THE TOWN WHERE MICKEY MOUSE HAS LIVED

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
University of North Texas in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

Takuya Koyama, B.F.A.

Denton, Texas

December, 1997

*The Town Where Mickey Mouse Has Lived* is a documentary video program in which people talk about themselves and the life of a small town. The town is known as the boyhood home of Walt Disney, which he recalled as the most charming place in his life. The interviews explore the personal perspectives of the people and why they stay in Marceline despite the fact that Disneyland, full of Disney's memories of Marceline, attracts people while the town has been obsolescent for a long time.
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INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The Town Where Mickey Mouse Has Lived is a documentary video program which discovers the forgotten truth about a small town. Marceline, Missouri is the boyhood home of Walt Disney which he recalled as the most charming place in his life as he stated, "More things of importance happened to me in Marceline than have happened since or are likely to in the future." After having become a famous cartoonist, he copied its Main Street in his creation, Disneyland, so that everyone has to pass its common entry to enter the world's happiest place along with his happiest memories. However, the town is not as lively as Disney remembered it. The population decreased to half of what it was at the time when Disney was there. It is obvious that the town has been obsolescent for decades as the passenger railroad has been taken over by other transportation.

The Town Where Mickey Mouse Has Lived highlights the people of Marceline who are satisfied with their lives regardless of their circumstances. The interviewees vary in their ages, backgrounds and experiences, but have the common feelings of love towards their town. Their beliefs are remindful of the material world in which most people have been addicted through the century because the interviews with them lead to self-realization of why they are where they are. Their discussions are presented in the hopes that their beliefs will inspire the people in the same circumstances to more a meaningful life. The
Town Where Mickey Mouse Has Lived is intended for people of all ages who are not satisfied with their lives, especially those who live in small towns.

Background

Marceline, Missouri, is located in north-central Missouri, a hundred miles east of Kansas City. The town was founded in 1888 as a division point for the Santa Fe Railway, which was expanding from Kansas City to Chicago. Coal mining, agriculture and railroading were important during the early years. It was a boom town at the time young Disney lived there from 1906 to 1910. "Everything connecting with Marceline was a thrill to us, coming, as we did, from a city the size of Chicago." Disney recalled. "The cows, pigs, and chickens gave me a big thrill, and perhaps that's the reason we use so many barnyard animals in the Mickey Mouse and Silly Symphony pictures today -- who knows!" To him, Marceline was a place of enchantment. However, as railroading had been outdated as major transportation, replaced by airplanes and automobiles, in the mid-century, the town was also becoming less significant as well. Nowadays, three thousand people live in the town, only half of that ninety years ago.

There were still times that the whole town was excited. In 1956, Walt Disney and his brother Roy returned to the town for the dedication of a new Marceline swimming pool. Thousands crowded around the pool for the dedication ceremonies to catch a glimpse of Marceline's favorite son. He also donated Midget Autopia, a child's ride originally created for Disneyland, to the park. In 1960, Disney was again invited to the dedication ceremonies for a new elementary school which was christened "Walt Disney Elementary School." More than five hundred people, along with a marching band, greeted
him at the Santa Fe depot. Disney had sent an artist from his studios to draw cartoon characters to decorate the new school's entrance hall and gymnasium. He also donated playground equipment that he had designed. In 1968, after Disney's death, Marceline was selected as the location for the first-day issuance of a commemorative Walt Disney U.S. postage stamp. The town marked the event with an official "Disney Stamp Day" filled with ceremonies and celebrations. The entire Disney family, as well as other dignitaries such as Missouri Governor Warren Hearnes, Post Master General W. Marvin Watson, attended the event.

Walt Disney also offered an idea to the town to build a small amusement park which would have recreated a 1900's working farm. But the project ended with his death in 1966. Today, the relationship between Marceline and the Disney family and Disney Corporations is narrower than it used to be. The town has recently tried to purchase the empty depot to build a "Disney Museum." The plan has, however, been stuck in negotiations with the Santa Fe Railroad as well as Disney Corporations.

