later.

There's a press release on YouTube filmed on November 15th, 1965, the day the Florida Project was officially announced. It's in black and white and begins partway through a speech by Florida Governor Hayden Burns, seated at a table with two other men. Behind the men is a sign that reads "Florida Welcomes Walt Disney."

Burns explains that Walt Disney will bring a new world of entertainment, pleasure, and economic development to the state of Florida. On his right, he announces, is Mr. Walt Disney. On his left, the financial genius of Walt Disney productions, its president, Mr. Roy Disney. The Governor addresses Walt, whose temples are grey and whose eyes gaze at the crowd. Burns says that this is the largest gathering he's ever

seen in the state of Florida. Walt laughs, perhaps at the comparative vision of crowds gathered daily at the Disneyland he's already built in California or at the vision of crowds he foresees at his Disney World to come. And then he speaks, his voice deep and weary.

"Well, Mr. Governor, it's been a wonderful reception that you've given us here. All the faces seem friendly and we feel very much at home." The camera centers on his face. He meanders over the bigness of the project, like he's not sure how much to reveal, and he lands in a place that feels strange for such a press conference.

"My brother and I have been together in our business for 42 years now. He's my big brother." Walt moves through his history with his brother: in more colorful words than the ones he uses, Walt is saying that he was Peter Pan, soaring through the air, refusing to grow up, and Roy was Captain Hook, waving his fists at Walt from his sure-footed stance on the ground. But, on the subject of the Florida Project, they were equals, partners, two Lost Boys, together accomplishing the goal of creating a new place of magic away from the hoteliers and businesses taking advantage of the tourist's natural attraction to the promise of magic and castles and escape. "He was with me from the start," Walt says. "Now whether that's good or bad, I don't know..."

My brothers and I would watch Walt talk about what he called the Florida Project, then fast-forward through the previews, and watch Ariel's adventure again. I was a 4th-grade honor student who told the school guidance counselor that I was crying in music class because I was afraid that my brothers and I would be left alone at home, when really I was upset that the music teacher picked someone else to sing the solo. After school each day, I would walk to the front of the school to the kindergarten classrooms,

where the teacher would tell me that Josh was in trouble again for throwing scissors or pushing over desks. At home, Dustin was two, running around the house wearing only a diaper. Our mother was a 25-year-old with three kids, a boyfriend named Mark who lived with us sometimes, and a job in the local textile mill. My father's mother would later tell me that she saw dark, purple spots on my mother's arms and she knew we would soon have to leave South Carolina. One day my mother started packing our clothes into boxes, telling us in the same voice she might use if we were going to Disney World that we were moving to Florida to be near our Mimi and two aunts in Inverness. But, it was a secret. We couldn't tell Mark.

There are people who spend their lives studying Walt Disney, digging through archives to fit together narratives about a man who was in many ways like the elephant with the blind men: each reached out to touch the elephant and each experienced a different side of the same creature. For a man with so many biographies and such storytelling ability, it's difficult to see which side of the same man we're looking at. He so carefully controlled the fairy-tale narratives he produced that it's strange his own narrative contains so many mysteries. How would he want to be crafted on paper? Would he care that the Disney channel—a whole channel dedicated to his works—recently showed the last time Walt was caught on film and brandished it as newsworthy?

I had been in fourth grade for two weeks, when my uncle from Florida showed up during Labor Day weekend. My mother packed me, Josh, Dustin, and whatever else would fit in his van, leaving the back door of the trailer wide open in the cool September air.

In the last time Walt was caught on camera, he sits behind a desk holding open a script. He looks at the camera as if he's just become aware that it's there. His gaze is foggy and I wonder how many takes this 2-minute speech took. Across the bottom of the screen appear the words "AN EVENING WITH WALT DISNEY: Filmed October 27, 1966."

"Good evening, friends," he says. He puts down the script. "I'm sorry to have to welcome you to this invitational showing of *Follow Me, Boys* in this way. I'd give anything to be there with you. But this seems to be one of those times I'm tied down here at the studio night and day. Of course, it's always this way when we're shooting a picture. And it so happens we're in the middle of shooting one right now." He talks about the film he's making and its stars. "Now there's a sequence in the picture that I would like very much to run for you. It's that part where Tommy, fresh off the boat from Ireland, has been sent by an employment agency, to the Biddle home to apply for the job as butler. He walks in unannounced and this is what happened."

The camera fades out.

We moved in with my mother's new boyfriend, Billy, who was also my mom's childhood sweetheart. Before we moved in with him, we would visit my mom's family in central Florida and he would take my mom on dates while our grandmother fed my brothers and me lasagna and cookie dough ice cream. When they came back, we would play doctor with Billy. I would give him shots with a clicky pen and write prescriptions for candy and chocolate. I remember standing in the hallway of our new home as my mom explained that Billy worked at a college. I imagined him with his dark hair slicked back,

wearing a suit, talking in front of a classroom. Only later when I attended the community college he worked at did I see him in action as a professional math tutor, scribbling numbers wildly across a white board.

Overnight, Billy suddenly had a family. He woke us up for school every morning and made sure we caught the bus. He pushed us on the tire swing he put up in our backyard and played chase with us between the wide, twisted oak trees, a warm breeze lifting the Spanish moss dangling on the arcing branches. He'd drive us to McDonald's or Burger King on the weekends while our mom was working. During the spring, he would roll down the windows as we passed through the orange tree grove, teaching us to seize the scent of orange blossoms in the evening air.

Pain in his chest and leg pushed Walt to go to the hospital across the street from his Burbank studio on November 2, 1966. He thought it was an old polo injury. A spot was found on his lung.

Mom and Billy took us to Disney World just one time. It must have been soon after we moved to Florida. I don't remember meeting Mickey and I don't remember riding the monorail and I don't remember the stroller my mom must have been using to push Dustin. I remember only a vague impression of a tall, pointy castle and the feeling that I might be sick on a ride that rose up out of Tomorrowland and flew our spaceships in circles above the Magic Kingdom.

When Disney historians want to hear what Walt was really like, they go to Richard Sherman, famous for working with Walt on *Mary Poppins*. Throughout his re-tellings, details change.

The story of the last time he saw Walt is always the same.

“He was walking down the hall, I remember, and he stopped by us. He never used to compliment us. He’d say, ‘that’ll work.’ And this time, he stopped and he said, ‘keep up the good work, boys.’”

The clearest image I have of Walt Disney World as a child is of a now-lost picture of Josh and me. I am 10, standing in a wide stance on top of a rock and offering the camera a peace sign, my bobbed brown hair at my chin in the style of Posh Spice. Josh is standing on the ground beside me with a wide grin and spiked up short blonde hair, caught forever in the middle of a karate chop of Disney excitement. In the background are larger decorative rocks and possibly a sign pointing toward the restrooms. I’ve since tried to find the spot in Magic Kingdom where that picture was taken. Why would my mother, who had only a disposable camera, choose to take this picture of us instead of pictures of us on rides or meeting Mickey or Goofy? A stranger looking at the picture wouldn’t even know that we were at the Most Magical Place on Earth.

Walt’s daughter told her father’s biographers that he’d celebrated his 65th birthday on December 5th, 1966 in the hospital. She’s been shopping for Christmas gifts on December 14th. She told the salesman that her father had been ill, that he’d lost a lot of weight, that he needed fleece slippers for his cold feet. Her mother called her that night.

“Walt was so wonderful today. He was so strong. I know he’s going to get better. When he pulled me down to kiss me, his arm was so strong around me.”

In 2010, I was in Orlando and I was a full-time student at University of Central Florida and I needed a job. I submitted an application on the Disney World website, which said that there were positions available in costuming, where my friend Tyler worked. I got an interview and went to the Casting Center thirty-five minutes away from my apartment.

Roy stood at the foot of Walt’s hospital bed, rubbing his brother’s feet. The ceiling tiles became a grid, breaking Walt’s not-yet-built Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow into squares. He pointed to each square, drawing with his fingers, the tiles becoming apartments, parks, businesses, and neighborhoods. He would skip over tiles, leaving spaces for technologies not yet invented. He would pause over some squares, not to wonder how an idea like an enclosed temperature-controlled dome over the center of the city might become a reality, but how exciting it would be to stroll those streets without rain, humidity, or heat.

Roy stood in the same place the next morning.

“Well, kid. This is the end, I guess,” he said, rubbing the feet of his brother’s body.

But it wasn’t the end. Roy carried on.

Two weeks after my initial interview I had been through both “Traditions” training, which introduced the culture and history of Disney as a company, and “On with the

Show” training, an introduction to Hollywood Studios. We were trained that cast members weren’t just workers or employees; they were part of the show. On my first day of training, I parked in cast member parking for the first time and walked through the cast member entrance.

Walt stands in front of the wall-length map of Florida. He moves from in front of the map to a nearby black chair. He is almost breathless. It is 1966, months before the spot is discovered on his lung.

“So that’s what Epcot is,” he says to the camera. “An Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow that will always be in a state of becoming... a community of tomorrow that will never be completed.”

His ideas expanded from those ceiling tiles, jumping off the page and onto the real land Walt had chosen. There, there is Main Street with its butter popcorn and cotton candy scents drifting down the road. To the east is Walt’s Tomorrowland. Watch the People-Mover carrying guests through Space Mountain and Buzz Lightyear’s Star Command. Follow the path down to Fantasyland, where we are reminded that It’s a Small World, but our ideas can still be very big if we are united. As evening falls, the tiny white bulbs illuminate Prince Charming’s Regal Carrousel, around and around, until the lights are one golden blur. Continue on to Liberty Square, where 999 happy haunts float through the Haunted Mansion and a hall of past and present presidents watch you from their places onstage, and on to Frontierland, a mountainous land of thunder and splashes, logs and trains pulling you down hills so fast it takes your stomach away. Keep on to Adventureland, a place alive with pirates and dancing bears and Dole Whips: pineapple and vanilla twisted together in a cold treat to battle the Florida heat. And then,

you're back at Main Street, U.S.A., the castle alight with purples and whites and blues. The lights around Main Street are lowered suddenly, as if each lamp on the street is an oil-powered candle turned down leaving only a flickering flame. The sky then is ignited, bursts of color exploding in the air, rupturing in time with the sound of someone, a child, singing softly about Wishes. At first it sounds cliché, dreaming about wishes coming true, but then the reality of this place, of these stars rupturing in the sky, of the tens of thousands of people paused, captivated by the same nightly event, becomes clear. This is a dream made real. This is Walt's Florida Project.

HOW TO BECOME A CAST MEMBER

First, I tried to become something, anything, else. A Delta gate agent/essayist. An office assistant/poet. An Old Navy cashier/playwright. The next David Sedaris.

I failed at each of these. I started failing early, my sophomore year in high school. When the guidance counselor asked what I wanted to be, I said that I wanted to be a journalist, that I want to reach into the world, pull out the facts, and put them on paper. She knew I made that up to sound good. Her eyes moved from my high school transcript to fifteen-year-old me with braces, acne, and frizzy brown waves, my sweaty palms grasping the edges of her cherry wood desk, and reminded me that no one reads the newspaper any more. I expected her to be supportive rather than dismissive. I took with me this lesson: most of my expectations would fail me. It's like what my best friend Jenn's mom always said: nothing will ever be as good or as bad as you first anticipate. Those words were comforting, practical, and realistic, just like the card she gave me when her son dumped me. "If you love something, you let it go," she'd written. I never considered, through the veil of my broken heart, why she'd written "something" instead of "someone."

Even so, I joined the newspaper staff. By the time I was a junior, I was the editor-in-chief. It was my job to assign stories to other students who couldn't write, didn't want to write, and hated to write. They turned in messy first drafts that I attempted to edit, only to re-write the whole story and give them the byline. Despite this, I decided then that there was an ineffable quality, something poetic and poignant along a path in which

there was no guarantee of success. I went to community college to get my Associates Degree in the closest thing they had to journalism: mass communications.

I became an editor at the college newspaper and sent my portfolio to the local daily newspaper. It landed in the hands of the Community section editor, who hired me as a freelance writer. My assignments were about trees shaped like bears and children visiting nursing homes.

With an Associates degree in hand, the journalism program in St. Petersburg looked just right for me. They even had a campus by the beach. I had already agreed to live with my best friend Jenn, though, and when I mentioned possibly applying for the University of South Florida, she told me no. Her boyfriend was in Orlando, so she would go to Orlando, so I would go to Orlando, so I moseyed along to the university there and applied for the journalism major. I came home from class one day to a letter that Jenn had already opened. They regretted to inform me that I was not accepted into the journalism major. I decided not to tell anyone. Failures are best kept to oneself.

Jenn was often outside of the apartment, living life and going places with her boyfriend, so I dated a graduate student who worked at Epcot, a biology major with keys to the department so that he could check in on whatever research he was conducting whenever he wanted. We saw the movie *Avatar*, and as the lights when down, he explained the director's passion for the underwater world as inspiration for Pandora. He was kind and he liked me and he was a writer too. By our second date, I had already read the first half of his novel, printed out on the back of pages I had already submitted for my creative classes. At the end of the evening, he parked in the handicapped spot at Bahama Breeze. I broke up with him to avoid hiding my face every time I got out of his

car, wondering who was watching the perfectly able-bodied twenty-somethings take the last handicapped parking spot.

For weeks after the breakup, only one thing bothered me about the graduate student. On our first date, he'd asked if I had a job and I said that I didn't because I had a full scholarship. By full scholarship, I meant that while I did have a scholarship, I was living off of loans. Why didn't I have a job? His question was the only part of him that lingered.

An email from the university landed in my inbox. Walt Disney World was hiring. I applied for a job in costuming like my high school friend Tyler. My work as costume mistress in the high school drama club surely counted as experience in this field. After applying, the computer took me to a timed web-based interview asking questions like "Are you generally a positive person?" and "In your opinion, was the customer always right?" I answered "Strongly yes," to both of these questions. An email soon arrived inviting me to the casting center to discuss possible employment opportunities. The casting center—like in the movies, not like a regular multi-billion dollar business's regular old H.R. building—was shaped like a castle beside Downtown Disney. I wasn't nervous about my interview. The interviewer liked me. She told me about the faux pas of her last interviewee—the girl had said that she hated working with customers at her last job—and said that she didn't have any spots open as a costuming host/hostess. There were plenty of spots open as an attractions host/hostess, however. Would I feel comfortable driving a jeep the size of a bus carrying dozens of people across an African-esque landscape? The question was so specific it made me nervous. A fork in the path: live with the possibility of crashing into a zebra every day or speak up. For the sake of the zebras, I spoke up. An area in Hollywood Studios called the Backlands had several

openings and she didn't ask this time if I was interested in it before she typed my name into a white box on her screen and hit the submit button.

At home, an email about my new hourly part-time role at the Walt Disney World Resort waited for me, the words "congratulations" in giant blue uppercase letters, along with an invitation to return to the casting center with the sixteen pages of documents attached to the email. This time, I would take the ramp up to the second floor and sit with others who had been Chosen. After this last bit of paperwork and documentation proving my citizenship and personhood, I would become part of the cast, a cast member. We weren't employees. We were members of the show. Our customers were guests, visitors to our show. Someone somewhere had called "action" and I was now part of the spectacle.

My first official day of work was *Disney Traditions*, which was, according to the booklet I'd been given, "the program that introduces each new generation of cast members to the culture and heritage of the world-famous Disney organization." The people guiding me through this process kept emphasizing the *Disney Look Book*, a guide to how one should dress as a Walt Disney cast member. These guidelines were Disney's version of the 10 Commandments:

1. Thou shalt wear only your gender's garments.
2. Thou shalt cover your tattoos.
3. Thou shalt wear your nametag on the right side.
4. Thou shalt shave your facial hair.

And so on, until finally:

10. Thou shalt use good judgment when “on stage.” Thou art “on stage” whenever the guest could see you, even if you are away from your assigned work location.

The guidelines seemed specific, but fair. I was prepared to follow the rules if it meant I got to play the game.

I reported at 8 a.m. to Disney University, a building just outside of Magic Kingdom. I'd gotten lost and accidentally gone through the main Magic Kingdom parking area. Luckily, the parking toll-booth cast member took pity on me and didn't charge me \$20 to pass. From the parking lot, I could see the spires of Space Mountain pointing into the sky. I spent the day staring at Powerpoint presentations on Disney's history, culture, and heritage. The cast member motto flashed often across the screen: “We create happiness.” I saw that motto and I felt something. I took this job because it was available; this thing about creating happiness was bigger than just singular me trying to get through college. A higher calling was at stake. For the first time, I took this job of making magic seriously.

On a practical level, creating happiness involved these four cornerstones: Safety. Courtesy. Magic. Efficiency. “Safe-D begins with me!” was the first and foremost of these rules. The trainer took my group of trainees into Magic Kingdom. We were a ragtag group of all ages with earpieces connected to her microphone dressed in our semi-business attire, like less tidy Men in Black. We had been assigned all kinds of destinations: sales, attractions, merchandise, I.T., and entertainment. One girl was going to become really close “friends” with Princess Aurora. Others were going to stock store shelves. One or two were headed toward the Haunted Mansion. Some would be staying

backstage, making magic from within. During our tour of the Magic Kingdom, we maintained all four cornerstones through consistent usage of the “Disney Scoop.” To demonstrate this maneuver, casually walk by a piece of trash on the ground, scoop down as you maintain your pace, grab it, and throw it in the nearest garbage can. Even the managers were responsible for this, the trainer said, pointing out people walking by in khakis and long-sleeve shirts (nametag on the right side) carrying trash pickers.

My trainer also demonstrated the “Disney Point,” a two-fingered approach to pointing using both the index and the middle fingers. The one-finger point, I was told, was offensive in some cultures and Disney was a place of many cultures.

Not mentioned in my training was what to do in the event that a snake came slithering through the park. We were in Adventureland and it was only the first of the many opportunities I would have to problem-solve on my feet. I was the first to spot the animal sneaking into a nearby bush as my trainer talked about the Hall of Presidents. This wasn’t particularly alarming, at least not to me. After all, growing up in Florida meant that when I would tell my Florida-native stepdad about the snake I saw in the back yard, he would run towards it bare footed to catch a glimpse. I know that a snake was hardly magical, though, in the eyes of the guests. My trainer seemed busy with her Hall of Presidents speech, so I told the nearby hotdog vendor about the snake and as the trainer concluded her oration, a gaggle of men appeared with a bag and a trash picker. They poked at the bush as my trainer lead us toward the castle.

Only later would I see videos of other creatures claiming that area of Magic Kingdom. Every few months, alligators will crawl up on the banks of Splash Mountain, feet away from guests reaching over the side of their log flumes, their mouths hanging open to expel the Florida heat from their cold-blooded bodies. Generally, the alligator

wranglers will wait until the park closes to remove the animal so as not to alarm the guests. Magic is helpful in these situations as most guests will either pass by without noticing the creature or will think that it's all part of the show. And that's always the job of an illusionist: ta-da!

In fact, every setting is created as part of the show. Walking down Main Street, our trainer pointed out the names on the windows of business owners, the windows hanging open or just cracked, the drapes pulled to the side just so. These names were like the credits for the park creators, tributes to their ideas and hard work, the trainer pointed out. I noticed how Main Street had a way of making you feel like you were stopped in time. It was as if the residents of Main Street had just left a moment ago and would soon return to greet you with their warm Marceline, Missouri hospitality. The same was true of Epcot, where beside the French pavilion, it looked like the fishermen had just a second ago left their poles resting by the water and would return any second with a bottle of wine.

By the end of lunch, worksheets about my place in the Disney story were completed, small group discussions about personal Disney anecdotes were shared, and I had bitten the ears off my Mickey-shaped cookie. Halfway through the second part of the day, the buzz from the air conditioning bounced off the walls and the class was struggling to pay attention to the trainer pointing at images on the Powerpoint. A knock on the door led one of the trainers to open it a crack to ask who was there. The door flung open and in walked Mickey carrying a gift wrapped in red and yellow paper with a big black bow on it. A sudden energy filled the room as the trainer opened the box, revealing new cast member I.D.s. Mickey leaned into to the trainer's ear, giving the

trainer a message for us: he was proud to have us as part of the team. And then he was gone.

“See the magic?” the trainer said. “When Mickey came in, I was watching your faces and every one of you were smiling. See what Mickey can do?”

Yes, I saw what he could do.

After Traditions training was *On with the Show* training, designed to introduce newcomers to Disney’s Hollywood Studios. After this second day of training, I was handed a piece of paper detailing my new costume to be provided by the company: a striped red and yellow shirt tucked into navy pants. Only by asking what attraction this costume belonged to did I find out that I had been assigned to work at Toy Story Midway Mania (TSMM). After training, I texted Tyler to tell him about my new job.

“That’s an all-star attraction!” he said and wondered aloud how I had managed to get that assignment.

