Hayao Miyazaki Biography

Hayao Miyazaki was born on January 5th, 1941 in Tokyo, Japan. He is a very successful animator, author, director, producer, screenwriter, and manga artist. His father, Katsuji Miyazaki was the director of Miyazaki Airplane. This company made rudders for fighter planes in WWII. This company gave their family good money as Miyazaki was growing up. His father would purchase paintings and show and explain them to guests that would visit them. Other than this though, there seems to be no other known artistic knowledge that he had.

His father was involved in the Imperial Japanese Army for a period sometime around 1940. His father was discharged after asking to be released so he could be with his wife and child instead. This was a very dishonorable things to do, but he was discharged nonetheless. His father later died on March 18, 1993 and it seemed as though Miyazaki had negative views of his father, unfortunately.

Growing up, Miyazaki has recounted that his earliest recollections are of “bombed-out cities.” He had to evacuate multiple cities while being the age 3 and 4 at those times. He also had digestive problems and doctors thought he wouldn’t make it past the age of 20. Because of this, he felt like a castaway. He started elementary school in Utsunomiya in 1947. Then he went to different schools after moving which were Omiya and Eifuku elementary schools and then later Omiya Junior High School.

Even as a young child, he already wanted to become a manga artist. This is quite interesting to see, as many people don’t know what they want to do when they get older. Even more so, they might have any idea of what they want to do, but typically this will change, perhaps many time throughout their lives. Especially to want to be a manga artist, it’s really hard to make a good living off this career and continue in it, so it’s impressive that he was able to have this desire really young, and do a good job well into the future.

When he realized he wanted to become a manga artist, he also realized he was unable to draw people. For quite a while he just stuck to drawing battleships, planes, and tanks, which depending on how complex he is making them, could be a pretty difficult thing to draw as well. Osamu Tezuka, Tetsuji Fukushima, and Soji Yamakawa were multiple manga artists that had a great impact on Hayao Miyazaki.

Interestingly, he ended up demolishing much of his early work, which is quite a shame, because I feel like many would have loved to see what he had done and where he came from. Apparently, he destroyed it because he had copied Tezuka’s style and thought it was “bad form” that would keep him from developing as an artist. Frankly, I can understand to a point where he is coming from. It’s important to learn to develop your own style as an artist. However, that doesn’t mean there is anything wrong with learning from other artists or even taking things that you like.

For example, I have copied a lot of works too, but the most important thing is not to take credit and make sure to give credit where credit is due. I would never try to sell anything that I hadn’t done on my own or take credit for it. If someone is already doing something good and right, there is no shame in doing the same thing as them in my opinion, especially if you can try to find ways to innovate off of that and make it better.

Another thing to point out is that even if for whatever reason what he did was a bad practice, it really shouldn’t matter. I think it’s more important as an artist to be practicing and working hard on your craft, rather than not at all. Even if he wasn’t developing his own style or wasn’t specifically getting good at originality or creativity, he was still getting good at something: drawing and animation. If you realize what you were doing was wrong, then stop doing that thing, and do the right thing. He didn’t need to throw all that art away just because it might’ve not have been the best practice. Even if he made the worst art on the planet, which I doubt he did, I personally think it’s good to keep it. I think as an artist, you should have no problem creating bad art or messing up, and you should keep those as a reminder of what you learned and what has shaped you into the artist you are today. It is actually pretty cool to see that Miyazaki was being smart, in taking concepts from people that were already good at their craft and trying to learn and emulate that.

After junior high, he went to Toyotama High School. There was a film that was Japan’s first feature-length animated film that was shown in color called Panda and the Magic Serpent. This film had sparked Miyazaki’s interest in animation and left a huge and lasting impression on him. After high school, he went to Gakushuin University and majored in Japanese Industrial Theory. When he had extra time, he would see his middle school art teacher and draw in his teacher’s studio. He ended up drawing thousands of pages of uncompleted manga stories and graduated school with degrees in economics and political science.

After graduation, he was hired at Toei Animation where he worked as an in between artist. I think this is quite interesting that he ended up going into animation right after college after taking all that time to earn two degrees that were unrelated. Of course it makes sense he would get a job in animation since he spent so much time drawing, but it’s fascinating to see that he still went to college before finally deciding to do what he actually wanted. Later he worked as a chief animator, concept artist, and scene designer, with the help of his mentor, Yasuo Otsuka, who greatly influenced his work. Later, he left Toei Animation in 1971 and went to A-Pro to work. Then he moved to working at Telecom Animation Film. There, he helped train the second wave of employees. During his animation career, Miyazaki helped with many films, manga, and stories.

With much success of climbing the latter in the animation industry, he eventually opened his own office in 1984 in Suginami Ward, naming it Nibariki. They produced the film Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind which ended up getting a lot of traction. Then, in 1985, Miyazaki and three others made the well-known company, Studio Ghibli. With the 22 films that have been created by this studio, he has been able to give us playful characters, developed and unique storylines, and shows the significance that friendships can have in people’s lives. You can see a lot in his films how nature and mankind react to one another and the detail and animation that is done is absolutely phenomenal.

Studio Ghibli has been able not just influence the audience but also the animation industry itself. It is very clear when you are watching their films, as Studio Ghibli has a distinct style and the creativity is abundant and original. You can see shows that have used similar techniques from setting layout, storyline, and character design to Studio Ghibli, such as The Simpsons, Gravity Falls, and Adventure Time. Some things that the company has done well at in comparison to the other companies within the industry are their themes of environmentalism, pacifism, and coming-of-age.

One important attribute that Miyazaki makes sure to include in his works is both having aspects of reality and fantasy meshed into one. I really agree with this notion and think that this is perhaps one of the reasons his animations are so good. I’ve learned that my best art has been based off of real life and some of the best artist I’ve seen are basing their art off of real life as well. One way that I got really good at drawing cartoons characters in general was by first learning anatomy. At first, I felt like I wasn’t that great at cartoons and just wasn’t ever going to be. However, once I started basing it off reality, it wasn’t as hard as I thought it was. Before I was trying to create something out of nothing, just straight out of my mind, but by using references, it helped me to create my own characters much more easily. The difference in the quality of my drawings was like night and day and I wondered why I hadn’t figured this out sooner. I also began to realize why it was so important to draw things from real life. It was because real life already had perfect images, and I just never realized it. The lighting, perspective, proportions, were all done correctly, so how could I not be using that to my advantage?

All in all, it’s clear to see that Miyazaki has done a lot in his life that has made him someone to look up to and to be inspired by. There are so many things that he’s doing right, it’s clear to see why his actions have had so much influence on society today. Hopefully, we can all progress at our crafts like he has and help each other to become better every day to make a difference in each other’s lives.