

► **TRAVEL-5** — The original Motel 6 is in Santa Barbara; travelers have to wait months for a reservation.

# TRAVEL

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**SUNDAY** March 29, 1998

## Memories and new discoveries *at the Magic Kingdom*

**Baby boomer returns to Disneyland for first time in decades with his own child**



Francesca and Marian Placidi pose with Mickey Mouse in obligatory photo.

**By Edward I. Placidi**  
CORRESPONDENT

drawn streetcars continue to ply Main Street. The Mad Tea Party cups were still spinning (though they didn't seem to go as fast).

And we Baby Boomer parents snapped the man-

hour, none of us with seat belts fastened, of course (talk about changing times). After riding Pirates of the Caribbean, we all got our own plastic swords from the gift shop and proceeded to duel all over the park and slay every kid we encountered along the way.

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By Edward I. Placidi  
CORRESPONDENT

**S**HOULD I? What could they do to me?" our summer camp counselor blurted out, more to himself than his troop of 10-year-old boys on a day trip to Disneyland in 1961.

But we took the bait, teasing him that he was "chicken."

Next thing we knew, he'd peeled his T-shirt and tennis shoes, dived in and fast-stroked out to the sultry mermaid on an islet in the lagoon.

He was quickly ejected from the Submarine Voyage and the park.

Fast forward 37 years to 1998. I return to Disneyland, this time with my wife, Marian, and our five-year-old, Francesca. The memory of that 1961 visit surfaces as I note that the mermaids are gone. I hate to think my summer camp group was responsible for their demise.

Guiding my daughter for her first time through the Magic Kingdom, I note that little else of the "Old Disneyland" had changed.

Sure, many new attractions have been added. But the Jungle Cruise had stood still in time — bad puns and all. Jazz musicians still jammed on the streets of New Orleans Square. Tom Sawyer's Island was the way we'd left it. The same self-drive, putt-putt cars ran the same Autopia track. Horse-

they didn't seem to go as fast).

And we Baby Boomer parents snapped the mandatory photo of our child with Mickey, just as our parents had done.

Yes, we would enjoy many new experiences — there are more than 60 attractions now, compared to 18 when Disneyland opened in 1955. But it felt as if we'd never left. Disneyland has transcended time.

Actually, what amazed us most was how little Disneyland seemed to have changed compared to how much we have.

I still wanted to sword fight, though, just like I did back in 1960-something when a neighbor had popped his twins, my cousin and I in his convertible T-Bird and soared down the freeway to Disneyland — literally at 90 miles per

from the gift shop and proceeded to duel all over the park and slay every kid we encountered along the way.

Out-of-control dueling kids? Counselors leaping into lagoons? I guess Disneyland actually has changed; people are much better behaved than we were back then.

All in all, however, time has not altered the essence of Disneyland: it remains one of the most enjoyable family experiences anywhere.

Here's a rundown on some of the features then and now:

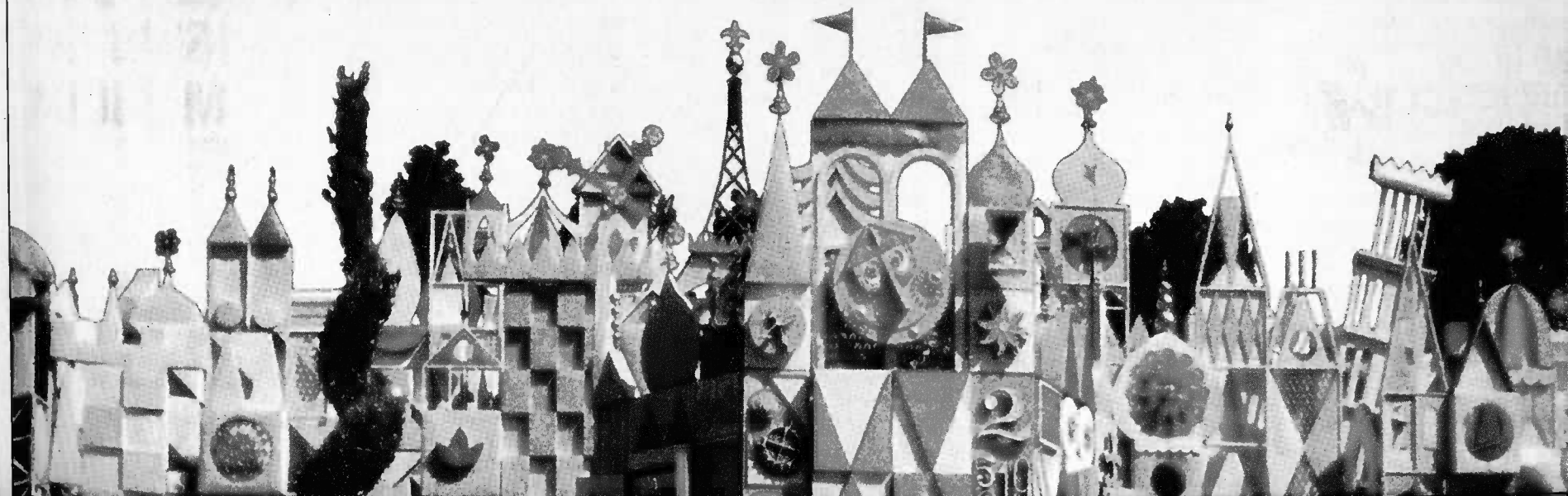
► **The Matterhorn** was always a beacon; you saw it first, in the distance, a few minutes before arriving, and it guided you the rest of the way. It was

