

Teamwork is a key to the success of Walt Disney (right), as this story conference shows. Yet his close supervision assures the "Disney touch."



Walt, his wife, and daughters Diane and Sharon pose beside pool at Disneyland.



THE SECRET OF

He makes the world of fairyland castles come vividly to life for all to enjoy.

by Peer J. Oppenheimer

WHEN WALT DISNEY stepped off the plane from Ireland, reporters wanted to know how successful he had been in casting actors for his next film, "Darby O'Gill and the Little People." "Very successful," Walt said seriously. "I finally signed Brian Connors."

The newsmen looked at him blankly. "Brian Connors, the king of the leprechauns," Walt explained. "He's 21 inches tall and 5,000 years old. He turned me down before because he didn't want to appear in a movie. But when he read this script he not only changed his mind, he offered me three pots of gold to let him appear in the film!"

"Come, come now, Mr. Disney," a rookie reporter replied dubiously. "You don't really believe in leprechauns, do you?"

Walt looked at him in surprise. "Of course I do," and, without a smile, he headed for his car. Puzzled, the young reporter turned to a veteran newsmen for a clue. "What do you think?"

"If Walt says there are leprechauns, you can bet your life there are," an old-timer replied, then added, almost as an afterthought, "and if they're hiding now, they'll be around by the time his picture comes out!"

For that is part of Walt Disney's magic: his ability

to create a believable world of dreams that appeals to all age groups.

However, when Walt himself was asked if he credits his success to an ability to see things through the eyes of children, he replied emphatically: "Definitely not. From Mickey Mouse to Sleeping Beauty and from Old Yeller to Brian Connors, the kind of entertainment we create is meant to appeal to every member of the family."

Still, Walt's ability to turn almost everything he touches into gold depends on more than producing entertainment with family appeal. Few artists, no matter how creative, have ever assembled a fortune without some shrewd business sense, or at least the ability to select employees who make up whatever they may lack in business perspective. But there's little evidence that Walt lacks anything.

In a recent article on Walt Disney Productions, *The Wall Street Journal* credited Walt's success to his formula of "Dream, diversify—and never miss an angle." It cited "his ability to wring every possible profitable squeal and squeak" out of every enterprise as proof that he is about the shrewdest businessman who ever came to Hollywood. And there are ample facts and figures to back up that impressive claim.

While most film companies cut their dividend payments last year, or made none at all, Walt

An idea at Disney's studio goes through such a wringer many creative artists rebel. Walt isn't



disturbed, though. Pictures incorporating many ideas are more likely to please many persons.

Walt Disney's first animation camera, built by himself and operated in an uncle's garage, was used from 1923 to 1929.



WALT DISNEY'S MAGIC

and through the Mouseketeer books, records, and syndicated cartoon strips. This will not only further publicize the film, but put still more earnings into Walt's enterprises. And since his products are never outdated, he will re-release the picture over and over again, as he has done with "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs," "Fantasia," "Song of the South," and other hits.

With this scheme multiplied over the past two decades, it's easy to see how Walt can afford to put close to \$2 million into studio expansion when other film makers are retrenching.

ALTHOUGH Walt Disney Productions has grown into a gigantic operation—it now employs close to 2,000 people—the driving force continues to be Disney himself, though he hasn't drawn a single character in 31 years. "Drawing," Walt says, "has long ago become a means to an end with me. It's not only that I have no time for it any longer, but I've found development of the stories themselves much more intriguing than drawing."

This seems all the more amazing when one considers that each film no matter how many people have worked on it, has the "Disney touch."

"The secret is teamwork," Walt explained. "Each character is arrived at by group effort. An artist might have a lot of talent and come up with an excellent idea, but if, after it is thoroughly analyzed, the character cannot be adapted and worked with by the group, we discard it."

What about the individualistic artist? "He has the best wishes of the organization," Walt smiled, but hastily added that in almost every instance another place has been found for him in the company. Many artists who couldn't "conform" have been turned into writers, directors, even producers.

This system has been condemned by some artists as a "production line" which kills individual effort. To this Walt replies that it's impossible to run such an organization with conflicting ideas, no matter how good they are.

Walt himself still supplies ideas for every phase of this enterprise—the films, cartoons, Disneyland Park, merchandise possibilities, as well as promotion and publicity suggestions—although his older brother Roy is the financial head of the company and makes certain Walt doesn't go overboard. Their close working relationship dates back to 1923 when Walt came to Hollywood. Only 22 at the time, he already had a good background in the field he had chosen for himself.

Disney Productions marked up its most profitable year—\$2.44 per share on total revenue of just under \$36 million. Five years ago the profits were 35 cents a share on revenue of \$7.7 million.

This, says *The Wall Street Journal*, was accomplished by Walt's method of firing shotgun blasts of ideas and products. As soon as one hits the public fancy, Walt moves in with all his money-making schemes and capitalizes on the popularity.

A typical example of how he works is the exploitation and promotion connected with "Sleeping Beauty," a full-length cartoon which will not be released until the end of this year. Yet at Disneyland, Walt's fabulous amusement center near Los Angeles, basic artwork from the film has already been transformed into color-animated dioramas where children and adults pay 35 cents apiece for admission. This not only puts cash into Walt's pockets, it also creates advance interest in the film.

And this is only the beginning. Walt's merchandising department has lined up toy makers, garment manufacturers, and others interested in making Sleeping Beauty articles, which will assure Walt 5 percent royalty with a minimum advance payment of \$5,000 per year per product—regardless whether it pays off for the manufacturers.

To complete the cycle, "Sleeping Beauty" will receive publicity via TV blurbs on "Disneyland"

Walt was born 57 years ago in Chicago. His upbringing there, on a farm near Marceline, Mo., and then in Kansas City, followed the pattern of a typical Midwestern middle-class family. His father, Elias Disney, was a contractor-builder; his mother kept house for four sons and a daughter.

Walt's first job, in the best American tradition, was a paper route when he was nine. He was an average student in school, joined a couple of secret societies whose aspirations are still secret to all but their members, and was active in sports, particularly track.

From a very early age, he showed decided interest in the stage, with Charlie Chaplin as his idol. On amateur nights at local theaters, he even did impersonations of Chaplin, and occasionally won prizes for his clever mimicry.

Yet he was not attracted to drawing. "I don't know how I got started," Walt insists. "Nobody else in the family is artistically inclined."

WALT'S FIRST real job, at 15 was not as a cartoonist but as a "news butcher," riding trains between Kansas City and Chicago to sell peanuts, candy, and magazines. His next job took him to France during World War I, chauffeuring Red Cross officials in vehicles he had covered with his sketches, forerunners of the characters that covered thousands of planes, trains, trucks, and jeeps in World War II.

Walt got his first art job shortly after the war when he joined an advertising company in Kansas City to draw pictures showing egg-laying mash and salt blocks for cattle.

Fired after business dropped off, he had a brief career as a postman before he decided to go into business for himself.

With a partner who had the unbelievable name of Ubbe Iwerks, Walt became successful at designing letterheads and theater ads—but not successful enough to reject a \$35-a-week art job a few months later which gave him his start in animated cartoons.

During the first couple of years, he kept his job as a cartoonist during the day, while working on his own projects at night in an empty garage, along with an increasing number of fellow cartoonists. His first big deal—seven films of modernized fairy tales—were sold to a distributing company in New York which promptly went into bankruptcy. Quips Walt: "The real secret of my success was that I was too naive to quit when I wasn't good enough."

This failure and his belief that he had gone as far as he could in Kansas City led him to Hollywood.

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