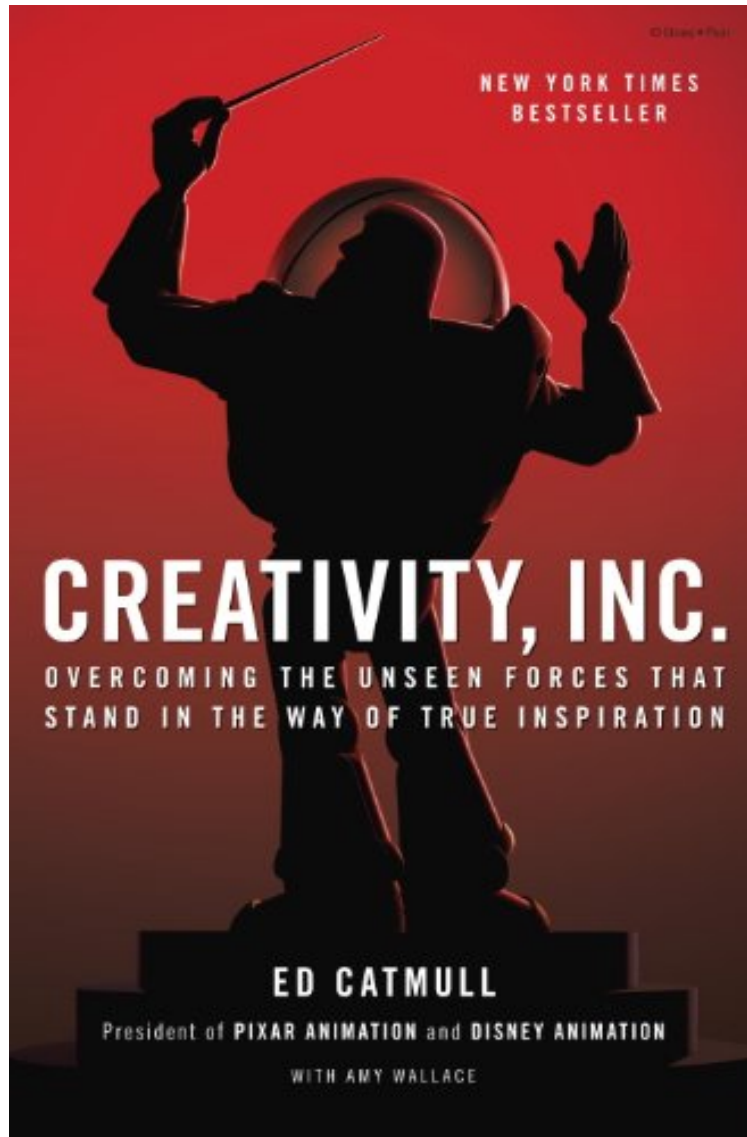


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Creativity, Inc.: Overcoming the Unseen Forces That Stand in the Way of True Inspiration

Ed Catmull, Amy Wallace

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Ed Catmull, Amy Wallace : Creativity, Inc.: Overcoming the Unseen Forces That Stand in the Way of True Inspiration before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Creativity, Inc.: Overcoming the Unseen Forces That Stand in the Way of True Inspiration:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Wonderful - especially to a practitioner of LeanBy Jason StokesI love this book. Catmull's approach to leadership is humble, people respecting, and focused on delivering value for everyone involved. As someone who practices and tries to live Lean - this is refreshing for a CEO. He is fully

cognizant of the fact that others have helped him to his place, and he wouldn't be successful without all the people who work for him. I took copious notes as takeaways from this book, have thought extensively about how to implement some of this in my organization, and even went so far as to buy a copy for the CEO of my company. This should be required reading for all business leaders, especially those who want to encourage the intelligence and creativity of their staff. Wonderfully done.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. borrowing Good to Great language