a state-of-the-art roller coaster when it opened, but



EDWARD I. PLACIDI photos

Characters from the movie "Hercules" act out their roles (above) in an extravaganza of singing and dancing at the Hercules Victory Parade. "It's a Small World" (below) is still going strong.



Please see **Disneyland**, TRAVEL-2

# Disneyland: Much remains the same as always

Continued from TRAVEL-1

a new level of thrills came when Disneyland added the frightening favorite of teen-agers, **Space Mountain**.

Space Mountain recently incorporated its own individualized stereo system, a first for a U.S. roller coaster. The computerized synchronization of music, narration and sound effects tracks makes the blast through a dark, star-studded universe seem even faster and feel more exiting.

The funny thing, though, is that the Matterhorn remains almost as popular as Space Mountain. The two are among the rides (along with **Splash Mountain** and **Indiana Jones**) with unbearably long lines most of the time. And if you don't want to waste hours of your day waiting to get on them, follow this simple strategy: Be at Disneyland when it first opens and head straight for them.

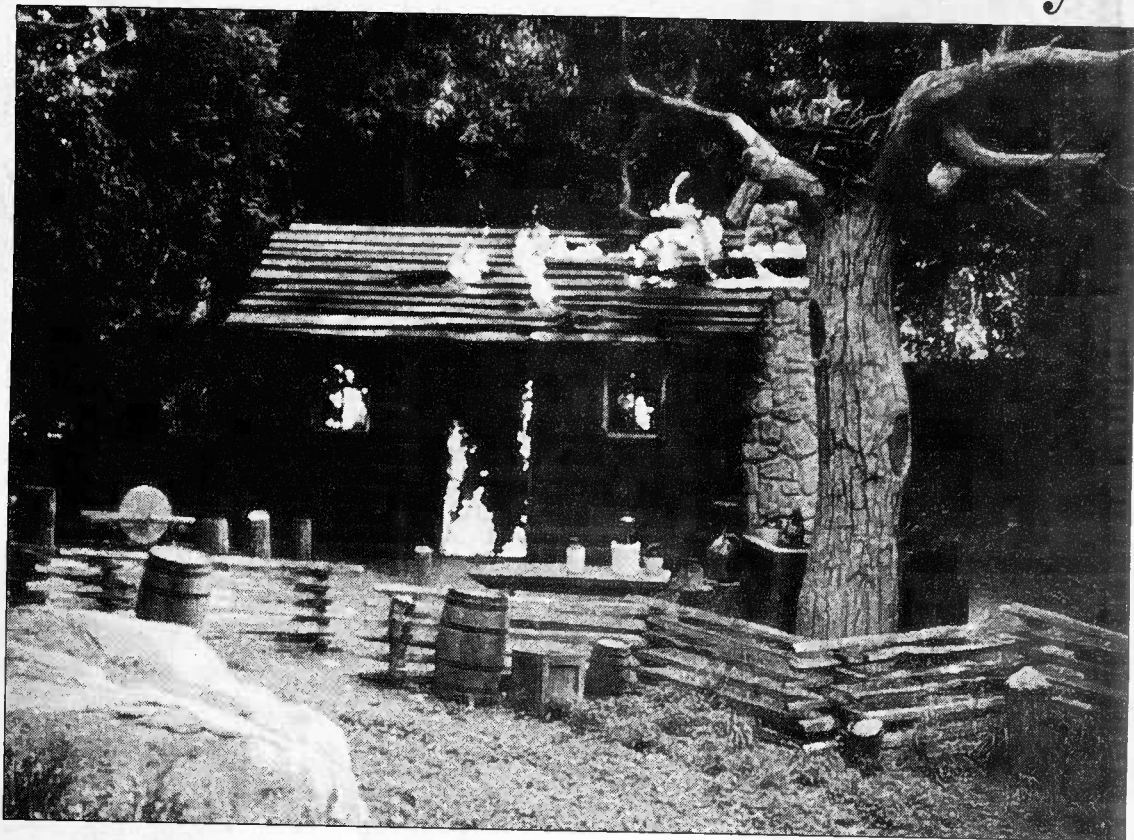
► Like the Matterhorn, **Pirates of the Caribbean** has made the transition through the decades and remained a favorite of all ages. The ride, however, apparently offended some and so recently was made more politically correct. Supposedly. The lustful Pirates apparently are now chasing food, not women.

