

Chapter 2

Stories Across Media

From There to Here: The Beginning of Interactive Stories

The early 1990s was a heady time for interactive digital stories. Just a few years earlier, in 1987, Amanda Goodenough had used the newly-released HyperCard to write the first interactive digital story, *Inigo Gets Out*.¹ Her motivation? To capture the traditional storytelling atmosphere her grandmother had created for her when she was a young child: a vital interactive environment in which her grandmother would say, “what do you think happens next?” and in which the lines were never the same. The stories her grandmother told became Amanda’s as she helped shape them with her own interpretations and brought them into her everyday reality. In Amanda’s *interactive story*, children make Inigo’s actions their own. “Children know intuitively where to click,” and how to make the story happen. It is no longer a “print” story, with words and pictures on a page, but a virtual story environment with which to interact and in which things can be made to happen.

Inigo was closely followed in 1988 by one of the first edutainment video games, *Mixed-Up Mother Goose*.² Sierra On-Line’s Roberta Williams, who had created the first graphic adventure game *Mystery House* in 1979, wanted to develop a game for her children that was more than entertainment, that also had an educational component. She chose to work with popular nursery rhymes and in *Mixed-Up Mother Goose* created an interactive story in which children travel to a land where the rhymes are real and have gotten themselves all mixed up. The children help each of the characters put their rhyme back in order by bringing back objects, people, or animals that

Online photos and graphics provide extra detail and are identified by urls the reader can refer to. This additional reference information will be particularly beneficial as an enhancement for the online version of this book. URLs are current at time of printing.

¹ *Inigo Gets Out* is the first interactive digital story created in 1987 by Amanda Goodenough using the HyperCard program. Photo of *Inigo Gets Out*: http://www.smackerel.net/black_white_03.html.

² *Mixed-up Mother Goose* was first released by Sierra On-Line in 1988. Designed as an adventure game for toddlers, it brought them into a fantasy world of nursery rhymes. Great gameplay and engaging graphics (for the time) made it a very popular story game. Cover of *Mixed-Up Mother Goose*: <http://www.mobygames.com/game/amiga/mixed-up-mother-goose>. Screen shot of *Mixed-Up Mother Goose*: <http://gamrreview.vgchartz.com/screens/16935/mixed-up-mother-goose/2/>.

belong to the rhyme but have been lost. Companies such as Voyageur, Broderbund, Simon and Schuster Interactive, Discis, and numerous smaller publishers, soon began publishing stories in CD-ROM format for children to engage with. Kids clicked their way through adventures with Peter Rabbit, Lil Critter, Brother and Sister Bear, and animated characters created just for the genre such as Slater and Charlie. They listened, sang, made things happen, played games, and even did so in the language of their choice—English, French, or Spanish.

Disney has been a part of this video game landscape since 1981. The Nintendo *Game and Watch* video game *Mickey Mouse* has Mickey, in typical arcade game action, juggling eggs. It wasn't until 1994 that the company gave one of its stories, *The Lion King*, an interactive story life in CD-ROM format as *Disney's Animated Storybook: The Lion King*. 1994 was also the year that brought Netscape Navigator to the Internet and made it user-friendly for the general public. Disney, never shy about being either the first or among the first to take advantage of new media opportunities to bring its characters and stories to the public, continued its move into interactive media and set up Disney Online. Today, sites such as *Pirates of the Caribbean* offer players an environment where they interact with their friends to create stories for themselves.

Disney has entrenched its stories in online media since the mid-1990s; in doing so it has continued to add to the transmedia mix that is a distinctive characteristic of the way it brings its story products to a diverse audience. Disney stories are like a Ferris wheel, the story is the hub from which media radiate as a spoke: different activities are the cab at the end of a spoke and engage parents, kids, and all manner of folks as they get on and off. Disney taps into humankind's innate interest in communicating stories as it uses media this way.