Methodology

The Town Where Mickey Mouse Has Lived is a traditional documentary video due to its overall purpose. Basically, the program is intended to "inform you, to draw your attention, to awaken your interest so that some social or political problem can be fully understood and perhaps ameliorated." However, shaping the program into a logical and emotional one would involve several approaches, and the best has to be chosen according to the nature of the program. An essay approach was selected for The Town Where Mickey Mouse Has Lived because of the subject material. It would be also the easiest to accomplish to cover the specific material in a relatively short work. The focus was
narrowed from a broad topic of the town to specific experiences of the interviewees relating to Disney. The discussions of the interviewees are, however, intended to represent most townspeople's opinions. Another aspect to consider for this approach is to determine easy to establish the framework. A key for The Town Where Mickey Mouse Has Lived was focused on the townspeople rather than an objective view of the town's history. By portraying the town through the people who have undergone the town's history, the program would presumably be more dramatic and persuasive. All of these should be determined by a considerable amount of research. Research usually includes print research, archive research, direct interviews, and location research, all of which were equally emphasized in this documentary. For the program, research was the most essential and occupied the largest part of the pre-production phase. Even though it was not necessary to structure the whole story during the pre-production stage, thorough research helped to define the limits.

In the preproduction stage, the assignments included planning the schedule, taking pre-interviews, researching the people and location. It was followed by the production stage that involved the shooting of pictures and recording of the interviews. Post-production dealt with assembling all the material into a completed form.
PREPRODUCTION

Establishing the project

Preproduction begins the period of time when the filmmaker turns his/her idea of making film into a reality. This is a very important period for being actually ready for the project, and therefore investing immense effort during this period will lead to successful completion of the project. It is necessary to formulate a concrete plan for the entire project so that anything that will occur later would be worked out without any difficulties. An approximate total of two months was spent on the preproduction, from researching the location to obtaining permissions.

Focusing on the subject

Looking back at the project during preproduction helps to clarify a general direction. Some changes may be needed at this stage if the subject is not clearly defined because once the filming starts, such changes become more difficult and can be expensive. The idea for this project was originally generated from a newspaper article that stated that while the town Walt Disney loved has been obsolescent, the townspeople still stay there because of their love for it. Visiting the town and interviewing the people during this stage reconfirmed this as well as it helped to gather information about the town. Most people feel the same about the town regardless of their circumstances. This led to a conclusion as to how important one's growing process is to determine his/her place at the
present time, even though people tend to neglect it and move to a "materially" better place. Researching books and newspaper articles also proved that Disney's creations were influenced by his memories in Marceline.

Once the objective was clarified, people were chosen for an interview based on their experiences involving both the town and Disney. In consideration of the purpose of the project, three participants were thought to be enough to represent the idea. They are the representatives who express their experiences relating to Disney, which are generally considered very important in the town's history.

Pre-interviews were held with these participants in order to explore them better and to familiarize their experiences. However, details were not discussed at the interviews in order to save a spontaneous conversation. Therefore, it took only ten to twenty minutes for each interview. After the pre-interviews, interview questions were designed to keep the participants from straying off in an unnecessary direction. The questions were broad and open-ended such as what happened or what is happening and how you feel/felt about it so that the participants could answer freely in their own words. Different questions were prepared for each participant since they have had different experiences. A total of approximately 20 questions were formulated for all the participants.