Still, Pirates of the Caribbean may continue to be a bad influence, on some children. The slave auction for women, for example, is still thriving, under a big banner that says: "Auction: Take a wench for a bride." And when Francesca saw the mountain of pirate treasure, the five-year old was instantly corrupted, exclaiming, "This pirates' life is not bad."

► The moniker we came up with for **Splash Mountain** was the "great deceiver." It lulls you into a comfort zone on a gentle float aboard hollowed-out log boats with happy singing and dancing through down-home, backwoods "critter country." Suddenly, there's a sheer drop, but it's over seemingly instantly. And you're back to being lulled — until the big five-story drop, hurtling straight down. Your heart stops.

All the teen-agers aboard held their hands high in death-defiance during the plunge, reveling in it. Francesca, however, burst into tears if scared her so.

► Francesca was much more comfortable at the **Swiss Family Robinson's tree house**. She wanted to climb through it repeatedly. An old standard and



The log cabin on Tom Sawyer's Island in Disneyland has been burning for decades EDWARD T. I. PLACIDI photo

*It hit home how Disneyland, despite handling massive crowds each day, still goes to special lengths to maintain the personal note that has always been part of the Magic Kingdom.*

the huge brown bear who never tires of standing up and roaring and the timeless, sprawling Indian village.

► One Disneyland classic that is gone forever and seems to be sorely missed is the **Electric Light Parade**. People talk about it as if a loved one has passed on. These days, guests are instead treated to the **Hercules Victory Parade**, which is certainly timely but also self-promotional. All the characters from the movie, riding on floats and parading on foot, act out their roles in an extravaganza of singing and dancing — with the hydra heads snapping at the crowd and Hercules flexing his muscles. My favorite was the outrageous Narcissus who was beside himself admiring his reflection in the mirror.

While waiting for the Hercules Victory Parade to begin, a young Disneyland employee came along handing out stickers to the kids and working the crowd. "My name is Kim," she announced.

pass by, a foghorn-blowing ship where you climb a rope ladder to get up to the deck, a bouncing room, cartoon cars to sit in, spin the wheel and pose for photos, a wacky trolley to ride and many shops selling Disney merchandise and fast food.

Our favorite addition (since the "old days") was **Star Tours**. As you snake through the line, waiting to board your flight, you watch R2D2 and C3PO of Star Wars fame acting out space scenarios and hear announcements about departing and landing flights in a "spaceport" of the future. Then you're off on what is supposed to be a pleasure journey to the planet Endor but end up embroiled in Star Wars-like battles. The experience is so lifelike you feel like you're careening through the universe aboard a spaceship with Harrison Ford.

The biggest news at Disneyland is yet to come: the launching of the new **Tomorrowland**. The themed land is mostly under construction right now, with only some rides in operation. But on May 22, a re-

## If you go

Visiting Disneyland on a travel package can be the best way to go. Packages may combine hotel accommodations, Disneyland tickets, breakfasts, shuttle service to and from the park, a discount book for other local attractions and shopping and other extras. They generally offer good value, particularly if you're planning a visit of several days.

With numerous packages to choose from, however, the problem is which one to select that will give you the components you need for the price you want to pay. Below are several sources to help you pick the best package for you.

► The Walt Disney Travel Co., Inc. offers packages with hotels throughout Anaheim and the adjacent areas in every price category. Call (714) 520-5050.

