

Behind The Scenes: The Walt Disney World Moms Panel - Our Last Days

by Kim LaPaglia, PassPorter Guest Contributor

(Part three of three part series. Click to read parts [one](#) and [two](#))

Maybe it was the special good-night snack. I slept much better this evening although I was still too excited for a normal night's rest. My life at the moment was certainly far from ordinary. The next morning dawned warm and sunny as I enjoyed the walk to the Coronado Springs Convention Center. I wondered if Leanne had arranged the surprise weather as well. I knew anything was possible at Walt Disney World.

I entered the Walt Disney World Moms Panel training room to enjoy breakfast and was greeted by what were now familiar faces. As we sat at our computer stations, we were finally able to see what the site would look like to visitors. As we learned how to navigate the administrative side, we were given practice questions to work on. Typing my first practice answer, I tapped the keys hoping to offer my best personal experience.

How many business trainings have you been to where a blue fairy godmother named Ivanna Dream enters? Ivanna had read our bios, and with her sarcastic sense of humor proceeded to draw attention to each of us. The room was filled with laughter as she continued to "quiz" us on Disney trivia. And then... Leanne had another announcement.

We would get to meet Meg Crofton, the first female President of Walt Disney World and it would be commemorated in photos. For a group of "Moms" and Walt Disney World fans, this was extraordinary, life-altering news.

Next, a lovely lunch was set up in the outdoor courtyard, directly off our training room. I grabbed a plate of food (as did the other Moms) and rushed back to the room to prepare for our next task; a photo and video shoot at the Magic Kingdom. Between bites, I paced the room while practicing my video bio. I also changed into my "starring moment" ensemble. We had been given tips on what to avoid (clunky jewelry, for instance). I chose my favorite turquoise color and black pants. In hindsight, I wish I had worn capris which would have looked more like I was spending a day in the parks. But at 5 ft tall (okay short), I was worried about appearing even less vertically challenged. Truthfully, I was more worried about my video bio than my attire. If only I had just sat in the Acapulco room and enjoyed my lunch like our one "Dad," Bret!

At 12:15, our minibus headed to the Magic Kingdom. The bus parked backstage and we entered near the Plaza Restaurant. We headed to the Rose Garden area to the right of the Castle. It was roped off and set up for a photo and video shoot. My husband was allowed past the ropes to watch the production. It was sunny and hot, but our thirst-quenching wish was soon granted with bottles of water. This afternoon was a complete whirlwind. We were led out towards the hub and soon after, a horse-drawn trolley pulled up. The horse was taken away and we took a group photo aboard the front of the trolley. By now, we had many spectators, again wondering who we were. I can not even begin to tell you what it felt like climbing aboard the trolley with my new friends. It was magical, dreamlike, and fun. The photo really captures our memorable moment.

As we returned to the Rose Garden, I believe a magic spell was cast over me. My nerves were now calm and I did nothing but enjoy every second of the afternoon. I had a great time watching the smiles on everyone's faces. I took time now and then to look at the people staring at us. I frequently glanced at Cinderella Castle to imprint this day in my memory. We each had individual shots taken. Candice Coleman from the Disney News Bureau also interviewed each of us. It was much easier to have a conversation led by her enthusiasm than to remember what I wanted to say with just a camera staring at me.

We were called over to do our video bios, where producers at three camera areas were available to help us. When it was time for mine, I asked the producer to break mine into segments. She asked me to tell her about myself and then share my favorite park tip and so on. While I did this in only a few takes, I wish I had spoken more eloquently. I also wish the sun hadn't been glaring in my eyes causing me to squint. What mattered most was that I was finished.

When Mickey made his entrance, I felt like a child entering the Magic Kingdom for the first time. I couldn't contain myself and started yelling "Mickey!" I quickly calmed myself as not to interfere with the video bios being made. As you can imagine, the boss' arrival really made quite a stir and guests were trying to figure out what was going on in the Rose Garden. Believe me; I still couldn't believe this was happening. I felt magical merriment all day.

