

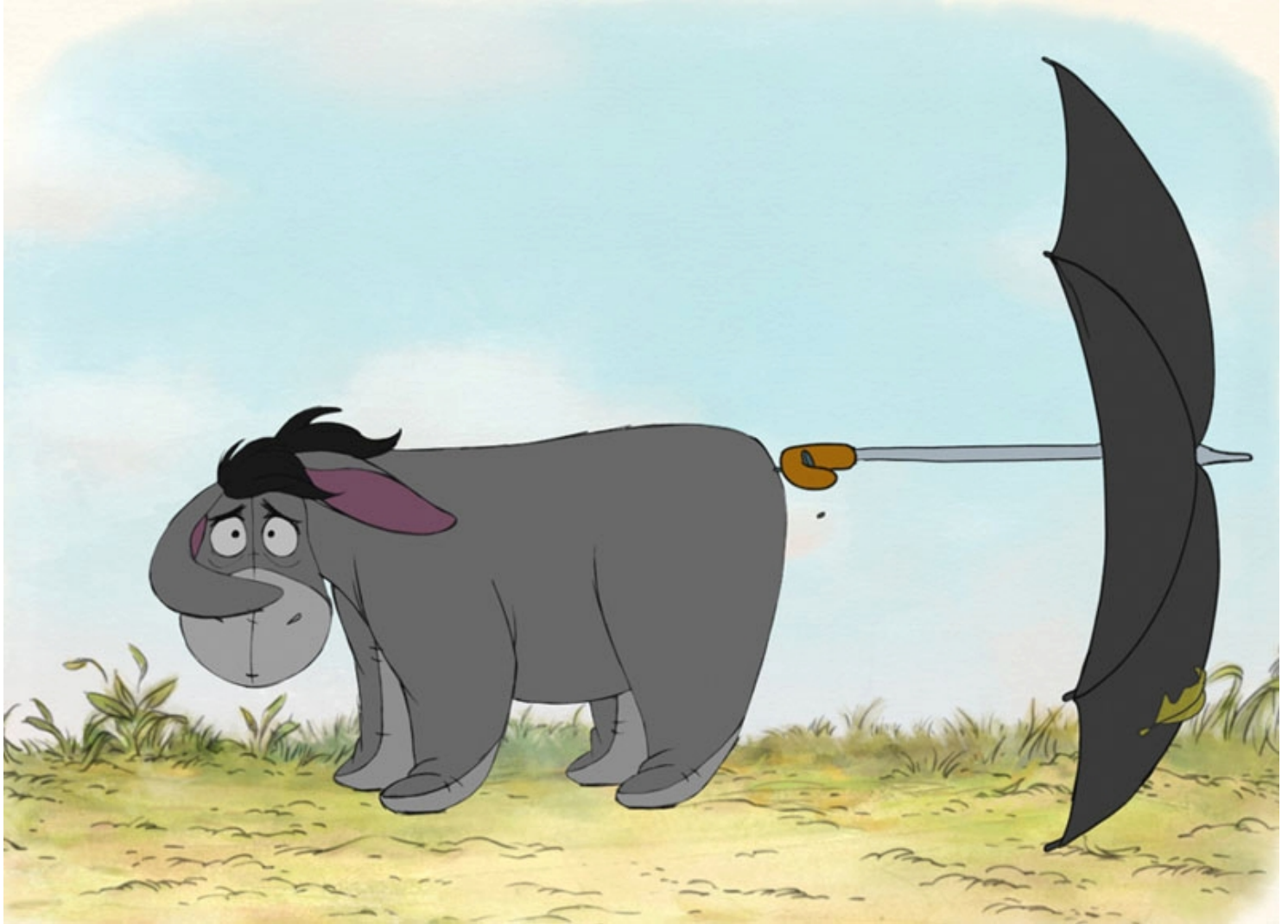
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St. Albert Gazette

Ferguson still making his marks in Disney pics

By: Scott Hayes

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Brian Ferguson, an animator with Disney who grew up in St. Albert, has lent his hand-drawn illustration to the corporation's newest feature film *Winnie the Pooh*.

Supplied photo/Disney Enterprises

Brian Ferguson doesn't get back to St. Albert much these days but he still holds the city in his heart.

The 50-year-old has three young children to keep his hands full.

"The idea of flying the whole family is daunting as anything," he laughed.

Of course, his hands are pretty busy too. The traditional cartoon illustrator with Disney Animation Studios is currently preparing visual development for a new movie, just as his last work is being released into theatres this weekend.

Winnie the Pooh is the latest Disney movie to feature all traditional hand-drawn illustrations. It's a risky endeavour in the entertainment industry that has spent the last 15 years phasing in more and more computer generated (CG) effects, characters and scenes.

Most animated movies these days are created entirely on computers but Disney has reaffirmed its faith in traditional illustrations.

After *Home on the Range* in 2004, the company had practically abandoned the practice and shut down the whole division, but *The Princess and the Frog* in 2009 resurrected the art form.

Even though Ferguson has had to adapt and learn how to work with computers, he's thrilled that he still gets to be creative with his first love: pen and paper.

When asked how he has managed to get through these interesting times, he replied with jubilation that only hinted at what must have been a lot of job stress.

"I'm very impressed with the company – they've got this commitment to quality. Even with the way that hand-drawn animation is suffering, they're making this commitment to hanging onto this group of us that they've got right now," he said from his desk in San Fernando Valley, California. "We're constantly thinking that this has got to end really soon. I'm just amazed."

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"They keep saying that our influence is going to give a stronger foundation to the development of these movies."

Regardless, he's still living his dream. The lifelong artist graduated from Sheridan College in the early 1980s and has never looked back. Among the memorable characters that he's made his marks on are the parrot Iago from *Aladdin* and Timon the meerkat from *The Lion King*.

"For my taste, choosing between computer animation or hand-drawn ... I don't like having to do that. I love both. I love watching both and I love animating both."

Reminiscing about his youth

He does think fondly about his days growing up on the outskirts of town in Forest Lawn, catching creatures in the ponds of Akinsdale and seeing the northern lights when he biked home from his job at the Silver Lantern Restaurant. Even though he went through culture shock after moving with his family from South America when he was 11, he adapted quickly and established himself with his classmates.

"I met the best of my friends there. I have this one friend that, to this day, I'm still really, really good friends with. He and I were friends right from when I first moved there.

"The whole culture overall is so nice. To be able to ride anywhere I want on my bicycle and not have to worry about being locked in behind a fence ... I forgot to appreciate that until I moved here and now it's kind of like it was when I lived in Venezuela.

There's a lot of fear," he laughed. "It's one thing I appreciate even more now."
