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The Magic of a Munich Teacher Wins Her a Trip to Disney World

By Sarah Hinnenkamp



Barb Hill at Disney World.

Last fall, Barb Hill's daughter sent her a link for a Disney contest, urging her mother to apply, as one of the requirements was applicants had to be teachers.

"I thought, well, I could do this, but I won't win," said Hill, who teaches 5th and 6th grade language arts at Mu-

nich Public School.

She did win. Hill was one of 50 teachers selected from 32 states out of 5,800 essay submissions that centered on the creativity and imagination they each demonstrate in their classrooms on a regular basis. The prize was being part of Disney's Imag-

ination Campus Celebration at Walt Disney World Resort in Florida over Memorial Day weekend.

Hill was shocked when she found out via email that she had been selected, and she had to keep it a secret for a while, but before long, Memorial weekend arrived, and Hill was on an adventure. Disney provided the fancy hotel room for three nights, three-day park passes for Hill and her husband, and a \$200 Disney gift card.

"They just went above and beyond. It was surreal," Hill said.

The first day started at 7 a.m. with a trip to Magic Kingdom, getting to see the hidden parts of Disney and walking in through the back way where cameras aren't allowed.

"They walked us down Main Street USA, and we were the only ones there," Hill said.

The group had cameras rolling on them the whole time they were there and plenty of Disney executives around them. They went to Cinderella's Castle for photos and had breakfast on a terrace. After that they worked in groups to design their own theme park and presented the projects to the rest of the group.

The teachers, who represented elementary, middle, and high school, served as the Grand Marshals in the daily parade. Another group activity involved learning the choreography for a song from the Broadway musical, Frozen.

"I learned that I'm really bad at that, and I'm a much better audience member, but it was fun. I was just trying to get through it," Hill laughed.

They also heard from Alton Fitzgerald White, who is a critically acclaimed actor best known for playing Mufasa in Disney's *The Lion King* – a role that he performed 4000 times on the Broadway stage.

The event hosts had surprise after surprise for the group, including staff and executives applauding and cheering as the honored teachers walked through a corridor of people. It was to show appreciation and love for the teachers who have worked so hard and been through so much during the course of the pandemic. Disney executives said this group was representing thousands of teachers.

"It was a tearjerker for me," Hill said.

The surprises weren't over yet. After being told they were just standing in front of a new ride at Epcot to take a group photo, they found out they got to experience the Guardians of the Galaxy: Cosmic Rewind roller coaster. The group had met one of the ride designers earlier in the day, and he invited them to bring their families to go on the ride, which is an OmniCoaster, meaning the individual cars on the rollercoaster can rotate 360 degrees.

Hill's adventure on just one of the days took her from 7:00 a.m. to 11:30 p.m., giving her plenty of memories to come home with and plenty of time to get to know the other teachers on the trip.

"The other teachers were just amazing," Hill said. "We have started a Facebook group, and the creativity is just blowing up; people asking 'have you thought about this in your classroom?'"

Most of the teachers there were from

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much bigger schools, different from Hill who teaches in a smaller school that has pre-K through grade 12.

What about that essay that Hill wrote? What did Hill write about that led Disney to reward her with a trip and a great adventure.

aside one day during the winter when she and class paraprofessional Lisa Meyer transform their classroom into the Titanic, and they become characters. Hill dresses up as Captain Edward Smith, and the students dress up as first-class passengers.

journey, and they learn throughout the day," Hill said. "At the end of the day, they get into the lifeboats, and I go down with the ship."

Now you can see what Disney saw in Hill and the work she does in her classroom through imagination-pow-