Meg Crofton arrived and she was absolutely gracious. Meg was so elegant in her Mickey Red suit with her "Meg" Cast Member pin. She and her husband had read our biographies over the weekend. I was stunned. She asked us what the most exciting thing we had done over our weekend was. Brigitta said, "Meeting you!" We all agreed. What struck me was that Meg really gets why people are so passionate about Walt

Disney World; that it's the experiences we have rather than a single attraction or hotel that make us return again...and again.

We took more photos. Each of us with Meg, each of us with Mickey, our group with the Moms Panel logo sign and so on. Click! Our enchanted day was captured. When our starring moments were finished, we were given free time in the Magic Kingdom until 5:00 pm. As we made our way to the Jungle Cruise, we thought about going on It's A Small World, but the line was too long. Perhaps we had been spoiled from the VIP entrances that we had enjoyed during the previous day's tour.

We went to the Jungle Cruise for a boatful of laughter. Next, Michael and I left the group so I could phone my son who was now home from school, and then do some shopping. Michael left to play and I returned to the bus at 5:00pm. Back at Coronado Springs, we had a short time to get ready and at 6:00pm. we were back on the bus, headed to Epcot.

Again we arrived via a backstage entrance and went directly to Tutto Italia, the restaurant in the Italy pavilion. We sat at two round tables with Moms Panelists and Cast Members enjoying great conversation and delectable food. Near 8pm we were led to the Candlelight Processional to enjoy VIP seating. We were led past all of the guests waiting in line and directly to our seats in the third row, where we enjoyed the heartfelt show.

As if the day wasn't magical enough, we were then taken to a private Illuminations dessert party. We were in Morocco now. There was a bar doling out beverages and a dessert table with an assortment of tasty treats. Our families (and friends) were invited to join us. Beth and Laura had their families in attendance. Bret had his sister and some friends. The conversation, drinks, and fireworks were sparkling.

It was very late when we returned to the Coronado Springs Resort. Some of us were not ready for the revelry to end so we stopped at the outdoor bar. It was another warm evening. It was nice to chat and get to know each other better.

Finally this enchanting day had to end, or so I thought. Our surprise tonight was a framed picture from our first evening with all of the panelists at the Osborne Family Spectacle of Dancing Lights. Here we were captured with the giddy looks of children on their first trip to Walt Disney World. At last, I slept peacefully.

On Sunday, we had a later flight so Michael and I had breakfast at the Pepper Market before going to Downtown Disney to shop. I was happy to run into Darcie one more time and we chatted before reluctantly

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sharing a good-bye hug. After shopping, Michael and I relaxed at the pool before finally dragging ourselves to get ready for the trip home. I was happy to see another panelist, Michelle, waiting for the VIP Tours transportation. This gave us time to chat on the way to the airport.

At home, I slowly acclimated myself back to reality until disneyworldmoms.com was launched on January 7th. Answering my first question was so exciting. We had been told at training that our answers could express how we truly felt and the moderators would not be editing our content. If we didn't like a hotel, restaurant, price, etc., then we could share our honest views. We could send people to other sites that we felt were helpful in planning a vacation. I received some requests for interviews. Our local TV station came to our house and our family excitedly watched the 6:00 show that night (as well as set the DVRs in our house to record). I had two local newspaper interviews. One printed a TOO large photo of me with my "boss," Mickey.

We now have monthly conference calls so we can touch base with the Cast Members. We offer suggestions to make the site more user-friendly. I hope that guests (especially first-time visitors) will continue to find information to help ease their Walt Disney World vacation planning. We have all been pleased with the success of the site. Thank you to the many friends from PassPorter and DisBoards that have been cheering us on.

What's next for me? I have been asked (along with Darcie) to attend an informal media event April 18-20. I hope that whatever comes after the Walt Disney World Moms Panel, that it involves writing, Walt Disney World and my new lifelong friends. So for now, I'll close this saga with 12 words: Beatrice, Beth, Bret, Brigitta, Darcie, Erin, Heather M., Heather R., Kara, Kim, Laura and Michelle.

[Click here to read the first part of Kim's series on the Disney Mom's Panel.](#)

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About The Author: Kimberly LaPaglia thrives on answering questions about Walt Disney World vacations. Stay tuned for her last day of training which includes the Walt Disney World Moms Panel photo shoot and what it's been like since the site went live.

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