My third day of training was my first day in my new home: the toy box. A trainer named Bill waited for me on a bench in the costuming warehouse. He walked me past aisles and aisles of costumes worn by other cast members in Hollywood Studios to arrive at hundreds of orange and yellow-striped shirts in the style of a boardwalk barker. Bill waited with infinite patience as I tried different sizes to hide my hips in the clown pants. It was hopeless, so I decided to just leave the shirt untucked to cover how round the pants make my belly look. As soon as I emerged from the dressing room, Bill made me go back in to tuck in my shirt.

Bill took me across the park to Andy’s toy box, previewing the fifteen minute walk I would perform—unpaid—every day to and from Toy Story Mania, stopping to perform the Disney Scoop or answer guest questions. Only when I arrived at the computer

backstage at Toy Story Mania could I clock in and get paid for performing the Disney Scoop and answering guest questions. Our first job was to actually go on the ride. Bill procured some 3-D glasses for us and guided me on how to score the most points by pulling the string of the cannon in front of me. We aimed at targets and together, racked up hundreds of thousands of points. It was six minutes of spinning and aiming and firing in an 8-person vehicle controlled by a green button and hundreds of computers stored behind our building. Bill led me around for the next three days, showing me how to unstuck stuck lap bars, where the nearest guest bathroom was, how to keep my eye on the yellow safety line, and how to operate the ride.

The fourth day was my assessment, which was definitely not a day in which I was followed around by an upper-level cast member judging my ability to do the job I've just been trained to do and deciding whether I was allowed to keep my job, but, as a manager explained it to me, "a fellow team member following me to decide where I might need more support or more training." The person doing the assessment was Fitz, a round tight-lipped German who, when I heard that he was leaving the toy box and asked why, said "because it is a horrible job."

My ~~inspection~~ assessment went well enough, but after a week, I understood what Fitz was talking about. The guests were angry, my feet were tired, and when I messed up, my fellow cast members leered at me because I'd caused fewer guests to get on the ride, reducing the efficiency of guests per hour flowing through the turnstiles. Slowly, I made friends with my fellow toys, friends I would keep in touch with for years, even after I left the toybox 18 months later, and even after they became coordinators and managers and eventually left the Disney Company themselves.

My favorite job in the toy box was one I dreaded during training week: Grouper. The Grouper was responsible for grouping the guests into rows to maximize efficiency. In other words, Grouper plays a game of Tetris, fitting people into the seats, trying to fill up as many spots as possible. The difficulty in this job came from my urgency to fill the spots and the guests' ignorance about how many people were in their group.

At least half of my guest encounters in this job went like this:

Me: "Hi. How many people are in your group?"

Guest:

Me: "How many people are in your group?"

Guest: (after counting for what seems like an eternity) "Two."

Me: "Thank you. Please go to row one." (to next guest) "How many people in my group?"

Guest from back of line: "Eight!"

Me: "Great! Two people go to row five, two to row six, two to row seven, and two to row eight."

Guest from back of line: "But wait! We're with them!" (points at the two guests already getting on the ride from row one.)

Me: "So you're a group of ten?"

Guest from back of line: "Yes but they're with us and they're getting on the ride and we want to be together and how could you split us up now we'll never find each other I want to talk to your manager!"

My friends on the job taught me to remember the cast member motto: "We create happiness!" Safety. Courtesy. Magic. Efficiency. Safety. Courtesy. Magic. Efficiency. Safety. Courtesy. Magic. Efficiency.

Even though I was a nice person and even though I liked working with people, I worked hard to quash the urge to push the angry guest into the ride vehicle and slam the lap bar down so tight it suffocated him from the waist down.

Instead, I smiled, apologized, and used the Disney point to show him where to go.

One month after my hire date, I went on a date with a man I'd been talking to online. In my online dating blog, his moniker was simply Puerto Rico because that's where he was from. I agreed to meet him at Epcot for our first date. I could get into any of the parks for free, and even bring friends and family into the parks for free, but I had never been to Epcot. He loved theme parks and had found me with the key words "Disney" + "Theme parks" + "light eyes." Puerto Rico would later describe me on our first date as "covered in pixie dust," which meant that I was goofy and excitable, something he recognized in himself during his six-month internship as a computer scientist with Disney almost a year before. Even when I was off the clock, Disney meant being part of the magic. As I walked around Epcot on that first date, I called all the little girls dressed up as princesses "your highness" and used the Disney point and smiled so wide that Puerto Rico thought I was too ditzy for him. He still asked me for second date because he didn't have any other prospects and at least I would be someone to go to the parks with, even if I wasn't girlfriend material.

Several months passed. I was working outside of the toy box one day taking fastpasses when my manager David called me over to him. David was a former marine who had worked in the parking lots before moving up into the world of management. Parking lots had to be one of the most brutal, most boring jobs at the parks, so I thought he had to be one tough guy. He was a small man wearing his shoulders high on his

body, so I approached him nervously. His long-sleeve shirt contrasted against his bald head, seeming strikingly bare against his professional *Disney Look Book*-approved attire. He asked if I had gotten dressed in the dark. Another manager was standing next to him and the two of them laughed while I tried to figure out what part of my costume was wrong. I had missed a belt loop in the back, David said.

More months passed. I worked on holidays. I worked on both the most crowded and least crowded days of the year. I worked past midnight and had to return by 9 a.m. Sometimes, I was tempted to sleep in my car, but it was better to drive the half hour home, paying the \$4 in tolls it cost each way. During this time, I came to understand that there was a difference between being a good cast member and just being a cast member. When I was on the job, I earned compliments from guests and managers. But that's only when I actually was there. There were many days I requested off, but didn't get, so I would call in sick to the cast member hotline. As I dialed in, I imagined cast members in some call center listening to their fellow cast members explain all the reasons they couldn't come to work, so I kept it simple. I didn't bother trying to sound sick. I just told them I couldn't make it and said thank you.

Later, my favorite manager, Chris, would call me back to his office located in a trailer behind Toy Story Mania to inform me that every time I called in sick, I was earning a point on my record card. After three points within a six-month period, I would be fired. He gave me a sheet of paper about the Family Medical Leave Act and searched my face for some hidden sickness, some reason why I didn't want to come to work. "It's a horrible job," I didn't say.

Occasionally Puerto Rico, who eventually moved to Virginia and became my long-distance boyfriend, would ask me if I wanted to quit because over the phone I sounded so discouraged. I finally told him yes, that I wanted to quit.

Years passed, as they often do, and I would move to Virginia with Puerto Rico and go to graduate school. Somehow, I found that I missed that horrible job. And I wonder if I might do it all over again. But it's difficult to decide if I miss the job or if I missed the cast member that I was, her openness, her hands wielding magic, her ask-nothing-in-return smile.

ESCAPE

My friend Tyler joined the College Program at Walt Disney World in 2008, the year after we graduated from high school. He moved to Orlando instead of making the hour and a half commute from Inverness, where we both grew up. He was escaping our small town and his mother, who disowned him when he told her that he was gay. Tyler had spent many nights on my mom's couch during his first months of community college. When he saw the opportunity to get a place of his own, he jumped on it. Six months after he started the job, my best friend Jenn, my mom, and I visited him and he got us into the Disney parks for free. This was one of the few perks of being a CP (someone in the College Program). CPs were recruited college students from all over the world who came to Disney for what was advertised to be the internship of a lifetime. In reality, the College Program hires students to work on holidays and during the summer for barely minimum wage and some college credit. CPs learn by experience that they are the lowest on the totem poll of cast members, working the longest hours for the lowest pay.

We almost didn't recognize the 19-year-old who got into my mom's car that June day outside of the Disney-housing apartment he shared with three other CPs. Tyler was suddenly skinny, his brown cargo shorts falling off his hips and his face less round and more angular. The blue-grey eyes behind his glasses were tired and his straight mouse-brown hair fell over his ears. He needed food and a haircut.

We spent the next eight hours soaking up Tyler's world, listening to behind the scenes stories, his celebrity encounters, and his adventures in all four Disney parks. As

we got onto the ferryboat to take us to Magic Kingdom, he told us about how he loved working in the costuming department, but he didn't love living in the dorms provided by the company. Any day could be "someone's Friday," which meant that they had the next two days off, so there was a party somewhere in the dorms every night.

Later that day, Tyler insisted on taking me backstage at Hollywood Studios. I objected at first; he had already explained that if a guest was caught backstage, they could be banned from the parks for life. But, Tyler wanted to show us his backstage world and he knew drinks were cheaper backstage. He told me that people would just assume that we were stage technicians or actors before or after a shift since we were in regular clothes. If we had lanyards, we would be fine. He knew because he was a costumer for several Hollywood Studios shows, including Fantasmic and Beauty and the Beast. My mom and Jenn waited outside while Tyler ushered me past a doorway with a sign that said "Cast Members Only." He put his cast member lanyard around my neck and turned over the badge with his picture on it.

"Just be quiet and follow me," he told me. I followed him and my body started shaking. I knew I was the kind of person who could never be hired as a secret agent. In the middle of a secret mission, I would be the person to say out loud the words "secret mission." But, we needed four drinks and he had only two hands.

"What do I do if they ask me where I work?" I asked, fingering the badge.

"They won't. Nobody cares."

"But what if they do?"

"Say you work on one of the shows."

"What if they ask what that means? We need a plan. Cause I don't know what that means. What's the plan?"

“Stop saying the word plan,” he said and by that time, we had walked the twenty steps from the entrance of the backstage area to the cafeteria. My best course of action was to shut up and not look anyone in the eye. The room was big, bigger than our high school cafeteria that had seated 500 students. How had they managed to hide this huge building in what seemed to be the middle of the park? On the walls were TVs showing various news and sports channels. Also on the walls were quotes in huge curly fonts from famous movies. “Buckle up. It’s gonna be a bumpy ride.” “Toto, I’ve a feeling we’re not in Kansas anymore.” “Keep the change.” I felt a tug on my arm.

“Come on! You’re supposed to look like you’ve been here before,” Tyler whispered.

“Sorry!”

He led me to the back of the cafeteria, where there was a Subway, a pizza-making station, a barbeque place, and soda machines. Tyler filled up four fountain drinks while I awkwardly leaned on the counter, trying to think of something to say that would convince anyone watching that I had done this a million times. We carried the drinks to the cashier, a young guy, our age, who barely glanced at us as he gave us our total.

We carried our drinks out the door. Before we walked back onstage, Tyler took the lanyard off me and put it back in his pocket so that we looked like regular guests again.

I would later be assigned to work in this same park and would frequent this cafeteria for lunch, looking for guests who could be posing as cast members like I had two years prior.

I didn’t realize it then, but it now seems that Tyler was always escaping. In Inverness, he escaped to my house when his mother kicked him out. At Disney, he

escaped his apartment in CP housing because he didn't get along with his roommates, who partied and drank constantly. He threw himself into his work, spending his days in the utilidors under the Magic Kingdom dressing Mickey and Minnie and the whole gang for shows and spending his nights above ground, waiting for the castle's nightly "kiss goodnight," a 2-minute show not often seen by guests. In the darkness, lights on the castle would shimmer and the lullaby lilt of "When You Wish Upon a Star" would play, the twinkles on the castle in time to the melody of the song. And there was Tyler night after night, at 3 a.m. on Main Street in the most magical place on earth, the white illuminations of the castle reflecting in his square glasses.

SAID

Walt D.: Disneyland is a work of love. We didn't go into Disneyland just with the idea of making money.

Lisa M.: I love rope drop. The rush of getting to greet a huge number of our guests all at once never gets old. But when a guest stops to tell me after he rides that I did a great job it makes my day.

Tim F.: Was anyone at the Magic Kingdom yesterday? It was supposed to be "7/10" crowd level, but it turned out to be a "10." The last few times I have been I could not believe how crowded it was for October!

Nicole L.: As a current cast member, I love working at Disney. I get to ask for autographs, play Disney memory, sing birthday songs every way possible. I guess what I'm trying to say is, I love my guests. Any and all shapes and sizes, it doesn't matter their income, their status, I just love making people happy. I know there are other cast members out there and in here that feel the same. So I thank Disney, for this opening, I thank you, the guests, for letting me be a part of your family and your vacation.

Julia-Anne H.: I'm glad to hear you love your jobs and appreciate them. I have to drag my backside into work every day and there is no fun or job satisfaction, just a means to pay the bills. You lucky people, I envy you.

Jeanie G.: Last night leaving Epcot a Guest went past me and flicked a lit cigarette he finished smoking onto the ground. I was in shock. It really offended me. I consider Disney a home. These disrespectful actions sadden me and upset me. I take it personally. I'm protective of it.

Amanda N.: Three Disney performers fired from the Festival of the Lion King after refusing to wear soiled costumes will get their jobs back, as well as back pay.

Cast Deployment System: Thank you for helping Make the Magic!

Rebekah: 24. FSU grad. Cast member. Schedule this week: 83 hours, 0 minutes.

J.: Walt actually grew up in a family that struggled for money in Chicago. He came to California with his entire life savings in his pocket, about \$20. Why would he look down on poor people if he grew up understanding what it's like to not have enough money?

Chris G.: Disney is very, very expensive already. But I always felt no matter how expensive it cost me to take my family I never left Disney feeling I didn't get a good enough vacation and was ripped off. It's one of the few places I can say I have gone and felt that way.

Melissa G.: Disney is a LUXURY. If you don't want to pay the price they set, DO NOT GO. It's that simple. Here is an example- Porsche is expensive. Yet, nobody gripes that they can't afford one. Nobody tells/demands that Porsche to lower their prices. This country has forgotten what "LUXERY items" are. Everybody demands everything for free. Get over it!

Ally O.: I'm fine with it. Maybe higher prices will keep riff raff out and people won't go as much. Oh and Disney doesn't care what we think they make gazillions.

@stbaumer: You can talk about modern Disney and all the progress its made from these frankly nauseating beginnings, but holding Walt Disney up as some champion of individuality, self-expression, and self-esteem is a damn lie. He only wanted you to be yourself if you were white and middle class.

Peter B.: Disney remained something of a hick from the Midwest who thought of Jews as accountants and merchants. I once made the mistake of asking Walt a question that had business implications (we were having lunch at the Disney commissary at the time) and he replied by saying, "Let me check that with my Jew." He started to summon a financial aide nearby, but I quickly changed the subject.

Erica D.: Our kids talk about our trip every single day and cannot wait to return. That's not because of the rides or the food. It's because Pocahontas sent us on an adventure that involved Tink, Jasmine/Aladdin, and Tiana/Naveen. Our boys became Jedis and fought Darth Vader. Our daughter really believed she was a princess and Gaston made

me blush. Those are the memories that we'll remember. Sure, the Seven Dwarfs Mine Train was fun, but nothing compares to you all, the cast members sprinkling pixie dust every hour of every day.

Barbara C.: Sadly I've never had magical experiences like those. I had a bad experience in Magic Kingdom in March. During a parade, cast members kept moving people and it was my husband myself and our 3 kids. I am disabled and they kept moving us out of the way to make room. Well my husband and I and the kids got separated. I was upset the entire time and couldn't enjoy the parade or fireworks as I was trying to find the rest of my party.

Carlos: Keep it moving!

Scott A.: Most Instagrammed location in California: Disneyland...who would've guessed?

Maurisa M.: While lying down for his afternoon rest time my 5 year old called me into his room. I asked him what he needed. With eyes shining he said, "Momma, I know what we can do when we are at Disney World. We can go around the world." He was so excited to know he could visit Italy and China among other places.

Guga O.: Where am I?

WISHES

Disney does it all the time. The stage is set every morning: the castle glimmers just at the end of Main Street, a happy tune floats through the warm air, a hint of cinnamon rises from a churro cart. The rope drops, the crowds push forward, forward into the most magical day of their lives.

*Star light, star bright,
first star I see tonight.*

Disney makes wishes come true every day. Sometimes it takes work to make those wishes come true. Sometimes a mother needs to stand in line for two hours so that her daughter can meet Elsa or Ariel. Sometimes a father needs to run to the back of the park to get fastpasses for his family, losing his place in line for another ride. Sometimes a family has to save up money over several years to make this trip. And sometimes, a family walks through the turnstiles and they are asked to be part of the parade down Main Street. Sometimes, anything is possible.

Maybe I've always loved the idea of wishes coming true. As a journalist, I wrote all the time about wishes coming true, so often that I wonder now if that was a hidden motif in my writing, if I wrote about wishes coming true even if it wasn't there.

A mother was collecting prom dresses from around the state of Florida to give them away. It had been five years since her own daughter passed away in a car accident. In the article, I wrote about how her eyes watched other peoples' daughters trying on the dresses she had collected, how her daughter didn't make it to prom. She was making other people's wishes come true.

A retired woman's home burned to the ground. She and her daughter barely escaped. They received mismatched donations that filled the tiny apartment someone had let them stay in. They had everything they needed except for a computer for the woman's developmentally disabled daughter. Then, a computer showed up on their doorstep and the computer was the miracle, the wish come true.

For these women, wishes came true. Out of tragedy, these women carved a space for good things to happen. Even in the tiny town of Ocala, Florida, wishes came true.

My favorite days in Disney's Hollywood Studios were those when I could walk onstage before park opening. The air would be still and cool and wet. I loved passing Dinosaur Gertie at her usual post standing waist-high in Echo Lake overlooking the hidden cast-member-only entrance. Her round eyes glowed gold in the soft sun and smoke quietly poured from her nostrils. Her legs were invisible beneath the waterline and her round mint green body, right at the water's edge, served as the hut for "Dinosaur Gertie's Ice Cream of Extinction." Dinosaur Gertie herself was a 15-foot tribute in brontosaurus form to the fact that 12-year-old Walt had seen Gertie in a cartoon and had been inspired by her to create cartoon characters of his own. Later in the day, this area would serve as one of two smoking areas in the park, but as I passed by in the morning,

the air was clear and the water was calm and brown-feathered ducks rested on the rocks in the middle of the pond. They wouldn't begin their morning until the first guests came through the turnstiles. Popcorn didn't drop itself.

Characters make magic happen. An hour after Hollywood Studios park opening, a few well-placed trees among the great plain of concrete provide shade between the lake and the great sorcerer's hat. Pooh and Piglet greet guests under those trees. And on the other side of the hat, Chip and Dale make bunny ears above the heads of tourists from around the world. Minnie poses just in front of the hat, her hand flicked up at the wrist, a yellow shoe tucked behind her thin ankle, a silent smile affixed beneath her large eyes.

*I wish I may, I wish I might,
have the wish, I wish tonight.*

Onstage Hollywood Studios was separated from backstage Hollywood Studios by an ivy-covered iron garden gate. Once onstage, the cast members put away whoever they were outside of the park. Onstage cast members were representatives of the whole company, so it was essential to be tidy and happy. Backstage, I could untuck my shirt, talk on my cell phone, and eat or drink. Onstage, my shirt had to be tucked in, my nametag on, and my cell phone hidden from view. Onstage, I could be asked questions like "What time is the 3 o'clock parade?" and "How do I get to Star Tours?" and "Where's Harry Potter World?" Onstage, I was not Amanda the writer, Amanda the 22-year old

English major, Amanda the sister of three. Onstage, I was “Amanda from Inverness, FL, happy to answer all questions and help you out in any way possible with a smile.”

Sometimes, nothing is possible. The fastpasses are gone. The show is full. The restaurant has been booked. The ride has broken down.

“Andy has come home from college,” we would say when Toy Story Midway Mania was down for repairs. Or, we might say, “Rex had to get some more batteries for us!”

On some days, my job was about sharing secrets about the game with kids with terminal illnesses as I helped them into our one-of-a-kind WAV (wheelchair access vehicle); keeping fastpasses in my pocket in case I met a nice family of four who were just happy to be at the parks, with no expectations of the magic I kept in my pocket; talking with families wearing “I’m celebrating!” buttons with the words “Mom’s cancer survival” written in black sharpie; and meeting parents and kids who were celebrating what they called “Gotcha Day,” the day when they adopted their two four-year-olds from across the world. On some days, the guests made my day magical.

We'll make a wish, and do as dreamers do.

Sometimes in between closing vehicle doors and pulling down lap bars, the cast members would pause to talk about what was going on in our lives. Some of us were students attending one of the local colleges. Others were retired folks who worked at Disney for the opportunity to make magic. Still others were good people dragged down

by the monotony of working in the same positions dealing with the same guest problems without solutions in sight. In the end, when the guests and managers were against us, we banded together, no matter what country or state our nametags said we were from. We most felt separated from management when we followed the rules they had handed down and they broke those very rules. Once, two families of guests got into a fight at the back of the line. A few members of their party had gone to the bathroom and wanted to catch up with the rest of the group. The family behind them wouldn't let them pass. I called a manager and security and pulled both groups out of line, standing between the two families while they yelled at me for removing them until finally, a manager arrived. I hoped that he would evict them from the park after the way they'd behaved. But, the manager talked the problem over with them and walked them up the exit separately to put them on the ride. This was the standard procedure for VIP guests and these two families, who had verbally and physically assaulted one another, got the same treatment. I was the bad guy and the manager was the hero. This was an extreme situation, but these slights happened often. We would enforce fastpass return times and the managers would override us, allowing the guest to go hours early.

