

A TEI Project

Interview of Richard Huemer

Contents

1. Transcript

- 1.1. TAPE NUMBER I: Side One, (July 24, 1968)
- 1.2. TAPE NUMBER I: Side Two, (July 31, 1968)
- 1.3. TAPE NUMBER II: Side One, (August 7, 1968)
- 1.4. TAPE NUMBER II: Side Two, (September 10, 1968)
- 1.5. TAPE NUMBER III: Side One, (October 8, 1968)
- 1.6. TAPE NUMBER III: Side Two, (October 8, 1968)
- 1.7. TAPE NUMBER IV: Side One, (June 30, 1969)
- 1.8. TAPE NUMBER IV: Side Two, (June 30, 1969)

1. Transcript

1.1. TAPE NUMBER I: Side One, (July 24, 1968)

ADAMSON

Just to start with, I'll ask you when you were born.

HUEMER

I was born in Brooklyn, January the second, 1898: the turn of the century.

ADAMSON

And you first started to draw at the age of four.

HUEMER

Yes. If you'll pardon a turn of the century pun--I first started to draw my breath at the age of one minute. I became interested in animation when I was about ten years old, and I used to animate little figures in notebooks, and flip them, little figures of boxing, or athletic events, and that really was the first animation I ever did. I got the idea from little photographic animation books that were current at the time. Incidentally, that's where Winsor McCay got his ideas to do animation, I understand from his son, whom I met, while we were

working on a Disney picture. There had been a fire in the drugstore in the neighborhood, and they found numerous of these little flipbooks, which were about three inches square, and you flapped them, and you saw a little scene. I suppose they had been films. They used to give them away in drugstores as an advertisement.

ADAMSON

Were you scribbling in your own school notebooks?

HUEMER

That's right. Imitating them. I was the local high school cartoonist. I went to Morris High School in the Bronx, and Alexander Hamilton in Brooklyn. And in both cases I drew cartoons for the annuals, and wherever cartoons were needed for bulletin boards. I always liked to draw, in other words. The first film I ever saw was the Nelson-Ganz fight, which was at Coney Island. It was a film of the fight, of course. They had signs outside of these little restaurants, which said, 'Basket Parties Welcome.' Which meant that you could go into these places, which were filled with tables, and my father would order a glass of beer or coffee, and hot dogs for us kids, and we would open our sandwiches and eat them, and they would project these strange movies. One of which was the Nelson-Ganz fight, and I'm sure we saw some of Lumiere's and other French producer's pictures then. In shocking pink color, some of them were. Animated cartoon movies were done then by somebody nobody ever mentions: Wallace Carlson. He did something called 'Dreamy Dud.' And I saw those about 1914 at the local theaters in the Bronx.

ADAMSON

This is after Winsor McCay.

HUEMER

About the same time. I saw his 'Gertie the Dinosaur' at the Cretona Theater in the Bronx; and I was therefore able to recreate it later on a Disney T.V. show, where we reenacted McCay's performance including the picture 'Gertie' which, of course, as you know, still exists.

ADAMSON

What were your reactions to these films?

HUEMER

We didn't have the expression then but if we had, I would have said I 'flipped.' I really was sold on animated cartoons. Involvement with live-action films seemed out of reach. Especially as I liked to draw. I spent about a year at art school: Art Students' League, in New York City. I studied under Bridgeman, the famous anatomy teacher. Really was famous. Didn't rub off much on me though.

ADAMSON

What did you do, just sketch nudes and things?

HUEMER

Yes, that's right. Studied anatomy and painted a little. But I always wanted to be a cartoonist. Up in Fordham, where I lived, almost every day I passed a sign on the door of the building opposite the university, which said, 'Raoul Barre: Cartoonist.' And this intrigued me to no end, and I walked up the stairs, and walked into the animating business. When Raoul Barre Looked up from his desk and said, 'what can I do for you?' in his strange Canadian brogue, I said, 'I would like a job.' He said, 'You would like a job?' I said, 'Yes.' He said, 'Go to the next room and sit down, they'll put you to work.' It was as simple as that. And they put me to work at something that was called tracing. This was about 1916 and they were doing Mutt and Jeff cartoons. I had to quit high school to go to the League, that's how much I wanted to be an artist, and now I was quitting the League to go into cartooning. I was abandoning the fine arts. They already had the cell system, but it was not the way it's done today, which is the cells opaqued, to fit over the background. Our cells were used to contain the background and whatever lines on a scene were not 'disturbed' by the character. All the action was carried on the paper. We inked on paper, with very flashy techniques, in the imitation of Heinrich Kley, once in a while. And I would take a series of cells that fitted over the paper to complete the picture. If the character walked in front of an object, the drawings that it took for him to pass that object had to have whatever he 'disturbed' drawn on that drawing. That's where the tracing came in, we traced that thing in the background onto those five or six drawings while he was passing the object. And then that went on celluloid and stayed there, because he wasn't disturbing it any more. But he was walking in front of something else now, and

then that had to be traced. In other words, we broke the scene down into little groups of areas that were disturbed, so that we could trace those onto paper. The foreground stuff was on celluloid, and the ceiling would be on celluloid--which was never disturbed. So it took about three celluloids. I think that's the most we used. And then with the paper, you had your complete frame. I was doing the tracing, from the background that somebody laid out. I didn't do it very long; in three weeks, I was animating. That's how easy it was in those days. The staff consisted of about five animators, and about five or six tracers. Actually, there weren't more than fifteen people at the studio. Barre made one film a week, that never ran over 450 feet. And, believe it or not, it cost about a thousand dollars. And that's what he got for it, about a thousand dollars. The most he ever got was 1500 dollars.

ADAMSON

How did you get your promotion?

HUEMER

By asking for it. And the genial frenchman said, 'Why not?' He was a very fine gentleman. Animation in those days was not a difficult art. If it moved, it was good. Actually, the novelty carried it. The business got into trouble when the novelty wore off, and the people expected to see gags, and better animation and better ideas. Which, of course, Disney eventually succeeded in doing.

ADAMSON

How funny were these films at the time you wandered in?

HUEMER

As we used to say in those days, as funny as a crutch. This was an expression. They weren't funny, actually. They really weren't. We got very few laughs. I can remember taking my family to see some bit of animation I was particularly proud of, and, just as it went on, somebody behind me said, 'Oh, I hate these things.' We actually didn't consider the audiences as much as we should have. We did things more or less to please ourselves. It was as though we were enjoying ourselves, doing what we liked, what we thought was funny. It was just not understandable to audiences, very often. We were given a portion of the picture, over a very rough scenario. Very, very sketchy, no boards like we

have today, nothing like that. The scenario would probably be on a single sheet of paper, without any models, sketches, or anything, you made it up as you went along. You were given a part of the picture, and, you did what you wanted. If it was a picture about iceskating, you took a scene of somebody on ice skates, and you used your own gags, and made it all up. We had some famous people who came later on to Mutt and Jeff: Milt Gross was one of them, and Gregory LaCava worked up there a while, and men from the magazines like Nankeville.

ADAMSON

How were these stories written?

HUEMER

We all helped. We'd spend an evening talking about it. And that's all it amounted to. Sometimes, if somebody had an idea, he would do it himself. Generally it was picking a theme. I can remember some of the titles. One was about housepainting, and we called it, Painter's Frolic. Now, all you did was whatever you wanted to, anything a painter did. Another one was called The Steeple Chase. This was a rooftop thing. We did pictures about Hawaii, we'd say, 'Let's do a Hawaiian picture.' 'Fine. I'll do the surf stuff, you do the cannibals,' or whatever else. Five animators would do it, and we'd do it all in a week. Some artists were faster than others. Some were quite fast. Some of them were really slashy with their pen techniques.

ADAMSON

Like Winsor McCay.

HUEMER

The next thing that really was a tremendous improvement was the opaque cell, which Terry was a great devotee of, when he did his Aesop's fables. Terry's cartoons were already a little better. At least, the characters were cute, And at the end of each picture he'd have a little funny moral: Aesop said, '.....' The reason he could make slightly better pictures was because he had a great deal with RKO, who had bought into his studio, which assured that each one of his pictures would play all their houses, for a good price. So Terry was the first one to really make money, in this business. Pat Sullivan made money

too, but in a different way: his pictures were so popular in England, that they got all sorts of objects and artifacts, handkerchiefs with Felix the Cat on them, and this, similar to what happened to Disney, defrayed the cost of his pictures and gave him a nice profit. Felix the Cat was bigger in England than it ever was here.

ADAMSON

Seems to be an occupational hazard.

HUEMER

No, not really, we weren't as bad as newspaper people. Animators actually were a very jolly bunch. It used to be a lot of fun, working in the studios, a lot of horseplay. A lot of kidding. No timeclocks or anything like that. We did a lot of things like sending new people for a box of vanishing points, you know, that old gag. When a new guy would come in, they'd send him out for a film stretcher.

ADAMSON

Like a day camp.

HUEMER

Yes, it was really fun. And we did our stints quite comfortably; there was no stress. After all, 450 feet for about five or six men to do, that's not such a chore, especially if you like to draw.

ADAMSON

How many drawings would you do in an hour?

HUEMER

About twenty. Maybe more. Depending. In those days, we did a lot of hold positions, and just moved maybe an eye. When a character talked, all we'd have was a Repeat and Reverse of a mouth movement, and the rest of the figure didn't move at all. It was traced on a cell. And then the mouth, just this little bit, was on paper. Then a balloon would come out, with lettering, and hold, and then explode. As his mouth manipulated, the balloon came out, very quickly, just bloop in about five drawings, and held while you read the balloon. And then it whirled away or exploded, we had various ways of accomplishing

that. Characters did violent takes, like all the hair flying off. Once had all the features fly off in the air and come back and slap back in Mutt's face. This was a 'take.' We experimented with all these crazy things.

ADAMSON

How did audiences react then?

HUEMER

They didn't get it. I swear, they didn't get it. For one thing, the timing was off. And we didn't have sound. Sound was the great saviour of the animated cartoon. I was with Barre till about '21. And then the place folded as they so often did in those days. You never could be sure of your job. Every spring was a crisis. This was contract time, you know, with the releasing company. I can remember being told, 'Don't go far, we'll call you. Don't call us.' And never being called. Barre was a very dedicated person, just like Walt Disney was later on. His idea was to plow back everything into the business and not worry about making a profit for himself. He rightly figured that if the pictures were good enough, why, they would pay their way, and people would demand them, which is what Disney eventually accomplished. Walt's pictures cost him much more than he got for them, at first; even Three Little Pigs made not so much money as you may think. He was such a nice little Frenchman, who had a funny way of talking. I can still remember, he would say things like, 'Mutt comes into de room, and throws the tom-a-toe at the cannery.' Meaning the tomato at the canary. Cute guy, too bad he lost his marbles. Mutt and Jeff started as a comic strip that had to do with horseracing. It would predict winners of each day's race. That's how it got its fame. It didn't matter what the gag was, in the last balloon, he'd say something like, 'Well, I'm putting my money on Bluenose in the sixth race.' He did very well predicting these things. Finally, he dropped that, maybe there came a time that he was losing too consistently. It became a regular type comic strip, one of the very few strips of the time. This goes way back to the time of 'The Yellow Kid,' and comic strips like that. I don't know exactly how Barre got it, Mutt and Jeff. I do know that he must have gotten it through Bud Fisher, the guy who drew it. Fisher financed it, but had nothing whatever to do with the pictures. We saw him very seldom. We heard he was a millionaire by then. Even then, he was a fantastic businessman. He just had a knack for making money. The strip was

enormously popular, it was probably the biggest strip of its day. Something like 'Peanuts' is now.

ADAMSON

What did he think of the cartoons?

HUEMER

I don't know if he ever saw them or gave a damn about them. Just financed it, it was another venture of his. But he did watch the releasing very carefully. I understand that he checked in on that, and he caught somebody who was robbing him and hauled him over the coals. He was really a very shrewd guy. You know, he had a million in the days when it was like having a billion now.

ADAMSON

Is that why Mutt and Jeff continued, even after the Barre corporation folded?

HUEMER

I think Fisher turned it over to something called the Jefferson Film Corporation, which was owned by Fox. And Fox released them. There was always a Mutt and Jeff studio. Although it was run by different people. The place was run by Barre; when he got out, it was run by Bowers, who took it, and ran it for a while; and then the Jefferson Film Corporation moved in, and they ran it till it quit. And I kept working for them. We all kept working for them.

ADAMSON

And how long did the Jefferson Film Co. run the thing?

HUEMER

Oh, just a few years. Nothing lasted very long.

ADAMSON

How much money did these films make, do you know?

HUEMER

No, I don't. I don't think they knew either. There was a time when they were given away with features. It was a package deal. You got a feature, you got a

newsreel, you got some other strange thing, then you got a cartoon. Very often they didn't even run the cartoons. If the exhibitor hated the cartoons, he didn't run them. That's how interested they were.

ADAMSON

So the cartoons never really caught on, like the comic strip.

HUEMER

Well, Mutt and Jeff didn't. I think the Fables caught on slightly. By 1920, somewhere in there, I think that Bray was making a living and Feischer, who was with Bray, started his 'Out of the Inkwell' around 1915. These were released in something called states' righting. Or I could buy the rights to run that film in a certain state--say California. I have the rights. I have the film, now I can release it in any theater I want to. I paid a certain amount of money for that, so that in the 46 states you were sure to at least get a certain amount of money, just for giving them the rights to run it. Then you didn't bother about it anymore. That was their affair, to make prints, to sell it, to send it around, whatever they wanted to do with it. It was kind of a precarious business. And that was because there was no actual demand for these things. Not that people weren't thinking about improving them. There was a guy Carl Lederer who thought of making a feature, way back in 1919. Cinderella. This was going to be a beautiful thing--silent, of course. Many had the idea. He never completed it; he died. This same fellow, Carl Lederer, also had the idea of multi-plane, or depth in a cartoon. He took three different speeds of a background, moved them in different gradations: half-inch in the front, quarter of an inch farther back, and then the sky, tracing all three on one piece of paper, going back and laboriously tracing so that when you used these traced pieces of paper, you got this effect of the speed in front, and then less and less in the back. There was an amazing feeling of depth. We used it in Mutt and Jeff. We used it over and over again; he made two, one a country scene and one a city scene. And they were great! But I don't think the audiences noticed them. In general they were still faintly hostile to the cartoons.

ADAMSON

You washed cells and used them over again at this time, didn't you?

HUEMER

Yes, we had to. Had to cut corners. We counted pencils, too. We turned back the stub of a pencil to get a new one. It was a tight operation. And I don't know whether we ever got vacation! I don't believe we ever did. Of course, we got a vacation at the end of contract time, when we were out of work for a few weeks. Without pay. And we worked half a day Saturday. But then everybody did in those days. As an animator, I made about a hundred and twenty dollars a week. This was around 1920, and it was a lot of money! More than a lot of my relatives made. And I understand that at Hearst's International, guys like Frank Moser did fabulously well. They told me that he made about 400 dollars a week just animating. But he was lightning fast and could slash it out. Hearst had the International Studio, where he did all his King Features characters, like Happy Hooligan, and Katzenjammers, 'Jerry on the Job' all these things were done in animated cartoon form, as sort of subsidiary to the newspaper strips.

ADAMSON

If it was such a tight operation, how could they afford to pay you all so much?

HUEMER

That's a good question, isn't it?

ADAMSON

It would seem, because Chaplin was getting this unheard of 100 dollars a week in 1914. For five years later, that would seem to be quite a stunning fee for animators.

HUEMER

You know, that's something I hadn't thought of in all these years: how they could do it. I know when I worked for Fleischer, in 1925, I was making 125 dollars a week. I guess maybe they did make a go of it, barely. When I talk about counting pencils, I'm talking about 1915, when they were making them for a round a thousand dollars a picture.

ADAMSON

You were getting less at this time?

HUEMER

About 75 dollars still a good salary. Of course, I got seven dollars a week as a tracer.

ADAMSON

Regardless of how, why do you think they did this? They didn't need to attract people. They didn't need to tempt them with a large salary.

HUEMER

There weren't that many animators available, or that many people who would be interested, or even knew about the business. You'd be surprised how many people didn't know about animated cartoons, or paid any attention to them. A guy like Moser appeared brilliant to them. They would get crushes on people, a boss would, and say, 'Oh, this is the best animator in the business, he's a wizard! Can't lose him!' So they would pay him a good salary. It actually happened to me with the Fleischers.

ADAMSON

When did you start working for the Fleischers?

HUEMER

Around 1925.

ADAMSON

Is this after Mutt and Jeff?

HUEMER

Yeah. I must have had other jobs, I was still an artist. I could paint lampshades.

ADAMSON

So you started with the Fleischers about '25.

HUEMER

You better make that '23.

ADAMSON

All right.

HUEMER

(to tape recorder) You heard him.

ADAMSON

You started with the Fleischers about '23. And they were doing what?

HUEMER

Oh, they were doing 'Out of the Inkwell.' Koko the Clown and Max were the only characters. Then we introduced other characters as protagonists. Once we took him to Mars, and he had Martians to contend with. Those were actually pretty good cartoons, I still believe. They were definitely to my mind a step above the Mutt and Jeffs. They had better stories.

ADAMSON

Were the animators still making up their own gags, or did you have a little bit more supervision?

HUEMER

Myself, I would work with Dave Fleischer. Max was the guy who acted in the pictures. Dave was his brother and more or less the director of the operation. We'd get together and talk about it. The studio was so small that you could walk from desk to desk. Not like the Disney studio, where it's full of rooms, and where nobody ever sees anybody or talks to anybody. You could yell across the room, 'Hey, Dave. I want to talk to you. Suppose we do this.' And then we'd sit down and talk it over and laugh our heads off at our great gags, and then I would animate it. But, of course, we had a basic theme. Did you ever see the one about the fly? That's the surviving one that you see around a lot. A fly is bothering Max; well, take it from there, what can a fly do to disturb this? So it was very relaxed at Fleischer's.

ADAMSON

How big a part did Max play in these cartoons?

HUEMER

He would open it, and in some trick way the clown would come out of the inkwell. Max would take the cork off the inkwell, or other cleverer ways, then Koko'd be loose, so he'd play against Max. He'd squirt ink at him, whatever the gags were. Then in the end he always went back into the inkwell, and Max put the cork back on. A circular effect, to complete the thing.

ADAMSON

What would you say was the major reason for these cartoons being better than the others?

HUEMER

They had more interesting ideas, for one thing. They had live action, which is understandable right away. Here is Max, a live person that they got to like after a while. Max was not a great actor or comedian, but at least, if you saw a few of them, you got to know him, and you were sympathetic to his troubles. Another thing they did was something they called Rotoscope. They did that right from the very start. Dave Fleischer would put on a clown suit, and they would photograph him; and then they would take those photographs and work over them. A simple process, but it gave astonishingly lifelike action. Incidentally, McCay's action was very lifelike, too, in some of his early cartoons, which was amazing, because he didn't use Rotoscope. He didn't base it on any live action. He did a little thing about Nemo, which was very natural, really very beautiful animation. It's surprising, because he did that before anybody else, and then in between that time and when Disney came along, there was a lot of this raunchy-looking stuff--not good drawing or action. McCay hit a high peak at the very start, after which quality went down and then came up again when Disney entered the picture.

ADAMSON

Winsor McCay didn't use the inbetween system, did he? He would go straight from one drawing to the next.

HUEMER

That's right. We found that out at a banquet we gave in 1928. It was called the Animators' Banquet. We invited him, and he was the guest of honor.

ADAMSON

You didn't do this every year, did you?

HUEMER

No, they wouldn't let us because after we were through the owner of the hotel says, 'Raus! -- and don't come back!' The last I saw the night of the brawl was somebody trying to kick off the chandelier. Anyway McCay got up and he had a few under his belt, as we all did--there were only about thirty of us, that's all there was in the business, in those days.

ADAMSON

McCay was a sober, timid sort of person, wasn't he?

HUEMER

Well, he wasn't sober this night. He got up and he said, 'Now I'm going to put you fellows wise to something that I've just discovered,' he says, 'Instead of working straight ahead, which maxes it hard to know where you're going in animation, why don't you take drawing no.1, and then look ahead and make drawing no.5; and now look, you can put drawings no. 2, 3, and 4 right in between!' He was telling us about the inbetween system! Of course, we respected him so much that nobody said, 'Aw, come off it, we've been doing it since 1915.' So that's how we know that he must have animated straight ahead.

ADAMSON

So you were doing the inbetween system from the time you started?

HUEMER

Oh, yeah. And we wouldn't let anybody touch our inbetweens. We had no inbetweeners. It was pretty important that we did all this ourselves. It was too precious to let some jerk come in who maybe didn't know how to draw, and monkey with your stuff. As a matter of fact, for the record, in all modesty, I'm the first one to use inbetweeners. And it came about when I was working for the Fleischers. They--poor fellows--liked my work so well that they said, 'Why don't you do more of it? I mean by having someone do the inbetweens?' And my first impulse was 'Oh, yeah?' 'I will, like hell!' Then, being basically a very lazy fellow, I thought, 'Why not?' So, Art Davis was assigned to me.

ADAMSON

Is inbetweening invariably tedious?

HUEMER

Well, it's not creative. You don't dare be creative about inbetweening. The extremes create the action, the mood, or whatever you want to put over the point. Did the spacing, too.

ADAMSON

Were you satisfied with his work?

HUEMER

Oh, fine. Didn't know the difference.

ADAMSON

What percentage of the drawings did he end up doing?

HUEMER

About seventy-five. We exposed our own animation right on the paper. We didn't even have exposure sheets. We drew down in the corner. Suppose you had somebody repeating an action, we'd say, 'R and R'--repeat and reverse--'five times stopping on 8,' then you go ahead. Of course when sound came along, you have to have exposure sheets. This is an amusing incident that explains how careful we were in drawing our things when we worked in pen and ink with Gilott pen points--they had to be Gilott's 290's, these famous English pen points. Some guy was animating an explosion and he noodled up this drawing of smoke and things breaking, and everything; and he made such a beautiful drawing of one of these new inbetweens that he held it for five exposures. He couldn't stand having the thing go through in one exposure, as it should have. His work of art might have been missed! I could tell you his name, but he's a friend of mine. The inking techniques were very interesting, some guys were very good. You'd put shading on the leg that was behind the other one, if you wanted to. We did the clown in the rip and slash system, which is cutting papers out to fit over each other like a puzzle. We used to noodle up closeups of the clown's head with shading all around the eyes, and everything. We used a very heavy outline in those days; very, very thick

outline, all around the figure. That was because in the printing and developing of the film if we didn't have a heavy outline, very often, it would bleed out. So it wasn't just an affectation, it was necessary to do it. The Fleischers only used opaque cells when the clown worked over a photograph. Say he was on the desk. Then he would be--as we do today--on an opaque cell. Of course, he was just black and white; white-faced, black suit. Didn't use any grays that I can remember. Rotoscope was how he combined the cartoon with live action. First, he had a camera above and below a Glass plate, with pegs; a projection machine was below that shooting up, and a camera was shooting down. First he made a matte of the clown. This was used for putting cartoon with live action, putting them on the same film. They were a pretty inventive bunch, the Fleischers. The bouncing ball thing was invented by them, the idea of bouncing a ball on words. They got an old-fashioned washing machine, and lettered the lines of the song, white letters on black, and then tacked it on this round drum. Then they covered the whole thing black, and when they turned the drum a line would come into the opening of a slit and go down, and then the next line would come. Then, they had a black pointer with a white dot on the end, so that when the line moved in--you never saw where it came from--then the pointer would go, dee-dee-dee-dee-dee-dee. You didn't see the pointer because it was black against black. You saw the white ball: it looked as though the white ball was jumping from word to word.

ADAMSON

This wasn't an animated white ball?

HUEMER

No, no! It was done this way, with a pointer. Filmed in live action! The pointer doesn't photograph because it's black. They never let the pointer go in front of the letters. It's going above the letters. They'd knock it off in no time at all. The first one they made was called 'Oh, Mabel,' and I animated it. It was a song slightly popular at the time: 'Neath your window I am waiting, oh, Mabel!' -- something to that effect. I would animate the lines in, and I had a little figure jumping to accent: 'Neath-your-win-dow-I-am-waiting'--and she'd jump back as the next line came in-- 'Oh...' and ride along; the thing rode along in panorama. And we did strange things. We'd turn words into funny objects and we'd explode words. They'd drift down, grow, shrink, other characters would

come in and chase them off. I didn't do the bouncing ball that was always the chorus. I just did the verse. The verse was always some figure animated that was appropriate, like 'In the shade of the old apple tree' and the word would animate up into a tree. They were white on black, but they were negative. We'd have to make a black face so that when it was reversed it would be a white face. 'Then the letters, being black would come out white. It was so successful that when they ran "oh, Mabel" at the Circle Theater, in Columbus Circle, New York, it brought down the house, it stopped the show. They applauded and stamped and whistled into the following picture, which they finally stopped, and took off, and put back the 'Oh, Mabel' cartoon again. They ran it again to the delight of the audience. I always say that was an indication of the audience. I always say that was an indication of what sound would someday do for the animated cartoon, because it was a sound idea. The use of sound combined with action even though the audience supplied the sound, nevertheless, it partook of that feeling. They sang their little hearts out. It was very successful. With Mutt and Jeff we did something called 'Sound your A' in which Mutt and Jeff appeared on the screen, and seemed to talk to Max Manny, the drummer of the Strand Theater, whose idea it was. He stood up in a spot light in the orchestra, and he'd say, 'Well, Mutt, how are things today?' And then the character would seem to look down at him, and a balloon would come up and say, 'Fine.' They played back and forth, and this, again, was, in a sense foreshadowing what sound would do someday. It was very, very successful. This was the most successful Mutt and Jeff.

ADAMSON

This was something like what McCay did with 'Gertie the Dinosaur,' now, wasn't it?

HUEMER

Right.

ADAMSON

Was there great similarity between your work and other animators' work? Or was the difference imperceptible enough, since they were using the same techniques?

HUEMER

Within a picture, say there were three animators doing it, you would have to look very closely to tell the difference in animators' drawings. But you could tell, instantly, whether it was a Terrytoon, or a Fleischer, or a Mutt and Jeff, or a Felix the Cat. At least I could, I imagine audiences could too, if they cared. They were stamped, they were individual. Always the same way of doing it.

ADAMSON

So that your work took on a different look when you changed studios.

HUEMER

That's right. Even though you retained a little; you couldn't help doing things certain ways. But audiences were ever aware of anything like that. Even to us there wasn't much. Of course, I knew my own work, I could tell mine in a minute. I saw an old Mutt and Jeff cartoon that I'd worked on, and I could tell my own work. This was one that was done when we had a little outfit called The Associated Animators, and all we would need would be the inkers and the painters of the cells--by this time most cartoons were done in the opaque system. We were the first cooperative in the animation business. It was myself, Burt Gillette, Ben Harrison, Manny Gould--and we decided to be both the owners and animators; we wouldn't need a staff; we would save all that money. Finally we went to Mutt and Jeff or rather Bud Fisher's attorney and got the rights to do the Mutt and Jeffs again. They had lapsed for a while. We did a number of these, and I saw one just the other day: it wasn't too bad. Incidentally, we couldn't make any money. It wasn't a successful operation. Besides, I think Mutt and Jeff was fading away, and Bud Fisher withdrew his financial support, and that ended it. That was the end of Mutt and Jeff.

