

## Shawn Krause Episode

**Shawn Krause:** And one of the unique things about Pixar is that you show your shot to the room, and you talk directly to the director and try to present your ideas about what we're trying to do. That's something that we've done since toy story. That's a very rewarding way of working as an animator because you really get to show what you want to do. Someone's not telling you don't do that.

[00:00:19] **Bryan Smith:** Bryan Smith here and welcome to the dream path podcast, where I try to get inside the heads of talented creatives from all over the world. My goal is to demystify and humanize the creative process and make it accessible to everyone. Now let's jump in. Hey folks, Sean Krause is on the show. Sean began his career as an animator at Pixar and Sean's first feature at Pixar happened to be Pixar's first feature as well. A little film you may have heard about called *Toy Story*. Sean could have left the movie business forever after *Toy Story* and his career would have been considered amazing, but he kept going of course, as great artists do.

[00:01:00] And he went on to animate the most culturally defining films of the nineties and two thousands, including *A Bug's Life*, *Toy Story 2*, *Monsters Inc*, *Finding Nemo*, *The Incredibles*, *Cars*, *Finding Dory*, and *Soul*. He also led the entire animation team on *Cars 2*, *Inside Out* and *Up*, which was the first animated, 3D film to open the Cannes film festival. *Up* also won the academy award for best animated feature and was nominated for best picture.

[00:01:30] I think I've seen every one of Sean's films in a movie theater with my kids laughing and sometimes even crying at the incredible stories. These films brought to the big screen during Sean's tenure at Pixar. He also oversaw the animation production on several Pixar attractions at Disney theme parks.

[00:01:48] Along the way he picked up a visual effects society award as the lead animator on the character, Joy from *Inside Out* and became a member of the academy of motion, picture arts and sciences in 2020, Sean left Pixar to join Spire animation studios as creative director, where he's working on a number of exciting projects, including an animated feature with Danny McBride called *Trouble*.

[00:02:13] If you listened to my interview with Sean's colleague at Spire Michael Surrey, which launched a few days ago, you've probably already surmised that it's animator week on the podcast. And I don't think I could have picked two more talented animators to have on the show. So, without further ado, let's jump into my chat with Sean Kraus. Sean Krauss, welcome to dream path podcast.

[00:02:34] **Shawn Krause:** Thanks so much. I wish I had a cool microphone like that.

[00:02:38] **Bryan Smith:** Oh, yeah, I just, I just got this thing a couple of weeks ago and before, I mean, I've been doing this a couple of years and I've always had this trusty little hundred-dollar mic and it's worked wonderfully, but I decided to upgrade. And now it looks like this monstrosity on here, my face, but-

[00:02:57] No no it's great.

[00:02:58] **Shawn Krause:** It sounds so much better. We work with a guy on the rigging side of things and. We drove with him. Cause it sounds good podcast until we talk to him with a load, you get this great sultry voice.

[00:03:07] **Bryan Smith:** He's got that radio DJ voice.

[00:03:09] **Shawn Krause:** Exactly. Yeah.

[00:03:11] **Bryan Smith:** Yeah, I'm trying to look and sound legit as much as possible these days, so.

[00:03:15] **Shawn Krause:** I like the guitar collection too, by the way.

[00:03:18] **Bryan Smith:** Oh, thank you. Yeah. I try to try to have a backdrop that is a little more interesting than my blank wall or maybe my linen closet.

[00:03:27] **Shawn Krause:** Yeah. I moved out of my office, my makeshift office, because we're all working from home. I had to come in and meet in the living room because I basically did my laundry room up with a curtain.

[00:03:37] Yeah. So, we, so it wouldn't be like, you could, and see, I had to turn my whole office, the other way towards the wall was going to be too much work. So, you know, so.

[00:03:45] **Bryan Smith:** Yeah. So where is home for you?

[00:03:47] **Shawn Krause:** Up in the bay area in Lafayette, California, highway 24 across the bay bridge and went straight out to the tunnel.

[00:03:54] It's about 20 minutes Northeast of that.

[00:03:57] **Bryan Smith:** So, how was it working away from the hub of Los Angeles?

[00:04:02] **Shawn Krause:** Well, I've only been up here my whole career. Yeah. So, that's all I know, but I, but I mean, we're going to move down there cause we're going to put our studio down there. But, but yeah, so I, you know, I came out, I grew up in the Midwest, grew up in St. Louis. And so when I, when I came out, I was in LA and then came up to the bay area. Pixar was basically my first job. And so it was almost like when I would tell people about my experience being at Cal Arts, Later in life because they would, a lot of people would go, high school in the, and I I'd say, "oh God, I'm so jealous because you got to go right into it, you know?"

[00:04:35] And they'd say, I'm so jealous of you. You gotta, you gotta a regular, degree. And then you went into the, to the art. So it was a bit like that with Pixar where I feel like in a way I'm, again, kind of jealous of them in some ways, because they all had great experiences and stories and they knew, you know, they knew the industry, they knew each other, they bounced around a lot.

