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take a job with Disney Studios. “While in my third year at ArtCenter, Walt Disney suddenly had a need – a huge need – for artists and that opened up an opportunity for many of us students who were still in school,” recalls Floyd. He says he jumped at the chance to work for Walt Disney and his dream company. In 1956, Floyd was the first African American artist hired at Disney. His first job was as an “in-betweeners,” or animation apprentice, on “Sleeping Beauty.” What’s an in-betweeners? “It’s the tedious work that a trainee or apprentice would do as they are learning to be an animator, and even though it is a rather mundane job, it is a necessary job and a job where you train... doing all the in between drawings that are necessary to make animation work,” explains Floyd. After a couple of years at Disney, Floyd was drafted. At that time, “every young man had an obligation to serve his country... You would serve your time and then you would return to work a couple of years later.” Floyd returned to the studio and continued to work on animated movies. Eventually, Floyd started his own company with a friend and colleague called Vignette Films, Inc. At first, Floyd tried to balance both jobs, but after Walt Disney died in 1966, Floyd decided to leave the studio to

work full-time on his own venture. For about 10 years, Vignette Films created all kinds of projects, including Black History films for high schools as well as logos, title sequences and animation for many TV shows, including the animation for the dance show “Soul Train.”

CARTOON KING

Floyd says his life and career began moving in a different direction and soon he landed a job with Hanna-Barbera Productions, working as an animator on some of the hottest Saturday morning cartoons of the day, “Scooby-Doo,” “The Flintstones,” and “Josie and the Pussycats.” Floyd was with Hanna-Barbera for about seven years before returning to the Disney Studios. This time, as a writer. Floyd spent the next several years writing for lots of publications, from comic strips to books for young readers.

But in 2000, when Floyd turned 65, he was forced to retire. A recent documentary film, “Floyd Norman: An Animated Life,” shares Floyd’s life story and especially focuses on that chapter of his story as he refuses to stop working and eventually is re-hired by the Disney company at age 79. Now Floyd is happily at work every day and says he has no plans to retire - ever.

By Janis Campbell

FAST FACTS

Family: Floyd lives with his wife, Adrienne Brown-Norman, who is also a Disney artist, in Pasadena, California. He has five grown children and 12 grandchildren.

Advice Part 1: “You have to have a dream. When I was a child, I had a dream that I wanted to do this job and where so many people give up on their dreams because it’s either too difficult or it appears to be impractical, they give up. And you don’t have to do that.”

Advice Part 2: “But the second part to this is you have to be willing to do the work. The dream will not be dropped into your lap, you still have to earn it. Dream and dream big, but be willing to do the work.”

Animation Pioneer: Floyd says he understands the importance and the social implications of being the first African American animator at Disney, “but for me it’s never been the motivating part of my life. My motivation was always the art, the work, creating. That’s been the motivation.”

A-List Animation: Floyd has contributed to a legendary list of movies, including the Disney classics “Sleeping Beauty,” “The Jungle Book,” and “Mulan,” and Pixar films “Toy Story 2” and “Monsters Inc.”

Story Power: Floyd says, “...what I’ve done throughout my career is to tell stories. And these stories cross all barriers, they cross language, they cross ethnicity, they cross race. People relate to the stories we create, and the stories we tell, and that means we are all basically one people.... and that’s very unifying and a very positive message.”



Animator Floyd Norman is right at home at his drawing table. He has loved drawing and sketching since he was a little boy.



Floyd Norman shares some of his artwork with filmmakers Michael Fiore and Erik Sharkey who directed the 2016 documentary “Floyd Norman: An Animated Life.”