

Behind the Scenes: The Walt Disney World Moms Panel Selection Process

by Kim LaPaglia, PassPorter Guest Contributor

While researching my next Walt Disney World trip, I happened upon an advertisement for the first ever Walt Disney World Moms Panel. Apparently the team selected would be providing advice on planning a Walt Disney World trip. My immediate thought was "This is me!"

As a stay at home Mom, I wasn't actually looking for a new challenge, but this opportunity seemed perfect since I was always helping other families anyhow. I filled out the questionnaire, briefly mentioned to my husband that I applied for this "Disney Mom thing" and forgot all about it. So on October 17, 2007 when I got an e-mail congratulating me for making it to the next phase of the selection process, I was truly surprised. The e-mail had the cutest Walt Disney World Moms logo and the password to fill out the next questionnaire was Cinderella (my favorite princess). Now my heart was pounding with excitement and magical possibilities.

I spent several days writing and editing my answers for the next three essays. I submitted them and made a wish. Of course, the odds were staggering so I tried not to get my hopes up too high.

Around 5:00 p.m. on October 26, I received another e-mail with the same Walt Disney World Moms Panel logo. So adorable! This e-mail congratulated me on making it to the final phase and invited me to schedule a phone interview. I was now among 26 Disney fanatic Moms filled with hope. (No kidding, Hope is my real middle name.) I spent the next couple days seeking advice on whether I should schedule my interview for the first available day. My mom gave me some good advice (gotta love Moms) and I waited for the call to schedule the interview. Over the three days, I had family and friends sending me all kinds of pixie-dust greetings filled with remarks of good luck.

I kept thinking about the search. They were specifically looking for moms that have "mastered the art of planning a Walt Disney World vacation." Over the years I've planned numerous trips for our family, friends, teachers, neighbors, and acquaintances that had been told to call or e-mail me about a Walt Disney World trip. I really concentrated on what it had meant to me to help people plan their trips to this vacation destination that meant so much to me. I reflected on how meaningful it was for first time visitors to return and tell me, "Oh, now I get it." I also remembered what it was like when our son was born 12

weeks premature and how I cried, "But I just want to take him to Disney World." Two years later, my husband Michael and I walked hand in hand down Main Street with our son Nicolas between us and our extended family looking on.

I scheduled my interview for Monday, October 29 at 4:00 p.m. My weekend was spent preparing. I am much more comfortable writing than talking (especially over the phone) so I had my husband call me several times to do practice interviews. I printed out "cue cards" in case I went blank and taped them to the wall of my bedroom. I wanted to take the call where I was surrounded by photos of our son in Walt Disney World, our Disney Vow Renewal (when I rode in Cinderella's Coach), as well as Grand Floridian, Cinderella and Castle memorabilia.

The interview went well and I wrote, "I feel like I did my best and I'll have no regrets either way. I just didn't want to bomb and then regret it." I also told my mom, "All I know is that never in my life did I think I'd be talking to FOUR Disney executives for an opportunity that involves writing and vacation planning. I'm just thankful for this chance because it's an experience I can always be proud of."

Then I waited and dreamed. It really helped exchanging e-mails with some of the other finalists as we could all understand the anticipation. I was grateful to be part of such an outstanding group of Walt Disney World fans. On November 7, I tried to keep busy by getting out luggage for our upcoming (pre-planned) trip to Disneyland. I used packing to go to the Mouse's House in California as a wonderful diversion.

At a little after 4:00 p.m., I got the call of, "Congratulations!" It was absolutely surreal. I got off the phone and ran downstairs. I was crying and laughing. Okay, I was sobbing like a baby. I kept telling my son, "Mommy got it. I got it." Then I told him to always believe in his dreams. I knew the call could go either way so I also had a speech ready for him about how you should always try your best and that winning isn't everything.

I didn't even realize the magic was just beginning. I got an e-mail of congratulations with Minnie Mouse actually speaking my name!

I called everyone. I wrote to my family and friends:

"I just wanted to thank each of you for your support during the application process for the Disney World Moms Panel.

In January, go online to disneyworldmoms.com

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I made it!!!

10,000 applied

26 finalists

12 made the online panel forum

I'm going to Disney world!!!!!!

All evening I kept singing "When you wish upon a star." My son clearly thought I had gone nuts. No, just Goofy! But then it was back to being a mom, as of all nights, my husband was working late and I had to take care of dinner and homework.

As the days followed, I kept getting more e-mails from Walt Disney World about the upcoming training. There would be a photo shoot in front of Cinderella Castle. But more unbelievable, my room had been booked, transportation would be arranged for me, meals had been planned, and this obsessive planner didn't have to do any research. It was a great trip for a mom who usually plans every detail.

We were instructed to begin work on our video biography. This would be a short clip where we should "Tell about yourself," "Tell about your family," and "Tell about your favorite Walt Disney World tip." We also needed to begin drafting a written bio that would go on the web site. Even as I worked on these assignments, I felt like none of it was truly real.

By December 8, my husband Michael and I were on a plane to Orlando. Michael wanted to live his dream (playing in the parks by himself) so I purchased airfare so he could join me. He also said he couldn't imagine not being able to at least get a glimpse of me enjoying this once in a lifetime experience. Our son was a great sport about us heading off alone to Walt Disney World, and we were proud of him. Okay, it definitely helped that we had just gotten home from Disneyland five days earlier.

I was nervous and excited on the journey to Walt Disney World for the Moms Panel training. Thankfully I had been in touch with nine of the Moms and Bret, the lone Dad. It was nice to get to know each other before arriving Orlando. To this day, we still keep in daily contact. Discovering new friendships with people as passionate about Walt Disney World as I am has been a magical experience. We all come from different places and yet, we have one thing in common that really holds us together; our love for sharing Walt Disney World with our families and our desire to inspire other travelers to find the magic inside Walt

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Disney World.

Stay tuned next week for more on Kim's experience as a Walt Disney World Moms Panelist!

About The Author: Kimberly LaPaglia is honored to be part of the first ever Walt Disney World Moms Panel. She is looking forward to her next Disney vacation in June 2008.

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