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March 6th, 2018
4th period

I-Search Media Search Paper

Part 1

I grinned widely, clenching my toes as I neared the top of the hill on Big Thunder Mountain. The tracks were making a loud clicking noise as the train moved upwards. I glanced at my friend next to me, who looked absolutely terrified. I turned back to the tunnel ahead of me, seeing the bright blue sky that was littered with small clouds. Excitement was coursing through my body. I threw my hands up as the clicking noise slowly faded out and the train started to descend into the spiral down the rocky mountain...

I chose Disneyland as my I-Search topic because of my general interest in the park and the fact that I was visiting Disneyland during the time of our research. It was very fortunate that I was heading to Disneyland during Mid-Winter break so I could do some research notes there, in person! When I started my research, I realized just how little I really did know about Disneyland. I always thought that since I had been to the park so many times, I would know more than enough about it. But that was not the case. I chose four main topics to research; Money Management, Monitoring Safety, History of Disneyland and Behind-The-Scenes Details and future expansion of the park.

The third section of my research was the general history of Disneyland. There was a lot of information I was already aware of, such as how Disneyland is based in Anaheim, California, and was founded and created by Walt Disney. Though, there were also many other things I

learned that I didn't already know. Such as how Walt Disney spent a weekend in 1953 brainstorming the ideas for Disneyland while his daughters played in a park. Walt knew of the parks and fairs of the time, but they were mostly for children. He wanted a park that was fun for the whole family; he wanted an amusement park. So he set out to create one based on his and the Disney company's creations (Cohen). Walt had always dreamed of big things, and he certainly achieved them. Even after he passed in 1966, Disneyland continued to grow and expand, along with the number of guests visiting the park, "By the turn of the 21st century, more than 14 million people have visited annually" (Encyclopædia Britannica). And the Walt Disney company even expanded across the globe. Ten other Disney parks have opened worldwide such as Walt Disney World in Florida, Disneyland Paris and more (Adams).

A very important thing to Disneyland is safety. Especially since it is such a large park, they need a way to monitor everyone's safety all at once. On the opening day of Disneyland, there were expected to be 22,000 guests to attend. Of course, there can always be more than what's expected because the maximum capacity is around 80,000 people (Thomas). How does Disneyland monitor such a large number of people every day? I'll tell you. In rides such as Pirates of the Caribbean and the Matterhorn, cameras are set up around the attraction to keep guests from going places where they are not supposed to. Originally cast members had been set up in the Pirates of the Caribbean ride to keep guests from joining the pirates out of their boat, but they found that cameras were more effective since cast members occasionally fell asleep. David Koenig states, "Safety always comes first" (Koenig 169), and he is incredibly right. In fact, cast members save people from injuries every day. Just because Disneyland seems like a magical place where you can forget all your problems, doesn't mean there aren't problems. But since Disneyland loves to keep its image as clean and friendly as possible, safety is at the top of their list of priorities.

Money Management. Now, of course, Disneyland has to manage its money somehow. It is quite the industry, and to keep it up and running it needs some spectacular management and strategies. Back in the 1950s, Disneyland cost \$17 million dollars to build. That's quite a lot of money, even for today in 2018. So obviously maintenance would cost money as well, and how would they keep funding it? In park concessions. In the 1950s, an adult ticket for the park was \$1 dollar and 50 cents for a child, and attractions cost extra money as well! (25-35 cents for adults, 10-25 cents for children) And in addition to those costs, concessions sold took even more out of your bank account. Bob Thomas explained, "if you're a glutton and try everything; it could cost you \$8.70 for yourself and \$5.15 for each tot." If you were to check the park today, you would see that the prices for items may have increased to fit today's economy, but they are still the same amount as they were in the 1950s. This was, of course, amazing management to keep the park's money rolling in and stop them from going bankrupt or from collapsing. And as you can tell, it's worked (Thomas).

And my final subtopic was the smaller details about Disneyland or expansion. Considering how large the park is, there was bound to be an abundance of details that the normal eye wouldn't pick up as they walked around the park. Disneyland is such a complex place, and many people have no idea what happens behind the scenes. Because of how large the company is, they like to keep expanding. As Walt did say, "Disneyland will never be completed." In the future, there will always be new experiences that cast members face as new attractions appear. The Matterhorn and Monorail were added in 1959, mere four years after opening, and of course, new challenges arose among the cast members; keeping guests and their belongings safe and maintaining the attractions (Cohen). They do in fact have to keep up with a very strict reputation to keep up. Disneyland was the 1st modern theme park in the entire

world after all, and keeping the clean and pristine image of the sunny, California coast theme park is rather difficult. But so far, it's been going very well. Disneyland even has a star on the Hollywood walk of fame for its contribution to the entertainment industry (Adams). And they're still going strong.

Part 2

Disneyland has been apart of my life for as long as I can remember. The sparkling castle and glittery lights have always been my happy place, and trying to decide on just one aspect of the company for my project was quite the challenge. You see, Disneyland is so complex and filled with facts and knowledge that I would love to be apart of, but there are so many things to learn about that I had to narrow down my research to one thing. It was hard, I will admit. Leaving behind the other things I was interested in about the company and park was definitely not something I wanted to do, but in the end I realized just how significant my research question was to the park today. My question, "How has Disneyland stayed operational throughout the years?", is a vital point in the park's history and I'm glad I chose that as my question because of how important that question really is to the park. It's the question of how the park has stayed open this whole time. And who wouldn't want to know that?