Determining Visual Images

The question the filmmaker must ask himself before the actual shoot is in whose point of view the project would be shot. In other words, he/she must visualize images of the project along with the style he/she has chosen. This was an ultimate decision for this project. When the medium was considered, shooting in film was determined to be the best
to obtain a better visual quality than shooting in video. It would be easier for film to create various effects such as slow or fast motion. However, with the limited budget, it would not be wise to shoot the entire scene in film because the project would definitely include interviews which are normally lengthy, but wasteful. To solve the problem, it was decided not to film the interview scenes. It is partly because the presence of the interviewees would be less important in that they represent the whole community, and partly because the project would be able to project Walt Disney's memories more by mostly showing the scenes of the town. Photo archives were needed to suggest Disney's presence visually. It was verified in advance that the interviewees could provide the relevant pictures for the possible use of the project. Special permission was not required for other scenes such as the inside of the elementary school and the pool. According to the department of publicity in Disneyland, permission for shooting in Disneyland was supposed to be unnecessary unless professional equipment such as thirty-five millimeter film or a tripod is used, but it was realized at the location that sixteen millimeter film would also not be permitted. Furthermore, it turned out to be nearly impossible for students to film in Disneyland.

Reviewing the locations also helps to visualize the project. It is not only to confirm the circumstances such as parking spaces or security, but also to refamiliarize the subject matter. Because of the locations that were not possible to visit so frequently, it was done just before the actual shoot by spending a day reviewing the locations. It was extremely helpful when it came to visualize the story at the interviews. Copyrights of the pictures of Disney characters were a primary concern, but it was found out to be unnecessary because those pictures were either donated to the city or drawn by other people.
Estimating Budget

The budget for this project was crucial because personal funding was very limited. Even though school equipment and facilities were provided to compensate some of the expenses, shooting in film was a major factor in determining the scale of the project. Travel and its accompanying fees would also raise the total cost. The first estimated budget was approximately $2,500, excluding the final print. The film stocks and their processing and developing fee would cost about $1,200. Travel to Marceline and to Disneyland would be roughly $800. The cost of postproduction would be about $300. The rest would be spent on contingencies. Normally, it costs more for a twenty-minute documentary film, but by minimizing the crew members and by planning an efficient schedule, it made it possible to produce this project with a relatively small amount of money.

The money spent during the pre-production period may reflect the rest of the phases as unorganized planning could endanger the completion of the project, so the importance of preproduction was well-emphasized in this project as well.

Checking Out Equipment

Equipment selection should be associated with the style the director has in mind. It is necessary for him/her to understand how to operate the equipment before going out to shoot. Especially, it is always good to inspect locations prior to the actual shoot to organize a list of the equipment you may need. For this project, the equipment was kept to a minimum due to a distant location where it would be difficult to bring too many devices. An Arriflex S camera was chosen because it had the variable shutter speed control device. Bringing extra batteries, cables and film stocks would compensate for
potential problems. The use of special filters was anticipated, but the school did not possess them at the time. It might have been a poor decision not to rent them at a special store since the bright sunlight without them sometimes limited the shooting time. Slower film stocks might have been another option. All the equipment was carefully tested to detect any problems before moving to the location.

Planning the shooting schedule

Drawing up a schedule is very important and should be carefully planned in order to organize the project. Inefficient planning would result in exceeding the budget, spending extra time, or even failing in what the director wants. With the limited budget, this project was forced to undergo a relatively tighter plan. One week was thought to be enough for this project, including the time for location research. The weather was always a threat since there was not much extra time to be spent on the location. The time was set up with the individuals chosen for interviews. Forty minutes for each participant was reserved, including the time for setting up the equipment. A sound person was the only crew member selected to go to the location, partly because of the budget, and partly because of mobility at the location.
PRODUCTION

Conducting Interviews

The production phase started with interview sessions. Each participant was separately asked some questions through the first two days. The interviews were conducted at the participants' homes so that they would be the most comfortable. There were only three persons present at the interview: the director, the soundperson, and the interviewee. The DAT sound recording machine and a shotgun microphone were used at the location. No filming or lighting was involved. Several attempts were made to make the interview as natural as possible before the actual interview. First, introducing ourselves and the purpose of this project was to let them know the project would be shown for an educational purpose, not a commercial use, in order to avoid making the interviewee nervous. Second, having a little chat would create a softer mood for the interviewee to speak while getting to know him/her better and building confidence between the director and the interviewee. Third, not referring to the subject at all was to reserve their feelings for the actual interview.

