

Merry-Go-Round

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Another First-Timer's View of the Convention

Meg Marchiando

Lights, music, horses running in circles... What better way to watch adults instantly revert to their four-year-old selves?

I went to the NCA convention to see the horses, to check out their paint jobs and carvings. Sure, I was looking forward to riding lots of carousels, meeting people who love them, and not having to think about planning for dinner. What I didn't bargain for was the energy from the pure joy and love of carousels.

I'm one of the painters for the Carousel of Smiles, a 1920s Allan Herschell being restored in Sandpoint, Idaho. While I paint, I imagine kids riding our merry-go-round when it's finished. I wonder who rode the horse I'm working on, and how the carnival workers handled them. I thought I knew what their futures would be — kids choosing their mounts, grinning as they make memories, looking for the little surprises we've painted on them for scavenger hunts, forever remembering the Carousel of Smiles and hopefully having our ponies hold a little spot in their hearts for the rest of their lives.

What I hadn't thought about was the adult riders bringing their own history to our horses — wanting to be first in line, scoping out their

favorite horse and waiting semi-patiently for their turn to ride! Their smiles! Their joy!

The NCA convention was the best people-watching I've enjoyed in years! I didn't want to ride first; I wanted to watch the first riders, to see which horse the head of the line chooses, everyone so eager to get on and then, the magic... The happy grins as the ride begins to turn, the music starts up and grown-ups turn into the children they used to be. Living in the moment... Remembering the past... Maybe holding hands with the one they love or a new friend they met the prior day! Smiling and waving to the crowd, perhaps seeing their parents out there watching them ride. Pure joy.

At Sonny's Place, on our last spins of the day, the band organ went into "Take Me Out To The Ball Game." The riders, already smiling, began to sway. A couple of voices started in and soon everyone was singing out, raising their arms and swaying to "the old ball game." If that doesn't make a heart swell, nothing does.

As I was meeting people during the convention, I wanted to know everyone's connections to carousels and how they fell in love with them. Most had a childhood story of a particular machine they rode whenever they went to its place of operation. Some, like me, were late bloomers, finding an appreciation of carousels as an adult. My entry was through a side door... I didn't love carousels or know much about horses, but an opportunity came along to paint merry-go-round ponies and it sounded amazing! While working on the horses and learning about the restoration of an entire machine, my appreciation has grown tenfold. Even though my love of carousels and my joy in painting figures didn't start in childhood, anyone who talked with me at the convention would probably say that I am all-in.

I'm so glad I was able to attend, to have met people who "get it," who also feel the magic of these works of art. Experiencing nearly a week of adults tapping into their childhoods, reliving the joy of riding carousels, was totally worth the price of admission.

Meg Marchiando with an Allan Herschell horse at The Carousel Museum, Bristol, Connecticut. Meg painted an Allan Herschell horse for the Carousel of Smiles, Sandpoint, Idaho, that has a similar, unusual saddle design.

—Photo:
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