[00:04:56] And I, on the other hand have the great fortune of being in one place that was fantastic. And it worked out great. So, I stayed there, but it was like, you can't go back and relive it, but, you know, I feel very fortunate, but I, I feel like. I wish I would have had those stories during that era too, you know.

[00:05:12] **Bryan Smith:** Yeah.

[00:05:13] **Shawn Krause:** Can't have it all, I guess.

[00:05:15] **Bryan Smith:** What an amazing confluence of events to allow you to start at Pixar really at ground zero in terms of maybe not exactly ground zero, but pretty darn close to it with toy story. And when I think of Pixar, that's the immediate image that comes into my mind toy story, which is a culturally defining movie for this country. And for this world, I think.

[00:05:37] **Shawn Krause:** I agree, and I feel very lucky to have happened, to line up right at that moment. Cause I like you; I could say it because I think again, I feel like it was a stroke of luck, but it is, it's kind of like a Snow White moment where it really, really was a very defining moment in especially animated films.

[00:05:55] So, yeah, I mean, I, I came in and I remember I had always, I had always wanted to work at, Disney for years, my whole life. And my teacher was an animator. Larry White was my teacher at, at Cal arts when I was there. And it was really striking to me. He showed me the short films that Pixar had done in, in our class one or not needed.

[00:06:18] Our whole class showed us the short films and, and like a lightning bolt. I went, that's where I want to work. And it was crazy to me because I'd never dreamed, I'd ever want to work anywhere else, but it was, it struck me as just the freshness of it. It was, it was a combination in my mind of the Muppets meets Warner Brothers meets Disney and it had all, it just had a really fresh take on things in my mind. So, I was then focused on that. And so when I got into the producer show at CalArts and Pete Doctors said, Hey, I'd like to meet. I was like, giddy. I, you know, I mean, because I just was such a fan of even the work they had done. And I knew nothing about *Toy Story* when I came up.

[00:06:58] **Bryan Smith:** So, in terms of the craft of animation, when you came into Pixar, was it completely transforming at that moment in time in terms of CG and the way that animation was being produced? Or were you still in this old school? Because I just had the pleasure of talking to Michael Surrey this morning. And I asked him this question about, you know, in the eighties, when he was starting to do animation, how different was it from the animation that was done in the forties and fifties? And basically, his answer was not much in terms of, you know, thousands and thousands of images to make up like a five second frame.

[00:07:36] And it would take weeks to do it. So, when you started at Pixar, how was the technology changing in terms of computers and the way that you approach a five second frame of footage?

[00:07:48] **Shawn Krause:** Well, I think, well, most of us, probably everybody started at that time. We had to learn how to draw a traditional style, like 2d animation.

[00:07:57] So we had a real strong grounding in that. I mean, I'd only done it, you know, with school for about a year, but I, when I was a kid, I would draw out a flip book and I would experiment. I had the, a, that *Illusion of Life* book that everyone has that, Frank Thompson, Allie Goss wrote, you know, about their time at Disney and how they, they formed the principles of animation.

[00:08:18] They put that in there. So, we were using all of the picks are really looked. To them to, to, you know, stand on their shoulders to kind of bring that into the, into the computer. And I think the biggest change that what Pixar was doing that, that made the biggest difference was they were adopting those principles, and I mean, I'm just animation wise. The biggest change was that. Squash and stretch and retaining volume and giving that elasticity that illusion of life to characters that I don't know if I'd seen done in that way. You know, *Jurassic Park* had used the kind of creature animation, but it really didn't have that exact in my mind.

[00:08:56] I hadn't seen anything else that had done a really exaggerated, you know, Disney-esque way of approaching animation. So, what got me was that, you know, I, again, I had done it for like a year. I worked at a small company called Creative Capers for about three months. They were wonderful to give me my first break into a real job.

[00:09:15] And, I was doing, doing CD rom games. If you remember those, you know, drawing that, and if you made one post change, one post you had to re animate all the in-betweens. And that was, you know, it was really a lot of work. So when I came up and I remember, one of the animators showing me, give me a demo on how it, how it works in the computer and when he had the ball there and then you move the ball up and down and change, you know, the height of it would squash it or change the timing of it and then pull a camera around.

[00:09:45] I was a little bit like "I'm in." Because for free. So, I think we, you know, we tried to hold on to all the, All the principles and the ways of looking at animation that a traditional animator would I, and I, I think with the computer, the difference was it's easy to. One of the pitfalls. It's easy to look at these characters, especially when they're designed so beautifully and just move them around and think "done."

