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Making Magic

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It was a normal day on the seas of the Caribbean. The all-too-familiar scent of bleach and must filled my nostrils. It was right around dinner time when I walked into the attraction through its exit, passing the Blue Bayou restaurant and its never-ending line of viciously hungry patrons. I walked through what I call the “brain scanner,” a camouflaged contraption that counts heads of guests as they leave the attraction, threw my arms into an X on my chest, and yelled “CROSSING,” letting the dispatchers know I needed to cross the flume via a boat to get to the other side of the dock.

After clocking in and getting my assignment, I took over at Front Unload, letting Lisa go to break. That position had become second nature to me. Open the gates. Spiel to the guests, “Welcome aboard, Mateys! Stow all yer loose treasure, and there be no flash pictures. Enjoy yer voyage!” Wait for the green light. Push the button. Never, under any circumstances, take your hand off the emergency stop.

The dock is set up in a manner that is most efficient. Two boats pull into the station. Each boat contains six rows that can accommodate three passengers in the front, two in the back, and four in each of the middle rows. As the two boatloads pull into the station and the guests disembark to their starboard side, the gates open to allow twenty-one new passengers on board via the port side. Sixteen seconds after the last boats are dispatched, a green light affixed to a post on the dock signals that the ride is ready for a new load of passengers. When the gates to the back boat are closed and all the sailors are seated, the pirate or wench at Rear Unload may depress the dispatch button, signaling its preparedness to the cast member at Front Unload. When the same safety precautions are met at the front boat, the pirate or wench at Front Unload presses their dispatch button and the boats take off.

After a few minutes of sending sailors into the abyss of the Caribbean, Cindy, the wench at Rear Unload, began loading guests with disabilities onto the rear boat via the starboard side. This delay
causes a bit of a lag in the dispatching of boats, and I chose to take those few extra seconds to enhance the guests’ experiences; a practice Walt Disney called “plussing.” My favorite activity during these bonus seconds with guests was to tell corny pirate jokes. “Why did Captain Hook cross the road? To get to the second hand store!”

The console phone began ringing and, unfortunately, this particular impromptu stand-up act was cut short. “Front Unload, Kylie.”

“Hi, Kylie, this is Ashley at the Blue Bayou. I have two guests here on their honeymoon. Any chance we can make some magic?”

Making magic was another way to “plus” a guest’s experience in the parks. At Pirates of the Caribbean, we did this by allowing sailors to enter through the exit, bypassing the line, and for special occasions we loaded them onto an empty boat, letting them sail through the attraction on a private cruise.

“Sure thing, Ashley,” I replied. “Bring them in whenever they’re ready.”

A few minutes later Ashley appeared with a young couple. It was quite obvious that they were flying high on fresh love. The pair sported cliché Disney t-shirts which read, “I’ll be your Mickey” and “I’ll be your Minnie,” along with bride and groom Mickey Mouse ears, and the park’s complimentary “Just Married” buttons. They walked through the secret door connecting Pirates of the Caribbean with the Blue Bayou in an embrace, never letting go of each other. Ashley introduced them to me as Justin and Michelle.

“Thank you so much for doing this for us!” Michelle said to me. She had a Valley Girl voice that matched her perfectly manicured hands and the blond curls flowing from beneath her mousey veil.

Justin reached his hand out to shake mine. “Yes. Thank you so much.” I reciprocated the gesture and shook his hand. It was clammy but strong. He had dark eyes that begged not to be trusted and slick, black hair like a Greaser. The pair reminded me of a modernized teenage John Travolta and Olivia Newton John.

“It’s my pleasure,” I responded, as I had been trained to do.

The first day of training, in a class called Traditions, my colleagues and I were taught two of the most important universal
Disney lessons. Firstly, whenever a guest says ‘thank you’, it is only appropriate to respond with ‘my pleasure’.

“Responding with ‘you’re welcome’ or ‘no problem’ sounds as if you were put out by doing what they asked,” our trainer Erika explained. “Saying ‘my pleasure’ tells the guest that you truly enjoyed serving them.”

The second most important universal lesson was related to pointing. At Disney, everyone uses the two-finger point. Most people think the Disney two-finger point was adopted because in some cultures pointing with one finger is considered rude, but in reality it is utilized simply because Walt pointed with two fingers. The reason for this? He always had a cigarette between his index and middle finger. This practice has now been implemented at most theme parks around the world.

Performing the Disney two-finger point with flawless form, I pointed to a yellow line on the dock and asked Justin and Michelle to wait behind it. As their boat pulled into the station I warned them to watch out for those disembarking and, when the coast was clear, to load into row two. I spied on them. I waited for the green light. I pushed the dispatch button. And I sent the couple on the ride of their lives. As I watched them drift off into the darkness of the bayou, I saw the ears on their heads lean together. Justin put his arm around Michelle and gave her a quick kiss on the cheek. A smile played across my face, and I felt pleased with myself for being able to give the couple this rare, precious gift.

