

Grandview native, Bill Peet, Walt Disney storyteller

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the *Seven Dwarfs*. Disney was already Peet's boss, and Peet had done some in-betweening on the dwarfs, never credited. You won't find Peet's name in the credits for *Pinocchio* either, even though the cartoonist contributed to nearly every sequence.

In the late 90s, Peet was interviewed by Tom Heintjes for the cartooning magazine, *Hogan's Alley*. In the interview, Peet opined on in-betweening. "It was like telling someone who wanted to be an architect to lay bricks so we can see what you can do," he lamented. "That's how silly it was to come in as an in-betweener. You can't prove that you can do anything other than draw like a robot, stay between the lines and be careful. Actually the poorest artists made the best in-betweeners because it was less creative...They could be turned into a machine without it hurting too much." Being "turned into a machine" was not



part of Bill Peet's long-term career plan. He detested in-betweening, calling it in his Caldecott Honor Book, *Bill Peet: An Autobiography*, "tedious" and "pain-staking." He wanted out. "If I hadn't had the chance to go into story,"

he said, "I wasn't going to stay around."

Peet believed it was a sequence concept for *Pinocchio* that kept him from being fired after the 'no more ducks' incident. (Yes, according to his autobiography, the incident really happened.) The studio had put out a call for bogey characters to populate a "Bogey Sequence" in

Pinocchio. (The bogey idea was later dropped.) Peet jumped at the opportunity to prove himself something more than an in-betweener, to show that he had talent, vision, that he was a true artist. He submitted his bogeys.

His submission paid off.

Cartooning *Pinocchio* was Peet's first introduction into the inner mechanics of major motion picture production, and it was also the first time he met Walt Disney up-close-and-

personal — in meetings. Prior to *Pinocchio*, Disney had been for Peet like an illusive shadow, a form without substance, something to remark on inwardly and wonder. In Peet's first day-long storyboard meeting, Disney edited ideas with uncanny efficiency and (what has been described by many individuals as) unadulterated ruthlessness. Disney could cut, congratulate, plan and command with incredible decisiveness. The executive's behavior in Peet's first storyboard meeting made a lasting impression.

Even so, being promoted to the motion picture department, working on *Pinocchio* and discovering the omission of his name in the credits, left Peet "depressed for weeks afterward." And, "I was even more discouraged," he wrote, "when I joined fourteen other sketch men to create a pictorial version of Beethoven's Sixth Symphony."

Peet, of course, refers to the Greco-Roman sequence in *Fantasia*. In the (now undeniably famous) sequence, pointy fluffs of hair, pastel

as cotton candy, bounce with the bellies of pudgy little cherubs; teen dream centaurs bathe, frolic and flirt; proud Pegasus-parents teach their newborns how to fly; happy-footed satyrs play their flutes for neon unicorns; and a sleepy, blue-toned Zeus uses black clouds as blankets. The story editors were at a loss when it came to Disney's musical

experiment, so Peet and his fellow cartoonists invented the entire sequence, its characters, its captivating micro-narratives.

"We were responsible," tells Peet, "for what finally came out on the screen."

Despite its artistic success, the *Fantasia* experience left Peet deeply unsatisfied. Crammed into a room of over-worked cartoonists felt too much

like in-betweening, and throughout the years, as his career with Disney Studios progressed, he perceived himself overlooked, under-appreciated and remained disheartened.

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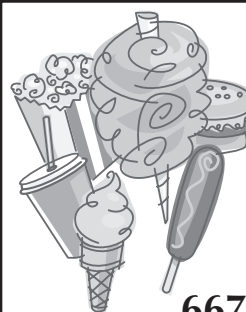
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