

## When It Comes To Carousels

by

Scott William Foley

“I want to ride a carousel.”

That’s honestly what she said. Can you believe it? Here’s a former judge, a woman who is still sharper than most of the people in the city, and she’s telling me that she wants to ride a carousel.

“Are you sure, Judge Bachmann?”

Her expression, probably the one she reserved for her court’s most foolish of offenders, informs me that she is very sure.

“But where am I supposed to find a carousel in the middle of November? There aren’t too many fairs going on this time of year.”

“Silly boy,” she says back. Keep in mind I can’t be more than twenty years her junior. “Finding me a carousel is *your* job.”

Let me explain how I got myself into this pickle. I worked my whole life. From the minute I graduated high school, I was out there earning my living. Circumstances demanded that I fend for myself, and so that’s what I did.

But when I finally retired, well, I didn’t really know what to do. I thought I’d love all the newfound freedom, but I actually hated it. I never had time in the past to develop any hobbies; heck, I couldn’t even spare a few moments to settle down with someone. After I finished my career, I had a nice house, a good car, and plenty of money, but I

didn't have a clue how to enjoy them. I spent more days than I care to admit meandering through the channels and wearing a path on my rugs.

Eventually my friend Trudy asked me if I wanted to volunteer for a program she'd developed several years ago. She calls it "Seniors' Day Out," and it's meant for trusted members of the community to visit senior citizens and basically take them out on the town to do whatever they want. I've been close to Trudy for years, and after listening to her talk about how her program had paid for trips to baseball games, museums, fancy restaurants, even plane rides, I jumped at the chance. I'd like to tell you my participation was the result of altruism, but by now you know better. I just wanted something to do, and it was all the better if it was on someone else's dime.

I excuse myself from Judge Bachmann and enter her kitchen so that I can call Trudy and figure things out. Trudy almost immediately picks up and, after assuring her that Judge Bachmann is safe and everything is fine, I ask her where in the world I can find a carousel.

As it turns out, I don't need the entire world because our local mall has one. Go figure.

Stifling an urge to complain to Trudy, to scoff at the very idea of taking one of our most respected citizens to ride a child's toy, I remain silent. Also, I'm fairly certain that Judge Bachmann is eavesdropping.

Sensing my torment, Trudy says before hanging up, "You do whatever Judge Bachmann wants, and please loosen up and try to have some fun, would you?"

Right.

Spinning around in circles on a piece of molded plastic isn't my idea of a great time to be had by all.

I walk back into the judge's living room and say, "Ready to head to the mall?"

Judge Bachmann isn't only still smart as a whip, she's also fortunate enough to remain as healthy as a horse – no pun intended. In fact, if it wasn't for her weakening eyesight, she wouldn't even need me to haul her around and lead her through the mall.

After a few moments of walking, I see the carousel. I can't believe it's located smack-dab in the middle of the mall. I've probably passed by it a hundred times over the years, but not once did I ever notice it.

This carousel doesn't have to brave the elements like the kinds you see at carnivals and fairs. It's a two-tier job, each decked out in bright lights and ornate trim. The top tier wears a red and white steeple with a great blue flag piercing the above space; a golden horse is embroidered upon the flag.

The carousel sports both horses and horse-drawn carriages, and I'm not lying when I say that the whole scene is downright regal.

How is it I never noticed this thing?

After waiting in line behind a young mother and her toddler, I gladly pay the four dollar admission out of my own pocket. See, I'm a *little* altruistic. Besides, Judge Bachmann deserves it, and I won't ever find a cheaper way to show her my appreciation.

While helping her up the red, glossy steps, I ask her which carriage she prefers.

“Carriage!” she huffs. “I’m riding a horse, mister.” And then, before I can intervene, the judge hoists herself onto a white stallion.

As the judge settles in, I glance behind me and see that the mother who was ahead of us in line is poised next to her toddler with one hand on a nearby pole and the other gripping his waistband.

Considering this a good idea, I take hold of the horse’s pole next to Judge Bachmann’s and stand at the ready in case she slips.

“Don’t even think about it, sonny-boy,” she says. “Either hop on that horse or get off the carousel, but you’re not going to just stand there and ruin my good time.”

Remembering Trudy’s edicts, I bite my tongue and straddle the horse alongside the judge’s.

The carousel rotates, slowly at first, but it quickly picks up speed. Once the horses are at a full gallop, I hear a jubilant laughter filling the air. Because it is high-pitched and childish, I naturally glimpse over my shoulder at the toddler riding behind us. Though the boy wears an expression of rapt ecstasy, he’s not laughing because his face is frozen in delight. Seriously, I’ve never seen anyone so happy in my long, overworked life.

Taking that into account, who would’ve guessed I’d see the judge wielding the same unadulterated glee mere seconds later? She’s having more fun than the toddler!

As we continue riding, I still can’t figure out the source of the jubilant laughter. No one else is on the carousel besides the toddler, his mother, the judge, and me, and while many onlookers are smiling and waving at us, none of them are outright laughing.

Before I can help myself, I wave back at our audience, and that's when I realize *I'm* the one laughing.

... I suppose Judge Bachmann might be on to something when it comes to carousels.

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