

DISNEYLAND for GROWNUPS

*Adults can savor the
happiest place on earth with
a youthful perspective.*

By Eric Lucas



YES, IT'S A SMALL WORLD.

You can tour the whole globe in less than 10 minutes—we had done just that earlier. Hop on a boat, and wave to hundreds of happy children singing in eternal chorus as you pass by. It couldn't be easier. So when my wife, Leslie, and stepdaughter Kirsten, eyes sparkling in the bright afternoon light, asked what ride I most wanted to do again, I fashioned an innocent smile and declared: "It's a Small World."

Mock groans greeted this. Shoulders slumped theatrically. "No, not again!"

I shrugged. Yes, again. Disneyland® Resort's famous ride, featuring what might be the world's most familiar song, populated by 300 perky doll figures, captivated me in ways that defy all rational analysis.

And so did Disneyland. I spent a wholly happy two days in the happiest place on earth during my first visit at an age greater than the park itself. I admired its impeccable cleanliness, omnipresent cheeriness and faultless customer service. I heard dozens of languages, walked and rode beside people of every human hue, size, age and garb. Everyone smiled. The music of laughter rode rays of sun.

Disneyland is widely considered the best place on earth where anyone can be a child again, and I endeavored that. I climbed aboard Huck

"Small World" repeats endlessly on eponymous Disneyland rides around the world 24 hours a day. Sherman credits the song's catchy appeal to its deliberate contrapuntal structure in which verse and chorus follow the same chords, but in different rhythms. That way when verse and chorus are heard simultaneously, which happens about a zillion times during the ride, the musical texture and color are deepened immeasurably.

I never saw Disneyland, or any theme park, as a boy, and I can't say I missed a thing. Not once did I pester my parents to go to Disneyland. I was happy enough to play kick-the-can in the back streets of my Pittsburgh neighborhood. Instead of crawling through mock caves on Tom Sawyer Island, I crawled through imaginary caves in the piles of maple leaves be-

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Finn's raft and crawled through eerie caves on Tom Sawyer Island; marveled at caroling parrot-puppets in the Enchanted Tiki Room; and ducked attacking crocodiles in a jungle river. But enjoying childlike fun was not the meaning I derived from the place. This, it slowly dawned on me, is the medicine for one of the great ills of our time, cynicism.

"There's so much that we share, that it's time we're aware, it's a small world after all," wrote Robert and Richard Sherman in 1963. Take the ride, and you hear this refrain dozens of times. In fact, as you glide from the Hello Room to the Goodbye Room, you hear interwoven layers of the song, in dozens of languages.

You visit Scandinavia, Europe, Asia, Africa, Latin America, the South Seas and a multicultural finale section that features everyone singing in English.

The characters, mostly children, are called "Audio-Animatronic" figures. (Say that three times fast.) Not all sing—my favorite, a pink walrus, simply bobs its head.

One of the Sherman brothers, Robert, argues that theirs is the most-heard song on earth, surpassing Paul McCartney's "Yesterday" because

hind the garage.

However, as an adult with my own family decades later, I was periodically approached with the notion that it was time to go see Disneyland. Not for Leslie and Kirsten—each had been twice before. But for me.

As my Small World experience illustrates, there's much at Disneyland that an adult can savor from both a youthful and mature perspective. If you're tempted to dismiss the underlying message of the song and the ride, keep in mind it was commissioned in 1963 just months after the Cuban missile crisis, when I was among millions of school kids who practiced abandoning schoolrooms

for fallout shelters should nuclear war erupt. As a child of the '60s riding Small World, I could only smile at Disney's subversive long-ago attack on international conflict.

There's a lot more at Disneyland to appreciate from an adult perspective...

Cleanliness: Aside from the possible exception of the White House grounds, Disneyland is the most litter-free nonwilderness place in the United States. Should you have some spare moments you can play an amusing game—find a bit of litter before a Disney employee does.

It's not impossible; after all, there are only 20,000 Disneyland workers to clean up after a countless number of visitors. But you must have an eagle eye, stay alert for people looking suspiciously irresponsible, and dash in

on Main Street. I thought it would be sufficient to cushion it in socks for the trip home, but no.

Employees spend two intensive days in training, with a half-day alone devoted to wrapping purchases. They really want you to get it home in one piece ... now that's customer service.

Business philosophy: Disneyland's business purpose is to make money. That's fine with me—commerce is the most effective force for positive human interaction. I'm a Disney stockholder.

But the company doesn't push buying down its customers' throats. Water fountains are numerous and easy to find, even next to cafes selling soft drinks. Check out your nearby sports stadium and see if that's so. Disney requires that visitors discard glass bottles with beverages in them when you enter the gates—but they give you a plastic cup in which to put your drink. And you don't have to wend your way through a gift shop when you exit a ride, like at some museums. In fact, I had to consult a map to even find the gift shop.

It's easy to dismiss Disneyland as trivial because it is quaint, childlike, unabashed and cheerful. But those are its essential virtues, and scoffing at them illustrates perfectly how pervasive cynicism is today.

Yes, it is a great escape from the stony realities of life. That's just how Disney meant it, and how even the most seasoned grown-up can take it. Stuck in a crowd siphoning ourselves from Fantasyland to Tomor-

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after they drop their candy wrapper. I captured three such items. And I watched with high amusement as a robotic talking trash can walked up to a fellow outside a restroom who was just finishing a hot dog. The trash aperture opened wide, and the somewhat agog diner dropped in the wrapper.

It's legendary in business circles that everyone in Disney employ, from busboy to chairman, spends a few minutes each day sprucing up the park. Walt Disney himself did so, and the tradition continues today. How's that for a worthy corporate culture?

Customer Service: "No, let me wrap it for you," the clerk pleaded after I had bought my souvenir coffee cup

rowland, I accidentally stepped on the foot of a fellow who was taking a holiday from his job on the offensive line of the USC Trojans. He was the size of a small garage, and I had inadvertently mashed his toe. He turned to me and said politely, "Excuse me, sir."

If that sounds like the sort of thing that happens in fairy tales, well, it's because this is the world capital of fairy tales.

Storybook Land, my stepdaughter's favorite ride, is another boat-borne odyssey through a fairy-tale environment—in fact, fairy tales are its substance, from Hansel and Gretel to Little Red Riding Hood. At one point during the ride, passing an amazing horticultural series of miniaturized gardens, our guide, Breanna, explained that some of the shrubs here had been planted by Walt Disney himself years ago. "They're kept miniature by a process known only to Tinkerbell!" she gushed, as sincere as a 3-year-old explaining how Santa Claus gets around.

Of course, Breanna was just playing her part. We all know, children, adults and Disney workers alike, that Tinkerbell can't keep plants small.

Can she? **U**

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