During the recorded interview, it was intended to make it more like a chat than a formal conversation so that the interviewees would speak in their own words. Basically, the interviewee's answers were not interfered with until he/she seemed content with them. Questions were not necessarily asked in order to maintain the flow of the talk. Follow up questions were sometimes asked when they assisted further discussion. The interview
lasted until the subjects provided considerate responses to all the questions necessary for the final piece, but as a result, it took about thirty to forty minutes each as planned.

Shooting Visual Images

After all the interviews were completed, the next step was to shoot visual images to accompany them. The images do not necessarily match with what the interviewees talked about, but should be associated with it. However, at this point, the editing process was not considered. It was because the town was so small that it would be possible to shoot everything related to Disney to cover the interview materials. It began with the photo archives that represented Disney and the town of the past. Later, they became an indicator of what to shoot in town. Specific images were provoked by particular portions of the interviews and photographs. General scenes were shot, weighing more on artistic value than on the storytelling quality. Many cut-away shots were shot in case no images would match the voice in the editing process. Each scene was shot relatively longer than necessary so that editing would be much easier. Fast and slow motion were frequently attempted by changing the shutter speed to create visual effects. Tracking shots were accomplished by riding on the back of a car. In some occasions, the scenes were shot as a point of view of interviewees who were not present there. No staged actions except people waiving were involved during filming. People volunteered to be filmed and were unpaid. Written permission was not necessary at any locations, but most of time it was consented in advance with the parties concerned. While shooting, no sound was recorded. Lighting was kept to a minimum in order to create a natural atmosphere. Special attention was given to the exposure of light that sometimes exceeded what the camera would tolerate. In that case, waiting for clouds to cover the
sun would be the best to do if no special filters were at hand. A total of five 400 feet rolls of film stocks, four black-and-white and one color negative, were used, which is about sixty minutes.

Confronting Problems

Even though a schedule was made and all the things needed were prepared, sometimes unpredictable events would happen. In the production phase, it may jeopardize the completion of the piece. Fortunately, nothing very serious happened during this project. However, there were some lessons to be learned. First of all, the climate of the location should be considered if it is distant from the director's base and never visited before the shoot. It was expected, but not taken very seriously that the weather in Missouri was much colder than that of Texas. This was solved when one of the interviewees offered sweaters. Second, a half day was wasted when the film roll was jammed in the camera but the shoot was continued without its notice. That caused the shooting schedule to be extended for another day. Third, the choice of film stocks may not have been ideal for the outdoor shoot. In this project, an ASA 200 was selected for black-and-white stocks, but sometimes the sunlight was too bright for the camera to handle correct exposures. When it occurred, a delay of the schedule was inevitable in order to wait for darker conditions. Occasionally, zooming was jerky as it was difficult to operate. Practice with shooting the same action several times smoothed it out and yielded a better shot. The main problem that occurred during the production was the realization that shooting in Disneyland was not allowed after the arrival on the location, even though it was thought to be already cleared on the phone. Therefore, the scenes of Disneyland had to be given up for the final version. Some photographs were taken just in case those
would replace the scenes. Ambient sound was recorded for possible use in the work.
POSTPRODUCTION

Keeping Log

The postproduction stage often begins with reviewing the material shot during the production phase while recording every take on the paper in order to indicate where material can be found when it is required for editing. After all the film rolls exposed were processed, they were transferred to a regular VHS videotape to make the editing process easier and cheaper. This decision later affected the capability of duplicating the shots. The video of about 60 minutes was then reviewed and each shot was logged. This is a good time to reevaluate what has been done and where the piece would be going. At this point, it seemed all the shots needed were filmed and most of the images were fairly useful. Some of the shots were stained by the processing lab. The sound was also transferred to VHS tapes, then the interviews were written down as well. The interviews did not turn out to be what was desired. The audio level seemed a little lower than expected, thus it was necessary to boost the volume while in the rough cut process.

