



*Any image that you see on the Web belongs to someone.*

# Walt Disney, Easter Eggs, and Monsters

## WHEN CREATIVITY AND COPYRIGHT COMBINE

### Wendy Grieb

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I have been drawing for as long as I can remember. As a young person, I loved *The Muppet Show* and Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*. My childhood dream was to become a children's book illustrator, work for Disney, or work for Jim Henson designing puppets. My father and mother were both art teachers and were very encouraging of my development as an artist. I loved to draw so much that once my mom found me asleep on the floor with the pencil still in my hand touching the paper in the middle of a drawing!

It will come as no surprise that my major in college was drawing. My first job was as an elementary art

teacher. For five years I taught art to children from kindergarten through sixth grade. I love working with kids, picture books, and cartoons, so I guess it was inevitable that I was hired by Walt Disney TV Animation as a storyboard artist drawing cartoons. A storyboard artist is a person who takes the script for a show and draws out what the cartoon will look like. The artist draws and composes the shots that will be in the cartoon, camera moves and layout, and the acting for the characters. Storyboard artists are in a sense "directing" the animators on what they will be animating and what the characters will be doing and feeling—the storyboard is effectively a blueprint for that show. The first animated TV show I drew for was *Pepper Ann*. I went on to draw storyboards for many Disney TV shows, including *Lilo and Stitch*,

*Hercules*, *American Dragon*, and *Phineas and Ferb*. Working for Disney was very rewarding and exciting. It was a dream come true.

Even though I was excited about the projects I worked on for Disney, I had to be careful what information I shared with friends, family, and other artists. The contract I signed specified that my work product was "work for hire," which meant that any art I created while working at the studio belonged to the company. That meant any artwork that I created while on the job at the Disney studio is owned by them, and nothing I storyboarded could be made public until the animated cartoon that I storyboarded had aired on TV. (Any personal work created by me at home belonged to me.) NDA (nondisclosure agreements) are another common aspect of working

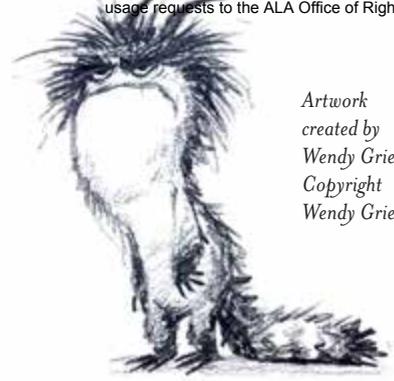
in the entertainment industry. Nondisclosure agreements are designed to protect the property on which the artist is working. NDAs ensure that the studio, network, etc. has control over any information related to a project and the release of that information. Even after a show had aired, I could not sell any of the art I created. However, it can be used for self-promotion. This means I can use the work that I have done for Disney in a portfolio of my work when searching for other jobs as a storyboard artist.

I worked for Disney for sixteen years on numerous productions and then decided to return to teaching. I teach college students at California State University, Fullerton, with my husband, Chuck Grieb. Teaching Animation and Storyboarding is very rewarding. I hope to instill in my students an enthusiasm and love for animation—especially storyboarding—I have always felt. My love for storytelling continues in my work outside of school as a freelance

storyboard artist and illustrator of children's books. In a sense, I get to do everything I love!

Working with my husband is also a dream come true. Chuck and I have enjoyed animating and storyboarding together and now teaching. We make a great team, and I know that I am stronger and better as an artist and teacher for my being with him. He challenges me, offers insight, critique, and a fresh POV. When I am creating a piece of art, Chuck is a reliable measure, critic, and part of my process, whether I want to hear his feedback or not! With both of us being artists, the level of understanding we have for each other's challenges is complete, and we are both very supportive when the other wants to buy more art supplies!

In addition to teaching and storyboarding, I also illustrate children's books for Mighty Media Press. I have illustrated six books for the Monster & Me™ series. It has been a lot of fun, as monsters are one of my favorite



Artwork created by Wendy Grieb. Copyright Wendy Grieb.

things to draw! In my illustrations I enjoy putting in "Easter eggs" for the readers to find. I got the idea from one of my favorite illustrators Mercer Mayer, who would put a cricket and spider in all the illustrations in some of his Little Monster books. Looking for them in the drawings was so much fun that I started putting little things in some of my illustrations. None of my "Easter eggs" are direct copies of copyrighted works, but they are meant to suggest familiar things that kids and adults alike might enjoy. For example, I would never put a Mickey Mouse into my books since he is the symbol of Disney and more than just a character.



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Storyboards created by Wendy Grieb. Copyright Walt Disney TV Animation.



Artwork created by Wendy Grieb.  
Copyright Wendy Grieb.

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However, in the background of a drawing, amongst other statues or decorations, I might include a statue similar in appearance to a “weeping angel,” a character from the popular *Dr. Who* series.

I still need to be mindful about protecting my illustrations—especially since I often post my work on social media. Sharing illustrations digitally comes with its own set of risks. Any image that you see on the Web belongs to someone, and if you would like to use an image, piece of art, photo, etc. you must get permission from the individual who created the work. When putting my work up on my website, Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr, etc. there is a risk that people will see it, like it, and use it for their own purposes. If someone is using my work to make money and does not have my permission, then that behavior is, of course, stealing.

Unfortunately, preventing someone from stealing intellectual property can be difficult. A friend of mine recently found that a piece of her art had been printed

on shirts that were for sale on Amazon. To my knowledge, I have never had a piece of my artwork stolen and sold. My artwork has been used on Twitter once in a type of meme, but I was given credit for the artwork. My husband has had his work used (without his permission) to accompany newspaper articles in another country. Oddly enough, though they did not request permission or pay for the art, the articles credited him as the artist, which is how he discovered that his work had been used in this manner.





Even though there is some risk to posting my work online, I find it worthwhile. I enjoy seeing the work of other artists and receiving feedback from them on my work as well. It is much easier today to find information and to see other styles of artwork than it was when I was young. I find the tremendous resources available online very beneficial for doing research for my illustrations and when learning new art-creation processes.

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Being an artist is very rewarding, and technology has made access to imagery and information easier than ever before. Having this access is wonderful, but it also important for an artist to pay attention to and control how his or her work is perceived and used by others. Intellectual property, the value and uniqueness of the imagery artists create, needs to be recognized by all.

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**Wendy Grieb** is a professional working in the Los Angeles animation industry; she also teaches animation and illustrates children's books. An Annie Award-winning storyboard artist, she has worked as a developmental artist, illustrator, and character designer for companies such as Disney, Nickelodeon, Sony, Klasky Csupo, White Wolf, and more. She lives in Yorba Linda, California.

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