[00:10:11] You know, it's like, it's all it looks great, you know? And, but you're not thinking about the pose all the time. You kind of have to force yourself to plus it or break something in a different way to make it look like a graphic representation for a stronger silhouette or a stronger pose. And then the other thing that can be challenging is, under the hood, when we're doing things, when you look at the arc of the bouncing ball going up and down, you would have, in the computer, a bell curve to describe that, that, that, movement, you know, and if you had had to be a lighter ball, that would be like a, a bell curve with, like a really smooth top and then a sharp bottom.

[00:10:49] And if you looked at it with a heavier ball would be the opposite. And so. You would look at those things and feel it out when you watched it, but you ha, you have to really think about the frame visually like a traditional animator would to think of spacing because the spacing has such a huge impact on the, the feeling of something as well.

[00:11:07] So you can't just always rely on how does these arcs for these. Linear representations of movement over time look, you want to really think about what am I seeing and how am I supposed to, how can I make that more impactful? So, that's just two ways. I think that I would point out, you know, out of the gate that we were, we were trying to adopt and put into what we were doing.

[00:11:28] **Bryan Smith:** Yeah. And since that time, I mean, today for animators. Getting into the business. Are they still going to have to come in with that same core foundation of drawing skills and understanding anatomy and the basics of drawing as much as they did back then? Or is it different now?

[00:11:45] **Shawn Krause:** Well, I think that, you know, that's always great. That's a huge plus to having drawing is fundamental. I think it's just going to make their work even that much stronger or someone coming into it. But I think, you know, kind of, unfortunately, You don't have to be as strongly draftsman now because you don't, it's all it's there. You just want to be informed about what you're doing, that you did, that you're doing these things, you're posing these characters with the same thought process as you would, if you were drawing it.

[00:12:17] **Bryan Smith:** Yeah.

[00:12:18] **Shawn Krause:** And again, the pitfalls you fall into a shape like, oh, the hands are separated. That's great. No, I want to move this to look better in a graphic way to say something more. I want to elongate something that fingers or a hand or a, you know, whatever it is to, to feel like I would draw it. It's a choice, you know. So even now we can draw over our work. If we're looking at our animation in a computer, you look on the screen and you can draw over what you're doing, and I find that a lot of times, if I'm animating something, I'll block it in with the, with the 3d character.

[00:12:51] And then I might draw over something that's more of an elaborate movement or process because. It's a little more freeing. It doesn't take as much time. You can kind of get the gestural idea, but what's also interesting is that you'll get happy accidents sometimes with the computer character and you'll get interesting accidents, or you'll find yourself approaching it in a different way because you're drawing versus moving a three-dimensional object in space.

[00:13:17] So, it's nice to bounce between the two. So, I, I still do use bits of what I learned. And again, you know, Mike, you talked earlier is a brilliant draftsman and a brilliant animator. I never had to do timing charts like he would do with animation. I never had to. Draw that well, to keep a character on model, I never got into it.

[00:13:36] Cause I, again, I, I didn't need to day to day. And if you're not drawing like that day to day, you know, that's, that's what gets you so good at? You're just constantly doing it. It's like playing guitar with me, right? You can just get better and better.

[00:13:49] **Bryan Smith:** Right. So, is it still just as time consuming, but just in a different way to create that five seconds of screen time or is much faster because of computers?

[00:13:59] **Shawn Krause:** I think it just depends on what you're doing. If you're doing *Cars*. It's probably a lot faster because it's, I think it's a lot trickier to hand draw a vehicle or something as rigid in 2D. Conversely, if you're doing organic characters, fish, people, it might be easier to just draw it by hand because it's all there where you have to force something that is very rigid or con or plastic to want to be organic.

[00:14:25] And when you're using computer graphics. So, there's a balance, you know, and I think at the end of the day, it doesn't. We don't see that much time, because even we would go back and pick when I was at Pixar and look at "how long did it take to render a frame from *Toy Story 1*? How many times, much time does it take to render a frame from *Coco*?

[00:14:42] And it kind of is the same, if not slower, because at every advancement of the technology we would go further with what we want, what we could do or what we wanted to do. So you're always pushing the limits of what you can get done and, you know, ultimately things are getting faster. It's just what we, what are we throwing at that, that that rendering time or that image?

[00:15:01] **Bryan Smith:** Right. And this is an observation I've made specifically about toy story because of an event I went to at Sundance maybe 10 years ago with Andrew Stanton and Andrew was on the stage and it was like some forum Q&A thing, and Andrew was talking about the story development for *Toy Story* and how long it took, like just how painstaking it was to go through one hour and a half, two hour film, years. I mean, you're talking about years of story development. Yeah. And I noticed, I think between *Toy Story* one and two, I think it was like four years. You have this winning franchise, but it takes that long to actually nail it. When did you, as an animator start to get tuned into the story side of things?

[00:15:49] **Shawn Krause:** Well, you know, you're always at Cal arts, we were doing our own films, so we're, we were in it out of the gate. You know, we're always thinking of that. I think when it came down to more was, I was drawn to the performance side of things, and it's all rooted in character. It's all rooted in storytelling, right?