Editing Interviews

After logging all the materials, the next step was to organize the interviews. Each interview was reviewed and rearranged in the most logical sense so that the story would become the most meaningful according to the project's objective. A general construction could be accomplished on paper, but the best way to keep the flow of the conversation was to listen to the interviews over and over. The first assembly for all of the interviews
was almost 23 minutes long after having eliminated all the answers that were irrelevant to
the subject or that were repetitious. Several different possibilities were attempted until the
interviews started to form the storyline. After making additional edits, the length was
reduced to 15 minutes, almost 5 minutes for each interview. Basically, it was constructed
into three sections for the three interviewees. Each interviewee tells about his/her feelings
about the town from different perspectives. The first section contained Disney's visit in
1956. The second consisted of Midget Autopia and the Marceline Project. The final
section included Stamp Day and the Disney Museum. These sections were ordered
chronologically. The conclusions of the
interviewees were arranged together and placed at the end. Visual images were not a
consideration at this point.

Assembling Shots

Along with the story line, visual images were matched to support the story. This
stage is particularly important to shape the story and not necessarily done with great
precision. Since most of the scenes were shot without any particular images for the
interviews, each scene that represented or implied the monologue the most clearly was
inserted with no attempt to shorten it. At the same time, the interviews were edited to
correspond to the visuals. Attention was paid to flow and clarity of the story. No special
effects such as dissolves or fades in/out were used at this time. A total length was almost
30 minutes, which would definitely be shortened in the rough cut process.

Making the Rough Cut

After a careful review of the assembly for its content, the rough cut was done to
organize the structure. At this stage, particular attention was given to pacing, rhythm of
the story and the structure itself. The structure was based upon the emotional
development of each interviewee as well as the town's history. The clarity of the story
was given priority rather than use of good stories or beautiful pictures. The interviews
were put in more proper order and the images that did not match the monologue were
replaced with better ones. Sound effects were added to create a richer audio. This whole
process was repeated until a satisfying shape would be constructed. The first rough cut of
this project was about 20 minutes, excluding the credits and the title. Additional cuts
were done for a total of 4 weeks to make the piece a satisfactory one, which ran
approximately 15 minutes. Finally, a title was put in the beginning, and this project would
be ready to proceed to a fine cut.

Making the Fine Cut

During the fine cut, some changes were made for this project. Original pictures
were utilized for a better quality, but the sound was mostly copied from the rough cut.
Transition effects were created by using the A/B roll machine. Music was added and all
the sound effects were finalized. Reducing the noise of the background was attempted by
recording the sound at a minimum level, which, as a result, sacrificed the overall sound
quality. Two days were spent for the fine cut to complete the twelve-minute final piece.
CONCLUSIONS

Reviewing the Project

The project was made with an intention of rediscovering people’s lives by examining them again. It was hoped that the viewers would realize the importance of where they came from since they tend to forget it, or try to, while being preoccupied with material things. The people in Marceline proved that they could be happy with their lives without any fame because they always know what the most important thing to do for themselves is and they practice it in every day life. They proved that anyone can find happiness inside him/herself if one realizes his/her self. The question arises as to whether or not this project has expressed it clearly for the viewers. It seems that the story focuses more on the relationship between Walt Disney and Marceline than on the people. It is partly because the impact of the name Disney was so strong that it obscured the people’s existence since they do not appear on screen until the end. It may have been a poor decision to shoot in film since using video would have made it possible to videotape all the interviews. It is still understandable, however, to grasp their happiness when it comes to the ending scene where the townspeople are smiling happily in color. Considering the objective of this project, it came out to be all right after all. A few regrets should be remembered through the production regardless of how well the plan was made at first. During the production stage, the interviews were not conducted well enough to build a better story at the postproduction phase. The sound
was also recorded lower than it should be, which forced the audio level to be boosted to create a disturbing background noise. The shooting was parsimonious due to the limited budget, and that sometimes forced the use of scenes somewhat irrelevant to the monologue. The story was often changed because of the shots that are much fewer than expected, and therefore, the project turned out to be only 12 minutes, half of what it was planned to be. However, the biggest turnover during the production was that shooting in Disneyland was not permitted and no pictures of it were taken. It was not only a waste of time and money, but also a restraint through the rest of the production because the comparison of Disneyland and Marceline was intended to be visualized rather than told by the interviewees. With the recorded interviews in the production stage, this was very difficult to achieve. Technically, it was a learning experience in spite of pre-existent knowledge and a careful test. Some slow/quick motion effects looked unusable partly because of the camera that did not tell the exact shutter speed. Some shots were under/overexposed due to a miscalculation of the light meter. Sometimes, zooming was jerky due to the lack of practice. But fortunately, most of them did not have much of an effect on the final piece.