By Silenlight

In Creativity Inc. — a leadership classic in the making — co-founder and president of Pixar and Disney Animation Studios, Ed Catmull, takes us through the struggles and the secrets of what made Pixar and more recently, Disney Animation Studios, organizations that inspire creativity, collaboration, and excellence. Catmull is not your typical Silicon Valley executive. He has a PhD in Physics, is curious and open minded, and above all, comes across as a man more interested in creative challenges than the promises of safe harbor. He began his journey with one dream — to follow in the pioneering footsteps of Walt Disney and make the first computer animated feature film. Catmull's engaging storytelling style brings us into the actual questions and crises he personally experienced while growing into his leadership role. He does a masterful job of brining the reader into the mind of the matter and almost invites participation. Once he achieved the dream of creating the first computer animated feature film, Toy Story, he noticed a sense of inner emptiness. Having witnessed the fruition of a life-long dream, he determined to develop as a leader who would dedicate all his energy and time to create a culture that would sustain the "magic" behind Pixar's initial success. After Toy Story, Pixar would go on to produce multiple Oscar winning box office hits. In fact, to this day, there is no film with the Pixar name on it considered a failure either financially or critically. The company's unique culture and their unrivaled success, can be attributed to the complimentary effects of Steve Jobs's business acumen, storytelling genius of former Disney animator, John Lasseter, and Ed Catmull's executive leadership. Throughout the book, Catmull emphasizes the one guiding principle that shaped every other decision he tried to implement at Pixar and Disney: "Good ideas come from anywhere." Hence, to create a culture where candor was the norm, he tirelessly labored to remove barriers that instilled fear and short-circuited communication among employees. Constantly asking questions and probing the way they did business, Catmull is perhaps, borrowing Good to Great language, what I would consider a Level 6 leader. He is humble, caring, trusting, and brutally honest. I classified him as a 6 due to the fact that he seemed to have been successful at reproducing the Pixar culture at a fledgling Disney Animation Studios, which he and John Lasseter took over in 2004. They were largely responsible for the sea change at Disney, which had not produced a box office hit in more than fifteen years, until the release of Tangled and Frozen. He took a micromanaged Disney Animation Studio and liberated the talent they had, by changing both the physical and invisible architectures of the workplace. Catmull did for Disney what one of the Pixar directors said Steve Jobs did for them, he was the "creative firewall." Catmull asserts, "while experimentation is scary to many, I would argue that we should be far more terrified of the opposite approach. Being too risk-averse causes many companies to stop innovating and to reject new ideas, which is the first step on the path to irrelevance." Many leaders would agree with this statement but very few would go out of their way to remove what are considered "privileges" that distance leadership from the common workers, such as corner offices, personal parking spots, and so on. When Catmull moved into his Disney office, the first thing he and Lasseter did was tear down their very distinguished executive suites and converted them into community rooms in exchange for offices in the center of activity. Catmull's story is distinct because of his dedication to what is a very common idea. Namely, that inspiration and creativity is cultivated in safe and nonhierarchical collaborative environments where people have a sense of worth and ownership. A principle basic to most, if not all leaders. But his book captures the discipline, resolve and integrity, necessary to apply the idea in a company through its birth pangs and great successes.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A phenomenal book that will completely upend your views on what really comprises Creativity

By Helen Kain

This book is captivating for its candour, transparency and wealth of wisdom. So often creativity is presented as free-floating and mysterious, demanding to be unchallenged and unfettered. The success of the culture at Pixar challenges those assumptions. This book provides a clear view into the creative process at Pixar, with its unflinching attention to detail and excellence, its processes of reworking, rewriting and reworking again; encouraging risks, acknowledging mistakes, throwing out what doesn't work. The lessons on the leadership and culture at Pixar are even more compelling: ferocious about producing the highest quality product, but not at the expense of belittling people. It's inspirational and humbling all at the same time. A must read.

