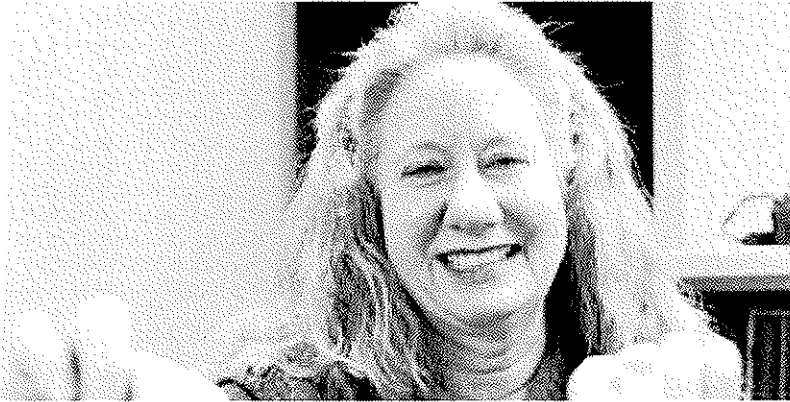


Hair makes 'cast' on Disney movie



Cheryl Prueher shows the ice skater that was to be the inspiration for Ariel in The Little Mermaid. Instead animators were inspired by Ms. Prueher's hair. - Mary Orr

By Mary Orr

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She never made it to the big screen working for Disney, but her hair did.

Cheryl Prueher of Harrison said that the animators took their inspiration for The Little Mermaid's hair from her own red locks.

She grew up in California, learned French while attending private school and ended up working for Disney through a temporary hire agency. Mrs. Prueher and her husband recently retired in Harrison.

While in California she worked at Walt Disney Imagineering for a couple years as a French translator and assistant to the project manager in charge of designing Disneyland Paris in the 1980s.

At that time animators created The Little Mermaid. They posted a flyer that announced that they wanted to fashion Ariel in the image of Katia Gordeeva, a Russian figure skater and Olympic and world champion in pair skating, and needed footage of her skating and any interviews.

Mrs. Prueher happened to have the very thing they needed.

"I think I was around 25 at the time, and I was an ice skater, and used to tape all ice skating events," she said. "So I called the number listed for animation and told the guy what I had on tape, and said I could bring it in with me to work the next day."

The next day when the animator came to retrieve the footage he explained what they

were using it for.

“He told me that they were thinking of having the Little Mermaid look like Katia Gordeeva, as she had a kind of other-worldly look to her,” Mrs. Prueher said. “But the whole time he was telling me this, he was looking at my hair.”

Mrs. Prueher has red-gold hair that she wore mid-way down her back at the time, light skin, no freckles and green eyes.

“People tend to look at my hair a lot, so I didn’t think that much of it at the time,” she said. “The following day he came back to return my tape and again, I got the staring at the hair treatment.”

Mrs. Prueher told all of her friends that when the movie came out, the Little Mermaid would look like Ms. Gordeeva, who has dark brown hair, light skin and brown eyes.

“But when the movie came out in 1989 she looked like all the other Disney female characters, except she had my hair, right down to the length I wore it and the way I styled it,” she said.

Ariel was the first Disney character with red hair.

“The animator never told me that he used my hair, but most women can tell where a guy is looking, and it was my hair, not my chest,” she said.

Mrs. Prueher and her husband moved to Harrison in 2008. She volunteers as a board member for the Spokane Figure Skating Club, judges competitions, serves as treasurer for St. Paul's Lutheran Church and creates Web sites for organizations. She has created a site for St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Hope's Haven, and the Valley Piecemakers quilting club.

Her hobbies include quilting and ballroom dancing.