

Doug Lipp – Remembering Kevin Corcoran



I met Kevin Corcoran during my first visit to The Walt Disney Family Museum. The museum, a gem of Disney heritage situated at the Presidio in San Francisco, California, is a whimsical and deeply thought-provoking acknowledgment of Walt's accomplishments and values.

My wife, Pam, and I were invited by Ron Miller and Diane Disney Miller to attend a special event at the museum honoring Kevin's acting role in Old Yeller, and Ron's contribution as second assistant director. Ron and Kevin's engaging conversation during the museum event sparked my subsequent interview with Kevin.

Another highlight for Pam and me that day was discussing with Diane her vision for the museum; we experienced directly and profoundly Diane's passion for creating a most fitting tribute to the legacy of her father, Walt.

The lessons Pam and I learned that day have greatly enriched our lives.

“Walt could read people and he exhibited great empathy; I needed a velvet glove, not a steel hand, and he knew it.” – Kevin Corcoran

Kevin Corcoran, one of the most beloved child actors for Walt Disney Studios in the 1950's and 1960's passed away last week. Kevin, who appeared in iconic films like Old Yeller, The Swiss Family Robinson and Pollyanna, had a special relationship with Walt Disney. While interviewing Kevin three years ago for Disney U, he shared with me the following example of what made Walt Disney so special; a man who truly put people first ... and who exhibited the extraordinary talent of leadership balance.

“My father passed away when I was 9 years old and in the middle of shooting The Shaggy Dog film. I was devastated, couldn't remember my lines, and also had the pressure of my contract being up for renewal. Walt and the Studio executives, well aware of my troubles, completely rearranged the shooting schedule to accommodate my needs. Despite this, I was an emotional mess.

In those days at Disney Studio, we went to school on the film lot. One day, my teacher approached me at recess and told me Walt wanted to see me. So I ran up to Walt's office on the third floor of the Animation Building. Walt said to me, 'I'm sorry to hear about your father. I know how tough this must be for you.' Walt was comforting and went on to ask, 'Are you still having fun? Because if you're not, you don't have to do this any longer.' I told him I was struggling, but that I would be fine if I had a little more time to get over my father's death.





I already had a good relationship with Walt; he often visited the sound stage and movie sets, plus I joined him during special events at Disneyland. Walt could read people and he exhibited great empathy; I needed a velvet glove, not a steel hand, and he knew it. But what Walt next did inspired me then and inspires me now. I committed to getting the job done. Then Walt, in a businesslike but paternal manner, smiled, stuck out his hand and said, 'Man to man, let's shake on that'."

Kevin, who also appeared as "Moochie" in the Spin and Marty serials on The Mickey Mouse Club, was second-to-none in his many roles as a precocious child. That precociousness did not extend beyond the sound stage.

Kevin attributed much of his success, both as a child actor and as an adult, to the culture at the Disney Studio. Despite the success so early in his career, Kevin's life after acting was devoid of the career meltdowns so frequently associated with those who attain childhood stardom. Although a nurturing environment, Walt and the Studio staff kept the young actors grounded. "Star mentality" wasn't tolerated. Walt's ability to balance tough love, (the steel hand) with empathy, (the velvet glove) created a culture of respect ... and set the stage for Kevin's success later in life.

***Our deepest thanks to Kevin Corcoran for the great gifts
he gave to us all and our heartfelt sympathies to
his friends and family.***

