



*"He can call me a flower if he wants to..."*

## **"Bambi" – A Disney Film Classic**

**By Gale Alexander**

In 1923, Austrian author Felix Salten wrote "Bambi, a life in the woods" and in 1939 pioneer and movie visionary Walt Disney adapted that book into the 5<sup>th</sup> full-length animation film. Disney changed the entertainment industry for children and adults when he created animation. The technology was called motion stop or cutout animation. Disney wanted to educate children through the power of film. The message in "Bambi" is simple and timeless; protect the environment and the creatures that inhabit the planet.

It may have been the 5th animation film in the Disney canon, but it was the first to use children. Prior to "Bambi," adults played the roles pretending to be kids. The movie wrapped in 1941 but was put on the shelf for a year making room for the October release of "Dumbo," and then to be sensitive to the bombing of Pearl Harbor, "Bambi" was released on December 21, 1942, by RKO and the Disney studios in Los Feliz, California.

A young Stanley Jarl Alexander attended Sunday school in Los Feliz. His teacher recognized his sweet little voice and asked if he would like to be in a movie. "No!" replied the shy six-year-old. He would rethink his decision when he learned he would get to miss school. When Stanley and his parents arrived at Walt Disney studios no one knew anything about Stan coming in for an audition nor did they know the name of his Sunday school teacher. Fate would intervene, and since Stan was there, a very tall man with a script would read the lines for Stan to repeat.

Back in Stan's elementary school, the other kids were envious when his grandfather would arrive to take him out of class. Alas, Stan would have a tutor on set and, to his dismay – homework. It was work. But it was fun. In the sound booth, another tall man would hold a microphone for him while he delivered his lines. When they played back the audio, Stan didn't recognize his voice. Unfortunately, the film ran long. Approximately 6000 lines were left on the cutting room floor, many of them Flowers, but 1000 lines have been added back to the latest release.

The story chronicles the adventures and coming of age of Bambi the fawn, Thumper the rabbit, and Flower the skunk. They all live in the forest and Thumper is teaching Bambi to speak. First, he sees a bird followed by a butterfly. He learns the word bird and then sees a butterfly. When Bambi calls the butterfly a bird, Thumper goes nuts. But then Bambi sticks his head into the flower patch, and comes nose to nose with a skunk. Bambi, quick to impress Thumper, mistakenly calls him a flower. A hibernating "Flower" is all aflutter and repeats those iconic lines:

"Oh, that's alright, he can call me a flower if he wants to. I don't mind."

The line is film iconography.

While shooting the film, Stan only saw pieces of the movie. It wasn't until his parents took him to the theater that he saw the film in its entirety. He remembers the event vividly. Instead of the lights dimming, they came up and the theatre manager took the stage and asked him to stand and take a bow.

Stanley Jarl Alexander set his career goal in the eighth grade to study medicine. He graduated from UCLA, before his acceptance to USC School of Medicine. He interned at Boston City Hospital under the Tufts University service and did his residency and fellowship in Internal Medicine and Rheumatology at the Mayo Clinic. He is the recipient of an award for his lifetime achievement in medicine from AMA, the American Medical Association. He received the Best Doctor in the San Gabriel Valley annual award in Rheumatology in numerous years, and too many additional awards to mention. He practices rheumatology in Southern California.

After generations of people around the world grew up watching the film, in 2011, the Library of Congress included "Bambi" as one of the iconic films added to the National Film Registry.

Congratulations to the animators, who painstakingly sketched the film by hand and gave Bambi, Thumper, Flower and the rest of the characters movement, to the storytellers, cast and crew, and to Walt Disney for his genius and vision.

Thank you to the National Registry and the Library of Congress for recognizing "Bambi".

*“Bambi” (1942) was added to the National Film Registry in 2011. Posted in November 2023, the views expressed in this essay are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the Library of Congress. The photo of Bambi and Flower is from the Library of Congress collection courtesy of the Walt Disney Company.*

Gail Alexander is a screenwriter and author, who resides in Southern California with her husband, Dr. Stan Alexander. At the age of six, Stan was the beloved voice of “Flower” in Walt Disney’s “Bambi” (1942). Stan went on to become a renowned physician and writer. Gail and Stan created and wrote the newsletter, “Doctors Matter” serving physicians in the San Gabriel Valley. In retirement, Gail and Stan continue to write non-fiction and fiction novels and enjoy spending time with their six grandchildren and four great grandchildren. Now 90 years old, Stan recently reunited with two other voices from “Bambi” in celebration of Disney’s 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.