

Disneyland Memories: Growing Up with Disneyland

by Andee Zomeran, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Most everyone can remember their first trip to a Disney park.

Disney fanatics are able to identify the exact moment they became addicted to the Magic. I call myself a "pre-natal" Disney fan; I'm sure I had the obsession before exiting the womb. Just an infant the first time I went to Disneyland, I grew up visiting annually when my parents made the pilgrimage from San Diego to Anaheim.

My mother, a Southern California native, watched orange groves cleared away from a little spot in Orange County in the 1950s. She and her cousins saw the birth of a little amusement park that became a world-renowned tourist destination. In my current mentality of Advanced Dining Reservations, FastPasses and ParkHoppers, I can't comprehend my mother's memories of a slow-paced afternoon where ticket books were needed for a train ride and Audio-Animatronic birds were entertainment for the day. Recently, I asked her to record some of these recollections so I could attempt to re-create her experiences in my mind's eye. What I learned made me a tad jealous of her Disney history, but mostly made me aware of where my own passion began.

□ Mom's extended family lived in Fullerton, the town next-door to Anaheim. She would spend summer weeks with her favorite aunt, who would take Mom and her cousin to Disneyland frequently. Most of her older cousins served as some of the park's earliest Cast Members. She writes about special "privileges" when having family members under Disney's employ:

With such a large family in the area, there always seemed to be someone who knew someone else, etc., etc., with "connections." This was the case with a cousin who was in fireworks inspection detail. He would let us in the side gate with all the cast members and characters when we arrived. It always made me feel so special. I'm not sure if we bought our supply of ticket books or if they were gifts, but we always seemed to have enough. It was fun to go on the Matterhorn, too, where we hoped we would be able to see another cousin helping visitors on and off the ride. Lederhosen were a nice touch.

My mother notes some of her favorite attractions, the same attractions that are often overlooked in favor of the bigger, faster, more thrilling rides that so many visitors seek:

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□ The best train rides that circled the park were always the ones where they let Lois (Mom's cousin) and I sit in the very front with the conductor. Aunt Laura would stick around while we explored the park. She would set up a meeting time and place for us so that she could find herself a nice spot to wait and "people watch." However, she did do a few things with us including the Tiki Room...a favorite of all of ours and sometimes the Pepsi Saloon show and the Jungle Cruise.

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□ In the ultimate of all "people watching" (and probably the single memory of which I am most envious), Mom recalls:

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□ It was always fun to spot Walt, himself, strolling around the park. Aunt Laura probably preferred Knott's Berry Farm as an outing, but when Walt showed up, that made the day worthwhile at Disneyland.

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□ When packing for our Disney vacations, shorts and tank tops fill our suitcases. Can you imagine if the following were still the case?

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□ I probably didn't realize it at the time, but the dress code for visitors made an impact on me. There was something safe in knowing that things were watched, through fun loving eyes, and that I don't remember any rowdy situations.

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□ Ladies wore dresses and men wore slacks to the Park in the 50's. I firmly attest that I have never packed my Sunday best for Disneyland. However, I believe Disney's Cast Members still have that "watchful eye" and I have seen where guests have been asked to turn a shirt "inside-out" to avoid offending other visitors. What would Walt say about the short shorts and the bare mid-drifts of today's fashion?

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□ My mother shares that, when she and her cousin were older, they used to take in the dances at the Carnation Pavilion at the end of Main Street, U.S.A. I wonder if she had as much fun as I did in the 80's when dances were hosted at "Videopolis," in the place that is now Princess Fantasy Faire. Mom reminisces about banana splits during visits to the Carnation Cafe. Me? I prefer the hot fudge sundaes. She would always bring home a bag of rock candy from the candy shop for my grandfather, while my souvenir treats are usually the chocolate-covered, Mickey-shaped pretzels. Mom and I both share a common love for the fireworks and watching Tinker Bell make her magical flight.

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□ It's always a surprise to me when I meet a fellow West Coaster who has never been to Disneyland. But this story about my mother's Orange County family puts me in shock:

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□ It always made us smile to think that a couple of my uncles living in nearby Fullerton and Anaheim didn't frequent the park, in fact I don't know if they ever visited it. They always told me that they wanted to "wait until it was all finished." They had been in the area since the 20's & 30's and may have even picked citrus on the very property that became the "Happiest Place on Earth."

□ Really, Uncles? Weren't you paying attention when Walt said, "Disneyland will never be completed. It will continue to grow as long as there is imagination left in the world?"

□ Those who know me recognize that Disney has a permanent place in my heart. My mother's memories cause me to reflect how that love was passed on from the moment I was born. The Pixie Dust will surely continue to spread through our generations as my young "pre-natal" Disney fans create special memories that someday they can share with my future grandchildren.

About The Author: Andee Zomerman lives in the Pacific Northwest and is a wife and mother to a family that loves all things Disney. They seem to be constantly planning their next Disney vacation -- even while experiencing the current one.

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