

My Life Plan, Revisited

"You just got into the College of Engineering at the University of Wisconsin-Madison! What are you going to do next?"

"I'm going to Disney World!"

Not many people go into college knowing exactly where they will end up when they graduate. Well, it's a good thing that I never really fit into the category of "many people." I know that I will be working at the one place where dreams come true, where fantasy meets reality, and where I never have to grow up. That's right folks; I'm talking about the Walt Disney World Resort in Orlando, Florida. My future aspiration and ultimate career goal are to become a Walt Disney "Imagineer" and to develop new concepts for the company's theme parks and resorts around the world. The Disney Company just gets it right when it comes to the little details that make everything more magical. I've wanted this for a long time now, and I just can't see myself anywhere else in the future . . . or so I thought. My short, yet enlightening, time spent in engineering here at UW-Madison has made me reconsider my future and question my goal. How could a semester and a half of freshmen "weed-out" classes compromise my entire self-declared destiny? Well, it turns out there's a big world in engineering, outside the Disney "World."

Let me start off by explaining the extent of my obsession with all things Disney. Every biography I've ever done for a school assignment has been on the life of the man who created it all, Walter Elias Disney. I've seen every Disney movie multiple times; let's just say you'd want me on your team for Disney Scene It! I've been to Walt Disney World

and Disneyland a combination of 15 times. I can name every attraction and navigate the theme parks with my eyes closed while carrying a Mickey Mouse ice cream bar in each hand.

One of the main reasons why Disney has become such an important part of my life is that a trip to Walt Disney World, in my mind, was always associated with time spent with my family. While many teenagers would cringe at the idea of spending a vacation sharing a single hotel room with their parents and older brother, I would always look forward to our trips. However, I take the most pride in my vast collection of Walt Disney Imagineering books. I have learned so much about the specific aspects of Imagineers' jobs and the innovative problem solving they do on a daily basis. Chills run up my spine and goose bumps cover my arms as I flip through page after page of concept art and attraction designs. The reason why I am so drawn to Imagineering is Disney's attention to detail and the creativity involved in the Disney design process. Disney's ability to take guests to places that only exist in their imaginations is incredibly fascinating and inspiring to me.

Before I knew anything about engineering or what opportunities were offered at Disney, I, like every other ambitious child, had ideas of what I'd be when I grew up. I was never a "normal" little girl, meaning that when I grew up I didn't want to be a ballerina, an actress, or a princess. I had my sights set on something a little higher, literally. I wanted to be an astronaut! I swore to myself that I would be the first person to kick a soccer ball on the moon. Well, one day in middle school, I found out that for every 4,000 applicants to the NASA space program, only 20 lucky individuals are hired every two years. That day was comparable to the day my brother told me that Mom and Dad

were actually Santa Claus. It wasn't until sophomore year of high school that I became sure of the fact that my calling truly was at Disney. To be completely upfront and honest, I originally chose engineering because I thought that it was the surefire path to becoming a Disney Imagineer. Go ahead and ridicule my lack of logic, but without Disney, I don't know if I even would've considered engineering. In fact, I consider calculus as my archenemy; I just don't think we will ever play nicely. I find myself sitting in my calculus and chemistry lectures, thinking to myself, "Will I really need to know Euler's Method or the hybridization of an atom when I'm at Disney?" This kind of thinking could have been destructive if it weren't for my own "great awakening" that took place about a month ago.

I have two things to thank for showing me the vast opportunities that come with an engineering degree: career fairs and IsyE 191, The Practice of Industrial Engineering. Speaking with multiple company representatives at the spring career fair, including those working for Accenture and FedEx, has been a rewarding and eye-opening experience for me. It proves that, with engineering, there is such an immense variety of work available out there that offers me the ability to choose something that specifically fits my interests. It relieves the uneasiness I feel when I ask myself, "What if, God forbid, I never get to Disney? What then?" If I don't reach my number one goal in life, I will still be able to fulfill some of my other life ambitions, thanks to engineering. I will still be able to work with diverse groups of people on many different projects. I'll still be able to see new places, and I'll still be able to improve someone's life directly with something I have a hand in creating. The many guest speakers who lecture in IsyE 191 have also presented a wide variety of opportunities, just within Industrial Engineering. Thanks to this class, I have developed a new interest in the Human Factors and Ergonomics side of IE, and it

has reassured me that I very well could be in the right place. It has helped me realize that maybe I was drawn to engineering because I actually enjoy this stuff! It turns out that maybe I do possess the qualities of a successful engineer, meaning I'm too creative for my own good, I love problem solving (I admit it, sometimes even in calculus!), I strive to make things better on a daily basis, and I have an innate curiosity that questions everything. I have come to realize that, instead of just liking the idea of being an engineer, I actually like engineering as a whole.

Ultimately, I would still like to end up with Disney Imagineering, but now I know that if I don't snag that coveted Disney internship my junior year, or choose to take a co-op position in Wisconsin instead of taking a semester off for the Disney College Program, I'll be just fine. With my newfound knowledge and appreciation for the field, I know the sky's the limit in engineering. I never thought I'd say this, but it might be okay not to achieve my goal. If I only focus on one thing, I might let other opportunities pass me by without even knowing. Right now, it's good to keep my options open.

To end my tale of enlightenment, I'd like to quote my favorite Imagineering book (hey, old habits die hard, right?). The last page of the book is completely blank except for this message: "There are two ways to look at this blank sheet of paper. You can look at it as the last page of a book, or as the greatest opportunity in the world because nobody's put anything on it. Go ahead and use it to dream, create new things, and let your imagination go. Why not? Everything begins somewhere . . ." I filled the page with the ideas and improvements I had for the Disney theme parks. However, if this were the last page of a book about my recently started journey into engineering, it would still be completely blank, ready to be filled with opportunities yet to come.