

# LABOR<sup>OF</sup> LOVE

*Dick May began his Disneyland career as an Attractions Host back in 1956—when Walt still walked the Park. This was just a part-time job for May who for 29 years pursued a “real life” career as a teacher and counselor. When he retired from teaching in 1981, May worked full-time at the Park until his recent retirement. But Disneyland is in his blood! Known throughout the Park as a prime example of the “Spirit of Disneyland,” May still assists the Disney University from time to time, developing orientation, training, and motivational programs. Here he recalls the days when Disneyland belonged to Walt.*

It was your typical California summer day in the late '50s. Dick May was taking tickets in front of the *Casey Junior Circus Train* in Fantasyland when a woman at the front of the line asked, “Does Mr. Disney ever come around here?” Before May could respond, a smiling man with a mustache and a wide-brimmed hat spoke up from

behind her. “Yes,” said Walt Disney to the speechless woman, “I do.”

Walt may have surprised the woman in line, but to May and his Disneyland co-workers during the Park's early years, Walt's presence was a regular—and often unpredictable—occurrence. In fact, he would often appear and be gone as soon as he learned what he wanted.

“I was testing the *Skyway* one morning soon after the installation of new cabins,” recalls May. “I was watching them come in when Walt appeared and asked how they compared to the old models. I said that they were much better, and that our line was moving much more quickly. He said, ‘That’s why we spent the extra money;’ and then he was gone.

“That was just his way,” explains May. “Most of the time he would walk through the Park alone—no security or anyone with him—with his hands in his pockets and his hat brim pulled down low. It was his way of getting a feel for

how people were reacting to his Park, and finding out what could be done to improve the show.”

Disneyland employees who worked in the Main Street area would often be the only ones with any advance notice of Walt's visits. The clue was his big grey Lincoln, which he parked “back-stage” near his private apartment above the Disneyland Fire Station.

Many times he would use the apartment to spend the night in his Park. On those occasions it was not uncommon to see him walking down Main Street after closing time, coffee pot in hand, en route to a casual meeting with the late-night cleaning crew to fill them in on his latest trip or project.

“Walt was so aware of people, so aware of quality,” stresses May. “He gave final approval on everything—from major construction projects right down to the portions served in the employee cafeteria. He could do this because he cared so much for everybody and everything at the Park.”

It was this facet of Walt's personality that caught May's attention and, more than any other, has stayed with him through his own career over the years: Walt's desire to give the public what they wanted, and his insistence that they always come first.

“I was in charge of the *Rafts* one day,” May remembers, “and here came Walt through the area on one of his walks. As he was passing, a man recognized him and, after running to catch him, grabbed him firmly by the upper arm. Before Walt could utter a word, the man literally dragged him to where his wife and child were sitting and said, ‘Here, Walt, I want my kid to meet you.’ And Walt knelt down in front of that little boy and made over him like he was the only child in the world.

“Walt really loved this Park,” concludes May. “For him, it was nothing but a labor of love.”

by Craig Hodgkins



Dick May remembers Walt's love for people