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER | NAMED ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR BY | The Huffington Post | Financial Times | Success | Inc. | Library Journal

From Ed Catmull, co-founder (with Steve Jobs and John Lasseter) of Pixar Animation Studios, the Academy Award-winning studio behind Inside Out and Toy Story, comes an incisive book about creativity in business and leadership — sure to appeal to readers of Daniel Pink, Tom Peters, and Chip and Dan Heath. Fast Company raves that Creativity, Inc. "just might be the most thoughtful management book ever." Creativity, Inc. is a book for managers who want to lead their employees to new heights, a manual for anyone who strives for originality, and the first-ever, all-

access trip into the nerve center of Pixar Animation—into the meetings, postmortems, and “Braintrust” sessions where some of the most successful films in history are made. It is, at heart, a book about how to build a creative culture—but it is also, as Pixar co-founder and president Ed Catmull writes, “an expression of the ideas that I believe make the best in us possible.” For nearly twenty years, Pixar has dominated the world of animation, producing such beloved films as the Toy Story trilogy, Monsters, Inc., Finding Nemo, The Incredibles, WALL-E, and Inside Out, which have gone on to set box-office records and garner thirty Academy Awards. The joyousness of the storytelling, the inventive plots, the emotional authenticity: In some ways, Pixar movies are an object lesson in what creativity really is. Here, in this book, Catmull reveals the ideals and techniques that have made Pixar so widely admired—and so profitable. As a young man, Ed Catmull had a dream: to make the first computer-animated movie. He nurtured that dream as a Ph.D. student at the University of Utah, where many computer science pioneers got their start, and then forged a partnership with George Lucas that led, indirectly, to his founding Pixar with Steve Jobs and John Lasseter in 1986. Nine years later, Toy Story was released, changing animation forever. The essential ingredient in that movie’s success—and in the thirteen movies that followed—was the unique environment that Catmull and his colleagues built at Pixar, based on leadership and management philosophies that protect the creative process and defy convention, such as: • Give a good idea to a mediocre team, and they will screw it up. But give a mediocre idea to a great team, and they will either fix it or come up with something better. • If you don’t strive to uncover what is unseen and understand its nature, you will be ill prepared to lead. • It’s not the manager’s job to prevent risks. It’s the manager’s job to make it safe for others to take them. • The cost of preventing errors is often far greater than the cost of fixing them. • A company’s communication structure should not mirror its organizational structure. Everybody should be able to talk to anybody. Praise for Creativity, Inc. “Over more than thirty years, Ed Catmull has developed methods to root out and destroy the barriers to creativity, to marry creativity to the pursuit of excellence, and, most impressive, to sustain a culture of disciplined creativity during setbacks and success.” —Jim Collins, co-author of Built to Last and author of Good to Great “Too often, we seek to keep the status quo working. This is a book about breaking it.” —Seth Godin From the Hardcover edition.