Our jobs were also difficult because we sometimes needed to band together for support. Management preferred that we stayed separate to prevent us from goofing off, which was reasonable, but sometimes, when our job was standing in the same spot, pressing a button for 45 minutes, the time didn't seem to pass. Even though management didn't want us to talk, we did, because that was the only way to get through the day. We knew the names of one another's spouses, shared stories about our kids and families, and went out to the Tavern in Celebration for drinks after a long week.

Our favorite guests were those who were spending some of their last days with us at Walt Disney World. Children with the Make a Wish Foundation visited Toy Story Mania because it was fun and because when they walked through the doors, they were shrunken to the size of one of Andy's toys and they were in Andy's room and they could play with Buzz Lightyear and Woody and Jesse. And they could escape their daily rituals of tubes and hospitals and doctors. "Wishes are more than just a nice thing. And they are far more than gifts, or singular events in time...For Wish Kids, just the act of making their wish come true can give them the courage to comply with their medical treatments. Parents might finally feel like they can be optimistic."¹

*and all our wishes
will come true.*

"On average, a wish is granted every 38 minutes."²

Cast members are often dreamers. His or her dreams differed, but each person who made Toy Story Mania operate had one. I dreamed of working for Disney as a writer, wearing real clothes and not some itchy costume. One of the most challenging cast members to work with was John. He hated slow-downs and he didn't like working with new people. He knew the ride inside and out and didn't hold back his frustration when someone else messed up. He eventually took a liking to me for some reason and one day shared with me in a quiet moment that he wanted to work in Walt Disney Imagineering, planning and implementing new ideas for the parks around the world.

¹ Make a Wish: America. (2015). Our mission. Retrieved from <http://wish.org/about-us/our-story/our-mission>

² Make a Wish: America. (2015). Timeline. Retrieved from <http://wish.org/about-us/our-story/timeline>

Matthew wanted to work at Animal Kingdom with the rhinos. Sarah dreamed of moving into management so she could affect change and actually have someone listen to her ideas. Working at our ride was never an end goal for anyone. Instead, it was a stepping-stone to something bigger and better. We were all hopeful about what might be next.

Jiminy Cricket: *See what a little wishing can do?*

Wishes are delicate, heavy things. Possible and impossible. Shared and individual. Walt didn't invent making wishes come true, but he did dream into reality a place where they mattered, where people could wish every evening around a castle, watching bursts of color explode in a dark sky, dreams realized or not.

FORGED

Grey skies greeted “guests” last fall at a “bemusement park” called Dismaland located in Weston-super-Mare, England. Designed to be an art project organized by the anonymous street artist Banksy, the project simulated its own Magic Kingdom, complete with a castle. When news of the park filtered through the Disney news sites, the consensus was that this was a dirty mockery.

I didn’t find myself outraged like most Disney fans. I spent hours scrolling through hundreds of pictures of every inch of Dismaland. The rusted castle was the central figure of the park, complete with a dirty moat that—admittedly—looked only slightly browner than the water around its Magic Kingdom counterpart. The decomposing turrets even looked like they might be in better shape than the Hong Kong Disneyland castle, which had during its refurbishment been covered in plywood and painted over to look like the castle. There was even a blue sky painted on the plywood, often contrasting with the reality of the gray clouds behind it.

At Dismaland, inside the castle was a video playing the part of the movie where Cinderella gets her happily ever after, again and again, on a loop. Arranged on the other side of the castle was a life-sized upturned carriage with a dead blonde plastic princess hanging out of the window, surrounded by plastic photographers with flashing cameras. I connected this image immediately with one from my pre-Florida childhood: the evening news station on my mom’s bedroom television proclaiming that Princess Diana had been in an accident. Soon after, someone gave me a Princess Diana Barbie doll. Who would

give a third-grader such a morbid gift? It was a special edition and listed the dates of her birth and death in a grey ribbon on the outside of the box. Even as a child, I knew that seeing those concrete markers of her life's beginning and ending made the doll seem like a tombstone. Its pinched face perched above my bed on a shelf, watching me at night. For weeks, I slept on the floor in my mom's bedroom, telling her that I couldn't sleep because of Princess Diana.

What message were Banksy and his co-artists hoping to send with a Cinderella-Princess Diana hybrid hanging out of a carriage? The connection to Princess Diana was obvious, but what seemed more important were the onlookers to the scene: the mannequins acting as photographers; the human tourists standing around the photographers; and then me, peering in through a photograph thousands of miles away. We were all casual observers of this tragedy. We would catch the show and move on.

Outside of the castle, in the middle of the moat was a full-size statue of Ariel posing on a rock with her red hair and long green tail, only she was blurred, like a paused V.H.S. tape, the scrambles creating fragments of the image. The image was familiar, yet frightening in how it so readily brought back the two-dimensional Ariel I'd known as a child. She was present, but also partially absent. Was this a copyright issue? Did making her blurry make it more difficult for the litigious Disney company to sue? Or was their intention to act contrary to what would be found in a real Disney park? In scrambling parts of her, she became less realistic, more transient, the opposite of what a real Disney park might do in making Ariel as real and solid as possible.

In the hours I spent gazing at pictures, I tried to consider each piece as I might a work of art, peering and waiting for some message or some clever connection to the

Disney parks I know so well. I couldn't help but also watch the people captured on camera looking at the pieces. In dozens of pictures, I was surprised to find people doing what they did at the real Disneyland. They lined up. They took selfies. They bought merchandise and used the bathroom. The scariest part of this park would have been if it were empty. Despite the dreary clouds in every picture, people brought life to the park.

Perhaps there's no greater truth. Perhaps it's all meant to poke fun at the reality Disney creates every day. There's no such thing as magic, and yet, it's one of the cornerstones of being a cast member, in the lineup after Safety and Courtesy, but before Efficiency.

Some parts of the exhibition were mirrored images of our non-Disney reality, but with a twist. The killer whale emerging from the toilet to jump through the hoop into the kiddie pool is a commentary on SeaWorld and its inability to protect the whales from the humans and the humans from the whales.

Five years ago, I was still trying to be a journalism student. My ethics in journalism teacher announced that just a few miles away, Tillikum the killer whale had drowned his trainer in front of hundreds of audience members. My teacher asked what we thought about how the press had handled the situation. My immediate reaction was to search the Internet for footage, to watch what had happened, to see it for myself. The only video that evening was of the trainers standing around after the fact. Later, more videos would be uploaded, videos with titles like "Slow-motion footage of Dawn with Tillikum seconds before take-down" and "Killer whale kills trainer footage – Disturbing scenes," videos that I couldn't bear to actually watch. I could see a plastic princess hanging dead from a carriage in close-up, but I couldn't watch a video that would show

me, in grainy cell-phone cameras from afar, a woman's real final moment. They were different kinds of reality.

Another too-familiar scene came in the lumpy black balloons spelling out in capitalized white Comic Sans the words

"I AM

AN

IMBE-

CILE."

The idea behind the balloons was probably that no one would buy a \$20 balloon that declared its buyer an imbecile. And yet, there were pictures of children running in front of the castle, the black balloons trailing behind them. Perhaps the irony goes even beyond Dismaland, extending to the typical theme park visitor. In my 18 months as a cast member at Hollywood Studios, some conversations with guests left me wondering how they'd managed to actually get to me considering that it had taken work to leave wherever they'd come from, land in Orlando, get to the Hollywood Studios lot, pass through the turnstiles with a valid ticket, and trot all the way across the park to Toy Story Mania only to ask me what time the 3 o'clock parade was. During what Floridians officially call "love bug season," I often heard complaints about love bugs from tourists that had never encountered such strange, two-headed insects, constantly mating as they flew in the air. Many vacationers wondered if they were dangerous and I always reassured them that these weird two-headed creatures were perfectly safe. Some guests had legitimate concerns. One guest asked me why Disney didn't do anything about them and I smiled and told her that I would mention it to Mickey at our weekly

meeting, the same response I had to the guest that seriously suggested to me that we turn off the water falling from the sky because it was ruining her magical day.

Every day was an exercise in patience. After a while, I was used to the crazy questions and I even anticipated that guests would go from confusion to anger when I brought reality to their so-far magical day. A question about where to get a fastpass would lead them to find out that we were out of fastpasses, which meant that their day was wrecked and it was my fault.

On one summer afternoon, I was working outside of Toy Story Mania arranging strollers, a task we were given because the guests often left their strollers just anywhere, blocking other guests from getting on the ride. It was our job to move the strollers into orderly lines, mimicking miniature parking lots. When one family took their stroller, we'd move another family's stroller into that spot. We were parking lot attendants, but we were also (unofficially) security guards. Guests had a tendency to leave their cameras and purses in the strollers, trusting that this magical world contained no thieves. It was a naive, but lovely sort of trust; for the guest, apparently the rest of the world was a dangerous place, but once on Disney property, the rules of the real world no longer applied.

A woman was parking her stroller to go into the ride. The skies were turning cloudy and a chill floated in the breeze, indications of a thunderstorm. I was moving down the line of strollers, putting the cover up on every stroller and moving items from the seat to the bin under the seat to do something to prevent them from getting wet. The woman was trying to remove another stroller from the small covered area to replace it with hers.

“Oh, ma'am. I'll park that for you,” I said.

“Don’t touch my stroller,” she said, trying to squeeze the stroller in. I saw bags in the seat of the stroller and realized why she was trying so hard to make it fit.

“Okay. But, you probably should take the stuff in with you so it won’t get wet,” I said.

“Then do your job and don’t let it get wet,” she said

“I’m sorry, but this awning actually isn’t very good at keeping the rain away, especially when it rains sideways like it does here in Florida,” I said.

Thunder echoed in the distance. The sun disappeared behind a cloud. She looked at me in my clowny, striped orange and red shirt tucked into my fat, navy blue pants. She rolled her eyes and shoved her stroller into a smaller stroller under the covering, knocking it over. A child’s stuffed animal and a sippy cup hit the pavement. The cup rolled down the street. The woman walked past me and into the ride. I ran after the cup and righted the stroller. Light drops of rain splattered the ground.

Without hesitation, as if it was something I’d been trained to do, I pulled the brakes up on the woman’s stroller and pushed it across the street to the overflow stroller parking area, the one completely exposed to the rain.

Why in this particular moment did I decide to take action against this woman? It was hot, but every day was hot, and she was rude, but I’d smiled through more challenging guest interactions. Maybe I’d had enough. Maybe it was the way she’d looked at me and how in that instant, a telepathic link had been formed, and I’d watched her decide that I was some theme park worker, some person who didn’t matter, a nobody.

One of our managers, a 5-foot woman in her 50s with bobbed yellow hair, stopped me.

“Why are you moving the stroller away from the ride?” she asked. The one and only time I’d been doing something I knew was wrong, I’d been caught.

“The woman was going to a different ride, not Toy Story,” I said. It wasn’t a good excuse. She watched me. My heartbeat pounded hard in my ears. “She asked me to?” I tried to put a period on the end of the sentence, but it came out a question. The rain splattered harder on the pavement.

“Okay,” she said. And that was it. She knew neither of those reasons was true, but she also probably knew that sometimes, it was best not to know. She walked away and I parked the stroller, knowing that the woman would have to spend at least a few minutes searching for it and that it would get wet. It was petty, but it was the only thing I could think of to repay the woman for her unkindness to me and to the other guest whose stroller she’d knocked over. Today, it seems like a small crime to commit, but in the moment, I felt reckless and powerful.

I soon was assigned to go back inside. I spent the next few minutes thinking about the cup rolling. I was so enraged that all I could think of was the fact that I hadn’t wished her a magical day. I’d picked up this “magical day” tool from my friends who had worked at Toy Story Mania since the ride opened in 2008. Our trainers did ask us to say it, so it was pretty standardly used no matter your job, but when we said that special phrase with that wide smile and that happy, fake tenor, what we really meant was “Fuck you!” But, there was a technique to it. If only I’d been able to see her again, I knew I could craft the cheesiest, fakest “magical day” in the history of “magical days.”

And then, a magical moment happened for me: I was pushing down lap bars and pushing the green button to send the vehicles when I spotted her getting into a car. I

waited the six minutes for her car to return, took in a big breath as the doors opened, and let it go:

“Have a magical day!”

She ignored me and left the building. I’d done all I could do. I was content to wonder for the rest of the day how long it had taken her to find her stroller and how wet it was. After all, she had actually taken my advice and brought her things on the ride with her; otherwise I might have had second thoughts about my revenge—*might have*.

The one thing I didn’t consider was the actual child the stroller belonged to. I don’t remember a child at all, not when the woman was parking the stroller or when she got off the ride.

Working at Disney also meant learning how to lie. I lied to my manager that one time and I lied to guests, though with the guests, my lying was mostly meant to tell a story. One story I told many times was about Luxo, Jr., a dancing lamp that came out to Pixar Place outside of Toy Story Mania. He was the 2-foot version of the lamp at the start of every Pixar film and he stood 10 feet in the air on a little pedestal. Different genres of music would play and Luxo would dance as best as a lamp can dance, culminating in what was clearly Luxo’s favorite song, “You’ve got a friend in me.” Then, he would bow and back up into the two little doors he had emerged from. I never saw him perform live, but he lives on in YouTube videos. He hasn’t been seen since 2010, just before I started working at Disney. His very creation was the act of making something imaginary real, but in the end, his maintenance costs and the fact that guests hardly noticed him made it inefficient to use him. Guests would ask me where Luxo went and I would say that he needed some refreshments or that it was his day off when really,

we knew that he was probably gone for good. I lied in this case for the sake of storytelling, but maybe I maintained the lie because I was hopeful for a return.

Walt Disney himself also had a tendency to lie. He told the world that he'd created Disneyland because he wanted a place where parents and children could play together. This may have had some truth to it, and it's a nice a creation story that's been passed down through the ages. Other sources say that Walt wanted to build a theme park because he'd spent years wandering the sets of Hollywood movie studios and he wanted to make sets of his own movies and invite people onto them. It started with a tiny mock-up of Giopetto's workshop from the film *Pinocchio*, which prompted Walt to ask his team how much it would cost to make it life-sized. From there, the ideas kept expanding until the fully formed idea of a Mickey Mouse park was fleshed out.

As an adult, Walt also adored railroads. He built his own miniature, ride-able railroad set around his California home and some, including his own daughter, say that Walt built the theme park because he wanted his own real working railroad system. His motivations were vast and complicated, so the story of wanting a place to bring his daughters to play was probably easier to tell, giving tour guides a more magical narrative.

A 2001 book by Richard Foglesong presents a lesser-known narrative: Walt's first park wasn't good enough so he built a second park in Florida that has since crippled the state. In the 1960s, the Disney company was powerful enough to negotiate an eternal partnership, a marriage, with Florida. In the book, Foglesong presents Walt as a storyteller so skilled that he tricked the state into allowing the company the freedom to do as it pleased when it came to building its magical world.

Just a few months before his death, Walt was on television talking about a dream city that would have real inhabitants and real companies living and working together in his Epcot, his Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow. This was a complicated city to realize because of Florida's law concerning how the land that Disney had built was to be governed. After all, a city has citizens, who have the right to vote. After losing control in Disneyland once hotels and highways sprang up next to his California park, Walt needed full authority over this new magical land. Because the government of Florida so needed Disney's economic boost and because Walt Disney told them that he was building a city, not only an amusement park, Florida gave the Disney company full jurisdiction over the land it had bought. They could have their own police and fire-fighting forces and could even build their own nuclear plant, though this never came to realization. In *Married to the Mouse*, Foglesong says that he found a memo with Walt's scribbled notes saying that Epcot would never have permanent residents because those residents would have the right to make choices. Instead they would be "tourists/temporary residents" despite the fact that he kept telling the world that they were building a real city. Foglesong argues that this political move allowed the company to create its own government to control Disney property, thus evading "state and county regulation of buildings, land use, airport and nuclear power plant construction, the distribution and sale of alcoholic beverages" that any other company would have to follow. This evading continues today because the agreement was made permanent.

Another regulation is that should outside local police or local sheriff departments go on Disney property, they have to check in with the company first, which leaves Disney to do its own policing. In fact, we were told during cast member training that we had to carefully obey the speed limit signs, no matter how late to work we were, because

the Disney police could ticket us. A rumor also went around when I worked at Toy Story that while cast members could be ticketed, tourists or visitors couldn't be ticketed because of the way the police system had been set up. A fellow cast member once advised me to pretend to be a tourist if I ever got pulled over, though this could be hard to do if you were pulled over and wearing your costume.

It's political and it's messy, but learning about Walt's very public deception concerning Epcot has changed how I look at him. He was a businessman, a dreaming, scheming businessman. I felt betrayed by the man who had come across the screen before *The Little Mermaid* when I was a child, talking about people living in a domed environment and parks full of greenery for children to play in. Those parts, maybe, really were what he intensioned, but the idea overall felt somehow cheapened and deceitful. This is despite the fact that I love the Epcot of today because it is the place I met my husband on a blind date, where we celebrated our first-year dating anniversary, and where we walked around World Showcase the day after our wedding wearing Mr. & Mrs. mouse ear hats. Epcot was built on a lie, but I have to admire the creativity it took his team to make it into the place of today that I love.

Maybe I love Epcot because it feels like a place of permanence. It will always be there when I go back to Florida. Whereas the black balloons declaring oneself an imbecile and even the Mickey-shaped balloons found in the real Disney parks will be gone by the time you get home, the memories forged in the parks will remain. Even that word—forged—has its several connotations; to forge is to fake, but it's also to build.

Are my warmest memories of the Disney parks just that—a forgery? Were they somehow less authentic because they'd been made in an artificially constructed place?

Do they matter less because they happened in a place where everyone makes memories?

I look back on these memories for hints of fakery:

- My husband and I were at the top deck of the Liberty Belle, cruising along the Rivers of America in Magic Kingdom, our “Just Engaged” buttons from Guest Relations glimmering pink on our shirts and our Mickey hats, his black with a tuxedo hat and mine white with a shimmering crown and a glittery veil, balanced on our heads when a few guests on the shore waved and cheered for us, screaming “Congratulations!” We waved back only to realize that we had somehow caught the attention of dozens of guests now waving to us, as if we were in a parade.
- The four of us—Will, Katie, Francisco, and I—were waiting in our front-row seats for Fantasmic and those first notes of the show blasted across the water. The lights rose from the bottom of the mountain where Mickey would be making his first appearance of the show wearing his sequined black jacket and poochy red pants.
- Francisco and I were at Monsieur Paul’s restaurant in the France pavilion with a seat overlooking the lake, where boats ferried guests from Morocco to Canada, sipping white wine and imagining, if this was our one-month anniversary, what other wonderful things might be to come in this relationship.

While it’s true that there is present in these memories an air of sentimentality because of my fondness for Disney as a concept and as a theme park, it’s also true that sentimentality is present in all our memories. Memories are actually great exaggerators,

or, more accurately, they're great at creating blurs and filters. One study on memory likens our minds to VHS tapes.³ In each viewing, the brain also does some writing to fill in blank spots that we've forgotten, making our memories undependable and susceptible to damage. This means memories that are most sentimental, or the most re-watched, are the most changed from their original versions. When I asked Francisco if he thought that memory of us on the ferry waving to crowd below was as magical as I thought it was, he had to work to recall it specifically. Only by using my explanation of the memory did his memory of the same event become more clear. And yet, I had colored his memory just in re-telling mine.

I'm not sure which version of the word "forged" applies when it comes to my most magical memories at Disney. In considering these moments, the common thread seems to be that something personal, something small and unique, was happening in each. On the ferry, we'd been singled out because we'd just gotten engaged. At Fantasmic, we were sitting as close to the show as possible, making it more intimate when Peter Pan swung over our heads via a rope on Captain Hook's ship. In the restaurant, we'd been granted the best table in the restaurant and the food, though in a theme park, was authentically French and the second-best meal of my life beside the French restaurant we ate at in Beaune. Each moment was real, but also had some magical help through narrative or atmosphere. The set pieces—the ferry, the show, the restaurant—were creations, and had preconceived narratives imbedded in them, but the experiences themselves are real enough to me because I felt them.

³ Bridge, D. J. & Paller, K.A. (2012). Neural correlates of reactivation and retrieval-induced distortion. *The Journal of Neuroscience*, 32(35), 12144-12151.

In the end, I have to wonder if it matters that my memories of Disney are so sentimentally shaded. Maybe it's enough just to have these experiences. In a place shared by millions, I can still feel special in the forging of these personal memories.

Dismaland was a forgery, a parody that prompts viewers to question the original, but it was a forgery that prompted its guests to have an experience. Perhaps the difference is that the Disney parks are designed to prompt a magical experience whereas Dismaland promises only an experience of some kind. And maybe just having an experience is enough.

