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Riding the Rollercoaster

Have you ever met those people in the world who simply adore thrill rides? Perhaps you are one of them yourself. They're the kind who eat, drink, and breathe excitement. The sort of people who buy annual passes to places like *Six Flags Magic Mountain*. They're the people who feel their best screaming their head off while hanging upside-down on the top of a triple-corkscrew. Simply put, I am not one of those people, but that hasn't always kept me and the rides apart.

I was not at all, and am still not at all, a thrill-oriented person. My response to rides of that type has almost always been an emphatic "No way!" I had no desire to waste my time going around in circles on a device that was designed for the purpose of making me feel momentarily exhilarated with fear. For me, thrill rides are like fireworks – a lot of time, effort, and expense spent on only a few moments of excitement. Thrill rides only appealed to me if they had some other redeeming quality, such as the behind-the-scenes workings and awe-inspiring synchrony of video display and cabin motion found in a simulator such as "Star Tours."

I'm personally the most in my element while sitting in front of my computer, eyes glued to the monitor, spending hour after hour dominating in a new multiplayer strategy, first-person-shooter, or role-playing game. My life isn't all computer games, though. Programming – anything from games to websites – usually gives me a thrill of its own. I also love sports, especially the competitive ones, and have experienced some of my greatest "thrills" by making game-winning or impossible plays or moves. Winning energizes me every time, no matter what I'm competing in.

Because of my aversions to thrill rides, when I took my sisters to California Adventure, I had no delusions of wasting my time on anything more “thrilling” than “Soarin’ Over California”. It was moderately surprising, then, when I was talked into going on the “little” or “mouse” rollercoaster. “Mild” was hardly the word I would’ve described it with, but it was fun.

Looking back, I hadn’t been completely devoid of thrill rides my entire life. I had taken on simulators such as “Star Tours,” the dwarf-sized rollercoaster at *Santa’s Village*, and even something as out-of-my-league as “Big Thunder Mountain” at *Disneyland*. This, however, was pretty much the extent of my thrill ride career.

My past experience with the other modest roller-coasters prevented the little one from really being a milestone. As if getting me on the “little” coaster wasn’t enough, my adventurous sisters started in with “Let’s go on California Screamin’,” and eventually succeeded in prodding me into the line. “California Screamin’” was the biggest and most intense rollercoaster at the Disneyland resort, and once I found myself in the death-grip hold of its steel harness, it was obvious that this ride would make the others completely inconsequential. At one-hundred and twenty feet high and achieving a top speed of fifty-five miles per hour, the solid steel coaster was a formidable giant to a rookie like me. I guess I had decided to challenge this monster because I was tired of “not knowing what I was missing,” or of wondering why all these crazy people screamed on a ride that didn’t seem to be going all that fast. Perhaps it was because I didn’t want to be considered so chicken that I wouldn’t even go on a rollercoaster as mild as “California Screamin’.” Of course, “mild” is a subjective term; calling that ride mild would have been like telling me that jalapeños weren’t hot!

In reality, I wasn’t afraid at all; fear wasn’t an issue. I had seen dozens, if not hundreds, of people cycle through rollercoasters such as this. I was a bit apprehensive, to be sure, but not

afraid. The thing I feared the most was that one of my sisters would break her neck by forgetting to put her head back against the seat when we took off.

Take off we did, as the electro-magnetic workings beneath our seats hurled us forward with a futuristic whir, taking us from a dead stop to fifty-five miles per hour in just four seconds. We took off so fast that tears were driven from the corners of my eyes and flattened on my temples. Luckily, there were still no snapped spines. I had determined that I was going to break the mold, something I still take quite a bit of pleasure in doing. I wasn't going to scream, I wasn't going to throw my hands in the air, and I was going to do my best to avoid being surprised and elbowed by the turns. While everyone else's eyes popped as we flew up off of our seats into the harnesses, I was guessing at what "G"-forces we were experiencing, and doing my best to recall the applicable physics calculations I had labored over only a few months before. I alternately opened and closed my eyes during turns and drops, just to feel the difference, and the moment we flew out of the loop, my mind was at work convincing my body that it was perfectly logical that I didn't *feel* upside-down while my head was looking up at my feet. Me riding this rollercoaster was like Sherlock Holmes investigating a murder seen – no emotion, no exhibition of surprise – all business.

Some might say that one isn't really enjoying a ride while being as cold and calculating about it as I was, but just because I didn't ride the rollercoaster like everyone else doesn't mean that I just treated it as an assignment. I did enjoy the ride, and I had a huge grin on my face throughout the entire thing. My sisters were a bit surprised that I had gone, but not so surprised that they neglected to ask "Can we go again?" It wasn't quite what I had in mind, but tackle it again we did, thanks to the under-sized line. The second trip opened up a few more opportunities

to break the mold, including more precise leans into the “surprise” turns and the staring down of the on-ride camera as we flew past.

I still haven't gone on those rides in which you strap into little chairs on the outside of a tower and get jerked up and down through two-hundred feet of air, but trying them out is not an impossibility anymore. If I were with the right group, I'd go in a heart-beat. I think that part of what has kept me from changing overnight in regards to being willing to take off on thrill rides is my fear, not of changing, but of other people who have known me for a while seeing me change. I'm not sure why, but it seems to me to be the biggest dissuasion to change I've experienced, even though I know that they aren't doing it intentionally.

On the brighter side, my latest accomplishment was riding the “Tower of Terror”. The fact that I wasn't overly impressed illustrates that the change is not in my opinion of thrill rides, but only in my willingness to ride them. I still consider thrill rides to be an inferior waste of time, and I'm still much happier playing a strategy game, but I'm now able to understand that the type of excitement they generate can't really be compared to that from a computer game. They're inherently different, and while I may prefer one, I'm now willing to try both.