Stories and Communicating

Through historical time – and even among our aboriginal forefathers – all the races of man have been dramatizing these eternal quests and conquests of mind and heart; in arenas, around tribal fires, in temples and theaters. The modes of entertainment have changed through the centuries; the content of public shows, very little. (Walt Disney)

People's drive to share stories has been with us since time immemorial. In the days when our ancestors gathered around a fire to keep warm, the desire to bring stories to an audience through a media other than speech resulted in such dynamic scenes as those depicted in the wall paintings in the Chauvet Caves (France). In these caves there are over 416 picture stories—paintings of “bold lions, leaping horses, pensive owls and charging rhinoceroses” that are 32,000 years old, the oldest such paintings known and “a veritable Louvre of Paleolithic art” (*Time Magazine*).³

³ “What those first artists invented was a language of signs for which there will never be a Rosetta stone; perspective, a technique that was not rediscovered until the Athenian Golden Age; and a bestiary of such vitality and finesse that, by the flicker of torchlight the animals seem to surge from the walls, and move across them like figures in a magic lantern show (in that sense, the artists invented animation).” —Judith Thurman. Photo of *Chauvet Caves*: <http://atlantisonline.smfforfree2.com/index.php?topic=19325.0>. Quote from Thurman: http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2008/06/23/080623fa_fact_thurman.

Why do we make this effort to share stories? Because stories are an integral part of who we are as human beings. Psychologist Donald Polkinghorne says of narrative that it is “a primary form by which humans experience meaning.” He tells us that narrative is ubiquitous to humans and a fundamental component of how they shape their worldview (Polkinghorne). Stories are the way we link our daily activities into a whole and provide for their significance within the entity that is our life. Literary critic Gerald Prince tells us “[narrative] does not simply record events; it constitutes and interprets them as meaningful parts of meaningful wholes. . .” (Prince 129). Stories are important to us because they connect new knowledge that we come in contact with, with past experience; this gives it context and makes it more understandable and more memorable. Stories are not only a way we make sense of the world however. They are also the fundamental way in which we communicate with each other: the way we tell each other what we’ve done, who we are, and what we believe in.

We hear stories, we participate in stories, and then, we pass stories on. It is human nature to tell stories—they have been used as a way to share experience and pass on learning to others since time immemorial. As the Chauvet Caves show us, 32,000 years ago stories were shared through paintings on cave walls. These paintings were not just images of static figures. The artists endeavored to show action, movement, a sequence of events; they created images that showed their ideas clearly because they provided a *story* about their experience.

Over the many centuries our need to communicate through stories has encouraged the creative use of media available at any particular period in time to do so. Stories have been carved into stone, embellished on pottery, laid in mosaics; they have been told orally by bards, sung by choruses, and acted out by theatre groups; they have been printed on pages, transported over telephone lines, and sent by radio waves; they have been carried on celluloid film, captured by cathode ray tubes for television, and built with wood, bricks, and mortar for museums and entertainment parks. Today they are brought to us in virtual online worlds courtesy of computers and gaming systems. Stories are ubiquitous in the world and, more than ever imaginable, stories are common to us all. Thanks to global online environments, not only is the generic idea of story common to us all, but stories once specific and available only to a culture, are common to us all.

Disney Stories

Since the beginning of mankind, the fable-tellers have not only given us entertainment but a kind of wisdom, humor, and understanding that, like all true art, remains imperishable through the ages. (Walt Disney)

Disney stories cross all cultures and are present in all strata of society. They are without peer in being represented in every media available. How is it that *Disney* stories above others have endured for decades and woven their enchantment over each new generation?

When one of the creative directors at Disney/Pixar in Vancouver spoke to a group of students about his creative team's process he used as an example developing sketches of characters and scenes for the film *Ratatouille*. He spoke about the hows and whys of making decisions about the characters' personalities and the storyline, and provided insight into the philosophy that is part of the company's, not just the team's, creative process. The phrases he used—"believability through authenticity," "studying reality in order to caricature it," "getting to the heart of the matter,"—have been used consistently to describe Disney's approach to the development of its animated stories since the 1930s. Disney stories engage because of compelling and believable characters.

The stories endure because they are *intended* to endure, because the characters and stories are developed as signifiers that tap into archetypes we inherently understand, relate to, and connect with. The personalities are believable and their actions elicit empathy. Walt's goal was to engage and entertain the general public with his stories. That he did so successfully was a result of his "great sensitivity to people in the mass. He knew instinctively, how to reach Mr. and Mrs. America; he's a great entertainer." (Newsweek 1962). How did Walt acquire this sense of stories people wanted to hear? Where did this sensitivity come from?

