

My Neighbor Mickey: Living Near Disneyland

by *Andee Zomeran, PassPorter Guest Contributor*

"Mom, let's go to Disney today," my eldest said one morning after our recent move to the Seattle area. "Oh, Honey, we live very far from Disneyland now. Did you know some kids have never been to Disneyland?"

Her confused expression made me aware that we had raised our children in a different reality than most. As new residents of the Pacific Northwest, we would all have to get used to the Disneyland Resort as a vacation destination rather than a meeting place for our weekly play dates.

I am frequently asked what it was like living 15 minutes away from Disneyland. Did we go often? (Yes.) Didn't we get tired of it? (No.) Sure, a Disney vacation is hard to beat, but being at Disney for a day when you live so close carries its own magic. There was no worry about rushing to the next attraction. No stress over how much money is budgeted for food. If my 4-year-old wanted to ride "it's a small world" over and over again, we could plan an afternoon around it. Mickey wasn't a novelty, he was our neighbor. When I look back on our time living in Orange County, there are a few memories that will stay close to my heart.

Play dates: Our school district had an early-release day every Wednesday, so we were able to be at the resort by 2:00 pm. Most of our friends also had annual passes so our kids could spend hours together in a single land. The Redwood Creek Challenge Trail at Disney's California Adventure was their giant playground. Hot days were spent at the water play area in Bountiful Valley Farm. Cooler days were spent learning to draw in the Animation Academy or kickin' it with Crush in Turtle Talk. When the crowds were heavier, we could stop in for a story with Snow White in Fantasyland, have interactive time with Jasmine and Aladdin in Frontierland, or learn to be Jedis in Tomorrowland. Sometimes we'd just get a corn dog on Main Street, U.S.A. and wait for the next parade.

Fireworks: Some evenings we'd head to Disneyland for the nighttime firework spectacular. But a better memory? Stepping out on our front porch to watch the show from afar.

Date Night: Adult time rates high on my Disney list. I loved when the babysitter arrived to get the kids down for the night. I'd meet my

husband after his work-day was finished for dinner at Downtown Disney. Then we'd wander over to Disney's California Adventure for California Screamin' and then to Disneyland for Space Mountain. Nothing could top the date on our 10th wedding anniversary -- a night out at Club 33, the exclusive restaurant above Pirates of the Caribbean in New Orleans Square. That night, romance was defined by eating our filet mignon, drinking our bottle of wine, and watching Fantasmic! from our window view.

The Whole Resort: A few times, we needed even more of the Magic, so we would book a night at one of Disney's fantastic hotels. This was an opportunity to relax by one of the themed pools and to be a part of the Disney nightlife. One summer hotel stay, we wore our swim suits into both parks and did every water attraction. This time, our daughters weren't squirming after Splash Mountain. They were ready to get to Grizzly River Run!

Holidays: Is there anyplace better to celebrate an occasion than at a Disney park? We had Mother's Day brunch with the Princesses at the Plaza Inn. Our eldest daughter celebrated her birthday with Goofy at Goofy's Kitchen while my youngest daughter preferred to have her cake with The Little Mermaid at Ariel's Grotto. While others were standing in line at the mall for their pictures with Santa, we visited with him while he was wearing his California surf wear at Sunshine Plaza. Of course, the next year we visited him at his cottage in Frontierland. There, he was in his traditional red suit and Mrs. Claus was hosting a party where we were able to make our own Christmas cookies. We were even able to get up close and personal with eight reindeer getting ready for their big night out!

I have so many happy memories of our time living by the Disneyland Resort. But I think the most special would be:

July 17, 2005: Disneyland's 50th birthday. The resort was celebrating the event for over a year. At first, we thought we wouldn't attend on the actual day. We knew the crowds would be heavy. People would be lining up in the wee morning hours to get their special pin commemorating the day. I love all things Disney, but I wasn't sure I was ready for the chaos. Besides, we had plans to be in San Diego that weekend. But on Sunday evening, as we were headed back home on I-5, I turned to my husband and said, "Should we?" He didn't need me to clarify. He knew what I was asking. We drove past our freeway exit and continued 15 minutes north to our destination. Parking was easy that evening -- a sign! We strolled right into an empty entrance gate, bewildered that there were not more people. The Cast Member told us that the morning had been crazy, but once people obtained the special items they were

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looking for, they left. Our little family was ecstatic to be handed golden mouse ears with the unique date imprinted on the back, a free gift to everyone entering that day.

We dined at the French Market restaurant and devoured our birthday cupcake that came with each meal. Then, as our own tribute to Walt Disney, we hopped on board the train that was so dear to his heart. We rode the whole route, taking note of how the park had changed and what had stayed the same. I pointed out to my daughters what I remembered when I was their age while sitting on the same train. I told them stories about what their grandmother experienced when Disneyland was brand new.

As we got off the train on Main Street, U.S.A. and exited the Park, I was flooded with years worth of memories. Recollections came from my childhood, my teen years and my college years, our engagement with Mickey giving his consent, when I realized ... I grew up here. And I realized how truly fortunate I was to be living next to *The Happiest Place on Earth*.

About The Author: Andee Zomeran lives in the Pacific Northwest and is a wife and mother to a family that loves all things Disney. They are looking forward to their two-week Disney Cruise/Land vacation in December 2010.

Article last updated: 09-16-2010

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