



By John Loofbourow, MD

**Stand in line long enough with your kids, Pluto and Minnie,
and da refrain is etched on da dad's brain.**

IN HONOR OF SMALL WORLD Order Day, Disneyland provided each child with a black cardboard necklace-pendant in the familiar shape of a Disney character's head. Every child's home town was writ large on the front in phosphorescent chartreuse with the parent or responsible adult's name on the back.

The problem was that the entrance fee was 75 percent off; so talk about crowded! It was rumored that Security wanted bar codes and portable scanners to keep track of lost kids, but Publicity objected; they felt it lacked the personal touch. That was the end of the bar code idea because the Disney personal touch is sacred. It was a cool morning and we hadn't seen "It's a Small World II" the last time, so we went anyway.

My son was a Pluto Venice Beach and my daughter a Minnie. Venice Beach, too, of course. Things didn't look so bad. We got there early, and were only about 200 people back from the covered part of the line. I felt sure we'd be in the shade in short order.

But we were still so far from the front that I couldn't see the ride, and I wasn't sure it was the right line, so I asked the Donald Brooklyn's adult in front of me, in my most cheerful voice.

"Hi! I'm Don' Nocere."

He turned his head slightly but not his trunk. "Do you know if this is the Small World line?"

"How should I know, buddy?"

I turned to the Belle Bogota's lady behind me and asked again, but she looked puzzled, and fired off machinegun Spanish for a couple of minutes. I couldn't tell if she was angry or trying to be thorough and helpful.

At last she looked down at the Belle herself, who said:

"She don' know."

Well, no one in voice range was actually sure. I got on top of a bench to look and still couldn't tell. Finally the Minnie Minneapolis' mother two places back went to look. Her brother was with her and would watch the Minnie. They hugged and kissed and looked teary-eyed, like she was going on a long trip. As it turned out, they were right.

In about 20 minutes the Minnie's uncle asked to take Minnie to the bathroom; would I save his place? The Huey Stockholm behind her seemed OK with that. Life goes on, even

in line. People began to interact, usually with tolerance, sometimes with humor, occasionally with irritation. Mickey San Jose's man (there were quite a few Mickeys and Minnies) was constantly on a cell phone, and he wasn't the only e.type; soon we could overhear stock trading, game playing and even hushed trickles of phone sex. We inched along at times, and at others seemed to stagnate. People in adjacent rows sometimes became quite involved with one another, and as the line snaked back and forth tried to keep talking. An Aladdin agreed to move back, so as not to be separated from a Snow White. People from Brazil moved to be with their countrymen. Communities formed.

There were problems, too. Some people unaccustomed to lines became restless. By nightfall the management brought out cots and bedding. In their opinion, they said, this was the line for "It's a Small World II," and that was reassuring.

With a charge card we could rent laptops with movie CDs. Of course, they were all Disney, but one has to admire genius for organization and the human touch. At 11 pm the Minnie Minneapolis had still not returned. Her brother was worried. Some felt we should send out a search party, others that it was too risky.

A Somethingorother Sacramento insisted loudly: "What the hell, when she comes back, we'll have to send somebody else out to search for the searchers. I say wait."

Everyone started speaking at once. "If she was your own sister, you'd not say that!"

"We still don't know if this is the right line! They only said they thought we were in the right line."

"I say we need to get organized here."

The California locals were dominant of course, and elected as chairman Mickey San Jose with his cell phone. A lot of other Mickeys voted for him too. They acted like their Mickey sign made them upper class. They issued numbers so we could go and come - to the bathroom, or to get food - and not lose place in line. A five-member council was formed with a Mogli Mexicali, a Donald Singapore, a Lion King L A, a Moulan San Diego, and a Minnie... Auckland, I think, I can't recall her last name.

In the second week a big fight broke out between a Louie Portland and a Dopey Miami. Both had been drinking and Dopey accused Louie of a racial slur. Shouting, shoving, cussing, bird flipping and finger whipping was encouraged by some, who had been missing their Jerry Springer or Wrestling fix. Finally Disney Security appeared and Dopey and Louie were thrown out.

The council let their children stay with other adults, provided they were of the same type: That is, another Dopey or Louie. It didn't seem ethical to mix characters. After that big row, the council named a Sergeant at Arms; a Pittsburgh Little Mermaid who was a defensive lineman for the Steelers.

Disney management took care of the trash. Other services were lacking, and only gradually became available, through entrepreneurs in the line: like clothes washing, tent rentals, sundry sales and counseling. I was in danger of having to provide medical services after my son let it out that I was Doctor Don' Nocere; but I pretended to be a pathologist, so escaped most of the duty. Religious services were held regularly.

Pocahontas Beirut set up a tent massage parlor, but some folks found the presence, or should I say the noises, irritating. The crisis was ultimately resolved by taxing the owners and moving the massage business tent to some distance, where the operation could be better supervised by the council. Alcohol and bookmaking operations soon met with the same fate.

We never heard from Minnie Minneapolis again. Her memorial service, after she had been lost for six months, was moving. We set a little cross with a Madonna by the Women's

Rest Room flower bed, next to two other little shrines.

In the Fall, Snow White and Aladdin were married; she was obviously pregnant. To everyone's distress they were not of the same character, like both being Donalds. That was revolting, but we gradually got over it. The line took on a kind of rhythm, an ordered and civil certainty. No one suspected it might end.

It happened suddenly, as unannounced as an earthquake. The worst for me is that I lost my best friend, Louie Brookline, the guy in line ahead us. He turned out to be an ornithologist, and held regular classes on birding. I miss the Japanese classes, too, as I was beginning to learn some of the characters. Old Louie. Sometimes I want to go back and get in line again, but it will never be the same as it was then.

We were herded with strangers from unknown regions of the line into those dreary little plastic boats, like cattle loaded for slaughter. My cell phone became perceptibly heavier and hotter in its holster, as though insisting I activate it.

"It's a world of Laughter, A world of Peace..."

It was all over. The soothing lyrics and music that used to wash over us like beach waves became viciously ominous, insupportable, howling, thundering in the voice of Gabriel:

"Please move to the end of your row. Remain seated and keep your arms inside the boat. Have a Safe Ride, and a Good Day."

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