ADAMSON

As animation advances, from about 1910 into the thirties, there was less and less appearance of human figures, and animals began to take over.

HUEMER

Well, animals were always very popular, because when you do something with an animal, it's unconscious satire. And it seemed to be more sympathetic. Even Disney went to animals. He had this little girl, remember the Alice

cartoons. And, of course, Terry had Farmer Alfalfa character in his, but all the rest was animals. Animals were very successful, they always were.

ADAMSON

Farmer Alfalfa was more or less just a stooge for a lot of cats and mice, as I remember.

HUEMER

That's right. Alice was sort of a stooge too. Then the animation business was looking very shaky to me, and I decided to get out of it. I drew a comic strip called 'Good-Time Guy' for the Metropolitan News paper service, which ran for about; a year or two. It was a people-type strip. The guy who did 'Ella Cinders' Bill Conselman wrote it, and I drew it. Well that folded too. Then I went back to the Fleischers. I was with them in 1929 when the crash occurred, I can remember it, crashing.

ADAMSON

Did this affect you very seriously?

HUEMER

Not personally, no. I didn't own any stock. I didn't understand it. Who did? The animation industry looked awfully bad, at that time. Disney, of course, had already entered the field, and had done some oswalds. They were far superior to anything any body had done, in my estimation. And we, me, Harrison and Gould, used to go seek them out, find out where they were running and study them. And, bad as they look today--(and I've seen them recently, and they are pretty bad)--they were tremendously superior to our thing. That was our opinion as craftsmen of the business. I was with Fleischer again when sound broke on the scene; and the 'Skeleton Dance' took New York by storm, and naturally everything went to sound.

ADAMSON

And you went to Columbia.

HUEMER

That's right, we did Scrappy and Toby the Pup. That's the first thing we did, Toby the Pup. Sort of a nondescript little character. A black little beast, that

walked on its hind legs, and had a big mop of black hair. A weird dog-like thing with long ears.

ADAMSON

Was he sympathetic? Who create him?

HUEMER

Sid Marcus created him. He and I came out to start the series. We left Fleischers together. Mintz moved to California, and we went with him, and started Toby the Pup. Mintz also brought out Harrison and Gould to continue Krazy Kat, which they had been doing. They ran concurrently. The Fleischers naturally joined the gold rush after Disney's stunning success with his first sound cartoons. Their first was a Popeye short cartoon with a Noah's ark theme. I'm under the impression that some of the dialogue was not prescored. Their own original method of synchronizing cartoon and sound was the invention of George Ruffle, who was one of their animators. It consisted of photographing a bouncing ball, attached to the bottom of a baton which occupied the space at the left side of the film reserved normally for the sound track. In effect, this acted as a metronome and could be photographed to provide any desired beat, more particularly, the ones established and determined in advance by the animation itself. As the recording session, the musical director had only to watch the baton going up and down in the preempted sound track space and guide his orchestra accordingly. Musicians and vocalists also carefully watched the cartoon to add their sound effects and dialogues. It was the answer to previous and haphazard methods of synchronization such as having a flower which had nothing whatever to do with the action wag back and forth in the corner of the scene for the musical director to watch. As far as I know the Popeyes hit it off very well, and after them came Betty Boop, and a revival of Koko in the Song Cartune setting--all with sound, of course. But I was long gone from the Fleischers by then. I spent three years with the Charles Mintz outfit and established myself with the studio of my choice--Disney's. Apropos of the great popularity of the Popeye cartoons, there's a story that concerns Walt Disney while he was on one of his trips to South America. I wasn't on the trip. Joe Grant and I had been left behind to finish up Dumbo. Anyway it was at some big social function the locals were throwing to honor their famous visitor. Most of the crowd were

English. The typical kind. All evening long as Walt danced, some guy would give the famous wink, in passing him on the dance floor and nod knowingly. Then he would give the Popeye 'Beep Beep' and whirl away with his partner, satisfied no doubt that he knew he had shown Disney that he was aware of a thing or two about what was what in cartoons. It's hard to blame the poor guys, since actually, the great majority of people of the world probably thought that Disney was the only one who made animated cartoons. Technical item: When I came to the Mutt and Jeff studio in 1916 they were already using the Top Peg system of registry. Before that they had used various different ways of keeping the drawings in register. One way was to have a number of pinholes on each sheet of animation paper at the top. These coincided exactly with relative holes in the animation board. The animator put the pins, ordinary straight pins, through the paper and into the holes and also under the camera. It worked until the peg system came along. Another strange deviation from common procedure was that Paul Terry and also his brother John Terry did all their animation on transparent tissue paper. Everybody else, as far as I know used the so-called Light Boards and regular paper. After all, how can you flip tissue paper? Let me tell you the story that I've told many times, about what people thought of the business at first. When we opened our second Mutt and Jeff studio in Fordham, we were in the Fordham Arcade. And down below on the street level, there was this tailor, who had a small shop that we animators patronized. He was just burning up with curiosity about what we fellows were doing upstairs. We were in this loft that was meant for light manufacturing, and he couldn't figure it out. 'What are you boys doing up there?' he persisted. And we explained, 'We're making animated pictures,' or at least we tried to explain...and finally I said one day, 'Well, come on up, Mr. Pincus, or whatever his name was. I'll show you what we're doing.' And one day sure enough, he appeared at the door, hat in hand. I took him in tow and lead him around, from board to board. I flipped drawings. I showed him the instructions, how we did it...as much as you can explain it. Even today you can't do it much different, you know, it's still much the same principle. Well, I showed him everything, and he just stood there, shifting from foot to foot...occasionally he'd go, 'Tsk, tsk, tsk,' or 'hmmm.' Never a word. I thought maybe he wasn't listening. Finally, it was all done, I said, 'Well? what do you think, Mr. Pincus?' And he said, 'Tell me...from this, you are making a living?' And that would be a good title for a book about this period, 'From This You

Are Making a Living.' It was all completely incomprehensible to him. Same as the word 'animation.' It didn't mean anything at all to people. As far as some people knew, it meant mating animals.

ADAMSON

Give us an idea what the studio looked like.

HUEMER

The Barre studio was in an enormous bare loft, about a hundred feet by about seventy-five...without any breaks...well, yes, at one end there was a wall for an office. The studio part had these long benches, with room for three or four light boards on each side, facing each other.

ADAMSON

Light boards...

HUEMER

Well, that's what we called the animation boards. There was a long shelf in the middle, on which you could put your drawings, and which separated you from the guy on the other side--to whom you could talk through these shelves. And there were about twelve of these units, standing right in the middle of the room. Twelve of these benches or tables, containing about, oh, eight places for animators--which was far more than were needed when Barre set the place up. He never filled it. At no time was it ever completely filled. We only occupied, well, maybe, four rows of these boards for tracers and animators. Then there was a camera from Barre which occupied another room to the side. The loft was very bleak and it was very cold in the winter. The heating was totally inadequate. We often had to go home, because our fingers got stiff from cold. That was when the oil heaters no longer helped. We had these little oil heaters that stood around on the floor. They don't exist anymore, but we had them in those days before little electric heaters.

ADAMSON

Like smudge pots?

HUEMER

Well, except that they didn't smudge. There was a little tank on the bottom, with a round cylinder, where the heat came from--no, they were clean enough. I guess it was kerosene oil they burned or something that didn't make a smudge. The whole studio was very bare looking.

ADAMSON

No drawings hanging on the walls, or anything?

HUEMER

Oh, no refinements, no, indeed. No curtains or carpets. We had bare board flooring.

ADAMSON

No, I mean like sketches.

HUEMER

They couldn't afford it. No.

ADAMSON

What did you do with your old drawings after you had made your little films?

HUEMER

They were always thrown away.

ADAMSON

Just thrown away...

HUEMER

Oh, sure. You couldn't draw on the other side of the paper, could you?

ADAMSON

Even though you did save the cells...

HUEMER

As I say, we saved them and washed them. That was a regular job for somebody, to be continually washing cells. A Mrs. Malloy did that. That wasn't

too easy to do either. The ink stuck to the cells. We had to use ammonia and one thing and another. No, the older studios were pretty bare, just utilitarian.

ADAMSON

How did the Fleischers look?

HUEMER

Same idea. Only Walt Disney definitely took pride in the appearance of his studio. Made beautiful desks, nice furniture, landscaped the grounds, had full-time gardeners all over the place. Well, he had the money. We didn't have the money for that. Not in those pioneer days.

ADAMSON

Well, it's also a matter of care. Out of one room you have several hundred drawings come out every day. Very often, in the places I've seen, they'll take a cell and a background, and over, lay them over, and then just put them up on the wall.

HUEMER

No, we never did that.

ADAMSON

Never bothered with that.

HUEMER

Well, as a matter of fact, they weren't that good.

ADAMSON

I see.

HUEMER

They (the Fleischers) started with Popeye just as soon as sound became obligatory.

ADAMSON

Do you know why they picked him up?

HUEMER

sure, It was a good property because Popeye was the most popular comic strip at that time.

ADAMSON

Like Mutt and Jeff.

HUEMER

Yeah, sure. It was a very big feature (newspaper that is). It was quite a plum to have. If you should happen to see one of the old Popeyes you may notice that there is never a quiet moment--in the dialogue, that is. Dialogue that is crucial to the story will be worked out and synched to action. But in between there is a constant stream of muttering, often unintelligible. But it was very effective, a device to keep the thing alive. Yes, sound did wonders for the animated cartoon. There'd be none without sound, I don't think. Certainly very little public acceptance.

ADAMSON

Killed off the two-reel comedy, at the same time.

HUEMER

Yeah, and a good thing.

ADAMSON

Why?

HUEMER

I don't know. I didn't care for them.

ADAMSON

When did you start noticing them?

HUEMER

I'm sure it was around 1914. Chaplin did something called His New Job. This was the first one of his pictures that I ever saw. It just flattened me. It just killed me. And everybody else too. Suddenly everybody was talking Chaplin.

ADAMSON

This is the one moving the piano.

HUEMER

I don't know what, even what it was about.

ADAMSON

You remember the title!

HUEMER

Yes, that was the title: His New Job.

ADAMSON

Would you say this had any effect on what you were doing?

HUEMER

You mean, did we imitate Chaplin?

ADAMSON

Not imitate exactly.

HUEMER

The only one who was ever really influenced by Chaplin was Walt. He just couldn't get him out of his system, you know. He thought of Mickey Mouse actually as a little Chaplin. Not that he walked like him or looked like him, but Walt kept the feeling of this little droll kind of pathetic little character, who was always being picked on. But cleverly coming out on top anyway. Other people influenced Walt, too, Douglas Fairbanks, and other outstanding performers. Walt had a wonderful gift of adapting things that were good and changing them so that you couldn't recognize them. Actually making them better. As far back as 1916, when I came to the Mutt and Jeff studio, they were trying to improve their animation. When I got there, they were all talking about a bit of animation done by a chap named Rigby, which has two goats, butting each other or something. By today's standards it's less than nothing, but this was considered so great, when I came there. Rigby was the studio hero for a few weeks. This was 1916. And then around 1918, Albert Hurter,

who did such great work at Disney's later on, had to draw an American flag; and he looked out the window, saw a flag, and, wonder of wonders, he actually copied the movement--studied it and copied it. Something which nobody had done before. If you had done a flag before, you would take three drawings and have it merely sort of vibrate. But he analyzed the action, and its folds, etcetera. He was such a magnificent artist! And when this scene came out, we just thought, 'This is the end! The living end! This is the greatest!' In other words we weren't blind to improvement. As a matter of fact, another thing done at this time, which Walt also did later, was what Barre--or Bowers, one or the other--instituted, art classes. We would come back at night to study the human form. Self-improvement, so that we drew better. Another Disney precept. The studio would hire a model to come to pose for us. And thereby hangs a tale. We had this nude model posing for us one night, and Vet Anderson who used to draw for Puck and Life (they called him Vet because he was a veteran of the Spanish-American War) used to keep his tobacco loose in his pocket, and fill his pipe by dipping it in the pocket full of tobacco. We were all drawing one night this nude model when, all of a sudden, she, giving no exclamation, stalked off the platform and left the room. We looked at each other wondering, 'What's the matter?' So one of us ran after her asking, 'What's wrong?' And she said, 'That man!...with the red face. Why is he leering so evilly?' Now this was his habitual expression when he concentrated. Vet always smiled anyway. But she thought he was leering, enjoying her nakedness. But we did have art classes, and we did, as I say, study the pen techniques of Heinrich Kley and other people. We thought Oppen of Happy Hooligan fame was a fine draughtsman. Gibson was the greatest pen and ink man, of course. Who could imitate him?

ADAMSON

You didn't stay at Fleischers' long after sound came in.

HUEMER

Well, I was in and out of Fleischers' several times. I left to go into the Associated Animators--a company I helped form. Then I came back again. Then I left to do my comic strip. Then I came back once more. And then I left to go with Charlie Mintz. The last time I left Max said, 'All right now, this is the last time you're gonna leave!' He didn't really mean it. He was a lovely guy. I

loved Max. He said, 'That's a fine thing, leaving me...that's the last time you're gonna do it to me.' Ben Sharpsteen had been touting me to Walt Disney. (There was only about ten or twelve of us animators in the world, you know, and I was one of them.) and when Walt Disney came to New York on a business trip he looked me up with the idea of getting me to work for him. I invited him to dinner. He didn't know New York, and I took him to a place called The Chili Villa, which even to this day I think serves the finest Mexican food I've ever eaten. Simply magnificent. I took Walt and his wife Lily there to talk things over. It was understood right away that I would consider working for him, even before we went to dinner. But I wasn't sure. He said, 'Yes, let's talk anyway.' So we went to Chili Villa on 45th Street. And all through the meal I don't think Walt addressed five words to me. He sat and brooded and ate this heavenly food, and never said anything about how great it was, or much of anything else. So I spoke mostly to his wife. And I thought, 'This is certainly a strange guy. I mean nobody has ever done this to me in my life.' Well, later I found out that he was in very deep trouble, and was brooding. He had some serious set-back. Something about the business end of it, I think. That's why he'd come to New York. So that was my strange introduction to Walt Disney. I finally agreed to work for him, but a day later I got a better offer from Mintz and decided to take that. When I called Walt up and told him, there was silence for a while. Finally he said, 'Well, okay, but you'll be very sorry.' And I was. Because I should have gone with him right then and there. I would have had a better time, and I'd have enjoyed working in the business with a real genius. Although I must say the money he offered wasn't nearly comparable to what Mintz was going to pay me.

ADAMSON

Really? Why was that?

HUEMER

Well, I guess Mintz thought I was that good. He offered me a percentage cut besides.

ADAMSON

When was this first meeting with Walt?

HUEMER

1930. So, then I went to Mintz. And stayed until 1933. When Mintz tried to cut our salaries during the depression we went on strike. And so I left Mintz. Instead of going on strike though, I went over to Disney's at last. I had regretted turning him down as he had predicted.

ADAMSON

But was there that much difference in salary?

HUEMER

There was quite a come-down in salary--almost half. Walt was not one for paying big salaries at that time

ADAMSON

Mintz was?

HUEMER

Well, Mintz was simply because I had the reputation of being one of the men he badly needed to start a new series. He underpaid the rest of the staff besides.

ADAMSON

What was it like, working for Mintz?

HUEMER

Oh, fine. In a way you did what you pleased. He didn't know what was going on. He didn't care. He wasn't really interested much in the pictures. He was just a promoter, he bankrolled it. You couldn't ever do anything without a release and his big job was to wrangle that with Columbia and RKO.

ADAMSON

Oh, I see.

HUEMER

Mintz was a businessman. He had nothing to do with the creation of it. He left it up to me and Sid Marcus. For Toby and Serappy and Krazy Kat was done by Gould and Harrison. They handled it to suit themselves. Sid Marcus and I directed and did the stories. But we also had to animate at the same time.

Once you'd laid the picture out, and timed it, why, there wasn't much else but to animate it. We were still our best animators, certainly better than any neophytes we could hire. Harrison and Gould did the same. They animated most of their Krazy Kats.

ADAMSON

Did you have inbetweeners now?

HUEMER

Yes, we did. We had everything.

ADAMSON

And inkers and painters?

HUEMER

Yep. We used the opaque cell system which had been universal for a long time now.

ADAMSON

And pre-recorded sound?

HUEMER

Yes.

ADAMSON

So, you're pretty sophisticated by this time.

HUEMER

Yes, we were comparable to all the other studios. After I left Mintz, they went on for many years doing Krazy Kat mostly. My leaving didn't ruin them.

ADAMSON

What did you think of what you turned out at this time?

HUEMER

Not much. Some of them were all right. But they didn't compare to Disney's cartoon. Let's put it that way.

ADAMSON

Well, without taking Disney into account: did you find them going over better than what you'd done before?

HUEMER

I'm afraid they didn't do much better at all. Not in my opinion. They weren't in color. Walt did the first color cartoon: 'Flowers and Trees.' When I came to Disney's, they had already finished several cartoons. They had done 'Flowers and Trees,' which was the first 'Silly Symphony' and they were just finishing Three Little Pigs, which I didn't work on. Which, as you know, was a smasher.

ADAMSON

Did Scrappy make a profit for the studio?

HUEMER

I couldn't tell you that. It's my impression though that cartoons again were victims of block booking. They gave the cartoons away with their features. One of those things.

ADAMSON

So the audiences weren't that concerned about the product.

HUEMER

Not much I guess. It wasn't like Disney, where they demanded Mickey Mouses--remember the slogan, 'What-- No Mickey Mouse!' There was nothing like that with Scrappy or Krazy Kat. The people laughed a little. But not like at Disney's pictures, which were belly-laughs. No, Disney brought careful planning, in every phase of the making of an animated cartoon. Careful planning and meticulous attention to detail, and ideas, and gags, gags, gags! I mean he was his own best gag man. Had the best gag mind I ever ran across.

1.2. TAPE NUMBER I: Side Two, (July 31, 1968)

HUEMER

One whole incident started when I drew great big teeth on Koko, something the Fleischers never had done up to that time. Well, Dave started kidding me about it, baring his teeth at me every time I looked at him. Or he would draw an enormous tooth on my drawing paper when my back was turned. Then finally one night on my way home, I put my hand into my pocket and fished out a handful of teeth, Human ones. He'd gotten them from a dentist friend of his. I forget what my next move was--probably slipping one or two into his dessert at lunch, or some other disgusting thing. And then came the morning when I raised my drawing board to switch on the light and my hand touched something slimy. There draped over the light bulb was the lower half of a cow's jaw, replete with great big yellow teeth and shreds of unhealthy-looking flesh. Naturally I couldn't let him quit while he was ahead. So I sneaked down to the street when he wasn't looking and placed the cadaver on the motor of his Ford. I was only sorry I wasn't there when he started to smell roast beef on his way home. That kind of ended the whole rib. Neither of us could find a topper after that. Although thirty years later, when I met Dave accidentally in a theatre lobby, the first thing he did was to make big teeth at me. Did I tell you the trick with the stuffed dates? There was always a good deal of horseplay in those prehistoric animation studios. There was this guy who was an irritating kind of character. He was quite hard of hearing, and wore the first hearing aid I had ever seen up to that time, but I guess he was just naturally unlovable. Among other odd things (he was also a poet) was his devotion to health foods. He brought all sorts of unconventional foodstuffs for lunch. He was particularly addicted to stuffed dates, that is, dates stuffed with chopped nuts and raisins and things. One day while he was out of the room, we took his stuffed dates, removed the filling, and substituted a mixture of our own--mostly tobacco. Then we all waited at lunchtime for the big horselaugh would you believe it? He picked them up and ate them all! Without even making a face! Were we frustrated. The only conclusion I could come to was that he was hard of tasting as well as hearing. At the Mutt and Jeff studio, George Foster was our champion ribber. His favorite trick was to get hold of some newcomer to the studio who was all eager to learn the business, and GIVE him the business. George was the oldest of the animators--thirty-five, I think, but that was old for our new industry. He had gray hair and this mock pontifical manner of speaking. He would sell the poor guy on the idea of something called 'still life animation.' The importance of it, that you had to learn it before

you could animate. He invented all sorts of strange words and gimmicks. In regular art in those days, one first concentrated on still life before tackling the human figure. Well, this was the same basis for learning how to animate; you had to first study still life animation and that was his gag. Until the kid finally caught on to it. I told you about how Bowers bought an interest in the business. I think he put in about three thousand dollars, which gave him a part ownership. Bowers was a very talented man. He didn't have to be a renegade, which he was. He claimed to be some kind of an ex-circus performer. And always told us tall tales, about, walking across tightropes high over a street. He said with an oil stove in each hand, the kind we used in the studio. Both burning, yet. And once that he had been run over by a wagon, in the desert. But the sand was so soft that it left his impression in the ground and didn't hurt him at all! I mean that's the kind of guy he was. With it all, he was a very brilliant political cartoonist...worked for the Newark News. He came to Disney's in the 1930's with a film he'd made, trying to get Walt's backing. Incidentally, it was an idea he had stolen from Barre. If you look at an old Barre cartoon you'll see this gag of a chicken laying eggs and little automobiles hatching out, all because it was scared by an automobile or something. Bower's crib of Barre's idea was done, however, in live action--stop motion. And it was really quite good.

ADAMSON

Who made the automobiles?

HUEMER

He did all of it, I imagine he put the whole thing together. Where it is now, I don't know. But anyway when Walt asked me about him. I told him what he'd done to poor old Barre, and what an all-around unreliable sort of a guy he was. So Walt said, 'Thank you,' and that washed out the whole deal. And that was my revenge!

ADAMSON

How old was he?

HUEMER

That's the strange thing. Nobody knows! He was one of those men who could be any age. He was wrinkled and yet he wasn't, and he was vital, and actually you couldn't tell. This was one of the big puzzles about him. How old was Bowers?--used to be one of the gags. Nobody ever found out. And he wouldn't tell anybody. It's my impression though that he wasn't very young. At that time he must have been say in his forties--which was old for the business then because we were mostly in our twenties. Did I tell you about how he conned somebody out of some money, and when the sucker came to collect it, and he started arguing with Bowers. And the guy picked up a blotter on which there was an American flag, and in his anger threw it down on the ground, not knowing what he was doing, and Bowers yelled, 'Stop! You know what you've done? You ought to be ashamed of yourself. The American flag! You've desecrated Old Glory' It was during the war, you know, and foreigners were looked on with suspicion. Anyway, Bowers completely cowed him and he left. But that's the kind of a guy Bowers was. His wife worked at Disney studios for a long time. A lovely quiet woman. She may still be around and in the business somewhere. A sort of mousy woman. Not the kind you'd ever think would marry such a raffish character.

ADAMSON

Was she still married to him at the time?

HUEMER

I don't know. He died. I think, in the late 30's. She was one of the painters, I think. Let me point out that the animated business is not like being a policeman, or a doctor, or going around having adventures. You're just sitting at a board--sitting tight. And animating all day from nine to five. Five days a week, then going home and coming back tomorrow to do it again. All these little things tell you are just incidental. The horseplay and these little ribbings are just incidental stuff.

ADAMSON

Didn't you feel at all restricted, working in that sort of framework, nine to five, five days a week?

HUEMER

No. You were completely absorbed in what you were doing. We all loved to do it. Animating is fun. It still is. Not for me though, I dislike it very much now. It seems very tedious now, medieval. But when you're young, it's great. Besides it's very inventive, you were your own story man, and your own cameraman in the sense that you exposed your scene yourself. You did very much what you felt like.

ADAMSON

Your own layout man?

HUEMER

Oh, by all means. What there was, was very simple. Sure, you were everything. Even your own dialogue man. The little balloons that the characters spoke in would be what you put in them. You sat down and made it all up from the whole cloth. So that was very absorbing. And very satisfying too. If it came out all right, that is.

ADAMSON

You didn't feel that being called upon to be creative was an outrage or an imposition?

HUEMER

Heck, no, you welcomed it. That's what you were there for. That's why you were in the business. Same as when I went into story at Disney's. That was fun too. That was creative. My, how the day flew! The creative part was great. The fact that you had the freedom to do this. That your reputation hung on what you did, as an artist, as an animator, as a creative person.

ADAMSON

Didn't make you tense up at all?

HUEMER

Of course not. Anyway it wasn't that critical. Very often the producer was darn glad to get the footage. Because he had to have so much every week. Mind you I'm talking of the early days--not Disney's.

ADAMSON

You didn't get much friction as far as the stuff not coming up to par, or anything like that?

HUEMER

No, very little of that. Our standards were pretty modest.

ADAMSON

You did no pencil tests.

HUEMER

Oh, no, Disney started that. The way we worked it at Fleischers, Dave would come over to your board and sit down with you and talk about what we were doing. It was very informal. As I told you the other day, we had a basic story line, of course, that we stuck to. For instance, if a character went to Mars, it had to be Martian stuff and not Hawaiian! But that's about it. If you entered from the left, you went out at the right.

ADAMSON

Was there any problem of the ends not joining, or the pieces not meshing?

HUEMER

None whatever. A simple hook-up sufficed.

ADAMSON

You didn't feel, at any time, that you were part of the filmmaking industry, then, did you?

HUEMER

Now, that's a very interesting question, because never did. Animated cartoons were sort of the backwater of the movie business--I almost said, 'Asshole!' That's what some used to call it! Of course, you know, they didn't pay any money for them in the theaters. Distributors gave them away. They never got any reviews in the trade journals. They didn't get reviews until Disney came along, and sound had made the cartoons really good at last.

ADAMSON

You said there was no actual demand for the cartoons?

HUEMER

Correct! Not way back in 1916.

ADAMSON

Well, why do you think they were done?

HUEMER

Don't ask me. I don't know. Nobody made much money out of them. It was just a novelty. Why are novelties made?

ADAMSON

Mostly to make money, it seems to me.

HUEMER

Well, if somebody was making money, they didn't let me know. I don't know who was making it. Well, come to think of it, Fables made money, as I told you, because it was kind of a kept woman proposition. RKO ran them in their theaters, and they had to pay so much pershowing because they had bought ownership in Terry's studios. That was a different thing entirely. They had a ready-made market with their enormous chain of theaters in which they could run these things. And they were therefore guaranteed a certain substantial amount for each film; it wasn't a hit-and-miss affair like other cartoons had to contend with.

ADAMSON

But if there wasn't an actual demand, how do you think they got started? How or why? What were these people's attitudes toward what they were doing? Were they just doing it for kicks or what?

