

Two Girls

Flying

I.Fly

By Jacqueline Bergrin



A friend recently posted a video to her Facebook page that I found riveting. Two girls, likely in their early 20's, were strapped into a "swing" sort of contraption and pushed from a platform perched over a canyon. Down into it they swung. Watching their initial drop in a bungee-like fashion just above the canyon's bottom, nearly caused me cardiac arrest. Then, before they were rapidly hoisted back to their starting point, they swayed above a river and rocks – still screeching from their initial descent.

I sent the video to my sister-in-law, Debra, with the caption, "Something for 'Two Girls?'"

Driving down Riverside Boulevard towards the gorgeous stretch of our South Shore's beloved Long Beach, I see, ahead and off to the right, the set up of a trapeze, and a trailer stationed just nearby. It's insanely summery outside, warm and without a cloud in the sky. Parking at 3:30 on this Wednesday afternoon was super-surprisingly easy. My tummy, not so much. It's not that I'm nervous about participating today. *I'm just really excited.* Earlier I'd told my children that I'd be taking trapeze lessons. My daughter, knowing full well that I had my navel pierced at 30, my foot tattooed at 37, and my nose pierced at 39, asked me if I have any fear. "Only of your Aunt Debra," I replied.

Funny thing is, it's Debra, I do believe, who is scared. She's seated near the trailer, talking to a staff member of *I.Fly*, a recreational flying trapeze and circus arts program. Her expression is one that suggests that she's less than happy, while I, on the other hand, probably look enthusiastic enough to skip instruction and begin climbing the ladder.

We sit on some benches in front of the net. To my left, there are a handful of other people that will be participating in this hour and a half class. Most – if not all – are between the ages of 7 and 14. Then there's Deb and me, 42, who are, well, a little older. Deb's mildly freaking out while I'm trying to listen intently to an instructor who's explaining what we'll be doing once we get to the board we will jump from. If she doesn't stop muttering and fidgeting, I'm going to club her with my purse, which would likely propel her into the sand-strewn parking lot. On the bright side, then she wouldn't have to worry about getting on a trapeze and flying. For just a fleeting moment, I wonder if there's

something wrong with me - I'm not the least bit nervous. This is an event to be had and then crossed off my own personal "bucket list". Perhaps it is something I'll experience only once in my lifetime – and not because I'm going to get propelled into an abyss I hope. I'm probably calm because I'm being realistic about this. I'll be safely harnessed; it's not like I'm expecting to be Peter Pan.

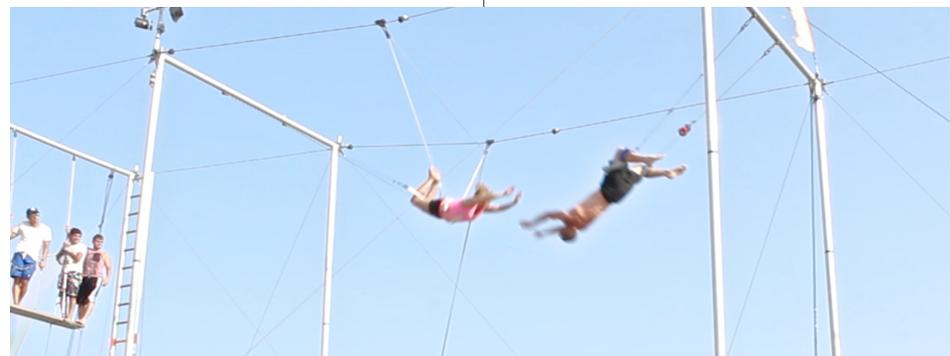
The ascent is, for me, the frightening part of this. But at the same time, it's thrilling. Extremely. I stop every few rungs I've climbed, pausing to look out towards the beach and the ocean's waves. Not down. I don't look downward. I don't believe there's a need to; next time I'm near the ground, it will be because I went by way of landing into the net as a result of gravity. But by the time I reach the platform where instructors are waiting to check and recheck my harness, I'm looking down – and I have a moment of, "I'm really about to do this?" The moment is not so dissimilar to that which I experienced before I walked down the aisle towards my husband.

