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Three Years in Wonderland: The Disney Brothers, C. V. Wood, and the Making of the Great American Theme Park

Todd James Pierce

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While the success of Disneyland is largely credited to Walt and Roy Disney, there was a third, mostly forgotten dynamo instrumental to the development of the park?fast-talking Texan C. V. Wood. *Three Years in Wonderland* presents the never-before-told, full story of “the happiest place on earth.” Using information from over one hundred unpublished interviews, Todd James Pierce lays down the arc of Disneyland’s development from an idea to a paragon of entertainment.

In the early 1950s, the Disney brothers hired Wood and his team to develop a feasibility study for an amusement park Walt wanted to build in southern California. “Woody” quickly became a central figure. In 1954, Roy Disney hired him as Disneyland’s first official employee, its first general manager, and appointed him vice president of Disneyland, Inc., where his authority was exceeded only by Walt. A brilliant project manager, Wood was also a con man of sorts. Previously, he had forged his university diploma. A smooth-talker drawn to Hollywood, the first general manager of Disneyland valued money over art. As relations soured between Wood and the Disney brothers, Wood found creative ways to increase his income, leveraging his position for personal fame. Eventually, tensions at the Disney park reached a boiling point, with Walt demanding he be fired.

In compelling detail, *Three Years in Wonderland* lays out the struggles and rewards of building the world’s first cinematic theme park and convincing the American public that a $17 million amusement park was the ideal place for a family vacation. The early experience of Walt Disney, Roy Disney, and C. V. Wood is one of the most captivating untold stories in the history of Hollywood. Pierce interviewed dozens of individuals who enjoyed long careers at the Walt Disney Company as well as dozens of individuals who?like C. V. Wood?helped develop the park but then left the company for good once the park was finished. Through much research and many interviews, *Three Years in Wonderland* offers readers a rare opportunity to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the men and women who built the best-known theme park in the world.

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