HUEMER

You mean the people who produced them? They were all fundamentally artist fellers, to begin with. Winsor McCay, of course, was an extremely good cartoonist, one of the very greatest. And Barre was a fine artist and painter. Terry and people like him were cartoonists, and it was a challenge to try this new medium. It was intriguing and it was fun to do, too. They enjoyed themselves. I can never say that it wasn't fun to animate. Nor did I ever meet

anybody who didn't thoroughly enjoy doing it. We were all glad to be in the business. It was new and it paid very well. And there were those of us who experimented, like Earl Hurd, who invented things...the Fleischers...and later Disney.

ADAMSON

It was mostly for the artistic interest, then.

HUEMER

I guess you could say that. We all loved being cartoonists. Which we had of course set out to be. We all got paid for it. When I told you the other day that some of the artists made about three or four hundred dollars a week, and you were wondering how that could be, in those poor times, well, those animators like Moser worked for Hearst. He had organized the International Cartoon Studios. He had money to throw away, and he could run it at a losing proposition and pay those salaries.

ADAMSON

So that Bud Fisher and people like this ran the things as one of their ventures, didn't care whether it made money for them or not. Didn't care if it lost a little, apparently.

HUEMER

I'm not so sure, but Bud Fisher may have made some money out of it, too. He had the knack. But I'm sure Hearst lost on his International Pictures venture.

ADAMSON

But he thought it was doing his whole business good.

HUEMER

Exactly. It was publicity for cartoon characters in his newspapers.

ADAMSON

What sort of person was Fisher?

HUEMER

I never spoke to him. He would just pop in and pop out, had so many interests, and this was probably the least of his ventures. He seemed to be a very quiet guy. He gave some of us the feeling that he was trying to be superior, you know, as the boss. Although he wasn't actively the boss; he never bossed anybody, or stayed long enough to tell anybody what to do. He just hobnobbed with Barre. That was his only contact. We just saw him walk in and out, that's all. Besides, he was doing his strip at the time, which was making a great deal of money. As I told you, he was a millionaire.

ADAMSON

So there was a comradeship in the Barre group.

HUEMER

Oh, wonderful comradeship, yes.

ADAMSON

How long would it take them to shoot one of the films, then, between the time you animated the stuff and saw it on the screen?

HUEMER

Oh, that was very quick. We made one a week, so they overlapped in photography and other operations. We used to look at our own work and laugh like hell. (Adamson laughs like hell) We did, we thought it was great. But in the theater, they didn't. We were pleasing each other, you know. Very strange thing. I remember a scene I did with Mutt and Jeff playing instruments. As well as I can remember offhand, Jeff is blowing like hell on this big tube. All of a sudden a brick flies out and hits him on the head. Big laugh in the projection room. Gags like that. Later, he blows a flute and a snake comes out, it was dopey stuff. We thought that was very funny. But, the stuff really wasn't built up to the way Disney subsequently learned to do. That is, to prepare, to establish things. We never seemed to bother much with that, or perhaps it never occurred to us to do it. Disney always very carefully planned things, so that everything was understandable, and one thing happened after another, logically. There's gotta be logic in humor, I guess.

ADAMSON

So the serious part of comedy was what you were missing.

HUEMER

Our mistake was we weren't establishing anything first. We were giving the payoff without the buildup. Of course, I'm only talking about myself, maybe other people did things differently. However, the operation was very much as I describe it all over. In other words, that you sat by yourself and did what you felt like. And if it was good, you pleased the boss, if it wasn't you didn't work there anymore. Simple as that.

ADAMSON

You said you never felt like a Capricorn.

HUEMER

No, I'm not a perfectionist. I'm very careless, and very lazy. And I couldn't care less about most things. And that's the funny thing about it, I got away with it. From this I made a living! Tell me more about Capricorns.

ADAMSON

Well, they usually find the hardest way to do things.

HUEMER

See! That's what's wrong. The whole thing's a fake.

ADAMSON

Why?

HUEMER

Well, I take the easiest way all the time..

ADAMSON

Even when you were doing your comic strip? How long would that take you?

HUEMER

I had to make one a day. Six a week. I had two comic strips, did I tell you that? One was called 'Good Time Guy' which I did with Bill Counselman, who did Ella Cinders. Well, he wrote 'Good Time Guy' also, and I drew it. And all I did was draw one a day. Took three or four hours. He would type them out--sent them

in from the coast...first panel, second panel, third panel, and what happened in the action. The dialogue would be in separate boxes so I could tell what it was naturally. I also did 'Buck o' Roo' many years later. A Western satire. I was out of the studio for a while. The first one was in twenty-seven and twenty-eight and the other was in the fifties.

ADAMSON

Was it a realistic strip, 'Good Time Guy'?

HUEMER

Yes, sort of. It wasn't grotesque or too cartooned. Sort of in between.

ADAMSON

It wasn't a Mutt and Jeff sort of thing.

HUEMER

Oh, no, that's what I mean. It was more in between that and the very straight drawing you often see nowadays. I don't know if you know of an artist by the name of Norman Lind. He was very prominent in the twenties. He laid the characters out for the syndicate and then they got me in to draw them. He designed them. But 'Buck O' Roo' I wrote originally and somebody else drew it. Tried that combination. And that didn't work either. Except for a couple of years. Now I write the Disney strip-'True Life Adventures.'

ADAMSON

You write them? Based on what?

HUEMER

All based on animals...mammals and birds and fish.

ADAMSON

I mean does somebody hand you the information or something?

HUEMER

No, I get it out of books. I read all the time. I search through magazines, books. And I'll get a nub of an idea. Then I have to change it a round to make it an adventure, and I get into the merest touch of what's called

anthropomorphism. Just a touch. Because too much is no good. Phoney. The feature is an outgrowth of the Disney films, 'True Life Adventures.' Only I can't use the movie material, because it doesn't adapt to a single panel treatment. It depends on a given dramatic situation. I've been doing it for thirteen years.

ADAMSON

Got out of the animation business.

HUEMER

Yeah. Oh, well, I did that long ago. I got out of actual animation way back in '38.

ADAMSON

How come?

HUEMER

I got tired of it, finally. Bone weary. I went into regular cartoon direction, I directed, a couple of Disney shorts. 'Goofy and Wilbur " was one, and the other was 'The Whalers'--'Goofy and Wilbnur' was the first time Goofy was used as a main character. Before that, he'd been just one of the cast.

ADAMSON

Why was it you finally left cartoons altogether?

HUEMER

Why I went into doing the newspaper end? They asked me at the studio. So I did it. I used to like to give shows, as a kid. Little shows with a little theatre with a little proscenium and a little stage and then I'd put my hands into the scene, you know, like a puppet show. I was in show biz.

ADAMSON

You did that regularly or just from time to time?

HUEMER

No, once in a while. Otherwise I was a normal boy.

ADAMSON

What kind of cartoons did you do in high school?

HUEMER

For instance, they were mostly things like headings for articles. There was the lettering, 'Football,' and some appropriate figure under it kicking or doing something like that. I didn't tell you about my career with Judge magazine, did I? For many months, almost a year or so, I drew spot gags for Judge.

ADAMSON

When was this?

HUEMER

Well, that's when I was with the Associated Animators. We had our own animation business, and I used to do that on the side. The New Yorker just started about that same time. I never made it. Although, I tried to sell them a number of things.

ADAMSON

When you ran the Associated Animators, was the idea for the three of you to share the profits, the three of you?

HUEMER

Yes, four of us partners.

ADAMSON

Or did you pay each other salaries, or...?

HUEMER

Well, we took what was left. We had a staff of about ten people. And one other animator, a guy named I. Klein who subsequently got into the New Yorker and did a lot of stuff. He's one of the pioneers.

ADAMSON

He was paid a salary?

HUEMER

Yes, he got his salary. Forget what it was, it wasn't much. But, as I told you, we made them for \$1200 a week. And we had to pay the rent, and buy supplies and film, and pay people to ink and paint. And we had two cameramen.

ADAMSON

So the four of you arranged all the finances?

HUEMER

Yes. When we delivered the negative, we got \$1200. From Bud Fisher's attorney. I'm afraid we didn't take home much money ourselves.

ADAMSON

Is that why you gave it up?

HUEMER

No, finally Bud Fisher decided not to do it anymore. He gave it up. So we didn't have any money. I went straight back to Fleischers from there. But Gillette went with Bowers, and Harrison and Gould went with Mintz. But we had been, as I told you, the first co-operative. U.P.A. tried it later and were successful in a more receptive market.

ADAMSON

You say you enjoyed working with the Fleischers more than most of the other things you'd done.

HUEMER

I actually enjoyed working with Fleischers more than anything else in the world. That's taken for granted, but working with the Fleischers was a very pleasant experience in my life, they were very nice guys. And I'm not saying that because this is on tape. No. Max was a very kindly guy, a gentleman.

ADAMSON

What function did he have in the creation of the thing?

HUEMER

I think Max was with Bray, originally, and then I believe, after he'd made some films, I'm not sure, then I think he took Dave in with him. Think that's how it

worked. You see, he had been creative in starting the 'Inkwell' series. Later on, he didn't mix in much in the production. I think his brother Dave carried it on for the most part. Nevertheless, he was there to render final opinions and as president to run the company. After all, he had other ideas on expansion. He formed little live action companies. He would buy films. He started Red Seal Film Corporation to release this product and for a while he was doing, unsuccessfully I'm afraid, what Disney finally did very successfully--releasing his own pictures. It wasn't successful for the reason that in establishing these little agencies and booking offices, he paid out more than he took in for the films. It just didn't work out. And that's the story as I understand it. Max was really the front man, but of course he was in every one of the Koko the Clown cartoons.

ADAMSON

He spent most of his time in the front office and as an actor.

HUEMER

Yes, it seemed to keep him very busy. I never saw him much in the drawing rooms. I mean actively participating. Dave took over that chore. Dave handled it. And very well. It was fun working with Dave.

ADAMSON

When you say it was fun, do you mean...

HUEMER

Dave had good ideas. We laughed a lot, and said, 'Hey, that's funny!' Or, 'Great! Why don't we do that.' That's how the business of creation was carried on.

ADAMSON

Most of the people who ran animation concerns then seem to give out more than they take in. What kept their concerns going?

HUEMER

Well, I told you that Pat Sullivan made a lot of money on licensees. And Terry made much money on his being associated with RKO. I guess Fleischer must have taken enough money in, at first, on his pictures through states' righting

them. Otherwise he couldn't have operated. At the time I wouldn't say that he was a wealthy man, as an owner of a company... certainly he was no millionaire, the way Disney became, or some of the others like Hanna-Barbera, my God! Wow! At any rate it was pretty touch and go. For a long time. And there was, as I told you, a crisis every spring. Whether we were gonna get a new release or not...we called it getting a release. Very often the release was out the front door.

ADAMSON

You never expected the thing to burgeon into what Disney turned it into?

HUEMER

I must say I never did. Oh, there were people who had dreams, I told you about this one guy, Lederer, who was going to do a feature about Cinderella. He was the fellow who invented depth in the panorama scenes, you remember. I have here a book of Lutz's, you've heard of him. In this he talks about what the future might mean to animated cartoons, that they might someday do serious worthwhile things.

ADAMSON

Of course, the book was written in '24.

HUEMER

Yeah, whenever it was. Incidentally, Lutz looked like something from the Left Bank or out of La Boheme.

ADAMSON

Is this Disney animation paper?

HUEMER

Yes, that's Disney animation paper. Notice these slits. Originally he only had two holes like everybody else. Then he added slits for better registry.

ADAMSON

I've got Koko the Clown in front of me. Four fingers, did he always have four fingers?

HUEMER

Yep. All cartoon characters have three fingers and a thumb.

ADAMSON

Big, long, vertical eyes.

HUEMER

Yep, with a little cross in between them.

ADAMSON

A little cross?

HUEMER

Should be. Isn't there?

ADAMSON

Oh, you mean in the middle of...

HUEMER

In the middle of the eye, there should be a little slit.

ADAMSON

How was that designed?

HUEMER

oh, that's, a clown's make-up, don't you know... they put little lines down this way when they paint their eyes, you've seen clowns in this make-up.

ADAMSON

Now, this clown was modeled after Dave.

HUEMER

Dave put the suit on, and then pranced around in front of a camera and did whatever was required. For Rotoscope, that is.

ADAMSON

But it has his facial features.

HUEMER

Well, it has his rather big neck.

ADAMSON

And wide mouth.

HUEMER

Well, in a way, I suppose. We did all our own inking. First you penciled. And then you made the inbetweens, and you inked those. That reminds me now, I'm glad you mentioned that... Way back in Mutt and Jeff days when looking at a piece of film, I noticed that very often the action was blurred in between, when something was moving fast. And I decided that I would save all that work of in-betweening by just having a bunch of lines or smudges, just scrabble, from position to position, when something moved fast. To prove it, I had an alarm clock flying through the air, and right in the middle of the action I put a brick. And when they ran the finished film you didn't see the brick! It proved that you didn't really see what was in the middle. But I overdid it, finally it looked like haystacks in between, from position to position, and then Barre told me to please knock it off. He was always polite. He said softly, 'Let's make the in-betweens like every body else, eh?' If you look at old films, you'll see often in a quick action that the figure will be blurred. I got the idea of using lines to fill that space in, going in the direction of the action, roughly of course in the shape and size of the character.

ADAMSON

This is done today all the time!

HUEMER

It is done today! By George! I never thought of that. Now that you mention it. That was really the Blue Streak, that's where modern animation *really* came from!

ADAMSON

What do you mean?

HUEMER

I Mean the stuff that Hanna and Barbera do. In Disney's 'The Tortoise and the Hare' we had the hare running so fast that he left a blue streak trailing. We always had this blue streak, and he just went across in about four drawing, leaving this long blue streak. That was the first time it had been done. Now they do the same thing. Another Disney invention! When I did it I had it moving too slow so you could see the lines. The Clown's not comparable to Disney's characterization which, as I started to say before this, woke us all up by trying for greater realism, which we either didn't then know enough to attempt or care to attempt. At any rate we hadn't done it.

ADAMSON

You were copying action off the Rotascope, isn't this the method used to animate the Clown?

HUEMER

Yes. But that would only be one little scene in one of the shorts. And it was too expensive to do. It meant that all the action had to be... first shot, photographed, and then it would have to be projected and somebody would have to draw each frame. And somebody would have to change it, and somebody had to ink it. All so that it didn't look too different from the animation that was hand-drawn.

ADAMSON

Did you do any of it?

HUEMER

No, I never did any of it. That was purely mechanical.

ADAMSON

It looked pretty realistic, though...

HUEMER

Did Dave ever mention somebody by the name of Doc Crandall?

ADAMSON

Not yet.

HUEMER

Well, he should because when I came to work for Fleischers he was their only animator. He used to do the Rotascope. He used to transpose it from film to cartoon as well as do other bits of animation.

ADAMSON

There was only two of you, then, when you started with Fleischer?

HUEMER

No, Burt Gilette had gotten there before me. And he got me in. That's how it happened. He'd been at Mutt and Jeff. He had been sort of a shop foreman up there. He was head man for a while, ran the place. When it changed hands, after both Barre and Bowers were out, Gilette ran it for the Jefferson Film Corporation. So when he left that place he went to the Fleischers, then he got me in there. It was a very small staff. I don't think there were more than about six people in on the proposition.

ADAMSON

The whole thing? Including inkers and painters and cameramen?

HUEMER

Yeah. Something like that. Say ten at the most.

ADAMSON

Not even as big as Barre's place, then.

HUEMER

No, it was very small, very cozy little place. They were on the first floor of an old brownstone building on 45th Street.

ADAMSON

They were more and less leading the field at the time, weren't they?

HUEMER

No, Terry was already doing well. Terry had a head start, had already started his 'Fables' operations. And Pat Sullivan was going along too. I don't know of anybody else.

ADAMSON

Did you see much of the stuff turned out by the other studios?

HUEMER

When I was with Fleischers, the only one who we considered serious competition and who we considered perhaps as having the edge on us was the Terrytoons. We often went to see them to study them. And we were often impressed.

ADAMSON

When you say 'we' are you including the Fleischers?

HUEMER

Sure, the Fleischers too. We were all friends, you know. It was a small world.

ADAMSON

But they didn't resent the competition?

HUEMER

Oh, no, nothing like that. There wasn't enough involved for that. Don't forget Disney was the big boy in those days, and there wasn't really anybody that was anywhere near him. He wasn't big at all before sound. In fact he was clearly nowhere before sound. I had never heard of Disney until I went to the Colony Theater on Broadway and saw one of his silent 'Oswalds.' Now this must have been '26. Or somewhere in there. And I liked it so well that it was a case of 'My gosh! Who was this guy, where'd he come from?' And 'This is the best stuff!' And, bad though it may look now, it looked, wonderful to me. And to us...other friends in the business. It wasn't long before sound came out. With it came Disney's smash cartoons successes like 'Plane Crazy,' 'Skeleton Dance,' and 'Steamboat Willie.' But before that I think I'd seen about four or five of Disney's things. I used to go deliberately to that theater just to see them. I thought they were that good.

ADAMSON

How did you feel about this? Did you feel any resentment?

HUEMER

Pleasure.

ADAMSON

As a member of the industry?

HUEMER

Right. I admired Disney as somebody who gave us something to be proud of. No, there may have been those who were jealous, but I never was. And there were those who figured that if they tried to, and if they had Walt's secrets, and knew his tricks, they could do the same. Everybody thought Walt had some kind of deep secret formula. Things known only to him that made his cartoons so good. Outsiders really insisted that he had some clever trick or other. The only trick he ever had was great genius and application, and his perfectionism. Boy, he had it! It actually was a shot in the arm for the business. I was with the Fleischers and we all started making sound cartoons. The only ones who did anything comparable at all, and they didn't ever quite reach Disney, were Harman and Ising. They occasionally would turn out a real good film. They worked something like Disney. They had some of the feeling of a Disney, the only ones who ever had it, they had it. They would occasionally try to do something significant. Like they would make a cartoon against war. Which wasn't half bad. Once when they were in trouble with Schlesinger Disney helped them out financially. There's a famous story about Walter Lantz. He used to give runnings of his cartoons in theaters for kids on Saturday. And one time he ran all his Oswalds and then he appeared personally on stage and talked to the kids. Then when it was over he said, 'Now what is the best cartoon in the world!' And all the kids yelled out, 'Mickey Mouse!' This actually happened.

ADAMSON

You weren't very impressed with the Mintz organization in the period you were working there.

HUEMER

Not too. I'll admit that we tried to make good pictures. But, again, they didn't have a very good release. I don't remember seeing many of them around. Columbia was releasing our stuff. You see, Charlie Mintz himself was a businessman. To him, it was a good way of making money. And that was the trouble with many of them. That was the trouble with Schlesinger of Warner Brothers, it was just a source of income for him. And while he was concerned, no doubt, in making them good, he had no actual hand in accomplishing this.

ADAMSON

Well, describe working conditions at the Mintz place.

HUEMER

They were fine for me.

ADAMSON

You had freedom?

HUEMER

Oh, yes, complete. It was pleasant for me. And for those of us who were bosses. Like Harrison and Gould were there on 'Krazy Kat.' And Sid Marcus and Artie Davis also, who were headmen of the 'Scrappy' series.

ADAMSON

So you were directing?

HUEMER

Yes, we directed. As well as animating everything also.

ADAMSON

But you didn't have to do your own inking or painting?

HUEMER

No. When you worked on paper, you did your own inking. We did it at the Fleischers. Even the stuff that was transposed to cells, to be used over a photograph on the Rotascope, would be inked, And you did you own inking. Heinrich Kley was a great pen and ink technician. We admired him. He was a beautiful draftsman. And the stuff had a cartoony, humorous appeal. Wasn't

straight drawing. And because, as I say, we sketched and did various embellishments with the pen and ink, which was fun to do, we tried to imitate him. We couldn't actually imitate him because you couldn't actually imitate his technique. His figures were too full of lines. They weren't simple enough for the tracing and retracing we had to do. Walt had a whole collection of Kley's stuff, He picked them up after the war, He's got'em framed, down in Disneyland. There's a place down there called the '37' Club, or something like that, which is for VIP's only. You can only get in through the studio. But in the lobby they have many of Kley's wonderful framed originals.

ADAMSON

I do notice that this was more or less the cartoon style of the strip and of the time.

HUEMER

Of the time, yeah. Of course, they all were, naturally. Bray's 'Colonel Heeza Liar' is distinctly a cartoon of its period. I'm not just saying it about Bray's. Actually it was a kind of a fundamentally ugly style of caricature. To me anyway.

ADAMSON

Did it seem ugly then?

HUEMER

No, actually not. Everybody was doing it. You'll find, if you look at 'Colonel Heeza Liar,' he's quite an ugly little guy. And so is Felix the Cat--a pretty weird little thing--but I thought Mickey Mouse was cute immediately. Right away he was a cute little character.

ADAMSON

Did Mickey Mouse look that much more striking than Oswald the Rabbit?

HUEMER

Well, we could all tell the difference. Yes, there was a big difference. Of course, Oswald the Rabbit didn't have the stories. But most of all Oswald didn't have Disney. If Mickey Mouse didn't have Disney, it wouldn't be Mickey Mouse. No, that man Disney was good.

ADAMSON

All of the cartoons of the time resembled animated comic strips, didn't they?
This was the idea.

HUEMER

Basically, yes. But not in pen technique because you couldn't put all this shading in the cell system cartoons. Terry couldn't put any of that shading in like I have done there. Because that was done on paper. You could do shading on paper. In 'Koko' you could do it on paper also. But you couldn't do it on cells. Nobody did it. Certainly not Terry.

ADAMSON

The animation that I've seen of this time seems to have a completely different texture.

HUEMER

Well, because it wasn't analyzed. Disney was the first person who really analyzed cartoon action. Old animation was done from pose to pose without much thought. It was almost like it was a design. Without any weight. Whereas Disney immediately gave his characters weight, and life and breath, and naturalness. In Disney it flowed from thing to thing, and our stuff went from extreme to extreme. Because it was. A character would come to a complete stop from a stride position; he'd come to a complete stop and there he'd hold it. And his eyes would blink. Or his hair would stand up, or whatever. Or if his head did turn, the rest of him would still be stuck there stiffly. Whereas Disney got away from all that. He figured that in any action a figure never came to a complete stop all at once. Things overlapped. Overlapping action was an invention of Disney's. When a fat man jumps up, the top part of his body takes off first and then the lower part follows up a few frames later. And then when he comes down, this mass stretches out, keeps going up for a while, and then that drops after. This idea, one thing overlapping, movement within the figure, was something that Disney first brought to our attention. It was never done in the old days when everything was like a cut-out thing, moving in one piece. No thought of his clothing following through, sweeping out and dropping a few frames later which is what it does naturally. That's why Disney's animation looked so different.

ADAMSON

Did the animation industry consist of, chiefly, older or younger men?

HUEMER

Barre had been a fine arts painter, who painted portraits and things like that, and he may have been in the commercial art business. George Stallings had been a cartoonist in the South somewhere. Stallings was about five years older than me; and Foster had been in some business like upholstering, I think anyway. Foster was the oldest. Then he must have been in his thirties. And I told you about this other guy, Weber, who was a sign painter. How he only came in when it got cold. And for the rest, they were young like myself, all guys who wanted to be cartoonists. Art Davis' brother, Mannie Davis, came to work there too, about that time. I don't think he'd had any other jobs. And Feg Murray was a sports cartoonist, in New York City. He had been a sports cartoonist on a newspaper. But none of us had too much experience. Certainly not in animation, because it was such a new business. Charlie Bowers had been an editorial cartoonist for the Newark News. And I hate to admit it but he was a damn good one. He really was great.

ADAMSON

So by the twenties, it was pretty much of a mixed bag, then, of people who had been artists and cartoonists and people who hadn't been anything.

HUEMER

It would have to be. We were all equally inexperienced. We had the brother of Glackens, the famous Ashcan School artist. He worked for a while at Mutt and Jeff. He had been some kind of a fine artist and illustrator and had contributed to Judge and Life. And somebody called Frank Nankeville. He also worked out there for a while. You'll find his name also in Punch and those old comic magazines. And I told you about Vet Anderson, the guy that kept his tobacco in his pocket...to fill his pipe. He had also contributed to humorous magazines. So some of them had that sort of experience. They could all certainly draw. Each man was his own creator. He sat there and he thought up all the stuff he animated. It was his responsibility. It was always inherent in the thing down underneath that you would like to do something good. Like when Albert Hurter did the American flag, which we thought was so wonderful. Of course

Hurter was superb as an artist. Very possibly he was the best that ever came into the business. No, we often experimented or tried to do nice things, like when I experimented with the haystacks, for in-betweens, to try it that speed effect. And as for gags, we tried to be as funny as we could. Didn't have much time to do it though. You mainly had to knock out your footage quota in a week. Next week you started over again with some other picture.

ADAMSON

You didn't feel any pressure at this?

HUEMER

To be sure. There was a great deal of pressure. We had to work nights some of the time. No picture; no pay.

ADAMSON

Without overtime?

HUEMER

Oh, God, no! There was no union then.

ADAMSON

When did they enter the picture?

HUEMER

Around '39. When they organized and struck Disney's. Before that, there had been a sort of company union of which I was vice-president. Yes it was definitely a company union. Disney had initiated and fostered it. They figured we had to have a union so they, mostly Gunther Lessing-Walt's attorney, set it up.

ADAMSON

What was its purpose?

HUEMER

To have a union to thwart, any outside union from getting in. To satisfy people who thought we ought to a union.

ADAMSON

Well, what did you achieve?

HUEMER

Nothing. Because the other union (IATSE) came a long and put us out of business. The more legitimate union, according to the laws, came along. The one we have now, the Screen Cartoonists.

ADAMSON

Are they the ones who staged the strike?

HUEMER

Yeah. Right. I didn't go out on strike. Being vice-president of the other union, what could I do? They used to jeer at us as we came in and out. And once Walt took off his coat and wanted to square it off with somebody. I think it was Art Babbitt. Just kidding, you know. But they weren't kidding. They'd yell things at you as you went through the gate. Mighty uncomplimentary things. Like how one guy was an alcoholic or something.

ADAMSON

So you never had much to do with the other union?

HUEMER

Oh, yes, I was a steward for a while in self-defense. Sure, we all joined it. Cartoonists are not that labor oriented. The easiest thing was to join it and go along with it. Sure, I was a steward for a while.

ADAMSON

A steward?

HUEMER

Yes, I represented the animators or something was on the board. The only stewing I did was about the indignity of having to go to meetings which bored the hell out of me.

ADAMSON

Your friends, are they cartoonists?

HUEMER

No. My personal friends are mostly civilians.

ADAMSON

Did you stay away from them intentionally?

HUEMER

I've always made it a practice not to limit my friends to business associates. I like to leave my work behind. Oh, occasionally, of course, we got together. But not as a steady thing. I do it less and less as time goes on. I think it's a good idea. I don't think many people socialize with each other at Disney's. I think you should have a complete change in every way when you leave your job. Go home and forget it.

ADAMSON

Did you go home ever and experiment at night with various projects?

