

Full Circle Moments at the Disney Archives Exhibit at the Museum of Science & Industry: A D23 Event Review

by Ana Rapin, PassPorter Guest Contributor

"Please draw a full circle. That is the foundation of our Disney character."

My husband and I, on our first adult day trip since the births of our daughters, aged 4 and 3, had reached the last element of the Treasures of the Disney Archives exhibit at Chicago's Museum of Science and Industry (MSI). There, in the Animation Studio, museum staff encourages and instructs visitors in drawing a beloved character.

□ For me, visiting the exhibit was a full circle moment. My father is a museum curator. My mother is a former Walt Disney World cast member, in what was the County Bounty Tent in Mickey's Toontown Fair. Historical preservation and Disney animation are encoded in my DNA.

□ We arrived at museum opening, after a four-hour drive from Michigan. As our last visit to MSI was an 8th grade field trip 13 years prior, we were struck anew by the size and beauty of the museum. Large banners hung among vast pillars depicted those ears, marking our destination. Kisosks accepting cash and card made for quick and efficient payment of the \$10 daily parking fee.

Basic museum entry is \$18/adult, \$11/child (3-11), and \$17/seniors (65+). An additional timed entry ticket is required for Treasures of the Disney Archives and other special events, at \$9 each. Ticket packages provide savings and are available at the museum and online. The exhibit is presented by D23: The Official Disney Fan Club. Silver and gold club members receive a discounted ticket price. For one-third of the cost of a Magic Kingdom ticket, you are treated to all the pixie dust and over 14 acres of educational, interactive, multigenerational discovery.

□ It's not "Disney" without a photo opportunity, and your first stop is in front of a green screen. A photo package with three images and commemorative frame is available at the end of the exhibit for \$20, \$18 for museum members. You are superimposed into images from The Lion King, Mary Poppins, and the Fab 5. These are now proudly displayed on my mantle.

□

Following a brightly colored hallway, you reach a darkened room housing four viewing screens. Walt Disney's childhood and early career is presented in video, with interview excerpts featuring Walt. The winding corridor continues, the walls covered in text, photographs, and artifacts, largely documents and correspondence. These depict the journey to Disney's accomplishments, including the trials, errors, and failures along the way.

The next portion is where Disney lovers will find themselves amazed. After another wall of informative videos, you are treated to one-of-a-kind artifacts from many Disney feature films, as well as Walt's personal effects. The original storybooks seen in the intros to *Sleeping Beauty*, *Snow White*, and *Cinderella* rest on pillows behind glass, receiving every bit the fairy tale treatment. Early memorabilia, called *Disneyana* (Disney and my name side by side, we are meant to be) is showcased with fun facts. Academy Awards sit beside awards Walt and Roy Disney created for each other. Nearly 300 artifacts surround, many never before available to so wide an audience.

The crowning jewel of Treasures of the Disney Archives, viewable on three sides, is Walt Disney's office. His desk, inspiration pieces, phone, lamp, even his pens are reconfigured in this space, encircled by even more display cases. It would be only a minor stretch of the imagination to picture Walt himself in the chair, working where so many childhoods were shaped and adventures created. As if out of respect and in recognition of the prominence here, a hush falls over the area. Even the smallest of visitors stand still and linger with understanding.

While being able to read helps children independently appreciate their surroundings, hands-on areas bring the exhibit to even smaller levels. A wall with phones and buttons play classic Disney songs, while a trivia wall features questions about Princesses and Villains. Those questions were answered with Jeopardy Champion Ken Jennings-accuracy by this 26-year-old child-at-heart. Technology enhances the interaction with an area with iPads allowing you to bring animation to life.

Mary Poppins receives a featured space in the exhibit, followed by visually stunning and familiar costumes worn by stars of the film industry. My all-time favorite artifact, having been seen years ago in a queue line, rests in this case; the spell book of Winifred Sanderson from *Hocus Pocus*. I literally leapt for joy repeatedly, and with no shame. Then you enter the Animation Studio. It is brightly lit, with playful interaction, and highlights Disney's giving ways, as a man and as a company. I stayed through two sessions, sketching Donald Duck and Goofy, while additional characters are sketched in other sessions. You

then have the chance to purchase the photos taken of you at the start of the exhibit, and then exit, to be directly immersed in the next segment of your outing.

□ Despite being review-focused, it would be a great disservice to potential visitors unless I stressed the magnitude and eminence of MSI. Treasures of the Disney Archives has an estimated self-guided time of 40 minutes. While we took 90 minutes, my husband and I spent a total of five hours perusing nearly 35,000 artifacts in the museum's numerous changing and permanent exhibitions. MSI has many live science experiments, including a 40-ft. vortex that simulates tornado conditions. There are vast hands-on learning opportunities at every turn. Families with sensory difficulties will find many dim, quiet areas for exploration. An Omnimax theater, food courts, and gift shops round out the experience. We are already planning a return trip with our children.

□ The term "priceless" is often used flippantly, but make no mistake, that is the most accurate description for Treasures of the Disney Archives. These items could never be replaced and a great deal of attention went into creating this exhibition. MSI staff members, having seen a larger version of the exhibit at the Regan Presidential Library, reached out and worked alongside D23 to curate this presentation at every phase, specifically for MSI. Extensive research included two trips to Disneyland. The staff was trained directly by Disney artists to ensure the Animation Studio was as authentic as in the parks. It took nearly two weeks for a team of three to unpack crates shipped from California and set up the various displays. Treasures of the Disney Archives is set to end its extended run on August 3rd, 2014. Afterward, all the artifacts will be returned to the Disney archives, and no new exhibition has been announced by D23.

□ A son of Chicago, Walter Elias Disney's story and work has completed its own full circle, arriving back home after much time away. Remarkably, this would also be a full circle moment for Elias Disney, his father. Elias worked on the construction of the 1893 World's Fair. The Museum of Science and Industry, formerly the Palace of Fine Arts, where Walt's legacy is on display for the world, is the last remaining building from the Fair. Three full circles. A hidden Mickey. This is the foundation of Disney and it is magic.

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