

The Trapeze Experience

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THE PHRASE 'THE CIRCUS IS COMING to town' conjures childhood memories hinting to exotic and dangerous vagabond adventures. The trapeze aspect of the show always promised sheer entertainment, watching the brave souls dive midair, floating effortlessly like carefree swans. They appeared at ease facing death, with only a mesh net protecting their angelic bodies from a crash meeting with the earth. Since my recent trapeze introduction at The Crossings, I possess a new perspective on why these daredevils choose to risk limb and life as a profession.

Prepared for my adventure and toting my then 9-month-old son, Aidan, I soon found myself on an instant side adventure. After not listening carefully to the directions, I hiked through uncharted territory in this Hill Country sanctuary off Lake Travis, trying to locate the trapeze. This sort of experience is not new to me, but now that Aidan is along for the ride, I have to remember details like marking the trail and realizing that a hike might not be the best idea.

I listened to my instincts and returned to the starting point. As I exited the trees, I met a local television anchorwoman. She was dressed in trapezing attire, and probably found my abrupt introduction a little disturbing. Regardless, Aidan adapted quickly to

the scenery change and we chatted our way to the trapeze setup, as my heart rate quickened. I realized I would have to put my words to action and spend the next hour upside-down.

The Trapeze-Experience™, visiting the Crossings until May 19, is led by Peter Gold, who has been in many of the top flying trapeze acts in circuses around the country, including (but not limited to) Ringling Bros. Gold describes himself as a “fear transcender” and confidently convinced the group of four women and one man to take the leap.

“When you experience trapeze, you move through new doorways of self-exploration and discover newfound courage,” said Gold. “People take the plunge for many reasons, including emotional release and mastery of physical skills. Even the corporate world uses the trapeze to connect with employees, build team trust, and help staff to reach an inspired state.”

Gold emphasized the safety procedures and we were prepared for the experience. We stretched and Aidan was in good hands with The Crossings staff. (I know that bringing a baby to a trapeze event is not normal. How many babies can say they have seen their mama trapeze?) We each signed our lives away on a consent form and collectively reviewed why we had

agreed to spend our Tuesday morning swinging circus-style. As I determinedly climbed the stairs to the platform, I grew pointedly aware of the gusting wind. I glimpsed Tony Steele, a pioneer in trapeze, and focused on his voice as the wind tried to side-swipe my efforts.

Upon arrival, Steele, titled ‘the catcher,’ greeted me with complete circus professionalism. The man known from 1955-1975 as the greatest and most renowned trapeze artist in the country, guided me atop the 9-foot trapeze platform and eased my nerves. He called out my routine: a forward swing and a back flip dismount. It was time to maneuver myself to the edge of the board and I borrowed a few extra minutes, learning that Steele was a legitimate circus member. “I ran away to join the circus, and my mom wrapped my lunch in a road map,” he said.

According to Gold, form is paramount in the trapeze act. He advised us to stand with our feet a good distance apart, to breathe in and out, and to place our dominate hand on the bar and the second hand to the side until we were prepared to take the jump. As I leapt, I discovered the freedom that is the trapeze.

As a child and teenager, I lived and breathed gymnastics. That training

stayed with me and was awakened when I left the platform. Suddenly, my inner gymnast awoke and began floating to Gold’s instructions. I felt a confidence and calm that I have not felt in a very long time. The key to a good trapeze artist is the ability to trust and listen. It’s funny how this activity’s rules are applicable to everyday existence.

With my second attempt, I managed a tight backflip and was pleased enough to call it a day. Aidan had seen enough and I will probe him later on his recollections of the day’s events. I sat among the participants, breathing heavily, windblown and adrenaline-inspired.

In the minutes that hung between the net and me, I was free. Perhaps that was my trapeze moment of Zen: Let go in order to gain control of your life. Then again, maybe my true calling is the circus. I better go - Cirque du Soleil may be trying to contact me. ★

A novice jumper psyches herself up to jump off a 9-foot platform, captures air and composure simultaneously. Looks for the net and hangs on for dear life. The daredevil extraordinaire achieves the desired upside-down position.



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