[00:16:06] But that's what I like to see in my work on the screen. And I like seeing the performance, getting a reaction from the audience and knowing I did that, and it got a reaction here. I made them cry. I made the, you made the, made them laugh. But as I went on and I explored that quite a bit, it was more when I stepped into a leadership role on, on *Up*.

[00:16:25] And then, you know, as I progressed up to *Inside Out*, the more you're in that world and the more you right. You're thinking on a, on a higher level and you're, and you're seeing your contribution on a, on a broader scope you're being, you know, in other you're

invited to other meetings, you start to then become interested in other things and other aspects of filmmaking.

[00:16:46] And so I really started to be a lot more curious about that to the point where, you know, I'd asked to be, you know, involved with story a bit more. And so I got a little bit of a chance to kind of. You know, getting the story room a little bit and, and see what that's about and, and try my hand at that before I left.

[00:17:02] So it was, it was later definitely. It was midway through my career, I guess you'd say like on *Up*, I started to be more nearing that way.

[00:17:10] **Bryan Smith:** Yeah, *Up* for me, I think was a turning point in animation in terms of like, well, I mean, *Toy Story*, I think was a turning point from the standpoint of a parent who attends the film to please their child and then is surprised by how moving the film was, and it's like, actually, this is an adult film, just as much as a kid film. But *Up* seems like it really was a game changer. In terms of like just raising the bar for how incredible a story can be and how you've got you're looking around the theater and there's like adults just like trying to hold back their tears and, you know, it just taps into so, so much nostalgia and so much about, you know, the existential crisis and you know, how short our lives are.

[00:17:57] But at the time that you were working on that film, did you realize that it was going to be a game changer in animation?

[00:18:07] **Shawn Krause:** No, I mean, I didn't, I guess it was such a string of films that had already done that a bit like *Toy Story 2*, even, you know, like they're asking these questions about, on one level, but they have this dual meaning to them that that's always been kind of in the mix.

[00:18:23] So, you know, that was just, I think just a wonderful experience. It's so many great things happen. It was such a great time, you know, for all of us working with your best friends there. So, it was just fun to see it happen. And I think that was the whole time that I was at Pixar because every film was just a joy to be involved with and the bravery and the luxury of being able to take those risks for these, the directors and writers, when they were doing these things, to be able to be around and be a part of that and to contribute to those, to those things was just a real honor and, and fun. Just so much fun.

[00:18:59] **Bryan Smith:** Did you ever think as an animator that you would be working on films that would be nominated for academy awards when you first started your career?

[00:19:07] **Shawn Krause:** No, I was thinking about the other day, because you know, we were talking about doing this and it was like, all I wanted to do is this, I love growing up with Warner brothers cartoons and Disney cartoons, and I thought that's so much fun, and I always gravitate towards drawing. I was gravitated towards, you know, that kind of thing. And so I just, when I came out, I thought I'll be lucky to get a job, but I'll be happy. You know, when I moved out to land at a place and have *Toy Story*, be the first film that I got to work on them was just mind blowing and, So, no, I did not. And that was never in, in the, in my back of my head at all.

[00:19:43] **Bryan Smith:** I see. That *Up* was to show it Cannes. And did you go to Cannes or what was that?

[00:19:50] **Shawn Krause:** No, I didn't, I did not go, but it was wonderful. That was a big, that was a cool thing. Cause I think it was one of the first animated films that I know of to be there. And, and to be in that held in that regard, you know?

[00:20:03] And so I was just so happy for, for Pete Doctor and Jonas, especially because I, you know, Pete Doctor. Someone I met at Cal arts and, when we came to the Producer show, but, but Jonas, I had known Jonas when he started there, he was a producer. And we became friends like the first year and it was just fun to see him rise through the ranks.

[00:20:23] He's such a, a great person, and such a talented person and just so happy. Cause they're such good people too. And, and so that was that again, all these kinds of firsts or big, big things happen with each success of film, it was, it was just a real fun ride.

[00:20:40] **Bryan Smith:** And *Inside Out* when you were working on inside out, what were the challenges that you faced as an animator dealing with taking concepts that had never been animated before and putting them into visual form like emotions?

[00:20:56] **Shawn Krause:** It was more like, how are we the differentiate between the, the humans and then the mind characters and, you know, ultimately, we, we went to a more pushed, you know, cartoon style of, of the mind characters, but, yeah, it was this kind of test of the waters, of what can we do? What do we need to see with the effects? What do we need to see with the performance? Trying to dip our toe into making them move and react in a way that's visceral and relatable. And I think that one of the big challenges was every character from the mind characters were so distinctively different. They required a lot of work for the animation team to pose those to character, because it was a very graphic style going back to like the "how do we lean on that way of animating?" You know, Fear? His eyeballs were every time he turned his head, you had to move his eyeballs. Every time Joy turned her head, you had to move her tuft of hair on there. And one of the things we did, we took a nod from the beautiful work that, Lynchian everyone had done on *Tangled* that at, at Disney and just in awe of the appeal that they got out of those characters.