HUEMER

Yes. I did a book of poetry, and I've done quite a bit of writing. Like the record I showed you which I did for the studio called 'A Christmas at Disneyland.' It was in some magazine one Christmas. Very nice spread. Later put it on a record. And then there's that book I wrote, the poetry book--A Dragon on the Hill Road. I'm a very lazy guy. I like to read other people's writing mostly.

ADAMSON

When you're off work, you resign your ambitions?

HUEMER

I don't have any ambitions anymore. When you get to be my age, you don't worry about your future achievement. It's sort of behind you. What can you hope to accomplish anymore? If I haven't done it now, it's not likely I'll ever do it.

ADAMSON

Well, let's go back before that.

HUEMER

Well, I did the drawings for Judge magazine. I did them on the side. I needed the money-being vice-president of 'Associated Animators' paid only in prestige.

ADAMSON

Was this book of poetry published?

HUEMER

By myself. I designed it and I went to a printer and had the whole thing gotten up.

ADAMSON

Is what I'm looking at typical reading material Aldous Huxley, Milton and Dante?

HUEMER

Yes. I even read Bulwer-Lytton's dry-bones stuff. These are all art books down on the bottom shelf.

ADAMSON

Cezanne, Botticelli.

HUEMER

And collections of comedy reprints out of the New Yorker and Vanity Fair, Peter Arno. All the good comic artists are there. But the older I get the more I like to read factual stuff, I no longer care for novels. I just got finished reading Macaulay's History of England. It was fascinating. These were living people. This happened. I don't like make-believe stuff anymore. Not unless it's real good. I'm a Civil war buff as you can see. I've always as you can see. I've always been interested in the Civil War. I've always been fascinated by history. I should have been a history teacher. I'm serious. If you would ask me what I think I should have done, I'm sure it's that. I never lose interest in the historical past.

ADAMSON

Well, don't you think you might, if you were compelled to do it every day?

HUEMER

Listen, I've read so much stuff. You can't begin to think! Shee!

ADAMSON

Did you ever do any actual research? For kicks, or just a lot of reading?

HUEMER

No. Just reading. I never intended to do anything with it. Although there's a lot to be done in history. Lots to be done. You could take any subject, and so far just the surface has been scratched. Take Abraham Lincoln. I've got so many books about him, yet you could still write a great book on him. I just got finished reading about James II, in England. What a fascinating sonofabitch! Really a mad monarch. You wonder why the English put up with him so long.

ADAMSON

So you're an historian at heart. You weren't thinking during the twenties that you wished you were doing this? You were still fascinated with animation then, weren't you?

HUEMER

Oh, of course, By all means, yes, always in some form of drawing. When I wasn't doing animation, I was doing a comic strip. I've been very happy with my profession. Even though I might better have been a history teacher.

ADAMSON

Do you think it would have worked out better?

HUEMER

Either that, or if I had been on a newspaper. That's an interesting profession. I should like to have had a column in the newspaper. Like FPA. I suppose I'm kidding myself. Don't know whether I could have done it. But I certainly should have liked that. But then nobody comes along and says, 'Hey, kid, how would you like to write a column,' do they? No. I consider that the animation business has been very good to me. I made very good money. I don't have to worry financially even if I stop working. And I met some awfully nice people.

Associated with a genius--Disney--and that's something. Associating with a genius is really something. It's frightening. No, it was stimulating to be around Disney. When he'd come in a room, the hair would stand up on the back of your neck--figuratively. He'd have that effect on you. You'd feel the presence. It was spooky.

ADAMSON

Well, wasn't this probably because he was your employer?

HUEMER

No, I think it was because he could see right through you. Partly because he had the power of firing you which incidentally he never wanted to do, hated to fire anybody.

ADAMSON

But, like every other creative person, you felt you've had talents that haven't been used.

HUEMER

Yes, that's about it. That's why I've written lyrics for several musical comedies that have never been produced, hoping they would be produced. I belong to ASCAP. I've written lyrics for songs that Disney has used. All part of the creative life and relief from your other work too.

ADAMSON

At the same time, you never felt frustrated?

HUEMER

I think, only once or twice, kind of late in my animation period, did I feel that. I'd finally had enough. That I'd really had it. As a matter of fact that's how I became a director. I got to the point where it bothered me even to animate a figure across the page. That fact that here he was way over here and now I had to bring him way over there. I had gotten fed up. Let him do it by himself! So that's when I went to Walt and told him I was through with animation. Was there an opening for a director? Luckily there happened to be. And direction at Disney's is a whole different thing, and a whole big story. What directors did at Disney's and what they didn't do. And I think that was the most fun of

anything I did. I only directed two pictures The Whalers and Goofy and Wilbur, but I'm sure that was the most fun I ever had. It was just great. For one thing you were presented with a great, finely worked out story. This was given to you. Walt had worked on this story, you had, too, a little. But here it was on your walls on the story boards. There it was, all you had to do now was to make it. And this was a wonderful thing. You knew that Walt already liked it. All you had to do was to make it animate, which you did, with animators, and with a musician, and you timed it, and you recorded your dialogue, and you looked at rush. You had so-called sweat-box sessions where the animators showed their stuff and you criticized it, and then you had it inked and photographed and cut. It was great, just creative as can be. Then you went to a preview and the laughs were for you. You felt that you had had something personal to do with them. And knowing you had pleased Walt made you feel great.

ADAMSON

In the early days your cartoons weren't previewed or anything, just simply sent out. You didn't attend their first screening in a theater?

HUEMER

We often didn't know what happened to them. Once they left the studio, you didn't know where they went. They might have been cropped in a deep hole. Some of them deserved to be, I'm afraid.

ADAMSON

Did you care?

HUEMER

Not too much. And when you did go in pre-Disney days, what happened was as I told you somebody would say 'I hate these things!' That sure took the edge off your pride. I'm sure my slight misanthropic tendencies date from that period.

1.3. TAPE NUMBER II: Side One, (August 7, 1968)

HUEMER

We always had preliminary meetings before we did any of the episodes or musical numbers in Fantasia, and out of nowhere one day Walt said, 'Say, is there any kind of music that would support the idea of the creation of the world, or the beginning of life on this world?' And before he was finished saying it almost, Stokowski said, 'Why, yes! The Sacre!' Walt said, 'The sock?' And Stokowski said, 'Yes, Sacre du Printemps by Stravinski!' --which means Rites of Spring. And Walt said, 'Yeah? Maybe that's what we're looking for.' Stokowski said, 'It isn't really about the creation of the world, but it is music that was written to depict life in primitive Siberia among the wild, almost stone-age people--their dances, and their religious rites. It's very, very weird, out of this world music.' So Walt said, 'Let's hear it.' So we happened to have a record (we did everything from records at first, like with Beethoven, we had Toscanini's version to work from originally, and got the record and played it. And that was it. Walt said, 'This is great!' So there's the genesis of part of Fantasia.

ADAMSON

Stravinski wasn't very pleased about that.

HUEMER

We never saw Stravinski. At least, I never did. There are various versions on that. One is that when Stravinski saw it, he said that's what he meant, that's what he had in mind. Although I don't believe it. I don't think Beethoven would have said that's what he had in mind if he saw what we did to his Pastoral Symphony either. But it was original with us.

ADAMSON

Well, would that bother you, if he did say that wasn't what he had in mind?

HUEMER

Aw, no. Why should it? Who cares what they think. I mean we're in the entertainment business, and music's a very arbitrary thing, isn't it? You can say this music represents a storm; the next guy says no, it represents a battle, or another guy says it represents an earthquake--and they would all be right, because who's to say? So we say that that Beethoven music reminds us of fawns cavorting and centaurs. So go prove it doesn't!

ADAMSON

When you started to work for Disney, did you do any animating?

HUEMER

Oh, yes. I animated a lot of his pictures like 'The Grasshopper and the Ants,' 'Tortoise and the Hare,' 'Water Babies.' My first animation was in Lullaby Land and a number of Silly Symphonies. Then I animated on 'The Little Wise Hen' which was the first time Donald Duck appeared, the first time they used his voice. They hadn't 'found' him yet; they hadn't determined how to use him. He became a cranky character later on, but in this he was just a duck who-spoke with 'Ducky' Nash's voice. And I animated on 'The Band Concert,' which Shickel says is one of the best of his shorts. I did The Duck in that picture.

ADAMSON

So you did run into the problem of finding the voice for the duck?

HUEMER

No, that was all done. Walt had determined that. The story as I hear it is that Ducky Nash came to Walt looking for a job and demonstrated his voices, and said, 'Here's one that I got. How do you like this? I don't know what it is.' And did it, and Walt said, 'Why that's a duck!' Anyway that's how I heard it; I wasn't there. He became a crank in another picture, which I didn't animate on. I believe it's called 'The Orphan's Benefit.' That's the first time he was a crank and did this come-on-and-fight bit. Dick Lundy animated and deserves credit for that. And Freddie Spencer deserves credit for having drawn the duck the way he looks today. The original duck, the way we animated it at first, the models were made by somebody else and had a long, sort of pointed beak. But Freddie Spencer made it just the way it looks today. Spencer was killed in an automobile accident in the thirties. Promising career.

ADAMSON

When you say models, do you mean model sheets?

HUEMER

Yes...

ADAMSON

He wasn't doing three-dimensional models then, was he?

HUEMER

No, no. That was only done when we were doing features. As a matter of fact, not until we did Pinocchio. We had a whole department, the model department, that did just that. They would have Pinocchio in a sitting pose or pointing or whatever would help the animator get the feeling of the roundness of the character. About two or three positions, I guess, at the most. Same with Gepetto; I can only remember two on him. There were twenty models made in each series at least. Not only were there 10 or 15 animators, there were also people who followed up, who had to see them, too.

ADAMSON

Then you never animated from these models? You always had the model sheets?

HUEMER

I think my last actual animation was on Snow White. It was a sequence that was cut out, the bed-building sequence. That's how Walt worked. He did a lot of buck-shotting around, trying things so he'd always have a lot of nice wealth to cut from. He could always cut to the bone, so what was left was great. And then there was an eating sequence. That was completely animated, but also cut out. These were real big sequences.

ADAMSON

That's the one where Dopey coughs up the soap that he swallowed in the other scene, isn't it?

HUEMER

Yes...

ADAMSON

They showed the pencil tests on television.

HUEMER

That's the TV show I worked on. We took these old drawings and we cleaned them up and shot them, so it could be used to show people on TV. These are pencil drawings, as you recall. You may have noticed that it was kind of indistinct and vague in spots, and fuzzy.

ADAMSON

It was beautiful. It's a great scene!

HUEMER

It's a good sequence. Well, that goes to show you. Walt had to cut something. And this was something that didn't tell the story, wasn't necessary.

ADAMSON

When did they build beds?

HUEMER

It was before Snow White got into trouble with the witch. They're all sitting and thinking, with a beat--oom-bah-oom-bah-oom-bah-bah, oom-bah-oombah-oom-bah-bah. And then one dwarf would say, 'Why don't we do this,' and the other would yell, 'No!' It goes on like that until finally Sleepy yawns and says, 'Why don't we build her a bed?' And then they all say, 'Yes! Hooray! We'll build her a bed!' and off they go. That's how they started. I remember one of the things I animated was one of the dwarves on top of a pole with a chisel, and he sneezed, and the force of it projected him down the pole so that the chisel carved a scroll. Stuff like that--gags. That would have been a good sequence, too.

ADAMSON

How much of that was finished?

HUEMER

Pencil tests. Then he decided he didn't want it, so he didn't finish it up. Then I became a director and I was moved on to Pinocchio. I was the first director on Pinocchio. I worked on a lot of the opening stuff, where Gepetto wants a child so badly and the Blue Fairy comes down and obliges him and all that. From there I went on to Fantasia and story directing.

ADAMSON

How did you get into story directing from directing?

HUEMER

That's just a title. As a director, you are very much involved in the story anyway. It all blends together--you can't really say where one leaves off. The actual director of the picture was Ben Sharpsteen, I think, the over-all director, that is. As a story director I was in on the creation of the material with Walt and the rest of the staff. And I would occasionally take sections to work out with a group. I remember what fun it was working on the Tchaikovsky stuff, the waltz of the flowers, the wonderful leaves and plant stuff, forms. I had this little group and I'd visit them every day, and we'd sit and talk; that's how a story director works, you know. You say, 'What have you done? Hey, that's good!' or 'It isn't going to work,' and you talk, you toss around ideas, and you get it worked up and drawn up to the point where Walt finally comes in. Then he sits down with you and takes it all apart or adds new stuff, and that's how the thing was worked out. I remember it was such fun because there were three girls doing the story boards and they would pick weeds in the outside lots and bring them in. You'd be surprised how good looking these things were. They would use them for designs and for some of the little characters like the thistles. Very interesting. They were a very dedicated group. People who work on story boards are generally fine artists. Yet they don't know too much about animation, or ever do get into animation. These are what we call story sketch men. They are very skilled people. The animators had nothing to do with Fantasia until Walt had okayed the story boards on the picture and a director was assigned to it. This particular section, I forget who directed it, oh, yes, Sam Armstrong. He got the boards. Then he sat down with the lay-out men who laid it out, and timed it, and then the animators came in. The animators never had anything to do with the story in any form. Not at Disney's. Oh, occasionally Walt would say, 'Let's have a meeting,' and everybody in the studio would be there, practically. But that was unusual, that was not the regular way of working.

ADAMSON

The director was somebody who never sat in on story conferences, then.

HUEMER

That's right. Not at first. It would be handed over to him. Or he might be at some of the very late ones, when we knew exactly what we were doing and Walt liked it and we knew we were going to make it. Then the director would be called in. As it moved along, Walt never stopped improving it, polishing it. That's the beauty of Walt's place. It was never finished until it was previewed. And even then it wasn't finished sometimes.

ADAMSON

How long were you on Fantasia?

HUEMER

All the way through. Let's take for instance the Beethoven section. We had a recording by Toscanini to work with. The notes are the same no matter who plays them, so we figured the timing would be about the same too. Toscanini may have had a different interpretation, some spots might be a little faster than another conductor. But that would be the only difference--fundamentally we knew what we had to deal with in timing. So we cut new records and made copies for the people who were working on it. The group was divided into four different movements, and the idea was to play the record and see what ideas you would get that would fit the music. We knew what we were basically going to do, because we had decided it was going to be about Greek mythology. So we had that to start with, before we even sat down with the records: this was going to be a thing that had to do with Mount Olympus and fawns and all the Greek mythological characters, except they would be caricatured, they would be funny in spots, like Bacchus. So these four different rooms maybe had sometimes only two guys working on their part, and they would play the record all day and make sketches to fit what they thought was best. And I would come in every day, and we'd sit together and talk; and I'd go into the next room and do the same. And so day by day, it would build, slowly build. Finally after a week or two we'd have something up there on the boards. When you played the record and pointed with a pointer at different pictures, you could follow the flow of the story and get some idea of what we were trying to do. Walt wouldn't come in yet. It was really my decision when it was good enough for him to see. You never presented anything to Walt that you weren't awfully sure of. You had to have confidence in it yourself. 'All

right,' I'd say, 'Let's go with this. This it it!' Then Walt would come in and occasionally he would say no. But I must say that generally, especially on a picture like Fantasia which had to do with music and just isn't everybody's cup of tea, that he went along with most of it. He had very wonderful ideas, of course, he would always have them. Then we would noodle up the sketches better. Other, better artists would give us an idea of what it might look like in color and treatment. And when this was done, we had the stuff on the boards with some nice colored things and played the record, and you could actually see Fantasia right up there. Then a director would come in, and it was given to him to make. But before he did that we had to go to Philadelphia with Stokowski and record it in his fashion. Walt's idea was to get the benefit of the way he would interpret it, although he was already guided greatly by what we had planned in the story. We had suggested cuts in the Pastoral Symphony. It repeats itself all over again, I think in the second movement. So we didn't do that; it would have made it too long. Little changes like that. We went to Philadelphia, to the Academy of Music, where Walt had worked out the idea of having nine separate sound tracks. We had nine different command posts in the basement of the theater, each one recording its own sound track from its own mike placed in a different spot in the orchestra. An interesting thing about that theater. It must have been built sometime after the Civil War, and in the basement right underneath the audience was a big, round brick wall. Across the top of this there were stringers or beams very much like the sounding board of an instrument. Now the architects' idea was that the theater was actually to be a huge instrument, that would reverberate or do something with the sound on account of this construction beneath the floor. Evidently it does help because the acoustics in the Academy of Music are supposed to be really great. And we had these nine tracks--that's how we recorded Fantasia. A funny incident happened when we doing the Dance of the Hours. Remember the hippopotamus dance? Stokey said, 'Now I'm going to try to play this music funny.' Walt and I and the rest of the staff sat in the back of the theater and listened to what they were doing. And he plays funny music; you know, da-da-a-a-a, with everybody trying to make funny sounds. It was awful. And Stokey finally rapped on the stand and said, 'No. Let's forget that. I guess there's no such thing as funny music.' So they played it straight. Walt had gone along with the experiment of having these marvelous

musicians trying to be funny, blowing strange notes and whatever they were doing. But there's no such thing as funny music, if anybody should ask you.

ADAMSON

Why was it that you and the key story directors were taken to Philadelphia?

HUEMER

We had to know what was going on. That was one of Walt's policies, to keep people in on everything, to keep the pot boiling. This is an insight into Walt, though I've often wondered why we were taken to Philadelphia. Once while they were playing they did something that I didn't think was right, considering that I knew the picture about as well as anybody. I turned to Walt after it was over and said, 'I didn't like that certain whatever it was.' And Walt said, 'Oh, that's all right. He knows what he's doing up there. Let's not interfere,' you know. So I just kept my mouth shut after that, even though I still think I was right. There was nothing bad; it was just that I thought something could be a little better. After all I'm sort of a half-assed musician myself. But I guess Walt figured we're paying this guy \$20,000. (or whatever it was) so let's get our money's worth. That was it. So you may well ask why we went, because that's all we did, we sat there while they played for about five days and then we came home.

ADAMSON

All expenses paid?

HUEMER

Of course. Once in a while Walt would introduce me as Dick Huemer, 'the guy who knows all the good restaurants in Philadelphia.' Simply because being a New Yorker, I had gone to Philadelphia once in a while, and happened to know several of the good restaurants like Bookbinder's. And he couldn't get over that, that I knew all the good restaurants in Philadelphia! Golly, he had the habit I mentioned of cataloguing people. Any little thing like that could catalogue you. It would never get out of his mind; there was a place where that item was stored and it would never be eradicated. He may be dead now, but I bet it's still there! Or he might introduce me to someone and say, 'Meet Dick Huemer. He goes to operas.' That's why I got on Fantasia, incidentally,

because he knew that I went to operas, you see? In my New York days, I used to go to the opera. Didn't we all? Didn't we all hear Caruso and the rest in our day? You bet we did!

ADAMSON

Then from that point you were a story director?

HUEMER

I never animated again after that. Like I said, I'd had it with animation. I told him that didn't want to animate anymore. And, looking at my animation, he agreed. No, I'm just kidding.

ADAMSON

How many people went to Philadelphia?

HUEMER

There was me, Joe Grant, and Ed Plumb; a guy named Chilog, who was his cutter; Bill Garrity, who was the sound engineer; Walt, of course. Maybe a secretary. Maybe some electricians and men in the sound department. Guys that I didn't know. Maybe ten, twelve. That's about it.

ADAMSON

Did he have any trouble justifying this?

HUEMER

Are you kidding? Walt spent the money. If Walt had said, 'Take this money and throw it out the window,' do you think anybody would question him? 'Throw it out the window! If Walt says so, that's right!' It's like Napoleon; it's his money. No, he made all those decisions. He was a real, absolute monarch there. Why not? He made it.

ADAMSON

Who's this Joe Grant person?

HUEMER

Joe Grant and I worked together very closely. He was head of the model department. He designed characters, like the Queen in Snow White--that's the

sort of thing he did. He was a very good artist. He was also very close to Walt. Walt liked his work. So you might say that he was more than that. He was, in a sense, an assistant director to Walt. Very close, on all these things. Disney finally let him go. Around 1950, somewhere in there. We actually were sort of a team; did a lot of pictures together. Joe was a fine artist and also a good story man. Walt used to say that he was a good catalyst. I'm not sure he knew what that meant, but that's what he called him. One who mixed things and people together. All during the war we made a lot of pictures together, like 'The Fuhrer's Face,' with the raspberry in it, and 'Education for Death,' about how a German child is raised and becomes a hard-core Nazi; and 'Reason and Emotion,' little figures inside a man's head, a little caveman and a professor with glasses--how they fight it out in the guy's brain and who wins--all these war pictures. And particularly the thing called 'The New Spirit,' which Joe Grant and Walt and I went to Washington about. Morgenthau wanted a picture to sell war bonds, a Donald Duck, so we got the story up and flew to Washington and told it to him. And he bought it. Congress raised hell with him for spending money. He was very pleased when we took the boards to him, very pleased. I remember that we tried to do it in the Baby Weems technique, limited animation. And we actually ran Baby Weems for Morgenthau, and he just shook his head and said, 'No, I want the Blue Plate Special.' He wanted full animation. Which he finally got.

ADAMSON

Were you a fan of limited animation?

HUEMER

Well, Joe Grant and I invented it, actually, for Baby Weems. Baby Weems was our story, too. It was a sequence in The Reluctant Dragon. But that was the first time that limited animation had ever been done. It was done because we did it like a story, like a book turning pages. And then people started saying, 'Well, let's do the Baby Weems thing,' and that's how the title was originated: Baby Weems animation.

ADAMSON

Was there any relation between what you did for Baby Weems--the idea of maybe one thing moving in the whole picture--and the short cuts you used to take for Mutt and Jeff?

HUEMER

No, not really. This is a deliberate attempt to make a still drawing do the job of animation. It was really an effect of these still drawings telling the story; we could have just flopped them over without anything moving, which has been done too. You just have a little bit of movement or a dissolve. I wouldn't compare that with the old days. The old days we didn't know any better; this we did deliberately. We could have animated this and it would have been beautiful. (Although it was all right the way it is.) But the story suggested that kind of treatment, the over-all story. Robert Benchley just came into the film as an actor. He had nothing whatever to do with the story or writing. He just read his lines; even though he was probably the best humorist in the country at the time. We didn't use him that way at all. He wouldn't work at our prices for one thing. And then Alexander Woolcott came in and gave us a talk. Walt used to like to do that: have famous people come in and talk to us. And all he did was tell us stories. Filled the soundstage with studio people and just told them stories, which were great. He was a very interesting raconteur.

ADAMSON

Would he pay the people?

HUEMER

No, they would do it of their own accord. They would come visiting; everybody in the world beat a path to Walt's door. Did I tell you about the first time I went to work for Walt? I was sitting in his sanctum, and we were talking; and we were all set, had agreed on how much money and everything. Walt started to tell me that he was going to make a cartoon-feature. Mind you now, this was in 1933! He was already thinking of it. Not only that, but it was going to be Snow White. He started tell me a little about the story, how she eats the poison apple and dies, and how as she's lying there all the goddamned little animals are looking in the window with tears rolling down...Walt was such a wonderful actor that my throat started to get tight, and my eyes began to get moist--it was wonderful, the way he was telling it. The idea of doing a feature

was such a brazen, daring idea to begin with, in 1933. Then he told me that he might also some day like to have some kind of an amusement park. You don't have to believe this if you don't want to, but he did! Not the way it finally turned out, but the idea, the germ, was there. And while we were sitting and talking, in came Charlie Chaplin. I almost fell out of the chair, because after all Charlie Chaplin was one of my idols. And behind him was another one of my idols, H.G. Wells! They came right over and Chaplin very proudly introduced, not Walt to Wells, but Wells to Walt! 'Here's somebody I want you to meet, Walt Disney, this great guy sitting here.' That was the feeling. It was a wonderful experience; but I don't know what they said because I left soon after. We once had Frank Lloyd Wright there, and we had not yet finished doing the Nutcracker Suite, but we had enough of it to show, some of the color stuff, and we ran it for him. And we waited for his reaction. And he shook his head and said, 'This is not it.' He didn't like it. And he gave Walt a long lecture, he said, 'Walt, you have great possibilities. You should go away somewhere and purify yourself. Then come back and do something wonderful.' And here we thought we had done some thing wonderful. Maybe we had, I don't know, but he didn't seem to think so. Of course it didn't throw Walt a bit. He didn't care; he knew what he was doing. He had Aldous Huxley in on Alice in Wonderland, the first five meetings. At which I was present. And at which, every time he started to say anything, he never got anywhere, because Walt did all the talking and had all the ideas. Actually, Huxley didn't seem to have any ideas. He sat there with his one baleful eye (he's kind of blind in one eye, I think; even then it had a kind of grayish effect), and the only thing I can remember him saying was this: Walt was explaining something about the entrance of somebody, and suddenly Huxley pipes up and says, 'Ah, yes, I see that! Hail the Conquering Rabbit comes!' Apropos of nothing, Walt just grunted. Then he disappeared. Five meetings or so and we never saw him again. But that's how Walt worked, he was very lavish with material and men. Huxley was well paid for those five days, I should think. Walt was always curious about people and what they could do. And he thought he might be able to contribute something being an Englishman, and knowing all about Alice in Wonderland, which he probably did. And being a sort of whimsical guy having written Brave New World, which Walt probably never read. Walt wanted to progress and improve, and he wanted to draw on the brains of the world, if he could. He spared no money, no pains to improve the

product, ever. He never cut corners, that I can recall. Cut salaries once, during the Depression. Everybody had to take a cut, but we were willing to do that. It was a community enterprise, you know, we all had a feeling of love for it-- which I still do. It's a wonderful organization. There's never been anything like it. Never will be. And Walt had art lectures. We'd all go to lectures by good artists, whose names I forget now.

ADAMSON

What was there reaction to going into the Walt Disney studio?

HUEMER

Well, you know, everybody was crazy about Walt Disney. There was nobody who didn't think Walt was a genius. Everybody'd be willing to do it. Didn't even Khrushchev want to go to Disneyland. Everybody!

ADAMSON

When you first started working and were animating, was he going to the care and expense of making pencil tests and filming them for Silly Symphony cartoons?

HUEMER

I told you that on the outside we all thought that he had a secret process? If anything that was it. He made pencil tests when nobody else made them. He was the first guy to do that. He'd photograph the thing in negative and we ran the negative which would be white on black, a cheap thing to do. There was no use going to a print because you threw it away when you were through. And then we ran it on a little movieola, in a room about four feet square which we called the Sweat Box, appropriately enough. We didn't have any projectors. There was a main projector down on Soundstage One, I think, but we had one movieola, the old-fashioned one with the little round glass, not the big square field like you have now. A little thing about four inches round.

ADAMSON

What could you tell from that?

HUEMER

Well, you saw a square picture inside when you looked through the round part. You saw it about six, seven inches long.

ADAMSON

One person at a time?

