



# Visiting in 1971 (and Today) — WITH KIDS

BY DANI MORITZ

**A**t almost 9 years old during her inaugural visit to Walt Disney World, my mother's first memory of her now-favorite place was sheer confusion. *Where in the world is the park*, she thought as her dad (my papa) navigated the overwhelming parking lot she now knows as the Transportation & Ticket Center. She boarded a vessel familiar from her trips to Disneyland — a monorail — and the magic came finally into view. First, she was captivated by the masterful topiaries that once adorned the monorail track, but then her eyes were drawn to the most magnificent sight she had ever seen: Cinderella Castle.





Contributor Dani says her mom remembers seeing the topiaries from aboard the monorail as Magic Kingdom came into view.

**PHOTO RESTORATION BY BILL COTTER**

She'll forever cherish that jaw-dropping moment when she stood before the iconic castle, perhaps more majestic than the one she had encountered at Disneyland, and the irresistible urge that welled up inside her, compelling her to dash toward it. Before she could, though, she recalls my grandmother reining her in, along with her older sister Lynnette, her eldest brother Bruce, and her grandpa, Grandpa Fischer, for an obligatory picture at the park's entrance. After obliging her mother, my mom remembers clutching her father's and grandfather's hands and coming face-to-face with a sign that unveiled the profound significance of the place she would come to love for decades.

"Here you leave today and enter the world of yesterday, tomorrow and fantasy."

And with that, she took a deep breath and literally skipped alongside her sister and grandfather straight to the castle, the one now affectionately known to our entire family as "Grammy's Castle."

### A WHOLE NEW WORLD

My mother had visited Disneyland multiple times before, but she didn't know what to expect traveling to the newly opened Disney World in the winter of 1971 – though she and her siblings were grateful the usual 27-hour car ride would be truncated to a slightly more manageable 16-hour drive.



Dani's Uncle Bruce at Walt Disney World in 1973.

**PHOTO COURTESY OF DANI MORITZ**

*PREVIOUS:* Cinderella Castle circa 1971. **PHOTO RESTORATION BY BILL COTTER**



Dumbo the Flying Elephant was the first attraction that contributor Dani's aunt remembers the family riding in 1971. **PHOTO RESTORATION BY BILL COTTER**

After that first visit, though, my mom recalls the primary difference being the enormity of everything at Disney World compared to its sister location on the West Coast.

"The castle was bigger; Main Street seemed so much bigger and brighter," she says. "Everything just seemed more."

### A DIFFERENT TIME

Walt Disney World in its inaugural year was a markedly different experience compared to what it is today. Not only were there far fewer rides when my mom visited during Walt Disney World's opening year, but everything felt different – including the way guests dressed. While today's guests are often adorned with comfortable, breathable athletic attire, my mom recalls visiting Walt Disney World in the '70s dressed in her Sunday best. During their first visit, my mom and aunt sported matching pink dresses and white Mary Jane shoes, and her dad was impeccably dressed in a dashing blue suit.

My mom can't help but chuckle as she remembers that the weather that year turned out to be chillier than expected, prompting her parents to purchase souvenir sweatshirts. However, unwilling

to compromise his distinguished appearance, my papa chose to wear his sweatshirt underneath his suit jacket. Talk about a look.

She also fondly remembers Disney's earlier ticketing system, in which families got coupon books filled with A, B, C, D, and E Tickets, each corresponding to different rides. One of her favorites, Haunted Mansion, was an E-Ticket attraction, while the C Ticket would grant you passage to Dumbo the Flying Elephant, which my aunt recalls being the first Disney World attraction the family rode.

Both my mom and aunt hold a cherished memory in common: During every visit to Disney World and Disneyland, my papa would seek out a family to give their unused coupons to, taking great pride in enhancing another family's magical experience.

### DISNEY OVER THE DECADES

Over the decades, Disney World has changed. Attractions have come and gone. Imagineers developed entirely new theme parks. Crowds increased. Shows became more and more magnificent. Through it all, one thing remained the same: that magical feeling my mother felt





The extended Moritz family poses in front of the special 25th anniversary Cinderella Castle. PHOTO COURTESY OF DANI MORITZ

leaving behind her everyday world for a place filled with magic, hope, laughter, and make-believe.

In 1996, my mom brought her own children to Walt Disney World for the first time. She was pregnant with my baby sister, Jena, during this trip. I was 4, and we were accompanied by my 2-year-old sister Jessica, my dad, and my dad's parents, my beloved grandpa and grandma.

Much like my mom once did with her father and grandfather, my sister and I held hands with our dad and grandpa walking in and squealed at the site of Cinderella Castle. My dad, who previously didn't understand my mother's fascination with Disney World, transformed in that instant.

"I could see the look on his face," my mom says. The man who once was all about the thrill rides took me and my sisters straight to Fantasyland, smiling from ear to ear. "From that point on," she says, smiling, "he was a Disney dad."

Soon, our family began creating our own Disney memories. My mom fondly recalls her grandfather playfully racing her back up the queue of Space Mountain after their first ride, gleefully shouting that they would never catch him. I treasure the moments when my dad would consistently accompany me back to Tomorrowland to conquer my favorite mountain, while my mom would take my little sisters back to our cherished resort, Disney's Wilderness Lodge.

In the years to come, our love of Disney would only grow, and finally, while aboard a Disney Cruise in 2004, my mom convinced my dad to make yet another Disney commitment.

"You and your sisters were so busy having fun that we decided to see the Disney Vacation Club presentation," my mom recalls, a sly look on her face. "I remember Dad looked at me and just said, 'All right.'"

The rest, as they say, is history. My family is now a proud DVC family; Disney's Saratoga Springs Resort & Spa is our home resort.

### THE FOURTH DISNEY GENERATION

While bringing her own children to Disney was certainly magical, nothing could prepare my mom and dad for the joy of bringing their grandchild, my daughter Sagan.

Since she was 3 months old, we've been to Disney World hundreds of times as Annual Passholders, stayed at several Disney Resorts, and continued the family legacy of making magical Disney memories.

"Everyone said she would get bored, and still every single time we go is special," my mom says, with tears welling up in her eyes. "As many times we've been, Sagan still gets excited, and her eyes light up. It's magic. It's our special place."

That explains why Sagan wouldn't know what you mean if you were to ask her about Cinderella Castle. To her, it's always been and will always be "Grammy's Castle."



Dani's mother celebrates granddaughter Sagan's first visit to Walt Disney World — at Animal Kingdom. PHOTO COURTESY OF DANI MORITZ

### 50 YEARS OF MEMORIES

If you were to ask my mom for her favorite Disney moment, she couldn't tell you — because, to her, every single one is special.

Maybe it was sitting alongside her grandpa on the Walt Disney World Railroad, sharing giggles as he playfully embarrassed the rest of the family with his train whistle. Perhaps it was watching the Electrical Water Pageant with my sisters and me on the dock of Wilderness Lodge, or accompanying me to special events when I proudly wore my Disney name tag as a Cast Member. Or maybe it was witnessing her granddaughter run into the welcoming arms of the mouse who started it all...

She's seen year one. She was there for the 25th (and loved the controversial cake castle), and she proudly celebrated Disney's 50th anniversary. Walt Disney World will forever hold a special place in her heart, just as it does in mine, and now, it's becoming the same for my daughter. It's difficult to envision any other place as magical as that. 🧡

*In memory of the loved ones who shared in the magic: Elmer Fischer, Bruce Stocker Sr., Tom Moritz Sr., Bev Moritz, and Bruce Stocker Jr.*