Life Experience, Joy of Entertainment, Love of Drawing

Three things become apparent when we look at Walt's early life. It was filled with experiences that gave him a familiarity with people from all walks of life in innumerable situations. It was filled with merriment as Walt delighted in entertainment of all kinds. It was directed by Walt's love of drawing and cartoons.

By the time Walt was eighteen he had lived through more types of experiences than have many people in their entire lives. He had been part of a farming community, lived and worked in a medium-sized mid-western town, and worked in a large city by the time he was fifteen. Although born in Chicago, his parents moved to the community of Marceline when he was just four; there he enjoyed the freedom of life on the farm. His familiarity with the cycle of seasons on the farm and his earthy, often farm-animal related humor stem from his early experiences participating in daily farm life, herding pigs, leading horses, and helping with harvesting. With three older brothers to carry the burden of the work he had the freedom to watch the rabbits, foxes, and squirrels in the local woods and the many birds that nested in the trees. He could cool himself off at a nearby creek or forage the woods for wild nuts, grapes, persimmons, and chokeberries. When his two oldest brothers left to start life on their own, his father could no longer manage the farm and moved the family to Kansas City where he purchased a newspaper distribution route. Here, for six years until he was fourteen, Walt together with his brother Roy, delivered papers from 3:30 in the morning through all weather conditions. Walt's father did not pay him to deliver papers, although he did give him a small allowance—his room and board were his pay. To make pocket money, Walt worked at a pharmacy delivering prescriptions;

he got a hot noon meal by sweeping out the candy store across from his school. The distribution business was not a success and the family moved back to Chicago. Walt stayed in Kansas City for the summer to work for the Santa Fe Railroad as a news butcher hawking fruit, candy, and soda pop across half a dozen states.

When he got to Chicago, Walt began attending McKinley High School. Work was a constant, however, and he took a job as a handyman at his dad's jelly factory, even serving as watchman outfitted with 0.38 caliber revolver at his side for a night. He tried his hand as a guard and gateman for the elevated railway line, and worked at the post office, sorting mail, delivering it in a White truck, and picking it up in a horse-drawn mail wagon. The tide for the War in Europe had turned for the Allies and with Roy in the Navy and Ray in the Army, Walt didn't want to be considered "a slacker" and also wanted to serve. There were few opportunities for a sixteen year old, but when the American Ambulance Corps of the Red Cross began to look for volunteers, he changed his birth date to 1900 and signed up. He arrived at Le Havre in war-torn France in December 1918 and spent his 17th birthday celebrating in a local cafe in St. Cyr. When he returned to Chicago a year later, he was more mature and more confident about what he wanted to do. After his experiences in France he did not feel he could return to high school, and he had no calling to work in his father's jelly factory. At eighteen Walt took the train to Kansas City to find a job among his old contacts—he intended to be an artist.

For all the hardship and work in his life, from an early age Walt loved entertainment. He would play tricks on his parents, in particular his mother, who appreciated his jokes and added a sense of "gaiety" to their home. He organized events such as a circus parade with his sister and his friends. He enjoyed the warmth of friendly neighbors, the Pfeiffers, joining them for evenings of song, piano playing, and joke telling. He went to vaudeville shows and copied acts to perform at his school. He learned how to put a gag or a story across to entertain.

His most popular performance was "Fun in the Photograph Gallery." Walt portrayed an antic photographer, posing his fellow students, then dousing them with a jet of water from the camera. The audience was delighted when Walt produced the "photograph" – his own caricature of the student who had been squirted. (Bob Thomas).

He (with Walter Pfeiffer) entered amateur night at a local theatre as "Charlie Chaplin and the Count" and won fourth prize. He even performed at the neighborhood vaudeville house as the topmost boy in a balancing act.