HUEMER

No, two people could see. Walt would stand behind you and you would run the stuff and very enough tear it. You know these are pretty crude machines: Rrrrp! There'd go the test! You'd make a loop of the action and you'd keep running that and study it. And how could you go wrong? You'd see mistakes which other people couldn't see because they animated and put it on the screen, and there it was, they were stuck with it. But here we could take all the bugs out or change it. And then we would assemble the pencil tests. on a reel so that we'd have the whole picture in negative white lines on black, and run it with sound. So you never went to inking and painting until the pencil tests were exactly the way you wanted them. Nor did you clean up a rough pencil test until then. Sometimes it looked like a bunch of hay, some guys animated so roughly. Fergie had very rough pencil tests--like a haystack with beautiful movement, just beautiful. That had to be cleaned up, then it was given to the inker. The animator worked out the action then handed the tings over to an assistant to put in the in-betweens. You'd clean up your principal poses then the in-beweenner would make neat ones in between. Then that was photographed, as complete as it ever would be, except it was cleaner later. Then it would go to the inker. Walt was the first guy to work out that system.

ADAMSON

How often were things changed?

HUEMER

Oh, quite a lot. Every time you took a test in it would have some changes. I doubt if I ever did anything that I recall went right through. Or anybody else for that matter.

ADAMSON

Did that annoy you, to have to change everything?

HUEMER

Why should it? We all wanted the same thing, we wanted great pictures. No, this was a good feeling, nobody took offense at the slightest criticism. We asked for it, we'd go to Walt and say, 'Walt, in the last picture, I wasn't satisfied with something. What was wrong?' And he would try to tell you...we had that interest in our product. It was like a crusade to do the best, and it never seemed good enough. I know we were very ambitious in doing things like The Goddess of Spring, which was a complete failure. It was all people, the Grecian fable of Persophone and Pluto, you know the story of the Underworld and going to Hades and all that jazz. And the picture was really a hell of a picture without being very good. It was one of our more resounding failures. This was long before Snow White. This was one of the last things I worked on as an animator--a Silly Symphony. It's probably still around. One time I resented the fact that some inker (who was a very skillful person in her own way, of course, and I couldn't do inking if I tried) would take my drawing and go over the lines, so that when it was done it was her work and not my original drawing. I stewed over that, and I thought, 'Why can't this be done in some photographic process?' I knew nothing of photography, mind you. To this day I don't, but it occurred to me this would be the only way it could be done. Why not shoot each drawing that you have cleaned up and then it's your drawing on the cell, and then have them print that thing the way they would if somebody had inked it. I had no idea whether this could be done, and probably it couldn't at the time. But I thought the idea was right and I went to Walt with it and his answer was no. For one thing we didn't know how it could be done; but if you put some genius like Iwerks on it perhaps it could have been worked out. But he said, 'Even if it could be done, it wouldn't be desirable because what happens when people ink is that it reduces the pictures to all looking the same, which is good. Whereas if you photographed the actual drawing of each animator, it would all be different, because everybody has a different pencil technique,' which they did. And he didn't think that was desirable. So the thing was dropped right there. This was way back in 1935, I think, when I first thought of it. Probably a lot of people did. But I resented the fact that I would really work to make nice pencil drawings, (they were really very nice; you could frame them I suppose, not [just] mine but anybody's!), and then along came some gal and went phht! with a lightning stroke and phht! took all the guts out of the line and the shading and

the feeling of it. That's what made me think of doing it the other way. Of course the Xerox is a different process which, as you know, rearranges the molecules or something, and it's not actual photography. In effect it takes your exact line and so it transfers the same vitality to the screen. I think it's tremendous. In *The 1000 Dalmatians*, he [Walt] used it entirely for the first time. They do it all the time now, in everything.

ADAMSON

How long had you had this feeling about inkers?

HUEMER

Well, I'd had the feeling since we stopped inking our own stuff on paper. What you drew in those days you saw on the screen. And the minute you went to working with backed-up celluloids, why then you lost contact with the actual working of the artist. So with me it dates from about there. It really is a blemish in *Snow White*, the fact that when they ink they lose a certain amount of accuracy, and when you have a slow motion you get a trembling. Naturally this happens because you may put the line perfectly in between on your pencil drawings, but when an inker comes along and deviates she can't possibly have what you put there, she deviates just enough. In *Snow White*, in the girl's face, you see this happen. It shimmers, whereas you don't get that nowadays with Xerox. Of course, the in-betweeners are damn well certain to put their line perfectly in between, and it stays there, nobody touches it, nobody inks over and moves it a little bit. Even a thousandth of an inch may make a difference in a very close action. So that's another thing that I thought was so terrible about animation in the older days, that you got this shimmering in a close action. Which is far from ideal if you want to be a perfectionist about it, [and that's] what we tried to be.

1.4. TAPE NUMBER II: Side Two, (September 10, 1968)

HUEMER

Now, we'll talk about Disney and one of his weaknesses which I consider to be the fact that he was never really able to judge men too well. He had a habit of taking any given individual and putting him into an arbitrary job, giving him a title and expecting him to do the job. Walt made most of the decisions at the

studio. He was his own best story man. He was his own best editor. He was, in a sense, his own best animator, because at first he taught us all how to animate. But too often, in my opinion, he would these posts with men who were incapable. For the very reason perhaps that it didn't matter. In the last analysis he did it just as I said. It remains to be seen, however, now that Walt's been dead these two years, whether this policy is going to be beneficial to the studio. Has he left anyone who can fill the enormous vacancy that remains behind him? When we were stuck we'd turn to Walt and he'd have some wonderful opinion. He'd apply his 'instant genius' to the thing. And now he's not here and nobody exactly fill in. Hopefully somebody may arise, or some combination of men, I don't know... He was always working on story. He was forever picking your brain, even if you were at a social affair with him of something. Anything you said he'd be listening to, cocking his ear, you know, and remembering everything you said with that marvelous brain that never forgot a thing. Not a single thing! This I venture to guess was the core of his genius, this wonderful memory. And, of course, his way of reaching back into that memory and picking out things and applying them right to the heart of any subject. He could go right to the nub of the problem, no matter what it was. Even if it was the design of a uniform for the employees at Disneyland, he would have an opinion on it. Nothing was too small for him to venture an opinion on and his was generally the best one. Oh, maybe once out of fifty times somebody else would have a better one--generally it was his. That was my boss.

ADAMSON

What other animators did you like?

HUEMER

Well, I liked everything that Tex Avery did. And I like anything that Chuck Jones ever did. Or anything Freleng ever did. These guys are geniuses, in their own substantial way. And I equate them with Ward Kimball in our studio, who I think is a little old cock-eyed, ring-tailed genius type also. And Milt Kahl.

ADAMSON

How about the Tom and Jerry things?

HUEMER

Quite good. But not as good, to me, as these others I mentioned. And then there's Dick Williams who in my opinion comes closest to creating a poetic feeling in animation. Dick is a Canadian who works in England.

ADAMSON

What did you think of the UPA cartoons?

HUEMER

I considered them very clever. They were sort of what was called in those days 'way out.' And their animation was also more limited...it wasn't as thorough as Disney's, as lifelike. It was the antithesis of Disney. In other words I think they were both cutting corners and doing impressionistic animation. But they had some good pictures; 'Gerald McBoingBoing' was a great story. The original was by Doc Seuss who by the way was on the Disney staff briefly during the war. Doc Seuss' story was foolproof. And when they did Magoo they had a good voice to base it on.

ADAMSON

That was Jim Backus.

HUEMER

That's right. They had an unusual voice to start with. When you have a solid thing like that you're half-way home. Like when you have Donald Duck's voice, you know, you're there. All things being equal you're bound to have a pretty good picture. And Backus certainly helped to make Magoo. They had some very good animators there, of course. Hubley was one, and Art Babbitt, too. I didn't have anything at all to do with UPA; I just approved of it from a distance.

ADAMSON

Hubley worked at Disney's for a while, didn't he? He was on Fantasia, wasn't he?

HUEMER

Yes. Quiet sort of guy, seemed to be. With a great interest in social matters, socialistic, I mean. He was considered to be a little to the left, which in those days we were somewhat shocked at. Nowadays who isn't a little liberal. But in

those days... well! Walt you know was definitely to the right. He couldn't abide those blokes who were tinged with a little pink.

ADAMSON

He was very concerned about the political opinions of his employees?

HUEMER

Yes, he was. Remember when this writer was running for the governorship of California? Upton Sinclair? He had a new idea, a sort of socialistic share-the-wealth scheme. I remember Walt had Gunther Lessing give a talk to the staff to try and sway us to vote against Upton Sinclair. One thing about Walt though. Regardless of political opinions or religious convictions or whatever, his first consideration was what a person could contribute to the studio and the product. He was always willing to give the benefit of the doubt, and very liberal with those whom he employed. I think he would have used the Devil himself if he were a great animator. He had what practically amounted to a mild 'entertainment monomania.' And he rewarded the good workers. In 'The Waltz of the Flowers' we used special eels that had a tooth or roughness to them, and when we worked the color over that surface it gave the effect of pastel. If you look at the film, next time you see it, see if you don't get the feeling of pastel drawings in motion. Elmer Plummer did the story sketches, black paper with pastel which gave a very grainy effect. You can tell it'd pastel and not flat water color or paint. Walt very much wanted to retain that effect on the screen, so they cast around till they could get a cel with a rough surface. It looks just like pastel in operation. A very lovely effect and another first for Disney.

ADAMSON

Did this come up in the story conferences?

HUEMER

Sometimes, sometimes not. Walt would say, 'We've got a certain look to these story sketches, a pastel look. It's good. How can we retain it,' as much as saying, 'That's an order,' and somebody would go ahead and work it out. Walt, of course, had other things to do, and whoever was assigned to it would jolly well work it out. Walt would leave it in your lap, like he did to me in the

dinosaur sequence in 'The Rite of Spring.' After a meeting which wasn't too satisfactory, he said, 'Well, I leave it in your lap, Dick. Work it out!' And it was work it out and no excuses. So I worked it out. You can imagine that there's nothing to start with, except for the music, only blank boards and a lot of dinosaurs. What do they do? What does this music suggest to you? It suggests a fight. This wailing music suggests the trek of the dinosaurs seeking water from the dried land where the mountains have risen and the earth has dried, the swamps drained....they have to go find water. Stravinsky's music suggested this eerie, mournful scene of staggering through the swirling dust. You see some fall dead and others struggle on. They become silhouettes in the murk. We envision their extinction to the strains of the music.

ADAMSON

What basis did you work this out on? Did you do any research as far as constructing or creating the sequence?

HUEMER

Of course. We had to get books on dinosaurs and learn all about them and how to draw them, according to authorities. Bill Stearner was very good at drawing these things. He made all the inspirational drawings. Particularly impressive, I remember, besides the dinosaur stuff, was the formation of the earth where the red-dot crust is bubbling and volcanoes overflow and lava runs down the mountain sides into the sea and the hissing steam swirls up. Stearner was very good at making those original sketches, great impressive drawings in pastel where you could feel the heat. It was remarkable how those directors who followed up were able to duplicate what those story drawings looked like. And it was a case of they jolly well had better, because Walt said, 'That's what they should look like; this is great, this is the feeling I want.'

ADAMSON

Actually he did the 'Sorcerer's Apprentice' sequence before he actually got the idea for the whole feature, didn't he?

HUEMER

Yes, quite a while before.

ADAMSON

Was it finished?

HUEMER

It was all finished, in the can.

ADAMSON

Inked and painted and no idea what to do with it?

HUEMER

The idea, as far as I know, for the whole feature hadn't been thought of yet. That is making a whole feature based on the [musical] classics. Evidently after seeing 'The Sorcerer' Walt thought, 'Well, why not? If this is so good, let's take other great music and the same treatment.' So we did it.

ADAMSON

You didn't work on 'The Sorcerer's Apprentice?'

HUEMER

No. Incidentally, it was a beautiful lay-out job done by Tom Codrick, on whom I pin much of the success of that segment. That's only my personal opinion, but I remember seeing thumbnail storyboards of the whole thing where you could go through the whole thing fit to the music and almost get the effect of [full] animation. Beautiful job.

ADAMSON

The whole 'Sorcerer's Apprentice' sequence?

HUEMER

Yes, in color, even. It was one of the nicest jobs I'd seen up to then. It was produced by Perce Pearce, who dropped dead of a heart attack in London in 1955.

ADAMSON

You mean you pin the whole...

HUEMER

Well, no, I don't intend to pin all the glory on Codrick. There were good animators on it. Frank Thomas was on it; he's still one of Disney's top animators.

ADAMSON

Tell me something about the research you had to do for the dinosaur sequence, and the microscopic organisms?

HUEMER

Well, there's nothing to tell, you can find all that material in books.

ADAMSON

Did you do that?

HUEMER

Yes, that was part of my job, and the staff's. We were also influenced a great deal by a fellow named Knight, K-N-I-G-H-T, who illustrated these things that were issued by the Union Oil Company, some giveaway gimmick at gas stations. You may have seen them--we were greatly indebted to those. Stearner and a guy named Major were the fellows who did a lot of the preliminary sketches. These inspirational sketches were terribly important. In any picture, you can't overestimate them. And again when we had the storyboards up, you could play the music and get the sense of the whole picture right there. It was up to the animator and the director then to put the right weight and feeling into the dinosaurs. In the dinosaur fight, we animated them as if they were creatures capable of pretty fast movement. As a matter of fact, maybe they weren't. I found that out later, but even so it's conjectural, isn't it? Being so heavy and unwieldy a dinosaur fight was probably like two turtles battling. We didn't know and we had to do it all in the framework established by the music. And from the chords and musical configurations we got lightning-like thrusts or lunges. We didn't care too much about the scientific end of it; we were being entertaining.

ADAMSON

Well, the program mentions all these people, Andrews and Julian Huxley and others. What did they do? What was their function?

HUEMER

They never came to the studio if that's what you mean.

ADAMSON

It [the program] claims they were there and saw you through the whole production.

HUEMER

I didn't see them! If the program says that, I never read it.

ADAMSON

It says they were associates and helped you check scientific accuracy, your authenticity.

HUEMER

Well, maybe somebody asked them. Maybe Walt did. I wasn't there when it happened. It wasn't too important once we had the basic facts in hand. Believe me, it wasn't important at all.

ADAMSON

So as far as research goes you just--what had been written about them in books?

HUEMER

Sure, that's right. And that was surprisingly little.

ADAMSON

And it's all speculation, right?

HUEMER

Oh, of course. There were certain things: we could tell the shape and the size pretty well, because they've put bones together.

ADAMSON

How did you know that they were reptiles? That they had oily skin?

HUEMER

From petrified or ossified or whatever happens remnants of skin. Many impressions in stone of skin have been found.

ADAMSON

Another thing they mention in the program are the special effect in 'The Nutcracker Suite.'

HUEMER

They used multi-plane. But multi-plane was not an effect that we hadn't used before, many times.

ADAMSON

This Pastoral Symphony was your idea?

HUEMER

Did I tell you about how we were going to use something called Pierne from a French musical comedy or operetta called 'Cydalese et le Chevre Pied.' It was a number called the 'Entrance of the Little Fauns.' It only ran three minutes and we had a Victor record of it. And that's what gave us the idea of using Greek mythology and its creatures, Fauns and Centaurs (from which we evolved Centaurettes) and all the Pantheology. Joe Grant and I worked with it quite a while, but we couldn't find any visual contact. It was very strange music. If you ever get a hold of it and play it, you'll love it I'm sure. It goes like this...[Huemer hummed the tune]...and it bounces along without stopping, never a pause or slowdown. So it didn't give us any kind of a handle or contrasting phraseology. You have to have phrases to work with when you transpose something from music to animation. You've got to have resting points, in other words, and we found none. His music would just go straight ahead. We couldn't stop it, we couldn't cut it, and here come the fauns, and here come the Centaurs, and here comes Jove throwing thunderbolts...we couldn't find a place to put all this fine pictorial material in. So Joe and I looked around for another piece of music and decided on Beethoven, the Pastoral Symphony, which is about someone's feelings on their journey into the country, and other bucolic matters. So we went ahead and laid it out and presented it to Walt and he went along with it. But Stokowski didn't like it at all. He said, 'Beethoven didn't mean this, he meant human reactions and their

salubrious feelings.' But somehow we brushed aside his objections and went ahead. So that's how that came about. And we've been criticized for it, as you may have heard, in reviews and such.

ADAMSON

How come?

HUEMER

Well, just as Stokowski thought, some didn't consider our treatment appropriate. Although I still do, and it's a fait accompli, it's finished.

ADAMSON

At what point were the inspirational drawings done?

HUEMER

We decided to do the 'Little Fauns' which suggests fauns, not deer fawns, but little men half-goats with horns. Pan was a faun, wasn't he? So this suggested a story-line. Actually the story of Cydalese has something to do with Pan or some other mythical creature who gets mixed up with a female human. I never saw the operetta. We assumed a lot and that gave us a cast of creatures. Bacchus, Minerva, and Jupiter, and all those other minor characters, plus centaurs and centaurettes, and even a little colored centaurette, and Cupids, of course. So we had assembled a cast with no place to go if we dropped the idea of Cydalese entirely. So they went into Beethoven. Personally I like it; I'm sticking with it. 'Yen-Sid the Great Magician' [in 'The Sorcerer's Apprectice'] was Disney's name spelled backwards. Deems Taylor calls him that in his introduction to the 'Sorcerer's Apprentice.' The characters in 'Night on Bald Mountain' were carefully laid out by character model men, as to their looks and their dance, it was worked out in live action as many of the things at the studio were. Did you know that Snow White, for instance, was all acted out first by Marjorie Belcher with a costume on?

ADAMSON

On the Rotascope...

HUEMER

On the Rotascope, right. Well, the dancing ghouls in 'Bare Mountain' was a similar operation.

ADAMSON

How did they do that? Bring in little gremlins?

HUEMER

Size has nothing to do with it. You can reduce it.

ADAMSON

I mean were these people dressed in gremlin suits?

HUEMER

What they looked like wasn't important either. All we were after was the live action, and you could take human live action and make a pig out of it if you wanted to. You wanted the feeling and flow of the action, the timing and spacing of the movement which is contained in live action. Since you take drawings out here and there, they didn't have to look like gremlins. In the Dance of the Hours we very carefully laid out the whole thing with dancing girls, the whole ballet with ballerinas in tutus, ballet slippers, the whole thing. Joyce Cole was the ballet master. And then this was handed over to the animator and where there was a girl he drew a hippo or an ostrich. So this is the same thing, you see, it doesn't matter what the person looks like, you can make a gremlin, a turtle, and eagle, anything out of him. Another thing: the size of the head was always enlarged in human figures, because the proportion of the human head to the body is not a cartoon proportion. And the whole figure was simplified, of course. To my mind the whole show was stolen by the evil character on top of the mountain, the Devil who summons everybody up to his revel, dead people from the moats, ghosts from the graveyard. You enjoy [watching] the mischievous character more. So it was kind of an anticlimax when we came to the Ave Maria at the end of it. Actually there was a thing that we consider a mistake in Ave Maria. There's one point where a line of little characters are walking along carrying what look like targets. But it's not a target, it's just a badly drawn torch with the illumination from the flame spreading out. It's still there; so let's say it's a stylized torch and excuse it that way.

ADAMSON

What about the Toccata and Fugue, Mr. Huemer?

HUEMER

I don't think we were quite ready for it, myself. I think it's easily the weakest thing in Fantasia, I don't know how you feel about it. Not musically, musically it's great. Stokowski's arrangement is beautiful. But to me it's a little dinky. All the little things dancing around, it isn't clever or imaginative enough to be a good interpretation.

ADAMSON

Why do you think you would do it better today?

HUEMER

That's a good question. You'd have to think very carefully about what to do, get a different interpretation of it.

ADAMSON

Do you think people are more ready for that today?

HUEMER

Yes, I do. I think abstract stuff is done more today...and real well. That was probably the first time it had been done in the big time so to speak. It has been done in a small way by Fischinger. He came to the studio to work on it at first, and didn't last very long, because what he contributed were these little things dancing dinkily. The sort of thing he had been doing. It was not the thing for us to do. We had to be above little dinky things dancing.

ADAMSON

This is Fischinger's design?

HUEMER

Fischinger was a contributor, he couldn't do it all be himself. He worked at his board and he drew what he thought was called for. Then it was taken and finished by other people. The director, Sam Armstrong, then took the music and made it more his own, with big church windows rising up, Gothic things

and shapes the music seemed to suggest and all the other fantasies of interpretation.

ADAMSON

But it was Fischinger's design, basically?

HUEMER

No. He started the project, and some flavor of it was retained. But not much really. I wouldn't say he dominated it at all. Far from it. I've never given it that much thought since, but I'm sure we could come up with something that would benefit and honor the music a lot more than that treatment did. It was fairly criticized, too. I saw the thing ten years ago and it's, the one thing that made me scrounge down in my seat when it came along. But for its day, I suppose it was ahead of its time in a way.

ADAMSON

Did Ave Maria seem a let down to you then?

HUEMER

No, not generally. It was Walt's idea to portray the triumphant return of holiness and sanity after a night of orgy and evil. That's a good thought, still good, I think. Perhaps it was a let down pictorially but not musically. Because after all the excitement and horror that you heard and saw on Bald Mountain, the clashing noise of that really evil music, it was a relief to come to something soothing and beautiful. The music was great but I don't think we did a good job on that Ave Maria...a beautiful job on Bald Mountain though. Speaking of 'The Rite of Spring,' in my opinion, dinosaurs will never again be represented that well on the screen again. It was a really perfect job of animation, the mood, the coloring, everything. I don't think that Bald Mountain could ever be done as well either. And also most of the Nutcracker Suite is, I think, perfect. And there are things in Beethoven which are great, like the storm sequence which I consider very good. I don't particularly care for some parts of it such as the drunken Bacchus stuff. And 'The Dance of the Hours' is unquestionably a classic.

ADAMSON

Do you think that Fantasia will ever be de throned from the summit of animation?

HUEMER

I don't think anyone could afford it again. Things are too costly now, a lot of things will probably never be done after the Disney era. I venture to say that a hundred years from now whoever hears this may back me up in saying that they still will not have equaled some of these bits of animation which Disney fostered. On the other hand, you never know, maybe they will. Nowadays, it's mostly a matter of economics.

ADAMSON

Fantasia wasn't...let's say as profitable as it should have been, was it?

HUEMER

No, it didn't start off with much of a bang, but since then it has recouped. Anyway it's a feather in Walt's cap; it's one of his great pictures.

ADAMSON

Artistically. But didn't he have a financial problem at the time?

HUEMER

Yes, after that there were tight times for him.

ADAMSON

After he spent all that money and failed to make it back.

HUEMER

I believe that, up to the beginning of the war, Walt was in serious financial difficulties. When the war came along, he got a lot of war contracts, cost plus or whatever the system was. And that kept him handily afloat. But I do believe he would have been in very serious trouble if the war hadn't come along when it did. Then he had another crisis after the war, around the time of Cinderella when he said at a meeting, 'Boys, if Cinderella doesn't make it, we're through!' P.S. It went. Cinderella was a success.

ADAMSON

Do you still feel that this was the summit of animation?

HUEMER

How can you arbitrarily say that? Depends. If you look at anyone of his pictures, it will contain something fine. Everybody has his own Disney favorite. You can't get away from the fact that Snow White has a tremendous impact even today. Even with all its jittery animation in the close-ups. Snow White is a great picture; and if all of Walt's pictures were to be destroyed except one, I'd have a hard time answering that. I might very well say Snow White. Emotionally it's great, a perfect story! Too bad they didn't have Xerox then.

ADAMSON

Where's the story that Dumbo comes from?

HUEMER

I never saw it, but they say it was on a little strip that was given away on a cereal box. Or maybe it was even printed on the outside, I don't know. But it had the basic elements of the story: the little elephant who had big ears, was made fun of, learned to fly, and was redeemed. All in just a few panels. Well, we took it from there, had a few story meetings, then Joe Grant and I wrote it up a chapter at a time and submitted it to Walt. He used to come down and say, 'That's coming along good. We'll make it!' We got sketch men and story men and went to work and put together what we call a Leica reel. Did you ever run into that before?

ADAMSON

Leica?

HUEMER

A Leica reel was a way of presenting a storyboard with the individual pictures on filmstrip that was run through a Leica projector. You'd flip over a picture and talk about it, then flip over the next. You could visualize the story quite well. Come to think of it, we did some of Fantasia that way, but I don't think they use it any more.

ADAMSON

So you did sketches...

HUEMER

Which were photographed onto 35mm film. 'Here Dumbo comes in...click!...and there's his mother...click!...and she picks him up ...click!...and the ringmaster enters,' and so on.

ADAMSON

And you show these to whom?

HUEMER

To Walt. This was how we often held a story meeting. Sometimes we had rough Leica reels in pencil, and later we would film them out and make a color reel. And you almost have the feeling of an animated reel, a full scene.

ADAMSON

When you first got Dumbo, what form was it in?

HUEMER

Somebody had started working on it and there were quite a few sketches that I remember, but no storyboards yet. Mostly talk, getting together with Walt, and taking notes, and studying them. Dumbo was put aside a while to concentrate on another picture, I suppose, then Joe Grant and I picked it up.

ADAMSON

On your own initiative?

HUEMER

Yes, we were allowed to, even encouraged by Walt: 'See what you can get.' He was very good about that. Sometimes, you didn't know, but two or three other guys might have been assigned to the same thing. Walt had a trick of pitting men against each other that way; he loved that kind of conflict. In fact, it annoyed him when men got along together too well. He thought rivalry was good, it made sparks, it stimulated people.

ADAMSON

How long was this version that you and Joe Grant did together?

HUEMER

It was about that thick. [Huemer indicated half an inch with his two fingers.] With extra long papers, great big long ones. It has all the basic elements. Not that we had made them all up; some had been talked about.

ADAMSON

How closely did it stick to this story when you finally did it?

HUEMER

Well, nothing ever sticks closely. A picture's a thing that grows like a snowball. Everybody adds to it, the director, the animator. And then when it's done, it can still be added too. So it's hard to say. After Walt had read the article in Time Magazine in 1941 about Dumbo, he met Joe Grant and myself in the lot and indicated his displeasure. He didn't think it was a very good article, not particularly flattering to him. As he turned away he said, 'What the hell, didn't have anything to do with the picture?' which is what the write-up sounds like I must admit. But in a sense it was partly true, he didn't have as much to do with it as he did with his other pictures. And sometimes his withdrawal from a picture didn't work out too well. For instance, he didn't have much to do with Sleeping Beauty, and to me it is one of our poorest pictures mostly for that reason.

ADAMSON

Why didn't he?

HUEMER

He couldn't get interested in it. That's my opinion, again. Oh, he didn't stay away entirely, no more than he did with Dumbo. He was down in South America while Dumbo was being made. But, no, he couldn't warm up to Sleeping Beauty; neither can I for that matter, still can't. I think it's an extremely vapid picture.

ADAMSON

Why was it done if he couldn't warm up to it?