[00:22:07] So, it was our understanding that Glen Keane had drawn over a lot of the animators works to help people push it. And again, to find that balance between traditional and 3D. So Tony was at the studio. And so, we asked him to do that for us. And Tony has such a humble way of approaching this and working with the animators.

[00:22:30] So, people would send work to him, and he would kind of offer suggestions with a really make this bigger question, mark. He was very, very, collaborative and gracious and humble. And it really worked well for everyone because. It upped everyone's game. And that collaboration between what we did and what he could bring to the table was that was another element of what we did.

[00:22:57] And we use that on subsequent, every subsequent film. Now I believe, I think *Soul* even had two people doing it to help out. And so it's a great role that just, it's a nice balance between those, those skillsets.

[00:23:12] **Bryan Smith:** As you may have noticed there are great resources and advice mentioned in all our episodes. And for many of them, we actually collect all of these resources for you in one easy place. Our newsletter, you can go to [dreampathpod.com/newsletter](http://dreampathpod.com/newsletter) to join. It's not fancy, just an email about each week's episode, featured artists and resources to help you on your journey. Now back to the interview.

[00:23:37] What kind of conversations do you have with the producers and the directors about how much to make the characters look like the voice actors? Because I noticed like in *Toy Story*, I can kind of see Tom Hanks in there. And I don't know if that's just, you know, maybe it's just me and I'm imposing that or projecting that onto the character.

[00:23:57] And then, you know, other characters, obviously like a Buzz Lightyear year with Tim Allen. I mean, I dunno, it's less Tim Alan-y in terms of the visual, but what kinds of decisions are being made and why on those issues?

[00:24:10] **Shawn Krause:** Well, I think it's mostly comes to the animator, so I don't think, well, that's never been a goal of what we've done. We never really tried to do that. Occasionally, I think maybe when Phyllis Diller was doing was it was on *A Bug's Life* they might've added some flowers to her, had to do inspired by Phyllis Diller's hair. Occasionally, you know, things will come up. I think a lot, all the time, at, at Pixar they'll record the voice talent.

[00:24:37] And so some animators like to do their own reference. Some animators do thumbnail only. Sometimes they look at the voice actors doing the performance and just try to pull inspiration and ideas from anywhere you can. So, yeah. Maybe, you know, sometimes people will pull something from a performance, so it could look like Tom Hanks, or it, you know, or Tina Fey or somebody, but it's never the goal.

[00:25:01] It's never the ideas to do it that way. I, you know, I think other studios might have done that more than we did, but it, you know, what was funny to me was that I remember when people would talk about like, when people were drawing. And doing 2D animation, you had a mirror, you'd look at it and you draw the character, and it would start to look like the animator occasionally, because you're looking at the way your brows furrow, you're looking at the way you would smell your mouth.

[00:25:26] So I think those things would be reflected in a drawing and it felt weird that that would happen in 3D, but it would, it would happen with us too, because someone might talk. And do a performance and do their head this way. And it would show up and you get those movements, and you could put, oh, that animator.

[00:25:44] I know that that's like how they would do it. So those elements would creep into what we're doing as well. So, I guess it's just natural because you're looking at yourself through these things.

[00:25:54] **Bryan Smith:** Is this like a wives tale or is this true that sometimes animators will slip things into animated films that are kind of like hidden things that are kind of inside jokes or things that you wouldn't pick up on consciously.

[00:26:08] **Shawn Krause:** Yeah, I think for years, you know, going way, way back, you, you hear stories and you'd see things from other Disney films or Warner brothers days, you know, signs or characters with people that they knew. And certainly, in articles it's well known. I mean, it's throughout every film there's. You know, there's, like, maybe I think there was maybe a doll in the girls room and *Up* when the balloons go up, that was the next movie.

[00:26:30] And this movie has a car from this movie and it, you know, it's a toy, you know, so there's all these ways. We were kind of hinting at things. There's the, the number of the Cal arts school classroom. That's an all films. And so there's all kinds of those kind of inside jokes, you know, on, And *Incredibles*, you know, there at the beginning when Mr. Incredible was going through the streets, that's, I believe that's all downtown and Emeryville where Pixar is the streets he's going through. So, there's lots of little nods and winks to, oh, here's one in *Inside Out*. I remember they had a, my dad's a locksmith has, has a, a shop in St. Louis and she runs up, well, one of the first sequences we did, she runs up to a door to open the door.

[00:27:10] And I was like, oh, I wonder if on that lock, you could put, you know, the little, the graphic or the name of my dad's shop on there, because it'd be kind of like I gave him a business card just to kind of say, this is, you know, this is what it is. And I totally forgot about it. And like six months later, someone cuts comes up and says, Boy, who did you pay to get your name everywhere?