► Many area hotels have created their own Disneyland packages. Among them are Hilton Suites (714-938-1111/800-445-8667); Doubletree Hotel Anaheim/Orange



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► Francesca was much more comfortable at the **Swiss Family Robinson's tree house**. She wanted to climb through it repeatedly. An old standard and one of the tamest attractions in Disneyland, it doesn't assault the senses like many others (and absent the fright factor, there's not a teen-ager in sight, and therefore no lines). But Francesca did eventually become more daring, as most little ones do as they experience more and more of Disneyland.

► **Thunder Mountain** is not the hairiest roller coaster, but it has an edge to it. With its mining theme you careen in darkness as if through mine tunnels. And Francesca demanded to go back for seconds, riding white-knuckled but determined to show us she wasn't afraid.

► **Tom Sawyer's Island** is a frozen slice of a former time on the Mississippi. Even the vegetation is exactly as I remember it. Watching the excited, beaming boys and girls scrambling over the rocks, through the labyrinth of caves, climbing up in the tree-house, trying to keep their feet crossing the rope and pontoon bridges — took me back decades.

And up in the towers of Fort Wilderness where we fought endless battles against enemy invaders, battles are still being fought and the rifles still echo each time you pull the trigger with the recorded ping of a shot being fired. Time has wrought differences, however: As kids, we fired at will, as there were no stigmas against playing with toy guns; today's parents were tolerating just a shot or two before prodding their young ones to move on.

► As they have for decades, the big white **Mark Twain Riverboat** and the **paddle-yourself canoes** still circle Tom Sawyer's Island — sailing past the eternal burning log cabin,

root, act out their roles in an extravaganza of singing and dancing — with the hydra heads snapping at the crowd and Hercules flexing his muscles. My favorite was the outrageous Narcissus who was beside himself admiring his reflection in the mirror.

While waiting for the Hercules Victory Parade to begin, a young Disneyland employee came along handing out stickers to the kids and working the crowd. "My name is Kim," she announced. "If you need anything, just let me know."

I wasn't sure what we could ask her for but it hit home how Disneyland, despite handling massive crowds each day, still goes to special lengths to maintain the personal note that has always been part of the Magic Kingdom.

There was the cashier in a gift shop who fussed over Francesca and went on and on about where we could find the particular stuffed animal she wanted, oblivious to the line of people waiting to pay behind us. There was the jolly "captain" of the raft over to Tom Sawyer's Island who, nonstop, joked collectively and individually with his passengers. There were the marchers in the Hercules parade who involved and interacted with individuals in the crowd, the Greek soldiers who exhorted you to sing along and patted little children on the head, and there was the dragons who playfully snapped their jaws in people's faces.

Still, offering ever-more exciting and new attractions is the lifeblood of amusement parks, and Disneyland is no exception.

The newest thrill ride, **The Indiana Jones Adventure**, is a true crowd-pleaser. Employing state-of-the-art computer technology, all the hair-raising action of an Indiana Jones movie is compacted into a few-minute ride.

The biggest new undertaking since I was a child visitor was the addition of Disneyland's eighth themed land, the three-dimensional cartoon world of **Mickey's Toontown**. It's a goofy and chaotic place for little ones. It contains Mickey and Minnie houses, a kiddie roller coaster where frogs squirt you as you

future. Then you're off on what is supposed to be a pleasure journey to the planet Ender but end up embroiled in Star Wars-like battles. The experience is so lifelike you feel like you're careening through the universe aboard a spaceship with Harrison Ford.

The biggest news at Disneyland is yet to come: the launching of the new **Tomorrowland**. The themed land is mostly under construction right now, with only some rides in operation. But on May 22, a revamped Tomorrowland will be unveiled. At the entrance, the new **Astro Orbiter** will allow guests to pilot their own spaceships as they soar through an animated "astronomical model" of planets and constellations. **The Rocket Rods XPR** will follow the path of the former "PeopleMover" on a high-speed, four-minute journey — becoming Disneyland's fastest and longest ride ever.

The "**Honey, I Shrunk the Audience**" show will combine the latest 3-D film and theatrical effects. "**Innoventions**" will be a two-level interactive pavilion of near-future technology. There will be an interactive fountain where children can walk through and play in cascading bursts of water. The overall ambience is being redesigned, as well, to resemble an environment of the future.

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► Southwest Airlines and Alaska Airlines offer packages that include airfare. Contact Southwest at (888) 423-4000 and Alaska at (800) 426-0333.

► Contact a travel agent for more choices.

Tomorrowland's most popular current attractions, Space Mountain and Star Tours, will remain, as will the Disneyland Monorail, Autopia and the Submarine Voyage (I understand, alas, that there are no plans to bring back the mermaids, not even in some alien or futuristic form).

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