“Just might be the best business book ever written.” —Forbes “Achieving enormous success while holding fast to the highest artistic standards is a nice trick—and Pixar, with its creative leadership and persistent commitment to innovation, has pulled it off. This book should be required reading for any manager.” —Charles Duhigg, author of The Power of Habit “Steve Jobs—not a man inclined to hyperbole when asked about the qualities of others—once described Ed Catmull as “very wise,” “very self-aware,” “really thoughtful,” “really, really smart,” and possessing “quiet strength,” all in a single interview. Any reader of Creativity, Inc., Catmull’s new book on the art of running creative companies, will have to agree. Catmull, president of both Pixar and Walt Disney Animation, has written what just might be the most thoughtful management book ever.” —Fast Company “It’s one thing to be creative; it’s entirely another—and much more rare—to build a great and creative culture. Over more than thirty years, Ed Catmull has developed methods to root out and destroy the barriers to creativity, to marry creativity to the pursuit of excellence, and, most impressive, to sustain a culture of disciplined creativity during setbacks and success. Pixar’s unrivaled record, and the joy its films have added to our lives, gives his method the most important validation: It works.” —Jim Collins, co-author of Built to Last and author of Good to Great “Too often, we seek to keep the status quo working. This is a book about breaking it.” —Seth Godin “What is the secret to making more of the good stuff? Every so often Hollywood embraces a book that it senses might provide the answer. . . . Catmull’s book is quickly becoming the latest bible for the show business crowd.” —The New York Times “The most practical and deep book ever written by a practitioner on the topic of innovation.” —Prof. Gary P. Pisano, Harvard Business School “Business gurus love to tell stories about Pixar, but this is our first chance to hear the real story from someone who lived it and led it. Everyone interested in managing innovation—or just good managing—needs to read this book.” —Chip Heath, co-author of Switch and Decisive “A fascinating story about how some very smart people built something that profoundly changed the animation business and, along the way, popular culture. . . . [Creativity, Inc.] is a well-told tale, full of detail about an interesting, intricate business. For fans of Pixar films, it’s a must-read. For fans of management books, it belongs on the “value added” shelf.” —The Wall Street Journal “Pixar uses technology only as a means to an end; its films are rooted in human concerns, not computer wizardry. The same can be said of Creativity Inc., Ed Catmull’s endearingly thoughtful explanation of how the studio he co-founded generated hits such as the Toy Story trilogy, Up and Wall-E. . . . [Catmull] uses Pixar’s triumphs and near-disasters to outline a system for managing people in creative businesses—one in which candid criticism is delivered sensitively, while individuality and autonomy are not strangled by a robotic corporate culture.” —Financial Times “A wonderful new book. . . . Unlike most books written by founders,

this isn't some myth-heavy legacy project—it's far closer to a blueprint. Catmull takes us inside the Pixar ecosystem and shows how they build and refine excellence, in revelatory detail. . . . If you do creative work, you should read it, now."—Daniel Coyle, author of *The Talent Code* "A superb debut intended for managers in all fields of endeavor . . . He takes readers inside candid discussions and retreats at which participants, assuming the early versions of movies are bad, explore ways to improve them. Unusually rich in ideas, insights and experiences, the book celebrates the benefits of an open, nurturing work environment. An immensely readable and rewarding book that will challenge and inspire readers to make their workplaces hotbeds of creativity."—Kirkus (starred review) "Punctuated with surprising tales of how the company's films were developed and the company's financial struggles, Catmull shares insights about harnessing talent, creating teams, protecting the creative process, candid communications, organizational structures, alignment, and the importance of storytelling. . . . [Creativity, Inc.] will delight and inspire creative individuals and their managers, as well as anyone who wants to work in an environment that fosters creativity and problem solving."—Publishers Weekly (starred review) "For anyone managing anything, and particularly those trying to manage creative teams, Catmull is like a kind, smart godfather guiding us toward managing wisely, without losing our souls, and in a way that works toward greatness. Perhaps it's all up from there."