

WARNER'S CORNER

MICKEY MOUSE



JAMES WARNER

Mickey Mouse is known by all, as is his creator Walt Disney, who I have grown to respect as one of the greatest men of all time. I had the huge privilege of direct exposure to the philosophy and thinking of the great artist, philosopher, and creative genius.

When Disneyland was built, Main Street was paved with a relatively thin asphaltic concrete surface. It did not hold up under the constant pounding of parades, double-decker buses, animals, and humanity, so it was promptly replaced with concrete. This was problematic as well. Disney dictated from the beginning that Disneyland would be a clean, spotless, friendly place. To this end, Main Street was washed nightly with fire hoses. Water penetrated the joints and mud tended to squirt out as the wheels of double-decker buses crossed over the joints. Slabjacking was not common in those days in southern California, but was an activity of my (then) little firm. And we had the good fortune to be employed to even out the slabs and stabilize the joints at Disneyland.

As luck would have it, Mr. Disney walked by with some others as we were working. He stopped, and while the others stood around bored, watched as we gently lifted a settled slab. He had never heard of such a thing—lifting settled concrete—and his curiosity led to all kinds of questions about it. As there was no satisfactory equipment for such work, we had built the grout pump we were using and actually developed the methods for injection as well as monitoring the work to ensure accurate lifting. I was more than willing to explain the work and answer his many questions. After a considerable discussion, he looked at me and said, “You are a true imaginer!” And so began a long association with his organization, even including repairs to the miniature steam railway that circled the backyard of his Los Angeles home.

The independent nature, extraordinary imagination, and wisdom of Walt Disney have been immortalized in several biographies and other books, which I heartedly recommend. And although it is the successes that are typically emphasized, he also experienced the problems and setbacks we all encounter along the road of life. But unlike so many, he continually persevered and overcame all obstacles that arose. And it was in such a worrisome time that Mickey Mouse came to be.

“He popped out of my mind onto a drawing pad, on a train ride from Manhattan to Hollywood at a time when business fortunes of my brother, Roy, and myself were at lowest ebb and disaster seemed right around the corner...born of necessity, the little fellow literally freed us of immediate worry. He provided the means for expanding our organization to its present dimensions and for extending the medium cartoon animation towards new entertainment levels. He spelled production liberation for us.”

“The life and ventures of Mickey Mouse have been closely bound up with my own personal and professional life. It is understandable that I should have sentimental attachment for the little personage who played so big a part of the course of Disney Productions and has been so happily accepted as an amusing friend wherever films are shown around the world. He still speaks for me and I still speak for him.”

And yes, even with Mickey Mouse there was risk...

“Getting the money to open Disneyland—about seventeen million it took. And we had everything mortgaged, including my personal insurance. We did it with the knowledge that most of the people I talked to thought it would be a financial disaster—closed and forgotten within the first year.”

But “most of the people” were wrong, and we all know the success Disneyland has enjoyed.

“We believed in our idea—a family park where parents and children could have fun together. It has that thing—the imagination, and the feeling of happy excitement—I knew when I was a kid.”

And much later in life he exclaimed to his people, “I only hope we don’t lose sight of one thing—that it was all started by a mouse.”

While few can have the amazing talent of Walt Disney, let us all be guided by his example: follow your dreams and persevere, even in less-than-wonderful times.

James Warner, PE, is an independent Consulting Engineer specializing in foundation and structural restoration and repair. Formerly a contractor in these specialties, he organized the original concrete repair program for World of Concrete and presented those seminars for 19 years. It was at one of his seminars that the seeds were sown for what is now the International Concrete Repair Institute (ICRI). He continues an active consultancy and is an Honorary Life Member of the Institute.