

Disney - A Lifetime Experience: A Walt Disney World Planning Article

by Mark Revisky, PassPorter Guest Contributor

My first experience with Disney was before my ability to remember.

My brother was diagnosed with Leukemia when he was five (I was two at the time). The Starlight Foundation sent my family to Disneyland in California. Traveling on this trip included: my mom and dad, my sister, brother, and me (that is our birth order as well). I have looked at the photo album a hundred times but have no recollection of that trip. I saw pictures of character meet and greets, the electrical parade, and the ride Dumbo.

Fast-forward from then (somewhere around 1988-1989) to 2003 when my fiance's family traveled to Florida and invited me to go along. We went to Disney World for five days. The magic was incredible. We skipped many of the kiddie rides as the youngest on the trip was around 14 years old. We hit Space Mountain, Splash Mountain, the Rockin' Roller-coaster, and several shows. After the vacation was over, I made a scrapbook for my fiance that Christmas.

Fast-forward two years. On March 12th, 2005, my fiance, Missy, and I were married. On March 13th, we flew to Orlando to begin our 10-day honeymoon right next to Disney World. My generous uncle traveled extensively for his company and used his frequent flyer miles to send his nieces and nephews on their honeymoons. My sister went to the island of St. Thomas. My brother went to the Smokey Mountains. We could have traveled to Australia, the Bahamas, Mexico, San Francisco, New York City, or any exotic location we could think of (we grew up in rural Illinois so any city with a population over 100,000 was huge). We were too excited to think of any other destination that Disney World.

We had several days at the parks and we wore our bride and groom hats. The cast members were very attentive to us. One cast member saw us exiting one ride and took us to the front of another right next door. As he led us past those standing in-line he said, "Excuse me, magical moment in the making!" (And it was magical! We missed the 30+ minute wait!) Again with no little kids, we skipped many of the smaller, kiddie rides. To be fair, I never want to ride 'it's a small world'. The only souvenir I bought on the trip was a small, plastic wind up Mickey and Minnie dressed in wedding clothes. It still sits on my desk.

A few years later, we moved to St. Louis as I started my new job at a small church. We had just welcomed our first child, Owen, into the

world seven months earlier. Less than two years later, our daughter Olivia was born. We took some mid-west trips to the major cities around us but we had the desire to take these kids to Disney World.

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□We planned a trip for the end of February in 2011, when Owen was three and a half and Olivia was 1 and a half. We put a countdown calendar on the wall, I showed Owen pictures on the computer (we would not get smartphones until a month after our trip), and we created a lot of excitement for them. To make the trip better, my wife's parents were coming with us. We all would fit into my mini-van and having the extra hands for the kids would be a welcomed help. (We have taken several trips with them and it has always been pleasant).

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□Finally, on a Sunday after church, we loaded up in our van and began the dreaded 15-hour drive from St. Louis to Orlando. We ran into a tough weather system in Tennessee that was producing tornados so we stopped at Cracker Barrel to let it move past us. Around 11 that night, Owen was getting tired in the back seat and restless so I let my father-in-law drive while I sat with Owen, helping him relax and finally fall asleep.

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□We made it past Atlanta before stopping for the night (it was around 2a.m.) I was excited to see the lights of Atlanta at night but fell asleep as we approached it and woke up after we already passed it (I fall asleep way too easy). We arrived at our rental house the next afternoon. We spent over a week in Disney World, five days at the parks. It was a great experience. The kids had a great time and Owen still has memories of that trip, even though he was so young.

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□What made the trip more memorable was the morning before we left to go to the Magic Kingdom, my wife took a pregnancy test and we found out baby number three was cooking (Max would be born in November). We were excited, even though it meant Missy would have to avoid some of the rides this time around.

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□A funny side note, the first day we arrived at the Magic Kingdom, Owen said he wanted to meet Pluto. We saw Pluto at the end of the day, standing near the main entrance. When we had the kids get next to him for a picture, Olivia lost it and screamed (it is a cute picture). What makes it funny is when I was in Disneyland all those years ago, I was afraid of Tigger and screamed when I had to be next to him (also a cute picture). I guess it runs in the family.

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□We finally had the chance to ride many of the smaller rides: Aladdin's Magic Carpet, Winnie the Pooh and the Honey Tree, It's A Small World (Ugh!), Dumbo, and Buzz Lightyear's

Space Ranger Spin (Owen insisted we ride it at least a dozen times and we did.) Owen received his first Disney toy after exciting that ride. He loved the character Zurg and bought one at the little stand near the line. Olivia's first toy was a Cinderella doll (the doll that looks like a young kid). She fell asleep holding it in the car on the way home. The lines were almost non-existent and we waited no more than 15 minutes for any ride. It was perfect for us.

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□ We knew this would be our last Disney trip for a while and it was. Now we have five kids, ages nine years old to 17 days old (as of this writing, June 25th, 2017). We decided last week that we would take all our kids (and of course my in-laws) to Disney once again in 2018. What helped make this decision was good friends of ours decided to go and invited us along. They also have five kids, about the same ages as ours. So we will have at least six adults (maybe eight if my wife's sisters can go) and ten kids, all 10 years and under.

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□ We just told our kids the news, yesterday. How did they take it? Well, that will be for another post. As the sign entering Disney World says, "A place where dreams come true." Until my next post, keep dreaming.

About The Author: Mark is a preacher at a small church in St. Louis, is married with five kids, and loves Disney World. Though trips to the Mouse Kingdom don't happen annually, they are treasured when they happen. Mark's family looks forward to their February 2018 Disney trip with their friends and family.

Article last updated: 07-21-2017

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