

The Making of PassPorter: A "Text" Ed Course

by Jennifer Marx, *PassPorter Guidebooks Author*

If you've been to Walt Disney World, you may remember Martin Short's friendly introduction to sex education in "The Making of Me" film in the Wonders of Life pavilion at Epcot. It's recently inspired me to tell our own story of how we make PassPorter. I don't have any cute graphics or highly paid actors to aid my story, but I hope you find my "text" educational (and insightful) anyway!

The Beginning: A new PassPorter begins the day the previous edition goes to press. (OK, maybe a few days later -- we usually collapse from exhaustion first.) Disney changes everyday, and so we begin compiling a list of changes for the new edition. Once the previous edition is actually published, we keep a copy of it on our desks to mark up with changes for our next edition -- simple but effective. We continue to monitor news, changes, and additions right up to the day we go to press with the new edition.

The Fresh DNA: Reader feedback and suggestions work like an infusion of fresh DNA -- it's the stuff of life for PassPorter. We read and review the registrations, surveys, e-mails, and message board posts regarding the previous edition to find out what our readers want to see added or changed in PassPorter. We also monitor the message boards for questions and issues we haven't addressed. Without feedback, and the ability to act upon it, PassPorter would be like so many other books that seem to exist in a vacuum, hermetically sealed from the reactions of the readers.

The Quest: We continually quest for new and updated information on each trip we take in the year leading up to the new edition. We carry PDAs on our trips, which we use to record the information and then synchronize with one of several databases that we designed. Two of the trips are usually designated specifically for our quest -- a trip with Allie (to get her fresh opinions, reactions, and tips) and a trip just before we go to press (to catch any last-minute changes). On each of these trips we're also snapping lots and lots of photos -- we take somewhere between 4000-5000 photos each year, primarily for research and some for possible publication.

The Moment of Creation: About nine months (surprise, surprise!) before the book is actually published, we create the electronic files for the new edition. The book files are created in Adobe PageMaker 7.0 on a Mac G4 Cube -- they tend to start out small, but then blossom up to

500 MB by the time we go to press. Photo files are created in Adobe Photoshop, and map files are created in Adobe Illustrator.

The First Three Months: Once the files are created, we go through all the text and identify those sections we want to expand and add. We make room for the new stuff by adding or reformatting pages, and/or clearing outdated items. This is also our most intense period of research.

The Second Three Months: This is when we move from collecting information to actually adding it to the book files -- our most intense period of creation. We will spend 8-12 hours a day, for weeks and weeks on end, writing new text, placing photos, rearranging things to fit, collecting tips and stories, etc. In the middle of the fifth month we finish with the bulk of the additions, and send it off to our expert review team for their comments and suggestions. While we wait for their reviews to come back, we create new covers (this year we even had readers vote on the cover they liked best -- we used the one they chose). We also use this time to work with other Disney-related services to create coupons for the back of the book. Once the reviews start coming in, we incorporate the changes and suggestions. At this point, we're in the middle of the sixth month, and the proofreading process is in the full swing. The text gets proofed about 4-5 times before we finally wrap it up.

The Third Three Months: This is mostly a lot of wait, wait, wait. This period kicks off when we put all the book files onto a CD and FedEx it to the printer in Hong Kong. Then we wait for our pre-press "bluelines" (proofs) to arrive for checking. If there are pre-press mistakes, we send in the corrections and wait again for more proofs. Once the final approval is given, it's up to the printer to print... (wait) ... assemble... (wait) ... package... (wait) ... and deliver (wait wait wait) ... the books. While we're waiting, we're taking lots of pre-orders from individuals and bookstores, and working with our publicist to get the word out. This is also when we send out announcement postcards to those readers who requested one, and put up the free pages to download off the Web site. And this year, we were working on our new cruise guide during this time as well.

The Arrival of a New Bundle of Joy: And what a bundle it is ... this year our Walt Disney World guidebooks arrived at our warehouse on over 20 pallets, each weighing over 1000 pounds. As soon as we receive word that they've arrived, we check the condition of the books. Of course, we have to stop a moment to ooh and ahh over the new book, too!

Of course, the REAL work begins once the books arrive. First, we have thousands of pre-orders to fill in a matter of days. While we don't do most of the packing (can you even imagine?), we do need to tell the warehouse what to pack and where it goes, and we do send out some time-sensitive packages from the office. New orders are streaming in now, too, and the books need to be promoted through radio interviews, magazine and newspaper articles, and so on. The Web site needs updating, the trade shows need attending, the bookstores need contacting -- the list is endless. And, of course, the whole cycle is beginning again ... there's always another new book (or two or three) on the horizon for us!

Yet, in the midst of all this, it's nice to just pick up a book, admire it, appreciate the smell of the ink and paper, and feel good about our "little" creation. What was it Walt said? "I hope we never lose sight of one thing ... that it was all started by a mouse." And in our case, it was all started by a mouse and a little text.

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