—The Christian Science Monitor "Many have attempted to formulate and categorize inspiration and creativity. What Ed Catmull shares instead is his astute experience that creativity isn't strictly a well of ideas, but an alchemy of people. In *Creativity, Inc.* Ed reveals, with commonsense specificity and honesty, examples of how not to get in your own way and how to realize a creative coalescence of art, business, and innovation."—George Lucas "This is the best book ever written on what it takes to build a creative organization. It is the best because Catmull's wisdom, modesty, and self-awareness fill every page. He shows how Pixar's greatness results from connecting the specific little things they do (mostly things that anyone can do in any organization) to the big goal that drives everyone in the company: making films that make them feel proud of one another."—Robert I. Sutton, Stanford professor and author of *The No A**hole Rule* and co-author of *Scaling Up Excellence* About the Author Ed Catmull is co-founder of Pixar Animation Studios and president of Pixar Animation and Disney Animation. He has been honored with five Academy Awards, including the Gordon E. Sawyer Award for lifetime achievement in the field of computer graphics. He received his Ph.D. in computer science from the University of Utah. He lives in San Francisco with his wife and children. Amy Wallace is a journalist whose work has appeared in *GQ*, *The New Yorker*, *Wired*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *The New York Times Magazine*. She currently serves as editor-at-large at *Los Angeles Times* magazine. Previously, she worked as a reporter and editor at the *Los Angeles Times* and wrote a monthly column for *The New York Times Sunday Business* section. She lives in Los Angeles. Excerpt. copy; Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. Chapter 1 Animated For thirteen years we had a table in the large conference room at Pixar that we call West One. Though it was beautiful, I grew to hate this table. It was long and skinny, like one of those things you'd see in a comedy sketch about an old wealthy couple that sits down for dinner—shy; one person at either end, a candelabra in the middle—shy; and has to shout to make conversation. The table had been chosen by a designer Steve Jobs liked, and it was elegant, all right—shy; but it impeded our work. We'd hold regular meetings about our movies around that table—shy; thirty of us facing off in two long lines, often with more people seated along the walls—shy; and everyone was so spread out that it was difficult to communicate. For those unlucky enough to be seated at the far ends, ideas didn't flow because it was nearly impossible to make eye contact without craning your neck. Moreover, because it was important that the director and producer of the film in question be able to hear what everyone was saying, they had to be placed at the center of the table. So did Pixar's creative leaders: John Lasseter, Pixar's creative officer, and me, and a handful of our most experienced directors, producers, and writers. To ensure that these people were always seated together, someone began making place cards. We might as well have been at a formal dinner party. When it comes to creative inspiration, job titles and hierarchy are meaningless. That's what I believe. But unwittingly, we were allowing this table—shy; and the resulting place card ritual—shy; to send a different message. The closer you were seated to the middle of the table, it implied, the more important—shy; the more central—shy; you must be. And the farther away, the less likely you were to speak up—shy; your distance from the heart of the conversation made participating feel intrusive. If the table was crowded, as it often was, still more people would sit in chairs around the edges of the room, creating yet a third tier of participants (those at the center of the table, those at the ends, and those not at the table at all). Without intending to, we'd created an obstacle that discouraged people from jumping in. Over the course of a decade, we held countless meetings around this table in this way—shy; completely unaware of how doing so undermined our own core principles. Why were we blind to this? Because the seating arrangements and place cards were designed for the convenience of the leaders, including me. Sincerely believing that we were in an inclusive meeting, we saw nothing amiss because we didn't feel excluded. Those not sitting at the center of the table, meanwhile, saw quite clearly how it established a pecking order but presumed that we—shy; the leaders—shy; had intended that outcome. Who were they, then, to complain? It wasn't until we happened to have a meeting in a smaller room with a square table that John and I realized what