HUEMER

Well, a lot of reasons. I mean you've got a staff to keep busy. You've got to do something. And once they were under way, no one cared to think that it

would turn out all that ineffectual. There's always the eternal hope that it'll be great. That's inherent in everything you do. What they did on that picture, which was wrong I think, was that the animators got it into their heads that the appearance of the characters was so important. I remember one of them, it was Mark Davis, pointing out that they had a whole new concept of design on these characters, and if you study some of the drawings which are in the book I lent you, notice the crispness or designed quality of her hair or of the drapery. How it falls and curls this way, all very carefully worked out. They thought this was important which in its own way it was. But what was more important was that they didn't have a good story. I mean they didn't have one with the guts that it should have, or heart appeal or novelty or comedy. Again, my opinion.

ADAMSON

How were the songs combined with the story? Did you include in your original synopsis, places where songs might go and what sort of songs they might be?

HUEMER

I can remember one particularly, and that was in the Pink Elephant sequence. That feeling is written in there, of a musical nightmare. Ned Washington wrote the lyrics, and he would be in on the story meetings and would present his songs, you know, he'd tap them out. Walt didn't have quite the grasp of music that he had of other things. That was one place where he was somewhat at the mercy of his musicians and lyric writers. If there was a poor lyric, he couldn't say, 'Well, why don't we have so-and-so,' because he wasn't a great poet or rhymester, which it takes to be a lyricist, I guess. Nevertheless, it was he who came up with the line: 'It's a Zippedy-doo-dah Day,' which became a hit in 'Song of the South.' But generally he just okayed (or didn't okay) a lyric or melody. A songwriter would mostly put his own work through just about the way he had written it. But he had to make it fit, which could always be done, of course. I've done that sort of thing myself, on occasion. We would say, 'Let's write a song...a mother song for when she's chained up and Dumbo comes to visit her.' Well, naturally there's some heart-breaking type of lyric indicated, and Ned Washington came up with 'Baby mine don't you cry...' A heartbreaker.

ADAMSON

And the opening scene, that stork?

HUEMER

Yes. It was suggested in a story meeting that we would show the stork with the baby looking for Mrs. Dumbo [Jumbo] to deliver it to, and we thought, 'Why not have a song to set up the stork on his mission.' So Ned Washington came up with 'Look out for Mr. Stork that funny little chap...he'll come along and drop a baby in your lap.' and so forth.

ADAMSON

Why did the song on the stork have one idea, which was look out for the stork, and yet what was shown was a completely different idea: everyone's pleased as punch!?

HUEMER

Oh, that doesn't matter. A lyric like that is atmospheric. It gives you a comic slant on the stork and his business, and also the story point--the coming of Dumbo. There are some songs which are largely production songs, telling a story or making a point, like 'When I See an Elephant Fly' which loses a great deal out of context. It advanced the story; that's what we call a production song. Whereas the stork number was just a nice opening theme with storm and stork flying, it gave you a nice feeling. We often did that. We were being entertaining.

ADAMSON

The fact that the two moods conflicted...

HUEMER

I don't think they did. You're the first to say that. You've been analyzing it too much. Listen to the rest of the words: 'You may be poor or rich...it doesn't matter which millionaires get pairs like the butcher or the baker.' It's just a song about somebody going to deliver a baby. 'He'll find you in China or he'll go to County Cork, so you better look out for Mr. Stork!' In the case of 'When I see an Elephant Fly' again the song arose out of the situation--Timothy trying to make Dumbo fly and the crows ridiculing him. It was based on an expression, 'I'll believe that when elephants fly,' a clever retort people made back in 1910.

ADAMSON

Really?

HUEMER

Yes, that's the expression: 'That'll happen when elephants fly.' And other cracks along those lines: I saw a brownstone stoop, I saw a banana stand, etc. Remember those sayings? Did you ever hear a fireside chat? Ha, Ha!

ADAMSON

Were they all made up by the songwriter?

HUEMER

I would say that most of them were compiled by the lyric writer.

ADAMSON

Really?

HUEMER

Yeah, sure. There you go again doubting me!

ADAMSON

Why is there such a proliferation of villains in Dumbo?

HUEMER

Well, villainy makes a background for the goodness of the good characters, doesn't it? It brings out the fact that the mother had to struggle in this nasty world, where everything is stacked against her. And little Timothy, the last guy you'd expect to help, the traditional enemy of little elephants (which is biologically true, of course) turns out to be the great benefactor. And in the end everybody is proud of Dumbo.

ADAMSON

Yes, but only after he's proved himself.

HUEMER

Well, let's say that it's melodrama.

ADAMSON

Well, it seems a very sardonic view of the world.

HUEMER

Well, you'll find that's how I am. I see no preponderance of good in it. Which is realistic. But we won't go into that.

ADAMSON

Go into it.

HUEMER

A hundred years from now, it'll all be settled, we'll all be blown up. Think of it! There'll be nobody to read this thing. All this work for nothing!

ADAMSON

Do you think that the film reflects your own outlook?

HUEMER

I don't say it's all my fault. No one man had that big an effect on it. Disney characters, and I don't mean chromatically, are always black and white, drawn very sharply, no grays. You're a villain or you're not. That was his formula, anyway. As a matter of fact, it's characteristic of our medium--that's how cartoons have to be. Otherwise, they're wishy-washy; again, in my opinion.

ADAMSON

Yes, but if you look at Snow White there's only one villain.

HUEMER

Well, that's how the story was.

ADAMSON

If you look at Pinocchio, it's about half and half. In Dumbo there is quite a paucity of sympathetic characters.

HUEMER

Did it bother you?

ADAMSON

No, it didn't bother me.

HUEMER

It was entertaining, wasn't it?

ADAMSON

Oh, yeah. I thought it reflected an outlook.

HUEMER

Not entirely. It's inherent in the story. It's the story of an elephant that was born a cripple. Naturally, everything is stacked against him; the whole world is stacked against a cripple, isn't it? That's the situation, and if you don't show him battling against this situation, then you don't have conflict, do you? So in a picture which shows a cripple or a freak, you're more apt to have nasty people. The situation of the crows picking on little Dumbo was there already. Either dialogue or song would do; but a song would be an oblique way of doing it, a pleasanter way, a cleverer way, a much more entertaining way, than just saying, 'Look; who's trying to fly?' In a song you can bring out all these points painlessly.

ADAMSON

Then there was the idea of ending the movie...

HUEMER

The music? The idea of using a reprise like the 'Elephant Flying' song is standard musical comedy procedure. And when you think about songs in-the picture that's the one that has the best beat, a good lively beat. That's a very good quality to end the picture with, and that's why we did it.

ADAMSON

Who did the voices for the crows?

HUEMER

Let me think about that. Oh yes, it was a colored group from the Hall-Johnson Choir.

ADAMSON

Did they react to the Negro stereotype business that you had indicated?

HUEMER

You mean did they react unfavorably?

ADAMSON

Did it offend them?

HUEMER

Not at all.

ADAMSON

Did they think it was very funny, or what?

HUEMER

Yes, they did, they liked it very much and enjoyed doing it hugely. They even offered suggestions, and we used some of their ideas, lines of dialogue or words, little touches. Happens all the time when you're making a picture. Somebody will suggest an improvement. The [new] material keeps accumulating all the time. I don't think the crow sequence is derogatory. In fact, when someone mentioned the possibility to me, I was quite taken aback. I never gave that angle a thought; and I still don't. But this may be part of why the studio hasn't re-released it lately; I don't know.

ADAMSON

That may pass.

HUEMER

Of course, it will. There's nothing derogatory anywhere in the sequence. It's damn cute!

ADAMSON

When did you first hear anybody question it?

HUEMER

Never actually...not until this present unrest began a few years back. I don't remember the exact circumstances. I think someone just mentioned the possibility.

ADAMSON

You had a Negro in Fantasia, too, didn't you?

HUEMER

One of the little centaurettes in Beethoven was a little colored girl. That is the top of her body was a colored girl, the rest was a Zebra, and she was the maid. While one of the centaurettes was primping the little maid was handing her a powder puff and holding up a mirror. But, you see, we were using her in that capacity; that's the only place she appears.

ADAMSON

You had absolutely no kickback from that at the time?

HUEMER

Nothing. I don't think many of them saw the picture.

ADAMSON

Did you ever think of leaving Disney?

HUEMER

Yes. During the war, Joe Grant and I were finally at odds with Walt and he with us, and we thought we ought to leave. We went over to see Quimby at MGM Studios and started arranging a deal. Actually we did arrange one and were all prepared to go over and work for Quimby. And Walt heard about. You see, during the war you weren't allowed to change jobs; and employers were obliged to tell a competitor when men were thinking of changing jobs, which Quimby did. Or at least Walt found out somehow and he forbade us to leave. So that's the nearest we came to leaving at any time. We finished out our contracts.

ADAMSON

Did you ever think of leaving after that?

HUEMER

Not seriously, no. It was a pleasant place to work. It was still a great big Santa's Workshop, you know.

ADAMSON

Were you going to do the same sort of thing over at Quimby's?

HUEMER

Yes. Joe Grant and I would have been producers, like Hanna and Barbera who were going great guns at the time doing Tom & Jerry. Tex Avery was also a producer over there.

ADAMSON

Producer?

HUEMER

By producer, I mean he would make his own picture and direct it. In effect, that was producing. They didn't give him the title, but his operation was that of a producer. Quimby was the official producer of all MGM cartoons but he contributed nothing creatively.

ADAMSON

So you would have gone back to directing, in effect?

HUEMER

Not animating! God forbid! Moving that character across the paper?! Whew!!

ADAMSON

Why did you pick Quimby?

HUEMER

Well, his outfit was doing the nearest thing, we thought, to what Walt was doing. He had Harman and Ising working for him and they were quite close to Walt in their operation, having been with him. Never once got even close, but they were trying. And we heard that MGM wasn't a sweatshop like Warner's.

ADAMSON

How do you mean sweatshop?

HUEMER

They didn't pay well. It was a case of grinding them out like sausages. Apparently, all Schlesinger cared about was getting the money. Grind them out, make the deadlines. It was a miracle how many good pictures they made even so.

ADAMSON

Why was Quimby's operation different? He wasn't that different a person.

HUEMER

Well, MGM had the tradition of having good men there, guys like Tex Avery, and Harman and Ising, and Freleng, and Hanna and Barbera. Milt Gross worked at MGM for a while, did you know that? Milt Gross told me that he used to listen in on Quimby's meetings after hours. Quimby's spies would come to him and tell him what was going on. Milt said he found a place in the floor where he could listen and hear them spilling everything. He was very bitter about MGM, Milt was. Perhaps I shouldn't be telling you this. Of course, they're both dead.

ADAMSON

Tell me about Fred Quimby.

HUEMER

Tell you about Fred Quimby. Well, let's put it this way: the only qualification he had for his job was that he was breathing, which he had to do, you know. Previously, I think he had been a film salesman. Evidently, the MGM management arbitrarily put him in charge, like saying, 'Okay, Quimby, you will be head of our cartoon department.' They tell me he was a sort of unlettered character. The time he was reading a review of one of their cartoons in a trade paper which was headed: 'A mediocre cartoon,' and Quimby looked up from this paper confused and said, 'Macrocolor? Say, listen! Our cartoon was made in Technicolor, wasn't it?' He had misread Macrocolor for mediocre! That'll give you a hint of his sharpness. He had nothing whatever to do with what went into the pictures. He was just lucky to have good men. (I had that story from George Gordon.)

ADAMSON

Tell me about the things you did to get Walt interested in Dumbo, the story.

HUEMER

I'll let you read our outline of the treatment, and you'll see little devices in the writing. Like I drew a teardrop on the page which said, 'Read no further unless you are of strong character and can take it, because what we're going to tell you, you won't believe-see you tomorrow!' Sort of kept the suspense from day to day. Very corny writing, but we thought it was a good way to intrigue him. Actually Walt was very susceptible to stimulation. People would show him drawings and he'd light up and get enthusiastic. Little character sketches stimulated him into doing the centaurs and other mythological characters. He'd say, 'Yeah, that's funny.' You know? 'That's good, we ought to do something like that!' And we'd be off and running with his approval. Again it was a case of bringing logs to the head beaver for him to build his dam. Not that he wasn't capable of getting his own logs. He could get the biggest logs you ever saw. When you write something or do something, you analyze it for the most effective approach and/or an unusual way that has never been tried before. You can't really say that there's any hard and fast rule for it. But all along the line, in every phase of production, you're trying, if you have anything at all on the ball, to do it in some way that has never been done before. Or always to keep suspense, and principally to get surprise, and even more than all that: which is the funniest, if comedy is what's called for. Or if it's tragedy which occurs in Dumbo when his mother is locked up, what is the saddest thing you can do? You lock her up, she's caged, it's night time, She rattles her chains...it's the most lugubrious situation you can contrive. It's simply a matter of working and picking away, discarding things and coming up finally with what's best--most show worthy.

ADAMSON

So you had to work hard until you had this result?

HUEMER

And how! None of that first blush stuff. Sure, Walt would often get big inspirations; and sometimes other people would, too. But generally it was all

hard work, analyzing and re-analyzing...re-re-re-analyzing, discarding and starting all over again.

ADAMSON

I'm thinking of that wonderful shot where Timothy has decided that he can't fly, it can't be done, and he looks down and sees their shadow on the ground.

HUEMER

Again, that's the result of analyzing and finding the most effective way to do it. You could take that whole picture and do every scene in it twenty different ways. Some might be better; although I can't think of anything in that picture that might be done differently. I think the lumbering elephants are beautiful. Verna Felton was the voice for one of the elephants. We recorded it first, you know.

ADAMSON

What about taking the easy way out?

HUEMER

No, Disney never imagined doing that. That's one of the secrets of his success; and we talked about his little magic tricks and what his magic consisted of. One of the tricks was never leave a thing until it had been milked in every possible way, and worked out in the best possible way no matter how much time it took or how much money it cost. He built his pictures that way. Actually, not that you bring it up, he made many sequences just to see if they would work. Even though they weren't essential to the story, he'd go ahead just to see, to try, always to try for the touchdown play. It's how the bedbuilding sequence I told you about in Snow White happened. And the eating sequence was also cut out.

ADAMSON

You seem to have a lot of respect for this man.

HUEMER

You couldn't help feeling awe in the presence of genius. This is an actual physical feeling. It reaches out, it touches you, like electricity. Figuratively, we could feel him coming down the hall, our hair would stand on end, the backs

of our necks would cringle--you could hear him coughing. Not that you were afraid of him; nobody was afraid of Walt physically. When he came into a room and people jumped into their seats, he bawled them out, 'Don't be afraid of me. I don't want to see you jumping into your seat like that. If you ever do it again, you'll hear from me! Don't be afraid of me. I don't mind you standing around. If you feel restless go out and walk in the garden!' I'd like to see you do that in front of Quimby or Schlesinger. Those guys loved to see everybody at their boards working as if in a sweatshop. Not Disney; he was the first one to introduce the idea of relaxing the grim grind on people. And as a result he got more work out of them because they worked out of love for what they were doing. And the fact that they were doing something which a lot of them thought would be imperishable. High sounding words, but it's true. Walt was in a lot of ways a very kindly man. I think I've told you this, a very fatherly guy in many ways. He started loan companies for his employees, instituted all kinds of incentive programs, and if you did a good job on a scene, you would get a bonus without asking or expecting it. I remember getting a thousand dollars once. One animator got three thousand dollars. All extra, mind you, outside of salary just for having done something that pleased him. Walt was always willing to remunerate people for doing good work. He appreciated good animation. Direction really didn't mean that much to him at the time because of the fact that he was really the director, and the men who called themselves directors were, you might say, assistant directors. They did a lot of the routine work like timing and handing it out, those technical tasks that had to be done. Of course, they also put in their touches; everybody did that. We used to have gag contests, and we would pay money for gags that were accepted; and week after week the studio gardener would come off with the most money. The gardener!

ADAMSON

Why didn't he ever become a gagman?

HUEMER

He was a damn good gardener!

ADAMSON

As far as employers having this attitude, how would you compare Disney with the Fleischers?

HUEMER

I would say I'd like them next to Walt. I liked working for the Fleischers. They were very warm and human. So many studio owners or managers were sons of bitches, they really were. But the Fleischers were very human people; I liked them. We were good friends; we'd go bowling and things like that. We enjoyed making good scenes. I remember sitting down with Dave beside, he'd take a chair, and we'd talk and work it out. I remember working out a scene of Koko landing on the moon with strange characters, a luna army in charge of a looney drill sergeant that snapped at Koko with enormous teeth. We gave him a funny name, 'Bezark,' I think. And it was fun to plan it out and animate it and flip it for Dave. And they paid me all right; I was getting \$150. a week. That was bad money for those days, and since I enjoyed the work it was pleasant being with the Fleischers.

ADAMSON

What were your feelings when the Gulliver's Travels film came out?

HUEMER

I thought it missed. Don't you? I don't believe it was such a financial success. Certainly not compared to Disney's features. Maybe they thought it was all right, but we a Disney's knew it wasn't good animation. Oh, it's no use my giving a critique on it. It certainly wasn't up to a Disney picture.

ADAMSON

Did you think that was the trouble with it, that it was trying to be a Disney picture?

HUEMER

I may be the only one who ever mentions it, but thought perhaps these little characters were supposed to be a little like the dwarves. Is that the name, Gabby? Well, there you are, you see, ending with a 'y' like Dopey. And you can't compare the drawing to Disney. Can you compare Gabby to the dwarves? There is no comparison. The dwarves are elegant, grand. And I'm not prejudiced.

ADAMSON

Why do you think they made it?

HUEMER

Because after the smashing success of Snow White, it must have seemed like a good way to make a fortune. They were getting on the bandwagon; it's traditional in Hollywood.

ADAMSON

You're given story credit for Saludos Amigos. What part in it did you have?

HUEMER

I did the story of 'Pedro.' And this is how that came about. Joe Grant and I worked up a little story while Walt was in South America, called 'Petey O'Toole.' P.T. like the letters on an airplane. Joe and I wrote this story of the baby mail plane who was to make his first trip around the country. He has parents who are big transports and they warn him to look out for high tension wires. These were weird menacing characters (which incidentally were left out of the story) that live only to tear an airplane from the sky. There's a storm and his getting lost and the mother going out and searching for him and so forth. When Walt came back he didn't have enough material for one of the South American features which he had contracted for so he brought this story from Joe and me, and he changed it over to give it a South American setting. He now had to carry the mail over the mountains, past terrible Mount Acumcagua to the coast.

ADAMSON

Well, who did the transformation?

HUEMER

I wasn't in on that. Joe and I were then working on something else. It might have been one of the war pictures.

ADAMSON

Did you write it intending for Disney to use it as a short or what?

HUEMER

Naturally we thought he might be interested in it. It was cute, the little plane with the little nose and eyes.

ADAMSON

Did you do the drawings?

HUEMER

No. Joe Grant did some of those...Martin Provinson...Jack Miller also worked on them. So they didn't have to change the drawing of the character, just the terrain, substituting Acumcagua as the menace. We had 'The Old Man of the Mountain' in ours. It was the Old Man who tore planes from the sky because of the wind around him and everything. The grumbling PT's getting lost in the snowstorm, the menace, everything was essentially in the transposed version.

ADAMSON

Is it true about the winds at Acumcagua?

HUEMER

Maybe so. I was never there in my little Piper cub.

ADAMSON

How about the puns at the beginning, the thing about the little boy plane? Were they yours?

HUEMER

Yes, I'm afraid so. Sorry.

ADAMSON

I thought they were great! The conception of the mountain was my other question. It was a very ghastly, imposing figure!

HUEMER

The idea came from the Great Stone Face in the White Mountains, but we didn't really have any specific place in mind. Now, Peter and the Wolf which you are going to see and for which I did the final story was started by Ham Luske and put aside as unfeasible. Walt gave it to me, probably I suspect, to make me uncomfortable. So I was stuck with it, analyzed it, and found out why

it hadn't been coming off. The whole trouble was in the introduction of the characters. If you play Prokofieff's recording, you'll find the order of characters different from what we did. His starts with the introduction of the wolf--and the whole key of the thing working was to take the wolf out of that. This is how simple things can be in analyzing. We put the wolf last, let him end the introduction of the characters, and when the narrator says, 'And there was also a wolf!' you can get smoothly into your story. You couldn't have done that with the wolf coming along at the very start. It was simply a matter, and it often is, of arranging these segments differently. And it worked like a charm. It's a good picture thanks mainly to Ward Kimball's great animation of the huntsmen.

ADAMSON

Getting back to the story of 'Pedro,' there was sort of a jump: you decided he was dead then you decided he wasn't dead. Was that in the original?

HUEMER

Well, that's suspense.

ADAMSON

Then all of a sudden he comes in!

HUEMER

That's legitimate.

ADAMSON

But that was in your story?

HUEMER

Yes, sorry.

ADAMSON

I did like the puns though, didn't I?

1.5. TAPE NUMBER III: Side One, (October 8, 1968)

HUEMER

I want to give you a few thumbnail impressions of some of the fellows at Disney's. It's not going to be easy to make this interesting because after all what can you say about guys who come in, sit down, and do an eight hour stint at their desks or drawing boards. You see, animation requires a lot of strict application, nose to the grindstone, turn it out. I don't think bricklayers work any steadier than animators. It may be art to some, but to animators it's just plain hard work. Now I'll tell you about Norm Ferguson. Norm started as a bookkeeper at Paul Terry's Aesop's Fables. Then I suppose one day he thought he'd like to animate, tried it, and didn't get much encouragement because he left Terry's and accepted an offer from Disney. Walt was really hard up for men in those days, and he was trying almost anybody that showed any talent. In every studio there was, and still is, the so-called Best Animator. When I came to work at Disney's in 1933, Norm, or Fergy as we called him, was it. Not only the best at Disney's but consequently the best in the world. Walt was just crazy about Fergy's animation and with darn good reason. Fergy's characters lived and breathed and seemed to have actual thought processes. His Pluto and the flypaper sequence, for instance, was a real classic. It still holds up as well as ever today, 1969. I just saw it last week in connection with a show we were doing for TV this Christmas, and we all laughed as much as ever. Fergy did the roughest pencilling of anybody I ever saw or heard of. The inkers used to be almost in despair, picking the right lines to follow out of this mish-mash, but they loved it, they loved to work on his stuff because they also knew how great it was. They appreciated good stuff when it was finally on the screen. Fergy wasn't just a Pluto and Peg-leg Pete animator either. He did all the wicked witch animation in Snow White. He used to say that he would never leave the Disney studios, and when he got too old and feeble to animate anymore, he'd be perfectly content as a studio cop. It's sad to tell you that his wish wasn't granted. Like so many animators, eventually he became a director, and while I don't know all of the facts it's my belief that Walt pinned some of the blame for the poor showing of Saludos Amigos on Fergy. I know they had several bitter arguments, which was very unusual. Then one day he was gone. He found a job with several smaller studios; he might even have gone into business for himself. About five years afterwards he died very suddenly. I remember seeing him in a bar, Alphonse's in Toluca Lake, where a lot of us animators used to go after work, and he seemed perfectly all right. The next week I heard that he'd died. Fergy had been suffering from diabetes

for about 25 years. Well, I'd just like to say that Fergy was one sweet little guy, that's how everyone felt about him, and in his own way, he was also one of Walt's demi-geniuses. At a meeting once Walt said to Fergy, 'Fergy, you're a great actor,' and Fergy sort of simpered and said, 'Well, don't know.' And Walt said, 'Yes, you are. That's why your animation is so good because you feel. You feel what these characters feel.'

ADAMSON

How did he get an offer from Disney, if he was a bookkeeper?

HUEMER

Because he had done some animation. I think Manny Davis took him under his wing a little and sort of helped him out, so he had actually done animation for Terry. I suppose he wanted to improve himself, and Walt was expanding and would take anybody with experience. Fergy hadn't animated much before, but he fell right into it. He was one of the naturals, like Freddy Moore or Ward Kimball. It just naturally flowed out of their pencils or heads or wherever it comes from.

ADAMSON

Most of Walt's publicity shows an animator making faces in a mirror. Was that very common?

HUEMER

Well, that was done more commonly in the days before we took to using live action to base the animation on. You know that Snow White, the girl, was all photographed and the animation based on actual film. Now a picture like The Goddess of Spring, which was full of human characters, was not. And if you were to run it today, you'd see how difficult it is to animate without live action to go by. To sit down and animate a human figure, the way you would a cartoon figure, just doesn't work out. There are too many little subtleties in the thing that make it live. It's my impression that mirrors weren't used too much except as a publicity gag. You'll see Fergy doing it.

ADAMSON

You never used mirrors at Fleischer's?

HUEMER

No.

ADAMSON

Or Screen Gems?

HUEMER

No.

ADAMSON

Not Screen Gems. Columbia?

HUEMER

No.

ADAMSON

Or Mutt and Jeff?

HUEMER

No.

ADAMSON

How often did you use the Rotascope?

HUEMER

For all human characters in features starting with Snow White. Even Fergy's witch was based on something Verna Felton acted out. Her actions were reduced to photostats and he worked over them changing the proportions and eventually the face and everything. The Prince and even the dwarves were done that way. I remember Perce Pearce acting out one of the songs about how he caught a skunk, chased him up a tree, and 'I got the worst of him, he got the best of me,' something like that. I know that they photographed animals for Bambi. They had an actual deer on the lot; it escaped one day and we were running all over the Hollywood Hills after it. And when they did Lady and the Tramp, they did a lot of photography of dogs to study their actions. Of course, it's not possible to make a dog do exactly

what those dogs [in the picture] did; it can't be done. But you could get the actual physical movement, which you couldn't do just by imagining it. But by studying live action, you can do it. Walt was a great one for analyzing that kind of thing, everything as much as he could, which nobody else in the business ever thought of doing. Now, we'll talk about Earl Hurd. Back in 1914 or 1915 Earl had a comic strip in the New York Mail, a newspaper since defunct. It was called Editor Mouse; you'll note mice were already used in cartoons then. It was mostly based on puns some of which I thought were really quite clever. Earl had another comic strip in the middle 20's called Suzie Sunshine. It was a continuity strip with a little girl character, and for the first time ever as far as I know, one of the characters died. This was a very unusual and shocking thing to have in a comic strip in the 20's, and it got a lot of publicity. Well, the strip died too, eventually, which was nothing new. The mortality rate is very high in comic strips, as I know only too well. Earl was a very inventive guy. He invented the cell system for animated cartoons. He also invented a graduated ratchet system for the movement of pan backgrounds under the camera. Before that it used to be done by hand by making little gradations on the bottom of a pan. But he rigged it up so that it could be done with a crank. In his later years he mechanized his chicken yard in Burbank, gates opened and everything operated by electricity. It was a very astonishing thing. He was a pretty old guy then and hadn't aged well. He was kind of shaky; smoked too much I suppose. For some reason I never figured out he kept a live chicken back in his studio in New York in the 20's. I don't know, maybe he couldn't eliminate the farm boy from his nature. There's a memorial plaque to Earl Hurd in the lobby of the theater on the Disney lot. It's the only one of its kind; nobody else who ever died has one. He died quietly of a heart attack in his workshop tinkering to the very end. And also to the very end his sketches were very highly thought of at Disney's. He still had a very keen mind and it took a premature death to remove him from active participation in the 30's. He was one of the real pioneers. The whole idea of using cells was his, instead of doing it the way McKay did with everything on paper and traced. Wilfred Jackson has been written up quite a bit. You'll find a reference to him in Walt Disney's daughter's book and in The Disney Version and a book that's going to come out this year on Walt. He was a very important man at Disney's. I worked with him a lot; he was the only cartoon director who came to work in sneakers. He was quite careless in his dress. And I know that when Walt

retired him after 30 years of faithful service, Jackson was also very upset. This happened in 1958. Walt gave him a gorgeous trip around the world with the goose hanging high and the red carpet rolled out. Jackson really got the royal treatment. He had gone on the trip because he had had a heart attack and Walt thought that it would be good for him. But it's my opinion that Walt thought also that he was not really going to be able to come back to work, that his attack had incapacitated him. But Jackson stayed on, and I worked with him on a few TV shows and then in 1958 Walt retired him. I know that he was very unhappy and it took him a long time to get used to this. He was one of Walt's very first men, came out of art school poor as a churchmouse, hardly had the fare to get to the studio. He worked out the idea of music with a cartoon, he was very instrumental in working that out.