DÉJÀ VU

1. Once upon a time, there was a beautiful young girl, a commoner, who lived with her father and her wicked stepmother. She was surprised to find one day that she would soon be having a daughter of her own.
2. They say she is like a princess, the Disney kind, so nice she's fake. It's easy to disregard her, to tell her, as her mother-in-law did, that she is living in the clouds because she wants to be an actress one day. "There are no do-nothing days when you have a baby, Lisa," my grandmother said. Even so, we did nothing on days probably meant for something, my mother and I cuddling in my parents' bed until my father returned from the auto shop.
3. On her wedding day, my mother sat on a throne of sorts, a toilet seat. She held a mirror to her eyes as she applied her false eyelashes. I picked up pieces of her hair and pulled them tightly around an iron. "You're doing them away from my face, right?" she said. Sometimes I was and sometimes I wasn't. We'd been through this when I'd gotten married two years before. She was 41 and I was 26 and it was déjà vu.

4. There's math to be done now. There are fifteen years and three months between us.

I was conceived when my mother was in eighth grade. She got off the school bus carrying her bookbag on her back and me in her belly in the front. Other cars stopped at the bus's red sign, watching my mother toddle across the street for her shift at Burger King.

5. The woman and her daughter grew up together.

6. "How could you do this to me?" her wicked stepmother had said. My mother wondered, how did getting pregnant mean doing something to her stepmother? "Where will the baby go?" my mother's first husband asked. I stretched in her belly and he suggested the nice couple at church. And his boss at the auto shop was also looking into adopting a baby. They could give the baby to one of them. My mother nodded, knowing it would never happen.

10. The mother and the daughter both grew up. They parted, their happy endings on different paths. The mother became a model and photographer. The daughter filled her home with books.

11. "Okay, my secret is out," my mother says. In the right corner of the screen is the "Home Shopping Network" logo. The camera moves in tight on her face. "I'm the mother of a 22-year-old. And I know I do not look like it. And do you know why? It's because of this product! I will never go a day without it. And this is why." She runs the pen-like machine over her eyebrow and the camera zooms in on her face, adding a digital line down her forehead to her chin. On the left side is "before" and on the right is "after." Amazingly, the machine has dramatically lifted her eyebrow and the world takes a moment to witness her Snow White complexion, her Ariel hair, her Merida blue eyes. As they call in to make their purchases, do the viewers at home notice that the machine does not buzz in my mother's hand? Is it possible that the model is keeping her eyebrow lifted in place?

12. In the video, my mother was 37 and I was 22. In the video, I will always be 22. And even when I am 72, products of its kind will still sell because it's better to believe that a woman is magically beautiful because of a product.

13. When I was in middle school, my mother worked as a waitress at a country club. The same customers would come in and order the same dishes. One couple had a little girl who called my mother Belle. The little girl saw past my mother's black polo and apron and her red hair and light eyes, picking up on something else, like my mother was a princess on the inside.

14. "You live day to day," my mother says. "You make sure baths are given and that the kids have food and that you get to work on time and they get to daycare. It's just making it through until a catastrophe happens and you lose your job or get a divorce and then you just reconfigure. Always in emergency survival mode."

15. One day, the daughter was walking in the forest on her own when she saw her mother from afar. They had been separated for many months. She ran to her mother, only to find a mirror in her mother's place.

16. I have a princess station in my bedroom, or at least that's what my husband and I call it. It's a vanity—such an appropriate word—where my makeup is organized into drawers labeled “eyes,” “face,” and “lips.” I sit before this mirror every day and every day I wonder what else I could do with the time I spend there. But I do it because I see her in that mirror. Fix your hair and do your makeup and you've completed the first step toward solving any problem.
17. She takes the iron from my hands and gives me a folded sheet of paper with her vows. “Will you read them and tell me if they're any good? I wrote it at 3 a.m.” She is asking me as a writer, not as her daughter. I read them out loud, the words difficult in my mouth because they are not mine, because I don't agree with them. “You vow yourself body and soul?” I say. Shouldn't you save something of yourself for yourself? I don't say. She holds up a curl for inspection in the mirror. All I'd promised in my wedding vows was that I'd try, even when it was hard. I knew better, somehow, than to promise my entire self to someone else. Hadn't she, through two husbands and countless boyfriends, taught me that?
18. She has worked at Home Shopping Network for just over a decade. Younger girls are replacing some of her friends. She fights against replacement with 18-inch hair extensions and makeup from MAC. I've gone with her into a dermatologist's office, listening while she asked the woman at the counter about injections to plump up her mouth lines. “I would be fine if not for these,” she tells me, pointing at lines around her mouth as we talk on FaceTime.

19. Before she started dating her new husband, my mother never said the f-word. It's a word that falls easily from her mouth nowadays when we talk about traffic or bitchy co-workers or life things that are generally fucked up. He is loud and she has become fluent in the same language of thunderous profanity. Our conversations belong to us, but they are marked by this alien word.
20. The daughter studied her reflection, wondering why she'd seen herself and thought it was her mother. She studied her own face, looking at the differences: her cheeks rounded where her mother's arched inward; her nose slanted where her mother's nose straightened; her chin flattened where her mother's chin curved. How could she have been confused?
21. On her wedding day, her guests liken her to a movie star. She and her new husband leave the reception to walk around the dark park. They wander through the Christmas lights while the photographer takes snapshots, blurry greens and reds in the background. On the way back to the reception, a family of strangers asks to take pictures with the bride and groom. A little girl, three or four years old, stares up at my mother. The camera flash lights their faces. The little girl fingers my mother's silk dress. My mother could hardly sit during the reception, but she bends down to the little girl and hugs her. Does she know instinctively what Disney princesses are trained to do? You don't know how much they need to be held. Don't be the first to let go.

22. I was taking selfies with my maid of honor, celebrating the end of my single-woman status. We were going out for drinks and dancing and I had curled my blonde hair and fiddled with my makeup until it was just right. I was pretty and pleased in my “bride” t-shirt and jeans. Then, my mother emerged from her bedroom in a black skirt and tight shirt, her hair a cascade of red, her makeup dark and flawless. Out of my excitement came a surge of anger that I didn’t know how to grasp. She saw it, she felt it, and she changed, put her hair in a ponytail, wiped the makeup from her eyes as if she could wipe away the accidental and awful thing she’d done: on a day celebrating me, she was more beautiful.
23. When my brother, today a 6’8” prison security guard in Kentucky, cried because he’d had to add to a young man’s prison sentence, I imagined what my mother would have done if he’d made this admission to her. She would have congratulated him on his giant squishy heart, on the good man he was because he’d seen another person in pain and his good heart was bothered. She would have told him that maybe, then, he wasn’t cut out to be a prison guard because it’s one thing to carry a nightstick and a taser and fill out paperwork, but it’s another to have his kind of heart and see the human side of his prisoners. She would say that she wasn’t telling him this only to protect his feelings, but also because his feelings could cloud his judgment, leaving him hurt or killed. Because I knew what my mother would have said, I didn’t say it.
24. The daughter saw their likenesses too. Her eyes were so like her mother’s she couldn’t be sure they were her own to claim. She was her mother and she was not her mother.

IN BEAUNE

We collect Disney parks the way people collect baseball cards, or at least that's the way we tried to explain it to the four Australian strangers across the table from us.

We were having a five-course lunch—probably the most expensive meal of my 26 years—in Beaune, France, taking a break from a day-long tour of the Burgundy wine region. My husband Francisco and I, along with our two friends Will and Katie, were on our first vacation outside of the United States during the hottest European summer in one hundred years. Katie and I were on break from our jobs as teachers and Will and Francisco had taken off two weeks from their jobs as engineers. The four of us were from northern Virginia wine country, and Katie even worked at a winery on the weekends, so we thought we knew a lot about wine. We were wrong. We had arrived into Beaune (pronounced “Bone,” not “Bay-own” as we first thought) to discover a whole new world of winemaking with its own language: “terrior” (“tare-raw”) and “grand cru” (choke slightly on the R's and you're pronouncing it correctly) and “climat” (“cleh-mah”). By lunchtime, we had been to two wineries and tasted wines worth hundreds of dollars. We were just getting our entrees when my husband told the husband-wife tour guide team and the two retired couples also on the wine tour with us that we were going to Disneyland Paris in two days.

“Surely you're joking,” said one of the women, her face scrunched as if we'd told her that we'd ordered a round of fried roaches for the table. Her helmet-shaped haircut jerked around her ears.

“Aren’t all the Disney parks the same?” asked her husband, a white-haired man shaped like an opened paperclip.

This was a reaction I expected. I had hoped that we wouldn’t have to explain this part of our two-week European trip to this particular group of wine snobs. Granted, in simply being part of a group paying more than one hundred euros per person to visit three wineries and have lunch, we all qualified as wine snobs. But these wine snobs, I just knew, wouldn’t understand our gravitation toward Disney. Their reaction wasn’t unusual. When I talk to my friends or students at school about Disney, they’re interested, but most people I know have no desire to spend a day in a Disney park. In the beginning of every semester, for example, I get to know my classes by asking the students to come up with one true thing about themselves and one lie about themselves, asking the rest of the class to guess which is the truth. I use myself as an example to get us going. My truth is that I five years ago, I worked at Toy Story Mania in Hollywood Studios, pushing the green button, pulling down lap bars, collecting Fastpasses, and trying to explain to angry guests why our wait time was 140 minutes. My lie is that I love to eat snails. This semester, one of my students said that the thing about the snails had to be true because I didn’t look like my soul was dead enough to have worked at Disney.

Others think that adults who go to any of the Disney parks more than once must be overgrown children suffering from the aptly named Peter Pan Syndrome. The wine snobs fell into this category. Actually, going to Disney as an adult has been the best way to enjoy the parks. My childhood experiences at Magic Kingdom are blurry, but my adult memories are so blissfully vivid that I’m drawn back to the parks to experience those memories over and over again. Articulating this complex Disney draw is difficult, so often

when I talk about going to Disney or writing about Disney, the easiest thing to do is explain my connection through my earlier employment with the company.

“I used to work at Disney,” I said, accepting a plate of baked chicken covered in a white and brown sauce from the waiter.

“It’s like...” Will said, cutting into his beef. “Going to all the top golf courses in the world, just to say that you’ve been there.”

The Australians nodded. Will had never worked at Disney; he and Katie just liked going to the parks, but he knew how to speak their language. They had told us earlier in the day that they were skipping around the world, playing in golf tournaments. They’d traveled from Australia to Ireland to New Jersey to Germany and now to France to compete. Disneyland Paris sounded like a lot more fun than what they were doing, at least to me. I realized then, as we took our first bites into the authentic French cuisine before us, that these people would never need to explain why they would go all over the world hitting balls with sticks. People know golf, even if they don’t understand it entirely.

“We’ve been to Disney World in Florida and Disneyland in California, so now we need to go to Disneyland Paris,” Francisco said.

“And we’re going to Tokyo Disney next summer,” Will said.

“And Shanghai Disney after that, once it’s built,” Francisco said.

I wanted to explain that it wasn’t just about collecting all the Disneys. For my husband and Will and Katie, maybe it was about going there to say they’d been there and to prove that they were hardcore Disney people. For me, going to all the Disneys was about a return to the familiar. All the unfamiliarity in these foreign countries had been hard work. It’s easy to be the clueless tourist when you’re a tourist and you’re genuinely clueless, but it was hard for me to accept our roles as clueless tourists. It

meant not only being outsiders, but also dealing with the fact that we were bound to end up looking stupid in a country that I'd been warned did not suffer fools lightly. We were all well educated people, but still, beside my fear of being pickpocketed, I was only more afraid of looking like an idiot.

We were halfway through our two-week vacation across seven countries: Germany, Austria, Liechtenstein, Switzerland, France, Belgium, and Holland. Every day had had something new, some new street on which to get lost, a different hotel, a rule we broke because we didn't know it existed. None of us really spoke the language of these new places, either. I had learned basic French that summer, but that wasn't enough. In Virginia, I was bursting with language, finishing my last year of my creative writing M.F.A. and teaching English at the university level. In Europe, communicating suddenly required bravery. Our first country had been Germany, where we'd been lucky because people seemed to understand English and preferred to speak it over the terrible German we were speaking. In France, though, I had to gather my courage before speaking for our group. I'd begin every conversation by adjusting my greeting to match the time of day to say hello to the waiter or the person behind the counter and then launching into one of the few phrases I knew I knew: "Est-ce que vous comprenez l'Anglais?"

If they said yes, that they spoke English, I considered myself lucky. If they said no, my chest would flutter as I tried to make myself listen instead of thinking about how much I didn't understand. I worried that I sounded rude by immediately asking if they understood English. I worried that I sounded stupid because I wasn't pronouncing it correctly. I worried that I would give Americans a bad (or worse) reputation because I was being rude and sounding stupid.

Disneyland Paris would be different. At Disneyland Paris, I knew we could relax. We could go to the castle and ride Pirates of the Caribbean and see the princesses in the parade. Disneyland Paris promised the familiar.

The conversation at the table moved quickly from Disney to golf to Australia to Vietnam to the quirks of the French. The table listened while Helmet Hair told the story of dinner the night before. Paperclip had wanted chicken from a French restaurant, so he had stood up from the table and pantomimed a chicken, bobbing his head and flapping his arms.

“So none of you speak French?” I said as the plates were being cleared.

“Of course not,” Helmet said.

“How do you survive?” I said. “How do you get what you need?”

“We get on well enough,” the other Australian woman said. She was a tiny lady with short gray hair and she’d been quiet for most of the meal, rolling her eyes at the talk of golf.

“Most people speak English and if they don’t, it’s just that they don’t want to,” said Paperclip. He eyed the waiter placing bread on the table. “Like this fellow here. He understands English, but he won’t use it.” The waiter turned back toward the kitchen.

“Plus, we have Bob to communicate for us,” said Helmet. The four of them laughed, teasing Paperclip for his chicken impression.

I tried to decide if these people from the other side of the world were brave or just ignorant. How could they travel the world expecting everyone to speak English? Even though these Australians spoke our language, I found myself struggling to understand them. Helmet had been astonished that we were spending a whole day at a place she thought was for children and I was equally astonished that people spending the day

tasting some of the most expensive, sought-after wines in the world could at any moment get down on all fours and moo like a cow to ask for a steak.

We followed lunch with a third and final winery where the winemaker had inherited his land from his father and styled some of his wines based on his experiences working at wineries in Oregon. It was one of the most unique wineries in the whole world. The winemaker's wife Kyoko poured the wine. The Australians, however, seemed to have had enough. Kyoko would pour the wine into their glasses and the Australians would pour it into the spittoon without even tasting it. I let the complicated flavors sit on my tongue, watching Helmet nod off in the afternoon heat.

Two days later, we went to Disneyland Paris even though the weather had promised nothing but heat and rain. As we wandered the Disney Studios park (based on the Hollywood Studios park in Florida) and the Disneyland Paris park (based on the Magic Kingdom park in Florida), I found myself sometimes disappointed. There sometimes was trash on the ground. The cast members were less friendly than their American counterparts. The castle was also small and pink, unlike the tall, pointed silver fortress in Florida, but it was also beautiful and different in its arrangement atop a cliff.

In the afternoon, we found the familiar I'd been looking for along with the surprise of something new. The clouds cleared long enough for Queen Elsa and Princess Anna to come down Main Street on a *Frozen* float, waving and smiling just as they'd waved and smiled when my husband and I had met them in California on our honeymoon. Soon, the clouds returned and we ran towards the back of the park, hoping to find a restaurant to wait out the storm. We ducked into a cavern off the side of the castle while my husband consulted a map. I wandered deeper into the dark cave toward a misty lime-green pond. A roar echoed off the walls and I stood face-to-face with a 90-foot

dragon curled up on the edge of the pond. Its head waved and its tail beat against the ground. Then, its orange eyes blinked and it laid down its head for a rest before its next scheduled roaring.

DISNEY VINTAGE

When you're famous, people look carefully at the narrative of your life, picking out the moments that led to your success in the same way grapes are plucked from a vine. They wonder, how did that moment of success grow out of that other moment? But what they really want to know is how to replicate that success, as if it's a formula. These grapes grown at this temperature at this spot in the vineyard will produce a wine that tastes like this. Those grapes will taste like that. There is a science in this process where there is no replication in how a poor boy from Missouri becomes not just a man, but a myth, a product, an easy-to-obtain vintage taste on the tongue.

Pluck these grapes, then. Squish them into their juiciest parts. Watch the colors blend. Cork it. Store it.

His first act of creation, the first hint of the world-building to come, takes the form of a form. It's an artistic act, turning his birth date from 1901 to 1900. Carefully he twists the one into a zero. Even a year older, he isn't old enough. The enlistment form requires his parents' signatures.

Now, we peer over the shoulder of his mother, who is small and practical, the form in her hands. What must she have thought of her youngest son's desire to escape into the hands of the army? She sees that she has no choice. If he wants to go, he will go, the paper signed or not. At least, in signing her name, she knows where he'll be.

For Walt, it's adventure, not war. The war is harder than he thought it would be, but that's nothing a bit of imagination can't solve. He writes home that he's feeling fine, he hopes everyone back home is fine, he is having a fine time. He signs his letters, "as ever, your old artist," because that's what he had decided to be. He imagines that he is okay, even with the gruel for food and the influenza spreading through his unit. He is fine.

So here's one moment ripe for plucking: where his peers are struggling through their reality, he drifts through a reality of his own creation. He stands out. He's promoted from driving ambulances to the position of tour guide for visiting army officials. His job is to impress the officials, to show them that everyone is feeling fine, everyone is having a fine time, the war is going fine.

That moment is juicy and good. Leave behind the fruit that tells the story of his failure to succeed in any other capacity. He is great at war only if war means sketching his comrades and putting funny words in their mouths with speech balloons. Watch the reality of war slowly interfere with the cartoon world in his head. For him the war ends with a discharge form he requests and submits because of the war's interference in his art.

Getting home will have its difficulties. A strike in Marseille means he's stuck in France. He bumps into an old friend. In his head, he rebuilds the world he knows back home. There is adventure to be had there: the two friends make a pact to drift down the Mississippi together like Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer. The friend catches a ship back home, but Walt is stuck for weeks in France until another ship arrives.

Watch these moments like a montage: He wanders the streets, carrying a sketch pad. He buys a puppy. He kills time riding the streetcar and sketching the Kaiser. Men

and women speaking French brush past him in the narrow alleyways. He holds his pad close to his chest as they pass. In the closet he rents by the dock, he curls on his pallet of blankets arranged on the floor, sketching the “slackers” who didn’t enlist. The world back home needs these drawings. Then, there’s an empty sheet of paper. Shapes emerge from his pencil, the shapes of heads, of long lines representing their future arms, the American flag somewhere in the background. He decides that this is how American should be: proud to be sending their food to the troops and buying saving stamps. Finally, at the end of the montage, he wakes up. He has fallen asleep with the pencil in his hand. The day has arrived. Watch from a distance as he crosses the plank and steps onto the ship. A flash of lightning and it’s dark and there is Walt, clinging to the side of the ship, waves falling over his head, salt water and sky water mixing in his eyes.

Then, it’s morning. The Statue of Liberty is in the background as he disembarks. There is a telegram from his Huckleberry friend, who has gotten engaged. That trip down the river is so far forgotten that it is almost as if it never existed.

In the vineyard, pass over that hard, brown bit. Instead, feast your eyes on this plump red berry:

Walt stands before his father. The decision was difficult, to become an actor or to become a cartoonist, but he has decided. It is a rare moment of logic for Walt, an argument his father can’t disagree with. Cartoonists have more job opportunities.

“You’re going to make a career of that, are you?” he says.

He is.

At first, but no one will hire him to draw cartoons, especially not the local newspaper, the *Kansas City Star*. Witness the way he mopes over his sketch book, waiting. And then, his brother has heard about a job with Gray Advertising. The words appear across the glass pane of the office's front door Walt pulls open. After the moments we've followed, we know that his sketch pad is always in his hand, but for some reason, he is empty-handed on this job search.

Here's another delicious grape to pluck: The fact that Walt has not brought his sketch book will make him stand out in the proprietor's memory because every artist he knows carries his portfolio when job hunting. It is a golden, delicious moment of irony and happenstance, an accident in his favor. He is hired.

Another montage: there's Walt, sitting at his drawing board, a thin mustache over the cigarette in his lips for the first time, a sports coat slung over the back of his chair, long brown suspenders arranged over his white long-sleeve shirt. The sun moves up and down over his shoulder through the window, time-lapse photography moving time forward as Walt is still, the pages falling backward over the back of the easel.

Then, we hit play and there's the boss, telling a fellow boss that Walt's work is good, offering to pay Walt \$50 per week. And then there's Walt on the other side of the desk, shaking his boss's hand and saying "that'll do fine." He closes the door behind him on the way out. He pauses. It's double what he'd been expecting. "Yep," he says. "That'll do just fine."

