

Playing With the Big Boys

I can't even begin to count the number of wise-cracks I made about my part-time, no-brainer, semi-retirement gig as a lift operator at the local ski resort's tubing park.

My gosh, I was a corporate girl. Seen much success in my life. Even published a book. So, when the subject of my new employment would come up, I was the first to offer a quip.

They said it would be a physical job. Pfft! I ran marathons for crying out loud. Twenty six point two miles! I mountain biked six days a week – and I even had a half ironman under my belt. Physical job? I cracked a joke.

They said I had to be gracious to the guests. Whaaat?!?!? I invented customer service and couldn't imagine any possible conditions that would render me unkind. I cracked a joke.

They mentioned I'd have to like the outdoors as the shifts were seven solid hours of being in the wintery elements. I coughed at the absurdity of me not wanting to be outdoors all day long. I lived in the bush! I am an outdoor fanatic. I cracked another joke.

I even cracked a joke when I realized my entire new 'team' consisted of a brood of teenaged boys.

For those who haven't experienced winter tubing, picture a large hill, extremely steep incline, covered with snow, and sculpted into six individual lanes. People pay money to sit in a big rubber tube and be pushed, spinning down the icy lanes up to speeds of 60km/hr.

It is exhilarating. I know. I am now a Tube Thrower. I am the person perched at the top, doing the pushing, spinning, pulling. The person responsible for the ultimate ride of a lifetime.

My first shift started off with an abundance of confidence. Throwing on two lanes at a time, I vaulted over the ice wall separating the two lanes with the prowess of an Olympic hurdles gold medal winner.

I pushed. I pulled. I spun. I leapt over the wall and repeated the process.

Layers of clothing were cast aside as I heated up and sweat poured off me. Each time a rider asked for a straight, fast run, I pushed so hard I ended up half way down the hill.

Trying to stop after letting the tube go is like sliding to a stop on a skating rink. Digging in the knees, feet and hands, I could only pray that some part of my appendages would grip onto something so I wouldn't have to hike back up the entire hill.

Climbing back up the hill. It was sort of like conquering Everest. A thousand times in one day.

In the beginning my head would pop back up in view of the waiting tubers like a gopher popping out of a hole. Cheers would go up! Arms would pump in victory.

Somewhere along the way I realized that five men, all wanting to hang onto each other's tube for the ride of their life, was like hauling a thousand pounds of dead weight. Spinning them, and getting out of the way in time, turned out to require more finesse and delicate grace than a ballet dancer and speed skater combined.

After a few hours, my finesse drained and the Everest climbs all ran into one barely recognizable strain.

Vaulting the ice wall became more of a desperate slither, although I did notice, with clarity at one point, that ice really is as hard as a rock!

I recall one time, clawing my way back up the hill, uncertain if I was still living or if I had in fact died and God decided I needed to work a little harder before letting me pass through the pearly gates.

I clawed up, not certain my fingers were still attached. I prayed with all my might for a forty pound six year old to be waiting for me, wanting only a teeny, weeny little push.

I got to the top. Begged my legs to follow me over the ice wall. I looked up. And there, all set up, ready and raring, was a group of six men, six tubes, with a good hour of beer-drinking, tail-gating in the parking lot under their belt. They were in their tubes waiting, a good twenty feet back from the start line.

This was six hours into my seven hour shift. I think I let out a cry as I shook my head and hollered, momentarily forgetting the rules of pleasant customer service, 'Are ya NUTS?!?!? I ain't pushin' ya from back there guys! Holy crap – you're like twelve hundred pounds!!! Get up and move closer by another twenty feet!'

My new buddy Steve, the only fellow Thrower my age, laughed so hard he fell over.

Lucky for me, the men did too. I praised the mind-deadening attributes of beer. That group of guys wanted the ride of their life, and they got it. I know this because they came back again and again and again.

Eventually I heard the magical words that my shift was over.

I hugged my loyal tubers (who knew they developed alliances and favourites), and I staggered over to where the spare tubes were kept.

“Yo, Weez! You lucky dude (apparently I am a forty-seven year old female dude), you get to turtle down cause there are no spare tubes,” wisely advised a fellow Thrower.

Before I knew what was happening, I was lying on my back, legs pulled into my chest and throttling myself down the hill, head first.

No one is allowed to do that. I can see why. Except employees. I didn't recall reading about that particular privilege in the employee handbook.

When my body finally came screeching to a stop, I stood, albeit wobbly, re-focused my eyes and meandered as straight as possible to my car. It was covered with snow. I barely noticed. I was delirious. I think.

I opened the door. Turned my back end to the seat and promptly plunked down. Unfortunately my legs didn't get the memo. They didn't move.

I mustered a bit of reserve energy, grabbed each leg above the knee one at a time, and lifted them into the car.

Eventually I made it home. Eventually I got out of the car. Eventually I went to bed, and this is where the lesson for today comes into play.

Someday, sometime, when you least expect it, fate will get you back for your wise-crack jokes, so be careful what you make fun of. It'll always come back and haunt you!

Three thoughts went through my tired brain as I laid flat on my back in bed that night, unable to move a single muscle in my body.

First, I thought about how much I actually liked the job.

Second, I thought about the payback for all my wise-cracks and the hilarity of it all. I got exactly what I deserved!

My third thought was a little selfish. I sort of wished I had installed a crane in the bedroom that could roll me over onto my side.

Life is a journey my friends. Laugh as much as possible along the way, especially at yourself. It will bring you and those around you joy. Laughter is nature's way of cleaning out the cobwebs from your mind, body and soul.

Till next time,
Louise

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