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Advanced Composition

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Dropping One Hundred and Twenty Feet in Four Seconds: My Daughter and I Experience the Summit Plummet at Blizzard Beach, the Third-Tallest Free-fall Water Slide in the World

*I felt like Lucifer. At one moment I was looking down at earth from the heavens, and in the next I was staring at the heavens from my back.*

*Five minutes before drop*

My 9-year-old daughter and I watched the tattooed veteran walk past us and descend the stairwell. He was the second adult to abandon their place in line, showing the rest of us that this ride was less about bravery and more about determination. He had been a stalwart figure for those of us approaching the ride's summit, and was definitely a tethering point for our waning fortitude. However, one look over the guardrail—the one separating riders from the descent—

was enough to make him reconsider his decision. Lorelei and I watched the middle-aged man maneuver past the other park-goers as he made his way back down the slope.

“There goes another one,” I whispered to her. She smiled back at me, reveling in the fact that she might be more determined than those that left. She was a stick-figure of a girl, weighing only 60-pounds, but that didn’t limit her bravery any.

“Am I going first or second?” she asked, as our feet passed the last step. It was at this moment that I knew we would have a story for generations to come.

*Five hours before drop, passing the park gates*

It was the middle of June, and the monochrome-gray morning clouds had just begun to dissipate. What started out as a muggy 10 a.m. morning was now beginning to look like an ideal Floridian day with temperatures hovering just under unbearable. The forecast had been set at 97 degrees, which presented a level of humidity more than tolerable for anyone choosing to participate in outdoor activities. In fact, the atmosphere that day couldn’t have accented the park’s theme any better, as the whole thing had been designed to resemble a melting winter resort.

**B**izzard Beach is one of two Disney waterparks in the Orlando, Florida area, and, in my opinion, houses the better half of the corporation’s water attractions. This includes several freefall water slides, a bobsled slide, and a tumultuous wave pool that conjures six-foot waves in a stormy sea atmosphere. While all these rides attract a good number of people, the main draw of the park is a one hundred and twenty foot tall free-fall water slide called the Summit Plummet.

This intimidating attraction is ranked as the third largest slide of its kind worldwide. Stationed inside the center of the park, this pseudo-ski slope towers over the other attractions.

After securing entry into the park, my mother (a 53-year-old retired Certified Nursing Assistant), my daughter, and I decided to set up an itinerary for the day. Since we all had different tastes in rides, we thought it best to hit the ones that suited all three of us first. This course of action allowed us to maximize our enjoyment at the park, while simultaneously giving me time to build up my mother's courage for the more thrilling attractions. This objective was important to Loreleí and me because we hated any instances where my mom missed out on something fun. Of course, there were times this outcome couldn't be helped, as she was deathly afraid of heights and had specific health complications. Since she was a survivor of three heart attacks, her body was not in an optimal state to handle excess stress. While we wanted her to get on every attraction with us, we were certain that Blizzard Beach's main attraction would be too much for her. This suited Loreleí and me just fine, as we were the thrill seekers in our group. I had grown up afraid of most thrill rides, and wanted to spare my daughter the disappointment of missing out on such experiences, if possible. I had fulfilled this objective rather well, as she almost always attempted the rides I did. She had even talked me into riding things I had not initially thought about riding in the first place.

*Two hours before drop, resting on the artificial beach*

After three hours of waiting in lines, climbing up steps, and sliding into three-foot pools of water, we had covered a majority of the park's attractions. We decided to update our itinerary

at the wave pool. With another four hours left, we felt like this was a good decision. This moment of respite would help the excitement subside for a moment, as well as give our feet a break from walking. Besides, my mother wanted to take a break on the man-made beach. The multiple ascents and descents had started to take their toll on her, and she needed a moment to build her energy back up. It was in this moment that Loreleí and I decided to tackle the Summit Plummet. My mother agreed, and told us to go ride the attractions she wouldn't do.

*One hour before drop, standing before the base of the Summit*

We tilted our heads up as we approached the Summit's line. From a distance, the ride had seemed much more manageable, and much less intimidating. This was not to say that neither one of us had thought the ride was going to be a pushover, but it was definitely a moment of reevaluation. It was the first time either one of us had to look directly up in order to see the top of a water slide, which provoked our curiosity that much more. The line started at the bottom of a plastic snow mound, and increased in a slow incline as people reached the tiny platform at the top. It reminded me of the Grinch's cliff from *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*. This effect came from the ramp encasing the slide. This design allowed the attraction to keep the resort theme, while simultaneously masking any possibility of ascertaining an angle of the descent. Riders would never realize that the drop was almost vertical, until they were standing before it.

By the time we secured a position in line, the queue was already full. This problem was a trifle, though, as our time spent inside the line was minimal. As we climbed higher and higher, we looked out over the expanse of trees and marsh, pointing out the other kingdoms inside Disney's Empire. We had found the Animal Kingdom, due to its star attraction the Expedition Everest roller coaster, and what we assumed to be the Magic Kingdom. The sight of the other

parks was beautiful to behold; however, it was also a means of blocking out any secondguessing. We didn't have to time to think twice because each step up the slope allowed us to see more and more of the growing empire. It was similar to the mitigating effect felt on a Ferris wheel. The higher the wheel placed you, the better viewpoint you had of your surroundings; it was only until the ride stopped at the top that you realized you were hovering in mid-air in a rotating carriage.

*Time of drop, peering over the threshold*

"I'll go first, that way you can see how to do it," I told her. Like every other rider before me, I had performed the ritualistic action of looking over the guardrail. I hadn't really thought about the meaning behind doing it, and could only reason it to be an excuse for exhaling a few public profanities. After all, no one seemed to mind. I turned my head, and took one last glance at the Disney Empire, before sitting down in the tube. The operator chuckled. It must be fun watching peoples' expressions at this moment, I thought.

"Lie flat on your back, cross your arms and legs as you descend, and push off when you're ready" the operator said. I looked down the slide one last time, held my breath, and pushed off.

**H**ave you ever had a moment where time feels like it slows down? A moment where you have entirely too much time to think? Well, this drop issued one of those moments. In my four second descent, the ride managed to rip open my swimming-trunk pockets and dislodge my wallet, park-access band, and other contents; to raise me about an inch off of the slide, before

slamming me back down; and to make me question whether or not I had potentially wet myself. I also found the time to regret, come to terms with, and enjoy my decision to conquer the Summit. I felt like Lucifer. At one moment I was looking-down at earth from the heavens, and in the next I was staring at the heavens from my back. Even though there was barely enough time to comprehend the entirety of what had happened, my brain somehow found a way to overclock itself for a fraction of a minute. As the adrenaline left my body, I found my excitement quickly turning over to worry. My daughter was still on the platform, one hundred and twenty feet above me, alone, and potentially rethinking her decision. I exited the tube and prepared myself for a sprint back up, before noticing a small, pink figure darting down the slope.

In the same four seconds, Loreleí had reached the shallow pool at the bottom and was lying there in the same dumbfounded position as I had been in. As she sat up and exited the tube, I noticed that her lips were blue; her hands were shaking; and that her eyes were still wide.

“I did it, Dad.” She said, broadcasting the same smile as before and running to me with her hand raised for a high-five. “Can we do it again?”