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Hedda Hopper's Hollywood

HOLLYWOOD — The more than 7 million people who have gone thru the gates of Dinseyland since it opened two years ago have seen only the end product of a man's dream. I wish they could know Walt Disney as I do—a man with the ageless heart of Peter Pan and the wisdom of Solomon — a man who loves his friends and who has made friends with all the people of the universe . . . Walt recently opened his 1957 summer season at Disneyland. This year's visitors realize he has kept his initial promise, "We will continue to grow, to add new things so long as there is imagination left in the world." . . . A few of the innovations which have brought three adults thru the gates for every child admitted are music everywhere, and dancing nightly. Every night at 9 there's a fantasy in the sky, as Walt calls the aerial fireworks which he feels are a true part of the American summer scene. There's a new high speed streamlined train and futuristically designed watercraft of fiberglass. There are three autopias today instead of one, and a house of the future which represents three years of planning. There's Tom Sawyer's island, a fishing pier, and score of irresistable things all part of the growth program Walt set for himself.

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Disney believes, as I do, that people are interested in how he got started and where he is going. "This is a dream come true," he says. "I remember, as a boy, when we first moved to Kansas City around 1910 and lived a block and a half from the amusement park. I loved it and I could get in for 10 cents. We lived in that house for only a few months, then moved to where I had to travel an hour and a half to get to the park . . . "My career in movie making has its restrictions. The picture must be wrapped up and sent to technicolor laboratory and after that I can't do anything about it. You're thru, washed up, and can't do anything more about it. That's why I can't sit thru a screening in a theater with an audience because I see so many things that could be better. It's different with the park. I manage to get there once a week. My wife and I have an apartment over the firehouse; it's furnished in the gay 90s manner — that's how I keep her interested. When we come out she sits in the apartment and reads, and I go out and study the place. . . "I see things that aren't right and I can change them but I've not been able to do that with pictures. This is the compensation I get out of Disneyland.

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Of course a lot of people think we're interested in money—that's a fallacy. I learned a long time ago you have to make money if you want to spend it. How can I put in 2 million dollars worth of new rides next year if I don't make money this year? I studied economics and learned money is something you use to do something with. If you haven't got that money you can't do things. I went broke twice before I got wise to that. I had to prove to bankers that I wasn't an artistic success and a commercial failure. I didn't have the money to get this thing going, but I found the way to get started was to quit talking and begin doing it. When I talked in terms of three years in advance the bankers would say, 'I'll see you in two years.' So I talked in terms of one year in advance and got things started.

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Things like Disneyland grow with imagination plus money. I thought if I got a big hole in the ground, tore up enough of the landscape, I'd get some. help. When we finally opened the gates two years ago Disneyland wasn't finished. But I had to grin and look at people anyway. I couldn't get all the shrubs and trees I wanted, so in order to have the place green I let the weeds grow. I had little signs made with botanical names and put them around. People would look at them and say, "I've never seen that before; let's get some for our garden' . . . "I was critized on every hand. Some said 'Disney hasn't enough drinking fountains.' Others allowed this was done purposely so we'd sell more soft drinks. Actually it had to do with a plumbing strike with the general contractors. We didn't have rest-room facilities or drinking fountains or any other plumbing in. Just four days before thee opening I had decide where I wanted the plumbing and which was the most urgent immediate necessity; drinking fountain or toilets. The latter won.

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When we opened we owed 8 million dollars. The bankers would scowl and say, 'You're not going to put more money into that place?' Now we only owe 6 million dollars, so I'm in a better spot. My fun lies in finding out what kids like. I let the kids take over — turn 'em loose. Take the island — I want to find out where the kids like to climb, then I'll build a path. I just got thru spending $300,000 on it. We'll wind up with three quarters of a million when I find out just what the kids like . . . "The next two or three years are going to prove whether Walt's right or wrong. We have 50 acres and plenty of room for expansion and I can show you 5 million dollars worth of new projects on the drawing boards. I'm trying to get as many things as I can that will pay and yet be free to the people and still give me a chance to pay the street sweepers, the cleaners, and all the helpers we must have here . . . "I have the Mark Twain boat for Frontierland but I'd like another ship, too; a square rigger modeled after the Columbia, the first one America built . . . "There's an American theme behind the whole park. I'd like a French section telling about the Louisiana purchase, and a pirate section with American pirates. I want a haunted house — most people like to be scared — I know I do, and I'd like a New Orleans section . . . "I believe in emphasizing the story of what made America great and will keep it great."

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