Above all, Walt loved to draw and developed a facility for cartooning and caricature. While in school he was constantly drawing: in his textbooks, on the blackboard, on the neighborhood clubhouse walls. When he was nine and his sister Ruth was sick, he drew pictures and made his first animation—a flipbook—to entertain her. He drew a caricature a week for a local barber who had seen and admired his drawings. In exchange, he received free haircuts. When he graduated from the seventh grade, he received a seven-dollar prize from one of his teachers for a comic character he had drawn. He took children's art classes at the Kansas City Art Institute and later he took art lessons at the Chicago Art Academy. While at McKinley High School he joined the staff of the school magazine as a cartoonist and photographer. He went

to burlesque houses (when these still offered family entertainment) and copied gags, compiled a “gag file,” and tried the gags out on his father. While he was in France and working for the American Ambulance Corps he drew caricatures for his fellow soldiers, illustrated advertising posters for hot chocolate and baths, and decorated his canvas-topped truck with cartoons. He sent cartoons to *Life* and *Judge*, popular humor magazines of the time (none accepted!). He used his artistic skills at every opportunity and could turn them to any direction.

Walt made use of all that he saw and did in his work. His wealth of life experience and his abiding interest in entertainment serendipitously dovetailed with his love of drawing and cartooning and gave him an advantage over others in the animation field.

Nothing in a lifetime of picture making has been more exciting and personally satisfactory than delving into the wonders, the mysteries, the magnificent commonplaces of life around us and passing them on via the screen. (Walt Disney)

Becoming an Animator

By the time Walt arrived in Kansas City from Chicago in 1919 he was already accustomed to hard work, to taking chances, to looking to new ideas, whether to expand his repertoire of jokes and gags or to find new avenues for his drawings. Through a friend of his brother Roy, he learned Pesmen-Rubin Commercial Art Studio was looking for an apprentice. He got his first job at this two-man commercial art shop. Six weeks later, the holiday rush was over and so was his job. His next job was a quick dip—two months—into a partnership with Ub Iwerks (aka Ubbe Ert Iwwerks), a fellow-worker at Pesmen-Rubin. Moderately successful during its very brief existence, the partnership was nevertheless a wavering enterprise. Walt, keen on making it as a cartoonist, applied for a position that came up at the Kansas City Slide Company, a studio that made promotional slides shown in movie theatres.⁴ Here he was introduced to the technology of animated pictures and was soon “intoxicated with animation”—“The trick of making things move is what got me.” Even before he turned twenty, Walt’s goal was to have an animation studio that would turn out new films each week.

Our Story

Walt Disney was passionate about cartoons and animation; early on in his career his animated shorts were more about presenting gags than about telling stories. It was his nature, however, to take things first as he found them and then to find a way to make

⁴ Walt worked for the Kansas City Slide Company for two years from 1920 until 1922 learning the animation trade. Photo of Kansas City Slide Company: http://www.ncs-glc.com/GLC/ed_black/disney/disney1.html.

them better and in that way transform them into something completely different. Over the years, his affinity for creating personalities, his inclination to develop storylines, and his drive for innovation in use of technology and new media became distinctive features of the approach he took to creating stories that so engaged and entertained audiences. Our story is, in part, an exploration of the marriage between technology and story, for in his quest to make the best of animation, Walt pushed the one to attain the best in the other. The following chapters of this book describe Walt's approach and show the changes wrought through his exploration. Some history is provided to give the reader context for the discussion, but there are many books that offer historical details about Walt Disney, the films he made, and how he conducted his business, and that is not the intent of this book. Rather the intent is to present an overview of what changed in the way a story was presented as new media were explored and new technologies developed.

The first third of the book describes Walt's approach to developing his animations and provides a frame of reference for the next two sections. During the *Alice* and *Oswald* years Walt moved the content of animated shorts from a series of often unrelated gags, to a storyline consisting of gags that were contextual and based in personality. With the move from silent to sound in *Steamboat Willie* and subsequent talkies, Walt designed sound effects that helped establish characters' personalities, added complexity to the story environment, and also added to the shorts' comedy. Color, when it finally came to Disney animations in *Flowers and Trees*, added nuances to each character's persona, heightened the underlying emotions of the story, and intensified its impact on the audience. The 33rd *Silly Symphony*, *The Three Little Pigs* brought "true personality" to the characters of the three pigs and their nemesis the wolf, and "depth and feeling" to a story the audience could empathize with.