If I am able to follow instructions when I'm up on the "board", receive the "fly bar" that will be given to me by an experienced *I.Fly* flyer, lean forward (OMG) while holding the bar with both hands, and slightly bend my knees while fully arching my back so he can hold my harness, I'll be prompted by the person on the ground who is holding my safety lines as to when I can leave the board. Then I'll be on my way to swinging over the net that's now far below me.

As the bar is being retrieved for me, I use my left hand to brush back some

strands of hair that the wind has blown across my face. Out of the corner of my eye I see that people on the boardwalk are casually leaning on railings and watching. Are they considering if I'm a 40+ year-old woman who has lost her mind? I'm very short and they're too far to be able to see any signs of wrinkles by my eyes when I squint. Maybe they think I'm a kid. Maybe they just think I'm someone who's crazy. Either way, I'm about to take flight.

I confirm I'm ready, and then I'm off, and flying. I've made a full sweep over the net, and at my return, it's shouted out to me to draw in my knees, put them between my hands and put them up over the bar. I do it. Then I'm told to let go and arch my back. I do it quickly and easily as all hell. Holy s—t. My knees, suspend me now upside-down, hands-free, over a net. Maybe I did this in a former lifetime? I'm suddenly an aerialist, being told to regain hold of the bar, bring my knees back down so I'm swinging by my arms, and then – forwards, backwards, forwards, letting go – propelling myself into a backwards somersault and landing in a net.



My G-d. I've done it.

Debra needs such heavy encouragement from the *I.Fly* staff, I'm grateful they don't kick her out of the lot. There are even some of the children in our group telling her that if they can do this, she surely can. I'm still enthralled by what I've just done, so I'm not prodding as much as I otherwise would. I'm a little caught up in the thrill of it all. But she's far more reluctant than I expected her to be. When she's convinced to just give it one try, she begins her climb. I shade my eyes to find that she's stepping from the closest rung to the board and onto it. Did she just look down to me and mouth some words? If she did, good that the children didn't hear them.

Deb can dance like all hell, but she's not quite as graceful on a trapeze bar. It's been but a few seconds since she's been guided to hold onto the side of the net and slowly somersault off of it and onto a mat on the ground, and she's already telling me she is done. Debra did it, and she's done. "Not for everyone and certainly not for someone who has a fear of heights like I do," she says – but she's glad she did it. Debra's already asking me

what color *I.Fly* tank top she should buy that will let everyone know she flew.

It's my fifth time up here. Yup. My fifth. The first four flights were fabulous; I didn't miss getting my legs up and onto the bar even once. Hung upside down each time. This time – *this time* – I'm going for the "big time". Having chalked my hands, wrists and a little of my forearms to cut down on anything that might preclude someone from grabbing hold of me, I'm going to swing into the open arms of an experienced trapeze "ist" on a swing opposite me. He's already in motion, and with his "Hup" signal to me to take off, he's assessed our momentum so that when I let go of my bar, with outstretched arms, I'll fly right into his. And fly into his, I do, just like magic.

When I was a little girl, I never dreamed – like so many children do – of running away with the circus. Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey excited me with its thrilling aerialists, elephants, lions, tigers and bears – but then they began

phasing out some of the most thrilling of their wild animal acts, and that disappointed me some. Still, they say you're never too old to enjoy a circus, and to this day, I still do. Especially, I take delight in seeing my children's hands sticky from cotton candy, and their eyes widen as they watch the daring acts of some of the performers, particularly, those of the trapeze artists.

Next time the circus comes to town, I'll likely think to myself, "I did that!" as I watch them fly through the air with the greatest of ease, *for I was a daring 42-year-old woman on a flying trapeze...*

I.Fly has two locations – 45 Riverside Blvd. in Long Beach, and in Eisenhower Park. Call them at 516.640.6995 or visit them at www.iflytrapeze.com to learn more about their group and individual sessions, and varying workshops including other "aerial disciplines".

Watch a video of Publisher, Jacqueline Bergrin, "flying", on the Local Luxuries Facebook page...