ADAMSON

Instrumental, is that a pun?

HUEMER

No pun intended. As a director Jackson was very meticulous. Having worked with him, I thought perhaps a little too much so. I didn't think it really required that much going over. He worried an awful lot. I think that's why he had his heart attack, he was a worrier. It was really frightening to work with him, to see how he would go into something and analyze it right down to the atom. He turned out fine work though.

ADAMSON

Did he have more art training than the average animator?

HUEMER

Very possibly. I think several other animators had some art school training. I know I did. I know Tytla did. And I'm sure that Freddy Moore didn't. I think Kimball's training was correspondence school.

ADAMSON

Did you ever feel that need for more art training than you had?

HUEMER

Yes, I did. I wish I'd had more. I think you have only so much talent, that's as far as you go. I don't think I had the talent to be an illustrator or a fine artist, so I didn't go into it any deeper. There are some men who have had the talent in the business. I think that Bill Tytla was a very fine artist and a good animator, in my opinion one of the best ever to work at the Disney studios. He was a very moody person with the kind of personality that Walt didn't understand. Walt didn't understand a lot of people that were out of the range of his experience. I think Walt felt Bill was a little foreign or maybe being too New Yorkish. But Walt couldn't help admiring his animation, because who couldn't? It was just great. I think it was practically perfect. His animation of Satan in 'A Night on Bald Mountain' in Fantasia is a classic. Bill could animate anything funny or otherwise. Just the other day I saw something he did in one of the shorts of a giant. It was a beautiful piece of work with all the weight of a giant. And I'm sure this was done without live action study. I'd say that Bill can animate anything especially weighty characters like the giants or the elephants in Dumbo. His wife was always needling him to leave California and go back to New York, and one day he gave in and left Hollywood. I know he hated to do it. Bill was very proud of his Russian descent too. I can still see him at a party beating his chest, a glass of vodka in the other hand, and yelling, 'I'm a Cossack! I'm a Cossack!' Cute guy, I tell you. Since he's been in New York, I've lost track of him. Nor has anything outstanding been done in animation by him that I've noticed. It's a shame, a man with his talent becoming mired in the mediocre work they do in New York. The story about Freddy Moore is that he came to Walt asking for a job, and when Walt asked him if he had any samples, Freddy fished around in his pocket and brought out a few crumpled pieces of paper. And when Walt saw what was on them, they looked so good that he was hired right on the spot. I don't think he had any organized training in drawing. Anyway, Walt was very interested in hiring him because he was a natural draftsman, absolutely natural, it flowed right out of his pencil. I think that was the trouble with Freddy, it came too easy to him. With the possible exception of Grumpy who was mostly Bill Tytla's creation and Dopey who was Art Babbitt's, the dwarves in Snow White would not have been the same without Freddy. He keyed them for what they became. Fred was great until he died prematurely, indirectly the result on an auto accident. I never saw so many people at anybody's funeral. He was another one of Walt's palladins. But you take a guy like Milt Kahl. Freddy's stuff looks shallow compared to Milt's.

That was the trouble with Freddy, if I may say so, he wasn't too analytical. And this will show in animation. Bill Tytla, for instance, was a very smart guy, and that's why his stuff had weight. Again no pun intended. When he did these giants, they had weight, and these were great things. Freddy Moore was a bit of a lightweight that way, but he didn't have to think about it, it just flowed out. Any more you want to know about him?

ADAMSON

Any Moore? Was most of Freddy Moore's activity in the creation of characters, or in animation, or in direction? What did he spend most of his time doing?

HUEMER

He was never a director. It was in the creation of characters, his style of drawing and his animation. They went hand in hand. Freddy was also very good at drawing girls, beautiful, sexy little women. But they all seemed innocent and childlike, again a reflection of him, although he was a plenty virile guy. He fell out of the window at the big brawl we had at Lake Narconian to celebrate Snow White. He fell out of a second story window and landed in a bush; he wasn't hurt at all. This was a famous saturnalia that took place on Walt's bounty. This all night affair, this orgy where drinks are on the house and free rooms, oh boy! Walt never did that again! I myself didn't stay; I left at sundown because I wasn't there with my wife. I had to come home. Did I ever tell you about when Walt did the Midas story? He was out of a director at the time, and Walt himself decided he would direct a short. So he got Freddy Moore, the best animator in the place, for little characters, cute stuff, and Norm Ferguson to do the Midas, the big character. And Walt personally made out the exposure sheets, sat down just like we directors did, and did all the work. And with the best men and the best brain in the business, how do you think the picture turned out? Lousy. And he had to admit it himself. Now, isn't that a funny thing? When it came right down to it, he couldn't do it, and yet he could get it out of other people. This is a strange thing. The picture was not funny, it wasn't convincing, you weren't with it, it just wasn't there.

ADAMSON

Well, didn't he in effect direct all the films at first? Steamboat Willie and things like that?

HUEMER

Yes, those he did, that's true. But when I got there in '33, he already had a staff of directors, Jackson and Dave Hand were directing. Walt was just the producer. In effect, Walt moved his directors around just as though he were directing, but when it came down to where he did it himself, as he did with *Midas*, he got a poor result. There's something I have to bring out and that is, it's my opinion that, great as Walt undeniably was, he never would have accomplished what he did if he hadn't attracted such talented guys. I always liked to say, 'All right, Walt's a genius, but he couldn't have done it with *Zulus* or *Eskimos*.' Like Napoleon had to have brilliant marshalls who were talented tacticians in their own right, Walt had to have this group or, as I call them, the palladins.

ADAMSON

How did he attract them?

HUEMER

Take me for instance. When I turned Walt's offer down in 1930 to go to work from New York, the moment I turned it down, I regretted that I hadn't gone to work for him. Because Walt was doing the kind of animation that you could be proud of. We're not in the business just to make money. We picked animation because we liked it, we wanted to be animators, we liked to draw. So every animator regardless can't help admiring superior stuff or wanting to have a hand in it. And Walt was such a thundering success that I really bitterly regretted that I had turned him down and gone with Mintz and just frittered away three years on making money but doing little else. And Ward Kimball, who was undeniably one of these palladins, told me just the other day that when he was up in Santa Barbara he couldn't wait to come down to ask for a job with Walt. These people would set their sights on Walt Disney and working for him, if they had any talent or ability or desire.

ADAMSON

How was it that you got to work for Disney again? Did he make you another offer or did you go to him?

HUEMER

I went to Ben Sharpsteen who was my friend and said, 'Well, Ben, I'd like to come and work for Walt now.' And Ben just went and told Walt and that was all it was. I went and had this interview with him and in walked Charlie Chaplin and H.G. Wells and I almost fell on my pratt. Anyway I think that Kimball was certainly one of Walt's great acquisitions. Even when he was on George Drake's training program he did a marvelous first piece of animation lampooning Drake. It was so funny that even though it infuriated Drake, he couldn't do anything about it. It was a beautiful piece of work, and it was one of the first things Ward had ever done. You see, Walt set up a program. He sent George Drake and Don Graham to New York, and they advertised in the New York papers for people to learn the animation business. They get letters and if the qualifications suited them, they'd write the guy to come for an interview. And if he passed that, he was signed to come to Hollywood and learn animation. There would pay him ten dollars a week or whatever it was, just enough to get by, and there would be a school of animation. They got about 20 guys, paid their fare out here. Drake was a very tough taskmaster and thoroughly resented by all the kids. But Ward's was a very wonderful piece of work, that's why Drake couldn't conceal it from Walt. Eventually that thing broke up anyway. It only lasted for a short time during the thirties. What puzzles me about Ward is how he finds time to do all that he does. Being a full time animator is job enough for anyone especially with the creativity he puts into it. His is a very good story mind and he manages to put his personal stamp on everything he does, for instance, the cats in Cinderella. That's Ward. I kind of think Walt was a little jealous of him, I think he did him that honor. Ward is a very clever oil painter, too, among other things. He could have shone just in that one medium. He bought and refurbished a life-sized locomotive and coach, repainting the thing with little designs and fixing it up so that it runs perfectly. It's a museum piece; it's such a beautiful thing that Walt tried to get it away from him to run at Disneyland. He felt he needed another locomotive down there; he even told Ward, 'The men are coming to pick it up tomorrow.' And Ward said, 'No. No, they're not!' I don't think Walt ever forgave him for that. Then, of course, there's Ward's Jazz band, The Firehouse Five--which in

itself is a career. They perform professionally, you know, and they have a lot of records out. Mostly... Disneyland, but they get lots of dates at big affairs. Ward plays the jazz trombone. He also put out a very clever book of pictures with captions called Art Afterpieces, which went into several paperback editions, in which he takes very famous paintings and gives them a funny caption. And then he has the best collection of Disney memorabilia in the world: Christmas cards, all kinds of Disney toys, dozens that were current at one time but can't be gotten now; and Disney watches, some of which are worth \$100 apiece now, dinky watches that sold for \$1.50. He's got a house full of that stuff. But I must say he's maintained his own identity, he didn't get absorbed in Disney. Ward Kimball is still Ward Kimball and more power to him. He animated one of the TV shows that I saw the other day. But I think he's going to be a director or producer, like this TV show he just produced, The Mickey Mouse 40th Anniversary Show. Bill Peet is another who kept from being completely submerged by Disney. Today he's grinding out very, very good children's books, and by his own admission he's a very happy guy. Calls me up every once in a while when he's in his cups and talks for hours. Bill has that very happy and unusual combination of a keen story sense and brilliant comic drawing ability. He was also a good painter. I don't think he was ever very happy working for Walt. I don't think Walt ever really knew his worth, but we knew how good Bill was and believe me we appreciated him. Walt eventually recognized his ability, but by that time Bill was so embittered that he never quite got over it. Toward the end Walt is said to have told Bill that he was much too clever to be working for him and asked him why he didn't quit, and Bill did. But he didn't do it until he finally had built up a good kids' book business. He's got about ten very good books out which have nothing to do with Disney, nor did Walt ever buy any of them to base his pictures on. They're some thing on the order of Dr. Seuss only better in my opinion. He draws them and writes them. Very interesting character; he was a Hoosier. Now, there's Don DaGradi. Like Bill Peet, Don combines great drawing ability and great story ability. I do think Don is the funniest guy I ever met personally. He's not doing cartoons anymore, he's graduated. He's doing live action pictures with Bill Walsh. They make a very fine live action team. Actually he and Walsh are at the moment the hope of the studio, now that Walt is dead. DaGradi was a lay-out man on pictures like Cinderella. He uses that talent on live action pictures now. They do a lot of sketching, you know, for live action

pictures. They very often lay-out a whole picture in sketches, did you know that? Just like cartoon storyboards. Then they take the boards down to the sound stage where the stuff's being shot and the director looks at it and knows just what to do. Maybe that's what's the matter with some of them. I just worked with Dean Jones by the way on this Disney birthday picture. He's a nice guy.

ADAMSON

Does he play Mickey Mouse?

HUEMER

Sort of...he puts on one of those hats with the ears. Well, so much for Don DaGradi.

ADAMSON

This brings up an interesting thing. If he was such a funny person, why didn't he become a humorist?

HUEMER

I don't quite...

ADAMSON

Why be a lay-out when everything you say is hilarious?

HUEMER

Well, he was an artist basically. He could draw like hell. And a great lay-out man, that pays just as well as the other. To Disney, it did. Anyway his stuff was amateur stuff when he was being funny. Sitting in a projection room while they were running his comments would kill you. Dan's part Italian and part English. You wouldn't know he was Italian, he doesn't look it. He doesn't wear a ring in his ear.

ADAMSON

Do you know if Bill Peet did any animating before Disney?

HUEMER

I don't believe so. He may have been one of the people in Drake's program. When I say that was an inquisition and a nasty operation, I don't blame Don Graham for it. The other guy was the hatchet man and his name was anathema to the people who suffered under him. You see how little I know about these guys and I worked with them. As I say very few of us fraternized after work. Before Ham Luske applied for a job in Hollywood, he also wanted to be an animator. He had worked up in San Francisco, I think, on a newspaper. Without the least bit of knowledge of animation, he made a film test of a player serving a tennis shot which was just great. I imagine he probably studied live action, but he never admitted it. Ham was a dedicated guy, but he was such a worrier. Worrying about the future of animation after Walt's death may have contributed to his attack of heart failure. He was, I would say, directly responsible for the animation of Snow White herself. This was the first time anything had been done that was beautiful in the simple analysis of the action. It was done over live action, but if you could see what he did, taking the figure of Marjorie Belcher (she was dressed in costume, of course) making the head almost twice as large and cutting down the waist and reducing it to a cartoon. This was a big job; he had to do thousands of these. Everybody had to give him credit for that. (Marjorie Belcher, by the way, became Marjorie Gower Champion.) What he did was really a sensational advance in the history of animation for serious human characters. When Fleischer did the clown in Rotascope, they didn't change it much. It was Dave's proportions, head in a suit with the hat, and everything simplified, of course. But Ham did more than that. He would change the proportions so it became a cartoon, a figure. Study her if you get a chance any time and see if you can tell how many heads tall she is. Instead of a human being, eight heads tall, she became five heads tall, so it all had to be different proportions. He did a great job on it. Anyway, it was a big advance over The Goddess of Spring. He told me that his wife acted it out for him, but they didn't photograph it so it came out terrible. But then none of us were very proud of our animation of that picture. I animated Pluto, the devil character, and I didn't do it over any live action, I just kind of acted it out myself and then drew it. It wasn't very good either. Ham became a director in the last ten or fifteen years. They took him off the last cartoon features and put him on animated TV shows. And he wasn't very happy about that, but then you can't please everybody, can you? I knew Dave Hand in New York where we were both animators on the Out of the Inkwell

staff. I remember when I came back there after one of my leave takings, he was let out and I took his job. Dave wasn't very outstanding as an animator at Disney's, but when Walt made him a director, he was very effective and directed one of the best shorts of that time. When Walt really wanted a good picture and he had a real good story, I think he gave it to Dave because Dave really put the stuff in it. When Snow White was being set up, Walt very arbitrarily pointed the finger at one Harry Bailey, an old New York animator, and said, 'You're the director.' And this was one of Walt's mistakes. Bailey, who is in the Great Animating Studio in the Sky now, really flopped at the job. Bailey was a tall, handsome guy and Walt was frequently impressed by the physical aspect of people. Bailey really didn't have the ability for it. He was pretty helpless about it, so one day Walt just demoted him and put Dave Hand in his place. Again he just pointed a finger and made Dave Hand the chief director of Snow White. Walt really produced Snow White as I've told you so many times. Walt was in on every single move, every single thing that was done. You can't think of a thing Walt didn't okay in that picture. Well, how can you say that Dave was the producer? Dave was his assistant producer, let's say. It was Dave's job, or any producer's job to see that Walt's directions were followed, to see that Walt got what he asked for. If something was obviously very bad, the director would see to fixing before Walt noticed it, but when it came to making the decisions as to what to leave out or what to do next, the director per se didn't do it. Walt did it. But Walt needed this assistance, this guy to pick up the loose ends behind him and oversee the working out of a feature cartoon. What is directing? The janitor used to send in gags. We used to have meetings where everyone was called in to give their opinion of something--then you were the director. You had to break this down into titles of some sort. A producer, theoretically, was above a director. A producer like Dave Hand had four directors under him and they had to answer to him for certain things, but nothing that was of great moment. Walt had the last say on that. There really is too much emphasis placed on titles. It doesn't really mean anything. You can't pin it down the way you can in the Army. When I was a director, I was able to sweat-box stuff and have animators change it without Walt seeing it. Once when an animator balked, we went to Walt and Walt backed me up because I was supposed to present something that was in fairly good shape for Walt to pick on. Walt figured a director knew what he was doing enough so that when we weede something out-it was really bad. Dave

when his contract expired left the studio, and since then he's been involved in some sort of commercial thing in Colorado Springs. Evidently he's made a good living. Of all the people that passed through the Disney studios during Walt's lifetime, no one had the knack of getting along with Walt like Perce Pearce. This plus a certain creative ability and a flare for organization made him very popular with Walt. For instance, it was he who suggested putting an elevator in the new Burbank studio when we went over the plans. This was unheard of--an elevator in a cartoon studio? I think Perce had a lot of business experience. He had this real pontifical manner and all the cliché expressions, 'seeing eye to eye,' and 'do what it takes.' This went over really big with Walt. Perce was given, which is a strange thing, a certain autonomy over Bambi. Walt shifted the responsibility to him and told him to move over to a place which they had rented over on Seward Street. They called it the Seward Street Studio; it's still there although Disney doesn't own it. There he was and he sat with his staff and started grinding out Bambi. Perce, as I told you, had a lot to do with Snow White which will show in his record and 'Sorcerer's Apprentice' which he directed. After the war when the studio decided to use up its impounded European currency (you couldn't get the money out, you had to leave it there and invest it after the war), Perce was sent over to produce a series of live action pictures. This was the first serious attempt at live action features by Disney. He made Rob Roy and The Sword and the Rose. I don't think they were financially successful; anyway he stayed in England. On the opening day of Disneyland in 1955, we got word that he had suddenly died of a heart attack at our London office. He sat down at his desk and died. He used to tell me how he played Walt like a fish on a line, letting him think he was having his way but just when the right moment came to gently pull him back. At least he believed he was doing this. But Perce was a guy who got on your nerves at meetings because he was very deliberate. He never blabbered like some people. He'd button his coat and suck his pipe and look at the ceiling for a minute (I don't know how he got away with it) and make you wait for an answer and finally say, 'Uh-huh.' He had this image all worked out, and Walt loved it. He had a very successful career at Disney's which only began to lessen after those live action pictures. I think again Walt blamed him for their lack of success.

ADAMSON

Had he ever been an animator?

HUEMER

I don't know. I don't think so. I wonder how he got started. I know he very quickly got a director's job. He was an imposing guy, too, mature compared to animators who are really generally naive. The businessman type--Walt loved it. Les Clark was one of Walt's first animators. He's still going strong today. A quiet, self-effacing guy who turns out a fine job of animation; Walt was very fond of him personally and so am I. He's such an unobtrusive guy I don't know what I can tell you about him. A funny thing about Les, he's not really too great a draftsman but he's good enough to look very good. He's not what I would call a natural artist. Ham wasn't a natural artist either. Bill Peet and Fred Moore are naturals, Milt Kahl and Kimball, too. But there are guys who have to work at it; and it isn't quite as brilliant but the animation is still great. You'll find a guy on the roll call by the name of Dick Anthony. He was a crackerjack background and matte artist; I think he came from outdoor billboard advertising. I know he tells stories about being on the scaffolding in the freezing weather back East.

ADAMSON

He animated to get in out of the cold?

HUEMER

Probably. He was a very moody guy and seemed to brood a lot, especially when he was laid off at the studio. I asked why he didn't get another job and I couldn't get a decent answer out of him; he was a little tetchy. He was a terrific gun collector, and one day he put a pistol into his mouth and sent a bullet through his brain. I just bring him to your attention as one of the few studio suicides. The other was Frank Churchill, who may have been Walt's finest creative musician. He was also the studio's outstanding alcoholic; but it didn't interfere with his work. He'd come back from a little saloon up the street and he was leaning backwards. He used to play the piano in the silent movie days to help actors get into the mood. I remember being terribly impressed when Walt sent him up to Arrowhead with Larry Morey. You remember the 'Drip, Drip, Drip, Little April Showers' number from Bambi? They went up there in the solitude and wrote that. Churchill did very well and

bought an immense piece of property above Gorman, and there it was that he put a shotgun between his knees and blew his brains out. I think he was brooding about his unfavorable status at the studio. He couldn't take falling out of favor, I guess. Albert Hurter goes back to 1918, somewhere in there. There aren't any of his drawings in existence in any other medium besides pencil. I have the only one that's an ink drawing, of some horses. But he was very good with pencil renditions. Albert was a Swiss. Never got married and when he died he left a stamp collection that was worth a fortune. He lived in a dump on Main Street in L.A. and outside of his rare European stamps had no outside interests. The way Walt used him was to turn him loose on a project, give him his head over a situation or something and see what he could come up with. He'd sit by himself all day and fill sheet after sheet with drawings, all highly imaginative and often grotesque. He was on most of the early Silly Symphonies. The wonderful details and carvings in Snow White, the furniture, candlesticks, costumes, were all his, created or inspired by him. His sort of Medieval, Germanic approach was just what the picture needed. In Fantasia, the demon on top of Bald Mountain was his idea. A simple pencil sketch suggested the whole thing to us. He showed a demon up there unfolding his wings and we picked up the story. That's how he operated. He would give wonderful inspirational suggestions. He left instructions in his will to publish a book of his collected pencil drawings, and this was done under the title He Drew as He Pleased. It has a very fine forward by Ted Sears who was one of the old timers. We sat at the same bench up in Fordham. When Hurter dropped out of Mutt and Jeff, he was in advertising for many years. Actually nobody else could use him; his animation was all right for Mutt and Jeff, but it wouldn't have done for the then prevailing style. So Walt never used him for animation, just for sketches, which was a very clever use of the man because he did brilliant, beautiful stuff. Nobody like him, nobody. Then there's Winston Hibler. He had some stage experience and came to California to work as a blackjack dealer on a gambling boat. I don't know how he managed to get on at Disney's, but he did as a cutter, not as an editor, just a cutter. And he was very unhappy because he was ambitious. So on his own time in his own home he worked up complete storyboards on Johnny Appleseed. He brought it in, showed it to Walt, and he said, 'This is the best news I've had in a long time,' and bought it. That's how he started, and Walt immediately put him on story. His narration and story collaboration were certainly important in setting the

tone for the True-Life Adventures. His stamp is very indelible on those things. Without Hibler they might have been good, sure, but he added something extra. Since then he's graduated to live action pictures and is now a producer. Then there's Hugh Hennessey. I think he was Walt's first lay-out man. And since Walt instituted the idea of lay-out men, he was probably the first in the business. Other studios didn't bother going to the trouble of laying anything out, camera fields and fields of action and all that. Hugh was a very good artist. He has a son who is a brilliant painter who is also in the motion picture business but not in cartoons. I'm pretty sure that Hugh posed for the live action of the face in the mirror in Snow White. That's his basic face you see there. Might even be his voice. He was very active and well thought of to the last, one of the big men in the studio; and he died of a heart attack in the men's room of Scotty's Castle in Death Valley.

1.6. TAPE NUMBER III: Side Two, (October 8, 1968)

HUEMER

Now, I'll tell you about Fred Spencer who was the good duck man at the studio. He became the Donald Duck specialist. He wasn't only good but awfully fast, and when Walt instituted the system of paying bonuses, I think he had Fred in mind because he was the principal benefactor. He made an awful lot of money on his duck stuff. Some of the guys would get up to \$3,000 extra on a picture that way. If he'd lived, he would have retired rich but he was killed in an automobile accident coming home from a football game. Not much I can tell you about him. He had a very unfortunate disfigurement; his lower jaw had been caved in as a child by a baseball bat. So he had a big hollow on one side of his face and he was red-headed--that's all I observed about him. We had a lot of good oil and water color painters at Disney's. We still have Peter Ellenshaw, an Englishman, who specializes in matte shots for Walt's live action pictures. He's so good that his latest exhibit of oil paintings in Pasadena was sold out the first day, at enormous prices. So he's no Sunday painter. Then there's Josh Meador. He spent all his spare time, every weekend, with oil painting. At first all he did was paint seascapes. He taught himself and evolved a very effective style using only his pallet knife, which he pronounced 'pilot neff' because he came from the Ozarks and had a very thick Hillbilly accent. In fact, we thought that his real name was really Josh Meadow and that he said,

'Josh Medder,' so he became Josh Meador. We don't know; this was just a gag. He had a very impressive posthumous exhibit in Bardsdall Park in Hollywood last year. He died in 1967. Not much I can tell you about him except that he was a very strange looking man, a very craggy face, really most remarkable. He must have had Indian blood in him or something.

ADAMSON

You were talking about working in the same room. How roomy was the Disney studio?

HUEMER

We had rooms as big as this one at Disney's, about 12 by 8, with a window at one end, a door at the other, and a table. There was room for four in these rooms, grouped by animator and assistant. So Ham and I shared one room with our assistants beside us, and all we had to do was reach over and hand them whatever we wanted them to do. This arrangement in itself was an innovation. Fergy had his room and he had two assistants. Ham and I both later had two or three assistants all in the same room. Never more than four people, and there was a long row of maybe ten or twelve of these rooms.

ADAMSON

Right around at his peak how many cartoons did he have going at one time?

HUEMER

At one point he had Bambi and Fantasia going, and he may possibly have overlapped Pinocchio in there somewhere. And shorts went on, too. They never stopped making Donald Ducks.

ADAMSON

What went on with Bambi in the Seward Street Studio?

HUEMER

Down at Seward Street, they were doing storyboards, of course, and they were doing experimental stuff, too. I remember Perce showing us how he had gotten the dappled shadows on Bambi when he lay under a bush. Real complicated stuff. Things like that. And I believe they did a little animation

there. But the animation was done principally back at the main studio, after the storyboards had been finished down there.

ADAMSON

This must have been the most comfortable, elegant, and personalized studio you worked in.

HUEMER

Walt was a great stickler for that. He wanted the furniture painted, and he had good-looking individual desks painted ivory with little touches of orange here and there. Walt always wanted nice surroundings; along the ceiling we had little blue borders of conventionalized flowers and things. A great regard for outward appearances was a vital part of Walt's make-up.

ADAMSON

Was the studio shown to a lot of people when it was in operation?

HUEMER

Not much; that is, not much to the public, until we moved to Burbank. There were always prominent people who wanted to come through that Walt wanted to show it off to, actors or maybe a governor. And after a while the studio instituted tours, but they don't do much of that any more either.