was wrong. Sitting around that table, the interplay was better, the exchange of ideas more free-flowing, the eye contact automatic. Every person there, no matter their job title, felt free to speak up. This was not only what we wanted, it was a fundamental Pixar belief: Unhindered communication was key, no matter what your position. At our long, skinny table, comfortable in our middle seats, we had utterly failed to recognize that we were behaving contrary to that basic tenet. Over time, we'd fallen into a trap. Even though we were conscious that a room's dynamics are critical to any good discussion, even though we believed that we were constantly on the lookout for problems, our vantage point blinded us to what was right before our eyes. Emboldened by this new insight, I went to our facilities department. "Please," I said, "I don't care how you do it, but get that table out of there." I wanted something that could be arranged into a more intimate square, so people could address each other directly and not feel like they didn't matter. A few days later, as a critical meeting on an upcoming movie approached, our new table was installed, solving the problem. Still, interestingly, there were remnants of that problem that did not immediately vanish just because we'd solved it. For example, the next time I walked into West One, I saw the brand-new table, arranged as requested in a more intimate square that made it possible for more people to interact at once. But the table was adorned with the same old place cards! While we'd fixed the key problem that had made place cards seem necessary, the cards themselves had become a tradition that would continue until we specifically dismantled it. This wasn't as troubling an issue as the table itself, but it was something we had to address because cards implied hierarchy, and that was precisely what we were trying to avoid. When Andrew Stanton, one of our directors, entered the meeting room that morning, he grabbed several place cards and began randomly moving them around, narrating as he went. "We don't need these anymore!" he said in a way that everyone in the room grasped. Only then did we succeed in eliminating this ancillary problem. This is the nature of management. Decisions are made, usually for good reasons, which in turn prompt other decisions. So when problems arise and they always do, disentangling them is not as simple as correcting the original error. Often, finding a solution is a multi-step endeavor. There is the problem you know you are trying to solve; think of that as an oak tree; and then there are all the other problems; think of these as saplings; that sprouted from the acorns that fell around it. And these problems remain after you cut the oak tree down. Even after all these years, I'm often surprised to find problems that have existed right in front of me, in plain sight. For me, the key to solving these problems is finding ways to see what's working and what isn't, which sounds a lot simpler than it is. Pixar today is managed according to this principle, but in a way I've been searching all my life for better ways of seeing. It began decades before Pixar even existed. When I was a kid, I used to plunk myself down on the living room floor of my family's modest Salt Lake City home a few minutes before 7 p.m. every Sunday and wait for Walt Disney. Specifically, I'd wait for him to appear on our black-and-white RCA with its tiny 12-inch screen. Even from a dozen feet away; the accepted wisdom at the time was that viewers should put one foot between them and the TV for every inch of screen; I was transfixed by what I saw. Each week, Walt Disney himself opened the broadcast of The Wonderful World of Disney. Standing before me in suit and tie, like a kindly neighbor, he would demystify the Disney magic. He'd explain the use of synchronized sound in Steamboat Willie or talk about the importance of music in Fantasia. He always went out of his way to give credit to his forebears, the men; and, at this point, they were all men; who'd done the pioneering work upon which he was building his empire. He'd introduce the television audience to trailblazers such as Max Fleischer, of Koko the Clown and Betty Boop fame, and Winsor McCay, who made Gertie the Dinosaur; the first animated film to feature a character that expressed emotion; in 1914. He'd gather a group of his animators, colorists, and storyboard artists to explain how they made Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck come to life. Each week, Disney created a made-up world, used cutting-edge technology to enable it, and then told us how he'd done it. Walt Disney was one of my two boyhood idols. The other was Albert Einstein. To me, even at a young age, they represented the two poles of creativity. Disney was all about inventing the new. He brought things into being; both artistically and technologically; that did not exist before. Einstein, by contrast, was a master of explaining that which already was. I read every Einstein biography I could get my hands on as well as a little book he wrote on his theory of relativity. I loved how the concepts he developed forced people to change their approach to physics and matter, to view the universe from a different perspective. Wild-haired and iconic, Einstein dared to bend the implications of what we thought we knew. He solved the biggest puzzles of all and, in doing so, changed our understanding of reality. Both Einstein and Disney inspired me, but Disney affected me more because of his weekly visits to my family's living room. "When you wish upon a star, makes no difference who you are," his TV show's theme song would announce as a baritone-voiced narrator promised: "Each week, as you enter this timeless land, one of these many worlds will open to you" Then the narrator would tick them off: Frontierland ("tall tales and true from the legendary past"), Tomorrowland ("the promise of things to come"), Adventureland ("the wonder world of nature's own realm"), and Fantasyland ("the happiest kingdom of them all"). I loved the idea that animation could take me places I'd never been. But the land I most wanted to learn about was the one occupied by the innovators at Disney who

