

Distinctive instinct

How Grandview native, Bill Peet, became an acclaimed storyteller

by Casey Uebelhor

Walt Disney Studios is a long way from Grandview, but one Grandview native made it there — and made it his stepping stone. His name was Bill Peet. This is his story.

I.

Planted on stools behind mid-century drafting tables, a dozen heads droop like withering house plants. These men are drawing. Drawing and drawing. Creating the hundreds of in-betweens — the drawings between drawings — that allow a cartoon mouse to wipe a white glove across his brow or a sailor-suited duck to untangle a red ribbon.

They are the *in-betweens*. Men between men. (They feed themselves on gels and ink, cigarette smoke and industrial lighting.) And day after day, they keep the black lines coming, most of them with no hope of promotion.

Then one day, one of them slams down his pen and screams, "NO MORE DUCKS! NO MORE LOUSY DUCKS!"

And walks out.

An afternoon passes — and an evening — during which the poor, strong-willed cartoonist realizes a terrible fact. He's fled the studio and left behind his one and only jacket.

Reluctantly, he returns to the drafting table in the morning. He retrieves his jacket and discovers he's been promoted.

Promoted!?

He lets the shock settle in: he still has a job. And! No. More. Ducks.

Elated, he walks across the parking lot to an old stucco apartment building. (The jacket goes with him.) He reports to what was once a second floor bedroom, where the walls are covered in storyboards for a feature film — *Pinocchio*.

He throws his jacket over his chair, takes a seat and gets to work.

II.

Bill Peet first saw Walt Disney in December 1937 at the gala premiere of *Snow White and*

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Bill Peet stands (second from right) amongst Disney cartooning colleagues. Note the workroom wall, covered in *Fantasia* sketches.

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