[00:27:29] And I said, what do you mean? And they said, well, we went to assess review, and then your dad's shop's everywhere. My dad's shop logo in the window and you'll see it on when, Riley and her mom are walking up the street, talking about getting pizza and then even better at the end when you're going into the minds of characters and this the cat moment.

[00:27:49] **Bryan Smith:** Yeah.

[00:27:50] **Shawn Krause:** It has my dad's logo, and it hasn't changed. It's the logo. So, people will go into the key shop in St. Louis and ask, how did your name get in there? So, it was kind of fun. So, that is one that it was nice to kind of be surprised that it would be that out there, you know?

[00:28:05] **Bryan Smith:** That's great. Yeah. Yeah. So, tell us about *Soul*. I watched it recently. I watched it with my kids, and it was just incredible. I mean, you just know you're watching something really special and *Inside Out* is the same way, a completely different world that's created. And these fantastical elements that all come together in this really incredible way to tell us about working on that project.

[00:28:27] **Shawn Krause:** Well, in that one, I was kind of bounced around a little bit. I, you know, I, I have an animation credit. I did a little bit of animation in one shot in that film. I did more of the promo directing of the promotional work, 'cause I was trying to stretch outside of what I do. And I was lucky enough to kind of shadow inside the storeroom a little bit and kind of just be a fly on the wall and see if I can learn something in there.

[00:28:48] So, you know, I think what I could speak to in that is more about just watching the way, you know, Pete Doctor and the story team come up with this and try to form this world and the conversations in the wild, what can you use? You know, cause there's so many ways of looking at things and how do you, what does death look like?

[00:29:10] Where are you going? Where are you going? What does that look like? Is that, is that unsettling? So, it's a lot, like *Inside Out* where it's sort of like, what does emotional worlds look like? What would her islands look like? And so, it's all these really big ideas. And I think the challenge comes down to how do you make it relatable? How do you make it, you know, fun, digestible, engaging, emotional, all those things?

[00:29:34] **Bryan Smith:** They're not too abstract either.

[00:29:36] **Shawn Krause:** Yeah. Yeah. And give it stakes, you know, like one of things we talked about, again, going back to the *Inside Out* was just when we're treating the characters in a really cartoony way, if you start to have them zip around like Bugs Bunny and have no consequences to how they act physically, then you're not going to have the same connection of danger when you, they get in perilous situations.

[00:29:57] So, it just one of the nice things that Pixar gets to do, and I'm sure they did it on *Soul* a lot. Was that. You keep changing things to you, get it right. You keep changing things until they work. It's not like, okay, here's a script done. Just lets us make that, you know, so, you know, Kevin Knowlton, the editor has a big part in that.

[00:30:16] He had a big part in and *Inside Out* and other films we've done. And he and Pete worked very closely together. You know, animation, story, everyone. It's a such a collaborative process. So, it's just, it's a real exploration that we're doing together.

[00:30:30] **Bryan Smith:** What does the team look like on a movie like *Soul* in terms of how many people are there, how many different departments? And, I just have no concept of what an operation looks like at Pixar for producing a film like *Soul*.

[00:30:44] **Shawn Krause:** I would say, you know, when we started on toy story, the, the animation team was about 25 people ballooned up to maybe 30. You get to the, you know, the era of *Soul*, you're over a hundred animators, over 110 animators or so, you know, working on these things that the, the dailies get to be two hours or three, you know, two hour daily is not half an hour, hour long dailies.

[00:31:05] **Bryan Smith:** What are dailies?

[00:31:06] **Shawn Krause:** Oh, sorry. Okay. Dailies are, but okay. Well, when you were showing shots in animation, one of the nice things, and again, I think it was adopted from the Disney way of doing things. Was. You would get into a, you go into the room and the animators would send their work to the main computer there and the director's there and you sit there with the director, and one of the unique things about Pixar is that you show your shot to the room, and you talk directly to the director and try to present your ideas. But what we're trying to do, you don't have to go through other leadership roles before you get to the director. That's something that we've done since *Toy Story*. And that was a very, it's a

very rewarding way of working as an animator because you really get to show what you want to do. If someone's not telling you don't do that. And it, you know, for better or worse, because certainly when you show your work on the screen, there's days it gets a big reaction, right.

[00:32:01] Or other people kind of, you know, ah, debate this, you don't want no reaction. So, yeah. Well, I guess that didn't work, you know, so, so it's, it's sweet. So, what we do is after the animators are given their, their work that would go to their offices, put it together, probably talk, you know, shoot reference, talk to fellow animators and get something there.

[00:32:24] The ready to show, and then you show it to the, to the director. And we would have, we have dailies every day, 9:00 AM when we get into the thick of production. And it's how you vet performances is how you look at it together. You look at all the shots and the content sequence to make sure things are playing well together, and that, you know, you're looking and so that, you don't do something and then you watch it with other work around it and like, oh, that totally doesn't work. As everything's going on 11 and really huge. We have, we have to have a nice flow to this are things hooking up in continuity from shot to shot.