Then, there's a quiet moment. There's Walt sitting at the easel, practicing his autograph. His loops are wide and long. He is deciding between "Walter E. Disney," which sounds good because of the rhyme in "E." and "Dis-ney," or just plain "W.E.D." or

“Walt Disney.” We zoom out to find ourselves perched on the shoulder of another artist working nearby.

“Is it Walter or Walt?” the man asks, and Walt looks up, emerging from the world of his name.

“Walt,” he says, and reaches out to shake the man’s hand.

“Ubbe,” the man says. “Ubbe lwerks.”

You may not have realized it, but this was also a fleshy piece of fruit, ripe for the pressing to escape the sour juice within. This is the beginning of a beautiful friendship.

Here are a few muddy bunch of grapes to pass over:

At the advertising agency, Walt’s drawings have to be redone. Most of his creations aren’t good enough. He is fired.

He picks up a job carrying mail through the busy Christmas season until he is fired again on January 1st.

But here’s a seed that could grow into a fat grape: To Walt, those six weeks he spent with Gray Advertising gave him enough experience to open his own agency. This would mean being a boss and not a cartoonist, though, and the idea of being a cartoonist is appealing enough to list it on the 1920 census. Those words are so clear that we can see the census form sitting on the desk of Walt’s tiny cramped office ourselves. In the box labeled “occupation” are the words “commercial artist and cartoonist.” What we don’t see is a pausing, if there was one, over these words. Were they easy to write? Was he so sure of his future that he felt it appropriate to list this on a document meant for an archive lasting hundreds of years?

A few weeks go by and Ubbe has lost his job too. One phone call and the two young men, both 18 years old, will call the new company Iwwerks-Disney. After all, Disney-Iwwerks sounds like a place you'd go for an eye exam. They can't afford office space, so they strike a deal with the owners of the National Restaurant Association to create artwork for their newspaper, *Restaurant News*, in exchange for desk space. Watch the two men climb the stairs above the association's office to find two desks arranged around a toilet and a sink.

The seasons change, evident in the coats the men now have shed. Spring's arrival brings change in the form of the *Kansas City Star*. From afar, we see only a big red circle drawn around some printed words in the help wanted section. Zooming in on the page, we see the words "Wanted for K.C. Slide Company: Artist, Cartoon and Wash Drawings; First Class Man Wanted; Steady."

Here's another succulent grape: Walt steps off the Kanas City streets and walks through a door labeled "K.C. Slide Company." He has shed his jacket on a nearby chair and over his shoulder we see a cartoon that moves. He's watching it, not entertained, not amazed, but thoughtfully, mechanically, mentally pulling it apart like a toaster so that he can put it back together again.

A quick shot now of Ubbe back at the studio the two men have just created, sitting at his desk next to the toilet, fine-tuning the lettering on an ad Iwwerks-Disney has been commissioned to do for the National Restaurant Association. With Walt's departure, it's inevitable. Ubbe turns off the lights of Iwwerks-Disney, its desks emptied.

He walks the same streets as Walt and also passes through the doors of the K.C. Slide Company.

But here's a brownish berry that maybe, in collecting the moments that create Walt on the vine, we don't want. In his new office, there's Walt, drawing the same cartoon faces over and over, characters with long noses and wide ears, changing expression under different styles of hats. A boss walks by.

"They want portraits," he says, watching Walt flip the pages of his cartoon.

"They'll like this," Walt says and the boss sighs and moves on. Ubbe peeks over the partition separating the two men.

"What happened?" Ubbe says.

"It's fine. It'll be fine. The hats look good," Walt says and Ubbe retreats, knowing that Walt will never admit that he can only do cartoonish figures. Still, Walt will be right. The hat company will like it, will think it's part of Walt's artistic vision, not a result of his limited artistic abilities.

At home, we see Walt at his desk in his father's garage, rented at the fair price of \$5 per month, the book *Animated Cartoons: How They Are Made, Their Origin and Development* open before him. We zoom in on his drawing board, watch an image taking shape of a man falling off a horse, the safari-dressed man falling forward, the mule-horse's legs bucking backwards as Walt flips the pages. He records these images with a camera borrowed from the agency and we watch him watching other cartoons he's made of two men talking to one another in a park, one waving a cane while smoke escape his cigar.

Requests for cartoons like these come in at the ad agency and when Walt takes them on, his boss says that they're too good; it's bad to stand out; the new stuff is too new.

And then, this, the sweetest piece of fruit for your winemaking yet: Walt becomes a little celebrity. He sends his work to the Newman Theatre, which shows cartoons before and in between movies.

Our vantage is from the front of the theatre. Walt settles in a seat behind Newman himself. The lights go down and the film begins, the black and white projection pointed directly at us so that we are blinded to Newman, but we can see Walt at the back of the theatre.

The short ends and the lights go up again. Newman whips around to find Walt.

"I like it," Newman says. "It is expensive?"

"30 cents per foot."

"I'll buy all you can make," Newman says and leaves the theatre.

At 19 years old, Walt has reached his first audience, but there's no profit to be made. He's forgotten that it takes exactly 30 cents per foot to make, but at least he won't be losing money in this deal. Walt doesn't have a head for money, but he's got a head for taking risks.

We can now see Walt spending his nights playing film he's recorded backwards, so that a man jumps from the ground to the roof and a little girl catches a glass bottle of milk as it leaps from the ground, a thousand pieces back into one whole jar. In another film, he has figured out how to put three of the same person on the screen at the same time. Before a black curtain will be three Walts, each sporting a different combination of

hat + coat + tie + mustache. All three will appear to silently enjoy a conversation as they puff on their cigarettes.

It's obvious that these endeavors need a studio, need a name. Iwwerks-Disney didn't go as planned, but those were still images. These are moving pictures. These are the future. Someone will suggest "K.C. Studios," named after Kansas City, but that seems boring. "Kaycee Studios" seems smarter and will sound better when explaining his self-made studio to his future biographers.

A sour grape gets into the mix, somehow. Walt accepts a task that requires him to go up in a plane and film other planes doing tricks in the sky. We see him in the front seat of the tiny plane, cranking the camera, while Frank, a fellow who has joined Kaycee Studios in the evening, holds the tripod in the back, helping angle it. Walt points out particular angles for the pilot to follow, winding the camera, while Fred tries to pretend he's not there.

"Doing okay, Fred?" Walt says.

"Just keep cranking," Fred says.

"This is our break. Just keep thinking about that," Walt says. "Okay now take us under there." And the plane dives.

Back on the ground, the men check what they've captured, sure the footage captured what they saw: aircrafts dipping and floating and twirling, fifty planes wing walking, stunt flying, and parachute landing, an intricate ballet in the sky. But all that's there is the image of a whirling brightness, a brightness that will burn itself in his brain, the only image the camera got before the blackness set in. This is what failure looks like. Fred stomps out of the garage and doesn't return.

A few days shy of 20, the idea of filming real life has failed, but for Walt, failure signifies that it's time to try a new tactic.

Fairy tales. Fairy tales will be the new thing. Taking old stories and making them modern, going back to animation style that worked so well in the Newman Theatre. J.M. Barrie's Peter Pan has always stuck with Walt, but he couldn't even film a real plane in flight, much less get a person soaring through the air. People on the ground are easier. Little Red Riding Hood seems easy enough.

But it's not easy. He's moved away from his father's garage to a tiny room in the city. Hired interns will help with Little Red and so will some of Walt's old pals, including Ubbe. A pan around the studio reveals that the "studio" is partitioned with cardboard walls to separate the interns from Walt. The money coming in from the K.C. Slide Company won't be enough to cover both Walt and Kaycee Studios, so he'll write a few bad checks.

One day, a man arrives at the K.C. Slide Company.

"I'm looking for Mr. Walter Dinsey," the man says to Walt, his hat in his hand.

"I don't think Mr. Dinsey is in the office today," Walt says and the man thanks him and leaves.

Every few weeks, the man will return, looking for Mr. Dinsey. It becomes an office joke.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Dinsey hasn't been showing up," Walt tells the man one day and just as he's about to leave, a colleague yells for Walt across the room.

"You're Walt Dinsey?" the man says, turning around.

"Disney," Walt says, accepting the envelope. "It's Disney."

Here's another grape to add to squeeze into your mixture. The taste of this one will be a surprise. After all, Walt was up for a few surprises, so add this one to your bunch: Walt walks into his boss's office with a letter of resignation. He is in debt, but he has plenty of the only kind of currency he really needs: personality and ideas. It's enough to exchange for some cash from a guy who believes in these fairy tales. Now is the big time. He's gathered his interns and his friends. It's time to put Little Red into the world. To celebrate, the men go out on the town.

Walt sits on the curb with a camera empty of film. He winds the camera, pretending to be on a shoot. A woman stops by, her hands gloved, a round hat on her head.

"Are you boys making a movie?" she says.

"Yepp. A picture about the good old days in the city."

"Oh how exciting! What's it called?"

"It doesn't have a name yet, ma'am. We'll have to take it back to New York City and put it together before they name it," Walt says and his friends laugh.

Back at the office, other ideas for fairy tales are pinned up on the board. He keeps working on these even though his bank account descends deeply into negative numbers. He is fed by the local diners who let him get by on IOUs they know will never be repaid. It's enough for the cooks and waitresses to see him fed and happy, talking about the latest fairy tale cartoon and how it's shaping up.

The phone in his apartment rings one day and, though he usually doesn't pick up and though he's running late for a meeting, he picks up the phone. It's the shoemaker down the street.

"You owe me \$1.50 if you want these shoes," the man says.

“I don’t have a \$1.50. Those are my only shoes. You can’t hold them hostage,” Walt says.

“\$1.50 or no shoes,” the man says and hangs up.

The phone rings again. It’s Dr. McCrum, the man he’s supposed to be meeting.

“Walt, I’ve got the money for the film. Come on over and we’ll set the deal,” the doctor says.

“I can’t,” Walt says.

“Why not?”

“I haven’t any shoes. They were falling apart. I left them at the shoemaker’s shop downstairs and he won’t let me have them until I dig up a dollar and a half.”

“I’ll be right over,” the doctor says.

The doctor pays the shoemaker and takes Walt, now with his shoes, to his dental office to talk about making *Tommy Tucker’s Tooth*.

After a few months, we’ll see Walt wandering the streets of Hollywood with just a few dollars to his name. He wanders onto film sets, studying them, watching the directors in the same careful way he’d considered those first cartoons at the K.C. Slide Company. How did they do it? Meandering those sets will put an idea in his head that won’t go away until he built his own real movie set for visitors to wander: Disneyland.

His parents will follow him to Los Angeles, even though his father still didn’t think he’d make, that he’d crash and burn the way he himself had crashed and burned every time he’d tried something new. His older brother Roy will give up his job to look after Walt, chasing him from Kansas to California.

Walt will push his animation team in his new Hollywood studio to the brink of exhaustion making Snow White come to life. And she will live on the screen, eliciting

emotions audiences never imagined from a cartoon. Weeks after Snow White's birth, his small, quiet mother will die. She'll have mentioned a smell. Walt will have sent someone to find the source. The toxic fumes will still move from the furnace and into her chest, poisoning her in her sleep.

Let's consider our grapes then, how they've come together, the bitter and the sweet, to form this carefully considered blend. All those white grape moments—the artistry, the refusal to give up, the little celebrity—are alone too sugary, sweet to the point of syrup. But, together with the dark grapes, they form a taste that's vintage Disney: the sweetness of the magic in his head blended with the bitterness of reality's wars, failures, and deaths.

It's a nonvintage known around the world, so tempting and so recognizable that it's easy to forget the fruit that led to the wine. But smell it and the fruit is present: The Walt Disney vintage is known for its softness on the palate, for the warmth it leaves in the belly.

Uncork it. Pour. Swirl. Taste. Swish. The Walt from the grapes is a different man to different people. The bottle describes a hint of honey, the taste of nutmeg, aromas of almond, but every taster will feel something different on the tongue. Past the forward tannins, do you get that tang of tobacco and leather? And the smoke on the nose? The finish long and lingering.

ON TIME

1. The beginning

Robert Osborne, a host on the Turner Classic Movies (TCM) channel, once said that he envies anyone who sits down to watch *Notorious* for the first time. To be on the edge of experiencing something so beautiful for the first time just didn't compare to watching it over and over again, trying to get the same feeling. I understand exactly what he means. But for me, that film is *Casablanca*.

My memory fails me when I try to remember the first time I saw *Casablanca*. What must it have been like to be that teenager alone in the dark living room of her stepfather's house at 3 a.m.? I do recall that I missed the first few minutes of it, the beginning with the map and the narrator explaining that this was German-occupied Morocco in North Africa, the part with the plane flying overhead and the man warning the nice couple about bad people being everywhere in Casablanca as he steals the man's wallet. Even today, that part of the film isn't as dear to me as the 90 minutes that follow. I remember that I hit "record" on the DVR in time to catch "Rick's Café Americain" spelled out in neon, the ubiquitous spotlight of the almost-Nazi occupied city passing over the café's wooden double doors as Dooley Wilson's upbeat "It Had To Be You" bounced across an unseen piano. What must I have felt as the camera moved forward past those double doors, the sound of the piano growing louder? I've seen the film so many times, I can't remember not knowing that in a moment, I would be seeing Humphrey Bogart's hand scrawl the signature of "Rick" before passing the receipt back to the waiter and

picking up a cigarette, his heavy-lidded eyes concentrated on a chess game with no opponent. In the hands of Bogart—never “Bogie,” a nickname I always felt was too friendly for his somber image—the smoke rises up like a barrier, shading parts of a hardened face that betrays nothing. At this point in the film, we’ve been told that Rick never drinks with customers, never, making not only his customers jealous of his time, but, sitting on my couch, me too.

2. The past

My husband Francisco has his own obsessions. In graduate school, he earned a fellowship to pursue his degree in computer science. He was a single guy newly transplanted to Orlando from Puerto Rico, so he spent most of his time playing video games and watching anime. His favorites were in Japanese with English subtitles, stories of science fiction, adventure, and risk with a little bit of love story mixed in. His favorite anime of all time is *Macross*, a series that was created in the ‘80s and still has new content being created today. The series has spanned four movies, three TV series, and six direct-to-video films, alongside several comic books and novels. Sometimes, I catch him singing in Japanese as he works in our office upstairs and I assume it’s the theme song from *Macross* or from his second favorite, *One Piece*. His voice is deep and low when he speaks, but he raises it to match the enthusiastic, baritone lilt of the song. He took Japanese classes in graduate school, but now, five years later, all he remembers is how to say his name in Japanese. He sings in Japanese with a Spanish accent.

Whenever I visit my mom in Florida and he stays behind in Virginia, he binge watches anime. When I call, I hear the pausing of character voices in Japanese so he can talk to me. He says it's like the old days in Orlando before he met me.

3. Eternity

My fascination with films like *Casablanca* from the '30s, '40s, and '50s is something Francisco will never understand. The obsession itself, maybe he understands, but the object of the obsession, not at all. His anime and video games have happy endings. Many of my favorite movies don't. It doesn't make sense to him why I watch 1940's *Waterloo Bridge* over and over even though it's one of the saddest films ever made. In the film, Myra and Roy fall in love after only a few hours together and go back to their separate apartments, telling one another that the night apart will be like "a little eternity." The next night, they go to a bar. The lights go down, leaving candles to illuminate the room. One by one, the candles are extinguished until Roy and Myra are shadows swaying in the darkness.

Roy is called to war the next day. A few weeks later, the newspaper announces his death. When she met Roy, Myra had been a promising ballerina; she was kicked out of the ballet because she wanted to be with Roy. When she reads that he is dead, she becomes a prostitute. A year passes.

She goes to the usual place at Waterloo Station to pick up soldiers and there, Roy passes under the arches, alive after a year in a prisoner of war camp. They try to live happily ever after, but her secret prostitution weighs too heavily on her. She goes to

Waterloo Bridge on a dark night and steps into the path of a moving truck just as Roy arrives at the bridge to tell her that he knows and that it's okay.

Maybe I love this film because of all that it doesn't say, because of the silences, the shadows, and the darkneses. Maybe I love it because their story is as relevant now as it was in 1940. A tale of lost love that returns but cannot be endured is timeless.

4. Turning in a circle

In November 2012, Francisco and I went to his childhood home in Arroyo, Puerto Rico to help clean out his mother's house before her upcoming move to Florida. We started in his old bedroom, picking up action figures from places on his shelf that they had maintained for almost a decade, their tiny arms loaded with weapons and ready for battle. Francisco struggled to decide what to donate, what to throw away, and what to mail back to our newly purchased townhouse in Virginia. He had collections of magazines, mint condition action figures, and comic books, some of which were valuable and most of which were worthless. He would pick up a figure from its place on the shelf, wave it in the air, making it do battle with some unknown bad guy. There, I saw two Franciscos: a round, 8-year-old child standing beside the 6'2" tan man with black, square glasses, both waving the tiny, hard plastic man through the air, charging forward at the first hint of evil.

I thought of Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. In it, the characters reenact their pasts over and over, stuck in a loop, realizing that "time was not passing... it was turning in a circle." Here was Francisco, turning in a circle.

In an upstairs closet, I found a box of cards and craft projects. I pulled out a card he had made in 3rd grade for mother's day that said in Spanish, "Happy mother's day. Please don't cry any more. It makes me feel sad. I love you."

I tried to imagine the child from the pictures still hanging on the walls of this house walking in from school to hand his mother this card, decorated with pink flowers, made with construction paper and crayons. He was a plump child, his cheeks full and his hair puffy and curly on top, almost a twin of the character of Russell from the movie *Up*, and a boy scout, nonetheless. He would have passed the card to her, then headed toward the fridge, maybe looking for an afterschool snack since he tended to hold on to his lunch money for larger purchases like comic books or video games. She would have been tired after a long day at her job as a social worker, but she would have smiled as she opened the card. I wonder what her reaction was when she read that her son had heard her crying every night. Did she try then to explain that sometimes it's too hard not to cry as you stress over how to keep food on the table and take care of your ailing mother and pay for private school for your bright son and visit homes all across Puerto Rico to decide whether a child needs to be saved from his or her own parents? Or did she decide to try to be more quiet?

I showed the card to Francisco, who laughed it off. He gave it again to his mother, just as he'd done 20 years earlier. She was sitting on a stool watching us go through these boxes. She briefly read over it and handed it back to me.

"Oh yes," she said. "I was sad."

I was puzzled by the two possible meanings of her response. Was it that reading that card all those years ago had made her sad? Or was it that she was justifying Francisco's observation that she had indeed been sad so that's why she was crying? By

the time I thought to ask, Francisco had found something else from the box and was asking her if she remembered it.

5. Turning in a circle again

In *Casablanca*, time works in a loop. The same thief beseeches a tourist that there are “vultures, vultures everywhere” as he steals the tourist’s wallet. The roulette wheel spins, stealing money from the hands of desperate refugees. The usual suspects are rounded up.

6. The beginning again

There was a three-year job opportunity as a computer programmer in Germany for Francisco. We were thinking about what it would be like to leave the United States, bringing with us our dog and our Americanism. We were thinking about what bad things could happen, what vultures may await us. We were also thinking about what good things could happen, what stories could emerge from our time there. But even before we’ve begun, three years away from our family and friends seemed like a little eternity.

It didn’t matter, though. We wanted to do it, but it wasn’t meant to be. The opportunity passed. But now, six months later, another job has opened. Still, we are “waiting, waiting, waiting,” just like the man in *Casablanca*.

7. Turning in a circle again

The first time I went on The Great Movie Ride at Disney’s Hollywood Studios, I was moved to tears by the realization of my favorite film come to life. Near the end of the 18-minute tour into the movies, the final scene from *Casablanca* is acted out by life-size

audio-animatronic figures standing beside a plane. Rick, in his trench coat and fedora, looks into Ilsa's eyes and tells her that if she doesn't get on the plane, she'll regret it. "Maybe not today and maybe not tomorrow, but soon and for the rest of your life." Just as his character in the film does, the animatronic Rick pauses. Then he says, "we'll always have Paris."

The Ilsa animatronic is silent, but in the film, where Rick has paused, Ilsa has asked "What about us?" Her face is luminescent, her eyes wet and searching under her sloped hat. In the 1940s, filmmakers used filters on their cameras to perfect an actress's complexion. Ingrid Bergman as Ilsa didn't need any filter, but they used it anyway, elevating her to a glowing, unearthly beauty. On the ride, Ilsa is a passive figure, present only to give Rick someone to talk to. Her face is pointed and her skin is plastic and her head moves from gazing at the floor to gazing at Rick, lifeless despite the small movements of her head. Her hands demurely cross in front of her. In the film, she's holding onto not only her purse, but her hope. In the ride, she holds nothing.

