

# Roller Coasters: Freedom?

By Beth Foreman

*For safety and comfort, you should be in good health and free from heart, back, or neck problems, motion sickness, or other conditions that could be aggravated by this adventure. Expectant mothers should not ride.*

That's what the signs always say. Warning! Caution! Of course there are risks when you climb aboard a car that travels at lightening speed along a steel tubular track, throwing your body with a force of nearly 5 Gs.

The warning signs should also add: *If you are old enough to remember typing on a manual typewriter, you will experience heart, back, or neck problems on this ride.*

But on this day, I felt young and brave and free! I was filled with the Amusement Park Spirit! So my daughter and I got in line for the roller coaster.

The last time we rode this roller coaster, my daughter had a bad experience and I thought she'd never ride another roller coaster again. And in my flawed motherly wisdom, I thought she might miss some future happiness if this happened. It's sort of like climbing back on a horse after being thrown. "Try it, honey," I encouraged. "You were younger then. It's not so scary. Really, it'll be fun!"

Fun? Did I say that?

As we stood in the long line, I saw her growing anxiety. Her face was tense. Her eyes were pleading. *I don't want to do this. I don't want to do this.* But her mind was determined. "I can do this," she stated firmly.

Meanwhile, I was thinking, *I don't want to do this* as we hopped into the car and the safety bar was lowered. Escape was impossible, and I questioned my sanity. Why am I doing this? Do I really think it's exhilarating to race through thin air at highway speeds not knowing what's around the next corner? Do I have fun being out of control? Do I like to panic and scream?

According to *How Stuff Works*, "Roller coasters are driven almost entirely by basic inertial, gravitational and centripetal forces all manipulated in the service of a great ride."

How can I begin to enjoy something that I don't remotely understand? Gravity, inertia, centripetal force. Not even vaguely familiar concepts.

Gently, deceptively, the car began to climb the first steep metal hill. My heart pounded.

Then I made a really big mistake. I turned toward my daughter, leaned down and asked, "Doin' okay?" Just when she hollered with glee, "Yea!!" our car dropped and jerked to the right and my neck went somewhere else. Ouch.

Ninety-six painful seconds later, it was over. My daughter hopped out of the car, grinning like the Cheshire cat. "Awesome! Let's do it again!"

Victorious, she had climbed back on the horse.

I had fallen off, and I needed a chiropractor.

I'm completely befuddled by the Amusement Park Spirit, the force that moves people to stand in long lines just waiting to be tossed and spun like a load of laundry.

“The Switchback Gravity Pleasure Railway, the first true roller coaster built in America in 1884, charged riders 5 cents to travel down the rolling track along the beach. People would stand in line up to three hours to ride La Marcus Thompson's creation at Coney Island in New York,” according to *How Stuff Works*.

I asked my son to explain why roller coasters are such a thrill. “Because you can do something that would normally kill you – like riding an out-of-control car-- but it doesn’t kill you. That’s fun!”

Fun?

Excuse me, but my idea of fun is reading a one-thousand page saga, sipping an iced tea with a fresh lemon hanging on the side of the chilled glass, digging my toes into the white ocean sand, hearing the gentle surf, and knowing that dinner will be grilled salmon with another fresh lemon on the side. Yes. And maybe a game of pinochle after dinner.

The Millennium Force at Cedar Point in Ohio, according to *How Stuff Works*, boasts a record-breaking height of 310 feet and speeds of about 92 miles per hour.

No thanks. I’m quite comfortable at sea level. Not moving.

One coaster fanatic says, “I like the feeling of floating, of feeling free and unrestrained.”

Free and unrestrained.

*“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.” Galatians 5:1*

Now that’s true freedom. Standing firm in the knowledge of my salvation through Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection. And it’s thrilling...because sometimes life is like an out-of-control car. But filled with the Spirit of God, I can stand firm and feel peace throughout the ups and downs, the twists and turns, knowing that around the corner is eternal life.

Pinochle anyone?