

# Grandview native, Bill Peet, Walt Disney storyteller

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Disney then asked Peet to work his magic on Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*. Peet wrote the script, storyboarded the film, and as always, designed nearly all the characters; but artistic differences over the film finally pushed Peet to leave the studio. He departed (privately angered) after a heated meeting, on his birthday, January 29, 1965, and consequently, that was the last time he ever saw Walt Disney.

By that time, Peet was working on his sixth book. He wrote in his autobiography that "doing the books on the side was walking a tightrope" and that "after twenty-seven years it was time for a new beginning."

Peet read about Disney's death in the newspaper a year later. The "wizard of fantasy," as he was named by the *LA Times*, died of lung cancer on December 15, 1966.

*The Jungle Book* was released ten months after Disney's death, in October 1967.

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In total, Bill Peet authored 36 children's books with millions of copies sold. None of the author's books were as personal to him as *Chester the Worldly Pig*.

He was born William Bartlett Peet, in Grandview, 1915. His earliest memories were of Grandview and the pet pigs on the farm his family inhabited. The character of Chester echoes that memory.

Peet was one of three brothers whose mother was forced to provide her family's income. His father, an almost entirely absent figure in Bill's life, was drafted into World War I. After the war, Peet failed to return to his family. In truth, he had never even been

shipped out of Kentucky to fight.

Bill's mother left Grandview for Indianapolis with a teaching degree, and his grandmother used her life savings to purchase a house there. As his grandmother ran the family, his mother taught school, and

Peet became fascinated with Indiana wildlife, raucous locomotives, big city circuses, industrial centers and of course the noisy thrill of the Indianapolis 500. As a boy, he began to draw, and all

of his childhood fascinations would appear again and again as themes in his work. (For the reader willing to look closely, there is something of Indiana to find in each of Bill Peet's books.)

Peet was a depressed adolescent,

flunking out of high school. A

schoolmate, who recognized his talent, encouraged him to take an art class. It was art that rescued young Peet from the dangerous listlessness of teenage depression and a disastrous home life (his father would show up once in a while to squeeze money from the family). Eventually, he was awarded a scholarship to John Herron Art Institute, Indianapolis. There he thrived, and there he met Margaret Brunst, who would later become his wife.

Early on, he dabbled (somewhat successfully) in painting. Then, there was a small stint in New York, as Peet looked for work as a cartoonist. One day he was handed a pamphlet for Disney — a studio that was actually hiring.

He went through weeks of rigorous

auditioning for Disney, as did all cartoonists, before landing the job. Margaret left the Midwest for California as soon as Bill was hired. They married immediately and lived in what Peet called "a dingy

little apartment a half hour walk from the studio."

In his autobiography, Peet considers himself much like Chester. The hapless pig has a unique talent that removes him from his country life and thrusts him into the world. Over time, the pig is mistreated, abused, chained and forgotten, chased, kidnapped and after a series of narrow escapes, finally finds himself sleeping in a dingy alley. (There is even a character in

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