

## Cripple-Go-Round Allen Hines

**Dr. Miltner's English 10001 class was asked to write a personal narrative on a past memory, which generated Allen Hines' "Cripple-Go-Round." The students were required to focus on the sights, smells and feelings of the memory and then fully explore them within their essays.**

Nearly everyone has used the expression "I could just kick myself" after saying or doing something stupid. Some have even used the more extreme version: "I could just slit my wrists." Most people just leave it at that. But for some young people, it is not just an expression; they actually do hurt themselves. I started early. At the age of eight, I felt rage at having to use a wheelchair and frustration because I could not express myself to others without an interpreter. So, I began doing what is known as "cutting." A crafty boy, I was adept at shaping common objects, such as coat hangers and even some of my toys, into instruments of self-torture. My arms bore most of the cuts because there, they were easy to explain away as accidental scratches from crawling on the floor. I

was not always lying when I told my parents this. Once, I found an exposed carpet staple and slashed my hand with it. When I cut into my skin, I felt a sense of control. The angry, red droplets seemed to symbolize my rage, and I felt better for getting them out. Three years later, I was still cutting, having found no better way to deal with my emotional pain. Then, a ride at a Pennsylvania theme park changed my life from depression to optimism.

I hear screams of people on amusement park rides and naturally turn my head toward them. The screams come from young people who are in sight one second and gone the next. Pointing toward the noise, I say, "Ooh, that one." My family follows as I get in the queue. The marquee outside the ride excites me. "The Scrambler," it says. "Do you have what it takes?" Rays of the sun reflect off of the metal of the machine and, for a moment, I dream of mowing people down to get to the front of the line. I decide this is unnecessary because the line is short. Soon, I am placed into the black and red contraption. I sit on one side of a car with my mother; a couple of strangers sit across from us. The strangers kiss and the man says, "Trust me honey, this'll be great." From a stall near the ride entrance emanates the smell of spun sugar. Long metal bars clamp down in each of the rides' cars, more for a sense of security than actual protection. Garbled speech comes from a loudspeaker, something about remaining seated – not a problem for me. With a whine, the giant cylinder in the center of the ride begins to rotate as the ride starts. On the other side of the ride, the smell of buttered popcorn permeates the air. The spokes on top of the ride turn with the central cylinder, lazily at first, then speeding up steadily until they whistle, as if cutting the sky. Centrifugal force is felt by the passengers in the cars at the ends of the great spokes of the axle. The cylinder becomes the center of gravity with the cars orbiting like asteroids, barely missing each other as they hurtle through space. The woman across from me screams. Her cheeks flap. Her eyes bulge. And her hair floats through the air like so many tamers' whips. Now at full speed, I inhale the best smells I can ever remember. Sweet cotton candy and savory popcorn seem to meld into one succulent aroma. We spin at a speed that blurs the area surrounding the ride, compelling me to grab the sun-warmed bar above my knees. Gravity presses on my chest, causing my breathing to become labored. At any moment, my diaphragm may fail to expand; the moribund feeling is exhilarating. I look for my father, who decided to sit this one out, but I see only blobs of color. The tallest of those blobs must be him, I decide. Suddenly, the man across from me screams. His hair is blown back, revealing a receding hairline. His face is flushed and gaining a green hue, much like a cartoon character. Then, the whirlwind slows; the ride is ending. I recognize my father again. He stands by my wheelchair grinning as the man across from me gets off the ride and hurries away, covering his mouth with his hand. The woman follows, clucking I-told-you-so's. I turn to my mother. "That was great," I say breathlessly, my hands still fastened to the long metal bar. The ride operator appears at my side. "Hey buddy, wanna go again?" he says, winking. "Yes!" I scream.

Though it may not seem like much to most people, the offer of an extra ride is a crucial point in my life. My life is not so horrible, I realize on the car ride back to our hotel. I roll up my sleeves and look at my arms. What am I doing to myself? After all, how many other kids get to ride twice without standing in line again? Life as a cripple has some perks after all. In another week, my family and I go home. I gather all of the wire coat hangers I have strategically strewn about my room and put them in the laundry room, where they belong. After that, I pick up all the toys that I had used to hurt myself, throw them into a cardboard box, and stow it in a dark corner of my closet. Again looking at my arms, I ask my mother for a few bandages to cover the scabs, so that I would not be

tempted to pick them. She smiles as she hands them to me, thinking I am finally giving up that nasty childhood habit. Years later, in a tearful moment for both of us, I confessed to my mother what I had been doing. I see a psychiatrist who prescribes three different mood-leveling drugs. I take them, but I do not need them. My medicine came from an amusement park in Pennsylvania, and it was a cure-all.

“People who cut themselves are often full of intense emotional pain, but they have difficulty relieving the tension this causes in the usual ways. They may think that they have to be strong, and so they may not allow themselves to cry. They may have been taught as children that expressing emotions is wrong. But the tension inside their bodies and their minds becomes almost unbearable, and they find that cutting themselves somehow relieves that tension.... Sadly... those who cut themselves are more likely to commit suicide later if they [do not] get help with their underlying problems” (Cutting).

I was on track to be one of the thousands of young people who commit suicide each year. Yet that one question in a juvenile’s mind saved me: How many other kids get to ride twice without standing in line again? This question got me to stop hurting myself, and to get help. Had I not asked this question, this piece of paper might still be blank.

#### Works Cited

“Cutting.” Teens Health. 15 Sep 2004

<[http://kidshealth.org/teen/your\\_mind/mental\\_health/cutting.html](http://kidshealth.org/teen/your_mind/mental_health/cutting.html)>.