



Give Kids the World Cartoons

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Give Kids the World Village is a whimsical seventy acre resort with the purpose of providing children with life-threatening illnesses and their families a “wish trip” to visit central Florida attractions such as Disney World, Universal, SeaWorld and many more. The village works with several different wish-granting organizations around the world and has never turned down a child. This incredible organization has grown over time with the help of thousands of weekly volunteers and a very small staff of approximately one-hundred forty.

Inspired by founder Henri Landwirth, a holocaust survivor and former hotelier, Give Kids the World was established in 1989. Landwirth’s experiences in concentration camps coupled with the loss of his parents caused him great sadness. This led Landwirth to view his childhood as a time of desolation. However, these experiences left Landwirth with a special place in his heart for children struggling with illnesses because he saw them as he once saw himself. Another experience that led to the inspiration of the village occurred years later, while working at a hotel in the Central Florida area. Landwirth was contacted on behalf of a little girl suffering from leukemia whose final wish was to visit Disney World. While Landwirth and others struggled to work out the logistics to grant the girl her wish, she passed away. Landwirth vowed never to allow this to happen again leading to the idea of a village where families like hers could never be turned away.

Landwirth’s research brought to light several intriguing statistics. As he claims in his autobiography, *Gift of Hope*,

“I discovered the wish of nearly three out of four terminally ill children is to see Mickey Mouse...I found out that almost every foundation in America took six to eight weeks to process the many components, including hotels, transportation and tickets, necessary to arrange a trip for the families.” (Landwirth, 181)

While Landwirth continued to acquire monetary support from the community, he organized

partnerships with involved companies such as Disney and SeaWorld and with former employers (mostly hotels). The hotels guaranteed him a percentage of the rooms in their facility, giving him enough units to establish the organization. Landwirth even struck a partnership with Perkins Family Restaurants (their loyalty to the organization remains to this day), guaranteeing food for his families each day. All the while, he was still focused on creating a village specifically for the families.

In 1989, the magical village finally opened. In an interview, former wish child and current volunteer Lori Skloff claimed that some children don't want to go to the theme parks when they arrive because they are having too much fun at the village. In another interview, Neal McCord, Director of Facilities at Give Kids the World Village stated, "A father told me this place is magical", the father went on to explain, "...my son has six or seven respiratory seizures every day, to the point where he has to be resuscitated. At this village, he's not having them."

My introduction to Give Kids the World occurred in 2011. I was a member of the Social Justice Living and Learning Community at Florida State. We planned a service trip to the village for Spring. Although we spent most of our time doing menial jobs such as picking up litter, the service trip left an incredible mark on me. I really understood and appreciated the experience the village was trying to provide the families. The trip left such a mark, that when I began my coursework at the College of Motion Picture Arts, I was insistent on making a documentary about the organization.

In 2012, my documentary crew and I travelled south to Kissimmee, Florida. After weeks of preparation, we managed to conduct interviews with several important staff members including Pamela Landwirth, the President of Give Kids the World, as well as some wish children and their families. In addition, we were able to document almost every square foot of

the resort.

In order to create this magical environment, several characters, places and events were created for the families to enjoy.



Castle of Miracles



Old Elmer



Mayor Clayton



Mayor Clayton and Ms. Merry in front of Gingerbread House

(All images courtesy of Give Kids the World)

At the conclusion of the family’s weeklong experience, the child is given a “Mayor Clayton” plush doll to remember the trip and the village. However, when our documentary trip concluded, I was left thinking of possible improvements.

As a huge Disney fan, I found myself comparing the village to theme parks and resorts Disney offered. Realizing that Give Kids the World has a stable of characters only seen at the

resort, I wondered how the children could develop a connection with them in just seven days. In 2008, Time Magazine published an article describing the history of Mickey Mouse and his effect on the Disney company. After Mickey's third animated film (the first to be released to the public), *Steamboat Willie* (1928), the mouse became a huge hit. "The mouse was a national fad by the end of the year, and it wasn't long before the real genius of Disney kicked in: marketing." (Suddath, Time Magazine November 18, 2008).

Walt Disney's famous quote, "It all started with a mouse" is very telling. The rise of iconic character gave way to the rise of Disney resorts and theme parks all through its emergence as a cartoon. While Give Kids the World does a fantastic job of creating a magical environment for the children and giving them a memorable experience with the characters when they arrive, the experience could prove more impressive if the characters were familiar and lovable to the children before their arrival to the village.

For my project, I intend to conceptualize four short animations featuring the characters and locations at Give Kids the World Village. The animations will be conceptualized, drawn, storyboarded, and presented with voice-actors to complement the storyboard images. With these animations, I intend to provide the means for the children to develop a connection with the characters, as well as to explain the mythology behind the characters, places, and events they are about to take part in using the common characters around the resort as well as a few others inspired by the resort itself. In order to create this connection between child and character, I intend to create each character as a true character rather than a vehicle for laughs and gags. This concept was first used for the Oswald cartoons developed by Disney and later used for Mickey Mouse. Neal Gabler's biography on Walt Disney titled *Walt Disney: The Triumph of the American Imagination* states that Disney, "...wanted to forge Oswald into a distinctive

personality, “to make Oswald peculiarly and typically OSWALD” (Gabler 103). The animations will be created similar to the templates used in Disney shorts, specifically those featured in Disney’s TV series, *House of Mouse* (2001-2002).

My goal is, upon completion of the project, to present the final work to Give Kids the World with the hope that they will either animate the projects for their wish families to view prior to visiting the village, or develop their own animations based on the concepts I have created.

This project has been proposed and is being researched throughout the current semester of fall 2013 (the project’s first research term). The project will be completed in the spring 2014 semester (the final research term) and will be scheduled for its defense in April of 2014.

Works Cited

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