[00:32:58] So yeah, dailies is something that we do every day with the director and we all kind of get to learn from each other, inspire, you know, and, and, and poke it things. And what's the best way to do this.

[00:33:10] **Bryan Smith:** Going back in time, a little bit here to your college days, you came from Missouri, you got an MFA, right?

[00:33:17] **Shawn Krause:** Yes.

[00:33:18] **Bryan Smith:** Did you also get another degree that I see that it was a non-art related degree?

[00:33:24] **Shawn Krause:** Oh, I, well I had a masters and a degree in, master's, a bachelor's degree in a fine art drawing and painting and then a minor in art.

[00:33:34] **Bryan Smith:** Okay. And so, and then you came out to Cal arts. And how long were you there? About a year?

[00:33:40] **Shawn Krause:** Uh, yeah, just one year to Cal arts. Yeah.

[00:33:43] **Bryan Smith:** How important was your bachelor's degree in terms of your formation as an artist and as a craftsman versus the Cal arts piece. And can someone get into this industry today without either of those components, in your opinion?

[00:34:00] **Shawn Krause:** Yeah, I think it just, I think it comes down to just talent, you don't have to have all that stuff. I mean, there's, there's lots of people that I've seen in men over the years that they're just naturally brilliant artists. They have some envious, enviable ease with creation or what they do, or they pick this up and they just do that. And I'm like, what? I don't know. I just tried that. So it happens, you know? So-

[00:34:24] **Bryan Smith:** I hate those people.

[00:34:28] **Shawn Krause:** Yeah. It can be frustrating and, you know, but yeah, there's people who just fall into it and they just are good at so many things that you have a natural ability. And so. You know, for me, I think it was great because I'd always been interested.

[00:34:40] I didn't know really what I wanted to do. I mean, when I was going to get my bachelor's degree, I think it was, yeah, it was probably before Disney kind of had their second, their resurgence with the *Little Mermaid* and all that stuff that really brought animation to the forefront of popularity. Again. So, you know, I had, I didn't know when I was going to do so, but I always loved film and I loved fine art and my parents were always big lovers of things like that.

[00:35:10] So, I think that because they were into it, I was inspired to do things like that. I. Would draw all the time. And so, what was nice about it was that it opened my eyes to so many things in the art world. It gave me a lot of life drawing, experience. 'Cause I think the hard part going to Cal arts and the w where I had a leg up a little bit was that I was a little bit older.

[00:35:32] So, I had a little less, I knew I wanted to be there. I wasn't hemming and hawing. And that when you're at Cal arts, there's so many things you have to learn when you're there. I mean, Learning animation itself could be all you do, but they had design classes. Then you have story classes and then, and then you have life drawing classes.

[00:35:50] So, to get all those, the character design classes to get all those strengths up at the same time is a pretty big task. You kind of want to fall into the camp that you're really interested in. So, the fact that I could come to the table with, with a lot of life drawing experience, held my venture into drawing animation. I wasn't just learning it right then, you know, so yeah.

[00:36:13] **Bryan Smith:** So, what inspired you to go in a completely different direction and leave Pixar for Spire?

[00:36:20] **Shawn Krause:** I think like most people, you know, who, who who've been around 25, 26 years, you're looking for opportunity. I mean, Pixar is a wonderful, fantastic, amazing place, but it's it, you know, it can get easy to kind of settle into, okay I do this really well, you know, but as you go on you suddenly kind of underneath the surface, something's going okay. I'm feeling you don't recognize it. It's I guess they call it mindfulness. Now, you know, being full of like, why am I feeling less thrilled about this? I still love it, but it's, being drawn to story and I'm bringing drawn to filmmaking, being drawn to music.

[00:36:56] Literally, I started getting into music after so long that I started to kind of reach out to other ways and, and, and so when you're at a place that long and a place that big, you know, there's a lot stuff, things going on, it's very hard to fall back into that scrappy time of, of, you know, the *Toy Story* or *Bugs Life* at the beginning when it's all hands on deck and Hey, you can draw some stuff here. I will take it over here and do this. So, the opportunity to get back into that mental place. The opportunity to kind of take some risk on was exciting that the Unreal Engine and using computer engines to maybe take what we do to the next

level, right? You know, was exciting to kind of, to know, even a couple of years ago, Andrew Coates who had done *Borrowed Time* was very interested in what, what was going on.

[00:37:47] And it's advanced quite a bit since then even. But I think it was, yeah, just opportunity talking to Brad. The idea that I could get out of animation is it's really hard to get out of the animation department, you can get, you get to the top of animation. You get to the top of the story department.

[00:38:02] What's next? You know, and it's like producing, directing, you know, the leadership. Those are the kinds of ways you can go with it. So, the idea that we could go and, and, maybe grow out of those, those areas was really exciting. And Brad Lewis is fantastic, and he was like, come in, what do you want to do?