During my first two months of working at Hollywood Studios, I used to leave my job at Toy Story Mania and go to the Great Movie Ride by myself to stand in line and watch this breathtaking, foggy Casablanca evening perfectly captured. All those times, I never noticed how the Ilsa figure never got her chance to speak or how the tour guide talked over the scene rather than allowing the scene to speak for itself. Once I stopped to watch the film version again, I realized how empty and cheapened the Disney version was. By its very presence, it represents what's not there, what's gone unsaid. The question is at the same time continually asked and never asked: "what about us?"

8. The past again

My favorite scene in *Casablanca* is one most film historians don't mention. It has nothing to do with "of all the gin joints in all the towns in all the world..." or "play it, Sam." Instead, it's a moment of artistry that passes by so effortlessly as to go unnoticed, a smooth, single shot by a single camera.

Rick and Captain Renault are in Rick's private upstairs apartment. They have just placed a wager over whether Victor Laszlo and his companion will get out of Casablanca. Plenty of witty dialogue is exchanged. Renault is in the middle of a speech about how the Gestapo doesn't interfere with him and how in Casablanca he is the master of his fate when a guard informs him that Major Strasser, the villain of the film, has arrived.

"You were saying?" Rick says.

"Excuse me," Renault says and hurries downstairs.

The shot moves to the bottom of the stairs, following Renault as he moves around the room, giving instructions to his men in anticipation of catching the criminal Ugarte to make a show for Major Strasser, then lands on Rick, who crosses in front of the camera in his signature white tuxedo coat and black bowtie.

There is an art form to this 20-second part of film history. It is a dance between the camera and the actors, choreographed to make the viewer feel like he or she is there in Rick's café, taking part in what is about to happen, the viewer's neck craning with the turning of the camera. Though it's only 20 seconds, rarely do films stay on a single shot for longer.

I really admire this approach. There's no hiding between camera angles and cuts to different characters. The same technique is used in some of my other favorite films like *Singin' in the Rain* with Gene Kelly or *Swing Time* with the incomparable Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. Those films use long camera shots so they can soak up all of the talent provided by these actors, performing dances they've rehearsed for weeks so that they can be their best on camera. Both Gene Kelly and Fred Astaire were such perfectionists that after recording a perfect take, they would go into a sound stage and do it again, performing their part and their partners' part to make sure that the sound of their tap shoes were in time to the music; no stray steps would be tolerated. They needed to get it right because they knew that these performances would be rewound and played, over and over again, sealing them in time.

9. The beginning and the past

Francisco and I have been to Disney World countless times. We both worked for Disney in the past and we've been back over and over. We know the parks like we know our hometowns. The day after we were married, we went to Epcot with our friends to drink around the world at World Showcase, a series of pavilions that represent countries around the world. Francisco and I had walked this circle of countries again and again during the three years we dated, sipping Grey Goose slushies in France and sake in Japan. But on the day after we were married, we were standing near Morocco when a typical Florida downpour started. Our friends were still in France, so Francisco and I found shelter in a Moroccan gift shop. At the back of the gift shop was a bar we'd never seen before. We ordered drinks, marveling at how this bar was in the right place at the right time, at how we never even knew it existed.

Sipping my Casablanca Sunset, I peered outside. The rain poured into the cobbled street, filling little puddles. People ran past us, splashing water with their tennis shoes. The Moroccan-style architecture of the building across the street gleamed wet, dark orange in the cloud-covered sun as evening approached. Francisco and I had been married for almost 24 hours and I was safe and dry and our friends would be meeting us for dinner. Warmth spread from the cranberry and orange on my tongue down to my belly.

We talked again about how we had missed this bar so many times because we hadn't bothered to look. We were amazed that we could find something new in something we thought was old. We missed the irony that by old, we were talking about a 20-year-old representation of a country with a centuries-old history.

Two years later, we would run the Disney Princess Half-Marathon and then go to Epcot to drink around the world with our friends. We would call a cab and the driver would have an accent we couldn't quite place, but an eager friendliness as he congratulated us on our run and told us that we should wear our medals every day. He asked us to guess which country he was from. He gave us a hint: it was a country in Epcot's World Showcase. I guessed on the first try. Morocco. He was born and raised in the city of Casablanca.

"Is it like the movie?" I asked, half-drunk and half-aware that it was a ridiculous question. Nothing is ever how it is in the movies, especially when the movie was made seven decades ago.

He managed to laugh when he told us it wasn't at all like the movie. He missed his country, his city, his Casablanca, he said. But the poverty and the corruption... he

trailed off, unsure about how much to reveal to three buzzed Americans who could afford to get drunk at a Disney park.

“It’s too bad to live there,” he said.

10. Turning in a circle again

Near the middle of the film, Major Strasser (the main bad guy) sits down with Rick to tell him that the Germans have collected a complete dossier on him. Rick reaches for the document as Strasser explains that he knows what Rick did in Paris, “but don’t worry, we’re not going to broadcast it.” At the news that the Germans have been keeping an eye on him, Rick’s eyes flick up from the dossier.

“Are my eyes really brown?” he says.

This question went unanswered until 1988 when *Casablanca* in color was aired on TV. Millions of viewers tuned in to see Rick driving in Paris with Ilsa, he in a brown suit and she in a blue dress, her dark blonde hair blowing in the wind.

In color, the interior of Rick’s café has an orange-yellow glow. His face looks younger, like he’s wearing a thick layer of cream-colored makeup. His hair is light brown, not black, which clashes somehow with the white tuxedo coat and black pants in which I’ve come to know him.

With this new addition of color, my attention turns to other details I’ve never noticed. The random blues and greens in the background distract from the motion of Rick’s eyes that I usually watch. Background characters walk by wearing bright red fez hats. Actors without speaking roles huddle in the background, wearing loud yellow and orange prints. The result of adding color is that the film becomes tarnished, oranged and rusted. The new technology ages an ageless film.

“If you’re going to colorize *Casablanca*,” Bogart’s son, Stephen, once said, “why not put arms on the Venus de Milo?”

11. The past and the beginning

In the end, Rick sends Ilsa away with Laszlo. He knows that he and Ilsa, despite their love in the past, are two small people in a world large with time.

12. Eternity again

“You must remember this:

a kiss is still a kiss.

A sigh is just a sigh.

The fundamental things apply

As time goes by.”

GO-AWAY GREEN

Disney on Ice came to George Mason University during the second year of my creative writing M.F.A. My husband and I paid \$90 for 6th row seats to watch one of our favorite Disney movies performed on ice, *Frozen*. The Patriot Center was crowded with little Elsas and Annas. At the beginning of the show, ice skaters came out on stage to teach the audience how to do the “Snowman Dance.” The kids around us got to their feet, wiggled their bodies, and waved their arms, pretending it was snowing. My husband and I looked at each other, wondering what we had gotten ourselves into. We had already earned weird looks from the woman who scanned our tickets when we arrived. We were probably the only childless couple in the crowd of 4,000.

Then, Mickey came out on his ice skates, followed soon by Minnie, Donald, and Goofy. They ice-danced and soon announced the entrance of the princesses and their princes, Ariel & Prince Eric, Belle & the Beast, Cinderella & Prince Charming, and Jasmine & Aladdin. Though it had only been ten months since my husband and I had taken our honeymoon at Disneyland, I realized in that moment how much I had missed a little bit of Disney in my life. Gliding across the rink, Mickey and his gang made it so easy to get lost in the moment, capturing kids, parents, and those in between in a few moments of joy.

During the show, I noticed that Ariel (the Little Mermaid) looked a lot like Elsa. They seemed to skate in the same way and had the same body type.

“I think Ariel and Elsa are good friends,” I said to my husband, Disney-speak for “I think Ariel and Elsa are being played by the same person.” At Disney, there’s only one Mickey, one Minnie, one Cinderella, one Ariel, one Elsa. To say out loud that the same person played them would suggest that these weren’t the one and only Ariel and Elsa, which I didn’t want to do since we were surrounded by children. My husband had worked at Disney as a professional intern doing work for the I.T. department as a database engineer. I knew that he could interpret what I was saying.

“You mean they’re played by—” he said. I covered his mouth.

“Stop!”

He laughed. I realized then that we weren’t in Orlando. We weren’t at Disney World. We were in Fairfax, Virginia. And yet, I wanted to protect the magic for the people around us—the kids and the adults—because this was a Disney show. Admittedly, some of my Disney training still comes out of me unexpectedly. I don’t do the Disney Scoop, but out of habit I do use the Disney Point sometimes. This need to use Disney speak was more than my training, though. I wanted to protect the magic of the show so these people could get a taste of the magic I had experienced every time I went to Disney as a child and every time I’ve been to Disney as a guest.

Part of protecting magic means engaging in storytelling. I’ve been a storyteller since childhood, writing tales about animals and documenting my daily life in my diaries. In college, I thought I would take my storytelling skills to Disney and become a writer in their creative department. Being an actual cast member, though, taught me the division between the labor forces and the creative forces. This division has existed since Walt had the idea to make cartoon fairy tales in the 1930s. He thought that his animators were of a higher class than the simple painters of his cartoons and films. Animation took

talent while cell painting took only paint and a brush. This translated to the theme parks even when I worked there. The Imagineers were kind to us as we went out our usual day operating the ride they'd designed and built, but they were still considered artists and we were laborers. I would still do some storytelling, though, in how I talked to our guests. If someone had been on the ride and the game hadn't worked for them, we'd give them a second ride. I would pull down the lap bar and say, "We're in Hollywood, right? Take two!" And they'd laugh or they'd ignore me and the ride vehicle would take off.

Two guests in particular loved the storytelling I did. Jeff and Joy were from California and were huge fans of the ride, spending the whole day waiting in line to ride it over and over again. Eventually, the cast members noticed their enthusiasm and started giving them fastpasses so they wouldn't have to wait. Then, when they'd have to turn in their fastpasses, the cast member would tell them to keep it so they could go around again. They made time in between rides to talk to us about Disney. They loved it when I'd be standing at the dock waiting for them to return. "Welcome back, toys!" I would say. Jeff and Joy told me once that making the high score of the day felt good, but being a toy in Andy's toy box was even better.

One day near the end of my time at Disney, I was feeling particularly exhausted. I'd been in class and on campus working on my writing for a final portfolio the whole day before and I wasn't looking forward to the twelve-hours I'd be spending in the toy box that day. "Exit this way," I said, waving my hands at the newly arrived vehicle full of guests. Jeff and Joy appeared behind me. They'd been on the vehicle and I hadn't seen them.

"You didn't call us toys," Joy said.

I didn't have an answer for her. I tried to say something about them being more like cast members themselves because of how much time they spent at the ride. They smiled and continued on, but I knew that I had failed them. Not all of my colleagues were as eager as I was about keeping up the magic, and yet, I had been the one to disappoint two of our kindest and most enthusiastic guests. I was one of the most positive members of the team, which irritated some of my fellow cast members, and I knew then that I was losing my pixie dust and that it was time to move on.

Some of my fellow toys went all in on their roles as toys. In the *Toy Story* films, all of Andy's toys had Andy's name on the bottom of their shoes. The cast members would do the same, writing Andy's name on the bottom of their black tennis shoes. The writing would be the same, all the way down to the backwards N from the film. Sometimes guests would see us go through a door marked "ANDY'S TOYS ONLY!" and they'd ask us if we were Andy's toys. The cast member would pick up their foot and there would be Andy's name, certifying that they were Andy's toy. It was a small gesture, but it seemed to mean a lot to the guests.

As willing as we were to protect the magic and take part in the story, sometimes magic backfired. Sometimes, things went wrong. We often ran out of fastpasses early in the morning and our wait times were always an hour or more. As a result, we heard a lot of guest complaints.

There seemed to be two kinds of guests who would find themselves leaving the parks angry: those who believe in magic so much that they forget reality and those with over-the-top magical expectations. Both kinds of guests visit the Disney parks because the Disney Company sells itself by selling magic.

The first kind of guest bumped into me outside of Toy Story Mania on a rainy afternoon because she'd been looking at the sky instead of where she'd been going. Her brows furrowed and she asked whether the water falling from the sky was real or just a special effect. I told her that it was real and she asked me to make it stop. I could only blink at her, realizing that she was really asking me to turn off the rain. When they step onto Disney property, something happens in the brains of guests. They leave reality behind, forgetting that the parks don't operate on pixie dust.

The second type of guest seems to equate magic with special treatment. These guests expect to skip the line or fly from the castle with Tinkerbelle. Even if they're having a lovely day, when something goes against their expectations, some guests allow it to ruin their day. Guest services will often go above and beyond to improve what they can, but those expecting perfection will ultimately be disappointed because perfection doesn't exist, even in a Disney park.

Wonderful things can still happen when guests have a positive attitude. In that way, magic does exist. If someone drops their ice cream, it's easy to give them another one. If the ride breaks down, we can give out fastpasses to people who got stuck on the ride. I often carried fastpasses in my pocket, hopeful that I might meet a kind family that wouldn't have a chance otherwise to go on the ride. If a child was wearing a Woody or Buzz or Jessie costume, I made sure to talk to that child as if they were the real character. If a couple was wearing "Just Engaged" or "Just Married" buttons, I asked them their story and made whatever arrangements I needed to make to get them through the fastpass line. As cast members, we were happy to play our parts as makers of magic expecting nothing in return.

As a former maker of magic, I'm fascinated by how magic is made. Nowadays, I ride the attractions looking for all the things the Imagineers hoped to hide. When the Evil Queen turns into the Old Woman in the middle of "Fantasmic," I'm looking for the escape hatch. When I pass Madame Leota in the crystal ball suspended in the air in the Haunted Mansion, I search for projectors and wires. Other people may be content with the explanation that it's just magic. I'm not. Understanding how it was done doesn't take away from my experience. Understanding how it was done completes my experience, allowing me to appreciate the imagination and engineering that made the feat possible.

This need to understand the magic is my only possible explanation for my bucket-list dream of getting stuck on a ride. In my time at Toy Story Mania, I evacuated hundreds of people off my ride, walking them through a part of the ride that only cast members would regularly see. The lights would come on and we would go to each vehicle, help the guests out of the vehicle, and then ask them to follow us to the exit. We also had to make sure that they didn't take pictures, which I found difficult to enforce since I would absolutely be the guest walking around capturing the things I wasn't meant to see, not to share them online later, but to keep them for my own study. On every ride I've ever been on, I've dreamed of the ride going "101"—having to be shut down and evacuated—for the opportunity to see the ride with the lights on. My wish finally came true at Disneyland Paris at the end of the Phantom Mansion ride. As we neared the final corner before the exit, the ride paused and a voice overhead asked us to stay in our seats while a cast member came to escort us from the ride. The lights came up and I took pictures and videos of everything I could see, filming to my heart's content. I took a careful look at the brush strokes on the face of the nearby cowboy ghost, the way his vest pulled against his body as he fired at an unseen villain. These details would usually

pass by too quickly to be appreciated. I could only imagine the closing time crew responsible for walked these paths, double-checking the stitching of that vest. I remembered then an article I'd read about the work that happened during the night shift at Disneyland and details about a particular person whose job was to watch the Enchanted Tiki Room show over and over again, watching each of the 225 singing birds, plants, and tikis to make sure they looked their best.

Imagining the work that has to happen to make the magic can upset some people. They might think that in learning about magic, it becomes ruined. While it's true that Disney as a company today can be very protective of certain secrets, Walt loved to impress his audience and then tell them how he'd done it. Nowadays, the company does not allow cast members to take pictures backstage or talk onstage about there being more than one Mickey, but Walt was bursting with the need to share his secrets. In the 1960s, he often appeared on a T.V. show called "Walt Disney's Wonderful World of Color." He'd invite a camera into his office or into the spaces where his people were working on the newest project for the parks or for other events happening in the world. He'd bring out a talking bird and then show the audience how his new audio animatronics worked. He'd show a cartoon and then pull apart its pieces to explain how the multi-plane camera made the cartoon more realistic. He wanted first to entertain, but then to educate.

Today, when we visit the parks, I try to keep this in mind. Magic is entertaining. Being part of making that magic in the short time I worked in the parks was what made me feel like I was part of something bigger, that my job mattered. Yes, I know how the dancing ghost scene in Haunted Mansion works and I know the technology behind how Mickey blinks his eyes and moves his mouth in meet and greets and I know how

characters can walk past you in the Animal Kingdom without you even noticing.

Sometimes it's hard to rein in my enthusiasm and I can't help sharing what I see when I go to Disney.

There were seven of us on the Liberty Belle, the steamboat that carries guests on the Rivers of Tomorrow, taking a tour around Tom Sawyer's island. We were in Orlando that weekend to run the Disney Princess Half-Marathon, to take place at 5 a.m. the following morning. Five of us were going to run and two were there for support. From the top level of the back of the boat, I could see the Haunted Mansion, which we'd just ridden. We had two first-time Disney visitors with us, so I was trying to keep hidden, magical gems for myself, but this one was too good.

"Hey Will," I said. "See Haunted Mansion over there?"

"Yeah."

"See how the outside looks like a mansion, but just beyond it, there's a light-green, almost beige-y building?" I said. He looked beyond my two-fingered point. Just visible between a few tall trees was a tall, plain building painted camouflage-green.

"What is it?" he said.

"That's the show building for Haunted Mansion. The place is actually several stories tall and it peeks out from behind the outside of the building that guests think is a mansion."

"So it's much bigger than the outside of the ride makes you think?" he said.

"Exactly. But, what's even crazier is the color. It's a studied shade of green that's actually designed and copyrighted by Disney because it makes things disappear in plain sight. It's a color called Go-Away Green."

He called his mom, a first-time visitor and our cheer squad for the race, over to where we were standing and explained what I'd just shown him.

"I wouldn't have even thought to look," she said.

And that's the point. The things Disney wants to go away are the things I am most compelled to study. When construction is happening, I want to peek in and imagine what's to come. When Cinderella's evil stepsisters, Anastasia and Drizella, are talking to guests during "Meet-and-Greets" in the parks, I look around for the person wearing the khakis and carrying a trash picker. That's the person watching the performer to make sure they're in character. Right before a show begins, I look for the person dressed entirely in black move into the booth, the person who will control the audio, the lights, and the pyrotechnics.

I recently found an entire blog dedicated to exploring these things hidden in plain sight. Posted more than four years ago are images from inside the Carousel of Progress, a moving theatre that transitions audiences from one decade to another in the lives and technological improvements of one family. In one scene, Uncle Orville sits in a bathtub in 1920. In this part of the show, he's wearing an Uncle Sam hat and smoking a cigar and he yells to the rest of the family "There's no privacy at all around this place!" From the audience's usual vantage, they see only Uncle Orville leaning against the back of the tub from the waist up holding a newspaper, his feet hanging out of the other side of the tub. Uncle Orville is so lifelike that we can see the hairs on his arms and the headlines in the newspaper in his hands from the *National Police Gazette*. The newspaper itself is an interesting choice for both Uncle Orville and the Imagineers, Walt Disney's term for the engineers who imagine the stories, logistics, and designs for everything in the parks. Why would the Imagineers pick a tabloid often known for its exploitation of women? It's a

detail that guests would never consider, but it does the job of establishing Uncle Orville's character. The Carrousel of Progress was meant to show the progression of the technology in one family's lives in the 1920s, the 1940s, the 1960s, and finally in the future. This magazine appears in 1920, but by 1960, the mother and daughter in the family are experiencing the women's liberation movement, a time when this magazine wouldn't be tolerated in the family. It's a small nod that extends past technological revolution that most guests will never know about.

Particularly fascinating, though, is the new perspective we provided by this backstage photo, published online in 2010. Uncle Orville ends at where his ribcage would be. In place of his ribs are just wires running down to the bottom of the tub. Both legs are attached to the bottom of the tub and only just at his knees do the legs turn from plastic white to skin-tan. The feet hanging over the tub's edge are so realistic that it's possible to see Uncle Orville's calluses. The bottoms of the feet are even pink where they touch the edge of the tub, showing where his foot would feel pressure against the porcelain. Other than his missing torso, the scene is realistic to down to the last detail: towels on the towel rack, bottles of soap on the shelves, and even toilet paper on the roll behind him. And yet, there is a speaker hidden at the bottom of the tub between his legs. From this new vantage, Uncle Orville is just pieces of a man in a tub, but somehow, the details of the room and the newspaper are just enough substitute to make it seem real enough that a head-and-legs-only human would be reading a bawdy magazine in the tub in the early 20th century, lamenting the lack of privacy in the small house.

If Imagineers had imagined that photos like these would emerge on the Internet, they probably would have painted the bottom of the tub, the white parts of Uncle Orville's legs, and even the speaker a nice shade of Blend-in Brown, tricking the eyes into

thinking everything is how it's supposed to be. For me, the magic isn't in how this trickery works, but in the way Imagineers want these things to disappear at all.

For other Disney fans, the magic comes in the experience of the spectacle. I am sometimes swept up by this spectacle too, giving me a moment to stop wondering about how the scene before me has become realized. There's also a distinct pleasure in guessing how it happens and then in being wrong. At the end of the *Frozen* show, all the ice-dancers came out and performed one group extravaganza musical number. Mickey and Minnie slid across the ice alongside Anna and Kristoff. And there was Ariel, who'd been absent since the beginning of the show, dancing right beside Elsa, as if the choreography had been designed solely to prove that Anna and Elsa were indeed friends, but they were not "close friends." I had been fooled and it was awesome.