made these animated films. Between 1950 and 1955, Disney made three movies we consider classics today: Cinderella, Peter Pan, and Lady and the Tramp. More than half a century later, we all remember the glass slipper, the Island of Lost Boys, and that scene where the cocker spaniel and the mutt slurp spaghetti. But few grasp how technically sophisticated these movies were. Disney's animators were at the forefront of applied technology; instead of merely using existing methods, they were inventing ones of their own. They had to develop the tools to perfect sound and color, to use blue screen matting and multi-plane cameras and xerography. Every time some technological breakthrough occurred, Walt Disney incorporated it and then talked about it on his show in a way that highlighted the relationship between technology and art. I was too young to realize such a synergy was groundbreaking. To me, it just made sense that they belonged together. Watching Disney one Sunday evening in April of 1956, I experienced something that would define my professional life. What exactly it was is difficult to describe except to say that I felt something fall into place inside my head. That night's episode was called "Where Do the Stories Come From?" and Disney kicked it off by praising his animators' knack for turning everyday occurrences into cartoons. That night, though, it wasn't Disney's explanation that pulled me in but what was happening on the screen as he spoke. An artist was drawing Donald Duck, giving him a jaunty costume and a bouquet of flowers and a box of candy with which to woo Daisy. Then, as the artist's pencil moved around the page, Donald came to life, putting up his dukes to square off with the pencil lead, then raising his chin to allow the artist to give him a bow tie. The definition of superb animation is that each character on the screen makes you believe it is a thinking being. Whether it's a T-Rex or a slinky dog or a desk lamp, if viewers sense not just movement but intention; or, put another way, emotion; then the animator has done his or her job. It's not just lines on paper anymore; it's a living, feeling entity. This is what I experienced that night, for the first time, as I watched Donald leap off the page. The transformation from a static line drawing to a fully dimensional, animated image was sleight of hand, nothing more, but the mystery of how it was done; not just the technical process but the way the art was imbued with such emotion; was the most interesting problem I'd ever considered. I wanted to climb through the TV screen and be part of this world. The mid-1950s and early 1960s were, of course, a time of great prosperity and industry in the United States. Growing up in Utah in a tight-knit Mormon community, my four younger brothers and sisters and I felt that anything was possible. Because the adults we knew had all lived through the Depression, World War II, and then the Korean War, this period felt to them like the calm after a thunderstorm. I remember the optimistic energy; an eagerness to move forward that was enabled and supported by a wealth of emerging technologies. It was boom time in America, with manufacturing and home construction at an all-time high. Banks were offering loans and credit, which meant more and more people could own a new TV, house, or Cadillac. There were amazing new appliances like disposals that ate your garbage and machines that washed your dishes, although I certainly did my share of cleaning them by hand. The first organ transplants were performed in 1954; the first polio vaccine came a year later; in 1956, the term artificial intelligence entered the lexicon. The future, it seemed, was already here. Then, when I was twelve, the Soviets launched the first artificial satellite; Sputnik 1; into Earth's orbit. This was huge news, not just in the scientific and political realms but in my sixth grade classroom at school, where the morning routine was interrupted by a visit from the principal, whose grim expression told us that our lives had changed forever. Since we'd been taught that the Communists were the enemy and that nuclear war could be waged at the touch of a button, the fact that they'd beaten us into space seemed pretty scary; proof that they had the upper hand. The United States government's response to being bested was to create something called ARPA, or the Advanced Research Projects Agency. Though it was housed within the Defense Department, its mission was ostensibly peaceful: to support scientific researchers in America's universities in the hopes of preventing what it termed "technological surprise." By sponsoring our best minds, the architects of ARPA believed, we'd come up with better answers. Looking back, I still admire that enlightened reaction to a serious threat: "We'll just have to get smarter." ARPA would have a profound effect on America, leading directly to the computer revolution and the Internet, among countless other innovations. There was a sense that big things were happening in America, with much more to come. Life was full of possibility. Still, while my family was middle-class, our outlook was shaped by my father's upbringing. Not that he talked about it much. Earl Catmull, the son of an Idaho dirt farmer, was one of fourteen kids, five of whom had died as infants. His mother, raised by Mormon pioneers who made a meager living panning for gold in the Snake River in Idaho, didn't attend school until she was 11. My father was the first in his family ever to go to college, paying his own way by working several jobs. During my childhood, he taught math during the school year and built houses during the summers. He built our house from the ground up. While he never explicitly said that education was paramount, my siblings and I all knew we were expected to study hard and go to college.