



Franklin Thomas

September 5, 1912 - September 8, 2004

Died: La Cañada Flintridge, California

Franklin Thomas died at his home in La Cañada Flintridge, California, on September 8, 2004. He was ninety-two. Born in Santa Monica on September 5, 1912, he drew through school, studied at Stanford and Chouinard, and in 1934 walked into the Walt Disney studio as a young in-between when the place was still inventing its own grammar.

He became one of the Nine Old Men, the animators Disney trusted with a character's weight. Bambi's terror in the meadow, the spaghetti kiss in Lady and the Tramp, Baloo's lazy swing in The Jungle Book - those are his scenes in the public memory, though he would have named the assistants first. He thought acting on paper was a moral job: if the audience laughed at a drawing that had not earned the laugh, the picture had cheated. With his friend Ollie Johnston he wrote The Illusion of Life, a brick of a book that still sits on desks of people who will never work on a cel.

He played piano in a Dixieland group of studio men, the Firehouse Five Plus Two, because a deadline was not the only clock in the building. He married Jeanette, raised children in the Flintridge hills, and outlived the ink-and-paint rooms that had made him. Santa Monica was the birth. Burbank was the lot. Flintridge was the house where the last years were quiet and the old reels still made sense.

The studio he entered as a young man had become a corporation. He treated that as weather. The drawings remain the work he would have wanted counted.

Services

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Johnston, of The Illusion of Life.

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