ESCAPE AGAIN

After my first day at Disney University, I called Tyler and asked him to meet me in the parking lot. He got out of his car carrying a lanyard.

“Now you’re part of the Disney family,” he said, putting my new badge into the lanyard. “And that’s pretty big stuff.”

He insisted on taking me back into the utilidors for a personal tour of his own, which we weren’t supposed to do when off duty, especially since I didn’t even work at Magic Kingdom. He walked me to the bus station and explained that we should tell anyone who asked that we were going to look up our schedule on the computer. As we waited, I noticed that he looked a little healthier than he had a few months before; his unshaven cheeks and chin were fuller and the eyes beneath his black Dolce & Gabana frames were bright and blue. We got on the bus and soon arrived at the utilidors. The entrance to the tunnel was wide and open, the path wide enough for golf carts to whiz by us in both directions. There was also the smell of sour vomit permeating the passageway.

“The trash from the whole park is vacuumed through these pipes at 60 miles per hour,” Tyler said, pointing to tubes wider than me hanging from the ceiling. “And it all ends up here, at the opening where we just came in. It makes the whole place smell like shit, but you get used to it.”

As we made our way past the Mouseketeria--the cast member cafeteria--and the character dressing rooms, Peter Pan and Wendy passed us headed in the opposite

direction. Tyler said that they had just come off stage from “Dream Along with Mickey,” a show he’d worked on before. Across from the cafeteria was the wardrobe department, where Tyler worked. Through the glass double doors, I saw hundreds of costumes, lined up in rows that went longer than a football field.

“Come in and feel Cinderella’s dress!” he said. He walked in and checked to make sure that there were no coordinators—the mid-level managers of each area—and we went in. He pulled a massive light blue dress from lines of other character costumes. Sewn into the dress were hundreds of individual lights and sequins ranging in color from white to gold to pale blue.

“This is what she wears for Spectromagic, the parade we’re going to see tonight,” he said. “Hold it. See how heavy it is?”

I took the hanger from his hand and could barely lift it. It must have been 50 pounds.

“How does she wear this?”

“She can’t really walk with it so we have to help her carry it. That’s why she sits in a carriage thing during the parade.”

We went back into the utilidors and waited for an elevator. The doors opened and there was Captain Jack Sparrow. He nodded at Tyler, wished us a good day in a voice that had no trace of pirate, and walked past us. I got a glimpse of him walking evenly through the backstage halls before the elevator doors closed.

“Asshole,” Tyler said.

“He seemed really nice.”

“He’s a real asshole. I’ve worked with him before.” I wondered then if he meant that he had worked with that particular cast member playing Jack Sparrow or with a Jack Sparrow. I thought about asking, but considered that it might be a stupid question.

That night, we waited for Spectromagic at the front of the park. Tyler knew exactly where to stand and what to say to get us a V.I.P. spot on the curb where the parade “stepped on,” which was parade-speak for where the parade started. Tyler wanted this spot because this is where the characters would be able to see him, and they did. Cinderella blew Tyler a kiss from her carriage. She really was beautiful in her sky blue dress, sparkling with alternating blue and white lights. I wondered if that was the exact same dress I had held only hours earlier. I knew it was the same dress pattern, but was it the actual dress I had tried to pick up?

From the carriage, Cinderella’s Prince Charming also waved at Tyler, who crossed his arms and looked away.

“Asshole,” Tyler muttered.

At the back of Cinderella’s float was the Fairy Godmother, who Tyler said was his favorite character. When she saw Tyler, she waved her magic wand and glitter fell on our heads.

Though he was not the one performing, on this night, Tyler was the rock star. All the characters in the parade had obvious reactions to him--in character, of course. A man standing behind us leaned in to Tyler at one point during the parade.

“You must be somebody important,” the man said.

Tyler gave him his best Disney smile, but didn’t deny it.

I had been working at Disney for six months when Tyler got a second job with Delta Airlines as a ticketing agent. He took full advantage of the employee discount; he could fly anywhere in the United States for free and he got major discounts on international flights.

I didn't hear from him for a few months because he was busy filling his passport with stamps from France, China, Australia, and Japan. He was twenty-two years old and had already seen more of the world than most people would in a lifetime.

In France, he visited some friends at Disneyland Paris. With his Walt Disney World I.D. he could get in for free, but it turned out that he also needed his Maingate, a card that Disney cast members used to get their friends and family into the parks for the day, which he had left in Florida.

While arguing with the cast member at the turnstile, he happened to spot Meg Crofton, the president of Walt Disney World, leaving the park. He approached her and told her that he was a cast member from her side of the world and that he was having trouble getting into the park.

"Surely my friend here can help you out," she said, turning to Chairman and CEO of Disneyland Paris, Phillipe Gas, who escorted Tyler to the turnstiles and swiped his own Maingate. He then gave Tyler his business card.

"Don't hesitate to call me if you have any other problems this week," he told Tyler, who entered the park, gave a cheery wave to Meg, and was then on his way.

I had been working for Disney for more than a year when I heard from Tyler again. He needed a place to stay.

He had left or been fired from Disney, I'm still not sure which. The story was too complicated, he told me. He had left Delta. He was looking into jobs as a flight attendant and there were openings with Alaskan Airlines.

"You're so lucky!" I said. "You can pick up and pursue all your dreams. If you want to be a flight attendant in Alaska, you can do it."

"Yeah..." he said, sitting on my couch surrounded by the blankets Jenn and I had shared with him, playing with his iPad. "I thought about maybe getting on a plane and just going to Australia. Maybe stay in hostels while I go across the country, work a few side jobs. I did really love Australia."

"What about France?" I said.

"Ew! No! France is pretty in pictures, but it's fucking nasty and the French hate Americans. They think we're horrible. They don't get us."

"That's so cool," I said, something I caught myself saying a lot to him. "You have first-hand real-world knowledge like this. You've been places, seen things most people only dream about."

"But it's..." He looked up at me from his game. "It's kind of lonely. I did all that by myself. I did the Broadway tour that I always dreamed about and all those people weren't passionate about it the way I was. They just did it because it was a job. I went to all the Disney parks in the world, except one, and now I'm like... now what? What do I have to live for?"

"Tyler! Don't talk like that!"

"It's true," he said.

"You're so young. Your adventures are just beginning. This is just... a phase."

“But why? I do all this shit and everybody thinks it’s cool, but no one cares about me, not really...”

I should have comforted him, told him that Jenn and I cared about him, that we loved him. Instead, I found myself studying him, forming the words I would use to describe him in my writing, translating this moment to sentences and paragraphs. I could have stopped thinking about how to put him into words and just said something. It’s was still there. I could have said that he’s not alone in the world. The moment was there, but passing, that chance to let him know that he mattered.

“Can we watch the new *Pan Am*?” he said. And it was gone.

OBITUARY NOTICE

Amanda Kay Canupp, 22, formerly of Orlando, Florida, died tragically and unexpectedly yesterday when she fell into the electrical track at Toy Story Midway Mania at Disney's Hollywood Studios.

This was a usual day in the toy box with wait times spanning more than two hours. Fellow cast members—employees of Disney made part of the show in the very act of doing their job—report that she had spent an hour outside the attraction explaining for the seventy-second time that day that the Fastpasses had run out at 11 a.m. A colleague then gave her a slip of paper indicating that it was time for her break. She politely ended her conversation and proceeded up the exit ramp toward the break room. It was then that she noticed a lone toddler, a boy with golden curly hair wearing a blue shirt featuring the *Toy Story* characters, hovering on the unload dock. He was eyeing the blinking red lights in the track. (Disney officials say that these red lights are designed to make people aware that there is a sudden cutoff in the floor to the four-foot drop down into the track.)

Perhaps it was the combination of the bright colors of Andy's bedroom and the playful instrumental theme of "You've Got a Friend in Me" blaring through the speakers that inspired the child to take a giddy run toward the track. Perhaps it was the thrill of being a two-year-old at the happiest place on Earth. Perhaps it was the complete freedom of being left behind by his parents, who were halfway down the exit ramp when the thought occurred to them that they had forgotten something.

“I think I left the camera,” the mother said, pausing suddenly.

“No, no, it’s here.” The father lifted his hand, where the camera was swinging by the strap on his wrist.

“My cell phone?” she said.

“In the backpack.”

“Sunglasses?”

“They’re in your hair,” he said, removing them from her head.

“Oh wait! Duh! Little Tommy’s juice cup?”

By the time Little Tommy’s parents had returned to the unload dock—it is unclear whether they returned to retrieve the cup or the child—they had missed all the action. They didn’t see Amanda run toward the child as he barreled past the yellow safety line. They missed the moment when Amanda caught the child by the back of his shirt and used the force of her run to spin him in the opposite direction, like a Do-Si-Do gone wrong. They hadn’t noticed that, while the child was now running directly toward them, Amanda had taken a hard fall on her face directly into the electrified busbar.

Witnesses confirm that at this point that it was neither the fall nor the concurrent electrical shock that caused Amanda’s death: it was the full speed collision with Vehicle 12. Vehicle 12 had just been tagged for removal because it had been “overpropelling.” (Disney officials insist that this definitely most assuredly 100 percent for sure does not mean that the vehicle was charging wildly down the track at uncontrollable speeds and not listening to its programming.)

Amanda’s fellow cast members saw her unfortunate fall, but, for fear of a reprimand and two points on their record card, did not push the emergency stop button to shut down the ride. After all, three reprimands leads to job termination and the number

of guests per hour had not been up to par that day, so the managers were pushing the cast members to “keep it moving.”

Almost prescient, Amanda had told a fellow cast member only that week that she would completely understand should no one hit the e-stop in the highly unlikely event that someone should fall in the track as one must protect one’s record card, after all.

Just after the incident, as guests continued to be loaded and vehicles passed over her body, managers gathered on the unload dock to discuss whether to close attraction to remove the body or to wait until the end of the night for the custodial cast members to bring the pine dust used to sprinkle over vomit in order to sweep it up as a solid. After much debate, it was decided that it would be best to use the pine dust after all because the building could use some freshening up.

Reedy Creek Emergency Services (better known as the Disney police) were also on the scene. They stood around for a moment, but when they found out it was just a cast member who fell in, they hurried off on their bicycles towards more pressing matters; they had also received a call that a cast member walking toward his work location had his shirt untucked, and thus was not in Disney Look.

Cast members from marketing were also on the scene to assess the situation and to create some story should a guest be upset from having witnessed Amanda’s death. Upon the realization that the guests hadn’t seemed to notice anything unusual (in fact, they believed it was all part of the show), the consensus was that no one seemed to care.

As the guests who witnessed the event left the building, they felt some wet stuff coming from the sky, whereupon they asked the nearest cast member, “Is that real rain or is it a special effect?” When the cast member, an employee of the company for more

than a decade, simply stared incredulously, not knowing how to answer the question, the guest then proceeded to ask the most pressing question of the day:

“Where can I get a Fastpass?”

Amanda is survived by a full tank of gas, an engagement ring from Tiffany’s in her boyfriend’s pocket, and a voicemail with a job offer at a publishing house.

STARS

We were at the Melting Pot waiting for our final course when the waitress slid a plate across our table. On it were the words “happy 5th anniversary” written in chocolate with two candles sticking out of strawberries cut into the shape of a heart. I gave the waitress my phone and asked her to take a picture of us. My husband and I put our heads together over the plate and smiled. As she put the phone back in my hand, it vibrated with a text from my best friend.

“Are you seeing the news about Paris? This world is so fucked up!”

My husband must have seen something change on my face as I read it. He asked who it was.

“Nothing... just something about Paris,” I said.

Francisco is the type who keeps his radio tuned to N.P.R. He spends a half hour reading the news every morning. He considers himself a citizen of the world, not only a Puerto Rican living in northern Virginia. He slipped my phone from my hands and read my friend’s text. He pulled out his own phone to see what she was talking about.

“Please don’t,” I said. “Not yet.” I knew that I was putting off the inevitable, that something big had happened, but if I could just stay away from my phone a little while longer, my world could be chocolate for a few minutes more.

I was a cast member at Walt Disney World in 2011 when Casey Anthony was on trial. Police had found her daughter Caylee’s skeletal remains less than a mile from the

apartment I was renting in Orlando. Her parents lived one street over, and helicopters would fly in circles overhead at all hours of the day and night, their spotlights pointed at the Anthony home.

July fifth of that year was a particularly busy day at Hollywood Studios not only because it was peak summer season, but also because it was the day after a holiday. That morning at Toy Story Mania began as most in the toy box did. The opening crew would gather on the unload dock of the ride 20-30 minutes before rope drop brought guests into the park. The instrumental medley of *Toy Story* songs that would play all day would be muted and the lights weren't yet in show mode, casting a bright, white glaze overhead instead of the dim golden yellow positioned to highlight and hide particulars in the room. We'd listen to the manager tell us how many thousands of guests to expect that day and remind us to "keep it moving" so that we could reach the goal they'd set up of 1,200 guests per hour. On July 5th, however, that morning's manager took a moment after his usual speech to say that a decision was imminent on the Anthony trial. We could talk about it backstage, but not in front of guests. Not even a whisper. Guests came to Disney to escape the rest of the world and our job meant protecting them from whatever verdict we heard on the television in the break room. Reality could shatter the magical world of Andy's toy box.

"We mourn those lost to the horrific attacks in Paris. We pray for the injured and we hold them all in our hearts. As part of France's three-day national mourning period, Disneyland Paris will remain closed through Tuesday 17 November 2015." Tom Wolber, President of Disneyland Paris

I stabbed a raspberry with the long fork and dipped it into the pot. The sour berry and sweet dark chocolate melted on my tongue and I tried not to think about what might be happening in France. Only three months ago, we'd been biking the streets of Paris, drinking champagne at the top of the Eiffel Tower, and contributing to the chaos by driving in mad circles around the Arc d'Triumph. I had enjoyed the city of light, tasting and seeing and touching everything I could, but the whole time I'd been in Paris, I'd been a nervous wreck, terrified of being pickpocketed. Just as we stepped off the Eiffel Tower, the surrounding area went dark and the tower began to twinkle, sparkling up and down from its base to the top level we'd just left.

"Selfie, selfie, selfie," a man said, approaching me with a handful of cell phone selfie sticks. In the chaos of the lights shining above us, I'd lost my husband and our two friends. I was clearly alone. With every tourist distracted by the lights, I knew that this was probably prime pickpocketing time. I moved my eyes from the tower to the man's eyes.

"No, monsieur," I said and the man moved on to a woman beside me.

Then, I saw dozens of men carrying selfie sticks running toward me. Behind them, a dozen policemen on bikes chased them. The men and the police whipped past me and into the nearby street. There was only the tower left, twinkling.

Back at the restaurant, I received another text.

"Sooooooooo happy y'all are not in Paris. Love you."

It was my grandmother, a woman who had never and would never leave the eastern United States, a woman who said, when I took her to the nation's capital, that the buildings in Washington D.C. were so tall.

By this time, the chocolate in the pot was mostly gone and my belly was full, but my heart felt sick for whatever had happened that I didn't yet know.

The day after the Parisian attacks, guests brought flowers for cast members at the France pavilion in Epcot. They placed them around the fountain and throughout the day, cast members picked them up and took them backstage. That evening, the real Eiffel Tower in Paris was dark, but the miniature Eiffel Tower standing above the French pavilion was illuminated in blue, white, and red.

I was working at the merge point at Toy Story Mania, collecting fastpasses and managing the flow of the fastpass line and the regular line merging together to form one, when my coworker Tim walked past me. He leaned close into my ear.

"Not guilty," he said. He shook his head and walked past me.

I was shocked. All the evidence had been against Casey Anthony. The whole world was sure that she'd killed her four-year-old daughter. And yet, a jury had just found her not guilty.

A few minutes later, a guest stopped me to ask if I'd heard any news about the trial. He'd been in line for more than an hour and he couldn't get cell phone reception.

I told the man I hadn't heard anything.

I left our table to go to the restroom, nearly colliding with two waiters carrying trays of glasses and pots. I had intentionally left my phone behind. I knew that I would see numbers, how many killed and how many injured. I knew I would see what had happened, but not understand why. I knew I would wonder where it would happen next.

On the evening after the Parisians were attacked, the French cast members in Walt Disney World gathered after the nightly fireworks show. They stood in the facsimile of their home country and held a French flag that stretched three-cast members wide and sang their national anthem. Guests turned their cameras to their fellow humans, flashes illuminating their faces in the dark.

I returned to the table. My husband was reading his phone. I slid into the booth. "What happened?" I said.

"Terrorist attacks. Several places in Paris. More than a hundred killed."

I didn't ask for more. Sometimes knowing is too much. I gathered my coat and my purse. We walked toward the exit and I wondered how many in this restaurant would go home to news about hurt or dead loved ones. I wondered where my friend Tyler was. He was a flight attendant and likely to be anywhere in the world at any time. I wondered if the faces of the wait staff and hosts I saw watching us walk out the door were wondering if we had already heard.

On the way to the parking garage there was a television with images from France. I stared at the dark pictures. Minutes passed before I realized that the words scrolling at the bottom of the page were in French. I had learned some of the language in time for our trip to Europe three months ago, but it wasn't enough. I wasn't meant to understand.

On the morning of November 15, 2015, a guest filmed the outside of Disneyland Paris. The lights outside each ticket booth were on, but silence replaced the usual merry

tunes bursting from the speakers. Where guests would line up to pick up or purchase their tickets into the parks, rows and rows of queues were vacant.

The person who'd posted the video wrote that he was feeling frustrated, but didn't provide any details about whether he was frustrated because he couldn't go to Disneyland Paris or because acts of terror had caused this strange silence. Other comments posted on the Disneyland Paris Facebook page talked about a honeymoon being ruined, about victory for terrorists with closure of the parks, about national mourning not being reason enough to lose the money spent on tickets.

"Ma déception est forte juste pour les étoiles que nous ne verrons pas briller dans les yeux de nos enfants," wrote one mother. *My disappointment is great because of the stars we will not see shining in the eyes of our children.* "Mais nous sommes en vie." *But we are alive.*

The car ride home was quiet. We left the radio off. As we walked into our townhouse, I received another text, this time from my mom.

"I'm so glad you weren't in Paris when the attack occurred."

I showed my husband the text. He's making plans for us to travel this summer to the other Disneys we've yet to see, the ones in Tokyo and Hong Kong and Shanghai. My mother and my grandmother will worry every moment I'm away. Still, we will go.

Finally, at home in my bed that night I read the news. I watched people detail the horrors they'd witnessed and the prayers they'd sent for their own lives and the lives of their loved ones. I followed the events using an app on my phone allows people to make and share lists. I read lists with titles like "Unfiltered thoughts on Paris," "I'm too scared to sleep," and "The scariest night of my life."

I made a list of my own.

Things I Understand Following the Paris Attacks

- ...
- ...
- ...
- Nothing...
- ...
- ...
- Except...
- Fear cannot stop us.

How do we navigate in a world classified into colors designating the likelihood of being attacked by a stranger that day? It's a question I ask without a clear answer, other than to refuse to be paralyzed by possibilities and likelihoods. I am frozen, however, at the idea of having children. It's an old problem, bringing innocent people into a world racked with guilt. But it's new and big and present to me. I will worry not only for myself and my husband and our parents and siblings, but also for the beings I've brought into the world.

And we will see that world together. We will talk about it first, perhaps over smooth vanilla ice cream at our kitchen table before we leave, discussing the reality of people who want to hurt them for no reason. But it will be worth it to take that risk when we stand at the base of the Eiffel Tower to witness its instantaneous transformation from still and dark to glittering white and yellow, reaching up into the shadowed sky.

Millions of people will still flock to Paris for its food and wine and palaces and towers. Parisians will still go out to cafes and movies theatres and nightclubs. Even Andy's toy box will go on, moving thousands of guests through the ride every day.

My husband read the texts from my family. He put my phone down and went on. He is planning a trip this summer to see the remaining three Disney parks in Tokyo, Hong Kong, and Shanghai. He is maybe braver than me. "We're going," he said. And that is enough. We will go.

HOW TO SURVIVE A TERRORIST ATTACK

“The[se] ‘STAY SAFE’ principles tell you some simple actions to consider at an incident and the information that armed officers may need in the event of a weapons or firearm attack.”ⁱ

“1) Run. Escape if you can.”ⁱⁱ

Richard Sherman and his brother Robert were hired by Walt Disney to write the score of the *Mary Poppins* film. Richard tinkered at the piano while Robert tinkered at the lyrics. Together, they built a haunting song that feels strange next to others in the collection. It is not rousing. It is not the kind of song one sings because there is no other way to express immense feelings.

