

Amazing Autograph Books: Creating an Autograph Scrapbook

by Lynette Wilhelm, PassPorter Guest Contributor

For our first trip to Walt Disney World I designed and created (with the help of my then 6-year-old daughter) a personalized autograph book. I knew about the small autograph books that are offered all over the parks for sale. I felt that they were too simple and plain. I wanted my daughter to have a unique memory book. Instead of a straight "autograph" book, I decided to create a scrapbook that would hold autographs and pictures together.

In the months before our vacation I hunted for the items I wanted. I found a spiral-bound scrapbook that has 40 pages of 9"x11" card stock in it. I bought every type of sticker I could find for Disney characters. When I couldn't find any for certain characters at local craft stores, I shopped online at a place called MouseMemories.com. I looked online for pictures of each Disney character I thought we might meet. I collected and stored everything away until three weeks before our trip. Together, my daughter and I then went to work on her "autograph" book.

First, we sat down and I pointed to each two-page section asking her which character she wanted to go where. My daughter's favorite character is Sleeping Beauty, so Aurora got the privilege of getting to go first. I printed-off a picture of Sleeping Beauty, and my daughter glued it on to the right-hand side. I cut funky borders out of card stock with scrapbooking scissors, and she glued them on the edges of each page. On the page that we glued Sleeping Beauty's picture, I gave her the stickers I had collected and let her go to town! She placed as many stickers as she wanted all over the page. We left the page next to the picture page blank so that we could later fill it with autographs and pictures of my daughter with the character. Through the book we went, following the same routine, for each character. It took us a couple of hours, every afternoon for about 2 1/2; weeks before we were done. We hadn't left for Walt Disney World, and I was already tired of that book!

Excitedly, we went to Walt Disney World, bringing the book. I intended that, as we wandered around the parks and came across a character we had not yet seen, we could wait in line to meet them. If we missed characters, it would be no big deal -- we could bring the book back on some other trip. Somehow the book took on a life of its own! It became our mission, scouring each park to make sure we got every autograph of every character we had glued onto a page. My husband, parents, and

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brother all assumed it was something I solely wanted to do with my daughter, leaving the job of waiting in line all mine. 40 characters in eight days was quite a bit of waiting! The book was bulky and HEAVY and of course I was delegated to carry it throughout the parks. I sometimes carried it in my backpack so that it wouldn't get ruined, but often it was placed in the bottom of the stroller. Then we had to yank it back out each time we had to fold the stroller to climb onto a bus (either to go to our resort or another park).

What was really cool was how almost every single character stopped and noticed my daughter's autograph book. There was no quick hug, sign, picture, and off we go. They stopped, looked, and (the ones who could talk) took the time to chat with my daughter and ask her questions about her book. Ariel took a full five minutes while my daughter sat next to her, flipping through the pages of the book (and when we saw her later at a character breakfast, she kissed the page dedicated to her!). Aladdin and Jasmine flipped through each page, showing their assistants and chatting with my daughter about her necklaces and the princess costume she was wearing.

Even the non-talking characters were amazed at her book! Bolt had his assistant take a picture of the book. Donald's helper counted how many Mickey stickers there were and how many Donald stickers there were, and to Donald's delight, there were more Donald stickers. Mickey flipped through each page while at breakfast with us, taking a long look at his own page. It was wonderful! We have personalized stories about how the characters interacted with my daughter. Other guests were delighted and amazed at what we had made.

When we came home, we filled the pages with photos of my smiling daughter visiting each of her new friends. We found every character in that book, save three, and some we didn't expect, like Tinker Bell's fairy friends; and Wendy as well as Peter Pan! I cut off the spiral binding (it was starting to fall apart from use) and placed each page in a protective sleeve. The cover was filled with a picture of my daughter in front of Cinderella Castle. The first two pages are filled with various photos taken of her around the parks. It really is a wonderful treasure trove of memories of our vacation.

I have three other children and honestly, I can say I will never make a book like that again. Mostly because of how heavy and bulky it was. Carrying it around everywhere was not easy or fun. I am very grateful for the memories my daughter has. I know that there will be other Disney trips, and now the bar has been set! Since making another book is out of the question, I have wondered what will I do to make equally memorable items for my kids.

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For starters, we could bring t-shirts for autographs. Items brought by other guests include hats, pillowcases, blankets, canvas bags, photo mats, posters, photo frames, post cards, backpacks, baseballs, DVDs and calendars. To make it really inexpensive, some have grabbed park maps and had the characters autograph those. For the adults, you could buy a book on Walt Disney and have autographs done on the front and back covers.

I also learned that someone had bought a Disney recipe book and had the chefs at each restaurant sign their favorites. Picture plates can be purchased beforehand (example, the Disney Princesses) and then have each Princess sign next to their picture. Making your own smaller autograph book with preprinted designs for each character is very popular. Photo albums that have been decorated with stickers and pictures is another suggestion. Scanning autographs into the computer and printing them off onto paper, and including photos (after you have already traveled with the tiny book) is another thought.

As I was researching all of these ideas it came to me that you could buy a placemat-sized piece of poster board and bring it along with you in a round mailing tube. After collecting your autographs, have it laminated and then you have a personalized placemat to enjoy at home. Lastly, I have heard of cutting out fabric squares and having the characters sign them with fabric markers. You can embroider over the autographs, and then stitch the fabric squares together into a patch work quilt of memories.

It's amazing how inventive Disney guests can be! We definitely have a well of ideas to draw from on our next Disney trip. Until then, we will enjoy my daughter's "autograph" book.

About The Author: Lynette Wilhelm is a stay-at-home-mom raising four soon-to-be Disney lovers. She has visited Disneyland at least 10 times (as early as her baby years) all the way up to her teen years. In 2009, while pregnant with her fourth child, she went to Walt Disney World for the first time with her husband, three kids, two grandparents, and her brother. She enjoys many things Disney, but none more than watching her own kids grow up and fall in love with those very same things.

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