Overall, the completed work did not come out exactly as expected, but it was satisfying in terms of the experience that had been built through the project. The experience has also broaden a new perspective on other people's lives as well as on my own. It has been realized that the process of making a documentary was more important than the result obtained.
Endnotes


2. *City of Marceline*, 145.

BUDGET
"THE Town Where Mickey Mouse Has Lived"

Production Expenses

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Processing and Video Transfer
$950

Video Stock

| VHS            | 10 @ 5 | $50 |

Travel

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Total $2695
ADULT RELEASE

Program Title:  Marceline (working title)
Date:  10 - 17 - 96
Program Owner/Producer:  Tak Kayama

I have participated as indicated on the above film program (the "Program"). In consideration of my recorded appearance on the Program, and without any further consideration or compensation from you, I hereby grant permission to utilize my appearance and performance in connection with the Program in any and all manner and media throughout the world in perpetuity. Furthermore, I hereby transfer to you all creative, copyright, and proprietary rights, including performance and publicity rights, that I have engaged in or created during the Program.

I agree that my participation in the Program may be edited freely in your sole discretion. I consent to use of my performance, likeness, voice and biographical material about me in connection with Program publicity and related institutional promotional purposes. I expressly release you from and against any and all claims which I have or may have for invasion of privacy or publicity, defamation, personal injury, or any other cause of action arising out of production, distribution, broadcast or exhibition of the Program.

Signature:  
Name:  [Signature]
Address:  [Address]
Date:  Oct 29, 96
ADULT RELEASE

Program Title: Marceline (working title)
Date: 10-19-94
Program Owner/Producer: Tak Kagami

I have participated as indicated on the above film program (the "Program"). In consideration of my recorded appearance on the Program, and without any further consideration or compensation from you, I hereby grant permission to utilize my appearance and performance in connection with the Program in any and all manner and media throughout the world in perpetuity. Furthermore, I hereby transfer to you all creative, copyright, and proprietary rights, including performance and publicity rights, that I have engaged in or created during the Program.

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Signature
Name: [Signature]
Address: [Address]
Date: 11-29-94
ADULT RELEASE

Program Title: Moreline (working title)
Date: 10 - 19 - 96
Program Owner/Producer: Tak Kayama

I have participated as indicated on the above film program (the "Program"). In consideration of my recorded appearance on the Program, and without any further consideration or compensation from you, I hereby grant permission to utilize my appearance and performance in connection with the Program in any and all manner and media throughout the world in perpetuity. Furthermore, I hereby transfer to you all creative, copyright, and proprietary rights, including performance and publicity rights, that I have engaged in or created during the Program.

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Signature: KayeMahon
Name: KayeMahon
Address: 10010 Broadway Moreline Mo 08663
Date: Oct 28 96
PROPERTY RELEASE

Film Title: Marceline (Working title)
Producer: Tak Koyama
Date: 10-19-96

Permission is hereby granted to Tak Koyama (hereinafter referred as "Producer"), to use the property and adjacent area, located at Magnolia Antiques, for the purpose of photographing and recording scenes (interior and/or exterior) for the Producer's project, with the right to exhibit and license others to exhibit all or any part of said scenes in film throughout the world.

The above permission is granted for a period of 2 months from Sept to Oct 96.

Signature:
Print Name: Kaye Malin
Address: 100 W. Broadway, Marceline, Mo 64758
SOURCES