Walt believed animation as worthy of being a feature as any film of the time and in 1934 chose the fairy tale *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* to make into a full-length animated feature. The leap from a seven-minute short to an eighty-three minute feature required major technical problems be tackled and gagmen to "develop into men who will be capable of carrying a story through to completion" (Thomas 133). The multiplane camera added visual depth, a more realistic approach to drawing human figures made Snow White and her friends more believable, gags were created to be consistent with the different personalities, songs were woven contextually into the story, and the integrity of the storyline took precedence over any "piece of business," no matter how funny, lovingly rendered, or costly. Engaging the audience became a matter of analyzing each scene and presenting ideas with maturity and subtlety, not crudeness and overemphasis—a tactic used in many animated shorts. Our look at stories in film stops with *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. There was indeed exploration of the way stories were presented over the following years—animation put together with live action proved a successful combination, live action adventures and comedies became hits, early computer animation added to the realism of stories such as *Tron*—the medium, however, motion picture film, remained the same, and as our story is meant to take us across media we move on to look at how Walt transitioned the Disney stories into other media.

The middle chapters of the book show that Walt had an overarching vision for his characters and his business; his comprehensive approach forged a Master Narrative for his star Mickey and for “Walt Disney.” Walt made Mickey into a universally loved character not only through the weekly animated shorts but also through merchandising products, establishing *Mickey Mouse Clubs*, and performing vaudeville reviews. Such cross media appearances of Mickey and friends substantiated and added to the Disney Master Narrative. Walt’s interest in using all media to bring Mickey and his stories to a wide audience sent Mickey journeying into comics, books, radio, television, and eventually Disneyland. Taking Mickey’s stories across media gave the character different ways to express his personality and to reach out to and engage the audience. A live Mickey jumping through the screen to land on stage gave a three dimensional life to what had been a two-dimensional figure. A Mickey storybook read to a child in the comfort of the family living room made Mickey’s stories personal in a way Saturday afternoon features could not.

The final section presents how Disney stories moved into a digital world and continued the pattern of innovation in both technology and story development that Walt had set in his quest to develop personable characters and create stories in which every aspect is carefully designed to engage as it entertains. The first Disney games were entertainment products that used classic Disney characters in traditional arcade style games; similar to other such games, the action had little to do with stories. The first full-length Disney film that was made into an adventure game was *The Black Cauldron*. The interactive digital environment required that the story be adapted to accommodate interaction and new storylines were created to give players opportunities to be involved. The interaction was also designed specifically with children in mind. The graphics in the game, although crude, were more realistic than other games of the time. It wasn’t until almost ten years later in *Disney’s Animated Storybook: The Lion King* that Disney achieved stunning visual quality in an interactive digital story on par with that in the animated films. Newly developed software allowed game developers to use graphics from the award winning film and create an environment in which children could become a part of *The Lion King*’s story and interact with all their favorite characters like Simba, Pumbaa, and Timon. At the same time *The Lion King* animated storybook was being created, Disney established an online presence with *Disney.com* and then launched an ambitious entertainment site for children, *Disney’s Daily Blast*. For the first time, an online site brought stories, comics, arcade games, and educational games to children through a site that was designed specifically as a safe environment for them, was available in their home, and gave them a range of ways to play in one easy-to-access environment. The next digital technological innovation Disney tackled was Massive Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs). Taking what was perceived until then as an adult medium, Disney game producers developed *Toontown Online*, a safe and engaging interactive entertainment environment for children. Here children could choose their own avatar *Toons* to represent themselves as they entered different lands, engaged with classic cartoon characters, challenged themselves with different task, and had the opportunity to interact with other players online. With the development

of the MMORPG *Pirates of the Caribbean* Disney brought one of the last themed rides Walt had personally helped design for Disneyland into an online environment.

Our story ends with *Pirates of the Caribbean* as an example of the comprehensive reach across media that Disney stories attain and how they change in the process. Following Walt's original precepts about bringing stories to audiences through a range of communication media, *Pirates* became more than a ride, a movie, and a virtual world. It became a merchandising opportunity that both extended the Disney Master Narrative and crossed into other storytelling media including video games, books for young readers and (again a new media) Lego (both traditional blocks and online).



<http://www.springer.com/978-1-4614-2100-9>

Disney Stories

Getting to Digital

Lee, N.; Madej, K.

2012, XVI, 196 p., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-1-4614-2100-9