

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Feb. 15, 2017

CONTACT:

Lindsay Ivins
Maritza Fairfield
909-445-1001

Pioneering African-American Disney Animator Returns to Monrovia High to Encourage Student Dreams

MONROVIA – Ron Husband, the first African-American animator to work for Disney Studios, returned to his alma mater, Monrovia High School, on Feb. 10 to share his wisdom on animation with students as part of the District’s Black History Month celebration.

Husband spent the day at Monrovia High School talking with students about different artistic styles and his experiences in high school and working for Disney.

“It is such an amazing thing to see such a successful alum come back to our school and share about their successes and love for the community,” Monrovia Unified Board Vice President Terrence Williams said. “I hope our students take these experiences to heart and understand how much they can inspire other students after they graduate.”

Husband, a 1968 graduate of Monrovia High, addressed nearly 100 students about the importance of preparation and perseverance, two study habits impressed upon him by Dorothy Clemmons, his Monrovia High art teacher.

Husband was born and raised in Monrovia and spent his entire life in the Monrovia Unified School District, attending Huntington School, Santa Fe Elementary, Clifton Middle School and Monrovia High.

Husband began his career at Disney in 1975, when many of the animators from the studio’s golden era, Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston among them, were on the verge of retirement.

It was Sam McKim, Disney Imagineer and Husband’s teacher at the Art Center College of Design, who pointed Husband toward the Disney animation trainee program. Through the program, veteran animator Eric Larsen recognized Husband’s talents through his sketchbook drawings and selected him from candidates answering an open call for animators.

“Ms. Clemmons advised me to carry a sketchbook with me at all times, and I have never forgotten this,” Husband said. “Without the sketchbook, I would not have been able to capitalize on the opportunity presented to me at Disney.”

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The transformation of Husband from “in-betweener” – a then-uncredited position that supports a character animator – to a full-fledged animator with screen credits was a years-long process. This is where the preparation and perseverance Husband learned at Monrovia High paid high dividends.

“To receive a screen credit – and the right to call yourself an animator and get paid union wages – you needed to produce 100 feet of film,” Husband said. “I spent several years supporting the animators until I broke through on the short film ‘The Small One,’ and I never looked back.”

Before retiring, Husband worked on more than 20 Disney projects and acted as a bridge from one golden Disney animation era to another. Among Husband’s screen credits are “Beauty and the Beast,” “The Little Mermaid,” “The Hunchback of Notre Dame,” “Fantasia 2000” and “Atlantis: The Lost Empire,” which had the distinction of being the first Disney film to feature a black character, Dr. Sweet. Husband was supervising animator of the unit that animated Dr. Sweet.

Husband spent about eight months illustrating the children’s book “Steamboat School,” a fictional story based on the life of Rev. John Barry Meachum, a slave who purchased his freedom in 1815 and spent the rest of his life as a civil rights activist. After the book was published in 2016, Husband was approached by the Monrovia/Duarte Black Alumni Association, which purchased copies of “Steamboat School” and donated them to Monrovia Unified’s five elementary school libraries.

“Mr. Husband has created a legacy that Monrovia Unified will be proud of for years to come,” Monrovia Unified Superintendent Dr. Katherine Thorossian said. “We are all so fortunate to have alumni like him keep in touch and return to our campuses after so many years, sharing his life experiences and lessons with our students. It’s invaluable.”

PHOTO CAPTION

021517_MUSD_ALUM: Monrovia High 1968 alumni Ron Husband, the first African-American animator to work for Disney Studios, returned to his alma mater on Feb. 10 during Black History Month to impart his wisdom and experience onto current Monrovia High students. During his visit, he took a trip down memory lane by visiting the art classroom he attended nearly 50 years ago.

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