Shortly thereafter I was sent to break. I spent fifteen minutes watching Food Network in the closet that served as a break room backstage. To access this room, you walk through the stage door and immediately down half a flight of stairs. At the bottom, there is a small shelf containing a computer where work assignments are given. To the right of the computer is a water fountain and to the left are two doors. One of these doors leads to the Indiana Jones queue and the other, directly above another very short flight of stairs, leads to the break room. The break room door is similar to that of a church nursery, a Dutch door that is missing the top half, but this detail is often missed because the door is always propped open in case of emergencies. Through the doorway, on the immediate right, is the so-
called break room.

It consists of a mini-fridge with a small microwave perched atop, a very large breaker box serving as a TV stand, and a smaller electrical box protruding from the wall that serves as the table. This particular “table” is about a foot long, but only six inches wide, and I can say from experience that it is quite difficult to balance a TV dinner on it while answering texts and eating. There is only enough room for two people in the break room, and most of the time pirates waiting for their shift to start sit on the stairs instead of packing into the break room like sardines. Walking straight through the door and past the makeshift rest area, one would find oneself traveling behind the shrubbery of the Bayou and into the banjo player’s cabin. Upon exiting the cabin, there are cast member bathrooms and kitchens for New Orleans Square’s many restaurants.

I was just getting up and heading to the computer to clock back in when I heard the stage door open.

“Kylie, you down there?” Natalie wailed down the stairs. Natalie was the Lead for the evening. Not quite a manager, but not quite a lowly grunt worker, a lead is the head of an attraction, shop, restaurant, or area. Natalie knew more about our quaint attraction than anyone else onsite. She could fix faulty water levels and blown hydraulic lines in seconds, and she was always quick on her feet to solve guest complaints.

“Yeah, I’m here,” I shouted back. “Just about to get a new assignment.”

“Don’t bother,” Natalie retorted. “We have a situation in Tower. Meet me up there.”

I quickly shuffled into my becoming pirate vest and wide belt and half-leaped, half-ran up the two short flights of stairs, one backstage and one onstage. When I got to Tower, Natalie and Bruce were scanning the nine TV screens that showed live video feed from the 33 cameras dispersed throughout the attraction. I saw boats sailing past the Blue Bayou, through the Transition Tunnel (the well camouflaged transition point between Pirates of the Caribbean’s two show buildings), and in the Auction Scene, but nothing really grabbed me as a “situation.”
“Look at camera 30,” Natalie said as Bruce enlarged the image on the extra screen. “Did you load those guests onto that boat?”

I looked at the picture of what was taking place in the attraction. Having engaged the lift break, Natalie stopped boat 14 at the base of the lift near the Jail Scene. The boat was where it should be. It wasn’t taking on water. No one was using the flash on their camera or standing up. But there were my two new friends, Justin and Michelle, one on top of the other, fornicating.

“Kylie. Did you load those guests onto that boat?” Natalie repeated.

“Ye.. Ye.. Yes. I did. Bu.. But I didn’t know they were going to do THAT!” I stammered. I quickly relayed the story to Natalie and Bruce of Justin and Michelle’s honeymoon, and Ashley calling, asking to make magic. “Someone sure is making some magic, alright,” Bruce interrupted. “But it wasn’t you or Ashley!”

Disneyland Security was waiting on the dock when I descended the stairs from Tower. They asked to take a statement and I again explained the situation that had taken place only twenty minutes earlier. Having composed themselves after their festivities in the Caribbean, Justin and Michelle, her Mickey Mouse ears a little askew, were surprised to see Security waiting for them at the station. The couple was escorted out of the park and their tickets for the day were voided.

Almost a year later, after completing my Disney College Program and moving back to Concordia, I grabbed a Cosmopolitan magazine off the rack at Safeway and took it home to read. As I gazed through the pages filled with gossip and advertisements, I saw an article suggesting some of the most fun places to “get it on” in public.

Thinking back to the incident at Disneyland, and intrigued to see what Cosmo had to say on the issue, I read. “We’ve all seen Fear. But it’s probably not a great idea to do anything raunchy on a ride that involves speed or unpredictable motion, because people are going to lose actual teeth. The ideal place to get discreetly happy is probably more like a Pirates of the Caribbean ride…”

Right you are, Cosmo. Because it would be totally cool to get caught on the cameras, an incident termed ‘pirate porn’ in Tower,
only to be shamefully kicked out of Disneyland. Maybe you should try *It's a Small World*. I hear there aren't any cameras over there.