

ADULTING AT DISNEY

CHARACTER GREETING FAILS (AND HOW NOT TO)



Seconds before I ran straight into the wall. PHOTO COURTESY OF RAIN BLANKEN

BY RAIN BLANKEN

As Mickey released me from our hug, I continued to gush about my love for him and took a few steps back... BAM, right into the scenery. As I untangled myself from the metal decor and rubbed my elbow, Mickey rushed over to make sure I wasn't hurt. My husband, Todd, laughed mercilessly and the Photopass photographer looked on in disbelief.

Video footage would later reveal that I was apparently trying to exit the Photopass area to scan my Magic Band -- but was in such a daze from Mickey's attention that I collided full-speed with the set.

I bet he thinks I'm so *cool*.

I wish, dear friends, that I could say this was the only time I've embarrassed myself in front of my favorite characters at Walt Disney World, but oh, far from it. There's something about coming face-to-face with the likes of Mickey, Buzz Lightyear, and Rapunzel that turns me into the biggest doofus on Earth. My goober grins in character photos are a family legend.

During my career as a writer and editor, I've interviewed and attended media events with celebrities. My mom even dated MacGyver once upon a time. I get neither nervous nor giddy around real-life

PREVIOUS PAGE: Pluto knows how to get guests to smile. PHOTO BY MIKE BILLICK

famous people -- they're just people like you and me. But once Elsa beckons me over for a photo? Forget about it. I'm as good as a melted snowman and probably just as much fun to talk to.

What is it about meeting my favorite Disney characters that turns me, a 39-year-old woman with three grown children, into such a goofball? I'd venture to say it was a deep-seated childhood connection to movies I saw as a kid, but even when meeting Baby Groot, a comparatively new adoration of mine, I still find it difficult to remain coherent.

HOW I PICTURE IT HAPPENING

I can count on one hand the number of times that I was cool and collected during a character greeting.

For example, in 2008, when my daughter, Evelyn, was little, we had dinner with the princesses at Akershus in Epcot's Norway pavilion and I kept it together enough to ask Cinderella if glass slippers were comfortable (the answer was yes... even when dancing till midnight). Evelyn was very impressed and told this insider information to all her friends back home.

Actually... maybe it was just that one time in 2008.

HOW IT REALLY HAPPENS

Fast forward to the night Evelyn and I went to a DVC Moonlight Magic event at Epcot just a few months ago. We stood in a 30-minute line for a unique character greeting with Mushu and Mulan (in her armor!). For 30 minutes, we had the chance to try to come up with cool poses with "Ping".

So when it was finally our turn? Yeah, we didn't even have our Magic Bands on and had to dig one out of our bag to scan for Photopass before the greeting could even begin. Mulan tapped her foot and told the whole line that



If we look nervous and bewildered, it's because we are. PHOTO COURTESY OF RAIN BLANKEN



The author poses with WDW Magazine photographer, Courtney Reynolds and Daisy Duck.
PHOTO COURTESY OF RAIN BLANKEN

General Li Shang definitely needed to give us more training.

We giggled nervously, I bumped into Mulan's sword, and Mushu wagged his finger at us in a very "dishonor on your cow" kind of way. Our photo opp was over in seconds and we walked away dazed and thankful. It's not every day

we get scolded by Mulan.

Even last week, Todd and I met Pocahontas on a hidden trail near the Tree of Life at Disney's Animal Kingdom. Since she was wandering back there by herself, we had plenty of time to chat. I was actually doing pretty well until she told us all about her spirit animal (a raccoon -- like Meeko). She

asked Todd what his spirit animal would be and he replied sensibly, "a dog" because they are so likable and loyal.

Then, as Pocahontas turned toward me and asked what my spirit animal would be, I uttered the words... "Well, I'm really into snails right now..." That moment replays in my mind in horrific slow motion.

I, being the cool lady that I am, started on a long ramble about my pet snails. I'd collected a few garden snails over the summer and for some reason thought that the one-and-only Pocahontas was just waiting behind this tree to hear a crazy lady name each of her pet snails and go into great detail about their personalities.

I bet she thinks I'm so cool.

I know I'm not the only one with this issue, and I want to be able to offer you some great tips on meeting characters—but it feels a bit disingenuous to give you advice that I myself have trouble following. So here's what I'm going to *try* to do to keep it together the next time I meet one of my idols at Walt Disney World:

RAIN'S COOL SYSTEM TO KEEP IT TOGETHER AT CHARACTER GREETINGS:

- C** **Come up with a question or comment:** While in line, I'm going to come up with a question or comment for the character I'm about to meet. I'll tell Daisy I love her outfit, ask Aladdin and Jasmine if it's this hot in Agrabah, or finally remember to tell Mickey "Happy Birthday".
- O** **Opt for a unique pose:** Instead of guffawing until Pluto takes my arm and turns toward the camera, next time I'll ask him for a selfie or suggest we put our "paws out".
- O** **Ooze confidence:** I have to remember that the characters want to see me just as much as I want to see them! Their Cast Member friends greet a lot of people each day, and making the interactions interesting is something nice I can do for them.
- L** **Let's be prepared:** Magic Band? Check. Do I know if I want my husband to take video while Photopass snaps pics? Where should I put my stuff before Minnie is suddenly waving hello to me? Getting these things in order could really help restore honor to my cow.

How about you and I stick to the plan to see if our character greetings improve? Don't hesitate to report back to me @wdwmagazine on Instagram to let me know how it's going, and I'll check in, too!

I don't know if I'll ever get over my nervousness of meeting my favorite characters – I want to get better, but I have to admit: my fails sure have reaped some unique and hilarious experiences that I wouldn't trade for the world.

And in my defense... the night I ran into the wall at Mickey's, I had good reason to be so dazed; it was the very end of the night at Epcot and Todd and I were the only guests inclined to bid Mickey a good night at Epcot's Character Spot. Mickey actually came out to greet us, then took my arm and led me all the way down the curving hallway (leaving my husband in the dust). For a few brief moments, I felt like the queen of Disney.

I hadn't been in there before, so I had no idea where that hallway went,

but when you're at Walt Disney World and Mickey takes your arm, you just go wherever he leads you. By the time we were finished with photos, I was so dazzled by the magic that walking into that wall was probably the best I could do. 💖



Buzz Lightyear was somehow charmed by my nervous banter. PHOTO COURTESY OF RAIN BLANKEN

EXTRA MAGIC

You got the perfect family photo on Main Street U.S.A. in front of Cinderella Castle taken by a Disney PhotoPass Photographer. However, it seems like it could use a little extra magic. On the Disney PhotoPass website, you can select your picture and have some editing fun, by adding borders and stickers or zooming in on your family to crop out some of the crowds.