

The Insignificant Significance of a Roller Coaster

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We were standing before it, a terrifying skeleton reaching up towards the sky.

Wildwood's "The Great Nor'Easter" Roller Coaster. At 13, I had never been on a roller coaster. From the time I was very young, my family thought negatively of them, they did *not* enjoy roller coasters. We never went to amusement parks and I had probably only seen three or four coasters in my life. Because these negative thoughts surrounded me from such a young age, I grew up with a hatred for them, with no reason of my own. I turned down field trips, I turned down friends, all because of a decision that was made for me.

Then came the summer of 2017. I was spending a week in Wildwood with one of my friends. She was so excited. On the long car ride there she chattered for hours about the three ride piers along the boardwalk. I didn't say anything, but in my mind, I argued with every point she brought up. How thrilling? More like how awful. How fun? More like how deadly. But, I kept this to myself. After all, she had invited me to join her family at the beach and I wasn't going to be the one to start an argument. Most of the week was great, we walked on the boardwalk, we rode on our bikes, and we went to the beach, but eventually, I couldn't convince her to put it off anymore. We were going to the ride pier.

We walked from our beach house to the farthest pier. I trudged behind her with lead feet, fearful of the divide this could cause between us, while she told me how she had planned the whole evening out. We would start at the farthest pier, and work our way back towards her beach house. In Maddie's words, we would "build up the intensity, and end with a bang". The "bang" being the Great Nor'Easter, Wildwood's largest roller coaster, which reached speeds of 55 miles

per hour and was 115 feet tall, according to the advertisement she pointed out on a billboard nearby. I enjoyed many of the other rides we went on, but once the sun had begun to set she dragged me to the line for the roller coaster. I didn't tell her I had never been on a roller coaster, just that I didn't like them. I insisted she go alone, but she wouldn't let up. Before I knew it, the line moved and we were too far in to back out now. So we got on the ride.

Before I could comprehend what was happening, I had been dragged to a seat. Not just any seat but the very first seat on the ride. Maddie sat beside me. She failed to notice my distressed state and gave me a wide smile. Her severe lack of fear comforted me, and for the first time, I considered the possibility that rollercoasters might not be as awful as I had always perceived them. But this brief comfort was short-lived, as the ride began to move, squealing as it inched upwards to the first hill.

As I was being led into the sky, my attention was drawn to the view of the endless Wildwood beaches and I felt eerily calm. In the moonlight, the ocean looked black crashing onto the sand. But just as I began to settle in, the ride stopped going up. My calm feelings left me as the ride hurtled down towards the people on the pier. It went so close I could probably reach and touch someone beneath the ride, but right before I got the chance I was whisked away into the sky, again. I was upside down and right side up and upside down too many times to count. After what felt like ages, the ride slowed and came to a stop. Maddie hopped off the ride - as though her insides hadn't been thrown in a blender - and disappeared onto the pier, making a beeline for another ride. I stumbled after her the best I could, into the crowd.

In the end, I really am glad Maddie got me on that ride. Although it was far from enjoyable, and was far out of my comfort zone, thanks to her I can say I have now been on a

roller coaster. For most people, it isn't that big of a deal, but to me, it means a lot more. My whole life I have listened to those around me and let their thoughts shape my perceptions of what I like and how I should be. I assumed others were right and did not give myself a chance to make my own decisions. It took something as insignificant as going on a roller coaster to realize: I need to decide for myself. I am glad I have people in my life like Maddie who won't give up on me, and will take me out of my comfort zone to show me another side of things. Although I didn't like the ride, I can now say it is because I have decided, on my own, that roller coasters are not something I enjoy, and not because someone else told me so.