[00:38:20] You know? So, I think it was time just felt like it was time as well. Like you get, you get to a place, you, you contribute, you learn some things. And then you kind of, you go, "okay, where else can I help? What else? Where else can I come well and learn from other people and, and shake it up?" Because a lot of times I find a Pixar to a lot of great ideas were coming from people who were coming from other places now and saying, "Hey, I worked at this place. We might try this.

[00:38:45] I worked over here. And, and I was always blown away with people the past, like 10 years, who would. Who would say, oh, I reregged that character. Oh, I, I took it. I, I brought it out of your Presto and put it in Maya and did this and it brought it back in and I'm like, how do you even know how to do that? Because you just get kind of like comfortable with what you know. So, it was a real exciting opportunity to, to make that change.

[00:39:08] **Bryan Smith:** Yeah. And the way I'm envisioning this, it's like you're working for Facebook or Google for 25, 30 years. And then it's like, okay, I'm going to jump ship and do something a little riskier and a little more bold and possibly more personally fulfilling, like, you know, working for a startup. And I don't know if this is a startup or not Spire, but certainly a smaller operation than Pixar, huh?

[00:39:31] **Shawn Krause:** Yeah, and it definitely isn't like a startup. We feel, 'cause we were building the pipeline. We're figuring things out. We're starting fresh, all the nice, you know, things that you had, you know, you think, okay, we're not going to have this, this, this will be here. Oh, we don't have that older guy. We don't have this. So you're like, we're really getting everything together, but everyone's really excited and enthusiastic about it. And yeah, it's a, it's a really fun, fun time right now.

[00:39:59] **Bryan Smith:** So, what kind of projects are you excited about right now? I saw something about on your Twitter feed, about *Trouble* with Danny McBride.

[00:40:05] **Shawn Krause:** Yeah, we are extremely excited about that. I mean, I mean, it's a universal situation, right? I mean, who hasn't been in trouble, you know? And so when Brad kind of pitched it as a, okay, we've all been in trouble, we've all done things we shouldn't have, you know, but what if getting in trouble wasn't just getting in trouble, it was an actual place? I was like, oh, okay. And so, your mind just starts racing about what is that place? And then when he said, you know, Danny McBride was on it, I mean, I'm a huge Danny McBride

fan and his writers, you know, Kevin Barnett and Chris Pappas are, I've met them, in a few meetings as we've gone along.

[00:40:45] And they're just brilliant, hilarious people and writers. And so it's, it just feels like. This could be something. One of the, one of the great things is that we don't have an identity as a studio, yet we don't have a way we have to approach things. We don't have a certain sort of way of telling stories that you can fall into after a certain amount of time.

[00:41:06] So, the idea that we could take this to places that we're not tethered by, you know, our own limitations, maybe, you know, it is exciting to see where that. So, yeah, I mean, and you know, and the little bit I've, I've briefly met, you know, you know, Danny McBride in meetings and just to see how brilliant he is as a story mind and how funny he is and how he's just, it's inspiring to be in the room with him, you know, zoom room.

[00:41:37] **Bryan Smith:** Yeah. Yeah, it's interesting that there are certain comics or comedic actors who. Okay. They're known for being funny, but I think to be that funny, you have to be vulnerable. Like you have to be ready to be the buffoon and have everybody see how flawed you are and that's part of their magic. But I think also that translates really well into connecting to people on an emotional level.

[00:42:04] That's why I think comedians like Bill Murray are so great in dramas, you know, lost in translation. And I think Danny McBride has that. There's something about Danny, that's really special in that way. Kind of a Bill Murray or Jack Black. He can make you cry with laughter with raising one eyebrow, that type of charisma.

[00:42:22] **Shawn Krause:** Well, and it takes some pretty, pretty amazingly flawed characters who do some crazy despicable things you'd say, and some make some terrible, terrible choices. And you're still rooting for them that you still like them. Yeah. Right. That's phenomenal in itself. Like that's quite a feat to pull off, so yeah.

[00:42:43] **Bryan Smith:** Yeah. Who can ever imagine the rooting for the eastbound and down character, but I was, I think we all were.

[00:42:52] **Shawn Krause:** Yeah.

[00:42:53] **Bryan Smith:** Yeah. Well, Sean, it's been a real pleasure talking to you. I see you're on social media on Instagram and Twitter. And your handle on those channels is Krause\_Shawn, right? K R a U S E underscore. Shawn, any other places online where people can reach out to you and ask questions and connect with you?

[00:43:16] **Shawn Krause:** Uh, on LinkedIn. And so that's about it, you know?

[00:43:20] **Bryan Smith:** Okay. Yeah. Well, I really appreciate you sharing your story with me.

[00:43:24] **Shawn Krause:** I appreciate you reaching out and connecting. It's been really nice.

[00:43:28] **Bryan Smith:** Hey, thank you for listening and I hope you enjoy today's episode.

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