ADAMSON

Like Universal City?

HUEMER

Nothing like that, don't get that idea! There were only certain days and these were small parties who would be pretty well screened. It wasn't indiscriminate. They never made a thing of it like at Universal; but it was done occasionally.

ADAMSON

You said a couple of people succeeded in not being submerged by Disney. Do you think most people were?

HUEMER

Sure, like in any business. If you don't devote yourself to it, you probably won't be successful. I never wanted to be submerged in it, and never really was; Bill Tytla was another. I mean this blind devotion, this automatic chauvinism, that some people have. Not everybody had that. Ham Luske had it. It was a blow to Willy Jackson to be let go when he had devoted himself so wholeheartedly to the studio. It's hard to take for guys like that.

ADAMSON

Did you ever feel any sort of resentment about the impersonalization of becoming a Disney employee?

HUEMER

For a long time, of course, there were no screen credits whatsoever. I'm sure everybody secretly resented that. Not actively. What could you do about it, anyway?

ADAMSON

And then when credits did appear, there were so many names that the effect was still anonymity.

HUEMER

Well, I, for instance, had a legitimate beef on not getting a credit on Pinocchio, on which I did a lot of work. But I never made an issue of it. What did I care? As I say I never was a chauvinist regarding the studio of anything else for that matter. Very often a guy would do work and somebody with a say in it and having it in for him would kibosh his credit. I think I told you in an earlier session that, personally, I can take it or leave it alone. I'm the laziest person you ever met, and working two days a week at the moment suits me fine. It should've been that way right along. Not having freedom of motion, being able to get up and leave when I wanted, bothered me. I understand that it's economically impossible in the animation game where it's a question of turning out footage, you can't expect your boss to let you off the hook...when I was a boss, I certainly wouldn't let my people loaf either. It's very ambiguous, the whole thing, isn't it? Life is that way.

ADAMSON

I asked you once before if it bothered you to work nine to five and you said, 'No.'

HUEMER

Let's say at one part of my career, it didn't; and then later it did. When I first started, like everybody else, I was eagerness and fire and excitement and involved in the fun of it, naturally. When I had certain jobs at the studio that I liked, when I was a director, I loved it. It was thrilling to sit at your desk and make decisions and to have power in the creation of the thing. I would've worked ten hours. But hunched over a board animating, making a character move from here to there, that was just too much. Then I looked out the window.

ADAMSON

Do you think this bothered most of the people at Disney, that they were not recognized as individual creators, but everything they did was looked upon as the work of Walt Disney?

HUEMER

I don't know if it was an active resentment. Sure, it may have been there; but who else in those days was given credit? On Scrappy or any of those dopey Mintz pictures, we didn't give credit to animators. It was by Dick Huemer. It was kind of taken for granted. Nobody got credit for 'Out of the Inkwell' except Max--'Max Fleischer's Out of the Inkwell' and that was it. It was a fait accompli. You couldn't combat it. You might wish when you did some really nice stuff on an early Disney that you could have your name on it, but there are other things involved. It was only a short; you couldn't help thinking, 'Who [out there] cares who animated it?' Most people surely didn't. Like credits on TV shows--I never read them.

1.7. TAPE NUMBER IV: Side One, (June 30, 1969)

ADAMSON

Walt didn't have much affection for Alice in Wonderland, did he?

HUEMER

I think it was over his head myself; I think he muffed the whole idea of it. To me, it's one of the greatest books in the English language; it's much too good for children. And Walt was unsubtle. All the brutality of the Queen, that was exaggerated. But the thing that I was greatly disappointed in was the 'Walrus and the Carpenter' episode. It turned out dreadful, but Walt can't be blamed for that. Bill Peet handled that completely by himself, simply because Walt wasn't with it, he wasn't interested. He often withdrew from things he didn't quite dig.

ADAMSON

Do you know why he did it in the first place?

HUEMER

I think he felt he had to do it. People were always writing in and saying why don't you do this, why don't you do that. I myself asked him back in 1938, why don't you do The Hobbit. He couldn't see it. But people constantly were saying, 'Walt Disney simply must do Alice in Wonderland!' So we did it! And that's how it turned out. Blah!

ADAMSON

Do you suppose that's why he had people like Aldous Huxley on it, to try and figure out what there was he wanted to get?

HUEMER

It's my personal opinion that he thought it would be a great name to associate with the picture. Walt was always very conscious of publicity and the effect of things. This seemed to be a good gesture, to have one of the great living English writers do the great English classic. And there was a similar quality about Lewis Carroll and Aldous Huxley, although Carroll was to my mind the greater literary figure. Huxley contributed not one thing to our Alice in Wonderland. Walt was very clever that way. When he did Fantasia he picked Stokowski one of the greatest names in music at the time, and Deems Taylor, who was the great American authority and critic on music; and Dick Huemer, who went to operas and knows all the good restaurants in Philadelphia. Ah! I have lived. I don't know any other reason why he picked Alice; it was simply a great classic and incumbent upon him to do it.

ADAMSON

I guess that was his feeling with Winnie the Pooh, too.

HUEMER

No doubt of it.

ADAMSON

Does 'Blustery Day' have a sequence stolen from Dumbo?

HUEMER

Yeah. Cannibalized. The Pink Elephant sequence. Even the lyrics of the song have the same flavor. It's different but you can see that it was profoundly influenced by the original in Dumbo. I suppose it's legitimate to repeat; it's probably a great compliment.

ADAMSON

Do you suppose this had anything to do with Walt's resentment towards Dumbo: take it's novel, best scene and steal it for another picture?

HUEMER

I don't know about that. The Time Magazine article really did give the impression that Walt didn't have much to do with it, and Walt was quite angry about it. So even though Dumbo has always been regarded as one of Walt's better pictures, he hated it, and to this day I don't believe it had been re-released. The TV version was cut down and our credits were taken off. 'Blustery Day' in the Winnie the Pooh series included that sequence, a direct copy from the big item in Dumbo, the same basic structure even to the sensation of a nightmare. Walt was that way. He had to own lamb. Until the mother licks the lamb clean and makes it hers, she won't nurse it.

ADAMSON

Eventually you and Joe Grant fell out of favor with Disney.

ADAMSON

He had economic trouble at this point, didn't he?

ADAMSON

Wasn't that part of the reason? Some kind of financial difficulty?

HUEMER

Oh, well, yes, of course. I think that was really the basic reason. I think it was Cinderella they were working on and I remember Walt saying, 'This is it. We're in a bad way. If this picture doesn't make money, we're going to be finished! The studio's going to be kaput!' The staff was cut way down and we got cut down with it. Whereupon I went to work for John Sutherland, who had a studio making commercials and anti-Communist propaganda pictures.

ADAMSON

You'd been attacking Nazism during the war.

HUEMER

Yes, like 'Der Fuehrer's Face,' and also 'Invitation to Death.' The answer is obvious: you make a buck however you can. Mr. Sloan, then the head of General Motors was a rabid anti-Communist, and Sutherland's pictures were designed to show how much better off American workers were than Communists, that was the gist of them. The other pictures Sutherland made were just commercials. For instance, we'd do spots for G.E. Then I was called back to Disney's. One day the phone rang; it wasn't Walt but the guy who was hiring people. He said, 'Drop in. We have something for you.' They had an idea for a picture that had been kicking around, about music. They wanted to do something semi-educational but funny and easy to take. I was put on that and out came Adventures in Music. The first picture was called Melody, and the second was Toot, Whistle, Plunk, and Boom, which was up until this last year the last time that Walt won an Academy Award for a short. That was about ten years ago. I was getting up another one about the nostalgia of music, with the same characters, Professor Owl and the Cuckoo bird with a dunce cap. got the whole board up and presented it publicly in the Penthouse Club, Walt, Roy, and several others, and it went over great. Then they suddenly decided not to make it. And I did a very bad thing. I figured they didn't want it, so I took it down and carelessly left it somewhere and it was thrown out. It's one of the lost stories, like the sequence of Snow White I did which by strange coincidence was lost, too. On that stuff I have the roughs on film, but the drawings are gone. Anyway, they called me up after I had left and said that

now they wanted to do the music picture, and they wanted to know where it was. I couldn't tell them. I left again briefly and went to work for Horell for a few months doing commercials. We also had a pilot on a cartoon series which didn't sell. They were starting a series and doing something similar to what I'm doing with you now, because even then I was considered an authority on the old days on animation. We made these four shows which were all about the animation business, 'Tricks of the Trade,' 'The Art Spirit,' 'The Plausible Impossible,' and I forget the name of the other one. I reconstructed the circumstances under which Winsor McCay did 'Gertie the Dinosaur.' He'd say, 'Are you hungry, Gertie? Here's an orange,' and he'd throw something up onto the screen. And Gertie would pick it up. It was very clever. They reproduced it exactly from my descriptions and even hired an actor that looked like McCay. And I remember seeing this in 1914. I was in high school at the time. He also made the Titanic which I didn't see at the time. 'The Art Spirit' was about Henriette, an artist who was a great art instructor in New York at the National Academy of Design where I studied. I showed how a viewpoint can differ from artist to artist. Mark Davis, Josh Meador, Eyvind Earle, and Walt Peregoy, these four studio artists, were to go out and paint a tree, the same tree on the same Sunday. I have one of their pictures hanging over my mantle, the one Josh Meador did. And it was amazing how differently each saw the same tree. Like Eyvind Earle, who does wonderful Christmas cards, delineated every knothole, every inch of bark, every leaf, very designy. That's the sort of thing I was doing at this time. Then Walt wanted to cancel out units. He cancelled Jackson's unit out. Jackson, myself, and others were taken off active production. I had been doing this True-life adventure strip since about 1955 on the side. So I just went on doing that; I wanted to retire anyway. I was old enough and even more tired that I was of animating that figure across the page. So that's all I've been doing; hoping you are the same.

ADAMSON

Show me the books you've got there.

HUEMER

This is the source of my material for writing the True-life adventure strip. I go through natural history magazines, National Geographic, Arizona Illustrated, these are all great sources for this sort of thing. Of course, I have to dramatize

and also change it so the author can't check back and say, 'Hey, you stole that from me!' That is the trick.

ADAMSON

How do you change it without falsifying it?

HUEMER

Say the coyote does something; I'll have a wolf do it. They're the same kind of animal, you know.

ADAMSON

Doesn't that kind of destroy the verisimilitude?

HUEMER

You can't prove that a wolf doesn't do it! I defy anybody to prove these things! But I have to be careful. In everyone of these books it says, 'Nothing is to be used without permission of the author.' Look at that. You'd be surprised how similar all these titles are. There must be dozens that are Mammals of this, Mammals of that. The stuff, what I'm doing, really isn't funny. Although I do try to look for amusing things. We have to be careful to avoid anthropomorphism.

ADAMSON

Before you said, 'We have to do some anthropomorphism, but not too much!'

HUEMER

Did I say that?

ADAMSON

That's what you said, yes.

HUEMER

Then you're right. You've got a better memory than I have.

ADAMSON

Plus I read all this stuff last night.

HUEMER

The trick with the True-life adventure is to have the reader identify with something in his life. Even though animals can't possibly think about things the way we do, when a dog seems to be talking to you there's a tendency to believe. That sort of anthropomorphism we're allowed to do. Sometimes there's a little comic twist, like when an eagle attacks a badger, we say, 'He'll find that it didn't pay to badger a badger.' That badger's a hell of a fighter; he'll bite the eagle's leg off.

ADAMSON

Is there that much to be known about the world, once a day for the last fourteen years?

HUEMER

You'd be surprised.

ADAMSON

Was it going before you?

HUEMER

No, I started it. Walt came in to the head of the comic strip department and demanded that it be done, to back the True-life adventure films. You may well ask where the material came from, but one thing leads to another. I must admit that it becomes somewhat formularized. Through six days a week--it runs on Saturdays, too, you know--there will be a small domestic animal (like a badger or weasel or squirrel or mouse), a large domestic animal (deer, mountain goat, or a bison), and something to do with the ocean or pond creatures (fish, whales, crabs, or abalone). You see, we've got three days already. And the fourth day we simply must have a bird; there must be a million things about birds. The fifth day, I go to Africa or South America, monkeys, lions, giraffes, or entirely exotic animals. That leaves one day, and I'll take some natural phenomena like earthquakes or tidal waves. Or trees, the fact that the bark of Sequoias is fire-proof which is why they have lasted two thousand years. The bark repels boring animals, as well; clever tree, isn't it? Then it's formularized further into mother love, mating battles, use of tools, cleverness. I call this 'Mother Nature's Inventions'. How woodpeckers actually

use their beaks as levers. So man didn't invent the lever, the woodpecker did. You'll never run out of material. And sometimes you can go back and switch the viewpoint from the antagonist to the protagonist. I just did one of the Seguarro cactus, a great big thing about twenty feet tall. Woodpeckers make holes in them and live in them, and later little elf owls live in them after they are abandoned, and some mice. So in a sense it's an apartment house. I usually type the whole week's work in about a day and then I read. I'll take notes and get maybe five items out of here, maybe just one or two, maybe none. I worked for Walt from 1933. We knew him socially, too; he was in this house. We all saw each other socially at first, for many years, then it became an unnatural arrangement. I felt uncomfortable, so I don't think it's good for bosses and workers to socialize. One by one everybody dropped out of the little coterie. If you were a soldier fighting for Napoleon you wouldn't want to go to his court for dinner, would you? Once I got on this strip, I never worked with Walt again.

ADAMSON

He doesn't pay much attention to his comic strips?

HUEMER

Actually Roy Disney ran that department and still runs it. Frank Riley is head of the comic strip department and first asked me to do it because he felt I could. Again it was a question of economics. When I was taken off film production, all I had left to do was the strip. So I do it and enjoy it very much. For one thing I get in a lot of reading, and it's creative as hell. You can't just put down the fact that a bird fell out of a tree. You've got to tell a story about it. And it's also got to be accurate because people check on us all the time. We get requests for certain copies of it, because there are a lot of people who like the strip and collect it. Once I had an item about Old Faithful geyser, and in a bit of careless writing I said that it went off every thirty seconds. It got by Frank Riley, it got by the artist who draws it, it got by the King. Features Syndicate's editor. It got by everything and everybody. It got into every paper in the country, and we got letters! Every thirty seconds! It would be going continuously if it went off each thirty seconds. I console myself by thinking that's an editor's job, to watch things like that. I've always wanted to be a writer; I guess I must have said that somewhere along the line. I have written some stuff. I wrote a whole

novel that was never published. It was back in the forties about an airplane on the way to South America, and it carries an underworld thug, a young couple married to other people eloping, a priest having trouble with his religious convictions, and it gets caught in turbulence and crashes on a shrouded mountain. It's foggy all the time, and they don't see the sun and don't know what's north, east, south, or west. It goes through all kinds of secondary and tertiary plots, very complicated. All they hear is a church bell. Some are hurt and some die, there's a terrible mess. Finally they get tired of waiting for rescue and wend their way down the mountain. And lo and behold they come to an area where a derelict ship has been tossed right up there. I suppose you can guess what's happened. There's been some kind of cataclysm which caused terrible tidal waves around the world and reached almost to the top of this mountain, Chimborazo or some such, in South America. They're the only people who were saved as the result of being in a plane. When I wrote this in 1948 they're weren't so many planes. Now there would be about two million people, eh? It's an open-ended novel. How can you resolve a thing like that? The whole thing winds up when an avalanche of ice and rocks descends on the ship.

ADAMSON

And wipes them out?

HUEMER

We don't know. I wish I knew how it ended. That's the last I wrote. I am a disappointed novelist. Animation was just another form of expression.

ADAMSON

Would you say this is true of most animators, that they are people with tentacles out in all directions?

HUEMER

Well, you take a guy like Ward Kimball. He has so many facets, it's almost ridiculous. The band, the books, the painting. He had a whole exhibit in the studio library of mechanical pictures! When you pressed a lever a ball went up or something clever happened, they were animated paintings. There's no end to what Ward can do. And I know Max Fleischer had been a political cartoonist

on the Brooklyn Daily Eagle. It was a great paper killed by unionism. When I went to see Max recently, he showed me a book that he had done some years ago called Noah's Shoes. In a sense it's like the true-life stuff I'm doing, lots of facts about animal life. I was afraid to tell him what I was doing because he might think I had borrowed some of the ideas out of his book. I must say I was really tempted when I read it. Some of the bits of information he dug up about creatures and their habits were quite good. He did a great research job, and it was a cute idea, a tongue in cheek kind of thing that refutes the Biblical story of Noah and the Ark. If you bring two of everything on board, you've got to bring what they eat also, and one eats the other. You've got to bring both the good and the bad, you get down to flies and how many germs. Max wrote it very well, and he was probably hoping that somebody would pick it up and make a movie or a cartoon out of it.

ADAMSON

It would be kind of hard to do.

HUEMER

Oh, it would be impossible. All those animals!

ADAMSON

All those germs!

HUEMER

The germs might be funny: 'Creatures from Inner Space.' That's another one of my true-life titles.

ADAMSON

Do you know if Max or Dave invented the Rotascope?

HUEMER

I think so. Oh, you're asking which one of them. I'll opt for Max. I think Max had more of the inventive bent. He invented lots of things; but I don't know of anything Dave invented. Does Dave take credit for it? No wonder they don't speak.

ADAMSON

Where did you hear that Max did it?

HUEMER

From Max's wife.

ADAMSON

When you worked there, you worked with Dave.

HUEMER

Yes, I never worked with Max. Dave, you might say, was the director of the thing. He chose the stories at that time. But I'm sure Max did the first ones without Dave. I worked with Dave. He sat beside me at my desk and we talked: 'What are we going to do? Let's do so and so--Ha, ha!' That's how we did them. We didn't write any stories up, commit them to paper that is. We didn't know what a board was. Their relationship was not like the traditional producer-director relationship. They were so close then that it was like one and the same person. They were one person, in a sense; they blended in my mind, or so I used to think.

ADAMSON

You didn't see any arguments or anything?

HUEMER

Never. Outwardly they got along very well.

ADAMSON

They split up five times according to Dave.

HUEMER

Oh, they may have, but I never heard anything serious, so in my mind it remained a very placid sort of thing. They seemed to get along like good brothers. The very fact, however, that Dave was the one that wore the clown suit from which they took live action photography to Rotascope makes me think that maybe he was in at the start. I think he must have had the Rotascope right away. It's too bad Max wasn't able to talk to us. They almost always had the Rotascope in their pictures which caused me to marvel at how

life-like it was. But how horribly it jittered; when a guy stood still, he shook all over the place. Which they couldn't get away from.

ADAMSON

Do you know anything about their Red Seal organization?

HUEMER

A little bit. Max started it with a guy from Agfa named Strauss. He bankrolled Red Seal. They overextended themselves, having booking offices all over the place, and they didn't have the product to justify the expense. They bought French things, and in those days there was no sound so it didn't matter, and they had their cartoon. They made Carrie of the Chorus, a serial. Ruth Fleischer changed her name to Ruth Florence and she acted in them.

ADAMSON

She acted in them? Was she Carrie?

HUEMER

No. She was Carrie's friend in the serial. Ruth Fleischer is Max's daughter. Dave directed it.

ADAMSON

Dave directed Carrie?

HUEMER

Uh-huh. I can still see him walking around with a whistle hanging from his neck, the plus fours, and the glasses, to look at the lighting. In those days it was pretty simple, you didn't need sound, you didn't need color. People just went out with a camera and made pictures. That's why you could make them so cheaply. How do you suppose they made Mutt and Jeff for fifteen hundred dollars? There was no color, no music, no synchronization to worry about, no nothing; but damn good stories. I've told you all that haven't I? Carrie never set the world on fire. It never gave Griffith a moment's worry. Max was the business head of it. He was the guy who confronted whoever had to be confronted, disgruntled investors and whatnot. So it ended in the backer taking over the whole thing and Max being ousted, and Red Seal films was liquidated. However, they weren't able to get the clown away from Max. So he

set himself up over at Astoria on Long Island, opened a little studio and continued making song cartoons. It was a little industrial section right under the Queensborough Bridge. Later they moved back to 1600 Broadway. 'Aesop's Fables' was the first to do opaque cells as they do today. I think that Earl Hurd was the original inventor of cells in animated cartoons, very possibly when he was working for Bray. Bray was head of the outfit where he was doing his work, and that may be how Bray came to be associated with their origin. I don't know.

ADAMSON

When you worked at Associated Animators, why did you pick Mutt and Jeff?

HUEMER

Because it was available. It had been a going series. Everybody knew about Mutt and Jeff; they were still in the papers. Anything that had publicity already going for it was a good bet. We also knew the lawyers who were handling Bud Fisher's affairs and were able to contact them and get permission to do it. Of course, we had to pay them so much every picture. We could have picked Krazy Kat, which somebody did not much later. I suppose we could have picked any cartoon strip character. Like Happy Hooligan, Katzenjammer Kids, Rube Goldberg things, they'd all been done.

ADAMSON

How clearly defined were these characters when you went to animate them?

HUEMER

It was a built-in thing in the strip that Jeff was always the fall guy for Mutt who always picked on him, but then the worm would turn and Jeff would out-fox him. It was a rivalry, like Laurel and Hardy. If we did a picture about painters, any kind of a gag that came along pertaining to painting was okay. They fell off scaffolds or painted a big bull that came to life, keen old stuff like that. Very unfunny stuff like that, I'm afraid. But the second Mutt and Jeff series was done of the present opaque cell system.

ADAMSON

Was that better stuff?

HUEMER

I would say so. We were more careful about our stories. And then things overall looked better with this opaque cell way of doing it.

ADAMSON

Was Koko a clear character in your mind?

HUEMER

No. There was no characterization in that series, on that fella. Disney's the guy that brought that into animation. In a situation, Koko did what anybody else would do.

1.8. TAPE NUMBER IV: Side Two, (June 30, 1969)

ADAMSON

The same thing with Scrappy?

HUEMER

You could loosely say that Scrappy was a little boy. He didn't smoke, he didn't drink, or go out with dames. That's about the only characterization. The gags could be interchangeable with a dog or a gorilla.

ADAMSON

What did Walt do with character and motivation? Did he discuss them over the storyboards?

HUEMER

Did he? You bet your life! Sure he did. That's the one thing that we got all the time. When I went to work for him, we did Silly Symphonies, and the characterizations were very clear in those things. Like when they did 'The Tortoise and the Hare.' It could only be the hare who acted the way he did, bombastic and boastful, yet talented. That was good clear characterization. The tortoise was definitely staged as a stupid guy who could good-naturedly be taken advantage of. Actually he won by default. But this was the kind of characterization that Walt insisted on. If anybody else had done 'The Tortoise and the Hare' it would all have been a series of gags about running, one after

another. But not all this clever, boastful stuff like stopping with the little girls and bragging and being admired, and showing off how he could play tennis with himself. Walt would take stories and act them out, kill you with laughing they were so funny. And there it would be. You'd have the feeling. You'd know exactly what he wanted. Walt could have been a great actor, or a comedian. That's what made his pictures great. And the characterizations in Snow White were beautiful. Just think, taking each one of those dwarves and making each one an entirely different personality. It was just unheard of!

ADAMSON

Where did Scrappy come from?

HUEMER

I felt that a little boy would be a good character. They needed a rounded character which would be appealing. Then we could do things with him. Like once when he was washing he put a towel in his ear on one side then pulled it out all black on the other side. You know, kids get dirty. The very fact that no one else was doing a little boy seemed an advantage.

ADAMSON

Why do you feel the series didn't work out?

HUEMER

They weren't worked out story-wise as well as Disney's. No matter what you say, it comes down to this: 'The play's the thing.' Walt worked out his stories down to the last blink of the eye. On the outside we might do little pre-sketches, but there was no time for real analysis. That's what Walt was able to do, give time to these things, because he had the money coming in on his licensee projects already. We worked on a pretty short budget; we had to have one of these every two weeks. We'd come back at night sometimes just to talk about the stories and save animation time. They tried that till we rebelled. Nobody wanted to do it. I don't know how other studios operated; I guess they were more or less alike. Nobody could put the meticulous care that Walt put into the stories, the perfectionism. The inventiveness that he supplied wasn't coming out of anybody else. He was there to do it. He was one of the greatest story minds ever. And you can see that not having him on a

series like Scrappy would make all the difference in the world. I, as one of the story men on Scrappy, certainly can't compare myself to Walt. Scrappy still exists on film somewhere. My son teased me with one. We all went to work for Disney as dedicated people who appreciated what he was trying to do and felt we were in on something historic. Like people who might have helped Michelangelo, we were working with a thing that was going to last and that was going to be remembered. We were all enthusiastic and had what we thought was a beautiful studio. This made you feel good. Every once in a while, Walt would throw a luncheon in a little dining room with a stained glass window and a long table down the middle. We'd discuss the next story, sometimes presented by the author, and were invited to criticize or to add improvements. All this was stimulating and wonderful. We had classes to improve our drawing, and Professor Markovin, who was teaching cinematography down at USC, gave us lectures about picture-making and analysis.

ADAMSON

About what? Cinematography?

HUEMER

About cartoons and what we were doing. Actually he knew nothing about it, but Walt meant well. He would ask us things on the side. You know what a plumber's friend is?

ADAMSON

It's a plunger, isn't it?

HUEMER

Exactly. He asked one day, 'I don't understand. They keep talking about the plumber's friend. Who is this friend of the plumber?'

ADAMSON

Who talked about the plumber's friend at Walt Disney studios.

HUEMER

Oh, we had one in every picture. This is what got caught on the duck's hide quarters or his head, and Mickey was always using a plunger. Walt liked those earthy things, you know.

ADAMSON

Just to finish up, explain to me how they synchronized music with action back in 1929.

HUEMER

There's a space alongside the image where the track should be, right? It's empty when there's no track, so there's a space. You just ran this film through the camera, and you photographed a baton, the way you wanted, every four frames it was up, every four down, whatever the beat was. So it was animated and you photographed the whole cartoon this way. It was photographed separately, and according to the exposures sheet you'd know what the beat was supposed to be. When it was projected with the matte open on the projector, you could see this baton bouncing up and down. The music director watched it and synched the score to that beat. That was the Fleischer process; but Disney didn't use that. He had clicks which you heard by earphone. You made a loop of film, then you punched the soundtrack so that it made a click every four, five, or six frames. The music director had earphones and he directed to. Automatically, it fit the picture. They were eight, ten, twelve a second; I don't think they varied much from those. They still do this. You animate a scene to an eight beat, so when you play an eight beat in your ear it will fit. Of course, there's more to it than that. They have bar sheets and the music has to be written to accentuate the positive.

ADAMSON

Do you want to bring it to an end now?

HUEMER

Yeah, why don't we? I'm getting hungry.

ADAMSON

Goodnight, Chet.

HUEMER

Have you got enough? Goodnight, er...Frank? Louie? Tom? Joe!

Parent Institution | TEI | Search | Feedback

Date:

This page is copyrighted