In my opinion, Disneyland has stayed operational based on two things; money management and ride operations. Those truly are the things that keep it running. The way they sell their merchandise and tickets keep the money rolling in, and the rides keep the people coming to the park. Though, there are some other people who disagree with that statement. They believe that, despite the average 14 million annual visitors the park welcomes (Encyclopædia Britannica), Disneyland is stealing money from guests. I've heard this from many

different sources, including my own family and friends. In a documentary I watched, it explained the finances of Disneyland and how expensive it really is for a family of four to travel there for a week. It can cost up into the thousands for the average family to travel to Disneyland (Koenig) and that is preposterous. Of course, I don't exactly agree with those who say Disneyland is a waste of time and money (Gumbel), but sadly enough, I might have to agree with them on some points.

I visited Disneyland in Anaheim, California for my On-Site Observation and as I walked around, I realized just how different the park was compared to how it was described in my reading. Many things had changed from the first "draft" of the park, of course, but I hadn't realized just how different the park really was. I had always seen the park in a glorious light, but after doing so much research on the park, I found that Disneyland had lost many of the things my reading described. For example, the close-knit family vibe that the park gave off was no longer present. It was more of a company than a family. So many different things came into play, of course, but that didn't stop the wave of guilt I felt as I walked through the park, noticing just how forced the friendly vibe was. In the book, *Mouse Tales: A Behind-the-ears-look at Disneyland*, author David Koenig explains how the park used to be like a family between cast members. Except, when Walt Disney passed away, the park became a less friendly place that was more business than family. I had never noticed before, but now I knew what I was looking for. The smiles cast member's wore were a little too forced, and it seemed as if they focused more on the job than the guests.

Merchandise sold inside the park is rather expensive, I do admit. Many people save up their money for vacation, only to blow it on churros and Mickey ears. But, the way Disney executives market the park really draws people in and keeps the money rolling so that updates on the park stay up to code and beautiful. With the number of funds they receive every year,

around \$13,000 billion US dollars combined from all 6 parks owned by the Disney company (Encyclopædia Britannica), they have the budget to keep polishing the park, adding new attractions and doing very thorough safety checks and precautions. Without the expenses, Disneyland would not be as safe as it is today.

And on the topic of safety, my second opinion is that ride operations keep the park up and running. Because of how advanced, safe and immersive, guests keep returning. They want to take another spin on the Teacups or bounce around on Indiana Jones' Adventure again. It leaves them wanting more. Without the rides, Disneyland would just be 85 acres (Horn) of gray concrete and nicely decorated buildings. The rides make Disneyland, and everyone is always very disappointed when one is not running or has a problem. If one ride has a problem, they close it down completely until it is fixed. Disney doesn't mess around when it comes to safety.

I do think my topic would be interesting to an avid Disney fan who loves to visit the park. Knowing more about its history and the brains behind the large operation that is Disneyland is very interesting. It is very fun to walk around the park, knowing the secrets behind why the buildings look like they do and why cast members are dressed in the way that they are. It feels as if you're in on a big secret. And the secret is the magic behind Disneyland. Not to mention, knowing more about Disneyland is good for vacationers who are expecting to go. Everyone likes to know what they should expect when visiting a place, and having at least some sort of clue on how the park is run and the expenses of merchandise and dining is very valuable in planning your vacation to the Happiest Place on Earth.

I've always been a big fan of Disneyland, that's no lie. I'm always looking forward to my next trip there. In fact, my room is plastered with Disneyland memorabilia and maps of both parks. I always felt as if I knew everything there was to do with Disneyland, but it turns out I didn't. And some of the things I learned in my research I wasn't all too happy with it. But I had to

remind myself that it is, in fact, a company. It isn't perfect, and it isn't all smiles and happiness. Disney works so very hard to keep their reputation sparkling in the news. "And the Walt Disney company has tirelessly worked to uphold the imagine since 1955. Squeaky clean, all American, fun for the whole family" (Koenig 16). And knowing the darkest parts of the park impacted me in a way I didn't expect. I expected to develop a seething hatred for the park, but I didn't. "And the shortcomings and selfishness that go along with being human don't disappear just because you visit or even get a job at what may as well be The Happiest Place on Earth" (Koenig 222). People are people, and they are going to act rashly, and sometimes their emotions get the best of them, and they stab another person in a theme park (Koenig), you never know. I understood the company's actions and why they took them to keep the park up and running. No company is perfect; no human is either.

Unfortunately, there aren't many other opportunities for me to learn more about Disneyland other than becoming president of the company or working in the park. Disney keeps things pretty well hidden from the average seeing eye. You would have to do some major digging to find the hidden treasures of the park. I've only scratched the surface when it comes to the park. There are so many other things I don't know, and one day I want to know them. I know that the Evil Queen cackles when you rub the golden apple on the Snow White ride, and I know that the yeti in the Matterhorn is named Harold, but there are so many other things to learn that I *will* learn as I continue my research on my own. Speaking with an ex-cast member would definitely do the trick, and of course, there are always other books to read. But I know what I'd prefer. I would prefer to be in the park and experience my research first hand. And as long as I can, I will. I did really enjoy this research project, despite the protests of my classmates. I love Disneyland, and learning more about it was so much fun. Not to mention, the fact that I was able to go to Disneyland for this project was such an amazing experience. Especially after gaining

some new found knowledge on the topic. Though, there are many things I still have questions about Disneyland. For example, how often do they do *deep* cleans of the park, or how they conduct so many people to keep the park up and running, and how difficult it is to manage so many rides all at once. But despite the research I've done, the magic isn't gone. I still feel that wave of excitement at the top of the ride before you drop, and I still feel my face muscles get sore from grinning as I hear my friend scream because they've never rode Big Thunder Mountain before. The magic never wears off. In fact, it grows stronger the more you know. Because with more knowledge, comes more understanding of just how amazing the park really is.