“2) Hide. Find cover from gunfire. If you see the attacker, they may see you. Bullets go through glass, brick, wood and metal. Silence your phone. Be quiet.”ⁱⁱ

One evening, the brothers were looking for inspiration, combing through the first book in the *Mary Poppins* series. Mary Poppins (never just Mary) was taking the children to buy breadcrumbs from the little old bird woman. She told the children to spend their tuppence feeding the birds. But why would such a practical woman as Mary Poppins tell the children to waste their coins on wild animals? They peered past the words on the

page, to the reality of the people on the page. Tuppence wasn't for the birds, they realized. Tuppence was for the little old bird woman.

"3) Tell. Stop other people from entering the building. Describe the attacker, numbers, features, weapons, clothing. Casualties, injuries, entrances, exits, hostages." ⁱⁱ

For the first time in its 24-year history, Disneyland Paris closed for three days after Paris was attacked by terrorists.

"4) Wait. Remain calm. Move to a safer area. Follow officers' instructions. Avoid sudden movements that may be considered a threat. Keep your hands in view." ⁱ

After three days, guests queued up through newly installed metal detectors, passing by police carrying assault rifles. They were asked to remove their coats and keep their hands out of their pockets. Details of these new security measures were posted online. Some asked about the necessity of heightening the tragedy, spreading the fear. Someone asked in return, "Reality is not necessary?"ⁱⁱⁱ

"5) Listen. Officers may: point guns at you; treat you firmly; question you; be unable to distinguish you from the attacker." ⁱⁱ

Years after production on *Mary Poppins*, Walt would call the brothers to his office and ask them to play it. He'd gaze out his window, the soft piano echoing off the walls. "That's what it's about," Walt would say.

*Come feed the little birds, show them you care
And you'll be glad if you do.
Their young ones are hungry. Their nests are so bare.
All it takes is tuppence from you.*

After the attacks on their city, the Parisians opened their doors to those in need of a safe place. Strangers spent the night together, powerless against the terrorists, but empowered by their joining. What do you do when the world takes? You give.

ⁱ National counter terrorism security office. (2015, July 21). Recognising the terrorist threat. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/recognising-the-terrorist-threat/recognising-the-terrorist-threat>

ⁱⁱ National Police Chiefs' Council. (2015). NaCTSO guidance note 1/2015: Developing dynamic lockdown procedures. Retrieved from https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/478003/NaCTSO_Guidance_Note_1_-_2015_-_Dynamic_Lockdown_v1_0.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ Keslassy, E. (2015, November 14). Disneyland Paris closed in the wake of terrorist attack. Variety. Retrieved from <http://variety.com/2015/film/news/disneyland-paris-closed-in-the-wake-of-terrorist-attack-1201639996/>

UNSAID

“If you can dream it, you can do it.”— ~~Walt Disney~~

Walt Disney was born in Missouri or Chicago or Spain or he sprang from the earth, a fully formed cartoon artist. It was 1900 or 1901. His mother was a common washerwoman, his father a Spanish nobleman—a scandal. Or, his father was an artist or farmer or banker, a supportive or angry or distant or strict man and his mother was his father’s opposite. He had one brother or two brothers or three brothers and a sister.

Walt was a writer, a poet, or an artist. His words were eloquent and exquisite; he never knew what to say. He applied for a permanent job with the *Kansas City Star* as a cartoonist or a clerk or a truck driver, but was turned down. Or, he had a job with the *Star*, but was fired for a lack of creativity. He took that feedback, moved from Missouri to California with only \$20 or \$50 or just a train ticket. He ate little or nothing, bluffing through on IOUs he never repaid. He ate dog food to survive or frequented hash houses and lunch wagons to save money; he got by on his personality.

He created Mickey Mouse to get himself out of the poor house on a train ride from Manhattan to Hollywood. Or, he was inspired by a little rodent he’d chosen to befriend in his Kansas City animation studio. Or, his oldest pal, Ubbe Iwerks, had the idea for a cartoon mouse. Or, Ubbe took Walt’s notion of a cartoon mouse and developed Mickey’s round ears and nose. Walt voiced Mickey’s cheery falsetto until he died or he did it once, but tired of it and passed it on. Mickey’s birthday is October 1st or November 18th or sometime in December or September.

“the more you like yourself, the less you are like anyone else, which makes you unique”

Walt had a nervous breakdown in 1935 or 1931 or both for a defective thyroid or an acute attack of perfectionism. He had a second or third nervous attack in 1939 when the air conditioning shut off one evening and he couldn't breathe. He might have described it “like submerging in a submarine.”

Walt and his brother Roy fought always or just sometimes. They went months without speaking or only let a minutes pass before acknowledging their apologies. Walt was the visionary and Roy was the fiduciary holding him back. Or, Walt was the brat and Roy was the moneyman with the plan. Walt wanted 22 or 24 karat gold on the spires on his Disneyland castle. Roy said it would cost too much money, so Walt waited until Roy was on a business trip to have it done. All but one of the spires is plated in gold because Walt never wanted Disneyland to be complete or because that spire was overlooked or because he ran out of funds or because it couldn't be completed in time before Roy returned.

The castle uses a technique Walt discovered called forced perspective, which makes buildings look taller than they are. The first floor is full-size, but the second floor is 7/8 or 5/8 to scale and the third floor is 5/8 or 1/2 of a standard-size building. Or, the bricks are smaller as the building climbs upward.

The castle was designed based on Neuschwanstein Castle or Château de Fontainebleau or Alcázar of Segovia. Once, a woman went to guest relations claiming that a brick from the castle had fallen on her head or her foot or the head or foot of her

daughter, despite the fact that the castle is made of fiberglass and the bricks are drawn or painted or carved.

“the very things that hold you down are going to lift you up”

Trashcans in the Disney parks are located 25 or 17 or 20 steps apart because it took Walt 25 or 17 or 20 steps to eat a hotdog. When touring his parks, he sometimes dressed like a farmer with a straw hat in order to fit in. He would ride the Jungle Cruise to check the timing of its boat captain or he would hang out near the exits of the rides to hear what his guests thought as they left. Or, he wore a suit and tie, giving out pre-autographed stickers to children who approached him.

Walt was a dictator who never complimented his artists or employees, or he was gentle and generous, spreading cheer wherever he went. He was a genius, a friend, an egotistical jerk, his way or the highway. The studio was like a cult or a college campus of creativity. His parks were a place for children; his parks were a place for families; he didn't care for children. He was at the studio all day, every day, or he spent every night with the family. Maybe he disliked Jews, sympathized with Nazis, and worked as an FBI spy. He was a paranoid or a perfectionist. He smoked rarely, sometimes, or always; he smoked and drank at the studio; he never drank.

When his employees spent weeks striking in 1941 for better pay, he drove through their line each morning, betrayed and angry. He bought his own police force and ordered them to push back the protestors no matter the damage or he told them only to preserve peace. Under the greatest challenges, he left or he was sent away. To end the

strike, Roy sent him to Latin America. Or it happened that Walt took a tour of Latin America at that time because he'd been invited as a goodwill ambassador.

“laughter is timeless, imagination has no age, and dreams are forever”

Walt Disney's last words were written on a piece of paper left on his desk: “Kurt Russell.” Or his last words were with Roy, detailing his plans for the Florida Project in the hospital. After his death in 1966, he was cryogenically frozen under the Pirates of the Caribbean ride in Disneyland or he was cremated and interred at Forest Lawn Memorial Park. Or, he wanted to be frozen, but the technology was new and he had never stipulated those wishes in his will, or in 2011, seven thieves broke into the cryogenics lab and stole his frozen head, which was displayed during the day and kept inside a steel-reinforced concrete vault at night.

When asked posthumously via the “Ask Walt” section of JustDisney.com what he presumably would have done if he had not passed away so early, he replied that he had been excited about his Florida Project and that he was considering a park in Marceline, Missouri. Or, he would never have talked to strangers about the future in his mind.

“when you believe in a thing, believe in it all the way, implicitly and unquestionable”

ESCAPE AGAIN AND AGAIN

After a year, I quit my job at Disney. I was tired of being yelled at and working 12-hour days while trying to fit in being a writer and working on my B.A. in English. I worked until the last day of June and coincidentally, Tyler texted me that day saying that he would be in Orlando for the night and that he wanted to hang out. I wasn't even sure from where in the world he'd be coming in. I hadn't seen him for a while because he had quit Disney or he'd been fired—I wasn't sure which—and he'd been working for Delta as the person who scans your ticket before you get on the plane. I never stopped to consider how such a self-sufficient person, someone able to negotiate even the most challenging of situations, could find himself on my couch again and again.

He met me outside the cast member parking lot because he didn't have a cast member I.D. anymore. And neither did I. I had just given it to my manager minutes before. We drove to a bar in nearby Celebration, Florida to hang out with my Disney friends one more time. I drank too much, so Tyler drove us back to my apartment.

“What are your plans, Tyler? I know you're busy,” I said the next morning.

“Well, I have a meeting today and on Monday, I fly to New York to begin my national Broadway tour. Yay!” he said, stretching as he rose from the couch.

“Where are you staying until then?”

“With friends maybe or in my car.”

“You can’t go home for a few days?” I said. “I mean, you’re welcome to stay here, but don’t you want to see your mom?” I knew he hadn’t seen her since he left community college to work at Disney four years ago.

“She doesn’t want me.”

Four months, one towed green Saturn, and one failed Broadway tour later, Tyler was back on my couch. He didn’t want to talk about what had happened.

“It’s coming, though,” he said, unpacking travel-size soaps from Bath and Body Works from a brown worn suitcase. In that bag was everything his owned, less than fifty pounds, light enough to check in at the airport. “She’ll get to be as lonely as I am when my sister graduates.”

As he spread his belongings over my couch, my eyes glazed over the 50 pages of *Cien Años de Soledad* I needed to get through for my literature class the next day. He stopped rustling through his suitcase.

“You know what’s the worst thing anyone ever said to me?” he said.

“Dime,” I told him.

“Huh?”

“Dime. It means ‘tell me’ in Spanish.”

“Dee-may,” he said. “Okay. Anyway, it actually happens all the time.” He sat at the kitchen table across from me. “People come up to me and they say ‘Wow, Tyler, you’ve accomplished so much.’” He rubbed his eyes. “‘Your mother must be so proud.’ You know what I say to them?”

“Dime.”

“I give them my best Disney smile and I say ‘Yes. She is so proud.’”

I began my final semester of undergrad with an internship editing online classes. On one Tuesday in August, I worked all day at the internship and when I came home, Tyler had baked a cake, made chocolate chip cookies, and cooked a chicken dish for dinner. I had an assignment to turn in online in half an hour, so I tried to listen to him while I answered a prompt about technical writing audiences.

He told me about the phone interview he'd scheduled in two days for a flight attendant position at Alaskan Airlines. He'd been corresponding via email with the woman who will be conducting the interview.

"For research purposes"—he said—he had looked her up on the Internet and found her online profile. As he wiped down my kitchen counter with a sponge, he told me that he'd found hundreds of pictures from Disney World on her profile and he planned to talk about how magical his experience was there. I didn't know details, but I knew it hadn't been entirely magical.

"I want this so bad," he said. "I've also been reading the forums about the interview process in person in Seattle. I studied all the questions they ask."

I stopped typing for a second to look at him. Jenn and I had taken him to Wal-Mart the Sunday before to get him a haircut and he'd shaved. He looked at me brightly and squeezed the sponge over the sink.

"I know you're meant for this job," I said. "I just don't want you to put all your eggs in the same basket again..."

"I can't wait to be in the air again. Listen to this!" He went to his laptop. "This is the radio base at Orlando International." All I heard was static, so I went back to my work, due in fifteen minutes. "Listen! Flight FX1209 with FedEx just took off with a north-eastern trajectory, which means that we'll be hearing it go over us in about two minutes."

My apartment was five miles from the airport, so the sound of roaring engines regularly filled my apartment. Still, I was impressed that he could predict it.

“It’s headed for Memphis. So fucking cool, right?” he said.

I had ten minutes to finish my assignment, so I just nodded.

Two days later, he impressed the interviewer enough to land an in-person interview in Seattle, Washington. That meant he had a plane to catch paid for by Alaska Airlines. I had to work early that morning so I hugged him goodbye in the darkness as morning slipped through the tall venetian blinds in my living room.

That night, Tyler texted my roommate. He didn’t pass the second interview. He didn’t get the job.

What happens sometimes is that it doesn’t work out. What happens sometimes is that your solitude gives you wings to fly. What happens, too, is that your solitude sometimes keeps your feet stuck on the ground.

And sometimes, your solitude leaves you alone.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

A Secret group of Disney's magical theme park Cast Members & Guests. (n.d.) In

Facebook group. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/groups/secretgroupofdisneyfans/>

I joined this Facebook group in early 2015, looking for a community of Disney fans to help me keep up with the happenings at Disney World. In this group, I found more than 50,000 members willing to talk and share about any topic related to Disney. From this source, I followed news stories as they developed, which was particularly useful in getting perspectives from cast members around the world during the 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris. This source is also where I found commentary from Disney fans that I used in "Said." My goal in collecting these quotes was to literally let them speak for themselves, evincing the true passion of Disney fans all over the world. Each of those quotes came from that group, somewhere, or from links that members posted in that group, which I've also listed in this annotated bibliography.

BackstagePeek. (2015). Backstage magic. Retrieved from

<http://backstagemagic.tumblr.com/>

I used this source throughout several essays, particularly in "Go Away Green." This source was particularly helpful in piquing my backstage curiosities. Going back into the 39 pages of archives will reveal backstage shots from Carrousel of Progress, Pirates of Caribbean, and even some shots of Cinderella sitting on the

asphalt as viewed from a guest taking a picture through a hole in a fence onstage at Disneyland Paris. Besides this, the anonymous writer details his thoughts on what Walt would think about how today's managers maintain magic. If you're interested in all things backstage, these discussions will satisfy your curiosity.

Brooks, D. (2015, September 10). Banksy and the problem with sarcastic art. *The New York Times Magazine*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/10/magazine/banksy-and-the-problem-with-sarcastic-art.html?_r=0

In my research about Dismaland and Banksy, I came across this fascinating article about the feeling of nothingness associated with Banksy's "sarcastic art." This made me wonder about the feeling of nothingness that Disney guests experience because it's too sentimental. The notion of sentimentality, though, perhaps isn't so bad a source of feelings, as I unpack in "Forged," but I was interested in hearing Dan Brooks's perspective on a place built specifically so that it lacks sentimentality in order to see what happens to a guest and their experience of the park. If you're interested in Dismaland, Brooks provides an excellent analysis.

Foglesong, R. (2003). *Married to the mouse: Walt Disney World and Orlando*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Used in "The Florida Project," this book was used heavily throughout my study of Walt's choice of Orlando for his second park. Foglesong makes so many striking arguments about how Orlando is now shackled to the Disney company with no options for divorce. He considers whether Orlando is better off for these early arrangements and he also considers Walt's deception concerning the original plans for Epcot and whether those deceptions were warranted.

Jobson, C. (2015, August 20). Welcome to Dismaland: A first look at Banksy's new art exhibition housed inside a dystopian theme park. Retrieved from <http://www.thisiscolossal.com/2015/08/dismaland/>

This source was my introduction to Dismaland, the central topic of "Forged." It provided plenty of pictures for me to analyze and acted as a starting point for making connections between the Disney parks I've come to know and this "forgery" (if that's the appropriate word for imitation/parody in this context).

Keslassy, E. (2015, November 14). Disneyland Paris closed in the wake of terrorist attack. *Variety*. Retrieved from <http://variety.com/2015/film/news/disneyland-paris-closed-in-the-wake-of-terrorist-attack-1201639996/>

I used this source in "How to Survive a Terrorist Attack" and in "Stars." This was a news source that detailed what happened to Disneyland Paris after the November 2015 terrorist attacks. Most interesting are the responses to this article at the bottom of the page, in which two guests discuss the effects of the attacks on their reality and on Disney's magic. I was moved by one reader's comment considering whether reality was necessary.

Mouselounge. (2011, December 15). The man behind the myth: Walt's passing [video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WG1saCPBD88>

Used in "The Florida Project," this video pulls together people who worked closely with Walt and asked about their last conversations with him. Particularly striking is Richard Sherman's never-changing final image of Walt walking slowly and quietly down the hallway, days before his death. His final words to Richard and the boys were enlightening as to Walt's knowledge of his own condition. This

was his acquiescence not to his disease, but to his understanding that something had gotten ahold of him.

National Police Chiefs' Council. (2015). NaCTSO guidance note 1/2015:

Developing dynamic lockdown procedures. Retrieved from

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/478003/NaCTSO_Guidance_Note_1_-_2015_-_Dynamic_Lockdown_v1_0.pdf

This is a particularly terrifying glance at the real helplessness we have in the midst of a terrorist attack, a source I used in "How to Survive a Terrorist Attack."

The advice is almost useless here because of the reader's own passive stance. I was fascinated that the British government could put out a document that gave such little practical advice for survival.

Novak, M. (2015, March 19). 8 Walt Disney quotes that are actually fake. Retrieved from

<http://factually.gizmodo.com/8-walt-disney-quotes-that-are-actually-fake-1692355588>

I used these quotes and their real sources in "Said." I was surprised to find so many quotes attributed to Walt. Traced back, many originated after Walt's death. Some are just misquoted and out of context, don't carry Walt's original meaning. Interestingly, these quotes are used throughout the parks. I saw the quote "If you can dream it, you can do it" posted outside of a construction site in the Animal Kingdom and had to laugh at the fact that not even the Disney cast members knew that Walt never said it.

Pollsson, K. (2015). Chronology of Disney World. Retrieved from

<http://kpolsson.com/wdworld/>

This progression of early Disney World helped me in re-creating the timeline in “The Florida Project.” It also led to other sources and other books that were of great use in understanding how Walt’s Florida Project came to be.

ProgressCityPublicTV. (2013, November 30). Disney World press conference (1965) [video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TmJPSjhveSA>

This press conference was essential to the writing of “The Florida Project.” I wanted to get every detail, every intake of breath, in describing how Walt presented his Florida Project.

Susanin, T.S. (2011). *Walt before Mickey: Disney’s early years, 1919-1928*. Jackson, MI: University Press of Mississippi.

This is an excellent book portraying Walt’s early successes and failures. I relied on it heavily to understand a young Walt in “Vintage Disney.” This early history of Walt isn’t well known because we’re often so much more interested in what Walt did right, but I’m really interested in the failures that led to his success. He is often cited as an example of productive failure, but it must have been difficult to have been in those moments of failure interspersed with those moments of success. Walt’s tenacity is truly the thing that made him successful over his ideas or his innovation. When he lost, he let go of that loss and kept moving forward.

TheOriginalEpcot. (2013, September 22). Walt Disney’s original E.P.C.O.T film (1966) HD full version [video file]. Retrieved from

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sLCHg9mUBag>

This was also essential to “The Florida Project.” I saw this short film many times as a child. My memory says that it was before *The Little Mermaid*, but I’ve found no sources to confirm that or deny it. It was originally shown on the Disney

Channel, which I know we never had growing up, so if it wasn't placed before our now-lost copy of *The Little Mermaid*, it was in another of the Disney movies we watched constantly growing up, perhaps before *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* or *Beauty and the Beast*.

Weiss, W. (2011, November 4). Is that really Walt's airplane at Disney's Hollywood Studios? Retrieved from <http://www.yesterland.com/waltsplane.html>

This is a source that I used indirectly in "The Florida Project." I found myself with very specific questions that seemed unanswerable throughout my research on Walt Disney. As I've mentioned, for a man in such recent history, it's interesting how much we don't know about him. I was getting conflicting answers about whether Walt was flying the plane, or even whether he had a pilot's license, when he saw Kissimmee. This source confirmed that he was, so I went with it because this had the most reliable backup in the form of an interview with Jim Korkis, a Disney historian with his own 300-page book about Walt trivia. It turns out that he didn't officially have a license, but he had a plane and what good is a plane if you can't fly it?

Yee, K. (2014, December 5). D-Tales #8: Carousel of Progress hides Disney History in plain sight with amazing details and tributes. Retrieved from <http://www.insidethemagic.net/2014/12/d-8-carousel-of-progress-hides-disney-history-in-plain-sight-with-amazing-details-and-tributes/>

This source was used in "Go Away Green" to discuss Uncle Orville's strange newspaper. I was led to it from the Backstage Magic Tumblr page, but it had great information about the context and tiny details hidden in those scenes about American's technological progression.

BIOGRAPHY

Amanda Canupp Mendoza graduated from Citrus High School in Inverness, Florida. She left University of Central Florida in Orlando with a B.A. in English and spent 18 months working for The Mouse at Disney's Hollywood Studios. She graduated from George Mason University in 2016, where she worked as a teacher, a writing center administrator, and *Phoebe* editor. When she grows up, she hopes to work in writing centers and continue to teach writing... Or maybe she'll go back to working for Disney. That is, if she grows up.